

## Poetry in the City 2003

Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> September – David Hart and Matthew Caley

A rainy night in Nottingham, a Monday at that and a distinct shortage of audience suggested that the opening night of this festival would struggle to be a memorable one. All the more remarkable then that it turned out to be one of the highlights for me.

Matthew Caley's work is clever and original with a whiff of New England about it. If it's not off the wall, it definitely hangs at an oblique angle. He has an inventiveness that often surprises you. Just as you were getting its meaning, a poem would veer away and slip nimbly out of your grasp. I liked his prizewinner from the National Poetry Competition: "Low Maintenance Roof Garden", also "The Mould Canticle" which he introduced as being part of a much longer poem. I asked him about this afterwards and he said he hadn't written the rest of it and probably never would; appropriate really for a man whose work has a volatile strangeness and fluidity that I really liked.

David Hart was a complete contrast. His work is roughly hewn from very real people and places. Far more willing to talk at length about his work than Caley, he explained that many of his poems give voice to people and places that cannot speak for themselves. Often he would articulate the plight of patients in hospitals where he has worked, "Of Course When They Say" was a good example of this. Hart won second prize in the National Competition with "Then in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century" which I thought was a bit predictable. He explained how poems are often random observations that come from nowhere and take him by surprise, introducing one as a "stray poem." If Caley's work was cerebral and elusive, Hart's was physical, robust and solid but it was none the worse for that.

Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September – Gillian Clarke

A good turnout at Lakeside for Gillian Clarke, quite a few GCSE students coming to see this hardy perennial set text monger. And good value for money she was too, serving up a well-balanced mixture of anecdote and explanation with a generous helping of her poems. She gave us the much-anthologised "Katrin" and several in a similar vein but I was surprised by her range. Her themes include art, the environment, geology, war, being Welsh and languages. "On The Train" about the Paddington rail crash was a particularly powerful poem. She certainly has the knack of coining a good line: "The drum and dither of wild bees" is one that sticks in my mind. Gillian performed consistently well throughout the recital and should get the high grade she deserves.

Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> September – Sean O'Brien

On to the wonderful Waterstones penthouse suite in the City centre for Sean O'Brien. The questions afterwards were the best bit of the evening for me. Another one who seemed reticent about his work, O'Brien was peppered with them, mostly about being Irish. He patiently explained that in fact he was born in Hull and despite his Irish father and surname is really very English indeed, but they kept on coming. This audience was having none of it. It made me wonder how far he would have got if his name was Smith.

Sean O'Brien told us that his poetry is about place, politics and history and he managed to make all three sound really rather dull. I liked his water sequence best: "By Ferry", "River Road" and "Water Gardens", and "Railway Hotel", his memorial to fellow poet Ken Smith was moving. On the whole, however, this was poetry for pessimists. The only phrase that

sticks in my mind is “the second-hand bathwater sky.” What an uplifting image! Do not share a bath with this man.

Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> October – John Hegley.

How refreshing to see a poet who understands the need to entertain and places it right at the top of his agenda. For Hegley, the audience is what it’s all about and he was almost music hall, complete with a bunch of songs competently performed to his own mandolin accompaniment. Dressed in a stunning retro-check suit, he looked the part too. Like a clone of Max Miller he teetered on the edge of a precipice as if willing the wheels to come off his act, asking the Lakeside audience for suggestions, questions, translations and even a plectrum. There was a thrilling sense of danger as he stood windmilling his arms on the high wire of his act and yet somehow you knew he would land safely.

If I had to criticize, I would say he spent far too long judging the caption competition he set for the audience, finally announcing he was bored with it long after we were, and some of the poems were lighter than helium. Hegley is by no means a shallow performer however. He has an almost Chaplin like vulnerability which is touching. Seams of sadness regularly break the surface in his work, particularly his Luton youth poems and the tribute to his father: “The sound of paint drying.” This was a brilliant show by an accomplished writer and performer. He finished off with “The Son”, a typically Hegleyesque take on the life of Christ. A few more poems as good as that and he would be a truly class act.

Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> October – UA Fanthorpe.

Back to Lakeside again for another poetry household name. So many of UA Fanthorpe’s poems are written for two voices that she usually appears with another reader. Here she was assisted, and augmented, by Rosie Bailey and the two formed a slightly eccentric but utterly enchanting double act.

