

## WRITING AN UNREAL BOOK IN AN ALL TOO REAL WORLD.

*If you write literarily about philosophy and ideas and you are not already famous for doing so, no-one's ever going to hear of you.*

...Author unknown.

This is a truism that all writers whose ambitions include writing about ideas and who choose fiction as their preferred platform are faced with before they write the first word of their novel. So if it is fame and fortune you are seeking then writing a novel which is an attempted literary think-piece on life and the everlasting troubles of being a human being, is most likely not going to result in anything like fame and fortune. But that doesn't mean it shouldn't be attempted.

In my novel *Doing Life in Paradise*, I have boldly, if perhaps stupidly, gone where very few dare to go these days, in this frighteningly fast 'real' world where 'real' is stupefying superficiality and hyper-speed is the default. I have tried to write a literary book that elicits active participation from the reader. It discusses ideas and presents them through the prism of characters who are deliberately 'unreal' and whose trajectories do not align with the usual hero's journey. *Doing Life in Paradise* is not a book where 'boy meets girl, boy and girl get into a pickle, boy gets pickle into girl' to borrow a Hollywoodism. This novel does not follow the usual three act formula, or even the Shakespearean structure of five acts. The characters are not 'realistic' in the usual sense of this description. Their situations are also not 'realistic', they are presentations, or cyphers and in service to the novel's themes. These themes include the discussion of the absurdity of hope and the human reliance on hope. It opens the

discussion of synchronicity and coincidence and how these two factors are both random and disinterested in us, but effect the outcomes of our lives and this in spite of us hoping almost to an excessive level that they do effect our lives, but in a way we want or hope, as though we can impose our will upon them. The book employs post-modern literary techniques such as playfulness, parody and intertextuality in order to prosecute the ‘unrealness’ of the story as a way of explaining the absurdity of life.

So back to the question of why ‘write an un-real book in an all too unreal world?’ Well because it is the job of would-be-serious writers to continue the journey of examining the examined life (there may be no unexamined lives left in this world). Our world is so agonisingly and astonishingly real, that we can’t get away from it. It is incoming relentlessly with blanket social media bombarding us, controlling us, telling us who we are, what we must do and how we should be, think and feel, if we are still capable of feeling.

Perhaps novels like *Doing Life in Paradise* offer something in short supply in today’s noisy world, perhaps what it offers is ‘quiet contemplation’ or a chance to sit in a corner and indulge the act of reading and thinking. *Doing Life in Paradise* promotes this moment of escape, but not the usual ‘escapism’ of fantasy, or murder mystery, or love story, or action adventure, which are often merely exaggerated extensions to the streaming relentlessness of our real life. *Doing Life in Paradise* is none of these generic forms, it deliberately challenges the reader to accept the notion that not everything is, or must be, in-your-face realistic, and some things don’t make sense, and this is one of the greatest components of life, and our lives. We must celebrate the opportunities of the ‘unrealness’ explaining the ‘real’, after all we are no better off understanding ourselves, or our lives or more urgently, our place in life, from the constant attachment and unnatural reliance on social media and twenty-four hour rolling news coverage. So

this ‘unreal’ book, which eschews formulaic story-telling, tells a story and explains this story by the use of micro-stories and does this by breaking the story-telling rules. It is in effect a story which prefers to think rather than act, or think first at least, and might just offer for those who like to think, and I am hoping there are still some of those about, the quiet contemplation of an imagination working – theirs and mine.

Perhaps the way I approach my writing goes to explain the above. In a somewhat exaggerated self-mocking discourse, I explain my writing process as such: I will look at the placement of a comma within a sentence for weeks. Then after a stupidly long time, I will eliminate it. The next day, I will put it back where it was. Then the next day after that, I am just as likely to eliminate the sentence all together. For me, writing is about getting every single word and grammatical flourish right, however impossible this is. Everything on the page is intended to justify its presence by doing a lot of work; it must serve the themes, and the ideas in some material way. It isn’t sufficient to just be there (like us), everything needs to tell a story as well as combine to tell *the* story. In *Doing Life in Paradise*, I try very hard to achieve this outcome. I want my reader to take their time and savour the moment, discover the moment, even argue and disagree but above all, I want to make it worth their while to stay off the grid and enjoy their thinking time.

I hope you enjoy the journey and the read. Good luck.

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