

Dan Oram - Black Country Writer



Who is Daniel Oram?

I was born in Bloxwich, grew up and went to school there. I was 'creative' in an unfocused, middle-class way. One of the earliest things I wrote was back in school. We had been given the task of creating a superhero. I created the character Prambo, a baby with superpowers. I joined a bedroom band in secondary school. We played a couple of gigs, recorded a demo. I was awful in a way that would haunt me for years to come. I wasn't rubbish, per se, just sort of average, nothing special. I left the band when I went to University, they carried on without me for a while. They became quite good. I moved to Winchester and King Alfred's College studying a B.Ed. in Drama, Theatre and Television studies. When it came to acting, again, I was so-so. I bagged the part of Bardolph in

Shakespeare's 'The Merry Wives of Windsor'. I found I could edit video and was a dab-hand with a camera. I gained a lot of enthusiasm and realised that I wasn't cut out to be a teacher. Without going into details, I disliked certain aspects. All of this was moot as about this time my Bipolar Disorder decided to kick in.

I ran, screaming from Winchester and desperately tried to prove I could do a degree and enrolled at the newly minted Wolverhampton University (a Poly no longer). Sadly, with manic episodes driving me to distraction and wildly fluctuating moods disrupting my peace, I crashed out of that degree too.

What came next was a dark period in my life. I spent ten years or so in the wilde-

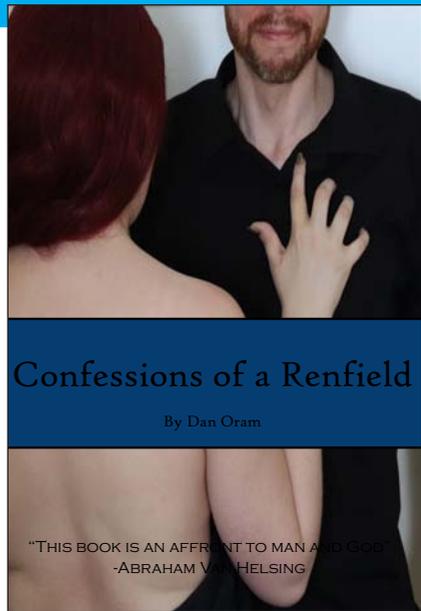
-ness. Learning what was wrong with me, finding out the best way to treat said condition and then slowly putting myself back together. I emerged, somewhat weak-kneed, but determined to make a life.

During this time I had gained an HND in Performing Arts, specialising in technical theatre as well as married my childhood sweetheart. She's still with me to this day, having stuck with me through tick and thin (mainly thin to be honest).

I managed to get a job working for a Council in the Black Country and held a job for thirteen years or so. During this time, I started working on prose and poetry. Now, I have put the public sector behind me and I have just started a new job helping to provide training and opportunities for unemployed people.

What made you decide to embark on a career in writing?

I have always scribbled down notes and stories. Around the age of fifteen I discovered table-top role-playing. This amazing medium for storytelling got me into the habit of creating stories the players in our group could live in. While I was recovering and finding my feet, I dabbled in poetry as a way of putting on paper some of my fears, hopes and nightmares. This wasn't meant to see the light of day, just something to help me recover, or so I thought at the time. As things got better and I got out of the house more, I indulged in one of my more guilty pastimes. I indulged in the odd spot of table-top wargaming. I knew it was just recreational and I could give up any time I wanted to, but it kept me occupied while my wife was at work. It was in a Games Workshop that I heard



the words uttered for the first time by someone who didn't know me. We had been playing a game called 'Necromunda' a gang-based skirmish game set on a fictitious world. We'd been playing for several weeks (about one game a week) and there was a story forming out of the events. It was just getting interesting when we were told we couldn't play that game anymore (anyone familiar with Games Workshop will know this used to happen from time to time). We were disappointed, as we all wanted to play the campaign to the end. For some reason, I said that I would write up the conclusion. I went away and scribbled a few notes, spoke to some of the others and came up with a story. It was called 'The Battle for Wal's Hole.' We were playing the game in the Walsall branch; do you see what we did there? I took in a couple of copies for the guys to read.

