

My Writing Life interview with Eliza Clark, June 2023

Fran Harvey

Hi, I'm Fran Harvey, and I'm a writer and musician who likes talking to other writers about their writing life. We've had a break for a few months, but now we're back. And today I'm talking to enfant terrible and sad hot girl writer Eliza Clark. Those are not things that I have personally said about her, but they're definitely things that people have called her on the internet - which is relevant to her new book. So I'm keeping that in. Eliza is from Newcastle, but now lives in London. Her debut novel was the cult hit *Boy Parts*, which was published by indie publisher Influx Press. That came out in 2020 in the UK, and has just been released in the US. And just a few days ago, a stage version was announced, which is appearing at Soho Theatre in London. Her next novel *Penance*, which is a fictional twist on true crime, creative nonfiction. *Untrue Crime*, I think I've seen it called somewhere, which I love quite like. It's available either soon or now, depending on when you're listening to this, and it's out courtesy of Faber. It's set in the struggling northern seaside town of Crow-on-Sea, and it tells the allegedly true story of how three teenage girls came to murder one of their schoolmates. Both books are really dark. They're really funny and twisted, and they're sometimes uncomfortable reading because Eliza it just goes there without flinching, which I personally love because they're exactly my type of book. They're definitely not for readers who only want likeable, redeemable, relatable characters. But I think I should also add that that doesn't mean that any of the unlikable, unrelatable characters are simple shallow villains, because they're absolutely not. and *Penance* in particular touches on so many different layers of class and truth and politics and so much more. To be honest, that's a lot deeper than we're going to be getting into, probably, in this interview. Eliza also writes short stories. There's one available to read in *Granta* at the moment, isn't there?

Eliza Clark

Yes.

Fran Harvey

Which is a nice segue into me saying that she's also just been named one of Granta's Best Young British Novelists, which is a title they only award to people once a decade. So it's a massive thing. It's really cool - congratulations. As always, on this podcast, I will be delving into Eliza's writing history, how she started, how she carries on, and wherever we go from there. So please stick around to learn more. Hi, thank you for chatting to me.

Eliza Clark

Hello.

Fran Harvey

Okay, so we're on Zoom, because you're down in London at the moment. Whereabouts are you calling from?

Eliza Clark

From Crystal Palace. So I'm living in Crystal Palace now. It's very nice. We're very close to the park. Weather's good. And I'm in my very small office, which is, it's called a bonus room on the plan of the flat. And I think all of the other flats on the street, it's just like a little platform for utility stuff. So like other people have got their fridges here, but ours has a door on it for some reason. So I'm in here.

Fran Harvey

Excellent. And is that the place - do you do any writing in that or is it...

Eliza Clark

Yeah, it's like my little office. My very little office. It's a metre wide.

Fran Harvey

Strictly no distractions. Can you remember, thinking way back when - which is not that far, because you are sickeningly young for such success - can you remember when, precisely, you knew you wanted to write and what, if anything, prompted that desire?

Eliza Clark

I don't know. I remember like, when I was a really little kid, I always used to say that I wanted to be an author. And I just, I dunno, I just really wanted to do it from like, when you would first do like creative writing exercises in school, I would do like -- like, I remember like, the first time we did it, I finished my exercise book, and had to get a new exercise book and the teacher spoke to my parents, when they picked me up, about it. And I got extra exercise books to write in, which I never actually did write in at home, because it's quite -- I dunno, it just requires a bit more diligence than you have when you're like six. So I didn't do a great deal of like extra writing outside of school, but I always really, really looked forward to it in first school. And then it was just like, when I was a teenager, I just started writing. I started writing fanfiction and stuff. So I kind of got into that more just because it was like, I think I was really excited about the idea of having a place to post stuff and people would read it. So it was kind of less about being -- I dunno, I suppose I was pretty into the stuff that I was writing fanfic about, but it was kind of more into writing fanfic, so I could write for it. And then yeah, and then I just kind of, I don't know, I guess I started doing more original stuff in my late teens and early 20s. And then sort of went to art school. Kind of had like a bit of a break from it, but found that I just kind of kept getting drawn back to like narrative and writing and I got more into - I was more interested in the sort of essay writing and theory and critical theory stuff on my art course than I was really making art. Yes. And then I sort of again, I was doing more short story stuff, more original stuff. Taking my work a bit more seriously. And then I got onto - well, I applied for a job at New Writing North and then I did not get that job, but they did

offer me a place on their Young Writers Talent Fund, which is kind of the big turning point for me, because I got one-to-one mentorship with Matt Wesolowski, who is also obviously a local writer to the region. He writes the Six Stories books, which are really good, and he's a really, really good mentor. So yeah, and then that made a big difference. And then it was just while I was on that mentorship scheme, I wrote Boy Parts and bish, bash, bosh, here we are.

