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grande-bretagne

introduction

Ce n'est pas facile de surnager dans les nouvelles vagues littéraires qui nous envahissent sans cesse; c'est même ardu. Ne parlons pas des marées de jeunes écrivains, c'est encore pire : ils sont inconnus, leurs poèmes paraissent dans des revues miméographiées (souvent éphémères) et ils oeuvrent dans la plus stricte intimité ou pour quelques amis avec qui ils forment une société secrète.

Bien sûr, on est relativement plus averti quand il s'agit de jeunes écrivains connus : leurs entreprises nous sont familières, ce qui n'implique nullement qu'elles soient plus heureuses ! Il est assez rare, d'ailleurs, que la recherche formelle soit aussitôt reconnue comme importante et valable.

En choisissant des poèmes pour illustrer dix années de poésie anglaise, j'ai pris quelques précautions afin de ne pas survaloriser, par ma sélection, la recherche formelle.

A titre d'exemple, je n'ai pas inclus dans cette minianthologie des poèmes de l'école de Liverpool. Les jeunes auteurs de cette école qui présentent la poésie avec un accompagnement de musique de jazz ont beaucoup fait parler d'eux récemment. A mes yeux, pour paraphraser l'oracle du Dr. Leavis au sujet d'Edith Sitwell, ces jeunes poètes ont une place dans l'histoire de la publicité plutôt que dans celle de la poésie. Mais il se peut que je me trompe à leur sujet autant que le Dr. Leavis à propos d'Edith Sitwell : c'est un risque que je prends !

Je n'ai pas présenté non plus, dans ce choix, les essais de *poésie concrète* (1) parus dans certains journaux, quand ce n'est pas placardés dans les rues de Brighton, cette charmante station balnéaire. S'il y a quelque chose de bon à faire dans cette voie, je suis enclin à croire que personne ne l'a encore réussi...

En faisant mon choix — j'aurais voulu qu'il soit plus élaboré, mais il m'aurait fallu plus de temps, — je me suis appliqué à mon-

(1) en français dans le texte.

trer le registre très étendu de la poésie anglaise contemporaine, je veux dire : la production des poètes qui sont encore dans la vingtaine ou la trentaine. De fait, ce registre est extraordinairement étendu. Que des écrivains comme Gavin Bantock et Anthony Howell (très jeunes tous les deux), George Macbeth et John Fuller, Edward Lucie-Smith et Anselm Hollo soient publiés joue-contre-joue dans certaines revues a de quoi surprendre. Certains critiques lancent les hauts cris devant cette promiscuité, mais il n'y a pas de quoi fouetter un chat, selon moi...

Au fond, quand la poésie anglaise avait un certain commun dénominateur qui la rendait facile à caractériser, elle était dans ses années creuses. Si on devait trouver un commun dénominateur pour qualifier la poésie des années soixante, cela ne serait possible que d'un point de vue rétrospectif. La stérilité, la pauvreté stylistique, la platitude de ce qu'on a surnommé "Le Mouvement" dans les années cinquante, ont nui considérablement à l'éclosion de la poésie en Angleterre.

Il n'y a pas lieu ici de commenter en long et en large ces poèmes : il suffira au lecteur de les lire pour se rendre compte. Toutefois, il convient de faire une ou deux remarques introductrices.

Depuis deux ans, Gavin Bantock a fait son apparition, pour ainsi dire, comme génie de la poésie. Il a écrit son premier recueil — *Christ* — quand il avait 25 ans (il est né en 1939). Il s'agit d'un immense poème de 7000 vers divisé en 26 chants, et qui raconte une sorte de variante de la vie du Christ. Ce livre a eu droit aux critiques les plus acerbes, mais aussi aux louanges et même à des prix officiels; l'ouvrage a été couronné deux fois. De toute façon, l'importance de ce livre transcende toutes les contestations dont il fut l'objet. Après, Bantock a entrepris d'écrire une trilogie dont je présente ici un court passage — *Ichor* — que j'ai extrait de la troisième partie. Je crains, hélas, que ce poème ne donne pas une juste idée de l'oeuvre. Toutefois, le lecteur y trouvera un exemple du style incantatoire de Bantock — sa qualité primordiale et peut-être aussi sa faiblesse. L'oeuvre de Bantock a déjà exercé une influence vérifiable d'autres jeunes poètes choisissent, comme lui, de s'exprimer par de longs poèmes et reviennent à cette ancienne forme épique.

