

dream-hinterland it is about, its movement flexing, expanding and contracting like the encircling mountains—through to the abrupt worldly “rejection” of the final short line.

In writing “The Old, Cast up on Lawns,” the recognition that four four-line stanzas was the “necessary” form helped me pare redundant detail.

## Uncomely Relations / Edward Brunner

### 1

In 1953, in an essay entitled “American Literature and the American Language,” T. S. Eliot remarked on the possibility that speech in England and speech in America were developing in such a way as to bring about two entirely distinct literatures, to each of which the other would be a foreign language. Characteristically, Eliot brought the problem to rest by invoking the examples of himself and W. H. Auden, both of whom, he tactfully hinted, had managed to transcend the division between the races. In 1953, with Eliot in command, the problem could be put away, and poets in both countries seemed to oblige by writing poems superficially similar, in distinct verse-forms with rhyme and meter and well-mannered imagery. But, to echo Virginia Woolf, sometime around 1960 human nature changed. Just as in 1910, with the death of King Edward, the long reign of Victoria came officially to an end, so in 1960, with the retirement of Eisenhower, the long post-war period of level momentum was brought to a close. American poetry began to be speculative, anxious, analytical, as it had been in the twenties. The Black Mountain poets, who had persisted in the tenets of modernism throughout the fifties, brought poetry back to an experimental, mythological, international base. And, in the group of young American poets convened for an earlier symposium in *The Iowa Review*, there are, correspondingly, imprints of surrealism, with “deep” images imported from Neruda, Vallejo and others, and of course everything is written in an open form—the poetry is naked and the poets are exposed. But, when we turn to the British poets grouped here, we discover something entirely different: only one, Robin Munro, fully trusts to the open approach, and with the single exception of Nigel Wells, the language is generally restrained and deliberately low-keyed. Instead of remorseless self-exposure, there is a definite interest in larger problems, problems of an entire society. Eliot’s prediction has come to pass.

The result of this evident division has been, until recently, an increasing defensiveness on the part of those concerned with British poetry. Beginning in 1962, when A. Alvarez opened his Penguin anthology, *New Poetry*, with Lowell and Berryman and trailed all the new British poets behind them, the tendency has been to judge British poetry in American terms.

The general assessment seems to be that Americans live for a future they are in the process of shaping while the British, no longer a world power, have only their past to console them. A few years ago, the editors of *Tri-Quarterly* sponsored a distinctly odd anthology that startled at least one British reviewer because of its exclusion of the work of Thom Gunn, Geoffrey Hill, Jon Silkin and Michael Hamburger, but the anthology lost much of its oddity once one understood the editor's premise: "There is," John Mathias wrote in his Introduction, "a contemporary British poetry which is modern," and young poets indeed write in open forms. The result was a presentation of the work of, among others, Tom Raworth, who admires John Ashbery; Gael Turnbull, who admires William Carlos Williams; and Anselm Hollo, who admires Robert Creeley—in short, an anthology that tends to prove that the very most that contemporary British poets could do was follow the lead of the Americans. Even Calvin Bedient, whose *Eight Contemporary Poets* is a most enthusiastic boost for British poetry, writes in his foreword:

Poetry in Britain and Ireland is now more modernist than ever (even if the contrary impression prevails). At its most durable, earlier twentieth century English and Irish poetry largely missed out on "modernism" . . . The ferment, as A. Alvarez has argued, was "largely an American importation and an American need." The Americans, after all, had to hunt up a tradition, the English already had one, there like the fireplace.

It is not that Bedient is being inaccurate—modernism never did get a hold on the British as it did with the Americans; what is disturbing is the use of "modernist" as a term not only of description but of value. The suggestion is that the only way to present contemporary themes meaningfully is through wide-ranging sweeps of language, disruptions of syntax, intense acts of self-discovery. Bedient is slightly apologetic that the British have come so late to the twentieth century; they are still indoors, by their neatly enclosed fires, while the Americans range about in the open air, in search of a provisional tradition. It is not difficult to see to whom the future is supposed to belong.

But is the future so assuredly American? Donald Davie is the best spokesman for the opposite view. What the British are doing, he insists, is not necessarily congenial to an American temperament. One of the impediments, for example, that an American faces in first reading British poets is that their attraction to closed forms inevitably associates with the formal American poetry of the 1950's. But Davie points out that, even in the 1950's, the two formal poetries arose out of very different needs. American poets were refining the principles of good taste established by the institutionalization of the New Critics in the universities in the 1940's, while British

poets, by writing with precision, were in combat with the flamboyant excess of Dylan Thomas, George Barker and W. S. Graham. One poetry was an act of withdrawal, the other an act of engagement. "For the Americans," Davie writes in his 1966 postscript to *Purity of Diction in English Verse*, "the academy was a refuge from the Philistines; for us, an alternative to Bohemia." And Davie's own writing of this period distinctly clashes with that of, say, Richard Wilbur. Where Wilbur is all delicate evocation of unseen beauties, deftly brought forward in a language of unsurpassed elegance, Davie is deliberately provocative, argumentative, even querulous, writing a poetry of open debate, drawing attention to the coldness of the wind or the rocks that obtrude on a field, or preferring the tautness of ripening cherries to the opulence of ripening plums. Wilbur realizes a world elsewhere, a world that exists best in language and the finest of touches, while Davie moves through his poetry in ways that nettle the reader into finding where to stand.

