

States. But even its most distinguished exponents, Cleanth Brooks for instance, are perhaps less interesting today than the amazing systematiser Northrop Frye and, in a more familiar mode, M. H. Abrams. For better or worse, European structuralism seems to be the most discussable critical mode at the moment. But nothing with its power to arrest attention has appeared here.

In economics the great names of recent years are American: Samuelson, Friedman, Solow. In sociology we have no one to put up against Parsons or Robert Merton. Historians are less American-oriented, it seems. The chief object of admiration is Braudel, and behind him the *Annales* group, inspired by Bloch and Febvre, to which he acknowledges allegiance.

To say these things is not to make an implicit appeal for the appointment of a Royal Commission. It is not surprising that the universities of this, after all, comparatively small country should not produce a continuous stream of irresistibly exciting intellects. The surprise, rather, is how vigorously such a stream flowed not long ago. The English mind has had very little to do with the universities in the total course of its history. They wholly monopolised it for the two centuries up to the Black Death. Then they quietly slumbered until the middle of the last century, when, first, philosophy with Green, Bradley and Sidgwick, and next history, with Stubbs, Freeman and Maitland, retired to Oxford and Cambridge from the London of John Stuart Mill and Macaulay.

I HAVE THE SENSE, then, of having passed my career in what might courteously be described as a period of retrenchment and consolidation in the British academic world. That is not to suggest that the universities have failed. The conception of them as centres of boldly original thought is the comparatively recent revival of a long-abandoned idea. The preservation of learning and its communication to new aspirants to it has always been the prime task and, although that has at times been neglected, it has been devotedly carried on in these creatively rather tepid years.

Behind that, perhaps of more fundamental importance, is the opportunity universities give to those who pass through them for a period of self-exploration and psychological experiment of a private and informal nature. The student revolutionaries of the late 1960s represented the universities as repressive institutions in which all the competitive and economic pressures of late capitalism were mutilatingly reproduced. The comparative impunity with which they romped away, the comfortably established positions that many of them now occupy, refute the theory

they asserted.

There were, of course, casualties. One of the two LSE students who really started the whole thing in this country killed himself. I wonder, too, what happened to Tom Fawthrop, whose William Webb Ellis-like tearing-up of his final examination papers in the summer of 1968 at the University of Hull has, at this distance of time, a certain pathos, like the sight of a broken cap pistol in a dustbin.

The student revolutionaries left behind them a swelling or rash of committees and consultative bodies which have to a considerable extent subsided, the inflammation soothed by the unwillingness of later students to attend such things. The rebels did not succeed in turning universities into the prisons they falsely said they were. The universities remain, happily, as vulnerable as they were before. I do not wish I had spent the last 25 years anywhere else.

Anthony Quinton

Poetry

WHEN TRYING to sum up the past twenty-five years in poetry in Britain, the temptation is to work towards some apocalyptic pronouncement, issue a denunciation or find occasion to compose a philippic. Auden wrote that the occupational disease of poets is frivolity, but that is only when they are gossiping together. Left alone with their thoughts, they are much more likely to suffer from paranoia. I am sure we all feel that no one out there loves us enough.

It happens that just before writing this piece, I was in the company of a successful playwright and a film director. Not only do such men make money, but they are looked up to by thousands of people in their profession. Going to publishers' parties and the like will remind a poet how little his art means to the average well-educated person. It is rarely read by anybody but fellow-practitioners and teachers. Robert Graves told the story of islanders who took in each other's washing: nowhere was washing better done. That was his parable for poetry. I think he was wrong. A tight circle of professionals leads to faction, resentment, and as steady a succession of attempted or successful palace revolutions as in some Byzantine court. Poets are obsessed by style and find occasions continually to invoke historical necessity for their proposed stylistic

PETER PORTER is a poet, critic, and broadcaster; his most recent book of poems is *"The Cost of Seriousness"* (Oxford University Press).

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changes. Unfortunately, some of the major poets of this century have had restless minds—Pound especially. And since most of the world (or its observable surface) is always changing, poetry, which might seem naturally a force for conservation, has to change with it.

My personal conviction is that the poet must deceive himself fruitfully if he is to survive in a social order which has no real reason for accepting him. That is, he must keep his excitement with the practical business of writing alive by always experimenting with modes of expression, while allowing his deep-seated respect for what is abiding in the art to guide him subconsciously. Very often in the history of poetry (and I suspect in that of the other arts as well) innovation is discovered to be a return to some already-achieved but largely forgotten or neglected principle. The importance of models or of styles to emulate cannot be overestimated. A good poet will find such models through personal interest and conviction, and not because a prevailing critical fashion has recommended them. The past is therefore always important, and the immediate present something which the original mind should hasten to depart from.

