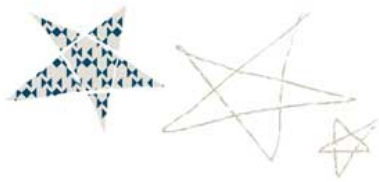


TLC Showcase

Ann Bone



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Introduction to *After Anjelica (detail)*, *Circulade* and *The Paradise Project*

As a one-time political scientist – academic researcher and policy unit wonk – my great challenge in writing fiction was shedding both analytical thinking and the hypnotic rhythms of the great nineteenth-century novels I grew up with, particularly the Russian ones. Dashiell Hammett was a great antidote. But it was quite a journey, so it took me some time to write my first novel, *After Anjelica (detail)*. Of course, I thought I had got there when I sent the script to TLC. No such luck. As Anna South sympathetically wrote in her report, ‘You’ve achieved a huge amount getting this far, and are now in an excellent position to sit back and contemplate the manuscript from a deliberately objective stance.’ In other words, a lot still to do!

Anna’s lengthy report was incredibly helpful and without it I could never have made the novel good enough to be taken on by Quartet and published in 2009.

So there was only one way to improve my next novel – more of a novella really – *Circulade*, set in a village in south-west France, where I lived for a while and visited often. Another perceptive TLC report, and another one of those comments: ‘Therefore, in the report which follows, I will focus on the aspects of the novel which, in my view, need enriching and developing.’ In other words, a lot still to do!

What I have discovered with TLC is that one thing leads to another – and another. No sooner was *Circulade* thoroughly revised, and novel number three started, than a new chapter opened. TLC’s conference ‘Writing in a Digital Age’ and the TLC Pen Factor competition gave me the chance to present my work in progress, *The Paradise Project*, set in Oxfordshire, to an audience and a panel of seven canny publishing experts. It was fun, and it was very helpful. But it was not the end.

Having travelled with me from a lost twentieth-century Hampstead, to a millennial south-west France, to contemporary Oxfordshire – its way of life beset by an excess of celebrities, and in the novel by a celebrated Devil as well – TLC is taking me into unmaterial space (to borrow a word from Unmaterial Books, my fledgling imprint for publishing ebooks). There is a plan for a Hackday when Media Futures will hammer out ways in which the projects presented at the TLC/Pen Factor event can be digitally filled out into three dimensions, or is it four, or is it more ...?

I am nervous. Looking at the amazing Profile Books/Inkle *Frankenstein* app, where each new paragraph depends on the reader's choice, I realize that all those alternative sequences the author once rejected in favour of a chosen path, all those alternative endings that didn't seem to work as well as the one that was opted for, will suddenly take on new life. It's the unwinding and rewinding of the writing process. Yet the author will still be an invisible guide. It's not so much the death of the author – that was so twentieth century – as the author's unmaterialization. I am nervous. But I have TLC to hold my hand.

Extracts from *After Anjelica (detail)*, *Circulade* and *The Paradise Project*, by Ann Bone

Extracts: Three Novels, Three Places

From ***After Anjelica (detail)***, set in a lost twentieth-century Hampstead

Dusk is a time when other people draw their curtains against the night, enclosing themselves in the safety of their lighted rooms. That is no longer for me. I stand outside the French windows of my living room, framed by the glow of its lamps, facing the deepening shadows of the garden. Dusk comes earlier, and chillier, as autumn approaches. I welcome it – the sooner and colder the better.

A woman alone, with a lifetime of memories to confront. Behind me is the house where I grew up, a villa in Hampstead, in one of the most desired streets in London. It is painted white and beautifully proportioned. A rose climbs up the calm facade on this garden side, spreading itself obediently round the windows. The house shows no sign of danger or unrest. But there was deception here.

Beyond the splash of light singling me out, I can still see the features of the garden. On the right side an old brick wall separates me from my neighbours, solid enough to keep curiosity at bay. Down the left side runs a hedge and clusters of tall plants which serve the same purpose. Nearer to me is the apple tree, mature now, its angular branches hung with occasional fruit. Further on a large bay tree looms, dense green leaves turning to black as the day withdraws.

The wide lawn filling the rest of the garden continues to its end, seventy-five feet away. Receding into dimness, it rises over the contours of a grassy mound at its distant righthand corner. Then a low brick wall runs along the divide between this garden and the garden of the house on the far side. It is an unremarkable wall to be so threatening. It marks the direction from which vengeance will come.

The back of the house beyond has already sunk into obscurity. I do not need to see it to picture it. Where this house is stucco, that one is red brick; where this one stands alone, the other is in a terrace. Those are not the facts that matter. What I see through the cover of darkness are the black smudges across its brickwork – sooty fingerprints of wrongdoing. The emptied windows with their glass blown out

are mouths open in reproach. The fire ravaged the house, as if to complete what had been started. How was it that I came to steal a life? Especially one so dear to me. I am forced to ask myself the question. Did I not know that once a life is taken, it is gone – impossible to keep, and impossible to give back? In the daytime I can see things differently. It is when night comes that I am stalked by the truth.

