



Postgraduate assignment feedback form

(to be completed by marker)

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<i>For completion by marker:</i> <i>Comments:</i>	
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THE WRITER'S WORLD

HPEN7019

ASSESSMENT

This assessment will include the following pieces of work:

1. An attempt at exhausting a game of rugby

(a) *Iago and Huw, The Void Between*

(b) Commentary

2. A conversation between two characters about a third

(a) *Alys*

(b) Commentary

3. Magazine Article

(a) Clare Ferguson-Walker

An integration of poetry with song and self

Interview with Dominic Williams

(b) Commentary

1. An attempt at exhausting a game of rugby:

Iago and Huw

The Void Between

“Ow...ow...” Iago groans, bitter and frustrated with himself. His foot is stuck in the wet sand, again. A hurried glance down at his legs leaves him angry. Below one knee is a shrunken, misshapen thing not to be recognised. The pain is excruciating, but it is only a small part of the anguish he feels.

Something tightens inside him. He glares, reflective, feeling undeserving for still being here, on the beach. The sun is now directly above him, there are no clouds. And although the itchiness on his back, raw with sunburn, intensifies, it's the least of his troubles. He's been at the cape since early morning, waiting.

A glimpse at his watch shows it's already midday. Unlike other summers here, the cape has never felt so bleak. He shades his eyes and shudders. There is this void, a gnawing uncertainty that eats at him each day. He can't wrestle free of his thoughts. As a dad, how can he rest?

His heart pounds faster and faster, with each beat images pile in of what might have been. Two weeks have passed, there's been no sign of Huw.

He throws up his arms... where is he?

At the same instant, a wave gently breaks, water washes over his feet. Circles of foam froth around his ankles. He gazes out at the horizon, there is nothing but miles of open sea. Then, from far out, a strange murmur, more drawn out than the rest he's heard before, whispers across the ocean. For a moment, the southerly path of the wind strikes a chord. Can it be a tiny wisp of a boy's voice?

He feels lifted. There is hope.

“Huw?” Iago calls and looks around. His voice, a deep bass, is marred by a tremor.

Then again, more murmurs trail the air.

“Huw?”

His heart beats fast, he's overwhelmed in his excitement. Can it be?

Contemplating, he sees how it was before: the rowing boat resting on the beach, near the rock pools by the water's edge. At least thirty yards away from him, Huw is there, where the boat is, on his hands and knees, digging, collecting seashells and rocks for his aquarium. He's one of those ten-year-olds who already have a purpose in life, an intelligent and devoted child.

"Huw..." Iago calls.

Then, out of nowhere sand stings his face; the wind and the tide are rising. How could this be? In June? It's an out of season surge that roars towards the cape. A strong smell of salt permeates the air. There is ferocity and danger, an undertone of power.

He runs towards Huw.

"Get away from the water!" he yells. He can hardly hear himself shout in the wind.

Dread rushes through him, he must reach Huw, there's a towering swell approaching the cape, it's increasing in height.

"Huw...run...run."

Then, to Iago's horror, halfway between him and Huw, the wave crashes hard against the shore. The rush of water thunders towards Huw. Soon he is shoulder deep. Seconds later another wave sweeps under his feet and knocks him into the roiling sea. He goes under, then breaks the surface. Just an arm's length away the boat grates against the rock.

Iago is petrified with horror, unable to think for a second. Then, he shouts,

"Grab the boat."

The tide engulfs and submerges the entire beach. Huw scrabbles for the boat and clutches onto the rim. He feels piles of slippery seaweed cling to his legs and arms. A huge piece of driftwood hurls itself against the bow. Smashed pieces narrowly miss him. He looks about for his dad, who is struggling towards the boat. Just then, he sees jagged pieces hurtling too close to his father, and points desperately at the shards of wood.

"There.....! There...!" he screams.

Iago glances in that direction but not in time. He feels a pain stab through his forearm. And then agony. Bits of wood rip through his shoulder and calf. He must get to the boat and Huw. He frantically wades forward; he takes a deep breath and lunges into a dive. But then something happens. He can't move. His foot, it's caught in something. He attempts to wrench it free but can't; pain shoots up his leg. It's futile. He's stuck.

The churning waves continuously knock him and Huw. More waves and debris soar towards them. He barely notices; his mind is focused on freeing his foot. He clenches his teeth, writhes, and twists but the result leaves him desperate. He's no closer to Huw.

"Dad... what's the matter?" Huw yells, his heart beats fast, he's so terrified for his father, then he remembers the life jackets. Maybe they're somewhere in the boat.

"Dad... life jackets?"

