



Clare Morrall's first novel, *Astonishing Splashes of Colour*, was published by Tindal Street Press in 2003 and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. She has since published two more novels: *Natural Flights of the Human Mind* and *The Language Of Others*. Born in Exeter, she now lives in Birmingham where she works as a music teacher, and has two grown-up children.

Clare's new book *The Man Who Disappeared* is a compelling story of deception, compromise and second chances, and questions how far we can know even those closest to us. Morrall probes beneath society's veneer and shows how in times of adversity, friends can fall away and the most unexpected people step forward. She delivers a thought-provoking, affecting and ultimately inspiring tale.

Praise for *The Language Of Others*:

'Not only very readable, but very moving; a funny, and occasionally sad, account of what it feels like to be outside the norm.' *The Times*

'Subtle and absorbing . . . Morrall has a talent for making pitiable characters triumphantly sympathetic' *Guardian*

'She also has a talent for making characters who might ordinarily alienate readers seem appealing, funny and moving.' *Daily Mail*

'Morrall's rewarding third novel combines strong characters and vital evocations of place with a greater psychological intensity' *Financial Times*

Clare Morrall: Interview

With thanks to John Murray & Sceptre, Cyprus Well got the chance to ask Clare a few questions about writing and reading and the day to day life of a novelist:

Can you talk a bit about influences on your writing?

*I think the two novels that made most impression on me and fired my imagination were Faye Weldon's *The President's Child* and Ondaatje's *The English Patient*. I picked up *The President's Child* from the library one day, never having heard of Faye Weldon before and was astonished by the immediacy of it, the wonderful chatty way in which she discusses everything with the reader. I didn't know you could break all the rules like this. I read *The English Patient* after it won the Booker Prize, and I was dazzled by the strength of the visual images, the poetry of the language and the constant shifts through time and space. It's still one of my favourite books.*

Describe your typical writing day and writing space?

I am still teaching music at a school in Birmingham, but only for half a day, so I usually write in the mornings. I am able to use a spare room in a friend's house near the school, and I set off at 8.30 as if I'm going to work and get there by 9.00. Then I write for about three hours, often in an empty house, in a room right at the top of the house. It's much easier to concentrate if I'm not at home and I tend to start work immediately because there are no distractions.

Do you plan out the characters and plot of your novels before you begin, or do you just "start"?

I don't plan very much, although I do spend a lot of time thinking. I usually have an idea of what I want to write about and a vague shape of the novel – which changes constantly. I need to know ordinary things like names, ages, appearance of characters before I can write anything, but none of them come alive until they take part in the action and I start to get a feel for them. I also need to know where I want to start. It's an evolving process. The novel has a life of its own, but needs a guiding hand.

When you have a "bad writing day" how do you get things back on track?

I just keep going. I've often found that things get better if you make yourself write, even if you feel it's rubbish (it usually is anyway to start with). And when I return to it the next day, it's not always as bad as I thought it was. Everything needs reworking and reworking, so it doesn't matter if I don't get it right the first time.

Do you have any other tips for aspiring writers?

Only do it if you really, really want to. It's incredibly difficult to get published and if you're not desperate, I would find something more useful to do with your time. If you do really want to do it, then keep going, ignore all setbacks and don't give in.

Who is your own favourite writer?

I don't have one favourite writer, although John le Carre comes close. His style, which is one of the most important aspects of a novel for me, is mesmerising. His characters are so real that you feel you're standing there with them, and he

explores the complex, contradictory layers of personality that make up human nature. He writes powerfully about love and loyalty between unattractive and unconnected people with a moving conviction. I also like the secret world of spies, with its own language and codes, but you don't have to like spy stories to appreciate his writing.

Thank you Clare!