Cambridge Creative Writing Company
Emily's Reading List

There are many wonderful books in the world. Read what you love! And as you read, think about how the author achieved the effects you most enjoy. How would the effects be different if the author had started in a different place on the timeline, focused on a different character, used a different style? Asking yourself these questions can help you recognise the choices they did make, and evaluate how those choices shape the reader's experience.

I have a few recommendations for favourites of mine, in case you're looking for direction:

In a Lonely Place by Dorothy B. Hughes

I write crime, so it's natural I have a crime recommendation. This noir written in 1947 is hugely popular with my past students, and it's an excellent example of "point of view". It focuses very closely on the main character, a murderer, but has also cleverly arranged the plot to give the reader access to information the focus character either doesn't perceive, or perceives but misinterprets. It's a brilliant psychological study of a dark mind unravelling.

Dark Matter by Michelle Paver

This is a ghost story (and love story) set at an Arctic research station in 1937. It's written in diary format, and is full of emotions and observations that the protagonist reveals only to the page, not to the people around him; the reader feels as if being let in on a secret. The sense of time and place—what it's like being in the Arctic, what it's like creating and running and research station almost a hundred years ago, what it's like being of a less-than-privileged class while surrounded by elites—is deeply immersive, as is the haunting. Best read under blankets by lamplight.

Jurassic Park by Michael Crichton

Most of us are familiar with the movie franchise. The idea of the book is so brilliant I'm sure it would have sold even if the writing had been pedestrian, but it just so happens that the writing is excellent. It's a terrific example of "show don't tell". That principle means it's more vivid and immersive to show the effects of something rather than to just state something. On a basic level, it's having a character enter a house leaving wet footprints and shaking out an umbrella instead of having the narrative just say "it was raining". The beginning of Jurassic Park is a master class in this technique. Instead of coming out and telling us there are dinosaurs being cloned on that island, Crichton shows us the many ways that people near the island are having experiences that hint at dinosaurs on the island. It's incredibly effective.

On Writing by Stephen King

This is a candid memoir of King's writing life, and many people find it relatable, encouraging, and inspiring. It's full of ideas you might apply to your own work, and most of all I hope anyone reading it will start to think about how their own writing memoir would look. These

things work for King; what works for you? One caveat: he got his agent and his first publishers at a very different time. His submission experiences are accurate and valid, but not a good template for submitting to agents and publishers now. But his advice and anecdotes about approaching writing itself are timeless.

If you'd like to read something of mine, the books in my detective series all stand alone in terms of the crime being solved; read any one that appeals to you! But they do connect together in order regarding the lives of the detective characters. So if you want to start from the beginning, the first is **The Whole World**. If you want to read only one, I've been told by many that the last is the best (and stands alone well): **Look for Her**.