

***THE LITTLE BECOME BIG?:
AMBIT AND LONDON'S LITTLE MAGAZINES,
1959-1999***

Christopher George Vowles

**Goldsmiths College
University of London**

PhD

2006

ABSTRACT

The Little Become Big?: Ambit and London's Little Magazines, 1959-1999

In *The Little Magazines: A Study of Six Editors* (1976), Ian Hamilton described the little magazine as a medium 'which exists, indeed thrives, outside the usual business structure of magazine production and distribution; it is independent, amateur and idealistic' (pp. 7-8). Although this definition applies to many titles of the Thirties, Forties and Fifties, it fails to register radical improvements in magazine design, distribution and book-keeping prompted by the mimeo revolution in the Sixties, Arts Council (ACGB) rationalisation in the Seventies and Eighties, and electronic publishing in the Nineties.

This thesis offers a literary-historical account of *Ambit's* evolution from a scruffy, mimeo-produced pamphlet to a glossy, ACGB-sponsored quarterly. It provides a decade-by-decade analysis of *Ambit's* principal formal and thematic concerns, relating them to the work of key contributors in poetry, prose fiction and the visual arts, and detailing the emergence of a distinctive *Ambit* identity. At the same time, *Ambit* is also treated as a chronologue of the formal development of the contemporary little magazine, registering the complex economic, cultural and technological stimuli that affected the medium between 1959 and 1999. Both approaches are designed to test Hamilton's reading of little magazine history against a detailed study of a major literary-arts quarterly of the post-1960 period, and identify ways in which contemporary publications like *Ambit* (1959-), *Agenda* (1959-), *New Departures* (1959-) and *Stand* (1952-) have departed from Hamilton's highly romanticised conception of 'littleness'.

The thesis concludes by suggesting that *Ambit* and its contemporaries have sacrificed independence, amateurism and idealism for the entrepreneurial pragmatism that has sustained their commitment to the 'non-commercial' publication of 'artistic work from unknown or relatively unknown writers' that Frederick J. Hoffman et al in *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* (1946) (p. 2) saw as the little magazine's raison d'être.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and that this thesis is entirely my own work, except where formally acknowledged in the footnotes and bibliography.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author and no quotation from it or information derived from it may be published without the prior written consent of the author.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher Vowles". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

Christopher Vowles

1 July 2006.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following for the help and support that has made this work possible:

The Arts and Humanities Research Council, for providing the financial support and the research training that have enabled me to undertake this study.

Chris Baldick, for his enthusiastic, thoughtful and whole-hearted supervision.

Ambit editor Martin Bax, for putting me in touch with a number of important *Ambit* contributors, and for a fascinating and generous interview which, I hope, has enabled me to capture something of the *Ambit* spirit.

Ambit assistant editor Kate Pemberton, for her positive response to a number of queries concerning the day-to-day running of the magazine, and for her general interest in my research.

Daniel MacDonald, for providing the photographic contents of Appendix 2.

Staff at the British Library, the National Poetry Library, the Bodelian Library, Senate House Library and University College London's Special Collections Library, for granting access to their little magazine collections.

Special Collections staff at Penn State University and the University of Texas at Austin, for granting access to their archives of *Ambit* and Oswald Blakeston correspondence.

Rupert Loydell (*Stride*) and Patricia Oxley (*Acumen*), for responding to queries about their experiences of e-publishing.

Rick McGrath (www.mcgrath.com), for bibliographical information concerning the work of J.G. Ballard.

Toby Litt, Ian Pollock and Peter Porter, for discussing their *Ambit* work with me.

I am also grateful to Jen Cochran, both for her friendship and for accommodating me during two study visits to Pennsylvania.

Finally, I would like to thank Liz Blackmore, Fabian Campbell-West, Jan Dormann, Colin Goodlad, Pam Hill, Tom Kiehl, Rod Logan and Wil Penberthy who, along with my Mum and Dad, have proved unstinting in their support and encouragement during my studies. This help is greatly appreciated.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
CONTENTS	7
INTRODUCTION.....	10
CHAPTER ONE. THE SIXTIES: EXPERIMENTS VISUAL, LITERARY, AND CHEMICAL.....	23
Mapping The Scene.....	23
Making A (False) Start. <i>Ambit</i> 1-9, 1959-1961.....	24
Getting With It. <i>Ambit</i> 10-41, 1961-1969	30
The New Design Ethic	32
‘A Most Dangerous Publication’	34
Experiments Literary and Chemical: The <i>Ambit</i> Drugs and Creative Writing Competition.....	36
Love, Sex, and Death: The Newspaper Issue. <i>Ambit</i> 37, 1968	41
The American Nightmare. Stars and Stripes Special. <i>Ambit</i> 39, 1969.....	48
<i>AMBIT’S</i> KEY SIXTIES CONTRIBUTORS AND PRINCIPAL SERIES ...	51
The Poetry of Gavin Ewart.....	51
The Collage Art of Eduardo Paolozzi	56
Principal Series. ‘Poem from the Past’ and ‘Retrospect’	61
THE SIXTIES: TOWARDS AN IDENTITY	69
CHAPTER TWO. THE SEVENTIES: COMPUTER-GENERATED FICTION, PORNOGRAPHY AND OTHER ATROCITIES.....	72
New Maps For A Changing Scene.....	72
Dear, But Not Yet Dead: The Sixties Live On. <i>Ambit</i> 42-51, 1970-72	74
Dubious Designs: Obscenity, Euphoria Bliss and the New Pornocracy. <i>Ambit</i> 65-69, 1976-77	78
Computer-Generated Literature and Other Atrocities. <i>Ambit</i> 51-81, 1972-79	83
‘Doing Their Thing’: A Poetry Special. <i>Ambit</i> 54, 1973	89
Celebrations: A Twentieth Anniversary Special. <i>Ambit</i> 80, 1979	96

<i>AMBIT'S KEY SEVENTIES CONTRIBUTORS AND PRINCIPAL SERIES</i>	
.....	102
The Apocalyptic Fiction of J.G. Ballard	102
The Poetry of George MacBeth	109
The Drawings, Watercolours and Illustrations of Michael Foreman	115
Principal Series. <i>The Vietnam Symphony. Ambit 63, 1975</i>	121
The Invisible Years: A Series of Apocalyptic texts written by various hands. <i>Ambit 66-79, 1976-1979</i>	125
Reviews Section	127
THE SEVENTIES: AN IDENTITY CRISIS?	132
CHAPTER THREE. THE EIGHTIES: FEMALE VOICES, FOREIGN TONGUES AND REGIONAL ACCENTS	136
New Maps For A Changing Scene	136
Female Voices	142
Foreign Tongues: European Verse in Translation.....	150
Foreign Tongues: Caribbean Special, <i>Ambit 91, 1982</i>	156
Regional Accents: Liverpool Special, <i>Ambit 92, 1983</i>	163
Foreign Tongues or Regional Accents? Irish Special, <i>Ambit 115, 1989</i>	169
<i>AMBIT'S KEY EIGHTIES CONTRIBUTORS</i>	177
The Poetry and Fiction of E.A. Markham.....	177
The Poetry of Fleur Adcock.....	184
The Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy.....	191
The Art of Ralph Steadman.....	198
THE EIGHTIES: NEW DIRECTIONS	204
CHAPTER FOUR. THE NINETIES: CONTINUITIES AND TRANSITIONS	209
New Maps For A Changing Scene	209
Absent Friends: <i>Ambit's Nineties Poetry. Ambit 128-153, 1992-98</i>	215
Perverse, Perverted and Peculiar: <i>Ambit's Nineties Fiction. Ambit 120-143,</i> <i>1990-96</i>	228
Retrospectives and Revivals: <i>Ambit's Nineties Art. Ambit 120-150, 1990-97</i>	241
<i>AMBIT'S KEY NINETIES CONTRIBUTORS</i>	248

The Poetry of Selima Hill.....	248
The Artwork of Ian Pollock	256
The Fiction of Geoff Nicholson	263
THE NINETIES: CONTINUITIES AND TRANSITIONS	273
CONCLUSION: THE LITTLE BECOME BIG?	278
<i>Ambit</i> and London's Little Magazines 1959-1999.....	278
<i>Ambit's</i> Achievements 1959-99: Poetry.....	279
<i>Ambit's</i> Achievements 1959-99: Fiction.....	287
<i>Ambit's</i> Achievements 1959-99: Visual Arts.....	294
The Little Become Big? From Idealistic Amateurism to Entrepreneurial Pragmatism.....	299
A New Form of 'Littleness'? Some Distinguishing Characteristics of the Contemporary Little Magazine	307
APPENDIX 1. A selection of correspondence from the <i>Ambit</i> archive, Penn State University, Pennsylvania, USA.....	312
APPENDIX 2. A selection of annotated cover designs.	325
APPENDIX 3. A complete alphabetical contributor list.....	334
BIBLIOGRAPHY	347

INTRODUCTION

In the Foreword to *Little Magazine Profiles: The Little Magazines In Great Britain 1939-1993* (1993), Wolfgang Görtschacher seconded Derek Stanford's assertion, made in an interview in 1988, that 'we need social historians of the little magazine' before going on to suggest that 'Although the overwhelming majority of British literary experiments and developments first originated from publications in the little magazines, this exciting phenomenon has largely been neglected by literary historians and critics.'¹ Outlining the reasons for this neglect in *Contemporary Views on the Little Magazine Scene* (2000), Görtschacher suggested that 'literary critics, university lecturers and literary historians',² since the rise of the Movement, have been too ready to endorse literary models valorised by

the networks and cliques associated with the bigger publishing houses (Faber, Chatto and Windus, OUP, Bloodaxe Press, and the heavily-subsidised Anvil Press), the Arts-Council-subsidised little magazines and literary reviews (*Poetry Review*, *London Magazine*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The London Review of Books*), the Literature Department of the Arts Council, and [...] the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and East Anglia [...].³

Central to Görtschacher's reading of contemporary literary history is the sense that the merit of any given text is never determined on 'purely literary' grounds alone, but remains within the gift of certain 'specific cultural groups' and a network of sympathetic institutions, whose value-judgments are constantly translated into the incontrovertible proof of cultural legitimacy.⁴ Amid such a cultural climate, the little magazines and the marginalised constituencies they serve are given short shrift by the prevailing literary-critical hegemony and, swayed by the very urgent

¹ Wolfgang Görtschacher, 'Foreword', *Little Magazine Profiles: The Little Magazines In Great Britain 1939-1993*. Salzburg: University of Salzburg Press, 1993: i.

² Görtschacher, 'Putting the Record Straight', *Contemporary Views on the Little Magazine Scene*. Salzburg: Poetry Salzburg, 2000: vii.

³ Ibid: ii.

⁴ Ibid: ii-iii.

pressures of the literary marketplace, university English departments remain reluctant to engage with such an unprofitable field of research.⁵

Persuasive as Görtschacher's argument is—particularly in the light of the complex interconnections he identifies between the academic, critical and publishing careers of Craig Raine, Andrew Motion, Blake Morrison and Christopher Reid—there are, perhaps, other reasons for the relative paucity of academic or book-length studies into the history of the little magazine in Britain. One fundamental and longstanding obstacle to academic debate has been the problem of finding a definition broad enough to embrace the little magazine in all its forms, yet narrow enough to distinguish it from the much wider province of literary periodicals and critical reviews. Somewhat surprisingly, given the relative flux associated with the little magazine, the best definition to date remains that formulated by Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen and Carolyn F. Ulrich in *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* (1946):

A little magazine is a magazine designed to print artistic work which for reasons of commercial expediency is not acceptable to the money-minded periodicals or presses. Acceptance or refusal by commercial publishers at times has little to do with the quality of the work. If the little magazine can obtain artistic work from unknown or relatively unknown writers, the little magazine purpose is further accomplished. Little magazines are willing [...] to do almost anything—steal, beg, or undress in public—rather than sacrifice their right to print good material, especially if it comes from the pen of an unknown Faulkner or Hemingway. Such periodicals are, therefore, non-commercial by intent, for their altruistic ideal usually rules out the hope of financial profit.⁶

Offered by way of introduction to a descriptive catalogue published in America in the mid Forties, this definition of the little magazine has proved remarkably durable, both as a summary of fundamentals and as a template for subsequent definitions. For Hoffman *et al*, the little magazine is an alternative publishing *medium* sustained by a limited, elite or cognisant readership; an avant-garde

⁵ Ibid: vii.

⁶ Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen and Carolyn F. Ulrich (eds), *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946: 2.

sensibility; an emphasis upon experiment; and a rejection of commercial values. Insofar as they satisfy Hoffman's key criteria, *Ambit*, *New Departures* and *X* can be accommodated within a definition of the little magazine initially framed for modernist titles like *Samhain*, *Poetry* and *Adelphi*. Such a straightforward definition, however, seems somewhat unsatisfactory in the light of the dramatic technological, social and cultural changes of the Sixties and Seventies. It was, perhaps, with this problem in mind that Ian Hamilton set out a revised definition of the medium in *The Little Magazines: A Study of Six Editors* (1976):

The little magazine is one which exists, indeed thrives, outside the usual business structure of magazine production and distribution; it is independent, amateur and idealistic—it doesn't (or, shall we say, feels that it shouldn't) need to print anything it doesn't want to print.⁷

Adapting Hoffman's formula to fit his own experiences with *The Review* and *The New Review*, Hamilton not only introduced a set of new tests around independence, amateurism and idealism, but declared that 'ten years is the ideal life-span for a little magazine', for

It is in the nature of the little magazine that it should believe that no one else could do what it is doing. This belief is almost always tied to the requirements of a particular period, to a particular set of literary rights and wrongs. It can rarely be carried forward to confront subsequent periods, subsequent challenges. Each magazine needs a new decade, and each decade needs a new magazine.⁸

Taking his lead from American commentators like Leonard Fulton, who insisted that 'transience is a characteristic of the small magazine',⁹ Hamilton was responding to the sudden explosion of non-commercial, polemical, and largely ephemeral magazines spawned by the mimeo revolution of the Sixties. What Hamilton did not foresee, however, were the significant advances in print technology and desktop publishing, and the dramatic increase in arts subsidies

⁷ Ian Hamilton, *The Little Magazines: A Study of Six Editors*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976: 7-8.

⁸ Ibid: 9.

⁹ Leonard V. Fulton, *Directory of Little Magazines*. First Edition. El Cerrito, CA: Dustbooks, 1964: i.

during the Eighties and Nineties that would stretch his definition of the little magazine to its very limits.

Unlike Hamilton, most critics of the little magazine since Hoffman have either shunned such definitions altogether, endorsing Gerald England's view 'that no satisfactory definition existed',¹⁰ or sought security in the kind of cautious bibliographical approach adopted by Görtschacher in *Little Magazine Profiles*: 'Little magazines, as I understand them, are numbered serial publications, mostly in paperback or A4 format, which regularly devote a major part of their total space to poetry or poetry matters.'¹¹ Given that the little magazines have been treated both as a sub-genre of the literary periodical by Hamilton in *The Little Magazines: A Study of Six Editors* and Muriel Mellow in Alvin Sullivan's (ed.) *British Literary Magazines: The Modern Age, 1914-1984* (1986), and as an alternative publishing medium by Leonard Fulton in *Directory of Little Magazines* and Görtschacher in *Little Magazine Profiles*, any sustained study of the little magazines is immediately fraught by problems of definition. This is further complicated by the extent to which the little magazine is, on the one hand, a unified object and literary artefact, and, on the other, a composite miscellany and a forum dedicated to the particular concerns of a specific literary community. While such seemingly divergent readings are not mutually exclusive, they are certainly difficult to reconcile with any single overarching definition of the little magazine 'phenomenon', and this may account for the relative lack of academic interest in the little magazines to date.

Once such problems of definition have been resolved, a number of interconnected methodological challenges become apparent. Firstly, for much of the twentieth century, the little magazines have been characterised by such flux that

¹⁰ Gerald England, 'No. 1', England and Vivienne Finch (eds), *British Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses*. First Edition. New Malden: Dustbooks UK, 1974: 3.

¹¹ Görtschacher, *Little Magazine Profiles*: 1.

even the most comprehensive catalogues compiled by Leonard Fulton, Gerald England, Peter Finch and others have become regular annual publications, struggling to keep pace with the medium's relatively high mortality rate. In such a context, the aspiring 'social historian of the little magazine' is confronted with a difficult dilemma for by concerning himself with the relatively large corpus of deceased publications he risks transforming the little magazine into a glass-cased museum exhibit, or the ephemeral relic of a bygone age. Conversely, by focusing on the significantly smaller body of current titles he risks translating his *in vivo* study into a subtler but equally problematic form of literary death warrant. On a practical level, he is likely to be hindered by the lack of enthusiasm for contemporary periodical literature that currently pertains in Britain, as evidenced by the partial and fragmentary holdings of little magazine archives held by the British Library, University College London, and the National Poetry Library; the relative difficulty of obtaining reliable contributor indexes for current magazines; and the growing number of British editors choosing to sell their editorial archives to American universities. In view of the methodological challenges outlined above, it is no surprise that many 'literary critics, university lecturers and literary historians' have chosen to ignore the little magazines for so long. What is remarkable, however, is the degree to which recent studies have sought to raise the profile of the little magazines, developing new methodologies beyond the encyclopaedic approach of Hoffman *et al*, and drawing particular attention to their role within the canon-forming process.

Prompted by a special number of the US-magazine *Triquarterly* entitled 'The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Documentary History' (Vol. 43, 1978), Görtschacher's *Little Magazine Profiles* is certainly the most extensive

treatment to date of the little magazines that grew up in Britain during and after the Second World War. Drawing upon a range of primary textual sources, literary interviews and statistical data, the first section, 'A Phenomenology of the Little Magazine', seeks to identify the primary characteristics of the little magazine and key moments in its historical development. Emphasising the uncommonly close bond between magazine editors, contributors and readers, Görtschacher goes on to distinguish various 'types' or genres of magazine, before outlining the problems associated with finding an all-encompassing definition of the medium. The second section comprises a series of 'Case Studies', and includes interviews with critics like Malcolm Bradbury; librarians like Geoffrey Soar, former head of the Little Magazine Library at University College London; and little magazine editors like Michael Horovitz (*New Departures*), William Oxley (*Littack*, *Littack Supplement*, and *New Headland*), and Michael Schmidt (*PN Review*). Covering a range of topics from editorial influences and selection policies to production methods and funding issues, these interviews provide some illuminating factual detail and anecdotal opinion concerning the trajectory of the little magazines since the Fifties. As forms of literary self-assessment they are particularly vulnerable to partiality, however, and need to be treated with caution.

The Year's Work in English Studies, Volume 74 (1993) summarised Görtschacher's text as an attempt at 'a comprehensive history of the little magazine in post-war Britain',¹² but such a 'comprehensive' treatment of the little magazines is not without its limitations, and the sheer mass of titles referenced by Görtschacher certainly complicates his literary-historical narrative, and detracts from the individuality of the high-profile publications singled out for special

¹² Ian Sansom, 'The Twentieth Century. Poetry—Post 1950', Peter J. Kitson and Elaine Treharne (eds), *The Year's Work in English Studies*. Vol. 4, 1993. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996: 501.

attention in his case studies. Thus it becomes difficult at times to track the history of a number of important magazines through the text. In *Contemporary Views on the Little Magazine Scene*, Görtschacher offered a revised form of his earlier literary-historical narrative, identifying the little magazine as the mainstay of stylistic and technical developments within 'alternative' (i.e.: non-Movement) poetics since 1960, and proposing the polemical 'literary history of neglect' outlined above. In addition, Görtschacher presented a number of important new interviews with editors and contributors working in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales—his emphasis having noticeably shifted towards titles of the Sixties and after. Despite certain formal limitations, *Little Magazine Profiles* and *Contemporary Views on the Little Magazine Scene* remain indispensable reference works for any student of the little magazines.

With the exception of Görtschacher's studies, comprehensive work in the field of twentieth-century little magazines has been scarce, although a handful of alternative models ranging from directories and annotated bibliographies to limited case studies and period histories should also be mentioned. The principal authority on British twentieth-century *literary* magazines prior to 1986 remains Alvin Sullivan's (ed.) *British Literary Magazines: The Modern Age, 1914-1984* (1986).¹³ This encyclopaedic work, comprising historio-descriptive accounts, bibliographical details, and principal contributor lists for 108 titles, offers a brief but credible overview of the development of the literary periodical in response to two World Wars, the post-war publishing industry, and the mimeo revolution of the Sixties—all illustrated by a useful literary-historical timeline. Unfortunately, Sullivan's wide-ranging assessment of the field is now somewhat dated and in need of revision

¹³ Alvin Sullivan (ed.), *British Literary Magazines: The Modern Age, 1914-1984*. New York, Westport and London: Greenwood, 1986.

as a number of magazines Sullivan lists as ‘current’ have since folded, while titles like *And*, *Ambit*, *Second Aeon* and *My Own Mag* have replaced them as important catalysts for, and chronologues of, contemporary trends within experimental poetry, fiction and the visual arts.

Adopting a similar approach in *Irish Literary Magazines: An Outline History and Descriptive Bibliography* (2003),¹⁴ Tom Clyde takes a much longer historical view of the development of the literary magazine in Ireland, offering a substantial literary history of the medium since the eighteenth century. Clyde’s accompanying bibliographical data is laid out in a particularly clear format, while the appendices, recording start-up rates and changes in geographical distribution of titles between 1700 and 1989, are useful for pinpointing twentieth-century trends towards greater regionalisation. Photographic reproductions of notable cover designs also add a valuable visual dimension to Clyde’s discussions of more experimental publications like *Crab Grass* (1972-197?) and *P* (1970-72). Although chapter 10, ‘Irish Literary Magazines, 1953-1985’, is the only section to bear directly upon the history of little magazines since 1959, Clyde’s work remains an innovative model for future literary-historical accounts of contemporary little magazines.

Departing from the directory model established by Hoffman, Allen and Ulrich in 1946, Paul R. Stewart’s *The Prairie Schooner Story: A Little Magazine’s First 25 Years* (1955) and Ian Hamilton’s *The Little Magazines: A Study of Six Editors* pay much closer attention to the ways in which particular magazines evolved in Britain and America. Still the most detailed and sustained book-length account of a single title to date, Stewart’s text charts the rise of a Midwest literary-

¹⁴ Tom Clyde, *Irish Literary Magazines: An Outline History and Descriptive Bibliography*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003.

arts journal from a campus-based paper to ‘an Olympian god among American journals’.¹⁵ Beginning with a general consideration of the little magazine’s roots in the Modernist literary journals of the Twenties and Thirties, Stewart goes on to discuss the *Prairie Schooner’s* relationship with the University of Nebraska, its complex financial arrangements, its editorial preferences, and its eventual achievements. Supported by an unprecedented wealth of review articles, correspondence and proofs, Stewart takes the reader deep into the inner workings of *The Prairie Schooner* by dealing directly with the editors, contributors and subscribers that shaped it, thereby avoiding ground already covered by Hoffman, and adding something genuinely original to the field.

Hamilton’s text is equally important and provides a fascinating account of Margaret Anderson’s *The Little Review*; Harriet Monroe’s *Poetry*; T.S. Eliot’s *The Criterion*; Geoffrey Grigson’s *New Verse*; Cyril Connolly’s *Horizon*; and the Communist-sponsored *Partisan Review*. A highly subjective consideration of six editorial personalities, Hamilton’s text recounts various personal, economic and logistical struggles with patrons, contributors and editorial rivals, although it lacks much of the critical rigour that distinguishes Görtschacher’s studies. Moreover, Hamilton’s highly romanticised vision of the little magazine as a paragon of amateurism, idealism, independence and transience was already dated in 1976, and certainly fails to account for radical changes in the medium since 1981.

Given the relative strengths and weaknesses of earlier works, and the more general methodological difficulties associated with little magazine studies, this thesis will attempt to test the common assumptions about ‘littleness’ advanced by Hamilton, Fulton, England and others against the longstanding definition of

¹⁵ Kerker Quinn, in Paul R. Stewart, *The Prairie Schooner Story: A Little Magazine’s First 25 Years*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1955: 171.

Hoffman *et al* through a detailed and intimate study of *Ambit* magazine between 1959 and 1999. Taking *Ambit* as a chronologue of major social, economic and technological changes within the little magazine community, and of recent developments within contemporary poetry, fiction and the visual arts since the Sixties, this thesis will offer a general literary-historical account of the evolution of the contemporary little magazine as evidenced by the experiences of one particular set of editors, contributors and readers. It will focus on the little magazine as both a unified literary artefact *and* the composite product of a dynamic literary community, relating the magazine's dominant formal and thematic concerns to those of a number of key contributors. It will identify the ways in which *Ambit* and its contemporaries engaged with important twentieth-century debates about sex, drugs and violence. It will account for radical improvements in magazine design, production and distribution standards with regard to photolithography, desktop publishing and the emergence of new institutional patrons. And it will conclude by suggesting that *Ambit* finally resists Hamilton's model of idealistic amateurism and transience in favour of a new spirit of entrepreneurial pragmatism and longevity.

The historical span of this study traces *Ambit's* evolution from its inception as a mimeo-produced pamphlet in 1959, to its first tentative experiments with electronic publishing in 1999, but it also acknowledges two fundamental turning points in the history of the literary magazine in twentieth-century Britain. With the demise of the high-profile *Horizon*, *Life and Letters*, *Penguin New Writing* and *Poetry (London)* in the Fifties, 1959 signals the end of a period of unprecedented popularity for the literary quarterly. But, in Görtschacher's view, it also anticipates 'a new, experimental, and [...] booming phase of little magazine publishing'.¹⁶

¹⁶ Görtschacher, *Little Magazine Profiles*: 122.

epitomised by the rise of *Ambit*, *Agenda*, *New Departures* and *X* in 1959, and by Alan Ross's purchase of *London Magazine* in 1961. Perfectly placed to respond to the optimistic do-it-yourself spirit of Swinging London and the newfound cultural and political freedoms that had spawned the Underground press, these newcomers were charged with carrying Britain's longstanding commitment to the literary periodical into a new era. In the same way 1999 represents a logical end-point for any study of a current little magazine, granting the necessary temporal distance that a twenty-first century study of twentieth-century trends demands, while recognising the potential of the Internet to transform the way in which little magazines are designed, produced and experienced.

Conscious of the lack of definitive single-title academic studies of the little magazine, I have sought to develop a new methodological model that embraces the literary-historical sweep of Görtschacher, the bibliographical focus of Sullivan and Clyde, and the intimate case studies of Stewart and Hamilton. For the sake of convenience and clarity, this thesis adopts a straightforward chronological and episodic form, placing *Ambit's* principal formal and thematic concerns within the context of the general cultural trends that define each decade. Modelled on the author bibliographies contained in Randall Stevenson's *The Last of England?* (2004), a series of key contributor profiles has also been included with the aim of illustrating and reinforcing the arguments advanced in the overarching literary-historical narrative. Through an examination of the work of these representative figures it is possible to build up a convincing portrait of *Ambit's* rising reputation, of its dominant literary-artistic preferences, and its major stylistic influences. Evoking the simultaneous sense of continuity *and* transition at the core of any long running little magazine project, each chapter seeks to capture something of the spirit

of the age that it describes, while providing the evidential framework for a continuous and systematic literary-historical account of *Ambit* and the little magazines between 1959 and 1999. Consequently the conclusion offers a qualified refutation of Hamilton's definition of the little magazines based on the specific details of *Ambit's* literary history, while the appendices contain a body of useful bibliographical, archive and reference material not widely available elsewhere.

Despite the groundbreaking work of Görtschacher, there remains a real shortage of 'social historians of the little magazine'.¹⁷ There is now a genuine demand for a new encyclopaedic work akin to Sullivan's *British Literary Magazines: The Modern Age, 1914-1984*, updated to include those major titles overlooked by his researchers, and for an extended literary-historical survey of changes within little magazine culture since the Sixties. At the same time, there is an urgent need for a number of single-title studies, such as Stewart's *The Prairie Schooner Story: A Little Magazine's First 25 Years*, free to engage with the detailed specifics beyond the scope of work by Görtschacher and Sullivan, and to record the achievements of a new generation of small press writers, artists and editors. As a hybrid study in which the unique experiences of a single title are used to illustrate broader trends within the little magazine community, it is hoped that 'The Little Become Big?: *Ambit* and London's Little Magazines, 1959-1999' will establish a credible methodological model for further single-title studies; will register some of the most significant major and minor literary-artistic trends of the last forty years; and will lead to a better understanding of the contribution that the little magazines continue to make to the cultural life of contemporary Britain. Intended to complement the existing work of Hoffman, Hamilton, Sullivan and Görtschacher in

¹⁷ Derek Stanford, in *ibid*: i.

particular, this study will, it is hoped, prove a useful addition to the existing literature on British little magazines.

CHAPTER ONE. THE SIXTIES: EXPERIMENTS VISUAL, LITERARY, AND CHEMICAL

Mapping The Scene

In 1964 Leonard V. Fulton published his first *Directory of Little Magazines*, a 38-page booklet containing editorial addresses and data relating to print format, size, price, general content and editorial preferences for more than 300 English language publications from America, Britain, Ireland, Europe and Australasia. In his short introduction, Fulton explained that the directory was not aimed at imposing order where ‘the very respiration of the thing demands chaos’, but

to afford writers a better than even chance at marketing material, and if it goes a step or two in this service it will have been worth the production. From the desk of my own magazine I have observed an enormous waste of time and postage. The latter can be written off. Time cannot. Time is the young writer’s (and editor’s) chief adversary—let none believe otherwise. The Directory may help him get an edge on it.¹⁸

While Fulton was keen to emphasise the fact that his publication represented a marketing tool for aspiring writers rather than any attempt at a totalising catalogue, it does provide an interesting picture of the British little magazines being read by American audiences in 1964.

Although predominantly concerned with the American big reviews and campus magazines, Fulton also listed the English magazines *Ikon*, *Manifold*, *Move*, *My Own Mag*, *New Departures*, *Openings*, *Origins Diversions*, *Resuscitator*, *Scrip*, and *Tlaloc* which had sprung up in or around London, and in the provincial cities of Derby, Leeds and Bristol. *Agenda*, *And*, *Outposts*, *Stand*, *The London Magazine* and *Ambit*, by contrast, were inexplicably omitted; and it was not until the appearance of a second edition in 1966, and a third edition in 1967, that Fulton included some of these important publications in his writers’ market survey alongside mid-Sixties

¹⁸ Fulton, ‘Counting Fry’, *Directory of Little Magazines*. First Edition: i-ii.

ephemerals like *Allotrope*, *Amazing Rayday*, *Anarchy* and *Assassins Broadsheet*.

Fulton's directories provide an interesting, however partial, illustration of a mid-Sixties little magazine scene which, Martin Booth has suggested, would later spawn 'over 600 small magazines devoted to either poetry alone or poetry and visuals or poetry and other branches of literature' between 1964 and 1972.¹⁹ They also suggest the logic for Booth's distinction between the magazines that had existed prior to 1964 and the wave of new publications that would follow in the latter half of the decade, many epitomising Fulton's notion that the little magazine embodies a form of suicidal bravery or 'anti-response' stemming from an awareness of its own inherent transience:

Appropriately, transience is a characteristic of the small magazine. The longevity of any given one is certainly no more than three years—they rise as they must out of anger or impulse, flame high for a brief, adventurous period, then settle to an ember or die very dead. There are perhaps resurgences, and some even live forty years. But the flame is never as bright as in that first splendid dash to freedom. Transience remains a true imperative, for transience and impulse are themselves creative imperatives.²⁰

Indeed, all of the English magazines listed by Fulton in 1964 would either disappear or lapse into irregular publication before the end of the decade. Somewhat ironically, considering the writers' market mentality that underpinned the publication, it was precisely those magazines omitted from the 1964 directory that rose to prominence during the Sixties, providing a constant and reliable market for would-be contributors.

Making A (False) Start. *Ambit* 1-9, 1959-1961

Falling into the first of Booth's categories as a pre-1964 magazine, *Ambit* was launched in 1959, in the same year as Michael Horovitz's avant-garde magazine

¹⁹ Martin Booth, *British Poetry 1964-84: Driving Through Barricades*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985: 66.

²⁰ Fulton, *Directory of Little Magazines*. First Edition: i-ii.

New Departures, and David Wright and Patrick Swift's high modernist review. *X*. Founded by the paediatrician Martin Bax, *Ambit* pointedly rejected the strident tones of its contemporaries; and the early numbers were marked by a caution that deliberately eschewed the 'anger' and 'flame' that Fulton associated directly with the 'splendid dash to freedom' and 'adventurous' spirit that had guided his selections for the first *Directory of Little Magazines*. Indeed, at a moment when the heavyweight *X* was agitating against 'a phoney avant-gardeism' practised by a handful of bohemians and their 'inverted bourgeois' camp-followers,²¹ and *New Departures* was aggressively pushing an anarchic blend of jazz, Beat poetry, abstract art, minimalist music and collage as a reproach to the '99% of contemporary litterateurs [...] untouched by the integral revolutions in fine art and music',²² *Ambit* was refusing to get involved.

In the first issue of *New Departures*, David Sladen declared:

I believe in the avantgarde of all ages: and the need to move with the times but not necessarily in step.

For the sake of argument, I believe in argument for argument's sake.

For the sake of the audience, I believe the actors should be audible. For the sake of the actors, the audience should understand that some silences are intentional.

*[...] Like a good chess-player, let us know the four or five moves ahead. Unlike a grandmaster, let us not know all the moves ahead. (The game of chess is not an end in itself)*²³

In making such a statement, Sladen was immediately tying *New Departures* to the self-consciously 'experimental', the radical, and the tongue-in-cheek: the suggestion being that if the magazine didn't know where it would end up, it knew at least how it was setting out. Ambitious and energetic, Horovitz was determined to ensure it began impressively, and, after writing to various literary friends, published a first number that included work by William Burroughs, Stevie Smith, John Fuller,

²¹ David Wright and Patrick Swift, 'On The Margin', *X*, Vol. 1, No. 1, November 1959: 79-80.

²² Michael Horovitz, 'A Circle for the Square World', *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 August 1964: 710.

²³ David Sladen, 'Credo', *New Departures*, No. 1, Summer 1959: 7-8.

Cornelius Cardew, Alan Brownjohn and Samuel Beckett. The second number, with its focus on minimalism, collage and Concrete poetry, featured Eugene Ionesco, John Cage, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Creeley, Gregory Corso, Donald Davie and Jack Kerouac. Such high-quality contributions brought immediate interest from the literary presses and the magazine-buying public, with Horovitz, reflecting upon the success of the first three numbers, recalling that ‘Most of the 3,000 copies of each were soon sold, and subscriptions trickled [in]’.²⁴

X made a similar impact with its icy rejection of the new fads surrounding performance poetry, jazz and assemblage. The contents of the 80-page heavyweight review came as a scornful reproach to the ‘hip’ pretensions of Horovitz’s new band of experimentalists, with Wright and Swift rejecting the American Pop Art influences absorbed by Horovitz in favour of a Franco-Celtic high modernism manifested in contributions from Anthony Cronin, Hugh MacDiarmid, Robert Pinget and Patrick Kavanagh. Deliberately anti-popular (Beckett’s essay ‘L’image’ appears in the original French), the first number carried messages of support from *The New Statesman* and *The Observer*, as well as adverts for Faber and Faber, Oxford University Press and the *Times Literary Supplement*. Deeply suspicious of the various ‘revolutions in fine art and music’, the first number of *X* was greeted enthusiastically by the *Times Literary Supplement* which applauded its ‘strenuous critical writing’ and its ‘dense and difficult’ imaginative contributions.²⁵ While Sladen offered a subjective Credo as an introduction to the *New Departures* project, Wright and Swift retreated to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* for a definition of enigmatic but objective precision:

²⁴ Horovitz, ‘A Circle for the Square World’: 710.

²⁵ Anon, ‘After Commitment’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 November 1959: 693.

x = algebraic symbol 'the unknown quantity'. 'Incalculable or mysterious factor or influence'²⁶

By the time *X* switched to irregular publication and ultimately suspension, Wright and Swift had established themselves as bastions of the counter-revolution, denouncing television and the subsidised arts as the symptoms of an imminent and irreversible cultural decline. For *X*, the real avant-garde were still working within the modernist tradition established by the principal French and Irish writers of the Twenties, Thirties and Forties, and its editors were reluctant to see those achievements swept away by the formal sloppiness of Beat lyricism and improvisation.

As the editors of *New Departures* and *X* actively sought contributors to advance their own literary-artistic agendas, *Ambit* 1 carried neither credo nor manifesto. Looking back on *Ambit's* early years, Bax recalled: '[friends at Oxford] were always asking: "What was my programme?" I said: "Well, I don't really have a programme; I just put good things together." And that was an acceptable view'.²⁷ This lack of programme would spill over into the early editorials which, stripped of a guiding ideological core, seem almost superfluous. Filled with an overwhelming weariness for the literary politics and rhetorical posturing of his contemporaries, Bax rather cautiously put the case for an independent magazine unfettered by the manifesto-ethic, his downbeat half-promise being 'If this isn't Art, it'll have to do—until the real thing comes along'.²⁸

Bax made no great claims for his magazine in the first editorial, but he might have sounded a little more upbeat for some of the work that appeared in the first number was not without promise. Obtained through a number of personal

²⁶ Wright and Swift, *X*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1959: 1.

²⁷ Bax, from a recorded but unpublished conversation at his home on 18 February 2004.

²⁸ Bax, 'The *Ambit* Axe', *Ambit* 1, Summer 1959: 2.

friends and contacts, the highlights of *Ambit* 1 included M. Piercy's black-and-white ink drawing *Children with birds*, the forms of her children mirrored by the gentle curves of the bird that holds their attention; Norman Wallace's poems 'Observation Post', 'Letters to Post', and 'Mortality', each infused with a Forties sombreness; and Oliffe Richmond's ink drawings of a grotesque pig-like face, a sketch-like study of a cockerel in motion, and the block-like forms of body-builders and professional strong-men.

When *Ambit* 2 appeared, a similar balance had been struck between the literary and the visual, as the adolescent narrator of Desmond Skirrow's illustrated short story 'News from Home' described a youthful world of boys, jukeboxes and coffee shops, shaped by the latest trends in fashion, music and science fiction. This was accompanied by Andrew Fergusson's abstract ink drawings entitled *The Architect's Garden*, and Merrill Fergusson's violent short story 'The Return', which closes with a pensioner beating a kitten to death with his walking-stick.

Despite the quality of some of *Ambit's* early unsolicited contributions, the visual unity of the first three numbers was undermined by inferior production and the lack of a distinctive design element. Initially funded by Bax and his friends, the first number had gone to press without a dummy, and many of the obvious presentational flaws would not be discovered until publication. Indeed, when *New Departures* 1 appeared in a 98-page format comprising three different colours and grades of paper, a combination of letterpress and lithographed elements, a colourful abstract cover design, and an unmistakably contemporary layout, *Ambit* was still struggling with the fundamentals. The small, single-spaced and tightly justified roman font of *Ambit* 1 made reading the fiction and the longer essays a daunting and somewhat tiring task, and the distinctly unsystematic application of 'creative

white space' (some pages remain half empty while both inside covers are squeezed for advertising revenue) further detracted from the visual attractiveness of the magazine. Bax acknowledged these limitations in his third editorial:

With our small resources, we had many difficulties: the production of *Ambit* 1 was poor but we had been unable to afford a specimen run and, you may remember, our appearance coincided with the printing strike. We think that *Ambit* 2 was better although we are aware there were far too many typographical errors. (We hope these are missing from this number).²⁹

The presentation of *Ambit* would steadily improve as the magazine moved away from the low-tech mimeo reproduction offered by a series of local printers (Camden Printing, Susan Tully Ltd and Dean Barker Ltd), settling for hot metal with *Ambit* 5 before transferring to The Lavenham Press from *Ambit* 10 onwards. Another key decision was to abandon the cartoon-like *Ambit* logo that had appeared on the cover of the first two numbers (a 13cm x 12.5cm black line drawing displaying a sinister-looking male, seated at a desk, with a quill brandished dagger-like in his right fist) in favour of a series of abstract artworks. This move freed up more space for *Ambit's* regular artists while providing Bax with an opportunity to assert the visual aspect he had promised to uphold in his ninth editorial.

Despite Bax's insistence that 'When *Ambit* appeared no new stars were seen in the sky and no famous Englishmen attended the launching. [...] *Ambit* prefers to approach the problems of existence in a more piecemeal fashion',³⁰ various design changes enacted between 1959 and 1961 began to afford the magazine a new formal coherence. *Ambit* 7 was particularly notable for major improvements in the size, setting and sharpness of copy; an attractive layout; and the enhanced clarity of the visuals, evidenced by Mary Pakenham Walshe's figurative ink drawings. *Ambit* 9 brought a further improvement in the reproduction of visuals printed in black-and-

²⁹ Bax, 'Ambit Ambitious', *Ambit* 3, Winter 1960: 2.

³⁰ Bax, 'Ambit in Orbit', *Ambit* 2, Autumn 1959: 2.

white; the first attempt at printing a musical score as part of Patrick Riley's essay on 'Serialism'; and an attractively designed contents page. As the physical appearance of the magazine steadily improved from *Ambit 7* onwards, a general improvement in the quality of the literary contributions followed as the sombre and more technically conservative Forties elements made way for the freer, witty experimentalism of Brock and his friends on the fringes of the Group. Slowly but surely, *Ambit* was 'getting with it'.

Getting With It. *Ambit* 10-41, 1961-1969

The story of *Ambit* since 1961 is largely concerned with a continuation of its 'piecemeal' progression from a publication responsive to the apolitical impulses of a small network of friends, into a magazine sponsored by the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) which, while still rejecting any single literary-artistic programme, had certainly developed a distinctive identity before 1970. Although this identity owed much to changes on the editorial board, further enhancement of the magazine's physical appearance and higher quality contributions, a series of controversial special numbers published between 1966 and 1969 also succeeded in attracting sales, complaints and a good deal of attention. If *Ambit* had set out in an overly cautious mood, it would soon become decidedly more daring in its publication of violent and sexually explicit material.

Like many of its younger contemporaries founded after 1964, *Ambit* began to explore the new territory opened up by the outcome of the Lady Chatterley trial of 1960, and the *Naked Lunch* appeal of 1965. The Lady Chatterley verdict had proved that a new 'defence of merit' introduced with the *Obscene Publications Act 1959* could be argued successfully where the interests of science, literature, art or learning were at stake, rather than a desire to 'deprave and corrupt' its readers.

