

Title	『ロンドンはすばらしい所』
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Citation	聖学院大学論叢,20(2) : 91-109
URL	http://serve.seigakuin-univ.ac.jp/reps/modules/xoonips/detail.php?item_id=34
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“London is a Little Bit of All Right:”

Contemporary Poetry in London

Kenneth O. Anderson

『ロンドンはずばらしい所』

— ロンドンにおける現代詩 —

ケネス・アンダーソン

この論文は Keats House では Keats についての研究が行われ、また現代詩人達の詩の朗読や議論を聞く事ができるといったように、過去と現在の詩の世界が混ざり合う、ロンドンでの現代詩の現状を検証します。ロンドンでは、図書館や大学の授業だけでなく、Poetry Society や Poetry Café で、またそれらの web サイトを通して詩と出会う事ができます。Poems on the Underground 協会は21年間地下鉄の車内に詩を掲示していますし、またインターネットの poetryarchive.org. では様々な詩を読んだり、詩の朗読を聞く事ができます。

最近ロンドンでの詩の朗読上演は、より畏まった朗読会と対照を成しています。またここでは、ロンドンでの詩のイベントや季節の催し物、詩のコンクール、詩を扱う出版社なども紹介します。このように過去の、また現代の詩に興味を持つ者にとってロンドンは “a bloody good place to be” なのです。

Key words: Poetry Libraries, Lectures, The Poetry Society, Poems on the Underground, Poetryarchive. org, Performance Poetry, Dub Poetry, Competitions, Publishers

Long ago, Noel Coward wrote that “London – is a little bit of all right...This old spot/ Is a bloody good place to be” (Baker, 1984). London is an especially good place for poetry, and has always been so. Past and present mingle in London: as William Faulkner said, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past” (Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*, Act I, Scene 3). At the Keats House near Hampstead Heath for example, not only can one see how Keats lived, one can also find information on poetry readings and lectures by contemporary poets at Keats House and at other places in and around Hampstead: e.g., a presentation held at Keats House on May 14, 2007 titled “Poetry and Words of Protest from Equiano to the Present Day” (London Metropolitan Archives, 2007). The Keats-Shelley Memorial Newsletter and the annual schedule for the Hampstead and Highgate Festival are two of

the many free sources of information that can be found at Keats House. (Incidentally, the Keats House received a grant of £424,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund in January 2007 to be “used for restoration work and to enable more of the Keats House museum archive to be displayed,” according to the Poetry Society website at www.poetrysociety.org.uk). As Kenneth Baker says of London in his introduction to *London Lines: The Places and Faces of London in Poetry & Song*, “...in all of these streets and alleyways there is a strong sense of the continuum of history. You can’t escape it in London; the past permeates the present, yet each succeeding present has to live with itself and stamp its individual mark on these London stones” (Baker, p. 13).

I. Poetry Libraries

Perhaps the most important poetry library and source of information about poetry in London is the Saison Poetry Library (www.poetrylibrary.org.uk), to be found on Level 5 of the Royal Festival Hall in the South Bank area of London. It was founded in 1953 by the Arts Council England (www.artscouncil.org.uk) and is still funded by the Arts Council. (It was closed from April to June 2007 for renovation.) Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes used this library and it remains a source of information and connection with other poets today.

The Poetry Library claims on its web site to be “the most comprehensive and accessible collection from 1912 in Britain” and includes not only books and magazines, but also cassette tapes, compact disks, videos and DVDs, press cuttings, photographs, posters and postcards for reference. It acquires two copies of every book and audio title, one for reference and for loaning out. Its purpose “is to stock all poetry titles published in the UK with a representation of work from other countries, including work in parallel text and English translation.” It also has a postal loan service for the visually impaired and is the home of www.poetrymagazines.org.uk. Part of the Poetry Library’s web site is dedicated to education and children’s poetry and there is a link to the Arts Council web site, where one can find more information about poetry. Of particular interest in 2007 was the commemoration of the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in Britain through 11 poems commissioned by noted poets such as Fred D’Aguiar, Bernardine Evaristo, and Paul Farley. A twelfth poem was commissioned between March 30-September 28, 2007, in a competition open only to poets who had not yet published a book of poems. The winning poem was published along with the other 11 poems on the Arts Council web site, one poem each month, the first one by D’Aguiar. On the Arts Council website D’Aguiar states, “We know Faulkner’s saying that the past is never past, but this is particularly true of slavery and its legacy for contemporary life. If we do remember the past we can avoid

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repeating its errors and we can do a little to correct the residue of hurt for those on the receiving end of history’s wrongs.”

The British Library is also a good source of poetry and information on poetry in English and in many other languages, as well as foreign language poetry in English translation. The collection includes books, periodicals, manuscripts, newspapers and sound recordings. It also has “special status as a Legal Deposit Library. This means that it should receive one copy of every book and periodical received in the United Kingdom and, via different legislation, one copy of every book published in the Republic of Ireland” (www.bl.uk/collections/britirish/mdbrpoe.html). Twentieth-century manuscript collections of poetry include the A. Alvarez archive, the George Barker archive, the Mandeville Press, the Poetry Book Society (of which more later), the Society of Authors, the Poetry bookshop, and the Tambimuttu archive. The library also holds manuscripts and manuscript volumes by poets such as Bob Cobbing, T.S. Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Ted Hughes, Elizabeth Jennings, Wilfred Owen, Sylvia Plath, Peter Porter, Siegfried Sassoon, Stevie Smith, Dylan Thomas, Derek Walcott, and W. B. Yeats.