It was there I heard that famous line that placed the seed in my head: "Yeah,

that published mate.” For the record, I didn’t get it published. I read the story recently. It’s clumsy, difficult to read and an embarrassing collection of dialogue, but there’s something there. I wrote some other stories, some quite long. There was talent, but I lacked the skills to make the most of them. Once again, resigning that period to the ‘In Haitus’ folder, I carried on getting better.

With the new found confidence of several years work under my belt and an increasingly stable mood, I decided to address a hole in my CV, so to speak. I had, up until this point, tried twice to gain a degree level qualification and come up short. My wife had recently finished a degree with the Open University and I thought “Y’know what, Dan, its time to have another go.” So I enrolled for a 6 year degree, studying in my free time, after work (I was working a full time job at the time) and wherever I could find time. It was tough, but I did succeed. I am now the proud owner of a B.A. in English Language & Literature.

It was on this degree I discovered that one of the modules was Creative Writing. Now, all of the little voices in my head reminded me that I had done some poetry and some people thought I should be published. I thought I would put it to the test. What happened next, literally changed my life. I was posting this wacky, out there, prose featuring a cast of vampires, werewolves, space badgers and other nonsense and people who didn’t know me, who had no vested interest in being nice to me, were telling me how good my writing was. I managed to receive the greatest compliment on that module: “I don’t like sci-fi, but I like that story” (The story was sci-fi, just for the record). I loved the course and immediately signed up for

the **ADVANCED** Creative Writing course. I was writing most of the time and I was really enjoying myself.

I think without Southcart Books, I probably would have gone on writing stories and leaving them on my computer. Southcart Books was a small independent bookshop in Walsall. Sadly, it’s closed now, but for a few, brief years it was a mecca for new authors and poets and kickstarted the scene in Walsall. It all started innocuously enough. My sister contacted me telling me that her wedding photographer had just released a book and that they were having a double book launch. They were looking for people to do readings of their work. Still reeling from my creative writing success, I stumbled into the place and said I would join in. The theme was music and I rifled through my notes and found something I could quickly adapt, timed it and headed to the shop. It was full of authors and musicians. I sat through these wonderful stories and songs until it came to my turn. Literally trembling, I took my place and started speaking. The rest, as they say, is history. I was smitten and bitten. Here was something I was not okay at, not average at. Here was something I was good at. I had taken my first steps into a larger world. I was now a Writer.

What is it about the Black Country that inspires you?

The Black Country is my home, I was born into its smells and sounds and sights. As a child, I remember I travelling into Walsall and all I could see was chimneys. I remember stopping at the level crossing as coal trains passed on their way to Reedswood Power Station, counting the number of coal trucks and losing count. I remember the drop forge

just down the road from us. On summer days, they opened the doors to the forge and you could hear the rhythmic sound of the hammer. The Black Country is not explicitly found in my prose. I write of exotic, faraway places like London or another world, but the echoes of the Black Country are still there.

In my poetry, the Black Country is more to the fore. My poem 'Langwidge' is based on my Grandmother, who was born with and lost her Pelsall accent. My poems are based in the Black Country, such as 'HomeRun' which is about the crawling route home from Wolverhampton in heavy traffic. I am Middle Class (and proud of it), but my roots are in the dark earth of this region.

What else inspires you? Do you have any favourite authors, poets, musicians that have influenced your work?

Speaking as a creative type, everything inspires me, from rush hour traffic through people's conversations overheard at a coffee shop to listening to Radio 4 (yes, I listen to Radio 4).

I like vampires. Yep I liked 'em since I was small. Although not as much as I like werewolves. I remember being very scared of werewolves when I was a kid. I faced my fear and I have learned all about real wolves. The wolf is an amazing animal and I understand why people are so obsessed with them. One day I hope to see them back in this country. 'Twould be nice, besides it might just help keep the deer population down in Scotland, although I'm sure people who cull them and then sell the carcasses for restaurants etc. will bitterly complain.

Next came Goth. Goth in the 80's influenced me loads. At the age of 15 I

to see The Mission with a friend and my life was changed from then on. It was The Mission, Fields of the Nephilim, Sisters etc. I grew up and began to read a whole bunch of new vampire stories.