"No...no... no life jackets... give me a minute." After a pause, he suddenly recalls, "...there's a rope, it's tied to the ring on the inside, near the seat."

"Yes, I can see it."

"Good, throw it to me." But as he utters the words, he feels himself slipping into unconsciousness. He doesn't hear Huw... the blood drains him. Exasperated, he fights, he must stay awake. He grabs his leg and pulls it; he must free his foot but how? His grip tightens around his knee, and he tugs again, hard, turning and twisting his ankle. Then...he can't...the pain.

"Dad... I can't reach it," Huw calls out.

Iago doesn't hear him.

Huw shouts again, but louder. Still no answer. He knows he must act fast. Why doesn't his dad answer? Gripping the rim with one hand he leans forward into the boat and stretches out his other hand.

"Hold on Dad... I should have it." but the rope is out of reach. Huw's arms are too short. Just then Iago's senses refocus, and his attention is on Huw.

To his horror, he watches Huw tumble into the boat. Iago knows the danger. A boat full of water can easily tip over. His stomach clutches. Huw wobbles on the already rocking

boat, grasps the rope and tries to throw it to him, but it falls uselessly into the water.

“Stop! Stop” Iago cries.

But Huw doesn’t listen, he must save his dad. He gathers the rope and raises it over his head to throw it.

“Stop!” Iago yells, his mouth filling with water as a second wave rushes into the cape. The undercurrent catches Huw off guard. He falls overboard and the boat flips. It all happens so fast. Iago freezes. He can’t see what’s just happened. Has the boat capsized over Huw? Is he trapped under it? Or is he somewhere in the incoming surge? Huw will die if he doesn’t think fast. It takes twenty seconds for a child to drown. He ducks under the surface but can barely see anything. Iago knows his ankle was dislocated by the tugging, earlier. His only hope to save Huw is to free himself.

He wrenches off his shirt and binds it tightly around his trapped leg just above his ankle. All being well, this should restrict the bleeding. From his pocket, he pulls out his folding fishing knife. His cold numb fingers can’t grasp it. He must grab harder; he must stay focused. His thumb presses down on the quick-release trigger. The blade springs out. For a single second, he gently prods around his ankle. It’s essential he finds the correct spot. But the water’s so murky, his best judgement will have to work. The sharp steel sinks into flesh, slicing through ligaments, slicing through the joint between the bones. Screaming in his head, darkness in his eyes, struggling not to faint. His foot is severed. He is free.

Faint with agony, he bites down on his pain, gulping water, he fights to stay conscious, pushing through the churning foam, reaching the boat, searching under it, around it. Huw is not there. His search continues and continues, each minute his mind reassuring him,

“Huw’s probably scrambled further up the shore. It must be... it has to be.” He scans and rescans the beach. Finally, faint, and exhausted, he sees a boy running across the sand towards home. Iago hears himself shout,

“Go... go home.”

The cry of seabirds, circling above the sea, feeding on fish over the surface, before they roost, distracts Iago. They bring his own lost position before him. It’s already dusk.

His mind spins, his knees shake under him. Evening after evening the lonely beach withholds explanation. But, by his visits each day to the cape, he commits himself to hope. And whenever he does, there's this feeling of... maybe... just maybe.

It's his frantic grab at the implausible.

For a moment, the wind echoes between the cliffs on either side of the beach. On the stretch of sand below his feet, he feels something. Dizziness takes over. Within a few feet, scores of hands stretch out towards him. On every side, he hears a murmur. He looks around.

And...who should be standing there... next to him, holding onto his arm, but Huw.

"Huw?"

The only answer he gets is the wind whispering.

Commentary

The inspiration for the short story *Iago and Huw, The Void Between* evolved from employing the 'Literary Audio-Visual Stimuli Experiment'. The creative process led to a narrative revealing the poignant grief of a father who has lost his young son. Beneath Iago's inconsolable sorrow lies a persistent sense of hope that he will somehow be reunited with Huw.

This experiment blended music with the animated visuals of rugby players in action to provide audio-visual stimuli for creative writing. The dual catalysts of sound and visuals heightened my senses of hearing and sight. I used 'Microsoft Speech' dictation to record keynotes and spontaneous reactions. After the experiment, these were integrated with memories, sequenced into passages, and compressed into a story. The name Iago or Jacob is a symbolic biblical reference to a father who mourned his son, thinking him dead. The title hints at an obscure void that stands between Iago and Huw, setting their worlds apart.

