

# KOMITO

C O L L E C T I V E

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*A sampling of texts from Writers in Residence Workshop  
Komito, Syros, Greece  
March-April 2026*

*With contributions from writers Sara Wheeler and Bruce Clark*



*photo: Racha Mourtada*

# WORKSHOP THEMES

and more...



1.

STRUCTURE



2.

SHOCK AND  
FORESHADOW



3.

VIGNETTE



4.

VOICE



5.

DIALOGUE



6.

ENDINGS

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# KOMITO COLLECTIVE

I joined the workshop for the most noble of reasons: as a fan-girl.

Thoreau, or was it Wheeler in *Too Close to the Sun* where I first read it, tells us *writers have to stand up and live, before they can sit down and write*. Ancient Egypt career counselling extolls the virtues of writing: *man perishes; his corpse turns to dust; all his relatives pass away. But writings make him remembered*. Yikes. Better than making mud-bricks all day, tells a 12th century BC script.

But if not for legacy or vocation, then what? Why are we compelled to write? This deeply human activity, merging cerebral synapses into thoughts, connecting them into narratives, then stories, prose and poetry. Like a favourite painting or song, a beautifully composed sentence both grounds us and lifts us. We savour them and we return to them, for comfort, to cry, to heal, to delight. Our private moments. To share, maybe. Always to grow.

This first volume of *Komito Collective* represents the camaraderie we felt during the Spring 2026 workshop on Syros. And a common goal, to lift our writing practice and decide on our voice. Bruce Clark and Sara Wheeler showed us the machinations of writing, then helped us tune, tinker and refine them - across themes of openings, vignettes, shock, structure, and dialogue. In these pages, a blend of testimonials for the workshop and island, sprinkled with both moving and comical writing samples. We are grateful to Sara and Bruce for the honour of being featured alongside them in this publication.

As fan-girling goes, I got my book signed. More, though, I won the clarity I needed for my writing project, from the formal instructors and from the co-participants, those kind enough to read and comment on my work.



Andrée Noëlle Cooligan

Initiator  
Komito Collective  
May, 2026

# LESSON ONE: READ

Teachers can learn a good deal from students.

Nikos Kazantzakis, who conveyed the joy of another Greek island, reckoned *True teachers are those who use themselves as bridges over which they invite their students to cross; then, having facilitated their crossing, joyfully collapse, encouraging them to create their own.*



Sara Wheeler

And so it was at Komito. I tried to pass on a little of what I have learnt over four decades as a full-time non-fiction writer (can one really be a writer anything except full-time?). I tried to show that mechanics lie behind a lot of it really; once you've got those in working order, the imagination can take over. I tried to hint - not wanting to scare anyone off - that the aspiring writer must read all the time. And I tried to pass on tips that have helped me. (Though I forgot to mention one of my top ten: never use the passive voice.)

We were not on Kazantzakis' Crete of course; but we were looking out at the same sea. I was immensely impressed at the ways in which the students at Komito listened, then took what they heard and applied it to their own work in their own creative ways. I can't honestly say I experienced 'joyful collapse'; but I was gratified.

I will end with my own response to the task we set on the first day: 200 words about oneself, as elliptical as you please. Bruce and I felt it was only fair that we complete the exercise ourselves.

I came of age between LSD and the SDP. Role models were scarce in the travel-writing game: the seventies had launched a golden age, but few women set sail. On an otherwise male-only Antarctic base I stowed used tampons in the pocket of my parka, where they froze into objects resembling stock cubes.

As the decades unfurled - Pole to Pole, via Poland - I recorded it all in small, hardback, narrow-lined notebooks. They stand, now, like old soldiers on high shelves in my office. To celebrate turning sixty - I use the verb with irony - I took the kitchen steps and got the notebooks from their shelves. I discovered that I had often left out the best bits from the published accounts.

There had been amours on the road. The friable pages brought them all back. I sat there on the top step as the light faded over London and my old life sprang up like a mosaic splashed with water.

I thought about the trajectory from the chaise longue to the double bed. Beryl Bainbridge once told me in the back of a taxi she was glad 'that part of my life was over'. I was twenty-nine years her junior, and young, and I thought, I can't imagine that happening, and when it does, it won't be living, it will be something else'. Now it has - happened, I mean.

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Sara Wheeler's prizewinning travel books and biographies include *Cherry: A Life of Apsley Cherry-Garrard* ('Superb' - *Guardian*) and *The Magnetic North: Travels in the Arctic* ('Exceptional' - *New York Times*). Faber published her authorised biography of Jan Morris in 2026. Wheeler is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. Her work has been translated into many languages, including Mandarin. Sara is a regular contributor to BBC Radio 4.

