

September 2026

Creative Writing Subject Adviser:

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This Newsletter marks the end of my happy 13 years as Creative Writing Adviser. As this is sent out, I am handing over to Lynne Carroll, of Crediton u3a. Her name may be familiar to you, as Lynne has written articles for previous Newsletter editions. She was the winner of the Third Age Trust's Short story competition in 2021 & some of you may have attended the Writing workshops she runs at the u3a National Festival. Lynne brings great enthusiasm to her new role, & I hope she'll enjoy it as much as I have done. Lynne says:-

I'm looking forward to following in Marcia's capable footsteps. I have found her support invaluable and would encourage you to contact me with any queries or ideas so I can continue to build on those solid foundations. lynne.carroll@subjectadviser.u3a.org.uk

There will be no more Newsletters after this one, but Lynne intends to send out regular updates in the form of Creative Writing Bulletins. To receive them, you need to register please. To do that, go to the Creative Writing Subject Advice page on the national u3a website (link below) & complete your sign-up request there.

<https://www.u3a.org.uk/members-area/subjects/creative-writing>

Writing prompt :-

Narrow Escape

Best wishes, & keep on writing,

Marcia

Maggie Smith 1931 to 2026

When I became Subject Adviser for Creative Writing, I took over from Maggie Smith, who had been in post for eleven years. Some of you will have heard that Maggie died in late July. She was ninety-five years old, & remained a strong support to me until the end. She was a big personality and will leave a huge gap.

Marcia

Thinking of Writing Your Memoirs?

Lichfield u3a members have created a template that could help. The writing pack is called 'Everyone has a Story to Tell' & provides an ABC guide to getting started.

Step 1 helps you think about creating a title page.

Step 2 provides timeline grids you can fill in, covering decades from birth to now.

Step 3 encourages you to write freely, choosing what you want to record.

The Appendices contain a lot of useful information.

If you want to compile your story on line, a digital copy is on the Lichfield u3a web-site under Projects/Memoirs: u3asites.org.uk/Lichfield/page/131291 Printed copies of the guide, template & appendices cost £8.50 +p&p from Veronica Birkett veronicabirkett7@gmail.com

How to Read (Contemporary) Poetry & Enjoy it ...a possible study day for your group

A poem can feel like a locked safe to which you do not have the combination or key, creating a feeling of impatience, the urge to read quickly and get it over with. But there are a few conventions, a few 'rules' which can unlock the safe and open up a whole new world of pleasurable reading alongside the novel and short story.

Bert Flitcroft has huge experience as a poet, running workshops & giving readings both locally & on the national stage, but says he now finds more pleasure (and satisfaction) in opening up the joy of poetry to wider non-poetry audiences.

Contact him if your group members would like him to speak to them.

email bflitcroft@btinternet.com www.bert-flitcroft-poetry.com Tel: 07583 362969

Bert was Staffordshire Poet Laureate 2015-17 & has 3 collections of poetry published. He has been Poet in Residence at the Southwell Poetry Festival & has performed at a number of major national festivals including Edinburgh, International Book Festival & The Birmingham Literature Festival. He has worked as resident poet with the Wedgwood Collection at the V&A, as resident poet with the prestigious R.I.B.A exhibition 'The Road Less Travelled' & recently as part of the University of Keele project 'Labelling the Museum'.

Observations

Susanna Beard

Writing fiction, I've discovered, has side-effects. Not bad ones, like some medications, but they are unexpected.

Like being more observant.

Not only do I notice objects in more detail, I notice things I would never have noticed before. Like spiders' webs: the way they are constructed - not always perfect, but perfectly designed for purpose. The way the raindrops hang in minute rows along the delicate strands, the way the light refracts from them, with a mirror-like effect if you look close enough. The way that frost sometimes stands up in frills on the top of fences or wires, like a mini-barrier discouraging invaders; the way that leaves shrivel and change colour with the ground frost, blending into the ground around them.

