

TLC Showcase

Denise Larking Coste



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Introduction

My association with TLC started in 2007, when I participated in two sessions which were part of a writing workshop that took place on the Greek island of Skyros. One was given by Richard Skinner on the novel, and the other by Becky Swift on the publishing world.

After this illuminating experience with the two TLC tutors, I decided to submit the novel I was working on for a fully-fledged TLC critique. Becky tries to match up writer and reader and I think this is absolutely essential for the assessment to be of real value. I received a detailed, frank and encouraging critique of my work, which led to a comprehensive re-edit. On the strength of this, I've just decided to submit this manuscript to a competition for women novelists.

My relationship with TLC developed further, when I decided to participate in the first TLC Adventure in Spain last year. Poetry was not on the official agenda, but I decided at the last minute to bring some of the poems I was working on all the same. An opportunity might arise to get some feedback – and poetry was my writing priority at the time. I could stand on the mountain side and read them out to myself if nothing else – maybe even find some punter to listen – or a bi-lingual Spanish goat. When we arrived at Casa Ana I saw that a poetry reading was to take place on the threshing circle at sunset: my luck was in. And Becky Swift said she'd be delighted to give me a tutorial on poetry rather than the official work theme of prose.

Becky's critique of a selection of my poems was deep and searching: she made me see what was working and what wasn't and why. Thus when The Literateur poetry competition was announced a couple of months later, I decided to submit three poems – and was long-listed which led to my being one of the writers selected for this TLC/Staple Magazine Showcase.

Prose

Leaving is part of a series of poetry and prose pieces called “I’m on way”, devoted to the theme of loving and leaving – both places and people.

Leaving

You will slip his head through the collar and tighten it a little – over the silk, the silk – and set him in his travel bag, pushing a bit from behind as he baulks and then together you will walk to the station - swing, swing across the public gardens light and shade covering, un-covering you as you go, enjoying this moment even in sadness the symmetry of the lines of limes, the autumn flowers cut by dust paths and on to the station and the train we journeyed in together so often the cat at our feet, and you will arrive at the country station and make your way a little wearily to the car park and drive to the house. Not seeing much until the hill just before Nohant, the view down to the right, the Blue Valley spreading, claiming a change in landscape with its many meadows and its many trees and the opening up of space, stretching wide on all sides the sky suddenly bigger, taller catching our breath... and then the drive through the cobbled streets of our market town and out into a hillier, wilder region - here every turn and shape in the road known until the final turn left and the lane and hedgerows and copses and every single piece of this picture known - every piece in every season known and seen through and through - then up the dirt track to our house – awaiting our return, silent, welcomingly blue shuttered and you will push the gate open - always a pause here - the cat let out of its bag and the surge of place, a throng: thickness of bush, lawn, field sloping to the pond under the oak and the view, the view of tree and tree and field and field and copse and copse and white dotted hills - cows and sheep and clouds wandering amiably over the top - and all those summer meals under the lime coming back and all those winter nights beside the fire coming back books music conversations. And all that to be taken away by me and now that I leave is to know me. And I, far away, will sit on my bed and think. Think of this, my shoulders bowed, my hands posed, lonely, on my thighs. I will see this journey as if I had journeyed with you. I will stare at my feet, and sit transfixed like a hare in a field, motionless.

Poetry

Evergreen

Maybe we should let this wind ruffle our hair as it does
water on a summer's day maybe we should hand it
to one another wind on ungloved fingertips touching
withdrawing as it does on water water searching
for the wind's hands – quite drunk - to cool her down
now moving delightedly through grass to be
flattened by those soft hands still wet with water.
We lie back damp arms entwined branches reach down
draw words on our foreheads close our eyes
how wind grass water come together holding
us - this is right as it should be and on to
day's end grass bouncing under bare feet
wandering back along water's edge the clean grasp of
weeping willows - we push aside green lace
our holy place our vows our promise for ever and
ever secret secret promise promise maybe evergreen.