# MY KOMITO, MY COMEDY IN FIVE SHORT CHAPTERS

## ONE

Imagine, in 1972, a sulky thirteen-year-old, a reluctant deckhand, who only joined family sailing trips on the understanding that on every trip ashore, there would be a new language to practise, like Scots Gaelic or Greek. We scudded past scrubby hills surging out of a steel-grey sea – which recalled Ireland but were more alluring. My father pointed at a speck of white: “That’s where Dick Musgrave has built a house. Apparently the locals call him “Mr. Sir Dick.” I had no idea who he meant, but odd turns of phrase stuck to my teenage mind like glue.



Bruce Clark

## TWO

Eleven years later, I was a scruffy, hyper-active journalist in Athens, burning the candle at all extremes and in the middle, too. As an Easter guest in 1983, I arrived by big ship and small battered car at the white speck and found something quite different: a giant fun factory, a place where ouzo flowed freely and freshly roasted lamb dripped off our plates. The stone staircase which led to the sea, and to all manner of frolics, was long and winding but we skipped down it like falling angels, knowing we could always re-ascend.

## THREE

By 1992, Moscow was giving me a ringside view of world historical events: the spectacle was often disturbing. When, amidst the grey slush, I dreamed of being somewhere else, it was never Ireland or England but Greece and its white houses, and long rays of sun hitting the sea at odd angles. I still believed that all journeys ended there, and in a way I was right. Even about my brother’s journey. He followed me to Russia in a wooden boat, dashed across the Black Sea, bashed through the Aegean, keeping Syros always in his mind. The great white house and its people offered him their usual limitless generosity. And it was, quite literally, my brother’s final voyage.

## FOUR

By 2011 I have discovered that places stained by sadness can be recoated with nicer memories, almost hiding the past. It is a relief to find that the great bleached house still stands sentinel over the sea; the breeze no longer cures all diseases, but some. Making my *nostos* after a long peregrination I rediscover some of those worldly-wise and tolerant grown-ups that we met in the 1980s. The ring of eccentrics and expatriates has widened. We ask Theo, a sweet widowed banker, for some island news. In a whisper, he reveals: “Maxine is going blonde....”

## FIVE

By 2026. I am gratefully amazed when the great house, the speck grown large, still seems to recognize me, like an Ithacan dog. Cool stone rooms that once resounded with our disorder are swept and furnished with serious books. Gazing down the steps to the sea, I realize how hard it would be to climb up again. Guests arrive from Beirut, Portugal and Helsinki, and before dinner, our young friend Josh does an impromptu folk dance. *La commedia non e finita.*

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*Bruce Clark is a British and Irish journalist, author, and commentator on international affairs, religion, and history. He was the International Security Editor of The Economist and a former correspondent for Reuters, The Times, and The Financial Times. Clark is the author of several books, including An Empire's New Clothes: The End of Russia's Liberal Dream (1995), Twice A Stranger: How Mass Expulsion Forged Modern Greece and Turkey (2006), and Athens: City of Wisdom (2021).*

# VILLA KOMITO

## SYROS, GREECE

### AEGEAN SEA



They did arise and go there, all twelve to Komito,  
And a small cabal built there, of books and essays made;  
Bright novels they have wrought there, a wealth of skill to show  
And muse was found when amity stayed.

And they did have some peace there, the peace that helped inspire  
Looming from ripples of Aegean to where the hoopoo sings;  
Now sundown's when they gather, when eve's an orange fire  
And then their new carved muse has azure wings.

They did arise and go there, and often all the day  
They hear Greek water slapping white tops in the sun  
Can Komito be a pathway, with so much craft arrayed  
To where the Booker Prize is won?

*Anon but thanks to WB Yeats*



# ARRIVAL

*Thoughts from a spouse who joined the journey*

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The friendly faces at the ferry port in Ermoupoli and soup and wine on arrival at the villa at almost midnight removed all thoughts of the early start and the delays and cancellations along the journey. We did not know that this inimitable Komito hospitality would be unstinting until our departure.

We retired to the comfort of our room and woke to our first breakfast. Delicious of course but the company exceeded our wildest expectations.

As a non-participant I felt welcomed by all. I stayed for the introductions at the start of the first lesson. This confirmed my sense of imposter syndrome.

I wandered off during the lessons but returned for delicious lunches having walked to local villages and explored the island and its capital either by bus or being offered lifts by our generous host.