Fran Harvey

So I'm gonna pick a couple of things out of everything that you've just said. So one of them is probably not massively relevant, but I'm just nosy. What fandoms were you writing for?

Eliza Clark

Yeah, I used to bounce around loads between stuff because like I said, I was kind of more interested in writing fanfiction than I was in stuff. I started doing it for Harry Potter stuff. That's obviously quite cursed now. [laughter] But back in the day, it was just it was because it was like such a huge fandom. There was just, like, loads and loads of stuff you could kind of mess around with and I think that was, that was the stuff that always appealed to me. It was like the big SFF stuff with like a big ensemble cast. But yeah, I just kind of pinged around loads.

Fran Harvey

And then my other question was, in amongst all this sort of, sort of practice writing, in a sort of sense, can you remember what piece you first wrote -- it might have been Boy Parts, but potentially before that, where you actually looked at it and you're like, "Okay, this is me taking it seriously. And this is a piece that I want to get published published."?

Eliza Clark

Yeah, I had a couple of short stories beforehand. I had a short story that was published on a podcast. The podcast was called Tales to Terrify, that I think is still up. I imagine it would be because Tales to Terrify has been running for like donkeys years. They do original fiction, but they also do like, readings of kind of classics, as well. So there's a bunch of stuff on there, if you're interested in horror short stories, like loads and loads, including, one of the first like, proper original things that I finished, which was called [laughs] that was called... it was called Carver's Brew. That was it. It was about two Victorian girls in a village, walking out to the forest to speak to the local abortionist, and sort that out. And it was, yeah, it was, I don't know, like I've kind of toyed with it, I might be able to do something with it. But it would need to like -- there's a lot of fluff in there. I'd probably need to cut like three or four thousand words from it or something like that. But yeah. And then shortly after that I wrote this sort of - there was this American cosmic horror publisher. They were an independent publisher and they went under quite soon after they agreed to publish this, which was a shame, but they'd done a call for submissions for like, just basically cosmic horror stuff again, that was like a bit more. Kind of like playing on Lovecraft stuff, but a bit subversive and a bit more like just kind of doing a bit more work with the kind of stuff, rather than the kind of classic Lovecraft 'I went to a scary village and it was scary and now I'm freaking man!' [Laughter] That kind of thing. And yeah, so that was going to be published as like a novelette.

Which I think is, what, that's like 10,000 words isn't it? And that was called Absent Mouth. And that's gonna be in the short story collection--

Fran Harvey

Oh fantastic.

Eliza Clark

--in a more edited form and because it was like, it was like basically for so long that the rights reverted back to me, which is always how you know something's gone a bit pear shaped. [laughs]. But yeah, I think those are kind of like two big turning points, were writing Carver's Brew and Absent Mouths, and both of them being accepted for publication in increasingly kind of difficult-to-get-published places. I quite like doing the short stories submission stuff, I think because it's so like -- I quite like getting like an elevated rejection. I always used to find that like [happy noise] 'oohh'!

Fran Harvey

Oh god, yeah! They're almost more exciting than just having a story accepted because it just comes with that little kick of like, oooh, nearly, reach...

Eliza Clark

[laughs] Yeah. I got like a really, really excellent one that I really, really genuinely appreciated from - it was for Absent Mouths as well, and I think it was from like, Clarkesworld or something?

Eliza Clark

Oh well done!

Eliza Clark

They'd gone out of their way to do like quite a long like 'I like this, but here's what's wrong with it', but in like a really constructive way. It was really, really, er, I really really appreciated it!

Fran Harvey

Yeah, that's brilliant. Especially because I know Clarkesworld gets so so many submissions.

Eliza Clark

I think it was them. It might not have been, but it was one of the like bigger ones that I was kind of surprised that -- I was very taken aback that they bothered to write to me, basically. I don't know, I kind of miss that, to be honest. I quite like doing the... But when you've got collection coming out it just kind of vacuums up anything that you do like that, especially when it keeps getting moved back [laughs].

