

POETRY WALES

Articles, Interviews, Reviews Policy

(Written by Isabelle Baafi, Zoe Brigley, Jonathan Edwards, & Marvin Thompson).

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General Instructions

- **Readership.** Please remember that your piece will be an article in a poetry magazine which aims for the widest possible readership. Some of these readers will be university academics who may be leading authorities on the poet you are reviewing; some of them will be people who are very new to poetry. All of them will be human beings. It is your job to do justice to the book you are reading or the subject you are outlining and to write accurately. But it is also your job to entertain your readers and to give them a good time.
- **Word Count.** Please stick closely to the word count agreed with the editor. Pages of the magazine are allotted to your contribution and, where you are significantly over or under, there will be a knock-on effect on the magazine. The earlier you can make the editor aware of any significant difference between your piece and the agreed length, the better. Things which come in bang on the word count, to time and with nothing needing changing, will make you loved. Please proof-read your work for errors (punctuation, spelling, grammar, issues with sentence structure and so on) before submission of your piece. Errors will generate more work at our end, so the cleaner the text you supply, the better. We need clear and readable reviews. One sometimes sees published reviews with issues in sentence structure that disrupt comprehensibility, or which are unable to integrate quotation grammatically in a sentence.
- **Deadline:** Similarly, if you think there is any risk of not meeting the agreed deadline, please let the editor know as swiftly as you can. Life happens to all of us, and we appreciate that things may get in the way. Please ensure the editor has as much notice as possible of any problems, so that this will not become a problem for the magazine.
- Additionally, all spellings should be in UK English, unless quoting a text. You can find our full style guidelines [here](#).
- **Researching Your Topic/Writers:** We ask you to research the topic or writers covered in your article or interview diligently and thoroughly. Have no fear though! This does not have to be an arduous or expensive process. We have some small research funds should writers need them, especially those who are low income, and for neurodiverse writers, we are willing to support the purchase of specialist materials, for example audiobook versions where available. Also please talk to us if you need access to academic journal articles, and we will do our best to help.

- **Interviews:** Interviews should be conducted with care. Please make it clear to your interviewee how the material will be used and published once the interview is complete. Make sure you have permission as to how the material will be recorded. For example, if you are recording a conversation on Zoom. Be sure you have permission.
- **Interview Example:** [see this interview by Hilary Watson and Carl Griffin of Seán Hewitt.](#)

Reviews

- **Two things are of the utmost importance. 1. Write the review as if the poet is sitting right next to you i.e. with respect. 2. Your review should serve the reader, so it is not simply about your preferences, but about empathising with the poet's project and considering how well that is executed. It is not about your personal preferences or pet peeves - e.g. you hate innovative poems, you think narrative poems are boring, you hate unrhymed sonnets. That's not what it is about - it is about helping the reader to work out if they would like it.**
- **Quoting.** Please ensure you quote from the text under review. We are unable to publish reviews which do not use quotation. Please double check that your quotations are accurate. Also however, do not over-use quotation so that the whole review is made up of quotations without contextualisation.
- **Depth:** Consider a balance between covering a range of poems from the book under review and discussing things in depth. You don't want your whole review to be based on one poem from the book; neither do you want to cover every poem in a superficial way.
- **Language.** We welcome a detailed probing of language, form, structure, and thematic exploration – but also, consider the social and cultural context of the collection, the space it occupies in contemporary poetry, the concepts and traditions that it draws from, and what it signifies as the latest stage in a poet's career.
- **Tip:** It *might* be the case that there are beautiful sentences in the English language which contain more than one colon; it is unlikely that any of them can be found in poetry reviews.
- **Opening:** It is worth thinking about your opening. By the end of your first paragraph, has the reader got a good handle on what this book is and what it's about – the most important aspects of its style and subject? Have you set the collection in the context of the author's previous work, or in the context of poetry more generally? Have you made the reader want to carry on reading your review, spending these minutes of their lives in your company?
- **Comparisons:** We tend to commission pieces based on three texts. We do want your piece to be coherent, so consider the segue you make between the three texts.
- **Care:** Please remember that the work you are reviewing will be of *immense* importance to the human being who wrote it. Please aim to treat the author as you would wish to be treated. Make sure you acknowledge the achievements and successes of the book, and discuss your favourite aspects of it. Say what you love, and why it works.

- **Honesty:** At the same time, we are opposed to reviews which sit on the fence or bend over backwards to be inoffensive, where the reviewer describes the content of the book without giving their opinion clearly. Please do honestly discuss aspects of the collection that you think are not working. It is especially important that criticism is well-supported by evidence and close reading.
- **Fairness:** Criticism can be robust, but, in the main, should be about the poems and not the poet.
 E.g. Bad: Abdul Smith comes across as an underdeveloped poet and narcissistic.
 Good: Abdul Smith's poems could benefit from being developed. For example...

If you do make criticism, phrase it in a fair and balanced way. E.g. "In this collection, I would have liked to have seen more..." or "Some might argue that these poems are too..."

- **Impact:** You are not writing a PhD thesis on the poems; you are writing a record of a human being's intellectual and emotional engagement with them. How do they make you feel? Why?
- **Enjoy it:** A book review is a record of the process of reading the book. So for goodness sake, enjoy yourself! If the reader is going to have a good time, you have to first.
- **Endings:** Think carefully about endings. What swish note will you conclude on? How will you make your reader say *Wow!* As an extension of the last point, you can expect people to come to your review because they are interested in the work of the writer you are reviewing, or even because they *are* the writer you are reviewing, or someone connected with them. But how much *more* wonderful would it be if they came to your review because of you, because they knew they'd get a good time from your piece, because they loved the pizzazz in your prose, the elegance of your endings, the shananana in your syntax? One of the reasons poets make great writers of reviews is that they love making something beautiful out of words. Think of your review in these terms.
- **Finally:** It is possible to do almost none of the above and write a brilliant review, and we would love to see it. But this list will keep you safe.
- If you have any queries or concerns that have not been addressed here, get in touch and we'd be happy to discuss it with you.
- **Review example:** [Linked here is a review by Jade Cuttle](#) which does many of the things above wonderfully, and is a useful model, but not a straitjacket. More sample reviews are available on request; please don't be afraid to ask if that's helpful.