In 1962, shortly after Alvarez had published *New Poetry*, Davie was strongly resisting, in conversation with Alvarez, the idea that American poetry provided the best model for the British. Against Alvarez, who was asserting that the inhumanity of present-day existence was so overwhelming in its harshness that it demanded a poetry formed out of violent impressions, seismic shocks, Davie argued that the important thing was for poets to form relationships in their work that mitigated against the hysterical tenor of the age:

I daresay you would agree that the cardinal rule in human relations is for one partner in the relation to respect the integrity of the other person, not to attempt to violate it, not to attempt to possess. Well, we've been hearing this from Lawrence and many others for quite a long time. We ask "how do we learn to do this, how do we learn not to dominate, not to be aggressive?" Simply a resolution: "I will not dominate," is not good enough. And it seems to me that the sort of thing which Tomlinson in certain poems in a sense recommends—realizing this stone wall as different from all other stone walls—in its otherness, its thusness, its quiddity. To see things in this way, to see a tree thus, to see a stone wall thus, affords a sort of model which you can then apply to human relations.

In this view of poetry, formality and restraint are signs of health, not evasions. The difference between Alvarez and Davie is that Alvarez conceives of restraint as operating prior to the writing of the poem, so that the poet is, by something akin to timidity, inhibited in his insight, distancing the subject before him, while Davie can imagine a restraint that is the issue of

engaging the subject, drawing the subject into a fine relationship to which the subject actually contributes.

This discussion between Alvarez and Davie, though taking place in 1962, is still relevant partly because the American poetry that Alvarez favors has not altered its direction in any radically new way. The great change in American poetry over the last few years has been the consolidation of the discoveries made in two revolutionary books, Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* and Robert Bly's *Silence in the Snowy Fields*. No two poets, to be sure, could be more dissimilar: where Lowell is intensely sophisticated, on the verge of seeming over-wrought, highly conscious of his individuality within a definite cultural upbringing, Bly is casually serene, almost impersonal, writing of the most cosmic of all matters. Lowell gropes toward self-understanding, and self-forgiveness, by rehearsing the past, while Bly affirms a self-dispersing identification with objects and creatures that tends to provoke awesome silence. Young American poets today have these two powerful, opposed personalities to overcome, and they do so by taking over their most distinctive qualities. In these young poets, the individual is usually bent on understanding himself, on bringing himself to some kind of definition—not by dwelling on sharp details, as Lowell did, but through the imagery that Bly developed, so that the individual's effort toward self-discovery is inflated, or deflected, by being grasped through images that attach to large cosmic events.

The other reason why the debate between Alvarez and Davie still continues is that the British insist upon it. The spirit of argument surrounds contemporary British poetry, and in fact the whole problem of the distinction between contemporary American and British poetry is very much a British invention. The Americans couldn't care less—as Stephen Berg and Robert Mezey, for instance, make quite plain in *Naked Poetry*:

With a few exceptions (mainly Ted Hughes), nothing much new has happened in English poetry since Lawrence laid down his pen and died.

But the British have created the problem, and even emphasized the distinction, not out of some conviction of their own diminished status in world affairs, but because it is congenial for them to come into a sense of their own identity by striking up a relationship, often combative, with others. This debate has gone on in England for years, with no conclusion, and no conclusion is feasible because the very notion of engaging the Americans, inquiring into their possibilities, is itself an energizing act.

American poetry, I would say, looks inward, attentive to its speaker, urging him to break into moments of intense, compressed clarity, moments of self-understanding that provide the justification for the poem; while British

poetry looks outward, attentive to others, establishing a network of relationships that defines the speaker through his connection with others. As a result, British poetry appears more involved in running through a series of balances and negotiations, none of them especially dramatic since usually bent on sustaining a thread of connection picked up at the outset of the poem. American poetry, by contrast, veers abruptly and vividly, since its speaker keeps coming into conclusions overwhelmingly important for himself. In most cases, just why these breakthroughs are important remains mysterious—most contemporary American poetry seems to me radically indirect; that is, the poet is a valuable model for others not because of what he has discovered about himself but because he is absorbed in discovering things about himself. The readers are not supposed to take his conclusions as having bearing on themselves but are supposed to continue, in their own individual way, his spirit of often painful self-inquiry, applying his example of self-attention to their own lives. But British poets define themselves socially, as it were, drawing in others, coming up against others, and investing them with life in a way that helps the speaker define not who he is but where he is. The reader may find himself taking sides. An American reader may be more used to reading poets who let him alone to develop in his own way; not Whitman but Thoreau is the hidden ancestor of contemporary American poetry. The ancestor of British poetry is Wordsworth, with his very certain ideas about himself, talking to his sister, talking to Coleridge, fudging up a conversation with the solitary reaper, or feeling the profound absence of Lucy.

But the quality of contemporary British poetry is best seen through one of the poems in this selection, Andrew Waterman's "The Mountains." If we think about this poem as a series of statements, as an example of old-fashioned narrative verse, it falls flat. It will probably bring to mind what has been considered, through the work of Philip Larkin, a perennial British theme: the lament over the emptiness, the absence of any romantic adventure, in modern life, and its corollary of the poet as the man who perceives this but is powerless to effect any change. Primarily through the changing tones in his poem, Waterman transforms this flat theme into something full, troublesome and disturbing. Waterman's poem genuinely deals with repression, with the denial by the community of the presence of mountains, of the night-time force that is capable of disrupting the even tenor of everyday existence, routine, mannered and blank. The terrible thing about that repression is the obdurate grimness it forces on persons—the grimness dramatized in the concluding words of the community: "There are no mountains." If this ending at first appears overly dramatic, with the poet crashing his way through swinging doors, that too is an instance of the length the poet must go in order to break into the consciousness of the community—which even then resolutely denies him: "No head /

looked up.” This grim, cold tone is all the more chilling because, earlier in the poem, Waterman has given the community an awareness of the mountains. Unlike Larkin, who tends to evoke, wistfully, the possibility of a life that is distinct from the everyday but which turns out to be unattainable and thus forces him to withdraw, pulling everyone else with him, back into the shell of the humdrum, Waterman is convinced that something ominous is occurring: everyone knows about the mountains but they choose to deny them, curtailing him and their own impulses as well.

