

Alison Moore in an Online Conversation

Sukhpal Sharma

An English novelist and short story writer Alison Moore (hereafter AM) was born in 1971 at Manchester, England. Presently, Moore lives with her husband Dan and her son Arthur in a village named Wymesworld which is situated on the border of Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire in England. She, so far, has written five novels and one book of short stories, which are published by Salt Publications. Her novels are *The Lighthouse* (2012), *He Wants* (2014), *Death and the Seaside* (2016), *Missing* (2018) and *Sunny and the Ghosts* (2018). Her short story collection is titled *The Pre-War and Other Stories* (2013). Her first novel won McKitterick Prize of 2013 and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2012, the National Book Awards 2012, the Sydney J. Bounds Award 2013, the East Midlands Book Award 2013 and the Athens Prize for Literature 2014. Moore's short story collection was shortlisted for East Midlands Book Award 2014 and the title story had won the New Writer Novella Prize 2009. *He Wants* was the Observer book of the year 2014. In Moore's writings, past has a significant role. Her characters wander in their past events. Not surprisingly, in her novels and stories, there are a number of themes such as isolation, grief, loneliness and disconnection. Moore delves into these aspects in very well-knit structures.

This conversation was collected during the research work which has been done with her two novels titled *The Lighthouse* and

He Wants.

Alison Moore (abbreviated as AM)

Sukhpal Sharma (abbreviated as SS)

SS: You wrote *The Lighthouse* after the demise of your mother in 1995. In this novel, characters Futh and Ester both remember their mothers. Is there any impact of your personal life on this writing?

AM: Not intentionally, but I certainly did begin writing more after my mum died – writing is no doubt a way for me to process and handle things. It was only after the publication of *The Lighthouse* and my collection *The Pre-War House and Other Stories* that I realised the extent to which my work deals with absent mother figures.

SS: Do your surroundings affect your writing? Are your settings, characters and situations affected by your immediate surroundings or by British milieu?

AM. The landscape of the Midlands (the broad area in which I grew up and live now) does appear in my writing, and I'm equally inspired by travelling, e.g. *The Lighthouse* was greatly influenced by a circular Rhineland walk I'd done, and key elements of my third novel *Death and the Seaside* were inspired by a seaside town I happened to be visiting.

SS. How would you describe your writing process?

AM: I only start writing when I have certain ideas/characters/themes/situations I want to explore, and I don't know the full story when I begin. I write fairly chronologically but I edit a lot as I go along, so I go back to the beginning quite a lot to comb through again as I get to know the story.

SS: Is writing deliberate or spontaneous for you?

AM: A mixture of the two – I’m aware of trying to build something, and making conscious decisions, but at the same time I’m very much ‘in the zone’, trying to follow the story, discovering it by writing it.

SS: Do you think someone could be a writer if he/she does not respond to emotions?

AM: Writers generally need to be open to the world, observant, responsive, but there’s a balance between responding emotionally to the world and being able to process and translate that into fiction.

SS: What kind of research did you carry out before writing the novels *The Lighthouse* and *He Wants*?

AM: I did the circular Rhineland walk that Futh does, but not as research – at that point I hadn’t conceived of *The Lighthouse*. I did keep a diary though, which was very helpful in writing the novel. After writing the first draft, I made a further journey by ferry, paying close attention to the details of the ferry and the crossing. *He Wants* has a fictional setting, but the nursing home element draws on a period in my life – before and during my time at university – when I worked in a nursing home.

SS: Do you see writing as a kind of spiritual practice or some kind of a solace to a bruised heart?

AM: I am aware that writing is something that helps me mentally and emotionally. I also think it’s just the way my brain is wired; it’s to do with the way I see and translate the world and is just something I need to do.

SS: In *The Lighthouse* Futh remembers his wife who left him and in *He Wants* Lewis remembers his wife Edie who died. Why are the

roles of protagonists’ wives not elaborated in these writings?

AM: Only because in these novels the protagonists are male, and they’re male because of the nature of the stories: in *The Lighthouse*, I’m exploring a fairly Freudian son to mother obsession, and *He Wants* explores a man’s homosexual desire – so they both had to be male and the story is largely about them. In my most recent novel, *Missing*, the protagonist is female, and the figure of her husband is minor.

SS: Are your characters real or imaginary?

AM: They are imaginary – I never deliberately write about real people – but my fictional characters will have traits or occupations I’m familiar with or have observed, e.g. the rather quiet, private male figure in both of these novels.

SS: In the concluding lines of *He Wants* “They speed down the long, dark country lane with their headlights on full beam and it makes Lewis think of flying, of what flying might be like, and of how you would be fine, you would be safe, up there in the air.” Do you not feel that it is a kind of compromise of Lewis’ with his life, because in the entire novel he wants so many things that he was not able to get. What do you think of these lines? Should we compromise with our lives and make do with what we have and continue our life as it is?

