



Being Genre-Fluid

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I'VE CALLED MYSELF a playwright, a children's author, a short-story writer and recently a novelist. My writing journey started with the short stories I wrote in school, scribbled down for class. Here is where I started to learn how to write character, to create voice. Then I moved on to writing plays at university. I'm not sure why I went on to study playwrighting. I had only read one play before I went on to study it, *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams. We were taught it in my English Literature A level class, and I remember being struck by how beautiful the stage instructions were, as if they were meant to be read too. I remember thinking that it wasn't so different from a book. And playwrighting had the advantage of getting to seeing my work performed. Of having my words come to life. I fast learnt that a play could become something else entirely in front of an audience. And that an audience will teach you what works. I learnt that monologues were fun, but if you could distil the whole essence of it down to a few lines, Pinteresque style, then that was when you really had something. I took this, and my sense of rhythm you develop when you write mostly dialogue, into my fiction. But it wasn't until I started writing children's fiction that I learnt about plot and pace. Children are much harsher critics than adults. If you don't thrill them, promise them an adventure and drama, or intrigue, they'll stop reading. In the adult fiction I write now I'm working on how to hone tone and create atmosphere. But I'm also taking the lessons I learnt from other genres and disciplines with me. They inform everything I write. When I think about plot, I draw on children's fiction, the chapter openings and end hooks and constant forward motion I learned how to do after three



novels. I think of dialogue in the same way I learnt to write as a playwright: edit, edit, edit, to the core of what needs to be said. And how if you want to make people cry you should make them laugh first. From short stories I learned how to create character voice, to take them on journeys in the space of pages. I think I can put my voice down to the many disciplines I've studied, read, and written, the genres and practices I've worked in. I'm constantly drawing on a bank of inspiration from a wide pool, taking what I need and leaving behind what I don't. And I'm constantly inspired to try new things too. Flash fiction, poetry, biographical and nature writing. Knowing that whether I'm successful or not in them, it will teach me something new. It will make me grow. It will change and inform all of my work. I've called myself a playwright, a children's author, a short-story writer and more recently a novelist. But now when people ask, I just say I'm a writer.