Focusing on the muted Six Nations match between England and Wales on an LCD screen whilst listening to the harmony of *Brahms Concerto No.2* and *Beethoven's Symphony*

No.9 evoked emotions and images that enabled me to craft a father's story of conflict, struggle, and sorrow.¹ Synchronizing the music with the players' actions inspired the narrative's theme and characters.

The physical action and use of rugby tactics directed the storyline. Bodily strength, the scrum, and tackles on the pitch between opposing players all helped drive a narrative containing mirrors of these physical, mental, and emotional struggles. This uneasiness played out on the beach and in Iago's mind. Iago and Huw's battle against the storm stems from the two teams labouring to win the game.

The music charged my imagination with the story's settings of landscape, time of day, mood, and atmosphere. Bass, mellow, and high-pitched frequencies aroused impressions that built the visual backdrop for the narrative, the characters' dispositions, and the ambience. Rhythm patterns created tension within the story, like a sudden surge of waves, followed by an emotional interaction between father and son. Lower chords prompted sadness, while higher-pitched tones defined pinnacle moments. Camera shots depicting the players' actions, expressions, and a twisted ankle, invoked the plot. However, the intermissions in the match broke the creative momentum.

Multiple drafts were re-edited, followed by proofreading. Scenes were rearranged, sentences rephrased, and punctuation improved. The feedback helped replace a knife with a more plausible blade.

A news article of an American climber amputating his arm to survive inspired the incident of Iago severing his leg.² Memories of the beach at New Quay provided the landscape scenes.

¹ *Six Nations Rugby Wales v England* (television programme) (Cardiff, BBC One Television, 27 February 2021) [accessed 04 Mar 2021].; Beatrice, Berrut, *Brahms piano concerto No.2*, English Chamber Orchestra under Kaspar Zehnder, SRF Kultur, Murten Classic Festival, (2019) <<https://soundcloud.com/beatrice-berrut/brahms-piano-concerto-no2>> [accessed 04 March 2021].; Ludwig van Beethoven, *Beethoven's Symphony No.9* <<https://soundcloud.com/iromaam/beethoven-symphony-no-9-full>> [accessed 04 March 2021].

² Burkeman, Oliver, 'How I snapped bone and cut off my arm, by US Climber', *The Guardian*, 09 May 2003. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/may/09/usa.oliverburkeman>>, [accessed 25 Mar 2021].

For authenticity, research was carried out on pocket knives, and the specific sea conditions and storm incidence common to cape landforms. *Writing Short Stories* by Ailsa Cox, assisted with structure, plot, character and suspense.³ Raymond Carver's minimalist and simple language style has influenced my writing.

The exercise has been valuable in identifying the use of stimuli for conjuring fresh ideas. The audio-visual technique is an excellent psychological mechanism for a writer with an open mind and ready imagination. From this experience, I feel I have achieved an imaginative piece of work, established new ways to tap into my thoughts and have improved my writing style using sound and visuals to drive a sense of immediacy.

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³Ailsa Cox, *Writing Short Stories: A Routledge Writer's Guide* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.11-12; 22-23.

2. A conversation between two characters about a third

Alys

"The shears... did you leave them on the lawn, lolo?" Efa asks, mystified.

She gazes outside at the back garden for quite a while through the kitchen window. Her fingers nervously grip the edge of the sink.

At the table, just behind her, she can hear lolo slurp his coffee and bite down on a piece of toast.

Efa looks over her shoulder at him and draws a long breath. He's seemingly more interested in his newspaper than her. And of course, besides his favourite mug with that horrible grotesque face of 'The Joker', is a roll-up ready to be lit. What's more, there are crumbs and strands of tobacco all over her tablecloth.

"Well...did you? It's Alys I'm worried about."

"It's not Alys, it's about your garden and veggie patch..." he contradicts, not looking up from his paper.

"Absolutely not!" Efa flinches at his implied insult. She pulls the dishcloth off the towel rail, aims it at him, but then throws it on the table.

"Well?"

He takes no notice.

From the window she surveys the back garden. Nothing looks out of place. The flower beds, sheltered by the oak tree, still have their foxgloves. The gate too, at the edge of the sloping field, is shut. And yet she struggles to calm herself.

"lolo?"

"No, I didn't," he snaps back. Then unexpectedly he puts down his paper, looks at her and bursts into a scornful laugh.

"It's all so funny. The day when Alys arrived here...your tomatoes and beans never made it to the kitchen table." He laughs again. "She fed it to the geese and the sheep!"

Efa glares at him, her cheeks feel warm. Yes, she does recall last year in June when Alys moved in from the previous foster home to live with them. It was on the day of her ninth birthday. And yes, she does remember Alys had fed the vegetables for their dinner to the geese and sheep in the adjacent field – excited by the birds and the animals, she'd had this irresistible outburst of generous affection. What's so wrong with that? She directs her gaze at him and comments on his last remark with composure.