UA Fanthorpe has been around long enough to be impervious to poetry fads and fashions. She just does her stuff her way and invariably gets it right. There were parallels with David Hart here as she frequently provided a voice for the inarticulate and disabled. She too has worked in hospitals and “The Watcher” and “Case History Alison” spoke movingly for to two of the patients she encountered. The conversational nature of many of her poems gave them a ‘Talking Heads’ feel and with the additional voice they were often like fragments of a play. It made me wonder if she has written for the stage. Her perspective shifted to her mother in “Home let” and then to a failed English ‘O’ Level student in “Dear Mr. Lee”. If the audience could have voted, I have no doubt this particular pupil would have been instantly re-graded as A\*. Archeology and mythology were also touched on in what was varied, often amusing and always engaging programme.

Afterwards, as the line for the book signing lengthened, I formed an alternative queue of one to thank Rosie Bailey for her invaluable contribution to this unique evening.

Monday 13<sup>th</sup> October – Bite

The Dress Circle bar at the Theatre Royal lacked the intimate, claustrophobic atmosphere that is the essential ingredient of pub performance poetry. Fortunately MC Steve Carroll, well known in Nottingham for his monthly slot at the Alley Café, could motivate a mausoleum. Apples and Snakes had chosen wisely and the audience was soon rocking. In fact Steve did such a good warm up set that he was seriously in danger of stealing the show.

Steve Rooney was first up and went down a storm with his ironic and witty perspective from the hard shoulder of life's motorway. It was a clever variation on the 'New Lad' theme, which is perhaps a wee bit close to its sell by date these days. Panya Banjoko was original, clever and funny in an inventive performance with an ambitious finale that worked brilliantly. Top of the bill was Mark Gwynne Jones, fresh from the Edinburgh Fringe and promoting 'Psychic Bread', his new book and CD. Mark entertained with some hilarious introductions and soon had the audience joining in with "Season of Mists". This and "Brassed off Billy Monty" are rapidly becoming classics of the performance circuit.

This gig was to celebrate the arrival of Apples and Snakes in Nottingham. Let's hope they're here to stay.

Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> October – Tony Harrison.

My biggest disappointment of the Festival. Maybe I was expecting too much. Tony Harrison is very proud of the fact that The Guardian publishes his war poems in the news pages rather than the arts section. They are in the right place. Undoubtedly well written, these poems are a dour, dated reincarnation of 1970's socialist realism. We got both Gulf Wars and we got Bosnia, all trussed up in a metrical, rhyming verse structure that seemed stilted and inappropriate. "The Cycles of Donnebabov" dealt with a story that should have been harrowing but it sounded clumsy and callous. His introduction was more moving than the poem.

The middle section was excellent, however. Everything fell into place as he read "Bookends", "Long Distance", and "Timer" with real feeling in that lovely gravelly Michael Parkinson voice. This is what we had come for and to his great credit he did them well, though he must have done them a million times before. They were sensitively and honestly introduced and it was good to hear a more recent poem "Under the Clock" written in a similar retrospective vein.

I was really beginning to enjoy the evening when it all went pear shaped. Or rather, Kumquat shaped. In case you didn't know, it's a kind of citrus fruit. Ask any member of the audience. We know all there is to know about them. Finally, we got to the poem: "A Kumquat for John Keats". This is about an imaginary meeting with Keats in an orchard in Florida. All well and good except that he saw fit to bowdlerize two of the loveliest lines from one of the finest poems in the English language (yes, beaded bubbles). It's just as well Keats didn't show up at this fictional assignation. I think we all know what he'd have done with Tony's Kumquats.

Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> November – Under a Michelangelo Sky.

The fireworks definitely started early when Poetry Alive hit the Theatre Royal Dress Circle foyer. Watching a Maura Murphy production is a bit like mixing your drinks. Admittedly, the champagne was on ice for quite a bit of the first half, but once this play took off, it stayed took off. This was an eclectic shock. A heady cocktail of music, song, poetry and dance, fortified with a heavy slug of high drama. As its kaleidoscope turned you could almost see the deranged images of protagonist Stevie's mind flashing across the ceiling. It was compelling stuff as Stevie, teenage mother of a stillborn baby ebulliently played by Jodie Porter, took us with her through a bout of insanity caused by a condition called post puerperal psychosis. Set against a backdrop of domestic frustration and strife which gave us two more strong female leads, one a brilliant piece of character acting by Maura Murphy herself, Stevie's story was the main theme of the play and every member of this sell-out audience was enthralled by it. The fact that Poetry Alive managed to make the most of what was no more

than a corridor to perform in – more street theatre than Theatre Royal- is also highly praiseworthy.

