PRE-SCRIPT

Anybody concerned for a viable poetry in Britain must be depressed by the persistence of the Movement Orthodoxy from the 1950s into the late 80s; by its consolidation of power for a bleak future; by its neutralising assimilation of the surfaces of modernism; by its annexation of the increasingly fashionable term post-modernism; and by its ignorance - real or affected - of much of the work of the British Poetry Revival. This "revival" since its abdication of a power base at the Poetry Society ten years ago, has continued to develop, absorbing the influx of continental theory and the influence of the American language poets which began about that time. But it has lost the partial visibility it once had. The archaic term "underground" suggests today, not so much falsely Utopian subversion, as entombment.

Nor has the academy helped much; the explosion of new literary perspectives has not changed the focus of discussions of contemporary poetry, except in the case of some women poets. Questioning the canon, even questioning the notion of a canon, has not allowed the emergence of new poetries.

Should the British Poetry Revival annex the term post-modernism, as that has been used in art criticism over the last few years? It might do some good: a label to stick on its poetics of indeterminacy; but there is something incomplete about its application to this poetry. True, it owes allegiances to, and measures its distance from, particularly the extreme forms of modernism, but the post- suggests a decadence, an apolitical unseriousness that is missing. Allen Fisher, the first poet presented in Pages, entitled a previous work Ideas on the culture dreamed of; the notion that literary production is one of those transformative "ideas" is widely shared. The aim of literary work is to change consciousness: the engagement of reading an open work alters the reader. (Roy Fisher and Lee Harwood
have argued as much, as does Allen Fisher in *Necessary Business*.) This work no longer consists, either, of a collage of Utopian images but is a disturbing clash of discourses, a rupture of old meanings to create the new. One cannot deny the note of despair in this clashing; the need to manufacture a culture, like Blake after the collapse of his radical dreams. But it has an affirmative moment in its opposition to current culture: a step outside post-modernist pastiche and its mirrored mirrors, without stepping out into the fictional field of the unmediated "real".

Uncertainty may be a certainty, but this survival of affirmation - which implies an act of faith in the productive reader - suggests that, however much post-modern this poetry is, it is potentially pre- something else: the work of art is always in a state of becoming; however much its post-modern strain works in complicity with the consumer society (as Jameson and others have argued) its affirmation turns its face to a future, and its textual openness engages the readers, who all share its state of becoming.

While art and film discourse is conducted in this country in these terms, the Movement Orthodoxy is content to promote the limiting rigours of competition writing, minor "original" modulations of hand-me-down styles and themes, and writing for the classroom. Hopefully, certain major selections and part of an anthology to be published next year by a leading publisher will offer a visible alternative. It will be an interesting exercise to watch the reviewers of the Orthodoxy trying to come to terms with them; will they oppose, assimilate, annex or ignore these important publications? But perhaps the books will sell, in the face of that, and engage and influence readers who are also writers, young enough to resist the Orthodoxy.

It is not the spirit of optimism that fuels this project, but a knowledge that the one necessary thing to do is to keep working, to set up processes that may have unforeseeable results. *Pages* is probably not going to affect this situation greatly. There are, however, advantages in small-scale serial publication (apart from purely practical ones of production!). Each issue is manageable, regular, potentially exciting; each issue presents the still new, but amasses through time into a larger unit. Immediate attention will be complemented by cumulative understanding. My own depression is assuaged by my enthusiasm at receiving the first few manuscripts through the post, an enthusiasm - an opportunity for active engagement - that I hope I can pass on to the subscribers of this project monthly.

Robert Steppat
Bristol Stomp.

1. A gazer's belief in estimation determines a defensive measure
   Took train to end of line
to look at horizon
suburbia in certainty.
Not weary of this, simply not challenged.
Returned to destination
over arches alongside
the Blakes' house.
Consider horizon
reflected on the pavement.
Mud-weeds
A rise of fog over distant
interrupted by a descending jet
It ceases turbulence and orbits
over browned sulphur
flushes a lake of red oil
into the reflections.