There is also a British Library Sound Archive of “thousands of hours of poets reading and discussing their own work” (British Library web site, op. cit.), including W.H. Auden, Robert Browning, Basil Bunting, Amarjit Chandan, Bob Cobbing, H.D., T.S. Eliot, Allen Ginsberg, Ted Hughes, David Jones, Philip Larkin, Robert Lowell, Hugh MacDiarmid, Louis MacNeice, Marianne Moore, Charles Olson, Sylvia Plath, J.H. Prynne, Tambimuttu, Charles Tomlinson, William Carlos Williams, W. B. Yeats and Louis Zukofsky. There are also archives of recordings connected with poetry in BBC Sound recordings, The British Council’s “The Poet Speaks” series, National Poetry Centre readings, Cambridge Festival readings, Cheltenham Festival readings, and Edinburgh Festival readings. A CD released in 2003 that one can buy in the British Library bookshop includes rare recordings of poets born in the nineteenth century (e.g., Browning, Tennyson and Kipling), titled *The Spoken Word: Poets*, and a two-CD set of W. H. Auden reading his poems was released in April 2007 to celebrate the centenary of Auden’s birth; most of the recordings had never been released before.

Moreover, in the Sir John Ritblat Gallery of the British Library one can see the actual manuscripts containing famous poems such as Shakespeare’s First Folio, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures Underground*, and even handwritten song lyrics by the Beatles.

From January 19-March 26, 2007, there was also a very interesting exhibition in the Folio Society Gallery of the British Library concerning poetry, “The Possibilities of Poetry from *Migrant Magazine* to Artists’ Books.” Only eight issues of this magazine were published, from July to September 1959, but they included poems and essays by some poets who were to become very influential: Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Alan Brownjohn, Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley, Ed Dorn and Cid Corman.

Furthermore,

Migrant was largely responsible for introducing the US Black Mountain poetry of Robert Creeley, Ed Dorn, Denise Levertov and Charles Olson to British readers, and fostered and developed key British poets such as Roy Fisher and Ian Hamilton Finlay. Basil Bunting, a pre-war modernist poet from the North East of England, was encouraged by the *Migrant* editors to keep on writing after a long period of silence; he went on to write his masterpiece, *Briggflatts*. Several poets originally associated with the magazine went on to work with some of the great modern book artists in the UK, notably Ronald King and Ian Tyson, to create pioneering examples of British artists' books...Richard Price, Head of Modern British Collections at the British Library and curator of the exhibition, comments, "... Enthusiasm for the various American avant-gardes, an interest in translation, an acceptance of a variety of aesthetic approaches, a confidence in the independent voices of the new poetry of England and Scotland, and the command of the means of production by the artistic community itself: these are some of the key lessons that *Migrant*, among a few other select magazines, taught - and which the flourishing British poetry scene in the 1960s avidly learned" (www.spl.org.uk/news/2007_2801.htm).

Four issues of *Migrant* can be seen in the Special Collections Library of University College, the University of London, as well as many other London poetry magazines of both past and present. In fact, The Little Magazines Section in the Special Collections Library, set up in 1964, and the Poetry Store Collection that was started there soon afterward, make up a collection of 10,500 volumes, as well as cards, posters and "unusual objects" (www.ucl.ac.uk/l/masc25/full.php?CollectionID=1). The magazines and other materials are not only from Britain, but also from Commonwealth countries and the U.S.A., and date back to 1890. There are first edition poetry volumes by such luminaries as A.E. Housman and W.H. Auden, There is also a handwritten poem by Byron, "To Samuel Rogers:"

"I just opened the book, and there it was," said Susan Stead, a librarian at University College London. What was there was the only known manuscript of a 12-line poem by Lord Byron, dated April 12, 1812, speaking of friendship and memory. During routine cataloguing, the manuscript, long assumed lost, was found inside an 1810 edition of *The Pleasures of Memory* by Samuel Rogers (*The International Herald Tribune*, January 5, 2006, p. 8).

Other important libraries at University College London for those interested in poetry are the main library at the main campus on Gower Street and the Senate House Library on Malet Street. The Senate House includes poetry in French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish as well as English.

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The Institute of English Studies based at Senate House also offers conferences and other research seminars throughout the year—e.g., “The Poetry of Robert Graves,” featuring the noted English scholar and critic Christopher Ricks, on July 5, 2007 (www2.sas.ac.uk/les/).

