

1975

## Poem for a Cambridge Platonist

John Drew

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ise, and the relationship of the parts is developed in the shaping of the whole. But the poem remains a process of discovery.

It may be that the description does not always take off, or takes off too late. John Drew finds this so of "Intruder," saved, he thinks, by its last line. If pushed to defend the poem, I might allude to a sense of enclosure, protective and cosy, given by the tent walls and the sociability, which exists to be disturbed into awareness of the outside, hostile, environment. In this and other poems about unnerving encounters, it is the feeling of settled, social ordinariness that, I think, must first establish itself before the shock of disruption can be felt.

I agree that poetry should work on a wider spectrum than photography—though to have one's work compared to Cartier-Bresson's is by no means discouraging. Eliot's lonely cab-horse that steams and stamps would make an eloquent photograph, but his fog that curled once about the house and fell asleep is so much more. This probably illustrates the kind of difference to which Drew is drawing attention. I wonder a little in passing, though, whether a photograph would quite convey the chilling of a summer evening and the slight sense of menace in an overheard quarrel, or make an equation of these two things.

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—the usefulness of rational behaviour and tradition set against the instinctive pull of freedom in "Hill Mist," the conflict between the two "attitudes of mind" in the poem about killing starlings. Drew is generous to these two poems, as he is to "The Dancing Man," another poem about intrusion.

I am inclined to accept his suggestion that my approach to the writing of poetry is level-headed, limiting though that is; but I am not sure that my poems would be written if there were no conflict between level-headedness and disturbance. Even in "Factory at Nightfall" there is competition between the attractions of cooperative endeavour and of lonely individualism.

I should be pleased if the particularity in the better poems could occasionally produce the impression "that much has been made known through it." I am grateful to John Drew for suggesting that it does.

## Poem for a Cambridge Platonist / John Drew

King's, Trinity, the Backs and meadows behind the house;  
Autumn, including the mushrooms, crab-apples and blackberries  
Keats forgot to mention; Intellect at a premium:  
Jude's dream made manifest. But literature is conceptual:

The Idea fixed in the mind but actually not realized  
Reduces life to a chaos, Cambridge to a kaleidoscope,  
The Cavendish to atoms. Autumn's fruits are scattered;  
Chapel or not, each college is a lunatic asylum.

The Image has no option; either it shifts or shatters  
Or ends in dissolution with Oxford, Kashmir, Canada,  
Names which cozen the ear or enter the eye as forms.  
The Mind is a flat landscape, full of ditches to fall in.

This is but a beginning; no cause to grieve a world  
We cease to be immersed in; reality is relative;  
Our children are not relations, our roots not in the soil.  
Come. See. Heaven lowers its branches for us to climb.

## Poem for Chandravadan Mehta / John Drew

Old man, scholar and endearing rogue, what strange star led you to London  
Where I met you, face eclipsed, diminutive in a suit from Savile Row  
As grey and full of propriety as was the city itself on that bright August  
day.  
A couple of months later, half the globe and a whole world away, I watched  
you grow  
The cotton falling off you in folds, white and finely-spun as the chameli  
flowers past which we walked,  
Petals of which you took, crushed and the essence showered  
Upon my intellect, then made for me a garland I cannot now discard  
Although I am back in London. My mind has been deflowered.

## Two Aspects of Paternity / John Drew

1  
You will not remember how we used to walk  
Down to the lakeshore, singing in the snow,  
Stick in your one hand, other hand in mine,  
Your whole being so utterly giving as flesh  
Can be when it is not intransigent.  
This harking on the past measures a distance  
Between us in the present. As you grow  
Your prettiest dress becomes a suit of armour.