George Macbeth, contrairement à Bantock, est le poète de la litote, au répertoire percutant et réaliste. Pourtant à la longue, on apprécie chez lui la complexité du style; on en est même frappé. *Drop* est un exemple de sa manière qui consiste souvent à accompagner le poème de notes au lecteur.

Anthony Howell n'a que 21 ans; ancien danseur de ballet, il consacre maintenant son temps à l'écriture. Son expérimentation favorite est la forme du roman, actuellement du moins. Sa poésie semble émaner d'un écrivain sûr de ses moyens, capable de s'exprimer en peu de mots, mais non sans conférer à ce peu de mots tout un flot de vie et de passion. Je reconnais en lui un poète destiné à un grand avenir parmi ceux de sa génération, mais il n'a pas encore tellement publié.

Lucie-Smith, Hill, Redgrove, Fuller, Kavanagh et Silkin se tiennent dans les frontières relativement sûres de la tradition. Néanmoins, ils sont tous de grands formalistes au bon sens du terme; il est d'ailleurs surprenant de voir quelle somme d'invention et de nouveauté ils confèrent aux modules traditionnels. Peter Jay, universitaire de profession, s'occupe aussi de rédaction et de traduction. Paul Roche, lui, est un poète qui a maintes fois revisité l'Amérique et aussi un dramaturge; mais, sur ce plan, il n'a pas encore trouvé un style bien personnel.

Et pour compléter ce palmarès, il faut compter, en plus, trois francs-tireurs. Anselm Hollo et Sully Potter (ce dernier est à peu près inconnu) manipulent l'humour comme une arme automatique; d'une lecture plutôt déconcertante, leurs poèmes contiennent une dose de vérité qui peut être absorbée sans trop de douleur.

Stewart Conn, dans *Ambush*, son meilleur recueil à date, se sert d'un vague décor de western à des fins polyvalentes. Sans doute tient-il son goût du western du cinéma ou de la télévision? Mais je trouve à son poème des qualités troublantes, presque inoubliables; j'y trouve aussi un arrière-goût de prose, une parenté étroite avec les formes du récit et pourtant j'y reconnais toute la concision de la poésie.

Il n'est pas pertinent de chercher à savoir lequel de ces poètes est le plus avancé sur la bonne voie; d'abord, y a-t-il seulement une bonne voie qui mène assurément à la gloire? Si oui, l'école de Liverpool est peut-être la mieux axée, à moins que ce ne soit George Macbeth qui, d'ailleurs, les devance d'une tête.

Pour le moment, on n'a qu'à lire et parfois relire; il n'est pas besoin d'aller au devant du temps et de juger.

De toute façon, on peut se réjouir que dans l'Angleterre de nos jours il y ait tant d'engouement pour la recherche formelle. Jamais depuis 1914, un tel éventail de goûts et de tendances ne s'est manifesté en poésie.

DEREK PARKER

traduction : Hubert AQUIN

DANDELION

Slugs nestle where the stem

Broken, bleeds milk.