Furthermore, the *Naked Lunch* decision seemed to suggest that an author could present his reader with an unprecedented and virtually limitless level of verbal abuse, drug imagery, extreme violence, and explicit and perverted sex provided that the text was not 'utterly without redeeming social value'. Although dissenting Justice Paul C. Reardon described the book as 'a revolting miasma of unrelieved perversion and disease, graphically described It is, in truth, literary sewage', *Naked Lunch* was distinguished from pornographic texts like *Cult of the Spankers* and *Screaming Flesh*, and subsequently deemed not to be an obscene publication.³¹

While the contents of *Ambit* between 1961 and 1969 reflected a willingness to explore the limits of this newfound literary and artistic license, Britain's critical commentators remained divided upon the issue of cultural 'merit'. In 1964, the moral crusader Mrs Mary Whitehouse forced the BBC's popular satirical sketch-show *That Was The Week That Was* off the air with her Campaign to Clean Up TV,³² and would later describe the Sixties as 'an illiberal decade' during which

The avant garde flooded our culture and our society with its dirty water, churning up foundations, overturning standards, confusing thought and leaving in its wake an all too obvious trail of insecurity and misery.³³

Thus a new cultural conservatism had sprung up in reaction to the transgressive sub-cultures that had emerged in London after Labour's General Election victory of 1964. Many of the little magazines that appeared after this watershed would grow out of individual disillusionment and ideological disagreements within the splintering Left to become infused with the same political concerns that motivated the alternative press. *Ambit* would remain largely free of these political commitments, dispensing with a recognisable editorial altogether in 1966. As a

³¹ Ted Morgan, 'Naked Lunch: 1959-1966', *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs*. London: The Bodley Head, 1991: 347.

³² Robert Hewison, *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties 1960-75*. London: Methuen, 1986: 27-30.

³³ Mary Whitehouse, quoted in Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed (eds), *Cultural Revolution: The Challenge of the Arts in the 1960s*. London: Routledge, 1992: 2.

result, Bax's self-professed anarchism would find its expression in the much subtler processes of editorial selection and organisation.

The New Design Ethic

With the appearance of *Ambit* 10, Bax's magazine underwent a fresh series of design changes that would place a much greater emphasis upon creative writing and the visual arts at the expense of the critical writing, occasional essays and retro ephemera especially prominent in the first three numbers. The standard of the artworks and their reproduction improved dramatically following the introduction of a high-finish art paper in *Ambit* 10 for plates by Michael Snow, while the glossy white card cover of *Ambit* 13 and the first coloured design of *Ambit* 15 reinforced the new slicker image. Names of contributors had been appearing on the front cover since *Ambit* 9, but from *Ambit* 13 a series of well-reproduced drawings and prints began to dominate. Early covers of particular note included Peter Blake's *faux naïve* ink drawing of a heart (*Ambit* 13); David Hockney's unfinished female nude (*Ambit* 14); Kevin Farrell's ink drawing of a racing cyclist (*Ambit* 16); and Robin Ray's parody of a tabloid newspaper for a 'Special New New Poetry Edition' [*sic*] (*Ambit* 17), with its imitations of Concrete poetry and its playful juxtapositions of word and image.

After *Ambit* 17, art editor Michael Foreman, who had replaced Andrew Fergusson in 1962, would produce much of the magazine's cover art. Instrumental in securing the contributions of his Royal College of Art contemporaries Blake and Hockney, Foreman was initially influenced by the photo-montages and screen-prints of British and American Pop Artists like Eduardo Paolozzi and Andy Warhol, the cover of *Ambit* 18, with its abstract Miss World newspaper cut-outs, strongly recalling Warhol's *Triple Elvis* (1962) and *Twenty Five Coloured Marilyns* (1962).

Foreman began to incorporate cut-outs from American magazines into his designs from *Ambit* 19, which appeared as line drawings, photo-montages, screen prints, or typographic designs, before his shocking cartoon for the Stars and Stripes Special (*Ambit* 39). Other important Sixties cover artists included Jan Howarth (*Ambit* 23), Paolozzi (*Ambit* 33 and 40), and Friere Wright (*Ambit* 35).

The artwork inside principally dwelt on the surreal and the fantastic, as evidenced by Carol Annand's line drawings of children squeezed into bottles (*Ambit* 13); David Oxtoby's satirical cartoons of wrestler-gods (*Ambit* 14); and Kevin Farrell's ghoulish crowd scenes (*Ambit* 16). Other themes included the American iconography found in Foreman's *Flag on the Mississippi Saturday Night* (*Ambit* 18), and Robert McAuley's *Three Deaths: 2. J.F.K.* (*Ambit* 21); and a sustained interest in lino and wood prints such as Heinke Jenkins's medieval monks (*Ambit* 15 and 17) and Klaus Micklitz's juxtaposition of a Mexican gun-slinger and Chivalric knight (*Ambit* 19). An increasing interest in collage and the continuity between images and text would see illustration and collaborative compositions dominating the visual contributions from *Ambit* 20, the first of these being a combination of surrealist poetry and abstract painting by Anselm Hollo and Barry Hall entitled *Heads to Appear on the Stands*.

Foreman's interest in cut-up techniques was curiously echoed in the literary content of *Ambit* during this period. In 1963, *Ambit* 17 featured George MacBeth's 'Fin du Globe', a template for a game of literary consequences consisting of 52 cards

which should be shuffled and cut before each reading. The game may be played with any number of players from 2 to 26. An equal number of cards should be dealt to each player. These cards may be arranged in any order provided they are kept face down until they are used. Players must continue to read in the order they begin and only 1 card may be read at a

time. When all the cards dealt to all the players have been read, the game is over. There is no winner, only the game.³⁴

Assuming the reader takes the trouble to cut out the 52 'cards' (there are, in fact, only 46) and follow these 'rules', the result is a vast number of texts randomly generated from 46 fragments seemingly formed from a similar process of random juxtaposition. Card 24 enigmatically reads:

Aberdeen.

Repetto to Sprock

The herring-boats are full of poisoned mackerel. The dead lobster is in the creel. I am typing this to be shown at once to Elvira Norman. Tell your beads, my dear, for a sick retriever. And keep your fingers crossed.³⁵

If 'Fin du Globe' represented a movement towards a multi-media literary artwork, it equally marked the first major injection of humour into the pages of Bax's magazine. Until *Ambit* 17 the standard of the literary contributions had been steadily rising, but with their core themes of human sacrifice (Humphrey Evan's 'The King', *Ambit* 14); rape (A. Beaumont's 'Pay Up and Look Big', *Ambit* 15); broken relationships (B.C. Leale's 'Separation', *Ambit* 16); and violent death (John Knight's 'The Twins of God', *Ambit* 15) had seldom threatened to raise a smile.

'A Most Dangerous Publication'

As *Ambit's* contributions became more formally extreme following 'Fin du Globe', the visual and literary contents of the magazine also began to explore a range of provocative themes. This trend had, perhaps, been signalled by the decision to publish Bruce McLean's *A Series of Drawings for a Sculpture to be entitled Vickie Kennedy will You be my Friend* (*Ambit* 24), eight non-representational ink drawings taken from a black-and-white erotic photograph of a topless woman dressed in stockings, high heels and lacy underwear. McLean's drawings appeared alongside Anthony Edkins's poem 'The Big Breast Saga', an uneasy satire upon the

³⁴ George MacBeth, 'Fin du Globe', *Ambit* 17, 1963: 21.

³⁵ MacBeth, *ibid*: 24.

relationship between sex and advertising, and Eric Matthieson's poem 'The Pornographers', which featured the lines

What you see here is yourself, homesick
For innocence, stripped of the leaves of this
Seedy summer; making the furtive point
Behind a dusty curtain; groping for truth perhaps
Beneath a sad and randy pleasure³⁶

As a number of erotic photographs continued to appear on the contents pages from *Ambit* 24 to *Ambit* 27, and another topless woman fronted the 'Anti-Sex' issue (*Ambit* 31), J.G. Ballard was exploring even more dubious territory. Listed as Prose Editor from *Ambit* 30, Ballard contributed 'You: Coma: Marilyn Monroe' to *Ambit* 27, which prompted the Conservative MP Graham Page to complain to Minister of State for Education and Science, Miss Jennie Lee, that *Ambit*

is disgusting when it is possible to understand the words used. Some of it seems to be the product of a twisted mind. If it gets into the hands of teenagers, as it easily could, it would be a most dangerous publication.³⁷

In response, Bax emblazoned Page's assessment across the cover of *Ambit* 28 before giving more space to Ballard's 'The Assassination of J.F.K. Considered as a Downhill Motor Race' (*Ambit* 29) and his 'Plan For The Assassination of Jacqueline Kennedy' (*Ambit* 31), each taking the themes of sexual deviance, mental abnormality, celebrity women, and murder to unprecedented extremes. Between 1967 and 1969 there followed a flurry of stories, poems and pictures in which mental illness (Eduardo Paolozzi's 'Moonstrips-General Dynamic F.U.N.', *Ambit* 33); abortion (Marvin Cohen's 'The Art of Concealed Abortion', *Ambit* 34); oral sex (Ann Quin's 'Tripticks', *Ambit* 35); and the atom bomb (Michael Butterworth's 'Sergeant Peppers Postatomic Skull', *Ambit* 36) had become more than merely passing references.

³⁶ Eric Mathieson, 'The Pornographers', *Ambit* 24, 1965: 40.

³⁷ Graham Page MP, quoted in *Ambit* 28, 1966: front cover.

Spurred on to greater acts of audacity by attention from Westminster, Bax's magazine revelled in its new 'dangerous' label and from *Ambit* 33 a short summary of contents replaced the simple horizontal list of contributors on the front cover.

The summary of *Ambit* 34 warned:

No. 34 contains Poems by Robert Angus, Philip Hobsbaum, John Pudney, Stevie Smith. Some Pornography by George MacBeth heavily illustrated by Michael Foreman. The Turned-in Broken-up and Gone World by Robert Sward and Ann Quin—Living in the Present. Martin Bax explains softly away Mr. Wilson's disappearance, the drug scene and poor buckled British Rail.³⁸

Such copy was deliberately intended to provoke a response, and notoriety was to prove a useful direct-marketing tool as a subscription leaflet included with *Ambit* 36 ranked Ballard, Brock, MacBeth and Paolozzi among the magazine's chief literary outlaws.

Experiments Literary and Chemical: The *Ambit* Drugs and Creative Writing Competition

In 1967 *Ambit* courted further controversy with an editorial announcement in *Ambit* 33 headed 'Drugs and the Writer':

Those who take drugs maintain that they both deepen and widen their experience. They believe that drugs make them more creative. On the other hand many people take exactly the opposite view. We intend to investigate the subject by offering a prize for the best creative work, both prose and poetry, written under the influence of drugs.³⁹

This statement brought a flood of entries, and the original deadline was subsequently extended to 1 March 1968. *Ambit* 35 carried contributions from the unknown J.R. Walsh, M.J. Harrison, Geoffrey Marsh and Mary Emmett, as well as the anonymous Dale and Barry, prompted by experiences with pertofran, penicillin V, caffeine, proplus, LSD, dexedrine and drinamyl, to list but a few. None of these drugged-up writers would appear again, but if *Ambit's* competition failed to launch any new careers, it certainly succeeded in attracting the attention of the serious literary press. Writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Derwent May credited

³⁸ Anon, *Ambit* 34, 1968: front cover.

³⁹ [Bax], 'Drugs and the Writer. An *Ambit* Competition', *Ambit* 33, 1967: 27.

Ambit with having ‘cultivated a school of good-humoured, if very slight poets—authors of joky poems about modern love affairs, full of throwaway laughs at their own sentimentality’, viewing the competition itself as an elaborate satirical plot: ‘a send-up of the idea of drug-inspired literature’.⁴⁰ Bax responded by repeating the terms of the competition:

we wish to make it clear that, as we said, the creative work is to be written under the influence of drugs. We mean just that. We deliberately did not specify the drugs. We ourselves have no idea which drugs may or may not have effects on the creative process. It was for precisely this reason that we suggested we should try to collect some evidence about it. This seemed better than reacting hysterically to the fact that every single person in this country takes drugs regularly every day in quite large quantities. There is no need to break the law in entering this competition by taking a drug which is illegal. *Ambit* has no intention of interfering in the right of any individual to do just what he wants if society will let him.⁴¹

Although Bax continued to insist that his investigation was a legitimate one, the majority of contributors published in *Ambit* 35 admitted to having used banned substances at some point in their careers. Thus cannabis featured heavily in the competitors’ commentaries, Davy Dean suggesting that his automatic prose extract ‘The Quality of a Smile Is Advertised Beauty’ was ‘written in its entirety with the aid of cannabis in the form of Moroccan Green and failing that, Congo Brown’,⁴² and Barry turning to pot as the formal and thematic inspiration for his ‘Spring Poem’. More disturbing was the heroin-fuelled paranoia that pervaded Dale’s poem ‘The Waking of Fred Bloggs’, a patchwork of images evoking loss, vacancy, and pointlessness. Even Ann Quin, winner of the £25 first prize, who suggested that her automatic prose contribution ‘Tripticks’ was ‘written under my usual combination of nicotine, [caffeine] and of course, the birth pill I take—Orthonovin 2’, confessed:

although I have never written under the influence of Pot, Peyote, Acid, Hash etc., I am absolutely certain that having taken these, especially Peyote and LSD, they did actually open out a much wider possibility for my writing afterwards [...]. After all taking these

⁴⁰ Derwent May, ‘Little Magazines’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 January 1968: 41.

⁴¹ [Bax], ‘Drugs and the Writer. The *Ambit* Competition’, *Ambit* 34, 1968: 43.

⁴² Davy Dean, ‘The Quality of a Smile Is Advertised Beauty’, *Ambit* 35, 1968: 46.

things are part and parcel of experiences, and they are bound to have some effect on a writer's work, visual and psychological.⁴³

'Tripticks' itself, illustrated by the psychedelic ink drawings of Martin Leman, is a bizarre agglomeration of automatic prose, cut-up, lists and aphorisms occasionally moving towards free-verse lineation in which the narrator and reader are constantly crashing into new geographies and new chronologies as a free-associative chain of tenuous and surreal images generates a text smooth enough to suggest coherence without ever quite achieving it. The second prize went to Henry Graham for his somewhat more restrained poetic sequence, 'The Samuel Palmer Paintings'. While Quin's prose rapidly leaps from image to image, seemingly spontaneously, Graham's poems remain unrhymed but tightly controlled as they spiral towards darkness, hopelessness, and despair. Commenting upon the compositional methods that gave rise to this sequence based on the paintings of the nineteenth-century romantic landscape artist, Graham wrote:

Ten poems written over about two weeks, there must have been about ten drafts to each poem. Start at about nine in the morning with six grains of Seconal (four 1½ grain capsules); I used the book *Samuel Palmer, The Visionary Years* by Geoffrey Grigson propped up in front of me, and hardly took my eyes off it. About three hours later, four and a half grains, and four and a half grains three hours later.⁴⁴

With the judging complete and the prizes awarded, Bax suggested that the effect of the competition had not, in fact, been to drive a horde of writers into hard drugs, but rather illustrated the extent to which 'practically everybody' had 'written under the influence of [...] drugs at one time or another, either deliberately or not'.⁴⁵ Reflecting generally upon the entries received, Bax and his team identified a narrowness of subject matter, a lack of structure, a preference for first person narration and the present tense, an abundance of unfamiliar words, and 'a similar

⁴³ Ann Quin, *Ambit* 35, 1968: 42.

⁴⁴ Henry Graham, *ibid*: 42.

⁴⁵ Bax, *ibid*: 41.

emotional framework' running through many of the submissions, although these observations were not in themselves sufficient to prove a non-existent hypothesis.

The competition had certainly generated attention, and *Ambit* was promptly denounced in the *Daily Mail* alongside *New Worlds* magazine, the fiction of B.S. Johnson and the poetry of Harry Fainlight. In a full-page article about ACGB funding and its literary beneficiaries headed 'Millions To Spend. And this is the sort of thing the Arts Council spends it on', the *Daily Mail* took particular exception to *New Worlds*, 'subsidised by the council for twelve months at a cost of £1,800' and recently considered 'so squalid by W.H. Smith's that it refused to sell it, complaining of the four-letter words liberally scattered throughout its serial story', 'lurid descriptions of sexual deviations' and 'illustrations [...] of a kind normally associated with American horror comics'. Similar criticisms were levelled at *Ambit* for publishing a poem describing 'unusual practices' entitled 'Up Shit Creek', and more directly for advertising 'a competition for work written under the influence of drugs'.⁴⁶ The *Ambit* and drugs connection also informed criticisms of 'The LSD Poet' Harry Fainlight, who had contributed poems to the 'hippy newspapers' *IT*, *Residue* and *Underdog* in addition to *Ambit* and *Encounter*, and whose *London* collection had, by his own admission, been 'written on drugs'. The article was rounded off with a cartoon worthy of any Underground artist, depicting a bespectacled arts bureaucrat-bird vomiting five-pound notes to an unsavoury rabble of pornographers, dirty old men and wine-sipping dames.

The anti-Underground exposé was to prompt further Commons debate about ACGB grants in 1968, with Jennie Lee taking questions from Sir Knox

⁴⁶ Anon, 'Millions To Spend', *Daily Mail*, 5 April 1968: 6.

Cunningham and R.C. Mitchell concerning *New Worlds* and similar publications.⁴⁷

Looking back upon the motivation for *Ambit's* controversial competition, Bax still maintains that the magazine did nothing wrong:

It was Jim Ballard's suggestion ... but it kicked back, because we actually thought ... we would be taking the mickey out of all the people who said they wrote under the influence of drugs. Actually of course we awarded the prize and we made it very clear that ... drugs are drugs. I mean, you had to define what a drug was and we didn't do that.⁴⁸

Coming so soon after the Rolling Stones drugs bust and the publication of the Castalia Foundation's 'Experimental Workshop' programme in the *International Times* in 1966, Bax's targets seemed to be the pseudo-scientists and psychedelic believers engaged in such 'research'. Indeed, upon being expelled from Harvard for their 'psychedelic research project', the academics Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert and Ralph Metzner turned their attentions towards *The Psychedelic Review* (edited by Metzner), and began developing a new protocol for further investigation by the newly-formed Castalia Foundation. Essentially staffed by psychologists with an interest in Eastern mysticism and New Age philosophy, the Castalia Foundation was committed to a programme of experiments in 'consciousness expansion':

In each generation a few men stumble upon the riddle of consciousness and its solution; they discover, once again, that beyond the ordinary world of microscopic, tangible, material things, there are endless levels of energy transformations accessible to consciousness. They learn again the age-old lesson taught by mystics and philosophers of East and West: that most of mankind is sleepwalking, moving somnambulistically through a world of rote perceptions. They learn that it is possible to 'come to,' to awake, to be liberated from the prison of illusory perceptions and conflicting emotions. As many internal explorers of the past, they become dedicated to the process of consciousness expansion, to the ideal of maximum awareness and internal freedom.⁴⁹

With supposedly genuine scientists making a healthy income on little more than a weekend experimental meditation workshop (for legal reasons, these experimental workshops did not involve experiments with drugs), *Ambit's* study was no more

⁴⁷ *Hansard*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Fifth Series, Vol. 762, Session 1967-68, 11 April 1968: Col. 1573; *Hansard*. Fifth Series, Vol. 764, Session 1967-68, 9 May 1968: Col. 591-2.

⁴⁸ Bax, see note 27.

⁴⁹ Pamphlet for the Castalia Foundation's 'Experimental Workshops', reproduced in Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1968: 209.

scandalous and no less credible than those being funded by American universities. If C.R.B. Joyce had found that *Ambit's* 'experiment' had uncovered little of scientific value in his 'Scientific Notes' to *Ambit* 35, then at least these results had come at significantly less cost to the public than Leary's astronomically priced workshops.⁵⁰

Despite the satirical nature of *Ambit's* 'investigation', the ACGB, an important sponsor since 1964, was by no means amused by the affair, and withdrew its grant. While Bax has since suggested that the ACGB's decision had little significant effect upon the magazine, the grant being worth approximately £50, steady price rises followed the withdrawal, and *Ambit* underwent an erratic period of growth that would continue until 1976. Despite the economic 'kick-back' Bax describes, however, Lord Goodman had drawn attention to 'a public nuisance', and had certainly assisted the editor in at least one aim for, in the words of Bax, 'one was always trying to get attention, of course'.⁵¹

Love, Sex, and Death: The Newspaper Issue. *Ambit* 37, 1968

After the Drugs and Creative Writing Competition, *Ambit* continued to embrace the shocking, experimental and risqué with a one-off special broadsheet number devoted to the themes of love, sex and death. Inspired by the *Ambit* News cut-ups that had replaced Bax's traditional editorial column from *Ambit* 29 onwards, and a distaste for the 'deeply serious'⁵² Underground paper *International Times*, *Ambit* 37 had grown out of a notion 'that you could write a newspaper that was totally different, whose content was presented as news but of course totally different to

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Bax, see note 27.

⁵² Miles, quoted in Nigel Fountain, *Underground: The London Alternative Press 1966-74*. New York: Routledge, 1988: 31.

what you see in the ordinary political newspapers'.⁵³ Exploring the relationship between word and image within the context of a newspaper parody, much of the visual content of *Ambit 37* was drawn from a number of 'found' or 'archival' sources seemingly at odds with the surrounding text. Thus beneath a headline 'HELP HELP HELP', the front page carried a black-and-white image of Brigitte Bardot and a black-and-white photograph of Adolf Hitler in black shirt and short trousers. Similarly a presumably 'found' Forties-style advert for the 'New Sub-Machine Gun' manufactured by Sterling Engineering for the British and Canadian Armed Forces featured prominently in the bottom left-hand corner, in anticipation of the war imagery that dominated the number.

Edwin Brock's sports page included a Weimar Republic 'team photograph'; an Iron Cross medal ceremony; and portraits of other Nazi 'medallists'. This was later balanced by a portrait of a decorated young Winston Churchill; an image of a British soldier in African or Indian khakis marching with a Union Flag, rifle-like, over his left shoulder; and a 'found' series of annotated paintings depicting 'Deeds of Superlative Valour Which Won V.C.s In World War I'. The decontextualisation of this collage process succeeds in stripping these images of individual meanings and charging them with new meanings derived from their juxtaposition. Consequently the instinctive reaction of equating Nazi iconography with evil, cowardice, and disgust; and British iconography with goodness, bravery, and pride is significantly complicated by the connections between the images themselves. There remains, perhaps, a process of implied equation operating within this succession of war images.

⁵³ Bax, see note 27.

Alongside the staunchly masculine images of war, there were also a number of 'found' pictures of women, the Bardot cover image being succeeded by Bruce McLean's erotic nude drawings (previously published in *Ambit* 24); Foreman's 'Miss World' image (previously published on the cover of *Ambit* 20); a Roy Lichtenstein-style design of a woman administering medicine to her husband; a photograph of a women's painting class; and a group of button-badge sized photographs of Bardot, Audrey Hepburn, and other female celebrities. Women were also prominent in the 'Poor But Loyal' photograph of a British wartime parade. The juxtapositioning of these images, however, was instantly problematic for while the images of war volunteers might suggest that women need not necessarily aspire to the glamour girl lifestyle, it was precisely these photogenic women that dominated the visual contents of the magazine. Mirroring the 'woman as object' tendency at the core of magazines like *International Times*, *Oz*, *Black Dwarf* and the new fashionable interest in pornography, *Ambit's* contents were still tame compared with some American alternative publications. *Los Angeles Free Press*, for instance, had followed *Village Voice* in publishing a series of sex-oriented personal ads; and Al Goldstein's *Screw* appeared in November 1968 as a publication 'entirely devoted to sex, and to challenging, claimed Goldstein, the left's "fucked up" attitudes to the subject'.⁵⁴ For all its nude pictures, *Ambit* would not go nearly so far in its assault on modern mores.

Henry Graham's 'A Social Sexual Primer for Children of All Ages' set the tone for much of the poetry that appeared in *Ambit* 37. A series of eight short poems, the 'primer' is a light-hearted and largely cynical vision of human sexuality that exploits the inadequacies of contemporary 'sex education' through a far from

⁵⁴ Fountain: 120.

fulsome discussion of the terms 'Womb', 'Birth', 'Mother', 'Father'. 'Puberty', 'Intercourse', 'Love', and 'Marriage' while highlighting the problematic transition from innocence to experience. 'Puberty' suggested:

You will discover your own body, and
if you are lucky others will also discover
your body. Far too much importance
is attached to sex, but
if you are lucky you may never
find this out.⁵⁵

Generalised to the point of universal applicability in its use of the second person pronoun, the poem's primary concern remains a biological one as the emotional or spiritual aspect of the sexual relationship is downplayed by the nonchalant tone of the experienced narrator whose repetition of the word 'lucky' suggests that the truly haphazard nature of human relationships ultimately renders a 'Social Sexual Primer' ineffectual. The irony of 'Intercourse' would follow, briskly glossing over the subject of homosexuality before going on to address the issue of unplanned pregnancy as (in the terms of 'Puberty') the product of either ignorance or bad luck.

A similar cynicism permeated J.G. Ballard's poem 'Love: A Print-out for Claire Churchill', a Concrete-style composition comprising ten columns in which the words 'GIRL', 'LOVE', 'KISS', 'SUCK', 'HAIR', 'FUCK', 'ANUS', 'HATE', 'WIFE', and 'BABY' are repeated in various arrangements to describe different heterosexual relationships. Further obscenities were hidden in the crossword, which demanded an uncommonly intimate knowledge of the French pornographic novel *L'Histoire d'O* (1954).

Some of the 'death' poems were no less sensational as Brock described an unfortunate suicide in 'Accident'; Sam Brown depicted a courtroom massacre in

⁵⁵ Graham, 'Puberty', *Ambit* 37, 1968: 2.

'Open Verdict'; and Eric Mathieson evoked contemporary unease concerning the journalist's role in Vietnam in 'Press Photograph':

Exposure and aperture
Just right.
Everything beyond craftily
Out of focus.⁵⁶

The ghosts of the Second World War would haunt Robert Angus's 'Sign Here', as the narrator's grandfather is executed for his refusal to sign an incomprehensible document, while Philip Crick's 'Off-Spring' would see 'a wiry boy / with a snipers gun' solemnly assuming the mantle of his fallen ancestors. The most technically accomplished of the poetic contributions in its deployment of cross-rhyme and condensed imagery, 'Off-Spring' neatly juxtaposes the violence and responsibility that comprise the young man's burden:

On the ringed step
of the war memorial, grey
among
 the cezanne pine

a wiry boy
with a snipers gun
(black gumboot shoved across the name
of a man whose jawbone
halved his gut, in far
away verdun)

crooks the lean barrel at the churning sky
hooks home the butt
 takes aim.⁵⁷

The pseudo-sections of 'Sports Page', 'Letters To The Editor', 'Reviews', 'Court Circular', 'Science Page' and 'Small Ads' of *Ambit 37* were largely dominated by poetry and the visual arts, although a smaller quantity of prose also appeared. Giles Gordon contributed 'The Blonde Bombshell', a short piece of fragmentary prose fiction in the style of Ballard's 'You: Coma: Marilyn Monroe' in which a series of provocative headlines ('For me, sex was a formative experience.

⁵⁶ Mathieson, 'Press Photography', *ibid*: 5.

⁵⁷ Philip Crick, 'Off-Spring', *ibid*: 6.

as so often it is', 'BODY HOT PANTS', 'HARD ON', 'COVERED BY SHEEN') and a large photograph of a car breaker's yard illustrate a text structured around a simple car/woman conceit. The second prose piece was William Burroughs's 'Johnny 23', a circular science fiction fragment in which a more extreme formal disintegration generates a series of unpunctuated self-contained scenes that combine to recount a modern-day Frankenstein narrative concerning Dr John Lee and his 'one hundred percent fatal' creation, Johnny 23:

Tranquility

he decided to end the whole distasteful thing once and for all by turning everyone into himself ... this he proposed to do by a virus an image concentrate of himself that would spread waves of tranquility in all directions until the world was a fit place for him to live ... he called it the 'beautiful disease' ...⁵⁸

This science fiction was accompanied by Christopher Evans's page of fictional science in which banal statements of the obvious masquerade as headlines detailing the very latest in groundbreaking scientific research. Thus 'MACHINES AND MEN MAY DIFFER... Card Judging Test Proposed!' offered a tortuous and lengthy description of how to set up an example card test in order to prove a distinction between the random and non-random judgments of machines and humans, before admitting that 'presently available machines might well do better than chance on such judgements and thus such a test would be of little interest to us'.⁵⁹ 'Flashed Cat Fires On', by contrast, concerned an experiment designed to test the responsiveness of cells in a cat's visual cortex to changes in light stimuli. This would also give Evans the opportunity to switch to the dense and clinical register of scientific prose:

Twenty cats weighing between 3 and 5 kg were anesthetized with ethyl chloride followed by ether. After insertion of tracheal and venous cannulae, a mid-collicular section was made through the brainstem and the animals were then maintained by artificial respiration. The

⁵⁸ William Burroughs, 'Johnny 23', *ibid*: 11.

⁵⁹ Christopher Evans, 'Machines and Men May Differ...', *ibid*: 10.

skull and dura were removed to expose a large area of the visual cortex of one hemisphere.⁶⁰

Continuing in similar fashion before breaking off mid-sentence, many of Evans's texts—like the cover story concerning Basic Training in the U.S. Army—appear to have been extracted from an assortment of obscure scientific journals. With the articles getting progressively more technical as the reader moves across the page, the effect of such a collage is to emphasise the extent of the disjunction between the languages of the sciences and of the arts, this 'literature review' succeeding *Ambit's* more familiar 'literary reviews' section.

Unlike the rest of the issue, the reviews of Gavin Ewart and Anselm Hollo remained firmly within the house style formalised in *Ambit* 18. Ewart's review treated *The Stopped Landscape* by Alan Riddell; *A Small Desperation* by Danny Abse; *Love In The Environs of Voronezh* and *Shamen* by Alan Sillitoe; plus *Lyrics For The Dog Hour* by Maureen Duffy. Of these five poets, only Abse had previously appeared in *Ambit*, and Ewart finds something in each of these works to approve while occasionally complaining about issues of form, word selection, and rhyming. Despite identifying the 'occasional cliché' and a certain ugliness in the 'environs' used in the title poem of Sillitoe's first collection, Ewart quoted enthusiastically from six poems written in rhymed quatrains and free verse emphasising 'original thought', strong description and 'energy' before concluding that 'Shamen' is 'completely individual in style and vocabulary'.⁶¹ Hollo then provided an equally positive assessment of four American volumes: the *Selected Poems* of Kenneth Patchen; *In. On. Or About The Premises* by Paul Blackburn; *The Sorrow Dance* by Denise Levertov; and *The Light Around The Body* by Robert Bly. Against the high-impact shock-tactics of *Ambit* 37, therefore, the reviews of Ewart

⁶⁰ Evans, 'Flashed Cat Fires On', *ibid*: 10.

⁶¹ Gavin Ewart, 'Seeking The Bubble Reputation Even In The Critic's Mouth', *ibid*: 8.

and Hollo continued to offer encouraging and constructive criticism of a diverse range of contemporary British, European and American poets.

While the appearance of *Ambit 37* elicited inevitable complaints, much of the visual material almost never appeared at all. Many of the images that had not been recycled from earlier numbers had formed part of a magazine produced by students at the Royal College of Art and subsequently banned by the college authorities. Although Foreman and his friends thought the magazine had been pulped and the images destroyed, a copy had remained with the printers. When this was returned to the College, Foreman passed it on to *Ambit*, and the previously banned images appeared in *Ambit 37*.⁶² Informed by the collage techniques pioneered by Paolozzi (who had joined the magazine with *Ambit 36*) and the guerrilla mentality of London's alternative press, *Ambit 37* remains the most stylistically innovative of the Sixties numbers. Put off by the logistical difficulties of producing the broadsheet, however, the magazine's editors returned to the 24.2cm x 18cm format introduced with *Ambit 23* for subsequent numbers.

The American Nightmare. Stars and Stripes Special. *Ambit 39*, 1969

While complaints about *Ambit 37* centred on the nude visuals and the violent themes of some of the fiction, those generated by the appearance of *Ambit 39* were of a more serious, political nature. The strongly anti-American Stars and Stripes Special (*Ambit 39*) appeared with a Foreman cover drawing of a Chicago policeman, with truncheon in hand, about to rape the Statue of Liberty. Inside the contents were no less provocative, the number being introduced by Bax's 'Editorial' 'On, At or About America', a disturbing piece of prose fiction illustrated by Foreman in which an apocalyptic war is waged against 'the cruel sea' as it

⁶² Bax, see note 27.

repeatedly washes up a series of mutilated paintings and household objects onto a desolate beach. Appearing shortly after the 1968 Yippie demonstrations in Chicago, and at a time when details surrounding the My Lai Massacre were gradually beginning to filter into the public domain, Bax's 'editorial' and Foreman's cover cartoon certainly appeared to reflect considerable British concerns about American excesses in Vietnam. As Foreman and Bax turned their fire upon the American Justice system, the excesses of carpet-bombing, and the widespread deployment of the toxic herbicide Agent Orange against the forests of Vietnam (implicit in Bax's 'sea' metaphor), Swedish poet Gunnar Harding, in 'Poem', reflected upon earlier atrocities committed in winning the West.

Elsewhere Ewart, in a series of largely dismissive reviews, urged his readers to 'Resist American Poetic Imperialism!'. Thus Allen Ginsberg's *Ankor Wat* is described as 'one for the fans. A failure, and not a very magnificent one'⁶³ while Ewart says of Robert Duncan, 'He's got something; and, while I'm not sure that it's something that I'd like to have, I'm aware that he's got it'.⁶⁴ Despite the largely flippant nature of many of Ewart's comments (the Snyder 'review' is scarcely a paragraph long), the review represented a warning to young British poets not to reject 'the short "well-made" poem in favour of the long discursive one'. Consciously reacting against the contemporary enthusiasm for the Beats and the Black Mountain school, Ewart offered W.H. Auden and Robert Lowell as 'better models'.

In spite of Ewart's protests, *Ambit* 39 did feature a significant quantity of American poetry ranging from the short political protest of David Ray's 'Zen' and

⁶³ Ewart, 'Resist American Poetic Imperialism!', *Ambit* 39, 1969: 40.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*: 42.

Robert Sward's 'Dreams', to Bob Kaufman's Beatific 'Poem' and Gary Kissick's imagistic 'The New Transcendentalist':

I have never seen this before—
a mushroom blown inside
out like an umbrella.
Give me a prize
for walking in the rain.⁶⁵

Therefore *Ambit* 39 remained a polemically charged meeting-point for American poetry and poetry about America. The consequences of printing such an anti-American number initially appeared very serious indeed, and Foreman's cover attracted a whole new class of complaint:

A lady in Kent wrote in and said it was obscene and disgusting. [...] Oh, there was a complaint from the American embassy, and Randolph Churchill of course was involved, he said it was disgusting and that the Americans should make a formal complaint to the British Government. The cultural attaché to America actually thought it was funny, and clearly was very much on our side. Well it was quite good... because the first thing that happened was we got an order for 20 copies to be delivered pronto to the American embassy, so we made quite good sales out of it.⁶⁶

Prompted by complaints about the cover, a visit from the police saw one constable declare 'it would be all right if it wasn't so well drawn':⁶⁷ in the event, however, no charges were brought against either the magazine or its staff, and *Ambit* persisted with this polemical anti-American tone as the decade drew to a close.

Paolozzi took these themes further in a series of aggressively critical collages including 'Why We Are In Vietnam' (*Ambit* 40) and 'Things' (*Ambit* 41), drawn from a range of consumer advertisements, newspapers and economics journals. By 1968, the protest mood that had descended upon Chicago, Paris and London was also beginning to permeate *Ambit's* copy as 'Why We Are In Vietnam' asserted:

According to a recent Gallup Poll, half of America's adult population has never read a book.

Yet every one of us has a strong opinion of what our country is or should be.

⁶⁵ Gary Kissick, 'The New Transcendentalist', *ibid*: 32.

⁶⁶ Bax, see note 27.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*.

Much of American opinion is based on hearsay, misinformation, half-truths, and personal prejudice.⁶⁸

Such a statement is almost impossible to reconcile with the editorial that had prefaced *Ambit* 5 in 1960:

Commitment, and particularly political commitment, makes one friends but loses one as many more. If one has new, original and useful ideas on a problem, it is important to state them; but when one can only reiterate the opinions of others, this reiteration may merely widen already unbridgeable gaps. Silence on particular issues will allow one to contact and make friends with a person whose opinions one regards as despicable on the particular issue in question. Once contact is established, new ideas may percolate previously barred entrances.⁶⁹

With attitudes towards sexuality, obscenity, government, and authority having changed so radically since 1960, the material that appeared in *Ambit* in 1969 owed as much to the Lady Chatterley trial, the *Naked Lunch* appeal, the *Last Exit to Brooklyn* appeal, the *Divorce Reform Act 1969*, and the My Lai Massacre as any change in editorial thinking. 1969 came to an end with *Ambit* having gained a good deal more friends than it had lost.

AMBIT'S KEY SIXTIES CONTRIBUTORS AND PRINCIPAL SERIES

The Poetry of Gavin Ewart

(Born: 4 February 1916, London. Died: 23 October 1995, London)

Having published his first long-poem 'Phallus in Wonderland' at the age of seventeen in Geoffrey Grigson's *New Verse* magazine and his first collection *Poems and Songs* in 1939, Ewart began contributing to *Ambit* in 1965 with 'Rififi (Trouble With The Boys)' and 'Wanting Out' (*Ambit* 24). Ewart published in *Poetry (London)*, *Horizon* and *London Magazine* during the Thirties and Forties, but would not produce a second collection until the topographical *Londoners* (1964).

⁶⁸ Eduardo Paolozzi, 'Why We Are In Vietnam', *Ambit* 40, 1969: 34.

⁶⁹ Bax, 'Uncommitted', *Ambit* 5, Summer 1960: 1-2.

When *Londoners* appeared, it signalled a shift towards free-verse style and social observation and a departure from the more formal imitations of *Poems and Songs*. Subsequent collections effected similarly dramatic transformations in style, with *Pleasures of the Flesh* (1966)—banned by W.H. Smith despite being listed by the *Sunday Times* as one of the best collections of the year⁷⁰—and *The Deceptive Grin of the Gravel Porters* (1968) demonstrating a renewed interest in provocative sexual themes expressed through disturbing and distressing imagery, and a diction of slangy explicitness.⁷¹ At the same time, Ewart continued to write for the post-1964 magazines *New Directions*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The Little Word Machine* and *Tuba*, and this magazine verse saw Ewart beginning to cement his growing reputation as an ‘alternative’ poet, his days as a *New Verse* contributor now firmly behind him.

With the Sixties representing a phase of newfound creativity for Ewart, the *Ambit* poems exhibit many of the essential characteristics of the mature work, including a strong autobiographical element, a diction of unflinching directness, and a typical preference for the epigrammatic forms that generate a vision of human relationships delicately poised between the light-hearted, throw-away gag and much sharper social observation. Appearing in *Ambit* 28, and the ‘Life’ section of *The Deceptive Grin of the Gravel Porters*, ‘Venus in Furs’ shows Ewart in a playful mood. It describes a masochistic private fantasy revolving around an opera performance in which the performers’ bodies become the focal point for the narrator’s sexual yearnings and the physical manifestations of the imaginative desires of composer, librettist and conductor:

⁷⁰ [Alan Ross], ‘Introduction’, Gavin Ewart, *The Deceptive Grin of the Gravel Porters*. London: London Magazine Editions, 1968: inside front cover.

⁷¹ Peter Reading, ‘Gavin Ewart’, in Vincent B. Sherry Jnr (ed.), *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 40: Poets of Great Britain and Ireland Since 1960*. Detroit: Gale, 1985: 110-116.

There's a new opera called *I Masochisti*
With words by Freud and music by Bellini.
The first night's full of scented, furry women,
You can't have them. The conductor's baton
Puts an embargo on all base desires.⁷²

Proceeding by means of suggestion, the poem's erotic content is implied through a series of puns, double entendres and knowing juxtapositions, as well as a few striking images. Thus the 'conductor's baton' is essentially a mundane opera-hall prop, yet against the provocative image of the preceding line it takes on a phallic significance. It is then transformed into a much more sinister instrument of oppression and control coming, quite literally, between the 'scented furry women' and the 'muted horn' to impose the 'marvellous deprivation' that the poem describes. Aroused but not relieved, the narrator is rendered a powerless onlooker as the 'big nipples [that] swell / Into crescendo' are answered by the 'big bass voice' of a 'Bullish, stalled industrialist':

Whipped by desires, you're the derided one.
Nobody wants you, loves you, likes you.
Such marvellous deprivation! Can it last?⁷³

The sexual themes are handled more seriously elsewhere, 'Profession' being a compassionate portrait of a prostitute:

In the harems the favourite women
Grew fat and white as celery
And so do I, obedient to a doorbell;
Specialist nightwork in a single room
In front of a long mirror.
No exercise but what is laughingly called
The pleasantest indoor sport.⁷⁴

Here Ewart's narrator constantly returns to the detached terminology of the marketplace to describe 'intake', 'business', 'clients' and 'property', evidently viewing this labour as an affirmation of independence and self-sufficiency. There remains, however, an ironic disjunction between the exotic image of the 'harem'

⁷² Ewart, 'Venus in Furs', *Ambit* 28, 1966: 19.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Ewart, 'Profession', *Ambit* 26, 1965/6: 17.

and the implied poverty of the 'single room'; the white fatness of opulence and the pasty flabbiness of squalor; and, more devastating still, an obvious conflict between the narrator's delusions of self-reliance and her obedience 'to a doorbell'. Similarly, the narrator's declaration 'A mistress, yes perhaps / A wife never', is mirrored by an overwhelming need to retain her sexual power and her ability to amass 'property' as a means of avoiding the 'screaming scenes' and the jealousy of the 'business'. Such aspirations are finally undercut with the realisation that any lasting retirement from 'working' life can only be achieved through death, and a poem recounting a loveless and dehumanised existence is brought to a conclusion with the line: 'And at the end retire and rest in peace'. Guided by a sympathetic pity, Ewart allows his protagonist to speak in a plain and unsentimentalised diction through which she emerges as a brave, though essentially doomed, figure driven by the same cynicism that characterises her nameless clients.

Other *Ambit* poems demonstrated a fascination with the forms and themes of light verse. In addition to those poems that appeared in *The Newspaper Special* (*Ambit* 37), 'The Statements' (*Ambit* 31) saw Ewart engaged in a straightforward act of poetic wordplay, the poem comprising an alphabetical list of twenty-six unrelated one-line image units. The poem begins:

Arts are actually anthropomorphic.
Business is often bilaterally baleful.
Causality is a considerable cow.
Desires are delightful as well as desperate.⁷⁵

Some of the subsequent lines are more memorable than these—'Yelling in youth is yesterday's yawning'—but the poem essentially offers little more than the playing out of an arbitrary exercise imposed by the form and offers few genuine surprises.

⁷⁵ Ewart, 'The Statements', *Ambit* 31, 1966/7: 18.

Significantly more extreme, 'The Headlines' is as an eleven-line poem composed either by cut-up, or in imitation of cut-up, beginning:

No dice, as Rasputin flies in to floozies
Mean famine tempts 5 bits from Queen
Profs flee as city falls to Turks
Agitator executed on funereal hill⁷⁶

Devoid of form and presumably unedited between its composition and its publication, this remains a piece of nonsense verse: a jumble of once meaningful texts rendered meaningless by the poetic process. Ewart appears to have subjected his *Ambit* poems to comparatively little revision, evidenced by a comparison with those versions that also appear in his Sixties collections, and this makes it easy to criticise some of the more nonsensical compositions. Alongside his major collections, Ewart had also written a large quantity of light verse later collected in *All My Little Ones* (1978), a selection of haikus, limericks and clerihews dedicated to 'The Very Honourable Martin Bax' and prefaced by the following warning:

Sometimes they turn out silly, sometimes they have (I think) poetic merit. It is up to the reader to decide the proportions that fall into each category.

