

## Election of Oxford University Professor of Poetry

### Simon Armitage – Candidate Statement

I fell under poetry's spell when I was fifteen and have remained under its influence ever since. At first I only wanted to read poetry, then eventually and inevitably wanted to try my hand at the stuff. Now, after so many years in the field, I feel I have plenty to say on the subject and a desire to talk and write *about* it. It's for that reason and at this time that I have put myself forward for the position of Professor of Poetry.

I believe the post has been well served by active poets. By poet-professors whose critical responses were shaped through both reading and writing, and who experienced the exasperations and ecstasies of putting poems together as well as the pleasures and pains of taking them apart. I would maintain the tradition of giving one formal lecture per term, the emphasis being on close reading of past and contemporary work, right up to the present day (and with accompanying texts, courtesy of my assistant PowerPoint!). The watchword will be *craft*. I'd also use the platform to discuss the situation of poetry and poets in the twenty-first century, to address the obstacles and opportunities brought about by changes in education, changes in reading habits, the internet, poetry's decreasing "market share", poetry's relationship with the civilian world and the (alleged) long, lingering death of the book. Following the example of the current post-holder, who knows, I might even break into song. Practicalities permitting, I'd also organise seminars or workshops for students who have ambitions of their own as poets, and encourage established poets to visit Oxford to read and talk about their work, so we might learn by example.

Most poets are critics at some level, and at some stage find themselves employed as teachers of poetry. Since 2011 I have been Professor of Poetry at the University of Sheffield, and before that held lectureships and professorships at the Universities of Manchester Metropolitan, Leeds, Falmouth and the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop, plus further teaching positions in this country and the United States. In March of this year at the invitation of Trinity College I gave the Hillary Lecture at Oxford. But rather than my teaching CV, I offer as credentials my passion for poetry, my reputation as a communicator and an advocate for my chosen art form, my track record as a published poet, and my work as a poet for theatre, radio, television and as a translator of Middle English verse. I don't have a manifesto, except to say that if there is a more suitable applicant then please vote for that person, but if Oxford saw fit to appoint a self-schooled poet who views poetry from a hill above a Yorkshire village, then I would be greatly excited and deeply honoured to take on the challenge. A former Oxford Professor of Poetry, Robert Graves, once described poetry as a continual, lifelong apprenticeship, and to that end it would be an adventure and an education.

<http://www.simonarmitage.com/>

### SIMON ARMITAGE

Nominated by:

E F Angiolini, St Hugh's College, W T Armbrust, St Antony's College, H Asari, Trinity, F M Ashcroft, Trinity College, J M Barnard, Wadham College, S L Beal, Trinity College, D L Birch, St Hugh's College, N Bowles, Nuffield, S P Breen, Trinity College, F S Broers, Trinity College, P R Bullock, Wadham College, J Carey, Merton College, R J Carwardine, Corpus Christi College, D H Cecil, The Queen's College, P E Chaisty, St Antony's College, J M Dodsworth, Wadham College, D W Dwan, Hertford College, S Evangelista, Trinity College, T W Faithfull, Keble College, C J Y Fletcher, Exeter College, R F Foster, Hertford College, K Ghosh, Trinity College, M R Gifford, Trinity, A S Harris, Christ Church, W N Hutton, Hertford College, H M Jones III, St Antony's, J J Keeling, Trinity College, Y F Khong, Nuffield College, K J S Knott, Trinity College, H Konagaya, Trinity College, R H

Lonsdale, Balliol College, S N MacFarlane, St Anne's College, M O MacMillan, St Antony's College, L K Marcus, New College, R McCabe, Merton College, M N Mendelssohn, Mansfield College, A Menon, University College, L J N Mignon, St Antony's College, K A Nicolaidis, St Antony's College, M Nishi, Trinity College, G C Olcott, Trinity College, R Ovenden, Bodleian Libraries, R S Parker, Trinity College, J H Pellew, St Hilda's College, E M Percy, Trinity College, T J Power, St Antony's College, A M S Prochaska, Somerville College, O J Ready, Wolfson, Worcester, I A Roberts, Trinity College, T K Roynon, Wolfson College, D Sanchez-Ancochea, St Antony's College, M Sekine, Trinity College, A Shlaim, St Antony's College, A M F Skilbeck, Somerville College, E J Smith, Hertford College, C A Stovell, Trinity College, D M Thomas, Keble College, V J Worth, Trinity College.

Simon Armitage's candidacy is further supported by Lord Melvyn Bragg, former Poet Laureate Sir Andrew Motion, Professor Neil Corcoran, former Oxford Professor of Poetry James Fenton, Emeritus Professor and poet Craig Raine and poet Christopher Reid.

Simon Armitage was born in 1963, lives in West Yorkshire and is Professor of Poetry at the University of Sheffield. He is the author of over a dozen collections of poetry, most recently *Paper Aeroplane – Selected Poems 1989 – 2014*, drawing on twenty-five years of published work. His translations of medieval verse include *The Death of King Arthur* and his acclaimed *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, now included in its entirety in the Norton Anthology of English Literature. His translation of *Pearl* will be published in 2016. Armitage is the author of two novels and two best-selling non-fiction titles, *All Points North* and *Walking Home* in which he walked the Pennine Way as a modern day troubadour giving poetry readings along the route. He writes extensively for radio and television. His dramatization of Homer's *Iliad*, 'The Last days of Troy', was performed at Shakespeare's Globe in London in 2014 and a new dramatic version of Homer's *Odyssey*, commissioned by English Touring Theatre, will open this autumn. Armitage's numerous awards include The Sunday Times Young writer of the Year, a Lannan Award, one of the first Forward Poetry prizes, a Cholmondeley Award, The Keats Shelley Prize, The Hay Medal for Poetry, and for his lyrics for the BAFTA winning film *Feltham Sings* he received an Ivor Novello Award. Simon Armitage is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and in 2010 was made CBE for services to poetry. In 2015 he gave the Hillary Lecture at Oxford on the subject of poetry and place, a transcription of which was published in the latest issue of Areté magazine.

Signatories to the resolution:

Felicity Broers, Trinity College  
Richard J Carwardine, Corpus Christi College  
K Ghosh, Trinity College  
Will Hutton, Hertford College  
John Keeling, Trinity College  
K J S Knott, Trinity College  
Margaret MacMillan, St Antony's College  
Michael Moody, Trinity College  
Emma Percy, Trinity College  
Martyn Percy, Christ Church  
Alice Prochaska, Somerville College  
Ivor Roberts, Trinity College