

Gauntlet Road

and

Rules and Rebellion: An Exegesis to Gauntlet Road

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Melanie Seligman

Abstract

I have taken an autoethnographic approach in my exegesis and split it into three parts. First of all, I contextualise my thesis in terms of genre and influences. My aim is to explain its conceptual framework. I give a brief overview of crime fiction in the last century and show how it continues to evolve and then make an attempt to find my own niche within the genre.

In the middle section I explain how my thesis blends or even subverts genres, departing from conventional suspense or mystery writing. My aim has been to re-establish the foundational principles of characterisation and plot in the genre. Setting and emotion are also more important in my thesis than the latest advances in technical wizardry, forensics and police procedural. I set out to explore the impact of loss and imminent danger to the victim, rather than writing a classic whodunit, or even a whydunit. These two sections look at ‘text to text’, and ‘text to world’. (Oliver Keene & Zimmermann, 1997)

Thirdly, I interview myself as a way to illuminate my routine, aims and thoughts behind the writing of *Gauntlet Road*. I chose this method because I felt it was the most effective way to reflect on my personal experience of writing and to describe intention and process (‘text to self’).

Rules and Rebellion: An Exegesis to *Gauntlet Road*

“Crime writing is like writing a sonata or haiku. There’s a definite form with a beginning, middle and end. But within that form you can do almost anything.” Harlan Coben.

“Death in particular seems to provide the minds of the Anglo-Saxon race with a greater fund of innocent amusement than any other single subject.” Dorothy L. Sayers.

Introduction

I chose the title ‘Rules and Rebellion’ as the central question in my exegesis. In what follows I look at the rules of the literary crime genre, and what these stories say about us and about our time. Is it the business of the writer (at least partly) to set the rules, then break them, to plough new fields in which we find and make new rules? Or do writers just write and the rules form around them?

The popularity of crime fiction is a fairly recent phenomenon. Twenty or thirty years ago crime novels were rarely on the bestseller list. Today crime novels account for ‘between 20 and 25 percent of the fiction sold around the world. At least what’s published in English.’ (Criminal Minds at Work, 2008)

Thrillers are the most paradoxical forms of popular fiction. The stories are often violent and sometimes horrific yet they are read for entertainment. They offer an avenue of escape from our lives yet readers remain safe in their armchairs. Judging by the rise in popularity of the crime genre with books from so many different countries being translated into English, it is fair to assume this reflects a deep need in contemporary readers. What drives this love of crime fiction?

Some of this need stems from the chance to solve a puzzle which detective novels present, providing an intellectual challenge. There’s a crime, an inquiry and a conviction. Good usually triumphs over evil (but not always) and justice is seen to be done which is about morality. So a detective novel pricks both our intellect and our sense of morality.

This provides the reader with a sense of order in an increasingly brutal world. Apart from a cathartic emotional release when the villain is caught, there's a control and comfort in fictional crime that in reality rarely exists. (Wheat, 2003, p. 22)

Genres and Influences

Thrillers and detective novels have changed over the last century, reflecting the many changes within societies. Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler didn't trust people in power so they wrote post-modernist cynicism about twenty five years before the rest of the world caught up. The age of unquestioned religious authority has waned and fictional detectives have become much more existential. In the past detectives were often older men, relying on the patriarchal God figure, implying that father knows best. More recently fictional detectives have changed again – today they are more likely to be chain smokers, womanisers and liars. Over the years fictional detectives could almost be used as an internal barometer of where in society we are at today.

Even some of the great romance novelists such as Jane Austin and the Brontes were skilled writers of the thriller element, whether it was attached to Rochester and his wife, or to Catherine and Heathcliff. At the turn of the century Arthur Conan Doyle spawned a whole generation of smart detectives with his eccentric but savvy Sherlock Holmes. He became an apt example of the patriarchal detective although with the passing years he is seen more as the tormented, wayward son.

This was followed by the Golden Age of Detective Fiction in the 1920s and 1930s. Agatha Christie's vision of cosy village life seen through the eagle eyes of Poirot and Miss Marple became popular. Other leading writers at this time included Dorothy L Sayers, Margery Allingham and the New Zealander Ngaio Marsh.