II. University College London Lectures

Lectures on and readings of poetry are often given by the English Department of University College London. On March 1, 2007 Claire Tomalin gave a lecture titled “An Approach to Thomas Hardy” and Kim Howley one titled “‘A complicated sort of fig-leaf’: The Human Body, Hygiene, and Science in the Early Career of Ezra Pound” on March 22, 2007 (www.ucl.ac.uk/english/current/postgraduate.grad-seminars.htm). The noted poet Mark Ford, a senior lecturer at University College London, also gave a lecture on March 15, 2007, “Poetry: Reading It, Writing It,” and read some of his own poems at the end of the lecture. Ford in his youth was influenced by the American poet John Ashbery and in fact has written in depth about Ashbery and the other poets in the so-called New York School (Frank O’Hara, Kenneth Koch, and James Schuyler) in various essays, reviews and books (e.g., *John Ashbery in Conversation with Mark Ford*, 2003 and *A Driftwood Altar: Essays and Reviews*, 2005), edited a collection of the New York School (*The New York Poets: An Anthology*, 2003), and been praised highly by Ashbery himself in an essay about Ford in Ashbery’s *Selected Prose 1953-2003* (Ashbery, 2004). Yet Helen Vendler has pointed out in her essay “‘The Circulation of Small Largenesses’: Mark Ford and John Ashbery” (Steve Clark and Mark Ford, ed., 2004) that Ford has his own poetic style, distinct from that of Ashbery, and one descended from British poetic sources as well as American. She states that what Ford found “liberating” in Ashbery’s poetry was “Ashbery’s war” on “outdated conventions and ossified belief-systems” (quoting Ford), but goes on to say that Ford has “his own comic élan, more orderly than that of Ashbery, more aggressive and metaphysical than that of O’Hara”, and that he “includes in his writing a physically sensuous documentation that is not present in the ever-theatrical, ever-virtual John Ashbery....Ford is also likely [in opposition to Ashbery] to set himself in a recognizable location or to narrate a stable incident”. However, she finds that, while Ford can be, like Ashbery, “impersonal,” he is “also confessional in a way closer to Hart Crane than to Ashbery.”

Vendler also notes that Ford “belongs to the line of British poets, from Shakespeare to Hardy and Hopkins, who are willing to describe unlovely moments in nature, but he differs from them in giving the introspective reflections arising from such depressed physical moments an Ashberian inconsequence and ironic comedy” and that Ford’s poetry is “English in its attachment to the line of

English romantic and modern lyric.”

Unfortunately, Ford hasn't written poetry in a long time. When asked if his teaching duties at UCL take away from his poetry, he replied that that was true, that his responsibilities as a senior lecturer are very taxing and that he hasn't written a poem in years (Ford, March 2007). This conflict between teaching and writing is a common one for poets, and Ashbery has been able to write so much poetry partly because he came to teaching late in his career. (A few poets, like W. S. Merwin, have managed to keep writing both poetry and prose by steering clear of teaching and university appointments altogether; for many others, the balance between being a good teacher and a good poet can be difficult and demanding.)

Many other universities and colleges in London also offer courses on poetry to both full-time university students and to working adults, both British and non-British: e.g., Morley College, which has several campuses located near Waterloo Railway Station in the South Bank area, and City Lit, a centre for adult learning based in Covent Garden. An annual guide to courses offered to adults all over London is Floodlight, published by Hotcourses Ltd. and available in bookshops all over London.

III. The Poetry Society

There often seems to be a division between poetry in academia and poetry on the streets, in both the United States and Britain. While John Ashbery, Mark Ford, and others may be well-known and read in academic/ intellectual circles, they are not well-known or read by those outside of these spheres. On the other hand, poets whose names are well-known by the general public are not always recognized or held in high critical esteem at the university level. There have been attempts to bridge this gap or at least explain it (both Christopher Ricks and Mark Ford have written perceptively about Bob Dylan) and to popularize poetry in all its forms, particularly through Internet sites (the American poet laureate Robert Pinsky encouraged people on-line to send in their favorite poems for anthologies he edited while poet laureate, while American poet Ted Kooser, a later poet laureate, tried to connect with the public about poetry through writing a nationally syndicated newspaper column; the poet laureate of Great Britain, Andrew Motion, helped to set up www.poetryarchive.org so that anyone could read poems and listen to readings of poems on-line. Nevertheless, popular readings, performances of poetry and poetry slams do not often involve the participation of academically accepted poets, nor do performance poets, poetry slam artists (and cowboy poets in the United States) often give readings at universities. Perhaps the twain shall never meet, or, if they do, on uncomfortable terms and deeply suspicious of each other.

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The Poetry Society (22 Betterton Street, London, near Covent Garden, also the site of the Poetry Café, a.k.a. The Poetry Place) is an organization which attempts to remedy this perhaps unfortunate situation. Founded in 1912, with 3,000 members around the world., it includes as two of its vice-presidents well-known poetry readers and performers Roger McGough and Benjamin Zephaniah, the latter of whom has been known to read poetry to a reggae beat; yet its honorary members include such academic heavyweights as Seamus Heaney, Andrew Motion (the poet laureate of Britain), Paul Muldoon and Fleur Adcock. The Poetry Society publishes the literary *Poetry Review* and a quarterly newsletter, *Poetry News*, and stages events, both academic and popular, throughout the year at the Poetry Café, yet does much more than that. To look at all the activities it is involved in at its web site, www.poetrysociety.org.uk, can be overwhelming. One can find news about poetry events and festivals, poetry landmarks all over Britain, poetry competitions and awards, poetry magazines, poetry libraries, public art poetry (in particular Poems on the Underground, of which more later), and poetry in education (such as having poets appear at schools or awards for poetry written by young people). One of the most appealing links at this web site is to *Poetry, Please*, the weekly radio show hosted by Roger McGough, to which listeners can send requests of poems to be read and discussed on the show.

IV. Poems on the Underground

On October 12, 2000, Simon Jenkins wrote an article called “Poetic Justice for the Tube” in the *Evening Standard* newspaper in which he wrote, “‘Thank you, whoever you are,’ cried delighted letters to London Transport. The authority itself was stunned to find itself popular at last....To watch a passenger reading a poem on the Underground, and catch the fleeting smile, is to share in a brief conspiracy of understanding” (www.poetrysociety.org.uk/content/education/potu/). The Poems on the Underground program has been one of the most successful attempts to bridge the gap between the public and academia, and not only posts poems on underground trains, but also organizes several poetry events in London every year.