AM: I think Lewis had to make choices, and we all do. It’s important to me that he does not regret his choice as such: he had a good marriage, a good companion; it’s more that there was an alternative possible life and he wonders about that, and wonders if he can still make that choice now. These lines echo an earlier line: ‘You’re safest of all in the air,’ which is followed by, ‘although at some point you

would have to come down.’ At the end of the novel, I can leave Lewis having got, to some extent, what he wanted, but, beyond the novel, he would have to make a decision about the life he wants, or Sydney might not want what Lewis wants. We do have to make choices and compromises in life.

SS: Why are your characters emotionally weak, always need sympathy, and always in search of something? Where do your characters get inspiration from?

AM: Futh was emotionally damaged in childhood by his mother rejecting and abandoning him, but although the way a reader sees a character is always true in its own way, I personally don’t see my characters in general as being emotionally weak. Lewis was becoming aware of his homosexual feelings for Sydney at a time when homosexuality was illegal in Britain, a criminal act, and many homosexual men hid their homosexuality, even from themselves. These two characters might be considered lonely figures but they’re not seeking sympathy. The fact that they are seeking *something* is an essential element in storytelling – the classic quest, the journey into the woods to find what has been lost or taken. And read your secondary question about inspiration, I would say that I do like writing about a fairly quiet, steady character into whose life comes what I call a disrupter, someone who is going to shake things up, press their buttons: in *The Lighthouse* it’s Ester, in *He Wants* it’s Sydney.

SS: What do you think about creative writing?

AM: I wouldn’t really try to define it – people write creatively in so many different ways. I enjoy shaping stories, but plenty of writers enjoy describing e.g. the view from the window, just capturing that.

It’s all creative and it’s all writing.

SS: In *He Wants* why did you choose a topic of homosexuality?

AM: The themes and stories suggest themselves to me – I don’t feel that I choose them as such. I never really know where these ideas come from, only that something has struck me that I would like to explore. With *He Wants*, homosexuality was a way of exploring the idea of the path not taken.

SS: In the recent years there is on-going debate regarding the objectification of women’s writings. Where the works of women writers are often claimed to be confessional, what are your views over this debate?

AM: I’m aware of a number of women writers who have been pressured to rework their novels in order that they can be marketed as ‘women’s writing’, which I think is terribly damaging. I see no need for such a category. Being with an independent publisher, I’m free to write what I like and not feel shoehorned into such a corner. It has been said that women often write about the domestic sphere, and that is true of me, because the area of relationship dynamics interests me, whether I’m writing ‘literary fiction’ or horror, so again, I feel free to write what interests me. I think that freedom is key.

SS: According to you what is the connection between frustration, desire and past?

AM: In *The Lighthouse* and *He Wants*, and *Missing* too, the protagonist experiences a loss either in childhood or during the transition from childhood to adulthood. They are in a sense trying to recover that loss, but rather than the classic quest, I’m interested in situations in which what (who) has been lost perhaps cannot be

recovered: Futh seeks substitute mother figures, Lewis wants to undo time and explore the option that was on the table when he was young, and Jessie (in *Missing*) is seeking a lost child, but none of them can truly reclaim what has been lost to the past: people leave; time passes. In *Missing*, I use imagery comparing this loss with ejection from the Garden of Eden, and being unable to get back in.

About the Author

Sukhpal Sharma is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in the Department of English at Punjabi University, Patiala. His research focuses on diverse areas such as fiction, science fiction, music, folklore, and philosophy. With an M.Phil. in English, his dissertation titled “Memory and Desire Loop: Analyzing Alison Moore’s *The Lighthouse and He Wants*” reflects his academic expertise and interests.

A Report on the 5-Day International Capacity Building Program on Poetry, Pedagogy, and Profession Organized by Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab: August 20-25, 2022

Navleen Multani

Public Relations and Department of English, Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab (RGNUL), Punjab in collaboration with Mary Immaculate College (MIC), University of Limerick, Ireland, Intercultural Poetry and Performance Library (IPPL), Kolkata, State Bank of India, Patiala and Manipal University, Jaipur organised 5-day International Capacity Building Program (CBP) on “Poetry, Pedagogy and Profession: Understanding Rhyme and Reason across Cultures” from 20th - 25th August, 2022. This unique program was organized with the objective to promote reading, writing and teaching of poetry. The 5-day program advanced National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 mandate regarding building of competencies. Mr Sudeep Sen, an internationally acclaimed poet and contemporary voice of Indian Poetry, was Chief Guest for the inaugural session.

Prof. G.S. Bajpai, Vice-Chancellor, RGNUL welcomed the guests. Citing Dylan Thomas, Prof. Bajpai remarked, “A good poem is a contribution to reality. It helps to change the shape of universe.” While addressing academicians, researchers, students and professionals, he observed that poetry immensely maximized talent and critical abilities. Voicing concern regarding artificial intelligence and impact of new technologies, Prof. Bajpai said that the knack of interpreting