



Loneliness and the Writer

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LONELINESS IS GOOD. Cutting off from other people is good. It preserves the world of your story.

A writer's loneliness is intensely, abundantly, multifariously teeming. Peopled and teeming. While the pen silently moves across the page; the cursor across the screen.

Being alone in a crowd is the perfect space. Staring out of a café window like Suzanne Vega in Tom's Diner, literally invisible to the woman on the other side of the glass, who's looking at her own reflection as she hitches up her stockings.

To sit alone amongst others, the hubbub of noise buoying you up, is a contemplative, delicious luxury: the secret universe you carry within, concealed from everyone inside your skull, safe.

According to nineties' creativity manual *The Artist's Way*, writing is formed in the dark, like stalactites. Drip. Drip. Drip. So much of what is going on has to be kept in its hermetically sealed bubble: especially if it's a full-length play or book. It needs to form its own reality in your head before being exposed to other people's opinions. When it's concrete, strong enough to stand being exposed to the heat of another's gaze, then it can be subjected to other people's attention, to their 'not getting it'. Their 'not getting it' will inform another draft. But reveal too soon and it can melt into nothing.



Loneliness is what you want. Writing becomes the only world you want to be in, and okay, that can be a problem.

When I was a postgrad student, a friend of mine observed me moving around the Arts Faculty building via the back stairs. She pointed out, correctly, that I scuttle, cling to skirting boards, dodge acquaintances — opting to be with the phantoms in my head.

I choose to walk through Victorian parks with Edwardian characters, rather than real-life friends. Sometimes the characters hold my hand. Mostly they're cross with me, annoyed, critical, but it's my job to understand them, not theirs to understand me, as they lead me away from flesh-and-blood folk I know, into the arms of anonymity.

It's also my job to listen to the scrapes, discordances and shortfalls of my own prose, like someone tuning a piano in a lonely room. Eventually the piano is tuned, not pitch perfect, but to the best of my ability, for now. This note is clear, this one clatters against the page and will slide off as soon as I pick up the notebook to put it away, which I must. Because there's a new sound...

... a key in the lock, a heaving of the front door, the thud of a backpack as it hits the floor. Flesh and blood footsteps approach.