2007 was the twenty-first anniversary of Poetry on the Underground. Judith Chernaik, an American novelist who started Poetry on the Underground, explained how she began the project:

I came to England with my husband Warren (professor at Univ. of London) and three children in 1972. I suggested putting poems on the Tube in 1985, or so, just writing to senior management, who to my surprise were very receptive. They said that if we could raise money to print the posters, and pay for a few spaces, they would increase the numbers to around 1,000The public has been hugely enthusiastic about the project from the very start, which is why

London Under-ground continues to support us.

I'm not a poet, though my colleagues are poets. The only poem I've written is in our Carnival of the Animals... (Walker Books 2005, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura—and there should be a Japanese edition soon). We choose the poems as a committee of three, myself, Cicely Herbert and Gerard Benson. We try to range through English and world poetry, selecting short poems of the highest quality and variety, calculated to appeal to a mass audience.

Our next project is a series of poems by African poets, and next autumn we'll be celebrating the centenaries of Auden and MacNiece. Next year [2008] we hope to celebrate Milton's quattrocentenary with a big splash. We've received lots of press coverage over the years, and recently a TV programme for Sky Arts [a digital television broadcasting company], broadcast last October [2006] but still appearing from time to time (Judith Chernaik, 2007).

The DVD program is brief (12 and a half minutes long), but manages to pack in several poems read on the underground by the actress Tara Fitzgerald and others. Judith Chernaik herself is interviewed in the program and mentions that, since the inception of the London Poems on the Underground program, similar programs have sprung up in Dublin (on the Dart suburban railway line), Paris, New York, and “virtually every capital city in Europe,” and that poetry exchanges have taken place, too: e.g., with the Shanghai Metro, where Wordsworth poems were placed in 2005, while classical Chinese poetry from the eighth century was placed on London underground trains. She says that the poems lift the spirits of those who ride the trains and may be feeling “oppressed by work.”

Also interviewed is John Simmons, a poet who, at the time the DVD was made, was writer-in-residence at Kings Cross Station with the task of helping any of the 140 staff members there with their writing endeavors.

Judith Chernaik also commented on Poems of the Underground in an article published by the *Socialist Review* in Issue No. 200 in September 1996 (<http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/sr200/reviews.htm>). She mentions that there are also poems on the underground programs in San Francisco, Chicago, and several Australian cities, and comments further on the popularity of the London program:

Anybody running a huge public transport system has to have some sense of the needs of the public, not just for safety, but also for the quality of life.... Poems on the Underground was launched at Aldwych underground station [now defunct] in the Strand. We had a launch party on one of the trains where I think just about every poet in London came. We had people from

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all over the country inquiring and sending in poems and this has never stopped. I think there is a great hunger in this country for simple, popular, cheap artistic ventures.

As for what kinds of poems she and her colleagues choose to place on underground trains, Chernaik explained,

...[W]e try to include some poems that are profound—that speak to the human condition. Then we try and have some poems that make people laugh...we also want contemporary poets to be represented. The whole idea of the programme is to show that poetry is a living art—living and continuously changing. The older poems are very important because if you only have contemporary poetry you are cutting yourself off from this supposedly dead stuff. But if you have them side by side people respond to the language and what is being said. We try to look at each poem as it would appear on the tube, as people would read it, people who may or may not have ever encountered poetry before. ...everybody can write poetry and everybody has thoughts and feelings to express. But the greatest poetry, the greatest human achievement, reaches a level that people can gain from even if they cannot write like that.

Poems on the Underground celebrated Valentine’s Day in 2007 by staging a program of love poems and music for Valentine’s Day at St. Giles Church in Cripplegate near Moorgate underground station. Poems featured were by Shakespeare, Robert Burns, W. B. Yeats, Simon Armitage and Carol Ann Duffy, while the music was by Brahms, Rachmaninov, and Tchaikovsky (played by the Apollo Chamber Orchestra).

Posters of love poems were displayed in Tube trains for eight weeks in 2007, beginning on January 29th. Among the poems chosen for these posters were Shakespeare’s “Feste’s Song” from *Twelfth Night*; “A Red, Red Rose” by Robert Burns; “Ballad of the Londoner” by James Elroy Flecker; “Lesson” by Anne Stevenson; and “Close, close all night” from *Edgar Allen Poe and the Juke Box Lesson*, the posthumous collection of poems by Elizabeth Bishop published in 2006. This display of posters on the underground was financially supported by the London Underground, London Arts and the British Council, with additional support for Young Poets on the Underground from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

On June 1st, 2007, Judith Chernaik, Cicely Herbert and Gerard Benson offered poetry and music at the Victoria and Albert Museum “Family Day” from 2 to 4 p.m. in the China gallery. This is one of the ways Poems on the Underground works to create interest in poetry even at a very early age.

The poems displayed on the underground have also been collected in books: *Poems on the Underground* (10th edition), published by Cassell in 2001 and *New Poems on the Underground 2006*, also published by Cassell. *Poems on the Underground Audiobook* is also available (Orion,

2006), and the above-mentioned *Carnival of the Animals* includes with the book a CD of Saint-Saens' music played by the Apollo Chamber Orchestra.

Independently of Poems on the Underground, the buses in Oxford which go to Oxford Brookes University have started displaying poems inside the buses for their passengers to read ([ah.brookes.ac.uk/poetry/on the bus](http://ah.brookes.ac.uk/poetry/on%20the%20bus)). Some U.S. buses are also displaying poetry (transit.metrokc.gov/ptog/poetry/poetry.html).

