

The Virtual Writers Group

led by Ian Clark, Thursday 20 August 2020
UPDATED WITH COMMENTS (2):Tuesday 25 August 2020

Present:

Veronica Carolan
Ian Clark
Adele Duffield
Malcolm Johnstone
Lesley Pemberton

Welcome to a new virtual meeting of the Whitby Writers Group.

Please send your comments on each contribution to me, by Monday night, 24 August 2020.

It will help me not to misplace your email if you choose a subject line containing:

- WWG (for virtual WWG) or VPG (for virtual poetry group)
- the date of the moot
- your name.

If for technical reasons you can't see the attachment, there's a list of past (commented) PDFs here:

www.whitbywriters.com/proceedings-of-virtual-meetings

Click an item on the list, and the chosen PDF will be downloaded to your computer.

When I get your comments back I will append them to the appropriate contribution in an update to these proceedings, which I will email to you again.

Matters Arising:

(none)

Members' Contributions:

See overleaf...

Veronica Carolan

The beauty of cats

Cats are useless creatures, some say: fit only for feeding, sleeping and leaving their necessary offerings. Following instinct, they hunt, toying with prey before consuming. Toms hungry for satisfaction prowl and yowl around gardens and empty streets. To what end? More cats. The pampered puss is the centre of her world, learning the language of her humans to satisfy her needs and creating her own tones and times to convey her desires. In practical terms, cats are useless.

But who wants utility? To know the humble pride of being sought out, snuggled up to, with the silent communion of open gaze softened by the slow squeezing of eyelids in mutual recognition, is reward enough for a lover of cats. Cats have added value. No matter that we are enslaved in ownership. Cats do not seek to please, yet they give pleasure. They demand to be fed whilst feeding our souls. Meticulous in hygiene, they may leave hairs or dead creatures around the house. Prone to unwanted creaturely visitors of their own, they may show their suspicion of human visitors to the home or may perhaps deign to greet them. Once settled, cats are monarchs of all they survey. They choose their throne: my royal mistress will choose my head, pillow or chest, the favoured lap; stretched luxuriously in front of the fire or at one's feet; perched on the draining board she waits for water to appear from the tap; she hides under bushes to ambush her twittering subjects; she commands the garden from the windowsill; she walks on the computer keyboard and sits on the newspaper. My cat is a jealous cat, brooking no other conversation without announcing her presence in the most inconvenient way, then settles, satisfied that she has held her own. Cats command their own territories and fear no conflict to defend their boundary. Growls, war-cries, hair on end, tail high, she gives no ground and will turn on anyone who dares intervene.

There was one Gli, Turkish for 'union of love', who has lived in the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul for many years, at home amongst tourists and worshippers alike.

Cats have been worshipped as deities. The Sphinx, part lion and therefore feline, as been described as 'an enigmatic or inscrutable person' (Chambers) which is characteristic of the self-contained feline personality. Cats have been captured in art and song, and have inspired writers and poets through the ages: the first, surely, written and painted in the 11th century and is Mei Yao Ch'en (or is this a pseudonym? Sound it out!) pens a poignant elegy to his deceased cat: *Sacrifice to the cat that scared all the rats* *; Pangur Bán, clerk's companion; Jeoffry, Servant of the Living God; mysterious Macavity and Eliot's other Practical Cats, the seafaring cat who eloped with an owl, the cat with the county-wide grin; Puss in Boots, even Schrödinger's Cat has a poem to its name.

Cats have been celebrated in art from Ancient Egypt through to the present day, particularly in sculpture. However, when searching for painted images of cats, I was struck more by their absence. The first feline image I came across was of a hissing cat in a picture entitled *The Skate*, painted by Jean-Siméon Chardin. This was his initial offering to the Louvre in about 1725. Artists of this period would introduce a living creature into their depictions of still life; in this case a cat which seems to be protecting

