

Why do I write?

Linda Brogan

Why do I write? I didn't attempt it till I was 30. I didn't achieve it till I was 40. I didn't reacquaint myself with my own voice, the knowledge of my own true lived experience till I was 60.

Why do I write? At first it was because I wanted to be somebody. I was fantastic at writing as a kid. I didn't even have to try. The teachers would rip my poems out of my hand and stick them on sugar paper and stick them on the wall. I can remember two poems I wrote when I was really little in primary school. One was about a witch. Being a witch. Her personality grew from the accumulating details of her ingredients. Her stirring was the action that set the rhythm. The other was about a firework: the whoosh of it taking off, the spluttering before it fell back to earth, its layout on the page – all created its individual personality.

I still admire the gush of Gabriel García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*. It does what I instinctively did as a kid. It gives you the feeling of the place by layering abundant ingredients, as the book's colony would have been built over time. The three main characters' personalities grow intrinsically from their interactions with these ingredients. I also love the way Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* accumulates its apocalyptic landscape and the two main characters' personalities, by making you live the actions of the man and his son scratching for shelter and food in a scarcity of ingredients.

I first realised I had a problem when I secured the role of Snow White in primary school. I was probably seven. 1966. I remember lying on the top half of the gym horse box in my coffin with my hair out. I didn't have a brush. I wouldn't have been capable of brushing my hair back into my two

plaits even if I had a brush. By the time my mum came to pick me up, my hair had grown, from lying down, into a huge afro. It was all over the place. My mum beat the living daylights out of me on the school steps. She had this thing: that I had to do better because I was half black. That was what was prompting my amazing feats in school – I always won the prize as best pupil at the end of each term – and why she bought me new clothes for each school day-trip. I never went on the annual school trip to Staines. It was a huge fear of mine. An afro all week: a totally tangled mess for an entire week. I was a mess.

Why was I a mess? This is what I write about. I unearth and investigate key moments in my life. Key actions. Why do I remember them? How do they tie up? What are the accumulated ingredients that built the Moss Side colony I grew up in? What has motivated my actions to scratch for food and shelter there?

Linda Brogan

Linda Brogan is a multi-award-winning playwright. She has been Writer in Residence at the National Theatre, Contact Theatre, Askham Grange Prison, and the Whitworth Art Gallery. Her recent work has concentrated on the Reno, a legendary 1970s funk and soul club in Moss Side Manchester, predominantly populated by 'half-caste' people born into the 1950s of 'No Blacks, No Irish, No Dogs', and stigmatized by the 1930s Fletcher Report – 'offspring of interracial relationships are born with mental and physical defects'. As a recipient of three consecutive Arts Council England grants, in 2016 Linda collected Reno memoirs; 2017 she excavated the Reno; and in 2018 *Excavating the Reno* was a finalist in eight national awards.

In 2019/2020, as The Reno @The Whitworth, Linda exhibited the Reno memoirs, artefacts, and teen photo montage in the Whitworth Art Gallery, and was awarded Manchester City Council's Outstanding Contribution to Manchester Culture Award. Currently she is working on The Reno @Manchester International Festival for 2022.

A recording of this talk can be found on the WritersMosaic website at

writersmosaic.org.uk

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