



Q&A with Piatkus author Clare Jay



Our Piatkus Book of the Month for March is the stunning debut novel

***Breathing in Colour* by Clare Jay.**

Breathing in Colour is the emotional and utterly gripping story about Mia and the fractured relationship she has with her mother. Mia has synaesthesia and sees the world in a kaleidoscope of shapes, colours and smells. When she goes missing on a trip to India, her mother must find the courage to trust her maternal instincts, or lose her daughter forever.

Clare Jay's short stories and poetry have won prizes and appeared in anthologies. She has a PhD in Creative Writing and tutors the subject at university level. She has led 'Dreaming into writing' workshops at international conferences, has lived in five European countries and travelled extensively in South-East Asia.

Here Clare answers some intriguing questions about her wonderfully imaginative first novel and tells us why *Breathing in Colour* is the perfect gift for this coming Mother's Day.

Piatkus: March sees the publication of your debut novel, *Breathing in Colour*. How does this make you feel?

Clare Jay: It's an amazing experience to watch as your imagination is put into a rather gorgeous package and sent out into the world. I'm so happy to see this book, which I loved writing, finally about to take its place in bookshops, and my main hope is that people will take pleasure in reading it.

Piatkus: What have been the most challenging and the most rewarding parts of the past year, gearing up to publication?

Clare Jay: Because I signed a two-book deal with Piatkus, one challenge has been getting used to the fact that although I had three long years to write *Breathing in Colour*, I only had ten months to complete the first draft of my next novel once I'd finished all the revisions for the first one! The most rewarding thing has been working with such a talented team of people: my agent, editor and publicist have been absolute stars. It has also been exciting to get an insider's view of the novel publication process for the first time.

Piatkus: *Breathing in Colour* is a striking and evocative title. Was it difficult to choose?

Clare Jay: The title came to me when I was already deep into the imagery of the novel and in particular the voice of Mia, who has the sensory condition of synaesthesia, where a sound might be tasted on the tongue, or a texture perceived as a colour. Engaging imaginatively with the sensory kaleidoscope of Mia's condition, I wondered how it might feel for her to hold her breath until she nearly burst, and it turned out that this was her route into breathing in bright swathes of colour. The idea fascinated me and I quickly realised that this was in fact the title of the novel.

Piatkus: What do you think makes your novel unique?

Clare Jay: The synaesthesia element is distinctive and I think Mia's narrative adds extra sensory texture to the novel. I also drew on the vivid imagery of lucid dreams and evoked personalised dream archetypes such as a winged elephant and a mysterious disc-headed man to add further emotional depth and psychological insight to the main characters.

Piatkus: India is an interesting setting for a novel. Is this a place that you know well, or did you do a lot of research?

Clare Jay: I've spent many months travelling through India and other parts of Asia, and when I travel I always have a notebook to hand, so my personal impressions of the country were my main memory-jog and general resource when I came to write up the India scenes.

Piatkus: We also have Mother's Day just around the corner. Would the mother/daughter relationship in this novel make it into a perfect Mother's Day gift, do you think?

Clare Jay: *Breathing in Colour* is very much a novel about the intense bond between mother and daughter, carrying the message that in spite of tragedy, misunderstanding and distance, this is a love that endures.

Piatkus: What are you writing next?

Clare Jay: My next novel, *Dreamrunner*, is about the effects of a violent sleep disorder on a close-knit and loving family. Set in Portugal, it explores the loss of trust in a relationship, the debilitating fear of madness, and a child's unwavering belief in magic and redemption.