



Sanjida O'Connell

The Perfect Place to Write

VIRGINIA WOOLF FAMOUSLY WROTE, 'A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.' Roald Dahl was inspired to create his own writing room – a hut at the bottom of his garden – after he discovered that one of his favourite authors, Dylan Thomas, wrote in a shed overlooking the Taf estuary in Wales.

The wonder of writing, of course, is that it can be done *anywhere*. I write on trains and planes, in cafés and bars, on laptops and in notebooks, filtering out the hum of voices and the clatter of cups. I compose sentences in my head as I walk or run, but what I love about writing is then being able to retreat to a dedicated room I can call my own.

I've always felt that writers need their own space — just as an ideal childhood would include a table for junk modelling, Lego building and colouring, that a grown-up is not allowed to tidy away. As a young adult, I started my career renting a basement in a shared house, and would have to roll up my futon to reach my desk when I wanted to write. While we were building our current house, our family lived out of three rooms. My 'office' became a desk in one corner of the kitchen-dining-living-play-exercise space — and I had to become fiercely territorial to stop it becoming a dumping ground for bags, bills and cardboard castles.

Now, finally, I do have a room of my own. Unlike Roald Dahl's, it's not littered with memorabilia — in his case, a model Hurricane plane, his own hipbone, ancient stones, chocolate wrappers, an opal from Australia.



Mine is a minimalist cube — the walls, floor, desk, lamp and bookcase are all white. I have a moon orchid next to my computer, and prints of white flowers — a jimson by Georgia O’Keefe, and white lace flower blossom by Hannah McVicar; a set of wooden angel wings that were a present from one of my closest friends. I only have books that are useful or inspirational to the writing process, and my own published works are here.

By making my space as distraction-free as possible, I hope to keep my mind focused on the writing. As Dahl said, ‘When I am up here I see only the paper I am writing on, and my mind is far away with Willy Wonka or James or Mr Fox or Danny or whatever else I am trying to cook up. The room itself is of no consequence. It is out of focus, a place for dreaming and floating and whistling in the wind, as soft and silent and murky as a womb...’.

I am, naturally, envious of Dylan Thomas’s view over a breathtakingly beautiful estuary. But here, in the remote Mendips where I live, I look out over fields and woodland, and while my imagination is wrestling with dark and twisted secrets in the thrillers that I write, I rest my mind in the quiet joy of a circling buzzard, the chatter of jays, and the slow but steady unfurling of fern fronds along the hedgerow.