I notice people's mannerisms. The flick of the hair, the folding of the arms across the stomach. Where their eyes land when they're talking. How some people hold back until there is a pause before saying something pithy, surprising everyone. How some people, usually men, hitch their trousers up when they're nervous. I notice people's voices, their clothes, the way they walk. How families interact, or not.

Smells and sounds are different, too. Often, I try to find the words for a particular aroma; it can be difficult, if not impossible. I do the same for sounds, for the tone of people's voices, for the click of my dogs' toenails on the bamboo floors in my house. I look for multiple words to describe the same thing. This, I imagine, stretches my descriptive muscle, brings language long-forgotten back into my vocabulary. I try to be my own Thesaurus.

Writing fiction is a joy. Who knew it had wonderful side-effects, like this one?

After a long career in public relations, Susanna took the six-month Writing a Novel course at the Faber Academy, and her first psychological thriller was published in 2017. Since then she has published 8 more. All are available on Amazon. She writes dark, contemporary stories with strong female characters, often set in interesting places. She is a regular interviewee on radio, at literary festivals, in libraries and at book club meetings. She is willing to speak at monthly meetings or help with workshops within say an hour's distance from her home in Marlow (Bucks). Visit Susanna at www.susannabeard.com; email her on info@susannabeard.com; like her page on Facebook: [@susannabeardauthor](https://www.facebook.com/susannabeardauthor); follow her on Twitter: [@SusannaBeard25](https://twitter.com/SusannaBeard25); or on Substack: susannabeard.substack.com.

GROUP NEWS

**Grange-Over-Sands****Jean Cowgill**

Recently our group ran a serial in our u3a's quarterly magazine. The setting was Cumbria with the title 'Hefted'. There were five instalments, each written by different people. Amazingly it gelled together very well. I took on the last one where we had some magic realism. In theory I am supposed to be doing an illustrated booklet.

Another interesting exercise was to write a piece based on Simon Armitage's 'The Owl and The Nightingale'. I heard part of this book on BBC Radio 4 quite by chance. I can recommend the book. The illustrations are wonderful. Based on a 12th or 13th century story, Simon Armitage's translation was superb. I gave the group about twenty alternative titles taken from the book. My own was 'The Head is Mightier than the Fist'.

Tadley & District**Pat Bailey**

At our June meeting, our group leader, Janie Haynes-Ager, become ill. She was taken to hospital, but sadly, died that night following complications during surgery. She was an exceptional leader, & this is our tribute to her:-

After discussion around the possibility of starting a Creative Writing Group, Janie agreed to lead. What a group leader she was! Absolutely fabulous! Group members have described her as kind & knowledgeable, always encouraging & supportive. Janie would listen patiently to all our angst & self-doubt & point out where we might perhaps improve or look at something in a different light. She had the most wonderful way of making everything a positive rather than a negative. Others have commented on her sense of humour, quick wit & how we would usually finish each session with one of her poems. She was never "precious" about writing & writers; she always wanted us to get fun out of our sessions & not take ourselves too seriously...& we did have fun!

It was thanks to Janie that we become published authors last year. The profits from the publication contributed to our charity providing audio books for people with sight problems. We have decided to continue running the group in her memory. Janie's shoes are too big to fill so, for the moment, we have agreed to run it as a sort of conglomerate with us all taking it in turns to suggest a topic & someone being responsible for the admin matters. Elaine Hare has agreed to be our Newsletter contact.

Writers on the Edge**Jo Jackson**

We have again organised a short story competition for Much Wenlock Olympians. Details may be found on page 8 of this Newsletter. We hope you will send in a story.

Barnsley**Mac Mckechnie**

We decided to share our enjoyment of the Writing group with the wider community, so Barnsley Word Circle was born— a monthly evening where poetry, stories & friendship can be shared. Organised by the Writing group, it's open to the wider community. People are welcome to come & listen, enjoy the atmosphere & meet others who love words. For those who want to take part, our open mic offers 4-minute slots for readings.