Christie is remembered for her ingenuity and clue-plotting rather than her complex character portraits. Dorothy L. Sayers could have been thinking of Agatha Christie when she wrote:

Just at present...the fashion in detective fiction is to have characters credible and lively; not conventional but on the other hand, not too profoundly studied – people who live more or less on the *Punch* level of emotion. (James, 2009, p. 87)

Around the middle of the century readers wanted an ingenious murderer capable of great skill. Along came the hard-boiled fiction of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett in the US.

Chandler's *The Simple Art of Murder* is considered a seminal piece of literary criticism and looks at the art (and failings) of detective fiction and American society in the 1940s. Chandler described his detective in a way that today sounds more appropriate to high romance or even fantasy:

In everything that can be called art there is a quality of redemption...But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything...He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. (Chandler, 1950)

In the 1970s readers expected specific, messy details and greater social realism in crime fiction. This desire for hard-bitten realism in crime stories became the norm in both the US and the UK in the last fifteen years or so with writers like Patricia Cornwell and Ian Rankin.

More recently we have seen the phenomenal success of Stieg Larsson's *Millennium Trilogy*, originally published in Swedish and now translated into English selling over 20 million copies. He owes much to Henning Mankell's Wallender series. I admire both these writers and took my cue from them. They both have strong, calm, characters trying to do the right thing - the journalist Mikael Blomkvist in Larsson's books, and the world-weary Kurt Wallender in Mankell's books. These authors influenced the way I conjured up Bo Zhang. Bo is a moral woman, willing to risk personal injury in her pursuit for the truth and her integrity is taken for granted. Like Wallender, Bo is solitary by nature although both Wallender and Bo yearn for connections with others. In Bo's case this is taken one step further as she also wants to feel that she belongs in England.

Influence of Movies/Television

Apart from books, movies and television series have also influenced my writing. Lynda La Plante's TV success with her *Prime Suspect* series was inspirational. This goes beyond storytelling (keeping backstory to a minimum) and character development. Camera

action itself has also influenced the way I write. My aim has been to give the reader wide pan shots then zoom into a close-up, as in the opening two sentences of *Gauntlet Road*:

“The sun dips below the hills and in the twilight the falling leaves look more ochre than chestnut. Running footsteps connect with dry ground, crunching through the forest.” (Seligman, 2010)

In cinema there is no interior monologue, unless the film maker resorts to voiceover. The viewer is left to think ‘I wonder what that character is thinking right now.’ Film maker’s use symbolic objects, camera lens tints, filters and mood music to suggest thoughts and emotions. This is the equivalent of leaving white space on the page, which in turn allows more space in the reader’s mind. I did not want to take overall control. I wanted readers to make their own mind up about characters and invite them to figure out how characters might feel without telling them, and even how I might feel as author. This is why I chose to use Third Person Point of View, both in Limited and occasionally Subjective. Limited was the primary mode, in order to carry the reader along through the scene, with an eye to the visual representations and a listening ear to the dialogue for nuance, context, latent conflict and subtext.

Shifting the Boundaries and Metanarratives

Over the past decade there has been another change in crime writing. Hyper realism has become popular combined with a well-defined detective whose name appears on the jacket, as well as that of the author and title (for example, Ian Rankin – Inspector Rebus, Lee Child - Jack Reacher, and Ruth Rendell – Chief Inspector Wexford). In this way publishers reassure readers that they will meet an old friend.

Kate Atkinson has shifted the boundaries further. Atkinson has always disliked being called a crime writer. After writing several literary books she wrote *Case Histories* (2004), the first of the four Jackson Brodie novels. Like me, Atkinson is less interested in the latest advances in science and police procedural. I found her books fresh and adventurous because the focus stays on character development and the ramifications of the plot elements *on* the characters. This is more satisfying to read than on plot, or the who or why aspects of crime.

“Mainstream crime is very end-driven: there's a plot that goes directly from A to B, and all the detective is doing is picking

up clues. That's important, but it's not what these books are about. The interesting thing to me is character... and character is unfashionable in crime. What a lot of crime fans want is plot, plot, plot, and character just gets in the way. So when you get something more rounded and interesting, it's inevitably not going to be mainstream." (Robinson, Interview with Kate Atkinson, 2010)

The great irony of the crime genre is that it offers a solid framework in which writers like Atkinson use her imagination to subvert. She creates stories about stories and plays around with the rules creating her own metanarratives. I love the humour in Atkinson's work – not just the sharp observations about society and domestic life but the confidence that she displays as a writer to rebel against the constraints of the framework and come up with something new. Most detective novels are written from the outside but, using Atkinson as a role model, I wanted to explore several points of view and reveal some of the thoughts of my characters – not just Bo Zhang, the private investigator, but also Lola Hunter, and occasionally Tom Porter and the inspector, Morten Fox.

