Need for responsible criticism of poetry

Dear Sir,

Peter Forbes, author of a lengthy review of The New British Poetry (5 November), clearly gives a privileged position to the Hardy-Larkin line in British poetry. He is entitled to that allegiance, but should recognise that some of the writers in the anthology — including myself — who show different allegiances, need not be less sincere than himself.

His dislike of the work in sections three and four of the anthology is no surprise. What is surprising is the tone of his defensive insinuations. To say that the poets inhabit a "fanzine world", is an odd rhetorical move calculated to devalue their seriousness. The younger poets are "young men without responsibilities". If Mr Forbes is referring to the lamentable lack of access to decent publishing and distributing outlets by these poets, and the concomitant lack of a large (but not unwanted) audience, a state of affairs that means that other poets are so often the only audience for the poetry, then fine. But these poets do not belong to his mythical, hermetic "brethren"; the "jeers of the public" that confirm their supposed elitism are Mr Forbes's invention.

Of course, words will not be-have like Pollock's paint or Coleman's sax, as he points out, but neither are words simply the "discrete entities, locked into meaning and syntax" that he would wish them. Not all of language's operations are locked into semantic and referential functions and the use that poets may make of its less obvious potentialities need not be the occasion for abuse.

Mr Forbes doubtless sees such language as obscure or meaningless, but it is also possible to argue that certain kinds of experimentation, far from being alienating, allow the reader a greater participation in the processes of meaning-making, a participation that is open to anyone who feels the effect of such language, and who can respond creatively. This is so different from the self-deprecating ironic modulations, and the manipulations of the reader, by the formulaic rhetorical devices of the Hardy-Larkin line.

The poets represented in sections three and four of the anthology need a responsive public, as well as a responsible criticism. Mr Forbes helps to provide neither.

Yours faithfully,

ROBERT SHEPPARD

Weybridge, Surrey
7 November
Hymn

I write little & destroy most
I wish I was in jeopardy

The Stream of Life

In the shit the fish are darting
(not as quick as that)

Plastic

pig
cow
horse
sheep
Anything else
paper
ball
balloon
& rain against the glass
Absolute zilch

Note

"You must keep it safe"
"9 against 20"

But he has the strength of 10 men!
And an energy blade.

"O for ten toes" (Long John Silver)
a bottle imp

parenthesis

mortiferous

"for me the noise of time is not sad: I love bells, clocks, watches"

the rattle of distance
the first vehicle
bones & lard ——

*
Impression

It all appears fine on the surface
Day to day buffeted bush
Scratching at it with sparrow beak
And retreating grouchily into myself
Find less and less, no place and
Unfortunately no expression worth it

Turn to the weather - fulminous cloud
Small boy playing by the window
Can't grow young and Don't grow up

Observe

A boy holds onto a girl
Her head on his shoulder
There isn't much in my distemper
For a kind world
Simplistic, going along
In a family way
Pushing a wired basket
Passed the display of goods
The stealth of marketing
Courses " & where would you
Wear these shoes"...glossy
Paper through the door, Free
No thank you on the phone
Envelopes for charities -
Squabbles with the Children
Over breakfast into the car
Bored to death by getting
Nowhere. Yawn, be polite.
Expression

What I feel is not articulated & gets me into trouble...Meanwhile on the highway what passes for Normality is of course normal...

Wet summer won't do it, can't see the people in their gardens or hear the birds of an evening but to visit then there's always something which rushes, hides to return nestwards...along a track

Flight

Pale sky &
The warm wind buffets off the sea
High cliffs of a small town
Onto soft rocks hands climb
Eyes of a gull gone & carried away by carrion
Sun against the warm wall
Released like a swarm of bees
Into life for a brief stay
And up again on the thermal
My back soar with recent scalpel incisions. Soft growth of translucent bone. The wings work. The perfect day
The sun against the mountains
Black sand, no hint of death
My light here
The love of others

RALPH HAWKINS
Narrative Charm for Ibbotroyd

Cobble & Pebble in the teeth. Fang & Club upon a wind is the morning Fields Louded Ably Thus.

Snow of Earth bladder waking to a new Ear when the stir of all Breath would to a Seeing turn, wondered upon; housed many, unhurt is.

0, many berries, Occupying (& not), a Quarter-Day heathered with Rawley Land of animal drumming many gentled adjoining utterances.

Just as water does, between worlds, Giant eveyRUE BETHS here edge the word. Crow trembles in the knot.
To Our Own Day

Branches, Boy Genders.
Groundsel, Mean owl face to the bone of a blue winged filth,

it made shine dully molten,

Singz Iz Heard
Toyz Iz Uz magician
Uz lutely tongeth
breaks in rock,
Uz ill's horn
paw mouthing
innards on stick
leathern stoop
in passage -

Prised linings, Great Milks occur/
ing
Blood, Blizzard Multiples
Blazed, Blades (flown)
ill.me.
dot.me.
glue.me.cloven.
cloaka Bones,
a branding math-smudge,
a common stuff, big broke dialleries on trappings
strode.
as if to. Spayfer Noisy Stuff.

Thank Filth occupied ease-ises of a third thy sung temperament. Let the Water Go loud coal the lures gabbled, fled.

Reduced.

w/acrids.
w/terminals.

"took the heart out, only the small heart, only the small heart".

Hurls to the Untitled, of bees.

Daub & Churl the fingers out & Doe, done'em in grey, Do Diadems Thy down of a bowed & wild rag: the still Written Up into caves.

MAGGIE O'SULLIVAN