It's so encouraging to watch people who say, "I could never do that," start putting words on paper, then finding the courage to stand up & share them. You don't have to arrive as a writer, just arrive, & the words can come later.

Our Writing group has gained a new member through this initiative. That's exactly the bridge we hoped to build— taking what we enjoy in u3a out to the community & in turn introducing new people to what u3a has to offer.

Christchurch**David Williams**

Douglas Eyre & I entered writing competitions at this year's Bournemouth Performing Arts Festival. I'm delighted to say we both won medals! His was for a poem & mine for a short story.

Co-authoring a Book**Diane Hope & Martin Simmons, Hampshire & Dorset**

We met at Basingstoke's Writing group 3 years ago. We had a shared love of writing & a little experience.

Diane had had short stories published in various women's magazines as well as some success with short stories & flash fiction completions, & was working on a novel as well as a memoir of her South London childhood in the 50s. Martin had co-written a psychology self-help book published by Winslow Press in 1993 & a first novel, *Brainwaves*, about a man seeking his identity after a brain transplant (available on Amazon). Shortly he will be publishing a second novel, *Eden is Burning*, set against a forest fire in France.

Writing can be a lonely experience so, having critiqued each other's pieces, usually short stories & flash fiction, Martin suggested writing a novel together. 'It will be fun,' he said, so Mariane Ditin was created & we began. Write what you know seems to be the received wisdom &, as we both know about aging, the highs & the lows, we set our characters in their 60s. We floated lots of ideas & slowly Ella & Alain came into being. We used real incidents to bring our characters to an A & E department where they meet & are attracted to each other ... inconveniently! Oh yes, I should say, it is a romance but also explores aging & end of life issues as well as relationships between families & friends. We had a rough idea of the story & started to write. Our writing process was simple. I wrote a chapter, then Martin followed on with the next chapter. It worked really well, each having a vested interest & eager to see what the other had written, thus saving our long suffering partners the chore of reading each draft.

Thanks to modern technology we could share documents, edit each other's work & leave comments & suggestions – very politely at first, becoming more forthright as our story evolved. Eventually we got to the end only to discover that the writing had been the easy part. What followed was a marathon of editing, rewriting, & editing again... & again... & again. Realising we needed help, we invested in a structural edit. This proved invaluable, & encouraging feedback gave us the confidence to keep going. After many more revisions, we were finally ready to seek an agent. Surely they'd be queuing up?

Sadly this was not the case. After 6 months of rejections – or complete silence - we decided to publish ourselves & found it is surprisingly easy, & FREE, which probably accounts for the 25,000 books published every week. Now, after 3 years our book is out there.

If you liked *Me Before You* by Jojo Moyes, we think you will like our story. It explores the same topical issue of assisted dying but with a light touch, even moments of humour, all wrapped in a tender, later life romance. It is the story of Ella & Alain, their fateful meeting, the decisions they face & the difficult choices they make. The first 6 chapters are available in a free sample, & if these pique your interest we hope you will want to read more.

Our title is *Let Me Go* by Mariane Ditin (Martin & Diane) & is available now on the ubiquitous Amazon.

Here is the link: [LetMeGo](#)

Thank you for reading about our co-writing journey. If you check out our book, we hope you enjoy it—and perhaps even leave a review.

Diane & Martin

Basingstoke & Bridport U3As

Email: marianeditin@gmail.com

Writing is a lonely business & most writers are plagued by insecurities. First there is the desire to be published & the crushing disappointment of rejections. I've had many since I first started writing fiction in 1988! Each one can feel personal & the desire to desist becomes stronger. With me though, it was a spur to continue & disprove them.

Then, when published, come the doubts about whether or not anyone will buy your book & if so will they enjoy it? The insecurities don't stop there, nor when several novels are published. Is this latest one as good as the previous novel or better, or worse? Will the reviewers like it? Will the readers enjoy it? An archive of letters by Iris Murdoch, which revealed this renowned writer's insecurities, is therefore reassuring.