V. Poetryarchive.org

The Poetry Archive is another laudable attempt to bring poetry to more people and encourage the reading, listening to, and study of poetry. It was set up by Andrew Motion and recording producer Richard Carrington in 1999 (www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/home.do) and is an excellent source of recordings of poets reading their own poetry (the furthest back are Tennyson, Robert Browning, and Rudyard Kipling). The president of the Poetry Archive is Seamus Heaney and patrons include the former U.S. poet laureate Billy Collins and the writer Melvyn Bragg. Carrington and Motion are the directors of the archive.

In his on-line introduction to the Poetry Archive, Andrew Motion quotes Robert Frost: “The ear is the best reader,” something with which many poets, including Robert Pinsky and Alfred Corn, would concur. It is indeed enlightening, surprising and rewarding to listen to a variety of contemporary poets read their work. Perceptive essays and biographical details are to be found for each poet included in the archive. The actor Stephen Fry offers a guided tour of the archive with choices of some of his favorite poems. Guided tours are also offered by novelist Monica Ali, Andrew Motion and poet Jean Sprackland (Sprackland is also the education manager for the archive). One can search for all poets by last name and all poems by title, theme or form; one can also view all poetic forms. There are aids and resources for both teachers and students and a list of other helpful websites: the Poetry Society, Poetry Class, Apples and Snakes (which bills itself as “England’s leading organization for performance poetry”), the Poetry Book Society, the Arvon Foundation, Poetry Zone, Moving Words, Poetry 180 (for American high schools, with an introduction by Billy Collins), Poetry Live, Ty Newydd (The National Writers’ Centre for Wales, in both Welsh and English), Teacher Net, The Writing Room, Teachers TV and the BBC Creative Archive.

The Poetry Archive claims on its site to be “the world’s premier online collection of recordings of poets reading their work,” yet very few American poets can be found on this site: Adrienne Rich, John Ashbery, Richard Wilbur, Charles Simic and Billy Collins are listed, but there is no listing for

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Elizabeth Bishop, Marianne Moore, Denise Levertov, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Frank O’Hara, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler, Ted Kooser, W. S. Merwin, Mark Strand, Philip Levine, Charles Bukowski, Brad Leithauser, or new voices like David Tucker. As for British poets, neither Mark Ford nor David Sutton is listed. It is to be hoped that this lack of so many good poets will be amended in the future. (However, recordings for most, if not all, of the above poets can be found elsewhere on the Internet and also on various CDs.)

VI. Performance poetry

Every week *Time Out Magazine* (Time Out Magazine Ltd., London), a guide to events and activities in London, lists, in its section on books, daily poetry readings and events (often with “open mic” nights at which anyone can read his or her own poetry). There is something happening in connection with poetry every day or evening in London, and what happens is widely varied. For example, the listing for Wednesday, April 18, 2007 in issue no. 1913 included, among other items, a poetry performance given by an Indian poet based in the Shetland Islands, Raman Mundair, at the Barbican Centre and was to be, in the words of *Time Out*, a “fusion of words and music. Plus guests.” On Friday, April 20, one could find the London Voices Poetry Workshop and on Saturday, April 21, “An Evening of Poetry, Klezmer, Gypsy Jazz and Swing.”

These poetry events tend to be very different in style and character from a seminar in which one would study, say, the poems of Wallace Stevens, W. H. Auden, or John Ashbery. Some, perhaps many, of the poems of these three poets are not readily accessible after one reading and need to be re-read, often several times, thought about and mulled over, before one can grasp a great deal of what they say or imply. Reading such poems aloud can make clear and bring out more of the meanings of the poems (as with all poems), but such poems do not necessarily benefit from being performed. In fact, poets such as Louis Simpson are wary of public performance or even low-key reading of poetry, feeling that poetry should not compete with music and dance, but have its own silent way of being enjoyed and appreciated by the reader, one that involves an intense relationship between the reader and the words and syntax of the poems:

Poetry is writing, not performance. Some people disagree—they think poetry should be performed. But if poetry is one of the performing arts it must compete with television, theater, and movies. There is a very clear danger to the poet who believes in performance: he will stress theatrical elements at the expense of thought. There is a communion between writer and reader that cannot take place when poetry is read aloud to a roomful of people.

Can poetry compete with rap lyrics? The songs of Bob Marley? The squirming of Madonna?...If you conceive of poetry as entertainment, which is what reaching out for a wider audience requires, then by all means do everything you can to increase your audience. But will it be an audience for poetry or for theatrics—an attractive personality, a striking delivery? The people who would rather have their poetry in performance are not lovers of poetry but of performance (Simpson, 1997, pp. 90, 91).

Every poet wants to be read and appreciated, to be sure; but there are different ways of interesting the reader, depending on the poet and the poem.

The poet John Mole points out some of the pitfalls in performance poetry: “There is poetry which is dependent for effect on the stage personality of its writer/deliverer, some of which, when performed by anyone else, can seem very lame indeed. There is also poetry which is clearly written as script for performance, and is of a quality that even a mediocre performer can convey. Then there are poems which, because of their technical virtuosity, are simply ideal for reading aloud (i.e. for ‘performing’) ...for two [i.e., poetry written as a script for performance] Vachel Lindsay immediately comes to mind and for three [ideal for reading aloud] I’m thinking of the hammering rhetoric of Dylan Thomas’ ‘And Death Shall Have No Dominion’, or the alliterative litany of Louis MacNiece’s ‘Prayer Before Birth’ as examples.” (Stephen Wade and Paul Munden, *Reading the Applause: Reflections on Performance Poetry by Various Artists*, Sherriff Hutton, York, 1999, p. 39).

