

Avril Silk

I cannot remember a time when I was not passionate about books. I read avidly and have been writing ever since I was able to hold a pen. The journey of learning to write with wit and wisdom is on-going. As a writer I am versatile and have proven to be reliable.

"After nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world." (Philip Pullman)

I was born in Bristol in 1946 into a family that included Bohemians, Quakers and Communists. Literature, theatre, music and art had me in thrall from an early age, so my time at Shenstone College of Education studying Drama, English and Art was wonderful. (1964-67) Life after college was considerably tougher as I taught, first in the Midlands, then in Somerset. My pupils often had special needs, or came from minority groups. I particularly enjoyed working with adolescents with psychiatric problems (Merrifield Education Unit, Taunton 1981–1993) and Gypsy Travellers (1992–2000). I also worked as a Community Arts Organiser at Kingsmead Community School from 1988 to 1993 and was responsible for a programme of arts events and performances across all disciplines.

A hobby of making stained glass windows became a business www.avrilsrainbowglass.com and I have made many windows designed by children I have taught. That work continues since my retirement from teaching.

I live in an amazing hamlet on the Somerset/Devon border, where I am Chair of the local arts organisation. For twenty-five years I was a board member with Take Art, Somerset's rural arts organisation. <http://www.takeart.org/> and have extensive knowledge of rural arts promotion. I am a seasonal guide at nearby medieval Cothay Manor <http://www.cothaymanor.co.uk/> and delight in sharing my enthusiasm with visitors to the house.

My son James takes time from his own writing and music to proofread and edit my Young Adult novels. His support has been invaluable and his challenges keep me on my toes. He seems to have inherited my love of cats, words and vividity, but he does not share my devotion to Bob Dylan...

Bibliography

Non-Fiction

Dreams of the Road, 2007, published by Birlinn

A book I co-wrote with Dr Martin Levinson of Exeter University's Graduate School of Education, using our extensive knowledge of Gypsies and Travellers in the South West. For eight years I worked as part of the Somerset Traveller Education team, supporting Gypsy children, their families and schools, and learning far more from them than they ever learned from me! *Dreams of the Road* goes some way in preserving their rich culture, collecting together memories, anecdotes, the fears and the hopes of older Gypsies living in the South-west of England. The book was a pleasure to write and has been very well received by Travellers and non-Travellers alike.

In July 2007 Martin and I talked about *Dreams of the Road* to a capacity audience at Dartington Hall's annual Ways with Words Festival. <http://www.wayswithwords.co.uk>

For information about *Dreams of the Road* see:
<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Dreams-Road-Avril-Silk/dp/184158505X>

Dreams of the Road led to work as a researcher with Bournemouth University on the *Grey and Pleasant Land?* project. The research culminated in an academic book, *Countryside Connections*, 2014, and I am listed as a contributor.
<http://www.policypress.co.uk/display.asp?ISBN=9781447310303&>

Fiction

Novels

The Wolfblood Prophecies

Kindle editions:

Forget Me Knot 2011

Mourning Glory 2011

Heart Seize 2012

These books can be enjoyed as straightforward adventure stories, but there are many philosophic and humanitarian issues to be explored for those prepared to ask awkward questions and contemplate difficult ethical and moral issues. The vocabulary and word play are intended to be stretching, adding a welcome dimension and challenge for avid readers.

Three volumes of my exciting and challenging series for Young/New Adults are already available: *Forget Me Knot*, *Mourning Glory* and *Heart Seize*. Still to follow are: *P.N.E.*; *Sinnerman Star*; *Oxide A-Z* and *Poison I.V* which will complete the set.

Reviews:

'A darkly twisting tale.' - Beth Webb, author of *Star Dancer*, *Wave Hunter* and *Shadow Dancer*.

"Go Jo! I love the emping - shades of 'Northern Lights' but much more than that... May Kindles across the land hum with Wolfblood... - Ally Kennen, author of BEAST, BERSERK and BEDLAM.

'Exciting and moving in equal parts, with twists and turns that kept me enthralled.' - Christine Bennetts, academic author and researcher.

*'Forget Me Knot is b****y marvellous. I devoured it.'* - Talis Kimberley, singer and songwriter.

For more information about *The Wolfblood Prophecies* see: www.avrilsilk.com

A Window on Her Life (Fire and Ice), desktop publication 2010.

I received tremendous encouragement from the organiser of the Ian St. James Award, Merric Davidson, to develop one of my short stories into a full length adult novel.