My abiding memories will be of extraordinary staff who catered for our every need, of a generous host and his wonderful evening guests who added to the wide ranging dinner discussions, to hearing the readings over delicious cocktails, the teachers who were so generous, the beautiful setting but most of all an extraordinarily diverse collection of fascinating writers at various stages of their journeys.

Jonathan Williams



# THE LION OF SYROS

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Nothing stirs the lion – not the wind, nor the children below, their voices rising through the square. To them, he is only a lazy lion, stretched out in the sun.

The lion of Syros sleeps, high on his plinth, in the shifting shade of the trees.

Head resting on folded arms, eyes closed, his stone the colour of pale beeswax, a faint furrow between his eyes.

He holds something in his paws – unwilling to let it go. The islanders do not speak of it. But they know.

They pass him as they always have, each alone, knowing that something of theirs had been left with him.

The man sweeping leaves pauses, leaning on his broom, and looks up at him, as though in quiet benediction.

Some moments are lost almost as soon as they appear.

The first breath of a long-awaited child – in a whitewashed room above the harbour, Eleni lying back, eyes closed, someone murmuring a soft *ftou* in the corner.

A boy on a bicycle in the late afternoon, his grandfather running behind him, one hand steady on the seat.

A girl in a shop, her grandmother bent before her, adjusting the strap of a new sandal around her small dusty feet.

Two figures in a narrow street – a pause, and then no space between them – her dress caught between his legs.

A journey ending at the right door – Nikos standing, salt-cracked lips, his hand resting against the wood, his mother's voice reaching him before she does.

These things do not stay. They fall, like leaves, before they can be held.

So he keeps them, folded beneath his great, resting paws. And when those who have left Syros return—after weeks, months, or years— the lion wakes, and for a moment, what was theirs is given back.




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*Based in London, Josephine Ogden is completing her first novel. She has a background in visual arts and is drawn to themes of memory, grief, and the quiet ways in which people endure and begin again.*

# VALENTINES

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I lay beneath the sculpture, arms crossed pharaonic-style. The navy neck-tie version was around the corner, and the red one above me. Wall-size works of art by Gathie Falk: *Veneration of the White-Collar Worker*. Rows and rows of white office shirts. Infinite jesting, of bureaucracy, the blue and red of Canadian politics. For 30 years, I admired the art collection throughout the 4 towers. Alfred Pellan. Greg Curnoe.

"Go back," I said "a little further, even further. Ok. There." Click.

The last day at the department was quick, February 14, 2019. Our anniversary. We had still the skating party details to finalize. Coffee. Sandwiches. Guest list. Rideau Hall's skating rink dates to 1872. Ice, to skate away on.

I held the checklist, complete except for one more sign-off. Fill it out. Check the instructions. Move along. Peter used to say "death by template."

The last signature was from the Director General, a man I did not know, acting for Chris. His signature acknowledged the other ones.

On the first day away, with YouTube, I learned how to make bio-waste bags from last week's newspapers. Old *Globe and Mail* pages, black ink on my palms. SNC Lavalin headlines with calls for PMO staffers to testify.

My next assignment was with Ibrahim about the archaeology project, and later that year we were assessing sites in Egypt. Now, West-Luxor, a type of posting, working with Dr. Myriam and the Spanish team. Finding imagery worthy of painting and print-making.




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Andrée is a former Ambassador, retired from Canada's foreign service. She joined the workshop for inspiration and to improve her writing skills. She is working on a combination of flash fiction and autobiography, mixed with her artwork.

# ANATOMY OF A BARELY BEATING HEART

*Racha Mourtada is an author and founder of Luqoom, a boutique publisher of pretty picture books in Arabic and English. An alumna of Faber Academy's 'Novel Writing Course' and the 'Columbia Publishing Course' at Oxford University, Racha moved back to her native Beirut in 2018 to set up her publishing house and focus on her writing.*

*The following is an excerpt from a novel Racha is working on titled: Anatomy of a Barely Beating Heart*

The Palm Beach Hotel stood facing the sea, at the very edge of what was known as the "Corniche", a long and lively stretch of sidewalk overlooking the water. The sun had dipped even further as Roya ventured out after dropping her bags in her room. Most people seemed engaged in some form of exercise, from serious runners, to wobbly rollerbladers, to middle-aged men power walking with cigars in hand. Interspersed were couples that grew more amorous as the sun sank lower in the sky. Roya dodged carts selling corn on the cob and drunken bicycles with obscenely pregnant baskets filled with 'ka'ak', a special Lebanese bread that looked like a hollow, lopsided, sesame-covered donut. She knew this because she bought two, one on the way towards the large Ferris wheel halfway down the corniche, and one on the way back. She tried to pronounce the word the second time she bought some 'ka'ak', but the man selling them just laughed at her. He was young and sandy coloured, from his hair down to his toes, and his eyes crinkled when he smiled. She could see that the folds between the wrinkles were much paler than the rest of his face. *He must smile a lot, Roya thought to herself, and in the sun, no less. I want his life.*

