



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

Matt: Welcome to the London Writer Salon. We are Matt and Parul. We are your hosts for today's interview. We're also the co-founders of the London Writer Salon. And our salon interviews are a chance for us to go behind the scenes of a writer's journey and dig into the stories behind the stories.

And so each week we invite to the salon a writer that we admire to explore the craft of writing, the art, of building a writing career, and the reality of navigating it all. And

Parul: today our guest is Maggie O'Farrell. Maggie is the author of *Hamlet and the Memoir*. *I Am. I Am.* *17 Brushes with Death*, both Sunday Times Number one bestsellers.

Her other books, incredible books, include *After He'd Gone* the *Vanishing Act* of Esme Lennox, the *Hand that first held at mine*. *My Lover's Lover* and instructions for *Heatwave*. Her latest book, which was out in Hardback last year, is out in paperback. The marriage portrait is out in July this year, and excitingly this year an adaptation of *Hamlet* opened at Swan Theater in Stratford upon Aen, and we'll be at the back theater in

Matt: September.

Today we are virtually honored to be hosting this at Arvan and who are well known. Many of you are big fans of Aon and members of Arvan. They're known for their incredible writing courses, events and retreats, both in person and online. And as you'll find out today, Arvan was a big part of Maggie's journey as a writer.

We'll be learning a bit about that. And today we will be talking with Maggie about her writing journey from journalist to bestselling author, how Arvan helped Nurture and. Help her launch the work in the career that and, the type of writer that she is today. The inspiration that drives Maggie's work.

And of course we'll talk about her latest novel, the *Marriage portrait*. We've prepared a bunch of questions for Maggie Parlo and I, but about 40, 45 minutes



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

or so in, we will turn it over to you to ask some of your questions. We'll try to get through as many as we can. And just a bit of a note on timing.

We actually due to unforeseen circumstances, we're gonna have to end this at five minutes past eight if you're in, the uk. But don't worry, we've fielded a lot of your questions and so we've embedded these into our questions as well. So thank you so much for sending those. Alright, let's again, without further ado to kick us off Mary Morris from Arvan artistic director.

Thank you Mary first for hosting us over to you.

Mary: Thank you Matt. It's really wonderful to be here. I'm Mary Morris. I'm artistic director of Arvin, and I'm based at Toley Barton, which is our beautiful Devon writing house. So if you're not familiar with Arvin, we are a charity that's been running residential writing courses for over 50 years.

So we seek to provide a very relaxed and creative environment where people can develop their skills or newcomers can begin their writing journey. And we have three houses, Devonshire and Yorkshire. And we have a very exciting project there at the moment to make Lum Bank our Yorkshire house, which was Ted Hughes's house.

A kind of hub for northern writers and to be more accessible for more writers than ever before. And it's also that I'm talking about Lum Bank, because that was in some ways the beginning of Maggie O'Farrell's journey. And she found direction there and motivation to carry on. So that brings us to our questions.

Welcome Maggie, and welcome back to Arlan Maggie. We are really

Maggie: delighted to, have you here.

Mary: When you began you said that Arvan gave you the encouragement to keep going. So you sent a you, submitted a rough draft of your first novel during one of those Arvan weeks. But maybe you could place us in your life at that time.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

What were you doing? Where were you, what brought you to that moment

Maggie: in the first place? Sure. And I would say hi to everybody and thank you so much for having me. So when I went to Arvan, it was, I think it was 1990, probably the end of 1996, which is of course a very long time ago. And I was 24 at the time and I was working.

As, I mean I was working on the Independent on Sunday, which sounds glamorous, but I really wasn't in a very glamorous position. I was the kind of dog's body on the art and books desk, which I was absolutely thrilled to be. I loved it. But I was also secretly writing something. Actually when Mary says I added in a rough draft that's slightly over overstating it, I handed in about 20,000 words of what I thought was a short story when I started writing.

It was getting longer and longer. It was by no means anywhere near a first draft. It was an absolute dog's dinner when I look back on it now. But I went on I think it was a novel. It must have been a novel writing course, and it was with El Smith Barker and Barbara Teo, both of whom I absolutely loved.

So I was totally in awe of them both, and I handed in what I had and And I feel I really wanted to finish it. I really wanted to write it as a novel, but I had no idea really how to do that or whether or not it was any good. I was at that point where I was, it was too long for a short story and no one needed long enough to be a novel.

So I didn't really know. I had no idea what it was. And then what happened was that I baked a day, or maybe even two days into the course, but not for an else, but said to me we need to talk to you. Can you come to the library? And I of course, instantly thought it's, they read what I handed in and thought it was so bad that I'm gonna be thrown off the course, I'm gonna be sent home.

I genuinely thought, that's what I go. So I walked into the library feeling really terrible and I thought, oh I guess I'll just have to think of something else to do with my life. But actually they both said really quite seriously we think you should finish this, and when you finished it, we'll send it to our agent.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

And I was it was, I. I still remember the, a absolute astonishing conversation, just that somebody had read it. Somebody I really two p people I really admired and they liked it. And then the idea that I would at some point get an agent was just so astonishing. And this is a story that I have told Mary before.

So this was the depths, absolute depths of winter in New Yorkshire, in Luang and new Yorkshire malls. And I was so excited that I ran outside and I was only wearing, I dunno, with jeans and a sweater. And it was pitch dark cause there's absolutely no street lighting around there. So I ran outside, so excited and I fell into an icy.

Stitch. And it was really difficult to get out cause it was quite slippery and I think actually the water was slightly filled with manure. So for one moment I thought, God, I'm going to die in a stitch and I will never get to finish my novel. I'll never get an agent and nobody will ever know what happened to me.

But I did spoiler alert, I did actually manage to get out. But it was all writer's journeys are you have these peaks and troughs. I think you have these peaks of relation where somebody says, I like it, or I can help you, or what you're doing is good. And it's followed by so many troughs and there's never a straight line, of course, between starting a book and finishing a book.

And there's certainly not a straight line between finishing book and publishing a book. So that's not the, that's just one, one chapter at the beginning of the story. There's a lot after that, obviously, like everybody else. It's quite unusual that the trough is almost literally a trough. It was a literal trough.

It's, we wanna have a blue plaque up

Mary: at Lum Bank, we're gonna find that ti ditch one way or another.

Maggie: Are there particular writers that stage in your kind of writing journey

Mary: influenced you either through your reading at that time or through directly teaching



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

Maggie: you? So many actually. I was reading, I always have actually been a real voracious reader, and this is something I always say to people who tell me that they want to be a writer.

