

Each month we will focus on an inspiring author based in or writing about Wales! You'll have an introduction to their latest book, what inspires them to write, and any advice they have for young writers!

Get to know

Jo Mazelis



Novelist, poet, photographer, essayist and short story writer, **Jo Mazelis** grew up in Swansea, later living in Aberystwyth and then London for over 14 years before returning to her hometown. Her novel *Significance* was awarded the **Jerwood Fiction Uncovered Prize 2015**. Her first collection of short stories *Diving Girls* was shortlisted for both **Wales Book of the Year** and **Commonwealth Best First Book**. Her book *Circle Games* was long-listed for **Wales Book of the Year**. Her third collection of stories *Ritual*, 1969 was long-listed for the **Edge Hill Prize** and shortlisted for **Wales Book of the Year in 2017**. *Blister and Other Stories* was shortlisted for the **Rubery Award** in 2023. She has taught creative writing for Swansea University's Department of Adult Continuing Education, at Trinity College, Carmarthen and for residential courses at the **Arvon Foundation**.



Summary:

Written over the course of her career this fourth collection of stories, *Blister and Other Stories* reveals the arc of the writer's imagination. Experimental early work like 'The Tower and the Mountain' and later works like 'Greyhound Nights' might be grounded in reality yet flicker and twist themselves out of shape as if reflected in water. From microfiction, 'The Dream of the Fisherman' and 'What the Sparrow Remembers' to longer tales like 'A Killing Frost', Mazelis stretches the potential of the form, touching upon myth and fairy tale with surreal takes upon grim reality, as evidenced in 'Amongst the Bluebells'. The book was recently shortlisted for The International Rubery Award, 2023.

What inspired you to write *Blister and Other Stories*?

It is the gathering up of stories which haven't appeared in my other three collections. There are works I wrote in 1980s, others published in 1990s in magazines, right up to 2022. My inspiration hasn't changed much over the years it always focuses on events both very human and very strange! I self-published this book in part for my daughter and granddaughter, partly for myself. It's very risky to self-publish so I was delighted when the book was shortlisted for the Rubery Award.

Tell us a little about the collection ...

The first work in the collection is 'The Winter Child' - it's an attempt to recreate the experience of a child raised in complete isolation from other people. His mother is suffering from some kind of psychosis and feels she must protect her son from the world. Everything

he learns comes through the distorting lens of her perception. Another story, 'The Famous Man' explores similar territory and asks what is truth? Who can represent truth?

If you could tell your younger writing self anything, what would it be?

Trust yourself; be yourself, however imperfect. It is better to try and fail than not try at all.

What books are currently on your bedside table?

Loop of Jade by Sarah Howe, *Pain, Parties, Work*: Sylvia Plath in New York, Summer 1953 by Elizabeth Winder and, of course, a library book, *Surrealism in Britain* by Michel Remy. I tend to flit between books these days, so poetry, a non-fiction title and an art book is quite a typical mix for me.

