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Editorial

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EDITORIAL

Editorial to Volume 7 Number 1

Dedicated to the Memory of Lee Harwood (1939–2015)

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Without thinking
I step aboard the orchid boat
the feel of silk
carrying me beyond all mirrors.

Lee Harwood, 'Departures'¹

It is fitting that a journal dedicated to critical writing about a range of innovative poetic practices of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries should embrace new and innovative publishing models. On the occasion of the re-launch of the journal on the Open Library of the Humanities (OLH) platform, it seems appropriate to reflect on the history of the journal so far, and to outline some of its many achievements as well as its future goals. The new editorial team and the wider editorial board are very excited about the new direction of the journal and greatly look forward to this next chapter in its life.

In late 2008, Robert Sheppard shared the idea for a new academic journal dedicated to publishing critical writing on innovative poetry with me and, literally the day after one of our more focused discussions of the idea in early 2009, an email from Anthony Levings (of his newly-founded Gylphi press) popped into our inboxes. We decided to seize the moment and, in September 2009, our inaugural

¹ Lee Harwood, 'Departures' in *The Orchid Boat* (London: Enitharmon, 2014), p. 12.

issue arrived, accompanied by well-attended launch events at Birkbeck and Salford Universities in October and December 2009 and followed later by the Irish launch at University College Cork in March 2010. Stephen Mooney was recruited as reviews editor and this team continued until 2013 when Stephen stood down, to be followed by Robert's move to the editorial board in 2014. The new co-editor Gareth Farmer and new reviews editor Vicky Sparrow joined in September 2014, and were welcomed in the editorial of the Bill Griffiths special issue.

In January 2015, we learned of the sad news that Gylphi would no longer be able to continue producing the journal. The difficult climate for academic publishing and the economic downturn as well as changes in UK Higher Education research policy have all played their role in the slowing down of demand for the print form of the journal and the viability of its production for a small publisher. The collapse of the company which managed subscriptions for Gylphi in Autumn 2014 was the final straw; the journal would have to seek a new home.

Gylphi and the editors shared the view that, in the new era of Open Access, which is compulsory for new UK research outputs to be entered into the next national Research Excellence Framework in 2020, we wished to avoid the 'author pays' model currently employed by a number of academic journals retaining print. We therefore mutually made the decision to re-home the journal in a new online-only form, via the platform provided by the OLH, thus making it effectively a 'gold open access' journal. We feel this new open-access model sits particularly well with the ethos of our journal, which is so concerned with liberated and liberating writing. We hope the move will open our work up to a wider community of thinkers.

We will always be hugely grateful to Anthony Levings for his vision, support and tireless commitment to producing the journal to such a high standard. We relinquish the print format with a somewhat heavy heart, but all previous issues of the journal will remain online to purchase from Gylphi (follow the link on the homepage).

When Robert and I co-wrote the editorial for the inaugural issue, we declared our intention to provide a home for critical articles on the history, context, close reading and poetics of what we called the innovative tradition in contemporary

British poetry. We negotiated the plethora of terms surrounding the field as well as sketching a history. In six years we co-edited ten issues of the journal amounting to nearly 1200 pages, comprising a core of fifty-one articles alongside twenty-three book reviews and twelve conference reports. While we are confident that we have attained our primary goal, and the second, closely related goal of publishing critical writing that derives from practice-led research, some of our other intentions remain to be realised. These include our aim to commission a volume on the poetry of the first decade of the twenty-first century, to publish articles considering poetics as well as poetry, and to publish work considering the pedagogy of teaching both the reading and writing of innovative poetry. Overwhelmingly, the mode of critical writing we have published has been the single author study, with only three articles that do not signal an author-based focus in their titles, and only four articles which consider in detail the work of more than one poet. There are a number of reasons why this is the case, but we welcome future contributions which strike out across broader territory and attempt to engage with larger themes linking discrete selections of contemporary practitioners.

One such theme might be the current status of women's experimental and innovative poetry. While I have treated this issue elsewhere², it is of great concern that of the essays published so far in the journal, thirty-nine are on men's writing compared to only eleven on women's writing. This is all the more surprising given the current burgeoning state of women's poetry in the field. Although one of our special issues was based on the proceedings of the 2010 Greenwich Cross-genre Festival which focused on women's poetry, three of our five special issues have focused on male poets: W.S. Graham, Bob Cobbing and Bill Griffiths, and were also based on conference proceedings. This imbalance is borne out among contributors with ten women to forty-three men so far, including two co-authored pieces by a woman and a man. Thus the key intention of this new phase of the journal is to help to establish

² 'Contemporary Innovative Poetry by Women in the UK: Revoicing in the work of Holly Pester, SL Mendoza and Sophie Robinson', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 9(1), 53–72.

a greater equality of coverage of poetry by women and men and greater equality between women and men as contributors.

