

Good evening everyone, I'm delighted to be here tonight to celebrate the publication of the 40th Friendly Street anthology. Thank you to the organisers, including Geoff Hastwell and Sue Reece, for offering to fly me in from sunny Sydney for this event tonight, and for the extra reading and piss-up at the Halifax Café tomorrow night. I'll save memories of Friendly Street in the years I was involved (1975-1979) until then – except to say that I must have been pretty young at the time, to be still standing here bright-eyed and bushy-tailed after getting up at 5am to catch the Tiger Air special.

Now, **the book.**

As Stephen Mallarme famously wrote: "Everything in the world exists in order to end up as a book." And here it is.

First we admire the 'Birdsong' engaging cover artwork by Jyoti, then open up. What do we have between the covers? About 136 pages of poems, organised into six Themes. These include poems addressing the act of writing poetry itself (should these be called meta-poems?) as well as appreciations of artworks, of fruit, of singers, personal reminiscences and political responses agitations amongst lots more. There is no lack of topics, and no lack of enthusiasm, or wit, or humour (there's lots of humour) or anger.

Sometimes there is a lack of considered technique - and of following the inspiration of a subject, and the angle of view, through with a concentration upon the integration of content with form.

Quite a few poems in *Many Eyes Many Voices* have been made for performance, and I can imagine them going across really well – as we shall hear tonight - with the added personal touches of the poet's voicing and expression, especially in the supportive literary environment of Friendly Street.

But how well do performance poems work printed on the page, without the 'music' of voice and personality, and in the cold hard light of day, and given to a stranger?

Poetry is a tough gig. To say that poetry is a highly competitive field is an understatement: it's multi-competitive, across cities and genres and scenes. It's not good enough to be simply ok in technique. Writing a poem becomes a way of bringing out the best in language, while adding zest and the rest to an idea, a story, or a collision of intentions which creates something unexpected and surprising in the act of being written, and – often – carefully revised. Think of tone and pace and action. Abandon the neat ending. Pick the poem up and handle it like a piece of bloody steak which you are going to grill and eat. Can you make all this gristle and fat and muscle into tender mouthfuls? If you're vegetarian, do the same thing considering the ingredients for a delicious salad or vegetable curry or stew. Mixing ingredients to make magic. You need to work on being original in some way, with what evolves into a signature style.

It's not easy to get published in poetry magazines and anthologies because different editors' apply different quality standards and to guess at them you need to read their magazines first, as well as delve into contemporary anthologies. It's OK not to like everything, or even anything! Thinking about what you don't like in somebody else's poem can help to define and refine your own work, even as a reaction. When I was studying English literature at Flinders in 1971, I complained that we had to read TS Elliott's *The Wasteland* in detail, while it would be better to be reading Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*. And a year later there I was driving Allen along South Road in my girlfriend's Mini Minor – but that's another story. The next year I was reading Yevtushenko's translations on stage with him at the Festival Centre - but that's another story.

We don't have to agree with editors' decisions, but they apply filters and have strong opinions and are willing to defend their decisions through poetics not personal politics. Effective editing is a lot of work! And we'll be hearing from the editors soon.

Poetry is like music, there are many kinds and no one person is likely to appreciate all of them. However, lots of people who claim to be writing "poems" don't read poetry seriously or see themselves as learning a difficult and enduring craft and art with a rich history. They just want to "express themselves" and "share their feelings". That's fine, but it doesn't mean it is good poetry. Being your own editor is a tough job.

Anyone who wants to call themselves a poet should do so. Everyone is free to write and recite whatever they feel like. There are no qualifications. All that matters is the depth of thought and feeling generated by memorable words. Some of these stick in the mind and inhabit the voice and stay with us. How did those particular words do that? Now *that's* interesting.

There's enormous achievement here. I think there's also room for more experiment with extreme kinds of language and dangerous poetics in future. Stay open to radical possibilities, and dare to be different – even from your own usual ways. And read poetry - widely, openly, hunting for your own inspirations.

There are lots of worthwhile poems in *Many Eyes, Many Voices*. It's a book to be proud of, and to be proud to be included in. Congratulations to the editors, Murray Alfredson and Margaret Clark, and to all of those who help to keep Friendly Street alive.

I declare *Friendly Street Poets 40* launched.