

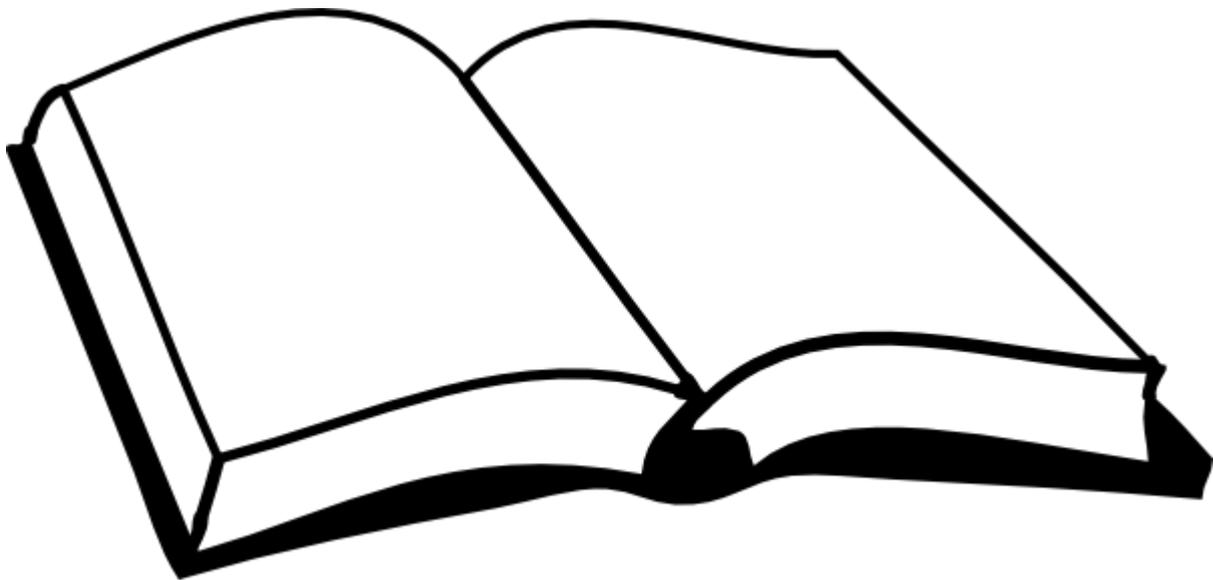
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COMPLETING A BIG PROJECT

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This is a tempting-fate BLOG, dedicated to all, like myself, who are currently in the throes of completing a big writing project. Three days from the end (metaphorically speaking), there comes a great knockout blow. You hear that someone you greatly admire has just published, to enthusiastic applause, a book on your subject. You had no idea that this work was in the offing. It is every writer's worst nightmare. But, after a while, you sigh deeply, grit your teeth, and continue. If Thomas Carlyle could rewrite the entire first volume of his

three-volume *History of the French Revolution*,¹ after a friend's maid had inadvertently burned the manuscript, then any authorial heroism is possible.

Then two days out from completion, you have a sudden change of mood. A false euphoria descends. The research and writing is so absorbing that you think of a hundred different ways to protract the experience. Your tome is about to become one of those great meta-works, like the real-life Lord Acton's much feted *History of Liberty*, which never actually appeared.² Or like the fictional Edward Casaubon's never-ending *Key to All the Mythologies*.³ The permanent-delay-it's-all-for-the-good manoeuvre, however, is but another version of the knockout blow. Its tempting but equally fatal.

Thirdly and finally, a grim exhaustion (better perhaps, a steely determination? ed.) supervenes. That's it. Writing at ever greater length is harming the cause rather than helping it. At last a knockout blow that's really helpful. All to do now is to complete Does making this public avowal help? Hmmm ...

¹ T. Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History* (1837), 3 vols.

² For J.E.E Dalberg-Acton, 1st Baron Acton (1834-1902), see O. Chadwick, *Acton on History* (Cambridge, 1998).; and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dalberg-Acton,_1st_Baron_Acton.

³ See G. Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (1871-2); and a spirited advocacy of the claims of Casaubon's unfinished masterpiece by N. Acherson, 'The Truth about Casaubon: A Great Intellect Destroyed by a Silly Woman' (1994), in <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/the-truth-about-casaubon-a-great-intellect-destroyed-by-a-silly-woman.html>.