

EDITORIAL

As a non-UK publisher, even considering the idea of submitting new collections for UK poetry prizes quickly ends in complete disillusion. The guidelines defining the rules and conditions of entry usually contain the stereotype requirement “first published in the UK or the Republic of Ireland”. The Poetry Society administering the T. S. Eliot Prize, famously described by Andrew Motion as “the prize most poets want to win”, concedes simultaneous publication in another country within one year. The Forward Arts Foundation defines the eligibility of entries for their three poetry categories in almost identical terms. Even the administrators of the Michael Marks Awards for Poetry Pamphlets confine entry to UK publications.

An important institution in this context is the Poetry Book Society (PBS). Again it only invites UK and Irish publishers to enter their forthcoming poetry books. Although it is “dedicated to promoting the very best contemporary poetry from a diverse range of publishers”, as it defines the policy on the website, we at Poetry Salzburg cannot submit our publications, although the great majority of our poets were born or live in the UK. For at least a decade I have discussed the policy with the PBS team online on various occasions. For example back in 2017, I argued that “although I am a publisher outside the UK and therefore not entitled to make submissions for recommendations etc., I have always admired your work. I sincerely hope that you will re-evaluate and, hopefully, change your policy, because I believe that publishers like myself also make an important contribution to the UK poetry scene.” The answer that I received at the time was quite promising: “We will definitely consider widening the submission parameters to include Europe and overseas publishers in the future. I believe the guidelines were simply in place to keep the submissions at a manageable level and avoid any costly export or supply issues but it’s certainly worth reviewing in the future.” Two years later I had another go: “Some time ago we discussed by email the possibility of changing your policy, i.e. to be more liberal, so that e.g. Poetry Salzburg publications can also be considered for the selections and are not just listed. At the time you seemed quite interested in introducing such changes. Unfortunately, I have not witnessed any changes in this respect. I still believe that only the poet’s place of residence is important and/or their citizenship. Irish institutions and administrations of literary prizes work

along these lines.” The empathetic answer that I received contained many interesting details, but – to be honest – did not raise my hopes that changes would be implemented: “We just have to consider the implications more fully. Our current guidelines are for books first published in the UK and Ireland for the main categories. If we open up submissions to Europe then we may have to reconsider the US too but there are cost and logistical implications for securing copies, delivery and postage and it opens up wider issues with territory rights as well so I’m afraid it needs a bit more thought. Also, we promote worldwide poets (they don’t have to be resident in the UK just first published in the UK and Ireland) and we wouldn’t want to disqualify overseas writers, so a simple residence clause wouldn’t really fit our worldwide poetry policy. We do appreciate your advice though and I hope you bear with us whilst we think it through a bit more!” In late June we received an official email from the PBS that they are “delighted to let [us] know that [they] have secured an Arts Council England ‘Major Projects Grant’ to deliver an exciting new chapter of Next Generation Poets, with generous support from the T.S. Eliot Foundation, Folio Society and a Tower Poetry Development Grant.” When I inquired whether Poetry Salzburg is eligible to submit collections, the answer I received was unexpected: “Yes it will be open to any poets resident in the UK and Ireland who published a full-length debut in the time frame.” Although I still had my doubts about the very welcome change of policy, I immediately started to consider all the many Poetry Salzburg poets that published a debut between 1st May 2014 and 30th June 2026. A day later I received another PBS email: “I’m so sorry I gave you the wrong information. I’ve just spotted this clause – apologies for the mix up on my part: The submitted titles must have been first published in the UK or Ireland during the period specified.”

Despite the situation that I have commented on I am very grateful to the PBS, as it lists our publications and thus we receive orders for some of its members on a more or less regular basis. However, despite Brexit and all that has followed since then, there is still some hope at Poetry Salzburg that poetry is stronger than any polarizing politics, that it will succeed in its bridge-building function, and that even the PBS and the administrators of poetry awards in the UK will finally open up to Europe and change their policy.

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