the pile of shucked oysters on the table. However, there were but few more. The Japanese painter Utugawa Hiroshige II offered *A white cat playing with string* which hangs in Minneapolis; Franz Marc painted *The White Cat* in 1912. Some years later, Susan Valadon painted her favourite cat Raminou, who is looking directly at the artist as she captures her personality. In Marc Chagall's painting *The Poet*, it is a huge blue cat that takes the eye. Much less whimsical is Picasso's rendition of *Cat catching a bird*, which captures something of the ferocity of the hunter and the panic of the struggling bird. Illustrators, however, could go to town on cats, probably far too many to mention, on book jackets, in children's literature and in popular prints, often given to anthropomorphism. In Louis Wayne's *The Bachelor's Party*, the bachelors line up with bottles of catsup and 'Old Tom'. Rather them than me. So, to close with a quotation and a riddle from David SmithWhite in his poem *Schrodinger's Cat*: "when is a cat not a cat?"** May the reader decide.

* <https://www.thegreatcat.org/cat-poems-sacrifice-cat-scared-rats-mei-yao-chen-1002-1060ad/>

** <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/schrodinger-s-cat/>



ADELE

Lovely piece on cats. I used to have 3 of my own. I'm definitely a cat person rather than a dog person. Really interesting read. Ideal to leave us dwelling on Schrödinger's cat which I have so often pondered.

(Loving the image at the end too, Ian 😊).

JENNY

Though, I'm not a cat lover, (hope we can still be friends after admitting to this), I did so enjoy reading this piece. Could you have made more of a cat's amazing hunting ability, particularly in the past when two or three cats could keep a farm or a ship or a factory free of vermin, due to the cat's desire to hunt for fun as well as for food? Or something of a cat's traditional role as a familiar to witches?

LESLEY

Being a cat lover (I have two of my own) I enjoyed reading this. All cats exhibit similar behaviours as you describe in the first part, yet they each have a unique personality.

As the saying goes “Dogs have masters, cats have servants”.
It was interesting that you couldn’t find any earlier paintings of cats.
I’m sure there must have been some - perhaps not by well-known artists?



IAN

Schrödinger’s Cat is my favourite fictional feline too.

Just to keep our website warm, I’m currently serialising *The Last of the Time Cats*. Read out to WWG a year or two back, some of our present membership may either have forgotten it or never heard it.

<https://whitbywriters.com/2020/08/24/the-last-of-the-time-cats/>

VERONICA

...there are two words missing - I must have been distracted: para 2, line 5..whilst feeding our souls. Also, I think there's a typo somewhere. Thanks for the illustration!

(Ed: fixed. Can't find the typo. Might I have fixed it already?)

Ian Clark

The Art of Suffering for Art's Sake

A crisis in the world's financial markets hits more than just fat cats. To what extent was shown me recently when one of my favourite charities* announced a funding shortfall of nearly half a million pounds. Could its supporters save it from having to turn away needy people?

Living on the basic pension, my capacity to help out was somewhat limited. But that very same day another appeal arrived in my inbox, this time from a local art group who wanted models for their weekly life class. No prior experience was necessary: the only qualification was the ability to sit still for twenty minutes at a stretch. The fee offered was respectable, less perhaps than the proceeds of a coffee-morning, but without the effort of making cakes and having to be nice to people. All I had to do was to sit still and look pretty.

The decision was a no-brainer, I thought. But this turned out to be true in more ways than one. I've done a lot of silly things in my time, but up until then posing for a life class had not been one of them. I consulted my daughter, a trained illustrator, as to what the artists might be looking for. She complained that her life class had engaged just one model (female), whose skimpy figure had offered "nothing to draw". I concluded that my capabilities must be ample by comparison and volunteered my services, stressing that my body could best be described as interesting rather than beautiful.

To my mingled satisfaction and alarm my offer was seized upon and I made my way the following Saturday to the undercroft of a church located in the depths of darkest Scarborough.

Who would not be daunted by the prospect of being the only unclothed person in a room full of silent people – and what is more, the centre of attention? How would I ever manage to stay still for that length of time? What if I needed to sneeze, or perform some other bodily function? It was then that I began to feel my age. With advancing years comes a measure of insensitivity: I realised I had embarked on something for which as recently as ten years ago I would not have had the nerve. Certainly nothing would have compelled me to earn my living this way. But having taken part in some spectacular stunts to publicise a good cause, seeing colleagues dress up as polar bears and mermaids to the same end, I felt the insertion of a steely core in the backbone to stiffen my resolve.

