

Talk about Poetry

By the Same Author

Poetry

The Benefit Forms
Going Out to Vote
Overdrawn Account
Anaglypta
This Other Life
More about the Weather
Entertaining Fates
Leaf-viewing
Lost and Found
Via Sauro Variations
Anywhere You Like
About Time Too
Selected Poems
There are Avenues
Ghost Characters

Prose

Untitled Deeds

Translations

Six Poems by Ungaretti
The Great Friend and Other Translated Poems
The Greener Meadow: Selected Poems of Luciano Erba
Selected Poetry and Prose of Vittorio Sereni

Criticism

In the Circumstances: About Poems and Poets
Poetry, Poets, Readers: Making Things Happen
Twentieth Century Poetry: Selves and Situations

PETER ROBINSON

TALK ABOUT POETRY
conversations on the art

Shearsman Books
Exeter

Published in the United Kingdom in 2007 by
Shearsman Books Ltd
58 Velwell Road
Exeter EX4 4LD

ISBN-13 978-1-905700-04-2 // ISBN-10 1-905700-04-0

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Acknowledgements

The first conversation, with Ted Slade, appeared in *The Poetry Kit* in 1999; the second, with Ian Sansom, in *Oxford Poetry* in 1994; the third and fourth, with Marcus Perryman, in *The Animist* and *The Cortland Review* in 1998. The fifth, with Nate Dorward, appeared in *Jacket* in 2002. The seventh, with Peter Carpenter, was published in *Poetry Ireland Review* in 2004. The eighth, with Katy Price, appeared in *Salt* in 2003. The ninth, with Adam Piette, partly appeared in *Tears in the Fence* in 2003; the tenth, with Alex Pestell, appeared in the magazine *Signals* in 2005; the last formed the basis for a profile by Tom Phillips published in *The Venue* in February 2006. With the exception of the interview with Ian Sansom, done by airmail, and the one with Jane Davies, which was tape-recorded, transcribed and revised, the texts were produced by electronic exchanges followed by mutually agreed revisions. The collaborative help of the interviewers is warmly and gratefully acknowledged, as is that of the journal editors where these conversations first appeared. Nor, finally, should the sustained support of my wife and children go without mention here.



The publisher gratefully acknowledges financial assistance from
Arts Council England.

Preface

This book developed piece-meal over the decade following Ian Sansom's suggestion that we do an interview for the magazine he was helping to edit. It began to take on shape and some coherence during the conversations with Marcus Perryman. As interconnected questions about poetry, its composition, publication, and reception were received and responded to, the possibility of a sequence of dialogues began to evolve. The questions asked were frequently also about the life of a contemporary poet, a life that has included a fairly representative measure of happiness and sorrow, belonging and displacement, success and neglect, achievement, failure, and continuity of effort. One of the things that made such a life possible has been the support of the friends and colleagues with whom these conversations were conducted. Nor is it a coincidence that the interviews making up these chapters were, with just two exceptions, conducted entirely at long distance and by e-mail.

The benefits of electronic mail, especially for those who in another age might have been described as in exile, are hard to underestimate. Despite the virtual condition of the messages, and the difficulties of tone and address to be accommodated, it's surely evident that this form of rapid communication has helped create the possibility for worldwide support networks and collaborative communities. Poets have immemorially tended to be sustained letter-writers. This mode of communication has simply made it more convenient for them to keep up their massive correspondences. Entirely unforeseeably, in 1989, at the age of thirty-six, I stopped living in the country of my birth. For me, e-mail arrived some five or six years later; it dramatically reduced the sense of isolation and exclusion that I had come to feel was an inevitable consequence of that mid-life change of place.

Naturally enough, much of what follows is concerned with the corner of the vast poetry endeavour that is represented by my writings. Nevertheless, as is made clear by the very first exchanges in the first interview, however isolated the individuals concerned, culture cannot take place in an imaginative vacuum. The following dialogues about the life and art of poetry are the results of more than three decades of reading or writing, and of innumerable conversations with poets from various countries and cultures. The

replies presented are of course my ideas about poetry and matters related to it; but there is also simultaneously a representation of the kinds of prompted thoughts it was possible to have with others at this point in the evolution of the art.