Unfortunately, there are so many aesthetic pushers about today that a poet may find himself harassed simply because his temperament will not allow him to accept the latest draconian pronouncements. To come to cases—I have never been able to understand the enormous respect given to Dr Leavis's tastes in literature—not because I resent his authority but because I cannot gain sustenance from a man who likes an utterly different set of writers from me. Similarly, my instinct, my ear and my understanding all tell me that Gary Snyder is a poet I shall never enjoy. Other people see him differently. There will never be an orthodoxy which will suit us all.

WHAT THEN about poetry in Britain today? Michael Horovitz would have us believe that it is dominated by a London establishment whose tastes are timorous and which suppresses experiment. Certainly, people will not accept much of what Horovitz puts into his *New Departures*, but it seems to me that he is just as willing to pass Test Acts against writing which he doesn't like as any establishment figure. It is very hard to know how far someone's writ extends.

I remember with unhappiness Donald Davie's denunciation of me in a radio talk ten years ago, when he singled me out as one of the reviewers responsible for limiting the imagination of the English response to modern poetry. I had reviewed Olson's *Maximus* poems and some of the recent selections of work by Robert Duncan and Michael McClure which were the fruits of a brief

enthusiasm for the American avant-garde which flourished under the Fulcrum and Cape Goliard imprints. I regret that publishers would be unlikely to take such risks today, but I do not repent my review, since it was an expression of my doubt of the worth of these poets, written from a position their supporters could not have expected to be favourable. I tried to account for my lack of ease at certain of the positive qualities of American poetry—most notably its gigantism and over-estimation of what poetry can do. Like beans which grow too large, a lot of American poetry seems to have lost its flavour. I made the mistake of describing poetry as "a modest art." Davie said that no American poet would accept such a pusillanimous doctrine. And some of our own over-reachers, such as George Barker, backed him up. But my statement was not necessarily reactionary.

Poetry is an important art—it is deep, yet it is forced to accept a narrowness of boundaries if it is not to betray itself into rhodomontade. Beyond a certain point, putting more material and more concern into one's verse is only an additive process. It does not make the resulting work more profound or more significant. Davie, who has praised Samuel Menashe's tiny Blakean shavings, should know this. Pound's *Cantos* break up, all too readily, into fascinating details and lyrical interludes—to say nothing of the opinionatedness of much of the grist of the poem. Being Australian, I have a natural sympathy with garrulous "village explainers", but I do not think that such oracles are the best models for our times.

Sometimes I say to myself gloomily that if poets were more fêted and better paid, they would not try to compete with philosophers, playwrights and film-makers, as they do at present. But, looking back over the past, I see that this is not the case. Poets want the bays, which are the Muses' gift, but they want applause as well. Modernism, with its built-in paranoid history, allows them to believe they can have both, and never with more conviction than if they are academics as well. Universities today resemble medieval monasteries in that they offer refuges to severe experimentalists who despise the taste of the public. They eliminate the need for any market-place, and they elevate history into the highest of the Pantheon's gods. But what does this new poetry do, and who reads it? The poet's followers, and eventually the official expounders—nobody else. Fame has to be sought through personal publicity—and it is!

WHEN ENCOUNTER began, English poetry still had confidence in itself. The Movement was just round the corner—John Wain broadcast

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Though no honours
came my way
those were

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the chief Movement poets in his Third Programme feature, *New Soundings*, in 1952–53, which I seem to remember he took over from John Lehmann. The Movement must have been one of the shortest-lived of successful orthodoxies, if indeed it amounted to that. The next generation was already knocking on the door (or digging under it, given the prevailing imagery of earth and refuse and civic grimness which the Group poets exhibited). I was of this generation: most of us are still writing, but we have gone off in different directions.

The 1960s saw both a new galvanism (Hughes, Redgrove, even parts of MacBeth and Middleton) and a new pluralism. At last, the dykes were down and England was open to continental and American styles, but with a troubling difference. Battles here tend to be fought on class lines and many of the radical supporters of American experiment (in any one of its guises—Beat, Gary Snyder, Minnesotan Peruvian, Black Mountain, New York Surrealist—my list is out of date, or, rather, I can't be bothered finding new identikit labels for the dozens of contending forces) were really resisting Oxbridge hegemony. It suddenly became good tactics as well as clever insult to describe London as the truly provincial place and your redoubt in the stormy fens or the white tile college as the international hub of Britain. I am yet to be convinced that American (I am not sure about Continental) fashions can be really mastered by the British. In painting and music, I am sure they can, but the results in poetry have been hazily derivative. Similarly, I remember thinking that the real focus of indignation in Peter Brook's *US* was not on Viet Nam but Hampstead. Auden, looking back on his English boyhood, wrote:

*Oxbridge philosophers, to be cursory
Are products of a middle-class nursery
Their comments are anent
What Nanny really meant.*

His Academic graffito can be adapted to many of the attempts of the younger English poets to become American. But there is a native vein of experiment which some Americans have been ready to recognise—it is in Roy Fisher, Christopher Middleton and Tom Raworth—only the last of these shows much visible Americanisation.

