

## FOREWORD

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I love anthologies. I love language. The two rarely come together. I have made the connection myself just once. My wife Hilary and I spent a happy year in 1998-9 combing library shelves looking for quotations about language and languages. Penguin Books published the result the following year: it was called *Words on Words*. We were amazed at the frequency with which authors of all genres and backgrounds sooner or later had something to say about language - whether about listening, speaking, reading, or writing, about its origins, analysis, and evaluation, about accents and dialects, about slang, swearing, and style, and a thousand topics more. But our approach was a minimalist one. We had space only for the shortest of extracts, and we often bemoaned the fact that we could not present our findings in their full glory.

I suppose this regret must have been at the back of my mind when I spoke at the VCN weekend in Winchester, a couple of years later, and we shared a few poems with each other. There was no anthology then to dip into, and pieces were hard to find. Five years on, and I was beginning to think that there would never be one. *Voice Catcher* changes all that.

I make a bet with any reader (apart from the editors). You will not previously have read all the items in this collection. After my *Words on Words* experience, I thought I had read it all. How wrong I was! Many of the pieces in *Voice Catcher* are new to me, and what a delight it has been to read them. I am indebted to the many contributors who have taken the trouble to share their reading in this way, and all praise to the editor and the team who have put this remarkable work together, for I well know just how complex and time-consuming a task it is.

*Voice Catcher* is a linguistic firework display, sparkling with all the colours of the auditory rainbow. The focus on speaking and listening will make it an invaluable resource for professionals, and the sheer brilliance of the pieces will bring our voiceworld to the attention of a broader public as never before. Talking about a visit to Shakespeare's Stratford, in this collection, Elizabeth Jennings reflects:

"Words aren't worn

Out in this place but can renew our tongue,  
Flesh out our feeling, make us apt for life."

*Voice Catcher*, in its own way, does the same.