One of the curious things about this poem is that when Waterman finally makes it to the summit, there is very little to see; the lines evoke a sense of relief, and when he says, “I held / the whole world’s curve, revolved it slowly . . .” there is more a feeling of security than of overwhelming power. The reason for this is, I think, that the main thrust of the poem, its real center, is not in the poet’s struggle to achieve the heights of the mountain. The hard part is getting down, and what Waterman is actually aiming for he has envisioned earlier, in the most alluring lines of the poem—a sense of the whole town moving easily between the streets and the mountains, a fusion of the civilized and the passionate, the daytime and the night-time together, which he believes he has seen, though again it is broken by the tone of denial:

Once,  
above roofs at the edge of the town a stile,  
and path leading up the climbing eye; there were people  
ascending, returning; some strayed to rest in the sunlight.  
But down in the street they denied the stile,  
and the slopes shut off, cloud spilling down ravines.

“The climbing eye” is what the mountain would bestow on the community; but denied, the mountains turn into something ravenous and menacing, “cloud spilling down ravines.” Nothing else in the poem is so compelling as this scene of beautiful work; unlike the dullard Waterman meets on the way down (a first sign of civilization), who simply follows his sheep like everyone else in town, “for no peak’s sake,” the people in this scene are full of drive and activity, “ascending, returning,” yet not at all harassed and pursued: “some strayed to rest in the sunlight.” For this instant, the poem loses the restlessness of its earlier parts, but all the nervousness returns with the curt denial.

It is essential that this poem moves through a range of different tones, that it is, in miniature, an evocation of the community and its conflicting tones. And Waterman can manage his work so well, making the poem an instance of beautiful work, because he is not hesitant to draw on the resources of formal poetry. The first line of the poem is as close as the poem

gets to a precise iambic pentameter rhythm, a rhythm, as it were, of daytime, a rhythm to which we are accustomed; almost instantly, in the next line, this rhythm collapses into an unexpected, disheveled, irregular grasping, undercutting the certainties of daytime. Beneath the regular forms of daytime lurks a profound disorder, a lack of direction, an absence of impetus: "and the brooks raising noise like something wanting answer." It is clear, after this, that everyday life is, despite its surface, shot through with hints and echoes of something beyond it. The difficulty is to be open, in the midst of the everydayness, listening for that which is beyond; Waterman is trying to make us listen:

and the air filled with the voices of the girls  
I had been young with calling in their children;  
still hauntingly that clear brow beyond me.

This gives the acute sensation of something which is heard, or recovered, only at the very instant it is realized to be lost—so it is easy to move away from the echo, to try to suppress it. Waterman is generous: he can suggest why the community would not find it difficult to deny the night-time force, which calls up so many unanswered questions or points out questions that have been answered poorly, even as he continually presses back against that denial as strongly as possible. Ultimately, this is the most impressive quality in the poem—Waterman's capture of the tenseness between him and the community, the community which should be drawn up to another level but persistently, maddeningly, resists the call. His own frustration, pressing back against the denial of the community, is, in truth, the frustration of the whole community which distorts itself by denying the presence and the challenge of the mountains; instead of coming up against the mountains, the community comes up against the poet, the representative of the mountains, to whom the community is his mountain. The entire relationship, intricately entangled as it is, draws the poet toward the community as he realizes how the community is an outsider to itself.

## 2

One of the qualities that distinguishes the poets appearing here from the majority of contemporary British poets is their willingness to get involved in relationships that actually resist the approach of the poet. The social tradition in British poetry all too clearly encourages a poetry of the sociable statement, in which the task of the poet is to comment on general issues. Though the poet remains turned outward, attending to the concerns of the larger society, he is chiefly a commentator, adding a few remarks of his own or initiating a special insight, but fundamentally remaining in a cozy posi-

tion, the tone of the poem bland, cultivated, easy to accommodate, "urbane."

If too many British poets are sociable in this temperate manner, these eight poets tend toward the argumentative, entering into areas not ordinarily examined, or involving themselves in relationships that call up numerous questions, or noticing what it would be convenient to ignore. Some are precisely sullen, working against the grain; they have determined what matters and wonder why others haven't. A few wonder why poetry can't be a vehicle for profoundly disturbing ideas. Others are quite aware of voids in the larger society and are determined to make, in the smaller society of the poem, those observations that will work contrary to the isolationism and functionalism of the larger society. None of them accept the idea that poetry is a marginal task; poetry could, or should, change people's lives.

Even the work of Nigel Wells and John Drew—the two poets of all the eight who are most radically absorbed in their own special worlds—has a rebarbative effect beyond the completion of the poem. Wells is quite plainly concerned with preserving strands of thought that might be called archaic, while Drew is committed to a viewpoint, in some of his poems, so alien to conventional categories of thought that the temptation is to label it as mystical. Both poets, furthermore, pursue their special leanings in an aggressive manner, insisting upon living out their convictions in their language; we are required to take them on their own terms, with no way to get around their forcefulness.

