

On Writing While Hoping

Alex Brianson

I know, right? What a day to reactivate my blog. Brexit legally happens today, and all of us who only have UK passports lose a big chunk of our rights. For many of us today is also about losing an important part of our identity; lots of people talk airily about being ‘citizens of the world’, but in the EU all member state nationals have actual legal, political, and social rights that go further towards making such cosmopolitan ideals concrete than anywhere else in history. It matters. Lots.

Other people have written already about how, as from tomorrow, those of us who wanted to Remain should start holding the government to account for its lies and deceit, so that in time the seeds of a Re-join campaign can start to flower. I agree. There’s some Schadenfreude in the realisation that the best argument for Brexit after the referendum result – that it had been the victorious side in that legally dodgy vote – is now of no relevance. As impertinent as a Farage in a hemicycle, in fact. (The hemicycle is the European Parliament chamber, for those who haven’t heard the term before.) You wanted it, you own it. Enjoy.

And there’s some pity too, for those who were conned into thinking Brexit would solve their problems, even those who compounded the sin by voting for the Tories last month. They are going to need a lot of help when the recession hits and *unaccountably* the government fails to jump in and provide the necessary cash to get them by.

And there’s even more compassion, because they will just love it 😊, for those who see Brexit as the return to Rule Britannia. They are about to get a huge and unwelcome dose of reality, and no matter how much their chosen purveyors of propaganda try to spin it, the truth will out – although it would be very naïve to expect such veracity to emerge without a truly stentorian battle with the right wing press and its agents of destruction in No 10.

So I feel strangely calm today; partly, this is because I heard the death knell sound for Remain on the morning of the General Election result last month, and partly, perhaps, because I’m an Aspie. It’s one of the things we tend to do if we have alexithymia (as about half of us seem to) – we take a long time to figure out what we’re feeling, so we can be really good in a crisis though we are churning away inside and will melt down or shut down later. I can only trust this isn’t so today, because I have had quite enough of that to last the rest of my

days in this particular incarnation, thank you very much. I'm feeling kinda interstitial. And in that liminal place, there is space for creation, and space for hope.

As a writer – and yes, I am still plodding along the dread path to finding a publisher – I find this fascinating. Part of the reason I wanted to be a novelist was to access the power of story to help people envisage a different, better world, and to feel there's actually a chance of bringing it about. It's why I chose the themes I did for novels one and two (respectively transgender rights and Brexit), and why I spent a lot of time creating protagonists who are flawed but compelling, and who readers will – I hope – want to see prevail in their heroic quests for happiness. At times like this, we need heroes – and sheroes or heroines too, depending on whether you want to distinguish on gender grounds here or not – to make us remember that courage brings rewards, and that integrity is crucial.

Of course in a fictional world the author can ensure the good end happily, as Oscar more or less once waspishly observed, and there's no guarantee of that in real life. And sometimes we want an anti-hero, like Deadpool, to wisecrack their broken way to happiness, or a flawed but wonderful Emma Woodhouse figure to *Bildungsroman* her way to the same destination. But without compelling stories and heroic figures, political movements don't stand a chance of success. And so today – particularly today – I commit to play my part in that weaving of a new world, through the imagination at first, and through action to make those visions real subsequently. In this there is hope, and as everyone since Pandora has found out for themselves, not only is it impossible to function for long without this shining state of mind, but at the bottom of every box of travails, there it is. L'espoir est mort. Vive l'espoir!