
Editorial

Make it new', decreed Ezra Pound with all the diffidence of Mrs Havisham instructing Pip and Estella to 'Play'. The truth is that neither novelty or playfulness is likely to respond positively to conditions created to encourage them: they are contrary gestures, and there's probably no surer way to stifle a creative impulse than to decide it must result in something new.

'New' is too big. It's like deciding to create something whole, or something pure: it can really only be recognised in hindsight. What is *newness*, anyway? 'Everything changes except the avant-garde', quoted Michael Donaghy (via Gore Vidal?) in a 1998 interview in *Metre*. Attempts to re-energise poetry through gestures of novelty tend to mothball pretty quickly, so that it never takes long for 'new' movements in poetry – flarf, the new concrete, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, post-internet poetry, and so on – to seem the equivalent of cribbage or quoits: all the rage for a minute or two (rarely even fifteen), but soon the preserve of the marginal eccentric, found only in virtual vintage shops and bought by no one with sense.

And yet, room has to be made for the new (whatever that is) if poetry is to exist outside of the cultural museum. There's new poetry all around us, in chapbooks, collections, at open mics and other readings, in magazines and online sites. You couldn't stanch the flow of it if you wanted to. It's new in the sense that it is freshly written, but also, perhaps, new in responding to poetic tradition in ways that have knowledge of contemporary life, and of the language we share to describe it.

This issue features thirty-six new poets. It seems strange to slap a defining number on newness, and I'm sure one reaction to this issue will focus on its omissions. Fair enough. But by the law of diminishing returns, it is possible to err on the side of inclusivity so far that the issue becomes prohibitively expensive to print and to distribute. Better this issue, with its inherent limitations, I think, than no issue at all. So, for better or worse (depending, I'll hazard, on whether or not you've been included in the issue), I set down parameters: to be eligible for consideration, you had to have published a pamphlet or a first collection in Irish or in English within the last five years. I know this necessarily excludes poets whose work I admire and which, I've no doubt, will go on to make a significant mark, and though I regret this, I also reckon that this probably won't be the last anthology of its kind, ever, and that other such opportunities will surely arise in the future.

I also acknowledge, as anthologists must, that in time this selection may look fusty or airy; that I may have gotten it all wrong, (there, I've said it), and that in twenty-five years, the poets who will have made a difference are not those featured here. It's possible, but I doubt it. I believe there's good and exciting work here, work that will continue to be honoured and enjoyed in all its many shades.

They're not all young poets (whatever that adjective might mean): I've always liked how poetry as an artform hooches up to make space for people who come to it late. It is the poems, as ever, I prefer to focus on.

So why then the questionnaire and its thirty-six sets of prose responses? Call it context. Or light entertainment. Or a new confessionalism. I thought it would help to show, alongside the poems, what kind of attitudes new poets strike when it comes to thinking about poetry and how it slips into or chafes against their otherwise lives.

It can be difficult to find an audience for your poems when you're starting out. Maybe especially nowadays, when there are so many busy words and bossy images to detain us on the way to the more subtle pleasures of a good poem. And finding an audience makes a difference. Solitude may well be a necessary poetic device, but it's probably not the most enjoyable human one. Which is why creative writing courses flourish, and writing groups and open mics and poetry readings too. Generosity is called for, I believe, and a nod of encouragement at the right moment can make a huge difference to a poet who feels she is speaking into the dark.

Poetry Ireland has been running its generous Introductions series of readings by new poets for many years now. It's heartening to see so many new poets here who have found an initial forum there. Something's going right when the mechanisms in place for encouragement actually result in the writing of poems. Good poems too; poems with vigour and grace and bravura and flair. I've greatly enjoyed editing this issue, encountering poems that have very little in common other than a commitment to the art of writing poems. Thirty-six poets: a wide enough choice for a huge range of subject matter and approaches. Wide enough, I hope, to illustrate how vibrant poetry is in Ireland, how far from being jaded or defeatist, how it likes to throw shapes and fool around, but also to insist how crucial poetry remains.

Thank you to all thirty-six poets featured here, for their complicity, enthusiasm and very good poems. And thanks to Sally Rooney and Paul Lenehan for pulling the thing together like so many instruments making, between them and the poets, what I hope is some kind of gorgeous, new sound.

– Vona Groarke