"Saturnalia" will go up and down, making God and the fool simply one, while "A Green Man" swerves and streaks in and out of sight. What surprised me, in Robin Munro's remarks, was his lack of emphasis on the high good humor of both poems. Anglo-Saxon verse obeys laws, and here is poetry swept up in those laws but, in trying to fit in and falling off, mocking the very rigidity of law. The meaning of the words is always dissolving into the sounds of words as the lines sweep along; we know the impetus of the line demands that the next words or so have in them a certain sound and the words streak and swerve to accommodate that—meanwhile, meaning falls behind, outrun by sound. The green man is too green, half-nature, allured by sounds no matter what, and half-man, trying to accommodate a meaning. So everything gets confounded; even at the end, when the green man "Grasps / The likely the truth," it turns out to be mixed up with "The offered escape" and he lopes out of the poem. "See's?" No, one can't, in this poem, where the laws of the verse tug at you like the strings on a marionette, jouncing you up and down. This poetry, though, has a definite edge to it: one isn't used to reading poetry and getting drunk on it—"Saturnalia," especially, is dizzying. The poems don't intoxicate, they get you drunk, and

that is rare, especially in the restrained atmosphere of most British writing. Norman Mailer's sense of comedy, of giving in to weakness, of following his nose no matter where it leads him, of outrageously twisting and writhing under the yokes of convention, contrasts quite markedly with the comedy of, say, Anthony Powell, whose Nicholas Jenkins never gives himself away for a moment. A more apt comparison with Wells is probably David Jones who, Wells makes us realize, writes not like an archaic priest but like a scholarly archaeologist, handling only the broken bits and pieces of a vital and disorderly civilization, puzzling about them incessantly, fingering them not only in text but in footnote; that past is shattered, not easily to be gained again, certainly not to be stepped into like a river. Wells steps into archaic thinking as though it were a river. He, if anyone, is the priest, dabbling with unruly words like amulets, making us feel how it was.

While Wells' poems are mostly body, mostly gesture and romp, with intellect always falling behind, Drew's poems are almost entirely disembodied, unfettered, up in the air. The two poets, taken together, are perfect, each strengthening the other's claim to his own territory. Somehow, Jeffrey Wainwright's comments make Drew seem too deliberate, too patterned; but then Wainwright is used to using his mind, attaching it to a purpose, instead of standing in awe of the mind, which I believe is Drew's accomplishment. Is the opening of "Poem for Chandravadan Mehta" really as patronizing as Wainwright says? I don't hear a cutting edge in it directed against London. It isn't that Drew is incapable of writing poems with such edges—he proves he can by including one in his reply to Wainwright—and he appears, from the poems in his reply and in others not published here, to split himself in two, at times writing in a sharp, detached, statemental way, aiming to make a distinct point, at other times, as in these poems, writing with his friends in mind. Not that in these poems about actual persons there are any distinct persons; the poems are quiet places, the kind of places that the closeness of friends encourages one to believe in, places where the mind can be free to move as it wishes. A cutting edge directed against anything is quite foreign to the sustained repose of "Poem for Chandravadan Mehta." Rather, what astonishes Drew is that in London Mehta is "As grey and full of propriety as was the city itself on that bright August day," while in India, equally at home, dressed in folds as "white and finely-spun as the chameli flowers past which we walked," Mehta is someone very different, yet precisely the same man. The mind adapts. The city becomes bright, though grey and proper, the flowers become "finely-spun," though casual and natural. No other reaction is possible but endless astonishment.

Of all the responses in this symposium, the interchanges between Wainwright and Drew are the most frustrating, and this is due, I think, to the special, strange requirements of Drew's poetry. Wainwright begins by trying to ground Drew and ends his discussion of "Poem for a Cambridge Pla-

tonist” by out-qualifying the qualifyings in Drew’s poem; Drew’s response, in which he agrees with everything Wainwright offers, then includes two poems that far extend Wainwright’s remarks, is equally frustrating. Drew cannot be grounded, as “Cambridge Platonist” should convince. By the time we reach the closing lines, so many solid things have been turned around, turned inside out and upside down, that when the poet says:

reality is relative:

Our children are not relations, our roots not in the soil.  
Come. See. Heaven lowers its branches for us to climb.

we are all but eager to reach out for those invisible branches, as welcome as the extended hand of the poet in “Come. See.” Drew really makes the world dissolve. And that is why the Drew who appears in “Two Aspects of Paternity” is so surprising, for here is sharp criticism of the poetry closest to him, made by those who perhaps matter most to him. One doesn’t connect Drew with the worldly role of a father. “Our children are not relations” is the kind of thing one expects to hear from him. But in “Paternity” he is stopped short, his mind no longer rolling, as he sees himself as quite distinct in the eyes of his wife and child, even the object of their criticism. It is rather remarkable, once one knows his other poems. Where, one wonders, will he go from here? Will profound, calming statements like “Many tears make up the smile of a Buddha” seem insufficient now, evasions instead of solutions, avoidance of contact rather than special forms of all-inclusive contact?

It isn’t surprising that Drew, reading the poems of John Cassidy, likens them to photographs; compared to the mistiness of Drew, Cassidy is a hard-edged realist. Nor is it surprising that Cassidy reacts so stiffly to Drew’s comparison, for he is involved in his subjects in a way most photographers are not:

I think it was Tom Stoppard who said that for him the satisfaction in writing plays was that he could argue with himself. Poetry also, in its different way, is a means of saying two (or more) things at once. I find such tensions stimulating . . .

Drew, and to some extent Wells, present obvious challenges to their reader, simply because they spread their unique personalities utterly throughout the poem, shaping each and every word. For Drew especially, who has cultivated in his more personal poems a highly distinctive style, with long, lax lines and great gaps between points, language is a medium he swims in—fluid, it will conform to the special shape of the swimmer. To the reader, Drew is that striking individual who can be denied or resisted or approved,

while Drew keeps continually spinning out his own sense of things. Cassidy, by contrast, writes poems that are not provocative in this way but that are, as his remarks claim, a form of dramatic argument, curious and investigative. Cassidy is denying, resisting or approving others in his writing. For him, language can be turned in many different directions according to the relationships that are being formed, the discoveries that are taking place. Sometimes the poem leads to an understanding, as in "Factory at Nightfall," where he realizes that his genuine inclination is toward the "single-handed amateurs" who "Engineless . . . confront their compass," rather than toward the massive and assured but somehow pompous and absurd ocean liner factory. (I connect this poem with his comment on ambitious poetry in his introductory remarks to Roger Garfitt's poems.) Sometimes the poem ends without developing in any distinctive direction, as in "Strollers" where the arguing couple are hopelessly fixed in their unyielding intensity, incapable of becoming anything other than destructive, so they simply chase away the sun, chill the air, and ring down the poem. Or the poem completes itself by poising between inquiries, balanced, the whole work a form of questioning not actually resolved, as in "The Dancing Man." For Drew, the attractive thing about that poem is simply its subject, the figure of the Dionysiac who disengages the community from its conventions; for Wells, that same figure is attractive because of his opportunities for misrule. Cassidy, while he recognizes the allure of the dancing man, reserves his enthusiasm by including in his poem the reluctance of the mothers and fathers of daughters. As Cassidy says, this is a poem of intrusion, and the last line, "Meet him if you can," far from being an unfettered endorsement of the dancing man, is so sober as to be cautionary.

