

EDITORIAL

The University of Salzburg poetry publications, launched by its founding editor James Hogg in 1981, would not have developed and flourished, as they did right from their early years, without the support of William Oxley. Hogg had been contemplating the idea of inviting poets to Salzburg, so that his students might be introduced to the practice and production of living verse instead of being restricted simply to the study of the established texts of the literary canon. By a happy chance, a circular from Peter Russell, received out of the blue, reminded Hogg of his early admiration for *Nine* – a magazine that Russell edited in the 1950s. Russell's publicity material happened to mention, as a fellow poet, William Oxley. Hogg decided to turn to him for help in enlisting contributors for a projected festschrift in celebration of Russell's sixtieth birthday. William furnished James with a substantial list of poets and critics and contributed two important essays. As James gratefully admitted, "the volume would have been less substantial in every way without Oxley's help."

One of the first publications of the Salzburg poetry list was *The Vitalist Reader*, which contained a selection from the poetry of Anthony Johnson (a university professor in Pisa) along with a number of poems from Oxley's and Russell's previously published collections and pamphlets. The three poets were regularly invited to give lectures, readings and tutorials for MA and PhD students at Salzburg. On one such occasion William and his wife Patricia entered my life, probably in early 1986, on the occasion of a dinner party, organized by James, to discuss my PhD project, a study, suggested by James, of William's poetry. For the next three years I spent the summer months, supported by a grant from the Austrian government, in Brixham in south Devon; that is, in William's study, where I collected the data for his bibliography, conducted countless interviews, and became the most important customer of the local print-shop where I had hundreds of photocopies taken.

Although I finally – and faithlessly – decided to abandon the project and, as a result of my fascination with *Littack*, a magazine that William edited in the 1970s, embarked on a study of British and Irish little magazines and small presses instead, William supported my new project with undiminished generosity. When I discussed the outline and approach of my project with him, he suggested poets, publishers and critics I should meet to conduct interviews with. William not only helped me arrange long lists of questions for many of the interviews, but arranged appointments with the prospective interviewees. Together with Patricia he accompanied me to meet John Heath-Stubbs in his London flat, Peter Dale of *Agenda* and Roland John of *Outposts* at the latter's home in Frome, the poet-critic Derek Stanford in the Royal Pavilion Garden in Brighton, and Rupert Loydell of *Stride* in his house in Exeter. In addition, William invited Fred Beake, editor of *The Poet's Voice*, and David Woolley of *Westwords* for interviews hospitably conducted in his garden.

Often William and Patricia took me down to the Shoalstone Seawater Pool, picturesquely situated on Brixham sea front. One day William raised the issue of translation and proposed to translate a selection of Georg Trakl's poetry in collaboration with me. Again, William's ideas, and his confidence in me as a collaborator, had a decisive influence on my life, let alone on my academic career. William delighted in helping me find my feet, as he often put it, and saw his function as that of an "enabler" – again, his term.

James Hogg handed the Salzburg poetry list over to me in 1996, on the occasion of his retirement. At the time we were already publishing a forerunner to *Poetry Salzburg Review – The Poet's Voice*. I worked on it as co-editor with him and Fred Beake, the founding editor. We published eleven issues and then in early 2000 James and Fred decided to leave the masthead and focus on other projects. I found myself, as it were, overnight sole editor of a poetry magazine. I had always wanted to run my own magazine and now James encouraged me to develop my own ideas on policy, corporate design and identity, and the editorial structure of the new magazine. Since the inaugural issue in 2001 William received a copy of every issue and I made sure that his was among the first that were posted. It was always a great delight to receive his acknowledgment of receipt and, some days later, his critique which was always encouraging and generous, although I am sure he did not always agree with what my editorial board and I decided to publish. The comment that I received for No. 34 was typically William – detailed, personal and generous: "a varied issue full of interest. I was very pleased to read the interview with Alan Riach because it gave me a good, up-dated perspective on Scots poetry, and I was glad to know that MacDiarmid is coming back into view again. I was additionally pleased to read your editorial, giving the magazine's policy of endeavouring to bring people like John Gurney and Fred Beake back into view, as well as encouraging new work. So, may I say, 'Keep up the good work'."

At the 2016 Torbay Poetry Festival, William and I had discussed the possibility of editing a Peter Russell casebook. He suggested a piece on the long poem *Ephemeron* which he submitted one or two months later. Due to many academic commitments, this project is, for the moment, in abeyance; but William's essay is here published for the first time. When I asked Patricia for her approval, I was moved in more than my conscience when she told me that William had asked about the Russell project hours before he passed away during the afternoon of 4 February. To speak of one's feelings is difficult under such circumstances. The reader will find this done with greater capability and a finer balance of sympathetic insight in the obituary written for him by his – and our - long-term friend Glyn Pursglove.

Wolfgang Görtschacher