



EDITOR'S COMMENT

Welcome to the fifth edition of WJEC's *i.e.* magazine, which sees the launch of the WJEC Inspire Me! writing competition. The details are included here along with top tips for writing magazine articles – as the shortlisted composition will be featured in the Winter 2015 edition of *i.e.* And if the lure of being a 'published writer' is not enough, there are prizes available for the individual winner and their school or college. Do encourage your students to take part!

For those young writers who prefer inspiration for their fiction writing we have an insightful interview with the first-time novelist, Alexandra Claire. There are some really interesting, thought-provoking musings in Cary Archard's article on the humble essay, and from the author of 'The Lone Reader' blog, ruminations about the place of silence in the English classroom. As ever, we are very grateful to all of those who have contributed to *i.e.*

We are always looking for teachers who wish to contribute to *i.e.* any ideas, plans, resources or opinions. It doesn't need to be a 'polished' article but something you believe in as an educator and feel may be interesting to other teachers. Please do contact us if you feel you would like to contribute.

Wishing you and your students a successful summer term,

Have a great term,

Kirsten Wilcock

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INSPIRE ME

WJEC is delighted to be launching its **Inspire Me!** writing competition.

We are encouraging young people aged 14-19 who have been inspired by their English lessons to put pen to paper, plug in their laptops and enter our writing competition.

Students are asked to write a lively magazine article about their most memorable English lesson with the aim of motivating English teachers up and down the country to inspire their students.

The top-placed entry wins its writer a Kindle Fire and their school or college's English Department £1,000 worth of book vouchers.

Some important things to remember:

- Your entry must be **no more than 800** words;
- It must be lively and entertaining;
- It should be an article aimed at teachers;
- The competition is only **open to 14-19 year olds** from WJEC centres;
- Entries should be submitted no later than **27 September 2013**.

The shortlisted articles will be published in WJEC's online English magazine, *i.e.*

Please see the WJEC website for terms and conditions – www.wjec.co.uk.

Copies of the form to accompany each entry and of the promotional posters for this competition to be displayed around your school or college are being sent to all centres that deliver WJEC English qualifications.

Should you require additional copies of the poster, please contact Dafydd Wyn (dafydd.wyn@wjec.co.uk).

To help with entries for WJEC's **Inspire Me!** Writing competition, WJEC's English Subject Officers have compiled their top tips for writing a lively and entertaining magazine article.

How to write a lively magazine article...

- Think about your PURPOSE and your AUDIENCE... Do you want your article to be funny, informative, to tug on your readers' heart strings or to make a comment about education and teachers?
- Think about who is going to be reading your article and use language that you think will appeal to them.
- Create an outline, mind map or plan for your article.
- Grab them with your headline! This is the first thing that your reader will see, make it snappy/relevant/amusing! Think about the different devices you could use to reel in those readers. Here are a few to think about:
 - o Rhetorical Questions
 - o Puns
 - o Alliteration
 - o An emotive quotation
 - o Exclamatory statements
- The key thing to remember is that you're telling a story to your readers; you need a beginning, a middle and an end. Create a clear and logical structure to that end point.
- The opening of your article should aim to get people reading, so find a way to grab them. This could be a quotation, or direct speech, or setting the scene, or use anything that will get the reader's attention.
- Quote key or interesting words and sentences to give the reader a sense of immediacy as this will make your magazine article more interesting.
- Finally, end with a bang. This could be an important point, a revelation, or quotation. The idea is to satisfy your reader and to get that reader interested in your other writing.
- Ensure that you have a range of sentence structures, are you going to use a succinct topic sentence to begin? Will you use more complex sentence structures in the body of your article? Think about the different effects that different sentence lengths give.
- Experiment with hyperbole and understatement, they are two very useful tools!
- Think about the layout of the article. Look at other pieces of writing from a variety of magazines. Use photos and images to make your article visually appealing.
- Make sure that your article is lively and interesting.
- Write with confidence and emotion but do not be overly emotive, remember this is an article and not a story!
- Check that you have chosen strong verbs and specific nouns.
- Use a mixture of vocabulary to engage your audience, a thesaurus can be a useful tool here.
- Spelling, punctuation and grammar **ARE** important!
- Put your article to one side for a few days. You're too close to the writing when you have just finished the article and drafting and editing requires an objective eye. Draft, re-draft and edit until you have something that you are proud of. You can find ways to make your article stronger.
- Cut out anything that is irrelevant or unnecessary.

ADVICE ONLINE

Below are some links to sites that offer advice on how to write magazine articles which may be useful to your students:

<http://deltachord.hubpages.com/hub/How-to-Write-an-Effective-Magazine-Article>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/english/creativewriting/commissionsrev1.shtml>

<http://blog.signummedia.co.uk/?tag=writing-a-magazine-article>

TEACHING RESOURCES

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/community/lesson-share/pdf-content/exams/exams-article-writing-cae-and-cpe-lesson-plan/147546.article>

<http://www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/Writing-a-Magazine-Article-6256876/>

<http://www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/School-Magazine-Article-redrafting-full-lesson-6172720/>

We are looking forward to reading all of the entertaining articles from your students.

Happy writing!



Competition

Inspire Me!

Write a lively magazine article about your most memorable English lesson

Task

WJEC are encouraging young people aged 14-19 who have been inspired by their English lessons to put pen to paper, plug in their laptops and enter our writing competition.

Your challenge is to write a lively magazine article about your most memorable English lesson to motivate English teachers up and down the country to inspire their students.

