

## **THE ART AND CRAFT OF WRITING PROSE: MARGIE ORFORD**

**17-24 JULY 2019**

All writing – it does not matter whether it is fiction, narrative non-fiction or memoir is about telling a story and telling it the way your particular story needs to be told. Writing itself is a craft. This workshop will focus on the craft of storytelling, structure, narrative voice, and the intricacies of language. I will make informal presentations during each session that will inform discussion and your writing practice. We will read some texts about writing together and also read different stories – novels, non-fiction, short stories and memoir – and look at how these stories are made, crafted, put together.

As no one can write without first being a reader, participants will have the opportunity to share their favourite writers and their own work.

### **WORKSHOP STRUCTURE**

- The course is eight days long.
- Morning sessions: 9.30 – 12.30 with a break for coffee
- Afternoon sessions: 14.00 – 16.00

Each day will have a similar contour. The aim focus is to get participants writing (and reading) as much as possible.

- 1 Each session will begin with a guided writing session – so that your own writing comes first and so that the blank page becomes our friend rather than something that makes us hesitant and afraid.
- 2 After that I will present different readings, insights from other writers and from my own experience – both successes and failures – as a writer. We will discuss this as a group.
- 3 After that there will be a number of guided writing exercises so that you can put into practice what we have discussed. You will have the opportunity to experiment, to work on your own story, and to try new things.
- 4 There will be the opportunity to read your work after each session but at the last part of the class will give you the opportunity to receive and give feedback on each others' work.
- 5 Bring – notebooks, pens, paper, your laptops if you like, coloured pens
- 6 A sense of adventure, a willingness to play, the capacity to work very hard and love it.

## 17 July DAY ONE Wednesday

### STORY

*'The role of a writer is not to say what we can all say, but what we are unable to say.'*  
Anaïs Nin

- Finding stories – making stories – the basic tools
  - beginning an outline of the story you wish to write. Where to begin. Where to travel.
  - Where to end and how to end.
  - Practice – free-writing, playing with language,
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## 18 July DAY TWO Thursday

### VOICE

*'Perhaps all writing is motivated, deep down, by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld, and to bring something or someone back from the dead.'*  
Margaret Atwood

- Voice and point of view are how we tell a story – it is the guiding structure of any story.
  - Finding what you want to say, finding how what you want to say, finding your own 'voice'.
  - Finding the voices that will tell your story – to answer the question of who is telling the story and what their relation is to it?
  - Narrators – reliable and unreliable
  - Practice: This will focus on third person and first person narratives – what can you do with these voices – and which will tell your story best?
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## 19 July DAY THREE Friday

### TIME

*'Lewis Carroll has the reversing watch that can turn back time, and make history repeat itself, twice or more, each time differently. [The writer's] Magical devices which give power to characters inside the story reflect **the power of narrative to go over the same ground again, and change what happens**: a writer can handle time in contradiction of physics.'*

*Marina Warner.*

- Writing is a form of metamorphosis and storytelling has a transformative magic. Creating time and its passing – and how it changes us, others, the world, our imaginary characters is key to creating the writing world.
  - Practically one chooses the tense – past, present and future – in which we will tell our story. Each tense has gifts; each has challenges and limitations. We will explore these.
  - Questions we will address – what is time, how is it felt, how to create the sense of time, the time of the body, the time of history, the intimate time of love, breaks in time, trauma – and the very powerful narrative drama of describing events that change us – where there is a clear 'before' and an 'after'.
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## 20 July DAY FOUR Saturday

### PLACE

*"The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. Each evening we see the sun set. We know that the earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits the sight."*

*John Berger, Ways of Seeing*

- Creating and recreating the world.
  - Place, setting, context, detail – these are key to making a world.
  - Descriptive writing, movement through a place or space, and how a character relates to or lives within that place is the architecture of a story.
  - This session will focus on very concrete descriptions of places you know, and places you have never visited.
  - We will work with images and do some sketching – with words and with pens – to practice a way of seeing that will bring your story to life.
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## 21 July DAY FIVE Sunday

### LANGUAGE

*'The sound of the language is where it all begins. The test of a sentence is, Does it sound right? The basic elements of language are physical: the noise words make, the sounds, the silences that make the rhythms marking their relationships. Both the meaning and the beauty of the writing depend on these sounds and rhythms.*

*Ursula K Le Guin*

- Language, beauty, pain, love, loss, hope, the senses – are the material of life and the raw material of story
  - Writers, unlike other artists, make the material out of which we craft our work – painters have paint ready-made, potters use clay taken from the earth.
  - We make our material from the way we put words together. We recreate sight, sound, taste, touch out of these magical, intangible things.
  - the senses and the words that make sense of them.
  - The building blocks are words, sentences, grammar, punctuation – ordinary things that make something extraordinary.
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## 22 July DAY SIX Monday

### TALK

*Never use a verb other than "said" to carry dialogue: The line of dialogue belongs to the character; the verb is the writer sticking his nose in. But said is far less intrusive than grumbled, gasped, cautioned, lied.*

*Elmore Leonard – The Ten Rules of Writing*

- Dialogue, conversation, connection, silences – how people interact with each and themselves
  - The elements of convincing dialogue and how to bring your characters alive.
  - Creating silences, filling in the gaps, bringing the past to life
  - Imagining into the place of characters you think know very well – and creating characters you do not know (or do not like)
  - Using camera angles as a way of thinking about how characters relate to each other.
  - Setting up tension and intimacy – the talking cure for problems of pace and plot in stories
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## 23 July DAY SEVEN Tuesday

### FORM

*'Whether it be the sweeping eagle in his flight, or the open apple-blossom, the toiling workhorse, the blythe swan, the branching oak, the winding stream at its base, the drifting clouds, over all the coursing sun, form ever follows function, and this is the law.*

*Louis Sullivan, Bauhaus principle*

- Finding the right shape for your work. Working with different forms and making your own to suit what it is that you want to say.
  - Exploring structures that would work – linear storytelling, telling it backwards, telling it slant etc
  - This session focuses on the writing of others – the writers we love and those we don't. We will look at what makes a narrative work – how tension is created, how stories are paced.
  - Practice: how to work with different drafts – from your first draft right through to writing that you can give to others to read
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## 24 July DAY EIGHT Wednesday

### WRITING THE FUTURE

*'If there's a book you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it.'*

*Toni Morrison*

- Outlining your project, writing a proposal for a book or a project, forming writers' groups
- The foundational tools needed for writing prose – fiction (novels and short stories), narrative non-fiction, reportage, memoir, and biography.
- Writing, reading of selected work in progress and final feedback
- The publishing process – and next steps