INTRODUCTION

Poetry is absolutely ideal. Byron, Pushkin, Rudyard Kipling: these guys are superb, in my opinion. Keats. These clearheaded maniacs. These profound beasts; spunking their imagery onto paper for our pleasure. Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson. I love having such books on my shelves and I waft my arms at them triumphantly as I plod about my flat in my gown. Occasionally I will remove one of these books - by Dylan Thomas perhaps, or possibly Auden - and I'll just sit there, thumbing it. Occasionally I will allow it to fall open and I'll gaze wistfully at the form. When witnessed at first hand, smeared on the page like that, poetry is sublime. There is something about the look of it that is almost painfully satisfying. There is so much space there. So much white. Each poem is like an island. We are invited to explore it if we wish, but we can, if we prefer, simply relax in the space around it. If I had it my way, all books would contain poetry. I hate the feeling of opening a book and being faced with a novel, say. Disgusting, confusing swathes of dense text, charting the inconsequential lives of made-up guys. You have no idea how disappointed I am when I infiltrate a book and I find that, instead of verse, it is stories, or recipes, or porn, or lists of businesses' phone numbers, or things to colour in. I once opened a book and found it to be full of diagrams and instructions. I hated that. I threw it across the room with great force and my lover had to duck.

2 So imagine my delight when I was approached by a man in his thirties. Well spoken and smartly dressed, he sat me down, bought me a plateful of oil-drenched English breakfast food and proposed that he publish a collection of my poems. I honestly couldn't believe it. I told him I thought he was teasing me and he assured me that, no, he was not. He had been exposed to my poetry and wanted it to find a wider audience. I still didn't believe him and ultimately a waitress had to come over and placate me because I was waving a tomato in the guy's face and shouting at him and loudly referring to the situation as 'a fucking wind-up!' I ordered another black coffee and allowed the man to speak. His suggestion was that we dip into my wealth of poems, drag some out and stuff them in a book. I nodded, mopped up some grease with some bread and did him the courtesy of listening to his proposal in full. You may not know, but in meetings such as these it is the responsibility of the man in his thirties to foot the bill so I ordered another black coffee as he set out his ideas for the collection. Once or twice I referred to it as an anthology and each time he would quietly correct me and say that it was a collection. I asked him what the difference was and he said that an anthology is what the great poets like Rupert Brooke and Rabbie Burns and Wordsworth would have. This is much more of a collection. I just thought, 'who cares?' A book's a book. We left on good terms. I shook his hand, and ordered one more full English; he settled up and drifted off into the morning. And then I sat back down at my plastic table and started sifting through my poems.

The collection comprises some three hundred of my first twelve hundred poems. They have been handpicked and sploshed onto pages by a paid designer. They range in size, length and theme, and, by and large, don't rhyme. This is because I have no mind for rhyming. Indeed, the fact that I have overcome that and become a poet at all is a triumph in itself. In this regard I liken myself to Beethoven or the drummer from Def Leppard – both of whom have become legends in their artistic fields in spite of effectively having one hand tied behind their backs. And so, now, have I. I am proud to have had my poems published. Damn proud that, finally, my poems have become islands on white oceans. Footprints in the snow. You can do with the spaces entirely as you will. You can feel free to scribble, doodle, scrawl obscenities in the margins. Kiss these white spaces; place your snail on them; allow her to crawl about the poems. For what it is worth, I will not be doing those things. I will be given a copy of my book by the man in his thirties. I will sign it and then I will lid my pen and place it back into its mug. I will treat the book with awed respect. I will keep the space around the poems pristine. I will dance through the book. Float through it. Eating biscuits. Enjoying the poems. Wondering what it's all about.



