

Generic questions for nominees for Sunday Times Fiction Prize [LitNet] .

1. In Margaret Atwood's book on writing, *Negotiating with the Dead*, she compiles a list of hundreds of reasons why writers write. Some of the reasons on the list are:
 - To record the world as it is
 - To set down the past before it is all forgotten /To excavate the past *because* it has been forgotten
 - To satisfy my desire for revenge
 - Because I knew I had to keep writing or else I would die
 - To produce order out of chaos
 - To hold mirror up to the reader
 - To show the bastards
 - To make money so my children could have shoes
 - To attract the love of a beautiful woman /To attract the love of any woman at all
 - To serve History

If you were to name your main reasons for writing this specific book, what would they be?|

My reasons for writing this book were essentially similar to my reasons for writing all my books, which are, in no particular order:

- To justify my existence, now that I no longer teach.
- To bring in a bit of money, now that I no longer teach, so that my dog can eat, and I myself may be spared for a while longer the diet of catfood a friend predicted when I retired.
- To keep me in touch with the literary world, which I admire and enjoy. I don't suppose all writers are warm, generous people, but in my experience the average is pretty high.
- To impress (I hope) my friends. (It's tempting to say to devastate my enemies, but I'm not conscious of having enemies. If there are some undeclared enemies out there, may they be devastated.)
-

2. If there were to be a large-scale film adaptation of your book, who would you cast as your main character, and why?

I would cast Brad Pitt, because I've always wanted to meet him, but in fact he'd be entirely unsuitable. So someone more inward and reflective – Ralph Fiennes? Or Daniel Craig, before he became James Bond.

3. Was there anything you found particularly difficult in writing your nominated book?
The ending – whether to end on a bang or a whimper. (I settled for both.)

4. What was the first book you ever read that made you think "I want to be a writer"?
George Eliot's *Middlemarch* always puts in an appearance in my Q&A sessions. So let's say George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, though in truth it's more likely to have been Enid Blyton's *Noddy*. (The real truth is I can't remember.)

5. Do you have a "first reader"? And relating to this question, who is your ideal reader?
My friend Christine Roe, to whom my latest book is dedicated, has been the first reader, or one of the first readers, of all my novels. She is also my ideal reader, in that she is critical without being devastating, admiring without being gushing, and utterly in tune with my way of looking at things. Above all, she has a sense of humour.

6. What has been your favourite South African read of 2011/2012?

Two: Damon Galgut's *In A Strange Room* and S.J. Naudé's *Alfabet van die Voëls*.

Which one of the nominated books would you place your betting money on to walk away with this year's prize?

I would rather place my betting money on the Durban July than on a literary prize – it's so much more predictable.