Cassidy is, I think, predominantly a poet of continence, but his reserve is effective precisely because he attains it by taking up those things which go against his grain. Instead of simply opposing the dancing man, the effect of the poem is of nervously, vibrantly containing him, just barely—he has a life of his own because, as Cassidy feels, he is not quite to be trusted. At the same time, the dancing man is not, decidedly, the Dionysiac that Drew would want him to be, but more akin to a knife-grinder or wandering pedlar, shabby, suspect, even unsure of his own talent.

Cassidy is perhaps at his finest in "Hill Mist," the poem that Drew urges everyone to read in his essay on Cassidy. It is common for poets, even English ones, to begin a poem by taking up the idea that they are utterly lost; "Hill Mist" opens with Cassidy surrounded by a fog, "unsure of anything, the / very ground untrustworthy," on the peak of a mountain down which he must climb. But what is rare is the poet who actually finds his way out of the mist without, at the crucial point, turning about and declaring that, in some way, the mist is itself the way out. Cassidy not only escapes the mist, he makes serious choices along the way, as this excerpt reveals:

Never  
follow a river, follow  
a wall. Rivers can become  
cataracts and rope down cliffs.

You see them streaking the sides  
of hills, often the only  
glitter in a grey day, loud,  
silver and suicidal.  
They have a logic that I  
hesitate at, a straight-down  
get-there determination.  
It is the way of water.

But men build walls; they lumber  
boulders in incredibly  
precarious places, they  
manage a balance you can  
only gasp at, but where men  
have lodged, and perched stones there is  
a sureness, a sense of place,  
and other men find foothold.

This poem, for me, unites all of Cassidy's best qualities—questioning, hesitant, yet moving toward a purpose. The agility of the poem beautifully comports with the wall Cassidy is affirming: the seven-syllable line affords the opportunity for poise and balance that makes the poet's affirmation utterly convincing. The ponderous weight of "lumber," for instance, works off the sudden fragility of "incredibly / precarious places" to evoke the sense of massive stones awkwardly positioned only to become transformed into balancing forces whose heaviness vanishes when they are played off against each other. Cassidy, confronted by the idea of the river, makes that river actually treacherous: "silver and suicidal"—one is swept down that line in an instant. As Cassidy hesitates, his lines also pause, and his fears are emphasized by the way the lines that follow seem to grind up and heap together scattered words:

They have a logic that I  
hesitate at, a straight-down  
get-there determination.

And because Cassidy is actually working toward a sharp sense of his own saving restraint, he is not denying the way of the water but realizing it all

the more clearly; when he safely emerges at the end of the poem, he is able to say, "That free / drop sparkled and surged in my / head all day."

Of the poets represented here, Cassidy strikes me as closest to the central concerns of British poetry. Who would deny that an American poet, in the same position as Cassidy in "Hill Mist," would take to the river? Poetry is a risk-taking activity in which, in trying to define once again the central self, one is likely to be broken up on the rocks. But the self Cassidy is evolving as he writes is not purely private; what is central about the self is that it can speak with, and include, other selves in its world, just as the wall is an emblem of community, of the reconciliation of conflicts, of the building of something valuable out of what might more easily be left scattered. Cassidy's restraint, his effort to find a place for himself in relation to others so others can find a foothold, far from being a mark of inhibition, is integral to contact with others.

### 3

The magazine *Stand* bills itself as "A Quarterly of the Arts." This is accurate, but not very just; its proper subtitle Jon Silkin utilized for his anthology of poems drawn from eighteen years of the journal: "The Poetry of the Committed Individual." There is probably no equivalent in America to *Stand*; committed poetry too quickly brings to mind the poetry of the thirties, of early Auden, of Spender and Day Lewis, poetry attempting to make a specific impact and effect reforms within a certain framework. That poetry is, in fact, dated and parochial, and a long poem like *The Orators* is interesting only as it evokes the anxiety of the thirties, of waiting for war, of preparing almost to be grateful when war finally commences. In America, it seems to me that protest poems are more prevalent than committed poems: the poet protests that his own liberties, along with the liberties of others, are dangerously curtailed by contemporary events—and one of the liberties the poet has already lost, as the writing of the protest poem demonstrates, is the liberty to explore freely the depths of the self, which is the essential task of the poet in America. A protest poem protests against the very idea that it had to be written; such things should not be.

In England, the task of discovering the self has less currency than in America, possibly because the culture is not so amorphous and open-ended. A British poet tends to enter a poem with a rather firm knowledge of himself, though he may find his knowledge challenged or deepened as he moves through the poem; but he is likely to know where he stands at the outset of the poem. Of the four poets still to be discussed, it is not unusual that they speak out of a committed stance. Drew is very much committed, for example, to his vision of reality. What is unusual is that all four directly register a concern for the way the larger society impinges upon them, becoming a force to be considered in their writing.