Poetry Alive is an exciting concept and this young cast left the audience breathless with an exhilarating performance of the highest quality which surely deserves a much longer run.

Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> November – Mario Petrucci.

Maybe poetry fatigue had set in, or the money had run out. Whatever the reason, the audience at Lakeside for this final event of Poetry in the City was thin indeed. Which was a shame because Mario Petrucci gave us a thoughtful, entertaining and well presented selection of his work. His is a poetry of place, mostly Essex, but we won't hold that against him. Maybe it's just that old English longing for sunburn in Siena but I was particularly attracted by the poems of his childhood in Italy. Nonno (Grandad) was my favourite. It is a beautifully drawn picture of the inhabitants of his tiny village all gathered round a single TV set to watch the first men on the moon. There is some lovely imagery here:

“the red disc of his cigar a slow pulsar  
on the blank square of the cantina doorway”

His Grandfather is devastated by the moon landing because the mystery of the universe has been stolen from him. The broadcast from the moon is a final intrusion into the rural innocence of village life and we are left listening to echoes as another gateway to the past slams shut in our faces.

Ian Collinson - November 2003. Published in *County Lit* and *Living Poets Magazine*.

### **Poetry in the County a review of the 2004 Southwell Poetry Festival.**

This festival has a comfortingly collegiate atmosphere. The ecclesiastical architecture creates a rarefied ‘Oxbridge sans université’ ambience and pilgrims progressed round Southwell’s campus ready to be enlightened. Welcome to Christminster.

Let’s dump the chronology, which was rather distorted anyway by the inclusion of Danni Abse’s reading in the Minster a full week before the Festival’s launch, and click straight through to the favourites menu. From the eleven sessions I attended the best poetry was by Michael Symmons Roberts, best by reading the ‘Two Poets’: Katrina Porteous and Alice Oswald and the event I loved best was Sunday’s rollicking Remembrance Day tour of the Minster led by local writer Rowena Edlin-White and poets Nicola Slee and Rosie Miles.

The whole festival enjoyed wonderful crisp, radiant autumn weather and the Minster tour benefited most from this blessing. The sun streamed in through the east windows flooding the interior with light until you felt the walls must surely all be made of glass. Just as important, this trio were so obviously loving working together and their enthusiasm was infectious. They revealed how the building itself could be said to have

memory in its features and scars and scuff marks. The balance was just right, Rowena's commentary was upbeat and not overburdened with facts and the performers demonstrated how uniquely versatile and effective poetry can be in this context. They moved freely through the gears, from the solemnity of remembrance in the Airman's chapel, where they combined for a moving reading of Edith Sitwell's 'Still Falls the Rain', to Rosie's incisively witty monologue, 'Gargoyle.' In this she articulated the pithy response of the facially challenged female grotesque adjacent to the hunky new Millennium Angel statue. It was evident that a lot of effort had been put into this tour and it was fully justified as the three worked flawlessly together to conjure the Minster vibrantly into life for us.

'Two Poets' was the title of the Saturday teatime reading in the Refectory by Katrina Porteous and Alice Oswald. Although they read independently and in contrasting styles you still got the impression that they were comfortable sharing and this resulted in a very positive mood in this brimful café. Katrina is famous for her Northumbrian dialect poems and for her mission to preserve the culture of a region that has lost so many livelihoods in mining, fishing, and agriculture. Her poem about the decommissioning of the cobbles in her home village of Beadnell, where these traditional wooden boats had to be burned, was particularly moving. Her poems have rhythm and musicality and her animated delivery is compelling. This is not to suggest her work lacks subtlety. Her poem about Hadrian's Wall skilfully cuts and pastes tales of how inhabitants of the region have suffered, and still suffer, at the hands of remote rulers and raiders over two millennia. Alice Oswald's style is less vocal but she still delivered her work emphatically and with great poise. She certainly held her own coming on after a more energetic performer and this is probably why they worked well as a pairing. Her writing is more mysterious and incisive, playing tricks with perception and reality. 'The woman who lived her life backwards' was a particularly good example of the edgy feel to her work. This, 'Moon Hymn' and 'What is water?' made me want to seek out her first collection.