"She was just being kind."

"Well sure, in the meantime, we've lost a lot of vegetables through Alys' generosity," he jeers.

Her heart beats fast, in her annoyance. She clenches her lips together. He's normally not so unpleasant. She knows it's his attempt to protect his own ego. He's just upset and disappointed. She's observed the battle with his confidence since his last book was refused publication. Yet he diligently writes every day, constantly in hope. Still, it's no excuse to be so obnoxious.

Iolo looks at her. "You weren't pleased either when she wore your pretty flowers," he sneers. "...her wrists, ankles...around her neck, her crowned head, ALL your flowers."

"I wasn't really annoyed, she's just a kid... a lovely kid!" When she thinks of Alys, it's with determined fondness. She muses on the day when Alys picked the daisies and made them into "fairy chains." It was wonderful to see this childish freshness, innocence, and curiosity. It's just sometimes, though she means well, she can be extremely... trying.

"And, not to forget the flowers all broken and scattered below the oak tree, the day she killed that squirrel," he taunts.

"She didn't kill it!" Efa sadly shakes her head. That day Alys had lit several candles on the heaped mound of earth after she had covered it with flowers, and birds' feathers. When questioned, Alys had tried to explain that she had been baptising the baby squirrel after it fell from the nest, but it drowned.

"Oh...I don't know," Iolo sniggers.

"Now, you're being mean...," she retorts sharply. "Alys' thinking patterns can be

confusing... it was her way of trying to save it.”

Iolo remains silent. He needs a smoke to keep calm. After a hasty look around the table, and a fumble through his pockets, he leaves the kitchen. He had left his lighter upstairs on the dresser.

She wearily slides off her ring and places it on the windowsill. Perhaps, finally, she can focus on the dishes? Her hands dip into the kitchen sink of soapy water. But then, she notices the shed door is ajar.

Efa nervously pushes the window open. A light breeze filters through... it reminds her of last summer, it was the same as this last year. She recalls Alys’ words, and her moods then. Alys had tried to protect the baby chickens from the fox by putting them in a box. But the container had no air holes. They never saw the next morning.

Efa wonders in dread, where is Alys, is she still upstairs...sleeping? She didn’t hear her come down. As Iolo’s harsh words echo in her mind, his heavy footsteps cross the kitchen floor and distract her. Efa glances over her shoulder at him. He places his lighter on the table, flops down into the chair and buries his face into his newspaper.

“I better go and check on Alys,” she mutters.

“She’s sleeping... I just checked.”

Relieved, she swirls the plates and cups around in the water. The foam slowly builds. Every scrub and splash makes the bubbles on the surface larger. A few crackle and pop against her hands - she never really paid any attention to such things before Alys came to live with them. She recalls when they were washing dishes together once - Alys said, “Efa... aren’t the bubbles noisy?”

Efa glances round at Iolo. “She’s quite bright you know... is Alys, and quite a joy with her chatter.”

“What?” Iolo puts down his paper and picks up his roll-up. Rising from the table, he strolls over to the kitchen sink, “...let’s be honest here, she’s a handful and she does some really weird things...”

Efa raises her hand, her fingers spread wide, defensive.

“Stop there...I’ll allow you to continue, only if you let me point out all your faults before you list hers?”

“Splendid, Efa... Bravo! The truth is you need her, so you forgive her anything. I’m out.” He walks into the back garden and lights up. She stares after him, hesitates a moment then calls out,

“Uhm...the shed...can you check it?”

“You handle it...and Alys.” He disappears around the side of the house.

A familiar creak of the floorboards above, followed by gurgling noises in the pipes catch her ear. Alys is finally awake. Hastily, Efa drains the water and looks at the clock above the sink. It’s half ten already. Then she hears the front door bang and lolo’s heavy footsteps ascend the stairs.

The stillness outside is interrupted by a loud thud. The sound startles her. Whatever it was that struck the ground, it fell out from lolo’s study window. She rushes out. On the grass, a wad of once-bound paper now lies strewn everywhere. Some pages have fluttered into the drain while others have scattered around the garden. She looks up.

“lolo?”

But nobody is at the window. Instead, she hears a rumble down the stairs. lolo shoots through the kitchen and out of the door. His arms raised, shaking them in the air, he curses. He quickly retrieves what’s left of his book.

“That ruffian...she broke into my study and threw my manuscript out of the window,” he growls.

“Why?”

“Said I must say sorry...she’d heard me being nasty, then mumbled about my book and threw it out.”

