

Nick Cooke has written three novels and a collection of short stories, two non-fiction/memoir books, a collection of poetry, four film scripts and over 20 plays, most of them full-length. He is also a writer of critical articles and in 2004 published an article on the fiction of John Updike in the literary journal *Areté*. He is 'by day' an EFL/ESOL teacher and teacher-trainer who worked as a curriculum manager in the UK Further Education sector for 20 years before deciding to take redundancy at the end of 2010 and focus on a combination of teaching, training and writing. Previously, during the 1980s, he spent six years as a teacher and translator in Turin, Italy, and before that he studied English Literature at Christ's College, Cambridge.

Slim Volume

Every few years I get humped round
in a cardboard box, filling
a musty shaft between heaps of my own kind
(allegedly), and then being placed
on a shelf where I wait, Griselda-like,

to be engaged. I've been with this chap
three decades and he's opened me
just the once. After skimming two stanzas
he pulled the smirk of the damned
and slotted me back beside God knows who,

for sometimes he is alphabetical,
frequently not. These last six months
I've had Pam Ayres, if you please,
as a neighbour. What possible link –
but don't get me started.

Why doesn't he simply bite
the projectile of his own taste
and hand me on to Ken Central
or dispatch me to a bonfire
with his wardrobe, rather than

hold me here, to – what, impress
his myriad friends? Most of them,
FYI, I've seen grow older and plumper
but no less keen on ordering pizza,
their looks more blank than any verse.

I came at Yuletide, needless
to remark – from some half-read uncle
who in the summer of so-said love
one evening went to see Ginsberg
with a daisy-headed quasi-lady-friend.

And maybe it's at Christmas I shall go,
amid frugal times, in exchange
for gifts I'd wince to look at.
But only if the fool ever catches on –
I'm quite valuable now.

Hospital Encounter

I know all the details
of the man next bed to me:
his age, religion, wife's name,
the last time he drank tea,

his ethnic origin, and two
phone numbers, plus the fact
that he wears dentures and has
an urgent cataract.

The range and number of his ops
would frankly stretch belief.
He's off to theatre now;
I hope he feels relief

to have got the whole caboodle
off his asthmatic chest.
Storing it all up inside –
it can't be for the best.

He seemed a very nice old guy,
with gentle tone of voice.
I'd like to get to know him
but I doubt I'll get the choice –

to him I must remain
a non-existence, unseen,
an earwig on a dry cracked wall,
a spy behind a screen.