

Jon Interviewing SUZIE GROGAN

Suzie My Keats book, I've just got the first proof of that back from my publisher, so it's got all the images in, it's all typeset, so that's getting really exciting now. That's coming out January next year, because it's the bicentenary of Keats' death in Rome in 1821. So it's 200 years since he died. And so it's coming out around the time when there'll be a lot about Keats in the press, so I'm hopeful. But that's a very, very personal one, because I've loved Keats since I was twelve

Jon Yes, until the 1960's he was regarded as the archetypal wet romantic poet, wasn't he...

Suzie Yeah, well...

Jon ... who wasn't interested in anything that was happening politically? But in fact, he was.

Suzie Very much so.

Jon He was quite into radical politics

Suzie And the latest biography by Nicholas Rowe, the most recent chapter really focuses on Keats' relationship with history and the historical events that were going on around him. And I found that fascinating, because actually from the very beginning, it's strange how even at twelve you can be intuitive about something. I never saw him as the weak, kind of feeble poet.

Jon He was a boxer.



Suzie He was a boxer, a pugnacious little chap, he was the guy to have on your side. People thought he'd be in the army, they most certainly thought, anybody who knew him thought he'd be in the military.

Jon It's strange in a way, because he was five foot nothing, wasn't he?

Suzie I've worked this out, and it was very sad, but he was the same height as Ronnie Corbett. Which is, if someone our age is asked, you know it's 'Keats was what?' So think Ronnie Corbett, and that's how tall Keats was. And you that we just don't appreciate that actually everybody was shorter, but he was very much shorter. Shelley was five eleven I think, Wordsworth was five nine. John Clare was about the same height, but he never met John Clare. It would have been wonderful had he met John Clare, because he'd have found somebody... What I like about it is that, you know, that they were real people. All through Victorian period he was seen as that kind of cut-down-by-the-critics young blossoming poet who, if only people had been a little bit kinder to him, he wouldn't have faded away in Rome. Which is tosh. Frustrates me when people still think that. But they were real people living in real times. The book on Keats is very much my journey – journey, a horrid word – with Keats, because he's been with me through some difficult times, because I had breast cancer when the children were still young. So that's nearly fourteen years ago now. He saw me through that, he's seen me through bouts of anxiety and depression. The language of his letters and his poetry, and the way he talked about life, and the philosophy he has of both poetry and life, has always, I think it's very sustaining.

Jon Your radio show – I'm keen to hear about that.

Suzie It was in Somerset, and it was community radio. It was wonderful, and because it's on the internet now, people from all over the place can listen to it. I had a great time. It's called 'Talking Books', and it was me having a fortnightly programme where I would interview a local author, or authors from further afield that I thought would interest the people of Somerset. So it was great fun, I met lots of really interesting people, because authors are generally quite



interesting people, they've all got a story to tell. And it was all different genres I tried to cover, and poetry of course is one of my favourites, and there's some great local poets in Somerset. You can still actually listen to some of the shows on SoundCloud, because I have a little SoundCloud station with my Suzie Grogan's Talking Books. I'm going to write another book, which is about the impact of spiritualism in the Great War, and how everybody turned to something in order to try and contact those they'd lost. Whether you believe in it or not, it was huge. And it's very relevant to now, and how we're very willing, not me personally, but a lot of people have been willing to, to believe things like the 5G is causing the virus, all these conspiracy theories about the deaths of people – we're very willing to be taken in by the very slightest evidence, because we're searching for some explanation for crazy things that are happening in our lives. And that's what people were doing, women particularly, between the wars. Between the wars is so misunderstood, and a lot of all the issues that have been relating to statues, and very current issues, relate very much to the, to the way we perceive heroes in British history. I think it's really relevant, the fact that we need to understand why people turn to these seemingly bizarre beliefs at times of crisis. But that's going to be a little bit more of an academic book, so I'll have to pitch that elsewhere. You know, there are echoes across 200 years, and we simply don't learn. You know, the idea that we don't learn from history...

Jon That's right. Well, I hope our listeners will just surge out into the bookshops and buy it. Suzie, thank you very much.

Suzie In January. It would be very nice.

Jon Thank you.