Roya continued to walk up and down the stretch of sidewalk she had familiarised herself with, afraid to wander too far. Teenage boys in their double-parked cars with the windows rolled down blared obnoxiously loud music and called out to girls who pretended not to like the attention. To one side, a perfect row of palm trees split the road down the middle, bright purple and yellow flowers sprouting at their base. To the other, sun-darkened fishermen stood knee-deep in rock pools, hoping to catch any fish that had survived the polluted waters. Roya leaned over the railing to take a closer look and just stayed there, still, as the sun blushed pink and slunk down to its nighttime repose. Shades of tangerine stained the horizon, as though a giant orange sherbet had spilled and melted across the sky. Before she knew it, stars popped out across the inky blackness, like eyes just awakened, blinking sleep away. She must have stood there for a couple of hours. Her feet had fallen asleep, but for the first time in a long time, she felt wide-awake.



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# SNOWBIRDS

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Each winter, like typical New Yorkers of a certain age, the couple flew to their second home in search of better weather. Snowbirds, New Yorkers call themselves, though the logic doesn't quite fit, since they're fleeing the cold. This couple, however, came from South Africa, seeking a cooler climate. The January heat was intense, and, since they could leave, they did.

In the middle of my first winter in Portugal, chilly and damp, the duo arrived and settled in at the bottom of the property where they, or another couple, had built an impressive, sculpturous home. Spacious and light, it was sufficiently elevated to give them a sea view. Lucky things.

Curious, I wanted to get to know these new residents. But they kept to themselves and weren't particularly friendly. Since I didn't know their names, I called them Nelson and Zola, inspired by their country of origin. Nelson seemed terribly responsible, wise and more worried, and Zola more youthful, sprightly and swift.

Nelson was often scouting about, walking the land, busying himself as men often do. He'd also throw back his head and sing to Zola (if only one could call that throaty rattle a song), while Zola stayed mostly at home (her head visible from my window). Later, I understood why she stayed in. That spring, Zola had twins. Quiet things.

When summer arrived, the entire family took off to somewhere in Scandinavia, maybe Denmark, said a neighbour. Such was the Algarve, full of temporary residents. I was too busy planting and feathering my own nest to pay much mind, but would occasionally gaze at Nelson and Zola's empty home and wonder at their lives so full of flight and freedom. I had come from across the Atlantic, bought a farm, and was not leaving.

The following winter, Nelson and Zola returned without their children. The rains made for an unpleasant Spring, cutting short their visit. My sister was sick again. That summer, the winds came from the east, the Levant, the Portuguese called it, oven-hot and desert-dry, parching my farm and weathering the buildings. I lost roof tiles, cracks opened in my walls, and I noticed Nelson's and Zola's empty home was battered and ragged. I wondered if they'd undertake repairs and return it to its former glory upon their return.

But winter came and went. I did not see the African couple. The weather was worse than ever. In March, the fields bloom, Zola appeared - alone. She sat morosely, staring out at her view. If she ate, I did not notice. I, too, was heartbroken. That December, my sister had died. The farm flooded. Nelson was clearly also gone.

Then, in April, Zola rose on her long, thin legs, unfurled her broad, black-tipped wings, perched at the edge of her tattered nest, and took flight. She did not head north or south, as she and Nelson had done. Instead, she soared west over the Atlantic, too wide a crossing for a white stork. I would have followed if I could.

# WHO CAPTURED THE CASTLE?

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Just before 'Lockdown', one of the curtain walls, which had bulged ominously for years, finally collapsed.

Imagine the excitement of the children, when a secret passage appeared, leading to the Castle. A secret passage was the feature of one of the ghost stories that we had grown up with.

We decided to use the 'dog days' of that Lockdown summer, to look for more signs of history. We became experts in metal detecting, and surveying signs of old building in burnt summer lawns.

It was eight hundred years old and the kids knew nothing. Jane and I had spent 30 years happily patching it up, while the young gang grew. It was time to put the story together.

Which of the tales we knew so well, held germs of truth? The Grey Lady, told to me by our lovely diminutive cook, Isobel, who would have seen her, if she hadn't been almost completely blind? Or Archie Armstrong, our 'armless ghost, who gnawed his arm off, before expiring in the dungeon, and his girlfriend, who, to cap it all, put a curse on the occupants of the Castle forever? What about the appearance of a smart sea captain to watch my friend take a bath, was he 'Buccaneer Smith'?