Some poets (e.g., Simpson) would undoubtedly question whether a poem which “can seem very lame indeed” if it is not performed well or if it is read on the page is actually a good poem at all, feeling that a poem should be able to stand alone on the page without needing to be performed. As for Vachel Lindsay, he was a performer as well as a poet and consciously acted out and dramatized his poems on the stage; many poets do not, and do not want to; and today one has to judge Lindsay’s poems without benefit of his interpretation or performance. As for the poems of Dylan Thomas and MacNiece mentioned by Mole, they can indeed be excitingly read aloud (especially if one is as brilliant a reader of poetry as Thomas was), but the task of a good reader who really wants to understand such poems is not to be content with the auditory experience, but to read and re-read the poems and think about them either in solitude or with other students.

Roger McGough, well-known for his entertaining poetry performances and for his stint as a pop star in the 1960s band Scaffold, comments, “I’m a great man for the running order [i.e. of the various performances and performers onstage], and keeping your mind on the audience—and that you’re not boring the audience” (Wade and Munden, p. 37, op. cit.). Is it the poet’s job to make sure that their readers aren’t bored? Admittedly, it may be important to entertain first and teach later, especially in

the case of people, whether children or adults, who have had unpleasant experiences with poetry in the past and have been turned off by it; but the ultimate appreciation and awareness of poetry as an art requires reciprocity between poet and reader, a willingness to engage with what the poet is saying and to concentrate on the multiple meanings of a poem, rather than to passively expect all to be unfolded for one without effort. In fact, this willingness to concentrate, this attitude of engagement and concentration can be fun, even thrilling, for those who have come to an awareness of what the art of poetry entails and the realization that a good poem will always reveal something new to the reader no matter how many times she or he encounters it. Simpson, for one, thinks that poetry by definition is (and always has been) art for a minority, often unpopular, and that a poet should not mind that this is so.

This can seem like elitism, but it need not be so. There is a place for both performance poetry and poems that can only be appreciated after several re-readings. Ideally each can lead to the other and each can be appreciated on its own terms.

Performance poetry in London and elsewhere in Britain is often ethnic. One example is South Asian poetry. The poet Debjani Chatterjee has stated that “Britain has a vibrant and evolving South Asian poetry in performance scene, but it is a scene that is largely invisible and runs parallel to the world of English poetry in performance. Few people outside the South Asian communities know of its existence, and those who do rarely attend and understand little of its dynamics and conventions” (Munden and Wade, p. 53, op. cit.) She goes on to explain what kinds of performances of South Asian poetry there are:

The ‘mushaira’, ‘kavi sammelan’, ‘kobi shommelón’, ‘virat kavi sammelan’ and ‘kavi goshtí’, are all different names for a South Asian event which is primarily poetry in performance. The word ‘mushaira’ is Arabic for ‘a gathering of poets’ and is used by the Urdu speaking communities who originate from North India and Pakistan. ‘Kavi sammelan’ likewise means ‘a gathering of poet’ in Hindi, as does ‘kobi shommelón’ in Bengali. The ‘virat kavi sammelan’ is a particularly large gathering. ‘Kavi goshtí’ or ‘poetry festival’ is also encountered within Britain’s Indian community, especially when a number of Indian languages are used. Each of these gatherings uses slightly varied conventions according to the South Asian linguistic grouping within which it occurs. Indians brought this literary tradition to Britain during the days of the Raj and it has continued to flourish within the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities (Munden and Wade, p. 54).

Chatterjee says that “Mushairas in Britain are generally free events and refreshments are often provided. These features combined with what may appear a certain degree of informality in the poet-

audience exchanges means that the mushaira is often a social as well as a literary event. It is even a family event, particularly when a mushaira is held at some festive time in a community centre” (Munden and Wade, p. 56). At the time *Reading the Applause* was published, funding was more of a problem and neither local nor central governments provided enough support for such South Asian poetry performances, so that “many of the larger British mushairas [were] sponsored by Asian doctors, an affluent and educated group” (Munden and Wade, p. 56). Since then the South Asian Literature and Arts Archive has been founded and is partly funded by the National Lottery Fund (www.britishcouncil.org/jp/arts-literature-activities-diversity-and-diaspora-htm). Encouraging and sponsoring such cultural events is a good way of achieving connection with and understanding of other cultures in a world in which globalization and cultural interdependence are becoming indispensable for the welfare of the world.

VII. Dub poetry

Another popular form of performance poetry in London is dub poetry. Dub poetry “is a form of reggae music with spoken words over reggae music, predominantly of a political and social nature. Dub poetry originated in the 1970s, along with the rise of dub music” (ItzCaribbean.com, www.itzcaribbean.com/dub-music.php, which claims to be “London’s leading website for the Caribbean community”). Jamaican immigrants brought dub poetry to Britain and Jamaicans growing up in Britain popularized it among white Britons as well as black (this popularization also took place in the United States, though at a later date.) Two of the most well-known dub poets based in London are Linton Kwesi Johnson and a poet mentioned earlier in this article, Benjamin Obadiah Iqbal Zephaniah.