“...never having written crime before, she (Kate Atkinson) instinctively grasped that the apparent limitations of the genre were actually liberating. “By becoming a crime writer,” critic and novelist Patrick Ness astutely noted, “she has become a better literary writer than ever - funny, bracing, and delightfully prickly.” (Robinson, 2010)

This sense of rebellion was something I appreciated and helped me to accept that first of all I had to learn the rules and an awareness of dimensions, before I could play with them. This isn't, of course, a new phenomenon. Artists in every field first learn the rules before they break them. Picasso spent years becoming an accurate figure painter before he went on to deconstruct the way we perceive reality and then invented cubism. Learning about the classical story design with its rigid rules and becoming aware of the balance between vertical and horizontal time in my own writing has been an invaluable lesson.

After about a month on the MCW I regretted that I had chosen to write a crime novel since I'm more of an instinctive writer than a plotter. Once I discovered that a lot of writers, including Kate Atkinson, don't plot that much before they start, it gave me hope.

“I never know in advance where all the bodies are buried. I used to worry about that. But then I found out that a lot of writers

don't know where the plot is going. So now I can just relax and write into it.” (Brown, 2004)

Rather than worry about my lack of plot I continued to focus on creating a strong female character (Bo Zhang) and show how she rises above her troubled past. Bo learns that she can still be objective/good at her job if she allows herself to trust friendship through her connections with Lola and Greta. Her character arc shows that by the end of the novel she decides not to move to Spain, where she would have to start all over again, but build on her existing contacts and the friendships she has already developed in England. In fact, most of the major characters are (knowingly or unknowingly) searching for a place from which to begin.

Lola’s character arc demonstrates self-reliance learnt through her interaction with Bo. Lola also learns to become more active in her decision-making processes. She puts boundaries in place with Hunter and Marc (which in turn enables the possibility of a new relationship) and becomes more ambitious in her aims to be a successful painter.

Setting

Apart from crime writers creating a memorable, often damaged but sympathetic detective, setting is also important. Reading a novel is a symbiotic act. We as readers must use our own imagination when we enter into the world drawn by an author and it helps if the setting is rooted in a physical reality. An evocative and sharply drawn setting will often stay longer in the mind than the actual plot of an exciting crime novel. These are some of my recent favourite crime writers that use setting to striking effect:

In England, Ruth Rendell portrays the wide open spaces in East Anglia. Ian Rankin’s fiction with Inspector Rebus draws us into the disturbing and gritty world that exists behind Edinburgh’s popular façade. Colin Dexter gets into the psyche of professors and the physical spaces of cloistered Oxford college life. Dexter has been quoted as saying he never set foot inside a police station and had little idea of how things really happened.

Dexter said that he "was just as anxious for the detective to manage without the pathology lab as for the crossword puzzler to manage without a dictionary." (qtd. in Charles)

PD James makes her own rules, setting her novels in closed societies, in ‘crucibles’ (for example in a lighthouse, nuclear power station, or on an island). James creates a border around the space and jams her characters within it. They have to get along or destroy each other to survive. By using this technique she takes away both physical and psychological escape routes. “My own detective novels, with rare exceptions, have been inspired by the place rather than a method of murder or a character.” (James, 2009, p. 119)

In Sweden, Henning Mankell gives us a bleak but hauntingly beautiful picture of rural Sweden. Stieg Larrson also writes about brutal crimes in Sweden set against the winter blues in Stockholm and other areas. Arnaldur Indridason uses his succinct yet bold style to portray the arctic chill of Iceland.

In America, Tony Hillerman sets his novels among the Native Americans living in New Mexico which is rich in Navajo culture. Sara Paretsky uses V.I. Warshawski to explore the urban subcultures of Chicago. When I think of James Lee Burke it is his Gothic rendition of the South that stays with me long after the plot lines of what happened to cop Robicheaux. When I lived in the US, I visited these places and saw how each writer used the landscape to its full effect to offset their stories. I found this inspirational and wanted to explore setting in my own fiction. I have written many travel articles and wanted to use my observations about places in my fiction, as well as in more formal articles.