Fran Harvey

So were you always-- cause, I mean, there's a very strong argument to be made that Boy Parts and Penance are horror in their own ways. But did you always sort of, prior to writing novels, did you consider yourself sort of more of a genre writer? Because everything that you've mentioned so far has been like, the big genre names, really.

Eliza Clark

Yeah, I did. My ultimate kind of goal was like, 'I like really want to get published in Nightmare Magazine or Black Static or something like that'. That was what I was kind of thinking was gonna be like, 'Oh, this is gonna be when I've like peaked is when I get into this sort of really cool genre space'. I've ended up in a sort of more literary framing, which in a way, I actually kind of think is easier to break into, just cuz, I don't know why. I don't know. I guess maybe I've got a bit of a skewed opinion of that. But yeah, I'm

really heavily influenced by horror. Originally, Boy Parts was like a horror, short story. It was like, well, it was 15,000 words long, which is useless, like, you can't do anything with that. It was stripped down to pretty much just the very nuts and bolts of the story. So there were a bunch of major characters missing, and none of the backstory stuff was there. It was just, 'I really need to take nude photos for this exhibition'. I basically finished it and I felt like I kind of wasn't done with it. So I sort of started expanding it out to like a bigger thing. And I was working with Matt on that in terms of like picking out stuff that could be made to kind of flesh the world out a bit more. And then yeah, I guess, because it's less sort of this story about this woman stalking, and maybe or maybe not killing boys, and then it turns into this kind of longer sort of character study thing. That's probably what kicks it out of a genre space, just because there's not as much focus on the plotty genre elements. But yeah, I'm very influenced by horror. I would quite like to do a straight horror thing one day, but it's hard! It's genuinely really hard to write things that are actively scary, I think. I feel like I tend to lean more into that sort of icky disturbed feeling, just because... I just think it's harder.

Fran Harvey

I don't think I ever knew, because-- oh, I should probably say to people, we worked together at one point.

Eliza Clark

Yes, we did. Yeah.

Fran Harvey

Like, quite a few years ago now. But I didn't realise that you had that because we worked together, but we were in separate rooms, so we didn't get to talk very often.

Eliza Clark

Yeah. Yeah, we were working together from like, 2018 to 2019?

Fran Harvey

Yeah, something like that.

Eliza Clark

And you were in the main office, and I was on the like, marketing cupboard.

Fran Harvey

The little marketing nook, yeah. We'd had a few conversations about writing, because I was one of the very lucky people who got to read an early version of Boy Parts.

Eliza Clark

Yes you did!

Fran Harvey

I knew it was going to be a hit. I knew it back then! [laughter] Yeah, I didn't realise you had that sort of grounding in horror, really, until I read Boy Parts and even then in Boy Parts the discussion is more of like, film horror. There's a lot of mention of film horror. And then obviously, in Penance, as well, it's more the true crime aspect of it, but it's still very much-- now that you've said that about the background in horror, now I'm looking at Penance and thinking I can see a sort of Lovecraftian element to parts of it.

Eliza Clark

Yeah, there is...

Fran Harvey

It definitely sneaks in and it's more of like, it's the sort of the psychotic 'is this real or is this madness?' aspects of it. I don't want to say much more about it, because I don't want to ruin it for people haven't read the book yet. Because it's only just come out. But yeah, now I can see that in there, it all falls into place. It's brilliant!

Eliza Clark

Thank you.

Fran Harvey

I was going to ask you about influences. Because I know I was one of many people who read Boy Parts and immediately compared it to American Psycho, like Northern female sort of version. And you hadn't actually read that. You hadn't read it before you wrote it and I think have you read it now?

Eliza Clark

Yeah, yeah, I got asked to appear on like a BBC anniversary documentary about American Psycho - like a radio documentary not an in-person thing - which was what prompted me to read it. [laughter] I really enjoyed it actually. I thought it got a bit baggy and repetitive in the middle, but there's some stuff in there that's like really funny. I think it's sort of under-sold as a comedy, to be honest. There's a bit where like, somebody's talking about taking their boss out for like a 'normal dinner', where the vegetables have been broiled. And Patrick Bateman is like, so upset and doesn't know what a broiled vegetable is. And he's like, what shapes were they cut into? And I just think it's like genuinely one of the funniest things I've ever read.