I always say to be a writer, you have to be a reader first and foremost. You have to be a reader. I've occasionally, I used to teach creative writing a long time ago, and. If any of my students came into my office and said I don't read anything because I don't like it interfering with my, craft, I would always say, you have to leave my office and you can only come back in when you can turn what you're reading.

You, do you ever meet a musician that doesn't listen to music? You have to, you can learn an awful lot from books that you love. You can possibly learn probably more sometimes from books you don't love from asking yourself, why does this work? Why does this make, set me on fire, and why does this leave me cold?

That's, always a very interesting analysis. You can read a book or I tend to, if I'm reading a book that I love or it's Do, the Writer is doing something interesting, I will read it first as a reader, and then when I get to the back, Page, I will read it again almost immediately as a writer, and I will be like an in sort of an engineer looking under the bonnet of a car and just thinking, how does, how is the writer doing this?

How does it fit together? What are the techniques that's employed here? What are the timeframes, what are the tenses? All that stuff. You read it again with a very, technical head on. That's great advice.

Mary: I'm, gonna hand over to Pearl Matt in, in a moment, but just one last question of if, somebody's considering going on an Avan type retreat, is there something that you would suggest to them in, terms of making the best of your time there,

Maggie: ditch as a science?



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

I would say, to choose the course really carefully. So if you want to be a screenwriter make sure you are on a screenwriting course. You don't just panic. Book a kind of short story writing or writing for children. Think really clearly about what it is you want to do and actually, but don't.

I don't think you need to stick to it too much. I thought for a long time I wanted to be a poet and I did write poetry for a long time. But let's just say it's not a great loss to the world's of poetry that I'm not a poet. But I think sometimes you have to listen to the kind of radio interference of what's coming in.

And if it turns out to be a short story, then write it short story. And if it's gonna be a novel, and it's gonna be a novel, but, so choose that. And also, if you're lucky enough in on the album brochure or whatever, to spot somebody who's writing you really admire, whose work you really love, then go for that.

Cuz you can learn an awful lot. You can ask that person. And that's writers who teaching a course, they're there, they want to help, they want to be asked. So don't be scared to go up to them and say, I have 15 questions and can I chat to you? Because I'm sure they'd say yes, I would've done, I'm not sure if anyone, I dunno, anyone will be grumpy and say no.

Maybe take a cup of tea with you and a chocolate brownie that helps. The chocolate brownie is a long way. Okay. Thank you

Mary: so much Maggie. I'm, going to hand over those the end of my questions, but lovely to have

Matt: you here. Yeah. Thank you Mary, so much again for hosting us here at Arvan. Maggie, I'm curious, in those early days at Arvan when you started to get affirmation and confirmation from people you respected about your work, what, did you have ambitions at the time?

Were you able to, were you imagining yourself as this great bestselling novelist or were you just focused on the book in front of you?



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

Maggie: No, not at all. I didn't, know what I was doing. I was 24 and I was flailing about trying to pay my rent in my horrible bed sets in London and trying to hang onto to a job and trying to learn learn how to navigate a journalist office.

I think, I suppose what the other thing I really believe in actually is that it's not so much, I have never. Ever admitted to myself, not even now, really, that I want to be a writer. I think the important thing is, that you want to write, and I think there is a really important distinction, and I think the people who want to write are going to be the ones who finish a book or finish their collection of stories or whatever it is they're writing.

I think the people who dream of being a writer are probably coming at it from the wrong direction. I think you, you have to have that urge and it's an insatiable urge and it's a slightly mad urge because really what, kind of person sits down and thinks, okay, for the next two or three years I'm gonna be working on this one story and talking to these imaginary friends, it is a bit of a mad thing to do.

So you have to have a certain amount of drive and you have to have certain amount of inspiration, and you have to have a certain amount of sticking power. You've got to be able to stick with a story and you've got to be able to rewrite it and you've gotta be able to redraft that one particular scene 25 times if it needs it.

So it's a kind of, it's a mix, but I think. I think if you're starting out, what you need to focus on is the work and getting the words done on paper. And you can practice your accept Booker acceptance speeches in the bathroom, Mary, if you want to. But the most important thing is that you get those words down, speech advice,

Parul: just like to pick up to round the time after Aon, where you went on to complete the book after you'd gone and it was published in 2000.

I'm just curious about looking back, how did you find your first



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

Maggie: publishing experience? I was very actually I think I'm quite unusual in the fact that I have always had the same publisher. So I haven't, I have been with the same publisher since 2000 and I've had the same agent and I've had the same editor, which I think is, extraordinary.

I think it's very, unusual and I, find it really hard to actually, to imagine ever writing or publishing a book without them without my agent, my editor of 20, however long, 23 years. So I've been incredibly lucky in that way. But certainly as I was saying there is no, straight line.

So when I came, when I finished the album course, I had maybe, I dunno, I'd written, I may have had maybe 25,000 words or something. And so I went on for the next year. I pushed ahead. I was writing obviously part-time. I was working full-time, so I was writing in evenings and weekends and it probably took me a year to finish a first draft when what I thought of then as first draft, it was actually a real mess.

And I did send it to Barbara and agent who was someone called Alexander Pringle, who actually shortly after it was left, she, she was a managing editor at Bloomsbury for a while. And she was very good and she didn't pull her punches at all. And she said you need to go and redraft this, you've got maybe seven plots and you probably only need a maximum of two or three and you've got far too many adverbs and there's this so she gave me, she.

Gave me this kind of quite stern advice, which was brilliant advice because actually, and she said, I'll, you need to go and redraft it and then I will think about taking you on. So it was very, she was very much contingent on it of whether or not I could actually do the work or whether I was willing to do the work.

I think, which is what you need to hear when you're 25. You don't need someone to say, that's great. I love it. You can be my client. I'm gonna get you a book, a publishing deal. Because it was very good that she sent me back to the desk. So I spent another I dunno how long it was probably nine months or so, redrafting



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

it, cutting out some of my really not very good plots and getting rid of my adverbs, et cetera, et cetera.

And at that point she said, okay, I will represent you. And it was sent out, I think, at that point to six publishers or so, all of whom said, no. And so I redrafted it again. I did another probably nine months work on it. And at that point it was sent out to different publishers, I don't know, six or seven of them.

And at that point they, a lot of them did want it. So I had, but I had there had been two years, I think easily a year and a half, two years between me finishing what I thought was my first draft and it being accepted for publication. So it's, a long road and you have to be willing to re-draft and work hard and cut and improve and all those things.