Linton Kwesi Johnson, born in Kingston, Jamaica and brought up in the Brixton area of London, “invented dub poetry,” according to John Dugan in *The All-Music Guide* (quoted at www.hmv.co.jp/search/artist/detail/00000000002982/). Dugan describes Johnson’s manner of reciting poetry as “a languid, slangy, streetwise style. Johnson’s grim realism and tales of racism in an England governed by Tories [during the time of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher] was scathingly critical. The Afro-Brits in Johnson’s poems are neglected by the government and persecuted by the police.” With Darcus Howe, Johnson published a socialist newspaper in London, *Race Today*, which mixed poetry with reggae and jazz in records (later CDs) such as *Faces of Victory*, *Dread*, *Beat an’ Blood*, and *Making History* (www.hmv.co.jp and www.itzcaribbean.com, op. cit.). He has often read poetry at universities and recently has turned more to writing and reading poetry without music. “In 1982,” reports Dugan, “the

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BBC commissioned Johnson to create a series of radio programs on Jamaican popular music, a subject he'd been researching for years.”

Benjamin Zephaniah was born in Birmingham, England, and has published many books—poetry, novels, plays and non-fiction—recorded CDs, radio and television programs, and has also acted in films and in a 1991 BBC television program titled *Dread Poets Society* (www.benjaminzephaniah.com/truth.html). He says he has been labeled “a dub poet, an oral poet, a performance poet, a pop poet, a rap poet, a Rasta poet and even a black poet”, but prefers to be called an oral poet, as the spoken word is crucial to his poetry. He takes exception to the idea that written poetry is necessarily superior to oral poetry, as “oral poetry has a much longer history [than written poetry] and has closer links with the masses than much of the poetry that is published by multinationals and what has always excited me is the fact that...the feedback [from the audiences for oral poetry] is automatic and it really is a great feeling to hear hundreds of people chant along with your poem when that poem has never been written down” (www.benjaminzephaniah.com). He also stressed the importance of performing poetry, rather than reading it, as an alternative to staid, academic poetry: “We [dub poets] perform like crazy people...in fact we do anything to change the dead, white and boring image of poetry. I would never play one off against the other, poetry that is written strictly for the page does not automatically rank higher than performance poetry or vice versa.”

VIII. Other poetry organizations and events

www.poetrykit.org is an excellent website listing many other poetry organizations in London for those interested in exploring yet other avenues of poetry. Two of these organizations “exist specifically to address the needs of exiled writers—Exiled Writers Ink and Artists in Exile, the latter focusing mainly on theatre. Exiled Writers Ink [has been] a registered charity since 2000. We hold regular monthly events at the Poetry Café, produce the magazine *Exiled Ink* and run projects and workshops” (www.poetrykit.org/orgs.htm). Other listings include the Caribbean Women Writers' Alliance, Poetryworks (started “to promote work by established and emerging poets, using unusual and exciting venues”), Scribes UK (“an information network and events organization for Poets and Artistes”), Second Light (a “network of women poets aged 40+”), Survivors Poetry (also listed at the Poetry Society website and “promoting poetry by survivors of mental distress”), and many more. There are also lists of poetry libraries and societies in London (including Poems in the Waiting Room, which “provides free poetry leaflets for poetry leaflets to read while waiting to see their doctor” and is also listed at the Poetry Society web site), and many other poetry organizations not only in

London, but throughout Britain and in other countries as well. One it doesn't list which holds many poetry readings, workshops and other events is the Troubadour Coffee-House at 265 Old Brompton Road. The Troubadour held its own Auden centenary on February 5, 2007; featured poets such as Kit Wright, Roger McGough, Hugo Williams, Andrew Motion and Carol Satyamurti speaking and reading in a program titled "The Poem and the Journey" on February 19; and held a presentation on new collections of poetry published in London on March 5. It also continues to publish its own poetry magazine, *Magma*.

The annual Hampstead and Highgate Festival, mentioned earlier in this article, held in May, sponsored various artistic events in 2007. The poetry events held were 1) Poetry in the House, on May 10, a celebration of the centenary of W.H. Auden held at Lauderdale House on Highgate Hill; a talk given by author Tracy Chevalier on her novel about William Blake, *Burning Bright*, held at the Highgate Literary and Scientific Institution on May 14; another Auden celebration on May 15 at the Highgate Literary and Scientific Institution; and a poetry performance by Ruth Rosen, "William Blake: Man Without a Mask," again at the Highgate Literary and Scientific Institution, on May 16 (*Hampstead and Highgate Festival 2007 9-19 May Events Guide*, May 2007).

The Royal Festival Hall Poetry Library (info@poetrylibrary.orh.uk) also held a T.S. Eliot Festival on May 19, 2007 and Louis MacNiece centenary readings on May 21, 2007. From June 29 to July 12, 2007, the Royal Festival Hall Poetry Library co-sponsored the London Literature Festival in celebration of the re-opening of the Royal Festival Hall after two years of renovation. A special pamphlet on the re-opening of the Royal Festival Hall, "Royal Festival Hall: Back and Better Than Ever," included with the May 30-June 5, 2007 issue of *Time Out*, (*Time Out*, op. cit.), reported that "Highlights include[d] an evening of dub-poetry with Linton Kwesi Johnson; the premier of '40 Love', a performance by Roger McGough and Brian Patten celebrating the 40th anniversary of the publication of *The Mersey Sound* book of poetry; Nigerian Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka giving the first 'Southbank Centre Lecture'; and a celebration of W.H. Auden....The festival will also see the reopening of the Saison Poetry Library...the area's famous for its rambling and secondhand book stalls underneath Waterloo Bridge..." (p. 14). The complete schedule for all the events held by the London Literature Festival was available at www.poetrylibrary.org.uk.