Fran Harvey

Have you ever seen the film of it?

Eliza Clark

Yes, I have. So I had seen the film, before I wrote [Boy Parts], but I was kind of like aware of it through cultural osmosis. And I'd read other Bret Easton Ellis, but I didn't like - I hadn't like seen the film ages before I started writing it, I think it was either in the midst of writing it or when I was kind of nearly done with the first draft. But yeah, I was very, very influenced by Alissa Nutting's Tampa, which I think is quite clearly influenced by American Psycho. So I think that's kind of more of the trickledown, in that people are seeing the influence trail there, but skipping over the woman writer and assuming that I copied a man. But I wasn't, I was copying another woman [laughs].

Fran Harvey

You name check Truman Capote and Gordon Burn amongst a few other true crime writers in Penance.

Did you read for research for Penance?

Eliza Clark

Yeah, I read loads. I read absolutely loads for it, I think because I was just kind of not quite sure what I was going to do with it. I had a bit of a time writing Penance. It's both a difficult second album and a lockdown book. So it was just, it was a fucking miserable writing process. I apologise for swearing.

Fran Harvey

Swear away, it's fine.

Eliza Clark

Oh grand. Yeah, no, it was it was absolutely miserable. It was like I started writing bits of it in winter of 2019. And then paused. I'd moved to London in summer of 2019, and I was working a really weird

corporate job where they did not know what my job was supposed to be. It was a new role that I'd been hired in. And I didn't know what I was doing. They didn't know what I was doing. So I had a lot of time at my desk to just kind of tap away in my gmail account. So I wrote the first kind of bits and bobs of it there, like at my desk, and then I quit that job because it was super weird. And I had like a month of garden leave, where I did a bit of it then. And then I started working at a different literary charity called Arvon. So I me and Fran worked together at Mslexia. And then in London, I was working at Arvon. And then the pandemic happened. And I think, I don't remember the first six months of it. I basically, I remember, in January of that year, I broke my finger, and then I quit my job. No, I quit my job and then I broke my finger. So I remember I went into work with like a really crushed hand that was bleeding, because I'd handed in my notice like either one or two days before and didn't want them to think that I was lying about maybe to go to A&E. I remember that. And then I remember starting at Arvon and a couple of things from my first week there. And then I don't remember anything. And then I remember Boy Parts coming out. And that's sort of my experience of 2020. So we've just lost like six months of that.

Fran Harvey

Oh, wow.

Eliza Clark

And then I think it was during that sort of second winter lockdown that I did loads and loads of reading for Penance. Because I did a bit of work in the summer. Again, like, it was all going to be like

first-person point of view, like collected things. And then I started having like, almost like logistical issues with that. Because I knew I wanted to do the third-person in the town stuff. And all the stuff from the girls' point of view was literally going to be like long diary entries and letters. And it was just, it was just dogshit. It was unreadable in that, particularly because I did-- there's a character called Angelica. I did her first. And I just thought this is so irritating. Like, nobody's going to be able to read this for any longer than like, I guess the snippets that you end up with in the book, because it was just like 10,000 words, of...

Fran Harvey

She's a very, she's a very strong voice. [laughter] She's a very particular type of voice. Yeah. [laughing]

Eliza Clark

It was too strong. And it was like eating a wheel of blue cheese. It was just like, it was awful. And I ended up cutting like 10 to 20,000 words of that. And just, basically the stuff that has reemerged in Penance is stuff that is like copy-pasted from that first original draft, and kind of stuck in there and tweaked a bit. So basically, I stopped and decided that I needed to do a bunch of research. And then, I don't do a lot of like paper reading, I tend to use audiobooks. So I just played a bunch of long video games and listened to like 10 to 15 books or something like that. Yeah, and it was more just because I felt like I didn't really have like a handle properly on what a true crime voice sounded like and how to use-- like I needed like a good refresher on how these books were structured. Because I definitely read

Happy Like Murderers [by Gordon Burn] in either early 2020 or at the end of 2019. And I really liked that, but that's so unconventional in the way that it's structured.

Fran Harvey

That's a hell of a book.

