

Oxford Professor of Poetry 2015

Candidate Statement

Dr Seán Haldane

When I was nominated for Professor of Poetry in 2010 and came third out of eleven, there was some debate about whether the post required an Oxford insider or an outsider. I claim to be both, in that I lived the Oxford experience as an undergraduate and got a First in English, but I have never been an academic. I resolved early never to make a living from poetry or by teaching it, and that any earnings from my poems would go towards publishing poetry by others. The main published books of my own poems are: *Skindiving* (Ladysmith Press, 1972), *Desire in Belfast* (Blackstaff Press, 1992), *Lines from the Stone Age* and *Always Two – Collected Poems 1966-2009* (Greenwich Exchange, 2000 and 2009). *The Memory Tree – Poems 2009-2015* will be published this year.

I have worked as a small press publisher, part-time farmer, writer, and clinical psychologist / neuropsychologist in various health services – including the NHS, where I established Memory Clinics in East London – and as an expert witness in civil and criminal court cases. I still have a part-time practice in London in neuropsychology supervision and psychotherapy. From 1968 to 1972 I was co-publisher at The Ladysmith Press, in Québec, which published over 20 books by young poets. In 2013 I founded Rún Press, Ireland, which publishes ‘Pocket Poems’, small hardbacks of the Complete Poems of poets whose work has previously not been fully collected. Its first books (2014) are the *Poems of Valentin Iremonger* and *The Poems of Martin Seymour-Smith*.

Across the decades I have published books on practical psychology, ‘student guides’ on Donne and Hardy, collections of poems, editions of poets (Trumbull Stickney, Kenneth Leslie), essays on poets and poetry in various periodicals (mainly the Scottish-American poetry magazine, Dark Horse, and The Reader), and two books on the nature of poetry – *What Poetry Is* (1970) and *Time / No Time – the Paradox of Poetry and Physics* (2014). I now also write novels. *The Devil’s Making – A Victorian Detective Mystery* won the Canadian Best Crime Novel award 2014 and is being published in a new US edition by Macmillan in 2015.

When I was at Oxford the Professor of Poetry was Robert Graves. His lectures were provocative. I remember undergraduates saying ‘He can’t mean it!’ But he kept an open door when at St Johns, and I and many others felt free to visit him. In private he was as frank as in his lectures. As Professor of Poetry I would establish just such an open presence.

I would lecture on such things as: What Poetry Is and Is Not; Poetry, Brain and Body; Paradox in Poetry and Physics; Poetry in Different Englishes; Poetry and Music. The poetry I know best is in English, but I am also at home with French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Gaelic (Irish and Scottish). If elected I shall finally be breaking my resolution not to teach poetry, but shall square that by channelling part of the stipend into publishing it.

See www.seanhaldane.com