These poems should not be read all together, at one sitting; that would be like reading an anthology of limericks straight through, too much of a good (or bad) thing. Instead the reader should savour each one separately, like an Individual Fruit Pie or a Thought For The Day.⁷⁷

During the Seventies and Eighties, many of Ewart's *Ambit* poems would continue to appear in his frequent collections. He would also become an increasingly influential figure within the Poetry Society, having been elected to the general council in 1976 before serving as Chairman (1978-79). Similarly, in 1984 Ewart had been considered a serious candidate for Poet Laureate before the eventual appointment of Ted Hughes.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Ewart, 'The Headlines', *ibid*: 19.

⁷⁷ Ewart, 'Preface', *All My Little Ones*. London: Anvil Press, 1978: 7.

⁷⁸ Stephen W. Delchamps, *Civil Humor: The Poetry of Gavin Ewart*. London: Associated University Press, 2002: 132.

One of *Ambit's* most important early contributors, Ewart represents a rare example of a contemporary poet whose reputation is still being settled on the basis of work encountered for the first time by readers of little magazines. His *Ambit* poems form a significant proportion of *The Collected Ewart* (1980) and, as such, must be seen as something more than mere off-the-cuff statements or joky experiments. At the very least they provide accounts of Ewart's development from a Poundian imitator into a new voice in contemporary poetry, and testify to *Ambit's* transition from a late-Fifties ephemeral into a magazine at the centre of the Sixties poetry scene.

The Collage Art of Eduardo Paolozzi

(Born: 7 March 1924, Edinburgh. Died: 22 April 2005)

Born of Italian parents and brought up in Scotland, Eduardo Paolozzi was one of the principal members of the first generation of Pop Artists in Britain, and remains one of *Ambit's* most influential visual arts contributors. Educated at Edinburgh College of Art in 1943 and the Slade between 1944 and 1947, Paolozzi went to Paris in 1947 to study the Dadaists and Surrealists he had already encountered in the Peggy Guggenheim and E.L.T. Mesen galleries in London. Intrigued by the work of artists like Giorgio de Chirico, Marcel Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters, Salvador Dali and René Magritte, Paolozzi immersed himself in the Tristan Tzara and Mary Reynolds collections where he came into contact with the collages of Francis Picabia and Max Ernst, works that were to exert an enormous influence upon Paolozzi's personal style from 1947 onwards.⁷⁹

Paolozzi's first solo exhibition was held in 1947 at the Mayor Gallery in London. In the same year, Paolozzi completed *I was a Rich Man's Plaything* in

⁷⁹ Uwe M. Schneede, *Pop Art in England: Beginnings of a New Figuration 1947-63*. Braunschweig: Waisenhaus-Bruchdruckerei und Verlag, 1976: 94.

Paris, his first major collage in the Dada-Surrealist style and the first collage by a British artist to be generated from 'comic strips, magazine clippings, commercial imagery and trivia'.⁸⁰ *I was a Rich Man's Plaything* is composed from a number of American cultural materials: first, there is the pulp-fiction cover, from which the title is taken, with its Forties-style pin-up and its list of contents promising the stories 'Woman of the Streets' and 'Daughters of Sin'. Cut-outs of a handgun and a 'POP!' sound-bubble, a cherry pie package and a 'Real Gold' label are pasted onto this surface, the resulting composite being set above a cut-out of an American warplane and an image taken from a Coca-Cola advert. Simply mounted on a 35.5cm x 23.5cm piece of paper, the completed artwork is firmly within the Ernst tradition of collage as

The systematic exploitation of the chance or artificially provoked encounter of two or more substantially alien realities on a seemingly unsuitable level—and the spark of poetry which leaps across as these realities approach each other.⁸¹

Dada-Surrealist principles also informed Paolozzi's famous *BUNK* lecture, delivered at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1952. As a founder member of the Independent Group, which set out to articulate cross-disciplinary anthropological responses to mass media culture and high technology, Paolozzi's lecture took the form of a succession of slides that drew upon glossy magazine covers, science fiction comic-books, and images of cars, robots, Mickey Mouse, monsters and movie-stars. Accompanied by minimal explanation, and flashed up one after the other, Paolozzi's found graphics represented both a readymade source of raw material and, however randomly assembled, a complete artwork composed in the most direct pictorial language then available. These slides would later be

⁸⁰ Tilman Osterwold, 'Pop Art in Britain', *Pop Art*. Köln: Taschen, 2003: 64.

⁸¹ Max Ernst, in Schneede: 94.

modified using screen-printing, collage and lithography before appearing in a limited printed edition of 150 copies in 1972.⁸²

As Paolozzi increasingly incorporated machines, robots, flying saucers and factories into collage sequences like *Scrapbook* (1961-62) and *History of Nothing* (1960), these themes also recurred in the sculpture. Gradually moving away from the bronze-cast archaeological subjects evoked by *Mr. Cruickshank* (1950) and *The Old King* (1963), Paolozzi began working towards the futuristic box-like structures of *Wittgenstein at Casino* (1963), *Diana as an Engine* (1963), *The Bishop of Kuban* (1962) and *Hermaphroditic Idol* (1962) which embody at once the composite and the total, suggesting a synthesis of man and machine ultimately realised in the figure of the robot.⁸³

Paolozzi's *Ambit* contributions are largely in keeping with his *Scrapbook* collages of the early Sixties, and indeed his first 'Moonstrips/General Dynamic F.U.N.' composition (*Ambit 33*) brings together text, photography, ink drawing and photomontage to generate an art object which consciously resists attempts at classification. Predominantly textual, the written elements of the work represent various discrete sections seemingly inspired by a number of 'found' sources. While the themes of these textual elements appear and disappear amid continual juxtapositions, these juxtapositions are significantly less sharp than those found in the work of Burroughs, Paolozzi's collage unit generally taking the form of the paragraph or sentence rather than the single word. The 'Merrywood Preserved' section, for instance, comprises: a discussion of Merrywood and a recent property development; a partial biography of Ludwig Wittgenstein; a notice for an unnamed

⁸² Wieland Schmied, 'Bunk, Bash, Pop—the graphics of Eduardo Paolozzi', *Paolozzi: Sculpture, Drawings, Collages and Graphics*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976: 21-23.

⁸³ Eduardo Paolozzi, *Eduardo Paolozzi*. London: Tate Gallery Publications Department, 1971: 70-71.

film featuring Gregory Peck and Ingrid Bergman; an analysis of the processes of radiating and conducting electromagnetic energy; a description of the compositional techniques of the artist Tjo; references to the assemblage techniques of Paolozzi himself; a consideration of the terms 'identification' and 'relate' with regard to television audiences; and a closing image of a courtyard lined with the corpses of young men.

Paolozzi would use a similar combination of text, image and collage in his 'novel' extracts 'Why We Are In Vietnam' (*Ambit* 40) and 'Things' (*Ambit* 41), although both compositions tend to rely much more upon visual juxtapositions for their effect. 'Things' begins by establishing a connection between the mechanical paint pumps used in the manufacture of metal furniture and the design features of the artificial heart. This is achieved by setting a photomontage of a variety of industrial machines including 'Heavy-duty Aro air-operated paint pumps', 'Aro self-feed drills', and a 'Simple, compact Aro pneumatic logic control system' alongside an image of a Vietnamese hospital filled with metal, tubular-framed beds, and text outlining the necessary characteristics of an artificial heart:

It is easy to see that there is another basic requirement for the artificial heart. The two ventricles must pump equal amounts of blood; that is, their outputs must be balanced. If they are not, either the blood vessels in the lungs or those in the rest of the body will become filled to bursting with an excessive accumulation of blood.⁸⁴

From this first juxtaposition a series of themes is established that will run throughout the piece, implying further connections. Images of the lungs are later reproduced in textbook medical drawings. The dominant image in the sequence, a cut-out photograph of an American car-boot, well stocked after a family shopping trip, generates further visual references as many of the elaborately packaged processed foods (the shrink-wrapped meats, the jars of condiments and the ready-

⁸⁴ Paolozzi, 'Things', *Ambit* 41, 1969: 27.

meals) mirror those found in the cut-out of an American refrigerator. Similarly, the pack of Christmas cards later becomes the theme of an advert for the 'American Youth Sales Club', an exploitative scheme offering its young salespeople the prospect of an 'English or American bicycle' as a prize for selling large quantities of greetings cards. Elsewhere, a range of mass-produced goods (a Spalding basketball, a spinning rod and reel combination, and a 1957 Chevy dragster gas model car amongst others) are offered as alternative prizes for the ambitious salesman.

The aircraft also features as a significant theme throughout 'Things', whether in the form of the passenger jumbo-jet that symbolises a luxurious means of literal flight from the man-made untidiness of the city; the more sinister R.C.A.F. Banshee Raider fighter-jet; or the apocalyptic U.S. Titan intercontinental ballistic missile photographed in California. Highlighting the diverse benefits and dangers associated with developments in ballistics and aeronautics, Paolozzi appears to be gesturing towards ideas discussed in relation to his 'Moonstrips' composition: the complex relationship between man and machine that both prolongs and cuts short human existence.

While the handgun advertisement in 'Things' would suggest that owning a handgun was as natural as having a girlfriend, the first 'novel' extract 'Why We Are In Vietnam' focused more closely upon the American fetishisation of the gun. Here a collage of newspaper cuttings is presented in the form of a tabloid front page, the cuttings describing various sexual crimes, shootings, serial killings and riots beneath headlines like 'Mad Scientist Shoots 3, Kills Self at A-Lab' and 'Judge's 2 Little Girls Are Slain'. These violent stories are then set alongside a series of small-ads placed by anonymous individuals seeking 'Freaky People', 'Gals', 'couples',

and 'Pinkable ladies' for a series of unorthodox sexual liaisons, and a cartoon drawing of a monster rapist engaged in anal sex with a woman. The effect of this piece is to suggest that there is a direct link between the daily horrors of American city life and the aggression of the U.S. Army overseas. Desensitised by a daily diet of shootings, murders and rapes, and weaned upon the mythology of the gun, a whole generation of high-school leavers were being drafted into the jungle to face the Viet Cong. At the same time, the American rhetoric of the Cold War suggested that Communism threatened the very material comforts that characterised American culture (the aeroplane, the automobile and the refrigerator), and the combination of rising domestic gun crime, fear of an unknown enemy and a young inexperienced army was manifesting itself in increasingly senseless explosions of violence in Vietnam. Paolozzi's collages appeared at the height of *Ambit's* anti-war mood, providing a visual critique in line with many of the literary contributions to the Stars and Stripes Special.

Appointed to the editorial board in 1968, Paolozzi, with his interest in photolithography and screen-printing, would continue to have a significant impact upon the nature of *Ambit's* visuals until his death. His influence as a collage artist would inspire many of *Ambit's* younger artists to experiment with similar forms, and his reputation as a leading figure within the Independent Group would manifest itself in *Ambit's* growing interest in multi-media art forms and collaborative projects.

Principal Series. 'Poem from the Past' and 'Retrospect'

As *Ambit* moved towards creative writing and the visual arts, the magazine's critical content began to diminish. During the early years much of the criticism had been composed of an erratic assortment of short essays on topics such as 'C.P. Snow'

(*Ambit* 5), ‘Prophet of The White Goddess: Robert Graves as Critic’ (*Ambit* 2), and ‘A Total View: A Comment on Durrell’s Alexandrian Quartet’ (*Ambit* 4) with standards varying dramatically from issue to issue. Alongside the occasional essays, *Ambit* offered a more sustained literary-historical discourse in the form of two notable critical series during the Sixties.

The ‘Poem from the Past’ series ran from *Ambit* 1 to *Ambit* 6 and comprised brief biographical introductions to, and short poems by, various poets ‘not known for their poetry’.⁸⁵ This curious concern for a handful of minor poets—largely sustained by an unusual life story—resulted in a biographical analysis of John Middleton Murry’s ‘An hour and I shall see you’, inspired by his problematic relationship with Katherine Mansfield; a discussion of Stephen Haggard’s ‘The Lotus’ as a premonition of his death in action in 1944; and an historical introduction to ‘Upon the Death of King Charles the First’ by James Graham, 1st Marquis of Montrose. The value of such an approach was limited, however, for the brief critical notes frequently seemed designed to dissuade the reader from exploring these neglected *oeuvres*. The preface to John Middleton Murry, for instance, warned ‘Very little of John Middleton Murry’s poetry is worth reading’;⁸⁶ similarly Willa Cather was ‘not a good poet and only published one small volume of verse’;⁸⁷ while Andrew Fergusson confessed to being ‘puzzled by the enthusiasm of nineteenth-century critics’ for the ‘Saxon strength’ found in Owen Meredith’s ‘The Parting of Launcelot and Guinevere’.⁸⁸ In the absence of any call for a contemporary re-evaluation of these minor poetic talents, *Ambit*’s ‘Poem from the Past’ series clearly undermined Bax’s promise that his magazine would devote itself to the ‘mysterious

⁸⁵ ‘Poem from the Past. Stephen Haggard’, *Ambit* 2, Autumn 1959: 13.

⁸⁶ ‘Poem from the Past. John Middleton Murry’, *Ambit* 1, Summer 1959: 21.

⁸⁷ ‘Poem from the Past. Willa Catha’, *Ambit* 3, Winter 1960: 19.

⁸⁸ Andrew Fergusson, ‘Poem from the Past. Owen Meredith’, *Ambit* 5, Summer 1960: 25.

elusive human mystery' that constituted Art.⁸⁹ With *Ambit* seemingly promoting 'bad poets' from the past, the series was dropped after *Ambit* 6 to be replaced by a much more valuable series entitled 'Retrospect: A Survey of Little Magazines from the Past'.

The 'Retrospect' series ran from *Ambit* 7 to 27, and carried sixteen articles (typically between two and four pages in length) on a variety of little magazines ranging from the Vorticist *Blast* and the Modernist *Criterion*, to more extreme publications like *Big Table* and *Swank*. Produced by a number of different contributors, the series remains engaging reading as Robin Harland's lucid literary-historical approach particularly complements Robin Skelton's reminiscences concerning The Peterloo Group, and Oswell Blakeston's assessment of his own *Seed* project.

Prefaced by two representative poems by Katherine Mansfield and Hardress O'Grady, Robin Harland began with an account of *Rhythm* (1911-13), including its editorial policy, cover designs and contributor balance. In these terms, Harland describes editor Murry's desire for a magazine that was to remain 'absolutely cosmopolitan' in its receptiveness to contributions from France, Russia, Poland and America while agitating against 'false aestheticism' in the literary and the visual arts.⁹⁰ Discussing the cover of the first number, Harland then goes on to emphasise the visual impact of *Rhythm*, informed by the Post-Impressionist principles of Fauvism:

The design of a nude woman seated below a fruit tree (hardly an Eve) is fitted into a single pattern with the outline lettering. Dozens of superb black-and-white illustrations show the same interest in strong outline and overall pattern, the same denial of narrative interest. Expensively printed on an antique laid paper with rough deckle edges, they are accompanied by typography in the same vein, with heavy black letters closely filling the

⁸⁹ Bax, 'The *Ambit* Axe', *Ambit* 1, Summer 1959: 2.

⁹⁰ Robin Harland, 'Retrospect 1. *Rhythm*', *Ambit* 7, 1961: 22.

page in the manner of William Morris and the other great private printers of the late nineteenth century.⁹¹

Harland was less enthusiastic about the literary contributions, suggesting that the writing of John Middleton Murry, Michael Sadler and Katherine Mansfield had been included simply to emphasise the editor's Fauvist credentials. Ultimately, with the magazine carrying drawings by Orthon Friesz, Pablo Picasso and André Derain among others, Harland would conclude that *Rhythm* remained a fundamentally unbalanced quarterly, yet one that 'can still make an effect after fifty years'.⁹²

Confined to a specific subject, Harland offers an accessible overview of Murry's first editorial project, his prose flowing much more naturally than in the stilted generalisations of 'Sit Trembling In Theatres' (*Ambit* 1). His other contributions to the series exhibited the same relaxed prose style that found *Wheels* 'one of the tightest coteries in recent English literature',⁹³ *The Egoist* an important but incoherent 'direct successor of the dully earnest *New Freewoman*',⁹⁴ and *The Criterion* 'an inestimably valuable model for the right kind of quarterly review'.⁹⁵ Harland's articles, therefore, provide a compelling outline sketch of the little magazine medium and its response to a turbulent period of Modernist experimentation during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

By contrast, Oswald Blakeston's contributions to the series provided an opportunity for a personal exploration of the little magazine as a community. In his discussion of *Soma* (a magazine passed over by Alvin Sullivan's *British Literary Magazines: The Modern Age 1914-1984*), Blakeston provides an entertaining account of his relationship with K.S. Bhat, an Indian doctor of medicine who edited

⁹¹ Ibid: 23.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Harland, 'Retrospect 3. *Wheels*', *Ambit* 9, 1961: 26.

⁹⁴ Harland, 'Retrospect 5. *The Egoist*', *Ambit* 11, 1962: 24.

⁹⁵ [Harland], 'Retrospect 6. *The Criterion*', *Ambit* 12, 1962: 20.

his magazine from a house next to a soap factory on Southwark Park Road. *Soma* was founded by Bhat in 1931, and continued to appear in a book-like format until Bhat returned to India in 1934. Blakeston describes a first issue

bound in hard covers with all the crown-octavo panache of a book. There was a long story about an old man who had lived too long from James Hanley, and a recording of a flight of The Holy Dove by T.F. Powys, and poems signed by Paul Selver, the compiler of books and translations of Czech and Russian poems published by Kegan Paul. Hanley, Powys and Selver were, of course, already big names: and if, quite honestly, all the contributors were not up to their standard, it remained that *Soma* could not be ignored.⁹⁶

Blakeston goes on to list the novelist Rhys Davies, the Indian-born Communist and Labour MP Shapurji Dorabji Saklatvala, John Galsworthy, Cecil Wrey and Frederick Carter as contributing to the second number, where his own story about ‘a retired major who was convinced that the nation was being poisoned because milkmen left bottles on the ground by front doors [...] [as] “an invitation for the dogs”’ appeared for the first time.⁹⁷ Much of Blakeston’s article is concerned with the early years of his own literary career and the personal impression Bhat left upon him. However, he does find room to outline some of *Soma*’s more innovative features, including the pictorial supplement enclosed with number four ‘in an envelope so that plates could be framed if desired’, and to register his reservations concerning the final issue, ‘perhaps the least successful’.⁹⁸

In an earlier contribution, Blakeston looked back to his own magazine, *Seed*, edited with Herbert Jones in 1933. Initially prompted by a desire to break into the literary circle, Blakeston admitted:

Even in the days when you could produce an issue of a ‘little magazine’ for £15, you still had to have the £15. This was awkward if you lacked the folding stuff, for everyone else at literary parties seemed to be or to have been an editor. They drew their words through their haloes. Not to be or have been an editor was like being on Miami beach without even a railroad to one’s name.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Blakeston, ‘Retrospect 12. *Soma*’, *Ambit* 20, 1964: 23.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*: 25.

⁹⁹ Blakeston, ‘Retrospect 9. *Seed*’, *Ambit* 16, 1963: 18.

This provides the prologue to a discussion of the problems posed by a deluge of unsolicited manuscripts, the constant dependence on hard-won advertising revenue, and the collapse of the magazine's distributor. Blakeston lists H.D., Francis Bruguière, John Betjeman, Kay Boyle and Mary Butts among his enthusiastic contributors, and takes particular pleasure in quoting Herbert Jones's wordless text 'layout for a poem' as an example of *Seed's* 'hope always to include something to shock'. Producing only two numbers, Blakeston had had little chance to formulate an editorial policy. Focusing on the personalities surrounding the magazine, he cites diminishing advertising returns as the primary reason for *Seed's* closure, as well as a sense that the 'point was to become an editor; and ... it was a little commercial to go on being an editor?' Rather than pass judgment upon his own magazine, however, Blakeston turned to *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* (1947), which described *Seed* as 'A short-lived but excellent little magazine [...] anxious for "new talent" but willing to publish authors already established.'¹⁰⁰

Alongside the literary history of Harland and the personal accounts of Blakeston, the articles of Jim Burns were noteworthy for their discussion of *Ambit's* immediate contemporaries, particularly with regard to American publications. Burns begins with the short-lived *Big Table*, a magazine established in 1959 following a censorship dispute between the editorial board of the *Chicago Review* and its sponsors within the University of Chicago. When the University authorities specifically objected to the inclusion of Jack Kerouac's 'Old Angel Midnight', extracts from William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, and Edward Dahlberg's 'The Garments of Ra' and 'The Sorrows of Priapus', the editor Irving Rosenthal responded by simply publishing these and other controversial contributions under a

¹⁰⁰ Hoffman, Allen and Ulrich: 315.

new title. Without the University backing enjoyed by the *Chicago Review*, funds were initially raised through a combination of donations and poetry readings; yet when the first issue appeared in the spring of 1959, 'the U.S. Post Office banned it from being sent through the mails and impounded over 400 copies'.¹⁰¹ As Burns goes on to list the international cast of writers contributing from number two onwards (the work of the Americans Allen Ginsberg, Paul Blackburn, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso, Charles Olson and Gary Snyder appeared alongside translations of Serge Essenin, André Breton and Antonin Artaud), he describes a magazine at the forefront of the American Underground movement whose resilient self-belief drove it into the financial difficulties that finally killed it off but enabled it, however briefly, to provide 'an important outlet for the new American writers, as well as some European moderns'.¹⁰²

Burns's peculiar interest in the short-lived American little magazine extends to his article on *Swank* and 'The Swinging Modern Scene', where he reflects upon the contribution of a bi-monthly 'magazine within a magazine' that 'deserves to [be] considered alongside the proper "little magazines" which helped to push the cause of the American moderns during [the] turbulent five years from 1957 to 1962'.¹⁰³ However, his account of the transatlantic bi-monthly *Migrant*, edited by Gael Turnbull, is of more immediate interest for *Migrant* not only provided a key source text for Donald Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry 1945-1960* (1960), but

helped focus attention both in the pages of *Migrant* itself, and through the series of booklets which were brought out in conjunction with it, on a neglected, but first-class, body of writers in this country, the best of whom were, and still are, about the only worthwhile British counterparts to the American poets of the 'Black Mountain' school.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Jim Burns, 'Retrospect 11. *Big Table*', *Ambit* 19, 1964: 15.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Burns, 'Retrospect 13. *Swank: The Swinging Modern Scene*', *Ambit* 21, 1964: 12, 14.

¹⁰⁴ Burns, 'Retrospect 16. *Migrant*', *Ambit* 27, 1966: 40.

With *Migrant* turning away from contemporary enthusiasm for the Beats, Burns describes a magazine working within the tradition of the *Black Mountain Review* and *Origin*, composed of poetry, short fiction, essays, critical commentaries and a substantial correspondence section. Identifying a key preoccupation with craftsmanship and technical accomplishment, Burns then singles out high-quality contributions from Hugh Kenner, Charles Tomlinson and Denise Levertov, before noting contributions from Alan Brownjohn, Anselm Hollo, Edwin Morgan, Michael Shayer, Ian Hamilton Finlay and Roy Fisher. The latter group is particularly significant, for these writers would all appear in *Ambit* throughout the Sixties, either as direct contributors or as review subjects. The contributions of Burns succeeded in bringing *Ambit's* consideration of little magazines up to, and a little beyond, the late Fifties.

The Retrospect series as a whole was to perform three functions. First, it demonstrated a genuine interest in the literary-historical development of the little magazine; second, it highlighted the crucial importance of issues of design, formatting, editorial policy, contributor balance and economic solvency; and third, it illustrated *Ambit's* increasing desire for 'a page in the literary history of the Sixties if not the Thirties'.¹⁰⁵

Despite its success, the 'Retrospect' series was eventually dropped following the appearance of *Ambit* 27, and although essays like Howard Sergeant's 'The Myth of the Roaring Forties' and Alan Brownjohn's 'Where The Movement Went (A Few Debating Points)' continued to appear, these were generally restricted to the context of various 'special numbers' as the magazine's critical essays effectively made way for an extended book reviews section.

¹⁰⁵ Bax, 'To Travel is Better than to Arrive', *Ambit* 19, 1964: 2.

THE SIXTIES: TOWARDS AN IDENTITY

In 1959, Bax had set out with a conscious determination to edit a magazine that would rise above the kind of manifesto-ethic that had spawned Horovitz's *New Departures* and Wright and Swift's *X* review. Anxious that his magazine should be free of 'political' concerns, and wary of literary 'partisans', Bax had begun with an attitude so hostile towards literary-artistic programmes that *Ambit* had briefly threatened to develop into a magazine dedicated to the cautious, the middle-of-the-road and the unremarkable. If Horovitz saw his *New Departures* project as an aggressive anti-response to the Movement-backed mainstream, and Wright and Swift portrayed *X* as a rallying-point for the counter-revolutionaries suspicious of declining standards in the arts, then the first three numbers of *Ambit* embodied a form of anti-anti-response, neither radically popular nor cryptically highbrow. This absence of platform significantly detracted from the coherence of the early numbers, and presented Bax with the problem of developing a coherent identity while seemingly refusing to do so.

By 1969, however, *Ambit* had become decidedly political in the aftermath of the Stars and Stripes Special, with Bax publishing a parable against the Vietnam War disguised as an editorial: 'On. At. Or About America'. The political themes of the late Sixties seemed to inject precisely that element which had been missing from the early numbers: an ideological centre and a renewed vitality of expression. This did not see *Ambit* publishing propaganda masquerading as art, but rather signified an increasing interest in a new set of writers and artists keenly alert to their turbulent socio-political surroundings. Experimental, surrealistic and broadly post-modern in style, the work of William S. Burroughs and Oswald Blakeston epitomised the fiction that *Ambit* would consistently prefer. The early interest in visual-textual experiments would further distinguish *Ambit's* prose, poetry and

visuals, with a sustained use of collage and montage techniques evident following the appearance of George MacBeth's 'Fin du Globe' in 1963. Eduardo Paolozzi and Peter Blake typified the interest in Pop Art style that characterised many of the visual arts contributions.

Formal coherence had been greatly enhanced following the decision to switch from black-and-white mimeo to hot metal printing after *Ambit* 5, and further aided by the long-term move to Lavenham Press Ltd. This stability enabled Michael Foreman to develop a whole new design element that combined sharper copy with clearer photographic reproduction of visuals. In a move that paralleled similar developments at Horovitz's *New Departures*, Alan Ross's *London Magazine*, and even the design department of Penguin Books, *Ambit's* cover art would deliver new aesthetic benefits for the magazine while unifying and contextualising its contents. Various controversies during the late Sixties served to generate publicity and enhance the magazine's reputation for publishing experimental, controversial and risqué material. These controversies, however, were essentially satirical attacks upon the Sixties psychedelic, rock 'n' roll drug culture (Drugs and Creative Writing Competition); the Underground Press (The Newspaper Special); and American foreign policy (Stars and Stripes Special). Such material showed that *Ambit* could not be written off as an uncommitted ephemeral.

By 1964 *Ambit* had met with the approval of Eric Walter White, and began receiving financial support from the ACGB. The ACGB also sponsored *The Review*, and although Bax was to receive substantially less than the generous amount paid annually to Ian Hamilton, such recognition was a sign that *Ambit's* position within the little magazine community had become gradually more prominent since 1964. From a slow start in 1959, *Ambit* had begun to establish an

identity for itself as a home for innovative, experimental and challenging work in poetry, fiction and the visual arts. While continuing to resist the temptation to establish an *Ambit* manifesto and an *Ambit* clique, Bax would persist with his policy of openness towards unsolicited submissions from contributors of both rising and established reputation. By 1969, *Ambit* had made significant progress towards establishing an identity at once apolitical, yet powerful and coherent.

CHAPTER TWO. THE SEVENTIES: COMPUTER-GENERATED FICTION, PORNOGRAPHY AND OTHER ATROCITIES

New Maps For A Changing Scene

The Seventies were to prove a turbulent period for the little magazines, a fact evidenced by the content and appearance of Fulton's ninth *International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses* (1973). Larger than the 1967 edition and with fewer obvious omissions, the 1973 directory also contained a greater selection of English little magazines. The Fifties survivors *Agenda*, *And*, *London Magazine*, *New Departures*, *Outposts* and *Stand* all appeared, as did the post-1964 magazines *Akros* and *Second Aeon*. Other entries included the recently founded *Aquarius*, *Byways*, *Good Elf*, *Kroklok* and *Littack*. Most of the mid-Sixties magazines listed in 1967 had disappeared, however, with the more experimental *Ikon*, *Manifold*, *Move*, *My Own Mag*, *Origins Diversions*, *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse* and *Resuscitator* all extinct by 1973. Fulton further identified 'a generally diminishing use of both mimeo (20% in 1967, 13% in 1973) and letterpress (43% to 18%), and a corresponding leap in the use of offset printing (38% to 69%)'.¹⁰⁶ By 1974, lithography had developed to such an extent that Fulton, in his tenth directory, was able to declare that:

Since the late Fifties there has been increasing and often experimental production with offset (photo-chemical) equipment, and now, as the knowledge and equipment become more refined, small press products have taken on an edge of beauty unknown forty years ago. Today more than 70% of the small presses use offset printing, compared to 17% in 1960.¹⁰⁷

An increasing polarisation between the very small magazines and the larger titles was also evident, as the proportion with circulations of less than 500 and in excess

¹⁰⁶ Fulton, 'Making The Ninth', *International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses* 1973-74. Ninth Edition. Paradise, CA: Dustbooks, 1973: ii.

¹⁰⁷ Fulton, 'Peopleship', *International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses*. Tenth Edition. Paradise, CA: Dustbooks, 1974: 7.

of 3,000 rose by 9% and 7%, while those with circulations of 500 to 1000 and 1000 to 2000 fell by 4% and 14% respectively.

By the appearance of his ninth directory, Fulton had entirely given up on a definition of the 'little magazine', with the result that a vast array of specialist journals and alternative press periodicals were included. Moreover, Fulton's 1973 directory introduced the acronyms COSMEP (Committee of Small Press Magazine Editors and Publishers) and UPS (Underground Press Syndicate) for the first time, suggesting that the distinction between the little magazines and the alternative press periodicals had become increasingly blurred. Specialisation brought radicalism and syndication in equal measure, and by 1974 the ALP (Association of Little Presses (UK)) and ALMS (Association of Little Magazines (UK)) had been established as the Seventies little magazines increasingly began to sound like offshoots of the Sixties alternative newspapers.

In preparing the first *British Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses* (1974), Gerald England followed Fulton's methodologies, setting out to survey the extent of the writers' market rather than labour the distinctions between little magazines, periodicals, newspapers and journals. When Fulton's thirteenth directory appeared in 1977, however, its editor proclaimed it

a graphic as well as a literal chronologue of the change and growth of the small press and magazine publisher. The majority of publications listed in the First *looked* like the Directory itself—set on a typewriter, saddle-stitched in format, and, other than its cover collage, minimally 'produced'. Most publishers here in the Thirteenth, on the other hand, are likely to produce a slicker product—coated-stock covers in two or three colors, square backed (and/or case) bindings, professional typesetting and graphic presentation—in short, a highly viable 'object' for the marketplace.¹⁰⁸

Others did not share Fulton's optimistic view, arguing that a glut of little magazines and a paucity of strong editorial personalities had propagated a new form of serial-anthology. In *Small Press Review* in 1971 Richard Morris asked 'Is there any

¹⁰⁸ Fulton, 'Frycount 13', Fulton and Ellen Ferber (eds), *The International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses 1977-78*. Thirteenth Edition. Paradise, CA: Dustbooks, 1977: i.

magazine as dull as *Poetry?*', lamenting that 'The editors of these rags do nothing but collect poems until there are enough on hand to fill up an issue, and then unleash them on an unsuspecting world.'¹⁰⁹ Meanwhile the *Times Literary Supplement* wondered whether the true little magazine spirit was being undermined by lucrative reprint offers, suggesting 'Anyone contemplating a new little magazine venture would be innocent indeed not to include likely reprint rights as one of his chief assets.'¹¹⁰

In effect, the Seventies anticipated a new era of professionalism for the little magazine that, despite the substantial weight of his own evidence, Fulton seemed reluctant to admit. Certainly by the end of the decade any comparisons between the late-Fifties magazines (*Agenda*, *Outposts*, *Stand*, *London Magazine* and *Ambit*), and the high modernist titles like Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* or Margaret Anderson's *Little Review* would prove true only in the most superficial of terms.

Dear, But Not Yet Dead: The Sixties Live On. *Ambit* 42-51, 1970-72

1970 brought no dramatic change in the nature of *Ambit*, a magazine that Derwent May saw as

mainly given up to those flip, good-natured young verse-makers, easy riders with only the simplest things to say and proud of it, that the editor has always had a penchant for. In recent numbers (40 and 41) the pop-surrealist vein has also been conspicuous, with the first two parts of a 'novel'—mildly disturbing collages of ads and pictures typical of an aggressive consumer society—by *Ambit's* chief hero-contributor, Eduardo Paolozzi.¹¹¹

May's judgment was based upon the last of the Sixties numbers, but many of the 'pop-surrealist' elements which he associated with *Ambit* would recur throughout

¹⁰⁹ Richard Morris, 'Goodbye Brain, I NEVER REALLY LOVED YOU. I ONLY WANTED YOUR CHEMICALS', *Small Press Review*. Paradise CA: Dustbooks. Vol. 3, No. 2, 1971: 7.

¹¹⁰ Anon, 'Little magazines in reprint: the profits of patronage', *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 February 1970: 177.

¹¹¹ May, 'Some literary magazines', *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 February 1970: 181.

the first years of the new decade before gradually fading out, or being translated into somewhat more aggressive forms.

With Michael Foreman's minimalist collage of a wrestler, a bright pair of feminine lips, and an anonymous Victory-sign adorning the front cover of *Ambit* 42. Pop Art remained a powerful presence in the magazine. *London Magazine* had adopted a similar aesthetic by the mid Sixties, and its Hollywood film-stills were complemented by a combination of collage work, line drawings on nude and surrealist themes, and sculpture influenced by the ideas of the Independent Group. These themes continued into the Seventies, with *London Magazine* carrying its own Statue of Liberty cover (Vol. 9, No. 9, 1969) and a fragmentary photo-collage of a face by Richard Hamilton (Vol. 9, No. 12, 1970), as well as poetry by Gavin Ewart, Alan Brownjohn and George MacBeth. By 1970, it seemed that Ross and Bax were beginning to steer a very similar editorial course, although this would subsequently prove a temporary phenomenon.

The concerns of *Ambit* and *London Magazine* during this period were in stark contrast to those of *Stand*. Despite Silkin's willingness to publish an increasing number of *Ambit* contributors (Jim Burns, Tony Connor, Giles Gordon, Robin Fulton, Edwin Morgan, George MacBeth and David Hockney), *Stand* began to retreat from the Pop Art designs that had appeared on its covers in the late Sixties. Silkin's magazine was now firmly established in its distinctive landscape format, and various female nudes (Vol. 9, No. 2, 1967 and Vol. 9, No. 3, 1968); Hollywood filmstars (Vol. 10, No. 1, 1968); and flag-based designs (Czech writing special, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1969) made way for more conservative covers incorporating geometrical shapes and abstract patterns. Moreover, as Silkin devoted his attention

to resurrecting the market for short fiction, *Stand* had become conspicuously more literary in outlook by 1970.

Besides the cover design of *Ambit* 42, artwork inside by Ken Cox (a combination of photo-collage and ink drawing); Jim Haldane (a line drawing of an upside-down teddy-bear in Y-fronts); John Walters (a comic-strip ink drawing of a man and woman in the style of Lichtenstein); and Dan Fern (a medical-book style ink drawing of a human skull) sustained the Pop Art style of the Sixties. The collage experiments endorsed by Paolozzi also continued, as Foreman turned towards a combination of collage and ink drawing that echoed the style of Terry Gilliam's graphics and animations for the surreal sketch show *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, broadcast by the BBC from 1969 to 1974.

Ron Sandford's portraits of Aurelius, Boethius, Justinian, Thomas Aquinas and Pope Innocent III mounted upon the torsos of topless women (*Ambit* 45) evoked a similarly Pythonesque tradition of comic surrealism. Elsewhere Bax and Paolozzi persisted with the collage techniques that had generated the '*Ambit* News' series in the Sixties, with 'The Great Exposure' (*Ambit* 43) drawing on images of tanks, superheroes, monsters and robots taken from Japanese magazines and other found texts.

After the appearance of *Ambit* 44, '*Ambit* News' was replaced by the Brownjohn jeremiad '(On Which to Feed Your Despair)' which, reflecting upon the coming decade, suggested:

Now it has all changed, and we are older,
And we hate the age completely, not nearly so
Entranced with our hatred. But now there are lots of younger
People entranced with hatred of this terrible age,

While underneath they like it in a way, because
It gives them the chance to feel like that. We ourselves feel lost
Because we can't tell them they are compromised like us,
That being hard for the self-absorbed to see.

And all the time the ages are getting worse and worse.¹¹²

Against the background of the massive 'Linebacker' air assaults of 1971 and 1972, Vietnam would continue to inform poems like John Pudney's 'Take This Orange' (*Ambit* 45), and Pete Morgan's 'Bang, Mister' (*Ambit* 46), although by 1971 many of these protest poems had lost their urgency.

Another unresolved Sixties debate concerned Michael Horovitz's *Children of Albion: Poetry of the 'Underground' in Britain* (1969). In a review entitled 'Songs of Ignorance' (*Ambit* 41), Tony Connor denounced the anthology as 'the worst collection of poems since the Spasmodics were in their prime'.¹¹³ In 'Underground Poets: A Reply From The Northern Line' (*Ambit* 42), Jim Burns took a different view. Horovitz's volume had given a generous amount of space to *Ambit* poets like Anselm Hollo and others, and Burns dismissed Connor's review as 'bad-tempered, as if he'd knocked it out late one night when tiredness and irritation were getting the better of him'.¹¹⁴ Acknowledging the impact of American models upon the work of his British contemporaries, Burns suggested the anthology showed 'poetry in this country as being a damned sight more varied than certain people would have us believe', and contained 'some good poets in its pages'.¹¹⁵ Such disagreements demonstrated that despite their occasional involvement with the Live New Departures and Poetry International projects, *Ambit's* poets were by no means unanimously supportive of Horovitz's particular brand of avant-gardism.

The influence of Burroughs still lingered in textual mosaics like Malcolm Ritchie's science fiction piece 'Transmission 211268 on Two Channels Completed on First 3 Man Apollo Moonshotday' (*Ambit* 43), while Alan Riddell's poems in

¹¹² Alan Brownjohn, 'A Palindrome', *Ambit* 44, 1970: 1.

¹¹³ Tony Connor, 'Songs of Ignorance', *Ambit* 41, 1971: 47.

¹¹⁴ Burns, 'Underground Poets: A Reply From The Northern Line', *Ambit* 42, 1970: 45.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 47.

Ambit 47 demonstrated a short-lived enthusiasm for Concrete poetics. Unfortunately, the formal innovations of Riddell's 'The Affair' and 'Now and Then' remained at odds with their unadventurous themes, while the more successful 'Towards Silence' (a form of spiralling visual pun on the final letter of 'DIMINUENDO') appeared heavily indebted to Eugen Gomringer's poem 'Silencio'.¹¹⁶

Many of the trends that had characterised *Ambit* in the Sixties did not disappear instantly. However new formal and thematic concerns had definitely started to emerge by 1974 as psychedelic experimentalism, sexual frankness, and implied violence gradually gave way to ever more cynical rewritings of the Sixties dream, work of an essentially pornographic nature, and a new mood of apocalyptic pessimism. If the Sixties were not dead by 1974, they were certainly dying.

Dubious Designs: Obscenity, Euphoria Bliss and the New Pornocracy. *Ambit* 65-69, 1976-77

If Leonard Fulton's 1973 directory appeared to suggest a natural affinity between the little magazines and the alternative press, subsequent events would demonstrate the very real differences between them. This was most clearly illustrated by the new spate of obscenity prosecutions that followed the formation of the Obscene Publications Squad, the appointment of Lord Longford's independent commission on pornography, and the latest offshoot of Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, the 'Festival of Light'. As Soho became increasingly synonymous with sex cinemas and porn shops, Britain's moral guardians renewed their efforts to 'clean up' the radio, television, cinema, and Soho's back streets. The first major casualties of this moralist backlash, however, were the alternative

¹¹⁶ Eugen Gomringer, 'Silencio', in Mary Ellen Solt (ed.), *Concrete Poetry: A World View*. London: Indiana University Press, 1968: 91.

newspapers. In 1970 the owners and editors of *IT* were prosecuted for conspiring to corrupt public morals and public decency following the publication of a homosexual personals column. The resulting fine of £1500 pounds and legal bills of £500 proved sufficient to put the newspaper out of business.¹¹⁷ This was followed in 1971 by the prosecution of the editors of *Oz*.¹¹⁸ Even the editors of *Nasty Tales*, who subsequently won their obscenity trial in 1973, would see their magazine fold under the weight of costs.¹¹⁹ Worse was to come, however, as Whitehouse brought a private prosecution against *Gay News* for blasphemous libel in 1976. Taking exception to editor Denis Lemon's decision to publish James Kirkup's poem 'The Love that Dares to Speak its Name', Whitehouse succeeded in her prosecution, thereby securing Britain's first blasphemy conviction since 1922.¹²⁰

Having survived a number of obscenity scares in the past, *Ambit* underwent a substantial redesign in 1976 that bordered on the pornographic as a slick black-and-white image of the topless 'Euphoria Bliss' appeared on the removable dust jacket cover of *Ambit* 65. Artfully draped around the capital 'A', Bliss's naked form returned for numbers 66 and 67. However, *Ambit's* covers had featured nude drawings during the Sixties and nude life-studies had been accepted by the magazine throughout its run, thus the blurb announcing *Ambit* 65, for all its irony, remained an essentially accurate summary of the magazine's contents:

SAME OLD AMBIT AS BEFORE SAME OLD PRURIENT LOVE AND SEX SAME OLD LOVELY EUPHORIA BLISS SAME OLD POETRY SAME OLD PROSE [...] SAME OLD SHAPE REDESIGNED BY DEREK BIRDSALL SAME OLD SONG IN SAYING FAREWELL IF THIS ISN'T LOVE IT'LL HAVE TO DO UNTIL THE REAL THING COMES ALONG.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Hewison, *Too Much*: 174.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*: 175.

¹¹⁹ David Huxley, 'The Trial of Nasty Tales', *Nasty Tales: Sex, Drugs, Rock 'n' Roll and Violence in the British Underground*. Manchester: Critical Vision, 2001: 96-100.

¹²⁰ Geoffrey Robertson, 'Gay News: The Angel's Advocate', *The Justice Game*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1998: 135-6.

¹²¹ Bax, *Ambit* 65, 1976: front cover.