Notes

Some important things to remember:

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WIN a Kindle Fire
and **£1,000** worth of books for your school!



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DONT FORGET THE ESSAY

BY CARY ARCHARD, SENIOR EXAMINER AT WJEC

It was a stalwart of previous specifications; it's older than the novel; it's probably more versatile than poetry. Is it time teachers and students of AS/A level English Literature gave more consideration to the essay? Don't be put off by its long history. In its modern form, its roots lie in Montaigne and Francis Bacon, contemporaries of Shakespeare. It reached celebrity status with Addison and Steele in the eighteenth century; its popularity dwindled rather after that, until novelists saw its potential in the twentieth. In 1905, Virginia Woolf, wonderful essayist herself, commented on the proliferation of essay writing; 'its popularity with us is so immense and so peculiar that we are justified in looking upon it as something of our own'. She put its popularity down largely to education which had led to a demand for more reading material and to a huge improvement in the skill of writing. However, above all, she argued, it was the very nature of the essay itself which accounted for its success, for what characterises this form above all is its variety, a product of its egoism. With the essay the writer has carte blanche to make whatever she can out of it: 'Almost all essays begin with a capital I – 'I think', 'I feel' – and when you have said that, it is clear that you are not writing history or philosophy or biography or anything but an essay, which may be brilliant or profound, which may deal with the immortality of the soul, or the rheumatism in your left shoulder, but is primarily an expression of personal opinion.' What form could be better suited to LT2's section B's personal writing? And with its unlimited variety, what other form has as much potential to act as partner text for LT2 and LT3?

At the start of the twenty-first century, the essay is witnessing another renaissance, another surge in popularity. It is also taking on new shapes; we have the radio essay, frequently heard on BBC Radio 3; and what is the ubiquitous blog but an internet essay, taking the personal and the immediate and the range of subjects to another level again?

But putting these recent developments aside for a moment, those fresh to the essay might start by considering selections by two of the twentieth century's greatest novelists. First, there is Woolf herself who encouraged the democratisation of the essay with two volumes of *The Common Reader*. The recent Oxford World's Classic's Selected Essays contains essays on feminism, politics, the cinema, places, and many perceptive pieces on writing itself. There's enough variety in this single selection of short concentrated pieces to make a wonderful partner text for most novels at LT2 and LT3. Woolf's contemporary, D. H. Lawrence, whose essays often read like prose poems, also offers marvellous selections (such as the *Penguin Selected*) covering politics, gender issues, the natural world, love and beauty, and, of course, sex. Lawrence's essays are never dull, rarely rational, brimming with exhilarating language. They fulfil another of Woolf's descriptions of the essay; 'A novel has a story, a poem rhyme; but what art can the essayist use in these short lengths of prose to sting us wide awake and fix us in a trance which is not sleep but an intensification of life'. The 'art', she argues, is the richness of language itself.



Many of today's finest novelists have followed in Woolf's footsteps and written collections of essay. Jonathan Franzen, Nicholson Baker, Siri Hustvedt, Jenny Diski and Julian Barnes, amongst others, have all written collections well worth exploring. Perhaps there's space here to discuss

two others in a little more detail. First, Michael Chabon's *Manhood for Amateurs* which is both a collection of essays and a memoir. What is striking about it is his unflinching honesty, which he maintains even when his children ask him if he has smoked marijuana; also his

lively curiosity; and his sense of the richness of the world and of how little of it we are able to remember or hang on to. His subjects range from Dr Who, comic books and baseball (this is a collection that might especially appeal to male readers), to misogyny, love and Jewishness. Above all, this collection centres on the transition from 'boyland' to manhood, written in a style which is exuberant, never macho, inclusive and warm. These are essays that exemplify Woolf's belief that the essay should intensify life. Here are the final words of the collection, describing his daughter's bat mitzvah; 'When the dancing began – we started, of course, with a hora – I escorted my daughter to a sturdy chair, and then a bunch of us, young men and old, graceful and ungainly, stout and fit, took hold of the legs and hoisted her up. There were far more of us than chair legs or places to grab them, and yet somehow, lurching and laughing and tripping over our own and one another's feet, we got her up into the air and managed to dance. She tossed and shone like a torch as we carried her around the room, all of us working together to trace our passage across the dance floor, like the silver yad flying along the letters of the oldest story in the world. I looked up at her, grinning and beautiful and terrified and happy, and felt not the same old 'time is fleeting and we are all mortal' but something finer and simpler and harder even to bear in mind. This is our life happening, I told her, or would have told her if I could have caught my breath long enough to say it over the clamor of the clarinet and fiddle, and it's happening right now.'

Is blogging a contemporary adaptation of the versatility of the essay or a new form of writing altogether? Whichever, blogs are now appearing in book form. A recent example is *On Writing* by the novelist A.L. Kennedy. Here is egoism in an extreme form; these essays are in-your-face personal. They appear to be closely related to the stream of consciousness technique or to the diary – though are written with more awareness of a wider readership than either of these. As the title suggests, students reading these essays will benefit from lots of advice on how to write as well as being entertained, informed and certainly amused (the book includes the script of 'Words', Kennedy's

one-person Edinburgh Festival show). This is a writer who can make something interesting out of the most mundane of subjects: her description of her infected ear touches our sympathy; she is probably the first essayist to mention peeing. Of her range, she says, 'I am aware that certain themes and key inspirations do repeat through this material: Chekhov, Shakespeare, love, my grandfather, working with other writers, the importance of creative activity, the importance of self-maintenance, my inability to stay that far away from a train for any length of time'.

