

Trust

An editor's note

With each edition of *New Letters*, we invest in the trust of our readers. Most of the work that comes to a magazine is entirely new, never before seen by anyone, and we want to select work we, and our readers, can believe in. I do not mean the willing suspension of disbelief, as Coleridge asserted, but closer to what he went on to call poetic faith. Readers need to trust that their faith in the writing will be worthwhile.

When the late poet Michelle Boisseau in her interview here asserts that some poems deserve “a bigger hall to sing in,” she describes the process of deciding which of her own poems, then, to set aside: “They might bring up something irrelevant,” she says, “or some other poem does it better.”

I am reminded of John Gardner’s assertion in *On Moral Fiction* (1978) that bad art is not simply a waste of time but immoral, because it takes up space. Lesser efforts crowd out the best of human aspiration and clutter our search for art that offers us the possibility of being uplifted. Gardner’s book offended some people, for its apparent moralistic and stern tone; Michelle Boisseau characteristically put such decisions in their most generous context. Both, however, asserted a similar principle.

Distinctions must be made. In a culture, now, where truth, itself, is suspect and concepts such as good-and-bad are considered merely matters of taste, both Boisseau and Gardner encouraged us to examine criteria, aspire to the best, even if we don’t always know for sure. “Commitment is healthiest when it is not without doubt but in spite of doubt,” wrote Rollo May. Such commitment is aspirational, the opposite of cynicism. Such is the work we—editors and readers—join in together. So, do me a favor. Read Fleda Brown’s poem here, “Come Moths.” I trust you will see why we gave it the whole page to sing in.

—R.S.