It is entirely possible that Roger Garfitt is moving in the same strong direction as John Cassidy, though at this moment it is hard to tell. Certainly Garfitt feels, as he indicates in his reply to Cassidy, that he is breaking away from the “bright coinage” of an earlier lyrical style and entering into parts unknown. This is bracing, and “Rosehill” is more than simply promising, but I wonder how easy it will be for him. I find it ominous, for example, that he can make such a neat distinction between what he calls the primary and the secondary imagination. The primary imagination, as he describes it, is intensely lyrical, the kind of thing described at the close of “Walking Home,” a poem from his first book, *West of Elm*:

a joyously empty man, my centre  
a circle of nothing  
through which anything may pass,  
aware only of one identity,  
a pair of ears moving on a surface,  
I walk a new landscape  
limpid as geometry, of space  
resolved into planes of silence  
or ringing trines, of time  
refined to the pulse of surprise,  
a flicker of notes through stillness.

What is stated in “Walking Home”—the intertwining of space and time, of sight and sound—is actualized as felt experience in “Gardening in Avernus,” where the pure and purifying consciousness of the poet is made tangible through the fine interplay of words. The secondary imagination, then, must be that which appears at the outset of “Walking Home,” that ordinary world of conveniences from which Garfitt is departing:

The clocked-in hours have ticked to a close  
and we’ve streamed out, dunking our cards  
in the machine, to the works buses,  
lit up the longest cigarette of the day.

And it is that which, in “Rosehill,” calls a string of row houses “*mushroom growths*,” or erects a fare stage in Old French—an imagination as dully and confusedly operating as the other is sharp and refined, an imagination that groups things for the sake of not seeing them.

The problem with maintaining such a split is the element of withdrawal it suggests. The problem comes up not because Garfitt is unaware of it but because it is at the very center of “Rosehill.” And it is possible that Garfitt gets around the problem by affirming, in “Rosehill,” that there is really

nothing to see. Like the cumulus clouds which overlook the poem from the beginning, Garfitt “forms and drifts,” his own words growing more evanescent, evaporating, dissipating, till “Change becomes stationary.” In one sense, this means that what Garfitt’s achievement amounts to is an emptying out of consciousness: our eyes look but see nothing, the voice speaks but touches nothing. The city, which is rendered nonexistent, gives rise to a poem that is nothing but air. Even from the start, the children who might conceivably have the curiosity and vitality to turn the city into a source of play and enjoyment are being lightly emptied out, turned into “light chasing on an / empty playground,” and their voices, instead of filling up the space of the city with unconscious energies, are heard as voices that “have distance / in.” No wonder, then, that the poems through section three physically rise away from the center to the heights of the hills, where activity trails away. In each place there is a remarkable absence of persons and the poet’s flight is unimpeded.

What Garfitt might say in response to this is that his intention is to try to get us to see the city, not in all its dulling ramifications, not in all its concrete details, but as it is touched upon by light: a city that is somehow hiding itself because it has no firm existence. The way to see the city, then, is to agree that it can’t be seen—its lack of substance is part of its special substance. The city drifts and forms, with no certain direction. This becomes more apparent in section four, which flatly opens:

There is no way to know us.

An ungenerous culture,  
nothing of our life appears.

In this section, persons are muffled in the most mysterious clichés:

There is no way to know us  
except as we know ourselves,

involuntarily,  
in the silences we call

*an angel passing*, in the  
skin tremor we call *someone*

*walking on our grave*,

or in the *eye* we call *the mind’s*  
opening . . .

Persons are shadowy and veiled, but instead of this becoming the impetus for criticism, it becomes an occasion for delicacy, the gentle turning of one to his lover, a moment which is overwhelmingly fragile not because it is threatened in any particular way by opposition but because at this moment it becomes one with the evanescent, ghostly fabric of the entire city, suspending the city within it, a refinement of all that is not a piercing stare.

Garfitt is a social poet of the most delicate touch; it almost seems improper, a violation of him, to draw up into the body of this essay the concluding sections of "Rosehill," for the poem might more properly remain hovering, unresolved, suspended as it appears in David Heal's selection. The subject remains bearable to the extent that it is just touched upon, in a fleeting phrase or fragment. Rodney Pybus, also a social poet, chooses instead to reiterate the unbearable nature of his subject—he is always, it seems to me, right at the breaking point, on the edge of the poem but, because of the ferocious nature of the pain involved, pulling back like one who is burned. The poem about Anne Frank's house, for example, is not a poem about Anne Frank, but a poem about Anne Frank's house. Yevtushenko, who believes he can speak in the voice of Anne Frank, comes to seem increasingly dewy-eyed and sentimental as Pybus continues. The truth is that the inhabitant of the house is, in her unbelievable pain, larger than life, and all that can reasonably be borne is her shell, the empty house. In bearing only the shell, Pybus is, in this respect, uncomfortably close to "some German tourists" who "troop past," whose "eyes are not eloquent. Nor do they speak." Yevtushenko brutishly tries for eloquence, and while it appears that Pybus is condemning not Yevtushenko but the tourists, this would be wrong; the tourists are right, evasive, ineloquent, unable to look with anything but averted eyes. Let Yevtushenko gush on; we get what we deserve—scraps, momentary glimpses, a surface of details each of which comes to seem like a gesture of avoidance that, even as it transpires, brings up all that is to be avoided. It is time, and rightly, to be not too loud, though the burden is difficult to bear; easier, like Yevtushenko, to let it all loose, but that righteousness is impossible. Even as Pybus appears to be judicious:

A peculiar but not uncomfortable place  
to struggle with growing up.  
Up to a point.

his very cool-headedness is only a shell, a mask that has hiding behind it a scream.