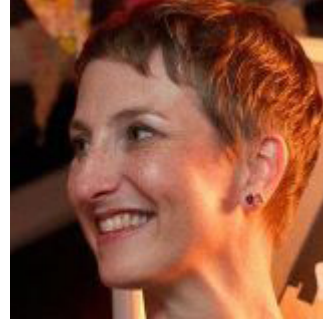
On Writing brings the essay right up to date. It is another example of this form's remarkable versatility. Hot enough for the most with-it student.



AN INTERVIEW WITH ALEXANDRA CLAIRE

BY JULIA HARRISON

Students have always enjoyed the creative aspects of our English courses. Creative writing allows candidates to express their innermost feelings, to experiment with form and style and to explore other forms of literature in their search for a narrative voice. This month, *i.e.* magazine has interviewed a first time novelist. Alex Edmunds who writes as Alexandra Claire is Cardiff born and raised. She began her professional life as a dancer and is an alumna of London Contemporary Dance School. After a successful dancing career, she moved into the field of the environment and renewable energy. In 2005 she began to write short stories and has been published by Parthian, Honno and the Western Mail. In 2011 she wrote her first full length novel *Random Walk* which is published by Gomer Press and set in a dystopian, future South Wales. It is 2035 and society has broken down, a devastating flood has isolated a city from the outside world and hungry inhabitants struggle to survive underneath a Big Brother-esque rule. The novel contains strong elements of popular culture, mixing parkour with street art and virtual worlds. Here she talks to *i.e.* magazine about the creative process of writing a first novel, how her previous jobs and the world around her inspires her and what it is like to be a young Welsh novelist.

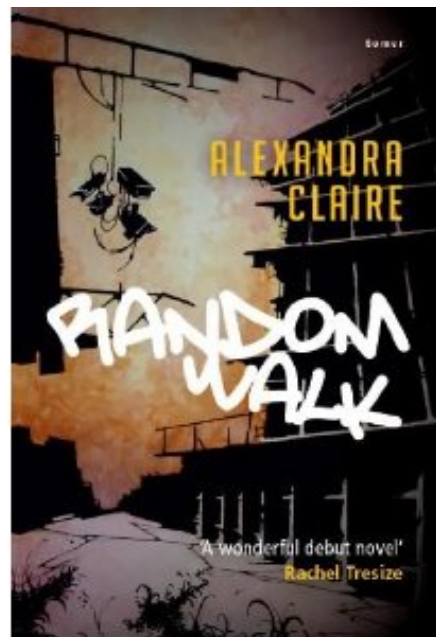


1. Your original career was as a dancer, what made you want to become a novelist and what are the similarities and differences between the two careers?

Both are about communicating feelings that are not easily expressed. I'd stopped dancing and choreographing five years before I began to write. While dancing and writing appear to be polar opposite forms of expression, they are still each a form of expression, perhaps the first is short hand and the latter long hand. It took me a long time to be able to express thoughts in words and I still find it very difficult.

2. Your novel centres around a dystopian version of Wales, how far do you believe that your cultural upbringing has influenced your work and where do your other influences come from?

Random Walk was very much informed by the differences I was experiencing bringing up my own child in the footsteps of my childhood, thirty years later in Cardiff and the surrounding area. Both cultures informed the book. The difference I felt most sharply for my daughter was the loss of freedom and opportunity to connect with the natural world. I don't read Dystopia as a genre, but books like Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have been deeply absorbed into our culture; none of us can help but be influenced.



3. In your own upbringing, how important was literature and the literary heritage of your birthplace?

Literature was crucial in my upbringing. We had little money during my early childhood but I was blessed with a mother who took me to the library on a weekly basis. I read precociously and avidly. In books, I found worlds where I felt safe and among kin. It seemed that what went unsaid in real life, could be screamed out loud between the covers of a book. Alexander Cordell's *Rebecca* novels are the first I recall reading about Wales and they are inscribed quite deeply into my psyche because their physical landscape was so readily there for me to see. I still think about the characters now when I drive up the A470!

4. Your work is heavily influenced by visual media, how do you think this adds to the themes in your novel and is it something that you would like to develop in future novels?

It isn't something that I'm interested in reflecting beyond the pages of *Random Walk*, but it was an essential part of that particular landscape.

5. Do you have a strong sense of the physicality of your characters when you are writing? If your novel was to be made into a film, who could you see playing the main characters of Remi, Osian and Lisa.

Having concentrated my focus on the expression of gesture and movement for the majority of my life, and most importantly during my formative years, physicality is my primary route to creation. Characters arrive in my mind physically fully formed; I watch how they move, interpret their body language and facial expressions and from these I begin to get to know my characters. Consequently, I have a strong visual sense of the book. I'd know what I was looking for in an actor's manner and appearance.

6. Who inspires you and why?

Generally, I'm inspired by those who achieve despite their circumstances. In a literary sense, there are a few writers whose works compel me to write. A few that I can think of right now are Jean Rhys, Cormac McCarthy and John Dos Pasos. All cut to the truth of the matter with stunning and courageous prose.

7. How hard was it to get your first novel published? Has this success given you confidence in your own ability or do you feel an increased pressure for your second novel to be published?

I came from nowhere and it was almost impossible to persuade anyone of influence to read what I'd written. Once I'd managed that, it really came down to luck; a publisher understanding the work and the book fitting into the publisher's current list. It's not for the faint-hearted.

