

Editorial

The place at which it becomes easy lose to patience with something like the radio programme Desert Island Discs is where it becomes less to do with the music and more to do with the person calling the tunes. Surely the good of any piece of music is in the way that it sounds, and not whose birth or funeral or bedroom you were on the way to the first time you happened to hear it. There is the common mistake of reading the work of any poet – though Robert Lowell or Sylvia Plath might be the obvious examples – and confusing what is on the page with something that happened in their life. There is the more common mistake of reading a poem and judging it by whether you feel you agree with it, or whether you like what you think it appears to be saying. When Ornette Coleman writes, ‘The only method for playing any instrument is the range in which it is built’, he has it exactly right. When Wallace Stevens writes,

Poetry is the subject of the poem,
From this the poem issues and
To this returns.

he is really saying the same thing. It is that plain.

Look at it this way: a poem is made out of words. On the page, a word has a shape; out loud, a word has a sound. Even if words do have meaning, the meaning probably drags along a little way

behind the word itself. Seen like this, meaning amounts to something like a shadow. It’s not that it is impossible for a word and its meaning to be related in some fundamental and organic sense. It is just that where a poem is concerned, the thing that is commonly taken to be the meaning can get in the way because often it is a distraction from what is going on in the words. Yes, of course metaphors are everywhere, but sometimes it is enough for a lemon to be a lemon and the sky to be the sky, and a picnic to be a picnic and a poem to be a poem.

If abstract painting can remind us that all paintings are simply made out of paint, then perhaps it can be possible to take on a similarly *actualist* approach when dealing with a poem: writing a poem means actually writing an actual poem; reading a poem means actually reading an actual poem.

The thing is, a poem has to create its own little world. Poems are best when they have some space to themselves.

A good love poem, for example, will succeed as a poem not because of what it says *about* love but because of how like love it actually *is*. Though this likeness will be related to the particular form of the poem, it seems somehow to go deeper and this does make it difficult either to explain or understand. A poem is a poem & love is love. Anything, of course, can function as a metaphor.

So writing a poem is a matter of taking on the form of the poem, and recognising that words are what there is to work with. The challenge of taking on the form is one that is common to anybody who tries to make anything. It is inevitable that a list of writers, artists and musicians who appear to recognise this challenge will happen to feature people whose work has something of an exper-

imental edge to it, and so might include Sonic Youth, Henri Matisse, Dr. Seuss, Fiona Banner, Bjork, Steve Reich, Yoko Ono, Paul Auster, Elizabeth Daryush, Nicholas Moore.

Similarly, putting together a magazine like *Stand* could be seen as being about taking on the form of the poetry magazine. Sure, the oblong format is a little unusual, but in presenting a mixture of poems and reviews and a couple of pieces of fiction *Stand* is doing something a lot of little magazines seem to go for. What perhaps makes this magazine different is the way it recognises that the tradition of English poetry is in fact a tradition of experiment. It is important to state the value we put on writers who are trying to discover new understandings of what it is to make a poem. This goes equally for the unsolicited work that arrives through the door and for the pieces we request for occasional issues like this fiftieth anniversary one. Most of the writers featured in this issue sent work out to *Stand* early in their careers.

Sure, we can play the game of wondering which of the writers we publish will continue to be read however many years from now, and even which issues of *Stand* might continue to be read. As with poems, the poetry magazine that offers most to its readers will probably be the one that makes a world for itself. Or at least the one that creates its own little space.

Fifty years ago, in 1952, Jon Silkin established *Stand*. We have listed below the contents of the very first issue:

Thomas Blackburn	<i>Samson</i>
Maurice Hurst	untitled
Philip Inman	<i>Drinking after the Spanish of Gabriela</i> <i>Mistrae</i> <i>At the Bar</i> <i>I was Asleep</i> <i>The Lilac and the Roses</i>
Jon Wynne-Tyson	<i>Eve</i>
Patrick Dromgoole	<i>Musing on Fear of Death</i> <i>Cedie Torpedoed</i>
Harry Tapsell	<i>Poem</i>
Jon Wynne-Tyson	<i>To a Lady with Definite Views</i> <i>The Anatomy of Beauty</i>
I. R. Orton	<i>Poem for a Cry in the Night</i> <i>The Two Diaries</i> <i>España from the Spanish of Antonio</i> <i>Machado</i>
Jon Silkin	<i>Song of Our Lady</i>

Forthcoming issues of *Stand* will include a translation issue, a competition number, a Leeds poets special and, at the end of 2003, a symposium for young writers.