

Getting frank with Diane Awerbuck

 By [Shan Raddiffe](#)

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Part educator, part writer and part Frank (in more than one way), Diane Awerbuck is the award-winning author of *Gardening At Night* and other stories. This Women's Month, I chatted to her about life, classic literature, and important lessons we should be teaching our girls...



Image: © Justin Youens

■ *Tell us a little bit about what you're working on at the moment...*

For money, I'm writing teachers' guides for an NPO, Class Act. They're partnering with the Department of Basic Education so kids can get their hands on some...basic education. It's a step in the right direction, and I enjoy this kind of work. Technical writing is the hardest kind – like haiku.

...which are what I'm working on for love. I've just printed a notebook for creative types, called 'As above, so below'. (Anyone who's interested in alchemy will have heard that line before.) The notebook also has fifty of my unholy haiku in it, plus a fantastic cover by Alex Latimer. They say you ought to write about what you know, and what I know is the Bible, and the Biblical sense. I've combined them.

■ *In the midst of Women's Month, how does it feel being one half of [Frank Owen](#)?*

I'm the better half. So it feels awesome. I think Alex [Latimer] is okay with that.

■ *Do you think there's still place for classic women's literature in this day and age?*

If the massive American Brontë-saurus fan base is anything to go by, then for sure. We still crave the wit and stability of that literature, and the knowledge that women have always been fighters – of all stripes. Those women are our literary ancestors. We owe them. My local old-lady fave is Pauline Smith – those Karoo short stories are up there with Bosman. And sci-fi counts as classic, too: Octavia Butler; Ursula le Guin, Atwood.



Cover artwork by Alex Latimer for Diane Awerbuck's *As Above, So Below*

■ ***If you could be any classic woman writer, who would you be and why?***

Atwood. She can do it all. That poetry! And she has clearly just run out of f#%!s to give.

■ ***What is it about women in this era that inspires you?***

(Now or then? Female role models are thin on the ground at the moment. Our politicians aren't exactly covering themselves in glory.)

Back then they were doing it all, but wearing horsehair weaves and corsets and long skirts. It's nuts. Maybe physical discomfort makes you cunning.

■ ***Who are your female role models?***

When I was younger, people like Camille Paglia, Juliette Lewis, PJ Harvey: cultural theorists who weren't pompous about their wisdom. But I'm over role models now. I'm forty-three, and being me is a lot of fun. I like 'em but I wouldn't want to be 'em.

■ ***If you could have dinner with any three women – dead or alive – who would they be and why?***

Famous people aren't as much fun as I used to think. The thing is that they're hardly ever doing the thing with you that made them famous: you can't really tell why they're special when they're eating. It's like being a rock star groupie: you might be bonking that singer in a hotel bed, but there's no guitar between the sheets.

I'd like to have dinner with the three women I'm planning to retire with. It's been a while since we were all on the same continent.

■ ***Speaking as a teacher, what should we be teaching or impressing upon our young girls more?***

I would just financially incentivise not having children while you're still in Pampers yourself. That's it. Do whatever you want, but don't have a baby until you're thirty. End of.

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