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Loneliness and the Writer

BEFORE EDITORS, DIRECTORS and actors get hold of our work, writing, unless you are part of a team, is a DIY job. It's a solitary profession and always has been, hundreds of years before television and film and social media arrived as constant companions of distraction. Ultimately, every thought and every word is down to one person. But loneliness isn't necessarily a negative state to be in when it comes to creativity. Personally I think it's essential.

The act of writing requires commitment, concentration, conviction and occasional boredom. It's a combination of those that propels the creative process. In order to have all of these when I settle down to write, it's best for me to be in a quiet, solitary environment, often with ear plugs in place, otherwise there's every chance I'll become distracted by others. I know several people who have built writing sheds in their gardens, physically removing themselves from any disruption in their homes. *Keep Out. No Entry. Cross This Line at Your Peril.*

Personally, I don't mind the loneliness of being a writer or the solitary job of sitting in my office. I never crave company when I write. I am very happy to wear pyjamas or my running kit and remain in my office alone all day, with the occasional foray into the kitchen for food and drink. If I want distraction there are plenty of ways to let it into my writing space.

In Ernest Hemingway's 1954 acceptance speech on winning the Nobel Prize for Literature, he said:



Writing, at its best, is a lonely life. Organizations for writers palliate the writer's loneliness but I doubt if they improve his writing. He grows in public stature as he sheds his loneliness and often his work deteriorates. For he does his work alone and if he is a good enough writer he must face eternity, or the lack of it, each day.

Henry David Thoreau says: 'I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude.'

Virginia Woolf writes in *A Room of One's Own*: 'A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.' Obviously Woolf doesn't acknowledge that only a certain class of woman had the resources to *have* a room of her own let alone the finances to go with it. But the point I make is the importance of solitude and loneliness that all three writers touch on.

For years writers have locked themselves away, welcoming solitude and using loneliness as a positive activity rather than a negative one. Dylan Thomas famously wrote in his writing shed. But in those days, there were no distractions that today are readily available to the twenty-first-century writer. Are we perhaps more easily bored these days, needing to get a quick fix of someone else's life rather than focussing on our own creative endeavours? Or do we still crave that lonely space and create it in the hope it sparks our creativity?