In addition, the Third Annual London Poetry Festival was held in London from August 10-13, 2007 (*Royal Festival Hall Poetry Library Newsletter* e-mail, August 1st, 2007).

IX. Poetry competitions and publishers

There are also many poetry competitions in London (besides the one sponsored by the Arts Council mentioned toward the beginning of this article), many of them open to both British and non-British poets and to overseas competitors as well. The Joshua Brearley Prize for poetry, with an award of £150, is “awarded annually to an undergraduate student pursuing a three-year B.A. degree in the Department of English Language and Literature” and must be “a poem or a group of poems not more than 200 lines” (University College London handout, spring 2007). The winning poem is published in the Creative Writing Society magazine *50 Metres Fully Clothed*.

The Poetry Society website mentions the Griffin Poetry Prize, the Northern Writers’ Awards, the Costa Books Awards (formerly the Whitbread Awards), and the Geoffrey Dearmer Prize (the poem which wins the Geoffrey Dearmer Prize is published in the Poetry Society magazine *Poetry Review*). The winner of the Hamish Canham Poetry Prize, open to members of *Poetry News*, the quarterly newsletter of the Poetry Society, receives £3,000 and has her or his poem published in an issue of the newsletter.

The Keats-Shelley Memorial Association, which is based in England but also supports the Keats-Shelley House in Rome at Piazza di Spagna 26, gives annual awards for poetry as well as for essays, the Keats-Shelley Awards worth £3,000 altogether. There is also the Templar Poetry Pamphlet and Collection Competition “open to all poets writing in English” which gives £500 to three winning poets plus various other prizes, including the publication of twenty individual poems in *The Competition Anthology* (Templar Poetry Pamphlet and Collection Competition handout, 2007), and the *Poetry London* magazine competition, which gives three prizes (£1,000, £500, £200) and four commendations of £75 each (*Poetry London* competition handout, 2007).

Other poetry competitions held in 2007 mentioned at the Royal Festival Hall Poetry Library site were the Virginia Warbey Poetry Prize, the Writers Bureau Poetry and Short Story Competition, the Bluechrome Poetry Collection Award, the Essex Poetry Festival poetry competition, the Salopian Poetry Society’s annual open poetry competition, the Chapter One Promotion poetry competition, the Suffolk Young Poets Competition, the Poetry on the Lake Competition, the Café Writers Open Competition, the Sealfield Writing Competition, the Wells Festival of Literature Poetry and Short Story Competitions, the Bad Time Rhymes Competition, the Mere (Wiltshire) Literary Festival Poetry Competition, the Nottingham Open Poetry Competition, the McLellan Award for Poetry, the Biscuit Publishing Poetry and Short Story Prizes, the New Writer Prose and Poetry Prizes, the Sefton Writing

Competitions, the WebWords Poetry Competition, the Ragged Raven Tenth Poetry Competition, the Plough Prize, the Spiral Poetry for Peace Competition, the Second Light Poetry Competition, the Swift Satire Poetry Competition, the Torriano Poetry Competition, the Beowulf Poetry Prize Competition, the St. Petroc's Society First International Poetry Competition, etc.

There are many publishers of poetry in London besides the ones already mentioned in this paper. A comprehensive list of these publishers (as well as poetry bookshops) can be found at www.poetrypf.co.uk/shoppubandbkshops.html. One of the most important is *London Magazine*. *London Magazine* was founded in 1732 and published for 53 years, then re-started in 1820 by John Scott (who was killed in a duel by a representative from Blackwood's Magazine with whom he had quarreled). John Lehmann began re-publishing the magazine in 1954, and then Alan Ross (who died on Valentine's Day in 2001) carried on publishing it and expanded it from a literary review to a review of the arts in general. Now the magazine is published by Christopher Arkell and Sebastian Barker. *London Magazine* has featured many poets, both well-known and not, and is attractively designed and printed, a pleasure to hold and look at as well as to read. The Royal Festival Hall e-mail newsletter for July 15, 2007 mentioned three new poetry magazines on the scene: *White Chimney*, *Brand*, and *The London Miscellany*, while the same newsletter mentioned in the August 1st, 2007 edition that the new *Walter de la Mare Society Magazine* had just been initiated, and, in its August 15th, 2007 edition that two new poetry magazines were the *Augustine Young* webzine and *Scintilla*.

An excellent source of information on contemporary poetry in London is *Book Lovers' London* (Reader, 2003), which lists bookshops, antiquarian dealers, auctions, bookfairs, charity shops and markets, libraries, museums, galleries and historic houses of literary interest, literary venues, festivals, courses, bookbinders and useful websites: enough leads to follow up to keep several poets or scholars of poetry busy for months or even years.

X. A Good Place to Be

Libraries, lectures, events, societies, organizations, competitions, magazines and publishers, academic poetry and performance poetry, all contribute to the variety of poetry in London and the debate as to what poetry is or isn't, to what it was, is, and will or won't be. One can stand back and try to assess it all, or one can become involved in it and see what one can contribute. The Internet has helped bring the poetry of London to the world, yet to come to London oneself is to experience what cannot be grasped solely through the Internet: the physical landscapes of London poetry and the physical presence of poets who people those landscapes. For someone who is interested in

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contemporary poetry, London is indeed “a bloody good place to be.”

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