The flower is eyeless : the sight is compelled

By small, coarse, sharp petals,

Like metal shreds. Formed,

*They puncture, irregularly perforate
 Their yellow, brutal glare.
 And certainly want to
 Devour the earth. With an ample movement
 They are a foot high, as you look.
 And coming back, they take hold
 On pert domestic strains.
 Others' lives are theirs. Between them
 And domesticity.
 Grass. They infest its weak land;
 Fatten, hide slugs, infestate,
 They look like plates; more closely
 Like the first tryings, the machines, of nature
 Riveted into her, successful.*

JON SILKIN

PERFECTION ISN'T LIKE A PERFECT STORY

*I think often of the time I was perfectly happy.
 And sat by the harbour reading a borrowed Cavafy.
 You were with me of course and the night before we
 played bar billiards, green under lights, in the café
 Postponing our first shared bedtime and every ball
 That didn't come back made us look at each other and down.
 I collected the key and we crossed the late-night hall
 And seeing the room you cried, it was so small.*

*We were too close. We bore each other down.
 I changed the room and we found that you were ill.
 Nothing was perfect or as it should have been.
 I lay by your side and watched the green of dawn
 Climb over our bodies and bring out of darkness the one
 Perfect face that made nothing else matter at all.*

P. J. KAVANAGH

SLEEPING

*The princess was baptised inside a shell,
 Nude, adult, rich and handsome, but a bitch.
 Small wonder she refused to ask that witch
 Who scuttled lecherous tars, dried up a well
 That poisoned villagers, silenced the bell
 of the smug church and moved fat squashy cows*

Whole, fields away to give a poor man's house
 Milk for a day ! Really, one just can't tell
 This story after all the palace lies.
 She simply cursed. The princess sighed, and rust
 Crumbled the pantry lock. The king yawned. Flies
 Settled on footmen turned to snoring dust.
 Churls grinned. Till through them, too, there flowed the deep
 And uncontrollable desire to sleep.

JOHN FULLER

FOR NO GOOD REASON

I walk on the waste-ground for no good reason
 Except that falle stones and cracks
 Bulging with need suit my mood
 Which is gloomy, irascible, selfish, among the split timbers
 Of somebody's home, and the bleached rags of wallpaper.
 My trouser-legs pied with water-drops,
 I knock a sparkling rain from hemlock-polls,
 I crash a puddle up my shin,
 Brush a nettle across my hand,
 And swear — then sweat from what I said :
 Indeed, the sun withdraws as if I stung.

Indeed, she withdrew as if I stung,
 And I walk up and down among these canted beams, bricks and
 scraps,
 Bitten walls and weed-stuffed gaps
 Looking as it would feel now, if I walked back,
 Across the carpets of my home, my own home.

PETER REDGROVE

HOLY THURSDAY

Naked, he climbed to the wolf's lair;
 He beheld Eden without fear,
 Finding no ambush offered there
 But sleep under the harbouring fur.

He said : 'They are decoyed by love
 Who, tarrying through the hollow grove,
 Neglect the season's sad remove.
 Child and nurse walk hand in glove.

*As unaware of Time's betrayal,
Weaving their innocence with guile.
But they must cleave the fire's peril
And suffer innocence to fall.*

*I have been touched with that fire,
And have fronted the she-wolf's lair.
Lo, she lies gentle and innocent of desire
Who was my constant myth and terror.'*

GEOFFREY HILL

BRIEF SEASONS

*Green ,green ,it is still
Green—a leap, so
Many new leaves to turn !*

*Warm seas and wine,
And our idle happiness :
Will we ever be in love ?*

*The sun drops deep, a breeze
Breaks the contour of cedars —
No beating of swallow wings.*

*Skeleton trees, winds rave,
Paths shine like distant rivers
Immersed in contemplation.*

PETER JAY

I KNEW UGGIE

*the first time i saw uggie
he was sitting in a tree
pulling silly-fellow faces,
scratch-scratching for a flea*

*the second time i saw uggie
he was scuttling on the ground
guzzling acorns and blackbeetles
and chasing rabbits around*

*the third time i saw uggie
he was dancing to a drum
with a dirty piece of tiger skin
to cover his naked bum*

*the fourth time i saw uggie
he was shouting out his name,
cavorting with hairy women
cooking beetles at a flame*

*the fifth time i saw uggie
he was sitting on a throne
smoking a pipe of tobacco
and writing on a stone*