Much the same thing can be said of "Marketing." Superficially, it is a smack against mundane tourists who gawk at whores, both relishing them and instinctively bowdlerizing them by turning them into memories, souve-

nirs, objects—instead of piercing beyond their stylized veils of boredom, the conventionalized gestures they adopt to suppress their individuality and allow them to conform to the expectations of a mass economy. Pybus, again, by emphasizing the conventionality of the women is himself closer to the tourists who look but will not see. This poem is like a postcard sent home; however, it is hardly “sunlit” like the postcard of the “houseboat of the American Bible Society” but rather filled with shame, repulsion, degradation. Having not pierced the veil, having not encountered any of the women except as a leg or plump breast, Pybus is something like a shopper, but one superior to the “rubber-necking Yanks and Leeds United / supporters” in that, unlike them, his postcard home reveals his exposure and humiliation of himself.

As my remarks indicate, I disagree with Waterman’s prescription for Pybus; and perhaps more importantly, I disagree with Pybus’ defense of himself. Pybus is not, I think, to be cured, and the cure, in any case, is hardly a need for greater incidence of “luminous presented detail,” though I realize Waterman may offer such a lame suggestion on the very solid grounds of his own dislike for the poems. These poems ask to be disliked; they are not, it seems to me, particularly thought-provoking, nor do they offer any incisive insights, but that is not their scope. And Pybus, I must say, strikes me as dead wrong when he defends them in terms of their ability to make statements; his elaboration on the Amsterdam tourist industry, which he makes in his retort to Waterman, is the kind of interesting notation that might make for a statemental poetry—it is incisive, and novel, with a neat twist. But the strengths of these poems have to do with their ugliness; they are repellent, because they are about things that want to be evaded or forgotten or ignored. There is no cure for anything in them for, and this is precisely the point, how can one forget Anne Frank and how can one begin to approach the awesome task of properly remembering her? The force of these poems is that they remind us of our disease, provoking quite understandable breakdowns into defensiveness; they have the quality and the force of bad dreams.

Jeffrey Wainwright is perhaps closest, of all the poets here, to the baffling ugliness that Pybus stares into in the only way one can, by turning aside at the last instant. His earlier poetry especially is harsh, violent, denigrating, underscored with an all-penetrating irony. In his pamphlet *The Important Man*, virtually no one escapes and everyone is sucked into the brutalizing accidents of history; the meaning of the title is that there really is no such thing: no one is important at all but, at moments of dire stress, this is a pompous title helpless human beings adopt to cope, vainly, with the devastation of them by events beyond their control. Obviously, the sentiment is most operative in war-time or in times of revolutionary change, and Wainwright’s intention is to speak so as to annihilate the pa-

triotism, the hopeful fantasies, the self-regarding faiths in convention that all operate to place the actual reality at arm's length. In "Three Poems on the Battle of Jutland 1916," from *The Important Man*, both the Germans and the British are entirely destroyed, and Wainwright views it from the perspective of the ocean, which rolls on forever, like a detached spirit of history, witnessing the destruction icily:

Brisk gunners, unhooded now,  
Turn in their bunks with open eyes.

The sea resumes impatiently  
Its measured swell.

Both sides claim victory.

Everyone, mistakenly, believes he can be a conqueror, whereas the truth, which is revealed too late and as in any case unbearable, is that everyone is a victim.

What makes "Thomas Müntzer" unique for Wainwright is that in this poem he is trying to hold together, in one complex personality, the idea of man as conqueror and victim. In his other poems, the lines are rather clearly drawn; the pompous aristocrat, in "Sentimental Education," is more or less charmed by the antics of the lower classes—but this is on the eve of 1848 and his smugness is already slightly forced. Wainwright can be particularly vicious when he is confronted with established figures; part two, "Another Part of the Field," from *1815*, is especially, and deservedly, biting:

The dead on all sides—  
The *fallen*—  
The deep-chested rosy ploughboys  
Swell out of their uniforms.

The apple trees,  
That were dressed overall,  
Lie stripped about their heads.

*"The French cavalry  
Came up very well my lord."  
"Yes. And they went down  
Very well too.  
Overturned like turtles.  
Our muskets were obliged  
To their white bellies."*

No flies on Wellington.  
His spruce wit sits straight  
In the saddle, jogging by.

The idea of man as both conqueror and victim is deepened, in "Thomas Müntzer," to point toward two utterly divisive sides in man's nature, two sides that are held by Wainwright as speaker in his earlier poetry: the side that is tender, full of pity and regret for all those who are the helpless victims, trapped by the conquerors, enlisted in service for no particular reason and usually ending like Napoleon's men as vulnerable as turtles on their backs or like Wellington's men as numberless as apples fallen in an orchard; and the side that is brutal, that reacts with unmeasured violence at the actions of the conquerors, thrashing out with a hatred and disgust for the destruction that provokes it. In the figure of Müntzer, these two sides clash, making for some agonizing contrasts—Müntzer the visionary, the next messiah, and Müntzer the madman and rebel, the veritable Antichrist. All creatures, he can see, should live together in harmony:

I live with the timorous snipe, beetles  
And skaters, the pike smiles and moves with me.

We hold it in common without jealousy.  
Touch your own work and the simple world.  
In these unread creatures sings the real gospel.

This tenderness is quite extraordinary, and its sheer opposite is the dead ear Müntzer turns to the cries of those who once had been conquerors and who he is now making victims:

They will seek about

And beg you: "Why is this happening to us?  
Forgive us Forgive us," pleading now for  
*Mercy* a new sweet thing they've found a taste for.

Though Wainwright, in his reply to Pybus, expresses some doubts about the effectiveness of this poem, it strikes me as the provocative piece he had intended it for. Wainwright speaks out of the very center of the most painfully wrenching experience, holding up the evasive action we take (as in *1815*, where the dead are euphemistically described as "The *fallen*") as well as breaking through that evasiveness to the reality it masks. The mind reels from pity to anger, from a desire to strike out to utter frustration at the enormity of the event; and the figure of Müntzer is straight in the mid-

dle of the unbearable actions that we, in a final evasive gesture, tend to think of as “history.”