In the course of separate conversations with different people, there was naturally the need to fill in some similar information so as to provide context for questions about different issues. While some slight cuts have been done to remove repetitions, I hope readers will understand the ways in which issues are necessarily returned to here and there. These eleven interviews were conducted over a period of as many years, busy years in which I remarried and became a father, years which saw the end of the millennium and what seems like a change of era. The person who began talking to Ian Sansom in 1994 was at a distinctly different stage of life from the one adding a few sentences to this preface. There will inevitably be changes of emphasis in the responses to questions that follow. There may well be some self-contradiction. Rather than go back over everything artificially constructing a coherent position that none of the versions of me ever held, I thought it best to let the exchanges stand more or less as previously published.

I hope readers, writers, and students of poetry will benefit from what follows — and as much from inner debate or promptings to respond differently as from agreement with what I say, or, indeed, the acknowledgement that such things might have needed, and been worth, saying.

Peter Robinson
18 February 2006

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ONE

Tell me about your background

TED SLADE: *Where were you born and brought up?*

I'm a vicar's son born in 1953 and brought up in a series of poor, urban parishes in the industrial north west of England. My birthplace is Salford, Lancashire, but with the exception of five years between the ages of 9 and 14 spent in Wigan, I grew up in Bootle and Garston, two different parts of Liverpool. My parents still live in the south of the city, and I think of it as my hometown. In 1996 I edited an anthology, *Liverpool Accents: Seven Poets and a City*, as a form of homage to the place.

Do you come from a literary family?

No. My parents are the first members of their respective families, and the only members of their generations, to go to university. They met at Durham in the immediate post-war years; my mother was there studying geography and my dad had discovered a vocation for the ministry in Bedford in 1942 while training for a modest role in the Intelligence Corps at Blechley Park. There were a few poetry books and anthologies in the house. I don't think they'd been looked at for quite a number of years when I started rifling through them in the second half of the 1960s. However, I do come from a fairly cultured and artistic family: my mother's parents played duets on piano and violin (come to think of it, they had a complete set of the works of Lawrence locked in a glass-fronted bookcase); my maternal grandfather was a serious amateur photographer; one of my mother's sisters went to Art School; my parents sang madrigals at one point, and are still involved with the performance of Church music. I was singing poems by William Blake and George Herbert and William Cowper before I knew what they were.

That seems pretty 'literary' to me . . .

Yes, perhaps it was, in comparison to what I read of Tony Harrison's childhood, for instance; but aside from a great-aunt who privately printed a collection of children's stories, to my knowledge I'm the

family's only published author (though one of my brothers has co-edited a collection of papers on his research field in Physics). Mum reads novels; dad reads the papers. All I'm saying is that I'm not Gert Hofmann's son, or Roy Fuller's.

Did your poetry come directly out of that environment, or were there other influences that set you off?

That environment involved moving around a lot in my childhood. The poem 'On Van Gogh's *La Crau*' in *Entertaining Fates* has these house removals in it. I changed places at the ages of approximately less-than-one, three, nine, fourteen, eighteen, and twenty-one . . . It crossed my mind recently that I've lived in the same flat in Sendai, Japan, for eight years now — and that's longer than in any other single place, including all my thirty-six years of residence in England or Wales. I tend to think that the moving around we did when I was young produced a sense of protective detachment from situations that may have helped to stimulate a poet's stance towards the world. Yet I don't believe my brother, less than two years younger, did the same; or he found a different way of managing childhood insecurities.