Eliza Clark

Yeah, it is. It's incredible and it's -- and I think I kind of really liked the sort of sense of ickiness of that kind of like that-- because there are points when you read it - it's a very challenging book, and there are definitely points in that where you're thinking 'Why are you doing this, Gordon?'. [laughter] I kind of wanted to have that sort of like feeling of 'why you're doing this, Gordon?' when I was -- so it was kind of like trying to get something a little bit more conventional in my head in terms of structure. So I'd read Brian Masters's *She Must Have Known* and *Killing for Company* while I was at university, and I revisited *Killing for Company*, which ended up being really useful in terms of dipping out of the miniature histories of geographical areas and bits and bobs like that. And then I also found Richard Lloyd Parry's *The People Who Eat Darkness* really, really useful. And what else did I read? I read *Sleep of Reason*, if you Google it it'll come up, and I read a couple of other different nonfiction books like I read *The Devil You Know*, by Gwen Adshead, which was really interesting and just kind of like almost to just get like a bit more of a sense of a nonfiction voice. What it feels like, even slightly outside of that true crime space. And then I stopped doing that and went back to it. And again, I was sort of struggling a bit with it, it was the earnestness of the voice that I was kind of having a bit of a problem with. I hadn't quite come

up with that sort of unreliable narrator idea yet. And that was sort of a lot of the difficulty I was having with it in sort of around summer of 2021, which was when I properly went back to it and wrote, like, probably the majority of the book. And then I read *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote. And I was really, really blown away by it. It's just, it's just like one of the best pieces of line-level writing I've ever read. It's just this absolute master class in storytelling. And I just kind of couldn't believe how good it was. And then I sort of read about the writing of it. And part of the reason that it's so good is because half of it's fucking made up [laughs]. And I think that was a really interesting turning point for me of just thinking like, well, what if he's just lying? What if my narrator has just made a bunch of stuff up? That instantly like helps loads with logistical issues and like, any kind of like suspension of disbelief breaking stuff that I had in there was instantly just kind of gone, because you're going into it knowing that a guy has written this and like, an unknown amount of it has just been made up. And then it was kind of like, I was able to kind of play with the kind of shakiness of the night of a bit more. Like, I feel quite bad because I've slagged off Louis Theroux a couple of times. But I like used to be like a huge fan of Louis Theroux's. And then the older, I've gotten the sort of nastier the tone of his work, I found. And I was kind of digging into that a bit to be honest, that kind of slight like, oh, that kind of thing, this very, like, middle-class guy who is not acknowledging the kind of power differential at all with a lot of your interviewees, and you're just constantly giving people enough rope to hang themselves with. And then you've kind of got control over the story. And I just always, I kind of find that aspect of his work more and more interesting the older I got, and the more mean-spirited, I started to find it.

Eliza Clark

Yeah, yeah. I think, um, I just wanted to say I think that that aspect of the unreliable narrator, but then also the way you just kind of wades in with like, 'I am who I am and therefore I know best and I'm just

going to draw these people and portray them how works best for me' works incredibly well in Penance,
because --

Eliza Clark

Thanks.

Fran Harvey

-- annoyingly, as a reader, reading it. And again, I don't want to give too much away, but it's upfront.
This isn't a book that like comes in and then it's like *gasp* twist at the end: it was an unreliable narrator
all along. It's right up front, at the start: this book was in trouble because so much of it is unreliable.

Eliza Clark

Yeah.

Fran Harvey

But you forget, you just forget that the guy who's telling the story even though like he even undermines himself in places with his own tone of voice, you just you forget that he's -- you already know that he's not being straight with the reader. Then that kind of hits you again at the end. And it's just yeah, I think you did -- I think it's an amazing book because, again, the class things as well. It's not just him coming in, there's levels of class within the town, and then who is blamed for what and where, and the backlash against certain people who are not even really involved. It's just, it's like, I can imagine it was a nightmare to construct because it's now so beautifully constructed that I can't imagine that it would have been any other way. It's one of those like it's so well put together that it's like well obviously it was meant to be like that all along.

Eliza Clark

Yeah, no, like super wasn't! The longer prose sections didn't come into it for like-- I took like a month off work to finish it in early 2022. And that was when I pretty much wrote all of those like prose bits as well. Those were really late addition. But I wanted to do something more ambitious after *Boy Parts*, especially after like, like you kind of touched on it, but that sort of like people kind of pointing to the similarities to *American Psycho*, and I kind of wanted to prove that I wasn't just a one-trick pony, that just did this one specific thing, and then turned out a follow-up novel that was the same thing, but not as good.

