

Interview topics

Why I write about what happens afterwards

Violence, trauma and intimacy are often used as dramatic events. Johan's fiction is more interested in what happens after the event has passed: the next morning, the decisions still waiting to be made, and the ways people continue ordinary lives around extraordinary experiences.

This gives an interviewer routes into *Hannah*, *The Gentle Orbit*, restraint in fiction, depicting violence without spectacle, and your own experience without making the personal history the headline.

Writing people rather than plots

Johan describes his fiction as beginning with people rather than plots. Characters make choices, circumstances change, and the story follows the consequences rather than forcing them towards a predetermined destination.

That's a good craft conversation: character agency, discovery while writing, why apparently small moments matter, what you leave unsaid, and your willingness to let readers reach conclusions without telling them what to think.

What does a writer ask of the reader?

Stories can ask readers to experience grief, fear, violence, longing and loss. When has a writer earned the right to impose that emotional cost — and when does it become manipulation?

I particularly want this one because it comes from something you genuinely think about rather than something we've reverse-engineered for publicity. It gives you the wonderful John le Carré/*The Constant Gardener* route and your idea of the “tax” a writer asks the reader to pay. It also explains quite a lot about your own restraint as a novelist.

Starting again later in life

After three decades working in and around large organisations, Johan published his first novel in his fifties and subsequently built a writing and publishing life alongside his work in leadership and organisational change.

This isn't the ghastly “it's never too late to follow your dreams!” version. There's a much better conversation here about accumulated experience, permission to try, becoming visible, changing professional identity, and what you know at 57 that you couldn't possibly have written at 27.

What organisations teach us about people

Thirty years around leadership, transformation and large organisations gave Johan another laboratory for watching human behaviour: power, fear, loyalty, status, uncertainty, institutional pressure and what people do when circumstances change around them.

That connects the fiction and non-fiction beautifully without pretending the novels are disguised management books. It's also where Stay the Course becomes relevant.

When life doesn't follow the plan

Across Johan's fiction and non-fiction sits a recurring question: what do people do when life takes them somewhere they never planned to be?

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