

# The Editorial Slant

*an editor's note*

"The wonder is," writes the late scholar R.H. Blyth, "that we understand one another at all." In this issue, the great and much-alive poet B.H. Fairchild takes on, in a new essay about poetry, the challenge of showing how literature attempts to achieve more than mere understanding. Literary art becomes, Fairchild says, "a way of being."

We at *New Letters* aspire to that way of being, where literature—all art and religion, perhaps—ultimately and at the least appears "steady and immediate," which is Blyth's description of the Zen of language; Fairchild chooses a term from the philosopher Heidegger, "Unconcealment," to begin his discussion about poetic language. Both descriptions firm up our hope that this issue of *New Letters* might set itself as a collective example of Being. Inge Genefke's testimony on torture, for instance, will create in us an awareness—not simply an understanding—of the abuse some human beings impose on other human beings. It's real. To borrow a phrase from Fairchild's essay, "I suppose I am asking the reader to remember to be astonished."

An interviewer recently asked for *New Letters'* editorial slant. We want writing, I said, that comes out of something. Here, Michelle Boisseau: "watch towers where border soldiers / insult each other's sisters on schedule"; and Michael Blumenthal: "[a pigeon] lying there / on the doormat, eyes open, wings spread." We want writing, I said, that advances literary art. Here, Kevin Young: "At night, / even the blind can see"; and we want writing that offers hope. Here, Mia Leonin: "I carry home the church in a child's baptismal shoe."

Finally, I direct your attention to a new series in this magazine, *Unbowed Books*, appreciations and re-evaluations of earlier books that deserve our renewed attention. We thank our friend Robert Day for setting us off on this venture. Each issue will feature such an essay by a different writer of prominence, and will further our mission to deepen what I necessarily have oversimplified in my references to B.H. Fairchild's way of being—to open for each reader a space that contains the immediacy and the mystery of literary writing.

—Robert Stewart