Ambit's 'prurient' interest in sexual themes had begun in 1970 with Gavin Ewart's 'The Pseudo-Martials' (*Ambit* 42) offering six short portraits of sexual deviance. In *Ambit* 46, Ewart had followed this with the explicit 'The Sexual Invasion of England', a narrative describing two Royal orgies: the first set in the Throne Room of Buckingham Palace, and the second in the bedrooms of Kensington Palace. Revelling in his theme of perversion in High Society, Ewart spared his readers none of the detail as the communal sex-acts rise to a grotesque climax in 'The Night of the Young Wives':

Upstairs in the bedrooms the surprised and bewildered wives [...] were raped and ravished in every possible position, with all possible degrees of speed and intensity. They were bent over chairs and buggered. They were beaten with hairbrushes, dogwhips, high-heeled shoes, in every variation of sadism and masochism. They rode their lovers like ships' figureheads; licked them like bitches; experimented with every posture; fornicated willingly, released and fully expressed every secret and hidden desire. For those without imagination (the majority) perversions were suggested from the great Book of Perversions.¹²²

Compared to the literary contents of *Ambit* 46 and 48, those of *Ambit* 65 were relatively tame. Ian Watson's story 'The Girl Who Was Art' managed a brief reference to female masturbation. MacBeth's poem 'Thick Governing Prick, Great-Rooted Blossomer' and Ewart's sonnet 'Be Gentle With Me' dealt directly with the pleasure and pain experienced by their male speakers during sex, yet these pieces were framed in a mischievous, light-hearted style that ultimately cast sexual intercourse as an act of love. Similarly, despite some graphic descriptions of homosexual intercourse and a violent murder scene made all the more vivid by Ralph Steadman's sprawling ink illustrations, Coleman Dowell's *Too Much Flesh and Jabez* seemed more concerned with psychological than physical relationships.

If the contents of *Ambit* 65 failed to live up to a racy cover design, the same might be said of *Ambit* 66 and 67, with only Jonathan Millward's fantasy-style sketches of plastic-clad women and American automobiles (*Ambit* 67); the

¹²² Ewart, 'The Night of the Young Wives', *Ambit* 46, 1971: 6.

adolescent section of Edwin Brock's autobiographical prose extract 'Here. Now. Always' (*Ambit* 67); and a handful of poems by Jenny Joseph (*Ambit* 67) aspiring to the erotic exploration of sexual themes. Furthermore, *Ambit* 66 was dominated by the still-lives of Arturo Laskus, while a collection of prints commemorating the bicentennial and 'The American Poster 1945-75', featuring work by James Brooks, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg and others, undoubtedly represented the centrepiece of *Ambit* 67. Nor did the contents of the magazine become any more pornographic following the appearance of *Ambit* 68, although the cover itself remained more in keeping with *The Sun* and the soft-core skin-mags than London's arts quarterlies.

Dispensing with the artistic approach altogether, *Ambit* 68 appeared with Bliss in a full-cover topless pose. However this special 'Theatrical Number' was essentially devoted to two lengthy play scripts: the Joint Stock Company's *Yesterday's News*, a study of political unrest in Angola, South Africa and Northern Ireland; and Michael McClure's Prologue from *The Ur Gorf Drama*, a nonsensical piece in which a bizarre cast of characters anticipate the coming apocalypse. Similarly, Keith Johnstone's discussion of dramatic improvisational techniques in 'Impro Book' and Ann Jellicoe's article on the Royal Court Theatre Writer's Group suggested that *Ambit* 68 was by no means entirely motivated by cheap titillation.

Playing on the obvious innuendo, *Ambit* 69 was fronted by two images of a nude Bliss arranged in the requisite position. Although sex played a significant part in the opening scene of 'Her Good Man Gone' (a second extract from Coleman Dowell's novel *Too Much Flesh and Jabez*), and Rupert Mallin's unpleasant poem 'Rape', the explicit cover again seemed oddly incongruous. In a series of cartoons entitled *What The U.S. Courts Feel About Pornography*, Cornelius Cole suggested

that the law had failed to come to terms with the pornography issue, his five scrawled ink drawings depicting a series of nude women in a variety of modest and franker poses observed by a series of devil-like Judges vacillating between lechery and puritanism. Bliss was dropped from *Ambit* 70, and a brief flirtation with the phallic drawings of Steadman followed before the magazine returned to the more familiar themes of Foreman and others.

Between 1976 and 1978 pornography or 'eroticism' also became a significant issue for *London Magazine*, although its approach to the subject was somewhat different. Under Ross, *London Magazine* had retained a substantial critical section, and this ensured that 'eroticism' remained essentially a theme for the magazine's reviewers and essayists. With *London Magazine's* discussions of eroticism in art and literature being conducted in rather rarefied, aesthetic terms, the potential for offence was slight. The seriousness with which Ross approached issues of pornography and sexual morality is demonstrated by the poems of Ewart, MacBeth and Porter published in *London Magazine*, which adopted a more restrained approach than might otherwise be expected from their *Ambit* contributions.

The obscenity trials of *Oz*, *IT*, *Nasty Tales* and *Gay News* during the Seventies had a catastrophic effect upon the Underground Press, rendering insolvent an enterprise already struggling to come to terms with its own ideological bankruptcy. The same cannot be said for the little magazines, for despite printing a handful of explicit poems, a series of topless cover designs, and Ewart's unashamedly pornographic 'The Sexual Invasion of England', *Ambit* continued to court controversy while evading prosecution. Given that *Ambit's* earlier transgressions had attracted censure from critics as diverse as Lord Goodman,

Randolph Churchill and the *Daily Mail*, the magazine could not have presented a better target for Britain's moral guardians; *Ambit*, however, received no more attention than *London Magazine* or *Stand*, although Bax's penchant for nude photography and erotic fiction stood in sharp contrast to Ross's critical approach to the pornography debate and Jon Silkin's attractive, if neo-Georgian, cover designs.

In many respects, the ACGB's support for *Ambit*, *London Magazine* and *Stand* symbolised a degree of establishment acceptance that would distinguish the little magazines from the likes of *IT*, *Oz* and *Nasty Tales*. The alternative newspapers, with their roots in the protest movements of the Sixties, were to attract the full wrath of commentators convinced that the 'pendulum of permissiveness' had swung too far. Yet the suggestion that the Underground movement bore sole responsibility for the emergence of a new pornocracy was grossly unfair. Looking back on the obscenity debates of the Seventies in 1980, Norman Shrapnel claimed,

Sex was not just in the bed or in the head. It was everywhere—on page and screen and poster, in gallery and theatre and pulpit, a cause of such unending controversy that it mattered little which side of the looking-glass the contenders happened to be. By this theory Lord Longford, Mrs Whitehouse, the editor of *Playboy* and the porn merchants of Soho were all acolytes in the same temple of mirrors.¹²³

Thus while Underground publications were prosecuted, fined, branded obscene and ultimately silenced for their obsession with 'the leading preoccupations of Britain in the Seventies', the state-sponsored little magazines continued to be tolerated, encouraged and bankrolled in the name of Art. The distinction between the two had never been sharper.

Computer-Generated Literature and Other Atrocities. *Ambit* 51-81, 1972-79

Drawing upon the apocalyptic sentiments expressed in the late Sixties and early Seventies by Paolozzi and Brownjohn, and the sustained interest in sexual matters

¹²³ Norman Shrapnel, 'Introduction', *The Seventies: Britain's Inward March*. London: Constable. 1980: 126.

exemplified by the pornographic fiction of Ewart and the Euphoria Bliss covers, the period between 1972 and 1979 would see the emergence of two principal themes: science fiction; and the atrocity, or catastrophic event. This is not to suggest that the variety distinguishing *Ambit* prior to 1972 had been abandoned, or that its editors had suddenly lost their sense of humour, for the poetry of Ewart, MacBeth and Porter; the fiction of Bell and Blakeston; the caricatures of Steadman; and the attractive watercolours of Foreman continued to lend both humour and colour to the magazine. By the middle of the decade, however, scientific and medical settings were increasingly prominent, while car crashes, Vietnam, violent death, and freak-shows had become the magazine's recurring motifs.

Ambit's interest in computers was fuelled by 'The Computer Prayer' (*Ambit* 43), a series of enigmatic, insightful and meaningless aphorisms generated by Christopher Evans's computerised synonym-paradigm model:

THE COMPRESSION OF UNITY IS THE HOPE OF OMNIPOTENCE.
THE AWARENESS OF ECSTASY IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF COMPREHENSION.
THE TRUTH OF IDENTITY IS THE FREEDOM OF LIFE.
THE REALITY OF PLEASURE IS THE ETERNITY OF EQUALITY.¹²⁴

The Cambridge Language Research Unit had devised a similar program in 1970 to compose haikus, an experiment that saw Margaret Masterman and Robin McKinnon Wood devote a full page article to 'The Poet and the Computer' and the Cambridge method in the *Times Literary Supplement*.¹²⁵ Visions of the computer as text-generating machine were revisited in Evans's 'The Yellow Back Novels' (*Ambit* 51), yet despite producing some eminently credible pulp-fiction titles like 'Storm Diamond' and 'Slave Dimension' and the equally striking pseudonyms 'Blade Sinatra' and 'Marsha Fantoni', this collection of computer-generated

¹²⁴ Christopher Evans, 'The Computer Prayer', *Ambit* 43, 1970: 31.

¹²⁵ Margaret Masterman and Robin McKinnon Wood, 'The Poet and the Computer', *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 June 1970: 667.

narratives suffered from an array of grammatical defects. Only 'King of the Arkonus' by 'Della Baron' was free of these deficiencies:

THE FURY OF THE MOTORS RATTLED THE LAKE.
IN THE DUKE'S BALLROOM A GILDED MIRROR CRACKED.
CHRIS BALLARD TREMBLED AS THE ROLLER SANK.
THE BOOK WAS COMPLETE.
'NOW YOU SEE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FEDERATION'S BULLETIN.'
VILMA CRIED AGHAST.
THEN INDICATED TRESAR. THE GIANT MARSHALL: 'LET THERE NEVER BE
PEACE WITHIN THIS COUNTRY!'¹²⁶

In 'King of the Arkonus', Evans's program appeared to have mastered the principles of cause and effect, and in *Ambit* 60 the program switched to detective fiction with a greater degree of sophistication. Unfortunately, the 'Machine Gun City' texts (*Ambit* 60) signalled a return to compositional strategies based upon the single-line unit, a method that undermined the cause and effect element of the narrative, resulting in an arbitrary juxtaposition of disparate sentences. These problems had been partially resolved with 'Machine Gun City, Part II' (*Ambit* 61), but inappropriate phrases like 'blood-curdling cough', 'coarse moan' and 'rasping gasp' still arose a little too regularly, and the chance unity of 'King of the Arkonus' went unrepeated. Having reached the height of its creative powers in the science fiction genre, and enjoyed a brief spell as a medical practitioner, the magazine's first and last non-human contributor finally disappeared from *Ambit* in 1976.

Machines would play a supporting role in 'Backwater' (*Ambit* 19), a futuristic story written by Brian Aldiss and attractively illustrated by Robert McAuley in which a struggling Earth-bound novelist called Petersen is visited by a researcher whose interest rests not with the protagonist's novels, but with his substantial collection of historical pintables. In the course of the narrative, Petersen's girlfriend Anna repeatedly reminds him of his literary shortcomings and challenges him to give up his novelistic ambitions. Despite the futuristic setting

¹²⁶ Evans, 'The Yellow-Back Novels', *Ambit* 51, 1972: 7.

made explicit with references to ‘Chinese Earth’, the ‘Celestial Baracuda’ [*sic*], and the ‘Human Exudations Recycling’ industry however, ‘Backwater’ remains a sympathetic, humorous and essentially realistic account of the differing expectations of a couple implausibly matched.

Moving away from domestic settings, Bax and others turned towards the hospital and the asylum. In ‘Night Round’ (*Ambit* 50), an extract from *The Hospital Ship* (1976), Bax recounts the experiences of a young doctor and his attempts to treat ‘his most bizarre patient “The Man from the West”’, who ‘wouldn’t talk or respond to sound’, but would occasionally ‘let forth a series of mewling noises’.¹²⁷ Bax introduces a large quantity of material from medical texts, including G.W. Allport’s *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation* (1960), C.E. Osgood’s *Method and Theory in Experimental Psychology* (1953), and E.B. Hurlock’s *Child Development* (1950), a technique that offers an illusory credibility to the surreal events that take place within Bax’s floating hospital, the constant shifts in register generating a narrative that negotiates an uneasy line between fact and fiction.

While the computer-generated texts of Evans, the futuristic tale of Aldiss, and the medical themes of Bax emphasised various aspects of *Ambit*’s continuing commitment to science fiction, *Ambit*’s prose editor J.G. Ballard would prove especially prolific in this field. In many respects, Ballard’s controversial series of ‘compressed novels’, *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970), is a round up of his magazine fiction from the late Sixties, much of which had initially appeared in *Ambit*. Thus ‘You: Coma: Marilyn Monroe’ became chapter four; ‘Plan For The Assassination of Jacqueline Kennedy’ chapter ten; and ‘The Great American Nude’ chapter six of

¹²⁷ Bax, ‘Night Round’, *Ambit* 50, 1972: 11.

what William S. Burroughs described as ‘a profound and disquieting book’.¹²⁸ *The Atrocity Exhibition*, with its strong apocalyptic and psychosexual themes, influenced a number of *Ambit*’s literary and visual contributors during the Seventies. The most notable examples of this were an ‘*Ambit News*’ column citing the results of a ‘Purpose in Life Test’ proving ‘Frankl’s notion that the meaning of life is enhanced as one finds meaning in suffering and death’ (*Ambit* 55),¹²⁹ and Cecil Helman’s Burroughsesque fiction ‘The Exploding Newspaper’ (*Ambit* 56), a story “‘about a man someplace who reads a report in a paper about an exploding newspaper, and then, a few minutes later—the paper *he*’s reading begins to tick, then blows up Bang in his hand!’”.¹³⁰ Atrocity themes would recur in the photo-illustrated libretto, *The Vietnam Symphony* (*Ambit* 63) (assembled by Bax and Paolozzi, and set to music by Henry Lowther), and extend to the personal ‘atrocities’ expressed in suicide poems like Ruth Fainlight’s ‘Last Days’ (*Ambit* 63) and Edwin Morgan’s ‘Instamatics’ (*Ambit* 54), where ‘A middle-aged precision instrument mechanic / having fallen behind with the mortgage repayments’ stages his own elaborate death with a ‘two-foot-long steel / paper-trimmer’, a ‘steel / anvil’ and a ‘complex of ropes’.¹³¹

In the Prose Special (*Ambit* 55), Ballard continued to explore atrocity themes in an extract from his latest novel *Crash* (1973). Stepping away from the clinical third person narration that had characterised *The Atrocity Exhibition*, Ballard’s narrator (who in the subsequent novel becomes James Ballard) recounts the events leading up to the death of Vaughan, a psychopath obsessed with recreating the fatal car-crashes of Sixties film-stars:

¹²⁸ Burroughs, ‘Preface’, J.G. Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition*. San Francisco: Re/Search Publications, 1990 [1972]: 7.

¹²⁹ Bax and Foreman, ‘*Ambit News*’, *Ambit* 55, 1973: 2.

¹³⁰ Cecil Helman, ‘The Exploding Newspaper’, *Ambit* 56, 1973: 23.

¹³¹ Edwin Morgan, ‘Instamatics’, *Ambit* 54, 1973: 52.

For Vaughan each crashed car set off a tremor of excitement, in the complex geometries of a dented fender, in the unexpected variations of crushed radiator grilles, in the grotesque overhang of an instrument panel forced on to a driver's crutch [*sic*] as if in some celebrated act of machine fellatio [*sic*]. The intimate time and space of a single human being has been fossilized for ever in this web of chromium knives and frosted glass.¹³²

Kurt Benning and Rudiger Joppien would explore atrocities of a different nature in a photo-illustrated article concerning the 'Origen-Mysterien Theatre' of Hermann Nitsche and the events surrounding one particular performance in Munich in January 1974. Nitsche's earlier work had combined 'elements of slaughter, sexuality and blasphemy', and this performance took place in a private club, well away from enemies in the German police and the conservative middle-classes.¹³³ The reason for this caution was soon made clear as Benning and Joppien reported upon a bizarre mixture of violence, bestiality and sex ritual before attempting to locate Nitsche within a tradition reaching back to Freud, Adler, Klimt and Schiele:

Nitsche opens the play by giving the signal to a group of musicians who start to produce an eardeafening noise. Meanwhile Nitsche draws lines on the floor around a surplice, a broken egg and objects of similar nature. This performed, he lays out the lumps of sugar in an unbroken sequence, ending in front of a monstrance; they are then melted with drops of blood. Blood, the [major] ingredient of the performance, is used for other actions too; a cup of it is emptied into the interior of the suspended sheep.¹³⁴

Further scenes include a nude woman covered in sheep's intestines, and a blindfolded man being led by the penis to a shower of sheep's blood. The climax comes when

one of the lambs is crucified on a wooden cross, with its four legs nailed to the wood. While the orchestra plays Bavarian brass music, the open corpse of the sheep is filled up with intestines and paste and trampled down by stamping feet until this substance has become totally amorphous. The show ends with the powerful image of an erected cross on which a man is fastened with his head down.¹³⁵

Benning and Joppien make a determined effort to interpret the Catholic ritualism, Crucifixion imagery and implied references to the disjunction between genuine

¹³² Ballard, 'Crash!', *Ambit* 55, 1973: 6.

¹³³ Kurt Benning and Rudiger Joppien, 'The O-M Theatre Of Hermann Nitsche', *Ambit* 58, 1974: 20.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*: 18.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*: 20.

atrocities and the violent illusions of the media, although their conclusion is ultimately as unsatisfying as it is predictable:

If Nitsche's play suggests an affirmation of this animalistic aspect in mankind, his effort could be understood as a demonstration of freedom, freedom that offers possibilities we are afraid to realize ourselves. Nitsche is a symptom for [*sic*] our present society.¹³⁶

Paolozzi's collages of the Sixties, and a good deal of poetry, prose and visual artwork besides, would seem to indicate that many of *Ambit's* contributors had already begun to realise that humanity's 'animalistic aspect' could open up a range of violent 'possibilities'. Indeed, in many respects, *Ambit's* interest in both science fiction and atrocity themes during the Seventies embodies a complex double-response to the issue of mankind's relationship with technology. On the one hand, the computer-generated compositions of Chris Evans suggested that technology might play a positive role in driving forward the boundaries of human creativity in art and literature. On the other, the atrocity themes presented in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, 'The Vietnam Symphony' and 'O-M Theatre', and evoked in 'The Hospital Ship' and Edwin Morgan's 'Instamatics', suggested that Apocalypse remained the ultimate goal of a human race once described by Ballard as 'perhaps innately perverse, capable of enormous cruelty' but which 'may have to go through this phase to reach something on the other side.'¹³⁷ These sentiments, more than any other, seemed to reflect the dominant tone of those contributors who no longer felt able to carry the good-natured experiments of the Sixties into *Ambit* during the Seventies.

'Doing Their Thing': A Poetry Special. *Ambit* 54, 1973

In January 1973, *Ambit* sent a letter to several of its regular poetic contributors which read:

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ballard, 'Introduction', *The Atrocity Exhibition*: 6.

Dear Poet,

We believe that most poets who have been writing for any length of time arrive at a theme which becomes central to their work. The theme may take on a different look over the years, become modified or expanded, but it is usually there, in some form or other, in the poet's best work.

If you agree with this, we would like to publish the poem which you think most successfully expresses your theme, together with a few paragraphs (maximum 500 words) of you talking about the theme and how it affects your writing. Ideally we would like to publish, in addition to the above, a new unpublished poem.¹³⁸

The result of this rare call for submissions was a Poetry Special (*Ambit* 54) in which many of *Ambit's* regular poets explained various formal and thematic aspects of their work. Consequently *Ambit* 54 opened with two poems, 'Bird Plant' and 'Apple Death' by the Liverpool poet Henry Graham, and an introductory note in which Graham affirmed his commitment to Surrealist principles:

I find in my own work reoccurring images from surrealist painting, Magritte, Ernst, De Chirico, etc., due I suppose to my being preoccupied with painting up to the age of 30. I most often use these images unconsciously when attempting to explore my own internal landscape. Just as in surrealism, it is the juxtaposition of apparently unrelated images I use as a trigger for the unconscious meaning, and not the intellect of words.¹³⁹

Consistent with *Ambit's* approach to the visual arts and prose fiction throughout the Sixties and early Seventies, Graham's post-Freudian interest in the unconscious, and his tendency towards bizarre, colourful imagery are well illustrated by 'Bird Plant', a menacingly humorous piece seeming to spring from the world of nightmare. Taken from Graham's *Passport To Earth* (1971), the poem begins with its speaker reflecting upon a sinister nocturnal visit from a flock of blood-sucking owls that 'came in the night / and ripped off the roof', and trees that grow 'noisily in my sleep'. With the speaker poised to visit some terrible revenge upon the birds, a surreal transformation suddenly turns a destructive act of burial into one of re-creation:

I will plant them in rows
in the garden, and when
they grow tall and strong
they will exist to hide

¹³⁸ Anon, 'Doing Their Thing', *Ambit* 54, 1973: 3.

¹³⁹ Graham, 'Doing Their Thing', *ibid*: 3.

me from my neighbours' eyes.¹⁴⁰

Introducing two of the shortest poems to appear in *Ambit 54*, Ivor Cutler seemed similarly inspired by the creative potential of the unconscious. While his untitled seven-word 'new poem' is little more than an ejaculation of joky irony, his 'My Mother has Two Red Lips' casts Cutler as a humorist concerned with the simple:

The theme is simplicity. How *not* to know what you are going to say, then let it trickle out a word at a time: to concentrate on the noise that the words are making, together; to let the meaning take care of itself. The unconscious uses words as a vehicle, and I am astonished/delighted/amused by what is going on inside. This, at its lowest, is a therapy, and should be private, but when it seems aesthetically good enough and communicable, I make it public.¹⁴¹

The work of another poet-painter, Cutler's 'My Mother has Two Red Lips' is marked by an abundance of nouns, an emphasis upon the image, and a brightness that recalls the bold colours of the Pop Art ready-made. The poem itself, however, has little meaning beyond the immediate, as a series of short lines generates a portrait of the partial, the provisional and the incomplete. The first stanza establishes that the speaker's mother has 'two red lips' and 'a limp / when she / breaks a bone', while the poem closes with an equally cryptic tableau:

She walks
a mile
on a sunny day
with a baggy parcel
of nuts.¹⁴²

Graham and Cutler asserted that their poetry remained grounded in a form of unconscious accident, but others were to subject their work to more rigorous analysis. Introducing his early 'How to Get a Girl Friend' and 'Meanwhile', Peter Porter wrote:

To have an *idée fixe* is not the same as to be able to illustrate it. My poems reflect three obsessions—the presence of the gods, the dominance of dreams and the psychosis of death.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid: 4

¹⁴¹ Ivor Cutler, 'Doing Their Thing', *ibid*: 9.

¹⁴² Cutler, 'My Mother has Two Red Lips', *ibid*: 10.

This is pretty heavy going, and thank Heavens, no one poem can stand for all these concerns. Without believing in the old gods of the Mediterranean, one can still say that their example of plurality and the importance of place in their theology has taken over much of the sensibility we inherited from Christianity.¹⁴³

The work of an individual preferring ‘to stick to orthodox syntax and to avoid the chopped-up look of poems so popular in the States and among our own avant-garde’, Porter’s poems are abstract and allusive in style, drawing their terms of reference from the realms of fine art, music and classical history. They are also notable for their formal regularity, demonstrating a high degree of technical accomplishment in rhymed and free verse forms.

In an extract from the dream-sequence ‘How to Get a Girl Friend’—where ‘Love replaces death in the dream, but it’s not easy to say who wins, since even the good feeling at the end is dangerously claustrophobic’¹⁴⁴—Porter demonstrates his capacity to switch suddenly from light verse to darker tones. Beginning with a series of upbeat images, these remain complicated by an ironic tone evident from the outset:

Be coaxed from parsing love’s fine language,
Be the right man in the right place for once.
Suck the straw she passes you,
Lick the grass stain off her skinny knees—
The air of afternoon is hairy,
The ground thick in dismembered bees.¹⁴⁵

High-flown poeticism is immediately grounded by the revived cliché of the second line, while the ‘knees/bees’ rhyme that might initially suggest light verse, is translated into an ominous premonition of an ending both imminent and inexplicable. Porter’s technical ability is signalled by subtle alliterative and assonantal patterns, hidden amid a concise tautness of lineation as the poem moves towards its downbeat conclusion:

It can never have been so beautiful

¹⁴³ Peter Porter, ‘Doing Their Thing’, *ibid*: 13.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*: 14.

¹⁴⁵ Porter, from ‘How to Get a Girl Friend’, *ibid*: 14.

Or worth so many lies: I am at home here
In my nest of doubts. Open your eyes love,
The sun adorns us with its happenings.¹⁴⁶

Porter pursues 'the same theme in much more abstract language' in 'Meanwhile', as he assembles a dense imagistic mosaic epitomising his belief that 'Art (especially music and poetry) is a way of taking death into ourselves'.

Alan Brownjohn argued that one should not expect to discover a 'central theme' in any single poem, but find it emerging from 'a mass of scattered particulars: various assumptions, tones of voice, atmospheres, habits in the choice or avoidance of subjects or techniques'.¹⁴⁷ Brownjohn identified his interest in the political themes of Englishness and patriotism through a discussion of 'Knightsbridge Display Window', a poem that recalled the domestic efforts of his great-aunt during the war:

 she planted out
Saplings of wilted lettuce which would
Hold the invader back; well,

Indirectly. Thus the war years were:
In things like this, a concen-
Tration of particular sensibleness,

A living-on by what would keep
Us living on [...] ¹⁴⁸

The uncomplicated diction and the emphasis on self-sufficiency and personal sacrifice stand in stark contrast to the glut of self-satisfaction and materialism suggested by the 'Knightsbridge Display Window'. Thus Brownjohn presents a political vision, rejecting 'shining uniforms', 'tanks and refugees', and 'Churchill-rant' in favour of 'cutting bread thinly', having 'just enough to wear', and agitating for 'a commonwealth of sense'. In these terms, Brownjohn sees his work as

a rather patriotic celebration of a particular set of English virtues: scepticism about the high-flown and pretentious, reasonable social decency and democratic stability, rationalist

¹⁴⁶ Ibid: 15.

¹⁴⁷ Brownjohn, 'Doing Their Thing', *ibid*: 10.

¹⁴⁸ Brownjohn, 'Knightsbridge Display Window', *ibid*: 12.

attitudes, an ability to be left-wing without being either violent or doctrinal, and a spirit of resolute determination to survive.¹⁴⁹

The only female poet to feature in the ‘Doing Their Thing’ section of the Poetry Special, Fleur Adcock seemed to echo Brownjohn’s assertion that it was probably more useful to talk of recurring tendencies than central themes, suggesting that

if my writing has a central theme it is such a broad one that it can be encompassed only by a very general title of ‘personal territory’—it includes close relationships, particularly family ones, with children or, extending back, with parents, ancestors, origins; place in the narrow sense of home, house, garden, one’s own bit of earth, but also in the broader senses; and imaginative territory: memories, fantasies, words, poems and books, paintings and images, religious and political ideas.¹⁵⁰

Having identified such a wide range of themes, Adcock offers ‘The Cave Revisited’ as characteristic of her interest in ‘ambiguity’. Prompted by a ‘dream in winter’, the speaker struggles to reconcile various images of death-camps, the womb, and the dream-child that sit so uncomfortably together, and is ultimately frustrated in her attempt to write down the words of the dream-child:

She spoke a carefully-balanced epigram
about order and cheerfulness,
disorder and dejection.
I was impressed; I tried to write it down
with my finger in a patch of dust
and woke in the effort [...] ¹⁵¹

Of those poets submitting responses to the *Ambit* survey, many would trace the source of their imagery back to dreams, or would invoke the ‘dream-sequence’ as a structuring device.

In ‘Notes on the Poet’s Working Day’, Edwin Morgan set out some of the more mundane experiences connected with the poetic life, describing his work as a poet and Reader in English at Glasgow University, and the difficulties presented by this dual role:

¹⁴⁹ Brownjohn, ‘Doing Their Thing’, *ibid*: 10.

¹⁵⁰ Fleur Adcock, ‘Doing Their Thing’, *ibid*: 19.

¹⁵¹ Adcock, ‘The Cave Revisited’, *ibid*: 20.

In this sort of job, poems usually have to be written either in the evenings or at the weekend or during vacations. You can accommodate to this, you can accommodate to the specific rhythm of the work, though not without tensions and frustrations. [...] There's often a real clash between the desire to write poetry and the necessity to get so many papers marked by a certain deadline. [...] But speaking for myself, I would only make the point that it's not impossible to combine an academic job with creative work.¹⁵²

Jim Burns described his own frustrations in a poem entitled 'The Poet's Life, 1972 Style' in which his poetic imagination perpetually causes him to neglect the mundane considerations of his office job, much to the annoyance of his supervisor. Inevitably, MacBeth took the theme further in his long poem 'A Poet's Life', a humorous account of a poet's transition from a target for the 'lesser-read weeklies', through poetry readings, short-term academic placements and freelance work, towards an entry in *Who's Who*:

WHOOPEE! He is in *Who's Who*. He leafs the pages
accounting for which of his friends
is still not in. He smiles,
observing with sad delight the absence of those
he is closest to.¹⁵³

Ambit 54 was not simply an anthology of the magazine's favoured sons, and new poetry appeared from Sue Jackson, Abigail Mozley, Marilyn Hacker (who first appeared in *Ambit 47*) and Pamela Beattie (who first appeared in *Ambit 50*), and the work of these contributors, often short and imagistic, offered some satisfying surprises during the Seventies. Apart from the occasional forced rhyme, Hacker's 'Seperations' [sic] sonnet sequence presented a convincing account of a dysfunctional relationship with some pleasing images. Similarly imagistic, Sue Jackson's 'Summer Poems' looked at the happier aspects of love, casting her speaker as a 'rare dragonfly' that her addressee is 'trying to catch'. In visual terms, *Ambit 54* was notable for the caricatures of Ralph Steadman which, drawn in characteristically sketchy style, complemented the poetry of Graham, Cutler, Brownjohn and Brock in particular. Devoted to poets both new and established, and

¹⁵² Morgan, 'Notes on the Poet's Working Day', *ibid*: 30-31.

¹⁵³ George MacBeth, 'A Poet's Life', *ibid*: 41.

their various experiences of the poetic process, *Ambit 54* remains one of the most satisfyingly unified of the Seventies special numbers.

Celebrations: A Twentieth Anniversary Special. *Ambit 80*, 1979

Although much of the content of *Ambit 80* was of a poetic or visual arts nature, the Anniversary Special, in keeping with many of the Seventies numbers, opened with a Ballard text entitled 'The Unlimited Dream Company'. Beginning in characteristically direct style, Ballard draws upon aspects of his own biography to present the story of a young man who is violently revived by a group of villagers following a near-fatal plane-crash:

In the first place, why did I steal the aircraft?

If I had known that only ten minutes after taking off from London Airport the burning machine was to crash into the Thames, would I still have climbed into its cockpit? Perhaps even then I had a confused premonition of the strange events that would take place in the hours following my rescue.¹⁵⁴

Set in a bleak near-future environment in which Shepperton's 'quiet, tree-lined roads' have become 'runways', the action centres on Blake and his developing obsession with aircraft, stemming from the transatlantic trips of his childhood, his work as an aircraft cleaner, and his relationship with a retired air-hostess. He talks of expulsions from school and university, the first of these prompted by his drunken attempts to copulate with the school cricket pitch, and the second by his attempt to bring a laboratory cadaver back to life, each of these seemingly unrelated incidents subsequently given psychopathic meaning by the epiphanic moment of the crash. The text is held together by various moments of inexplicable doubling, most obviously signalled in the crash-site as Blake's plane comes down on a film-set complete with 'A dozen antique biplanes' and 'actors in World War I leather flying gear'.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Ballard, 'from The Unlimited Dream Company', *Ambit 80*, 1979: 2.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid: 6.

Ambit 80 also featured fiction from the Caribbean poet, short story writer and theatre director E.A. Markham. 'The Mystery of Maureen' begins with Philpot, owner of an antique shop, embarking upon a perverse game of sexual role-playing with his wife Maureen, in which he rapes her in the guise of a Commercial Traveller and she pretends to be 'someone else'. When they wake the next morning, Maureen insists on being called Lindsay, and subsequently disappears. Philpot later fantasises about 'the wicked Page Three girl of the *Sketch*', vowing 'to accept her in exchange for Maureen',¹⁵⁶ and this wish appears to trigger a multitude of strange occurrences as the world suddenly becomes filled with a superabundance of 'Lyndsays'.

Reminiscent of *Ambit's* Seventies fiction, 'Maureen' traces a gradual movement from mundane reality towards a surreal and self-perpetuating sense of paranoia in which technology and the media become malevolent forces, further enflaming an overactive imagination. References to murder continue to drift into the text, yet it is unclear whether these refer to real events in Philpot's past, or to his tendency to fall asleep in front of the television news. During his search for Maureen, Philpot discovers that '*Lindsza* was Spanish and meant *elegance* or *prettiness* or *neatness*' and that '*Lindra*' in Swedish meant 'To soothe, to mitigate', before fearing that he has become the prime suspect in what was 'beginning to sound like a murder investigation [...]. Privately, Philpot was preparing his defence: why did he kill her? Each time it seemed like a different murder.'¹⁵⁷ Alive and well, Maureen later returns 'looking much the same as she had always looked', throwing Philpot and his friends out of the house.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ E.A. Markham, 'Maureen', *ibid*: 29.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*: 32-33.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*: 33.

The fiction of Bax, Ballard and Markham comprised a substantial part of the prose, but there was also space for an article by Peter Stewart, recalling a conversation with William S. Burroughs at the Nova Convention in New York. Essentially an article about the author's experience of meeting the infamous novelist nearly twenty years after the appearance of *Naked Lunch*, 'We're Here To Go' discusses Burroughs's interest in space exploration, his recently completed novel *Cities of the Red Night*, and his continuing ability to inspire his youthful audiences. Something of a fanzine piece, it is an interesting if not especially informative look at one of *Ambit's* Sixties hero-contributors, as Stewart breathlessly describes *Cities of the Red Night* as 'his longest work to date, about 400 pages, and [...] apparently quite different from his earlier works', before exclusively revealing that 'According to what he said it is set in the seventeenth century, and it isn't experimental in the same way as the earlier works—it is a much more traditional novel, "although with intrigues within the intrigue"'.¹⁵⁹

The poems in *Ambit* 80 ranged from the concise imagistic compressions of John Gunnell's 'Burying Of Wolves at Mölln', to the nonsense verse of Cutler's 'I Built A Road', many concerning personal or domestic themes. In 'Double Bed', Carol Rumens took a wry look at relationships, the double bed of the title being the poem's principal scene as the female protagonist

goes upstairs early,
lies wretched in the double bed,
letting its cool space ease her.¹⁶⁰

In this state, she soon falls asleep, pursuing 'new shapes / of desire' until her partner arrives with 'cold flesh / and delicate flattery', and the bed is transformed from a place of retreat where private fantasies might be indulged in secret, to a communal

¹⁵⁹ Peter Stewart, 'We're Here To Go', *ibid*: 69.

¹⁶⁰ Carol Rumens, 'Double Bed', *ibid*: 25.

space where physical needs are acknowledged but never quite satisfied by the seemingly routine act of lovemaking:

and at length she plays her part,
breathless, half-drowning,
while he straddles her as if
he would life-save her.¹⁶¹

Rumens suggests this ritual is an uncomfortable and fatiguing one, but one that also reaffirms the strength of a relationship rooted in comfort and familiarity as much as love. Whatever the implied difficulties that exist between the couple, he remains anxious to save her, while she is prepared to be saved.

Continuing in this economical style, Rumens employs a number of pleasing images suggesting that the couple have come to 'inhabit different angles', and 'no longer wave and smile / from each other's mirrors', before the female protagonist realises her partner has appropriated the 'cool space' she had originally sought. The closing lines imply a certain resignation, but one partly prompted by the protagonist's concern for her partner, as the double bed has become

too narrow to sleep in,
but impossible to leave,
she thinks, without robbing him.¹⁶²

Carol Ann Duffy took a different approach to the theme of love, throwing a sharp spotlight on a series of unsuccessful relationships. The message is somewhat obvious in 'Doll', the 'doll' being presented as a garish plaything to be picked up and dropped by the poem's anonymous addressee, but Duffy's short, punchy lines guard against self-pity:

I am a doll
you open the box
I love you kiss you
laugh and prance
you close the box
I cease to dance¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Carol Ann Duffy, 'Doll', *ibid*: 94.

Among the poems on relationships and death, Nicki Jackowska's stand out as lush imagistic portraits in which domestic settings are embellished with magical or surreal details. While Jackowska's poems rarely go beyond the recording of an instant in time, her imagistic palette generates some vivid juxtapositions, most notably in 'Old Man In A New Month':

The shape of sadness, blue-eyed fields;
tilt of the chair, the floors scrubbed clean
of fish-tails and feathers.
Measure-man, weather-man, telling
pin-striped rooms, down and nancy-free.¹⁶⁴

In 'Black Sister' Jackowska employs a similar technique, though with greater restraint, drawing her images from a store of childhood memories to present a portrait of a playmate both familiar and exotic:

And touching her is strange
like opening a paper bag
to glorious rainbow sweets.¹⁶⁵

She then goes on to describe 'a transmitter off-course', which rather leads her away from the themes of the opening stanza, but the poem remains pleasing if not entirely unified. Of her other poems, 'Stones, Lizards and Stairs' gestures towards Thirties surrealism, while 'Earth Rumour' looks back to the imagism of H.D., Ezra Pound and Richard Aldington. Other poems worthy of note include Agneta Falk's good-humoured jibe at academic pretentiousness, 'Conceptually Connected'; George Szirtes's nostalgic memory of old addresses in 'These You Have Loved'; and Michael Hofmann's humorous six-line poem 'Tangles':

In a cheap restaurant, friends tried
Out your head, soft & then spiky. Now
Your hair is longer, almost bends.

I have seen our sad direction too
Late, though it was obvious. Your
Red plastic comb is in difficulties.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Nicki Jackowska, 'Old Man In A New Month', *ibid*: 65.

¹⁶⁵ Jackowska, 'Black Sister', *ibid*: 65.

¹⁶⁶ Michael Hofmann, 'Tangles', *ibid*: 74.

Ambit 80 also carried some high quality artwork, much of it tending to mirror themes explored in the writing. Thus the gloomy darkness and formal ambiguity of Cathie Felstead's mixed-media illustrations provide a satisfying visual accompaniment to Ballard's extract from 'The Unlimited Dream Company', while Hannah Firmin's attractive wood-cuts of suburban gardens refer directly to the 'deep lawns', 'begonias' and 'potting-sheds' described in Adrian Henri's poem 'Death In The Suburbs'. Fiona Bain's ink-sketch of an elderly gentleman evoked the 'old soldier, one-eyed veteran' at the centre of Vernon Scannell's poem 'Last Attack', and Foreman supplied an attractive ink-wash illustration for Bax's 'Jump Up and Down, Your Majesty'. In addition to the illustrations, Michael Kilraine's pencil drawings of various grotesque faces, Micheal Wells's *ghoulish* ink drawings (a mass of masked and emaciated bodies displayed most sickeningly in the drug-den and orgy settings of *The Black Meat* and *Hassan's Rumpus Room*), as well as Peter Blake's sketchbook accounts of his tour with Ian Drury and the Blockheads, represented further high-impact visuals.

As a Retrospective for its regular contributors, *Ambit* 80 highlighted the extent to which the magazine's outlook had changed during the Seventies. Taken together, the contributions are imbued with a mixture of pessimism, anarchic energy and the grotesque. Thus the apocalyptic tone first struck by Alan Brownjohn in 1970 in '(On Which to Feed Your Despair)' (*Ambit* 44) now resonated through the fiction of Ballard, Bax and Markham. Similarly, the poetry (rarely as experimental as Alan Riddell's 'Pieces of Concrete' (*Ambit* 47)) either confirmed this apocalyptic worldview, or offered a temporary escape from it. By 1979 *Ambit* had become no less attractive and no less diverse in its interests, but it had abandoned some of the

more entertaining experiments of the Sixties, and its growing list of established names was beginning to make it look decidedly respectable.

AMBIT'S KEY SEVENTIES CONTRIBUTORS AND PRINCIPAL SERIES

The Apocalyptic Fiction of J.G. Ballard

(Born: 15 November 1930, Shanghai, China)

With the exception of William S. Burroughs, few *Ambit* contributors have achieved the popular appeal, or attracted the amount of critical attention enjoyed by J.G. Ballard. As author of the suppressed anti-novel *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970); principal protagonist of the psychosexual novel *Crash* (1972); and architect of the 1967 Drugs and Creative Writing Competition, Ballard has certainly proved no stranger to controversy in a literary career stretching back to the Fifties. Like Burroughs, Ballard's writing has frequently polarised a critical community responding with scholarly scepticism or fanzine enthusiasm to his early fragmentary forms, his abiding interest in psychopathic, apocalyptic and nihilistic themes, and his roots in the popular science fiction of pulp magazines. While Ballard's status within twentieth-century literary history has still to be determined, Colin Greenland in *The Entropy Exhibition* (1983) has already placed him at the forefront of a Sixties New Wave in science fiction. In the context of *Ambit*, however, Ballard's influence is indisputable, his characteristic forms and themes being embraced by many of the magazine's writers and artists.

Ballard's literary career began in the British science fiction magazines *Science Fantasy* and *New Worlds* in 1956, then dominated by the classic themes developed from H.G. Wells, John Wyndham and John Christopher. Despite favouring these traditional models, editor John Carnell granted Ballard and his

contemporary Michael Moorcock the licence to indulge in a range of formal and thematic experiments that spawned Ballard's first distinctly untraditional science fiction stories, 'Escapement' and 'Prima Belladonna'. Shunning the conventional *New Worlds* preoccupation with spaceships, interstellar travel and interplanetary settings, Ballard presented an account of one man compelled to relive the same ever-diminishing segment of time in 'Escapement', and 'an exotic fantasy about a man who sells musical flowers and a female singer with what look like "insects for eyes"' in 'Prima Belladonna' after which Ballard continued to write for *New Worlds*, becoming a regular contributor by 1960.¹⁶⁷ In 1962 Ballard was asked to write the guest editorial that was to provide the ideological framework for much of his subsequent fiction, and for many of Moorcock's New Wave writers:

The only truly alien planet is Earth. [...] instead of treating time like a sort of glorified scenic railway, I'd like to see it used for what it is, one of the perspectives of the personality, and the elaboration of concepts such as the time zone, deep time and archaeopsychic time. I'd like to see more psycholiterary ideas, more meta-biological and meta-chemical concepts, more of the remote, sombre half-worlds one glimpses in the paintings of schizophrenics, all in all a complete speculative poetry and fantasy of science.¹⁶⁸

Ballard immediately found an outlet for these ideas in a series of disaster novels—*The Wind from Nowhere* (1962), *The Drowned World* (1962), *The Drought* (1965) and *The Crystal World* (1966)—in which Earth and its inhabitants are subjected to mysterious and catastrophic tempests, sea-level rises, desert-inducing heat, and the quasi-spiritual processes of 'crystallization'.