Then the Role-playing game Werewolf: The Apocalypse came out and my life changed. I loved the combination of Eco-warrior/barely-controlled-killing-machine/spiritual-questing-shape-changers. Yeah, it kinda hit me hard, grabbed hold and never let go.

This was followed at Uni by Anime. I caught a screening of Akira in Japanese at my local college cinema. Several years later, I started to watch decent Anime. It was a tough time, the early days of Anime in the UK was pretty much the dross of Japan. Orotsukidoji and the follow ups (Orotsukidoji 2: even dodgier), general sex and violence. If that's your thing, hey, good on ya, but I knew there must be a balance. Now we have excellent and nuanced stories such as Fullmetal Alchemist or Neon Genesis Evangelion to name but two. Pretty much anything by Studio Ghibli is worth a watch. Their stuff is thought-provoking, funny and downright nice, which we all need from time to time.

Speaking seriously though, my greatest love is reading. I love reading. Not all of it is top notch literature, but books is books, eh? I started reading stuff like Tolkien and David Eddings when I was at school, but I think two books changed my view of, well, everything and they were 'Weaveworld' by Clive Barker and 'Neuromancer' by William Gibson.

I love cyberpunk with its man-machine interfaces and hyper-real description. I don't like all of Gibson's work, but 'Neuromancer' (and 'Count Zero' and 'Mona Lisa Overdrive') has a real emptiness to

it. Like a road movie in an urban setting. Despite the pressing mass of humanity surrounding them, each character seemed more alone than anyone. This staccato rhythm of hyper-speed events and the almost obsessional detail of the pauses between them, really gripped me.

'Weaveworld' is possibly the richest, most beautiful, ugly, sensual, brain-meltingly textured thing I have ever read. the combination of sexual allure and revulsion the book inspires sometimes is breath-taking. I still find it a pleasure to read.

On the poetry side, my first exposure to poetry was a little book called 'You Tell Me.' It was series of poems by Roger McGough and Michael Rosen. I learned that poems didn't have to rhyme, didn't have to go rumpy tumpy tumpy one/rumpy tumpy tumpy done. Another inspiration, although not always in a positive way, was the school book 'Dragonsteeth'. It featured poems by Seamus Heaney, Walt Whitman and Ted Hughes. The two that always stood out to me were 'The Projectionist's Nightmare' by Brian Patten and 'The Computer's First Christmas Card' by Edwin Morgan.

Tell us about the success you've had with your publications.

First, I need to measure success. My first novella, 'Confessions of A Renfield' is currently on sale at Amazon. Has it sold loads and loads of copies and made me rich? No, to be honest, I'm still in the minus figures. Does this mean I've not had success? To be able to write a story, proof read it, set it (with some help, thanks Ken Preston), create a cover, release it and run an ace launch party fill

s me with pride. It was a success. I'm not in this to make money (although, if I do, that'd be really cool).

Survival is success. The release of CoaR is still the high point of my career, not to mention the short story in 'Greetings'.

Tell us about your collaborative project(s).

Unless you count my tabletop roleplaying, I haven't been involved in any collaborative projects yet.

What advice would you give to aspiring Black Country writers?

Write. Don't ever stop writing. Keep going, never give up. Write. Never throw anything away. I have a folder on my computer full of half-started stories and ideas that went nowhere. One day, I'll peruse that folder and find exactly what I'm looking for. My Mom told me one of the greatest pieces of advice in the world: Everything is a learning experience. It's not good or bad, just an opportunity to learn. Even if what you've learned is "I'm never doing that again."

Read. Reading is the best research you can do. Read deep, powerful stuff. Read arty things that win awards, but are nearly unreadable. Read trashy novels and romances. Read leaflets from take-aways stuffed through your letterbox. It doesn't matter. Inspiration can be found anywhere.

