

Rae Howells is an award-winning writer from Swansea, Wales. She is a guest reader for Black Bough issue 3 and was approached for this role because of her experience and excellence as a writer. Rae has been published in all of the Black Bough issues and is widely published. We caught up with her...



RAE HOWELLS

Tell us a little about yourself and where your work is published:

Some of my earliest memories are of crouching on the living room carpet, fitting together brightly-coloured plastic letters as I tried to puzzle out the mystery of how words worked. Four decades on, and I'm still fascinated by the magic of words and language. I love the almost trance-like feeling of writing, the way the words flow out from my fingertips and onto the blank page to capture a feeling or a moment or a story. I've been lucky enough to pursue my lifelong love affair with writing through a career in journalism. But even better, ten years ago I discovered poetry. I've since won both the International Welsh and the Rialto Nature and Place competitions and been shortlisted in the Arvon International and PENfro competitions. I've been published in *Magma*, *The Rialto*, *Envoi*, *Poetry Ireland*, *Marble*, *The Cardiff Review* and *The New Welsh Review*. I have poems forthcoming in *Acumen* and the Poetry Business anthology, *The Result is What You See Today*. My pamphlet-length collaboration with the amazing poet Jean James, *Bloom and Bones*, is due for publication by *Hedgehog Press* later this year, and I'm also busy touting my first full collection around publishers. I'm a married mum of two and we live near Mumbles in Swansea.

How long have you been writing poetry and how did you start?

I started writing poetry just after the birth of my first daughter, who is now ten years old. When she was a few months old my mum decided she wanted the baby to herself for a few hours every week, so she insisted I go and find something to occupy myself. I found an adult education class in creative writing at our local university. The class introduced me to poetry, and the rest is history.

What poets are your favourites and what was the last collection you read?

The first time I read *Falling Awake* by Alice Oswald, I felt as though a previously unknown part of my brain had suddenly been jolted awake. It was electrifying. I can never go back, and nor would I want to. Since then I have discovered and loved Liz Berry, Isabel Galleymore, Polly Atkin, Pascale Petit, Galway

Kinnell, Gillian Clarke, Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Matt Howard and many, many more. I've got Natalie Ann Holborrow, Mari Ellis Dunning, Rebecca Tamas and Raymond Porter on my 'to read' pile. I don't know if this counts as a collection because it's such a strange mix of poetry and prose, but I recently read *Grief Is The Thing With Feathers* by Max Porter. I can't recommend it highly enough for hitting that sweet spot of language and emotion – a perfectly poised Venn diagram of darkness and light. Mindblowing.

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You have recently joined Black Bough as a guest reader, what drew you to the publication?

Fear of missing out! Since Black Bough started it's entirely taken over my Twitter feed, and as it's local, positive, encouraging, responsive, egalitarian and full of really great poetry, I really couldn't let it pass me by. I've had poetry published in issues one and two, and so I can't wait to go behind the scenes and do my bit on issue three.

Any tips you can give to poets wishing to be published by Black Bough?

First, proofread! Second, read out your poems, either to someone else or even on your own in your bedroom, and check they flow well, that you don't trip over the words or phrasing, and edit accordingly. Third, make sure your poems make sense. Maybe it's the journalist in me, but I do like it when the subjects and verbs are in the right places. Having said that I do like to be surprised in poetry, but I'm looking for poems where the language enables the meaning to sing out, rather than obscuring and obfuscating what you're trying to say. Last, take feedback gracefully. It's the best way to improve and develop your craft. Twitter: @raehowells Insta: @Poet_Rae

www.raehowells.co.uk