

October Poetry Group report by Annie Clouston

October's meeting was special. A social worker by profession and a poet by passion, George Jowett came to our meeting to read his poetry and to give us the back story behind his work.

He has had some success in competitions, though he has made many more submissions than he's had prizes – the field is thronging with poets. However, he did win a first prize given by the Arts Society North that two years before had awarded this accolade to Meg Peacocke, the Teesdale poet who stimulated the interest that resulted in our poetry group. In the late 1980s George won 2nd prize in a competition for a love poem with his poem *Pegging Out*. He read This poem seemed to us a tender and poignant tribute to a much-loved woman going about a simple domestic chore. Whilst George wondered if the poem appeared to be misogynistic the group demurred, and this raised the issue of “cultural vandalism” – the censoring of work because it may not meet the requirements of a society become increasingly bogged down in avoiding offence.

When PJ Kavanagh became poetry editor of the *Spectator* he published George's poem *Adders Multiplying* inspired by seeing the adder mating ritual, basically a fight:

It seems a rather funny way
To carry on. Still, to the serpentine
It's natural, I'm sure, to intertwine
And wrestle in these awkward, upright bouts.

George's poetry is meant to be read aloud; it is funny, personal, often playful, sometimes cynical. When working at the Aycliffe Assessment Centre that housed teenagers who had fallen foul of the law, he wrote *Cinderella*, a pantomime in rhyme for the lads to perform. He read to us the comic *The Ugly Sisters* and here is a stanza from *Buttons Undone*:

And as for Cinders, need I spell it out?
I'd love to get my hands on her.
So my confessions cause a stir?
You didn't think I felt like that no doubt?
Well, friends, you were wrong.
My passions are as strong
As anybody's are.
Stronger I'll bet.
OH NO THEY'RE NOT!
They are. By far!

I think the naughty (misunderstood and unfairly judged) boys would have embraced this activity with gusto.

George's recent (and only) published collection *The Gypsy and the Candy Floss Queen* was released at the outset of Covid, so all the marketing that goes with a book launch was blighted. The title poem is an epic account written in rhyming verse of a notorious murder in West Cornforth, County Durham, in 1978 and the prosecution – that ultimately failed – of the only suspect, a story that appeared in the *Northern Echo* in 2004 that fired George's imagination. This collection is available in McNabs in the Horsemarket.

Many thanks to George for enlivening our group with his wit and honest expose of the capriciousness of the Muse.