8. What is your favourite novel and why?

The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway. Not one word too many and not one out of place. The redemptive tenderness of the boy's love for the old man is excruciatingly wonderful.

9. Do you have rituals for creation? What about the drafting and editing process – do you think you are too hard on yourself or not hard enough?

For writing I need silence, solitude and my early morning mind before it's polluted by self-

judgement and mundanity. Even thinking about drafting and editing makes me never want to sit down to write again! I re-write each sentence again and again. I don't think I'm too hard on myself – it has to be the best that I can do. I have had moments of amazing clarity writing short stories where I've barely edited from the first draft, but they are rare.

10. How do you manage to be original and to come up with original ideas?

I'm not sure that there are any original ideas. But I do know that we each interpret life uniquely; our interpretations differ in subtle and intriguing ways. I try to express my own interpretations honestly. I trust that and I don't think about what other people are doing. I try to avoid clichés of expression.

11. What are the things that you enjoy the most about writing?

I enjoy nailing a thought to the page, playing with language and enjoy the feeling of satisfaction at having put my tangled up thoughts into order.

12. What are the things that you find the most challenging?

Re-writes at a late stage are difficult; each sentence changed impacts upon the sense, logic and honesty of the entire book and I feel as if my brain is leaking out of my ears.

13. What worth has the study of language and literature had for you as an artist and what worth do you think it has for young people as a whole?

I've had no formal study of language or literature beyond school. Correct grammar is intrinsic to communication. Being given the opportunity to study complete pieces of literature in depth at school enriched my life beyond measure. It is a gift given once but received over and over again. That may have been a cliché of expression.

14. The character of Lisa is an 'outsider' something that many young people will be able to identify with, how far are your characters influenced by your own experiences?

I am telling facets of my own tale through each of my characters. I do relate to 'the outsider' but I think that most of us do.

15. Your novel has strong references to gaming, do you feel that the pervasive nature of video games has had a detrimental effect on young people and how unwilling they can be to move away from the screen and pick up a novel or do you see it as a viable art form in its own right?

I see gaming as a viable creative art form in its own right. Game makers are creative artists. When the novel became popular, parents despaired of their daughters detaching themselves from the real world and investing their emotional attentions in fiction rather than fact. So, perhaps things aren't so different between this reaction and society's present angst regarding gaming? Well I think that there is a critical difference between the psychological involvements of a reader in a book compared with a player in a game. In a game, the player is the protagonist in a structured virtual world with firm boundaries, which do not extend beyond the game makers' imaginings. The participation is active and the pace is dictated by the game maker. Its purpose is to allow the player an opportunity to satisfy a hunger for challenge and achievement within the safety of a virtual world. In contrast to this, the reader of a novel is an observer, following a narrative written to enable a broader or deeper understanding of their own experience of the real world. So, I would say that gaming constricts the mind whilst reading expands it. Both are enjoyable.

16. Your novel also references Parkour, and Duca, as an Italian street artist, could also be seen to be part of a 'sub-culture.' Do you believe that it is these sub cultures which give young people a sense of their own identity and what gives you a sense of your own identity?

A dose of non-conformity makes for a healthy world. The years of early adulthood are filled with energy and promise - rebellion and path-carving are all part of that. Some people have enough energy to keep it up their whole lives.

17. What advice do you have for any young people looking to pursue a career in writing or in literature?

Read widely, be meticulous with grammar and seek to express your own truths.

18. How do you feel that your education within school/university prepared or DIDN'T prepare you for your career?

In school, I was taught grammar and how to move my mind slowly enough to spend months considering the depth and meaning of a piece of literature. However, at school it generally wasn't appreciated when I questioned teachers' opinions. London Contemporary Dance School encouraged me to question and explore and forge my own way.

19. How important is it that schools, universities and the government keep on investing in writing and young writers and how do we get this message across to others who do not see the intrinsic value in the arts?

It is crucial to civilisation. We have an absolute duty to ensure that no-one is deprived of the chance to develop their ability to communicate and comprehend to its absolute potential.

20. What ambitions do you have for the future in terms of your own writing?

To have the mental energy to sit down and write again. It will come but it may be a while. Meanwhile, the stories collect in my mind.

HOW SHOULD I TEACH ADVANCED LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE

BY SARA THORNE, TEACHER, WRITER AND EXAMINER OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE



APRIL 7TH, 2013 - 7:10PM BLOG ENTRY: SARATHORNEENGLISHLANGUAGE.COM

I say, I say, I say...

How should I teach Advanced Level English Language? How do I combine the technical demands of the grammar with the broad range of text types students need to experience? How do I address the balance between 'reading for meaning' and 'close analysis'? It's true – English Language is a course which makes many demands on teachers and students.

I certainly don't have all the answers and I continue to learn from the innovative and creative approaches that emerge in CPD meetings and in the coursework that reflects the high standards set in classrooms across the country. What I do hope, however, is that I can offer some interesting material to add to the good practice already out there.

My website started as a place to put all the practical exercises which had to be cut from *Mastering Practical Grammar*. With space at a premium, it made sense to keep the commentaries in the book, but there is a sound reason for starting with 'recognition' and 'description' exercises – it's the best way to develop confidence in using terminology. I therefore wanted to find some way of making the cut material accessible.



Why did the king go to the dentist?

To get his teeth crowned!

A language blog, I decided. It was the perfect medium – it would be accessible to most people; exercises could be reproduced with answers just one click of a button away; and it could be illustrated to lighten the tone. It seemed the perfect solution.