I've seen life drawings which show a huddled figure clearly suffering the effects of cold, or possibly a hangover. I wasn't cold – they'd given me a blow-fire all to myself which blew zephyrs over my bare skin – so I felt I could manage something more interesting. "Are you sure you can maintain that position?" said the leader of the class doubtfully.

Now I am no stranger to sitting cross-legged, but after five minutes I became aware of significant differences from my normal attitude of meditation. The padded coverlet beneath me was a lot thinner than the cushions I support myself with, besides which it

tried to slide on the Formica tables pushed together to form my plinth, throwing my weight onto one ankle. Soon the moderate discomfort turned into stabbing pain.

Determined not to change my position and thus spoil the work of a dozen good people who were staring at me intently, I kept silent and cast about for something to take my mind off my musculo-skeletal distress. I'm not a man to pray all that much, but I made the interesting discovery that two Mysteries of the Holy Rosary, silently recited, knocked the middle out of twenty minutes.

I rose to take my break with a stretch and a crackle of sinews, which drew looks of pity. All too soon however it was back to work.

"The same pose again... please?"

Fortunately my emergency kit included a spare handkerchief. From this I twisted a ring-pad for my angry ankle, thus reducing the sharp pain to a dull ache.

This time I had plenty to occupy my mind. A survey of what the class had painted revealed an undeniable consistency of treatment. Far from being the ill-used plaything of a dozen wannabe Picassos, the prevalent style of my portrayal was stunningly realistic. It compelled me to realise I was not the man I was. Indolent retirement had robbed me of my slim boyish figure, something my bathroom mirror had been lying to me about. Viewed in profile, my squatting position likened me to a sack of flour. I began mentally to count calories and consider what indulgences I could forego without life losing all its meaning.

"You were brilliant!" the leader exclaimed at the end of the session, though whether it was genuine praise or robust encouragement I wasn't sure. But I've since been back for further sessions and, as the infant Thackeray famously put it, the agony has somewhat abated.

What of the charity itself, whose plight had struck me so keenly? All I need say here is this. It exists to alleviate a national scandal. Were the facts known, a lot more people might be ready to give their time and energy to stop it happening. Though not necessarily to spend Saturday afternoons squatting nude in front of a classful of artists, each staring intently past a held-up pencil!

* *Freedom From Torture*, <https://www.freedomfromtorture.org/>



ADELE

I take my hat off to you Ian for being bold enough to have a go at this and then to write about and share the experience. What an entertaining read. It is always a surprise to see how other people see us, and not always for the better. I love your take on the process - both the pain and the humour. Great stuff!

JENNY

A brave act to support a very deserving cause. I have done some life modelling myself in the past and can well sympathise with the agonising pain that sometimes ensues from the simple activity of sitting still. The only thing to carry you through it, being the now rather old-fashioned, "stiff upper lip". Not having had a religious background, I used to count in sevens up to seven hundred and then backwards down again and can recommend this if you tire of the Mysteries of the Holy Rosary.

LESLEY

An enjoyable (?) anecdote of suffering for a good cause - to help alleviate the real suffering of others. What more can I say except that next time we all meet up I'll try not to think of you sitting there in your Birthday Suit.



(Ed: So grateful!)

VERONICA

I really enjoyed this and admire your courage and determination. Our daughter did the same whilst at uni. Ironic that having to 'sit still for twenty minutes at a stretch' is the last thing you are permitted to do!

Adele Duffield

Qisaruatsiaq

She was no base Omega
fished for a living
lived alone, abandoned herself
Qisaruatsiaq

She built snow homes come Winter
angered her sons
with obstinacy and stealth
Qisaruatsiaq

Pinch periods brough hunger
but she was resourceful
with empty nets, stole fish to survive
Qisaruatsiaq

Disappeared one day from her fishing spot
Her youngest felt it, deep
he tracked her by day and night
Qisaruatsiaq

His keen nose sniffed out her scent
following footprints
first booted, then barefoot
Qisaruatsiaq

Her footprints grew smaller
the young pup grew fearful, for the right foot
was human, the left was not
Qisaruatsiaq

He watches out for her daily
senses her watching him hunting caribou
the tribe tell children tales of *Canis lupus*
Qisaruatsiaq



JENNY

I first came across this legend when researching the Inuit. Frankly, I was mystified by it then and now. However, I think it is about growing old and clinging onto independence, even if it involves falling out with your family, isolating yourself and a bit of underhand dishonesty. Qisaruaatsiaq is helped to cope with this by the intervention of the supernatural, turning partly into a wolf to regain some of her former power. I think, or am I completely on the wrong track?

