

Review of the WSW - Thursday 10 January 2019

Richard Buxton introduced Melanie Whipman who presented us with a useful, thought provoking and stimulating Short Story Masterclass. More about Melanie and her talk at the end of these minutes.

Alison once more produced brilliant half time refreshments. Others raved about the lemon drizzle cake, but for me it's got to be a good year when there are home-made Cornish fairings to go with the tea and coffee.

Notices and Reminders:

1. Next month's meeting, Thursday 14 February, Manuscript surgery and Open Mic. Could be romantically themed, or not. Members who are willing to contribute 1500 words for surgery please email by 27 January.
2. Members Flash300 competition, to be judged by Tracy Fells. See WSW website for details. Deadline 28 February.
3. Slipstream Poets (Local society) Open Poetry Competition – details at www.slipstream-poets.co.uk Deadline 28 February.
4. Binsted Arts (another local society) and the South Downs Poetry Festival collaborating in one poetry competition. Details at <https://www.binsted.org/poetry-comp-19> Deadline 29 March.
5. Richard ? needs a script for South Down Film Makers, 5 to 15 minutes long, title "A change in direction."
6. Two book signings - I didn't get details, sorry.

There was a raffle, I didn't win anything. Of course.

Poetry Competition Results

Third – Liz Eastwood, *'Locked In'*.

Second – Liz Jennings, *'Just Another Summer Day.'*

First – Audrey Lee – *'Jocasta Speaks'*

Audrey gave a moving reading of her poem.

Short Story Workshop – Melanie Whipman

About her: Melanie is a successful short story writer, an editor and a teacher. She has an impressive list of academic achievements including a doctorate in which she investigated 'How to read a short story collection.' Her debut short story collection *Llama Sutra*, published 2016, won the Rubery International Award the following year. Find out more at her website:

<https://www.melaniewhipman.com>

Melanie showed us some quotes to encourage us to be prepared to write freely, then edit severely.

Flannery O'Connor – I write to see what I say.

Virginia Woolf – 'Diamonds of the Dustheap'

Joyce Carol Oates – Most empowering gift you can give yourself is entitlement to write roughly ... badly ..

Melanie liked Coleridge's definition of poetry – best words in best order – felt it applied to stories too.

Considered differences between commercial and literary fiction, and different genres of both. Table summarises differences Melanie suggested.

Commercial	Literary
simple quick read	leaves space for the reader, author decides what to leave out
metaphorical hamburger	metaphorical Michelin **** meal
Jeopardy likely to be 'physical world'.	Jeopardy likely to be emotional
Plot driven	Character driven
May be simpler characters eg stereotypes in some crime fiction	Personal or inner conflict demands complexity of character
Aim – entertainment	Aim - art
Puts reader first	Puts craft/artistry first

Genres – domestic realism, surreal, fantasy, magic realism, crime, uncanny, twist in the tale (that's her spelling – made me think). Slice of life or neatly plotted?

We were asked to discuss what makes a good (short) story:

Some of the answers – Hook, (sustained) voice, perspective, unexpected, a problem, jeopardy, emotion, story establishes world quickly. It needs 'to land' although finish can be open ended, story arc.

Some specific points –

Not too many characters, Rule of thumb – 1500 words, max 3 named characters.

Open ended stories (more likely in literary fiction) may resonate longer. Lyrical stories are open ended (unlike epical ones).

Begin in middle of action (*in media res*), anticipate events (*prolepsis – he was a dead man when he entered*).

Twist in tale must have signposts (reader recognises in hindsight).

Dialogue (and description) must move story on.

Two more quotes:

Mark Bradbury: The power to create and develop character is at the heart of all fiction.

Aristotle – Consistent Inconsistencies:

- Avoid generalities, clichés and stereotypes
- Be particular and specific
- Credible characters are usually inconsistent and have personality traits that conflict.

Just like clichés, stereotypes break our belief in the story.

We were asked to create a character by giving him/her a name, and completing three sentences for them: I want, I fear....., My most important possession is.....

After the break Melanie quoted Linda Anderson. ... can reveal character..... details of space they inhabit and possessions they've chosen. Belongings act as an index to character.

Melanie showed slides of a deerstalker, moustache wax, knitting needles and wool, an old Jaguar and discussed how they not only identified fictional detectives, but gave clues to their personality. The slides also demonstrated how popular crime fiction is with members of WSW.

We were asked to describe an object our character possessed in as much detail as we could, from as many aspects as possible

Melanie asked us how many of us had used metaphor (most).

She quoted Jane Hirschfield – The ability to plunge one thing into the shape or nature of another is a fundamental gesture of creative insight, part of how we make for ourselves a world more expansive, deft and fertile, more startling in richness.

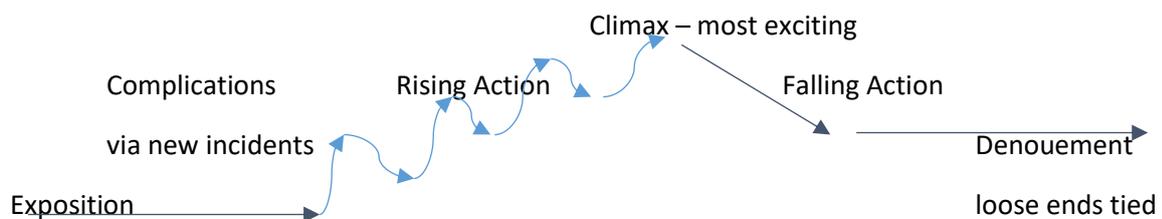
Melanie gave examples then warned that metaphors must be in keeping with the protagonist.

McKee – true character is only expressed through choices in dilemma. The greater the pressure the truer and deeper into who the character is.

As a follow up task we were asked to create a plot for/from/through the character we had developed. Melanie asked us to show our character looking for their possession, and thus to reveal physicality and emotions as they searched.

Two final points:

Remember Freytag's Pyramid



Character + Conflict = Plot

Wendy Swarbrick