

# Small Talk

## Joseph Connolly

**Joseph Connolly, 62, was born in Hampstead, north London, where for many years he was the owner of the Flask Bookshop. Since his debut novel *Poor Souls* in 1995, he has published 10 further works of fiction, including *Love is Strange* (2005) and *Jack the Lad and Bloody Mary* (2007). He is married with a son and a daughter and still lives in Hampstead.**

### **Who is your perfect reader?**

The perfect one is the one you can stop and start and programme like a robot. You don't want them to stop just when you're building up a scene.

### **What book changed your life?**

I didn't grow up in a bookish household, which surprises people. When I discovered Jennings in the 1960s I found that reading words without pictures wasn't boring. But I've got to come back to [PG] Wodehouse, who was given to me at school by a teacher who knew I didn't read.

### **When did you know that you were going to be a writer?**

Early. I was at a small boarding school where the arts were not particularly hailed and I started writing little half-hour house plays. When I left school I wrote a novel, which was appalling but showed I could do length.

### **What is your daily writing routine?**

I do the Times crossword with a big cup of coffee, then I start at 9am with a pen and a pad and go until my wrist won't have it any more. Fortunately, my brain goes limp about the same time as my wrist.

### **Where do you write best?**

Always the same place – a small attic room utterly lined with books. I can look through the window at huge trees and other people's gardens.

### **What do you snack on while you write?**

I'm quite monastic really. I have only

a light lunch – an omelette or something of that sort.

### **Which literary character most resembles you?**

I would love to say James Bond but that would be a lie. As I get older I begin to resemble Billy Bunter more than anybody as I go to clubs and lunches and do restaurant reviews.

### **Who are your literary influences?**

They stretch from Dostoevsky to Murdoch, with Julie Burchill in the middle. From Fleming I learnt how to end a chapter in a way that almost compels you to start the next.

### **Who would you like to be stuck in a lift with?**

The very thought breaks me out into a sweat. Scarlett Johansson possibly – she'll do.

### **Which book do you wish you had written?**

*The Complete Works of Shakespeare. Or Lucky Jim.* I reread it a couple of years ago and I was amazed by how fresh and modern it was. It definitely changed the novel.

### **How would you earn your living if you had to give up writing?**

It's something no writer dares think about. My son has lots of guitars, so I could busk. Or I could get a squeegee mop and annoy drivers. Or sit with a begging bowl outside News International.

### **Where is your favourite place in the world?**

Hampstead. Had it not been, I think I would have left ages ago.

### **What does it mean to be a writer?**

A glib and immediate answer is everything. It's a bit like asking what does it mean to be male – it is by definition in you, always.

Interview by  
Anna Metcalfe.  
Joseph Connolly's latest  
novel is  
*'England's Lane'*  
(Quercus)

