



About Me and Writing

How much time do you have to write?

About two – three hours a day, it depends what time I get up. I like writing in the early morning when there's no pressure from anyone – sometimes from 5am.

Do you keep a working notebook for writing ideas?

Yes. I LOVE notebooks and jumble them up with sketches and found pictures and quotes. They are messy, rumpled objects that I find beautiful. As well as notes, I write short stories or writing exercises by hand because I find that immediacy works best in short bursts of about 2,000 words.

Which writers / genres do you enjoy / follow?

I like books that were either written in the past or are set in the past and even better if they have a romantic thread. I can like anything though. It's more about liking the writing style than anything. I'd much rather read a lyrical book than a plot-driven one. I tend to read more by an author if I've liked one of their books. I love Edith Wharton.

What type of fiction do you avoid / dislike?

Sometimes there's a lot of hype about a book and I just don't 'get' it. I tend to avoid horror and find murder / crime difficult to read.

What are your reasons to write?

I grew up in a large, decrepit house with my two older siblings and our parents, spending vast amounts of time at home, playing dolls with my sister, cricket with my brother, and writing short stories about my toys and cat. I *liked* being alone in my room, imagining worlds and

describing them through poorly-spelled words and felt-tip penned illustrations. Navigating this world meant learning to be highly attuned to every nuance; my family never gave much away. It's made me hyper-alert to what's not been said, to every flicker on a person's face, every muscle tensed. It's made me want to describe these subtleties and make sense of people's inner worlds – or at least try to.

Why write a novel?

I like the challenge. Although I've written five manuscripts before, I haven't totally achieved yet what I'd like. Maybe I never will but I want to try again. I enjoy writing short stories but there's something more absorbing about writing a novel. I like getting lost in that world and the problem-solving needed to get a long piece of writing to work. The first novel I wrote was ten years ago when my children were small and found the lack of personal time hard. The novel took ages because I didn't know anything about writing one and had simply launched in. But it was addictive and I felt so happy writing it. Over five years, I went on workshops and met lots of other writers. For my next projects, I was more prepared - but still always learning.

Do you share common interests and ideas with other media?

I am very influenced by TV – either by the visuals or acting. Ideas can come from TV. I also feel very inspired by dance. I really like watching any form of dance. I draw something from the emotion, I think. And music! I can't – like some writers – listen to music as I write. Music for me has to be listened to as a thing not as a background. I'd love to somehow capture in words an expressive Bach cello or the slightly unhinged lilt of Satie's piano.

What non-writing activities inform your work?

I watch people and listen in on how they talk, what they say. I'm a spy! I sketch people secretly too – on buses or the park. Buses are a great place to people-watch and eavesdrop! Going to the theatre (when they were open...) is inspiring too. I like plays, dance, musicals. The experience often gets my imagination ticking. Walking is the best way for me to come up with writing solutions. If I'm stuck or despondent – or even if I'm not – I'll walk and some inspiration will pop into my head. Art exhibitions or even Instagram (I follow a lot of art

accounts) can be a really great way to start off a piece of free-writing. Describing a place or a person the way an artist has painted them can be a really interesting approach and take your writing somewhere new.

In terms of writing, what are your particular strengths?

I'd say I like writing and creating character first and foremost. Dialogue feeds into that as does description.

What are you less confident with?

Plot. Building plot isn't natural to me and I have to really consider where the peaks and troughs should be. I'm impatient about planning but have found a balance between writing freely and taking time to pause and question where I need the characters to get to next.

Most people don't know that I can...

Use British Sign Language, up to level 1.

In five years' time I will have...

I'm resistant! I don't like plans that are so far ahead... I just hope I still have all the things I have now: my family and cats.

In five years' time I will be...

Published maybe. I would like to have a novel published. That would be incredible.

And, lastly, why is the time right to put pen to paper now?

It's never the right or the wrong time! It's allowing myself to not care what comes out, freeing up those dreams and drowning out those nagging, annoying worries – those ones that say I'm not good enough. I love Kazuo Ishiguro's writing and listening to his Nobel Lecture, I feel he summed it up perfectly: "But in the end, stories are about one person saying to another, 'This is the way it feels to me, can you understand what I mean? Does it feel that way to you?'" Now's as good a time as any to find out.