2. Out of description an
obligation to perjure persistence
Shook strain to bend or lie in
to brook after happiness
despair in comfort.
Notary office, simply non-chalant.
Returned to destitution
overt arm-chairs, a long sigh,
"Happiness has its rights"
on the main gate. Confrontation
a blaze that breaks horizontal
insistence
cracks a hammerhead
into splinters on a magnet
solipsism's last ditch a gaze
over ground saltpetre
rushes a cake of reed foil
encourages perfections.
3. On Lambeth Road
saddened walkers hold their children
regain firesides with vague melancholy
that a joy has ended, a happiness completed.
Cling of bramble and nettle to barbed fence
a tenacious illness
where politics places existence
as a living process in question.
This cosmetic behaviour
rationalised
determines an offensive pleasure
Mistook pain to depend on design
a book about the horror zone.
The targeted buyer confronted with
unsatisfied needs
a huge army of wage-dependents
as a production-collective
reproducing war.

4. Blood reeds
a rhyzomic fog descants
Charcoal, saltpetre, sulphur bright.
Out of ground elixir
a mirror image of desire
inside walls of black stone
cultivation with equal care of
delusion, greed and hatred
This high status given to
illusion
the technocracy of sensuality.
An abstraction of use-value:
surface, package, persuasion-image.
The saddened with projectile mentality
An unfulfilled aspect of
the gaze a language
taken
for granted.

March '86 - May '87. Allen Fisher.
Trees and bushes were like smoke as the train drove past—smoke penetrated by intermittent lights.

The palm of the hand was mute, pressed flat against the glass surface. The power of expression it had forfeited passed into the ring on her index finger, vibrant, lustrous.

John had dreamt of his friend Paul the night before. Dreamt of walking down a street in Athens, thinking that he might somehow find Paul, and then Paul was before him, dressed in an army uniform, smiling with pleasure at seeing him.

Looking into Fran's eyes, John lost himself in the depths of a darkness, from which he had no wish to emerge.

Holding her hand, now, he remembered the night they'd spent talking and drinking with her brother: they had all stretched out on the floor of her room to sleep, the men on either side of her; under the bedclothes, he'd held her warm hand.

Two police officers stood questioning a man on the station-platform near where they alighted. As Fran and John walked down the platform, towards another small group of policemen, John noticed flecks of blood in front of them. When they reached the place where the second group was standing, he saw the bright pool of blood, and the body slumped on a seat. O Jesus, he said; and Fran tightened her hold on his arm as they walked on.

They stopped for a moment along the way. -Let's have another drink, he said, but she declined. He took a long swallow, finishing the bottle of wine originally intended for the party. The night seemed to have been hammered across its entire extent, like a sheet of copper.

-We're friends of Jacob's, he said to the young woman who answered the door. They went into the front room, and John found his way to the wine table. He couldn't see Jacob anywhere amongst the various groups.

Nicole, dressed as always in black, stood in a corner, holding a chrysanthemum in one hand, a cigarette in the other; her hair as yellow almost as the flower. Tall and attractive, she drew interest from all around the room; while seemingly remote from that interest.
He'd seen her twice before. Once, he'd met her and Jacob at a cinema, for a screening of Val Lewton's The Seventh Victim. She'd carried a long, stout black cane topped with silver; and however theatrical her appearance, her aloofness intrigued him.

The other time, he'd recognised her in a café, but without being noticed in turn. She'd sauntered from one end of the counter to the other and back again, finally ordering a meat samosa which she ate standing at the cash register.

They found Jacob in the kitchen, where he was trying to persuade a pretty, blond-haired teenager to kiss him. The boy looked abashed when Fran and John entered the room, but Jacob was amused. -John! he said. Do you remember the Rothko room? -Of course, said John. I caught you trying your charms on some innocent, in front of the very paintings I'd come to see that day. -You were shocked, said Jacob. -Only because they were Mark Rothko's paintings, John replied. They're paintings for contemplation, and that was what I was there to do — contemplate them. -How reverent! said Jacob.

Glass containers and pieces of fruit stood on a red-painted shelf against the red wall. Jacob leaned against a cupboard, on the door of which postcards had been tacked: a Balthus painting of a naked girl in an erotic posture; a Renaissance picture of the martyrdom of St. Sebastian; and finally, a photograph of a group of Minoan clay figures, a lyre-player with three dancers. -Paul? John said. -Oh, said Jacob, the dancers! Paul sent the postcard a couple of weeks ago. -What did he have to say? -That he's in the Greek army, which we knew, and that he hates it, which we knew. What do you expect him to say?

-You know, said Jacob, when I first met Paul I thought he was a psychotic. Fran said: That's unkind of you, Jacob.

