

# Editorial

As some readers will already know, this is our penultimate issue. Our three-year contract comes to an end with our twelfth issue next April. This, then, is an appropriate time to reflect on the way we have aimed to edit the magazine.

When we were interviewed for the position we were asked how we would handle the factionalism of contemporary poetry. We said, boldly (foolhardily), that we would ignore it. Our strong sense, as readers of British poetry of the past decade, was that the categories according to which the territory was divided, the short-hand by which British poetry was routinely assessed, had come to be damaging. The categories – the short-hand terms – are familiar: mainstream / avant-garde, formal / experimental, intellectual / accessible, elitist / popular, metropolitan / rural, written / performed, conventional / free, traditional / modern, et cetera. Categories, of course, can be useful; they can provide an orientation in the world. Critical short-hand, however, can become an alternative to reading, with a poem or poet, once labelled, being forever consigned to one corner of the territory or another.

For this reason we undertook to approach the poetry we received with what one might call a “wilful naivety”; knowing too well that the categories existed, but endeavouring, as far as possible, to read each poem according to its own specific terms and motives, and on its own particular merits. For this reason, also, we opted not to solicit poems, but to depend – all but exclusively – on the mailbag, thereby ensuring maximum range. The result, we believe, has been that the magazine has contained a genuinely diverse set of voices and styles. We are delighted, for instance, to have published, among others, the following poets:

Fergus Allen, Moniza Alvi, John Ashbery, Annemarie Austin, Ed Barrett, Alison Brackenbury, Andrea Brady, Kate Clanchy, Polly Clark, Robert Crawford, Matthew Francis, Lavinia Greenlaw, Jane Griffiths, Philip Gross, Michael Hamburger, Sophie Hannah, Lee Harwood, Michael Haslam, Geoffrey Hill, Alan Jenkins, John Kinsella, Nick Laird, Tony Lopez, Helen Macdonald, Sarah Maguire, E. A. Markham, John McAuliffe, Medbh McGuckian, Daljit Nagra, Caitriona O’Reilly, Jeremy Over, Don Paterson, Richard Price, Sheenagh Pugh, Justin Quinn, Peter Reading, Peter Redgrove, Jeremy Reed, Deryn Rees-Jones, Carol Rumens, Michael Symmons Roberts, Eva Salzman, Robert Saxton, Penelope Shuttle, Ken Smith, Anne Stevenson, Keston Sutherland, Fred Voss, Susan Wheeler, Susan Wicks, and John Wilkinson.

Our sense of the purpose of *Poetry Review* is that, as the national poetry

magazine, it should reflect, and be hospitable to, the nation's poetry. Where other magazines quite properly develop a singular aesthetic or style, *Poetry Review*, by its nature and remit, ought to aim to be independent – as far as that is possible – of schools and groups. And if it does achieve such independence it will, given the state of British poetry today, necessarily present a diversity of work.

As to why such diversity exists, why there is no single agreed style in British poetry at the moment (in the way that literary history likes to tell us that, say, the late-seventeenth century or the early-eighteenth had “a” style), one can only speculate. Quite possibly, to rehearse a familiar argument, it has something to do with the fact that in Britain, more than in many countries, there are not, currently, any governing themes, any common stories which people readily agree on. In this we differ, notably, even from America, where for good and ill, themes of freedom and democracy still organise debate. In Britain, for very healthy reasons, there are no themes – social, political or religious – that inspire consensus. One result, perhaps, is aesthetic diversity.

Diversity can be construed negatively and positively. Negatively, diversity is confusion verging on conflict. Positively, diversity is plurality, and, as Sarah Maguire's essay reminds us so clearly, a sense of the plurality of poetry, an appreciation of “world poetry”, simplistic versions of literary history notwithstanding, has always been British poetry's strength.

Once we had been appointed to the editorship, there were many people quick to advise us that this is an impossible job. It is an impossible job, in that you can't please all of the people all of the time, and because, in poetry as elsewhere, there are some people who do want to be pleased all of the time. Happily, though, in poetry as elsewhere, such people are very few. The great pleasure of the job lies in getting to know the full range of contemporary British poetry, and in presenting that range to a readership which, as letters, subscriptions and bookshop sales have happily testified, wants to know it also. We wish our successor(s) – unknown at the point of writing – every success, and look forward to reading their version of the magazine.