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Editorial

by Paul Stubbs

In a recent essay, ‘The Mirage of poetic evolution in Britain since Eliot’, I wrote: *‘The poet of the 21st century will, like any animal, be subject only to the continuing processes of adapting to his own biological environment, to create a poetry that must strive in its imagination to actually affect the planetary balance (...) The pen in the hand today need be no more than the needle of the seismograph, recording and tracing across the page the polysemic tremors of the modern mind.’*

What will be required to make this happen is, among others, an end to the ‘creative classroom’ (this Anglo-Saxon invention—while a rarity in the major cities of Europe—was a trend started in the USA that then moved on to become a profitable plague that has completely saturated the universities and schools in Britain), or the ‘pedagogical trough’ as Rimbaud once so eloquently put it. The ‘poetry’ workshop must first, like a disused church, be boarded-up, closed down, and its ‘teachers’ forced once again to endure their own imaginative ‘slave-labour’, to pick up and use the pen (again?) as something akin to a pneumatic drill to smash and break up the rocks and gravel of those languages still trapped within the sediment of our ‘ancient’ brains. What is clear though is that these ‘facilitators’ are only capable of providing artificial respiration for ‘pupils’ unable yet to understand the imaginative measure of their *own* breathing.

It is only when writers have learnt to free themselves of the ‘*necessity of success*’ (George Oppen) and its self-satisfying burdens that they begin to attain the necessary animalistic courage to endure whatever-next-arrives and to abdicate responsibility for what they write *before* writing. What, at the beginning of the 21st century, we require, is some kind of a new neural and/or

glossolalic linguistics, one in which *all* foreign languages are assimilated into their word-streams, a syntactically insinuated pseudo-grammar on which all spheres of the modern mind might, at the same time, interact. Such a hypermodern polymorphism in language has already been sought after of course, but should continue to be.

The French poet Jacques Dupin once imagined the possibilities of writing ‘*as if I had never been born. Every word until this moment: pulverized, laid bare, breathed back into nothingness. To write without any words, (écrire sans mots), as if I were being born*’. A notion of achieving ‘in’ language what at the periphery of the mind might seem impossible; but what can and should happen, if innovation is to survive, is the necessity to continually goad language into new verbal clashes with *itself*, to consciously work for a poetry that is what Hölderlin hoped would be ‘*as alive as possible, in which the very processes of thinking and imagining are enacted*.’ The opposite to this, though equally as exciting, is when the mind aborts its own syntactical clay to attain the gait of an antithetical language, such as in the extreme example set by the poetry of, say, two of the most radical of the German Expressionists, August Stramm and Kurt Schwitters, both of whom deformed and fractured syntax by neologizing their own minds and by hacking away the vines of *all* extraneous word-growths, until what remained was no more than an ‘image-stump’, the trunk of a once giant language blown apart by both the horrors of the First World War and by the shrapnel of the political rhetoric that preceded it. But it shouldn’t take a world war or a genocide or a societal collapse for language to be freed up and to rise from the darkness of a literary grave. After all, the history of human confabulation was *borrowed* from the jawbones of all those now buried, exhumed, and still to be unearthed. So maybe it is time to re-engage our fascination with the actual primordial mechanism of the mouth, and remember what first allowed speech, language, utterance, alphabets to be ‘liberated’—the painter Francis Bacon described his own fascination with the human mouth like this: ‘*I’ve always been very moved by the movements of the mouth and the shape of the mouth and teeth and I’ve always hoped in a sense to be able to paint the mouth and its interior colours like Monet painted a sunset*.’. In the same train of thoughts, the Austrian philosopher and mathematician Ludwig

Wittgenstein approached the final bulwark of language when, having clambered up and onto the last syntactical fortress of ‘difficult’ language, he reached a state where words failed finally to ‘*bear a family resemblance to each other*’. And this sense of semantic defamiliarization can have fruitful consequences for the act of creation. Let’s remember Allen Ginsberg’s words after finishing a forty-hour marathon writing session that culminated in perhaps his greatest work, *Kaddish*: ‘*Defeat like that is good for poetry, you go so far out you don’t know what you’re doing, you lose touch with what’s been done before by anyone, you wind up creating a new poetry universe.*’ A mantra for literary creation that you won’t be ‘taught’ any time soon at a university or school near you. When Artaud wrote ‘*poetry is for pigs*’ it was not just some arbitrary bludgeoning of everything held sacred, it was no less than the spirit of the *new* colliding with and word-splintering onto the zeitgeist-anvil of the *now*, the momentary outrage of reality being uprooted and yanked out of the soil of a subjective illusion too long infertile.

