

Emotion in the outdoors

Cumbræ writing workshop

Sunday 15 October 9.00 – 12.30.

"He who sees only what is before his eyes sees the worst part of every view."

Leslie Stephen, 'The Playground of Europe'.

An interactive and practical workshop, led and moderated by Ronald Turnbull.

The workshop will focus on conveying feeling in descriptive outdoor / nature writing. It will follow a similar format to the reasonably successful Zoom workshop of last February (still available to view 'Writing up your Walk' at www.owpg.org.uk/owpg-zooms/). It is likely to include

- Freewheeling discussion of a set of extracts of varying merit about 'Autumn'
- In depth analysis and discussion of a particular passage from Kathleen Jamie, 'Peregrines, Ospreys, Cranes' identifying several techniques that can be used to convey emotion and feeling
- A 'walking exercise' – incorporated into one or more of the BW's outdoor events
- A 150 word 'writing exercise'. (Participants will be invited but not of course required to share these for discussion.)

briefing

Please bring

- something to write on (piece of paper, laptop, etc)
- the extracts below (printout or on laptop etc)

preparation

1. Please read the **warm-up extracts** below, themed on Autumn, and assign each one a star-rating from zero (truly awful) to five (perfection)

2. Please read the **Crane** extract, which we'll be discussing in detail for the way it conveys emotion.

- Again, please assign it a star-rating
- What emotion is being conveyed in the first paragraph? In the second one?
- Can you identify one or two ways or techniques the author has used to convey her emotion?

the walking exercise

A short writing exercise will be about describing a moment of any outing from Saturday. Please consider while on the outing, perhaps with some way of taking a few notes

- What colour is the sea (not blue!)
- What colour is the autumn grassland (not green)
- One or two snatches of spoken dialogue
- One unpleasant or negative sensation or incident

The extracts: Autumn

Prince Edward Island

It was October again... a glorious October, all red and gold, with mellow mornings when the valleys were filled with delicate mists as if the spirit of autumn had poured them in for the sun to drain – amethyst, pearl, silver, rose, and smoke-blue. The dews were so heavy that the fields glistened like cloth of silver, and there were such heaps of rustling leaves in the hollows of many-stemmed woods to run crisply through.

Autumn in Pumpkin Country (1)

As the summer sun begins to wane and the days grow shorter, the world transforms before our eyes. The fiery hues of autumn ignite the landscape with a kaleidoscope of colors, as the trees shed their leaves in preparation for the long winter ahead.

The crisp air carries the scent of woodsmoke and pumpkin spice, inviting us to bundle up in cozy sweaters and scarves. The rustling of leaves underfoot provides a symphony of sound, as we crunch through the fallen foliage.

The harvest season is upon us, and the bounty of the earth is on full display. Apples, pumpkins, and squash adorn farm stands and markets, inviting us to create warm and hearty meals.

The world slows down, as nature prepares for its slumber. Yet, the vibrancy of autumn reminds us to embrace change and revel in the beauty of transformation. For in the midst of decay, there is a beauty that is uniquely autumn's own, a time of transition and a reminder to cherish each moment as it passes.

Autumn in England

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Autumn along the Mississippi

It was a crisp and spicy morning in early October. The lilacs and laburnums, lit with the glory-fires of autumn, hung burning and flashing in the upper air, a fairy bridge provided by kind Nature for the wingless wild things that have their homes in the tree-tops and would visit together; the larch and the pomegranate flung their purple and yellow flames in brilliant broad splashes along the slanting sweep of the woodland; the sensuous fragrance of innumerable deciduous flowers rose upon the swooning atmosphere; far in the empty sky a solitary *Haliaeetus* slept upon motionless wing; everywhere brooded stillness, serenity, and the peace of God.

Wellington, New England

Summer left Wellington abruptly and slammed the door on the way out. The shudder sent leaves to the ground all at once, and Zora Belsey had that strange, late-September feeling that somewhere in a small classroom with small chairs an elementary school teacher was waiting for her. It seemed wrong that she should be walking towards town without a shiny tie and a pleated skirt, without a selection of scented erasers. Time is not what it is but how it is felt, and Zora felt no different.

Late season on Scafell Pike

The sun was just beginning to rise as we made our way up the mountain. The air was crisp and cold, and the only sound was the crunch of our footsteps on the snow. The peak was still shrouded in mist, but we could see the outline of it against the sky.

As we got higher, the view became more and more spectacular. The mountains below us looked like tiny toys, and the clouds floated by like puffs of cotton candy. We could see for miles in every direction.

Finally, after a long and tiring climb, we reached the top of Scafell Pike. The view from the summit was simply breathtaking. We could see all of England spread out before us. It was an incredible feeling to be standing on top of the highest mountain in England.

