

Deborah Moggach: *author*

1948: Born in the Lake District

1971: Graduated from Bristol University and worked in publishing and as a waitress

1970s: Moved to Karachi, Pakistan

1978: Published her first novel, *You Must Be Sisters*

2004: Published *These Foolish Things*, later republished as *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* and adapted into a film

Today: Has written sixteen novels, many screenplays, short story collections and journalism. Deborah's book *Heartbreak Hotel* was published in February 2013

I think it's unfair to label women as 'domestic' writers. If you think of *Madame Bovary* or *Anna Karenina*, they are both novels largely about domesticity and yet written by men. But it's true that there is a domestic bias, seemingly, in women's fiction generally. I've never quite found an answer to it.

I've found writing the most gender-neutral industry. I think it's like driving in the dark – people can only see your headlights and not who you are. **But there is a slight gender bias in reviewing.** People have done surveys of reviews written by men and of male writers and there is a small imbalance.

My father brought me up as much as my mother did. They were both writers and my mother illustrated, too. My father might be cooking us breakfast while my mother was illustrating her books. They were great role models, both in terms of gender equality and in terms of working hard – they taught me that writing was hard work, a real job and not something for layabouts.

I'm not sure I've ever really met a woman who doesn't work, not properly anyway. I can't understand them; they feel like an alien species to me.

I first began to write when I moved to Karachi. That distance, the jolting out of your zone can be very refreshing and liberating, a lot of writers find the same. When you are far away, you don't suffer from the worries about what reviews might say or what your friends might think.

I couldn't bear the 'memsahib' world. It seemed obscene to sit around all day being served upon. In fact, I sacked the servant we inherited because of my liberal views, which was a terrible thing in hindsight because that was his livelihood.

I started by writing articles for magazines over there. Because the standards for English language material were not so high, the articles were all published. It was great for my confidence and writing is all about confidence.

I started my first novel in Pakistan, when I had all the time in world, and finished it in the UK with a tiny baby on my hands. But I spent pretty much the same amount of time each day working.

My theory is that having children sort of enriches you, if you can get a clear three hours a day in which to work, which is usually manageable when they're napping or if you can get help. You can get a huge amount done in three hours; women are natural multi-taskers. Plus, the work keeps you sane as well as solvent.

I worked through both my children's childhoods, but I was at home. I was a good mother really, if a bit distracted, but they never really noticed that. It's like walking on planks across a marsh – you are constantly jumping from plank to plank. But the real problems with juggling work and motherhood are for those people who go to work in an office, for someone else. That is much, much harder.

I write to be free – free of money worries and free from having a boss. For a very short period, early in my marriage, I had to ask my husband for money and I hated it.

I think there's a problem, now, with women earning more than their husbands. It's very emasculating for them and then they run off with Russian women who will bat their eyelashes for them. Society must evolve, but if women are doing so much of the wage earning and so much of the child rearing at the same time, there's no role left for the men to occupy.

In indexes of books, I always look for the parts on childrearing and relationships rather than politics. I'm obsessed with homes and the ways that people live these days.

Children are having adventures that are fed to them by corporations on screens rather than encountering them in the woods. It really exercises me.

The biggest change in women's lives is that we're having children later. Women are waiting, then suddenly reaching thirty-five and perhaps grabbing the nearest man. And this generation has seen so many examples of love not lasting. In my generation, love may not have lasted, but the appearance of commitment did.

There are very few suitable men around. When you compare them to the number of gorgeous, clever women it's really unbelievable.

We demand more from men these days. He's got to be clever, funny, an equal yet also someone who's going to ravish us. Perhaps we're searching for someone who doesn't exist. Love is such a bizarre and disorientating phenomenon that you can't teach someone how to pick a suitable partner.

When I look in the mirror, I see wrinkles now and they do bother me. I did some Botox once, but I stopped. I couldn't be fagged with it. The

wrinkles are just a part of what I am. But I can't go around without make-up anymore, I have to wear a bit of lipstick.

I don't find make-up an imposition, I like being able to transform myself from something hideous to something less so.

If I have a motto, it's 'everything matters, but nothing matters that much.' I like the way in which it is liberating but also kind hearted.

If I could give my younger self one bit of advice it would be to go to more legendary rock concerts. I seemed always to be away or childrearing when they happened. I wish I'd been at more turning points, too, like when the Berlin Wall came down. I could have dropped everything and gone, it would have been possible to be there.

SHORT EDITED VERSION

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