

This Poem Is Sponsored By... Poems in the Face of Corporate Power, an anthology published by Corporate Watch - review by Helen Moore

In an age where Art may serve primarily as commodity perhaps only the Fool can transcend the dictates of the market? Certainly today's comedians are most active in making acute political commentary, and amongst them in burgeoning numbers, that hybrid, the stand-up poet.

Familiar to many from the Slam poetry, comedy and festival circuits, comic performance poets such as Attila the Stockbroker and Luke Wright feature in this striking anthology of international voices challenging corporate power. Echoing the great Gill Scott Heron, Ben Mellor's 'Television will not be revolutionised' brings us a humorous vision of the vested interests of the corporate media, and Luke Wright's 'If (rebranded)', closely parallels Rudyard Kipling's well-known poem, cleverly readjusting its avuncular tone to sound like Alan Sugar briefing his latest apprentice.

Clearly humour has a powerful role in piercing what Harold Pinter describes as the 'vast tapestry of lies' which surrounds us, and many of these poems use wildly inventive comedy to capture the catch-phrases, clichés, corruption and greenwash of the slippery eel that is global capitalism. 'Advertising Will Eat the World' by 'Shadow Poet Laureate', Adrian Mitchell, demonstrates how it even tries to suck the poet into its gullet, while Janis Butler Holm's 'Memo to Barbie: Re the breakup' neatly satirises an aspect of the 'Nonsensedrome' that we inhabit.

However, comedy isn't always appropriate in confronting major issues, and the anthology rightly includes poems that focus on the dark injustices of our day. Canadian poet Heather Taylor's 'Dreaming On Empty' gives a voice to the oppressed - a parent remembering a daughter lost to "this birthworkdeath / Cycle of Fair Trade promises / And sustainable futures" - and Kate Evans' cartoon poem poses the stark question, 'What would you do for money?'

Nevertheless, a feisty spirit of activism prevails throughout both the book and its free accompanying CD, fulfilling editor Claire Fauset's intention that the poems not only illustrate "why corporations are destructive" - a verdict based on over ten year's of independent research by Corporate Watch - but also that they offer a collection for campaigners "to get their message across."

And if anyone is left recoiling at the idea of activist poetry, Will Holloway's 'I Did Not Speak Out' points to the sense of urgency, which I and no doubt all these poets share... "History is rising in waves/ so I can't understand why/ Poetry is on the beach, shouting: / Back, waves, go back! I command you!"