What was intended as a resource to be used alongside the grammar book, or as a set of stand-alone tasks, however, quickly became much, much more. The first days of the blog seemed to coincide with things in the news that had a 'language' issue underlying them. To name but a few ...

- Rafael Benitez complained about being called an "interim" manager - time to explore the connotations of a modifier, and the effect it can have on the way we respond to the head word in a noun phrase ([Interim – the power of a word](#))

- James Duddridge, the Conservative MP for Rochford and Southend East, said something “rather tasteless” in a Commons debate - thorny concepts of acceptability and appropriateness rear their heads ([Language and context – an inappropriate choice](#))
- and there was a media frenzy over Hilary Mantel’s description of the Duchess of Cambridge in a lecture given in the British Museum - an opportunity to explore the importance of looking at language in context ([That’s not what I meant at all ...](#))

The posts vary in length, and they’re not all topical, but what they have in common is a focus on language in action. For the Gothic-lovers, there’s a character analysis of the Count’s first appearance in the novel *Dracula* and an exploration of Gothic buildings in four eighteenth and nineteenth century novels. There are posts on words that cause offence and word blends; on Railspeak and the art of analogy; on the lexical and grammatical tricks underpinning jokes; and on the language of remembrance used to mark the death of Margaret Thatcher. Something, I hope, for everyone.

But there are two other key strands to the site: an overview of English grammar, and usage advice about those little things that can spoil a piece of work. These are on-going projects and will take time to complete. At present, there are grammar sections on open and closed class words, nouns and adjectives, and usage advice on it’s/its, less/fewer and of/’ve.

This isn’t the place to come for detailed information – the aim is to provide a ‘TOP 5’ things to know, a list of useful key terms, and exercises with answers. The exercises start with the principles of recognition and description, but move towards looking at language in context. It’s suitable for students and they can get facebook or twitter notification when a new ‘Language key’ or ‘WOW’ (Watch Out! Warning) is published.

Language isn’t something we just study for time-tabled lessons – it’s happening all around us all the time and it’s interesting. My hope is that the blog gets students engaged. There are contact details for questions, comments or requests, and opportunities to contribute (report on your own Railspeak experiences; describe your own Gothic building using the linguistic techniques explored in the post).

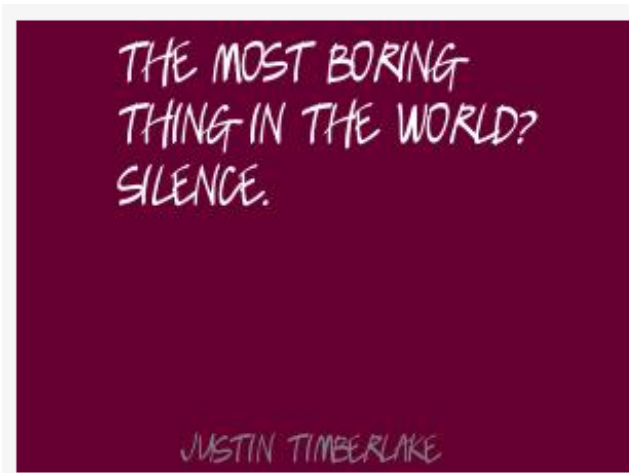
Yes it’s serious stuff, and yes there are a lot of terms being thrown around, but it reminds us that language study doesn’t have to be dry and distant. The topics are varied, the ideas and approaches are transferable; and the analytical methods are those underpinning the A Level course.

Do let me know what you think ...

THE MOST BORING THING IN THE WORLD

FROM THE AUTHOR OF [THE LONE READER](#) BLOG

Someone I follow on Twitter recently posted a photograph of this:



The evidence certainly seems to agree with Timberlake. You can't go anywhere without something 'entertaining' your senses. Browse in any shop and there's music being played, walk through a city centre and there's some giant screen advertising upcoming events or broadcasting the BBC news channel. And look at all the people. The vast majority of anyone aged under 35 travels around with earphones plugged in while more and more cars are fitted with screens for the kids to watch their DVD, lost in their own personal world. I'm also part of it. I often have the radio on in the background and I'm listening to music even as I'm typing this. So, silence must be really boring, right?

Except, of course, it's not. If you've read previous posts you will know that I'm a teacher and the lost art of silence is something that worries me. Lessons are meant to be fast-paced with plenty of stimulus for pupils with hearty amounts of visual, audio and kinaesthetic learning thrown in for different types of students. I'm not against this. I don't want turn back the clock to chalk and talk. The problem however can be that education becomes entertainment and if this is repeated for every lesson of the day, for every week of the year, imagine how tired these pupils must become. More importantly, it leaves no space for silence.

When do pupils, or anyone for that matter, find the time and space to think? Not just about what to have for lunch but for the deep thinking that considers issues greater than everyday trivialities. I teach Larkin's poetry at A Level and so we read 'Ambulances'. One of the ideas considered in the poem is death which 'dulls to distance all we are.' It still amazes me how few of the students have thought about death or the ideas and beliefs that they or others hold. But it's not their fault, they're never given the time to do so. Even the silence of death has been taken away from them. Where the minute's silence was de rigeur for reflection, we have replaced it with the minute's applause, at least at sporting events. I refrain. The banal has replaced the more fitting meditation on mortality. It seems too much like nihilism with a smile.