LESLEY

Not being sure if this was something from your imagination or not (but a very odd name to dream up for a person) I looked up some information on this tale and found it is an old Inuit story.

You have retold it in a poetic/blank verse form. Just one criticism - having read the short story online I think the last verse is not quite right. It says "He...senses her watching him hunting caribou". In the original story I read it as the woman, now wolf, who was hunting for food.

I am curious as to how you came across this strange tale. 🐾

IAN

Inuits are related to native Americans – and this weird tale is not unlike a pre-Columbian legend, or one from Lapland, or the Asian steppes. Just because the wilderness is right outside your back door doesn't mean it's less terrifying to you than it is to us in England. Indeed more so... you get to hear more stories.

VERONICA

How on earth do you pronounce this? A lovely poem and intriguing. Is this woman or beast? I had to look her up: Inuit woman turned wolf, which is actually the conclusion I'd reached by the end of the last verse, apart from the amazing picture. You seem to inhabit her world with her. Well done and thanks for a new fable.

Malcolm Johnstone

Farming in Africa, 2020

When you live and farm two hours from your main shopping town and an hour from an indifferent Health Centre and employ 200 workers, life can be stressful and challenging.

I arrived in Zimbabwe at the end of March for two weeks, just at the start of the coronavirus epidemic, and stayed two and a half months. Whilst there I witnessed three different and tricky occasions which needed immediate action.

Joseph the gardener without authority cut off a wrong branch and fell from the tree onto the concrete path below and severely damaged his back. He was taken to the Central Town Hospital and was diagnosed as paralysed, but due to the shortage of doctors no further help was available. We were advised to take him to the Rehabilitation Centre. A friend provided a wheelchair and after two weeks an ambulance arrived and with care carried Joseph from his house on a stretcher and carefully placed him in the ambulance, where the nurse gave him some water and took his blood pressure. Then he left for the Rehabilitation Centre.

Joseph had not been there long before requests came for gloves, dressings, bedsheets and a catheter. He is still at the Rehabilitation Centre.

A cow was having difficulty calving which ended in a prolapse situation, so with no vet for miles around, the owner of the farm with the help of the cattle headman went to work and after an hour and a half in the crush both cow and calf were saved, followed by very careful needle work. Both survived.

An elderly lady living on the farm had a heart attack, so she was rushed to the nearest doctor, who was over an hour away on a bumpy road. She was seen by the doctor, given some pills and sent home. She too survived.

And here we worry about wearing a mask.



ADELE

Nice to see an entry from you Malcolm. You've obviously been continuing your life-long experiences from Zimbabwe - even if this one wasn't planned to be quite so long! Three very different and quite troubling experiences - puts Covid-19 mask wearing issues in the Western world into perspective. We all live, learn and react to our own acclimatised world, which is just as well, because what seems shocking to us, may be everyday life to others and taken quite in their stride. Thanks for sharing. I would have loved even more detail.

JENNY

Your simple factual style works well for me, allowing the reader to feel pity or interest, without guidance from the writer. Three contrasting stories of life-changing injury, of birth and of defying death. The use of the word 'survived' is good because it is so different from the word 'recovered' which we might have used in talking about such situations in England.

LESLEY

Nice to have you back safely, Malcolm.

What an eventful stay in Zimbabwe. The people accept so much less than we take for granted: "after two weeks an ambulance arrived"!

How true that we worry about relatively minor inconveniences and yet people criticise the NHS. Despite the fact that we have a free health care service, even though it is struggling, we have so much to be thankful for.