But I think it was very good. I'm really glad they told me to do that. I learned an enormous amount from being told what was wrong with it.

Matt: And we're all glad you stuck with it because here you're not decades later and I'm curious and we're, spending a little time on your earlier career just to cuz that might be where a lot of people are right now.

And so after that first book comes out to much acclaim, we're curious what that second book, my Lover's Lover. What was happening for, you, what was it like after that success to then come out with the second book? There's in, doing research, there's a talk that Elizabeth Gilbert gave about musing on What if my best success is behind me with e prey love?

And I'm wondering what was happening with you? Were you worried about the success of the first one? How do I take this into the second one? Can you place this in your life with that second one? What was happening for you? How were you feeling about your writing?

Maggie: To be honest, I don't think after you'd gone was a massive seller or anything.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

I think I had some very nice reviews and people were very encouraging, but it wasn't as if it was a sudden big bestseller. I don't even think it was in the bestseller list. I don't, I'm pretty sure it wasn't. I forget now. It's a long time ago. So I think in a way I was quite lucky cuz it did, there was a kind of slow build.

I think it must be, I. Sometimes I, I do sometimes look at, I sometimes actually feel slightly anxious for first time authors who have a massive splashy hit. I think that must put an awful lot of pressure on you, I think. And I think it's but who know? Everybody, it happens differently.

And certainly I think what I didn't know when I started writing my second novel is that all novels are different and they all need a different technique and they have different joys and they have different challenges. And I think it's hard to know that, cuz sometimes I think when you've written your first novel, you think, okay I, know how to write novels now.

But actually what you know is, you know how to write that novel. What you don't know is how to write this novel, the new one. And I know that now, and it's actually a bit like, I think it's a bit like having children when you have your, when I had my first baby There's a huge learning curve and you have to learn all kinds of things and all weird vocabulary and worlds and, then you think, okay, I've got this now.

And so you think, oh, I have another baby. And so when I had my second baby, I thought, this is fine. I know how to do this. And then of course, along comes along a completely different person. And you've got to completely recalibrate your parenting for this next child. And I think it's exactly the same with novels.

You, with every book, you have an enormous learning curve and you learn all kinds of different things. And I always try to do something different with every book to set myself a new challenge or a hurdle, and you learn how to do it on the job. But it in a way it's good, but I think it's a surprise actually for somebody who.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

When you start your second level, cuz you don't necessarily know that I know it now and I embrace it and I really love it. I love the fact that every book feels different cuz it should otherwise you'd end up writing the same book over and over again. But I think that was a surprise for me.

Certainly. So it is all books are impossible in a sense. But, become possible if you have to find your way through them. That's very interesting.

Parul: And someone might look at you today, Maggie, and just think she's living the dream. A lot of writers in our community think of you as someone you know, like someone they aspire to.

You've had I think 12 books published you've, broken into the US market, you're a treasure of the literary world, but this is an overnight success. And everything that you've said, you sound like I'm

Maggie: dead

and I'm,

Parul: curious how you think about this. What do you think you've done right over this, over the decades to keep you going to, persist? As you say, each book is different, has its own challenges, what have you done differently? Do you think that's helped

Maggie: you? Actually in some ways I think I'm probably the worst person to ask that question to, and also because I have a deliberate policy of just never thinking about where I am or how people perceive me or where my books might be in some kind of tabulation of, I don't know.

I think for me anyway, I have to comp, I completely ignore that side of the work of being a writer, and I'm very lucky in that I have people who do that who cope with that kind of thing. For me I have a brilliant agent who deals with sales figures and, I always say to her, I do not want to know, don't send me any emails about sales, figures.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

I, I don't think it's, not good for me to know that stuff. My job as I see it, is to write the books and the only idea of success that I should be, grappling with is whether or not the book is working. Whether or not the second half agrees with the first half, whether or not the themes are coming together, whether or not the dialogue feels real and lived, whether or not the whole narrative has a pulse.

That's my, that's what I think of that in terms of success and failure. It's the work. And actually I completely ignore it. So I never, ever read my reviews for that very reason. I don't think it's very good for me. Cuz I like to write in a kind of bubble of un self-consciousness. I think the best book you can write is the one you can't not write.

It's always the one that's calling your name the loudest. It's the one that's tugging at your sleeve most. I consistently, and I think if you are trying to second guess what, I dunno, a market wants or a readership wants or even saying these words makes me ugly, come out in hives. But. You can't think about that.

The idea that you'd be writing with this imaginary reader or editor or market appearing over your shoulder. I find it so distracting. I just, I deliberately ignore it and I deliberately don't engage with it at all. That's one of the reasons I'm not on social media. I don't do any kind of social media at all.

It's partly time. Cuz I have three kids and they always have to come first, but it's also partly that I think no writer needs to hear themselves explain to themselves because you have to just think about the work and whether or not that is a success to you. Thanks Maggie. I think

Parul: that should be a wake up.

That should be a wake up call for all of us every morning. Just a

Maggie: reminder to focus on the, honestly I think different things different, everybody will, approach this differently. And some people and in a way that I'm quite lucky cuz I do have people that do social media for me.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

And not everybody's in that position. I'm very aware of that. So I'm lucky in a sense that I don't have to there are people who will take that on for me and I realize that not every writer is in that position, but for me, certainly I, need to not, I need to completely cut myself off from that.

I'm gonna put my blind down cuz I'm getting slightly blinded by my son. I'm not disappearing forever.

Matt: Go for it. Watching the, sun slowly set on you. It's something, very poetic about that.

Maggie: Oh, that's better sun. The sun in Scotland this time of year is quite blinding. Oh, that's so much better now.

Now I can see. See.

Matt: Thanks Maggie for the, for those advice and, that, those pieces of advice. Let's turn to your latest work. The, work that was pulling you most recently. For those of anyone here listening, watching who hasn't had a, the privilege of, reading the marriage portrait can you tell us a little bit about it?

Maggie: Sure. It's based on a real life story and it's about a young duchess, 16 year old Duchess in Renaissance's Florence, who is given to an not old man in marriage. And she realizes not long after the wedding that he is planning to murder her

suspense.

Matt: We're gonna dive into the craft. We have a bunch of questions. We'll see how many we can get through in the next 25 minutes or so. About the craft. Carl,

Maggie: I can't hear. And going



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

Parul: back to what you said earlier, Maggie, about you say the write the story that you not write. And. I've also read that you said that the novel chooses you and, so I'm curious about how the marriage portrait came to you. How was it shouting out to you, the nighting

Maggie: to be heard?