There are at least two benefits to silence. The first is the time to think through the way we live and why we live and to try to understand this one life that we're given. It gives time to question the beliefs we've been given by others or the ideas that we hold without even recognising that we hold them. It also allows us to listen. To listen to the world around us but also to listen through the medium of reading. Listening to that voice as we read should also make us question, understand and deepen our experience of our own existence. A good friend of mine, now retired, used to build in time during some lessons just to allow pupils to think. With the squeeze on getting results, I've neglected that and I'm going to try to rectify it. It may create better thinkers, better readers and, hopefully, better people.

A CONVERSATION WITH CATRIN CLARKE

BY JULIA HARRISON

Catrin Clarke is a Cardiff based writer. She has written for the BBC, writing episodes for series such as *Belonging* and *Indian Doctor*, she was the winner of the Welsh Bafta Best Screenwriter Award for her work on *Belonging* which also won Best Drama award for four years running. She has written plays for radio and has written a number of short films and screenplays. She has recently had her first short story published. In this interview Catrin talks about her influences, her inspirations and her processes and what it is like to write for so many different mediums.



- ***Your writing often centres around South America and Wales, how far do you believe that your cultural upbringing has influenced your work and where do your other influences come from?***

My partner is Chilean and was a refugee when I met him, which has had a huge influence on me; belonging, exile and being an outsider are among my main themes. I also write a lot about dysfunction in family relationships - I'm fascinated by the ebb and flow of need and repulsion that occurs within families. Having children has been a big influence also - I find them endlessly fascinating. When they were little we went through a difficult time as a family and were homeless for a while; it was a horrible time but invaluable from a writing point of view! Because of that time in my life my characters are quite often on the margins of society.

Wales has a strong culture of storytelling, passed down the generations; I grew up hearing stories. When I was little I was accused of being a liar quite often, (I invented a school ghost that my friends were thrilled about and quite happy to go along with until they discovered I'd made it up at which point they broke friends with me)! But my grandfather - a great storyteller - used to say that when you tell a story your duty is not to the truth but to the story.

- ***In your own upbringing how important was literature and the literary heritage of your birthplace?***

Really important. I grew up in a Welsh hippy household with shelves of books, no telly and a Dylan Thomas poster on the toilet wall! My mum (the poet Gillian Clarke) started writing as well, probably when I was about 10, although at first she threw everything in the bin. I have been writing since I was four or five and of course that was encouraged. My dad had wanted to be a film-maker but came from a strict working-class family where you had to do a proper job, and you didn't question that. So he was happy to encourage something I really wanted to do even if it was unlikely I'd make my fortune doing it.

- ***Most of your work is concerned with aural and visual media, how do you think this affects the way that you write, do you find that radio plays need a deeper level of characterisation because the audience is not presented with the visual aspect of a character?***

I don't find radio different to anything else really. Sound replaces image in the scene-scape and some dialogue has to be tweaked to make things clear to the audience. But I still think visually

when I'm writing both radio and prose.

- ***When you are writing for film and television do you have a definite idea about how your characters should look physically and are you involved with the casting process?***

Yes, I can't write a character until I know what they look like, what their mannerisms are - I need to be able to smell them! I spend a lot of time creating characters, asking lots of questions of them until I really know them. I do sometimes base them on a known actor or real life person, just to get a handle on them, but they always morph into their own character. Then another change happens in the casting. It sometimes takes a while getting used to an actor who is completely different to how I'd imagined them, but that's the nature of it; I have to know them to write them but then I hand them over to be reimagined by the director and the actors. I sometimes have a say in casting, sometimes none at all. That depends on the production. Writers tend to have more say in radio.

- ***Who inspires you and why?***

Artists like Frida Khalo and Doris Salcedo who explore huge themes of life and death in a personal way. Writers who have written books I'm jealous of like Cormac McCarthy with *The Road*, Julia Leigh with *The Hunter*, Daniel Woodrell with *Winter's Bone*, Violette LeDuc with *La Batarde*. Film-makers like Lynne Ramsay who have managed to negotiate their way through an executive-led system to make films true to them. Also dance, both modern and classical; it inspires me to go and make something beautiful. (Cheese alert - sorry!)

- ***You are now frequently on the awards lists, do you feel the weight of expectations on your shoulders? Has success added to this weight or has it given you some sort of confidence and comfort in your own ability?***

I'm not actually! Not at the moment. Writers go in and out of favour and I haven't been on an award list for a couple of years. I don't think awards add a weight of expectation - they give you some sort of confidence but you have to realise that its all rather random and dependant on taste, who's in or out of fashion, or just luck. You have to realise that even more when you're not the one in favour at the moment. And also that it can change in a flash.

- ***What is your favourite novel and why?***

What a hard question! At first I thought that I couldn't name just one, but then I thought about the book I've loved for the longest, which is probably *National Velvet* by Enid Bagnold. When I was a child I loved it because I wanted a horse as much as Velvet Brown did, and I love it now because of its exquisite, visual prose:

"... The boys and girls were hushed, black and still, against the doorways. Edwina stood like a statue at the cobbler's doorway as her mother passed, but her mother knew her.

'Growing,' muttered Mrs Brown as she went on. 'Poor lass has to hide it.'

The beautiful boy beside Edwina breathed again. He was golden-haired, and trying for the police. He felt he had no real chance for Mr Brown's Edwina, and he had no idea he was her first, her breathtaking first man.

'What'll Velvet...?' murmured Mrs Brown, looking a moment at the sky, and seeing Velvet's bony, fairy face. 'What'll men say about my Velvet?'