Here was I, complaining about a disastrous day at a conference. 😞

IAN

Just where did they think Joseph's employer was going to obtain a catheter? Happened to have a few spare in the medicine cabinet?

Imagine it getting that bad in Britain... "Your dad needs urgent treatment – please send ventilator."

VERONICA

An eye opener. Having come from Stevenage, Whitby felt a bit like the back of beyond, with the moors a huge stretch of little habitation (though Sleights have an excellent surgery and dispensary). We soon got used to it. This is a different situation altogether and puts our small concerns into perspective. We have an air ambulance to fall back on and we don't have to provide our own medical equipment. Thank you for a clear and unadorned account, Malcolm.

Lesley Pemberton

Creative Writing Day

Re-reading a short crime story I had written some time ago prompted me to write about my experiences of a Creative Writing Day (CWD). This is not something I intend to publish but may be of interest to fellow writers.

The CWD was - and I think still is - held in conjunction with the Harrogate Crime Writing Festival, now called the Theakston Old Peculier Crime Writing Festival, Harrogate. (That is spelled correctly; if you haven't heard of 'Old Peculier' it is a beer brewed by Theakstons in Masham, North Yorkshire.) The first CWD was held a couple of years after the Festival's beginnings on the Thursday prior to the weekend's main events. Having seen it advertised, I decided to attend because, at the time, I was taking up fiction writing again. I was attending a Creative Writing weekly class for adults at the local Nidderdale High School and Harrogate, where the Festival is held, is about half an hour's drive from where I live.

The cost for the day was £100, which I suppose was the going rate for a Day Conference at the time (2004). So I was expecting great things and hoping to learn something to help with my writing. How wrong I was!

It was a hot summer day in July when I drove to the Crown Hotel in the centre of Harrogate. The hotel is at the lower end of Cold Bath Road on its own 'island', surrounded by roads. Ironically, I could have done with a cold bath that day!

First problem - the hotel car park is very small and this wasn't helped by the fact that two large vans were taking up about half of the space whilst people were unloading stuff, presumably for the Conference/Festival. No parking spaces were available. The nearest long stay car parks were at least half a mile away and car parking charges are horrendous in Harrogate.

The alternative was to park on a nearby road, which I did, but this was 'pay and display' meters with a time limit of 2 hours. That meant I would have to move the car to another spot at regular intervals but I decided I could do that in the 'breaks'. The cost was still considerable but at least I didn't have a long walk in the heat.

Further problems arose during the day intensifying my view that the CWD was poorly organised. The event was held in a large room on the ground floor and there must have been nigh on 200 people there, seated in rows to face the presenters at the front.

It was very warm in the room and, as you may imagine, it got hotter and hotter as the day wore on with all those bodies in there. Live bodies of course! Well, I hope everyone was still alive at the end of the day.

Air conditioning? No, not in an old building. Windows opened? Yes but the noise from the traffic circling the hotel was very loud and the windows had to be closed.

Someone had the bright idea of bringing in a number of large floor-standing electric fans later in the day. That helped to cool the room temperature a little. However, the noise factor was still a problem and it was difficult to hear the presenters, even before fans were installed. I was sitting near the front during the morning and I could barely hear, despite the fact that my hearing was good at that time. Maybe it was one of the ways for the organisers to save some expense but there was no microphone/sound

system. It really was needed in a room of that size, regardless if there was no extraneous noise.

It must have been one of the organisers who welcomed everyone and gave an outline of what would be happening. No 'health and safety' information such as fire exits, no directions to the toilets, but it was reinforced that during the mid-morning and mid-afternoon breaks tea/coffee or a cold soft drink could be purchased at £2 each. What! £2 per drink (no free refills), no biscuits - that seemed a lot to pay even at hotel prices, in 2004, and I expected when the CWD cost £100 the refreshments would be included. Oh, lunch was included but more of that fiasco later.

Referring to the £100 cost again, I thought we may get at least a free pen and maybe a small notepad. Bought in bulk these work out at just a few pence each. What did we get? A free, small, round cardboard beer mat advertising Theakstons. Obviously provided by the Brewery. A photocopied A4 sheet of paper with the programme for the day; no nice little printed booklet which might have been a keepsake.

