

Author Guest Post for *My Crazy Reading Obsession*
Subject: My Writing Process

How did you come up with the story?

In *Doing Life in Paradise*, the narrative discusses the philosophy of the dependence people have on hope, or should I say the over-dependence. Without hope we all would struggle to get out of bed each day but too much hope, or the wrong kind of hope can be a paralysing factor in people's lives. It either prevents them from taking charge of their own life or at the very least, retards their outcomes – they hope for things rather than taking action to achieve the things they want in life. The story took shape when I imagined a group of ordinary citizens to which an extraordinary thing happens. Such as, in this case, the witnessing of the accident which kills a young girl. Events like this tend to interrupt people's hope structure.

Doing Life in Paradise asks the questions, what happens to a young woman when she witnesses a car accident, which results in the death of a girl her own age? What happens to the young driver of the car who causes the accident? What happens to the other people who witness this accident? such as a young boy with his mother and the brother of the girl run over and so on. And how do these people cope and proceed with their aspirations in the light of such a tragedy? Are their personal hopes and dreams corrupted? What can they rely upon now?

This is how I started the story, but how I invent scenes and characters is a function of my writing process.

What is your writing process?

As a writer, I am always thinking, listening and watching people. I note what people say, and what they do and when they do the things they do. I am not concerned too much about why people do anything, as the explanations of why people do the things they do, are very often elaborate lies – lies they tell themselves and lies they tell others almost as though the truth of our lives must be kept hidden. It is this behaviour and gap that the narrative explores.

I do not have a formal method to track a plot such as cards for each chapter or an organisational chart. Nor do I construct characters in service to a plot. It is the other way around. I am more interested in the characters and what they do both consciously and unconsciously.

It can start with a line of dialogue, or alternatively, a line of seemingly ordinary dialogue or behaviour will trigger an idea or a character. The discussion of the importance of either character over plot or vice versa has never been answered satisfactorily and probably never will. However, each writer will have their own opinion in regards to this question that will always inform the way they write. I think both are important, but for me, character is the superior of the two. So invariably, I will start with the character. I zero in on the gap or space we inhabit between reality and hyper-reality, the gap between lies and truth.

Elaborate action is not so important, I am more interested in the interior life of a character – what they think, what they believe in, and how they react when life indiscriminately singles them out and interrupts their universe. Postmodernism often concerns itself with the small events, not the grand events of life – indeed it might be said

that it is all the small human events that create the grand event or result from a grand event. This is never more evident than the example of 9/11 for example.

I start writing with an idea that is expressed through either dialogue or action and I may have a theme in mind but almost always, I never have an ending in mind – I prefer to let the narrative write its own ending, as life itself does. And it isn't automatic that any opening line or paragraph will survive. As any piece I write takes on its own life and creates its own universe and starts to drive in one particular direction, the first sentence or paragraph, even the character themselves might disappear or change. For example, I started *Doing Life in Paradise* with the character Peter. It was his story and journey that started the whole thing but that changed, and it became more of Ruby's journey, at least that is now how the narrative starts.

This may seem somewhat unorganised or even chaotic but that is not the case in the end. However, this method allows me to be as surprised as my reader might be with the actions and behaviour of my characters, and there will be a freshness and an absurdity to each character that might not be there if I were to use a more logical controlled method. In other words, I trust in the 'muse', I let the work do the work and I do not consciously impose myself in a contrived way.

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