

FROM A 2007 CORRESPONDENCE...

This email dialogue was conducted after both authors attended the Poetry and Public Language conference (University of Plymouth, 2007) and had published very different reviews of *Don't Start Me Talking: Interviews with Contemporary Poets*, edited by Tim Allen and Andrew Duncan (Salt, 2006).

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Rupert Loydell: Steve, I was quite surprised when I read your blog review of *Don't Start Me Talking*, as it was so positive compared to my one up at *Stride*. I've also received an email from Andrew Duncan, who I'd sent the correct bibliographic details to for a wrongly cited *Stride* book. Amongst other things, he mentions that 'One of the things which emerged from doing the interviews was just how much people disagreed about fundamental things – the feeling of collusion and identification which is the vital fluid of poetry seemed to disappear when you actually got down to cases.'

Both of these things got me thinking that perhaps I'd got it wrong, or come back from the poetry conference with my own agenda to impose upon the interviews book, so I'm busy rereading it. In principle I'm all for the notion of different versions of poetry, of poetics, but, for instance, this morning I'm wading through Michael Haslam's interview and, to be honest, wondering why I'm wasting time on such hippy dipshit. Also, I've never been one for the sort of biographical contextualisation that he [clearly at Andrew Duncan's behest] undertakes. What do you think about all this?

Steve Waling: Thanks for your comments. In some sense, I think the response to a book like this can be very personal – I was excited by the book, I think, because of my own need to feel part of this wider world of innovative writing – even of the 'tradition' of it. So I didn't mind the 'out-of-date' feel of it – the inclusion of Andrew Crozier, for instance, or even the Eric Mottram interview, because it added to my knowledge of where the poetry I'm now writing (as opposed to the poetry I started writing) comes from.

With regard to Mottram, I've only just this year actually read anything substantial by him – a friend of mine lent me a copy of *The Book of Herne*. There's large swathes of British innovative writing from the '70's to the '90's that I haven't touched - largely through its inaccessibility. The interviews have at least given me some other ideas as to what to look for.

You've been immersed in the world of innovative writing for longer than I – I was surrounded by fans of Armitage and Duffy and pretty mainstream stuff here in Manchester, once tried to write like Tony Harrison (eee bah gum! Ah'm workin' class me!) For someone who missed out on Bob Cobbing, JH Prynne and the other collectives because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time, a little bit of alternative

history gives us at least a feeling that we're not the only weirdos around. I'm aware that it's not all there is to it; it never is.

When I look at it again, I shall no doubt have a much better understanding and be able to sort the wheat from the chaff. Eric Mottram's anti-populism is irritating, for instance, in a way that classical music buffers talking about 'popular music' are irritating: you feel like shouting 'Shut up Granddad' at him. Harry Gilonis talks about his record collection, and you feel at the end of it like chucking a copy of Nick Hornby's *Hi Fidelity* at his head!

I'd add David Chaloner's interview to your list in the review, by the way. And I know he's an old hippy, but I rather like Micheal Haslam.

But the lack of women writers is a real fault. It turns innovative writing into a kind of boy's club.

Do you think there's a need for a history (or histories) of innovative writing in Britain, by the way?

RL: Definitely! But I don't know who could or would write it. I would want someone critical but generous, someone willing to contextualise, contrast and compare without saying 'this is the only good stuff'. It's the singlemindedness I object to, by any sort of writer. I mean, I've said it before and I'll say it again, I'd rather see Roger McGough reading his work than almost anyone else – I don't like poetry readings very much, and I'd rather have a drink and a laugh. But I don't want to read Roger's stuff on the page that much. I want to be able to write about my kids as a subject without being dismissed, I also want to enjoy both mainstream and experimental writing. I still think Ted Hughes, John Burnside and Ken Smith are great writers, and I don't like a lot of the avant-garde stuff around (I've never 'got' Bob Cobbing's work, for example, live or on the page). But that doesn't mean I simply dismiss it, although I think personal opinion and taste are fine as part of a value/response system (along with critical knowledge).

I think it's important if work is to be contextualised to realise that all sorts of writing can be informed and come out of the same social and literary contexts. I mean, I happen to think Tony Lopez's work is a good way of going about criticising how language is devalued by capitalism, but capitalism can be critiqued in other ways. Richard Kerridge spoke at the poetry conference on eco-poetics; mainstream writers on the Faber and Bloodaxe lists deal with such issues *in their own way*. You and I may get negative responses for daring to discuss 'the spiritual', whereas I am actually interested in that area, and think there are huge links between postmodern theology and l=a=n=g=u=a=g=e or linguistically innovative poetics.