Vicarage children have a built-in sense that they don't quite belong: they get told it by the kids from the local church school, and if they are growing up in poor parishes, then there may well be wildly discrepant assumptions of class and cultural difference in the mix too. In Wigan I discovered that my schoolmates came, by and large, from extended mining families with networks of relatives living sometimes in the same street. We were an emphatically nuclear family: my parents weren't in close touch with their siblings, and the surviving grandparents were in what seemed very distant towns. I wrote about some of this in 'Liverpool . . . of all places', my piece of autobiographical prose in the *Liverpool Accents* anthology.

One more thought on this would be that you can mention any bit of autobiography you like, and other people can be found who experienced the same things (my nearest brother, for instance) or more acute forms of them, and they didn't turn into writers — so the biographical facts might be necessary to explain why I did, but they can't be sufficient.

What sort of poetry did you begin writing — what were its main themes and techniques?

Between 1969 and 1974, when I graduated from York University, I wrote reams of poems in a variety of styles, imitating whatever I was reading or studying. The poetry I started writing was about my paternal grandfather (who died when I was five), landscapes of Liverpool and the Yorkshire Dales, the circumstances of my childhood and youth, girl trouble, student radicalism and Northern Ireland, paintings by Rembrandt ... and it tended to be in patterned but usually irregular metres with varying degrees of rhyme — from full to hardly any at all. Though I like to think I've got better at what I do, the non-aligned formal eclecticism I picked up as a student writer has stayed with me.

How did you first get your poems published?

My first published poem (a pastiche ballad) was in an anthology made on a hand press the school had acquired; another appeared in a mimeographed sixth-form magazine. I was involved in publishing two pamphlets with a student poet called Hugh Macpherson at York, and also appeared regularly in issues of the student magazines. At Cambridge in 1976, I started to edit with a series of co-editors, the magazine *Perfect Bound*, and early poems that I've reprinted went in there. By this stage I had started sending off to little magazines, and towards the end of the 1970s began to appear in the likes of *Stand*, in the *New Poetry* anthologies, and a couple of times on the BBC's *Poetry Now* programme. My first separate publications were *The Benefit Forms*, a pamphlet published by Richard Tabor with a grant from the Eastern Arts Association, and *Going Out to Vote*, a broadsheet done by John Welch's Many Press, both in 1978. By this stage I thought of myself as up and running; but it would be another decade before a book came out from one of the larger specialist presses, Carcanet. Looking back, it seems to me a standard 'paying your dues' kind of apprenticeship in the days before the big competitions and the leaps to public notice of the 1980s.

How did this breakthrough to a collection come about?

I'm not sure about a breakthrough . . . I can clearly recall offering manuscripts to Anvil and Bloodaxe in the very early 1980s, not long after a first book with a spine, *Overdrawn Account* (1980) from the Many Press had garnered a surprisingly large number of reasonable reviews. In both cases I got the usual reply. At which point, I seem to

have gone into hibernation, emerging in 1985 with a pamphlet (also from the Many Press) called *Anaglypta*. This came out at the same time as the Cambridge Poetry Festival of that year, a big event with a performance of Ezra Pound's opera, *Villon*, and a tie-in exhibition at the Tate Gallery (I did one of the essays for the catalogue) on the 100th anniversary of his birth. I was the chairman of the organizing committee. Anyway, I think it was at this festival that Peter Jay talked about doing a selection of Vittorio Sereni's poems, and Michael Schmidt (who'd published some things in *PN Review*) said, in passing, something like: 'You must send me a manuscript ...' The former took five years to come out, the latter three.

How was it received, critically, and by buyers? How did that influence your writing?

Well, *This Other Life* did surprisingly well: it was positively reviewed in most of the big places. Martin Dodsworth gave the book a very positive description in *The Guardian*, where I was paired with Les Murray. He was asked to nominate the Cheltenham Prize in the same year, and generously gave it to that book. I did a host of readings, was paired with Jo Shapcott in the New Voices series at the South Bank, and did three radio broadcasts. The book had sold out some time early in the next decade. I don't know the exact print run, but it can't have been that large.