Wainwright’s poem seems to shrug off the meticulous reading that Pybus gives it, possibly because Wainwright is shattering “history” by emphasizing not the details but the contradictions. In contrast, the two poems by Robin Munro seem to widen and deepen in their implications under the detailed explorations of Garfitt. The difference is not pointing a contrast between Garfitt and Pybus: like Müntzer, Wainwright is ripping at the seams, where Munro is clearly trying to conserve that which is threatened. But the North of England has always been threatened, it has always been a part of history. The myth of a pure land, virginal and only lately exploited by overmanagement and industrialization, a myth that Stephen Spender tirelessly recalls in *Love-Hate Relations*, is a luxury denied to the North of England, bleak, rocky, barren, a subsistence economy. Munro is not trying to minimize the threat of extinction that exists, but the force of these two meticulously composed pieces is that Munro is so sensitive to the ways the North has held itself together despite the brutality that surrounds it. The harebells are the proper emblem of this area:

With all their sky blue confidence,  
the harebell skin is fragile for a wind.  
I listen to their inclination  
in the sea-breath, rising.

—confident yet fragile, inclining to the rising sea-wind, the harebells persist by bending to the wind. In “Coastal Village,” Munro inclines himself in a similar way, bending toward the barrenness and discovering a special sensuality:

The salmon cobble slides in, slowing down.  
The morning slows down. (Why should  
mornings hurry? Evenings arrive  
in their own cool time.)  
The world slows  
well below the speed for dealing, right  
to ripen wheat,  
and grapes in the Moravian village,  
heavy with clover, remote  
from this northern one  
of the grinding mussel paths.

This is impeccably written, with the gentleness of the salmon boat negotiating the harbor, slowing down, slowly spreading its rhythm through the

passage, expanding into a sense of voluptuous ease that, just as it evokes a comparison that is almost oppressive, “the Moravian village, / heavy with clover,” suddenly returns us to the reality of the North, which no longer seems barren and exhausted but, with its “grinding mussel paths,” austere and ascetic. Friendships formed against an obvious gradient persist till they have acquired a definite value of their own.

Munro’s poems are more than preservations of local colors. On the one hand, they celebrate the Scottish fishing village life which has won through to a special austerity by responding to the treachery of the sea and the reluctance of the land; on the other hand, they lament the harshness of conditions under which these people had no other choice but to operate. Garfitt’s demand, with regard to “Ancestors,” that Munro begin in his work to put together what has been patiently disjoined seems to me surprisingly insensitive; that knitting is a luxury that, again, is not easily at hand in the North of England. As Munro states in his reply, his unanswered prayer—“*May the wild protect us*”—is as unsatisfactory to him as it is to Garfitt. At this point in the poem, Munro is moved to plead with the wild, the natural, asking it to act as a force that can recall the human to qualities of spontaneity and vitality. As Munro is quite aware, nothing is less spontaneous, and more painfully forced, than this prayer nostalgically emerging from the ravages of an oil-stained landscape. Up to this moment, Munro has been muffling his own pain, largely by envisioning his ancestors as entirely in the past; though put to sea, these ancestors were vital in a way that is now lost. But in forcing his prayer, in crying out, and in recognizing the hollowness of its execution, Munro finally allows himself to be pierced with an agony that is no longer muffled. It is then that he joins with his grandfather who spoke back, who was “exceptional, then homeless.” The continuity between the apparently vital past and the apparently arid present lies in the fact that both are efforts to sing surrounded by silence. What stems from this is a sense of the wild not forced to conform to an inflated vision but as it is in this harsh land, making that which endures on the very edge of the destructive, trying to soar even as that entails plummeting to the ground:

The wheatear persuasion  
(inside the dyke, a perfected nest).  
The curlew urging  
(her young urge into the ground).  
The chorus reminding.  
This country has been rich with them,  
the birds that sing,  
and those who are silent.

The tone is elegiac: Munro has, in truth, been somewhat humbled. He began finding himself someone special, someone with petrochemical in his blood, someone apart from his ancestors—tragically singled out as a survivor. What he discovers is that his ancestors themselves were survivors. It is not at all the uplifting vision that Garfitt demands in his lecture—not anything like a chorus of birds' voices at dawn. Munro is too plainly involved in the realities of the North. The wheatear persuasion, the curlew urging—it is not much, it is very frail, but anything more would be ponderously inflated, an exhortation too easily achieved by standing remote from the scene. Munro is not remote, though he may prefer to be; the poem has led him back to his ancestors, to seeing them as they are, aware of their littleness but fighting back as best they can, with the likelihood of losing always present.

The kind of poetry Munro is writing, poetry that pieces together without ignoring the overwhelming idea that what has been disjoined may never be able to be joined again, is impressive for its ability not to romanticize, not to make inflated claims. The difficulty is to get one's relationships into perspective, to promote a genuine clarity. Ultimately, a regard for this kind of clarity is the striking thing about all these poets. For Munro, as for Cassidy and Waterman, this means a poetry of evolvment in which one takes up and questions alternatives, working toward a firmer sense of things. For Wainwright and Pybus, the clarity requires looking at that which it would be easier to avoid, just as for Garfitt, one can look in a manner by finding the ways to move around looking. Drew and Wells, despite their apparent dissimilarity, both propose their own unique styles as very definitive ways of being—though Drew will call his in question and Wells may find his discomfoting. The poets, all of them, are determined to know where they stand, and their poetry is a process of refining and deepening. The reader, challenged by them, may want to turn away, to pursue his own course, to ignore their deliberation; what turns the reader back toward them, to find where he stands, is their continual insistence to engage, to get across their point of view, to make their work come clear.