The sound of hooves striking on metalled road came out of the darkness, and down the street, all alone, galloped a horse. Bodies shot out of doorways and shouts sprang from shadows. Something black and white and furious raced down the street. Mrs Brown stopped and stepped off the pavement. With a striking of hooves, sparks flying on the flints, a piebald horse, naked of leather, wild and alone, slid almost to his haunches and stood stock-still, shaking and panting. He lowered his head."

I could read this book again and again. Age hasn't withered it!

- ***Do you have rituals for creation? What about the drafting and editing process – do you think you are too hard on yourself or not hard enough?***

For me the best time to write is very early in the morning, before getting dressed or even making tea. I've discovered a technique called the Pomodoro technique where you work in blocks of 25 minutes. It's particularly good for the times when I'm scared to start a project or when I'm feeling stuck.

I have to turn the internet off because it's a terrible distraction.

Also, water always gets my mind going. A hot shower or bath or a walk on the beach never fails. A slight problem at the moment because the boiler's broken!

I'm not sure if I'm too hard on myself or not but I have been known to spend a week writing and re-writing just one sentence.

- ***How do you manage to be original and to keep coming up with original ideas?***

Observe, keep notebooks and sound recordings, write every day about what is around me - it doesn't matter whether it appears 'important' or not. In one sense, there is no such thing as an original idea and each and every one of us will imagine it differently. It's often in the minutiae of life where originality happens.

- ***What are the things that you enjoy the most about your career?***

The times when the writing is really flowing, and working in my pyjamas.

- ***What are the things that you find the most challenging?***

The times when there's no money. The isolation. Thinking that I'm no good. Rejection.

- ***What worth has the study of language and literature had for you as an artist and what worth do you think it has for young people as a whole?***

I haven't studied language and literature since school but I do remember one teacher, a crazy teacher called Miss Calford who I found inspirational both in English literature and language. I still remember her lessons and she was hugely supportive of me as a writer. I got As in both English literature and language and failed mostly everything else, and I put this down to her.

Literature and storytelling are as old as we are - it's how we understand our world. But I think we also need to embrace interactive technologies and games as well as books in order to keep young people excited and involved.

- ***How did/does it feel for you knowing that you, and the relationship that you had with your mother as a small child, is studied and analysed by hundreds of GCSE students across Wales? (Catrin is the subject of the much studied Gillian Clarke poem, 'Catrin'.)***

I used to hate it, but I'm getting used to it now though I still don't like it - it's weird. I've even had strangers on Facebook writing to ask me if I'm 'that' Catrin. Sometimes it's the main thing people know about me. I quite like the poem but I wish she hadn't used my name.

- ***With such strong influences, how have you found and developed your OWN voice?***

I've had a very different life to my mother and am a very different person, and I've had to try and keep that in mind. But a couple of years ago a play of mine was advertised as being written 'by Gillian Clarke's daughter.' Not even a mention of my name! It shocked and upset me a lot and now that I'm starting to write short stories, and moving towards writing novels, I am using my grandmother's name: my first short story is being published in the *Riptide Journal* in February 2013 as Catrin Kean. Not that I'm hiding anything, but I'd like to be viewed as me first and foremost. Which is a little ironic, given the theme of the poem!

- ***What advice do you have for any young people looking to pursue a career in writing or in literature?***

Work out a schedule that works for you and write every day without trying to write something 'good'. 'Good' happens when you've picked up on something among the reams of notes that excites you. Get on the mailing lists of your local literature council for schemes and groups, your local theatre who often run new writer schemes, the BBC writer's room, the film agency for short film competitions. Prime yourself for rejection - to be able to get up and write again after being turned down is one of your most important attributes. I have a ritual now - I drink way too much and allow myself to self-indulgently go to bed/rage/mope for 24 hours. Then I say forget it it and start again.

- ***How do you feel that your education within school/university prepared or DIDN'T prepare you for your career?***

I went to art college. It was great but didn't prepare me for anything.

- ***How important is it that schools, universities and the government keep on investing in writing and young writers and how do we get this message across to others who do not see the intrinsic value in the arts?***

Literature and writing is a way of understanding ourselves, the world we live in, other people. It can delve into places science cannot. Stories are like dreams - a way of ordering the world, and the need for stories is a very basic part of being human. (Sorry, I think I've said this before!)

- ***What ambitions do you have for the future in terms of your own writing?***

I want to have at least one full length film produced and write a novel or two. But mainly I want to keep on loving what I do.

KEY DATES : MAY - SEPTEMBER 2013

4th May	Submission for ELC English coursework
5th May	PRU / FE Centres only: Written Controlled Assessment samples to moderator & Speaking and Listening marks to WJEC: GCSE / English Levels 1&2
5th May	Outline of Activities form and sample of records to moderator GCSE / FS Levels 1&2
7th May	FS English Levels 1&2 Reading & Writing exams
15th May	Estimated grades to WJEC GCSE / English Levels 1&2
15th May	GCE Samples of internal assessment to be received by the Moderator
17th May	GCE English Literature LT1 examination
17th May	GCE English Language & Literature LL1 examination
20th May	GCSE English Literature Unit 1 examination
23rd May	GCSE English Literature Unit 2 examination
24th May	GCE English Language LG1 examination
24th May	Deadline to send FS Outline of Activities / Sample Records to SLC Moderator
24th May	End of FS E1-3 English controlled assessment window
24th May	Deadline for receipt of FS online mark