It's funny I think mostly that novels have quite long gestational periods for me anyway. There can often be years, or in some cases a decade or so that I've been thinking about something before I come to write it before something the time is right or it's the right time in my life, or who knows?

I, dunno why, I dunno what it is that makes a novel come to the fore. But with this one, actually this one is the exception to rule the marriage portrait because I, after I'd finished Hannah, I couldn't decide what to write next. And I was actually writing, I had two different ideas I was working on, I have two desks in my office and I was writing one book on one desk and one book on the other.

And switching between the two every couple of days just to see which one. Took, fire in a sense, or took, flight. But actually what happened was that I had the very sudden idea for the marriage portrait. And, that one just it just appeared in, it just fell into my lap one day and that one just blew the other two outta the water.

And I, it's actually, I'd been rereading Robert Browning's dramatic monologues, which are poems that I often do read, actually, particularly when I'm between projects or just embarking on something new. And I was, I'd been reading the most famous one, my last Duchess. And I'd just been thinking to myself idly one day whether or not it was based on real people, because some of them are.

And I looked it up on my phone. And within a minute or two I had her name, which was Lara Medici. And the awful fact that she'd been 16 when she died, probably at the hands of her husband and I. And then a minute or two after that, I, there was this portrait downloading on my very old phone, and it's a portrait by an branzino.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

In fact, you can see it just behind Matt on the American book cover. The British book cover has a different one, but she but in the portrait you can see her and she's, and she looks very I think unusually for Renaissance's portraits, which usually look quite blank and you can't really tell what the subject is thinking.

But Lere looks very anxious. She looks quite worried. And I think crucially, for me anyway, she looks as though she has something she wanted to, she wants to say she wants to tell us. And so it was really extraordinary and it's never happened before. And I hope it does happen again. Cause it's quite nice when you get this lightning bolt of an idea.

But I just, as soon as I saw her, I just knew that I was looking at the subject on my next book that I would write the story that she herself might have told were she able. And what are those first?

Parul: Maybe first month of writing. This looked like, were you writing at the beginning? Were you picking scenes from the middle?

Maggie: It's very exciting, definitely when you get a new idea and it's a feeling like nothing else actually. And but I do always really believe that actually beginnings are very hard. I wish, this is something I wish I had known or I'd been told when I started out, but beginnings are really difficult.

The idea that you have to write this first chat. You've gotta engage your reader, you've gotta set out your stool, you've got to establish the time and place and setting. You've gotta get the voice and the characterization. It's terrifying. Nobody would ever write any novel if if you worried too much about the beginning.

So I never start at the beginning. And I just plunged in and I thought who is Lucia? What, is she like? And so I'd had done a bit of research. I'd find out enough about her to get a kind of foothold. And actually the first scene I ever wrote about her. Was a scene where she's seven years old and she's taken to the basement of her father's palazzo to, he keeps an, exotic menagerie.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

And she meets a tiger for the first time. And that was the first scene I ever wrote. And actually it appears on, I don't know, maybe page 30 or 40 in the actual finished book. But that was me in a sense, getting to know her, finding out who she was who what's, in, what's inside her, what's in her soul.

And I should say that actually I wrote that, it was just, I started a book just as lockdown began in the spring of 2020. And so I, I wrote the description of the tiger from my daughter's plastics like tigers. I had them lined up at the end of, my, on my desk, about four of them. And they are brilliant.

They're very anatomically perfect. But it was that, it was, that, it was that size of a tiger that I was looking at to write that scene. And I wonder, and

Matt: because the marriage portrait and, similar with Hamnet, you take a couple pieces of historical facts and then you've created a beautiful story out of it.

And I, wonder at what point do you feel like there's a story here?

Maggie: I think I knew with both, with Hamnet and Lucia, that there was a story there just because it was just particularly I'd been into by contrast, Hamlet was a book that I thought about for a long time. It had quite a long gestational period, and actually one of the reasons it did, it was because I had a superstition, a very weird superstition that I couldn't write that book until.

My own son was well past the age of 11. I just couldn't do it. He's now a very strap, almost 20 year old, but when I first had the idea, he was probably about nine or 10. And I just knew that I couldn't write about this family and this mother that loses an 11 year old boy. Cuz I knew I'd be thinking about him.

And actually, inevitably my hamner in the novel is actually quite similar to my son in lots of ways. So I couldn't do it, but I, knew that there was a very interesting, to me anyway, story about. The death of this child, this 11 year old boy whose name is so similar to the play that the link between how the link



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

between Hamlet dying and the writing of Hamlet, that was seemed irresistible to me.

But I think I think what Hamnet and Lucretia have in common certainly is that actually there is very little known about the both their stories are in a sense, they are part of this enormously and famous stories. Lare is a Medici who is one of the best known dynasty of that era.

Her father was Cosmo to Medici. Her mother was Eleanor de Toledo. You could walk into the Defeat gallery. You can see many, paintings of her parents. They were incredibly famous. Her father built the afi, just for example. I don't think single-handedly, I think he ordered somebody to build it.

So I think what they have in common is that they are a kind of tiny unknown story in a much larger, well-known history. One of the reasons I wanted to write Hamlet is I always felt Hamlet had never been given his Jew. He was just a kind of literary footnote In his father's story, not enough people knew about him.

And certainly with Leia she's born into this incredible famous dynasty and this very, famous time. We all know a little bit, even if we've never been to Florence, we know what the paintings look like. We know what the buildings look like, we recognize it. But at the same time, hers is a history and hamlets is a history that's been written in water.

And I think gaps in a biography of a subject would be very frustrating for a historian or a biography. Certainly cuz there's not much known about either of these children. But for a novelist, those gaps or longers are, an opportunity cuz you, you can fill those gaps with whatever story you, yourself would like to tell.

And I'm curious about

Parul: how you build up these characters, as you say. You, have gaps in history, so you can build 'em up yourself. May maybe tell us about Lucretia. How did she become the



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

Maggie: character? She, yeah, certainly there are, so her parents, Cosmo and Eleanor were had and had an arranged marriage like she did.

But actually those was a hugely successful arranged marriage. They really loved each other and they really fancied each other and they really were, I think mi are in moron usually for that time in class. They really, they were fatal to each other, so when they were apart, and Cosmo used to seed his rule to Eleanor when he was absent from Tuscany, which was.

Unheard of the idea that the Florentine court, sorry, that's my daughter singing in the background. See, I think but for the Florentine Court to suddenly have to be deferential to a woman was really shocking. And not only she was Spanish it was even so shocking, the whole thing.