How did it all start? Why is this beautiful building still here? Why is it not listed as a castle, but as 'one of the best and earliest upper floor hall houses in the North of England'?



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*Encouraged by his long-time friend and study mate, Bill Colegrave, Antony Braithwaite is working on a lighthearted and witty history book about life in an 800 year-old Northumbrian castle.*

# SHEET ANCHOR

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We do these things out of curiosity. What wonderful places there are, we can't leave them lonely and unseen.

Just once in a while the reward is much greater. Just once in a while, always unexpectedly, there is a bigger reward. I call them *feeling in the chest moments* and they are remembered and recalled many times over. I had one such today.

We stop after 3 hours for breakfast. It is just bread, green tea and a bit of cream cheese in a sloping brown field with new spring grass, crossed by belts of snow. I found a cleft in a rock warmed by the early sun to lie back and see the meander of a tiny stream past the pale skinned spindly birch trees that line every watercourse. It is all quiet but for two hawks and some ravens swirling overhead. The hawks soared towards the snow peaks above. Three small shepherd boys, all with big eyes and purply brown faces came to smile with me.

Right then I felt it. That moment of happiness that I am there in that place at that time. I can list easily the places I have felt it before. Once, maybe twice, in Afghanistan; in front of the Potala Palace in Lhasa; on a windy dune south of Laghourt in the Algerian Sahara, and then today.

I think many of us have that sensation. You are lucky too if you do. The person who best expressed it was a hero of mine, the then-young Swiss traveller Nicholas de Bouvier in *The Way of the World* from travels in 1953:

*Time passed in brewing tea, the odd remark, cigarettes, then dawn came up. The widening light caught the plumage of quails and partridges . . . and quickly I dropped this wonderful moment to the bottom of my memory, like a sheet-anchor that one day I could draw up again. You stretch, pace to and fro feeling weightless, and the word 'happiness' seems too thin and limited to describe what has happened.*

*In the end, the bedrock of existence is not made up of the family, or work, or what others say or think of you, but of moments like this when you are exalted by a transcendent power that is more serene than love. Life dispenses them parsimoniously; our feeble hearts could not stand more.*



Badakshan Valley

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*Bill Colegrave's 2007 expedition discovered the source of the Oxus River (Amu Darya), and his research and findings were published in Halfway House to Heaven in 2008. Bill returned in spring 2026 to Central Asia, and shared these moments while heading west of the Ghor mountains en route to Chagcharan, after 10 hours on farm roads and rutted cart tracks. Bill is co-host with Christopher Musgrave of the Komito Writers in Residence Workshop.*

# THE GARDEN AT VILLA KOMITO

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The walk from Villa Komito to the lighthouse is along a meandering beaten track, up a hillside, past the long forgotten skeleton of a building, to the tip of a rocky promontory. It is a barren setting for Mother Nature to create a garden; she is not perturbed. Plants are not restricted by an imposed design but allowed to roam free. They are not separated into weeds and prize species but intermingle to create a tapestry of colour. The flowers are not big and showy, but short with small heads. They hunker into the undergrowth protecting their petals from the gusty wind. The odd brave soul ventures out, waving its bloom like a white flag. A glimpse of cobalt blue entices you closer. A pimpernel. Five petals unite at a purple heart to create a miniature saucer with neon yellow stamens dancing aloft. From the low vantage point, the vast array of plants comes into focus. Some are familiar: a cistus, a scabious, an iris; others are a mystery. Out of the wind, you catch the enticing aroma of wild herbs; the warm scent of thyme reminding you its nearly time for supper. Lifting your head, you can taste the salty sea air. This should be an inhospitable home for plants, instead it is a testament to Mother Nature and her ability to create the perfect garden.



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*Jane Williams joined the course to solve the problems she was encountering turning her PhD on the Russian mosaicist Boris Anrep into a book and left inspired with a new sense of purpose.*

# BURNING

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Mam had cancelled our English comics and Mr Lynch was told he had to take the British toy soldiers out of his shop window. He got a phone call they said.

Dublin was raging. It was a Day of National Mourning. The country shutdown, general strikes. No school, no shops, no buses. Everyone walked to the church and then to the city to protest. We'd been cooped up in the house since Mass that morning, relentless rain, the funerals of those shot in Derry the Sunday before on every air wave. Mam was irritable, she had her headache, we had to be quiet and good.