The recent short-listing of 'Corpus' by Michael Symmons Roberts in the poetry section of the Whitbread Prize, together with a tip from Simon Armitage to progress to the knock out phase, clearly came too late to boost ticket sales at Southwell. Sadly only about twenty people attended this excellent reading on Sunday afternoon in the Minster Centre. Michael gave us a thorough and informative introduction to his poetry. The striking thing about his work is that he always writes thematically. His collection 'Burning Babylon' was a sequence of poems about growing up in the vicinity of Greenham Common that grew into a book. Now he cannot imagine writing any other way and 'Corpus', which considers the body, is his latest example. His background is philosophy and theology but he is comfortable with the scientific, mostly genetics in this book. Of his earlier work, the poem 'Soft Keys' impressed me most. It was cleverly written, constantly switching between different meanings, making you see the familiar in new ways. Michael talked at some length about the importance of his Christian faith. There is nothing overtly religious about his writing yet he seems perfectly at ease with the tag 'Religious Poet'. I think this is unfortunate. There is a world of difference between a poet who is religious (like Alice Oswald for instance) and the 'Religious Poet', a label that rather misrepresents the poetry of Michael Symmons Roberts.

Talking of labels, poor Dannie Absie is festooned with them. They dominated the first half of his reading in the Minster choir stalls on November 4<sup>th</sup> when he ran through the Jewish, the medical, and then the Welsh poems. It was only in the second half, once he

had fulfilled his obligations to these stereotypes that we finally got Dannie the man himself. He read a lovely sequence of short poems describing each member of his family as a different flower. These were a delight, spontaneous, simple and charming. The highlight for me was his famous love poem Epithalamion. The second half was as short as it was sweet, but for an old 'un he did very well. Darkness transforms this venue into a cavern that tends to swallow poets whole. Dannie did far better than Kit Wright and Kathleen Jamie last year but that would not have been difficult.

Andrew Motion had a better venue, launching the festival proper on Friday November 12<sup>th</sup>. The Great Hall, adjacent to the Minster, is dripping with history and perfect for poetry, atmospheric but still intimate. It was a full house of a hundred plus for the Poet Laureate. A big name but something of a light heavyweight poetically, he came across as a sincere and modest man and the audience really warmed to him. He introduced each poem at length, which was interesting though he did tend to ramble. I liked the poem 'Drawing the curtains' which though quite recent is a reminiscence from his childhood. His poetry is in fact entirely retrospective. He did not do his poem about the gulf war but as I recall even that harked back to Sunday school. He was friendly and touching but seemed hopelessly out of touch and the performance itself was sloppy. Clearly there had not been time for a sound check because the microphone was a good six inches too low. He did not attempt to adjust it at first and stooped until near the end when he did try to swivel it up in the holder. And of course we had the inevitable 'this next poem if I can find it....' Why must poets act like this? I think it must be a symptom of English middle class obsession with amateurism. It drives me mad.

Saturday afternoon at the Minster Centre definitely had a PG rating. John Lucas kicked off with a riveting introduction to the amazing story and awesome poetry of the Dark Age Icelandic hatchet bard, Egil. It was a fascinating tale, which at the same time gave an excellent insight into the at times excruciating complexities of the business of translation. Mario Petrucci followed this up with a reading from 'Heavy Water', poems written from first hand accounts recorded by Svetlana Alexievich in 'Voices from Chernobyl.' These were moving, harrowing and delivered well but were perhaps a wee bit too literal at times. Poetry and journalism make strange bedfellows. Mario is currently poet in residence at the Southwell Workhouse and he gave us a taste of his work in progress. 'Shanty' likens the life inside to life on board ship, a very apt analogy. Mario's ability to write so credibly from another viewpoint will serve him well here.

The Workhouse committee room was the venue for another joint venture on Saturday: Julia Darling and Elizabeth Smither, a visitor from New Zealand. Sadly this time the two poets did not seem to gel and despite an atmosphere redolent with mystery right in the heart of this captivating building, it fell rather flat. For Elizabeth Smither in particular it was the wrong place at the wrong time. She should really have been reading in the home furnishings department of John Lewis. Her poetry was mundane to the point of banality and she went on far too long. Julia Darling was better. She read vivaciously from her poignant collection of poems that chart her journey through the experience of breast cancer, 'Sudden Collapses in Public Places'. These were sensitive, perceptive and often wryly amusing. In the second half she read from a more recent collection and it was good to see that she has moved on from being the 'Cancer Poet' now. The subject matter was more varied, though it has to be said all the family-domestic stuff was a bit predictable.

