First question: When and why did you start writing poetry?

I attempted to write poetry at school, although my English teacher thought all poetry should be formal and did not encourage my early work. Like many others, I started to write dreadful teenage poetry to emote about girlfriends (real and imaginary) and the pains of adolescence. When I started an Art Foundation course at 17, Brian Louis Pearce – a poet friend of my father, was the librarian at the college and encouraged me to attend the college poetry group. He also introduced me to small presses, poetry magazines and various poetry reading events. Living in London I was very lucky to be able to see many authors reading, including Ted Hughes performing *Crow*, Tom Pickard with Robert Creeley, and Peter Redgrove, as well as many more obscure authors. In the mid to late 1980s there was still a culture of alternative bookshops that stocked small press zines and pamphlets.

How aware are and were you of the dominating presence of older poets traditional and contemporary?

I don't think I was very much. I had to study Shakespeare at school, but as a playwright, and I was lucky enough to go to a school that was sensible enough to take us to see performances rather than just rely on the text. So, I saw *Macbeth* in four different productions over two years. I think we studied Keats at some point, and probably the WW1 poets. I didn't take much notice.

My father, who had become a teacher after being an engineer, loved T.S. Eliot, and I had to study 'The Waste Land' but also loved it, mostly as declamation and a London poem. I guess the formative poets for me were Ted Hughes, T.S. Eliot, Robert Creeley and Brian Patten. Adrian Mitchell, too. Only later did I pick up on Eliot as a Modernist, Creeley as a Black Mountain poet, and Patten as one of The Liverpool Poets, which Adrian Mitchell was an accessory to, although more political and anarchic.

Tradition simply seems to me to be another word for history, and history has tended to be somebody in power's version of things, trying to establish some sort of canon. I'm not that keen on those kind of ideas, but I do read contemporary (20th and 21st Century) poetry widely, although as I get older I try and spend more time with poetry of interest. I'm not very interested in end-of-line rhyming verse, or poems that tell stories, heading towards some kind of epiphany or answer.

What is your daily writing routine?

I'm not sure I have one. I often grab some time in the morning to read and edit, I sometimes take paper drafts to work to work on, I have notebooks in all my coat and jacket pockets, I sometimes type new texts up at work and email them home to myself. A lot of my poetry is assembled from other texts, including my own, or written back to images and ideas. I tend to write some poems in my head before committing to the page, others are forced out of the textual material around me to get a first draft I can work on. Most poems stay in my writing folder for several months, being re-read and edited most days, before I decide they are finished. There is usually enough time to get notes and phrases down, and other times to shape and edit properly in my study.

What motivates your writing?

I am interested in the amount of information we are swamped by now, and how memory, time and our attitude sieves and juxtaposes that. I also write about (or from) fine art and place. I think language is wonderful and enjoy playing with it: it's how we understand the world and is a fantastic elastic, pliable and elusive medium to work with.

How do the writers you read when you were young influence you today?

An interesting question. 'The Waste Land' certainly provides a model for collage and juxtaposition, though I dislike the author's assumption that we'd be learned enough to know Sanskrit and Mandarin and various European languages. Robert Creeley was a master of minimalism, and transcribing thought processes as they happen, alongside the imagistic. Peter Redgrove, who I was fortunate enough to publish several books by through Stride, opened my eyes to radical use of the senses and the mystical; I'd probably put Ted Hughes' *Crow* sequence alongside Redgrove's work, although it adds mythical and magical elements. Brian Patten showed me the romantic and idealistic; Adrian Mitchell the political lyric and satire. I don't know if any of them except Creeley have had a lasting and ongoing influence, but formative influences are fine! Sometimes one needs to revisit the familiar past – I've actually had a volume of Patten's selected love poems beside the bed for a couple of weeks, as I picked it up cheap in a secondhand bookshop recently. There are other works such as Ken Smith's original version of *Fox Running*, Gavin Selerie's *Azimuth*, and Julian Beck's poetry and theatre journals that I still return to.

I think the music I listen to (and sometimes review or write about), as well as the visual arts, creative non-fiction, postmodern theology, cultural theory and art criticism, along with a number of contemporary poets all influence me far more than those writers from the/my past.

Who of today's writers do you admire the most and why?

Wow, how much time do you have? Allen Fisher, Robert Sheppard, Rachel DuPlessis, for their sustained sequences and linguistic explorations. Charles Wright (who Stride published in the UK and Europe) and David Miller for their obsessions with doubt and faith. Luke Kennard and Dean Young for their wit and absurdism. Cole Swensen for her discreet themed projects. Other books by many other authors, including Mark Strand, Sheila Murphy, Ann Lauterbach, Tony Lopez, John Wilkinson, Alan Halsey, Brenda Coultas, Barrett Watten, Jorie Graham. Influences from deceased poets such as Robert Lax, John Berryman, Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Ted Berrigan, William Everson, Thomas Merton, Karen Solie, Kenneth Patchen, John Taggart, Yannis Ritsos, Montale.

I like the fiction and creative non-fiction of Teju Cole, Iain Sinclair, Olga Tokarczuk, Dubravka Ugresic, Gabriel Josipovici, Giles Gordon, Rodrigo Fresán, Joan Didion, J.G. Ballard, Charles Williams, Guy Davenport, Alan Garner, Russell Hoban and many others; I have big bookshelves. The third book in Agustín Fernández Mallo's *Nocilla* trilogy has just arrived – I am so looking forward to reading that.

