

EDITORIAL

Although Robert Rehder only published two collections during his lifetime – both with Carcanet in 1995 and 2009 – critics such as Marjorie Perloff, Tom Artin, and Peter Porter hailed him on his first appearance with the volume *The Compromises Will Be Different*, the last calling him “an individual and accomplished voice in contemporary verse”. Porter further described Rehder’s poetry as “the product of a long vigil at the side of twentieth-century creation”, showing “a keen awareness of the shift in the crisis-area of verse in our language as we come up to the new millennium.” I had known the poet as Professor of American and English Literature in Fribourg, as a great admirer of Ashbery, and as the author of influential books on Wordsworth and Wallace Stevens. Anthony Mortimer has characterised him as being – as literary critic – “clear, forceful and provocative in the tradition of the great R. P. Blackmur”.

On the occasion of the conference “Contemporary British and Irish Poetry in the Making” (that I helped organise in Salzburg in October 1996) Robert read his essay “Metaphor Is the Name of the Game”, which – to my great surprise at the time – traced his development as a poet who had only sporadically – unbeknownst as far as I was concerned – published in little magazines. When I suggested to Robert in spring 1997 the idea of devoting a section of an issue of *The Poet’s Voice* to his work, he invited me to his home in Corminboeuf, which he described as “a small village of around twelve hundred people and seven hundred cows (cows are included in the Swiss census) [...] it used to be a byword for the back of beyond”. The interview that materialised during my stay, two essays by Peter Porter and Tom Artin that Robert had suggested, and eight new poems were finally published in a “Robert Rehder Section” in No. 5.1 (Winter 1998/99).

At the April Conference 2008 of the University of Cracow it was the last time our academic paths crossed. In his rather idiosyncratic manner he entertained a large academic crowd with a reading of some poems from his (then forthcoming) second collection *First Things When*. It was also on this occasion that I asked Robert for a submission of new poems that could be printed alongside a review of his collection when it appeared. These he finally submitted on 22 March 2009, accompanied by an email in which enthusiasm dispensed with syntactic coherence: “The book has been chosen as a Poetry Book Society Recommendation, which the publishers say is a good thing! And have been doing a few readings:

at Tate Britain, Cambridge and the Manchester Central Public Library – and the so-called ‘launch’, as Carcanet calls it, here in Oxford (seemed like another reading to me!).”

Robert defined his poetological approach in contrast to Auden’s famous dictum: “Form is another version of our experience, literally an abstraction. Changes in art come from changes in ourselves and, as the nature of metaphor makes clear, the body imposes its own limits. To change from the form of the moment of experience, which I think about a lot as I consider the next poem, means altering our mode of apprehending the world and probably a reorganization of our culture. Whether this will happen if we write a very large number of good poems, I hope I live long enough to see. Perhaps even our freedom is determined.” With his two collections Robert certainly made an important contribution towards this social development. Robert died aged 74 on 6 April; he had just returned from Paris to Oxford where he had accepted a teaching post.

In this issue Glyn Pursglove pays tribute to James Kirkup, whose return to the pages of British little magazines and small presses was facilitated by James Hogg’s famous Salzburg Studies in English Literature, published under the imprint of University of Salzburg Press. After his return from Japan in 1988, where he had taught English Literature at Kyoto University for almost thirty years, he made his home in Les Bons, a small village in Andorra. Between 1995 and 1998 Hogg (re)published sixteen volumes of his work plus a festschrift. Pursglove rightly remarks in his obituary published in *The Guardian*, Kirkup “was not perhaps endowed with the most perfect of self-critical faculties and published rather too much work that was below his best. But it is remarkable how much of his output was of a high order.” The problematic reception of Kirkup’s work in the UK was appropriately summed up by William Oxley when he said in a review: “it is [...] his polyglot internationalism and multi-cultural feel, that makes his poetry more relevant to world-culture and less easy to judge from the standpoint of the accumulated tradition of English poetry.” Kirkup, who died on 10 May 2009, leaves a huge and varied body of work for critical posterity. It is to be hoped that future critics will work to remedy the relative neglect Kirkup’s work has suffered. In doing so they would help preserve something of value to mankind for James Kirkup is the kind of poet of whom one is glad to hear it said (as David Burnett has): “his is the party of humanity and in the long term this must and shall prevail.”

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