



## The Perfect Place to Write

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**F**OR ME, THE PERFECT PLACE to write is somewhere else. By that I mean, wherever I don't normally write, which is sitting at my desk in my living-room. I can write there of course, but a change of scenery is as good for renewed impetus as it is for proverbially nourishing the spirits.

In the absence of a dacha in Cornwall to which I would retreat to work on my new novel, these alternative venues have to be improvised. I am very good at working on holiday, tapping away in a hotel room, the morning punctuated by a tea-break and an exchange of pleasantries with housekeeping staff when they tap on the door.

Long afternoons when visiting friends are good for a thousand words or so, when everybody else has fallen to reading the paper or playing with the cat. Sitting in the garden on a spring day is very commodious, though you have to follow the sun's progress by regularly angling your screen away from it. A roughly secluded spot by the harbour is an agreeable prospect, or it was last summer until a couple advanced in years boarded their yacht and turned on a CD of rollicking sea-shanties. Spreading my arms in despair towards them resulted in the volume being turned up and a cackle of laughter.

A few years ago, a medical condition meant I had to sit with my foot elevated, which meant repairing to the bedroom. There I reclined, like the elderly William Gerhardie, through the writing of three books, until intermittent but increasingly ominous lumbar trauma drove me back to the desk.



There are exceptions to the somewhere-else rule. I have never been to a writers' retreat, not least because if they are catering for more than one at a time, they don't quite match up to my idea of a retreat. Conversations over the morning marmalade are all the more the enemy of promise than the pram in the hall. I wouldn't like to work in a coffee-shop, as many do, with the raucous spurting of the espresso machine, the ambient chatter, and the need to part with another £2.50 every four hours.

Working on the train is easier now that we are nearly all keyboard-tappers rather than adepts of longhand. The jolting used to turn my busy-looking calligraphy to boozy-looking scrawl, but touch-type has a way of adjusting for the motion of the train, rolling with the jolts. I can't work on a flight, which is not the least reason I don't fly anywhere any more.

There will be a place in Heaven, I imagine, with a balcony window open to the azure, a judicious mixture of Chopin Preludes and celestial silence wafting up to me, the only likely interruptions being the daily appearance of seraphic housekeeping staff, and perhaps Franz Kafka shambling in, swiping a vodka from my minibar, slouching against the end of my desk with it, asking me how it's going.