But perhaps 'histories' (or 'herstories'?) would be the answer, gathered together in one volume? I just think everyone needs to be honest about how and what they read, how they ended up writing experimental stuff. Why is everyone so keen to disown their

past? Ted Hughes, Brian Patten, Ken Smith, TS Eliot and Gavin Selerie's *Azimuth* were major influences on my early poetry. As was my parents' friend Brian Louis Pearce. Why can't we like Kenneth Patchen any more? Matt Simpson, John Berryman, early Carol Ann Duffy? It's ok, we all have dodgy record and book collections, we've all written bad poems. But I'm going off topic.

I'd be the first person to tell students and other writers that language is this fantastic pliable medium, that processes are useful, blah blah blah. But in the end they are tools, and don't necessarily make people write innovative work. Any more than the existence of improvised jazz has stopped boy bands. We choose what to read, hear or engage with. What we don't need to do is barricade ourselves in a room with like-minded people and shout 'go away' to everyone else.

SW: Some interesting thoughts. It's good to be reminded about honesty in particular – I'll certainly acknowledge my debt to Hughes, and also Elisabeth Bishop and Sylvia Plath, along with O'Hara, Ashbery and the whole New York crew. A lot of one's influences are to do with what one comes across at a particular time in one's life when one is ready to be influenced. Ted Berrigan's sonnets came at just the right time for this next book. Some influences you do have to shuck off, though – if I'd tried to be too Tony Harrison, it would have been bad for me. I'd have become just another 'Northern poet' with a chip on his shoulder.

And some influence is reactive: I'm *definitely not* going to write like Andrew Motion/Thomas Hardy etc...

I actually quite like Bob Cobbing – probably more than JH Prynne, who just goes way over my head even in the early poems.

In the interviews themselves, I didn't see much of the us v. them attitudes, though Tim Allen in particular seems to want to perpetuate the poet vs. academia opposition – and it's noticeable that no-one else did! I like the matter-of-factness of 'well, a poet has to have a job' in Tony Lopez's response (the more of him I read, the more I like him). And Robert Sheppard refused to have a go at the mainstream too. There were a few blasts at the establishment from Sean Bonney mind, but I didn't see anybody much having a go at Simon Armitage, for instance.

I'd agree with the need for 'histories' as opposed to 'history' – and most of these poets are from certain strands of the innovative, rather than others, and apart from David Miller, nothing spiritual (but it's noticeable that he isn't really asked about that.) (He's another poet I really must investigate – damn it, another maxing of the credit card.) Whether you can do that with just one book is another matter. I'm not sure you can do without oversimplifying or overcomplicating things. Which are two sides of the same coin, really: both revealing a lack of depth. I learnt a lot about certain movements in

British poetry from this book, but there's so much more that hasn't been told (so who's going to tell it then?)

And your word 'herstories' does bring up a real problem with this book: lack of women's voices. I gave a reading once in which I was asked what my influences were. I gave the usual list – all male – all big names. Someone asked me what women poets had influenced me. So I came up as quickly as possible with a list of names that I could remember.

The writers interviewed mentioned more women's names than were interviewed. That certainly says something about Allen/Duncan's view of the world of innovative poetry, doesn't it? That they expect the major players to be male? One of my favourite books is the Pig Press *Beyond All Other* by Elaine Randell – and her new *Selected from Shearsman* was one of the best books of last year (for me) – she can teach us a lot about concision and compassion in poetry. I do think the lack of female voices is a major flaw.

RL: I'm certainly not arguing everything is good! 'Reactive influences' is a good term. We all have people we wish to definitely not read or be influenced by... What I'm saying is you can't deny Andrew Motion or Thomas Hardy's poetry exists.

I'd like to read a genuinely wide set of histories of British poetry. But I'm constantly appalled at how defensive everyone is about their own work, or the five or six poets whose work they like. As Andrew Duncan says, people can't seem to even agree on the basics.

Prynne goes over my head, but surely that's OK? I'm glad he's there and that he's influenced so many writers. I like things that confuse and alarm me, upset my normal ways of thinking. Surely, Berrigan does that to an extent in his sonnets? How is it that they 'make sense' when he's simply taken lines from other poems? Why is the accumulative effect so interesting? I like John Wilkinson's and Drew Milne's poetry more for how it says whatever it says than what it might say – which I don't think I could define at all.