For the setting in my thesis I chose rural Britain, specifically the villages and Plains that surround the ancient monuments of Stonehenge. I wanted an area that I knew intimately (where I was raised) so that it would add realism and provide a sharp contrast - beauty with horror. Knowing it is the little things, the fine details that help a writer, I wanted to draw on my knowledge of local animals, the history and physical geography of Wiltshire. In my thesis I chose to use animals, in particular birds of prey, as frequent motifs to accentuate the predatory nature of the story.

I chose a location (Gauntlet Road exists in reality in Amesbury) as the title for my thesis as an appreciative nod towards the power of setting in this genre. Apart from the resonance with the word ‘gauntlet,’ using a place as a title has echoes of a street in London which fans (of Sherlock Holmes) all over the world know well: 221B Baker Street.

Emotion

Where does my own writing fit in with the evolving nature of crime writing? There has been an explosion of interest in CSI recently and I wanted to transfer interest away from technical skill to real people with real emotions by showing that the humanity of victims has become less important than gadgetry.

In today's entertainment world many of the characters in novels and TV programmes with a strong CSI element have become empty of any real emotion. People have become ciphers. Women are often just objects and no attempt is given to portray the devastation left behind after an act of brutality. Instead we are bombarded with clever gimmicks and technical nonsense. The reality is that almost all forensic pathologists are unable to leave the lab, although we are fed pictures and stories of a shrewd pathologist solving crimes in the field. My thesis is a reaction against this plethora of CSI. Where is this preponderance of gadgetry coming from? Is it commercially driven and just another symptom of the iPhone generation's desire for flashing lights instead of trying to understand complex emotions? Since most of these programmes are written by men in their thirties, perhaps this isn't surprising but I believe that today's audiences might struggle to relate to people's emotions. Perhaps this says more about the creators of these programmes than the audience. I'm trying to use aspects more traditionally related to women's processing modes (emotional and psychological), rather than straight 'take action' and practicality.

I used the viewpoints of two characters to tell the story. Lola is an ordinary mother. She discovers the first body and this experience sends her on a journey of self discovery and confrontation with her past. The second main viewpoint character is Bo Zhang, the independent private investigator. The two viewpoints follow two stories that start off in parallel but knit together the more the novel progresses. Character development pushed the story along as much as plot. I have attempted to parallel Bo and Lola in some ways – both women are in a kind of stasis, dogged by how the events of the past have shaped their character and modes of relating/not relating to others. Bo gets by doing what she knows, but not really getting to know anyone. Lola runs, mirroring the action she was taking when Stevie died, as if she can run all the way to a solution.

The clues, the whodunit skill and forensic wizardry so prominent in say, a Patricia Cornwell novel, are less interesting to me than the emotional resonance derived from

backstory. My backstory (Lola, her ex-husband Hunter and what happened to their child Stevie) is almost as important as Lola's jeopardy. It informs, disturbs and haunts the present. The satisfaction in the third act comes from good triumphing over evil but also from Lola confronting Hunter over the death of their son. It is this that sets it apart from classic crime novels and nudges it towards literary fiction. My aim has been to blur the lines between genres.

I also wanted to develop a rounded Chinese female character living in Britain and bring her up to date. Bo Zhang is strong, active and morally 'good.' She is not the stereotypical Chinese/Asian woman portrayed in many films and books – she is not demure, graceful, obedient and silent. Instead, she is brave, independent and not particularly interested in romance. She brings the traditional quality of honour to young Chinese women through her own actions.

In the late 1990s I lived and worked in Taiwan and saw an enormous change in the way Asian women perceived themselves although traditional values prevailed. I felt the best way to create Bo's character was to remove her from Taiwan and transplant her into rural England. The Chinese community in Britain continues to grow and now there is an upbeat website catering to the needs of young people, www.dimsum.co.uk It was here that I discovered a new TV programme with Chinese people speaking English aimed at children/teens. The main character is an energetic heroine called Bo. Since I had already chosen the name and mapped out her past I decided not to change my character's name and see it as a timely coincidence. Like many immigrants, Bo never feels that she really belongs anywhere, neither in England nor in Taiwan. In my next novel I would like to explore this further.

