

What was your favourite childhood book?

I was obsessed with a series of books about Viking warriors written by Geoffrey Treece-- Viking Dawn, Viking Crusader etc. (if memory serves). I'm quite sure I would like those books just as much if I read them today.

Which book has made you laugh?

Kingsley Amis "Lucky Jim."

Which book has made you cry?

When my father read "A Tale of Two Cities" to me and my two brothers, I think we were all in tears by the end.

Which book would you never have on your bookshelf?

Probably the Da Vinci Code (although I saw the movie, of course).

Which book are you reading at the moment?

"Alone in Berlin" by Hans Fallada--that forgotten German book that was recently re-issued in translation by Penguin. It is magnificent.

Which book would you give as a present?

"Stone's Fall," by Iain Pears. I think I've given it to at least five people so far, including one person (my mother) twice, forgetting that I'd given it to her the first time.

Which other writers do you admire?

I'm very drawn to the great non-fiction storytellers, so Michael Lewis and Janet Malcolm and Adam Gopnik are at the top of my list.

Which classic have you always meant to read and never got round to it

I've never read any Jane Austen, and feel guilty about that. Nor any Tolstoy.

What are your top five books of all time, in order or otherwise?

Oh dear. An impossible question! Here's a stab at it -- and these are just those that come to mind right away. John LeCarre's "The Spy who came in from the Cold"; Michael Lewis "The Blindside,"; Iain Pears "Stone's Fall"; Janet Malcolm "In the Freud Archives," Richard Nisbet and Lee Ross "The Person and the Situation."

What is the worst book you have ever read?

Well, I think I usually stop well before the end if I hate something, so its hard to say.

Which book have you found yourself unable to finish?

Virtually everything by Ian McEwan. Not because I think he's a bad writer. The opposite: he's so good and the situations and emotions he evokes are so powerful that I simply can't bear it. He's too strong for my blood.

Is there a particular book or author that inspired you to be a writer?

My mother wrote a memoir when I was very young called "Brown Face, Big Master," which is still the most beautiful and important book I have ever read.

What is your favourite time of day to write? And favourite place?

I like to write in the mornings, in the cafe around the corner from my apartment.

Which fictional character would you most like to have met?
George Smiley!

Longhand or word processor?
Both. The first for the first draft, the second for editing.

Who, in your opinion, is the greatest writer of all time?
No idea. I think it's awfully crowded at the top of that list.

What is your favourite word?
Malfeasance.

Other than writing, what other jobs or professions have you undertaken or considered?
I tried to get into advertising after college but couldn't find a job. I still think that would have been quite fun.

What was the first piece you ever had in print?
I think it was a book review for the American Spectator, years ago. As I recall, I got a key fact wrong and thought my career was over.

What are you working on at the moment?
Nothing! I'm out of ideas at the moment. Hopefully that will end soon.