I have to be honest and say that apart from some of the writers I'm in touch with and have published, like Sarah Law and Sandra Tappenden, a lot of my poetry shelves are full of male writers, although there certainly are authors such as Penelope Shuttle and Eavan Boland there too. I read a lot more American women poets: Sheila Murphy, Anne Sexton, Marjorie Perloff, Jorie Graham, Denise Levertov, Rachel Blau duPlessis, Cole Swensen, to name but a few.

I think when one edits a book such as *Don't Start Me talking* you simply have to make an effort to address questions of gender balance; and, here, the authors didn't. Obviously, tokenistic PC-ness isn't the actual answer. What do you think about this counting up of

women/men, queer/straight, ethnic/white that goes on? I mean, should we even try and consider UK poetry separately from other poetry in this age of the worldwide web?

SW: I wouldn't wish to argue that Andrew Motion or Thomas Hardy shouldn't exist! Yes, people do get terribly defensive/aggressive if someone challenges their little corner of the poetry world. I'm not sure, though, if the 'can't we all just get along?' approach works either though. Something inbetween outright hostility and a kind of blanket of 'everyone's alright' would be good: a kind of creative disagreement, and creative listening, perhaps.

I don't personally feel the need to investigate Prynne, by the way, not at the moment. Or probably Wilkinson, Drew Milne etc... but I take your point about how we read difficult poets, not for what they say but for how they say it. I can do that with Ted Berrigan's sonnets, probably because the way they're said interests me. I cottoned on early to the serious humour in the New York poets, and it's taken me a lot longer to get onto Black Mountain and Objectivist writing because, well, they just seemed rather over-serious. And Olson especially gave out this strong odour of male pheromones - all declarative and big-voiced. I much prefer Lorinne Neidecker and Denise Levertov; and Creeley in his hurt mode.

Your last paragraph interested me, because it's something I think about a lot. One of the problems is the problem of the invisibility of alternative voices. It was certainly the case with avant garde poetries in the 70s & 80s: where, unless you were in the right place at the right time, found the right bookshop or whatever, could you even find the avant garde? The same has been true of womens' voices, black voices, queer voices – hence anthologies & publishers designed to redress that balance. But then there's a danger of them becoming ghettos – so what do you do?

I don't like the idea of counting the numbers of women, black, or other ethnic voices in anthologies – but what else do you do? We're all more attracted by something we're familiar with – even if what we're familiar with is the more innovative writing, men go for male writers and women – do they go only for women writers? I like reading writers like Barbara Guest, Denise Riley, because they have different slants from mine. I've recently been reading Anne Lauterbach.

As for British writing – I'm afraid the question of invisibility comes up again - and possibly my quarrel with the very loud voice of Olson. Or Ron Silliman, perhaps, and his complaint against what he calls 'anglophilia'. There's also the long shadow of English self-deprecation. One sees this in art, poetry and music – especially British jazz, for instance. We keep looking overseas – especially to America – for out influences. Which is partly fine, because we shouldn't be insular, and we should be aware of things going on in Europe too. Or Africa. Or Asia. Though we probably can't be interested in it all.

But there are neglected, buried histories of innovative writing in England, going back to the 20s. Bunting was a great poet, almost totally ignored for years. Hamish Hamilton's *Elegies for the Dead at Cyrenica* is one of the great neglected long poems of the 20th centuries. The 40s especially seems to be a black hole of forgotten poetry. That's probably why I'd want to see proper histories of *British* poetry, because otherwise those quieter voices, those forgotten names, just disappear – rather like a lot of the early 20th century women writers it took Virago and others to remember.

I don't want to get all nationalist about this; but I do think we should actually speak up for our British writing: not as something unique and isolated from the rest, or even better than the big loud voices of American writing, but at least as good as, at least as internationalist and as exciting and innovative as. As someone very influenced by American poetry, I wouldn't want to do without their poetry. But I do think we should blow our own trumpet more often than we do.

RL: Aren't we all as visible or invisible, as ghettoized, as each other anyway? The sales figures for new writers published by any press aren't encouraging, in fact it's clear that many of the small presses often sell far more copies of individual titles than the likes of Bloodaxe and Carcanet. The downside of instant print, the web etc is perhaps loss of audience, and loss of critical standards – but the latter gets tangled up with taste. It reminds me of when I was a sad fifth former, into Yes and Genesis, and instantly ready to dismiss anything in the charts or vaguely popular. It seems to me a lot of the poetry world still works like that. I still don't particularly like chart music, but I don't feel the need to shoot it down.