I'm not sure that it was only this little bit of recognition that had an equivocal effect on my work (I was going into the phase that would precipitate me out of the British Isles and my first marriage); but a sense that I must be doing something right and that therefore people would be interested in what I produced led to some self-critical slackness that slightly weakens the next, rather too long book, *Entertaining Fates* (1992) — which, mysteriously, received only one review and that a nasty one in the Carcanet-connected journal *PN Review*. My own sense, and that of reviewers or people who've written to me, seems to be that with the chapbook *Leaf-viewing* (1992) and the collection *Lost and Found* (1997) I hit a surer vein.

You were involved in some of the developments in the '80s that led to poetry being described briefly as 'the new rock and roll'. Can you say something about that involvement? What lasting effects do you think what was done then has had on the readership for poetry?

It was all part of 'paying my dues': I arrived in Cambridge in the autumn of 1975 and found that there had been a large poetry festival (organized by Richard Burns) the previous spring. The organizer for 1977 had decided to concentrate on the avant-garde poets of Cambridge, London, Europe and America. I was made the secretary of the organizing committee, and learned a lot. This event was something like a luxurious poet's conference: money being spent lavishly on travel, hospitality, and the elegant festival programme, while the tasks of getting an audience to pay the bills were neglected. The inevitable result was that the society ended up deep in debt. At this point I took it over, went for a pluralistic approach, found a brilliant treasurer and colleague in the person of Alison Rimmer (as she then was), a director of Heffers Bookshop. With the 1979 festival, we got the society back into the black and put together a programme that could include a Sound/Performance poetry day, a debate on poetry and politics between Jon Silkin and Donald Davie, and readings by such poets as C. H. Sisson, Josef Brodsky, Anne Waldman and Allen Ginsberg. In fact, it was Ginsberg who helped us most with our debt problem: he did a sell-out Saturday night performance with Peter Orlovsky and a guitarist for the price of one-way air tickets (he was finessing a European tour) and £50 each.

That was my main contribution: after a break, I helped organize some Italian events in 1983 and oversaw the proceedings in 1985. It was on the basis of this expertise that Maura Dooley asked me to work part-time as an advisor for the 1988 Poetry International at the South Bank Centre. Preparing for it on a weekly and then daily basis with her was a great pleasure, but those kinds of events take their toll in stress — and the feeling of emptiness that came over me when it had finished contributed to a growing mood of quiet desperation that drove me to accept what I thought was a stop-gap job-offer to teach for a couple of years in Kyoto.

The lasting effects of poetry's public promotion as a Cinderella of the entertainment industry are probably mixed. There's the dumbing-down side (if it can't 'connect', like a stand-up comic's work, then it can get lost) and there's the access side — you may get exposed to great art being delivered by the people who made it, even if you only went along for a laugh.

Living and working in provincial Japan is obviously quite a contrast from your original background. How has this move influenced your work?

I've been asked about this a number of times at readings and in other interviews. The first thing to say is that I came to Japan because I hadn't found regular employment in England and was offered that two-year temporary job at Kyoto University, so took it as a break from a situation grim-ish on various counts in 1989. After being here about a year, I was offered a job with an annually renewable contract at Tohoku University in Sendai — and, aside from almost a year away to have and recover from a brain tumour operation, I've been here ever since. This has happened by taking one decision at a time, and was in no sense foreseen. I didn't come to Japan because I'm interested in Zen and archery, ukiyoe, haiku, or ikebana . . . To me, it's the place where I earn a living, and, somewhat to my surprise, I've started to feel that I know my way around — as well as learning something about Japanese arts and crafts into the bargain.

You call it provincial Japan, and that's right; it's not Tokyo, a place I don't much enjoy visiting, and is treated as distinctly 'hick' in Japanese culture. When Shakespeare's plays are translated, it's conventional practice to render the speeches of the rude mechanicals into the local dialect. However, Sendai is a city with a population of over a million: that's larger than any of the places I was brought up in — places with local accents that figure in the cultural mythology of Britain somewhat similarly.

