

361 Wynnum North Road
Wynnum

Dear Lake,

Isn't this fun, swapping likes and dislikes? One of my deep fundamental dislikes as a person (I dislike plenty of things, but am pretty tolerant of people on the whole) was precisely this Dylan Thomas to whom you devote a couple of lines in passing. He was a pig, and a terribly conceited pig at that; convinced not merely of his own genius but convinced that everyone else existed solely to minister to it. I'll tell you some time about our few meetings in London.

Politics are sometimes far less important in liking or disliking a person than one would think. I knew and liked Roy Campbell, even though he was a Franco man. He could handle the iambic pentameter! But I remember how I had to laugh at him once. I had shown him some heroics of my own in which the couplet occurred:

To name an author of unblemished splendour

Reason says 'Graves', but rhyme says 'Stephen Spender'.

He began to criticise the scansion in a niggling sort of way, and this puzzled me until I saw what he was up to. He was trying to push the metre around so as to make it possible for me to substitute 'Campbell' for 'Graves'. Vanity!

Yes, anarchism is the only really morally justifiable creed, though it is a hard one to live up to. I formally abandoned it, I suppose, in becoming a Communist -- nearly always a somewhat dissident Communist admittedly -- but what makes communism different from other merely political, merely expedient beliefs is that ~~that~~ it envisages the withering away of the State as the ultimate aim. There is, of course, the damned fact that a "stateless" community is militarily at the mercy of the nearest organised state -- like the unfortunate aborigines and Papuans today.

There is something irresistibly paradoxical about the way in which you and I and the late Lord Byron and Louis Aragon and a few others have quite sincerely combined revolutionary politics with a "traditionalist" taste in the arts. But the paradox is soluble. The fact is that we don't need those ever-so-modern technical innovations of the (N.B. politically reactionary) Eliot-Pound school.

Technical innovation is pointless unless it is a means towards expressing something new. And what is new in the Eliots and Pounds, and what is still newer in the Ginsburgs etc, is greater gloom, uncertainty, despair, and hopelessness. Being on the whole (I think) a fairly cheerful and hopeful bunch -- isn't it Pepys who said, of some political offender whom he saw hanged drawn and quartered, that he looked "as cheerful as a man could look in the circumstances"? -- we have no use for the technical apparatus of gloom and despair.

This is true of Carl Orff too. He strikes me as a cheerful old bastard. Compared with, say, Schönberg, he's positively Rabelaisian. His stage works are all comic rather than tragic -- and can you imagine any of the polytonal boys writing a comic opera?

By the way, ^{Orff} he has some very promising followers and pupils. A couple of years ago, at the Arts Festival of Orange, N.S.W., I saw with great delight a ~~short~~ short opera by Cesar Bresgen called The Enchanted Hedgehog, performed by the local schoolchildren. And on the following night, with nothing but profound boredom, I saw an ever-so-modern psychebloodydelic opera by one of the Sculbutmealies, on the theme of Orpheus. Bresgen and the schoolkids won hands down without even trying to!

Ref Sculbutmealies, I am still slightly puzzled by HANSCOUF. I can guess where the "-OUF" comes from, but the only "Hans" within my horizon is the sausage-manufacturer, the small-goods firm. Probably I'm not reading the right magazines.

As you say, it's hard to get our kind of verse into print. Until a few months ago, there was THE REALIST, of which I was poetry editor for some years. It was a sincere but terribly corny periodical when I was given this job, but I did manage to improve the level of the verse it published. A few real poets -- Wilhelm Hiener for one -- were writing for us when we got beaten by the combination of rising printing-costs and shortage of advertisements. A pity!

You wanted "to guy the form"? Now I think this touches the fringe of the utterly impossible. The goddess Dulness acts the part of Nemesis in such cases, and makes the result of such an attempt unreadable. This is why good parody is so rare. Could one guy the form of a limerick without creating a bad -- i.e. dull, unreadable, unmemorable -- limerick? I'll freely grant that some of the sillier moderns are guying the form of the novel successfully, but I think unintentionally: what they intended to guy in the first place was the average content of the average pretentious "psychological" (save the mark!) novel. I think a form can only be guyed by harnessing it to totally unsuitable content: a disquisition on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity conceived as a series of clerihews, for instance.

Having mentioned limericks, I find that I have a confession to make. I don't admire Edward Lear. I don't very much like Lewis Carroll either, come to that, though I find him a little brighter. My dear wife, who was English, claimed that this was a barbarous defect of mine, but I used to retort that, on the contrary, it was a national characteristic. She had a sort of superstitious tribal reverence for Dickens' humour too, which never got across to me. Leave me Here's Luck and The Magic Pudding, and anyone who likes may have The Pickwick Papers.

What are you doing on Friday night? If you own or have access to a car, drive down here. Follow Wynnum Road (which tends to be the left fork whenever serious doubt arises) until you come to Wynnum North Road. It wriggles a bit, and crosses the railway at Wynnum North Station. Follow it up the hill, over the crest, and nearly to its junction with Tingal Road. Mine is the third house on your right (the left is paddocks) before Tingal Road -- actually the corner of Wyn Nth Rd and Norland Street which is too small to be marked on most maps. We have a sort of informal musical party going on, an "end-of-term" thing with carols and talk and a flagon of claret. Some of my young musical colleagues have a nice taste in verse too.

Hope you can make it.

John Manifold.