One of the interesting things that has happened with the rise of Salt and Shearsman as presses, utilising print on demand facilities, is the reconsideration of poets from the second half of the twentieth century. I mean the big collecteds from Lee Harwood, Allen Fisher, John James etc mean this work is pretty easily available again for anyone interested. There's a new collected Iain Sinclair just out from Etruscan too. The problem remains publicity and marketing, but it always has been. I'm quite optimistic though about the world changing into small networked units and groups of writers, with no local or national boundaries.

But I take on board what you are saying about hidden strands of British writing. The argument against that is, of course, that other strands – say black writing, or queer writing – have been *more* ignored. There's also the question 'does it matter?' to be asked. We can never know everything, there's too much stuff around as it is. Availability of information doesn't make that information useful! There is something to be said for the sieving effect of time, which includes periods of re-evaluation such as we have seen in the last decade or so (with the publications I mentioned by Shearsman and Salt). Perhaps good art does win through in the end?

I also think that British academia is changing – there are lots of new appointments with regard to English and Creative writing around the country, lots of people we both know or know of, now teaching. I sincerely hope that we will see what I think has happened in America, which is a generation of poets/writers who want it all, the experimental and the accessible. Writers who can learn from many strands of 20th Century writing, not just one or two. What we can't do, of course, is dictate to students. One of my third year groups got very excited recently by looking at and also performing sound poems and Dada poems etc, but that's not what they want to do for their assessed performance. I think that's going to be a much more straightforward 'poetry reading'-type thing. But they are certainly aware of radical film & poetry experiments, improvisation, rap, rant and fringe theatre/poetry crossovers. Several of them got very excited by the 3by3by3 website project and have contributed to that.

Do we really need to define ourselves in the 21st Century by a line drawn on a map? – even if in our case that line is actually the edge of a land mass?

SW: If you see things in terms of sales of poetry books, I guess it's never been good compared to, say, airport novels and chick-lit! I think Andrew Duncan's remarks in his review of *The Poetry Wars* about the Balkanisation of poetry is also pertinent – that nobody looks over the barriers at what 'the other side (sides!)' are doing. We have an unfortunate tendency to see in binary oppositions (see Ron Silliman's constant Post-Avant v. School of Quietude oppositions.)

But the upside of this is a sense of 'belonging'. There is a little of this myth of the heroic individual who strikes out a lonely path of artistic endeavour that we still cling to; but really, most of us feel more comfortable if we know there's similarly-oriented people out there who are at least in roughly the same ball-park as we are. It's one of the reasons why I've started making connections with more non-mainstream poets myself; I've often felt like the odd one out in a collection of poets, all of whom are trying to be Simon Armitage, while I'm busy trying to be John Ashbery!

Which reminds me of something the poet Lemn Sissay said once: that he 'integrates' when he steps out of the door, and 'segregates' when he goes back to his family! I think there will always be groups, because human beings are probably inherently tribal, and I don't think there's anything wrong with them. It's when some groups start saying they're inherently better than those groups over there that there's a problem, in politics as in poetry. I used to look down my nose at prog-rock pretentiousness (as I saw it then) but now it seems just part of the musical landscape of the 70s, and I listen to everything from John Cage and Zappa to Blondie!

As for the British thing, I don't think we're as invisible as black writing and other groups, of course not, and I take your point about there being other groupings that might be of more interest than the purely British thing. I also take your point about the new collections of Allen Fisher, Harwood, *et al* (not to forget the wonderful Carcanet brick of

Tom Raworth! Or the Faber WS Graham!) But it is nevertheless characteristic of the British not to blow their own trumpet in the way that American poets or artists or musicians do, or even to do ourselves down a little. The way that British jazz of the 70s was almost forgotten, or it's assumed that only American jazz can be great, is a case in point. There's an assumption that all this weird modernist/post-modernist stuff is something only foreigners do, so the mainstream can admire it if it's written by a bloke from Eastern Europe who was imprisoned by the state, ignore it if it's French, shake our heads sagely about 'crazy Americans' while not having to worry their silly little heads that anybody British would have anything to do with such nonsense. Even just as a corrective to little Englandism, it's good sometimes to point out that some of these crazy modernists are British.

