



How did I get here?

Greg Mosse: Find me working

Greg Mosse graduated in Drama and English from Goldsmiths College, University of London. He has since lived in France and the USA, becoming a translator and conference interpreter. He has published works of science fiction, children's stories and commercial and literary translation, and is an experienced editor and creative writing teacher, as well as a secondary teacher and home educator. Greg and his wife Kate Mosse work together via www.mosselabyrinth.co.uk, an online creative resource based around the research for Kate's novel, *Labyrinth*, published in 2005. They are co-directors of Chichester Writing Festival.

When inspiration comes

My working life is an odd combination of routine and variety. Each weekday I tend to start work at around 7 or 7.30, usually at my computer. My wife, Kate Mosse, and I run a website called www.mosselabyrinth.co.uk, designed to share the historical research and creative background to Kate's best-selling novel *Labyrinth*. I look at updates to site pages – there are over 1500 – regular creative writing competition entries and contributions from our site visitors. There is usually some e-correspondence, including submissions to our favourite books pages – Bookfriends.

Sometimes I use this early session for my own writing and translating. (Often I will visit the Word Reference Forums site, a community of translators, to contribute to discussion threads.) I have technical dictionaries – the Ernst is invaluable – but the best reassurance comes from finding similar texts on-line and comparing authentic mother-tongue websites. Often these sites will be illustrated, allowing really reliable confirmation of esoteric details.

At 8.30 I begin teaching our 13-year-old son, who is home educated. This is where the routine part of the day comes from. We work from 8.30 to 3 each day, with breaks rather like you would have in a school day. That said, we are often away from our desks on trips and educational visits, playing tennis or swimming, meeting with other HE children. I sometimes teach classes for members of our local HE group, ActivEO.

Our son didn't much like school, finding the unstructured times most trying. We decided to home educate when he was nine (the beginning of year 5) and it's been an unqualified success. It takes an enormous amount of my time – and I am fortunate in that I have a background in teaching and can structure purposeful sequences of educational tasks quite easily – but it is definitely worth it. This is also a great help when assisting my daughter's GCSE revision. A child's life – like a writer's life – is often too much made up of deadlines!

Alongside my HE commitments, I have recently translated a short business book for Orion – *Bonjour Laziness* – and have been commissioned to write two history books. The first is for the Edward James Foundation, a

charity established by the surrealist patron Edward James and responsible for the exceptional fine art and craft centre West Dean College, in West Sussex. The second is a history of Carcassonne in southwest France, a companion to Kate's novel *Labyrinth*.

Teaching creative writing

Kate and I often teach at West Dean College. In the past, we have taught creative writing classes and master classes at literary festivals around the country, as well as for businesses and at the ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts) in London. However, due to the increasing pressures on our time, recently we have focused all our teaching at West Dean, where students can take residential rooms and really devote themselves to our weekend full-week classes. We have sessions on How to write a novel, Plot & Character, Location, Dialogue, Revision, Suspense, Style and Synopsis. We also run classes on genre writing, such as Travel, Crime, or scripts for TV, Radio and Film. Next year we are introducing sessions on Poetry and Reportage and Feature Writing.

Teaching creative writing is an extension of the work Kate and I both enjoyed as editors within publishing. In 2000, we decided to establish a website to publish and comment upon the research Kate was beginning to undertake for her historical novel *Labyrinth*. We knew that the novel couldn't possibly contain everything we unearthed and thought an evolving, magazine-like website would be more valuable than a fixed CD-ROM attached to the novel on publication. It was, of course, quite natural to use the website to pass on advice about writing and getting published. This led us to offer classes to the ICA – at first unpaid – then to literary festivals, of which there are at least one a week in the UK. The opportunity to base our teaching at West Dean is a happy coincidence, relying on a chance meeting with the principal, Robert Pulley, and the fact that West Dean College was not currently offering creative writing. Right place, right time ...

In April 2006, we established the highly successful Chichester Writing Festival at West Dean and the neighbouring Cass Sculpture Foundation. Kate and I are joint directors. The initial impetus for the Festival came from the Duke of Richmond, who saw it as a way of combining and integrating the skills, traditions and audiences of a number of arts organisations in southwest Sussex. Wilfred Cass and, especially, Robert Pulley made the Festival possible by committing early.

Last year, in my spare time (!), I finished the first draft of a novel. As soon as I have a clear three-month writing period, my priority will be to edit, revise and produce a finished version. Like Kate, when writing, I tend to work early in the morning, usually from 6. In this way, I steal a march on the day. Given the number of smaller projects – including two illustrated history books – I have underway, I may not find those three months of editing time for a couple of years.

A translator in Paris

How I got to this point is complex. At school I wanted to be a soldier, then I performed in a school play and discovered I would rather go to Goldsmiths College in South East London and study for a degree in Drama and English. By the end of my degree course, I had some doubts about my decision. Although I worked successfully in the London Fringe as actor, writer and director, the prospect of long-term poverty and the potential for rejection was daunting.