I think I should stress that I admire the work, not so much the authors. I know they're entwined, but it's the work that counts.

Fiction and music and non-fiction has as much influence on my poetry as poetry itself. In fact I find it much harder these days to get excited about books of poems than non-fiction.

Why do you write, as opposed to doing anything else?

What a strange question. I do lots of other things, just as any other writer does. I have a day job as a university lecturer, I am an editor for various journals and magazines, I am an abstract artist who has solo and group exhibitions, and in the past I have performed and recorded with various bands. I'm also a father, a friend, a canoeist, a sailor, a car driver, a letter writer, an avid reader and listener, and a hundred other things.

As I said above, I write because I am interested in how we (society) and I (just me) deal with the changing world around us, which we understand through language. Language is how we think and construct our world. I like what happens on the pages of text I construct, and other people seem to do so too.

What makes non fiction more exciting than poetry?

Mostly that it's not full of people emoting and whining about themselves. If am more polite, I think that the forms of Creative Non-Fiction are really being pushed at the moment, combining prose poetry, fiction, biography, mapping, psychology, photography, geography and other subjects. I'd recommend David Shield's book *Reality Hunger*, a kind of collaged poetics of non-fiction as a pivotal document. What's interesting is that experiment and innovation in creative non-fiction are happening in the mainstream, whereas fewer and fewer poetry publishers are publishing innovative poetry. More than ever, the most interesting poetry is happening live, online, in limited edition pamphlets and artist's books. One has to look harder than ever, I think. Maybe I'm just turning into a grumpy old man.

What would you say to someone who asked you "How do you become a writer?"

I would say start writing, but also start reading and find out how and why poetry has changed in the last century. Read work that confuses, puzzles and surprises you. Work out why you dislike or like some work. Think about how poetry might be renewed or adapted for the 21st century: it clearly makes no sense to write 16th century sonnets about courtly romance today, though that doesn't mean the sonnet can't be [ab]used as a poetic form. Think, also, about what you are doing that is different. I always tell my students that it is almost impossible to write new teenage love poems; also that most people have been through that experience. We don't need any more poems on certain subjects, and we don't need any poems that work by empathy, that we respond to by emoting and saying 'I feel that too'.

On a practical level there will come a point for an aspiring writer where the work meets an audience, be that a writing group, a magazine editor (and maybe the readers) or a seminar group at university. That changes everything. The realization that poetry, indeed all writing, goes out alone into the world, open to misunderstanding, dislike and being ignored, is a shocking moment. The more you understand how language works, what poetry can and does do, how the publishing industry and the alternatives work, the better you are prepared.

Tell me about the writing projects you have on at the moment.

I have just submitted a new book to Shearsman, which is the third and final part of a loose trilogy about Renaissance paintings, Italy and the annunciation. It includes a section written by Sarah Cave, who I worked with on the second part, *Impossible Songs*. I'm starting to think about a follow up to *The Return of the Man Who Has Everything*, which includes more of a loose grouping of my occasional poems, often collaged in response to what is going on around me

I'm working with several authors and artists, including Maria Stadnicka, on poetry and prose poetry about death and how the dead 'live on'. Not in any spiritual or ghostly sense, but how we remember them, the objects and traces they leave behind. Daniel Y Harris and I have more collaborative books to take to print, and I am working on several interviews with writers and musicians for academic journals. My university colleague the novelist Amy Lilwall and I have almost completed a second short prose work which we are looking to publish in an academic journal, and Kingsley Marshall, the Head of Film at Falmouth University and I are working on a new book chapter and a new conference presentation about *Twin Peaks: The Return*. We're also wondering about continuing our collaborative writing about the music of Brian Eno.

I will also be continuing to write book and music reviews for *International Times* and I have been invited to write a critical book about Brian Eno's albums, which I am not sure I have the time for at the moment. But you never know...

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Rupert Loydell is Senior Lecturer in the School of Writing and Journalism at Falmouth University, a writer, editor and abstract artist. He has many books of poetry in print, including *Dear Mary* (Shearsman, 2017) and *The Return of the Man Who Has Everything* (Shearsman 2015); has edited anthologies such as *Yesterday’s Music Toda*y (co-edited with Mike Ferguson, Knives Forks and Spoons Press 2014), *Smartarse* (The Knives Forks and Spoons Press, 2011) , *From Hepworth’s Garden Out* (Shearsman, 2010) and *Troubles Swapped for Something Fresh: manifestos and unmanifestos* (Salt, 2010). He has contributed creative and academic writing to *Punk* *& Post-Punk* (which he is on the editorial board of)*,* *Journal of Writing and Creative Practice, Musicology Research, New Writing, Axon, Text, English,* *Revenant*, *The Quint: an interdisciplinary journal from the north,* and *Journal of Visual Art Practice*; and co-authored a chapter in *Brian Eno. Oblique Music* (Bloomsbury, 2017) and in *Critical Essays on* *Twin Peaks: The Return* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

Stride magazine is now online at:  http://stridemagazine.blogspot.com/

Details of Loydell’s Shearsman books are at:  https://www.shearsman.com/british-poetry-books-H-L  [scroll down]

Details of Loydell’s Salt books are at: https://www.saltpublishing.com/collections/author-rupert-loydell

Details of Loydell’s solo and collaborative books from KFS are at:  https://www.knivesforksandspoonspress.co.uk/all-books