As for *defining* ourselves by a line on a map, I doubt there's such a thing as a single British voice; voices, certainly, even regional accents. Whether such things are important or not is a moot point, however. In some ways, I doubt I'll ever be able to shake off my 'northernness' even if I wanted to; my head is too full of the speech of the streets of Manchester, of the sights of hills, stone-built terraces, factories and the like ever to be entirely free of it. Though that is prone to an awful lot of clichés, and there are poets who are less place-oriented than I, including, I suspect, your own!

Speaking of introducing students to Dada etc, it's amazing what you can get people to try out for themselves. One of the problems I have with Eric Mottram's interview is the belligerence of his tone: his ideas are not all bad, and some are very good, but he comes across as someone who looks down his nose at the fans of Larkin and other movement poets again. I used to find that in Olson, rightly or wrongly: put the barriers up and charge at the opposition, rather than sitting down and talking about what interests you without disparaging someone else. I can sometimes be guilty of that myself.

RL: I like your idea of tribal, and of course I think the internet facilitates this, that is we can be members of different tribes for different subjects/topics/events. This may be part of our cultural confusion, because we are no longer geographically tribal... more by our taste, thought, and media consumption. What we listen to, read and how we think about it. Yes, belonging to a tribe or set of tribes, but the tribes don't have to be at war all the time. Or ignorant of each other's motives and practices.

Since you mentioned them, I've gone back and read the Harry Gilonis interview and although it doesn't make me want to read his poetry, nor shake my set-in-stone memories of trying to get money out of him for books sold at the Poetry Society, I actually enjoyed his musical namedropping. And Andrew Duncan's come to that – although I find it difficult to know how we share so many musical and cultural influences and events and have come to such different conclusions!

I still want to take something like the Keith Tuma anthology for Oxford as a genuine, wide attempt to embrace and show many different strands of poetry. I also think that



*An Anthology of New (American) Poets*, edited by Lisa Jarnot, Leonard Schwartz, Chris Stroffolino (Talisman House, 1998) is a fantastic gathering of new poetry that has taken on all sorts of modernist, postmodernist and other poetics and poetics, including some forms of lyric, metre and rhyme which often get overlooked as we try hard to be new and innovative.

My own take on contemporary poetry by, say, the under-40s (as a rough guideline) in Britain is that it's very similar. People don't have a problem reading most/any sorts of poetry, and draw from and on what they will. My students cast their nets much wider than I do. They have access to Dada recordings, hiphop and rap performances, song lyrics from many centuries, as well as the huge poetic output of the 20th century. Then of course there's art, music and philosophy, theology, psychology and such. It's endless, and I think they are much more adept at finding what they want and can actually use within this accumulation. It may be on one level scratching the surface, or filtering, but I don't have a problem with that.

SW: The tribal thing does have a problem if it ever gets exclusive, which I guess is what we're both trying to avoid. So I like the idea of being part of more than one tribe – flitting between tribes, so that one minute you're a post-avant poet, the next you're a 'spiritual poet', the next you might even be a British poet.

It does get confusing, though; and if you're not careful you'll end up trying to explain yourself to people who don't understand what you're doing, or think it's a bit weird that you're talking about God or cutting and pasting or (in my case recently) writing about some obscure place in North-East Lancashire while sampling the essays of William Hazlitt! I'm not surprised some people get defensive when they feel they're always having to explain themselves.

I think there is one thing that we've touched on that we haven't really got into much, and that's the question of womens' writing. We're both male writers, of course, but I am conscious that the list of 'seminal' (there's a male word if ever there was one!) that we're supposed to be influenced by is often very male. And this is whether you read Olson, Oppen, Bernstein, Creeley; or Larkin, Armitage and Don Paterson. Sometimes I think I should stop reading male writers and just read female writers to try and catch up. There's so many I've missed: Rachel Blau du Plessis, Fanny Howe (well, a little maybe), Rae Armantrout, Lynn Hejinnian. Some that I think have influenced me include Elaine Randell and Sheila E Murphy. Oh, and Geraldine Monk, who's terrific.

It often seems that womens' contributions to both mainstream and non-mainstream poetry are the first to get written out when it comes to writing the histories. As if they have nothing to teach us, and I think they have. Alice Notley was a revelation to me, and there's poems by Barbara Guest that are among my favourites.

That's partly about being interested, perhaps, in 'tribes' we can't personally be involved in. One could say the same about black writing or queer writing. How open can we be without falling apart?

RL: Maybe that's the trouble with tribes based on gender or sexuality or whatever? Maybe we should just form tribes as and when we need them to discuss or enjoy various poetry? But of course there is also the idea that you flagged up earlier, the desire or possibly need to belong.