3rd June	GCE English Language LG4 examination
4th June	GCSE English / English Language Unit 1&2 examinations
4th June	Level 1 / Level 2 Certificate in English Language Paper 1
6th June	GCE English Literature LT4 examination
6th June	GCE English Language & Literature LL4 examination
7th June	Level 1 / Level 2 Certificate in English Language Paper 2
4th July	Results published ELC English
15th August	GCE / FS results published
22nd August	GCSE / Certificate in English Levels 1&2 results published
20 September	Final date for Enquiries about Results

WHAT ' S ON

THEATRE



Royal Shakespeare Company

Hamlet

14th March – 28th September

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/whats-on/hamlet/>

Richard II

10th October – 16th November

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/whats-on/richard-ii/>

As You Like It

12th April – 28th September

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/whats-on/as-you-like-it/>

Titus Andronicus

16th May – 26th October

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/whats-on/titus-andronicus/>

London Plays Listings

<http://www.londontheatre.co.uk/londontheatre/whats-on/drama.htm>

On Tour – Julius Caesar

10th April - 28th April

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/whats-on/julius-caesar/>

USEFUL LINKS

www.thestage.co.uk

www.clwyd-theatre-cymru.co.uk

www.shermancymru.co.uk

www.chapter.org

www.newtheatreCardiff.co.uk

www.bristolhippodrome.org.uk

www.bristololdvic.org.uk

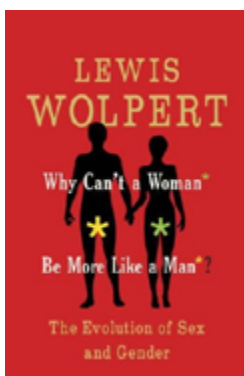
57th BFI Film Festival 9-20 October 2013 - <http://www.bfi.org.uk/lff>

A Celebration of the poet- turned- filmmaker – *Paolo Pasolini* - <https://whatson.bfi.org.uk/Online/pier-paolo-pasolini-part-two>



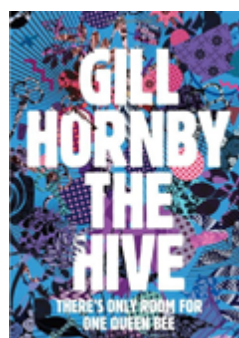
UK BOOK RELEASES

MAY



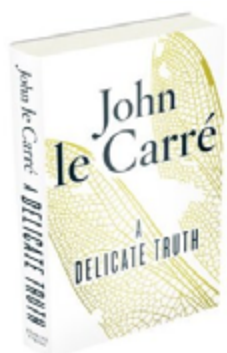
Why Can't a Woman Be More Like a Man
- *Lewis Wolpert*

- Edition: Hardcover
- Publisher: Faber and Faber
- ISBN: 0571279244
- Published: 16.05.2013
- No of pages: 224



The Hive
- *Gill Hornby*

- Edition: Hardcover
- Publisher: Little, Brown
- ISBN: 1408704358
- Published: 23.05.2013
- No of pages: 320



A Delicate Truth
- *John le Carré*

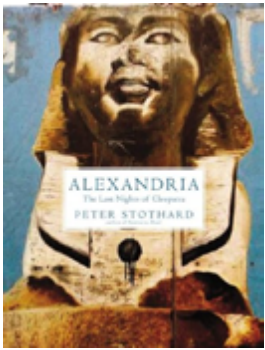
- Edition: Hardcover
- Publisher: Viking
- ISBN: 067092279X
- Published: 25.04.2013
- No of pages: 336



The Serpent's Promise
- *Steve Jones*

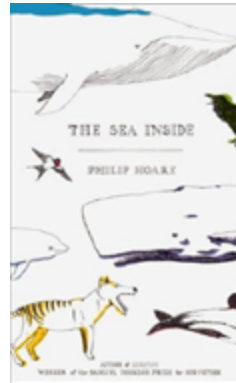
- Edition: Hardcover
- Publisher: Little, Brown
- ISBN: 1408702851
- Published: 02.05.2013
- No of pages: 448

JUNE



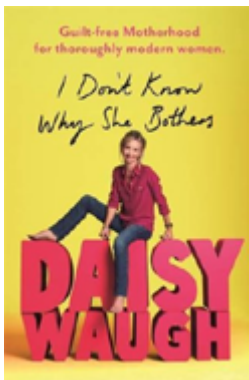
Alexandria - Peter Stothard

- Edition: Hardcover
- Publisher: Overlook Press
- ISBN: 1468303708
- Published: 08.2013
- No of pages: 400



The Sea Inside - Philip Hoare

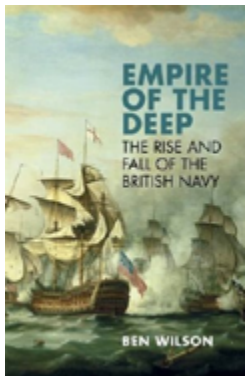
- Edition: Hardcover
- Publisher: Fourth Estate
- ISBN: 0007412118
- Published: 06.06.2013
- No of pages: 384



I Don't Know Why She Bothers - Daisy Waugh

- Edition: Paperback
- Publisher: W&N
- ISBN: 0297868764
- Published: 06.06.2013
- No of pages: 240

JULY



Empire of the Deep: The Rise and Fall of the British Navy - Ben Wilson

- Edition: Hardcover
- Publisher: W&N
- ISBN: 0297864084
- Published: 25.07.2013
- No of pages: 544

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