

On Finding Your Place and Time by Katie Rose Guest Pryal - Shelf Pleasure

Share the joy



Katie Rose Guest Pryal's coming of age novel, Entanglement, is set in early 90's Los Angeles. She fills us in on how she chose the novel's time and place.

After college, I moved to Los Angeles with a good friend and wonderful person. (She's decidedly NOT the model for the character of Daphne in my novel *Entanglement*. I need to make that super clear.) In fact, my time in Los Angeles in the 1990s didn't resemble my main characters' Greta and Daphne's time at all to the extent that they ran around with movie stars and worked for film and event production companies.

I spent most of my time selling ads for a newspaper. Early in the book, when Greta is looking for a job, she rejects the sales jobs in the classifieds. Yeah, I know just how she felt. Low-level sales is terrible.

But even after I moved back to the East Coast—which will always be my home—and went to graduate school in creative writing, Los Angeles stuck with me. There's something about the place: a sense that you are in a world that is not part of this world, and even after I left that feeling didn't go away. I knew I wanted to set a book there.

I started writing *Entanglement* after I married my husband. This is a key point because he owns a company like the one the book's hero owns—a production lighting company. My husband lights everyone from corporate CEOs to high-level politicians to gospel singers. Before we had kids, I worked as part of his crew when I wasn't working my real job at a university. I learned all about lights and cables and truss, and those details emerge in the book. I basically lifted my husband's company and dropped it in Los Angeles. I quizzed him on what his company would be like in a city like LA (in that place) and in the 1990s with that earlier technology (in that time).

So the book's place and time emerged from a combination of Los Angeles haunting me all these years later and my new knowledge of the kind of work that I would want a character like Greta to be drawn to, work on the edge of

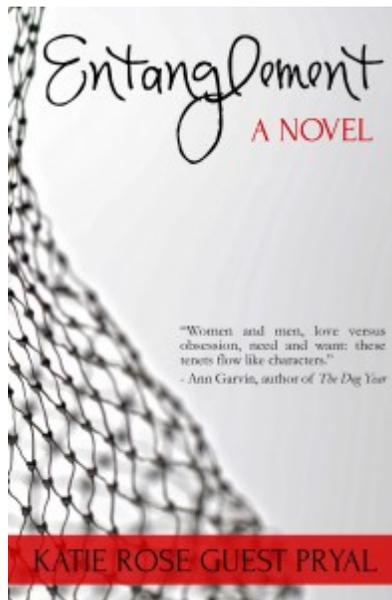
the film industry, physical, technical work, but work that is still beautiful. She is a person who wants to be behind the scenes, never in the spotlight, and I'd found the perfect way for her to work in a way that she loves.



The hardest part of writing about Los Angeles in the 1990s was remembering how things were in the 1990s. Even though my book isn't historical fiction, some of the challenges are the same. A lot has changed in the past 17 years, especially in the realm of technology. Many people didn't have cell phones then—they were still new. Daphne had one, but Greta didn't. And the phones would have been those indestructible Nokia bricks with replaceable faceplates. (Remember those? I loved those phones.)

Cars were different, too, and neighborhoods in L.A.—some have gentrified since 1999. Sometimes, while writing, I just had to decide that it was okay to invent something. Those decisions were hard because I wanted to be as accurate as possible. But there was no Google Earth for 1999. I couldn't pinpoint exactly where an old thrift shop used to be. I could have picked one that exists now, there's no guarantee that it would have been in that spot 17 years ago. Sometimes I was able to figure out where something was in that place and time, like their favorite coffee shop, but those occasions were rare. Over all, though, I think I was able to catch any anachronisms, and balance slavish accuracy with effective storytelling.

If there is something I wish I'd done differently, it is this. I wish one of my beta readers had been an LA native or at least a long-time LA resident—someone who knows both the place and the time. That's my advice to someone who finds herself in my position. Find someone who knows more about your novel's setting than you do and let them read. Both place and time matter.



Katie enjoys her three professions—novelist, freelance journalist, and lawyer—for one reason: her love of the written word. Fiction or nonfiction, Katie thrives on putting thoughts to paper and sharing them with the world. She lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where the energy of the campus and cafes inspires her writing. Her first novel, [ENTANGLEMENT](#) was published in June 2015 by [Velvet Morning Press](#). You can read the free prequel novella now, [LOVE AND ENTROPY](#), and grab a free copy of Katie's writing guide, WRITING ISN'T SEXY, by [subscribing to her email list](#).

Katie contributes regularly to THE HUFFINGTON POST, THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION, THE TOAST, DAME MAGAZINE and other national venues. ([You can view her writing here.](#)) She earned her master's degree in creative writing from the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins, where she attended on a fellowship. Katie has published five books on writing, the most recent with Oxford University Press, and although she has impeccable grammar, she would never correct yours. You can find Katie on Twitter at [@krgpryal](#), on Facebook at [facebook.com/katierosequestpryal](#), on her blog at [katierosequestpryal.com](#).