

Author Q&A with Forsyth Harmon



1. Where did the inspiration for *Justine* come from?

Justine was at least in part motivated by a desire to come to terms with some of my own life experiences. I was raised by my mother and her mother on Long Island, and I wanted to look at how conservative values affect relationships between women. That exercise was informed by a number of inspirational sources: both fashion magazines and independent zines of the mid-'90s, as well as indie films from that time, particularly Larry Clark's *Kids*; music, from the Native Tongues collective to The Smiths to Fiona Apple. Daniel Clowes' *Ghost World* was an early

inspiration, and, more recently, I've been inspired by Kazuo Ishiguro's work.

2. What is your artistic process like? When did you decide to first combine prose and illustration?

Combining prose and illustration is something I've always done. For me, writing is a rigorous exercise—it stirs me up—while I experience drawing as passive, a time to rest and process all those things that got stirred in the writing. I move between the two disciplines depending on my energy level.

3. If readers take away one thing from reading your book what do you hope that is?

My favorite books are the ones that ask me to read between the lines. I love Ishiguro's *A Pale View Of Hills* so much for this reason—there's an uncertainty around what Etsuko tells us and what actually happened that disturbs my sense of reality and makes me feel a little sick in a good way—a way that motivates me to question my own perception, the stories I tell myself. So I guess I hope *Justine* might inspire readers to question what's real.

4. Did anything in the writing of *Justine* surprise you?

I rewrote this story a few times, in a few different directions. Ultimately, I was surprised by how closely the final manuscript mirrored my original intention.

5. Do you have any writing rituals while you're working on a book?

I need a quiet environment and a quiet mind to write. I find jogging (if you can even call it that, I'm so slow) helps shake out my thoughts and prepares me to work.

6. What was your favorite book as a child? Who read to you?

My favorite book as a child was probably *Ramona Quimby, Age 8*. My mother always encouraged reading; we liked to get in bed early and read until we went to sleep, and this remains my nightly ritual to this day.

7. What's on your nightstand now?

Aimee Bender's *The Butterfly Lampshade*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Mieko Kawakami's *Breasts And Eggs*, Sanaë Lemoine's *The Margot Affair*, Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Amélie Nothomb's *The Character Of Rain*, Morgan Parker's *Magical Negro*, Yūko Tsushima's *Territory Of Light*.