Fran Harvey

You've avoided that, because Penance, it sounds really weird saying this to your face, it's still very much an Eliza Clark novel, but it's completely different to Boy Parts. But like, there's still themes in there. But it's not Boy Parts. It's definitely completely its own beast, You've sort of inadvertently answered quite a lot of the questions that I had written down in your other answers. I'm going to jump very quickly - also, because I'm aware of the time - to the four questions that I end with, Do you have like support readers or beta readers? Or do you work with like a writing group of any kind, or are you just an isolated writer?

Eliza Clark

Yeah, I'm pretty much on my own. Like, my partner will read bits and bobs. And I think because the the way that Penance was put together was so busy, and it was acquired by Faber & Faber as a partial manuscript. So it was like I had like quite a polished, first kind of 30 to 40,000 words for ages, and then not a lot of anything else. So it was written in a very bitty way, where bits of it had been seen and bits of it hadn't. But it's mostly like my partner will get kind of like first look on stuff, but even then it tends to be like, he won't see anything until it's a first draft. I don't know, I just feel very like conscious of people reading stuff that's not finished. I've never really had that kind of like writing group sort of thing. It's something that I'd probably maybe like to do a bit more. But I don't know, I think sometimes I think the delayed gratification is quite important for actually getting work done. I always sort of almost want to warn new writers who post like bits of their work on social media to just kind of be like, I don't know, because I think could that not be really like demotivating? Because you've already kind of had like feedback and like a pat on the back for that, and then maybe there's no need to go back and finish it and tidy it up? But I don't know, that's not the case for everybody. But yeah, I prefer to just kind of, I guess, keep it to myself until it's the early sort of semi-done.

Fran Harvey

So having having the mentor through New Writing North was like the first time really that you had almost somebody to report to on it, I guess?

Eliza Clark

Yeah, I guess, yeah. And then because I was writing short stories, it was kind of easier to have like complete work for him to look at, or at least complete drafts for him to look at.

Fran Harvey

I think I know the answer to this, but I'm going to ask it anyway. Do you prefer ink or typing?

Eliza Clark

Oh typing. I'm too, like, I think I'm just too lazy to do the handwritten stuff. I just feel like I'd never type it up. And my handwriting is appalling. So I quite often will write stuff down and then I won't be able to read it later.

Fran Harvey

I can massively relate to that. Yeah. [laughter] I started trying to do that I had a massive drop in writing output. I don't know like the whole COVID locked down thing, it just knocked the stuffing out of me, I really struggled to get anything done.

Eliza Clark

Same actually. I had a terrible time writing during lockdown.

Fran Harvey

So I actually did a thing which I honestly never thought I would fall back on because I've always been very sceptical about this sort of thing. But I started trying the morning pages thing. I actually started doing that whole 12 week course I've immediately forgotten the name off [The Artist's Way]. But it involves like morning pages and artists dates and stuff. And it's like going to do this. It's going to help kickstart everything. And then you get to a bit where it's like now go back and like reread your old morning pages and find out like what you've managed to achieve from bits that you've mentioned and what you've addressed. And I did open the diary but I can't read it. I just have no idea what I wrote. It's just squiggly lines. I don't know what any of the words are, so I couldn't do that bit.

Eliza Clark

[Laughing]

Fran Harvey

But they did, I think they did sort of help shake something loose a bit. Yeah, it's-- God, that's a weird process. I feel a little bit like I've betrayed myself for like caving and doing it, but it has helped. So anyway, sorry. This is not about me. This is not my interview. This is your interview.

Eliza Clark

But it is interesting that I think like how that kind of writing exercise stuff can land. Sometimes, I don't know, you kind of-- I feel like there is sometimes an impulse to be a bit sceptical about them and then, but then sometimes they are really useful.

Fran Harvey

Like, do you use freedom or anything to shut the internet down while you're working? Or do you are you a sort of constant dipper-inner-outerer? Because the internet is a massive part of Penance, actually?

Eliza Clark

Yes, I do have an app, to like freeze all the other stuff on my computer. I can't remember what it was called, but there's absolutely loads of them. But I think a lot of my work requires a lot of like I need to quickly Google something, so it's just sort of too inconvenient to have it. I'm actually I'm not too bad at like faffing about with the internet, when I'm supposed to be writing. I kind of like I'm either writing or I'm not but if I'm properly writing I can kind of be trusted not to be distracted. Yeah.