The correspondence between Iris Murdoch & French novelist Raymond Queneau spanned 29 years & shed light on Murdoch's insecurities about her ability as a writer. One of her early works featured a bogus scholar & another idea for a novel is cribbed from a book about telepathy, which she eventually abandoned. The Daily Telegraph said, "The letters reveal a woman riddled with self-doubt who was at times filled with hatred & contempt for her prose & wondered if she would ever write something good".

Iris Murdoch was thought to have attempted between four & six novels before her first book, *Under the Net*, was published in 1954. She looked to Queneau for intellectual stimulus & practical help. It's good to have a mentor in all walks of life, including writing. It's good to have an editor who understands your style of writing & can give support & encouragement. On the other hand, having an over-zealous copy or line editor who massacres your manuscript, making it technically, grammatically or politically correct or over-editing it so that it undermines your style & makes it turgid, can tip you right back into insecurity.

One thing Iris Murdoch didn't have to contend with was online reviews. These can be fantastic & incredibly motivating, as are personal emails, messages & feedback from individuals at talks. The advent of AI, which now sucks in all the reviews & spills them out as a snapshot review with ratings, is nerve-racking. One or two critical reviews from someone who picked up your novel but it was not to their taste can skew this.

In the letters, Iris Murdoch talked about the difficulty of judging her own work & her suspicion that what she had produced was worthless. She says, "While I am writing it, it's always surrounded by such an aura of creative aspiration & joy, clairvoyance & what not, it seems better than it is. Then afterwards the light is withdrawn & it seems quite dead & worthless." I so identify with that. A writer's doubts are natural & come with the territory. I love writing & crafting a good story & as long as I do then I will continue writing & hope my readers continue to enjoy reading.

Pauline Rowson is a regular speaker at u3as, talking about life as a crime writer. She can be contacted via her website: www.rowmark.co.uk The website is interesting (you can also sign up for her free newsletter) even if you don't want to contact her. She has a You Tube Channel showing videos of her interviews and talks. <http://www.youtube.com/paulinerowson13> You can follow her on Twitter and she has a Facebook page

I met Pauline soon after I became Adviser. I went to a talk she gave at a library in the next town to me. Afterwards, I asked if she'd write a few columns for the Newsletter. I had in mind a year or so, but she has continued ever since. She has been a delight to work with, always reliable & responsive. I am forever grateful to her.

Marcia

I'm writing as leader of the Ikley u3a Writing Group to let you know that I've just had 'Angel', my first novel published!

I've always enjoyed writing and in my business years was active in penning press releases and trade magazine articles, but didn't have much time available for the creative stuff! When I took over running the Ikley creative writing group, back in 2018, I found the support of our group to be a valuable stimulus for my own writing. It was a short story I had written decades ago that provided the stimulus, together with group feedback that led to my creating the novel that became 'Angel' which was finally published in May (available Foyles, Waterstones, Amazon).

I didn't have a literary agent working on my behalf. I did it the hard way, by researching publishing houses and choosing a shortlist of those with an international presence. I then sent out a copy of my manuscript to my shortlist (about 8) with a covering letter. There followed a long wait - well over a month before I heard anything and I then started to get rejections. More weeks passed and I then received an acceptance from Olympia Publishing - joy! So, I signed what was a hybrid agreement, sent it back and heard nothing more for ages. Meanwhile I had several more rejections before another acceptance from one of my prioritised targets. Not only was this an acceptance but two A4 pages of detailed praise closely typed (in small typeface) from whoever had read my manuscript!

What followed was a very lengthy process (about 12 months) with four stages of manuscript review with almost exclusively only small typos and grammar corrections but luckily no changes to characters, plot or any other aspects. I was pleased to find that they accepted my concept of a cover design (the final version was a bit too modern, but ok) plus my addition of a back cover synopsis and a prologue, both without any changes.