*this is uggie speaking, folks
—i reckon everyone's got a chance,
as long as we keep on singing
as long as we learn to dance*

*thanks, uggie — when i saw him next
he wore a silk dressing gown,
his teeth were new, his nose was straight
an dhis hair was plastered down*

*the seventh time i saw uggie
he was telling artful tales
of new issues and debentures
and promoting export sales*

*the eighth time i saw uggie
he was driving in a car,
charming a well-groomed woman
and puffing a cigar*

*the ninth time i saw uggie
he was passing a new law
to prohibit singing, dancing,
and eating beetles raw*

*may i (uggie) interrupt to say
i owe all my success
to big joe who writes my speeches
and big jack who helps me dress*

*thank you, sir — next time i saw him
he was lying on a couch
with seven psychiatrists standing round
and listening to him grouch*

*the last time i saw uggie
ha was sitting in a tree
pulling silly-fellow faces,
scratch-scratching for a flea*

TULLY POTTER

ONE NAME

*myth-
ology, or
 there's at least three
 ladies
 sitting in that tree
outside my window
 in the dark
which is also
 my head,
shaking
 and waving
its hairs,
 inside and
 out . . .
Oh, they are lovely
all of them. Three
or thirty-three
 Women
so much lovelier
 than men
— who used to be, once :
shouting,
 weeping real tears,
shedding their blood
 on real ground
 real blood shouting
and red in the face with it, no
I don't think they were
 lovely, ever.*

*Only beautiful male I know
 is seven years old
 and what does he know as his father.*

*me
 than whom none could ever be more
 confused with the trees the trees
 and their fruit. or
 myth*

*her name is,
 soft, soft in the dark, myth, Myth
 I love : Be mine —
 now that I am
 so
 given
 to you.*

ANSELM HOLLO

AMBUSH

*Most of the night we rode, guns at our backs
 And our hands tied, so that when the beasts stumbled
 We had to grip by the knees or be thrown. Our wrists
 Turned to wire. The blood froze.
 Twice we were signalled to stop. Then
 They gave us scraps, a mouthful of water each.*

*We had almost reached the clearing when it came.
 My horse, one of the first to be hit, went down.
 Another landed on top, its flanks bubbling.
 Branches were sawn by fire. My mouth
 Filled with blood. We had been ambushed
 By our own side. Unable to move, I blacked out.*

*The next day it was spring. Trees were traced
 Against an elegant sky. Without getting up,
 I tried to remember the dream. I found
 My hands still tied. And there,
 Stripped and dripping like stoats in the sunlight,
 Were eight men fastened through the throat to trees.*

STEWART CONN

METATHALAMIA : AFTER TWELVE YEARS

*I'm turning the heat off, he said.
The went on filing her fingertips.
As she stepped out of the bathroom rubbing his hair.
We can't keep it on all night just because there's snow.
He was in his pyjamas, the bottoms,
We never wore the tops . . .
Can we now ?
She went on sitting there,
The television on; she picked up her knitting,
Her face still pretty, but obsessed,
Like somebody challenging private Furies :
Baulked, hellbent,
What's the good of a heating system ?
She said. I thought we bought it to be warm ?
She looked up at the wall, not him,
Her eyes green as vitriol
Her lips snarled a little.
He walked away from her into the bedroom,
Shut the the door as gently as if it were in pain,
And tossed his book on to the bed.
Then there trickled out of him —
Pressed out of him — a groan :
Deep, irrevocable, distant, brittle,
As he ran his hand over the still curly head.
Goddam ! She does it all the time.
His eyes beat at the walls of the small unfinished room :
The wallpaper half torn
And the cupboards she'd been working on half done.
Between his teeth he hissed :
Will you allow me one decision — just one ?
I think it a kind of stupidity to be so sure of everything.
He kicked three of her shoes, lying apart and strewn,
Under the bed . . . I wish she wouldn't toss things off !
Oh if I'd been wrong,
The damage would be nothing to the damage done . . .
Wrong but tough.
I let myself be beaten down.
Little Anne was never really mine.
Nor any of the others — none.
He dragged the bedclothes back. Fool !
Fool, fool ! He unched his pillow.
That first little piece of hysterics she threw
(Top of the stairs in Brunswick Square)*

