



Creative Wordshops

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## Writing Letter

June 2025

re-story, re-create, re-  
imagine you

for this letter, a weekly story  
and ongoing opportunities -  
[dorianhaarhoffblog.co.za](http://dorianhaarhoffblog.co.za)

Dear writer, storyteller, reader, lover of words, images, silences...

Thank you for those who subscribe to the monthly letter and/or who receive the weekly Sat story. While the letter and story remain as a gift to all, for those who wish, I appreciate any voluntary donation.

Dr R D Haarhoff Standard Bank Current account 0828 59 248

### Presence, Memory and Imagination

*I know that nothing has ever been real  
without my beholding it.  
All becoming has needed me.  
My looking ripens things (Rilke)*

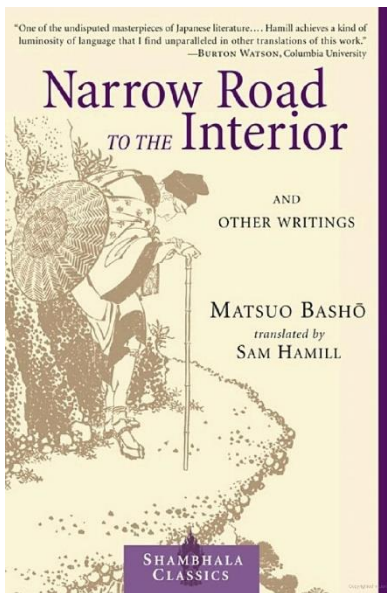


In life drawing classes the artist Degas (1834-1917) taught students to work from memory. There were three floors in the building - on the ground floor first year students sat with the model. Second year students drew on the first floor and third year students on the second. So the model was present in the face of first year students all the time, whereas second and third year students had to trip down the stairs to look at the model, then climb back to continue their drawing.

Advanced students had further to climb, holding the new insights of angles, images, proportions, shade, in their picture mind. Then descend to check.

Imagine Degas asking a writing teacher, 'How might you apply the three levels to your teaching?' This set me pondering about observation and description from memory and imagination. What do the writers say?

Basho the traveller cultivates a keen eye (This quote prefaces *The Writer's Voice* workbook):



Go to the pine if you want to learn about the pine, or to the bamboo if you want to learn about the bamboo. And in doing so, you must leave your subjective preoccupation with yourself. Otherwise you impose yourself on the object and do not learn. Your poetry issues of its own accord when you and the object have become one - when you have plunged deep enough into the object to see something like a hidden glimmering there. However well-phrased your poetry may be, if your feeling is not natural - if the object and yourself are separate - then your poetry is not true poetry but merely your subjective counterfeit.

And this: "When composing a verse let there not be a hair's breath separating your mind from what you write; composition ...must be done in an instant, like a woodcutter felling a huge tree or a swordsman leaping at a dangerous enemy."

John Irving and Rabindranath Tagore take observation two floors up:

A fiction writer's memory is an especially imperfect provider of detail; we can always imagine a better detail... the most truthful detail is what could have happened, or what should have happened...Being a writer is a strenuous marriage between careful observation and just as carefully imagining the truths you haven't had the opportunity to see.(I quoted Irving in my 2016 letter)

Some years ago, on being questioned as to the events of my past, I had occasion to pry into this picture-chamber....I then discovered, as I opened the door, that Life's memories are not Life's history, but the original work of an unseen Artist. The variegated colours scattered about are not reflections of outside lights, but belong to the painter, and come passion-tinged from the heart.(Tagore)

Scholars have long debated the interaction of memory and imagination. (There is Centre for Philosophy of Memory at Grenoble Alpes University, in

France.) Yet is there something writers can call observational memory? Is this a partial synonym for imagining the life we have lived? Or is memory one of the planets circling the sun of the imagination?

At the Ixopo Buddhist Retreat Centre you can choose to meditate in a saffron robe. (Monks took rags of corpses, sewed them together and dyed them in saffron). At a ZenPen retreat, after our silent meditation and breakfast, we began our session. I asked people to be in the presence of a plant in the garden. A woman who shared "I've not done much writing" offered this metaphor, "The flower is meditating in its saffron robe." A description of the flower and a memory of the meditation?

Here is one of my attempts at presence and memory - 1997:

### **Ice and Love**

I rest an ice cube  
on an expanse of tray.  
it stands solid, frozen,  
a flat-topped pyramid.

first the edges melt  
to a round shoulder  
then the ark slides  
on its own waters.

so it changes to  
a silver oval drop  
sucked in the cheek  
of a sweet-toothed sun.

what would the mystics  
have made of this melting  
which Aquinas saw as  
the first effect of love?

(Thomas Aquinas defined hate as a frozen state and love as a form of melting.) Perhaps we can train the eye in presence, memory in the absence of what is asking to be brought into being and through the imagination?

Dorian

# Writing Retreat Radar – Winter 2025

detailed flyers on request

## 1. Mentoring: ongoing one-on-one attention

*You help me to sound like myself (numerous clients)*

*Like a pair of sandals we walk this road together.*



## 2. Word, Image & Being Crafting your Writing

Fri 13 (17.30) – Mon 16 June (12.00)

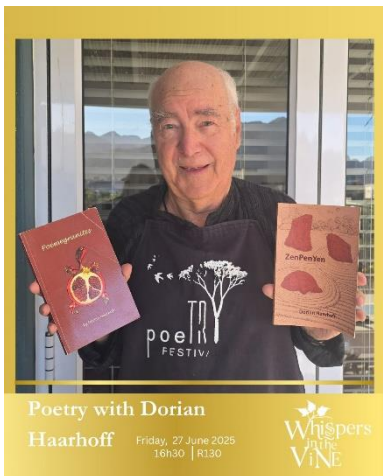
@ Temenos McGregor - [www.temenos.org.za](http://www.temenos.org.za)

+27 23 625 1871

for info and bookings - Dorian

discover the writer inside

only 5 places open



## 3. Lourensford Wine Estate Winter Celebration

Fri 27 June Tasting Room 16.30-18.00 R130

Do you enjoy reading and listening to poetry? Then this interactive time is for you. Warm your winter heart with words that whisper beneath the vine. Enjoy poet Dorian's mellow voice as he shares poems that speak to the season.

## 4. Tides 2025 (currently on the go)

A Story Apprenticeship on Zoom

*The story is wiser than the teller*

The **zoom story mentoring course** is about passing on story-knowing, insight and delight.

It is sharing a passion for stories, know-how and and and...

6 x 2 hour fortnightly encounters - 11 & 25 May 8 & 22 June 6 & 20 July

## 5. Writeway in Pringle Bay 2-3 Aug

Are words and ideas stuck in your head? Want to shake them loose? Need inspiration and writing company? Befriend words/let words befriend you?

Then this weekend is for you. Only 9 places



**FFC FESTIVAL  
WRITING  
WORDSHOP**

craft your text with  
Dorian Haarhoff

Sat 23 Aug  
13.30-16.00  
Som West

R290

12 places

082 873 6802

**The Writer's Voice**  
A workbook for writers in Africa  
Dorian Haarhoff

**FRINGE FIRESIDE CHATS**  
INDIE AUTHORS RISE UP

6.a

6b Also part of the FFC Festival

**Mentoring Panel - 5 writers whom I've mentored**  
discuss their self publications done and dusted or on their way

Sat 23 Aug 09.30-11.00 Gordons Bay Yacht Club

## 7. Magic Carpet Writers (Somerset West)

last Wed of the month writeway (next 28 May)

a fun-loving supportive thinking/being group of aspirant writers