The poems I write have inevitably been dramatically shaped by this largely unplanned change of life. The phrase 'jet lag and birdsong' in 'Their Fears' from *Lost and Found*, for example, would not have come to my pen before I started a love-hate relationship with the Boeing 747. Poems, for me, come out of the circumstances of life, and since so much of my life takes place in Japanese circumstances, some of the details of the place have naturally rubbed off. However, I've tried to keep away from tourist poems, or Japan-explaining poems — though there have been inevitable lapses. I've just hoped more or less to continue doing what I used to do but in different places.

The great advantage of 'exile' for a writer, or, more strictly in my case, economic migration, is that you are freed at a stroke from the innumerable ways in which a native culture sets the agenda and delineates the pale of thought and feeling. It does this so thoroughly that it's only when you've got clear of it that you begin to see how much you've been shaped. Perhaps the greatest supposed danger is that you lose touch with your native tongue. Frankly, I think that's

a parochial anxiety. I teach Literature in English, and English as a Second Language. I watch the different European and American news broadcasts by satellite at breakfast each morning. I'm in e-mail, fax, and phone contact with relatives, friends, and colleagues in most of the English-speaking countries and Europe. We live in the fragmentary, poly-lingual foreign community here, where the native Englishes are as likely to be American, Canadian, Australian, or New Zealander as the various UK versions. My wife is an Italian and my elder daughter goes to the local kindergarten, so the family conducts itself in three languages. I have a full-time relationship with a vast Babel of words, both native and foreign, written and spoken. Now I begin get the point of *Finnegans Wake*; sometimes I think I'm living in it . . . It's not that my language has been impoverished by emigration; it's been vastly enlarged.

Can you describe your most effective working method? Do you wait for inspiration, or sit down every day with the intention of writing?

I do both. Translations have to be done on a craft basis. So does fictional prose, so do critical essays — and interviews. Poems have to insist that they need to be written. So I carry around little notebooks, and jot down phrases, titles, and the like when they come to me, and then, if there's a need, I will find the time to bring them to a conclusion. I try to write as little poetry as possible: I don't enjoy the assembly-line feeling, and tend to think that over-production is bad for what I may be able to do.

How important to you are formal workshops, or getting the opinions of other poets about your work-in-progress?

I live in almost complete isolation from other writers here in Japan. I don't attend, or give, formal workshops. I don't think that other poets are always the best people to give advice because they have their own art to keep an eye on, so their comments are naturally shaped by their own way of doing things. When I send copies of poems or books to other poets, and occasionally critics, they tend to be warmly supportive or silent. However, I do show poems to some close and candid friends who are not poets, but are literary people, and I frequently withhold or revise poems on advice from anyone, poet or not. I also send them off to magazines and use the experience of rejection as a way of having second thoughts.

To what extent if any do you collaborate with other artists?

Hardly at all. I'm sure I'd enjoy working with film makers, visual artists, having poems set to music, or doing an opera libretto — but no one's asked me and I can't go looking for the work. I was once involved in the publication of a poem-card: but then I was the visual artist. I've usually enjoyed collaborating on translating poems and editing books or magazines.

Translation is itself a kind of cooperation, I suppose. How do you approach translating poetry? Have you had a chance to work with the original writers?

When I first started working on Italian poetry with Marcus Perryman I hardly knew the language, but wanted to learn it, and so he provided some prose cribs or rough drafts to work up with an eye on the original. That was in 1979. Two decades later, as I say, my wife is Italian and my parents-in-law don't speak English, so I'm more or less able to set the translation going myself and then ask for comments, corrections, and advice.

I've had the experience of collaborating with three living poets, though time has gone by and two of them are now dead. Back in the late 1970s, I did a translation of Alain Delahaye's *L'être perdu* and got in touch with him. We met in Cambridge and worked on the poems together, and he sent me sets of revisions and corrections — to the point where I began to feel, rightly or wrongly, that he was taking over the translations and robbing them of whatever Anglo-Saxon vigour I could impart. When I wrote politely agreeing to differ on a few choices of words, the collaboration came to a sudden end — and the versions have remained unpublished. I still have the drafts and the correspondence.