*When she sat screaming pregnant and unwed,
Sabbing out that no one understood her but her dog ...
I should have silenced her right there :
Slapped her down with one masterful slam ...
He cringed into the frozen bed.
I was never one to quell a riot,
Still less to be a rebel.
You're afraid of me, she'd said.
He help up a hand against the light.
Yes, I was afraid of women; afraid of men;
Afraid of everything that wasn't peace.
She loved me — how she loved me then !
He sank back. Oh what's the use ?
No woman is content unless she's led.
She wants the passion that I cannot give and never did.
Yet real love grew —
Proved by deed and will —
She never knew.
She stands over me now
With her obdurate steel
Like a reeking Clytemnestra, vicious as ice,
Striking again and again as love comes crawling out ...
Anything left to kill ?
One — two — three — no
She's stabbed more than a bloody thrice ...
He laid his book unopened tenderly on a chair,
Flicking off the light.
I never did turn own the heat, he said.
There was a choked, muffled stutter, brokenly sad :
No use being wise, is there ?
I made the big mistake of being nice.*

PAUL ROCHE

YOUR OWN PLACE

*Invent it now. Your own place,
Your own soil. All inferior
Localities are done with.
Yet how is it to be made
Without things remembered ? Sun
Thrown in fistfuls, and the sand
Of that ripe apricot; wind
Spiced with thyme and lavender
Blowing from one hill, at one*

Season. But these bring with them
 Disasters — the imperfect
 Friendship broken, and the perfect
 Love unconsummated. Sand
 Which burns the foot, hill blocking
 the View. So invent it now,
 And arrive after the long
 Voyage, alone, having left
 A companion at each
 Port, a lover in all the
 Hot bedrooms, all the stifling
 Cabins.

It is before dawn.
 There is a cove with a few
 Bare rocks. Your feet cling to them,
 Naked, as the rest of you
 Is naked. Women come laughing
 Down to the shore. You call you,
 Expecting to be embraced.
 They strip and bathe, brush by you
 Without a glance or a cry
 As the light swells and brightens.

EDWARL LUCIE-SMITH

A REASON FOR FIDELITY

For be it from me to say what you are;
 absent or inland, one is from another,
 singlar waters are seeping down
 are lakes of aloneness where each one
 is far. The eye outside us, the out-
 sider's eye, pursues compliments
 you deny. Think of a room we sink in
 where I heave, my love, into your
 arms such happiness it tires me —
 'Dreaming, he cries', you dream & cry
 in sleep, our closer alone — Who
 cares explosion in the eyes without
 the heart? The heart explodes, unloading
 leaves of the sea o fleaves
 like a rose bloated with summer. Lovers,
 locked up for a night, are
 thrown out on the streets, this morning,
 mournful as drunks. A rose you

are; as far from me as violence
and that brings violence close.

That brings violence close, as close
as a rain veil over not so distant
shore takes out of sight and
make sa distance of distinct
weeping, a dream of the latest dreamt
in the wrong place which, loved
out of time, may be prone
to linger. But once you refused
to blow this out the damn thing
burnt my fingers and the scar
has not washed out. Now we
separate with hurt and listen
to healing; each secluded beast
must suck remedial grasses in
a sick retreat. Animals. Witch
how, dun from veldt, they cross
the line that traces no man's land.
A family browse; species stalk
each other; enter a forst and
become spotted. Forest is there
for a use, they use it. Ask
the beasts; they cannot describe it.

