



Swansea-born, Welsh writer, Katie Stockton, is a graduate of Warwick and creative writing post-graduate student of the University of East Anglia. Katie's plays have been performed and writing published. Fellow Swansea writer, Lee Prosser, caught up with her.

KATIE STOCKTON: INTERVIEW

Q. Readers of Black Bough Poetry will be familiar with your connection to poetry, but you are also a playwright and have written seven plays to critical acclaim. Does your poetry feed into your scriptwriting and vice-versa or are there elements that you keep separate when writing?

A. Honestly, poetry and scriptwriting are probably the furthest apart when it comes to all the writing disciplines. I often like to insert a poem into my scripts, however. Great to have your poetry put in the spotlight like that and an interesting process to decide which of your own poems your characters could or would conceivably write.

Q. What motivated you to pursue academic study in creative writing?

A. Four years dedicated to nothing but writing has forced me to develop a mature writing voice for my age. Another reason, perhaps an oddity, was to see if one can really "teach" creative writing in the first place. Really, rather than to be taught how to write the perfect sestina or flash fiction piece, I was there to meet other great writers – tutors and students alike – and find out what they were reading, what events they were attending, and what they were writing, so I could do the same.

Q. In addition to writing poetry, you have been involved with poetry performance readings. Do you write differently for poems that you are going to perform in front of an audience?

A. I do not, simply because performance poetry is not something I find easy. I would, however, write differently if I weren't just reading out loud poems that were meant for the page. As long as you read a page-poem slow enough, with enough performativity for the bits with merit it, I think an engaged audience will usually get it. Some of my favourite poems in performance have been meant for the page; see *I Know A Man* by Robert Creeley, and its recordings online.

Q. You are currently working on your debut pamphlet of poems 'The World Within the World' which explores loneliness and intimacy. On first glance, these seem to be concepts that are quite removed from each other, what comparisons and connections does your poetry reflect upon in your pamphlet?

A. I think they can become strangely similar. Being alone is an intense form of intimacy with yourself. Being intimate has its boundaries that, once you realise you cannot surpass, make you

realise just how lonely us humans have to be. We are cursed with one mind, one perspective. It's lonely up in the faulty walnut. My pamphlet explores the transition from a state of extreme intimacy to extreme loneliness. You could call that a break-up, but that sounds less literary and the poems don't really talk about that anyway. They're about trying to find that magic feeling of company within a world that seems to have closed off to you. And that company can come even from the willows, or the steeples, or the woman on the bus with the scratch card who doesn't even know your name.

Q. When it comes to writing, in particular with poetry, writers can often favour certain stylistic choices whether that is emphasis on form, narrative, pace and rhythm. What for you is the main focus when writing poetry?

A. My main focus is imagery. I like to defamiliarize my readers. I've found form fairly restrictive and therefore difficult before, but I am partial to a sestina or a piece of oulipo writing.

Q. As discussed, your poetry pamphlet explores loneliness and intimacy, is there a recurrent theme that you keep returning to?

A. Along with these two, my other main point of exploration is language. In my opinion, language is the thing that separates us most from animals, but also proliferates our suffering. We talk ourselves into misery. We say things that hurt each other, we relive a moment again and again through a poem or song. It can be maddening. Language is a tool for destruction as much as construction.

Q. We are currently seeing an increase in the numbers of people reading poetry. What do you see as a pivotal role of the poet in modern-day society?

A. I don't know if I believe a poet should have a role. For example, though I am a politically engaged person, I wouldn't call myself a political writer. My main, personal goal is to prove to my readership that a twenty-two-year-old woman can write about anything, really. I think writers can be a great way to throw in the faces of the world just how smart and developed young people, women, marginalised groups, etc, can be. There is no denying the genius and craftsmanship behind an amazing piece.

Q. You were born in Swansea and now studying at the UEA in Norfolk for your MA in Scriptwriting, do the coastline and the sea influence any of your writing?

A. The sea, for sure. I recently wrote a screenplay about a

Swansea-based postman who had a fear of the sea. There's something about sitting atop of a hill in your childhood house, and looking down the slopes to the sea, and not being able to stop thinking about how it looks like everything could just slip down into that endlessness and never resurface.

Q. Are there any particular rituals or habits you adopt when drafting, writing and editing? Maybe a particular writing chair, desk, pen or place you visit that helps you to form or hone your ideas?

A. My bed, my pyjamas, a coffee, a playlist and a morning. I find when I write at night it's just an act of scraping the barrel. I like to write before I go off and do other things with my day.

Q. Besides your pamphlet are there any other projects that you have coming up?

A. Until September of this year, I focused on my dissertation project – a five-part radio series, exploring a long-distance relationship. There you go – a situation that brings intimacy and loneliness together! Now that has passed, I am looking into exploring a short story collection alongside my pamphlet.

Q. Finally, is there any advice you would give to writers, advice you wished you had been told when you started out writing?

A. None that you won't have heard before. If I had to pick three that have been the most important to me it would be; do not stop writing, the more you do it, the better you will get – 10,000 hours of practice makes an expert, or so I hear. Secondly, get out the house and explore. Staying stagnant is one of the worst things for your writing. Thirdly, edit a piece a good few times before you think of abandoning it. Becoming a great editor of your own work can be half the battle.

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Katie Stockton was interviewed by Lee Prosser, poet.

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The World Within the World

Returner, may you sound
like anything
other than trees

I cannot make peace with the trees
those enemies of imagination
are you more than a house of bones
and I more than this
potato sack of plasma

silk-worming into dusty duvets

and all this dereliction of difference
tight-roping along the rivers
stony sameness
settling for traction in the streams

where is the world within the world
hiding
is it not bored with its lairs
and where are the old emotional landscapes
from paintings

nothing in the cupboards
save for the loud roundness of tin cans
wicked cupboards
storing aborted landscapes
and totems forgot and
rivers of air

whizzing into a collapsing horizon

what binds the furniture together
what makes me wear this jumper again today
what squares the circles now

do the willows know I'm about to say
something cruel
do they droop from
crowds of smirkers

do they understand that cruelty
is just an attempt
at a power cut among
what we've come to call overstimulation

returner, whenever I think I can hear you
and your branch arms, vine hair
outside my little place
what shuffles there is actually
the souls of fallen twigs
their heartbeats
vengeful
shedding their bark
and abandoning it on moss
knowing they'll never again
be part of that deep nature they grew up in

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