He chases after the pages fluttering across the lawn, gathering up the rest of the torn sheets.

“Where is she?”

"In her room. I've locked her in there... for the time being."

"What!"

"Never mind that...just help me with these pages?"

As Efa rushes around the garden, hurrying after sheets, she spots the shears close by. Stringy white strands and a flaky yellowy crust cover the blades. Then a random tap-tap-tap of a woodpecker on the roof of the shed grabs her attention. She treads carefully towards the wooden structure. The door is slightly ajar. It's dark inside.

"The girl's a nuisance...," she hears lolo yell out and turns in his direction. He's by the vegetable patch near the shed.

"Let her be... you come take these papers."

"In a minute."

Impatient to go in, her foot pushes the shed door fully open. An unmistakable stench hits her. The smell is familiar.

Efa steps in, nervous. Her hand reaches for the light switch. In an instant, the scale of the damage is exposed. It couldn't be a fox, as the hens are still in their coop. It's just their eggs, they're smashed. It's a mess, dried yolk and bits of shell are everywhere. On the floor lies a can of adhesive, in it a brush. Then, she spots something next to the tin. It's a large, flattened cardboard box. Pieces of eggshell are glued onto its surface - like a mosaic. It's hard to decipher what the pattern is. The fragments have been stuck together in a childish way. She stares hard at it. Then it dawns on her. Of course, it's a baby chick, peeking out of an eggshell.

Just then lolo enters the shed. His eyes widen.

"What...what is this? Alys up to her tricks again?"

His voice startles her. She hadn't heard him walk in. His papers nearly slip out of her hand.

"Here, before I drop them." She hands the pile over.

Then, from the damp floor, she rescues Alys' artwork and shows it to him.

“Look...how creative this is.”

“What, broken pieces of eggshell stuck to cardboard?” he says, mocking.

“It’s a baby chick peeking out of its shell.”

For a few moments, he stares...

“Ah...I see it, now,” he looks around the shed, “...at least she hasn’t killed the birds.”

Iolo muses. There’s a story here...this is another one of Alys’ antics he can add to his manuscript.

Commentary

Alys is a short story portraying the intricate relationship between Alys, a young, troubled girl and her foster parents Efa and Iolo. She never appears or speaks in the narrative. The reader learns about the ten-year-old through her foster parents’ conversations and thoughts.

The story evolved from a character development exercise, first creating a single focal character, Alys, and then two other characters having a conversation about her after a significant event. An unloved child from a dysfunctional family, her personality is the stark opposite of my own. Her age, obstinate attitude, extreme behaviour, and backstory were first established along with her relationship with her carers. Her repeated fostering and its psychological effects formed the significant backstory, resulting in increasingly disruptive behaviour and culminating in the immediate significant event of the discarded shears and the eggshell picture.

The construction of Efa and Iolo was the next phase of the exercise, triggering the setting, theme and start of a plot. The immediate significant event created atmosphere, tension, and mystery. Efa, spotting the shears left on the lawn launched the story and drew Iolo into a conversation about Alys’ behaviour. Alys is notably absent. The dilemma of the shears, in turn, provided an objective to resolve the predicament, harnessed mystery, and generated tension.

Writing realistic dialogue was a challenge but was overcome through perseverance and researching books on the key techniques like *The Book of Dialogue* by Lewis Turco.¹ Conversations were rewritten until the exchange sounded natural. Drafts were re-edited to improve flow, clarity, and structure. Sentences were restructured, grammar corrected, and paragraphs rearranged.

The exercise has helped me develop skills to create intriguing characters using dialogue and to achieve a sequence of events with greater competence, meeting the requirements of the task set.

Linda Anderson's guide on *Creative Writing* helped me with character creation and dialogue.² *Writing Short Stories* by Ailsa Cox and John Gardner's *The Art of Fiction* assisted with suspense, plot, point of view and structure.³ As an admirer of Raymond Carver's work, my short story *Alys* has been influenced by his minimalist writing style and tries to tackle a complex subject in simple, sparse language without extravagant phrases and descriptions. The character Alys has been inspired by a real-life troubled child who has struggled with being constantly fostered. She is a combination of imagination, memory and the guidelines set out in the task.

Alys' name is symbolic of Lewis Carroll's Alice, with her wild and curious imagination; she is a capricious character of childish logic, kindness, and cruelty. Efa or Eva or Eve represent her role as a mother, while Iolo, who is a writer in the story, is a reference to Iolo Morganwg, the poet who forged several manuscripts.⁴ The idea of Iolo's intent to centre his manuscript on Alys emerges from the notion that Lewis Carroll may have based his fictional character, Alice, on Alice Liddell.⁵

¹ Lewis Turco, *The Book of Dialogue: How to Write Effective Conversation in Fiction, Screenplays, Dramas, and Poetry* (London: University Press New England, 2004), pp. 25-74; 164—167.