Reflecting upon Ballard's interest in scientific protagonists, de-evolutionary theses and detached third-person narrators, Michel Delville found in *The Drought* 'one of Ballard's most memorable landscapes', which he interpreted as an

endless "dune limbo" covering the sea shore, "a zone of nothingness" draining the characters of all sense of time and personal identity. For Ransom and the other inhabitants

¹⁶⁷ Brian M. Stableford, 'J.G. Ballard', in E.F. Bleiler (ed.), *Science Fiction Writers*. New York: Scribner, 1982: 277.

¹⁶⁸ J.G. Ballard, 'Editorial', *New Worlds*, May 1962: 117-118, reproduced in *ibid*: 281.

of Mount Royal, the silence and emptiness of the timeless beaches [...] can only lead to the gradual erosion of individuality and its submergence by the formless sandy waste.¹⁶⁹

The *Times Literary Supplement's* initial response to the book was reassuring, if restrained:

Mr. Ballard is sometimes intoxicated by the temptations of verbal impressionism into phrases so imprecise as to be virtually meaningless like “the spectre of the renascent dust”, or “containing a greater ambient time than defined by its own space”. But this is a very impressive book by a deeply serious writer, the originality and power of whose vision can be felt, even if not yet fully articulated.¹⁷⁰

The work that followed demonstrated a further rejection of traditional science-fiction themes, as a number of fragmentary experiments published in *Ambit* and *Bananas* inspired the bizarre ‘anti-novel’ *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970). First published in *Ambit*, ‘The Assassination of J.F.K. Considered as a Downhill Motor Race’, ‘Plan For The Assassination of Jacqueline Kennedy’ and ‘The Great American Nude’ appeared as textual collages, replete with Pop Art iconography and contemporary socio-political allusions. Initially prompting *The Atrocity Exhibition's* American publisher, Nelson Doubleday Jnr., to have the entire print-run pulped, ‘The Assassination of J.F.K.’ considers conspiracy theories surrounding the 1963 assassination, with Kennedy and Johnson presented as two racing drivers competing for the Oval Office:

As befitting the inauguration of the first production car race through the streets of Dallas, both the President and the Vice-President participated. The Vice-President, Johnson, took up his position behind Kennedy on the starting line. The concealed rivalry between the two men was of keen interest to the crowd. Most of them supported the home driver, Johnson.¹⁷¹

In an untypically linear narrative thematically linked but essentially peripheral to events within the submerged Traven/Travers/Tallis/Talbert plot, Ballard recounts Kennedy’s ‘race’ from the Dallas ‘Book Depository’ to disqualification at ‘the Parkland Hospital’, before suggesting that the Warren Commission set up to

¹⁶⁹ Michel Delville, ‘The Nature of the Catastrophe’, *J.G. Ballard*. Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998: 11.

¹⁷⁰ Anon, ‘Style Out In Space’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 June 1965: 469.

¹⁷¹ Ballard, ‘The Assassination of J.F.K. Considered as a Downhill Motor Race’, *The Atrocity Exhibition*: 108.

investigate events surrounding the Presidential assassination had generated more questions than answers.

‘Plan for the Assassination of Jacqueline Kennedy’ (*Ambit* 31) was more in keeping with the fractured forms and narrative trajectory of *The Atrocity Exhibition*. Composed from pseudo-scientific paragraph fragments concerned with the ‘leg stance’ of four female celebrities as ‘a significant indicator of sexual arousal’, the nature of ‘assassination fantasies in tabes dorsalis’, and ‘studies’ demonstrating ‘an increasing coincidence of sexual climaxes among persons cleaning automobiles’, Ballard’s piece becomes a form of Cubist montage in which sub-headings sketch a narrative described from multiple perspectives by the surrounding texts. The underlying ‘story’ is, therefore, a straightforward one in which Tallis is driven towards his sex-murders by a combination of external media stimuli and his own psychopathic tendencies:

In his dream of Zapruder frame 235/Tallis was increasingly preoccupied/by the figure of the President’s wife./The planes of her face, like the/cars of the abandoned motorcade/mediated to him the complete silence/of the plaza, the geometry of a murder.¹⁷²

When the photo-illustrated ‘Plan for the Assassination of Jacqueline Kennedy’ appeared in *Ambit* 31, Randolph Churchill denounced the piece in the strongest terms, and demanded the withdrawal of *Ambit*’s ACGB grant. Ballard adapted his narrative style slightly for ‘The Great American Nude’, which treated sex, pornography and paedophilia in a series of set-piece tableaux as the psychopathic Talbert devises a commercial sex kit consisting of:

(1) Pad of pubic hair, (2) a latex face mask, (3) six detachable mouths, (4) a set of smiles, (5) a pair of breasts, left nipple marked by a small ulcer, (6) a set of non-chafe orifices, (7) photo cut-outs of a number of narrative situations—the girl doing this and that, (8) a list of dialogue samples, of inane chatter, (9) a set of noise levels, (10) descriptive techniques for a variety of sex acts, (11) a torn anal detrusor muscle, (12) a glossary of idioms and catch phrases, (13) an analysis of odour traces (from various vents), mostly purines, etc., (14) a chart of body temperatures (axillary, [*sic*] buccal, rectal), (15) slides of vaginal smears,

¹⁷² Ballard, ‘Plan for the Assassination of Jacqueline Kennedy’, *ibid*: 89-91.

chiefly Ortho-Gynol jelly, (16) a set of blood pressures, systolic 120, diastolic 70 rising to 200/150 at onset of orgasm ...¹⁷³

Printed in 1968, Talbert's misogynistic list of female body-parts would anticipate feminist arguments about sex and commercialism, the media and the male gaze during the Seventies.

Interviewed by Thomas Frick for *The Paris Review* in 1984, Ballard acknowledged a major source of his anti-aesthetic narrative style, declaring 'Burroughs, of course, I admire to the other side of idolatry, starting with *Naked Lunch*, then *Ticket*, *Soft Machine*, and *Nova Express*', but insisted that aleatory methods had played little part in the writing of *The Atrocity Exhibition*.¹⁷⁴ With Ballard also emphasising his commitment to a surrealism which 'in Odilon Redon's phrase [places] the logic of the visible at the service of the invisible',¹⁷⁵ Robert L. Platzner's description of *The Atrocity Exhibition* as 'a form of sublimated and abstracted Gothic fantasy' set in 'the haunted castle of the mind, where the hero with a thousand names contemplates obsessively a constantly shifting landscape of pure terror' seems to account for the fragmented documentary forms, psychological themes and uncanny events which permeate the text.¹⁷⁶

Picking up where *The Atrocity Exhibition* left off, Ballard's next novel, *Crash* (1973), grew out of an extract by the same name that appeared in *Ambit 55*. A disturbing tale of psychopathic sexuality and automobile-fetishism, *Crash* would develop the themes of 'The Assassination of J.F.K. Considered as a Downhill Motor Race' and 'Crash!', as Tallis makes way for Dr Robert Vaughan, described by Daniel O'Brien as 'the self-styled "nightmare angel of the highways"', killed in

¹⁷³ Ballard, 'The Great American Nude', *ibid*: 54.

¹⁷⁴ Ballard, 'The Art of Fiction LXXXV. J.G. Ballard. An Interview with Thomas Frick', *The Paris Review*. Vol. 26, No. 94, Winter 1984: 148, 154.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*: 139.

¹⁷⁶ Robert L. Platzner, 'The Metamorphic Vision of J.G. Ballard', *Essays in Literature*. Vol. X, No. 2, Fall 1983: 216.

an attempt to stage his dream car crash into Elizabeth Taylor's chauffeured limousine on the London Airport fly-over'.¹⁷⁷ Ballard took further inspiration from audience reactions to his exhibition of a 'telescoped Pontiac, Mini and Austin Cambridge' at the Arts Lab gallery in 1969. On a drunken opening night, during which a topless girl hired to interview the guests narrowly escaped being 'raped in the back seat of the Pontiac', Ballard sensed in the audience something verging on 'nervous hysteria, though had the cars been parked in the street outside the gallery no one would have given them a glance or devoted a moment's thought to the injured occupants'.¹⁷⁸ Responding to the first edition of *Crash* in 1973, the *Times Literary Supplement* criticised 'a fetishist's book' in which 'there is no right or wrong, no sympathy or compassion, just a detached—almost aesthetic—delight in certain conjunctions and geometries';¹⁷⁹ and in 1997 a film adaptation produced by David Cronenberg was branded pornographic by Health Secretary Virginia Bottomley and subsequently banned from Westminster cinemas.¹⁸⁰

After *Crash*, Ballard published a steady stream of novels, with *Concrete Island* (1974) and *High-Rise* (1975) offering two post-modern gothic rewritings of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Thus *Concrete Island* recounts the tale of Robert Maitland who, following a hit-and-run accident, is marooned on a concrete traffic island amid the West London traffic with only his own ingenuity and the food scraps of passing truckers to sustain him. In *High-Rise*, a middle-class apartment block becomes the setting for a tale of tribal feuds, social breakdown, and cannibalism worthy of William Golding, as the block's architect dreams of colonising the sky and creating a 'new Jerusalem' that would prove the 'paradigm

¹⁷⁷ Daniel O'Brien, *SF/UK. How British Science Fiction Changed The World*. London: Reynolds and Hearn, 2000: 94.

¹⁷⁸ Ballard, 'authorial annotations for "The University of Death"', *The Atrocity Exhibition*: 25.

¹⁷⁹ Anon, 'A Bumper Fun Book', *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 July 1973: 797.

¹⁸⁰ O'Brien: 94-95.

of all future high-rise blocks'.¹⁸¹ Subsequent novels brought a shift from the experiments of *The Atrocity Exhibition*, with *The Unlimited Dream Company* (1979) appearing as a modern ghost story, and *Empire of the Sun* (1984) presenting a realistic autobiographical account of Ballard's childhood experiences of wartime China.

Since *Empire of the Sun*, Ballard has published four more novels embodying various aspects of his earlier work. In *Day of Creation* (1987), Ballard seemed to be looking back to his disaster novels of the Sixties, although a new irony pervades this fantastical account about a World Health Organisation doctor sent to a war-ravaged Central African country on the brink of humanitarian disaster. Amid this destruction, Dr Mallory succeeds in dreaming a new river into existence, but this symbol of hope merely becomes another strategic resource to be fought over by the warring parties. More overt political parables followed in the short-story collection *War Fever* (1990), before a second instalment of fictional memoirs appeared as *The Kindness of Women* (1991). Ballard has recently returned to exploring the familiar zone between the fantastical and the realistic in *Cocaine Nights* (1996) and *Super-Cannes* (2000), two novels that turned his favourite themes of perverse sexuality, violence, psychopathology, commercialism and celebrity to a new satirical purpose.

For forty years, J.G. Ballard has remained *Ambit's* most influential and prolific contributor of prose fiction. As author of *The Atrocity Exhibition* he inherited many of the surrealist and apocalyptic themes of William S. Burroughs, carrying these into the Sixties and Seventies with a series of experimental science fiction and gothic stories attuned to a mood of post-Vietnam, post-psychedelic disillusionment. His longstanding interest in the Pop Art themes of science,

¹⁸¹ John Fletcher, 'J.G. Ballard', in Merritt Moseley (ed.), *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 207: British Writers Since 1960, Third Series*. Detroit: Gale, 1999: 8.

commercialism and celebrity would extend, in literary form, a line of artistic enquiry that informed the sculptures and collages of Eduardo Paolozzi, the thinking of the Independent Group, and the *tromp-l'oeil* paintings of Peter Blake and David Hockney. Equally his sexual psychopaths and medic-psychologist heroes and their disturbing voyages into the claustrophobic inner-spaces of the human mind proved a major influence upon *Ambit's* fiction-writers, poets, artists and illustrators—an influence most obvious in the Seventies, at a time when

A whole new kind of psychopathology, the book of a new Krafft-Ebing [was] being written by such things as car crashes, televised violence, the new awareness of our own bodies transmitted by medical accounts of popular medicine, by reports of the Barnard heart transplants [...] the whole overlay of new technologies, architecture, interior design, communications, transport, merchandising.¹⁸²

Following Ballard's first contribution to *Ambit* in 1965, the magazine's fiction would become noticeably more Ballardian in outlook. This trend would reach its height during the Seventies as Ballard's characteristically apocalyptic vision became *Ambit's* primary response to the post-Vietnam world.

The Poetry of George MacBeth

(Born: 19 January 1932, Shotts, Scotland. Died: 17 February 1992, Tuam, Ireland)

Like many of *Ambit's* principal poets, George MacBeth emerged from the Group established by Phillip Hobsbaum in 1952, before going on to publish more than fifty collections of poetry; eight novels; the plays *The Doomsday Show* (1964) and *The Scene-Machine* (1971); and a book of autobiographical prose-poems, *My Scotland: Fragments of a State of Mind* (1973). He also edited *Poet's Voice* (1958-65), *New Comment* (1959-64) and *Poetry Now* (1965-76), and a handful of eccentric anthologies including *The Penguin Book of Sick Verse* (1963). The sheer magnitude of MacBeth's literary output, combined with his love of word games and

¹⁸² Ballard, from 'Interview with Lyn Barber', *Penthouse*, Vol. 5, September 1970, in Vivian Vale and Andrea Juno (eds), *J.G. Ballard*. San Francisco, CA: V/Search Publications, 1984: 157.

textual experiments, has provoked a mixed critical response. Having himself suggested that ‘the important thing is to thrash out huge quantities of fairly well-written poetry. If it doesn’t last, who cares?’,¹⁸³ and returning repeatedly to his core themes of war, horror and violence in a blackly comic style that blends serious social comment with grotesque fantasy, MacBeth initially found little favour with those British and Irish critics informed by Movement principles. American critics, by contrast, have responded much more positively to his ‘inventive, quirky experiments’ and his characteristic ‘brand of macabre humor and satiric wit’.¹⁸⁴

Coinciding with the rise of the Movement, MacBeth’s first collection of poems, *A Form of Words* (1954), initially generated little critical attention. A slim volume of sixteen poems, *A Form of Words* clearly rejected the ‘sceptical, robust, ironic’ tone of Philip Larkin and Donald Davie, although echoes of the young Ted Hughes could be heard in ‘Rhubarb’ and ‘Stones’ while the playfulness of ‘The Moving Finger’ recalled the William Empson of ‘Bacchus’, ‘Doctrinal Point’ and ‘Your Teeth Are Ivory Towers’. The volume was also notable for some outrageous opening lines including ‘No Strained epexegetic smile / Provokes a query in his head’ from ‘In Memory of a Classical Scholar’, and those of ‘Love’s First Act’, which read:

The seisachtheia of your kiss,
My darling, with unlawful art,
Inverting history, enslaves the heart.¹⁸⁵

A Form of Words was a clever debut displaying MacBeth’s skill in allusive sonnet, ballad, and villanelle forms, but it remained a round up of set pieces rather than a thematically unified volume.

¹⁸³ MacBeth, quoted by Lawrence R. Ries in Vincent Sherry Jnr. (ed.), *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 40: Poets of Great Britain and Ireland Since 1960*. Detroit: Gale, 1985: 328.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid: 337.

¹⁸⁵ MacBeth, ‘Love’s First Act’, *A Form of Words*. Swinford: Fantasy Press, 1954: 18.

The Broken Places (1963) followed, and the collection was greeted with measured praise by Gavin Ewart in *London Magazine*, who described a poet ‘Cryptic, obscure, oblique, sick, unpleasant, [and] sadistic’ who enjoyed ‘his own black eminence among present-day poets’.¹⁸⁶ Dedicated to the memory of the poet’s parents, death and violence dominate the poems from the grotesque parachute death of ‘Drop’ and the poet’s execution of a wounded bird in ‘The Bird’, to the darkly humorous ‘Scissor-Man’. In ‘The Drawer’, however, MacBeth confronted personal losses directly:

So this dead, middle-aged, middle-class man
 Killed by a misfired shell, and his wife
 Dead of cirrhosis, have left one son
 Aged nine, aged nineteen, aged twenty-six,
 Who has buried them both in a cardboard box.¹⁸⁷

The experiments of *The Doomsday Book* (1965) saw MacBeth in more playful mood, with the *Ambit* poem-games ‘Fin du Globe’ (a dadaesque poetic card-game) and *The Ski Murders* (a detective story arranged as a series of encyclopaedia entries) proving significant departures from his early syllabic formalism. While ‘Fin du Globe’ and *The Ski Murders* tested the limits of the prose-poem, the neo-classical ‘Circe Undersea or A Cry From The Depths’, despite its regular iambics and a-b-a-b rhymed quatrains, carried an eccentric commentary prefaced by a suggestion that the text had been transcribed from a tape ‘found floating in an anti-magnetic metal capsule by the first Venusian astronauts, 2020AD’.¹⁸⁸

Identifying the lack of a personal and unifying voice, Edwin Brock questioned ‘the intent or the persona or the mask or whatever it is that motivates what he’s trying to do’, suggesting MacBeth had become

¹⁸⁶ Ewart, *London Magazine*, (New Series) Vol. 5, No. 7, October 1965: 104.

¹⁸⁷ MacBeth, ‘The Drawer’, *The Broken Places*. London: Scorpion Press, 1963: 37.

¹⁸⁸ MacBeth, ‘Circe Undersea or A Cry From The Depths’, *A Doomsday Book*. London: Scorpion Press, 1965: 18.

a sort of one-man band (a very cool band) which can be engaged by the hour to play suitable music at any little mass-murder, wholesale rape or torture-party you happen to be planning. And he's practised so well, he's such a polished servant, that he has now become (almost) faceless.¹⁸⁹

Although formal experiment informed *The Keats Imitations* and 'The Crab-Apple Crisis' (a satirical treatment of the Cold War describing a step-by-step descent into neighbourly brinkmanship), much of the poetry following *The Colour of Blood* (1967) was increasingly dependent upon dream imagery and surrealism.

In *The Night of Stones* (1968) and *A War Quartet* (1969) MacBeth returned to darker themes, the former shaped by images of atrocities and nuclear holocaust, and the latter by memories of World War II. Apocalyptic horrors also lingered in the long Vietnam pamphlet-poem, 'The Bamboo Nightingale' (1970):

The internal war-game
of Mah Jong continues
by the yolk of human eyes. The monks burn
into silence. There is no-one to sweeten
the acid policy in the porcelain
of your LBJ Acropolis.¹⁹⁰

After *Shrapnel* (1973), MacBeth's response to World War II appeared much more personalised with the poet's dead father a ghostly presence in 'The War' and 'The Broken Ones', and MacBeth describing his volume as 'a gigantic jig-saw of violence and pain [...] the shrapnel from what explodes in the nerves, or seems to, when people are at war.'¹⁹¹ Perversely, *Shrapnel* also contained many of the light-verse riddles published in *Ambit 51* as *A Vegetable Bestiary*. These comic experiments followed MacBeth's *Orlando Poems* (1971) (a rather laboured parody of Ted Hughes's bestial *Crow* (1970)) and featured, among other unusual beasts, 'The Lesser Horned Artichoke':

It

¹⁸⁹ Edwin Brock, 'The Doomsday Man', *Ambit 25*, 1965: 2.

¹⁹⁰ MacBeth, 'The Bamboo Nightingale (a funeral-song to America, for her negro dead in Vietnam)', *Ambit 44*, 1970: 18-19.

¹⁹¹ MacBeth, 'Foreword', *Shrapnel*. London: Macmillan, 1973.

makes its name,
dies,
and is eaten, leaf by leaf, to the bone.¹⁹²

In *Buying A Heart* (1978), MacBeth's interest in food spawned the tightly rhymed 'Eating an Orange', a sensuous description of peeling and devouring, and the more loosely structured 'An Ode To English Food', before being translated into the more sinister predatory instincts of the *Crow*-like 'The Greedy Book' in which 'the Director General's / green tea', 'dog-eared stowaways from Peru', 'Tuesday' and 'the Houses of Parliament' all fall victim to the Book's insatiable appetite.¹⁹³ But the volume was by no means a triumph, and *Ambit* pieces like *The Silver Needle* and 'Crazy Jane's A.B.C.' seemed to support Christopher Hope's assertion that MacBeth's latest collection seemed 'to have been flung together in a hurry'.¹⁹⁴

From 1976 to 1977 MacBeth helped Ballard, Bax and Sandford with *Ambit's The Invisible Years* series, an experiment in continuous composition which sought to translate contemporary responses to Vietnam, computers, minimalist architecture, abnormal sexuality, violence and imminent apocalypse into a striking visual-literary impasto. Despite a promising start, the experiment quickly began to lose direction with an increasingly arbitrary correspondence between form and theme evident from *Ambit* 68, and subsequent instalments lurching repetitively from theme to theme with little unifying thread.

Poems of Love and Death (1980) signalled a return to form for MacBeth, and two moving reflections upon divorce, 'An Hour Ago' and 'In the Same Room', saw a shift towards more controlled syllabic forms and a new lyricism:

You lie and read

¹⁹² MacBeth, 'A Vegetable Bestiary', *Ambit* 51, 1972: 2.

¹⁹³ MacBeth, 'The Greedy Book', *Buying A Heart*. London: Omphalos Press and J-Jay Publications, 1978: 55-57.

¹⁹⁴ Christopher Hope, 'Time and the Developers', *London Magazine* (New Series), Vol. 19, No. 3, June 1979: 78.

And I lie and read in the same room
With my back to you. Whatever we need

From each other still, it isn't sex,
Or not that exactly.¹⁹⁵

Poems from Oby (1982) was imbued with a similar lyricism, MacBeth suggesting that it contained fewer 'comic and performance and experimental elements' but 'more optimism than usual, surprising perhaps in a poet approaching fifty'.¹⁹⁶ *Ambit* poems to appear in this volume included 'The Green-Eyed Monster, Jealousy' and 'Women Who Visit', and although the voyeuristic themes of the latter seemed to recall certain aspects of *The Invisible Years*, experimental forms and intellectual word games had disappeared in favour of a much more unified voice. Later disowning the contents of *A War Quartet* in his *Collected Poems 1958-1982* (1989), MacBeth declared:

A poet nearing sixty expects neither pardon nor quarter, but the ache for understanding grows with time. 'I see what you mean' begins to seem a nicer piece of praise than 'I like what you're doing'.¹⁹⁷

MacBeth remained a constant contributor to *Ambit* until his death from motor neurone disease in 1992, recording the progress of his illness in poems like 'The Young Nurse', 'The Sick Husband' and 'The Confinement', printed from the author's unedited typescripts in *Ambit* 128. These later formed the basis for the posthumously titled *The Patient* (1992), a volume affirming various long-held personal and literary friendships with poems dedicated to Anthony Thwaite and A. Alvarez. A work documenting MacBeth's personal journey towards death, *The Patient's* moments of escape into black comedy are balanced by the frequent return to images of painful physical disintegration. Thus 'The Sick Husband' typifies MacBeth's mingled feelings of disappointment, anger and powerlessness:

¹⁹⁵ MacBeth, 'In the Same Room', *Poems of Love and Death*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1980: 9.

¹⁹⁶ MacBeth, 'Foreword', *Poems from Oby*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1982: 7.

¹⁹⁷ MacBeth, 'Foreword', *Collected Poems 1958-1982*. London: Hutchinson, 1989: 13.

Your kindness hates these gnarled hands that it calms.
It suffers them and shivers. If I can,
And I can't often, I withdraw my palms
And quit your breasts. You love another man,

The one I was. [...] ¹⁹⁸

In his *Ambit* poems from 1963 to 1992, MacBeth engaged with the formal and thematic experiments that divided critical and popular audiences during his lifetime. In an article for the *Sewanee Review* in 1971, Harry Morris bemoaned 'so much talent so frequently misdirected', ¹⁹⁹ but this judgment was based solely upon the word-games and surreal . . . experiments that had dominated the poems of the late Sixties. The contents of MacBeth's second *Collected Poems*, however, suggest that such dismissive statements now deserve reassessment. A prolific contributor to a number of little magazines and periodicals including *Encounter*, *The Listener*, *The London Magazine*, *The New Statesman*, *Pacific Quarterly*, *Places*, *Quarto*, *The Times Literary Supplement* and *Stand*, as well as *Ambit*, MacBeth remains, at the very least, a significant figure in the history of contemporary British small press publishing.

The Drawings, Watercolours and Illustrations of Michael Foreman

(Born: 21 March 1938, Pakefield, Suffolk)

Michael Foreman joined *Ambit* as Art Editor in 1962, an appointment that coincided with a general improvement in the quality of the magazine's visuals and the development of a new design ethic. Since 1962, Foreman has produced a vast quantity of artwork ranging from the provocative cartoon cover of the Stars and Stripes Special of 1969 and etchings for Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition*, to the Freudian *Female Landscapes* drawings of 1975 and the Egyptian watercolours of

¹⁹⁸ MacBeth, 'The Sick Husband', *The Patient*. London: Hutchinson, 1992: 15.

¹⁹⁹ Harry Morris, 'The Passions of Poets', *Sewanee Review*. Sewanee, Tennessee: University of the South. Vol. LXXIX, No. 2, Spring 1971: 306.

1978. After spells as art director at *Playboy* and *King*, Foreman went on to launch a successful career in book illustration, producing drawings, watercolours and etchings for more than 200 volumes by Donald Davie, Oscar Wilde, Ernest Hemingway, Aldous Huxley and Rudyard Kipling among others. In 1971 he published the children's book *Moose*, his first major work as an author-illustrator.

Foreman graduated from Lowestoft School of Art in the late Fifties, and his first illustrations, inspired by his hometown of Pakefield, appeared in Janet Charters's *The General* (1961). This flower-power tale for children charts the General's transformation from warrior to peacemaker, as a fall from his horse introduces him to a natural world of vulnerable flowers, trees and animals, and prompts him to dismiss his army, give up his battle-dreams, and make peace with his foreign counterparts among the flowerbeds. Foreman evokes these themes in bold reds, blues and indigos in a series of ink-drawings, the story opening with a full-page picture of the red-coated General, his chest an impossible patchwork of medals and crosses. The General's army is drawn in the same dull uniform red, but its progress through forests and fields brings an explosion of colour as Foreman's peacocks, bees, badgers, hedgehogs, squirrels and owls are portrayed in a vivid style located somewhere between cartoon and naturalism.²⁰⁰

After *The General* Foreman moved to London to study advanced design at the Royal College of Art alongside the generation of Pop Art painters associated with the *Young Contemporaries* exhibitions of 1961 and 1962. These Pop Art influences clearly informed many of his *Ambit* cover designs during the mid to late Sixties, particularly those for *Ambit* 17 and 18 which display an obvious debt to the screen prints of Andy Warhol and the photo-collages of Eduardo Paolozzi.

²⁰⁰ Jane Charters and Michael Foreman, *The General*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961.

Foreman's cover designs for *Ambit* 19 to *Ambit* 24 continued to reflect Pop Art themes with black-and-white photo cut-outs of American automobiles, flying saucers and neon signs dominating until the appearance of Foreman's controversial cartoon of a Chicago policeman raping the Statue of Liberty (*Ambit* 39). American pop-cultural references emerged elsewhere in his *Flag on the Mississippi Saturday Night* (*Ambit* 18), alluding to Jasper Johns's *Flag* (1954-55); and in his *A Rainy Night In Indiana* (*Ambit* 55), depicting the Texan plains and its cowboys and race-drivers; and yet more clearly in his *Atrocity Exhibition* illustrations (*Ambit* 44), the cover showing an American landscape, its features composed from busts of John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, James Dean and Marilyn Monroe.

In 1970, Foreman's *Atrocity Exhibition* illustrations gave visual expression to the Pop Art themes and apocalyptic sentiments of Ballard's nightmare text, the first depicting a gas-masked mother pushing a pram through a dark, anonymous landscape littered with a war-time photograph of a gas-masked soldier and a gas-masked boy; a large canvas depicting a faceless skull, whose tattered uniform bears a swastika on the right arm; and the head and shoulders of a fourth individual, completely hidden by a surgical mask, cap and sunglasses. In the third drawing, *Love and Napalm: Export U.S.A.*, Foreman took a more polemical approach as a gigantic Uncle Sam comes striding over sky-scrapers and apartment blocks, the shield of the dollar in his right hand and the branding-iron of 'LOVE' in his left. Foreman's polemicism found other outlets after 1970, and many of the later covers echoed the line drawings and etchings of his book illustrations.

Published shortly after the Stars and Stripes Special (*Ambit* 39), and after Ballard's American edition of *The Atrocity Exhibition* had been pulped by its publisher, Foreman's first Seventies picture book for children, *Moose* (1971), was

informed by equally strong political sentiments. Founded upon Foreman's objection to American military action in Vietnam and Cambodia, *Moose* tells the story of 'just an ordinary Moose' who gets caught up in the crossfire between an ultra-militaristic Eagle and Bear. Much like *The General*, this Cold War parable sees Moose gather up the Bear's sticks and the Eagle's stones, turning these weapons into building materials, furniture and garden ornaments for a personal shelter that becomes a collective retreat from the fighting and, over time, a global paradise. The beauty of Moose's shelter prompts the warring parties to make peace and work towards building a new Eden through co-operation and shared notions of progress accordant with the sentiments expressed in the title track of John Lennon's album *Imagine* (1971), and the lyrics of The New Seekers' *I'd Like To Teach The World To Sing* (1971) that underpinned Coca-Cola's television advertising campaign of the early Seventies. The tale concludes with a lush indigo and green watercolour of Moose sitting in front of his shelter, a huge heart-shaped haven of glorious foliage and fairytale castles balanced precariously upon his roof, the castle turrets rising into the cloudy starlight. The accompanying text reads:

Moose was content. He sang to the stars, and sometimes, far off in the distance, he heard Bear and Eagle rumbling away to themselves. 'Shouting and fighting didn't do them any good,' said Moose. 'Perhaps one day they will discover that it is much more fun to sing.'²⁰¹

After *Moose* (1971), Foreman's *Ambit* illustrations increasingly came to mirror his picture books for children, commonly employing a fantastical ink-wash or bold watercolour technique. This is especially noticeable in his Chinese ink drawings (*Ambit* 60), and his Egyptian watercolours (*Ambit* 75-78) in 1978, later recalled by the exotic architecture of his *Panda's Puzzle, and His Voyage of Discovery* (1977) and *Panda and the Odd Lion* (1979) picture books.

²⁰¹ Foreman, *Moose*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971. Unpaginated.

In *Ambit 75* Foreman demonstrated the full range of his lyrical watercolour style with the first in a series of full-colour fold-out sections depicting three scenes inspired by a steamer trip along the Nile, and cast in dream-like pastel shades of sunset oranges, twilight pinks and mid-afternoon blues. Foreman's textual description of passing Thebes proved no less evocative:

Broad thick slices of island covered with sugar cane and bananas, and then thin flat waters, dry, thinly garnished with clover and dotted with goats like black olives. A man in the middle of a vast expanse of unproductive land bows to Mecca. One boy tends many rods. People sleep in the shade like bundles of washing. We drift by, drinking tea and eating fruit cake.²⁰²

This visual travelogue continued in *Ambit 76* with Foreman's visits to the Valley of the Kings, the Ramesseum in Thebes, the Colossi of Memnon, and the Temple of Horus at Edfu, during which he expresses concern for the 'great deal of over-development' he observes, epitomised by the incongruous 'neon soda signs' and 'concrete café'. The paintings again draw on a palette of pinks and blues to describe a landscape of statues, sphinxes and ancient ruins through which Egyptian trinket-sellers, local builders and American tourists drift as vital, but peripheral, presences. This study is completed with the large, colourful panoramas of *Ambit 77*, the final piece being a painting of the temple of Ramesses II, 'moved from its original site which was flooded following construction of the High Dam' and which Foreman finds 'Rootless—emitting only bigness, like a Hollywood epic'. A small sailboat in the mid-ground and the modern High Dam Cafeteria in the foreground perfectly demonstrate the temple's enormous scale.²⁰³

While many of Foreman's illustrations continued to take the form of watercolours like those produced for Taner Baybars's 'The Fourth Caravel' (*Ambit 70*), Coleman Dowell's 'The Snake's House' (*Ambit 79*) and Martin Bax's 'Jump

²⁰² Foreman, 'Drawings', *Ambit 75*, 1978: first fold-out sheet.

²⁰³ Foreman, 'Out of Egypt', *Ambit 77*, 1978: fold-out sheet.

Up and Down, Your Majesty' (*Ambit* 80), Foreman would also contribute many memorable drawings and visual studies throughout the decade. In *Ambit* 46 and 48 Foreman provided humorous, if explicit, visuals for Ewart's pornographic fictions 'The Sexual Invasion of England' and 'The Sexual Revolution Continued'—the fairytale surrealism of Ewart's cavorting royals akin to the style of Foreman's illustrations for Erik Haugaard's *Hans Anderson. His Classic Fairy Tales* (1976). More unusual works of this period included the *Italian Tower* and *American Tower* in *Ambit* 73 (the first an essentially plain, featureless tower at evening; the second a skyscraper drawn as a column of zeros spelling out '\$37,000,000'); 'Holiday Reading' in *Ambit* 59 (a cut-up made from the pages of a paperback novel); and his series of developing portraits in *Ambit* 74.

Alongside his work for *Ambit*, Foreman produced a vast quantity of additional children's titles in Britain and America as author and illustrator during the Seventies, his better-known titles including *Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish* (1972), *All The King's Horses* (1976) and *Panda and the Odd Lion* (1979), a trend that continued into the Eighties and Nineties with books like *Dad! I Can't Sleep!* (1994) and *Seal Surfer* (1996). Recounting his experiences as a child growing up in wartime Lowestoft, *War Boy* (1989) signalled a move towards personal history as Foreman drew upon evacuation notices, photographs, diagrams of war-planes, pictures from cigarette-cards and a wealth of anecdotes shared with soldiers, sailors, families and friends in an engaging memoir combining horror and humour. The opening page, complete with diagram, describes Foreman's first frightening experience of the Blitz:

I woke up when the bomb came through the roof. It came through at an angle, overflow my bed by inches, bounced up over my mother's bed, hit the mirror, dropped into the grate and exploded up the chimney. It was an incendiary. A fire-bomb.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ Foreman, *War Boy: A Country Childhood*. London: Pavilion Books, 1991 [1989]: 7.

Taking the Kate Greenaway Medal in 1989, *War Boy* was well received by those involved in primary education, and the *School Library Journal* praised ‘a personal and moving memoir’ in which ‘Skies blaze from fire bombs, but there are glimpses of home[l]y pleasures too’.²⁰⁵ *Michael Foreman’s World of Fairy Tales* (1990) and *Michael Foreman’s Mother Goose* (1991) attracted similar tributes as Foreman continued his fascination with the fantastical possibilities of the fairy tale.

Foreman remained preoccupied with travel themes during the Eighties and Nineties, his *Windows* watercolours (*Ambit* 100) describing the landscapes of Norway, Westhaven, New York, Kuwait and Kyoto, and his ink drawings for *Ways of Carrying Children* (*Ambit* 150) recording visits to Peking, Tibet and Inner Mongolia. He also contributed attractive illustrations for Michael Moorcock’s ‘Letter from Hollywood’ (*Ambit* 86). While developing a series of epic travelogue pieces, Foreman remained the magazine’s foremost illustrator, contributing more than 120 visuals between the years 1980 and 1999 alone. Responsible for some of the magazine’s most controversial and most attractive visual contributions from the Sixties onwards, Foreman continues to play a major role in shaping the magazine’s distinctive visual identity, both as an illustrator and as *Ambit*’s art editor.

Principal Series. *The Vietnam Symphony*. *Ambit* 63, 1975

In 1966 Bax decided to terminate the highly successful ‘Retrospect’ series, a move intended to reduce the quantity of critical material appearing in the magazine and to free up more space for *Ambit*’s creative writers. During the Seventies, *Ambit* did carry a handful of critical features including Keith Johnstone’s illustrated consideration of improvisation and acting in ‘Impro Book’ (*Ambit* 68) and the

²⁰⁵ Phyllis G. Sidorsky, ‘War Boy: A Country Childhood’, *School Library Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 5, May 1990: 116.

‘Doing Their Thing’ section of the Poetry Special (*Ambit* 54), but much of the magazine’s critical content was channelled into a growing reviews section as *Ambit* sought to re-emphasise its commitment to small press poetry. The Seventies did not produce a critical series analogous to ‘Retrospect’ or ‘Poem from the Past’, but they did see the appearance of two artistic works, *The Vietnam Symphony* and *The Invisible Years*: the former a continuation of Paolozzi’s *Why We Are In Vietnam* (*Ambit* 40) and the latter an experiment in continuous composition extending over thirteen numbers.

In strict terms *The Vietnam Symphony* is not a serial at all, but a photo-illustrated libretto appearing as a one-off sequence in *Ambit* 63. The visual themes of Paolozzi’s found photographs and the apocalyptic tone of Bax’s text, however, suggest a recapitulation of ideas central to Paolozzi’s collages *Why We Are In Vietnam* (*Ambit* 40) and *Things* (*Ambit* 41), and Bax’s ‘On, At, or About America’ editorial (*Ambit* 39). Thus Paolozzi presents a familiar collection of photographs, juxtaposing American economic and military power with Vietnamese dignity and poverty, these themes being made explicit in images of the U.S. B-52 bomber (deployed in the Linebacker assaults of 1972) and Presidential press-conferences, and in selected extracts from business journals. The contrast with images of ‘A young Moi couple building their bamboo [house]’, a ‘Chief of the Moi’ looking with silent gravity back at the camera, and various groups of villagers engaged in musical celebration is a sharp one. In typical Paolozzi style, the portent of these visuals is further complicated by references to Disney cartoons, television programmes, comic book heroes and villains, the moon landings, circuit diagrams and neon advertising. The combined effect is a visual critique of American cultural

and military imperialism, of which Vietnam is only the latest manifestation of a dehumanising Cold War mindset.

Bax's contribution takes the form of five movements, 'The Traveller', 'The Big Game Hunter', 'The Lovers', 'The Soldier' and 'The Mois', the first four documenting the differing responses of four western visitors to the geography and the tribal people of Vietnam. The *Symphony* begins with the rather romanticised vision of 'The Traveller', moved to lyricism by her exotic and primitive surroundings:

The sentient unhurrying unashamed body of the East
Silently carelessly wrapping its warm arms around my spirit
Indifferent to the fabric of Science
Psychology all the isms of written civilization
It snares the primitive senses and beckons
To its bed of hard teak wood or woven bamboo or leaf-strewn earth²⁰⁶

For the Traveller, Vietnam represents a temporary retreat from the familiar and the rational, and the heightened lyricism of her song suggests that she is responding to an imaginary landscape sculpted by her own over-stimulated senses.

The Big Game Hunter, who takes over the narrative in the second movement, seems similarly incapable of responding to Vietnam's inhabitants as equals. Having come for some carefree shooting, he becomes increasingly enamoured with the Mois people, especially the women, whom he describes in bestial terms as

gentle savages without any of the terror or suspicion of the visitor from the outside that is usually witnessed among similar wild peoples elsewhere. Women wrap a cloth from the waist to the knees and a short coat protects their shoulders and breasts. [...] Like all who have never known shoes, the feet are broad and hideous. In public the women coolies herd by themselves and remain entirely silent.²⁰⁷

He is also quick to draw comparisons between the 'sprinkling of government buildings' that distinguish this 'partly tropical possession of France' and the

²⁰⁶ Bax, 'First Movement: The Traveller', Bax and Paolozzi, *The Vietnam Symphony*, *Ambit* 63, 1975: 29.

²⁰⁷ Bax, 'Second Movement: The Big Game Hunter', *ibid*: 31.

'kindness, schools, sanitation, entertainments and tact' that epitomise his interpretation of America's colonial 'pacification' of the Philippines during the Thirties and Forties.²⁰⁸

Appearing without the spoken commentary that mediates the other movements, 'The Lovers' is a little more complicated and describes what appears to be a triangular story of love and betrayal. Thus the singer, a western woman, unfolds her pain as her 'friend' Youra falls in love with a young Mois who embodies the beauty of her fellow tribeswomen but, although blessed 'with breasts modelled by a divine sculptor', remains 'an uncivilized woman, a barbarian' to the grief-stricken heroine.²⁰⁹

The fourth movement brings a shift to the spoken prose of the Soldier who, in a parallel with the Big Game Hunter, has been sent to Vietnam for shooting of a different kind. His narrative takes the form of a letter home in which he describes his daily experiences with a mixture of black humour, grim stoicism and forced cheerfulness:

Yes, I like this country: apart from its filth, its diseases and its hypocrisy, it has a sort of poetry one can understand, a kind of animality. The women are attractive because of the simplicity of their dress, the regularity of their features and their frail appearance, though as everywhere else, this does not apply to the majority.²¹⁰

Even the Soldier's text, with its discussion of 'partisans', 'leeches' and 'mosquitoes', is guided by literary visions of isolation as he equates Vietnam with 'Defoe, Fenimore Cooper' and 'a Western, a sort of succession of bancos'. Indeed, as the text progresses and its speaker talks of La Fontaine, the tombs of the Emperors of Annam, and his discovery of a copy of *La Dignité Humaine*, his visit is

²⁰⁸ 'Philippines', Jan Palmowski (ed.), *A Dictionary of Contemporary World History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003: 512.

²⁰⁹ Bax, 'Third Movement: The Lovers', *The Vietnam Symphony*: 34.

²¹⁰ Bax, 'Fourth Movement: The Soldier', *ibid*: 36.

almost one of cultural discovery. This illusion, however, is brutally dispelled by the closing lines as he declares:

it remains to be seen how long it will take the predictions of global war to be realized [...] As far as I'm concerned it will be another edition of the 1940 business with, this time, a better comprehension of what's going on and greater opportunities for effective action. I shall survive or I shall be killed.²¹¹

With the fifth movement, 'The Mois', comes the textual reprise to Paolozzi's photo-collage as Bax recounts the history of a people and a way of life on the verge of complete annihilation. Tribes are distinguished in physical, linguistic, sociological and anthropological terms, and the final spoken lines recall the apocalyptic events of the My Lai Massacre (1968), the Battle of Hamburger Hill (1969), and the Linebacker air raids (1972, 1973):

Under the thatched huts, between the poles,
were rough board coffins all ready and waiting—small coffins
for the children, large ones for the adults.

It seemed to me that DEATH was the event the natives had most in mind.²¹²

Printed two years after the American retreat of 1973, and contemporaneous with the fall of Saigon, *The Vietnam Symphony* marks the end of *Ambit's* anti-war critique and serves as a powerful visual and textual testament to the personal tragedies brought about by the USA's part in the most apocalyptic of Cold War confrontations.

The Invisible Years: A Series of Apocalyptic texts written by various hands. *Ambit* 66-79, 1976-1979

The longest running of all *Ambit's* serials, *The Invisible Years* was also to prove the magazine's most experimental. Subtitled 'A Series of Apocalyptic texts written by various hands', the work saw Bax, Ballard and MacBeth contribute a variety of textual fragments to accompany visuals by Ron Sandford over a three-year period. In some respects, *The Invisible Years* represented a return to the word and image

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Bax, 'Fifth Movement: The Mois', *ibid.*: 38.

experiments conducted by Bax and Paolozzi in the Sixties, although attuned to a Seventies mood of pessimism established by Ballard's disaster novels.