Discussing translations of his work with the Italian poet Franco Fortini involved listening to him give extended accounts of the implications in the tiniest points, implications that it would have been all but impossible to have conveyed by means of a single English word into a culture where the contexts are not shared. It was, nevertheless, mostly an illuminating experience to sit and listen. Vittorio Sereni was quite different: he was simply supportive of the work, willing to discuss specific details only in terms of what was strictly needed to translate the passage. Sereni believed, I think, that his poems would

communicate if you simply translated the most literal and obvious meaning, and then made a coherent poetic form in the second language. Working on his poems brought us into contact with all the stubborn difficulties implied in saying you want to do an accurate rendering that is also a poem in its own right. Some people like to think that's impossible (you know the old witticism about translations being like women — the more beautiful the less faithful); perhaps so, but doing the impossible sounds like a perfectly ordinary human ambition.

How do you decide that a poem is finished?

There isn't one single way. I read it out loud over and over again. I agonize about whether this bit or that bit is bearable, or whether the whole thing should be quietly forgotten. I make adjustments, and read it again. Then maybe I go back to the earlier reading. I see whether it has takers when I send it out. If it doesn't, I agonize a little more. I leave it around for some time, forget about it, and then look at it again. This is just part of my managing an obsession as if it were a job. I may even make a few last changes on the proofs of the collection it goes in. I may even revise it before re-publishing ...

Who do you write for? Do you have a particular audience or person in mind?

I have a shadowy sense of a small readership. It's got a dark centre of people I know well and a penumbra with no clear limit of people I may know to some extent, or barely at all. It's perhaps even beginning to extend into the light of people who are completely unknown to me, and whose response remains a total mystery. Do I write for them? Well, I write for whoever cares to read what I write. Occasionally poems are also dedicated to particular people, or include events that were shared with friends, or pay homage to other writers. I also write for myself, because the poems have to give me pleasure or I don't see how they could reasonably give anybody else any.

Does poetry have to be 'simple' to get an audience?

No, I don't think so. Nor do I think poetry that provides no obvious problems of surface understanding — like Blake's 'Tiger' — is necessarily simple.

Which contemporary poets do you most admire?

Roy Fisher. There are many others that I can enjoy reading (e.g. Mark Ford, Elaine Feinstein, James Lasdun, Bill Manhire, Jo Shapcott . . .) but I admire Roy Fisher.

What is it about Roy Fisher's work that you find most admirable?

Much of the poetry I read, however different from what I could do myself, conveys thoughts and feelings which I've either had, know about and would prefer not to have, or which it's not too hard to imagine myself having; with Roy Fisher I read the productions of a sensibility that either gives me something that I don't have in my equipment at all, or which unearths things in my experience and sensibility that I wasn't aware of having. Whereas the poetry I enjoy tends to nudge me in stimulating ways I recognize, his poetry positively elbows me out of my habitual thought patterns. Being familiar with his writings doesn't seem to have changed this experience of reading it at all.

That's what I admire about his work; what I admire about him is that he's gone on doing what he does without getting too worked up by what everyone else is doing and saying, has only written when he feels he has to, has not felt the urge to push his work that hard, or promote himself too much. He doesn't attack other poets in print, and thinks that there are a host of ways to make poetry, none of which has got any prior claim to authority or is going to guarantee success in the enterprise. I admire all that, and wish I could better emulate it.

Which trends in modern poetry do you find most interesting?

I don't find trends interesting; they're for the literary journalists to do crowd control exercises. Also, there are so many poetic cultures in the world, and so many different agendas, that if you think you know what the trends are, then you are probably excluding most of them from your picture before you wonder about the question. Cubist? Apocalyptic? Movement? L=A=N=G? Deep Image? Pomo? New-Gen? Who cares? I like individual works by particular poets.