-Oh, said Jacob, you must understand how I felt: the disconnected sentences, the sudden fits of laughter.... He stopped, seeing John staring at him. -Mind you, he said, I thought John was a drug-addict when we first met. You know: the pale complexion, the haunted look in the eyes.

-But Paul, he continued, was simply an exception, and he was wonderful. I took him to a gay-bar once, for a drink; I slipped out to get some cigarettes, and when I entered the room again and saw him there, I couldn't help drawing a contrast between him and all the others. It wasn't just that he was the only heterosexual in the room. Everyone there was there to be seen, and worse than that, they looked exactly as they were supposed to look; Paul was free of those things, and I respected him for it. I went up to him and said, You look like an angel in this place.
Fran and John left the house to take a walk in the night air.

On the way back, he began vomiting. He leaned against a wall, and saw with dismay the thin stream emerge from his mouth; again and again.

Fran sat on the edge of the bed, watching him. He wanted to sleep, but the noise of the party was too loud. -You remember the blackbird? he said. She didn't reply. -That night we walked along the South Bank, and listened to the blackbird singing on top of one of the buildings, he said. -Yes, I remember, Fran said; but you should try to sleep. She stood away from the bed. -I'll come back in a little while, she said.

He'd told her the bird was singing for her, out of love; and she called out to it: Here I am, my darling!

The room trembled, like the tilt of a roof intersected by a bird's flight; as the memory shook open his feeling for her.

He was walking along a road, and he saw Nicole coming towards him. Nicole said, Why don't you try not to drink so much? He said, Why do you have a pentagram in your room? -It's something different, she replied, and shrugged her shoulders. John said: Someone once wrote that God's freedom was such that He could utterly annihilate a person without other reason than His will to do so. He also wrote that no necessity made God become man; He could have become an ass, or a stone in the street.

But he was sitting at a café-table, with Paul, and Paul was laughing hysterically. -What does the stone say about that? he said, and began laughing again.

-Well, you've really come! Paul had said, when they'd arrived at his cottage in Meligalas Messenias. And: She has lovely dark brown eyes! You didn't tell me that, he'd said of Fran. Paul had brought out a large jug of ouzo; Fran drank sparingly, but John tried to match Paul's prodigious capacity, with the result that he spent the later part of the evening lying down in the next room, from where he could hear Fran and Paul talking and laughing.

Fran had taken a photograph of Paul and John standing on a streetcorner in Meligalas; Paul large and nervously awkward, looking at the camera with a somewhat bemused expression; John small and fragile by comparison, wrapped in a trench-coat like an incarnation of Street-Corner Man.

They'd sat in the kitchen of the cottage, or in cafés, or taken walks along the earthen roads lined with large clusters of cacti, and Paul had spoken with bitterness and hatred of everything that he understood by the word history: exterior temporality that dominated the individual. -The kingdom of evil, he said. I want it to end! History: what a shitty idol to have! It's all control and power, from beginning to end. For me,
the end's come; and none too soon!

John had felt he was being ironic, for he'd already been called up for the army, and had only a couple of months of freedom remaining to him. But he'd said, What end, Paul? How has it ended? Paul had responded with uncomfortably loud laughter; before he'd answered: Wood and stones are my masters, they teach me what teachers cannot say.

Fran came into the room and sat down on the bed again; she said: I thought I'd see if you were any better. -What have you been doing? he asked. -I've been chatting to a few people, she said, but I'm not sure I really like it here. -I dreamt about Paul, he said.

Walking along the road that led to the station, neither of them felt like talking. It had been this road he had dreamt about; where he'd seen Nicole, before the dream had shifted to the café with Paul.

John remembered an evening when he and Fran had lost their way looking for a friend's house, and coming to a street corner, they'd gazed together at the fallen petals at the far end of the street: pools of sugar spilt on the dark pavement.

David Miller was born in Australia in 1950. Recent books include Out of this World (1984), The Claim (1984), and Losing to Compassion (1985). His essay on Paul Goodman has just been published as issue 27 of Allen Fisher's magazine Spanner.

Allen Fisher was born in 1944. The first two parts of a long work, Gravity as a consequence of shape (from which the work here is taken) were published as Brixton Fractals (Spanner, 1985) and Buzzards and Bees (Microbrigade, 1987).