Beasts cannot describe it nor what
they are, nor how they grow together
in the undergrowth and disturb
no one, nor how uneasily
we hunger. Frontiers are to affront
us, parting their way; their distance
quick as the largesse of money; time
is their dirty war. They're a
fallacy, Joe, get killed for dad's new
car; be widow's company in the dry
air. If individuals are out of mind
there is no anarchy of animals or
hierarchy of rock. Man is or else.
In singing hills or hills on either
shore no knowing sniper what he snipes
precisely is what he aims for.
To learn the weakness of one's enemy go
to those that love him; faults
they know but those
who love him well will not

*for ever tell them, those
 who would tell them do not know.
 Those who would tell them do not know :
 between what I know and what is
 seen; what may not be told or what you
 must deny leave much unsaid
 between outside and in. That's speaking
 purred or lay aslant with love
 admits the indivisible commune, emission
 from the pores of word. 'My wife,
 my child', are plausible excuses — they
 rise so fast in farthestmost
 trenches, the ends of the road — but
 give the lie to war. At least
 our least state is beyond frontiers,
 distance is all its length, and you
 are with me and without me, I
 know where you are. But far
 be it from me to say what you are.*

ANTHONY HOWELL

FROM ICHOR

*I indict
 the prophesies of prophets who murmur from armchairs.*

*I indict
 the disciples who do not understand the word discipline.*

*I indict
 the men who remonstrate from soap-boxes in the parks.*

*I indict
 the cat that laps milk from the saucer with sly glances.*

*I indict
 the animal-lovers who squash flies and eat meat.*

*I indict
 the vegetarians who claim to be fleshy human beings
 and beat their children.*

*I indict
 the church-goers who love hats better than throwing
 pennies into the sea.*

I indict

God

*If he lets people murmur,
if he is satisfied with smug worshippers,
if he laughs ever,
if he ever cries
if he looks the other way
or if he does anything at all
because to save one man is to kill a thousand
because to kill one man is to save a thousand*

Communists squabble.

Christians squabble.

Children squabble.

There is much turpitude.

I indict God.

He cannot manage the world.

He is lots of people.

He is an ogre with seven heads.

He is a bronze corpse.

He is a chatter-box.

He is the cross-roads with no sign-post.

He is a debauched old man.

His genitals are male and female constantly at play.

He is a spoon, porridge and a mouth.

He prays.

He plays skittles and misses and wins a pig.

He is the best pig.

He is a middle-aged school-teacher without glasses.

He is a soap-factory.

He has potatoes growing behind his ears in Ireland.

He is a nursery rhyme.

He stands in the stocks.

I indict God.

(I am God.)

I indict God.

GAVIN BANTOCK

DROP

*(A French soldier describes the sensation
of making a parachute drop on an F. L. N.
outpost during the Algerian War.)*

*Sky was the white soil you
Grew in. When the fourth stick broke
Into thistledown
At the crack of a whistle, streaked down*

*From the crutch out with a crust
Of fear it was like an orgasm to
Fork into air.
I could see why they'd nicked that nylon*

*Rip-cord 'the release'. We
Spread like a leprosy on their clean
Sun to the wogs. You
Could see they screwed heads grow up*

*Like dry coal we'd got
To clap a match to. Christ it was good
To feel the sick
Flap of the envelope in the wind :*

*Like galloping under a stallion's
Belly. Half of Africa flushed
Out and coked
Up : you could piss in its eye. You could want to*

*Scream the Marseillaise like a
Hymn. And then it was all gone.
Splum. You were sinking
In a hot bog you'd never wrench*

*Clear of alive. Soaked,
Vomiting, jelly-marrowed, afraid
To spit. No life
Left but that leg-breaking drop on a*

*Split stockade where they'd have your
Genitals off. You were strung up like Jesus
Christ in the strings
Of your own carriage : lynched by the Kosher*

*Sluts who'd packed your chute.
It couldn't work. You were on your own.
The stick had died
In the crews or never dropped. When the ground*

*Slammed you at eighteen feet
Per second you were out skedaddling for the first
Tree with your harness
Cut : the sten jammed whore —*

*hot yammering out of your
Groin. You were implementing the drill
Balls : it was flog
On till you blacked out dead.*

GEORGE MACBETH