

It's over ten months now since the first lockdown in the UK heralded a new reality of masks and handwash, shielding and quarantine. How has it affected us as writers? That's what the Agenda in this issue aims to explore (page 9).

It's been hard, very hard, for many of us – and continues to be so. But for one woman's experience of gradually resuming her writing whilst suffering from 'long Covid', turn to page 7; and for a new mum's experience of maintaining her creative mojo – and her word count – whilst in lockdown on her own with a newborn, turn to page 58.

In a sense this issue is all about healing and new beginnings – from Gilli Fryzer's extraordinary winning short story about sin-eating in Wales (page 37) to Jill Dawson's robust challenge to critique-based creative writing teaching (page 52); from Sarah Moss's cathartic jettisoning of four entire novels (I kid you not, see page 51), to Stacey

Halls' bestselling success with the help of a ginger cat (yes, really – see page 16).

While Mslexia Towers remains closed and we're all beavering away in our solo bothies, it's been bracing and comforting in equal measure to read the work you've been sending in to our 21 submission slots (most of them listed on page 82) – and to know that you're all still out there, still reaching out, still writing.



DEBBIE TAYLOR is the founder and Editorial Director of Mslexia. She has written for Oxfam, UNICEF, Anti-Slavery, WHO and others about women and social issues. Her many books include *My Children, My Gold* (Virago), a travelogue about single mothers, and *The Fourth Queen* (Penguin), a novel set in a harem in 18th Century Morocco. Her latest novel is *Herring Girl* (Oneworld), a paranormal historical murder mystery.



In terms of caring and domestic responsibilities, a woman's work is never done
DEBBIE TAYLOR
p9



Was it just forgetfulness? Or an inability to hear the praise in the first place?
JILL DAWSON
P54

I PUBLISHED FOUR NOVELS AND PRACTICED THE SHORT FORM FOR TWO DECADES BEFORE I GOT ANYWHERE CLOSE TO QUALITY

SARAH HALL, P35

Forum

- 5 Mslexia poll; Writing nest; Bear necessities; Submission stories; Blogability
- 6 What you're saying; What's on Mslexia Max
- 7 #amwriting: Camille Parke on writing while suffering from long Covid

Agenda

- 9 The return of the housewife: Debbie Taylor looks at the impact Covid-19 is having on women's writing

Craft

- 15 Warm-up; Seven plots; Poet Laureate
- 16 Cat woman: plotting with Blake Snyder's *Save the Cat* by Stacey Halls
- 19 Grow your own poem with Kate Clanchy
- 20 The story of your life with Catherine Cho
- 21 Poetry challenge,

selected by Linda France

- 22 T is for...; Flash Challenge with Meg Pokrass

Interview

- 23 Rachel Holmes talks to Melissa Benn

Reading for writers

- 27 Breaking the mould with Yvonne Battle-Felton; Books about writing
- 29 The Knowledge: Cosy crime with Julie Vuong
- 30 What's new in poetry by Stephanie Sy-Quia
- 31 Indie in the news: Nine Arches Press
- 32 What's new in short stories by Alice Slater
- 35 Indie in the news: The Emma Press

Showcase

- 35 Sarah Hall introduces the winners of the Mslexia Short Story Competition
- 46 Ingrid Jendrzewski

presents the winners of the Mslexia Flash Fiction Competition

Creativity & Wellbeing

- 51 Brain gym with Lucy Corkhill; Sara Moss' Achilles' heel
- 53 Crafting a cure with Victoria Field
- 54 A spoonful of sugar: challenging the teaching model for creative writing by Jill Dawson
- 56 It works for me: Nikita Gill; Lapidoptera, interview with Kiz Bangerh

Career

- 57 What's new on Instagram with Bethany Rutter
- 58 Bottling it: Laura Steven on writing with a newborn
- 60 Proud to place with agent Joanna Moulty; My portfolio career
- 61 Self-publish your middle-grade fiction by Debbie Young

62 Noticeboard Opportunities

- 64 Open for submissions
- 65 Insight: Bath Novella-in-Flash Award
- 66 Three of a kind: pets
- 67 Insight: The White Pube Writers' Grant
- 69 Insight: Stevie Finegan's manuscript wishlist

Off the page

- 70 The world's wife; Eyeverse
- 71 Playmaking with Margaret Wilkinson
- 72 Bedtime story; Breaking the Mould with Cecilia Knapp; Mslexia moths with Molly Naylor

Events

- 74 Events and courses
- 77 Getting a Gig: Story Strumpets

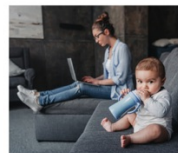
And finally

- 81 Emma Kennedy's bedside table
- 82 Submitting and subscribing to Mslexia

contents



'I wanted to put those figures back into the story, to recover a history that was suppressed'
RACHEL HOLMES
P23



I was afraid that if I felt like a milk cow, I might end up resenting my son
LAURA STEVEN
P58