

SPEECH AT LOCAL LAUNCH OF *GROSSE FUGUE*

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When I started out on this journey a long time ago, it was without any intention or expectation of being published. I just wanted to see if I could conjure from my own imagination a compelling narrative that addressed some large themes.

In brief, I set myself the challenge of confronting the legacy of genocide and the related questions of identity and belonging. Alongside that, I wanted to see if it was possible to express the mystery of great music and to expose it to an audience not yet addicted, as I am, to its inexhaustible richness.

But once it was finished, I succumbed to the arrogant temptation that I wanted others to read it, partly out of a desire to infect them with my ideas – after all, why should I be the only one who suffers. And partly out of the need to find out if it is any good.

I hope I've succeeded. But if I haven't, I would urge you to regard it as an heroic failure and at least acknowledge the sheer chutzpah of my ambition.

A moment of sentiment, if I may.

When I began writing, I had in mind that I would complete the first draft in time for my father's 80th birthday. By dint of a ferocious summer of writing, I managed that. If he had survived till today, he would, I know, have been enormously proud that it made it into print. Sadly, he died in February. On a happier note, now liberated from the expenses of a care home, my mother can afford to buy 125 copies every week.

I would like to say 'thank you' to Janet. It is she who has put APP's money where my mouth is and I am so grateful for the faith she has shown in *Grosse Fugue*. More than that, she played a key role in making it as good as it can be. Now, it's often said that, apart from the odd kidney stone, men can never know the agony of childbirth. Well, let me tell you, being edited by Janet and her crew was close enough for me. Every time I'd shout that I was ready to push, she'd don her surgical gloves and thrust her hand up my creative cervix, only to announce that I was one centimetre dilated.

And I want to tell you ladies this. There's no such thing as a writing pessary. No gas and air, no pethidine, no epidural. And if I could have worked out how to give myself a literary episiotomy, I'd have been down there with a scalpel. But, in the end, the labour brought forth something beautiful so it was worth it. But, as I believe is customary at such times, never again. NOT.

I've saved the most important thanks till last.

In his mid-30s Beethoven despaired of finding his perfect wife. So he created her in his only opera. And, at the end, when she has rescued him from imminent oblivion, Florestan turns to her and says: My Leonora what have you done for me? And she simply replies: Nothing, nothing, my Florestan.

Elaine is my Leonora, my rock and my muse, my North Star and my compass.

Without her, this book would, quite simply, not exist.

She has tolerated the self-indulgent process of planning, researching and writing it.

She has stoically accepted the financial insecurity of the freelancer and at times been the only bread-winner in the family.

But, above all, she gave me the confidence and, dare I say, courage to believe that I could conceive its structure and scope, develop the ideas, find the words - and even stand up here today and talk about it.

So, should you be kind enough to buy one or recommend it, please remember - it's all for her.

Oh, and relish the unique spectacle of Elaine actually encouraging people to buy retail.

Thanks so much for coming, your support means everything.