George Orwell invented a category of poetry that he called 'good bad poetry'. I think he included Kipling in this and I'm fairly certain that if their lives had overlapped he would have included Simon Rae too. There is no doubt that Rae is a very clever writer. His ability to produce witty and apposite poems to tight deadlines at the Guardian for ten years was remarkable. But on Sunday afternoon in the Refectory he seemed to be stuck in doggerel mode. Apart from some of his Oxford poems, particularly 'Abandoned Cottage' it was all rather samey, good-bad stuff.

The Festival came to a close on Sunday night at the Minster School with a beautifully written and presented account of Isaac Rosenberg's life and work. It's author, Jean Liddiard, narrated and the actor Sam Dastor performed Rosenberg's poems. A bit like his contemporary Edward Thomas, I have always felt that apart from a few exceptional poems the bulk of his work is rather pedestrian. Although this excellent presentation did nothing to change my view, it certainly taught me a great deal about the man, his life and his work. It was a deeply moving testimony and a particularly fitting finale to the Festival.

On the drive back to Nottingham I reflected on the weekend as a whole. I had certainly enjoyed my poetry pilgrimage in the sanctuary of Southwell's cloistered walls. The organisation and programming was flawless and the atmosphere enchanting, but something was wrong. As we sped towards Nottingham I recalled that on Friday I had dropped a friend off in Forest Fields on the way home from the first night. We drove down Berridge Road where the streets were alive with excited passers-by on the cusp of the weekend's Divali celebrations. As I set my friend down I involuntarily glanced over my shoulder as if to catch a glimpse of the Minster's twin steeples in their floodlit distances. They were too far away of course, half a century too far.

Ian Collinson.

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### **On first looking into... Michael Donaghy**

Donaghy Motion Williams. Not management consultants, or solicitors, or even the front row of a British Lions rugby team, but the line up of 'Penguin Modern Poets 11' which I borrowed from my Library at the end of the nineties to learn a little about the would be hooker of this pack and recently enthroned Poet Laureate, Andrew Motion.

Two particularly good things about this excellent series are that writers are free to choose the poems, which gives added interest to the selections, and that readers are given the opportunity

to sample the work of poets they might not have otherwise encountered. Thus it was that Carol Ann Duffy is indirectly responsible for introducing me to the fabulous poetry of Eavan Boland (Volume 2 Duffy Feather Boland) and our Monarch of the pen gets the credit for opening my eyes to our hero, Michael Donaghy.

It's worth taking a moment to compare the work of those two in this book. They both offer a remarkably wide variety of viewpoint, subject matter and location. The difference is that where Motion strains to achieve this degree of invention, striving so hard to 'make it new' you can feel the feet thrashing just beneath the surface, Donaghy's presentation is utterly natural and credible. Like the classic storyteller that he is, he effortlessly seduces the reader with his deftly drawn character sketches. To discover him in this collection was a revelation. Here at last was a contemporary writer respected by the poetry establishment who was not afraid to be lyrical in the old fashion, even to the point of rhyme:

For the present there is just one moon,  
though every level pond gives back another.

But the bright disc shining in the black lagoon,  
perceived by astrophysicist and lover,

is milliseconds old. And even that light's  
seven minutes older than its source.

And the stars we think we see on moonless nights  
are long extinguished. And, of course,

this very moment, as you read this line,  
is literally gone before you know it.

Forget the here-and-now. We have no time  
but this device of wantonness and wit.

Make me this present then: your hand in mine,  
And we'll live out our lives in it.

*The Present.*

This sense of wonder led some commentators to label Donaghy a 'modern metaphysical,' a description that is more of a hindrance than a help. His poetry does not have a mission to explain life. His science is deliberately naïve, deliberately 'Boy's Own,' but if the poem has a hint of pastiche, it is a gentle one.

Michael Donaghy's main objective is the creation and presentation of characters, revealing them in the form of dramatic monologue. He accosts you with these tales in true 'Ancient Mariner' fashion and those lucky enough to have seen him live will know how brilliantly he performed these pieces from memory, theatrically bringing his characters to life

All that summer we slept on fire escapes,

or tried to sleep, while sirens or the brass  
from our neighbour's Tito Puente tapes  
kept us up and made us late for Mass.  
I found our back door bent back to admit  
beneath the thick sweet reek of grass  
a nest of needles, bottlecaps and shit.  
By August Tom had sold the Blarney Stone  
to Puerto Ricans, paid his debts in cash  
but left enough to fly his body home.