The same news reel played over and over, thousands marching in the city, a vast powerful heaving swaying thing turning in the Dublin streets, an entity of its own. The Gardaí a small line, buffeting the swell didn't provoke the angry crowd, who were chanting, burning effigies. It was early dark when the British Embassy blazed, sirens, popping glass. Even the fire brigade stood back.

They let it burn.

I was restless, hovering between the fire and the tea-tray. Somewhere I shouldn't have been. But the heat of the fire warmed me and the rug was soft under my stocking feet.

"Burn the place, burn," "Burn the place, burn," I was swaying to the chant on the television.

Mam turned to me and snapped, "stay back from that fire!", and I twisted back into the path of the pot Dad was lifting from the hearth. Boiling tea splashed over my legs and fell on my feet as it hit the rug. I was screaming down at my feet, not understanding what had happened. Mam in her panic ripped off my tights taking the skin too. I blacked out and came to as I was being carried to the car, rain cool on my face, cool on my burnt legs. On Mam's knee in the back seat, I could see Dad's hands, steady on the wheel. Safe now.

The street lights strobed by and the wipers made their small rhythmic squeak, the rain was a quiet hammering. The 'shhh' of the tyres, that white noise again, nailing down.

"Stay awake!" Mam shook me, "stay awake!"

"Nearly there now, nearly there," Dad's voice was calm.

The roads were empty, every household in Dublin glued to the TV, we reached the hospital in minutes.

The curtain was pulled.

"Will she be able to walk?" Mam asked

"Not for a while," the Doctor said softly.

"Will she be scarred?"

"We won't know that yet."

Back home, sedated, bandaged, they laid me down on Mam and Dad's big bed. My legs couldn't even bear the slight weight of a sheet, so the fire guard was put over them, a protective metal cage.

My sister Ger was there that night, and every night after, reading me poems and stories.

'Child do not go, into the dark places of soul, for there the grey wolves whine, the lean grey wolves...'\*

\*Poem, To a Child by Patrick Kavanagh

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*Carol Byrne is an Ireland-born Syros-based artist, designer and businesswoman.  
She is working on a memoir from which the above text is extracted.*

# KOMITO EFFECT

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You come to a writers' residency in Komito as an add-on, planning to enjoy the Greek sun. You leave the island a few days later with no sun exposure, but full of the warmth of the brilliant writer-participants, charming hosts, and inspiring teachers.

I never thought about writing a book. I'm a short-form person, the kind of writing you do for work: reports, applications, marketing copy. And English is a foreign language to me. And yet, when leaving Komito, I have this idea I'm sharing with my spouse: *Listen, we should write a travel book about Canada, hit the road when I retire! Let's visit all the provinces I haven't seen yet.* She likes it, of course. We go back and forth, trying to find the *clou*. It still slips away, but I know the name from the very beginning: *Canada Arms*.

The world has finally realized it needs more Canada. *Come to Canada, easy access to the U.S. market*, commercial counsellors have repeated, presentation after presentation, to Europeans chasing the North American Eldorado. But in 2026, everything has turned upside down. *Canada is the destination, not a stepping stone to something bigger and more lucrative.*

Later, I realize I already have a collection of stories from traveling and living in Canada over the past twenty years. I still remember landing there for the first time. The soft carpet at the airport. *What an impractical choice. How do they clean it?*

*Canada Arms* is a book that ties small, everyday observations to a bigger picture: Canadian resilience in a troubling era. How it arms itself against a difficult neighbor, a difficult time. I remember the astonishment of a newly appointed Finnish ambassador to Canada asking: *how do they manage to keep this multicultural country together?*

Why *Canada Arms*? As our teacher Sara Wheeler said, *the title is already there in your text*. In this book, one of the chapters turns toward Canadian technological excellence and the Canada Arm: a long mechanical limb reaching out into space, carrying Dextre, the robot, into the dark.

An *arm* is first, the upper limb of the human body. This book is about those arms, Canadians. Arms that reach, build, hold.

An arm is an extension. Did you know, that Canada extends so far south, beyond the northern border of California?

Most of all, *Canada Arms* is a love story: to Canada, and to my favourite Canadian, Andrée.

It sounds like I have to write this book. I may need more Komito to do it.

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You have many pictures in your head *is a remark from a former student that has stayed with Jaana Ryyänen since the beginning of her career. Jaana works at a Finnish technology university.*

# THE PRESIDENT AND THE ICHTHYOPHILE

*In one writing session, participants were invited to juxtapose known world events with personal ones, via micro-vignettes. This piece was written in response to that. Andrew reminds that this is a play of fiction. Any resemblance characters may have to actual persons is purely coincidental (!).*

Thessaloniki Farmers market, Monday November 9, 2016. A wireless may be heard in the background broadcasting the news.