I loved this story... I wanted to follow up each of the characters... I think this would make a good novel, in the Rosamund Pilcher 'The Shell Seekers' vein. The central idea of the Zodiac window is absolutely captivating and well described – I could see it! Judge's comments.

With such praise, I went ahead and wrote the novel, drawing on my knowledge of making stained glass windows for a powerful metaphor of creativity, durability and survival. www.avrilsrainbowglass.com

Short stories/features

My features and short stories have been accepted for diverse publications:

- *Red, Green and Radical* – later *Red Pepper* (*The Nero Syndrome* 1993, *Revenge is Sweet* 1994)
- *Mendip and Northern Somerset* (*Another Rainbow* 1999, *Ready to Fly*, 1999)
- *Just 17* (*The Playboys*, 1992)
- *The Journal of Erotica* (censored)
- *Bitch Magazine* (Sundry very funny articles between 1992 and 1993 and I'm still waiting for the cheque...)

In 1993 I was short listed for the Ian St. James Award with *Crystal*, a poetic gothic horror story. *'Excellent, profound and moving story. Kept me guessing... Your descriptive passages are strong; your characterisation is unsentimental yet moving and the story works on several levels from exhibiting a wild imagination through to a deeply personal voyage of acceptance. I'm impressed.'* Judge's comment.

Raw Silk column for *Just Women* magazine

From 1988 to 1997 I was a co-editor and regular columnist for Somerset's award winning* *Just Women* magazine, covering a wide range of subject matter, with an emphasis on high ideals and low humour. There are many examples on my website: <http://www.avrilsilk.com/author/index.html>

*The Pandora Award for New Enterprise in Publishing

Theatre Reviews

Since 2011 I have regularly reviewed for remotegoat, and my reviews can be read on http://www.remotegoat.com/uk/user_view.php?uid=28383

Plays

The Chronicles of Focking Barton (2005)

With Madeleine Morey, also from *Just Women*, I have written a comedy series for TV based on our experiences as complete beginners producing a feminist magazine in deepest Somerset. The encouragement of TV producer Averil Brennan and our then agent, Conrad Williams of Blake Friedmann, resulted in a useful meeting with Paul Mayhew Archer, Commissioning Editor for Comedy and Entertainment for the BBC. He was very generous with his time and suggestions, but not, alas, his chequebook. The four episodes of *The Chronicles of Focking Barton*

(pronounced F'b'ton) each half an hour long, are still fresh and funny and again up for sale!

... *your writing is full of wit and humour and inventive ideas...* Conrad Williams of Blake Friedmann Literary Agency

Short musical plays

When I was teaching I regularly wrote short musical plays geared to my students, some of whom had extensive special educational needs, including psychiatric problems. The performances were a delight right up until the time Astrid the arsonist ran amok...

The Snow Queen

In the 1980s I was a founding member of Cock Crow Stone, a Somerset-based community theatre group and co-wrote much of our material, often using local legends and events such as the building of the Wellington Monument – *A Tall Story*. I wrote the lion's share, songs included, of a musical based on Hans Christian Anderson's *The Snow Queen*. I treasure the memory of an excellent review from Adam Helliker, written before his career in journalism whisked him away from sleepy Somerset to *The Telegraph*, *The Mail on Sunday*, Camilla Parker-Bowles' biography and a rum do with Princess Diana's address book!

The Snow Queen has been performed by Cock Crow Stone, pupils of Merrifield Education Unit and members of Taunton Youth and Community Centre.

Reminiscence work and community publishing

I've edited/instigated several community books;

- *True Romanies, True Friends* A desktop publication by Traveller pupils at Stanchester School, 1995, describing their curriculum enhancement project – a ground-breaking initiative led by me and Sue Hazell, a local youth worker.
- *Stowell 2000 – A Celebration* Published in 2000 by Stowell 2000, Red Cottage with support from the Millennium Festival Awards, Awards for All and South Somerset District Council. This is an intimate record of the community of Stowell in Dorset. I was writer-in-residence, interviewer-in-chief and editor.
- *Ashbrittle at the Millennium* Published in 2000 by Ashbrittle Arts with support from the Millennium Festival Awards. I am the Chair of Ashbrittle Arts, and this record of our community in 2000 was led by me. I set up a working group and together we interviewed everyone we could persuade to take part. I transcribed and edited the results, and, with graphic designer Ted Franklin and photographer John Ridgley, produced a well-loved book.
- *The Rose Queen Dined on Spam and Semolina* This lively collection of true-life stories about members of the Ashbrittle Lunch Club was published by me in 2008 with a grant from Somerset Active Living.