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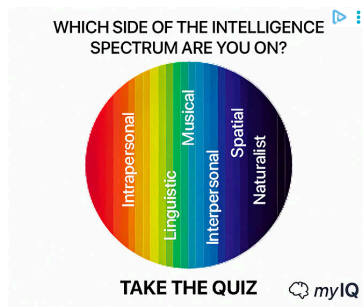
Twenty Questions

Twenty Questions with Anne Serre

How does distraction inform your writing? 'I don't really distinguish between distraction and everyday life.'

By **The TLS**





“How can I know what I think, until I see what I say?” (E. M. Forster). How much of your writing surprises you?

It doesn't surprise me when I'm writing, but sometimes, years later, when I'm rereading one of my books, I wonder how I passed from this or that scene or image to the next one. It's the workings of the imagination that are slightly mysterious.

What is the first thing you remember reading or being read to?

The novels of the Comtesse de Ségur. They opened the doors of fiction to me.

Is there a particular sentence that has stayed with you throughout your life?

Between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, it was that Latin inscription you sometimes find in monasteries: “O beata solitudo! O sola beatitudo!” (O blessed solitude! O singular beatitude!) Later, when I lowered my expectations, it was that famous remark of Montaigne's: “When I dance, I dance; when I sleep, I sleep”.

What is the most interesting item on your bookshelf?

It's impossible to choose. There are a hundred gems on my bookshelves.

Have you ever regretted publishing something?

No, but I've sometimes regretted not polishing it enough.

Proust had madeleines. Which foods or meals trigger your memory?

Are you sure Proust had madeleines? I'm more inclined to think he created that memory because of the cake's shape and name. If anything, it's smells that awaken memories in me, in particular the smell of certain houses.

Have you had any notable experiences meeting authors you admire?

When I was twenty, I met Julien Gracq, whose novel *Au Château d'Argol* had made a powerful impression on me. We met regularly, once or twice a month, for about two years. I would go to his home, and we would sit chatting in our respective armchairs. Today, I think of Gracq as my first psychoanalyst.

Do you have a favourite bookshop?

Gibert Joseph, on the boulevard Saint-Michel in Paris. There are three floors of books, you can spend hours there quietly browsing. The sales staff are very friendly and professional. And a lot of the books are second-hand or marked down, so you can buy five or six at a time without spending a fortune.

How does distraction inform your writing?

I don't really distinguish between distraction and everyday life.

What are you currently reading or watching?

I've just reread Carson McCullers's extraordinary *Clock Without Hands*.

Who has influenced your writing?

I would say Kafka, the father of us all, but around him are dozens of other writers.

Which piece of music have you listened to the most in your life?

I don't listen to music much, except when I'm driving in the countryside.

Do your ideas form themselves in your head or on the page?

Ideas are formed mostly in the head. What's formed on the page tends to be images.

What is the worst job you ever had?

When I worked for a women's magazine and had to interview people about their private life. It made me very uncomfortable.

If you could choose any piece of art to hang above your desk, what would it be?

I prefer to have slightly naive paintings around my desk. A work of art would be too oppressive.

What was your favourite text studied at school?

It's odd, but I can't recall one. I think I've always preferred discovering books for myself.

Which font do you write in?

It depends. It's not terribly important for me.

What does a writing day look like for you?

It consists of sitting in front of my computer, above all in the morning. After lunch, I go out and walk for an hour or two, usually in my neighbourhood. Then I come home and go back to work.

Which other art forms are necessary to your writing?

Film and painting.

Where do you seek refuge?

In my forty-year friendship with Mark, who's now my translator. In my family home in the Auvergne, which I have inherited, and in my flat in Paris. In reading and going to exhibitions. In writing my books.

*Anne Serre is the author of seventeen works of fiction. Her short story collection *Au coeur d'un été tout en or* was awarded the *Prix Goncourt de la Nouvelle* in 2020. [A Leopard-Skin Hat](#) is the fourth of her books to appear in English.*

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Twenty Questions

Twenty Questions with Elizabeth McCracken

Who has influenced your writing? ‘Everyone I am related to, by blood and marriage’

By [The TLS](#)

Twenty Questions

Twenty Questions with Michael Rosen

What is the worst job you ever had? ‘Painting the underside of an asbestos roof in a heatwave while standing on a plank with no guard rails.’

Twenty Questions

Twenty Questions with Mariana Enriquez

Which piece of music have you listened to the most in your life? ‘The song “From Her To Eternity” by Nick Cave.’

By [The TLS](#)

Twenty Questions

Twenty Questions with Simon Okotie

What does a writing day look like for you? ‘I write fiction on Wednesday and Sunday mornings between March 1 and October 31 (inclusive).’

By [The TLS](#)



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