*President-elect Donald Trump and his wife, Melania, are leaving New York. They are boarding Trump Force One.*

Sara Papadopoulos enters stage right dressed in dungarees, a straw hat and espadrilles. She is on a mission. With weekend catering to take care of (her friend, Christoforos, is coming to stay) she has fish on her mind. Sara Papadopoulos knows about fish. Like her colleague Brous Kazantzakis, the renowned fisherman from Samos, she is a celebrated ichthyophile.

*Donald Trump has won the most unreal, surreal election we have ever seen. He will become the 45th President of the United States.*

Sara Papadopoulis walks towards the fishmonger's stall and addresses the fishes arrayed before her. They are laid out like sorbets in iced polystyrene boxes: pinky-white shrimps, coiled octopuses, sword fishes with fins of cerulean blue. They are very fine, she muses, recollecting Brous hauling his nets onto the shores of Samos. The Epicurean maxim, 'Eat, drink and be merry', is one they share.

*Mr and Mrs Trump will spend the weekend relaxing at their luxury Mar-a-Lago estate. Their house has 58 bedrooms, 33 bathrooms, 12 fireplaces and 3 bomb shelters.*

Sara Papadopoulis begins making her selection, noting with delight the sea bream in the centre of the display. A fish's scales, she reflects, should resemble a mosaic in which each scale, each tessera, is held tightly in place, just as they are here. Next, she considers the fish's eyes, which are translucent, symmetrical, and crystal-bright, again just as they should be. Lastly, she strokes the fish's sides with her fingertips, noting that the flesh is plump and tender. Mindful that Christoforos is an acknowledged connoisseur of Greek cuisine she concludes the fish will do nicely. She will serve it with a rosé from Syros, followed by a minaret of jam for dessert.

*President-elect Trump flies to Washington DC in the morning...*

Sara Papadopoulis is considering how best to set out her dining table when she hesitates. She is unable to define her thoughts precisely, but the fish before her suddenly seems inadequate and she is thrown into confusion. She detects an artificiality, a grossness in its gold-iridescent tones. It is as if there is something disturbingly fake about this fish. She is feeling uneasy.

*It is not known what announcements Mr Trump will make from the Oval Office...*

Sara Papadopoulis's eyes move back to the prawns, the octopuses and the sword fishes. She is minded to elect one of those.

The curtain falls.

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*Andrew Dennis is an organic farmer from Lincolnshire. An enthusiastic long-distance walker, he is writing about his journey on foot to Mount Athos, an adventure enriched by his love for the land and the characters he meets along the way. He identifies as an omnivore.*

# 2020

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A seagull called way over my head, the sound a mournful wail that filled the hushed silence. I focused on one foot in front of the other on the empty sidewalk. It was spring, and beautiful, or would have been anywhere else. Here the gentle breeze moved past me and nothing else, searching throughout the empty sidewalks and bumping against the closed doors of the stores and restaurants. I skirted around an area of broken glass, left where it lay outside a gem and antiques store. The smell of freshly sawn wood was out of place in the city setting, emanating from rows of boarded up shop windows.

A lone bike messenger whizzed past me, his mask pushed tight against his face from the force of his speed. We locked eyes briefly before he was gone, and a world passed between us there. The only two souls to share many city blocks, with the seagulls as our companions.

Looking up I caught the sun's rays splashing over the monumental stone blocks of Grand Central Station. The beauty in the silence was absolute. I walked to the middle of the empty street and sat, closing my eyes in the sun, trying to let it wash away the constant fear that sat on my shoulders. I, like the messenger, needed to get to work.

Two seagulls called, having found one another. They swooped and swirled over the empty city, heading into the sun.

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*Amy DeLuca is a writer and historic building restoration specialist who lives in Newark, New Jersey, and works in NYC. She is working on a historical fiction murder mystery. This piece was written at the cliffside villa of Komito.*

# WRITERS IN RESIDENCE WORKSHOP



*Hosts: Christopher Musgrave (left) and Bill Colegrave (right)  
with tutors/coaches Terry Finnigan, Sara Wheeler and Bruce Clark  
Komito Villa, March 2026*

Expert authors and coaches on an Aegean island help hone writing skills at Villa Komito for a 6-12 day Writers in Residence workshop, designed for anyone interested in enhancing their creative competence in this most inspirational environment.

