

LANGUAGE WITH ALTITUDE

Review by John Karter

Occasionally you come across a book that demands to be read and re-read – not just by you, but by relatives, friends, colleagues, anyone you know who needs to be made aware of a remarkable new work that is as thought-provoking as it is original and clever. As a writer I have often struggled for longer than it takes to write a whole chapter in order to find *le mot juste*, the perfect word for a particular situation, but *Language with Altitude* has given me new hope for fast-track inspiration.

For anyone who works with words in any form this volume deserves a permanent place in your bookcase, office desk or briefcase. *Language with Altitude* opens up completely new ways of thinking about language: creating with words, painting pictures with them and treating them not as if they were fixed entities but fluid, malleable devices enabling writers to seduce, persuade, inform, teach, entrance and much more.

Some might think that in this age of digital communication and AI production-line writing, language is too formulaic and set in its ways to be revived, reshaped and de-clichéd. But the author Paddy Gormley is a master of language and thinking about language. He has been writing professionally for more than 40 years and has extensive experience of teaching creative and analytical thinking and writing skills, as well as having written plays for the London stage and radio. Gormley's book offers a totally fresh approach to rethinking how we might use language in more imaginative and attractive ways.

Among the topics covered is proseverse, essentially prose with hidden rhymes. Gormley contends that creativity is enhanced by the disciplines of writing in rhyming verse. He suggests that the creative process alternates between inductive and deductive reasoning. Inductive reasoning is where the mind moves from thought to thought and by so doing creates possibilities; deductive reasoning is basically analytical thought, drawing conclusions from a range of possibilities, in other words a process of selecting and refining.

Gormley offers an interesting proposition to determine how long a story should be: to imagine the end of the story at an early stage of writing and proceed to work towards it. I am not saying that he is wrong in this idea, it makes perfect sense. However, I know that many

writers, including myself, who often find the ending of a novel or play the most challenging part, would take serious issue with him on this!

Another fascinating contention in the book is that creativity does not just flow by pure inspiration or by spiritual attunement, as Julia Cameron contends in her seminal work *The Artist's Way*, in which she writes: "Creative dreams and longings do come from a divine source, not from the human ego." Gormley says we do not need to wait in hope for inspiration: "Many say their best ideas have come to them like bolts from the blue. As far as I'm concerned, such moments must be earned." He explains this by saying: "I find that nearly all of my ideas, far from coming out of nowhere, are occasioned by my efforts to solve problems or discover new perspectives on familiar themes."

Again, whether you agree with this suggestion doesn't matter. As with virtually all the ideas in the book, Gormley offers us refreshing alternatives to established ways of thinking. Whether it is the use of metaphor to interpret words beyond the usual set of meanings, ambiguity to evoke compelling images, or persuasive proseverse to spur listeners into action, there is rarely a moment when you feel you are not being offered something on which to reflect and consider.

My personal highlight comes near the end of the book when Gormley presents a brilliant reworking of Edward Lear's nonsense poem *The Owl and the Pussy-cat*, now entitled *Sea Change*. If you want a coruscating example of language with soaring altitude, *Sea Change* is a gem.

*John Karter is a former writer and editor for *The Sunday Times*, *The Times*, and *The Independent*. He is the author of a novella: *The Profit*, and six non-fiction books: *Park Life*; *Psychology of Relationships*; *The Love Delusion*; *On Training to be a Therapist*; *Frankie Dettori - the Biography*; *Lester - Return of a Legend*.