At the risk of being male, I think and hope that the negligence of women's writing is being addressed through recent anthologies such as *innovative women poets* and *American Women Poets in the 21st Century*, both of which are fantastic publications. And of course the likes of Salt and Shearsman are busy publishing women's writings, that is paying attention to who and why they are publishing who they do; the issue is on the agenda.

Rachel Blau duPlessis' *Drafts* project is brilliant, a source of wonder and ongoing exploration for me. The very notion of 'folds' and revisiting/rewriting/reconsidering poems again and again throughout a sequence, the wide-ranging subject, or content, of the work. It's just fantastic poetry, attempting to produce a monumental body of work. It seems to me to go hand-in-hand with her theoretical work, too.

At work, it's clear that many women feel they have moved beyond feminism, and that even the radical queers don't want to be associated with that term. My students are in the main resistant to the notion that they might be disadvantaged or discriminated against because they are male or female. Much more of concern is sexual orientation and race. They're all convinced they are media savvy and not affected by advertising, marketing or anything else. Perhaps they are, but I don't really think so! And they often aren't that interested in exploring any/the avant-garde either – the students on my Writing Lyrics unit mainly think music is for listening or dancing to, not deconstructing or assessing in terms of gender, race or class. Of course, they have to undertake that kind of work for assessment, but it doesn't come naturally to them. I think they are more into processes and having the tools to do things than that kind of contextual analysis – which suits me fine in most of my teaching, as I am a great believer [as you know] in processes and hard work.

Do you think social and market fragmentation and the change of publishing mechanisms will mean that we may never again have our set canon or geniuses? That we have access to so much now that we simply will never reach consensus? And might that not be cause for celebration?

SW: In many ways, I agree that we shouldn't form tribes on the basis of sexuality or gender – and I suspect that the two editors of the book we were discussing long ago would agree. Unfortunately, they seem to have excluded all but one woman poet from

their book, in their eagerness, no doubt, to only include 'the best' writers to interview. This is in 2007, for goodness sake!

So perhaps many women writers *have* moved on from feminism, at least from their point of view; but it seems that some male writers still need reminding of the fact that women writers exist, much less are worth reading. It's notable, though, that several of the interviewees named women writers as significant influences. I'd like to see us go beyond gendered anthologies, however good they are, and have more equal anthologies without anyone having to point out any imbalance. I think we're a long way from that.

I'd like to see an end to canons, ideas of genius etc., myself, though I'm somewhat more sceptical that the marketplace will bring that about. What I suspect might happen, however, is that there'll just be a bunch of competing canons, all vying for attention.

I suspect your lyrics students are not as media savvy as they think they are, if they're not willing to consider anything outside the hummable and danceable. And, however much they may find it unnatural, I do think that race, gender and sexuality need to be addressed. I'm sure we all like to think of ourselves as good liberal people who don't have a prejudiced bone in our bodies; but I suspect that inequalities are as built into the new markets as into the old. In fact, any notion of what's 'natural' needs to be challenged, especially in the age when everybody is supposed to be middle-class and to aspire to a kind of Pooterish existence in the suburbs of the mind. If not having a single canon ends in a kind of sludge of reasonableness, I'm not sure it's desirable. It's a funny thing, but I suspect that the only way to embrace 'difference' is not by subsuming it but by pointing it out and saying, isn't it great that it's different and it's got something to teach us?

RL: Interesting, the idea of numerous, differing canons, and also the idea of deliberately pointing out and noting differences. The latter, accepting and noting, seems to me a reasonable answer, and a way to diffuse the arguments that we've both agreed aren't healthy.

Without wishing to suggest that Allen & Duncan didn't think or plan their book, I'm not sure it's fair or reasonable to suggest that they have in any way claimed to have chosen 'the best' writers to interview. I think we can assume that some of their choices are who they know, where they live, and who deigned to be interviewed. I know myself from previous Stride books that some people are happy to be opinionated and forthright until it involved publication – at which point they back off and hide.

I'm not sure I want to start a huge debate about gender and minorities, nor if I feel qualified or knowledgeable enough about markets, to discuss inequalities. Yes, of course everything is weighted, biased and such, but I also think there are more and more ways of dissemination and publication these days. The centre may stay the same (for the

moment) but actually it's getting smaller (e.g. Waterstones stock) and the stuff in orbit (small press, internet, zines, podcasts, etc) is getting larger and larger.

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