

EDITORIAL

As a new member of the Editorial Board, perhaps I should begin by introducing myself. I am a former *Coronation Street* scriptwriter who has also written for many well-known British comedians. These days, however, I see myself as predominantly a poet. Indeed, the first writing I had accepted for publication – back in 1978 – was an Outposts poetry booklet, *Beneath the Chaos*, a pamphlet, I regret to say, entirely lacking in humour. I thought humour might stop me from being taken seriously in the literary world, that I would be categorised as a writer of what was often dismissed as Light Verse.

Since returning to poetry as my main writing activity, there has been a pamphlet with Poetry Salzburg, *Routines* – published in Autumn 2016 – and another pamphlet, *Troupers*, will be published by smith | doorstep in their Laureate's Choice series, this autumn. A personal highlight for me was to be invited by Carol Ann Duffy to read as her guest at the Royal Society of Literature's T. S. Eliot Memorial event at the British Library in February this year.

I have been co-editor of two journals: the online *Hinterland*, founded by Ian Parks, and the MMU journal *Avis*. I host a monthly spoken word event at the wonderful Square Chapel Theatre in Halifax, West Yorkshire, and I deliver poetry and performance workshops in schools for Children and the Arts / The Prince's Trust.

There, enough biography. Now to poetry, the reason *Poetry Salzburg Review* exists and has for some time. Why did I accept Wolfgang's invitation to join the Editorial Board? Apart from the close relationship we built working on my pamphlet, the journal is one of the most stimulating, eclectic and certainly international outlets for quality contemporary poetry that I have come across. It seems to me that the journal's only aim is to find and publish poetry that feels important – whatever the subject matter – and, in the search for these poems, established writers are welcomed and new writers are celebrated. This dedication to the search for poetry that, in the broadest sense, entertains, must be what has kept the journal alive and well for so long. That, and Wolfgang's hard work.

This is the first issue that contains some poems that I have chosen from the thousands of submissions we receive. I have wondered how difficult it would be to describe to you the sort of poetry I like and dislike. I feel it is incumbent upon me to at least have a stab at this, with-

out mentioning the work of any poets (past or present) in particular. So here it goes. I find traditional form – sonnets, terza rimas, ballads, ballades, villanelles – delightful, but only if they are done well. I champion fine examples, and I hate any snootiness aimed at them. Such forms can be strait-jackets made by angels – they can provide the discipline that creates great, concise, precise, imaginative work. I am not saying I always prefer these forms over more open or experimental forms – I don't, it's the poem as a whole that matters – but I do like to bang the drum for rhyme and metre executed to a high standard. More important, though, for me, is that a poem should have energy, life, vitality, whatever the form. Please do not interpret my comments as a pedantic love for traditional forms only – that is not what I am saying.

Even more important for me are the words themselves. David Constantine recently said, 'Poetry *is* an exact science'. A master of the art in any form, he meant that we must, as poets, use words with forensic accuracy, treat them with the utmost respect, in contrast to, say, politicians of all colours who these days bombard us with meaningless slogans, and twist words for their own power-mad ends. As writers, particularly poets, words are all we have. So I respond to poems where words are used with scimitar-like effect. I have no time for unnecessary preambles that bore me even before I know what the poem is supposed to be about. Equally, I am turned off by poems that use words to preach, or to show me how earnest and caring the poet is, or to pontificate. I will never enjoy a poem whose words make me focus on the poet rather than the subject. Too many poems, to me, today, seem to be about nothing in particular dressed up with clever metaphors or in-vogue sentiment or linguistic tricks – poems written by poets who have been described as 'on the make'.

Right, now I am getting to what I would really like to say. I believe that contemporary poetry needs, without dumbing down, to dismantle the many KEEP OUT signs that prevent readers outside the sometimes insular 'poetry community' from enjoying it. I use the word *enjoying* unashamedly: poetry, however serious its message, has to entertain. If it doesn't do that, no one but other poets will read it. Humour can be so helpful in this quest. A serious point, made with wit, can be really effective. And, finally, I would love to see more poems, with or without humour, that say 'look at that' rather than 'look at me'.

Keith Hutson