² 'Character Creation', in *Creative Writing: A Workbook with Readings*, ed. by Linda Anderson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 70-84.

³ Ailsa Cox, *Writing Short Stories: A Routledge Writer's Guide* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.11-12; 22-23; John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction: Notes on craft for young writers*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), pp. 155-194.

⁴ BBC Cymru, Wales, 'Iolo Morgangw', *Wales History* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/themes/figures/iolo_morganwg.shtml> [accessed 08 April 2021].

⁵ V&A, *The real Alice in Wonderland Alice* <<https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/the-real-alice-in-wonderland>> [accessed 08 April 2021].

The method employed to construct a short story using a conversation between two characters about a third after a significant event has been demonstrated to be an effective technique. It is a beneficial device to help trigger a story's fundamental elements of character, theme, setting, plot, conflict, and resolution. I will use this process in the future to assist me with my ambition as a writer to write short stories.

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Clare Ferguson-Walker

An integration of poetry with song and self



1.

"It's onwards and upwards," Clare proclaims

Clare's most recent multi-media project has revealed her genius as an artist. This tremendous achievement is a collaboration with Craig Leon, the American-born music producer, and animators such as Studio Ghibli's Hayao Miyazaki.

There are no doubts the Welsh artist's new work will exhibit her artistic flair. Clare's aesthetic integration of poetry with song, sci-fi music, and animated visuals to produce a short movie results in a truly avant-garde arrangement. She mixes singing with spoken word to deliver her poem 'The World's on Fire'. Here, she effectively demonstrates her virtuosity and her vocal calibre. The verses echo the effects of modern day and near-future political and cultural tension. She says, "Capitalism is collapsing before our eyes and you know climate disasters kind of [have] come down upon us." Craig Leon's music has a post-apocalyptic, dystopian style, and is complemented by Clare's collection of narrative drawings for the film's storyboard. Her illustrations will furnish anime artists with a concept. She has been working on this project for the last year and a half, "keeping it a little bit quiet."

Interviewed by Dominic Williams

Written by Prithi Shukla



2.

Against Austerity

Clare has made her mark in the last three decades with ample demonstrations of her colossal creativity, her humour, and her determined perseverance. It is difficult not to be in awe. She has always warmly welcomed any chance to expand her skills, accepting "every paid opportunity that comes [her] way."

Her presence in both literary and performing art circles has stretched her multi-talented profile. She emphasises, "You have to create a profile, so people know who you are." To enter the creative industry Clare explains, "You must just write."

She began as a "moody teenager" in her bedroom writing poetry, sending her work to literary magazines, and entering competitions. At nineteen she won her first competition, and this gave her a boost in confidence. After a degree from College Sir Gar for sculpture, she exhibited her work successfully at a range of galleries. Her work as a poet never ceased but was somewhat side-lined for a while.

Her eclectic interests continued unabated and, determined to succeed, she never gave up her

dream. After marriage and motherhood, she still managed to balance her domestic life wisely with her work. "I was going to juggle parenthood and children," Clare says. Her role as a creative writing teacher at workshops allowed her to briefly escape from domesticity and "from baby poo," Clare jokes, her quirky humour genuine and contagious.

During this complex life journey, she attended several gigs in London, and property slam events at 'Hammer and Tongue' and 'Apple and Snakes'. Many well-known names from the poetry circuit were present, including Joelle Taylor and Salena Godden. Her advice to anyone wanting to get into the creative industry is to "meet other people doing the same type of thing." She adds "...you never know who they'll introduce you to," Clare conveys. "Networking is extremely important." A weekend at Lan provided her big break. There she met Phill Jupitus and later, Dr John Cooper Clarke.

Clare is known for never allowing an opportunity to pass her by. She and a friend together sought out TV star Phill Jupitus. With classic candour, she told him "we are performance poets as well." After a short audition, he endorsed her act to support his at the Edinburgh Fringe. Here, she found herself performing in front of a large crowd of hundreds of people. Previously, her biggest audience had numbered about twenty. The confidence she derived from the accolades received there, allowed her to charge a proper fee for her work. "The endorsement of somebody who is taken seriously in his career has given me confidence," Clare reveals. She relates receiving a barrage of requests to perform at literature festivals, to feature slots and to 'Poem and Pints'.

