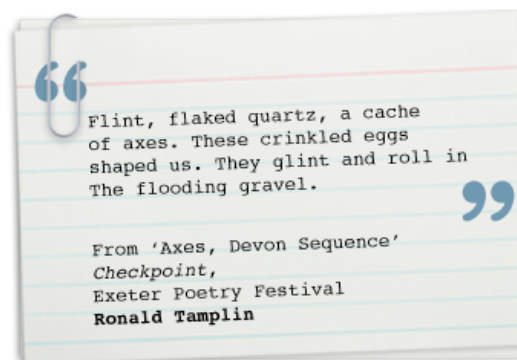


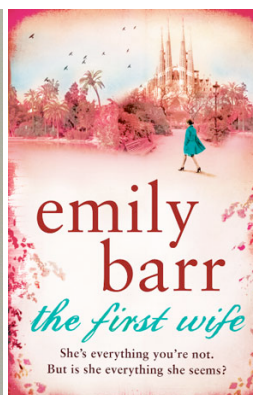


Good Morning! It's Monday on June 06, 2011.

Literature for everyone in the South West



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Emily Barr is the well-loved and bestselling author of *Backpack*, the original backpacking novel, and many other highly acclaimed novels. A former journalist, she has travelled around the world and written columns and travel pieces for the *Observer* and the *Guardian*. After living in France, Emily and her husband (whom she met backpacking) have settled in Cornwall with their three children. You can learn more about Emily and her novels by visiting her website www.emilybarr.com. Her new book, *The First Wife*, is published this month.

Cyprus Well caught up with Emily last week to ask her about her writing, and the world of books in general.

Can you tell us a bit about your journey from *Guardian* journalist to best selling author?

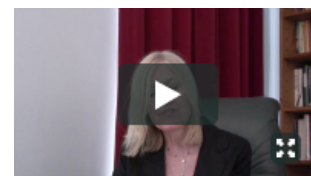
I loved working at the *Guardian* in my twenties but I was always very keenly aware that I was not a very good journalist. I would watch the people around me being focused and ambitious, and although I enjoyed the challenge very much, I could never summon that cut-throat instinct. I was happier making things up than trying for hours to get the right person to come to the phone and say the right thing, and in fact by the end of my time there I was writing a completely fictional column on the sports pages called 'The Other Half'.

Then, one fateful day, the journalist sitting next to me threw himself down in his chair and announced that he had just resigned, and was going to move to Scotland to write a book. I was insanely jealous, which made me realise that he was not 'lucky' so much as proactive, and that if I, too, wanted to move on, I had better make it happen. So I wrote an email (which was new fangled technology back then) to the travel editor, proposing that I



Literature Clips

Our patron, Helen Dunmore (courtesy [Bloodaxe Books](#))



[Helen Dunmore](#) from [Neil Astley](#)



[Lee Weeks](#)



should go backpacking for a year and write her a column as I went. I did not expect for one moment that she'd say yes, but she did, and three weeks later, all my stuff was boxed up, I had a brand new backpack, and I was off, around the world on my own. It was terrifying, and the best thing I've ever done.

While I was away I made a lot of notes for a novel set on the Asian backpacking circuit, and when I came home, I wrote it (*Backpack*) and was lucky enough to be taken on by Jonny Geller, who got me a deal with Headline. I've been with Jonny, and published by Headline, ever since.

***The First Wife* is your tenth book. Has writing become easier, the more books you have written, or does it get more demanding as you go along?**

Sometimes it feels easier, and sometimes more demanding. When I was writing my first book, I had no idea if I could actually sustain it to the end, so that was scary. Now I know I can get there, but I don't think you ever reach a point at which you know exactly how it's done and can dash off a book just like that. Which is probably a good thing. It's all, every single day, about discipline and getting in the right frame of mind to focus on your book and characters. I often start a book without knowing how it's going to end, and I like it that way. If you know too much about what's going to happen, you can lose a bit of the impetus actually to write the thing.

Can you give us a sneak insight into *The First Wife*?

The First Wife is set in Falmouth and Barcelona: it's the story of Lily, who has had a sheltered and weird upbringing, suddenly finding herself alone in the world. She becomes fascinated with a glamorous couple when she gets a job cleaning their house - then, when the woman dies in Barcelona, she is drawn to the grieving widower. But, as she gradually discovers, nothing is actually the way it seems...

Can you say a bit about your normal writing practice and environment - do you always write at a particular time of day, for example, a set number of words per day, a particular spot in the house?

I work while my children are at school, so that gives me some very rigid timings - there's no chance of getting carried away if it's nearly 3pm. At the moment we're living in a rented house with an attic, so I'm able to go upstairs, unplugging the wifi before I go, and shut myself away from the world and look out of my window at the sea while I write. I find it essential (and difficult) to shut out the details of domestic life: if you allow yourself to be distracted by the laundry basket or the dishwasher, the day is suddenly gone. I try to treat it as a job and apply myself during working hours, even if it means the breakfast stuff is still on the table when we get home after school, and I am very good indeed (to my husband's dismay) at ignoring clutter.

Occasionally I'll have a period of getting up very early in the morning to write: I love being up and about before anyone else, sitting at the kitchen table with a vat of coffee and writing as it's getting light outside. That tends to happen when I am feeling the deadline pressure.

Depending what stage I'm at with a book, I'll aim to write 2-5,000 words a day.

What tips do you have for aspiring writers?

Just sit down and write! It's so easy to be distracted by details, but until you've written something, and made it as good as it can be, it's all just a dream. When you've got it as good as you can make it, then start trying to get an agent, and see what happens.

Do you have any particular favourite authors who have inspired your own reading and writing?

I have lots of favourite authors - recently I read *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* by David Mitchell, and I was enthralled by every word. There are a few authors for whom I'll drop everything to read their latest: as well as Mitchell, they include Margaret Atwood and, for more personal inspiration, Sophie Hannah.

At Cyprus Well we're trying to keep an eye on the digital developments in the publishing world - iPads, Kindles, etc - do you have any feelings about where this might all be heading?

I think things are changing radically for the whole industry, mainly because people don't want to pay much (or anything) for ebooks. Assuming that at some point Amazon and co will be able to discount publishers' prices, then writing for Kindles etc becomes incredibly difficult economically. I imagine it will push more authors into self publishing (or 'indie' publishing as I see it's renamed itself), at which point quality control becomes an issue ... it's fascinating and a bit scary.

Personally I have resisted the lure of the e-reader, because as far as I'm concerned, looking at a screen equates either to 'work' or to 'I should be working'. I like books with pages, and reading in the bath, and not worrying if your book gets covered in sand. I also like the fact of owning a book, lending it out, and other things you can't do when you're just buying a license to read it on your Kindle.

Perhaps in the future, my children will be reading everything on a screen, though they like physical books at the moment, too and I'm not sure they will necessarily make a total switch when they're older. But what do I know? When I was young we would never have imagined the internet. Anything could happen.

Thank you Emily!

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Read Mandy Baggot's review of 'A Perfect Lie' [HERE](#)



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