But when they were apart, they used to write to each other a lot. And their letters are a mind of information, actually, about the domestic life of the medic cheese life in the Lazer. And a lot of lure siblings. She had many siblings. Eleanor's nickname was Laima. And it was very clear from the letters that Cosmo favored Isabella, one of the sisters, and Eleanora favored her sons.

It actually creates quite heartbreakingly. She's the youngest of the daughters, the fifth child. Doesn't really get much of a mention. She's very she seems to be very much overlooked. And underloved, it's very, it is very, sad, overlooked and underloved. But there was one glimpse of her.

Which really informed my characterization of her was there was a one line about her, it just says that she's a daydreamer and doesn't concentrate in her lessons. And so you find that tiny, shred. And from that I extrapolated this kind of slightly daydreamy in, has very, rich interior life. And also the de detail that I read about her father keeping an exotic menagerie in the basement.

That to a novel. That was totally sable. I've read that and I thought, oh my God, how amazing. The idea, this huge renaissance kind of fortress of a building had lions and tigers and gorillas in the basement. It's so terrible and so dreadful, but so irresistible to a novelist.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

So that of course became, as I said the first, my first foray into the book. When you discover

Matt: these little tidbits, these little lines, where do you house these? Do you have a notebook that you keep them? Is it separate from where you're writing it? What does that look like?

Maggie: Where do you put those?

Yeah, so I have a big love for stationary here is one of my notebooks actually just sitting on the desk next to me. So I have a notebook, or actually several, I have a set of different notebooks for each book that I'm working on. And so I do write everything down and then I could turn, actually, no, I can't really turn the laptop I could show you so I have big diagrams. When I get to a certain point in the book, I need to write a kind of flow chart of where I am, which what's gonna happen where, cuz I'm not a huge fan of chronology as a narrative propulsive force. I think chronology is a really quite dull, so often the books have, and my books have a kind of quite complicated timeframe.

And I have to be really sure that I remember I have a handle on what's happening where, and also you have to really. If you are going to write a book that's non chronological, you have to really make sure that you've left a clear enough trail of breadcrumbs through the forest for your readers to follow you.

Cuz you don't want to leave them behind cuz they think, hang on a second, where are we now? Where are we in space and time? So there are, I do do quite large flow charts and I have lots and lots of post-its, many post-its. And yeah so I don't, I mean I'm not much of a planner really.

I don't set things out very firmly. But I have a general idea of where I would want the book to go, but I'm very open to the book changing my mind. Certainly I think there's a point at which way your characters and the novel might start to defy you and you think when you're set out you think, okay, this is my book is gonna go from A to B, but actually what I find happens Is it sometimes you are



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

halfway through or a third of the way through and your characters will say, actually, we're not going from A to B.

We're going from A to C or maybe A to D. But that's always a good thing cuz I think that's the moment where you realize the book is working. That it's got its own heartbeat. It's got its own pulse and when it misbehaves it's always a really good sign.

Matt: I feel like there's some sort of secret in that, mindset cuz some people might resist that to say, no, this is the plan.

I don't want to go in that direction. Then meanwhile you're flowing with it, it sounds

Maggie: I think there's a huge value in your kind of instinctive level, your instinctive mind when you are writing. I think particularly I, I always try and leave decisions about certain quite technical things sometimes such as grammar tense or Kate whether it's first person, third person third person or whatever.

I usually leave that up. I think what Ard Kipling called the wrong side of his head. I think there's a sense in which you have to trust the material. You've got to trust the narrative and it will tell you what it needs. And there have been times when I've begun a book and actually got quite far and I've been writing in the, I dunno, first person past tense.

And actually what I will find that happens when I sit down in the morning, I will find that I am slipping into say the third person present tense. And after a while I have to ask myself, why is it I keep doing this? Why is it I keep slipping into this other one and maybe I should listen to whatever it is that's telling me that.

So I once wrote a book called *The Hand That First Held Mine*. I did exactly that. I started in the first person and about I was about 30,000 words in when I thought to myself there's a reason why I keep slipping into the third person. I



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

have to listen to this. The book is telling me the material is telling me that it needs something different.

So I had to spend, I think it was about a week, maybe two weeks, exchanging every it she and every meter. That was a really dull Fortnite, but it was worth it. It was the right thing to do. What do you do if you're ever,

Parul: sorry, just one question, Matt. What do you do if you're in that, at that junction, you're feeling a bit, you're feeling like you might be in the wrong direction, you want to switch tents or maybe there's another decision for you in the book, but you are just not sure, and maybe you're starting to feel frustrated.

What might you do to clear your head or to, get some perspective?

Maggie: I think there is a great advantage in knowing that not all of your work. Actually not, actually quite a large part of it is not achieved while you're sitting at your desk with your pen and paper or with your laptop when you are.

It's not a lot of the work as a of a writer is done when you are looking other way when you're doing something else. I've had some of my, I've resolved some big knots when I've been doing, I dunno, looking after my kids or walking around or I dunno, doing it washing up. I think there is a great, I think there's a huge, I think it's very important to walk away when it's happening or when you really, cuz with any book, you're going to meet a series of brick walls.

You're gonna meet a series of what you think are totally impenetrable nuts. But they aren't. You will find a way, but I think if you make yourself sit there feeling more and more miserable, that's not the way to handle it. You have to walk away. You need to take a break. You need to go for a walk. You need to see a friend, watch a film, read a book, anything.

And at some point Something, will loosen and something a, solution will, arrive for you.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

Matt: I'm curious at the scene and the sentence level, cuz this is a lot of the feedback that maybe you're not reading it, but we get when we hear about your work, is just how rich, how impactful and how effortless it looks.

And we're sure it's not effortless. And I wonder if you can give us an x-ray into what crafting at the sentence level looks like for you. If we were to like hover over you for, a day, for a week what, does that look like?

Maggie: I think what I would say is that I, I don't, partly I think it's partly having young children.

I mean my children aren't so much so young anymore, but I've had young children for quite a long time. I've got big age gaps with my children and I think, I don't probably spend many hours actually sitting at my desk writing if I. So as, particularly when I'm starting a book, I will try to make sure that I sit there for at least an hour, even if it's going badly.

So I would say if I'm actually physically writing, producing words for an hour, maybe two hours, that's a really good day's work. And the rest of the day I'll be with my kids or I'll be answering a thousand emails that we all get every day. So I think it is important to walk away, but like I was saying, but also I think I just literal love doing it.