Focusing on the apocalyptic themes of anonymous architecture, technological breakdown, sexual dysfunction, Freudian psychoanalysis, and inexplicable violence, the sequence lurched from Sandford's images of urban decay to Bax's descriptions of the Second Coming in a style that blended psychoanalytic insight with prophetic vision and nightmare. Consequently, in *Ambit* 66, the speaker initially appears as a prophet-martyr figure:

These are the years when the windows mew. These are the years when the widows [*sic*] blasted their names on the starway of the weather men, heating their sons over the vietnamas of Asia. Risking their navels for new seed from the rice river deltas.²¹³

Yet these ravings quickly become indistinguishable from nightmare, as the speaker observes:

elevators sprouted beyond their homes filling the skies with doors to button open. Buttons on the years touch tenderness in the computer centre. Printouts are softened. Soaps are hardened to wash away the skin and blood and leave the bones. The bones of man—hardened from the light—the bones that will live through the invisible years.²¹⁴

At the heart of *The Invisible Years* lies an interest in regression, both as a gateway into the unconscious mind of its authors and their ghostly protagonists, and as a structuring device through which cut-up phrases are translated into visionary mantras. Unfortunately this fascination with regression also brought a lapse into formulaic predictability as, pushed too far, this once novel experiment soon fell into a terminal self-regression, its *dreamlike* impastos diminished by over-repetition. With the grounding sub-plot of the anonymous male protagonist searching for his 'paranoid woman' also quickly evaporating amid a number of increasingly obscure journeys into the unconscious, the series was brought to an overdue end in *Ambit* 79. What had begun as an experiment in continuous composition with word and

²¹³ Bax, Ballard, MacBeth and Ron Sandford, *The Invisible Years: A Series of Apocalyptic texts written by various hands*, *Ambit* 66, 1976: 61.

²¹⁴ *Ibid*: 62.

image had ultimately descended into chaotic incoherence, and the series closed with a succession of textual reflections upon the nature of ending:

THE FOETUSES: THE EYES SHUTTING. THE WOMBS FOLDED.
COPERNICUS: THE STARS ARE DARK.
THE OWLS: SLEEPING DURING THE NIGHT.
DARWIN: THE RETURN TO THE SEA.
THE BIDETS: FLUSHING THE LOSS AWAY.
MOZART: THE MUSIC HAS LEFT THE SPHERES.²¹⁵

Having taken *Ambit's* readers into the disturbing and anarchic spaces of the human mind through a complex combination of flashbacks, dream sequences and regressions for three years and thirteen numbers, *The Invisible Years* eventually succumbed to a formal paralysis that undermined its apocalyptic vision of the contemporary world. A disturbing and rather confused montage of *Ambit's* principal literary-artistic concerns of the Seventies, *The Invisible Years* promised more than it could fulfil, thereby signalling the end of *Ambit's* enthusiasm for radical experiment.

Reviews Section

Book reviews in one form or another had been appearing in *Ambit* since 1963. After *Ambit* 67 in 1976, however, the magazine's reviews were consolidated into a single section with a regular team of reviewers typically offering a paragraph-length evaluation of a single volume. Prior to *Ambit* 67, a reviewer might have commented on as many as eleven books in the space of four pages, as in Gavin Ewart's 'Resist American Imperialism!' piece (*Ambit* 39), the opportunity for detailed analysis being limited as a result. Alongside the paragraph-length reviews that soon became the norm, a series of longer articles entitled 'Poet on Poet' gave contributors an irregular opportunity, from *Ambit* 67 to *Ambit* 88, to reflect upon the poetry and reputations of Fleur Adcock, Dannie Abse, Earle Birney and Peter Porter among

²¹⁵ Bax, Ballard and Sandford, *The Invisible Years*, *Ambit* 79, 1979: 67-68.

others, thereby allowing for the more detailed consideration of developing *oeuvres* that the regular reviews were unable to afford. Initially the magazine took a catholic approach to its review material, giving equal space to poetry volumes, pamphlets, anthologies, novels, short stories and plays. Reviews were later restricted to poetry volumes, pamphlets and anthologies, although the poets discussed ranged from the well-known Ted Hughes, Basil Bunting and Craig Raine to the lesser-known Freda Downie, Jack Carey and Neil Spratling. The reviewers were also poets in the main, and Fleur Adcock, Martin Bax, Jim Burns, Barry Cole and Neil Curry wrote the bulk of *Ambit's* reviews between 1976 and 1979.

Marking the first appearance of the consolidated reviews section, *Ambit* 67 is a good example of the characteristic range, tone and style of the magazine's Seventies reviews. Beginning with two paragraphs on Thomas Hardy's *Complete Poems*, Bax applauds the attention paid by Macmillan to the poet's dying wish that his 'complete poetical works should be made available "at a reasonable price" so as to be within the reach of poorer readers', before going on to praise a 'handsome new edition' with the text 'clearly set and readable'. Bax's admission that he is 'not really a fan' of Hardy's poetry is founded on formal and technical objections, a charge he supports by quoting a handful of poorly rhymed lines, although his approach to the volume is generally both fair-minded and positive.²¹⁶ Bax is equally generous in his discussion of *The Prison Cell & Barrel Mystery* by Peter Reading; *The Women Troubadours* by Meg Bogin; and *The Poetry of Surrealism*, edited by Michael Benedikt. Reviewing a subject close to the heart of many *Ambit* contributors, Bax describes *The Poetry of Surrealism* as 'invaluable', Benedikt having

²¹⁶ Bax, 'Review: *Complete Poems* of Thomas Hardy', *Ambit* 67, 1976: 66.

wisely preferred to give a good solid chunk of selected authors, rather than try to get in all the names, so that in this anthology one can really get to know the main figures of the surrealist movements. [...] There is a competent note of introduction and individual notes on each poem. Altogether an excellent anthology.²¹⁷

Bax's review of Meg Bogin, if a little less enthusiastic, is by no means dismissive:

The translations do not suggest that Meg Bogin is a great original poet, but she is to be congratulated on putting this collection [of Provençal sonnets and songs] together, and one hopes that it will encourage other poets to try their hand at translating some of these moving love poems.²¹⁸

Throughout his reviews Bax remains calm, reasonable and genial in his treatment of work from a broad range of contemporary poets and translators, delivering respectful but honest judgments upon volumes by established names like Peter Reading, and offering warm encouragement to those of lesser reputation. Consistently preferring to comment upon poetry that he likes, Bax the reviewer remains objective, if sometimes a little over-generous in his responses.

Contrasting sharply with the relaxed generosity of Bax, Barry Cole is, on occasions, unflinchingly blunt in his judgments. Chief among his dislikes, it seems, are deliberate weirdness and directionless surrealism:

The two most interesting things about David Jaffin's *As One* are (a) that the book was printed in Italy and (b) that acknowledgments are made to some of the most bizarre little magazines [...] —all British. Designed by Martino Mardersteig and printed by Stamperia Valdonega of Verona, the book itself is a genuine work of art.

The poetry is, as one would expect, another matter. Greymountainy might describe it.²¹⁹

This is the limit of Cole's praise for the book as he goes on to dismiss a volume which 'contains little for the intellect or the heart', being too reminiscent of Robert Creeley, too whimsical, and too inclined towards the 'chopped up lines which echo the more boring of the present-day American poets'. Henri Chopin, author of a poetic novel entitled *The Cosmographical Lobster*, fares a good deal worse as Cole declares:

²¹⁷ Bax, 'Review: *The Poetry of Surrealism*, edited by Michael Bendikt', *ibid*: 68.

²¹⁸ Bax, 'Review: *The Women Troubadours*, by Meg Bogin', *ibid*: 68.

²¹⁹ Barry Cole, 'Review: *As One*, by David Jaffin', *ibid*: 66.

the book is a mess. Chopin wears his would-be avant garde heart on the sleeves of a six-armed jacket. A mixture of surreal prose and numerological eccentricity the work neither entertains nor engages. [...] There are mixtures of late Joyce and late Cummings and of concrete and sound poetry.²²⁰

Citing a lengthy quotation chosen at random, Cole has so little to say about the volume that one wonders why it is reviewed at all, particularly given the limited space available within *Ambit's* review section. In many respects, Cole's reviewing style is rooted in the more polemically motivated occasional reviews that had appeared in *Ambit* during the Sixties, and Cole would make way for a cast of new reviewers headed by Fleur Adcock after *Ambit* 67.

Adcock's debut as a reviewer came in 1974 with an evaluation of Michael Longley, Alisdair Maclean, John Ormond and Thomas Kinsella for *Ambit* 57, and Adcock soon became *Ambit's* principal reviewer of contemporary poetry. Seemingly as catholic as Bax in her tastes, Adcock is constructive in her criticism and measured in her judgments, addressing the formal and thematic elements of her chosen texts in much greater depth than many of her fellow reviewers. In *Ambit* 71, for instance, Adcock greets *A Stranger Here* by Freda Downie with obvious approval:

Freda Downie's book is indeed admirable. Her poems are formally neat, elegantly made, the language reflecting her precise observation, the surfaces of her verse smooth and the carefully-chosen colours expertly applied. But she's as well aware of the bleaker and grittier aspects of life as of its felicities²²¹

Avoiding some of the longer opinionated introductions of Barry Cole, Adcock concentrates on exposition, generally quoting from either a single short poem in its entirety or from a few well-chosen lines to support her readings, the two stanzas extracted from Downie's title poem amply justifying Adcock's assertion that 'she comes across as a calm and well-balanced personality'. In *Ambit* 74, Adcock is

²²⁰ Cole, 'Review: *The Cosmographical Lobster*, by Henri Chopin', *ibid*: 69.

²²¹ Adcock, 'Review: *A Stranger Here*, by Freda Downie', *Ambit* 71, 1977: 72.

critical of *The Function of the Fool* by Stuart Evans, but her criticisms remain confined to thematic aspects of the text and look to emphasise the positive:

Evans [...] is erudite, thoughtful, civilized (a favourite word of his), humane; he handles verse-forms with professional assurance, and many of his observations are worth making. But there is simply too much Shakespeare (together with a tinge of Eliot) in his poems: kings and princes populate half of them; verbal echoes chime among his lines; even Helen of Troy, the subject of one sequence, comes filtered through a Shakespearian haze.²²²

The subject of Cole's 'Poet on Poet' article for *Ambit* 67, Adcock continues this essay series with an assessment of Dannie Abse which, based on his *Collected Poems*, is both rigorous and thorough. Thus she considers the Welsh-Jewish aspects of his verse, greeting these with mingled approval and scepticism, before tackling the problematic issue of Abse's involvement with 'the poetry-reading industry':

the diluting effect on his style of such devices as repetition, loosely-wrapped bundles of phrases, sentences without verbs in otherwise conventionally-structured poems, and the general slackening which can result from writing for immediate aural consumption: *The smile was*, for example, is a performance-poem that doesn't entirely stand up to scrutiny in its printed form.²²³

Adcock then proceeds to praise his 'humour', 'wit' and 'assurance in tone and vocabulary', placing *The Second Coming*, *Florida* and *As I was saying* among his best work. Discussing Abse's political, mythological and surrealist tendencies,

Adcock's final judgment is similarly balanced:

Dannie Abse doesn't preach or rant; his best poems make their points naturally and with an unobtrusive skill, and reveal further layers and levels on each re-reading. He says in his introduction, 'I hope this is only Volume One of a *Collected Poems*.' I look forward to the next, but this one will do well for now.²²⁴

Bringing a positive approach and a new level of formal and thematic exposition to the poetry of her peers, Adcock set the tone for the magazine's reviews section from the Seventies onwards and was largely responsible for developing a style of constructive criticism in which the established poet and the debutant alike could expect a fair hearing.

²²² Adcock, 'Review: *The Function of the Fool*, by Stuart Evans', *Ambit* 74, 1978: 89.

²²³ Adcock, 'Poet on Poet: Fleur Adcock reviews Dannie Abse', *Ambit* 70, 1977: 48.

²²⁴ *Ibid*: 50.

During the Seventies the number of fellow *Ambit* contributors reviewed by Burns and Bax steadily increased as the magazine began to find favour with a range of small presses and larger publishing houses. Restoring some of the critical verve the magazine had been lacking since the disappearance of the literary-historical 'Retrospect' series, *Ambit's* reviews section continued to embody the magazine's response to contemporary trends in British poetry, while providing numerous minor poets with their first reviews. As such, the consolidated reviews section performed a crucial role in demonstrating the magazine's catholic attitude to both 'mainstream' and 'alternative' poetry, and in enhancing *Ambit's* reputation as a literary publication associated with some of the small presses' key players.

THE SEVENTIES: AN IDENTITY CRISIS?

In many respects, *Ambit* experienced a crisis of identity during the Seventies as the little magazine community underwent a significant period of transformation with the advent of further developments in print technology and book design, the death of the Underground movement, and with major military conflicts in Cambodia and Vietnam finally killing off the spirit of progressive optimism that had prevailed among the youthful subcultures of London since 1964. A number of publications that had flourished in the psychedelic hedonism of the Sixties proved unable to adapt to the harsher socio-economic climate of the Seventies, high-profile casualties including *And* (1954-69), *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* (1962-67), *Poet Meat* (1963-67), *The Resuscitator* (1963-69) and *Tlaloc* (1964-69). The outlook was equally bleak for those founded in the early Seventies to champion the cause of Concrete and other ultra-experimental poetries, and *Exit* (1967-73), *Cosmos* (1969-70), *Black Country Meat Chronicle* (1968-70) and *Earth Ship* (1970-72) soon fell victim to what Görtzschacher has described as a 'period of consolidation'. With this mixture

of Concrete, surrealism and programmatic experiment looking like an increasingly irrelevant retreat from the political concerns of a new decade, some formal and thematic adjustments were necessary if *Ambit* was not to follow *And* into obsolescence.

The most significant change was one of tone, as a new apocalyptic mood gradually replaced the spirit of good-natured experiment that had informed the principal contents of the magazine prior to 1972. Whereas *Ambit's* Sixties fiction had been dominated by the surrealistic formal innovations of Oswald Blakeston and a gamut of Burroughs enthusiasts, the Seventies saw Ballard and Bax exploring the darker aspects of this legacy. Frequently set within hospitals, medical institutions, or post-modern urban environments, these texts would take violence, illness, death, suicide, deviant sexuality and abortion as their central themes, charting a claustrophobic descent into chaos, isolation and disintegration. *The Atrocity Exhibition* and *Crash* represent seminal works in this regard, for they not only reflected the violence surrounding the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the murder of Malcolm X, and the Vietnam War, but anticipated the debates about pornography, censorship and media responsibility re-ignited by films like *Clockwork Orange* (1972) and *Jubilee* (1979). Even the computer-generated texts of Chris Evans seemed dependent upon apocalyptic science fiction or gangster novels for their plots, as psychopaths, murderers, scientists and medics quickly became *Ambit's* favourite protagonists. Nor were the poets immune to this apocalyptic influence, as Alan Brownjohn greeted the new decade with a poem entitled '(On Which to Feed Your Despair)'; George MacBeth published the Vietnam-inspired *The Bamboo Nightingale*; and others continued to contribute poems commonly treating suicide, domestic violence and abortion. Only the visuals

and illustrations appeared to resist this trend, providing a variety of surreal and naturalistic images inspired by foreign travel, personal relationships, political cartooning and abstract art.

The second significant change was one of appearance, as the magazine underwent a series of dramatic redesigns overseen by Derek Birdsall. As the decade progressed, *Ambit* slowly retreated from the Pop designs of the mid Sixties and began looking to a greater pool of artists for its covers. After *Ambit* 65, the magazine adopted a series of quasi-pornographic cover designs featuring photographs of the topless model Euphoria Bliss that mirrored developments within *The Sun* newspaper and acknowledged the increasing accessibility of soft-core pornography but ultimately remained an inappropriate expression of the magazine's literary-artistic content. Seemingly motivated by little more than a flirtation with the 'sex sells' philosophy of tabloid journalism, the Bliss covers were soon dropped and the magazine reverted to less explicit images from *Ambit* 70 onwards after pressure from female members of the editorial team. The introduction of a removable dustjacket cover (*Ambit* 65) coincided with significant improvements in the quality of print, paper and bindings, and brought a new professionalism to a 96-page magazine aspiring to striking visuals and attractive copy.

The third change reflected a growing sense of self-realisation, as longevity had won *Ambit* increasing respect from the little magazine community and cautious interest from the *Times Literary Supplement*. *Ambit* therefore sought to consolidate its reputation with a number of showcase Special Numbers, including the Poetry Special, the Prose Special, and the Twentieth Anniversary Special, intended to demonstrate the extent of its contribution to contemporary trends in alternative fiction, poetry and visual artwork. One positive aspect of this approach was to

highlight the number of new women poets like Carol Ann Duffy, Fleur Adcock and Marilyn Hacker that the magazine was publishing alongside the older Group names. It also prompted Bax to give greater prominence to a book reviews section that became more thorough, detailed and wide-ranging in its choice of review material following the move to a consolidated reviews section in 1976. This trend, however, also saw the disappearance of some of the more entertaining one-off visual and textual experiments, with the lengthy *Invisible Years* series proving a particular disappointment.

By 1979 *Ambit* could be seen as an avant garde magazine slowly maturing into the voice of a post-Movement collection of poets, directly or indirectly associated with the Group; a vehicle for a generation of post-Burroughs writers of apocalyptic fiction struggling to come to terms with the paranoia of the Cold War; and a meeting point for three generations of Pop Artists whose careers were beginning to take them in different artistic directions. *Ambit* had survived the Seventies by adapting to them, a task made easier by the rising reputations of writers like Ballard, Porter, Brownjohn and MacBeth, and artists like Paolozzi, Blake, and Foreman. *Bananas*, which also favoured *Ambit* contributors, had proved equally attentive to the mood of the Seventies, prompting Douglas Dunn to dismiss both publications as

luxuriously given over to the exotic or obsessive, usually sexual, usually hung-up on a pale substitute of Gothicism larded over with a maunderingly irreverent view of society. That view is never excited into anything very critical, other than an infatuation with its own irreverent moods.²²⁵

By the turn of the decade Abigail Mozeley's *Bananas* project had come to an end. For *Ambit*, however, 1980 represented the beginning of a new chapter in the magazine's history as it continued to march towards its thirtieth year.

²²⁵ Douglas Dunn, 'Coteries and Commitments', quoted by Görtzschacher in *Little Magazine Profiles*: 174.

CHAPTER THREE. THE EIGHTIES: FEMALE VOICES, FOREIGN TONGUES AND REGIONAL ACCENTS

New Maps For A Changing Scene

After the experimental enthusiasm of the Sixties and obscenity trials of the Seventies, the Eighties posed very different challenges for the little magazines, as various adverse political and economic factors conspired to effect what Görtschacher has described as ‘the greatest slaughter on the British little magazine scene that has ever occurred’.²²⁶ Görtschacher has suggested that ‘between 1976 and early 1981 more than 110 little magazines ceased publication’, with ‘The alternative, experimental strand [...] particularly affected by this epidemic’.²²⁷ Yet a literary boom during the mid to late Eighties—sustained by developments in desktop publishing, mail order distribution and institutional patronage—spawned a wealth of new titles that were perfectly placed to capitalise upon a growing interest in contemporary writing evidenced by a new wave of University-based creative writing courses, regional poetry competitions and literary festivals. The transition from ‘slaughter’ to ‘boom’ was by no means straightforward, nor was it particularly obvious to little magazine editors at the time. Chronic inflation during the late Seventies had simultaneously driven up the cost of paper, printing and postage while diminishing the value of grants, subscriptions and advertising revenue, leaving many editors simply unable to pay the bills. However, the closure of *New Poetry* and *Samphire*, despite ‘constantly increasing sales, subscriptions and circulation’, demonstrated that even ‘commercial success’ could prove detrimental to long-term viability where magazines ultimately ‘outgrew their editors’ capacities

²²⁶ Görtschacher, ‘1978 to 1985—The Vulture Took the Cash Box from Its Hook’, *Little Magazine Profiles*: 184.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

to cope with them on their own'.²²⁸ Other high-profile casualties of this period included *Stereo Headphones*, *Transatlantic Review*, *Littack* and *Poetry Information*, many of which also succumbed to debts accrued in the drive towards professionalism.

Despite the obvious costs involved, professionalism remained the mantra of editors like Leonard Fulton who, writing in 1980, anticipated a decade in which 'continued growth for the independent publisher' would offer 'the new writer extraordinary possibilities for publication'. Such growth, however, was dependent upon editors making greater use of computer technology which, 'along with typesetting', would 'provide storage for editing, accounts receivable and inventory management, and critical support for what is essentially a mail-order industry'.²²⁹ Indeed, the size and shape of Fulton's *International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses*, in its sixteenth edition by 1980, clearly illustrated the positive and negative aspects of transplanting a high-tech, professional approach to little magazine editing. Having initially suggested that 'anger' and 'flame' were fundamental to the editorial mission in 1964, Fulton now saw the editorial role as primarily concerned with producing 'a highly viable "object" for the marketplace'.²³⁰ Similarly, stripped of its enthusiastic statistical commentary, and later purged of its 'hip' introductions, the directory had become just another trade annual and—judging by the limited nature of the British listings in 1980—not a particularly accurate one. Fulton's 560-page directory continued to sell strongly, but had inevitably lost touch with a number of its British editors. After 1984 those seeking a more reliable map of the contemporary British little magazine scene

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Fulton, 'Past and Future', *The International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses*. Sixteenth Edition. Paradise, CA: Dustbooks, 1980: iv.

²³⁰ Fulton, 'Frycount 13', Fulton and Ferber (eds), *The International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses 1977-78*. Thirteenth Edition: i.

would turn to Peter Finch's *Small Presses & Little Magazines of the UK & Ireland, An Address List* (ca. 1984), which appeared in a functional A4 stapled format. As manager of the Arts Council-backed Oriel Bookshop in Cardiff, editor of the acclaimed *Second Aeon* (1966-75) and a significant contemporary poet in his own right, Finch brought a considerable degree of inside knowledge to his annual *Address List*, which continued to provide the most up-to-date listings of British titles throughout the decade.

Although debt and over-ambition were doubtless responsible for many little magazine casualties, the changing priorities of institutional patrons like the ACGB and its regional counterparts would also play a significant part in undermining a number of long-running titles. In the same way that the little magazines were being urged to think of themselves in professional terms, the ACGB was being challenged to adopt 'certain similarities with industrial and business practice' accordant with the drive towards 'impressing on [...] clients the need for efficient and business-like conduct'.²³¹ Threatened by diminishing support from central government in 1981, the ACGB embarked upon a programme of internal restructuring, funding reviews and cutbacks that threatened to wipe out those little magazines like *Ambit*, *Aquarius* and *New Review* that had come to rely on ACGB grants in the Seventies. Both *Ambit* and *Aquarius* survived the loss of significant annual grants, the former by turning to sponsors as diverse as Exxon Mobil, Ford Motors, the Greater London Arts Association, and the Visual Arts Panel of the ACGB, and the latter by producing special numbers on Irish writing (*Aquarius* 12, 1980), Canadian writing (*Aquarius* 13/14, 1981/82), and Australian writing (*Aquarius* 15/16, 1983/84) that

²³¹ Elizabeth Sweeting, 'Keeping Our Balance', in Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, *Patron Or Paymaster? The Arts Council Dilemma*. Second Conference of Commonwealth Arts Councils in Montreal, Canada, 12-15 April, 1981. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, UK Branch, 1982: 56.

appealed directly to the interests of Regional Arts Boards and other cultural patrons while maximising advertising revenue. *New Review* was less fortunate, and ‘rising overheads [and] increased printing and postage rates’ prompted a switch to quarterly publication designed to bring ‘revenue into line with actual production costs.’²³² Eventually triggered by massive cuts in ACGB funding, the switch did little to offset Hamilton’s outgoings and the magazine soon folded. The passing of *New Review* did not go unnoticed, and, opening with the revelation that in 1982 ‘nearly £200,000 of the literature budget [remained] unspent’, William Scammell launched a blistering attack on ACGB inefficiency in the *Times Literary Supplement*, asking:

Why were the *New Review* and *Bananas* killed off when money of this order was ready and waiting to be used? Why must many good writers fill their days with hack work in order to survive? If London can’t or won’t spend its budget, why won’t they at least devolve it to the regions, where we are crying out for money to spend on worthwhile causes?²³³

The ACGB’s decision to axe its widely praised library subscription scheme in 1981 came as a further blow to the little magazines. Under the scheme, as Bill Buford explained, ‘A number of magazines provided a free subscription to any British library that requested one, and they were in turn reimbursed by the Council’, an arrangement which supported ‘the production of literary writing on a remarkable number of levels, subsidizing the publisher, the library and the reader all at once.’²³⁴ By terminating the subscription scheme, the ACGB had effectively halved the subscriptions revenue of most magazines, with many libraries unwilling or unable to take out direct subscriptions at full institutional rates. Assessing the impact of the ACGB’s latest attempt ‘to sustain [...] its major financial commitments’, Buford suggested that ‘Of its original 1,154 subscriptions, *Stand* now has around 400 to

²³² Hamilton, *The New Review*, Vol. 4, No. 48. March 1978: 1.

²³³ William Scammell, ‘Subsidizing Literature’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 February 1983: 134.

²³⁴ Bill Buford, ‘Take me to your reader’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 January 1982: 13.

500', while 'Agenda has dropped from 500 to sixty', before concluding that the ACGB's

commitment to entering the economics of publishing, through increased subsidies to publishers and presses, is laudable and in many respects overdue. But in a country that has difficulty even giving away its literary magazines, such a commitment is perhaps more complex than what the simple plan of putting the reader before the writer would suggest.²³⁵

Elsewhere Michael Horovitz complained about the protracted and difficult process of winning ACGB support in the first place. Responding to a review of Wong Wai-Ming's *Modern Poetry: East and West* in which James Kirkup declared, 'One could wish that there were more courageous international ventures like this one',²³⁶

Horovitz wrote:

Without wishing to steal any limelight from Wong Wai-Ming's hundredth issue, may I point out that *New Departures* is a remarkably similar undertaking for all that it stems from British soil, and is alive and kicking for all that it suffers a glaring lack of support or encouragement 'in its own country?' [...] I read Kirkup's piece a couple of days after receiving a note from Charles Osborne, Literature Director of the Arts Council of Great Britain, telling me that *New Departures* has once again been unsuccessful in its application to the Council for grant-aid. I've had the same letter every time I've applied, throughout the twenty-three years I've been editing and publishing.²³⁷

Further criticism came from Robert Vas Dias who, endorsing Horovitz's bleak outlook, argued that by refusing to support 'unfamiliar, nonconformist, experimental and adventuresome work' the ACGB was in danger of causing 'the rivers of raw material "at home"' to 'dry up altogether'.²³⁸ Citing his own experiences as editor of *Transatlantic Review*, Vas Dias continued:

After we were notified that the Antioch Centre for British Studies in London could no longer afford to publish the magazine, we applied both to the Arts Council and to the Greater London Arts Association and were turned down by both; our situation then worsened to the extent that we had to suspend publication entirely. [...] Although I'm pleased to be able to report that the magazine is now being published by the American College in Paris as *Paris/Atlantic*, edited by Michael Lynch and myself, the lamentable fact is that we had to leave Britain in order to continue.²³⁹

Despite the dire warnings of Buford, Horovitz, Scammell and others, the little magazines were to end the decade in remarkably good shape. *Ambit*, *Agenda*,

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ James Kirkup, 'Modern Poetry: East and West', *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 May 1982: 540.

²³⁷ Horovitz, 'Subsidizing Magazines', *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 June 1982: 639.

²³⁸ Horovitz, *ibid.*

²³⁹ Robert Vas Dias, 'Subsidizing Magazines', *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 June 1982: 695.

London Magazine and *Stand* appeared regularly throughout the Eighties and although prohibitively high production costs reduced *New Departures* to irregular publication, Horovitz continued to amass material for his *Grandchildren of Albion* anthology (1992). Meanwhile, personnel changes at *Outposts* and *Agenda* brought new contributions and a subtle reassessment of editorial aims. In 1986 Roland John took over from Howard Sergeant as editor of *Outposts*, subsequently championing poets like Derek Walcott, A.L. Hendriks and Peter Dale. Similarly, upon becoming co-editor of *Agenda* in 1981, Dale's influence manifested itself in special issues on French poetry, United States poetry, Criticism and Verse Drama.²⁴⁰

The Eighties also witnessed a flurry of new titles which, unburdened by the debts of the late Seventies and sustained by the revolution in desktop publishing, soon came to embody something of the Sixties 'do-it-yourself' spirit. Between 1985 and 1986 *The Wide Skirt*, *The North*, *Oxford Poetry*, *Westwords*, *Bête Noire*, *Words International* and others were established in the regions, where they were more likely to attract the patronage of the increasingly wealthy Regional Arts Boards. Among the newcomers, *Acumen*, a Brixham-based quarterly founded by Patricia Oxley in 1985, soon attracted praise for its catholic, if discriminating, taste in poetry, criticism, visual arts and music.

Alongside the little magazines, changing attitudes towards performance poetry not only brought the work of black poets, dub poets and punk poets to new audiences, but proved the catalyst for numerous 'alternative' small press anthologies. Responding directly to Andrew Motion and Blake Morrison's *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* (1982) which had suggested that for 'much of the 1960s and 70s, [...] very little—in England at any rate—seemed to be

²⁴⁰ Görtschacher, *Little Magazine Profiles*: 212-213.

happening',²⁴¹ a rash of alternative anthologies appeared to challenge this view. Consequently, James Berry's *News For Babylon. The Chatto Book of Westindian-British Poetry* (1984), and Apples and Snakes's self-titled *Apples and Snakes. Raw and Biting Cabaret Poetry* (1984) demonstrated the extent to which younger poets were discarding Movement principles in favour of oral performance, pop-cultural forms and anti-establishment themes. At the same time the Poetry Society's National Poetry Competition, having launched the careers of such high-profile figures as Tony Harrison, Jo Shapcott and Carol Ann Duffy, offered the unpublished poet the genuine prospect of publication, while the National Poetry Library's move to the Royal Festival Hall in 1988 brought a vast collection of little ^{the} magazines and small press publications to a prominent and accessible public location. Such developments, allied to the renewed generosity of the ACGB and Regional Arts Boards towards small press publications and local arts projects, proved highly conducive to the needs of the little magazine community. *Ambit* was to experience this shift from pessimism to optimism perhaps more than any other little magazine of the period, entering the decade with an estimated deficit of £9,400²⁴² before going on to become one of the ACGB's largest annual clients.

Female Voices

As the traditionally male-centred genres of science fiction, apocalyptic literature and pornographic writing disappeared from the magazine, *Ambit's* women became increasingly prominent. Apart from than the occasional appearance of Stevie Smith and Taner Baybars, *Ambit* had certainly been a predominantly male domain

²⁴¹ Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion (eds), 'Introduction', *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982: 11.

²⁴² 'Estimates of Income and Expenditure for the year ending 31 March 1981'. Figure taken from projected accounts for the year 1980/81 submitted as part of *Ambit's* application for grant aid from the Arts Council of Great Britain. *Ambit* Archive at Penn State University: Series I: Correspondence; Part II: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1974-88. Box 2; Folder 24.

throughout the Sixties. Following Fleur Adcock's appointment to the magazine's review team and the Euphoria Bliss controversy of 1976 to 1977, however, later years brought a considerable change in *Ambit's* attitude to women's writing and its treatment of the female body. By 1978 female nudes no longer dominated *Ambit's* covers, and the magazine departed from the exploitative images associated with publications like *IT* and *Oz*. Helen Chadwick's cover for *Ambit* 81 was the first female nude self-portrait to appear in *Ambit*. Between the covers, poetry by Carol Ann Duffy, Carol Rumens, Fleur Adcock and Marilyn Hacker; fiction by Tina Fulker, Deborah Levy and Sophie Frank; and visuals by Chadwick, Laura Knight and Hannah Firmin indicated the growing strength of *Ambit's* female voice which, though distinctly feminine, was by no means universally feminist in tone. This voice was typically at its most resonant in the poetry contributions of the Eighties, especially those concerned with issues of female sexuality and traditional gender roles. Marilyn Hacker's 'Peterborough' (*Ambit* 82) would weave these themes into a powerful illustration of the mingled desire, guilt and fear evoked by female sexuality. The poem opens with a familiar springtime image of 'maple and oak' in bud, yet this natural emblem of fertility is immediately complicated by the personifying simile that follows, as the early sunlight pours 'in a thin / wash on flat leaves like milk on a child's chin.'²⁴³ At once a life-sustaining fluid and natural female discharge, 'milk' is quickly displaced by blood, and the menstruation cycle becomes the poem's unifying motif. Thus the first period initially represents the first significant step into adulthood (the narrator confesses to being 'intoxicated with maturity'), before becoming a symbol for female suffering in a broader sense as the narrator is compelled to seek advice from a male GP whose only suggestion

²⁴³ Marilyn Hacker, 'Peterborough', *Ambit* 82, 1980: 34.

is that 'sex helped; once you were married'. Beset by physical pain and social pressure to conform to male expectations of the feminine so as not to appear 'too fat, too smart, too loud, too shy, too old', Hacker's narrator ultimately embraces the 'subaqueous monster' herself, gravitating towards homosexual desire:

I want to love a woman
with my radical skin, reactionary im-
agination. My body is cored with hunger;
my mind is gnarled in oily knots of anger
that push back words: inelegant defeat
of female aspiration.²⁴⁴

For Elizabeth Bartlett, in 'With My Body', contemporary liberal attitudes towards sexuality offered women a new range of emotional, as well as physical, experiences. Ostensibly describing an oral sex act between narrator and anonymous lover, 'With My Body' is particularly notable for its quasi-religious register, echoing the Catholic mass and Christ's Last Supper exhortation to his disciples:

With your mouth, like that, he said;
a first communion, a milky wine,
a pubic hair on my tongue, a time
to remember. People keep strands
of hair in lockets. I keep this one
like a saint's relic. He was no saint.²⁴⁵

The combination of the sacred and the sexual throughout tends towards an uneasy solemnity, as the experienced lover takes on the role of priest-Christ and the innocent narrator becomes supplicant-disciple in an exchange that, despite lacking a Christian foundation, is more than merely physical.

Diana Hendry would present one of many love poems treating female experiences of the courting ritual in somewhat wry fashion. Taking its title from the classical tale of Leda's seduction by Zeus, 'Leda and the Others' amusingly sets out the symptoms of a condition that causes its sufferer to

sniff the pillow
where he slept

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Elizabeth Bartlett, 'With My Body', *Ambit* 83, 1980: 19.

and keep his empty cigarette
packet in your pocket
and hang around the telephone
and hurt.²⁴⁶

Presented as a form of Dionysian escape from the self into 'drunkenness' and gift-giving, Hendry's view of love is one in which fantasy is constantly punctured by reality, optimism is dispelled by disappointment, and the exhilaration of freedom is banished by the rational need for security. Instead of a god, Hendry's narrator will end up with a 'clay man' who, rather than sweeping her 'into the sky', will offer her 'a house' and domestic stability.

Marriage and its shortcomings would prove fertile ground for Vivian Levick and Carol Ann Duffy as both outlined the emotional costs of divorce in their poetry. In 'Marriage Lines 1', Levick dealt with the awkward issue of the ex-husband's new partner in a humorous manner that exposes, as it salves, a deeper sense of failure, or loss. These insecurities further extend to issues of motherhood as, having met the newcomer, Levick's narrator declares:

I like to think she has long thin legs
And a ravenous mouth
But I think at the time I thought
She was rather nice.
The children liked her, anyway.
But then they also like Noddy
Whimsy bunnies
And sweets that ruin your teeth.²⁴⁷

As the narrator oscillates between the desire to demonise and to absolve 'she' or 'her' for the marriage breakdown, the poem is concerned with the painful process of 'coming to terms' with the loss of love, husband and, to some extent, children.

The most stridently feminist of *Ambit's* female poets, Carol Ann Duffy would continue to produce poems on a variety of themes throughout the Eighties. In 'Me Bryan', Duffy takes on the voice of a chauvinistic husband whose life revolves

²⁴⁶ Diana Hendry, 'Leda and the Others', *Ambit* 86, 1981: 63.

²⁴⁷ Vivian Levick, 'Marriage Lines 1', *Ambit* 87, 1981: 43.

around drinking, farting, karate and sex. In keeping with Michael Foreman's ink drawing of a bald, unshaven, square-headed individual, Bryan's outlook is both simplistic and aggressive, an impression underlined by his tendency towards monosyllabic words (the longest single words in the poem are 'Australia' and 'suspenders'), partial sentences, and his reliance on clichéd metaphors (e.g. 'strength of an ox'). Perhaps fittingly, the most creative of Bryan's lines is prompted by drink, as he declares that 'sleep is as black as a good jar'. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, Bryan clearly sees himself as a doting husband as the poem builds up to a closing scene implying marital rape:

Dinner on the table
and a clean shirt, but I respect her point of view.
She's borne me two in eight years, knows
when to button it. Although she's run a bit to fat
she still bends over of a weekend in suspenders.²⁴⁸

In holding up Barry as an emblem of unthinking chauvinism, Duffy added her voice to those demanding an acknowledgment of a problem that was increasingly becoming a matter of public concern.

Women were also well represented among *Ambit's* fiction contributors. Tina Fulker continued her series of snapshots from the life of her heroine Kiosk in 'Entry Form' (*Ambit* 93) and 'Fantasy Fortnight' (*Ambit* 97). In the first of these, Kiosk accompanies her boyfriend Jas to a restaurant only to spend the evening daydreaming about the waiters, observing other customers, and longing for excitement:

While she picked at her food Jas ate his quickly, not really noticing much else that was going on. Eager to get onto the next course he asked a waiter as he was passing if he could have the menu. Kiosk liked the look of him. He had film-set eyes she thought as he gave her a glance. She would have liked to have taken him into one of the side doors at the end of the restaurant marked private.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Duffy, 'Me Bryan', *Ambit* 98, 1984: 21.

²⁴⁹ Tina Fulker, 'Entry Form', *Ambit* 93, 1983: 30.

The entry form that Kiosk discovers tidying the house offers a momentary escape from the boredom of her job, the drabness of her wardrobe, and her strained relationship with Jas. When escape does come it is in the form of an exotic holiday as Kiosk wins a 'Fantasy Fortnight' competition. In 'Fantasy Fortnight', essentially a travelogue piece, Kiosk revels in the sights, sounds and smells of her temporary paradise, and in her freedom from the expectations of 'the London scene'. This fantasy is brutally shattered, however, when she returns to discover that her boyfriend has become interested in another girl.

Among the more bizarre contributions, Deborah Levy's 'Proletarian Zen' followed the fortunes of three Japanese sisters and their relationships with a corrupt Zen Master. Composed in a form of broken Japanese English, the text is an eccentric mix of tortured sentences, striking isolated images and epigrams evidenced by the opening lines:

How Zen master change sister life?

First sister play many hour with silk worm. She wash sake cup when sake cup clean. She arrange flower till flower open mouth lose youth. She become very strict house keeper. [...] First sister often get migraine. She lie on futon dim light, try to make sense disturbance behind eye and in heart. She image hand of Zen master place lightly small of back. This make feel better. Sometime she read book increase understanding of life.

Book often confuse sister.²⁵⁰

Both as teacher and man, the Zen master soon begins to exert his influence upon the sisters with a series of 'gifts'. To the first sister, an illiterate traditional woman, he gives a daughter. To the second, a poetess who creates a contraceptive sheath from a lychee skin, he gives a 'non literary experience'. And to the third, a plump woman with an appetite for food and jewellery, he gives a single red pearl. When the Zen master leaves them to get a job in a Tokyo car factory, the first sister is forced to bring up her child alone; the second becomes a teacher to continue the master's work; and the third becomes a member of the anti-capitalist ruling party intent on

²⁵⁰ Deborah Levy, 'Proletarian Zen', *Ambit* 96, 1984: 13.

bringing poverty to the first sister and banning the poetry of the second. In these terms, Levy's text offers a critique of female collusion with a patriarchal system continuing to function to the social and economic disadvantage of women and children. Equally strange, though by no means as focused as 'Proletarian Zen', was Levy's 'Tango Through Green Tanks', where images of war, violence and misogyny combine in a nightmare vision of hatred and destruction. Other significant fiction contributions during the Eighties included Katherine Xavier's 'Owls' (*Ambit* 93), a tragic tale of a love affair between mother and daughter; Sophie Frank's 'Bend Me, Shape Me' (*Ambit* 113), describing a hippy couple's descent into middle-class ennui; and Marianne Wiggins's 'Kafkas' (*Ambit* 107), a disturbing story about an obsessive woman's telephone search for a husband named Kafka.

During the Eighties, *Ambit* drew heavily upon a new crop of talented female artists and illustrators. In 1981, Helen Chadwick followed up her contributions to *Ambit* 68 and 69 with a series of new costume-sculptures for *Ambit* 81. The centrepiece of her *Objects* was a collection of black-and-white photographs in which a nude Chadwick gradually clothes herself in a fabric replica of an oven and a refrigerator, a protest, perhaps, against the Fifties vision of the 'Ideal Woman', as the artist is consumed by her kitchen appliances. In *Solid Objects* (*Ambit* 95), Chadwick offered an autobiographical archive comprising painted wooden replicas of various objects associated with childhood. The sequence begins with the 'incubator birth' and an image of the artist curled up in a small box. The objects then get progressively more intricate, moving from the 'pram 10 months' to the 'piano 9 years', until returning to the square pillar of the 'statue age 30 years'—each object a complex elaboration upon an essentially simple geometrical design.

Carolyn Gowdy challenged the 'Ideal Woman' less obliquely with a series of collage and *trompe-l'oeil* drawings entitled *Theatre of Women* (*Ambit* 83). The first drawing depicted a woman kneeling at prayer before a kitchen appliance, surrounded by various bottles of cleaning fluids. While the woman kneels, an angel descends in a shaft of light to establish an ironic juxtaposition between the mundane reality and the idealised representation of femininity.²⁵¹ These themes were taken further in 'It's important for the "ideal woman" to retain a youthful image', where an old woman stands in the middle of a bathroom being sprayed by a mechanical hand, while mocked by cut-outs of a cover girl and an advert for 'Luxuria Face Powder'.²⁵² Throughout *Theatre of Women*, Gowdy is intent on interrogating the 'ideal' or 'perfect' woman, suggesting that such unrealistic formulations remain the inventions of women's magazines, self-help books and cosmetics companies.

Less polemical work appeared in the form of Vanessa Jackson's swirling, neo-Celtic designs *Blocks for Centos* (*Ambit* 100), Elizabeth Pyle's abstract etchings (*Ambit* 93), and Eileen Cooper's charcoal drawings of mother and child (*Ambit* 107). Hannah Firmin's series of attractive woodcuts for Adrian Henri's 'Death In The Suburbs' (*Ambit* 80), Michael Moorcock's 'Hollywood Newsletter' (*Ambit* 81), and Henry Graham's 'Landscapes' and 'Astronomical Observations' (*Ambit* 82) brought a new dimension to the magazine's illustration work. Similarly, Laura Knight's dark chalk drawings for Katherine Xavier's 'Owls' (*Ambit* 93), her abstract, symbolic charcoal images for Peter Porter's 'Triptych 1498: 1984: 9814' (*Ambit* 96), and her chalk and charcoal pictures for Howard Young's 'Notes for 37 Fish' (*Ambit* 97) ensured Knight became one of the magazine's principal illustrators of the Eighties.