There are rustles in the garden. I stay in my pool of light, without the right to hide. I have tried to predict who it will be, coming from the direction of the other house. Someone from the past we shared, that much is certain. The one person it can't be is Anjelica, no longer here to defend herself.

www.afteranjelica.com (published by Quartet, and in ebook soon)

From ***Circulade***, set in a village in south-west France
at the turn of the millennium

He went first to the upstream side of the bridge and leaned over the railing. A long way down, he saw the river tumbling green between jagged walls. On his left a waterfall poured out of a break in the rockface and hit the surface of the river, stirring it into a frenzy. On his right the foothills of the mountains were hunched round the gorge, covered in a dark green scrub. It was a primal scene. Just what he had hoped for.

Staring down from the bridge, Stephen saw a formation in the rock below him. Three cavities dug deep and black into a bleached white outcrop, giving it the likeness of a skull. The dead eyes stared back at him. The mouth almost grinned.

He wanted the rawness of this place to test him in ways he could not yet predict. He had come here for change. Stooped under the backpack, he walked round from the upper road bridge and on to the Pont de Diable. This was said to be the oldest medieval bridge in France. The village half a kilometre uphill from the river apparently had buildings even older than that, probably as old as a thousand years. And next year would be the millennium, the year 2000 – two thousand years of storms down this river, two thousand years of destruction and renewal.

Looking downstream from the bridge, Stephen could see more of the havoc caused by the storm. The river streaming out of the stone arch below him was dark green, almost black, the current at its centre slipping fast like a snake. He saw how, once out of the confines of the gorge, the water spread sideways to right and left, raking the stony beaches. Trees lay on their sides with roots torn from their anchorage. Piles of smaller branches were scattered among loose stones of all sizes, flung here and there on a lunar surface.

A particularly large tree had snapped in two and Stephen saw the current tug at its branches to free them from the trunk. Under them, a log-like object had been caught and held. It was dark and lumpy, strewn with weed. The eddies of the current worried at it until it was dislodged from the tangle of the tree. The heavy object was carried out towards the centre of the river. The shape held his attention. It was the length and breadth of a person. The oblong turned in a half-circle with the current. Then a strong pull of the water swept it into the middle of the pool. He tried to see if there was a head, or arms, or another way to be sure what it was. Maybe it was wrapped. The object started to travel steadily away from him, downriver. Further on there was a place where the beaches drew together again, channelling the water back into a race. The side of the object knocked against a stony tongue of beach near the bottleneck. For a moment it looked as if it might be caught and held once more. He would be able to go down from the bridge and investigate, if he dared. Stephen held his breath as the object hovered, half floating and half caught. Then the river snatched it up again, carried it on, and pitched it head first into the narrow race. Projecting stones broke up the swift flow, making the water bubble and spit. The body – he was increasingly certain it was a body – was jostled across the stones. Finally it was through. On the other side, it was taken by water that was steadier but still powerful. Its dead weight might be swept by the river all the way to the Mediterranean.

www.circulade.co.uk (in ebook soon)

From *The Paradise Project*, set in rural Oxfordshire

Lucas stood by his pool, his hand resting on the head of the stone cormorant he had bought for a great deal of cash. He stroked the cormorant's head and followed its gaze to the fishes circling below in the water. The predator's wings were half spread, its beak empty. Locked in stone, the creature was forever frustrated. It was a kind of hell to be frozen like that. Lucas understood. What's more, it kept the fishes scared.

There was a pleasure in small acts of cruelty.

He was proud of his newly acquired estate. The smooth green lawn travelled half an acre to arrive at the creamy Jacobean face of the Priory, its yellowing surface scrubbed away as part of the conversion. The chapel on its left had had a makeover too, though not everything could be changed. The monks were gone, but the row of chapel windows made praying shapes, holy arches with fingers touching at their tips. Lucas shuddered.

He gave a final stroke to the cormorant's head and continued by way of the herb garden. In late September the rosemary and sage were overgrown and straggly. They reached out of their orderly spaces and over the flagged paths to brush against his body. He grasped a handful of lavender and crushed it against his palm until it fell in shreds. The scent clogged in his nostrils, producing another moment of weakness. The monks might no longer be here in the flesh but they insinuated their presence in every dimension. He would have liked to have had the herb garden filled in, stifled, but he had to stop himself from getting carried away. His task in this place needed patience, even modesty.

About the Writer

According to Ann, writing fiction is a great way to explore the past but it hasn't really explained what took her from being a journalist on women's magazines, to a political scientist researching and writing reports on education and health, to a freelance copy-editor for academic publishers – except that the last gives her the time and the flexibility she needs to write the fiction...

