

Val will keep on writing

Crime writer Val McDermid has revealed she wants to write novels for the rest of her life, like Ruth Rendell and PD James.

The Tartan noir writer, known to her fans as the “Queen of Crime”, once thought she had “five or six books in me” but has gone on to pen more than 30, selling over 17 million copies worldwide.

The prolific novelist says she has no plans to stop, however, and could continue into old age like her role models Rendell and James.

She said: “I just get bored if I’m not working on something. It’s what I do. My partner says I can’t retire until I get a hobby but my hobby is my work and I love it.

“I don’t see any reason to stop. Writers don’t by and large retire. I want to be like PD James and Ruth Rendell and drop down in harness.

“When Ruth Rendell had the massive stroke that ultimately killed her, in her handbag was a memory stick with the first draft of her final novel, so I want that to be me.”

McDermid, 68, told the Edinburgh International Book Festival she had not originally set out to be a crime writer but, following her graduation from Oxford University, had hoped to pen “the great English novel”. She said she completed the book but her attempt was rejected by publishers.

She said: “The one thing I would say about it is that I

finished it. I started sending it out to publishing houses and I used to get it back by return of post practically. By the end I was getting letters from people I hadn't even sent it to, 'we've heard about this, please don't'...

"I'd always read crime fiction, right from nine years old when I first discovered Agatha Christie. I realised that maybe what I should do was write something I understood so I thought maybe I could write a crime novel."

She had her first success in 1987 with *Report for Murder*, the first mystery for her journalist character, Lindsay Gordon.

She is now best known for her award-winning *Wire in the Blood* series featuring clinical psychologist Dr Tony Hill and detective Carol Jordan – played by Robson Green and Hermione Norris in the TV adaptation.

A new Karen Pirie thriller, *Past Lying*, will be published in October, and McDermid is currently working on *1999*, the third instalment in her series featuring female news reporter Allie Burns.

McDermid said that it was necessary in crime fiction to portray violence but insisted it was never gratuitous in her work.

She said she spent a lot of time finding the balance and making sure victims in her stories are portrayed as "proper characters".

She said: "When I'm writing the directly violent things it's a case of trying to walk the line between what people need to know to get a sense of this and what's too much.

"It's important to write honestly about what violence is and what it does, and how it contaminates the lives of everyone that comes into contact with it.

"It's uncomfortable at times and I always try to walk the line

between what I need to write to make people understand what's happening in the book – and the context of the violence in the book – and how its effects ripple out in all these directions, without being gratuitously cheap about it.

“That’s a difficult thing to do but I do spend a lot of time trying to get that right.

“For me it’s been important from the start – to contextualise acts of violence – to make victims proper characters. They’re not just cardboard cutouts...

“For me it’s important that you have a sense of who these people were and the lives that they’ve been torn out of. That’s quite an important aspect for me.”



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