²⁵¹ Carolyn Gowdy, 'Theatre of Women', *Ambit* 83, 1980: 51.

²⁵² *Ibid*: 54.

Keen to promote its female contributors, *Ambit* put women's poetry at the heart of its programme of public readings in 1983 and 1984. Fleur Adcock appeared at West Hampstead Community Hall with Judith Kazantzis and Carol Rumens on 9 December 1983, and was joined by Carol Ann Duffy and Grace Nichols at the same venue on 17 February 1984. Female poets were particularly prominent in the magazine during this period, and, if curiously not described as such, *Ambit* 93, 94 and 95 were essentially special numbers devoted to the work of female writers and artists. As Adcock continued to oversee *Ambit's* reviews section and Duffy's influence as poetry editor grew after 1984, *Ambit's* commitment to the work of women was a genuine one. It was also, perhaps, a necessary one for, with increasing numbers of women entering British universities, *Ambit's* core audience was changing. The decision to abandon some of the more pornographic flirtations of the Seventies can be seen as an attempt to make the magazine more appealing to female readers, and more palatable to some of its feminist contributors. With chauvinistic attitudes of the sort so prevalent in small press and alternative press circles of the Sixties and Seventies increasingly dismissed as misogynistic or outmoded, *Ambit's* shift of emphasis not only served to attract new readers, but to placate existing women subscribers. In the event, *Ambit's* openness to the work of female contributors was to prove both commercially and artistically beneficial, and the success of Carol Ann Duffy (1983) and Jo Shapcott (1985) in the Poetry Society's National Poetry Competition reflected the extent to which so much good work by women had gone unnoticed by critics and publishers alike.

Foreign Tongues: European Verse in Translation

A second significant feature of *Ambit* during the Eighties was its enthusiasm for Commonwealth and European authors. *Ambit* had always been receptive to

America, as evidenced by the Stars and Stripes Special (*Ambit* 39), Michael Moorcock's 'Letter from Hollywood' series, and Paolozzi's Vietnam collages, but the appointment of Anselm Hollo, Gunnar Harding and Jannick Storm as corresponding editors for Finland, Sweden and Denmark in the Sixties presented an opportunity to explore Scandinavian writing, prompting contributions in English from Hollo, and various translations of Harding's poetry from Swedish to English (*Ambit* 35, 41, 47, 50 and 75). *Ambit's* surrealist sympathies brought translations of Paul Eluard and André Breton (*Ambit* 42, 45 and 47), alongside Agnes Stein's translations of contemporary German verse and Giuliano Deigo's translations of Italian poetry. At the same time, *Ambit* began to carry a greater amount of writing from the Anglophone world, which highlighted the complex relationship between the English language and its postcolonial literatures and prompted a Caribbean special in 1982 (*Ambit* 91) and an Irish special in 1989 (*Ambit* 115).

The review sections of *Ambit* 79 and 80 in 1979 came as the first clear signal of *Ambit's* new internationalist aspirations as Neil Curry and Eric Mathieson reviewed translations of Paul Verlaine's *Femmes/Hombres* by Alistair Elliot and János Pilinszky's *Crater* by Peter Jay in *Ambit* 79. In *Ambit* 80, Curry focused on Afrikaans poet Breyten Breytenbach's *And Death White As Words* and D.M. Thomas's translation of Russian poetry by Anna Akhmatova, while Alec Worster considered two novels by the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, *The Death of Artemio Cruz* and *Terra Nostra*. Short notices of individual translated volumes also appeared regularly alongside lengthier special reviews treating European poetry in translation (*Ambit* 98); Dutch poetry (*Ambit* 102); Caribbean writing (*Ambit* 103); American poetry (*Ambit* 109); Czech poetry (*Ambit* 118); and Irish writing in English (*Ambit* 115 and 116). Not all of these foreign voices, however, were greeted

with enthusiasm by the review team. Of American poet Leslie Ullman's *Natural Histories*, for instance, Neil Curry wrote:

I do not believe that anything could breathe life into her short, drab, flat phrases, and when someone who claims to be an admirer of her work writes in the introduction 'her music is so unobtrusive that the ear picks it up but may not recognise that it is there,' then I know that he knows that in his heart I'm right.²⁵³

Curry was equally cool in his assessment of Breytenbach, suggesting that 'An overflow of powerful feeling, no matter how awful its cause, does not become a poem simply by failing to flow as far as the right-hand margin of the page'.²⁵⁴ Yet *Ambit's* reviews certainly introduced readers to the work of writers then virtually unknown in Britain: commenting on Francis R. Jones's translation of the Yugoslavian poet Ivan V. Lalić, Eric Mathieson praised *The Works of Love* as an accessible introduction to 'a poet "increasingly recognised as a major voice in the mainstream of European poetry"'.²⁵⁵ Ewart was similarly enthusiastic in his endorsement of Michael Hamburger's *Goethe: Poems and Epigrams* as a 'valuable service' to a poet who 'wrote every kind of thing that, in his day, could be written'.²⁵⁶

With translation playing an ever more prominent part in *Ambit's* reviews, Stein, Dego and others soon brought translation to the magazine's poetry pages. Stein's first piece was a translation of the Günter Kunert poem, 'Signs, Berlin Style' (*Ambit* 76). Translations of poetry by Sarah Kirsch, Christoph Meckel and Bettina Wegner duly followed. After 1980, Stein contributed eleven additional translations of Kirsch, Michael Krüger, Frederike Roth, Bernd Jentsch, and a handful of her own poems treating existentialist themes of exile, disconnection and loss. In 'On

²⁵³ Neil Curry, 'Review: *Natural Histories*, by Leslie Ullman', *Ambit* 80, 1979: 80.

²⁵⁴ Curry, 'Review: *And Death White As Words*, by Breyten Breytenbach', *ibid*: 81.

²⁵⁵ Mathieson, 'Review: *The Works of Love: Selected Poems of Ivan V. Lalić*, trans. Francis R. Jones', *Ambit* 98, 1984: 85.

²⁵⁶ Ewart, 'Review: *Goethe: Poems and Epigrams*, trans. Michael Hamburger', *ibid*: 85.

The Wind', Stein's anonymous addressee is alone in a desolate garden with a rising wind 'that has come so far', bringing fractured memories rushing into the present:

The past is a distance
your father once inhabited
a soldier alone in the deserted town
with him the sound of cannon over the hills
and him sitting in the dark church vaulted in silence
sitting and watching
the flickering light²⁵⁷

Many of the qualities evident in Stein's poetry—a preoccupation with history, a malevolent natural world, a melancholic tone and a complex reworking of the Romantic legacy of Goethe—sprang directly from her translations of Kirsch and Krüger. Indeed, the similarity between 'On The Wind' and Stein's rendering of Kirsch's 'Noon' is particularly striking, as images of perpetual decay become the focus for 'a vision that longs for harmony but recognises discord, whether in the relationship between man and nature or within the human community itself'.²⁵⁸ Brought up on the poetry of 'Goethe, Schiller, Heine, the classics', and enthused by the 'unusual humanistic direction' favoured by the subjects of her *Four German Poets: Günter Eich, Hilde Domin, Erich Fried, Günter Kunert* (1979), Stein is particularly alert to the concerns of post-war German poets anxious to retain a 'cultural consciousness' yet reluctant to engage in the ideological disputes that succeeded partition in 1949.²⁵⁹ Her translations generated an interest in post-war German poetry that was to form a considerable part of *Ambit's* poetry section from 1980.

Italian poetry in translation would also form a significant proportion of *Ambit's* contents during the Eighties, with Giuliano DeGo and Margaret Straus

²⁵⁷ Agnes Stein, 'On The Wind', *Ambit* 95, 1983: 29.

²⁵⁸ Peter J. Graves (ed.), 'Introduction', *Three Contemporary German Poets: Wolf Biermann, Sarah Kirsch and Reiner Kunze*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1985: 20.

²⁵⁹ Stein (ed.), *Four German Poets: Günter Eich, Hilde Domin, Erich Fried, Günter Kunert*. USA: Red Dust Inc., 1979: 1, 6.

presenting translations of Andrea Zanzotto, Alberto Mario Moriconi and a number of contemporary poets. In 1976, Dego had edited an anthology of translations for an Italian Poetry special of *Prospice*, edited by J.C.R Green and Michael Edwards, which subsequently appeared as *Directions In Italian Poetry* (1976). Translations from Zanzotto's 'The Mysteries of Pedagogy' (*Ambit* 89) and Gilberto Finzi's 'Hair' and 'Common Sense' (*Ambit* 95) by Dego and Straus had previously appeared in *Directions In Italian Poetry*, and are rare examples of *Ambit* reprinting material that had previously appeared elsewhere. But there were plenty of new translations too, some of which seemed uncannily close to the work of Ewart and Cutler. With their arresting titles and satirical tone, the translations of Moriconi were marked by an 'ironic, grotesque, even clownish humour' and a form located somewhere between narrative poem and epigram.²⁶⁰ In 'Broken Embrace', Moriconi's speaker hires a prostitute as a means of overcoming a recent break-up. Yet the prostitute's services prove to be more pastoral than sexual, as the speaker proceeds to tell her

of my hurt, of how it all had ended with you.
My tears dripped onto her breast...

And then,

softly, her eyes caressing me,
she ventured, 'Perhaps it was because
you didn't pay her...'

And she felt so sorry for me
that she didn't ask
to be paid either.²⁶¹

In the space of twelve lines, Moriconi transforms a 'whore' into a compassionate equal: an emotional and physical substitute, however temporary, for the speaker's ex-lover. The combination of simple, direct language and images reminiscent of traditional love poetry ('My tears dripped onto her *breast*', not 'breasts') generates

²⁶⁰ Claudio Marabini, in Giuliano Dego (ed.), *Directions In Italian Poetry: Prospice* 6. Breakish, Isle of Skye: Aquila Publishing Company, 1976: 41.

²⁶¹ Alberto Mario Moriconi, 'Broken Embrace', trans. Dego and Straus, *Ambit* 89: 81.

the emotional charge of the final stanza as the 'whore' is implicitly raised above the ex-partner and the tone of the poem shifts from mournfulness to wry comedy.

If Moriconi's poetry sat comfortably alongside that of Ewart and Cutler, the work of Giuliano Gramigna owed more to the experiments of Baudelaire and the French Surrealists. Strongly recalling the dense imagery and irrational narrative trajectory of Breton and Soupault's 'The Magnetic Fields (VI)' (*Ambit* 95), extracts from Dego's rendering of Gramigna's 'The (portable) Rite of Sleep' (*Ambit* 95) evoke similar bewilderment as isolated phrases emerge suggestively before disappearing again into an incessant stream of 'mental excrement'.²⁶² Stefano Agosti has described Gramigna's writing as an 'uninterrupted "exercise" in formulating concepts through the iron grating of a poetic text',²⁶³ and, on occasions, these exercises produce some pleasing results:

Reading other people's books
you find your own best poems. Or reading
in a dream. A Sunday morning with candy snow;
a tram-car at the stop, sparkling; suns glaring
through cut crystal bottles.²⁶⁴

Doubtless Dego and Straus had a somewhat easier task translating the vivid, painterly images of Maria Luisa Spaziani, for 'The Palette Goes Mad' (*Ambit* 99) is certainly one of the smoothest of the translated poems to appear in *Ambit*. It remains, however, as enigmatic as the work of Gramigna, presenting an essentially imagistic snapshot that gestures towards nature, romance and magic but resists simple exposition. The presence of the 'distant face' at the formal and thematic centre of the poem suggests love poetry, although this seems at odds with the sinister sentiments implied by the closing lines:

Harvests, red brigades of poppies
are pure memory. Terrors and hypnoses,

²⁶² Giuliano Gramigna, from 'The (portable) Rite of Sleep', trans. Dego, *Ambit* 95, 1983: 20.

²⁶³ Stefano Agosti, *Directions In Italian Poetry*: 46.

²⁶⁴ Gramigna, from 'The (portable) Rite of Sleep', trans. Dego, *Ambit* 95, 1983: 21.

two sides of a coin, flake away.
Superfluous and dying the last *Vanessa Pulchra* fades.²⁶⁵

Dego's original contributions to *Ambit* 95, translated by Straus, were more polemical in tone and less successful. However, the contribution of Dego and Straus to *Ambit's* interest in Italian poetry was substantial, introducing a variety of new voices to the magazine, and preparing the ground for N.S. Thompson's translations of Pier Paolo Pasolini (*Ambit* 93) and Allen Andrews's translations of Giuseppe Belli (*Ambit* 98).

A means of reinvigorating *Ambit's* poetry section and establishing its internationalist credentials, translations appeared regularly during the Eighties and Nineties, a characteristic that distinguished *Ambit* sharply from *London Magazine* which, with the exception of Graeme Wilson's renderings of various Japanese poets (Vol. 23, No. 5/6, 1983), avoided translation altogether. Jon Silkin's *Stand* and Patricia Oxley's *Acumen* commonly struck a balance between translation and original writing. Silkin published various one-off translations of writers like the Japanese poet Shimaki Kensaku (*Stand* vol. 25, no. 2, Spring 1984), the Norwegian poet Rolf Jacobsen (*Stand* vol. 25, no. 4, Autumn 1984) and the Russian novelist Yuri Trifonov (*Stand* vol. 26, no. 2, Spring 1985). Oxley, by contrast, focused on translations of Russian poetry (*Acumen* 1 and 3); Walloon dialect verse (*Acumen* 4); Persian poetry (*Acumen* 5); and German and Italian poetry (*Acumen* 7 and 9).

Foreign Tongues: Caribbean Special, *Ambit* 91, 1982

Certainly among the strongest of the Eighties numbers, the Caribbean special brought together a range of talented West Indian poets, with *Ambit's* regular contributors E.A. Markham and James Berry joined by Linton Kwesi Johnson, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Grace Nichols, A.L. Hendriks and David Nathaniel

²⁶⁵ Maria Luisa Spaziani, 'The Palette Goes Mad', trans. Dego and Strauss, *Ambit* 99, 1984: 89.

Haynes. As assistant editor for *Ambit* 91, Markham, in a lengthy editorial article composed with Peter Fraser, set out to query an Englishness founded on the contents of the *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* (1982), and to suggest that Caribbean writing ought to be considered an integral part of an evolving British literature. The view that ‘West Indian and British are mutually exclusive terms’, they argued, entrenched

a false dichotomy which leads to the acceptance of the exclusivism, the xenophobia, the parochialism that have become the strongest passions of decaying Britain. West Indians too, being British, fall into this trap, sometimes searching for roots by converting geographical expressions into cultural facts. The effect is that we have come to be seen as marginal, and have largely accepted that status.²⁶⁶

Markham and Fraser were inevitably informed by colonial history, yet they went on to suggest that the roots of this contemporary marginalisation lay not in the plantations, but in the rise of the New Commonwealth:

From the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, West Indians were part of British society, the islands a region of the British economy, not foreign countries controlled by Britain [...] Later, in the 1940s and 1950s when large numbers of West Indians started to settle in Britain, they found both their skills and their Britishness questioned. This forced them to define themselves as alien in the society, making it difficult to decide whether they were permanent or temporary residents. It can be argued that they settled for the worst compromise of all—that of permanent temporariness.²⁶⁷

This ‘permanent temporariness’ was explored in considerable depth in the play *Motherland*, which had emerged from a series of interviews conducted by Marcia Smith in 1981 into the ‘experience of hardship and discrimination’ faced by her mother’s generation ‘as early immigrants’.²⁶⁸ Drawing upon ‘the personal testimony of twenty-three women in the local community’, the play opens with Marcia persuading her mother to tell her about her life in the West Indies and her feelings towards England. The mother’s reluctant answers generate much of the material for the action that follows:

Mother

²⁶⁶ E.A. Markham and Peter Fraser, ‘In From The Margin’, *Ambit* 91, 1982: 66.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*: 67.

²⁶⁸ Elyse Dodgson, ‘Director’s Note. *Motherland*’, *ibid*: 26.

Well the only [English] people we knew were the preacher men they used to send over and all these little ladies they call 'band of mercy ladies' who used to come and sing about 'Don't kill the birds, the little birds that fly among the trees', and the impression they give us is like everyone over there is like that, so nice and sweet that in England it must be fantastic.²⁶⁹

Interrogating the difference between idealised visions of England and the grimmer reality of a post-imperial country in economic decline, *Motherland* tracks the progress of various women drawn to England by a combination of economic, educational and social factors. On arrival many of these promises prove hollow as Beverley, who has come to join her husband, is abandoned at Waterloo station; Juliette, Cheryl and Louisa, each training for a career in nursing, repeatedly fail their exams and are shunned by their white peers; and Sandra and Marcia are evicted by their landlord on six hours notice after a rent dispute.

Songs assume a critical role in the play. The first of these is a patriotic song, 'England, Sweet England', performed on steel drums to celebrate the coronation of Elizabeth II, but this is soon replaced by a series of parting songs, as the emigrant women take leave of their families. Later the songs become a vehicle for the women's disillusionment with life in England, most powerfully in the dream sequence of act 2, scene 3, as eight women return to their rooms and reflect upon the struggles of a long, hard day. The 'pain, bitterness, frustration' spoken of by the representative 'interviewee' is channelled into the lyrics of 'Motherland'—an ironic retort to the naïve strains of 'England, Sweet England':

Hold me
Control me
A robot for the cause
Sweep and clean
I'll follow your laws
My hands bear your scars
My children they rebel
You learn them your ways
So they rank till they smell²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ West Indian Women's Project, *Motherland*, *ibid*: 28.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*: 43.

Ending where it began, with Marcia and her tape recorder, the play closes with six mothers acknowledging significant differences between their own experiences of England and those of their English-born children. Comforted by the thought that an English education is something that ‘no one can take [...] away’ from their daughters, the mothers remain concerned about the prejudice and unfairness that awaits them, despite their heightened expectations:

You're born here it's true
you know the people's ways
but I'm so afraid girl
they will never let you belong
I can see you're different
cause you won't accept the things we did
and I'm scared when you talk like that²⁷¹

In this way *Motherland* explored, in an innovative style, the concerns of two generations of women formed by very different social, economic and educational backgrounds, for whom West Indian and British were by no means mutually ‘exclusive terms’.

With memories of the New Cross fire (1981) and the Brixton riots (1982) still fresh, there was a strong note of protest in poems like Johnson’s ‘Wat About Di Workin Claas’ and Berry’s ‘Man With Allocated Past’. Challenging working-class whites to hold the government responsible for the problems of inflation, unemployment and low pay rather than target their black fellow-workers, Johnson’s dialect poem closes with the plea:

noh baddah blame it pan di black working claas
mistah racist
blame it pan di rulin claas
blame it pan yu capitalis baas
wi pay di caas
wi suffer di laas²⁷²

Berry’s ‘Man With Allocated Past’ was a subtler and much broader critique of racist attitudes within the government, the police and British society. At once ‘a

²⁷¹ Ibid: 48.

²⁷² Linton Kwesi Johnson, ‘Wat About Di Workin Claas’, *ibid*: 3.

figure from Mars', 'a whale's experience / looking for a special hook', and a 'strange bird' 'walking cat's territory', the black man is constantly cast as hunted quarry by Berry, on the run from racist violence and from police harassment under the 'sus' laws. Alive to the racist threat represented by the New Cross fire—directly confronted in the lines 'He attracts a house / that explodes in flames'—Berry then moves on to highlight a latent racism which clings to a stereotype of the black man as criminal or 'clown', mugger or golliwog, who 'tickles gentlemen / and ungentlemen alike'. In each case, the resulting laughter is prompted by fear or ignorance rather than sympathy, and the final stanza closes with a powerful image in which black and white are presented in jarring contrast: 'His walking in snow is / a wrong scene'.²⁷³

In 'Over There', a prolonged period of exile generates a mythical vision of the Caribbean as suspect as any idealised construction of England, as Markham paints an ambivalent portrait of a land of 'hot springs and sunshine' which provides a temporary haven 'when the fresh cut of abuse / falls into an old wound' but is regularly ravaged by 'wild storms of temper'. Distant from the mundane realities of family life, the West Indies continue to exert their influence on Markham's narrator as a cricket team, an exporter of 'fruit and vegetables / [that] go quaint on my plate', and a place for family funerals, attended more out of 'respect than grief'. But ultimately, having being brought up 'here', in 'the grubby land of hate', England is where the narrator is closest to home:

Over There
 is where parents go to bury family
 and come back lighter, for a day or two, bouncing
 round the house, as if they're still young.²⁷⁴

²⁷³ James Berry, 'Man With Allocated Past', *ibid*: 69.

²⁷⁴ Markham, 'Over There', *ibid*: 25.

Poetry of a less political nature appeared in the form of John Agard's 'Me Anancy Poor Anancy', a traditional Caribbean trickster poem; Andrew Salkey's 'The Festival of Flowers', an imagistic reflection on love; and John Figueroa's 'Problems of a Writer who does not Quite...', a witty critique of Derek Walcott's *Omeros* and of the gradual 'mainstreaming' of Caribbean writing framed in a mixture of fractured dialect, comic half-rhymes and more formal patterns:

No more of the loud sounding sea
Or the disjecta membra:
Homer, Horace are not, are not for you and me
Colonials with too high a diction
Instead of simple drug addiction.²⁷⁵

Less striking than the poetic contributions, the stories were predominantly anecdotal in nature and echoed themes explored more thoroughly in *Motherland* and the poetry. Thus Amryl Johnson's 'Adrian' offered a rather heavy-handed account of a mixed-race West Indian teenager's descent into shoplifting and criminality, while Caryl Phillips's 'Coming Over' saw a group of young Caribbean men comparing expectations of England on the boat journey from Baytown: again, the issue of education dominates their conversation. 'Her Story', by Lynford French, was a well-written piece taking the reader into the mind of a black woman as she speaks of her needs, her desires, and her struggles with a husband who ignores her. Edgar White's 'In The City Of Cities' was a first person account of a Caribbean man's short-lived love affair with a Puerto Rican girl amid the squalor of New York's Lower East Side.

The visual content of *Ambit 91* was particularly varied. In an untitled series of essentially realistic pencil drawings Ray Povey presented a number of bizarre nude studies in which the surrealist emblems of doorways, staircases, bowler hats and male genitalia feature prominently. The three most eccentric images show a

²⁷⁵ John Figueroa, 'Problems of a Writer who does not Quite...', *ibid*: 85.

Caucasian female nude looking through a doorway at her double on a staircase; a West Indian male nude squatting through an open door, a female nude standing by a window in the room behind him, a chair and bowler hat placed suggestively between them; and the same young female nude striding through an open door into a room where an elderly woman lies dead in a metal-framed bed.²⁷⁶ S.E. Ashman's photographs of *Motherland* in performance were equally powerful, producing some particularly arresting images of a resolute-looking Barbara awaiting her husband, and of a depressed-looking girl (Tina) waiting for a taxi with her mother (subsequently modified by Alan Kitching for the cover design).²⁷⁷ Errol Lloyd's sketches of traditional African pottery and wall-designs were complemented by a pen-portrait of Edward Kamau Brathwaite, and two paintings of a young West Indian woman seated on a wooden chair, and a young West Indian man reclining on a bed.²⁷⁸ The visual element would be completed by Les Johnson's *faux-naïve* paintings—reminiscent of early Hockney—for Edgar White's 'In The City Of Cities'; Michael Foreman's sunset watercolour for A.L. Henriks's 'Recollections of the Sun'; Charles Shearer's relief prints for the poems of John La Rose; and Ron Sandford's portrait of Markham, with its characteristic multiple view-points.

In his editorial notes to *Ambit* 91, Bax had suggested that a Caribbean special number presented 'A Risk of Rhetoric', for 'Having right attitudes and striking them does not make poems (although many people think it does)'.²⁷⁹ The 'right attitudes' certainly come to the fore in the adverts for the Commission For Racial Equality, *Race Today*—Britain's Leading Black Journal, Black Ink, Macmillan Caribbean and New Beacon Books scattered throughout *Ambit* 91, but

²⁷⁶ Ray Povey, untitled drawings in graphite, *ibid*: 10, 11, 16.

²⁷⁷ *Motherland*, *ibid*: 33, 35.

²⁷⁸ Errol Lloyd, 'Drawings', *ibid*: 71-75.

²⁷⁹ Bax, 'Ambit—Caribbean Number', *ibid*: 66.

the quality of the contents generally, combined with the restrained nature of Bax's editorial, are sufficient to dispel any accusations of rhetoric. The regular contributions of Markham and Berry to the magazine ensured that Caribbean culture and black writing retained a prominent place in *Ambit* in subsequent years. For the quality of its contents, the standing of its contributors and the timeliness of its anti-racism message, *Ambit* 91 remains one of the most interesting and varied anthologies of black work in the visual and literary arts to appear in the Eighties.

Regional Accents: Liverpool Special, *Ambit* 92, 1983

In 1983 Bax published a 'Liverpool Special', supported by the Merseyside Arts Association, which brought together contributors associated with the Liverpool Scene in the Sixties and Seventies and their artistic successors. *Ambit's* association with Liverpool had begun in 1962, when the magazine participated in a poetry reading hosted by the Merseyside Arts Festival. Bax presented the Festival's under-17 poetry prize to 'A lad called Patten', and then lost 250 copies of *Ambit* intended for distribution at the event, after British Rail 'failed to deliver them'. The missing magazines were eventually located

by two poets who, walking the streets, were struck by a paper dart made from a dismembered copy. Investigating, they found the bundle of *Ambits* tipped out on to a croft by a landlady to whom they had been mis-delivered.²⁸⁰

The discovery of Brian Patten would prove more rewarding as the competition winner quickly became one of the leading figures on Liverpool's performance poetry circuit, some of Patten's best performances being captured on the 1969 recording *Selections from Little Johnny's Confession and Notes to the Hurrying Man and New Poems*.

Between 1963 and 1969 *Ambit* was particularly receptive to the work of Adrian Henri and Roger McGough at a time when the literary establishment were

²⁸⁰ Bax, 'Ambit's Entry Into Liverpool', *Ambit* 92, 1983: 2.

keen to dismiss the Liverpool Scene as a passing fad. The *Times Literary Supplement's* response to *The Mersey Sound: Penguin Modern Poets 10* (1967) was characteristically lukewarm:

Are they funny? Yes, sometimes they are funny, though one's response to the hard sell becomes weaker and weaker as the various publishers flock round with the same wares. Penguin is probably the best format for them, though the lurking aimlessness of this series is exposed once and for all by the choice (it was meant to be a serious breakthrough in bringing representative poets to the attention of a wider audience, remember? The gaudy cover and the opportunist proximity to *The Liverpool Scene* imply something quite the reverse).²⁸¹

Crediting Henri with 'little intelligence [and] few moral values', the reviewer described McGough's work as 'a matter of quantity rather than variety', before holding up Patten as 'the Lepidus of the trio', exhibiting 'hardly anything that you would call technique, but [who] does succeed quite often in making the right sort of equations out of feelings, observations and words'.²⁸² The witty surrealism of these Pop Poets was ideally suited to *Ambit's* satirical outlook during the Sixties as Bax sought to position the magazine between *New Departures* and the more restrained *London Magazine*. By the Seventies, however, the Mersey influence, sustained by regular contributions from Henri, as well as Henry Graham, Jeff Nuttall and Jim Mangnall, had begun to diminish. *Ambit* 92 thus reaffirmed the magazine's commitment to Liverpool, and to a form of poetry that, according to Edward Lucie-Smith, 'differs from other contemporary English verse because it has made its impact by being spoken and listened to, rather than by being read'.²⁸³

The Liverpool of 1982, however, was very different to that of 1962. In November 1985 a report commissioned by Liverpool City Council found that 'Between 1982 and 1985 Liverpool's unemployment rate, based on the numbers receiving benefit, increased from 22.3% to 25.4%', and that by 1985 'Almost one in

²⁸¹ Anon, 'Liverboom', *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 July 1967: 614.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Edward Lucie-Smith (ed.), 'Prefatory Note', *The Liverpool Scene*. London: Donald Carroll, 1967: 3.

three of the City's male workforce [were] "officially" unemployed'.²⁸⁴ The city was also coming to terms with the aftermath of the Toxteth riots: against a background of industrial decline, rising crime and poor housing conditions, a population already divided along racial and sectarian lines had exploded into violence on Granby Street on Friday 3 July 1981, following the arrest of Leroy Alphonse Cooper. Over the weekend a series of disturbances between the police and groups of black and white youths armed with stones and petrol bombs quickly escalated into nine days of rioting which saw 500 people arrested, one man killed by a police land rover, 468 police officers injured and approximately 70 buildings destroyed.²⁸⁵

Images of the Toxteth riots had been broadcast into living rooms across the UK, and the right-wing press soon rounded upon Liverpool with venom. Under the headline 'Looting unlimited', the *Daily Mail* on 3 July argued that although Liverpool had its 'race problems' and 'appalling unemployment', the riots were 'more about criminal greed', people 'queuing for their turn to loot, jostling and pushing as if it were the January sales.'²⁸⁶ Meanwhile the *Daily Express* on 6 July blamed the black and white youths who 'in their idleness [...] haunt dingy cafés ready to throw a brick at authority at the slightest excuse.'²⁸⁷ Bax's decision to devote a special issue to the artistic and cultural life of a city described by Andrew Brown of the *Spectator* as 'so squalid and run down at weekends that one cannot tell by looking at the rubbish, vomit, and orange peel on the pavement whether you are in Lime Street Station or a shopping arcade' was certainly a brave one.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁴ Michael G. Hayes, 'Summary', *Unemployment in Liverpool. 1. Unemployment Change 1982-1985*. Liverpool: City of Liverpool Council, 1985: unpaginated.

²⁸⁵ Anon, BBC News Online, 'Toxteth Riots Remembered', <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1419981.stm>. 4 July 2001. Last accessed: British Library, 7 December 2004.

²⁸⁶ Anon, 'Looting unlimited', *Daily Mail*, 8 July 1981: 2.

²⁸⁷ Alan Bennett and Mike Parry, 'The flames of hatred', *Daily Express*, 6 July 1981: 16.

²⁸⁸ Andrew Brown, 'The Toxteth Aftermath', in Philip Marsden-Smedley (ed.), *Britain In The Eighties. The Spectator's View of the Thatcher Decade*. London: Grafton Books, 1989: 32.

While politicians and planners debated the causes of the riots, urban deprivation would prove the dominant theme of *Ambit 92* as Ron Sandford filled four double pages with ink drawings of a fractured urban landscape viewed through broken windowpanes. Echoes of Sandford's unforgiving landscapes reverberated through Carol Ann Duffy's 'City', with its images of social disconnection and waste materials:

The city disgusts me.
I return to a room which I hate and find it burgled.
Sometimes I feel as finished as
a wheelchaired cripple in a heatwave.
My backbone is weaker than it was.

In the street tar softens with summer warmth,
what is not grey is only broken glass.
My eyes are swollen like a long parched tongue
from staring at debris, at brick,
I'm sullen with imaginings.²⁸⁹

A resident of Liverpool during the Eighties, Duffy painted a grim portrait of an urban environment slowly infecting its population with a sickness that brings 'tar' and 'builder's yards' where there were once 'trees' and 'grass', that reduces its people to 'scavenging', and that cruelly mocks the hardships of everyday life with its utopian epithets. Even 'Love', the mantra of former *Woolton* resident John Lennon, is translated into something perverted, hollow or dead:

Love too dies as we tear down buildings.
One of you lies dead in a room in Hope Street
inside a filthy inflatable woman.
Reasonable men open filing cabinets full of stained underwear.
I do not know how we have come to this.²⁹⁰

Kit Wright revisited Duffy's themes in 'The Losing of Liverpool', a satirically allusive piece tracing the city's role as slave-trading port, tobacco importer, refuge for survivors of the Irish Famines and home to an impoverished population of Welfare State dependents. Amid this history, the emblematic tower-

²⁸⁹ Duffy, 'City', *Ambit 92*: 67.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

blocks function as the metaphorical and thematic core of the poem, beginning as vantage points from which the ‘People could get a good view of the empty docks’, before being transformed into ‘terrible beggar-women’,

Upon whom everything aimed
Has recorded a hit:

Eyes gouged out, teeth kicked in, throats
Rammed with shit²⁹¹

In these four lines Wright overturns the Sixties image of Liverpool as the home of the Beatles and ‘hit records’, offering instead an unvarnished vision of poverty and violence. Another strong presence in the poem, the Mersey becomes a third victim of neglect as the liver-coloured river churns against ‘the weeds / in the cracks / of the wall’ and the wharves that ‘recall // fuck all...’²⁹² These sentiments were expressed with similar terseness by Roger McGough in ‘Gone Are The Liners’ which, despite its somewhat wistful title, was firmly grounded in genuine economic fears:

Gone are the liners
The glories of old
Now seagulls redundant
Sign on at the dole.²⁹³

The tension between a glorious mercantile past and a depressing present of industrial decline was captured powerfully in Sandford’s cover design of a ship taken from an emblem found on ‘a board blocking a warehouse gate in Liverpool Docks’ and presented as the ‘SPIRIT OF MERSEYSIDE’.²⁹⁴

A sense of overwhelming despair informed some of the more autobiographical works that appeared in *Ambit* 92, as Henry Graham’s ‘Bomb’ began with the nihilistic assertion that ‘In the beginning was the bomb’, before

²⁹¹ Kit Wright, ‘The Losing of Liverpool’, *ibid*: 102.

²⁹² *Ibid*: 102-103.

²⁹³ Roger McGough, ‘Gone Are The Liners’, *ibid*: 104.

²⁹⁴ Anon, ‘Contents Page’, *ibid*: 1.

going on to rage against a godless world of injustice and viciousness;²⁹⁵ Dinah Dossor's 'Scars' and 'Abortion' dealt with the psychological effects of physical abuse and unwanted pregnancy; and Beryl Martindale's 'Real People' treated the subject of self-harm.

In the prose piece 'Saturday Afternoon', Joe McCoy Jones focused on the equally depressing topic of football hooliganism, presenting a first person account of a violent clash between Everton and Swansea City supporters. Essentially a realistic piece despite its bizarre ending, the narrative wavers uneasily between exhilaration and despair, as the narrator and his girlfriend become caught up in the grotesque violence that anticipates their own personal apocalypse, the imagery throughout recalling television pictures of Toxteth:

The sky is violet, with orange overtones. Spontaneous human combustion occurs as a police sergeant bursts into flames before our eyes. The ground begins to tremble violently. It will all be over soon.

Rival supporters are crawling together, clamouring for shelter, dogs are howling in agony. I squeeze Lee's hand and we become one as the heat penetrates skin, causing a glue like solution with our flesh. A young child is tearing her skin, and flesh from her torso. She's too young to understand.²⁹⁶

Apart from Tony Dash's 'Sporting with Samuel Beckett', a collection of short poems in which Beckett frequently surprises his opponent with absurd gestures, *Ambit 92* would offer few genuinely comic moments. Many of the visual contributions were marked by a sinister gloom evidenced by Don McKinlay's drawings of a nude female stripping for a shadowy male voyeur, Stephen Abdellah's gargoyle illustration of Matt Simpson's poem 'Anglican Cathedral, Liverpool', and Maurice Cockrill's chaotic near-scribbles. Even Sandford's portraits of Patten and McGough, his sitters described in simple profile, evoked an unexpected seriousness.

²⁹⁵ Graham, 'Bomb', *ibid*: 3.

²⁹⁶ Joe McCoy Jones, 'Saturday Afternoon', *ibid*: 35.

Given the nature of its subject matter and the timing of its appearance, there can be little doubt that *Ambit* 92 had something of a polemical motivation, despite coy protestations that the volume merely reunited the ‘merry throng’ of ‘old and new Liverpool friends’.²⁹⁷ Although Graham and Henri would stop short of Lucie-Smith’s suggestion that ‘If one wants to find a modern equivalent of Murger’s *Vie de Bohème*, one has to look for it in Liverpool’,²⁹⁸ both poet-painters would use *Ambit* 92 as a platform from which to challenge conventional constructions of English poetry and British art. In ‘Martians Go Home!’, a strongly-worded critique of Morrison and Motion’s *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*, Henri declared:

New Martians are, in fact, but old Georgians writ large; the apparent newness of Craig Raine’s poems is only skin deep: in formal terms they are nearer to Thomas or Hardy, the far-fetched similes like curry sauce over chips from the Chinese takeaway. [...] There is lots of exciting new poetry being written in Britain at the moment, but one would have to look a lot further than the covers of this book to find [it].²⁹⁹

What *Ambit* 92 offered was an alternative to the complacent metropolitan values associated with the ‘ageing Oxbridge editor’, and a partial glimpse into England’s ‘not so green and unpleasant land’ [*sic*].³⁰⁰ Much of its content was dedicated to documenting a proud city’s decline into dereliction, poverty and violence, yet if the work of *Ambit*’s contributors did nothing else, it demonstrated that Liverpool still had the imaginative resources at hand to reverse this trend.

Foreign Tongues or Regional Accents? Irish Special, *Ambit* 115, 1989

In 1989 *Ambit* published an Irish special designed to introduce various contemporary Irish writers somewhat overshadowed by the critical attention lavished upon Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Michael Longley, Tom Paulin and

²⁹⁷ Bax, ‘*Ambit*’s Entry Into Liverpool’, *ibid*: 2.

²⁹⁸ Lucie-Smith (ed.), *The Liverpool Scene*: 8.

²⁹⁹ Adrian Henri, ‘Martians Go Home!’, *Ambit* 92: 99, 101.

³⁰⁰ Graham, ‘A Quote And A Comment’, *ibid*: 36.

Paul Muldoon since Morrison and Motion had placed them at the heart of a British ‘reformation of poetic taste’ in their *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* (1982).³⁰¹ For Morrison and Motion, the future of British poetry was being forged in Northern Ireland, with Heaney replacing Ted Hughes as ‘the presiding spirit of British poetry’.³⁰² The effect of this fashionable interest in Northern Ireland had, for British audiences at least, been to make Irish poetry synonymous with a handful of poets from Derry, Belfast and Armagh at the expense of those from the Republic—a situation prompting Peter Fallon and Derek Mahon, in the *Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* (1990), to declare:

The Northern experience has received a great deal of poetic coverage [...], to such an extent that it might almost seem abroad as if the only contemporary Irish poetry of particular interest had its origins there. The excellence and popularity of Seamus Heaney’s work has much to do with this, but the Northern phenomenon remains, in Kinsella’s phrase, ‘largely a journalistic entity’. [...] If the present anthology can be said to have any polemical purpose, that purpose would be to correct imbalances created over the years by editors, publishers and critics, and to dispel the illusion that Irish poetry has been written exclusively by persons of Northern provenance [...]³⁰³

Tasked with assembling an ‘All-Irish’ number, Bax insisted that *Ambit*’s editors had applied ‘No special exclusive criteria’ in selecting suitable material, but ‘tried to spread the word around that we were doing the number’. Furthermore, while *Ambit* had written ‘to some people asking them to send material’, the editors had deliberately chosen not to seek submissions from ‘those writers whose work is well known elsewhere and who are sometimes referred to as “the Irish poets”’.³⁰⁴

Reinforcing the sentiments expressed in Bax’s editorial, *Ambit* 115 was dominated by work of an autobiographical, personal, or domestic nature by poets living in, or associated with, the South of Ireland. Consequently, beneath a front cover somewhat surprisingly adorned with an image of Shakespeare in green (taken

³⁰¹ Morrison and Motion: 11.

³⁰² Ibid: 13.

³⁰³ Peter Fallon and Derek Mahon (eds), ‘Introduction’, *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990: xix-xx.

³⁰⁴ Bax, ‘*Ambit* in Ireland’, *Ambit* 115, 1989: 93.

from Louis le Brocquy's *Studies Towards an Image of William Shakespeare*). Sydney Bernard Smith launched into his 'Homage to Dinneen', a series of stanzas that gradually develops into a glossary of Gaelic phrases. Essentially an etymological interrogation of the Gaelic language, Smith's poem highlighted surprising continuities between words, leading to some highly surrealistic juxtapositions that rapidly descend into nonsense. Littered with Gaelic phrases, 'Homage to Dinneen 1' continued in similar fashion, functioning as a form of extended word game in which the translator exists as magician, or the

man who created his own
image and likeness
authentic
reflector³⁰⁵

Smith's poem was also a clear reminder of Irish poetry's bilingual tradition, Bax having decided against publishing parallel-text translations of Gaelic verse that would have reduced the space available for other work.

Other poetic contributions ranged from the intimately personal to the bizarrely comic. Theo Dorgan offered a delicately lyrical memorial to his father in 'Speaking To My Father'. In this particularly measured piece, Dorgan reflects upon his father's working-class background and his personal unease about the middle-class values thrust upon him by a university education:

How should I sit here and explain to his shade
That, yes, this is the work I do you died for,
This is the use I make of all that sacrifice,
I move great words as you moved heavy tyres.³⁰⁶

Thus the poem sets up a succession of comparisons between the physical labours of the father and the intellectual pursuits of the son, the former being associated with 'sacrifice', 'pride', 'patience' and heroism, while the latter are dismissed as 'useless', 'ignorant' and 'clumsy' as the son longs for the secure certainties of

³⁰⁵ Smith, 'Homage to Dinneen 1—The Great Dugort Stanza', *ibid*: 3.