Does poetry have any influence outside poetry?

The puzzle for me in your question comes from the spatial metaphor

implied by 'outside'. This could mean either 'outside poems' or 'outside the poetry world'. Apart from the literal sense of the words in the text and the words not in it, I don't understand what 'inside poems' could mean. Also the words in the poem only have sense because they are part of a language that includes all the other words not in the poem: so the words not in the poem are necessary to the words in it, and the words in it need also to be understood as they are used when not in the poem. Then again, the 'poetry world': what is it? Just an intersecting sub-set of the one world we all have to inhabit. So I don't think there's such a place as 'inside' poetry or 'outside' it. As for your version of Auden's 'poetry makes nothing happen' issue, I believe it has no end of influences; but you can't touch them, or quantify them, and people don't like to talk about them.

In his recent book Unweaving the Rainbow, Richard Dawkins claims that poets have not understood the poetry of science — the title comes from Keats' criticism of scientists. Would you agree that this antagonism still exists? Do we really still live in Snow's two cultures?

That brother nearest to me in age is a research scientist at the National Physical Laboratory, and we played out the old two cultures argument as a sibling rivalry theme. I haven't read Dawkins' book, so can't comment on that specifically, but it looks from what you say as if he's using the word 'poetry' in the phrase 'the poetry of science' to mean not poems about science, but the poetical as it can be found in scientific research. There are good poems involving science and not so good ones, and then there are poems not about science that simply take the applied facts of scientific experiment and technological development for granted. My brother did some research on the use of electron beam interferometry for the better identification of metal fatigue in, among other things, aeroplanes (more 'jet lag and birdsong').

There are some societal reasons for the antagonism. You could think it was a bit rich for scientists to say that poets don't understand 'the poetry of science', when scientists tend to give poetry such short shrift and assume that it's the poets who have failed to do the understanding. This happens because scientists are, as Wittgenstein noted, the acknowledged high priests and mythmakers of our culture. They are the hierophants at the temple dedicated to 'the meaning of the universe' — and if the poets want to get back a bit of their

lost cultural kudos (it seems to be implied) they'd better get their thinking caps on and spend more time in the conceptual lab, less in the imaginary museum.

I have been as awe-struck and flummoxed as the next person about the idea of time going backwards, space being curved, of black holes, event horizons, and big bangs, at the miracles of evolutionary biology which produced the frontal lobes to be awestruck with, or at the square root of minus-one . . . But none of it makes me feel the need to write a poem coming on, and so, for me, that's all there is to it. I'm glad scientists helped develop the technology for the CT scan, mentioned in 'Hearing Difficulties' from *Lost and Found*, and minutely accurate brain surgery (see 'A Burning Head' in the same collection) without which I'd have died a lingering, inexplicable death; I wish they hadn't split the atom and developed the Bomb or the nuclear power station — the Chernobyl accident's fall-out in rain on East Anglia being my private explanation for the brain tumour's triggering . . .

What use do you make of the internet? Do you maintain a website or use e-mail groups to display your work-in-progress?

I use it to try and keep in touch. It has eased the sense of isolation I feel living in Japan. I haven't set up a website yet, but one is in construction and it may be up this year. I don't belong to any e-mail group specifically for workshop-type activity, and the one list I'm on is too hairy and eclectic a place to ask for comments on the fine-tuning of a caesura. But, as I say, e-mail contact means that I can send new poems out to people for comment much more quickly and efficiently than in the past.

What are you working on at the moment?

I've just about finished a new collection of poems, begun in December 1993, which will probably be called *The Colouring of the Past*. There's the manuscript of the *Complete Poems of Vittorio Sereni* that Marcus Perryman and I are hoping to have published soon. I've a number of critical projects and translations manuscripts in progress. Just recently I've returned to some unfinished stories too. There's also a chapbook's worth of very new poems that may be publishable somewhere before too long. I've more, but that's surely enough to be getting along with . . .