SOCIOPOETRY

² I have chosen to start my book with this, most relevant of themes. Sociopoetry. Sociopoetry has always fascinated me. In case you are ignorant I will briefly describe the concept of sociopoetry. It is - as you might expect - poetry, which concerns itself with socio. Things falling under the banner of socio would include guns and prisons, the state of hospitals, how much we should give to beggars, whether we should experiment on beggars/force them to become soldiers, her nibs the Queen, the plight of the ethnic and whether there should be a National Lottery and, if there is, should it be easier to win. My father is a member of society so I have recently been bending his ear about what it is all about. I'll drive to his boathouse and we'll sit down, open a crate of Adnams and try and get to the bottom of things. He has some pretty extremist views, which only begin to make sense after about four Adnams. He believes that single people should be made to ring a heavy, town-crier-style bell when they walk into pubs and multi-millionaires should be forced to carry their first million with them in a large Karrimor rucksack at all times. In addition he doesn't agree with hoodies and he is unsettled by sign language. He thinks that a lot of the ills in society can be traced back to the fact that everyone wears jeans these days. He refuses to even use the word - calling them 'blue trousers' - and can quote some amazing statistics about convicted murderers since the turn of the twentieth century and the colour of their trousers. In addition, he thinks that it would be good to have a president in charge of the whole world (he suggested Michel Platini), he thinks that rock should be easier to buy outside of seaside towns and he believes that he himself should be knighted. I enjoy having these discussions with my (bearded) old man. Once we're good and stoked, and we've put the world to rights, he'll sling his bottle against the wall, trudge over to the rowing machine, take off his blazer and slacks and get down to business. There's no finer sight in sport than my old man, lashed off his skull, a blur of black swimming trunks and white vest, making that flywheel squeal. If I've got half of his appetite for giving a rowing machine a good seeing to when I hit his age I'll be delighted. In truth, I'll be delighted if I'm able to put away the amount of Adnams my old man does at that age, and discuss elements of socio the way he can. He is a very great man.



Chris darned his condom in front of his electric fire.

Then he slung it in the tin,

Popped it closed

And set off for Clara's.

'While you're down there . . .'

Mike Bates said to Candy.

He'd vaguely thought people would laugh at this.

Unfortunately, the reason Candy was crouching near his groin was precisely to pick up a glass which Mike had broken.

And also she was his daughter-in-law.

So it didn't get a laugh at all.

Maria sat sobbing in her cell at the all-women's prison.

Why had she stabbed the old man from her drama club in Leicester?

And why wouldn't the prison governess let her put on *Shakers* by John Godber?

The Queen took a normal job so the public would hate her less.

She became a lollipop lady.

Some hoodlums soon found out about this.

They started goading her; calling her posh and firing ducklings at her through a homemade bazooka made out of catering-size cans of beans fastened together with gaffer tape.

It started to get to Her Majesty.

She would get home, throw her lollipop stick onto the couch and be a right cow to the D. of E.

He'd say things like, 'If you don't tell me what's wrong I can't help.'

She'd just fart and eat her crisps and carry on watching *The Apprentice*.

Arnold was constantly unhappy

Because he was a maggot (the type of worm).

He knew he couldn't do anything about it.

That he should just get on with it.

But he couldn't help himself.

And so he dwelled on it.3

 $^{3~{}m I}$ expect this is also how people with glasses must feel.

Derreck dangled by the dunk-pot.

He caught me staring at his penis.

I quickly averted my stare and pretended
I was interested in his hip.

And then I loped, awestruck, towards
the Jacuzzi.

⁴ This is based on bitter experience. There's a man at my gym without even the vaguest grasp on what it is to be English. After he's showered he just stands there for ages with his dick out. It's as if he finds the idea of covering himself up deeply offensive. I'm only human – I don't go out of my way to look at him but there's only so much of this a man can take before he gets sucked in. Even once he chooses to get dressed, his approach is quite remarkable. Whilst most normal Englishman will start with his grunds and work outwards, this creature opens with the socks and then moves on to his shirt. He's still swinging merrily as he puts his dog collar and crucifix on. There was an occasion last summer where he must have been going straight to a barbecue and actually had his deck shoes on and his rucksack over his shoulder before he put his pants and Bermuda shorts on. I hated this and was physically sick.

A website was developed.

Homeless guys and people who had mansions they weren't using were hooked up.

Suddenly tramps were living in luxury.

They were exultant!

Some of them had staff!

I just found out
Someone's trying to kill me!
It's exciting, yes.
But also dangerous.
He's a professional.

⁵ The film *Leon* is superb. It's all about a trained killer who makes friends with a little girl and a plant. He is a Frenchman but you can't help but warm to him in spite of this and the fact that he carves out a living by shooting people dead. One Christmas my brother bought the DVD for his wife but the DVD wasn't in the case. She was furious, but ultimately calmed down and had three beautiful children by him.