One year on from my degree, I packed up all my belongings in a rucksack and a suitcase and parked myself at Victoria Coach Station, intending to take the next departure for the Edinburgh Festival. I discovered that the night coach to Paris was cheaper so I took that instead, arriving the next morning at 6.45 at Place Stalingrad, a sinister location in northeast Paris. It took me four hours to find a hotel room in Belleville that cost 1000 francs for the month of August, no hot water but free *bestioles*. I stayed in Paris for about four years, in steadily

improving accommodation, punctuated by a six-month trip to the United States. I remember sitting down for brunch in Los Angeles, a fish out of water, reading my *Larousse Dictionnaire Encyclopédique* for comfort.

Back in Paris I became a translator, working mainly on commercial documents and technical specifications. I found work by writing a letter to every agency in the Paris Yellow Pages. (If I were in the same position today, I would be writing to agencies in all the major cities of Europe and offering my services by email.) When they called for the first time, whatever was happening in my life I took the job – you must be available when they need you. Later, my first real contact with literature outside of education came through a friend who worked for Fayard, Muriel Spark's publishers. I spent three afternoons helping the translator with the more obscure English phrases in her novel *Not to Disturb*. Soon after I studied interpreting at the Sorbonne and began to earn a good living.

Putting family first

I returned to London, however, in order to be with Kate. We had been together at school in Sussex, then went to different universities and lost touch. Then, 20 years ago now, we met again by chance at Gatwick Airport - the best thing that has ever happened to me. It settled the path of the rest of my life.

In London, I found the commercial translation market slow and poorly paid. I took work in publishing, proofreading and, later, line and copy-editing. The work came from chance meetings and contacts with friends of friends. And, of course, being available when needed. I edited the English text of a novel, *Holograms of Fear*, with its author Slavenka Draculic, and was invited to translate her wonderful next novel – *Marble Skin*. When Kate and I decided to have children, it coincided with her leaving her editorial director post at Random House and starting a career as a writer herself. I trained as a secondary school teacher for French and

Spanish and spent the next seven years working in inner London comprehensives. There is nothing like the exhaustion of teaching – except perhaps working as a rep at a trade fair – but there is also nothing like the feeling of having done something worthwhile every working day.

A few years ago we moved to Sussex. Kate is one of the Co-Founders and the Honorary Director of the Orange Prize for Fiction. This experience and her publishing career meant she was headhunted for the post of Executive Director at Chichester Festival Theatre. We were back where we had started in our hometown. For two years I worked part time in local schools, covering a variety of secondary subjects – which turned out to be great preparation for HE. The key to this complex career has – throughout – been a willingness to change in order to put family first. I enjoy teaching, but the decision to train for secondary education was, above all, a way to find financial security while Kate was writing her first book (and not earning!). Focusing our creative writing teaching at West Dean College helps to minimize the number of days we are away from home. Teaching our son at home has postponed some of my projects, but for a worthwhile end.

Be open to opportunities

As our son's study becomes more independent and our daughter embarks on her A-level courses, I will be able to find more time for my own work – but, also, for the development the shared projects that Kate and I have in the pipeline ... Ultimately, though, the key to any successful career in the creative arts is being the right person in the right place at the right time. If you do your utmost to make sure that you are always open to opportunities, opportunities will come along. One day it will be your turn.

Cuando viene la inspiración, que me encuentre trabajando. (When inspiration comes, let it find me working.) Pablo Picasso

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Useful links

www.mosselabyrinth.co.uk

Six year online experiment sharing the process of writing Kate Mosse's *Labyrinth*.

www.sepulcre.co.uk

Focuses on the writing of Kate Mosse's latest novel *Sepulchre*.

The British Centre for Literary Translation
Based at the University of East Anglia, BCLT works to raise the profile of literary translation in the UK through events, activities, publications and research.

www.uea.ac.uk/bclt

LiteraryTranslation.com

A one-stop shop for the latest information on literary translation related- events, resources, prizes, workshops and activities.

The Institute of Translation and Interpreting
The professional association of practising translators and interpreters in the UK.

www.iti.org.uk

Translators Association

Specialist unit within the Society of Authors.

www.societyofauthors.org

Word Reference Forums

A community of translators

<http://forum.wordreference.com/index.php>

The National Association of Writers in Education
The one organisation supporting the development of creative writing of all genres and in all educational and community settings throughout the UK.

www.nawe.co.uk

The Publishers Association

The leading trade organisation serving book, journal and electronic publishers in the UK. Website has comprehensive *Careers in Book Publishing* section.

www.publishers.org.uk

The Publishing Training Centre at Book House Offers around 70 open courses covering the complete range of publishing skills plus distance learning programmes.

www.train4publishing.co.uk

The Society of Authors

Represents the interests of professional writers, writing in all areas of the profession.

www.societyofauthors.org

Society of Editors and Proofreaders

Professional association for employed and self-employed copy-editors and proofreaders.

www.sfep.org.uk