Clare discloses she first published one of her books with a vanity publisher for £1.50 per book. At gigs, she sold them for £10. She found

this method quite lucrative. Her creative writing feeds into all aspects of her life as does her sculpture.

After many years of pursuing her dream to go to America, she had finally succeeded in 2015 with an offer to show her sculptures at an art exhibition in Los Angeles, California. To find the money for the trip she applied to the Arts Council, but they denied her a touring grant. She was not deterred by this. Clare procured the funds herself to fly to America with her husband, children, and her sculptures. "It cost a lot of money to get us all out to LA," she asserts. She successfully integrates her family life and her work. "We stayed out there for two months and we toured up and down the West Coast. It was the highlight of my life." Clare's band also travelled with her. Besides music gigs, she also performed her poetry in America. Something always kept her going. She never stopped pushing herself and taking risks.

On her return to the UK, burnt out from an exhilarating but exhausting trip, Clare's efforts and experiences in America resulted in a remarkable breakthrough. The fulfilment of accomplishing her 'life's ambition' inspired her with a need to translate "her experience in a meaningful way." *California Scheming*, a spoken word poetic narrative, provided a watershed moment. One hour fifteen minutes long, it is a



Cellar-Bards 2013

2.

“It’s about learning to love yourself and love what you’ve got.”

reflective story about her journey to America, the excitement she felt mingled with the inevitable drawbacks of her adventure, her relationship with her father, her childhood goals, and the realisation of hard truths.

“You’re not going to get any kind of life healing from an external experience,” she says. “It’s about learning to love yourself and love what you’ve got.” Here she demonstrates that true change that comes from within.

Inspired by her earlier achievements with Phill, this time Clare prepared a headlining show to perform at the Edinburgh Fringe. This she later discovered, was quite risky because without Phill’s established profile as a household name, her relative obscurity as a performer was an issue. Tickets were not selling in the previous numbers. “Grandma hasn’t heard of me...WHY NOT?” she says laughingly, bravely injecting comedy into the situation. Being unaware of how to promote and market her performance proved to be a serious setback. “It is colossal to get people physically in through the door.” Competing with over “fifty-two thousand” other performers is very challenging, she explains.

Scarcely anyone attended her show, but her resilience won through. At her last performance, her luck turned. Besides getting a four-star review in the Edinburgh Fringe magazine *Three weeks*, an agent from London said he thought



3.

Clare Ferguson-Walker

her show was terrific. He offered her a contract, which she was delighted to sign.

Performing solo gigs at her own theatre shows, delighted Clare. “It was totally surreal,” she says emphatically. To see her name appear in theatre brochures besides eminent performing artists such as Ross Noble and Sarah Millican was exhilarating. There was now a true sense that she had achieved a really dramatic change in her career. Rather than being paid by ticket sale, she began to earn about £600-700 per night. In subsequent years, Clare had toured across the UK, although she had to change her agent after he fell in love with her.

Following these successful tours, she resumed contact with Dr John Cooper Clarke. Her work with Phill Jupitus gave her the confidence to ask John if she could tour with him. He agreed. “Brazen,” she says but it worked for her.

Soon she found herself warming up enormous crowds for the country’s renowned poet. “It was a steep learning curve. I knew I had to be good.” Her first gig in North Wales was a fabulous training ground for her relative inexperience. She drove up there under the illusion they would provide her with accommodation. But her first night was spent in the theatre’s parking lot

TEDxSwansea
2018



4.

in her car, followed by sleeping on sofas at friend's places. Clare realised she was being naïve, so she asked Phill if she could be provided with accommodation for her next performances. "Yeah, you've got good reviews; the crowd loves you; John loves you," Phill responded. That was seven years ago. She has been gigging ever since, luxuriating in 5-star hotels, and being treated like a rock star. Supporting John opened new doors, but also "bolted some shut." Some people were envious of her achievement. She would prefer "Less gatekeepers and snobbery" in the poetry world.

In between gigs, Clare runs workshops as a freelancer and for Literature Wales. "Confidence is a muscle, the more things you do [and] have in the bag, you have evidence so you can do something else," she says. Clare is well known in Wales by a range of art councils, conducting both literary and creative art workshops for

them. Working with children gives her great pleasure. In addition, commissioned by a mobile poetry outlet *Poetry Takeaway*, Clare composes specific poems for the public at events.

As a child, she was most inspired by Jim Henson, Salvador Dali, and Brian Fraud, the English fantasy illustrator. Her inspiration today is her own journey and her children. When she looks at them, she says to herself "Wow, woman look what you made."