She-wolf

Hours pacing icy landscapes - an odd couple
the male older and scruffy she smooth and sleek -
seeking shelter in forests of firs.
Pacing through snow discarding oak leaf imprints
under dark, spent trees.
Speeding feline lovers sun sagging, limping west-wards
impatient dusk just ahead.
Twilight quickening, running faster - she's off course -
his throaty bark coming just too late her body
already on the neck of the crevasse, falling,
hooked by glittering stalactites - a transient jewel.
His bark joining her cry – a mouth-full –
her last lament grounding him
now on his haunches, head back, moon clipped ears,
howling through night, astride black trees
riding through them like a warrior.

Lips

Clouds blotting her lips curled around tiny teeth
she is smiling she is drinking pulling
the lip of the glass to her mouth: fizzy.
Pink and petulant he thinks looking at her now
moving across the lawn to the well taking its lid off
the little dog running over to her, barking - she kneels beside him
quaintly smiling saying "sit" and he sits: darling one she laughs
the well swaying a little to one side.
Come the man called, loving her laughter running to
her dipping cherry lips into his: dizzy.
Glass thrown down the well taking a breath taking a break -
time suspended - and splintered below.
Above the air swings around blotting out clouds
her lips still sipping curling now saying
"lie down" to the dog who lies down and laughs.
Come he called loving her smile and she running to
his watching by the well, standing close: sexy.
Well still swaying a little as she laughs again
and the little dog begins to cry.

Prose

No man's land

(Prologue to a novel "The Stranger in my House")

When friends ask her if she ever feels nervous when taking her long, solitary walks across the countryside, she is always surprised. Nervous? Held, here, in the arms of nature? She shakes her head and smiles.

Until recently. Recently she's had the feeling that she is being watched or followed. The sudden crack of a twig - perhaps a branch being cautiously pushed aside and falling back? There it is again today: the twig snap. Silence. Heat. The hottest summer they'd had in years.

White cows, patterned with shade. Sun beating fields brown, burning trees: where was the green? A stricken landscape as if touched by some epidemic...where were the streams running through cool thickets, the sweep, the outspreading of it all, a soft, indulgent sun - the kind shade: growth? She feels oppression, as if something momentous is about to happen. To the Earth. To mankind.

Maybe it was the heat of that particular summer, that precipitated things, that gave an urgency to what had to be done. It was now – or perhaps never – as in times of war. As for this scorched earth, one blade of a farmer's tool, one rod of lightning on an upturned stone could set fire to it all...it could become hell. It could become an inferno.

A twig snaps again – she jumps, then laughs to herself, how silly one can be. Afraid? Here in the...Today the heat really seems...to close in on her as she walks through the familiar little wood about a mile from home. Her feet scuff the fallen leaves, dry and brittle as in autumn. Another sound. The sound of other feet shuffling dry leaves? She is being followed. She turns, quickly looking back. No one to be seen. Why this fear suddenly? It could be...who could it be? On all her walks through this wood, across these fields, she has never met a living soul. Just the sound of a combine harvester, and sometimes, when she walks westwards on a clear day, the distant toll of the village church bell calling out the hour. Time did pass, even in this timeless place.

Perhaps, if she had given things a little thought, she could have seen it coming. She quickens her pace, silly, but she wants to get back, home. Faster, faster... She suddenly feels that she is walking towards her... and then it comes, so quickly, the burnt leaves crackling like flames, steps

accelerating, someone running behind her, upon her, she turning, the blow, arms outstretched as she falls, mouth opening in a scream, then darkness, the dry ground under her parted lips releasing a rivulet of blood, staining her chin, her white T-shirt, the earth.

About the Writer

Denise Larking Coste was born in Scotland and has been living in Paris for over 30 years. She was lucky to have Michel Lederer champion a collection of short stories she'd published in English, and translate them into French (he is Michael Ondaatje's French translator). These were published by Editions Le Reflet and sold well in France and she was interviewed for the Breakfast Television programme of France 2. Her writing has also been featured in Frank, the international literary journal and other magazines and collections. In 2009 she was invited to run a workshop on short story writing at the Faculty of English of the University of Seibu in Romania.



In November 2010 she was long-listed for the poetry competition organized by The Literateur magazine in the UK. She has just finished a novella in French and a novel in English, both of which she is trying to publish, and is now working on her first poetry collection. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, London.