The Crime Genre Today

Today independent bookshops are disappearing in Europe and the US but shops that specialise in mysteries/crime are growing. Big cities in the US hold special events and author signings in shops like Mystery Loves Company in Baltimore. In New York City there are three shops specialising in crime fiction: Black Orchid, Partners and Crime and the Mysterious Bookshop. Websites like www.mysterynet.com list mystery bookstores across the world and demonstrate the rising popularity of the genre.

If I continue to write literary crime fiction then at least there are publishers and bookshops helping to promote the genre. From this I assume that today's readers are looking for a variety of styles, which encourages me to round out characters and develop real story lines instead of just plot, plot, plot. As Kate Atkinson says, so many crime novels are about ends while literary crime novels are more about the journey.

The threat of terrorism has become a global concern. Perhaps it is no surprise that crime fiction has picked itself up, dusted off and put on a new costume:

“as the evidence suggests, that the detective story flourishes best in the most difficult of times, we may well be at the beginning of a new Golden Age.” (James, 2009, p. 141)

Interview

I have interviewed myself to show a more personal response to the writing of *Gauntlet Road*. I chose this method because I felt it was an effective way to reflect on my experience of writing and to describe intention and process. Also, interviewing is a familiar technique as it draws on my background as a journalist.

Is your novel a typical crime novel?

The bulk of the structure is fairly typical but my novel doesn't fit neatly into the crime genre. I have tried to blend the idea of a literary character in Lola, her backstory with her ex-husband and how she deals with grief, just as much as focus on her jeopardy from the classic villain. I didn't want the intellectual side of crime writing to take precedence over the emotional, as discussed earlier.

Did your novel signify to you its own structure?

Yes, I think so. I didn't write the first chapter until the end. After reading the whole novel I realised it needed more on Stevie and the bath scene so then I wrote a framing first chapter. It resembles a cinematic scene with no names attached to the characters, just reporting what happened to the man and woman in order to leave the reader with a few questions. I wrote the framing first chapter in the present tense to give immediacy which in

turn adds power, and also to distinguish it from the rest of the novel which is written in the past tense. I was then able to repeat bits of the first chapter and continue it forwards in my denouement.

Do you think the structure has been successful?

I like the way tense is used as an element of voice and I think the framing first chapter and denouement work well together. The framing structure is an entity, to bookend the bulk of the narrative to establish and ultimately reconnect to the story of getting through the loss of Stevie and of so much more because of it. By tying this to the framing structure I wanted to give it psychological and emotional primacy. The question of how to balance my chapters and subplots took three attempts. It wasn't until I had finished the first draft that I could address these issues of balance and order.

Which authors have been your main influences?

My reading habits have changed dramatically. As a teen I thought nothing of wading through Russian, French and English classics. I considered myself a literary reader and still enjoy Sebastian Faulks, Rose Tremain, Pat Barker, Cormac McCarthy, J M Coetzee, John Banville, to name a few. I didn't read crime books and rarely chose a best-seller. In 1995 I read Danish writer Peter Hoeg's *Smilla's Sense of Snow* and was captivated by the way it broke all boundaries. Here was a crime story that wasn't driven by plot but offered a character study with immense sensitivity, a setting with symbolic value and a profound exploration on loss. A few months later I read *Snow Falling on Cedars* by David Guterson. It also blends literary fiction with strong characterisation and from there I explored further. Later on I discovered Tony Hillerman, Henning Mankell and Arnaldur Indridason. More recently I have appreciated dialogue far more than I used to. The psychological tension in the dialogue in *The Ghost Road* trilogy (Pat Barker) increased my interest. I was also gripped by the *Millennium Trilogy* by Stieg Larson. He paints a picture of business as usual for his journalist Mikael Blomkvist, interspersed with brutal acts of violence against women with a fine balance of justice triumphing over evil.

Do you read *how to write* books?

While on this course I have read about five recommended books. The one that influenced me the most was Stephen King *On Writing*. I loved it and decided that I would try and keep adverbs to a minimum and not use 26 words when 6 would do. This has been the guiding principle of my fictional voice. Perhaps it's also because of my training – hook

the reader in the first paragraph of an article as that might be all they will read. My appreciation of a long drawn out piece of description irritates me now. I see this as a sign of the times. If I pick up a novel today with long chunks of description with loads of adjectives, there's a good chance I will close the book.