Related to this is the even bigger challenge of extending the coverage to innovative poets from Black and ethnic minorities. Will Montgomery's piece on Allen Fisher and Linton Kwesi Johnson (Vol. 3, No. 1), Elizabeth-Jane Burnett's account of her performance *Exotic Birds* and its contexts (Vol. 3, No. 2), David Lloyd's consideration of race in Susan Howe's work (Vol. 5, No. 1) and Matt Chambers' essay on M. J. T. Tambimuttu (Vol. 5, No. 2) provide some coordinates for ongoing work. The research interests of Shearsman poet and critic Sandeep Parmar, Hannah Silva's AHRC-funded project on Black British poetry in performance and the work of Nisha Ramayya also promise new discoveries.

The study of the humanities in British academia will continue to face stern challenges in coming years under the current Conservative administration. While the contexts for the publishing and performance of innovative poetry itself seem to be thriving, the recent story of this journal, the demise of Salt's series of critical Companions (although Shearsman Books has been taking up some of the slack) and an increasingly competitive and divisive research culture will constitute demanding conditions for the on-going critical reception of innovative writing. This journal nevertheless hopes to play a significant role.

Aside from the larger aims outlined above, our current plans include the publishing of the proceedings of the conference 'New Papers on Contemporary British and Irish Poetry', held recently at the University of Dundee and co-organised by Tim Morris and Andrew Roberts at the centre for Creative and Critical Practice in the School of Humanities there. We also hope to publish selected papers from the symposium "'A copia of words": On Andrea Brady' held at Birkbeck in December 2014 and co-convened by my editorial colleagues Gareth and Vicky. Other plans include a new 'Critical Histories' section in which we will re-publish important past work in the field which may now be out of print and otherwise difficult to gain access to, including, for example, work by Veronica Forrest-Thomson. We are also in the process of recruiting new Welsh, Irish and Scottish correspondents to ensure that we are kept up to date

with developments in these places, and we are delighted to welcome Professor John Goodby of the University of Swansea as our latest addition to the editorial board.

The beauty and opportunity of a new online format means that the notion of discrete issues of the journal will undergo some modification. While articles will still be collected under a volume and number system, we will be able to publish individual pieces in a rolling fashion, so that the journal will hopefully become a much more dynamic and responsive space for critical discussion. Although this is perhaps the most immediate advantage of the online platform we hope to explore more options in future. And we would therefore like to ask you, our readership, for any suggestions and ideas as to how we can best develop our new digital identity.

To coincide with the launch of the Open Library of the Humanities project, we are delighted to present two new essays for our inaugural online presence. Joe Luna's essay on John Wilkinson's poetry extends the journal's coverage of this major poet, following Matt ffytche's remarkable piece in Volume 2, Number 1. We are also happy to welcome back Jon Clay who last graced our pages in Volume 2, Number 2 (on Douglas Oliver) and who now offers us his engaging reading of Sean Bonney's work. We are also pleased to publish three new reviews and a conference report. Lyndon Davies provides an eloquent review of John Goodby's book on the poetry of Dylan Thomas – a poet whose influence on contemporary poetry is sometimes overlooked. The book of essays edited by Tony Lopez which accompanies the Bury Text Festivals shares the Festivals' distinctive focus on text and visual art and is imaginatively reviewed here by Judy Kendall. Robert Kiely offers an energetic review of a collection of essays and poetry edited by Richard Parker which consider the expansive and complex legacy of Ezra Pound for contemporary poetry. Lila Matsumoto also provides a comprehensive report on the 'Work, Performance & Poetry' Symposium held at Northumbria University in April, organised by Jo Lindsay Walton, Ed Luker and Ian Davidson – papers from which can now be found published in *HixEros* 6.

We hope you enjoy the issue and look forward to your comments, feedback and future contributions.

Scott Thurston, with Gareth Farmer and Vicky Sparrow

Postscript: In Memoriam Lee Harwood

This opening issue of the journal is dedicated to the memory of the wonderful poet, Lee Harwood who died in July 2015. Lee was a friend and inspiration to many of the contributors, editors and board members of the *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry* and his work has inspired many of the poets whose work has featured in the journal. The editors of the journal wish to pay tribute to this poet of extraordinary gifts whom John Ashbery has called, with a gentle irony fitting of Harwood himself, his 'favourite English romantic poet'. Farewell, Lee Harwood, and thank you.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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