

EDITORIAL I

A few years ago I wrote, in an essay entitled "Interrelation, Symbiosis, Overlap", of the desire "to explore modes of thought, feeling and imagination, within or in terms of a material medium, and to discover and disclose aspects of existence and experience" I went on to say that I chose to write about poetry (and other art forms) as *exploratory*, "in preference to talk of innovation and 'advances'. Any art form that programmatically avoids or denigrates innovation is bound to fall victim to a notion of 'tradition' which is both complacent and stultifyingly naïve. This is not to deny tradition; but tradition loses itself to ossification when it is not open to renewal and unforeseen possibilities. This openness is absolutely crucial. But on the other hand, I don't believe that art *has* to be formally innovative in order to be significant; and the splitting off of innovation from questions of what – within a larger context – is being explored and opened up, and what we are bringing ourselves into relation with, is artistically disastrous, especially when it is tied to a dogma of perpetual 'advance' or 'breakthrough.'" (*Art and Disclosure: Seven Essays*. Exeter: Stride Publications, 1998.)

I find that I am irritated, even angered, when people prate about tradition while their notion of tradition is clearly lip service and doesn't do justice to the diversity and richness of the history of poetry in English, focusing instead on an extremely narrow range of possibilities. On the whole, these same people fail to fully acknowledge the importance of the material medium of poetry, i.e. language. But I find it equally irritating to read poets who either naïvely assume a *tabula rasa* as the basis of their work or whose notion of tradition is limited to the history of "innovative" or *avant-garde* poetry in the last century. For these latter poets, what should be a more complex and investigatory attitude to poetic language often results in a narrow and reductionistic focus – denying or marginalising the disclosive aspects of language and poetry. (I am using the word "disclosure" here in the sense of an opening up or uncovering of something – which withholds itself in its very openness. In other words, meaning is never "fixed", "closed" to further interpretation, yet neither does it settle into the closing-off of "meaninglessness". Questions of opacity and clarity may possibly serve to distract from more significant questions of disclosure and of *what* is being disclosed or opened up. So may a concern with

complexities of ambiguity and irony for their own sake.)

It seems more and more obvious that polarised notions of the mainstream and the *avant-garde* occlude what is most important in contemporary poetry: a wide range of poetic writing which is challenging and singular, but which often doesn't fit into dominant categories. Many of the poets I am thinking of can be seen as "innovative", without a doubt; for the most part, however, *not* in what has come to be the accepted sense. Some of them may in fact see themselves as belonging to the *avant-garde* (or various other terms, such as postmodernist or experimental or linguistically innovative poetry) – or in other cases to the mainstream. Others do not, nor are they perceived as such – often with the result that their work is relegated to the margins.

It was with these latter factors in mind – the diverse range of poets who are currently practising their art, the narrow and polarised categories of poetry that are currently prevalent, and the marginalisation of many fine and singular writers – that I was recently led to start up a new reading series in London, in collaboration with two younger poets, Jeff Hilson and Sean Bonney. This series, *Crossing the Line*, has already sparked off considerable interest. A few of the poets that I have chosen for this issue of *Poetry Salzburg Review* – Lee Harwood, Sharon Morris, Jeff Hilson, Alyson Torns and William Cirocco – have read or will be reading in *Crossing the Line* (in Bill Cirocco's case, by a fortunate and unexpected set of circumstances). The others – Elizabeth Robinson, Guy Birchard and Vassilis Zambaras – are poets I can only dream about as contributors to the reading series, given their geographical location (and the well-known aversion of one of these poets to readings!). But what I am emphasising is that I see my role as an Associate Editor with *Poetry Salzburg Review* very much as complementary to my role as an organiser with *Crossing the Line*. My beliefs about innovation and tradition, language and meaning, and so forth are important to me as guiding notions of what poetry may involve. But the most important thing is this: I wish to highlight and promote those poets and poetic writers whose work I find challenging, singular, exciting – whatever, if any, their allegiances may be.

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