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Why I Write

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Why I Write

Abstract

Once I met a man who though he loved novels, he mistrusted them. He said he believed in reality. He didn't want his attention to stray from reality. But it did. He was a compulsive reader. Making things up is what human beings do. We are story-making creatures, though we make these stories in different ways. We fantasize, we create different plots for ourselves out of randomness. Writing is the way I have chosen of making stories. I know if I didn't write, things might get dangerous. An event takes a particular shape, but I am aware of other shapes it could have taken. There was a time when I couldn't distinguish between them. Now I channel invention into novels. Why I write.



Elleke Boehmer was born in Durban, South Africa, of Netherlands parents, and is now resident in Britain. Her first novel *Screens Against the Sky*, which was described as an 'astonishing debut ... expertly told' by *The Sunday Times*, was shortlisted for the 1990 David Higham Award. She teaches in the School of English at the University of Leeds and also writes about issues of postcoloniality in the new English literatures. Her second novel, *An Immaculate Figure*, is published by Bloomsbury.

ELLEKE BOEHMER

Why I Write

Once I met a man who though he loved novels, he mistrusted them. He said he believed in reality. He didn't want his attention to stray from reality. But it did. He was a compulsive reader.

Making things up is what human beings do. We are story-making creatures, though we make these stories in different ways. We fantasize, we create different plots for ourselves out of randomness. Writing is the way I have chosen of making stories. I know if I didn't write, things might get dangerous. An event takes a particular shape, but I am aware of other shapes it could have taken. There was a time when I couldn't distinguish between them. Now I channel invention into novels. Why I write.

I write about tainting. I am interested in error and the consequences of error. The way people bear, or refuse to bear, the burdens of the past. One thing leads to another, in story as in life, but this isn't always admitted. The person I curse today may tomorrow tend my best friend's wound. I am intrigued by the ordinariness of wrong. Error is often very banal. No doubt South Africa, where I grew up, gave me these concerns. *Screens Against the Sky* was a domestic tale. But it was also about national claustrophobia. In my latest novel, *An Immaculate Figure*, the heroine Rosandra White, a beauty queen and girl-next-door, believes she can strip off various roles as she finishes with them. She doesn't see herself as part of a plot – a plot that could move towards dangerous conclusions.

Is there escape from all this, from consequences? An evasion of nemesis? Lately restlessness, and release, have started to preoccupy me. I would like to write about Britain, which has been my migrant home for years. British writing like British society is full of structures. People know their place inside these structures. I want to create some space around this fixity. I want to write a travel tale about a forbidden passion, set in England.