

What I would be if I weren't a writer.

[For the *Sunday Times*]

Thursday 20 August: I leave my home in Somerset West at 8.50 for a reading group in Constantia. Heavy traffic on the N2 delays me, and I reach Constantia at 10.20. I squeeze my Golf in between three Mercs parked in the street. Walking up the drive, I count eight more Mercs, plus two in the garage of the host.

I am here to talk about my novel, *Bodies Politic*. I count fifteen attendees and two copies of my novel. I talk for forty minutes. Discussion ensues; it appears that two, possibly three, attendees have read my novel. A hand is raised: "Is this book available in the library?" If so, she resolves to get hold of it.

I am thanked by the person appointed to the task. She has not read my novel, but says she will now do so. She hands me an envelope.

I leave. The envelope contains R250. Since I am in Constantia, I have lunch with a friend at Groot Constantia. The lunch costs R480. I drive home. The trip takes one hour and ten minutes, and my odometer tells me that I have travelled 147 kilometres.

Reaching home at 5, I read my e-mails. One, headed "Sunday Times request", asks me to write 250 words on "What I would be if I weren't a writer". It adds, "Unfortunately the deadline is rather tight ... and regrettably the paper doesn't pay."

What I would be if I weren't a writer is somebody who got paid.