

My favourite writers

Rikki Beadle-Blair

So many, so many...! Austen, the mighty Dickens, Hugo, the Brontës, Greene, Isherwood, Forster, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Carrie Fisher, Tennessee Williams, so many more. Ask me on another day – or even in an hour – and the list might be completely different, but the following are my favourite writers on my mind right this moment:

S. E. Hinton, an amazing young writer who back in the sixties and seventies wrote a stunning quartet of what we now call 'Young Adult Fiction' books about 'greasers' growing up dirt-poor in her home city of Tulsa, Oklahoma: *The Outsiders*, *Rumble Fish*, *That Was Then, This Is Now*, and *Tex*. They're all written in the voice of teenage boys, using their rhythm and slang to capture the bravado and vulnerability of being a boy growing up in that unforgiving place and time with heartbreaking brilliance. She wrote the first book, *The Outsiders*, while still in high school. Maya Angelou turned her long incredible life as black woman born in St Louis, Missouri at the start of the Depression into a series of legendary autobiographies - starting with the classic *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* – and assertive, uplifting poetry with titles like 'And Still I Rise' and 'Phenomenal Woman'. Earthy, dignified, wise and honest work from a woman who conquered the world – whenever the blues descend, googling 'Maya Angelou poetry' on YouTube will never fail you. Alice Walker: Boy, can this woman write! *The Color Purple* is her masterpiece, written in the first person as if from the barely literate pen of a poor young 'ugly' black girl in the American South, sold into brutal marriage and gruelling step-motherhood in her early teens, who somehow

grows into an independent clothes-designing, same-sex loving local businesswoman in her old age. Alice Walker's writing is intelligent, insightful, complex, compassionate, witty and profoundly human. She is truly epic. George Orwell's work is fearless and pin-point focused. Taking class politics head on with work after work in a style that is accessible, honest and utterly unpretentious, the thing that people forget to mention is what a brilliant storyteller and entertainer he is. Like a great athlete or dancer, even as he makes us gasp with his ball skills, fancy footwork and gravity-defying grace, yet still he is making it all look sooooo much easier than it is. A genius of communication and clarity.

Shakespeare, of course, is the Don. When you write 37 plays that hordes of doubting fans simply cannot believe you could have written on your own without a classical education... when 450 years later, words you popularized and invented and countless turns of phrase you came up with have become a major part of day to day English language... when you have fearlessly written about racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, ageism, left- and right-wing politics, law, war, class, sex, sexuality, gender, nationalism, isolationism, protectionism, fascism, liberalism, parenting debates and mental health issues, almost half a millennium before most of these issues even had names, you are officially more than a writer. You are a prophet. You are an OG... And the sonnets! Imagine just one of those being written about you? And all written to a beautiful dark-skinned woman and radiant graceful young man. Radical. Every time I see a production of the Bard, no matter how frustrated I am with the production and performance, I hear that writing cutting through everything. Its music, its gymnastic confidence and its infinite startling insight and compassion for who and what we are – and I am floored. Humbling and inspiring. The Don.

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Rikki Beadle-Blair MBE is a writer, director, composer, choreographer, designer, producer and performer working in film, theatre, television and radio, having written and directed 30 plays over the last 20 years, along with several feature films, shorts and tv episodes and series. He has won several awards including a Sony Radio Award, and a Los Angeles Outfest Screenwriting and Outstanding Achievement award. Rikki's passion for encouraging creativity and business sense in others has led him to becoming a committed mentor to a great many writers, actors, composers and directors around the world. **teamangelica.com**

A recording of this talk can be found on the WritersMosaic website at **writersmosaic.org.uk**

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