I've never had a job where I just love it as much as I do. And it's partly that, and I think there is, I think you do have to think about, I think there are moments in your book when you're thinking about the micro level, when you're thinking about putting one word in front of another. And what happens when I set this character in a room with that character, or if I send this person on a journey, you know what will happen?

And I find that quite exciting. And then also there are certain. Stages in the book where you have to think about the macro level and you've got to think about is this scene agreeing with that one? And is the book balanced? Have I left enough breadcrumbs through the forest? Does it make sense?



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

Does anyone, will anyone care? Will anyone care about this? And I think also another really huge, important thing to do is to try and find somebody. And it might be an agent, it might be an editor, or it might be a friend who will read it for you. And I have, my husband is, he's always been I've known him since I was 18, even though we haven't actually been together we weren't a couple for that long.

But, so he and I have always read each other's work and he reads mine and he is very he can be really quite mean and harsh of them, which is a very good thing cuz you don't necessarily want is you don't, what you don't want is the kind of person who's gonna say yes, it's lovely, well done. It's nice to hear, but actually that's not what you need.

You need someone who's gonna read it and say, This bit's all right, but that is really terrible. What were you thinking? That's rubbish. No one under, no one's gonna understand that. And you do need someone who's gonna point that out to you. And it may not be your closest friend. It might be somebody who you could rely on or somebody in a writer's group or something like that.

I used to go to a lot of writers' workshops where this is what I thought I was gonna be a poet. And in that way it's brilliant because you do get a lot of feedback and people will say to your face, I don't understand what you're saying in this sentence, but this one's okay. Thank you for sharing that.

Parul: I have another one more craft question for you. One of the writers in our community, Rachel Blackmore, said that she loved the way you move in and out of character's heads in the same scene, which means that the reader is immersed in a multitude of voices and that she, and we are curious if you could shed any light on the process that you go through to achieve that, or any thoughts on how writers can move between characters

Maggie: in the scene?

Yeah I think. What I always try and do when I'm writing something which is technical like that, is I often try and think about how, it happens naturally in our



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

own minds and how it happens if somebody is telling you a verbal story what is our natural human instinct in this in this kind of narrative technique.

So I come from my family, for example is, not particularly literate. I don't, I haven't got any parents or uncles or whatever who who are writers. But at the same time, our family is a huge verbal oral storyteller. We, all chat chat, tell each other stories. And I find it really interesting listening to people, the way people will tell stories cuz nobody, nobody in the world starts an interesting story by saying I got up and then I had breakfast, and then I got dressed and then I had shut everybody in the room would fall asleep.

But what they will do is say, I. I'm sitting on the bus they will talk in a present tense. And this person says to me and it's very, you're darting around and you're listening to this. And then you might think they might suddenly be the un they, say to me, how dare You And so they're switching characters and that's our natural human narrative impulse. And so I always try and bear that in mind. What feels natural, what feels right, what feels instinctive? And certainly that kind of idea of slipping in and out of character's heads is, fascinating, but it is quite technical.

And so the other thing you can do is actually just study other writers. There are plenty of writers who do that. Peter Carey is somebody I remember reading when I was trying to write this kind of idea of Epiphany or John Fransen has another one who does it really brilliantly. Molly Keen you can just go and you can stare at half a page.

And it was, I suppose it goes back to what I was saying when you read as a writer, you need to read those things as a writer and think how are they doing it? How does this work? How are they breathing life into several different characters and how do they make that shift on the page grammatically and visually from one writer?

And how, does the reader know that we're suddenly in the other person's head? You can plot it in a way if you look at other people's work.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

Matt: Probably one more question from us and then we're Maggie's gonna do a little reading for us, and then we have some time for audience questions.

So if you do have a question for Maggie, pop it into the chat and we'll see how many we can get through in, 10, 15 minutes or so. So Maggie, another one of your much love books is your memoir. I am. I am. And we read that. Normally you're a pretty private person, but, and you signed a contract for one pound so that you wouldn't have to return a large advance if you decided to never publish this memoir.

And we're also grateful that you did. What enabled you to be honest to, bear your soul and ultimately agree for that memoir to be published?

Maggie: It was a bit of a surprise, I have to say. When I realized that I was writing a memoir and it did happen accidentally, I never set out to know.

I always, in fact, my husband always used to joke that about me writing a memoir, cuz he always says, I'm the most secretive person who knows when I'm leaving the house. Sometimes in the middle of the day. He says, where are you going? And I always just say, I'm going out, not, I'm not going anywhere exciting or having an affair or anything.

I'm just probably going to the post office, but I just don't like to divulge that information. So he used to joke about it and then I finished writing. A book called *Distance Between Us*, and I thought I was going to write *Hamlet* next, but actually what was happening instead is that I was writing these longer sort of pieces, autobiographical pieces in the back of my notebook.

I hadn't even really admitted, I hadn't really got a notebook for it. Which, which were about the life and near death experience. And so I was quite surprised. And like you say, I was, when I showed some of it to my editor and she said, yes, great. Let's, I want to give you a contract for it. I didn't, I said, I can't take any money.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

Because I was so worried if I, didn't know if I could do it. I didn't know if I could write and then if I could write non-fiction and I didn't know that when I'd finished it, I would want to publish it. But actually, I would say that I think the thing that I found most liberating in a sense with that book was coming up with the structure.

So like many things I write, it's not arranged chronologically. Because I. I But it's arranged by body part instead the body part affected in the near death experience. And, that in a way was very liberating because if you are writing a, memoir that is chronological and you say I was born in Northern Ireland and then I went to infant school and then it's not possible to skip five years without your reader thinking, hang on a second greatly.

But it is also, I think if, you're not writing like that, if you are writing these kind of non chronological snapshots in a sense it is possible to for things that you don't want to say you can hold them back and, that's quite viable with that structure. And so it's not just about things about me.

I think the most important thing for me, actually, one of the most important things was writing that memoir, was that it would never be attacks on my friends and family. Sometimes I have read other writers memoirs and I've absolutely breathtaking what they say about. They're nearest and dearest and I would never want to write a book like that.

So it is so nobody in the memoir has, so my siblings remain anonymous. My friends are anonymous. Nobody actually has their real name other than my husband. My husband is, Will, which is his name. And my children aren't native and, I, it was very important to me to be able to keep other people's worlds private because one of the interesting things I learned about when I was writing that book is about the ownership of narrative.

Knew the idea. If you have an experience where there are three or four people involved, who does that story belong to? If it happens to you, does it belong to you or does it actually belong to somebody else? And how, much should you tread on their experience? How much should you make it your own? It's an



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

interesting question that never really occurred to me writing fiction, it wouldn't necessarily, but, so that was something that was very important to me, that if I wrote a memoir, it could be about me, but it hopefully wouldn't trespass on other people too much.