Fran Harvey

So I know now that you've got like you've got your horror background of writing, you would like to write a straight horror book, but it is really flippin difficult.

Eliza Clark

Yeah.

Fran Harvey

Is there a genre that you don't think you could write or that you would like, if somebody came to you and said, I want a novel, but it's got to be this genre that you would just be like, No, absolutely not.

Eliza Clark

Ooooooh.

Fran Harvey

genre can be as loose as you want it to be.

Eliza Clark

Yeah, that is really interesting. Hmm [thinking noises]. I don't know. I think I'd probably struggle with something that was like really heavily, like, plotty and intricate, like a proper like...

Fran Harvey

Like Penance?

Eliza Clark

Oh yeah... [laughter]. I suppose I'm kind of almost thinking about like, like a kind of like mystery thing. I read *The Name of the Rose* quite recently, and I was thinking about how like, cleverly written that is. I feel like I would struggle with setting up a mystery and doing all the clues and not making it too obvious, I think. But I don't know, I feel quite like I'd quite like to have a kind of stab at everything. So I don't know, maybe -- I think I would probably struggle with quite experimental literary stuff. I think that's kind of a bit where I get off as a reader as well, because I read quite broadly, but that doesn't tend to -- and, you know, I think I'd be quite shit in nonfiction as well. I think I fundamentally make things up for a living. So I think I would probably struggle with like-- I'm quite shy as well, so I think having to interview people would be really hard, and having to construct a story and not put too much of a spin on it.

Fran Harvey

You'd have to Truman Capote it, wouldn't you?

Eliza Clark

Yeah, probably, so it's probably best if I just don't. But yeah, I think that's probably like what I'm kind of most intimidated by, would be like a proper mystery thing. And then like proper nonfiction, and then some kind of like worthy experimental literary thing, I think, wouldn't be good for me.

Fran Harvey

Right, so any publishers listening if you want to commission Eliza to do any one of those three things just for the challenge... [laughter] I'm pretty sure no publishers listen to this. You're safe. It's okay. Okay, so this is the last question, what would your best tip be for somebody who's trying to get into writing, or who's trying to get back into it after struggling for a bit, like what's your best advice for sitting down and being able to do it?

Eliza Clark

Oh, that's interesting. Yeah, I'd be kind of tempted to say, just have a stab at some fan fiction. Pick something you like, and, like an aspect of a thing that you like, or maybe, I think it's sometimes it's not always a thing that you like, it's a thing that you like aspects of, but feel sort of fundamentally unfulfilled by. Pick something like that, and just write a little story about your favourite character from it. I think it can be quite freeing. I think it gives you a lot of space to work on like technical line level and pacing aspects of your writing and, like, Character Study kind of stuff, without you having to kind of worry about the enormous and difficult task of coming up with original stuff, which is really, really hard, and I think can be like a huge roadblock for people who are just starting out. At least it was a huge roadblock for me when I was like, 14, 15. And like, I think particularly for like, I guess, because kids are probably just

less embarrassed about that kind of thing, particularly for teenagers, I would recommend it. It is just like a really good and fun, like, quite like earnest thing that you can do with your time that is really really useful for your writing. If the idea of fanfiction, you find that very off putting, which is fair enough, I don't know -- I probably may be say probably to look into some writing courses just because I think like it's a bit of a rubbish answer. But it's like, it's just kind of anything that will give you kind the structure and the space to do some work, particularly if you're struggling to find structure in space in your day to day life, that I think that can be really useful. Like the mentorship stuff I did with New Writing North was really like, it was genuinely just quite life-changing for me. Those things are a lot easier to get on, unfortunately, if you're in the 18 to 25 age bracket, but there are courses, which can be quite expensive, but there are also bursaries. There are a lot of bursaries out there. So I would recommend having a look at some bursaries and have a look at some courses that you could potentially do.

Fran Harvey

Brilliant, thank you so much. Listeners, Penance is out on 6 July, and for those of you in the North East, Eliza is launching the book at the Biscuit Factory in Newcastle on that date. There's more details and a little preview article in this month's NARC Magazine. So please check that out. And also tickets for Boy Parts the play are probably also available at the time of listening. So, those are from SOHO theatre. So check that out as well if you're down in London or want to make the trip. Please don't forget more episodes of this podcast are available on Spotify with a variety of different authors from the North East, so please check them out. Subscribe to our channel to get a heads up for the next one. And thank you for listening.