

## *Writing... And then Writing Again: Marie Darrieussecq Explores the Art of Storytelling.*

Sometimes it's easy to start writing; but it's never easy to go on. When I was very young, I was a specialist in first chapters. Later in my life, I often had in mind or on paper the beginning and the end of a novel, the head and tail, but the belly of it resisted me: developing the middle, all those elements, events, twists and turns happening to the characters, often seemed absurd or annoying to me – and if it was like that for me, what would it be like for the readers?

During this course focused on four of my novels, I'll be happy to share with you my techniques and my tricks, what it's like facing this void at the center of every book, and skirting around what we call in French *la page blanche* – the blank page, or writer's block. Is sketching out a plan a solution? Or trusting the readers to follow the story without needing explanations and transitions, simply achieving the right tone of voice? What about titles? Typing or handwriting, daydreaming and walking, translating and being translated, here are some of the topics I'm eager to discuss with you, along with my major themes.

MD.

**Course schedule :** Wednesdays from 9 AM - 11 AM (AZ Time) on March 29, April 5, 12, and 17, 2023

**Format:** The first two class sessions (3/29 and 4/5) held online only via Zoom. The last two sessions held in person in the Rubel Room at the Poetry Center on the UA campus to a hybrid audience of in person and online students simultaneously.

### **Texts :**

*Pig Tales, a novel of lust and transformation*, translated by Linda Coverdale, New Press, 1998  
<https://thenewpress.com/books/pig-tales>

*All the Way*, translated by Penny Hueston, Text Publishing, 2014  
<https://www.textpublishing.com.au/books/all-the-way>

*Being Here Is Everything: The Life of Paula Modersohn-Becker*, translated by Penny Hueston, Semiotext(e), 2018  
<https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/being-here-everything>

*Crossed Lines*, translated by Penny Hueston, Text Publishing, 2020  
<https://www.textpublishing.com.au/books/crossed-lines>

### **Other resources :**

[www.mariedarrieussecq.com](http://www.mariedarrieussecq.com)  
[https://instagram.com/marie\\_darrieussecq](https://instagram.com/marie_darrieussecq)

### **Class procedure :**

The discussion will be based on the assumption that everyone is familiar with the novels and has them at hand during class.

## Calendar :

March 29

***Pig Tales*** (*Truismes*, 1996) is my debut novel. I will tell you how this book popped into my mind, how it got published in 1996 when I was 27, how it became an instant best-seller and what happened then, including how difficult it was to translate. Along with other novels of the 90's, it probably spearheaded a new wave of feminism in France. The story is a modern fable dealing with metamorphosis. Animals have always been present in my writing and in their own way they help me be the writer I am. I wrote this novel in one draft, in a sort of trance. In order to be able to write, I need to reach a certain state of absence of self, a form of meditation, to become porous to the world, and it doesn't happen that easily. Each one of my books has a specific voice, that I follow like a thread. Is it because of this specific voice that Jean-Luc Godard abandoned his project to make a movie of *Truismes* ? We will discuss what a fine line it is, between creation and mental chaos !

April 5

***All the way*** (*Clèves*, 2011) is inspired both by a classic French novel of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, *la Princesse de Clèves* by Madame de Lafayette, and by my teenage diary – a very special sort of diary. Is reading a lot a help or hindrance to writers ? Is keeping a diary necessary in order to become a writer ? This book is a sexual coming of age novel, explicit but also studied in high school in France. It's the only book that I wrote by following a strict plan, struggling both to adhere to and to break away from my diary. A movie was made out of it (*Clèves*, by Rodolphe Tissot, 2022), and the question of adaptation will also be central in this course. I'm currently writing a sequel to this novel, "Fabriquer une femme", and I will share my difficulties with you !

April 12

***Being here is everything*** (*Être ici est une splendeur*, Best Book on Art 2016, *Lire Magazine*) took me by surprise. I had not planned to write a biography, even less the biography of an unknown German painter, Paula Modersohn Becker. I came across her out of the blue, and it all happened as if her ghost had asked me to write her short life and make her art better known. As I was gathering information about her, mostly in Germany – not knowing a word of German - I co-organised her first exhibition in Paris at the Musée d'Art Moderne. I will tell you all about "my" Paula and the way I wrote about her, which I hope will enable us to discuss the leeway between fact and fiction, non fiction writing and the imagination.

April 17

***Crossed Lines*** (*La mer à l'envers*, 2019) is probably the book that was most challenging to write for me. It's a novel I kept in my mind for about ten years, closely intertwined with the "migration crisis" in Europe, not so much a crisis as a state of the world. In the 2010s, more and more displaced persons (I call them 'forced travelers') were drowning in the Mediterranean Sea and I felt powerless as a citizen and as a writer – as a mother, too. I hope this political – but also day to day – novel will enable us to discuss the ethics of the point of view. After the 140 first pages, I had to stop. I was stuck in the middle. I will tell you how I eventually wrote – and re-wrote – that novel, and finally published it in 2019. A "prequel" to *Crossed Lines* is my novel *Men* (2013), another book in which I got stuck in the middle!