As for the presenters - I can only remember one name, that of Lee Child, who was the first speaker. He was reasonably interesting but his agenda was to talk about his books and the up-and-coming one to be published. No particular information that would help would-be writers. He and the other speakers - apart from one - were of the same ilk. They were not teachers/orators but just ordinary blokes spouting forth about their own publications. Yes - blokes, men - no female writers presenting a session, despite the fact that there are many good female crime writers! I hadn't heard of the other writers and they certainly had no lasting impression on me. I mentioned one exception - the last speaker of the morning - but I can't recall his name. He was a Lecturer in Creative Writing (I think at Leeds University) and his professional approach was in contrast to the others. He did provide some points of interest relevant to creative writing. The only worthwhile session of the day.

Then it was time for the free (yippee!) lunch and there was a mad rush to get out of the hot room and into the long queue. As I mentioned earlier, I was sitting near the front of the room so no chance of getting near the front of the queue. Anyway I needed to move the car again, to be guarded by a different parking meter, having moved it once already during the morning break. When I returned to the hotel, the queue had diminished a little but I was one of the stragglers near the end.

Lunch purportedly consisted of a cold buffet with salads and some meats and cheese, maybe a few other things like quiche, if I remember correctly. No starters were apparent but there were some desserts. Drinks had to be bought as extras - not even any cold tap water available for free! I say 'purportedly' because by the time I reached the buffet tables I thought a plague of locusts must have descended beforehand. Either that or the hotel had not catered for enough people, or catered meagrely or - probably the actual reason - the people who got there first piled their plates high as mountains, not leaving enough for the remaining delegates. The catering staff were not forthcoming in replenishing the buffet for us poor souls in the latter part of the queue.

I managed to find a few scraps of salad and a morsel of meat (cold ham) but the desserts had disappeared by then, just a few cake crumbs mocking us. I considered scavenging food from some of the plates people had left but thought that wasn't very

decorous. The only other thing I could do was pay out more money for a much needed drink.

There was a little time left before the afternoon sessions started so I wandered around and found a smallish room occupied by some booksellers. I ventured in with a mustered smile only to be greeted extremely curtly by a woman who said, "We're not open yet, we're setting up today. Come back tomorrow." No polite apology that books were not on sale 'today'. Gritting my teeth - by now I was very disgruntled at the whole thing - I said "I won't be here tomorrow" and walked out. What a missed opportunity, I thought, surely they would have made quite a few sales if they'd been better organised.

However I was offered another freebie on the way back to the conference room. Sad to say it wasn't much use to me. A couple of people manning a table with 'Writing' magazine were giving away free copies. At the time I subscribed to that magazine so already had the copy. I took one anyway; I could give it to someone else in my writing class.

Entering the main room again, most of the seats were already taken except for a few at the back. Perhaps people who had been sitting at the back in the morning hadn't been able to hear a thing so they decided it may be better near the front. The fans were still whirring loudly, the temperature was still overwhelming, the afternoon speakers were still as boring as three of the morning ones had been. This was supposed to be a presentation by someone about publishing and a literary agent. No chance of hearing most of what they were saying but what little I could hear did nothing to inspire me.

I think I lasted about an hour; it was too hot, it was a disastrous effort at 'Creative Writing', it was totally disorganised. Armed with my free beer mat, free magazine and my own pen and notepad, I slunk out. I'd had enough. At least I wouldn't have to find another parking space and pay a further parking fee.

Literally, I headed home for the hills.

My criticisms of the event are not just based on my feelings about the CWD, although I can't imagine how it was a good experience for anyone attending that day.

During my career I was Vice-Chair of a specialist national nursing association for many years and, in later years, of a European nursing association. One of my roles in that capacity was to organise conferences ranging from a day to a week so I know how to go about it. A lot of work is entailed before, during and afterwards. I also arranged some day conferences for my place of work, inviting people from all around the UK.

I got the impression that the CWD was not organised or managed well and that the organisers wanted to make as much money as possible out of it. Yes, funds can be raised by hosting conferences but that should not be to the detriment of delegates' welfare or 'education'. The Crime Writing Festival is well-sponsored and attracts people from all over the world.