### *A Repertoire*

This is typical of the range and breadth of his inventiveness. An Irish American, born in the Bronx, who spent most of his adult life in London, he had ample experience to draw on. Catholicism, in both its Irish and American Hispanic incarnations, and traditional Irish music, in which he was a gifted performer, were significant influences on his life and writing. In this collection there are poems which reflect all these milieu plus two set in Spain, one in Africa, and there then is this one, the poem which really captivated me

I've played it so often it's hardly me who plays.  
We heard it that morning in Alexandria,  
Or tried to, on that awful radio.  
I was standing at the balustrade,  
Watching the fish stalls opening on the quay,  
The horizon already rippling in the heat.  
She'd caught a snatch of Mozart, and was fishing  
Through the static for the BBC  
But getting bouzoukis, intimate Arabic,  
All drowned beneath that soft roar, like the ocean's.  
'Give it up,' I said, 'The tuner's broken.'  
And then she crossed the room and kissed me. Later,  
Lying in the curtained light, she whispered  
She'd something to tell me. When all at once,  
The tidal hiss we'd long since ceased to notice  
Stopped. A flautist inhaled. And there it was,  
The end of K285a,  
Dubbed like a budget soundtrack on our big scene.

### *Cadenza*

Michael Donaghy, in his writing and performance was for me the antidote to the aqueous smartspeak that I felt poetry had become. As I write this it is almost exactly a year since his tragic and untimely death at the age of fifty. He is irreplaceable. He was a troubadour, a balladeer and in the truest sense of the word, a bard and I can think of no one alive today who writes and performs with his combination of intelligence, wit and vivacity.

I have a copy of his award winning collection 'Conjure,' which he signed for me when he read at the 2003 Southwell Poetry Festival. We had a brief chat and he amazed me by saying that he remembered signing a book for me at Poetry in the City in Nottingham the previous

year. Both books are inscribed with the same characteristically unpretentious, self-effacing message:

‘All the Best!  
Michael Donaghy.’

All the best, Michael.

Ian Collinson – Published in *Poetry Nottingham*

### **I can't believe it's not poetry!**

The definition of what is and isn't a poem can be a very touchy subject these days as our Nottingham readers may have noticed recently in 'County Lit' magazine. You might think it's a lot of fuss about nothing but it would be a mistake to dismiss this debate as an irrelevance because it highlights a significant problem that poetry faces today, namely: practitioners and supporters of contemporary poetry have a very different idea of what constitutes a poem to that of its wider audience. In consequence, poetry is becoming increasingly marginalized, with well produced but low circulation magazines addressing narrow, almost sub cultural groups of enthusiasts. We have to go back the best part of a century to examine how this has come about.

British poetry emerged from the nineteenth century in pretty bad shape. Its complacent Victorian cultural elitism was about to be challenged intellectually, socially and politically. Saturated with the values of an obsolescent imperialism it had no answer to the democratic, iconoclastic modernism that swept in from North America. But if the high cholesterol diet of the old poetry was now indigestible, the intellectualism of its low fat competitor was equally hard to swallow. Poetry was skimmed again and again as the century progressed. Apart from a brief excursion in the Dylan Thomas hot air balloon and Betjeman's genuflections to the past, the process of refinement continued unchecked. Post modernism has delivered a poetry that is all too often sparse, arid and unattractive and, unlike the manufacturers of soft margarine, it has failed to convince consumers that the flaccid, ersatz product on offer is better for them than the traditional one.

Poetry lost its innocence in the twentieth century and this self-knowledge has brought decades of self-obsession that have left it introverted and lacking in spontaneity. It has lost its voice and goes largely unheeded in an age when the Walkman does the talking. Going back to the old poetry, however, will not solve the problem. For exactly the same reason that the post of Poet Laureate is simply untenable these days, any attempt to revive the metre and rhyme of traditional verse will appear hopelessly anachronistic. In any case, the answer is not to be found in formal or structural considerations anyway. The really fundamental change that modernism brought to poetry in this country was not one of style, but its insistence on impersonality. There was an absolute requirement for poets to detach themselves and their emotions from their work. Apart from the writing of a few poets labeled 'confessional', this

aspect has survived subsequent challenges to modernism largely intact. It has resulted in a poetry, particularly a white, male poetry, characterized by a minimalist, impersonal cleverness that can be bleak and unexciting. The solution is simple. The time has come to put the poet back into poetry, and a bit of passion too! This will give us a product that is instantly recognizable and everyone will once again agree: 'we're all a lot better for poetry!'

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