Matt: Thank you, Maggie. Thank you. I, feel like we could spend a whole day with you. But that's, sadly our time is closing in here. And I think you have a reading for us from the marriage portrait if you would, like to do that. And, what a joy this is.

Maggie: This is the very beginning.

This is the first chapter of the marriage portrait, and it's called A Wild and Lonely Place. Lucia is taking her seat at the long dining table, which is polished to a watery gleam and spread with dishes, inverted cups, a woven circle to fur. Her husband is sitting down noted in his customary place at the opposite end, but next to her close enough that she could rest her head on his shoulder should she wish he is unfolding his napkin and straightening a knife and moving the candle towards them both when it comes to her with a peculiar clarity.

As if some colored glass has been put in front of her eyes, or perhaps removed from them that he intends to kill her. She is 16 years old, not quite a year into her marriage. They have traveled for most of the day using what little daylight the season offers, leaving Ferrara at dawn and riding out to what he had told her was a hunting lodge far in the northwest of the province.

But this is no hunting lodge is what Lucretia had wanted to say When they reached their destination, a high walled edifice of dark stone flanked on one side by dense forest and on the other by a twisting meander of the Poe River. She would've liked to turn in her saddle and ask, why have you brought me here?

She said nothing. However, allowing her mayor to follow him along the path through dripping trees over the arch back bridge and into the courtyard of the strange fortified, star-shaped building, which seemed even then to strike her as peculiarly empty of people. The horses have been led away. She has removed



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

her sudden cloak and hat, and he has watched her do this standing with his back to the blaze in the great.

And now he is gesturing to the halls country. So the country servants in the halls outta shadows to step forward and place food on their plates to slice the bread and pour the wine. And she is suddenly recalling the words of her sister-in-law delivered in a horse whisper. You will be blamed. S fingers grip the rim of her plate.

The certainty that he means her to die is like a presence beside her, as if a dark feathered bird of prey has alighted on the arm of her chair. This is the reason for their sudden journey to such a wild and lonely place. He has brought her here to this stone fortress to murder her. That's it. Thank you.

It was around applause. Just pause going around

Parul: for sure. That was beautiful.

Matt: Thank you so much, Maggie. This has been such an honor to be here with you, to be able to spend this time, ask questions, learn, get a little x-ray view into your craft and your work. And just be in, in your presence. So thank you, Maggie.

Pleasure. We've got about 10 minutes result. Tell 10, 12 minutes and we have a bunch of questions. So thank you everyone for asking it. We can also turn cameras on. What do you think, Paul? Yes. Yeah, absolutely.

Parul: If you'd like Maggie to see that you're in the room, please turn your video on. Yeah. So that she can see the wonderful audience that's here today.

Matt: So here's everyone lapping up everywhere, Maggie, from all over the world. And we have some questions coming in and how this will work. If you ask the question in the chat, Parla and I, we will pick as many as we can in the next 10 minutes to go through. And we'll alternate. So Par will pick one, I'll pick one and we'll go on.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

Until we have time, we'll ask them on your behalf

Parul: Just, in the interest of time.

Matt: Yeah. All right. What do you think, Pearl?

Parul: Yeah, let's do it. So let's start. I think I, we'll start with Anne who asks, how do you approach writing dialogue, especially in a different

Maggie: period of time? I think it's, I think you have to make a decision, or, I certainly did actually, when I was writing both this book, the Marriage Portrait and Hamnet, I.

I did, particularly with Hamlet, actually, I had a very, strict rule with myself that I was not going to attempt to write any kind of cod Shakespearean dialogue. Who would dare really the chutzpah of that. So I knew that I wasn't going to write any kind of pretend Elizabethan dialogue just because it, just trips up the reader.

But what I did decide was that I would only use words vocabulary. This is just in, not only in dialect, but also in the pros of that novel that didn't have the same meaning now as it did then. I spent the last couple of drafts of that novel with the O e d, the old Oxford English dictionary next to me, and I would double check words back and forth.

One of the things I remember having to get rid of was that I said that Something descended into a shambles. It was a shambles, meaning kind of chaos. But actually, when I looked at, checked in the Oxford English dictionary, I realized that shambles in 16th century meant to butcher a carcass. So that had to go, I had to find another word that fitted.

So I think you have to, just decide which way you want to do it. And so I, don't have anyone saying privy, and I don't have anyone saying sir, that was absolute my line in the sound. I will never say those words in dialogue because it just doesn't feel right in a modern, historical novel.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

So I just decided to, go with that. And the same with the marriage portrait and actually what I did with the marriage portrait when I. Before I began my morning's work, I would do a five or 10 minute online lesson in Italian. I speak a ver, a little bit of Italian, not much at all, and I understand the bit more than I speak, but just somehow I needed to get myself into the kind of grammar and the rhythm and just the sort of word order in a sense of that language.

Not actually Licia, they weren't speaking in those days. What we now know is modern Italian, but Tuscan, the language of the Florentine Court is, I was told by a historian and was the, is the closest to modern Italian. So I wanted to get the kind of syntax of that language into my head, which I hope managed to come out in the dialogue.

Thank you for the question.

Matt: Beautiful. Thanks for the question. Thank you for the answer. Let's see, what else Jan Bishop has a question. How do you cope with going places in your writing that are so emotionally traumatic? It must be hard to let yourself go and then go about life normally without being affected about what's happening to your characters.

I. How do you approach

Maggie: that? Yeah, I think that's, I think that's a very good question. I think it does happen, certainly with the marriage portrait. I was writing this and the, pretty much the writing of it was bookended by the covid lockdown. And so there was an awful lot of very dark and frightening things happening in the real world.

And not to mention I had three kids at home. I was homeschooling and trying to write my novel at the same time. But also the novel itself just goes to some quite dark places. The crate here is a young girl who's in a sense, given to a man who is, a very dark force. And certainly I did find that a bit disturbing, especially cuz I had a t I have a teenage girl in the house.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

And it was impossible not to imagine what that. That experience might have been like obviously people have said to me, did you base the crazier on your daughters? In? Which I think, did I base a young teenage girl who was enforced into marriage and then murdered by her husband?

No, I did not. I have other hopes and dreams for my girls there's always gonna be a bit of a cross-pollination. Certainly. So it is, I think it is hard, actually. There are times when of course it does. But I, do use, I think music is very useful actually to getting yourself into crossing the bridge from your everyday life into your, fictional life in a sense.