Clare is a creative anomaly. She is irresistibly funny, spontaneous, and charming but also resilient, courageous, and feisty. For anyone who seeks to join the creative industry, Clare Ferguson-Walker's story is truly inspirational.

"A lot of it comes down to believing in yourself, believing in your worth. If you're not confident, fake it," she laughs.



The Release
Clare Ferguson-Walker

5.

"A lot of it comes down to believing in yourself."

Commentary

The opportunity to write a magazine article on a creative artist offered an exciting challenge to improve my prospects in freelance work. Unfamiliar with writing interview articles, this experience has allowed me to develop my skills in journalism. Observing the film interviews on different creative artists, I was most inspired by Clare-Ferguson-Walker.¹

From the battles of teenage life, Clare found her poetry. The honest, open account of her journey revealed her struggles, successes, and dreams. She is humorous and representative of her contemporary genre. She knows how to command the attention of her audience. Readers love unique life stories that tell of challenges overcome. Her dynamic personality and determination made Clare the ideal candidate for my magazine article.

The assessment required us to write an interview article in a narrative form rather than a question-and-answer format. I researched interviews in several arts and literary publications such as *Poetry Foundation* and *Poetry Wales*.² Publications like *The Guardian* and their *Guardian Weekend Magazine* were also explored.³ They offer their readers a range of articles and features covering performing arts, books, literary topics, and interviews on creative artists. Clare's advice and engaging story will deliver a productive message for those readers and students who may want to enter the commercial world of creative arts.

¹ Clare Ferguson-Walker, *Interview with C. Ferguson-Walker*, (Interviewed by Dominic Williams) (2020) Available at: <<https://moodle.uwtsd.ac.uk/mod/url/view.php?id=341696>> [accessed 25 March 2021].

² Johannes Göransson, 'On the Road with Bruno K. Öijer' Interview, *Poetry Foundation* 26 October 2020. <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/154544/on-the-road-with-bruno-k-oijer>> [accessed 10 April]; 'Rosalind Hudis: How I Write a Poem', *Poetry Wales*, 26 January 2021. <<https://poetrywales.co.uk/rosalind-hudis-how-i-write-a-poem/>> [accessed 10 April].

³ John Plunkett, 'Phill Jupitus interview: 'I am not every everyone's cup of tea'', *The Guardian* 09 Aug 2010. <<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2010/aug/09/phill-jupitus-6-music>> [accessed 10 April].; Tom Lamont, St Vincent: 'I'm Deep in nun mode', *Guardian Weekend Magazine*, 19 August 2017. <<https://www.yourcelebritymagazines.com/products/uk-guardian-weekend-magazine-19th-august-2017-st-vincent-uk-cover-interview>>, [accessed 10 April].

In addition, features on how to write an interview article, published on websites such as *Word Press* were studied.⁴ This provided adequate research context for my piece.

The interview recording was first transcribed before I started writing. This made it easier to select engaging segments of the exchange, decide on quotes, establish my audience, and determine an angle and style of writing. Interview articles can take the form of question and answers, they can be written in the first person or written in a narrative third person format. I chose the latter. The writing style for my article is similar to that adopted by the *Guardian Weekend Magazine*, a print and online publication.⁵

The article begins with a quote from Clare to allow the reader to instantly engage with her thoughts and accomplishments and empathise with her journey. To pique curiosity, it appears immediately above the opening paragraph that refers to her intriguing multi-media project. Further quotes were used to help preserve a close reader connection with Clare. The article follows a narrative format, tracking the ups and downs of her creative life, concluding with a summary, and ending with a quote. Research was carried out on Clare's performances and additional questions were asked to fill in the gaps.

Several drafts were re-edited. Sentences were rephrased, incorrect grammar rectified, and paragraphs rearranged, to enhance clarity, structure, and consistency. Proofreading removed surface errors. A quote from the article was chosen for the title. This was emblematic and reflected Clare's artistic flair. The main obstacle in the process was replaying the film to transcribe the recording. It slowed down the task.

Comprehending and engaging in the process required to write an interview article has given me the confidence and skills to write such a feature for publication. This makes a career as a freelance writer and journalist an enticing possibility.

⁴ 'From Interview to Article: Lesson 6 Turning Interviews into Articles', *World Press* March 2013. <https://ottertalesnews.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/from_interview_to_article.pdf> [accessed 10 April].

⁵ Tom Lamont, St Vincent: 'I'm Deep in nun mode', *Guardian Weekend Magazine*, 19 August 2017. <<https://www.yourcelebritymagazines.com/products/uk-guardian-weekend-magazine-19th-august-2017-st-vincent-uk-cover-interview>> [accessed 10 April].

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