Literary ‘identity’ has suffered many necessary setbacks of course and should continue to do so. For whether it is the extreme grappling hook of the ‘I’ of Rimbaud that prevented his corporeal form from falling into the abyss, or merely the ‘heteronyms’ of Pessoa that equal his own tongue-width and inseminate the pores of his brain with the ‘pseudo-biographies’ of three other poets, it must at all costs remain the brutal single-mindedness of the writer to endure *and* locate what Paul Celan described as the ‘*ways of a voice to a receptive you*’. And this should become *de rigueur* for all the mental processes that conclude with a language arriving at the nerve-terminals of experience *before* the act itself of writing. Any desire to write or read or worse, ‘talk’ about literature, should not be part of any kind of a pedagogical need or want, it should merely be by biological necessity that any discourse is begun. The ‘professional’ poetry ‘performer’, after a hard day ‘teaching’ at a creative workshop, will retire to his study to tell himself how important his work is—a depressing, all-too-familiar tale of the contemporary writer who works the ‘circuit’; and it is all mostly vacuous, whether by empty intellectual titillation or by constant self-gratification. For there is no literary ‘world’, there is (or should be) only the ongoing search for a language that might just begin to alter *and* destabilize, not just any redundant literary forms, but also

entire biological systems of thought and ideas, and geographically solid terrains of the mind.

When the conditions for this ‘search’ have been deactivated, we often find ourselves suddenly drawn into the recurring ‘public’ vortex of imaginative atrophy, the creative hiatus filled in by such frequently regurgitated newspaper articles as those written by bored minds too used to ‘fame’ and ‘success’ to activate and re-engage in any great new battle of the spirit. For instance, they have asked (always along the same lines) ‘Is the novel/author dead?’ and much more repugnant, ‘Where is poetry going?’ The hollow chatter of poetical verbosity is, and will always remain the embodiment of the most puerile politics of *silence*. César Vallejo understood all too clearly this barely justifiable discrepancy between what passes as ‘literature’ and what actually is, literature (by stating, among other things, that the ‘new’ writer ‘*suffers a life in which these new relations and rhythms are made blood, are cell-based, something in the end that has become vitally bound up with sensibility*’).

It also seems that the majority of critics have ceased to believe that any ‘new’ literature or language can be applied to the most unendurable and private fixations inside of the *homo sapiens* today. True originality via the re-birth of the imagination is failing quite clearly to remain coterminous with its content. Criticism itself must also advance and evolve with the imagination, lest its ‘critical’ equipment become too dilapidated and fall into a linguistical state of desuetude. Both those writers famously ‘alive’ *and* those ‘dead’ need to be continually rescrutinized so as to help readers maintain the necessary mental equilibrium to read afresh each work. Literary ‘excellence’ is frequently lost to the sloppy jargon-fed editorial propensity for a ‘Top Hundred’ list. If we are not to endure some kind of a new imaginative theodicy then the level of criticism has also to be written in as original a way as the work being reviewed. The oft-repeated words ‘Sales’ and equally horrific ‘Profile’, that have managed to fossilize the tongue of writers, readers and publishers must also be removed as consequences of the heterogeneity of ‘creativity’. Even more abhorrent has perhaps been the emergence of the absolute sterility of the ‘Themed’ and ‘No-Themed’ submission piles of

editors, though such supreme acts of incompetence and idiocy of course require no further comment here.

Nietzsche believed strongly in such assertions of individuality as that *'The great poet creates only out of his own reality—to the point at which he is afterwards unable to endure his own work'*. This is the concussive and world-denying and *necessary* breaking free of the contemporary and imaginative membrane that enables complete linguistic self-expression, and what leads to the path of absolute and giant vision—which has absolutely nothing to do with literary 'recommendations' or the 'choices' of insular poetry or authors societies. Though such an inscrutable viewpoint today if heeded would be of course something of a deathknell for the importance of the 'Award Ceremonies'. In *The Truth of Poetry* Michael Hamburger rightly wrote: *'Even now a good many poets owe their reputations more to the aura that surrounds performers than to the quality of their work. Some of these poets need not concern us, since they belong to the 'history of publicity' rather than poetry.'*

Each of the works published in *The Black Herald* will have been selected only because it is vital *and* original, and above all else, might well incubate itself to the exterior world of publicity—though this is the hope of the editors, not necessarily that of the writers themselves. We will as editors continue though to seek out the *ghost* of a future hypermodern vision that haunts a work *now*. And while the iconoclastic voice will probably end up being as tame as that of the weak and piteous one, we must at least be careful enough not to pre-judge anything *too* early. But voices have 'always' begun to arrive that are necessarily contrary, anti-metrical, and insoluble, voices that undoubtedly await us on the other side of contemporary egotism and which lie already someplace *beyond* the prosodic narratives and desired effects of predictable workshop solutions.