So is it archaic to write description in crime fiction?

Description is expected in literary fiction but it takes a backseat in a lot of contemporary crime novels. Authors of plot-driven stories in the crime genre don't use many adjectives, adverbs, metaphors and similes. I picked a bestseller to read at the beginning of the MCW. As I had never read one of Harlan Coben's books before I chose *Caught* to see how he handled language. There was a stark lack of adjectives, no adverbs and dialogue often had no beats around it at all. Once I accepted his style I could see how lean and effective it was...just as Stephen King recommends.

This influenced me and I tried to find my own spare voice. For the first half of the MCW I had trouble trying to find a balance between developing my own voice and putting in enough beats around dialogue, internal monologue and description to satisfy other writers/readers.

What was the mood/texture that you were aiming for in Gauntlet Road?

I wanted to create an interior weather of gloom to reflect that crime has risen dramatically in the shire counties of Britain. The British countryside is often portrayed as a beautiful, serene place with thatched roofs, haystacks, lovely old churches and rolling pasture. I wanted to keep the setting but show that this is the chocolate box picture. The reality is much darker, especially in these times of recession and unemployment.

Do you think you have written realistically about violence?

I wanted to make a comment about society in Britain today and give it a social context, which I think I have achieved.

My villain is a pathetic, lonely man with an axe to grind against women, literally. I was less interested in why (although I have alluded to it briefly with suggestions that his mother abused him) than in the idea that violence is a way to cope for some people – cops and criminals. It is a way to react to the world that disappoints us or which we disappoint. I also wanted to contrast a successful, educated man in the character of Marc (a barrister, despite being abandoned at birth) with the villain, Robert. Marc is articulate and capable of manipulating situations. He is persuasive and acts in a contrary manner to the way he

speaks so although he doesn't end up like Robert, he has the potential to fall apart. I wanted to explore the idea that intellectual veneers are sometimes just that...the line between acceptable behavior and antisocial is sometimes very thin.

You have quoted Arthur Conan Doyle in *Gauntlet Road*. Was he another influence?

Yes, I have read quite a lot of his short stories as well as his detective novels. The main thing that stays with me from *Hound of the Baskervilles* is the sense of place. The lonely moorlands in Devon create an ominous foreshadowing for later discoveries. It was this feeling I wanted to capture in my own novel. The complexities of Holmes' character are another draw despite him being a classic misogynist.

How did you want to portray women in this genre?

Most females fall into clichéd groups in crime writing. In movies, TV programmes and play station games female detectives are often svelte, sexy, gun-toting girls who kick ass. Stieg Larsson's Lisbeth Salander in *Girl with a Dragon Tattoo* was inspirational although a bit cartoonish. His gothic girl with a damaged past has a lot to say about misogyny and Lisbeth has become a heroine for our time.

Other writers opt for the lesbian sleuth. Val McDermid's novels have been successfully adapted to the TV series *Wire in the Blood* with lesbian journalist Lindsay Gordon. Other lesbian writers include Patricia Cornwell whose forensic mysteries started the revolution in women's crime fiction. Or there is Manda Scott, a vet from Glasgow, whose crime books have titles such as *Night Mares* and *Stronger Than Death*.

Then there is the ice queen of cool reasoning like in Lynda La Plante's *Prime Suspect* books and TV series with DCI Jane Tennison.

I wanted to create heterosexual, empathic, yet capable women able to think on their own without the prop of a male lover. There is sexual tension rather than romance in my novel. Bo remains single throughout the novel and Lola attracts unwanted male attention wherever she goes. Lola's journey of self discovery enables her to confront what held her back and on the last page there is the possibility of love and a new beginning.

What was your writing routine?

On good days I wrote for about five or six hours. Some days I didn't write at all but then I tried to do research, read, make notes, go to class, or meet fellow bloggers. Sometimes in the evenings I edited what I had written earlier. Most days I wrote between

2000-3000 words and didn't start a new chapter until I felt fairly happy with the one I had finished. I write much like I read...one word follows the next.

Do you want to write another literary crime novel?

Yes, I want to build on what I have learnt this year. I plan to use two of my characters again – Bo Zhang and Morten Fox.

Now I have a better understanding of the tools needed to construct a novel and a greater understanding of who I am as a writer.

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