I'm a performance poet and I try my best to give my readings, poetry or prose, life. I can give tips on performing poetry and prose. First things first, if you want to perform your work, don't read it, perform it. I know that seems obvi -

-ous, but it is an important distinction. Every poem has its own rhythm and feel. Feel here is the important word. You have to find the emotions in the piece and follow them through, once you understand the emotion, then you can start adding in the performance. The next thing is, possibly, the most boring. Practice. Practice. Practice. Practice. Practice. You need to be able to let the flow of the poem take you along, and that only comes with saying it over and over and over. Listen to the words you use instead of the ones on the page. I find that many of my poems are very different after reciting them out time after time. The final, and most important point of all. Pick a point to stop making changes. Many of my poems are either 'open' or 'locked'. You can go back and back making change after change, learn to pick an end point to editing. Don't forget, that could be after you have performed it a few times.

When performing prose, there are differences. I'm not the type of person who can 'do all the voices' and I'm jealous of those that can. This doesn't mean that you can't speak with the 'voice' of the character. Each character uses different words and sentence structure. If, after reading a section of prose or story out loud, you realise all the characters sound the same, go back and make each voice distinct. This is a good thing for all writers of prose, people don't usually speak in perfect grammar. Writers are always driven to make sure that everything is spell and grammar checked. When it comes to people talking, the rules go out of the window. If you make your characters speak in a realistic way, then your performances will also be improved. One thing I find does help when performing short pieces of prose is music. I have recited several of my short

pieces to music and I have found that it has enhanced the piece greatly. It's something I haven't tried with poetry yet. The rules are simple, no lyrics or words are involved as they will clash with the words you want to say and check timings. Is your story long enough? Is the piece of music suitable for the story? Again, practice, practice, practice. Also, make sure you have a way of playing the music loud enough to be heard. Some venues will have a set up that supports this but be prepared.

Finally ... finally, have fun, enjoy your poems and prose!

What's next for you?

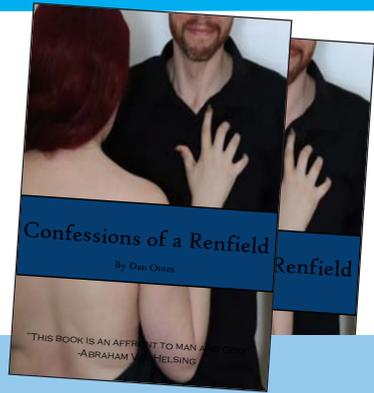
I am, as ever, working on my longest work to date. 'Welcome Back Victoria' is a Dystopian view of the near future. This cyberpunk influenced tale features mind control (the sensible, researched-kind), cyber terrorists and a backdrop of Neo-Victorianism. It's better than it sounds, I promise. This novel has been with me for a long time and it seems to have gotten away from me and I'm struggling to get it back under control. This one will need more time, I'm afraid. I am also, by popular demand, working on a sequel to 'Confessions of A Renfield'. I hope this one to be longer, but the short format seems to work as my protagonist, Jimmy, has a short attention span.

I am also working on my poetry. I am keeping my hand in on various Open Mic nights and attempting to collect enough poems for a pamphlet or, if the poetry gods smile on me, a small book.

Where can we buy your work?

I can be found in the following haunts:
Facebook: @Dan Oram-Author
Email: danoramauthor@gmail.com

In my first novella 'Confessions of A Renfield' James McAllen attempts to square the circle of his mundane existence with the dangerous, exotic world of vampires and those who serve them. Jimmy's life is turned upside down, when a vicious vampire hunter sets his sights on the one person he really cares for.



www.amazon.co.uk/Confessions-Renfield-Dan-Oram/dp/1731341415/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=confessions+of+a=renfield&qid=1581022340&s=books&sr=1-1

Or purchase a signed copies from author.

My short story 'Aftermath and After', set in a post-apocalyptic Birmingham can be found in 'Southcart Tales'.

www.amazon.co.uk/Southcart-Tales-Storytellers/dp/1525203420/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=southcart+storytellers&qid=1581022836&sr=8-1

My short story 'Cate's Folly' can be found in the Enthusiastic Press anthology 'Greetings'.

www.amazon.co.uk/Greetings-Poetry-Prose-Various/dp/1916113036/ref=sr_1_2?keywords=enthusiastic+press&qid=1581020714&s=books&sr=1-2



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