



The Writer as Outsider

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ONE OF THE CHALLENGES AS a writer is that you're in observational mode most of the time, if not all of the time. Sometimes you question your own experience, and whether things are real, or made up. For me this 'othering' experience often makes me feel like an outsider, like I'm exploring life without actually living it. There's also the added element of your own creative flair creating fictions that you want to be part of, and sometimes they can also feel false, or secondary to the purity of the thoughts that you have about the type of world you want to create or live in.

You can really get lost in creating new worlds, or at least new ways of seeing the world, and the world itself can be disappointing. Perhaps your expectations are too high, or in some cases too low. You can't fully belong because you feel responsible for documenting, or retelling, and that can sometimes be alienating, or add to the disconnected feeling of *I must write this all down. I must tell it accurately, or I must not get this wrong.* A good piece of work, or a piece of writing that you really connect with makes you feel part of something, so in that sense you're not an outsider at all, you are part of a huge literary canon, which feels like an immense joy, even if most of the other writers' part of that canon are long gone. In a way this is inclusive, but in another can make you feel lonely or isolated. My favourite joke to tell myself is that most of my friends are dead white men and women.

Solitude and isolation are two very different things. I think you have to



get used to carving a space for yourself emotionally and physically that only you can access. This is a place to go and work in isolation where you find solitude. Distancing yourself from society when developing your work can seem really important. I'm a very active and social person so I find it especially hard to lock myself away, it makes me feel like an outsider not having full control over my time; when I'm going to work and when I can stop working. It can make you feel like it's more than a full-time job, it's something you go to bed with at night, and can't stop thinking about over the weekend. You are not part of the 9–5 group so socialising can be difficult, you tend to have a group of friends that adapt to your lifestyle and those who don't, disappear, or move on. Similarly, it's hard to plan — you're always on call, it's not a life for everyone. It can make you unreliable and unpredictable, which can be difficult to explain to people who have set routines. The upside is that you're resilient and less affected by disruptions in the outside world. Being an outsider means you can adapt very well to new ways of living, and operate mainly on your own terms.