

1975

Anne Frank's House

Rodney Pybus

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as slight, vulnerable. This is the real self to which he has been chosen. His striving for comfort out of these depths seems reduced to a form.

I can't claim to be satisfied with the conclusion to the poem. Müntzer having failed, and seen his visions evaporate, struggles to articulate some meaning for his life. Always uneasy about what is real and what fantastic, he has driven through his doubt, accepted the "very clear things" as true, culminating in the rainbow at Frankenhäusen. But now what does he believe? Shrivelling that grandiose selfhood he fuses the Christian idea of eternal life with a notion of the determined fulfillment of history and of progress. It is meant as a measured but also forced and iron assertion, determined at least to triumph over doubt. He may be right.

My own major reservation about the poem concerns the deliberation of pattern, imagery, and theme which Rodney Pybus so sensitively picks out. I am worried that such a method of writing a poem responds too closely to evolved modes of literary criticism and that the poem as a result is too enclosed within its own genre. Ideally I should want (ambitiously) the poem to be some addition to our knowledge, and I believe that it is possible to speak meaningfully about history and politics in non-discursive ways. But the genre provides its own definitions and interests and so awards itself valueless self-sufficiency. I find it impossible not to feel this self-enclosure of the poem now as a constraint.

Anne Frank's House / Rodney Pybus

*I seem to be
Anne Frank
transparent
as a branch in April.*
—Yevtushenko, Babi Yar

Pushing aside sallow lace curtains, I can see
the clock-tower and the bulbous West Church spire
loom over the burgers' roof-tops on Prinzengracht.
A chestnut tree coppers the wet November
grass, forging this courtyard's unchanging
backwater elegance.

Not difficult to imagine in this annex,
now sealed off for thirty years from the hustle
of the seasons, a girl's sense of muffled security, far
from the strident rhythm of boots on cobbles,
the firecracker racket of small-arms,

the final departing hoot in the Amsterdam dawn
from the Zyklon B Express, overloaded
with its cargo of fading yellow stars.

Time to read aloud from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,
but not too loudly. Time to laugh at the title
of Hildebrand's *Camera Obscura*, but not too loudly.
(For what will the neighbours say?)

Time to record in that red and white tartan notebook
tender aspirations towards the impossible—
a quiet life of another kind.

Pinned up Ginger Rogers and Ray Milland
still look down onto bare boards
with yellowing Hollywood smiles.
Greta Garbo looks prosaic here, and at home.
On a small map the Allies are still
advancing through Normandy,
very slowly.

A peculiar but not uncomfortable place
to struggle with growing up.
Up to a point.

For the war-time price of a Jew
five people can now inspect
this ineffective sanctuary.
Studying the photographs, the books,
the lay-out of the rooms
and the meticulous documentation of murder and betrayal,
crimes that live and move
through these unfurnished spaces,
some German tourists troop past.
Their eyes are not eloquent. Nor do they speak.

Marketing / Rodney Pybus

In stately 17th century houses that lean together
above the water, graceful and various
survivors, women in windows show what they have
to sell. Red and purple neon signals through the afternoon dusk,
pointing men to the super-market whores. Perched on chairs
behind glass the women show what they have to
sell—a leg of silky succulence, a plump breast, beckon
the hungry to bed: another kind of shift-work.