So I don't listen to music when I'm actually writing, but I often listen to certain tracks that have some kind of connection to the book, either emotionally or in terms of time, just to get you to that place very quickly. And I also find it really useful writing in a place which has nothing to do with my domestic life.

I have, I'm lucky enough, I have a sh a writing shed in the garden. And even that short walk down my lawn is very good at having this kind of separation. Whether it's a cafe or whether it's a library or whatever, just somewhere where you can go, especially if you're writing something which might be difficult emotionally.

Just to have that kind of physical separation, I find very useful. All right, thanks

Matt: Jan for the question.

Parul: Maybe one final question. Kaki asks and says, Maggie, your senior and masterclass in media res in the midst of things, does this come naturally to you when you write or something that you've honed over your years?

Anything that's helped you refine

Maggie: this skill? I don't know. I, one thing I was told, I used to go to writing or poetry workshops by Michael Donkey, the Irish American poet, and he always said, I think it was William. Carlos Williams used to quote William



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

Carlos Williams who said, no ideas, but in things you've got to have things rather than ideas.

And I do think that's very useful. I think detail is, such a, an immediate thing, especially if you're going to write about the past, when you really want your characters, even if they lived 500 years ago, to feel present and the median relevant to a modern reader, you have to have some kind of detail.

It's much more interesting to read about detail than it is this kind of generalized, historical sort of broad sweep. So I do think that zeroing in as imagine if you are a film director, rather than using a wide lens, you use a very narrow focus to focus on something. And I think anyway that's, how characters and experiences and people in rooms, in novels feel real to me.

Wonderful. Great.

Parul: Thank you. Thank Maggie. And thank you for the question. Ka.

Matt: Yeah, thank you. Maybe another, one. Let's see. We've got quite a few questions about Hamnet and, Ginny has one. I'd love to hear about how you inhabited the characters in Hamnet which is one of Jenny's favorite books and, many people here.

It felt to me that you had been there.

Maggie: I had been there. I went, did a lot of kind of footwork and I walked around Stratford a lot and I went to see all the different houses and I took about a million photographs and asked about 3000 questions of every single poor guide. But also I did, I think it's important.

There's so much. Research you can do from books. I think obviously you can learn anything you want from books, but I think in a sense sometimes when you are writing a character, there is this point at which something, some kind of research where you get your hands dirty, is really useful as well.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

So when I was writing *Hamlet*, I, I. I did actually learn to fly kestrel. I went down to the Scottish borders and I learned to fly kestrel, and I also planted my own medicinal herb garden, and I made all the different potions and cures that are mentioned in the book. And similarly actually for the marriage portrait, I ordered raw Pigment online and, I ground it up with a PEs and water and I mixed it with lin seed oil.

I'm a useless artist. I couldn't do it to save my life, but I think you just somehow, you just to close the distance between you and your character, you need to do something that they do. And that's a very useful way of just feeling close to them and in and inhabiting them as much as you can.

I made a massive mess with all the pigment. It was quite fun though, but there's still a stain of Mad root on my kitchen surfaces.

Matt: Oh, love it. Maggie you're such a reminder of I'm just having some reflections here. Par I don't know if you have any, but my reflection is, how much fun you're having with this.

How much you see the challenge as actually part of the fun. Can I figure this out? Yeah. Just a couple reflections from my end. It yeah, Carl, I don't know.

Parul: It's been wonder. I think it's what's been really fun about interviewing you, Maggie, is that aspiring writers and a lot of writers in the room, we can put we can put writing in the publication of it on a pedestal.

But you're reminding us that actually just the joy of the craft and the joy of in, of doing the writing is what matters and what counts, and if that works for you, maybe that's inspiration for

Maggie: someone else as well. What I hope so actually what I should say is I bring it around right to the beginning of the talk when we were talking about the album course.



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

I went on some of the most useful advice that Elsa Barker and Bobo gave to me was just two words long. It is just keep going. That's, a lot of writing a novel. You just gotta keep going. And you'll get there in the end. Thank you so much

Matt: Maggie. Thank you for this time.

We owe you, we want to give you a London Writer Salon and Arvon, round of applause. But before that, we have five copies of the marriage portrait to give away. And if you would like a copy of the marriage portrait, you can raise your digital hand and hopefully you can find it somewhere digital is better.

And we'll pick five of you to send a copy of this beautiful book too. Alright. And then we'll wrap

Maggie: Pearl,

Parul: give you one more second to, to put your hand up and then we're just gonna choose five at random. Alright. Angelika Libra, Laura Lynch, Kathy Davis Miranda Eason and Alexandra

Maggie: Walker. You

Parul: have won a copy of the marriage portrait.

Please email us your address at hello london writers

Matt: salon.com. Amazing. Thank you so much everyone for being here. And Maggie, thank you. Thank you so much.

Maggie: Thank you for listening. All right, really. Bye. Really appreciate

Matt: it. Alright. Maggie drifted off, but we can clap her as she steps off stage.

And also a special thank you again to Mary at Arvan. Mary, we're gonna share links to Arvon. You got a bunch of great things going on there. Yeah, let me



Maggie O'Farrell - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

make sure you can unmute yourself. There you go. Mary, any final thoughts? And thanks again for hosting us, just how

Mary: inspiring that was really. And lovely to see all your faces and hope that maybe I'll meet some of you in

Maggie: person.

Who knows? Thank you. Very

Parul: fantastic. And for anyone who's thinking about Arvan, if you're interested in a residential course, they have a lot going on. I believe there's a if you're thinking of embarking in a fiction project, mark Hadden and Charlene Tara are teaching, are starting to write fiction at Lu Bank in August.

So there's a link and we'll share that as well in the

Matt: follow up emails. Thank you so much for being here, everyone. We'll send out the recording tomorrow. We'll send links to Arva and all these good things, anything we talked about. We'll also send links to that as well. Winners of the book.

Make sure you email us hello@leonardwritersalon.com with your mailing address. And that's it. Thank you

Parul: Thank you for being such a wonderful audience. Thank you for joining us. It's wonderful to have you in the room while Maggie was here. Hope you have a lovely evening, and if you haven't, if you don't write with us and want to we'll be writing in 55 minutes in silence that [writers our.com](http://writersour.com).

And if you are one of the, one of our writers, join us for today's New Zealand Hour. That's it all. Thank you so much. I'll tell next time everyone. Very lovely rest of your evening. All right, cheers and keep

Matt: going. Bye friends. Bye.