

1. One of the questions so often asked of writers, I think because most readers are in awe, is where do your ideas come from? Can you tell us the genesis of MAN OUT OF TIME?

The novel started off as an experiment based on the use of photographs. Some years ago while sorting out family papers I came across a box of negatives. There must have been close to 600. Out of curiosity I had them developed. I have always written from images, but previously these were internal, mental images that would trigger a narrative. When I came upon these photographs I decided to use them as the beginning of a story – to use them as evidence. But evidence of what? I knew almost nothing about their context, exactly when, where or why they were taken. So I set up a series of controls around these pictures and endeavored to write something in response to each of them, and simply see what happened. So I suppose the book started as an experiment in art writing. I was very aware of the different era in which these photographs were taken – all the images dated from the late 70's to the early 80's and were outward facing, looking at the world. They represented a mode of being where the concept of the selfie would be unthinkable. On their own the photographs appeared to present no narrative, if anything they were deliberately opposed to narrative and character – there were no people in the photographs, they did not depict any kind of dramatic occurrence. The challenge was how to find a connection between them, how I might interpret these photographs as evidence of a journey. What was that journey, and why was it taken? It was from this point that the predicament of the main character, Leon, emerged and from here grew the overarching trajectory of the novel. While only several of the many hundreds of photographs appear in the book, I have used the images at almost every stage of the novel, and their presence is the invisible bedrock of the fiction.

2. Your last novel, THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD, had a very strong sense of place (set in Perth and Cambridge), however, this new novel MAN OUT OF TIME is very different. It could be occurring anywhere with no obvious geographical setting. Was that an intentional change?

It was a very deliberate decision to not reference any particular place, or set the novel in a

specific geographical area. In the writing process I have drawn on a multitude of places, but the characters are not defined by their relationship to a specific landscape. Yes, this is very different to the scenario in *The Other Side of the World*, where the characters' dilemmas evolved around geographical location and their sense of place, their sense of home. In this new book, *Man Out of Time*, it seemed to me that the crucial thing was the characters' internal landscapes – this is what defines and troubles them. As characters, and as a family, they are not particularly attuned to a specific landscape. But perhaps this also contributes to their sufferings – they don't seem to know where they come from, they don't have a strong sense of rootedness or belonging.

3. You are about to publish your third novel in MAN OUT IOF TIME. Has your writing process changed over the years? Can you tell us about a typical writing week?

My writing week varies enormously, depending on what else is going on. I've tried various strategies in the hope of making my writing week more consistent, but they generally don't work very well, and I have to accept the flux of it. I prefer to write very early in the morning, and often start while it is still dark outside. Everything is very quiet then, and there's nothing to disturb. It surprises me how much can be done in a very small window, if it is the right window. Most of the time, by mid-morning the day tends to get consumed by normal life.

4. As well as a brilliant novelist, critic and teacher, you are a university creative writing lecturer, so you are probably asked this often, but what advice would you give an emerging writer?

My advice is always the same – and that is to read deeply and widely, and to

read things that challenge you. Read the book rather than watch the film, or at least read the book first. And read books that haven't been made into films! Keeping a notebook seems almost an anachronism now, but again, it's a really useful and quite beautiful thing to do: it trains your eye, you record things that might otherwise go unnoticed, and I think it's good to not be constantly connected to an electronic device, to just immerse yourself in the things going on around you.

5. Who are your writing influences? And your favourite five books?

My influences change, depending on what I'm working on. Things that influenced me 10 years ago for example don't have exactly the same hold on me now. For me, working on a book is to be in dialogue with other works of art. Some of my ongoing influences include the novels and diaries of Virginia Woolf, and the works of Proust. More locally Helen Garner, Drusilla Modjeska J.M Coetzee have been significant influences. In a contemporary sense, some of my key influences are the works of Deborah Levy and Rachel Cusk. I often find I need a long break from reading and writing, and preferred then to wander through art galleries. This often feeds back into the writing process. My influences here, touchstones you might call them, is the work of Barbara Hepworth, Cy Twombly, Gerhard Richter, and Anish Kapoor. My top five novels? At the moment it would have to be (in no special order):

Swimming Home by Deborah Levy

Age of Iron by J. M Coetzee

In A Strange Room by Damon Galgut

Transit by Rachel Cusk

The *My Struggle* series by Karl Ove Knausgaard (I'm fudging it to treat this as one title)

6. Is it too soon to ask what is next?

A novel with a happy ending, and some essays - including one on the idea of a happy ending.