I shall not attempt to deal with the many swings of fashion which came after the Movement and the Group, but simply state that the loss of confidence that I have detected in English poetry affects the traditionalists as well as the experimenters. It is disastrous in criticism also. Poetic polemic has become either vituperation or hagiography. I suppose all generations tend to

promote their own faction, but an intemperate puffing of one's friends is a sign of all the new movements during the past two decades—Peter Ackroyd's pieces in praise of the epigoni of Jeremy Prynne being the latest and most flagrant, if also perhaps the most interesting. I wrote at the beginning that the poet must refresh his inspiration by trying out new modes, and that these might be waiting for him in the great writers of the past. It is just as important that he doesn't follow a special insight if he begins to suspect that it will lead him into ever-narrowing defiles. The prevailing mode of reductionism is especially dangerous. Somehow we have to keep faith with the past by doing our best as complete poets, and not just by expanding individual departments of the art.

The really hard thing, as Henry James might have said, is to make your own destiny coincide with the necessity of your art. Most poets are forced to fake the coincidence, if only because they cannot bear the thought of being judged irrelevant by history. But the future will not divulge its taste, and those who woo Prince Posterity most desperately may be surprised to find him ignoring them. Both here and in the States, it seems to me, the most hopeful examples of poets coping with pressures put upon them are of resolute individuals, writers who may fit into avant- or arrière-garde categories but whose personalities supervene upon such labels. And we should not be too impatient either, but look at each man's work over a long span. Persistence is as important as early promise.

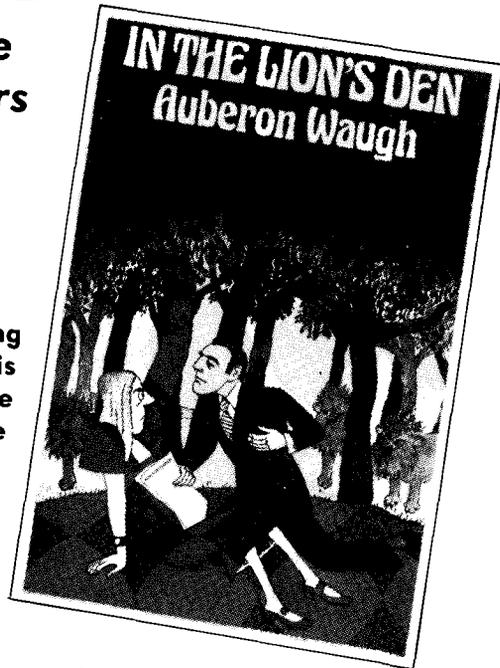
In Britain, there are many things which I am grateful for—certain poets, some books, occasional poems, and a climate of wit and tolerance. It is only fair that I should name some of them—both major and minor pleasures together. The list must go—Larkin's *High Windows*, for its refinement of his power of poetic afflatus; Peter Redgrove's rituals to bring back the pagan deities; Geoffrey Hill's works *passim* (the one poet whom each end of the taste spectrum admires); the spirit of Auden resting benignly now in the land of its birth; the vindication of Gavin Ewart and his belief in poetry's having many different ways of resorting to force; the shine on James Fenton's lines, with the hope of more of them to come; and finally a roll-call of clever and inventive writers it would be invidious to name, if only because it is always changing. And I should like a public more willing to read poetry, without the aid of critical dogmatism.

