

Editorial

Had Jon Silkin lived to see, and, indeed, to edit this Double Issue of *Stand* marking numbers 199 and 200, as well as 60 years in print, he would have been 82. We hope that what follows in these latest copies has some of the best of the ethos of the magazine's earlier days as well as something that reflects the aims of poets, fiction writers, and critics in 2013. And we should reflect not only the writers but also the implicit and explicit characteristics of small magazine publishing in the digital era and the world of electronic social communication.

In 1973 Jon Silkin edited for Penguin and Gollancz an anthology of poems published in *Stand* up to that date. The Penguin jacket showed twelve of the best covers of the magazine from the late '60s. The artwork was always original and eye-catching, and with a magnifying glass you can still pick out some of the names contained within – Siegfried Sassoon, Celan, John Heath-Stubbs, Terry Eagleton, and Roy Fisher. There are many others in those volumes who were beginning their careers then and are now celebrated. There are some, like Sassoon, who marked an on-going commitment to publishing on the literature of war and reflected an extraordinary level of personal contact between Silkin and writers of several generations.

Silkin's long Introduction to *Poetry of the Committed Individual* concludes with what looks like a personal and, possibly, risky claim: '*Stand* is produced communally, and it is our hope that a sense of collaboration emerges from this anthology.' Perhaps the

real extent of communal production and creative collaboration will be the subject of future studies. Certainly, a fair number of the poets included in the anthology had a connection with Leeds where the magazine was re-founded in 1960 and stayed till 1965 when it moved to Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Some, including Ken Smith, Jeffrey Wainwright and Tony Harrison, emerged as important poets in the late '50s and early '60s in Leeds. They gained experience on the student-run weekly poetry magazine *Poetry and Audience* and helped with *Stand* then or later. Smith became Co-Editor and Harrison Editor for a period when Silkin was in the USA. So there was an important assumption that poets both could, and perhaps should, be practical engineers in the moving of poetic cultural capital. To write the poems was in many ways also to have to claim responsibility for the means of production – choosing, printing, distribution and sales.

In 1964-65 Jon Silkin became involved in another way of generating poetic capital – Northern House Pamphlet Poets. Just as *Stand* was an organisation legally separate from big publishers and educational establishments so an opportunity emerged that would enable the production and distribution of first or interim volumes by new poets. Andrew Gurr of the School of English at the University of Leeds had acquired a hand operated printing press to demonstrate to students how copies of Shakespeare would have been produced in the 1600s. With Ken Smith, and later John Barnard, choosing, editing, hand type-setting, printing, stitching, distribution and sales became possible. In some ways it seems crazy. People said then (and may still say now): amateur, financially unsustainable and either self-indulgent or self-deluding.

It may have been any or all of those things. On the other hand, if you start from a premise of poetry being 'produced communally' and if you interpret that to emphasise the value of the writer having control over the appearance (both layout in print and becoming 'visible' to a readership), then his/her work, and the vital involvement of confronting the shops or individual readers whom the writer needs, as part of this conception of cultural capitalism, might be central to the aesthetic of poetry. Indeed, it was 'commitment' that was different from, even if dependent on, philosophical and political theory.

I have recently discovered a file of frayed and foxed Northern House papers from the time when Silkin's *Flower Poems* and Geoffrey Hill's *Preghiere* were in production along with first individual collections by Ken Smith (*Eleven Poems*) and T. W. Harrison (*Earthworks*). How far do these papers confirm or explode the notions that Northern House was communal publication in action?

The text of this student flyer is extraordinary in the digital age:

PRINTING SOCIETY

REQUIRES

EXPERIENCED TYPSETTER

and PRESS OPERATORS

or STUDENTS WITH ENTHUSIASM

The press room (behind the gym. outside the cafe) will be open on Friday morning from 10 o'clock until 12.30

The main project for the term is to set up and print the first two pamphlets in a series of

Northern Universities' Poets work. The first two poets are Ken Smith and Jon Silkin.

Anybody interested can contact Mr. A. Gurr in the English Department (2 Virginia Road) or turn up on Friday.

Did many/any undergraduates have experience of the real meaning of 'UPPER CASE' and 'lower case', setting individual type letters, and then pressing page after page? Perhaps some knew already; others learned. It also became a new and extraordinary form of practical criticism or textual analysis. Here is a hand-written note from Andrew Gurr to Jon Silkin describing the process of hand-setting some of the 'Flower Poems':

Jon:- a set of very rough galleys of all but DANDELION, which you've seen, most of A BLUEBELL, & THE VIOLET, which are set up but not checked.

These are the first poems I've ever set up which read better after going through them letter by letter than before.

... Can you leave galleys + text at the Eng Dept office for me by Tuesday? I hope to have the whole thing ready for the press by the end of next week. AJG

There follow copies of letters from Jon Silkin and Ken Smith to bookshops all over the world and School, college and university librarians asking them to buy the pamphlets. Radcliffe College, Harvard University, The University of Auckland New Zealand,

City of Durham Library, City of Birmingham Library – they are all there with invoices and receipts. There is a very neatly typed letter from Professor Richard Hoggart in the Department of English, Birmingham University, responding to the request to subscribe to Northern House:

Thanks for your letter of the 18th [December 1963]. We will be glad to subscribe as a Department and we wish the idea every success.

We have to have a bill to present to the central accountancy. Would you mind therefore sending us a bill for £3. 3. 0. [i.e. 3 guineas]. Drawn to the English Department and we will have it put through as soon as possible.

There is a serious of lengthy and detailed letters between Ken Smith and the British Library on behalf of the Copyright Libraries. Had the pamphlets been sent? Had they been lost? Why should Northern House pay postage twice? And a letter from Desmond Graham at Fourah Bay College, Freetown, Sierra Leone, enclosing '£1. 0. 0, for the two subscriptions'.

'Communal production' seems to have been a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it required almost obsessive detailed and time-consuming work on the part of the 'commune' of poets. On the other hand, it shows that organisations 'out there' were used to typing or hand-writing responses to financial transactions involving

tiny sums and still prepared to deal reasonably politely with tiny organisations like Northern House. It shows how academic environments (universities), and very senior staff with very junior undergraduates, were prepared to collaborate as part of a process which was essentially aiming to produce great art. It might now be justified as a 'learning process' with the pamphlets ticked off as 'outcomes'. Either way, we are happy to confirm that Northern House has been re-born as a part of the Carcanet Press, still with links to *Stand* and the University of Leeds. We are delighted to be publishing books by Rodney Pybus, Owen Lowery, Lucy Burnett, Rebecca Goss and John Whale. In December 2013 we hope to produce the *Complete Poems of Jon Silkin*. This will include all of the poems in the published books with dozens that have been discovered in manuscripts or obscure journals. As part of our celebration of *Stand's* 200th issue, and Jon Silkin's, Ken Smith's and Andrew Gurr's inspiration of Northern House, we look forward to renewing our acquaintance with his own important poetry. The *Complete Poems* is edited by Jon Glover and Kathryn Jenner. Please keep an eye on the Carcanet – Northern House website. We invite your responses to such changes – how would websites and social media have seemed in 1964-65 as a way of 'facilitating' the communal publishing of poetry?

Jon Glover