We spent some time taking in the view and enjoying the feeling of accomplishment. Then, it was time to start our descent. The climb down was much easier than the climb up, and we were soon back at the bottom of the mountain.

It had been an amazing day, and we were all exhausted but happy. We had made it to the top of Scafell Pike, and we had seen some of the most beautiful scenery in England. It was an experience that we would never forget.

Autumn in Pumpkin country (2)

As the summer fades away, the world transforms into a dreary and lifeless wasteland. The leaves fall from the trees, leaving nothing but barren branches that creak and groan in the wind. The colors of Autumn are not a glorious display of nature's majesty, but a reminder of the impending death that awaits all things.

The air grows colder, and the daylight hours shorten, trapping us in a perpetual state of darkness and despair. The smells of woodsmoke and pumpkin spice are sickly and nauseating, filling the air with a sense of decay and rot.

The harvest season may be upon us, but what does it matter? The bounty of the earth is nothing but a temporary reprieve from the impending winter, a cruel reminder of the inevitable scarcity and hardship that lies ahead.

The world slows down, not in a peaceful and contemplative way, but in a morbid and melancholy one. The vibrancy of life fades away, leaving behind a landscape of gray and lifelessness, where nothing thrives or grows.

In short, Autumn is not a season to be celebrated, but a reminder of the bleakness and futility of life, a prelude to the bitter cold and darkness that awaits us all.

Baby Steps

The autumn will soon be here, a child on tip-toe, excitement in each baby-step. She comes with the magic children breathe, to forge each leaf to gold or perhaps to the red of holly-berries. Each new day I awake, eyes raised to the strong arms of the

trees, seeking the first promise of her dance, listening for the sweet rustling music that inspires the wild pirouettes of each earth-bound gift.

Virginia

The ripe, the golden month has come again, and in Virginia the chinkapins are falling. Frost sharpens the middle music of the seasons, and all things living on the earth turn home again... the fields are cut, the granaries are full, the bins are loaded to the brim with fatness, and from the cider-press the rich brown ooze of the York Imperials run. The bee bores to the belly of the grape, the fly gets old and fat and blue, he buzzes loud, crawls slow, creeps heavily to death on sill and ceiling, the sun goes down in blood and pollen across the bronzed and mown fields of the old October.

The main extract: Ospreys, Crane

Kathleen Jamie – from 'Peregrines, Ospreys, Cranes', in *Findings*

I took an hour at lunchtime to cycle out and see if the ospreys were on the nest, this year as last, and they were. Even from two fields away I could see a black and white head, like a helmeted guard looking over a rampart. There was a stiff breeze and blousy clouds; the light was so bright it made your eyes ache. The tide was in and I made my way down to the estuary by a farm track which ended at a place where a smaller river empties into the Firth. When it got too muddy, I left the bike and found a way through the reed-beds till the water was before me like a secret place.

Gathered in the mouth of the smaller river, just resting on the water, were swans - nine-and-fifty of them, like Yeats's flock at Coole. Lots were youngsters with brownish plumage showing through the white, so I wondered if this was a gathering of those too young to breed, a club for adolescent swans. Now one would rear and beat its wings, then settle again on the choppy water.

I'd seen my ospreys, and the gathering of swans, and satisfied I turned to head for home again. Walking back to the bike I happened to glance upward, and there, flying toward me, was something huge, something I knew I had never seen before. The hair crept on the back of my neck and I fumbled to get the binoculars back out again. As it approached, it was like a brittle flying stick, side-on, growing thicker as it neared. It flew hugely and slowly, and looked as if it would pass directly overhead. I knelt down on the earth to make myself small, and steadied myself to focus the glasses on it, all the while telling myself to be calm, to look carefully and remember. It was big. Look at the wings, I told myself: straight and rectangular, with black and finery ends. See how it's flying - not like a heron, not with heavy, confident wing-beats, but

more...shivery. As it passed right over my head, it was the strangest thing, a weird cross-shape. I swivelled round on my knees to watch it travel southward over the fields and the village. It seemed to be making toward the pass in the hills the motorway takes, and the binoculars foreshortened the image, making the hills stand forward and loom bigger as the bird moved against them. Then it turned side-on, and its flight was almost tremulous for one so big. In profile, I could see clearly the head held far out on a neck so long and fragile it might snap, and the long legs and feet extended just as far behind. Like some medieval peasant granted a vision, I was kneeling in a field, fixated by this uncanny cross in the sky. Then, as it moved slowly out of sight, I raced for home excited as a child, holding its image in my head like a bowlful of blue water – mustn't spill a drop.