Peter Porter

*For all who take pleasure
in the art of English letters*

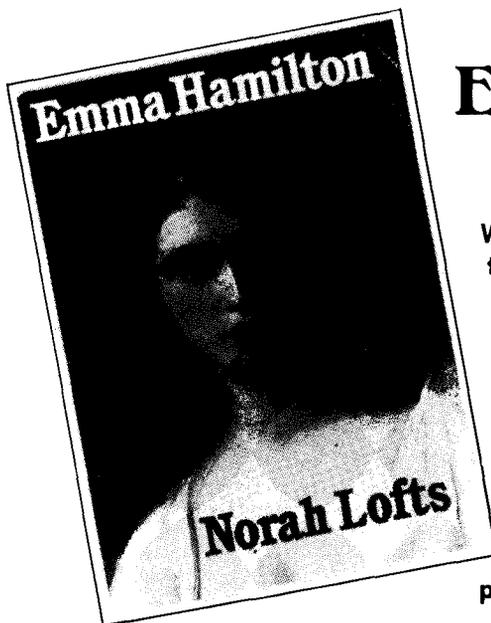
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MICHAEL JOSEPH

Art & Time

WHEN ENCOUNTER BEGAN, in 1953, I became Director of the Whitechapel Gallery and organised exhibitions there for sixteen years until shortly before I left London in 1970 for a five-year stint of work in America. There's much to say about art and the attitudes surrounding it in Europe and America in the past 25 years, but I want mainly to describe the nature of a new sense of time, working at more than one level, that has had a drastic effect on art and the way it is viewed. A good part of the energy and motivation behind my work comes from the ground that it occupies halfway between the artist and his public. Any conditioning factor of the period that seems relevant to both sides, so to speak, for the artist and his public, seems rare enough to deserve scrutiny.

My concern arises from the fact that largely because of the need to constantly revive fashion of all sorts in the acceleration of the stylistic producer-consumer game inherent in TV—and what that need engenders at other levels—it is becoming difficult for artists to distance themselves sufficiently from earlier styles, and most especially those of comparatively recent vintage, in order to work unselfconsciously along whatever lines obsess them in the present. The true identity of the present is becoming more and more overlaid and obscured by almost instant revivalism of one kind or another: shoes, rag trade, fabrics, furnishings, interiors, advertising, film style, typography, photography, and much else.

Artists cannot, of course, ever be completely artless and unselfconscious: a lot of art is made from art, and no painter or sculptor can work in an uninformed vacuum. But there's a big difference between the expansive awareness of art history and different cultures signalled a quarter-of-a-century ago by André Malraux's *Museum Without Walls* and the far closer, insistently compacted and trivialising way in which artists are forced to continually re-focus their attention on different aspects of recent visual style which carries with it connotations or direct references to the art of the period.

AN ARTIST NOW TRAVELS with an increasingly complex and heavy box of hypothetical formal equipment, some of it trivial, some of it serious, forged by stylistic awareness of the recent past.

BRYAN ROBERTSON, critic and art scholar, was from 1949–52 Director of the Heffer Gallery in Cambridge and then of the Whitechapel Gallery in London, where he organised many major exhibitions.

By "recent" I mean rather grandly and largely the last 20 to 30 years. Viewed as successive phases of style, the past is steadily becoming so much more recent. It turns into the present, or re-forms itself, so swiftly that any reasonably well-rounded stylistic awareness is becoming an almost intolerable burden for an artist to carry because no distancing and clarifying interval of time is allowed between him and the character of recent style. This is a new problem for artists which did not exist 20 years ago when the recent past swiftly became remote and had to wait a decent interval for re-scrutiny from a historical perspective.

Artists in the sense used here are not, of course, costumiers or designers of décor. But if my reference to the stylistic rapacity of TV as a threat to the historical measure and detachment best maintained by an artist seems irrelevant or far-fetched, it is partly because too much contemporary art has confused vision with style. There is nothing supernatural about an artist's "vision" (artists don't have visions in the Biblical sense); but vision for an artist is still, however old-fashioned as a word, something much larger than style, which merely implements vision. One of the weaknesses endemic in contemporary art in the past 25 years has been the pursuit of style for its own sake. Apart from the general lack of a coordinating belief, which leaves fertile ground for mannerism, this pursuit has also been encouraged by the teaching of art in art schools and particularly by the way in which basic principles of art formulated by Klee and his colleagues at the Bauhaus were packaged in art-school curricula in the 1950s as a "basic design" course. But all art is perceptual before it is anything, and abstraction in art is a long, organic process, as we see in Mondrian's great series of tree paintings. The authority to make an abstract statement comes from deeply felt habits of perception, personal obsession, and a philosophical approach to life. It cannot be taught as a formula for simple patterns.

So if vision has tended to degenerate into style at more or less the same superficial level of design as the visual connotations of time and place continuously flashed at us by TV, the validity of this style as a commodity is sanctioned by the network of exhibitions presented by the public institutions, museums, councils, and art centres that so actively meet the public need for shows. A producer-consumer society tends to produce and consume art at a great rate. The only criticism comes from an indiscriminating and confused left wing, which seeks to supplant everything with a bad public art of slogans and coarsely simplistic imagery for which there are no roots.