So now I awaited my copies and faced great deal of work assisting in the promotion of Angel.

Out of interest, the original idea for Angel dates back to a short story I wrote in 1991 creating one of the two main characters. I am now starting the process of working on offers of assistance to local bookshops with, perhaps, their 'meet the author' activities. Meanwhile, I continue to work on my next novel (41 chapters written and discussed with the group) but...there is much work lying ahead still, as I now realise that the plot needs a great deal more work. A great deal of restructuring/editing still lies ahead.

If my experiences in creating and obtaining publication of 'Angel' might be of interest to other u3a members, I'd be very happy to do what I can to assist, but must say that I am no expert - despite a lifetime of writing, I'm a beginner at the getting published bit! But I've learnt a good deal!

tony.armstrong68@gmail.com

STUDY DAY SPEAKERS

Patrick Forsyth (Maldon & Dist) has had numerous books & articles published. He has spoken at u3as on "A Journey into Print", about his struggle to get a light-hearted travel book published. He has been a tutor at various workshops for (aspiring) writers. He can be contacted on: patrick@touchstone28.com

Author Anne Ludlow is available to speak to u3as &/or to work with South East Region groups, in person or by Zoom. Anne can cover general writing, writing novels & self-publishing. Let her know what might suit & she will try to fit in! www.anneludlowauthor.com
anneludlowauthor@gmail.com

Jo Livingston, u3a Living History Adviser, will talk to your group (however large or small) by Zoom on historical letters & documents.... why some have survived, often by chance, but some intended to survive have not. The talk is called Write it Down, & you can contact Jo at jo_livingston@hotmail.com

NEED HELP GETTING PUBLISHED?

Dr Alan Corkish, (Maghull & Lydiate) has experience as a senior editor & in typesetting & cover design. He is willing to advise u3a members or groups (including editing) free of charge. www.erbacce-press.com

Patricia Feinberg Stoner (Arun East) offers a free taster editing service to members writing or planning a book. Patricia, whose own books have won awards, has set up Perdisma Edits, a proofreading, copy editing & creative editing service. She will take a look at the first 1,000 words of your book.
patriciafeinbergstoner@gmail.com
Facebook (Paw Prints in the Butter) Twitter (@perdisma). Website www.perdisma.com

Player Playwrights has provided space for writers to try out work since 1948. Professional actors read your work before a knowledgeable audience. This London-based group also holds regular play competitions & talks with agents, casting directors & theatre professionals.
www.playerplaywrights.co.uk
tonydiggle@cainct.co.uk



A Speaker for your u3a's Monthly Meeting

Mac Mckechnie, leader of Barnsley's Writing group is available (for expenses only) to give a power point presentation on Becoming an Author. His only stipulation is that your group must be in reasonable travelling distance of Barnsley! Contact Mac at mckechnie31@btinternet.com

WRITING PROMPTS

There are lots on the website
www.creative-writing-beginnings.com

Handbook for u3a Writing Groups

Available to download free from the Creative Writing Subject Adviser's page of the u3a website. Lots of exercises & material to use with groups.

COMPETITIONS

Free e-mail bulletin Chainlinks is a good way to keep abreast of what's on. Email Steph McGill & ask to be put onto the mailing-list.
artswest@cheshirewest.gov.uk

Wenlock Olympian Short Story Competition (Organised by u3a group Writers on the Edge)

Launch date: 7 September 2026.

Deadline: 29 October 2026

Length of story: max 2500 words

The story must be fictional, but can be on any theme of your choice.

Prizes: £150, £50 & £25 plus Gold, Silver or Bronze Wenlock Olympian Society medal

Entry Fee: £6 (£11 for 2 entries, £15 for 3)

Competition Judge Kate Innes- novelist, poet & children's writer.

For further information and to enter, please go to: [Wenlock Olympian Society](http://WenlockOlympianSociety)