## EXPERIENCED OR NOVICE WELCOME

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## TUTORS AND COACHES

March-April, 2026

Bruce Clark, Sara Wheeler, Laura Beatty, Clare Conville, Joshua Barley, Terry Finnegan

# HIKING IN THE CYCLADES



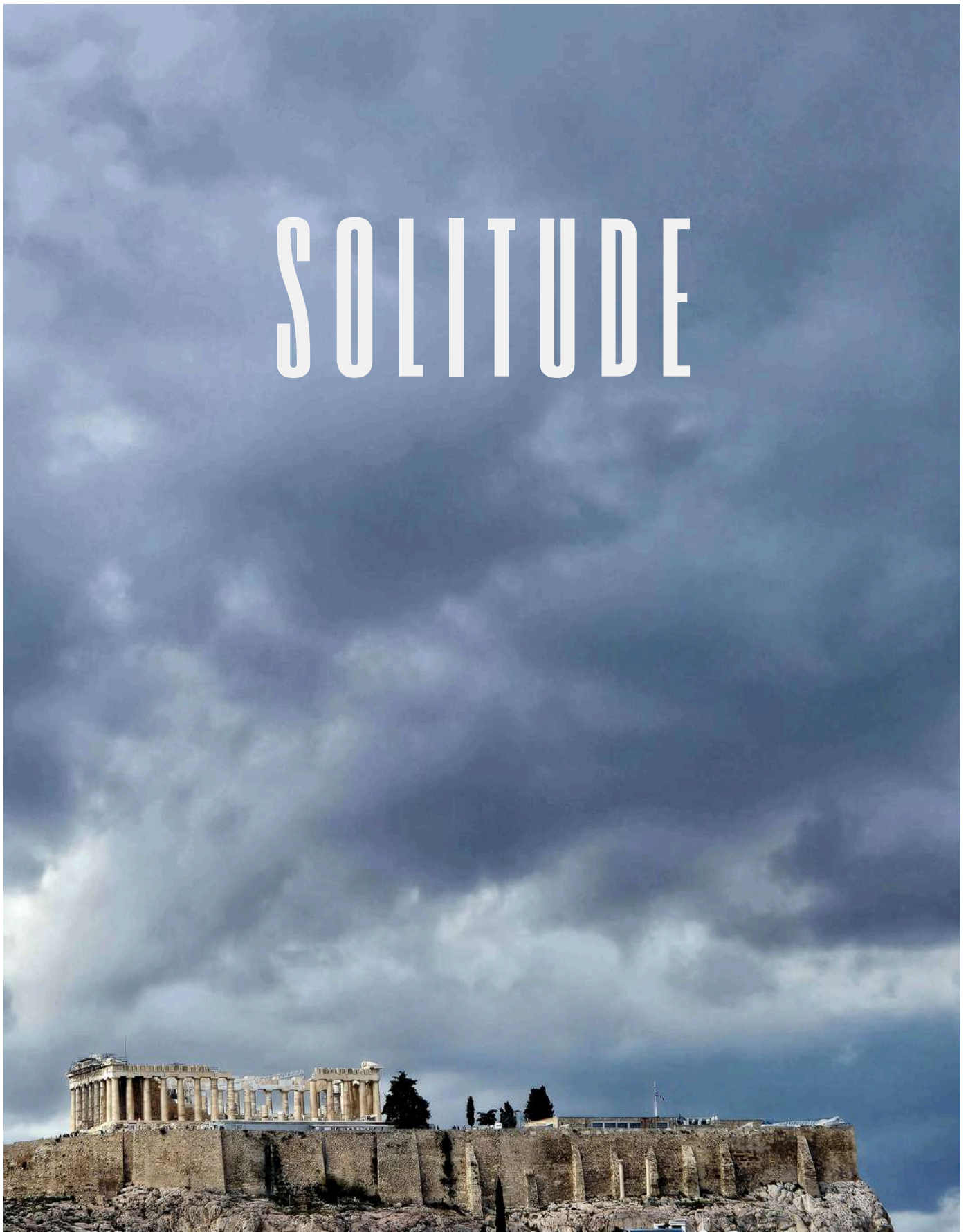
Syros is the administrative capital of the Cyclades. Its dramatic landscape calls for hiking, and beach combing.

Yoga, backgammon, and organized hiking trips are available and contribute to a healthy program for writers.





# SOLITUDE



*photo: A. Cooligan*

*A trip to Komito naturally includes a jaunt to Athens. Easy access via public transport or taxis from airport to the city and to the Piraeus port. The workshop has daily optional structured discussions.*

*The facilities and program offer plenty of space for time alone.*