

"A pure delight...cleverly
conceived and brilliantly executed."

—DEAN KOONTZ

AFTER SHE WROTE HIM



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Winner of the Ned Kelly Award for Best Crime Fiction

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. *After She Wrote Him* begins in a typically linear way and then becomes gradually more complicated as the characters mix in with each other. How did the different narratives and perspectives enrich the story?
2. Of the characters surrounding Madeleine and Edward, whom did you most empathize with? Why was their experience particularly affecting?
3. *After She Wrote Him* is an example of meta fiction (meta, meaning showing or suggesting an explicit awareness of itself or oneself as a member of its category). What did you enjoy most and least about this book's meta structure? What other examples of creative works can be classified as meta?
4. Have you ever become so entrenched in a novel that you felt you personally knew the characters—or they knew you? Why did those characters connect with you so strongly?

5. If you could design the perfect character, who would that character be?
6. What would they look like? What would be their chosen career? Strengths and weaknesses?
7. At the end of the book, whom did you consider the author, and who was the creation?
8. What about their stories and intentions made one “more real” than the other character?
9. Did you guess the ending of the book, and, if so, what clues did you gather that gave it away?
10. If you had to choose a moral of the story, what would it be?

A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

What was your inspiration for *After She Wrote Him*?

This was one those ideas that grew out of idle speculation.

I've always allowed myself the indulgence of believing in my characters when it suited me. It makes the act of writing less lonely in a way. The best way I can describe it is akin to those years when you were old enough to realise there was no Santa Claus but you wanted to believe, so you behaved as though you truly did...and there was a tiny part of you that thought "maybe...just maybe." I've always known that I played close to the line between imagination and delusion. Interestingly, it's this aspect of my process (if you can call it a process) that I am most asked about by readers. I suspect it's a game that both writers and readers play to greater and lesser extents.

I've often wondered what Rowland Sinclair (the protagonist of my mystery series) thinks of me. Does he like me? Would he read my books? Does he find me unnecessarily sadistic? I do, after all, visit all sorts of pain and trouble upon the poor man...and yet I feel he trusts me, that we're working together. But I have wondered what it would be like to be him, to have the circumstances of my existence controlled by someone else's narrative.

Of course, it's a writer's practice to extrapolate, to take things

to their natural end, and so I have, on occasion, thought about what would happen if I crossed the line completely, if I allowed the people I made up to take over, if I allowed them to control my life as much as I do theirs.

And somewhere from the midst these musings came the story of Madeleine and Edward, who write each other and entwine the lines of their stories and their lives.

Which character was the most interesting to write and why?

I don't define my characters at the outset, allowing them instead to develop and reveal themselves with the story, so writing each is a process of discovery, interesting in its own way.

If I had to choose, I suppose Madeleine was both easier and more difficult to write than Edward. I put parts of my own life into hers—where she lives, her background, her occupation. I'm usually an observational writer, and so I've never done that before. It meant that I understood the way she looked at the world, but it also meant that I was forced to occasionally see parts of myself in her, and I found that confronting at times. She came easily onto the page, but she did make me feel exposed.

But both Ned and Madeleine intrigued me because, as writers, they walk past the point at which I stop and turn around, they allow themselves to play with delusion. I stay on this side of the line, but there are times when my characters feel so real, I wonder, and I'm tempted. In this story, Ned is braver than I, willing to give himself completely to that process regardless of the consequences. Madeleine does so more gradually and uneasily.

Many readers know you for a different series of books (the Rowland Sinclair Mysteries). How did it feel to write something so different?

In many ways, the experience was similar: intense and immersive. But for the first time, I was writing without a scaffolding of history, and I was writing a story that was quite internal. It

didn't deal with larger issues of political movements and social justice. Everything in this novel looked in rather than out. I do remember feeling quite lonely when I wrote this book, in a way that I'm not when I write *Rowland*. I suspect it's because I didn't have as direct a link to Ned and Maddie as I do *Rowland*. I am *Rowland's* writer, so he speaks to me. Ned and Maddie are each other's writer, I just eavesdropped on what they said to each other. I do realise I sound quite mad.

You plotted the books so meticulously, with both Edward and Madeleine weaving in and out of each other's lives. Did you map this out before writing, and how did you keep it all organized while writing the book?

No, not at all. I am, what they call in Australia, a Pantser (in that I write by the seat of my pants). I don't plot in any way—I simply sit down with an idea and begin writing. I type straight into my laptop, and I allow the story to unfold onto the page of its own accord.

In *After She Wrote Him*, I wanted to echo the way my mind works when I'm writing, the way in which the novel's voice both merges with and takes over from mine—sometimes in the midst of a sentence or a thought. I wanted to reflect that fluidity but also maintain the individuality of both voices. To be honest, I thought it would be a great deal more difficult than it was.

I wrote this novel as I do all my novels, without a plot or plan of any sort, and I wasn't really consciously doing anything in particular. The novel is written in third person, and the point of view tends to change at a point when Maddie and Ned have the same thought or disagree, which is, I think, why the transition is smooth and not confusing. Again, I didn't do this consciously when I was writing—the changes were instinctive and responsive to the narrative rhythm, but, in hindsight, I see that those pivot points occurred when Ned and Maddie engage directly with each other. For a moment, at these places in the narrative, the reader's

mind is in both points of view, which allows them to move from one point of view to another without jarring.

How long have you been writing?

My first published book was released in 2010. I'd only been writing for a year and a half before that, so a little more than ten years. But for all the time before that, I like to think I was gathering material.

What do you love most about writing?

I'm besotted with the idea that people who have been conjured in my head, who are figments of my imagination, exist independently of me in the imaginations of readers I've never met.

Do you have any writing rituals?

I write through midnight on New Year's Eve so that I begin and end each year writing. For each new book, I buy myself a new pen—a rather strange ritual as I type the story straight into my laptop. I try to bake and decorate an appropriately themed cake for each book launch.

If you had to choose a mystery novel toolkit, what would it contain?

- A clean set of pyjamas
- Writing implements of choice (laptop/pen and paper/Dictaphone/crayon)
- A keen sense of justice
- A dry sense of humour
- A couple of sleepy dogs, or perhaps a cat, to keep you company as you write
- Coffee
- Snacks
- An insatiable curiosity
- Courage

What do you do when you're not putting pen to paper?

I live, with my husband and two sons, on a small trufferie in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains in New South Wales. Truffles grow underground on the roots of particular oak trees, of which we have about four hundred on the property. And so, in the winter, I spend a lot of time hunting for truffles with Badger, my truffle hound. Badger sniffs them out, and then I harvest them for market. I also paint—portraits mainly—and try to keep the garden under control, but, to be honest, the vast majority of my time is spent working on one manuscript or another.