

Weird and wonderful

LIKE many people, I was always taught to imagine myself in others' shoes – 'don't act without first considering how it will affect others, how they will feel'. That must have been the mantra and I think it's a good one.

When it comes to my writing, and especially my debut short story collection, *Second-Hand Rain*, I would like to think that this mantra applies to those moments when it might be easy to assume someone else's story, and to assume how someone else feels, while, in actual fact, you don't know their story at all.

That's the reason I took the opportunity to write from so many unexpected perspectives, some more unusual than others. Each story has its own voice – whether it's a lyrebird in an Australian forest, a person who has passed away or the baby of a phantom pregnancy. As a new writer, I wanted to research and imagine more, but I also liked the idea of providing opportunities to narrators who would not ordinarily be able to speak for themselves.

If my short stories had to be categorised, some of them would be 'dark' and 'psychological' but I would say they exist like the light and shade of an unpredictable week. Other than a Venetian merwoman, who is quite an anomaly within a real-life setting, there aren't any fantastical elements in my collection because it involves people and experiences which do happen, 'strange' or not.

I wanted to attain a level in my stories that was less of a skate along the surface and more akin to the unexpected conversations you have while walking home with someone after an evening out, with an acquaintance who is no longer afraid to make a bad impression and reveal that little bit more of themselves, that brief moment during which their inhibitions have shed away and friends become four-dimensional.

Swansea writer Georgia Carys Williams' short stories bring a world of unexpected characters to life

AUTHOR'S NOTES

There's a reason why those moments feel like the beginning of something, as though the barrage has opened and you're getting somewhere. It's because the water is flowing through and there is the story, telling itself, exposing fragments of a real character you hadn't quite met before. Those moments make us feel human.

I would hope my book is a similar kind of company and if readers choose books the same way they choose music, I would like the stories to give similar solace.

It covers hard topics: bereavement, suicide, depression, rape and adultery, many centered around the domestic. However, for the most part, alongside, I included a great dose of hope – that's what it's all about. I want my writing to connect with the reader in a way that makes them feel the struggle to swim for a while and at the same time, feel comfortable in acknowledging how difficult it can be to keep your head above the surface, no matter who you are. After that, you find a way forward.

I chose *Second-Hand Rain* as a title because the collection ended up bursting with water and, just as water is second-hand, so are emotions, ever flowing and difficult to keep hold of, a kind of



► Author Georgia Carys Williams

energy we absorb before passing them onto the next person. It's all unintentional most of the time, of course, but definitely circular, the way our moods can change as easily as the weather. If we aren't careful, our lives can even become what we think and feel and that's a frightening idea, but it's also one that many people have to take into account, especially writers.

Even though I'm at the beginning of my writing career, it feels as though placing myself in others' shoes has proved to be useful. While it's true that we can imagine people's worlds, we still need people to continue telling us how they feel and I would love for my writing to encourage that.

Some people insist that short stories are more difficult to write than novels because you are dipping into so many different tales over and over again. I'm sure I'll soon find out whether I agree with this view because I'm currently in the throes of writing my first novel and enjoying every challenging and revelatory moment of it. I intend to sink inside the head of the narrator as much as is emotionally possible, a habit I can't kick when there are so many surprising depths waiting to be discovered.

■ *Second-Hand Rain* is out through Parthian Books, £8.99, and is long-listed for the Edge Hills Short Story Prize 2015