The organisers have to pay for room hire etc., and, presumably, pay their speakers a fee. They get a special rate from the hotel. It doesn't take a maths genius to deduce that £100 fee paid by each delegate was mostly creamed off by the organisers. What would it cost to provide refreshments? Surely they could have been included? I would guess that

the lunch may have been costed at around £5 per head (for a somewhat meagre buffet at that), but this would be recouped largely by charging £2 per person per drink. Assuming that most, if not all, would want a drink during the breaks, especially on a hot day, it would mean that it was only costing the organisers approx £1 per person to pay towards the lunch. Do you see where I'm heading with this?

If 200 people pay £100 each, that's £20,000. Organisers pay out for room hire, etc., as mentioned before. Yet no free drinks (or refills!), no inexpensive pen/notepad, no nice little conference programme, no attempt to provide suitable acoustics so that delegates could actually hear the presenters.

Disaster, disaster, disaster!

A waste of my time and money.

I wrote to the organisers afterwards, expressing my criticisms (aiming to put them in a constructive way). What reaction did I get? Absolutely none, not even an acknowledgement of my letter.

If they made a considerable profit from the CWD, how much more did they make from the three day Festival that followed? Hundreds of people attend the event and pay for a full three day ticket or one/two days or separate sessions.

I hope they aren't bleating this year because the Festival couldn't be held, apart from some things online.

To end on a positive note, I attended a session - just one - at the Crime Writing Festival another year, which was to hear Kathy Reichs speak. She is one of my favourite authors, a Forensic Anthropologist from the USA, who writes fictional stories loosely based on some of her own experiences. I have all of her books plus a later series 'Virals' co-written with her son Brendan. The 'Virals' stories are aimed at the older teens/young adult market but I found them a good read. The TV series 'Bones' was inspired by Kathy's books, but does differ in some ways.

Now, that session I attended was worthwhile and I bought a hardback book which Kathy Reichs signed. Its pages have never been turned because I want to keep it in pristine condition. You never know, as a signed copy it may be worth more than its face value at some time in the future. I bought the paperback version to read.

That was value for money in my eyes.

Lesley Pemberton; 19/08/20

ADELE

I've never been on a big creative writing day like this and, given your example, would be very inquisitive before embarking upon one! What a shame the whole experience was a shambles. I've been on several, more local, writing retreats for the day with lovely lunches, plenty of coffee/tea/biscuits all day and beautiful settings

with ample free parking on site. Not with the famous guest speakers perhaps, but nonetheless with some inspirational writing exercises to get the creative juices flowing - and all for around £35/40 for the day. It's a shame some people are more about profit than provision.

JENNY

"When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions," or as my grandmother always said, "troubles come in threes". For Lesley- inadequate parking, poor food and uninspiring speakers. An interesting piece for we aspiring writers and of course salutary lesson, as a £100 is a lot of money to pay for a course, especially when you end up hot, cross and hungry. I think I would possibly have missed out the section on your own experience of arranging conferences, or perhaps have shortened it? A good positive tone in the final paragraph.

IAN

I once used to travel around England exhibiting educational products at exhibitions and conferences. Alas, Lesley's experience was not untypical of the more backward provincial towns (I place Liverpool in that bracket). Some civic stuffed-shirt looks up the going rate nationwide for a conference fee, or an exhibition booth, with pound-signs in their eyes: "Coo, can we charge *all that?*" Ignoring the fact the punters are going to expect more than sausage rolls and ham sandwiches – that's not his department. The attitude is (or was – and I'm going back 30 years) "what's good enough for a bun-fight at the Colliery is surely good enough for a jolly in the book trade – after all, who reads *books?*"

Still, you'd expect Theakstons to be able to organise a p*ss-up in a brewery!

VERONICA

Lesley, I found myself drinking O.P. yesterday - the White House doesn't sell Guinness - so very topical - it sounds as though you could have done with one on the day you describe. I like your sense of humour, looking back on what seems to have been quite a grim experience, even with live bodies! One typo towards the end (if/of). I'm glad your experience of the festival was redeemed somewhat later.