³⁰⁶ Theo Dorgan, 'Speaking To My Father', *ibid*: 17.

childhood. Dorgan's easy, conversational quatrains are ideally suited to his theme, and the subtle, irregular rhyme scheme employed throughout satisfyingly reinforces the poem's comparative method:

What would you make of me, I wonder, sitting here
Long after midnight, searching for the words to
Bring you back, soliciting the comfort of your shade
For the odd, useless creature that you made?³⁰⁷

Yet fittingly, perhaps, it is when the son is shaving, glancing at his own face in the mirror rather than probing into deeper thoughts with pen in hand, that he ultimately identifies himself as his father's son, recognising as his own the 'Shoulders squared to the blow that may come, / Hands tensed to defend what you hold dear.'³⁰⁸

Although the majority of poetic contributions came from figures already well established in the small presses and little magazines of Dublin (including founder of *Poetry Ireland*, John F. Deane, and co-founder of *Cyphers*, Macdara Woods), a handful of Ulster poets also featured in *Ambit* 115. The 'Troubles' of the Seventies found their most direct expression in Pádraic Fiacc's 'Belfast Elegy, 1981' and 'Death Comes To Me', and Sam Burnside's 'Six Loughs'. The son of an IRA man and editor of the controversial anthology of Troubles poems *The Wearing of the Black* (1974), Fiacc's poems documented the violent realities of life in Belfast, both in historical and intensely autobiographical terms. Consequently 'Belfast Elegy, 1981' is at once a memorial to Gerry McLaughlin, a young poet and personal friend murdered in 1975,³⁰⁹ and to a broader society within which violence and fear have become common features of daily life. The poem describes a visit by the speaker to his friend's grave in Milltown, filmed by Georg Stephan Troller. This

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Aodán Mac Póilin, 'Biographical Outline', in Gerald Dawe and Aodán Mac Póilin (eds), *Ruined Pages. Selected Poems [of] Padraic Fiacc*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1994: 13-16.

visit, however, soon becomes a frightening re-enactment of McLaughlin's killing, as the speaker encounters a 'stranger' who

hears my whine and jeers
'Are you suffering from depression, son?'
'Yes, yes,' I mimic back, 'Ay, ay, ah, ah!'
(An answer as I run, run
Miles from grave stone to grave stone?)³¹⁰

From this point onwards, the poem is shaped by nightmarish images of 'berserk' corpses and 'mummified' mad men, while the speaker struggles desperately to find McLaughlin's grave. This chain of nightmare images is briefly interrupted by the sudden appearance of 'A Brit army helicopter', a familiar sight in militarised Belfast, but powerfully brought back into focus by the blunt, direct diction of the final stanzas. Fired off like bullets, the hard monosyllables of the closing line bring the brutality of McLaughlin's murder echoing back into the speaker's act of remembrance:

At last I come on and re-read his name
On the cloud-dark grave stone.
He lies a little more far down
From the IRA plot.
Really, I have lost, like blood,
Any bit of bearing. I have lost all of my senses:
I plunge to the earth ... This is a good shot.³¹¹

In 'Death Comes To Me', Fiacca somewhat ironically suggests that death has become 'part of the family'—this all too familiar phenomenon being personalised and personified in the figure of 'My Nephew, Death, a child'. Framed as a loving portrait of a familial relationship between uncle and young nephew, the poem makes its point through a series of ironic images in which Death is presented as a playful youth who 'hugs me hard', 'wants me only', and 'runs the whole of Belfast / Back to me'.³¹² In this way, the poem's sinister subtext stands at odds with the

³¹⁰ Pádraic Fiacca, 'Belfast Elegy, 1981', *Ambit* 115: 57.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² Fiacca, 'Death Comes To Me', *ibid.*: 56.

naïve images of childhood innocence presented throughout the piece, and ‘Death Comes To Me’ remains a witty reflection upon the wide-reaching impact of the Troubles on family life in Belfast during the Seventies.

In more conventionally elegiac mode, Sam Burnside in ‘The Six Loughs’ charted Ulster’s tortuous progress towards peace symbolised by the stillness of the region’s lakes. The poem begins with a fairly traditional presentation of the Irish landscape, suggested rather than described, but ominous notes are soon audible as Burnside’s language becomes interwoven with funereal images recalling the Troubles. Indeed, as Burnside puns on ‘urns’, the lakes are briefly transformed into emblems of death:

On Carlingford, on Swilly, on Foyle
Silence has settled, like death in a house
Long prepared. Tall rushes, like mourners
Standing in rain, shadow the waters
Of the two Ernes.³¹³

Recalling the mythical exploits of Cuchullain, the Ulster landscape shares in the suffering caused by the ongoing struggle between Republicanism and Unionism. The reality Burnside presents, however, is neither heroic nor honourable as he condemns

the beatings and the hoodings and the shootings
By roadside and by lake and by mountain stream,
In fields of grass and grain stained twice³¹⁴

In Burnside’s view, this cycle of violence is the direct result of the province’s inept political leaders, trading ‘words that may mean anything’ and ‘fraudulent mouthings / That for so long revised the truths / All our people saw and knew’. The solution, it seems, may ultimately lie in a shared concern for a natural landscape long associated with Celtic mythology, spirituality and poetry. Perhaps this, rather than ‘another Patrick’, might finally bind together a people set against

³¹³ Sam Burnside, ‘The Six Loughs’, *ibid*: 60.

³¹⁴ *Ibid*: 60-61.

themselves by Republican and Unionist rewritings of Irish mythology. Burnside's poem concludes in pessimistic fashion, however, as the speaker holds his moment of peace, of 'silence', a temporary one: 'bird and beast wait for some ending of it, / For the breaking of it by some fresh word.'³¹⁵

The fiction appearing in *Ambit* 115 was as diverse as the poetry, and largely experimental in nature. 'The Salmon of Knowledge', by Dermot Healy, offered a modern slice through various versions of the *Aislinge Óenguso* (The Vision of Angus), found in the *Book of Leinster* (c. 1150), and Fionn mac Cumhaill's encounter with 'The Salmon of Knowledge', derived from the *Fenian Cycle*.³¹⁶ Recalling Flann O'Brien's comic novel *At Swim Two Birds* (1939), Healy problematically juxtaposes two broadly traditional accounts with a series of interpretations by the scholar Jonathan Adams, who struggles to reconcile the paganism of the Celtic texts with Protestant teaching:

Jonathan Adams [...] felt long lost Presbyterian genes begin to surface in his consciousness. The story that he was reading that praised the confines of the body was at odds with his mind which said the body was the source of evil. The bible was for him the home ground. Into his eyes passed the distant lights of Dissenter, Calvin and Jesus Christ, then the brightly featured faces of his daughters. He wished [Aengus] through the door to see what would happen.³¹⁷

As these narratives collide, Adams becomes so involved with the plight of Aengus that by the surreal conclusion of the text Adams has stepped into the body of the Irish 'god of love', who is also a form of questing traveller. The closing lines, however, offer little by way of resolution, and there is a lingering sense that Burnside has lost control of his competing heroes:

Jonathan Adams laid the book he was reading face-down on his chest. He held the book to him with a hand that afterwards was reluctant to let go. For a while he felt like the traveller outside the Tower of Babel, stepping in and out of the consciousness of himself and the consciousness of others. Then he fell into a deep sleep in which he burnt his thumb, a

³¹⁵ Ibid: 61.

³¹⁶ 'Angus Óg' and 'Fionn mac Cumhaill', James McKillop, *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998: 15-16, 204-206.

³¹⁷ Dermot Healy, 'The Salmon of Knowledge', *Ambit* 115: 25.

salmon thrashed, and he died, and his wife nearly died, such was her grief on finding him.³¹⁸

Other significant fiction contributions included 'A Statement', by Bernard Share, a lengthy and rather confusing novel extract set in Vichy France, and the intriguing pseudo-documentary piece 'Bug Out', by Carl Tighe, a compelling account of the unfortunate circumstances conspiring to send an English hippy to Vietnam.

In keeping with the literary contents of *Ambit* 115 and the wishes of Bax's editorial team, the visuals that appeared throughout the Irish special were equally accomplished and eclectic. Alongside Laura Knight's attractive illustrations of shape-shifting salmon for Healy's 'The Salmon of Knowledge', and Blaise Thompson's more functional drawings for Share's 'A Statement', Cathy Carman's sculptures and drawings of various faerie-like figures proved both grotesque and alluring. Similarly, the drawings of Breon O'Casey, a combination of simple line drawings of a maiden's encounter with a devil-like man, and some more abstract works, balanced Louis Le Brocquy's painstaking *Studies Towards an Image of William Shakespeare and James Joyce*.

The Irish special, *Ambit* 115, was the magazine's second attempt at producing a special number devoted to the art and literature of an Anglophone culture beyond the shores of Britain. Although less thematically unified than the Caribbean special, *Ambit* 115 would offer a powerful challenge to the view that an Ulster childhood was fundamental to the production of Irish verse. Therefore, despite Bax's insistence that 'no special exclusive criteria' had been applied to the process of selecting material for the number, *Ambit* 115 demonstrated that it was possible to engage with the historical, political and social concerns of writers and

³¹⁸ Ibid: 28.

artists living in modern Ireland without recourse to those ‘sometimes referred to as “the Irish poets”’.³¹⁹

AMBIT’S KEY EIGHTIES CONTRIBUTORS

The Poetry and Fiction of E.A. Markham

(Born: 1 October 1939, Montserrat, West Indies)

Known predominantly as a writer of quirky, offbeat fiction during the Seventies, Markham made his *Ambit* debut in 1976 with the surreal short story ‘The Interview’ (*Ambit* 66) and, following the publication of a handful of poems in *Ambit* 72, contributed five further stories and a novel extract, before establishing himself as one of *Ambit*’s principal poets of the Eighties. One of a number of *Ambit* writers to have experienced a Caribbean childhood, Markham moved to Britain in 1956 and studied Philosophy and English at the University of Wales in Lampeter, before becoming Director of the Caribbean Theatre Workshop in 1970. Encouraged by the role the Caribbean Artists’ Movement had played in promoting Caribbean writing during the Sixties, Markham joined a poetry collective called ‘The Blue Foot Travellers’ in the early Seventies and his first poetry pamphlet, *Cross-Fire*, appeared in 1972.

Characterised by its run-of-the-mill themes, a wealth of predictable metaphors, and a consistent awkwardness of phrasing, *Cross-Fire* was an unremarkable collection. *Mad and Other Poems* (1973) brought a slight improvement, evidenced by the confessionalist impulses of ‘Anonymous’ and the self-effacing wit of ‘The Early Years of a Tyrant’, which charted the speaker’s transition from lover of ‘dangerous toys’ to unassuming member of ‘the local /

³¹⁹ Bax, ‘*Ambit* in Ireland’, *ibid*: 93.

library'. Other poems like 'a play', however, were marred by the same contorted syntax and lack of metaphorical control so noticeable in *Cross-Fire*.

After *Mad and Other Poems*, Markham began writing the short stories that would represent the bulk of his *Ambit* work during the Seventies. Darker than many of his Seventies fiction pieces, and with echoes of Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Pit and the Pendulum', 'Digging' brought a switch from third-person narration as Markham stepped into the diseased mind of a man haunted by the screams of a woman called Sarah. Convinced that Sarah is imprisoned in some hidden basement, the protagonist starts digging an enormous hole in his garden in an attempt to find her, however this merely initiates a painful descent into insanity as he is joined by a number of additional diggers until

the shape, size and depth of holes was the subject of study, sabotage and finally a system of awards. Voices in the holes (always retreating as you approached them) were recorded on a machine, the efficiency and accuracy of which were argued over (It was the nearness and not the volume that mattered) and prizes were given. Soon all leisure pursuits consisted in identifying and imitating the buried voices.³²⁰

Markham's better fiction contributions are short anecdotal pieces dominated by dialogue, in which humour is generated by the bizarre situations in which his characters find themselves. On occasions, however, these situations can appear a little too contrived. In 'The Husband', for example, Markham tries to construct a political satire around a husband and wife and their dinner out, but ultimately fails as his gestures towards erotic fiction result in a distinctly limp conclusion. When the waiter comes round with the dessert menu, the wife asks her husband:

Will you eat a little Bangladesh? She urges (Geopolitics turns her on). Just a little. A little spoonful. [...] How about this funny little border thing on the Honduras/Nicaragua? A Tasmania dollop?³²¹

Despite finding a regular place for his fiction in *Ambit* and other magazines, Markham had not entirely renounced his poetic aspirations, and in 1976 a series of

³²⁰ Markham, 'Digging', *Ambit* 76, 1978: 40.

³²¹ Markham, 'The Husband', *Ambit* 73, 1978: 52.

pamphlets published under the pseudonym Paul St Vincent spawned the ventriloquist-persona 'Lambchops' that would inform his later poetry. In *Lambchops* (1976) and *Lambchops in Disguise* (1976), Markham abandoned the mannered speech and free-verse formlessness of earlier collections in favour of tighter, occasionally rhymed, poetic structures and a more relaxed voice modelled on the rhythms of everyday speech. In *Lambchops* Markham comes much closer to realising the satirical aims hinted at in *Cross-Fire* as he successfully uses the St Vincent persona in a poem like 'A Mugger's Game' to confront racial prejudice:

Black them here stop them there

before they get too cheeky
too second-generation aware

and ape us over-take us

queuing up for houses
they claim their fathers built.³²²

At the same time, the 'Lambchops' poems recount the everyday experiences of an educated black man and document his struggles with love, family and the academic life. These themes come together with genuine comic effect in 'Lambchops Wrestles With His Love-Letter', which sees its speaker hesitating over the first line of a love-letter to a girl who is 'sensible', 'safe' and 'dependable', who 'uses / cosmetics from necessity', and who also boasts 'functional / kissing' and 'good digestion'. Convinced that the love-letter '*has to correspond a little / with the person*', Lambchops then pauses to summon up this rather unflattering mental portrait of his beloved, until finally, with her image fixed in his mind, he launches into the wild hyperbole of his opening address: '*Dear, tropical-plant-of-the-High Street...*'.³²³ As the Seventies drew to a close, Markham dropped the St Vincent persona as another flurry of pamphlets and small press editions, including *Master*

³²² Paul St Vincent, 'A Mugger's Game', *Lambchops*. Leicester: Omens, 1976: 3.

³²³ St Vincent, 'Lambchops Wrestles With His Love-Letter', *ibid*: 6.

Class (1977), *Love Poems* (1978) and *Games and Penalties* (1980), triggered a return to the more personal themes of his earlier poetry.

Both Lambchops and Markham would feature heavily in *Ambit's* poetry pages during the Eighties, with Markham the love poet in the ascendant when the long poem *Life After Spéracèdes* appeared in *Ambit* 86. Easily the most ambitious and emotionally resonant of Markham's *Ambit* contributions, *Life After Spéracèdes* takes the form of a series of letters from the speaker to his distant lover, interspersed with quotations from various writers, historical figures and sports commentators. Confronted with the tensions and difficulties posed by the archetypal 'long-distance relationship', Markham's speaker is constantly forced to revisit past memories in order to bridge chronological and geographical distance and keep the relationship alive in the present.³²⁴ Recalling a pledge 'not [to] become strangers',³²⁵ the speaker begins by declaring

I am writing from a new address.
You, too, are a stranger to your apartment. So much
has changed since last year. To friends

we're apart in much the same way as before,
except that a year, coming between us,
has allowed ego to burn *grey*

self-consuming, to lie dormant
for the rest of a life-time.³²⁶

The melancholy tone is reinforced by the speaker's immediate retreat into memories of happier times in 'Cabris, our Cezanne village', when 'we were envied'. But it soon becomes apparent that the shared memories of Plato seminars, 'transliterating / *Beowulf*', and 'Cabris' are of rapidly diminishing value, and in the fourth section the speaker responds to his correspondent's reply with mingled anger and frustration:

³²⁴ Michael Thorn, 'E.A. Markham', in Thomas Riggs (ed.), *Contemporary Poets*. Detroit: Gale, 2001: 745.

³²⁵ Markham, 'Life After Spéracèdes', *Ambit* 86, 1981: 18.

³²⁶ *Ibid*: 17.

That was another life, you say, an address
better to forget: these letters are like children's
balloons running out of air. So my next note
must break a window or pull you up short,
like a terrorist in the body, with a knife.³²⁷

Trapped between the desire for a full, physical relationship and the yearning for a release from the superficial banalities of postcards and 'letters soggy with memory',³²⁸ Markham's speaker brings the poem to an ambiguous and dramatic conclusion with '(a letter not sent)', which exhorts its intended recipient not to 'read foolish letters'.³²⁹ Foreman's accompanying pencil drawing of an airmail envelope torn in half offers no additional clue as to whether the speaker has resolved to 'come home' or not. Other *Ambit* poems in a more personal mode included 'Family Matters', an elegy to Markham's mother that explored the reasons why 'The time to say Love, was missed',³³⁰ and 'Over There', which focused on the ambivalent response of second-generation West Indians to their Caribbean heritage. The themes explored in these *Ambit* poems would later shape Markham's first major collection, *Love, Politics, and Food* (1982).

In 1983, Lambchops made his first *Ambit* appearance as Markham began working on the poems that would comprise *Lambchops in Papua New Guinea* (1986)—a pamphlet informed by Markham's experiences on the Pacific island while working as a media coordinator for the Enga Provincial Government between 1983 and 1985. Although credited to Lambchops, the poems that appeared in *Ambit* 94, 'Von Hallett's Penultimate Stand', 'Sir Johnelsom Wantok Rewrites History' and 'Sir Johnelsom Wantok's Favourite Play', suggested that this persona had evolved, since *Lambchops*, into something much closer to the speaker of *Life After Spéracèdes*. In 'Von Hallett's Penultimate Stand', however, the Lambchops persona

³²⁷ Ibid: 20.

³²⁸ Ibid: 21.

³²⁹ Ibid: 24.

³³⁰ Markham, 'Family Matters', *Ambit* 91, 1982: 22.

is bypassed altogether as Markham takes on the speech of a Western filmmaker suddenly confronted by a tribal warrior party. Fearing some act of imminent violence, Von Hallett pleads:

So do not spear the cameraman who keeps
your record inside his head; do not divorce
it from the body where they can't remarry.
Your grandchildren would wish to honour
this memory without blush. I am not, you see,
here by accident: my credentials are sound.³³¹

It later becomes clear that Von Hallett is more interested in collecting dinner-party anecdotes than a documentary record of the indigenous culture, captor and captive being ironically reversed in Markham's closing lines:

Later, when I dine out on this incident
near Wabag, I will embellish your answers
with wit. I will make you bristle with English.³³²

Similar sentiments resurfaced in 'Expat. 3rd Class' (*Ambit* 100), as the VSO, 'the elite Club / of Anthropologists from Columbia', and the 'World Bank stars shooting / in to evaluate Projects / they haven't time to see' are mocked for their patronising attempts 'to help them develop'.³³³ Following the publication of *Human Rites: Selected Poems 1970-1982* (1984), Markham returned to fiction and contributed three more stories to *Ambit* in 1986 and 1989.

Perhaps more significant than any of Markham's poetic or fiction contributions of the Seventies and Eighties was the role he played in assembling the Caribbean Special (*Ambit* 91) as Assistant Editor in 1982. Dismayed by the lack of Caribbean voices in Morrison and Motion's *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*, Markham was instrumental in compiling a one-off anthology that included Linton Kwesi Johnson, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Grace Nichols, James Berry and David Nathaniel Haynes among others. Identifying the 'one token colonial—

³³¹ Markham, 'Von Hallett's Penultimate Stand', *Ambit* 94, 1983: 2.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Markham, 'Expat. 3rd Class', *Ambit* 100, 1985: 116.

from the old not the *new* commonwealth' in the Penguin anthology. Markham admonished Morrison and Motion for holding to an 'idea of variety' exemplified by

a couple of professed 'working-class' lads agonizing over the dilemma of being working-class and literate. (Working-class literate poets of our acquaintance whose preoccupations are more urgent, are clearly not British). Also not British is the West Indian poet who has been known to draw 1,500 people at a Reading. Or the one who won, in 1981, First Prize in the Poetry Society Competition. Or the third—Ah, but why go on. It would seem reasonable to ask, though, whether the roles here of who is marginal and who occupying the middle ground, have not been reversed?³³⁴

Markham's selections for *Ambit* 91 were subsequently endorsed by a number of Eighties anthologies including James Berry's *News For Babylon* (1984), Stewart Brown's *Caribbean Poetry Now* (1984), Paula Burnett's *Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse* (1986) and Fred D'Aguiar's selections for *The New British Poetry* (1988). They would also form a significant component of Markham's own anthology *Hinterland. Caribbean Poetry from the West Indies and Britain* (1989). While Markham continued to contribute to *Ambit* after 1989, his appearances became gradually less frequent as he worked on the fiction that culminated in *Ten Stories* (1994) and his first novel, *Making Time* (1999).

Although by no means always the most accomplished of *Ambit's* Eighties contributions, Markham's *Ambit* poems closely tracked his development from a mediocre pamphleteer into a poet of 'growing stature' who, Michael Thorn claimed in 2001, 'can write with equal brilliance in several different guises and registers'.³³⁵ Markham's poems and stories were also the first *Ambit* contributions to give expression to the experiences of West Indians struggling to come to terms with the harsh social and economic realities of Eighties Britain. This, allied to his work as a vigorous supporter of *Ambit's* younger Caribbean poets, is sufficient to justify Markham's place as one of the magazine's key contributors of the Eighties.

³³⁴ Markham, 'In From The Margin', *Ambit* 91, 1982: 67.

³³⁵ Thorn, 'E.A. Markham', in Thomas Riggs (ed.), *Contemporary Poets*: 746.

The Poetry of Fleur Adcock

(Born: 10 February 1934, Papukura, New Zealand)

Adcock's *Ambit* debut came in 1971 with three sombre poems, 'A Late Summer', 'Castaways' and 'Carnivores' (*Ambit* 46), reflecting upon the inexplicable violence of the First World War and the Vietnam War. By 1971 Adcock had already published her first collection of poems, *The Eye of the Hurricane* (1964), and further collections, *Tigers* (1967) and *High Tide in the Garden* (1971), since moving from New Zealand to London in the mid Sixties to escape the trauma of two failed marriages and the claustrophobic atmosphere of Wellington's literary community. In 1973, Adcock made her second significant appearance in *Ambit*, contributing 'The Cave Revisited' and a brief reflection upon the key themes and motivations of her poetry to *Ambit* 54. An issue that brought a number of new poets to *Ambit's* pages alongside established members of the Group like MacBeth, Brownjohn and Porter, the Poetry Special provided readers with the perfect introduction to Adcock's work as she described a 'personal territory' encompassing:

close relationships, particularly family ones, with children or, extending back, with parents, ancestors, origins; place in the narrow sense of home, house, garden, one's own bit of earth, but also in all the broader senses; and imaginative territory: memories, fantasies, words, poems and books, paintings and images, religious and political ideas.³³⁶

Ambit 54 would also mark the point in Adcock's career at which she began to develop the distinctive voice that would shape her work of the Eighties and after. Thus Adcock gradually moved away from the metrical rhymes and classical forms that marked poems like 'Remarks On Sernyl' and 'Note On Propertius 1.5' from *The Eye of the Hurricane* and *Tigers*, to adopt the prosy forms and colloquial phrasing found in 'Grandma' and 'Saturday' from *High Tide in the Garden*.

³³⁶ Adcock, 'Poets doing their thing', *Ambit* 54, 1973: 19.

The romantic impulse, so strong in Adcock's early verse, is clearly present in 'Fairy-Tale'. Appearing in *Ambit 75* before being collected in *The Inner Harbour* (1979), 'Fairy-Tale' is a straightforward love poem cast in a series of unrhymed, unmetred lines and language that is at once conversational and exotic. The abrupt opening sees the conversational tone in the ascendant:

This is a story. Dear Clive
(a name unmet among my acquaintance)
you landed on my island: Mauritius
I'll call it—it was not unlike.
The Governor came to meet your plane.
I stood on the grass by the summerhouse.
It was dark, I think.³³⁷

The speaker's insistence on the fictional nature of her text demonstrates a formal self-consciousness rarely made so explicit in Adcock's work prior to *The Inner Harbour*, and this fiction-making process is further highlighted by the speaker's asides, which signal to the reader that this island 'not unlike' Mauritius is, therefore, not Mauritius; that 'Clive' is an unlikely name for a fairytale prince; and that the imagination is only too willing to furnish the night-time setting that the memory struggles to recall. The rest of the poem is dominated by a succession of vibrant, colourful images of the speaker and her prince at one with the marvels of nature:

And next morning
we walked in the ripples of the sea
watching the green and purple creatures
flashing in and out of the waves
about our ankles.³³⁸

Although Clive remains silent throughout, Adcock refusing to describe him, the expectation is that he is every bit the handsome prince of fairytale, his presence otherwise hopelessly out of place among the 'seabirds', 'air-fishes' and 'sea-parrots' Adcock's speaker delights in. But

Even they were less of a marvel,
pretty things, than that you'd returned

³³⁷ Adcock, 'Fairy-Tale', *Ambit 75*, 1978: 15.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

after a year and such distraction
to walk with me on the plashy sand.³³⁹

Another *Ambit* piece inspired by the painful memories revived by an emotional return to New Zealand in 1975, 'Accidental' epitomised the dry, laconic humour that permeated *The Inner Harbour*. Describing an inauspicious start to an 'accidental' marriage, the poem takes the reader straight into the honeymoon bedchamber:

We awakened facing each other
across the white counterpane.
I prefer to be alone in the mornings.
The waiter offered us
melon, papaya, orange juice or fresh raspberries.
We did not discuss it.³⁴⁰

While the lush backdrop to 'Fairy-Tale' serves to unite the loving couple, mirroring their happiness, the waiter's breakfast menu has the opposite effect, his range of exotic fruits presenting an additional problem for the uncertain newly-weds. As the couple consider their reply, the speaker reflects gloomily upon 'All those years of looking but not touching' before lamenting:

And now this accident,
this blind unstoppable robot-walk
into a conspiracy of our bodies.
Had we ruined the whole thing?

Moving 'an inch or two closer together', the couple put on an unconvincing show of unity for the waiter and ultimately come to a silent agreement expressed in the most matter-of-fact terms. Their agreement is, however, somewhat undermined by their final attempt at resolution in the last two lines:

Our toes touched. We looked. We had decided.
Papaya then; and coffee and rolls. Of course.

Adcock's *Ambit* poems of the Eighties continued to explore personal and domestic relationships while demonstrating Adcock's ability to exploit the rhythms

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Adcock, 'Accidental', *Ambit* 65, 1976: 2.

of everyday speech, both for the convincing presentation of domestic scenes, and for more comic effect. These abilities are particularly evident in her translations from the *Carmina Burana* manuscript and the love poetry of Peter of Blois from the twelfth-century Latin (*Ambit* 85), which reaffirmed her ‘respect for what is classical and based on traditions’, and ‘structure’.³⁴¹ In ‘Farewell to the Threshing Floor’, Adcock is able to preserve the strong rhyme scheme and metrical pattern of the Goliards’ original, while infusing it with a contemporary spirit that sits comfortably with its timeless theme of nostalgia for lost youth. Thus

Cum Fortuna voluit	me vivere beatum,
forma, bonis moribus	fecit bene gratum
et in altis sedibus	sedere laureatum.

becomes

Fortune used to smile on me:	
	I didn’t have to try
good looks and charming manners	
	were mine in full supply;
she crowned my head with laurels,	
	and set me up on high. ³⁴²

Frustrated by the relative lack of tri-syllabic rhymes in modern English, her rendering of ‘The Conquest of Coronis’ is less accomplished, as the complex rhyme scheme of Peter of Blois’s original forces some awkward enjambment.

Presented with the more straightforward form of ‘His Not Impossible She’, however, Adcock is on safer ground as her male speaker lists the qualities of his ideal woman, ultimately settling for someone neither too coy, ‘overfree’, young, or old. Again Adcock scrupulously observes the rhyme and the metrics of the original, the tone of her second stanza shifting rapidly from the motifs of conventional love poetry to the slangy abruptness of contemporary parlance:

A tender little bud	with petals tightly shut
won’t do: it isn’t wise	to plough in such a rut.

³⁴¹ Adcock, ‘About the poets’, in Barbara Bleiman (ed.), *Five Modern Poets*. London: Longman, 1993: vii.

³⁴² Adcock, ‘Farewell to the Threshing-Floor’, *Ambit* 85, 1980: 89.

Better if she's attained her teens or even more:
an equal match in bed, a girl who knows the score.³⁴³

The poems that appeared in *Ambit* 85 would be included in *The Virgin and the Nightingale* (1983) alongside additional translations from the Songs of Peter of Blois and some anonymous love lyrics. Adcock's poetic contributions to *Ambit* 89, by contrast, were more immediately autobiographical in subject matter, rooted in memories of the poet's schooldays as a boarder in the English countryside while her father braved the Blitz as a student in London.³⁴⁴ Warmly attesting to Adcock's early fascination with 'English trees and flowers', each of these relaxed, prosy pieces recalls the exploits of a contented schoolgirl, tempered with enough self-deprecating humour to banish sentimentality. In 'St Gertrude's, Sidcup', Adcock looks back to her Convent school days. Bizarrely, having entirely forgotten the nuns, 'The only nuns who ever taught me', she fondly recalls

cutting out

zigzag trees in green paper
to stick on folded cards, for my first

Christmas that was not in summer:
the first Christmas of the war.³⁴⁵

The poignancy generated by this layering of personal and national histories, of childish innocence and the spectre of war, is soon undercut, however, by the gentle humour of the closing lines:

That, and running to catch a bus
In the snow, and my knickers falling down.³⁴⁶

'Chippenham' ends in similarly upbeat mood as the speaker, suffering from impetigo, gets on to a full school bus to hear 'an elegant male prefect' say "Let

³⁴³ Adcock, 'His Not Impossible She', *ibid*: 93.

³⁴⁴ Judith Meredith, 'Fleur Adcock', in Sherry (ed.), *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 40: Poets of Great Britain and Ireland since 1960*: 4.

³⁴⁵ Adcock, 'St Gertrude's, Sidcup', *Ambit* 89, 1982: 2.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

Fleur sit down she's got bad feet'''.³⁴⁷ The other poems offered an equally cheerful worldview: recalling the style of 'Fairy-Tale', Adcock's speaker in 'Outwood' observes the older Doris lying in the grass with a soldier, their mutual affection pleasingly captured in the gentle suggestiveness of the concluding simile:

he leaned over her pink blouse
and their voices went soft and round, like petals.³⁴⁸

Later *Ambit* poems alternated between the sombre and the uplifting, although the earlier preoccupations with personal relationships and family were still evident in poems like 'Witnesses' (*Ambit* 100), where a husband and wife play out a child custody battle in the courts; and 'Post Office' (*Ambit* 107), where an elderly couple queuing for their pension money remember their courtship days. A slightly cynical note had also crept into 'A Funeral' where, reflecting upon the sight of a horse-drawn hearse, the speaker concludes:

So that was it: we've enjoyed our drama.
Let's cherish it while it's still unique:
the Co-op's cashing in on nostalgia;
we'll see it all again next week.³⁴⁹

Despite these occasional moments of cynicism, however, Adcock rarely took on death, illness, and disappointed love with the same sardonic bitterness as MacBeth or Ewart, and she remains one of *Ambit's* most able exponents of the formally restrained, but emotionally resonant, modern lyric.

Alongside her poetry, Adcock became an increasingly important reviewer and contributed numerous reviews to *Ambit* during this period, passing a characteristically benevolent eye over the work of poets as diverse as Michael Longley, Paul Blackburn, Marilyn Hacker and Libby Houston. Indeed, such was Adcock's sympathy with Freda Downie's *Plainsong* (1981) that she came

³⁴⁷ Adcock, 'Chippenham', *ibid*: 3.

³⁴⁸ Adcock, 'Outwood', *ibid*: 4.

³⁴⁹ Adcock, 'A Funeral', *Ambit* 107, 1987: 95.

uncannily close to anticipating later critical appraisals of her own *Selected Poems* (1983) in saluting

Ms Downie's unobtrusive but meticulously tactful style; the language is plain (hence perhaps her book's title?) and she uses no fancy verseforms; but there are enough touches of brilliant and unexpected observation to make the poems stick in the mind.³⁵⁰

Adcock's reviews often demonstrated a greater engagement with the formal merits of the text than the largely polemical or impressionistic assessments of Burns and Cole, and Adcock steadily took on the bulk of *Ambit's* reviewing work. This role would also prove conducive to an editorial career that had begun with the *Oxford Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry* (1981) and the significant and timely *Faber Book of Twentieth Century Women's Poetry* (1987), designed to show 'how many good and interesting women poets have been writing in English during the course of this century.'³⁵¹ *Ambit* poets to appear in the latter volume included Stevie Smith, Denise Levertov, Carol Rumens and Selima Hill. Adcock then turned to translating the Polish poets Grete Tartler and Danieal Crăsnaru into English, publishing four further collections of her own poetry before the appearance of *Adcock's Poems 1960-2000* (2000).

As the first major female poet to appear in *Ambit*, Adcock played a significant role in making the magazine more acceptable to a new generation of women writers and readers. By combining a straightforward, accessible tone with a significant degree of metrical and formal control, Adcock's poetry brought new credibility to her favoured themes of love, family and personal history. This sympathy with the domestic and the personal extended to Adcock's work as a reviewer and translator, where she took particular care to highlight the formal and

³⁵⁰ Adcock, 'Review: *Plainsong*, by Freda Downie', *Ambit* 88: 1982: 81.

³⁵¹ Adcock (ed.), 'Introduction', *The Faber Book of Twentieth Century Women's Poetry*. London: Faber, 1987: 1.

thematic accomplishments of a range of female poets from Britain and elsewhere.

Adcock remains, therefore, one of *Ambit's* most important contributors.

The Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy

(Born: 23 December 1955, Glasgow)

Ambit initially discovered Carol Ann Duffy in the Seventies, some years before her 'Whoever She Was' took first prize in the National Poetry Competition of 1983, and her first collection *Standing Female Nude* (1985) appeared to widespread critical acclaim. Now commonly read as a feminist poet, many of her earlier poems were influenced by the working-class values, regional focus and live performances favoured by the Pop poets associated with Lucie-Smith's anthology *The Liverpool Scene* (1967).³⁵² During her years at Stafford Girls' High School and the University of Liverpool, Duffy became a passionate follower of the contemporary *poetry* *reading* circuit, attending readings by Norman MacCaig, Peter Porter and Adrian Mitchell, and it was at one of these readings that Duffy met Adrian Henri, with whom she would enjoy a brief relationship. Inspired by the popular forms and political themes of the Liverpool poets, Duffy began writing the poetry that appeared in the pamphlet *Fleshweathercock, and Other Poems* (1973). Characterised by a fondness for internal rhyme, surrealistic imagery and everyday speech, *Fleshweathercock* owed much to the work of Henri and McGough, as evidenced by the mock-cheery opening of the pro-CND poem 'Army':

Hello mother!
It's your eldest son back from the nuclear war,
well, half of me anyway.³⁵³

Suggesting little of the satirical, and occasionally acerbic, feminist poetry that was to follow, Duffy's initial *Ambit* poems were firmly rooted in the 'Pop'

³⁵² 'Carol Ann Duffy', *Literature Online Database*. Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 2003. Last accessed: British Library, 4 February 2005.

³⁵³ Duffy, 'Army', *Fleshweathercock, and Other Poems*. Walton-on-Thames: Outposts, 1973: 15.

mode. ‘Doll’ (*Ambit* 80), Duffy’s first poetic contribution, demonstrated the same preference for simple diction, emotional themes and strong closing images that typify poetry written for performance. In a review of *Fifth Last Song* (1982) for the Liverpool Special (*Ambit* 92), Jim Burns described ‘Doll’ as ‘Simple, even lyrical, but slightly ominous’ as an examination of the ease with which love can descend into dependency.³⁵⁴ *Fifth Last Song* was Duffy’s second pamphlet, and comprised twenty-one love poems illustrated by fellow *Ambit* contributors Maurice Cockrill, Henry Graham, Adrian Henri, Don McKinlay and Jeff Nuttall. Reflecting upon the pamphlet as a whole, Burns declared that ‘Carol Ann Duffy’s book [...] is well worth reading for the way in which it deals with some aspects of love.’³⁵⁵

Presented as a ‘Pool Poet’ alongside Henri, McGough and Patten, Duffy contributed five previously unpublished poems to *Ambit* 92 that further probed into the complexities of love and relationships. These ranged from the eroticism of ‘Till Our Face’, where the speaker is tenderly brought to climax by a lover whose gender remains a mystery throughout

Your mouth laps petals till our face
is a flower soaked in its own scent.
The plants abandon us³⁵⁶

to the *faux-naïve*, near-nonsense of ‘Missile’, in which a child-like speaker describes a simple world that gets progressively more complicated as death, or ‘bang’, destroys flowers, birds and everything else:

My true love. Bang. Two turtle doves.
Bang. Will ye no come back again?
The cat is spider is grass
is roses is bird fish bang.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Burns, ‘*Fifth Last Song*, by Carol Ann Duffy’, *Ambit* 92, 1983: 71.

³⁵⁵ Burns, *ibid.*

³⁵⁶ Duffy, ‘Till Our Face’, *ibid.*: 67.

³⁵⁷ Duffy, ‘Missile’, *ibid.*: 69.

More successful were the poems that appeared in *Ambit* 95, with 'Poker in the Falklands with Henry & Jim' exploiting the speaker's card-game as a metaphor for the Falklands conflict and the sinking of the *Belgrano*:

Opposite me

the bearded poet raises on two jacks. *In my country we do this*. But my country sends giant underwater tanks to massacre and I have another queen.³⁵⁸

In 'Before you jump (for Mister Berryman)', Duffy affectionately mimicked the free-associative style and enigmatic imagery found in *The Dream Songs*, her speaker desperately trying to persuade the great American Confessional, on the brink of suicide, to '*Climb down from there and come into the warm*'.³⁵⁹ Here Duffy exchanges the simple rhymes and the short lines of 'Doll' for a narrative style of prosy formlessness punctuated by moments of existential crisis:

My guardian angel has abandoned me but soon
we'll fly upon the curve of earth.
A miracle is all I ask. Not much.
The red wet mouth cries out that jealousy
was ruin of them all. Save me.³⁶⁰

'Before you jump' particularly stands out among Duffy's early *Ambit* contributions, as it signals the point at which Duffy began to move away from the witty, self-effacing style associated with the 'Pop' poets and towards a more personalised poetic voice that represented the perfect vehicle for her exploration of domestic, everyday themes from a female perspective. The Confessional mode embodied by Berryman can be seen at work in 'Where we came in', as Duffy's speaker describes an awkward meeting with a former lover and their new partner. Bizarrely, this encounter has been arranged, or at least agreed to, by the speaker and takes place over a meal in a restaurant. Although the respective 'new loves sit

³⁵⁸ Duffy, 'Poker in the Falklands with Henry & Jim', *Ambit* 95, 1983: 11.

³⁵⁹ Duffy, 'Before you jump (for Mister Berryman)', *ibid*: 13.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid*: 12.

beside us guardedly' throughout, they are soon swept into the background by Duffy's opening lines:

old lovers die hard, as in the restaurant
we pass the bread between us like a symbol
of betrayal. One of you tonight.³⁶¹

The 'new loves' (consistently mentioned only as 'they') are further excluded by the 'habits', 'small intimacies' and 'private jokes' that pass back and forth between speaker and ex-lover. As 'history' dominates the speaker's account of the dinner, her assertion 'I'm happy now. Yes. Happy. Now.' is finally undercut by the emotionless displays of affection that conclude the meal:

I see our gestures endlessly repeated as
you turn to yours the way you used
to turn to me. I turn to mine. And³⁶²

Ending in mid-sentence, these lines enact the endlessness they describe and anticipate a further series of romantic failures.

After 'Where we came in', Duffy made her first appearance as an *Ambit* reviewer, praising Grace Nichols's *i is a long memoried woman* (1983) as a collection of

tough, female poems which use their imagery with control. [...] In the poem 'Sugar Cane', Nichols simply but powerfully invests sugar cane with the evils and history of enslavement. Elsewhere in this book, men *grip the throat of cane*. There is much anger in her work, but no ranting.³⁶³

Duffy had previously contributed an essay on Henry Graham to the 'Poet on Poet' series (*Ambit* 88), but the poetry of Nichols—with its emphasis upon ordinary women, domestic settings, and confronting sexual inequality—would share many of the essential features of Duffy's later *Ambit* poems. In 1984, 'Ash Wednesday', 'Me Bryan' and 'Standing Female Nude' (*Ambit* 98) indicated the new feminist direction Duffy's poetry was beginning to take and anticipated the key themes of

³⁶¹ Duffy, 'Where we came in', *ibid*: 11.

³⁶² *Ibid*: 12.

³⁶³ Duffy, '*i is a long memoried woman*, by Grace Nichols', *Ambit* 96, 1984: 75.

her debut collection, *Standing Female Nude* (1985). 'Me Bryan' and 'Standing Female Nude' in particular also witnessed the emergence of Duffy's new ventriloquist-persona, employed for satirical or documentary effect throughout *Standing Female Nude* as a device for interrogating the innermost thoughts of a cast of marginalised women and violent, chauvinistic or unthinking men. When this ventriloquist-persona is put to work in 'Me Bryan', it is used to expose the chauvinistic disregard of the working-class male speaker for his wife, resulting in a satirically motivated piece that veers perilously close to caricature (see pages 145-146 above). The effect is more successful, however, when Duffy challenges male complacency from the perspective of her marginalised women.

In 'Standing Female Nude', Duffy's French prostitute delivers an interior monologue in which she reflects upon a male artist's attempt to paint her. The poem exposes the disjunction between male and female visions of the feminine, and the degree to which femininity has been defined by the male gaze in the Western tradition of nude painting. While the model's needs are grounded in the physical—the problems of obtaining 'the next meal', the coldness of the studio, and the 'twelve francs' in payment—the artist is concerned only 'with volume and space', determined that his muse be

represented analytically and hung
in great museums. The bourgeoisie will coo
at such an image of a river-whore. They call it Art.³⁶⁴

Upon seeing the painting, the model finally declares: 'It does not look like me', an ironic conclusion that Danette DiMarco has described as:

especially instructive. On the one hand, her response suggests that she is naïve and does not understand the nature of Cubist art. On the other hand, however, the comment suggests her own variableness, and challenges traditionalist notions that the naked model can, indeed, be

³⁶⁴ Duffy, 'Standing Female Nude', *Ambit* 98, 1984: 21.

transmogrified into the male artist's representation of her in nude form. To the model, the painting does not represent either what she understands herself to be or her lifestyle.³⁶⁵

Duffy joined the *Ambit* editorial team in 1984 as poetry editor, working with Edwin Brock and Henry Graham until Brock's death in 1997. Channelling her energies into sifting through the growing number of manuscripts arriving daily at the *Ambit* offices, Duffy featured less often as a contributor upon taking up her new editorial position. During Duffy's editorship, however, women became a stronger presence in Bax's magazine, and Judith Kazantzis, Julia Casterton, Carol Rumens, Nicki Jackowska and Penelope Shuttle particularly benefited from *Ambit's* renewed interest in women's writing. Anticipating the contents of *Standing Female Nude*, three further Duffy poems were printed in *Ambit* 100. 'Translation' and 'Alf Roberts' Daughter' then followed in *Ambit* 102. While 'Alf Roberts' Daughter' is little more than a comic caricature of a woman with a 'smile like diamond-scratch on double glazing, / heart like over-done quiche',³⁶⁶ 'Translation' brought a return to the surreal eroticism of earlier work as the poem presents a series of images detailing a sexual liaison between a woman in gloves, 'red to the elbow', and her male lover. Narrated predominantly in the third person, the poem exploits the concept of the translated text to generate some striking and suggestive similes:

Later, she held a dun root
on a scarlet palm, real satin, her lover's eyes
dark as a bell-tower, mouth bruising *O O* on the night³⁶⁷

Prefaced by a quote from Antonin Artaud declaring that 'All writing is garbage', 'Translation' appeared more in keeping with the witty bawdiness of Ewart than the meticulous explorations of female experience detailed in *Standing Female Nude*. 'Translation' did, however, appear in Duffy's second collection, *Selling Manhattan*

³⁶⁵ Danette DiMarco, 'Exposing nude art: Carol Ann Duffy's Response to Robert Browning', *Mosaic. A journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba. Vol. 31, No. 3, September 1998: 37.

³⁶⁶ Duffy, 'Alf Roberts' Daughter', *Ambit* 102, 1985: 88.

³⁶⁷ Duffy, 'Translation', *ibid*: 88.

(1987), which developed the interior monologue technique utilised so successfully in *Standing Female Nude* to present a damning critique of Thatcher's Britain.

Although the polemical tone of *Selling Manhattan* was also a major feature of *Another Country* (1990), Duffy's *Ambit* poems continued to focus on more intimate themes, and 'Words, Wide Night' (*Ambit* 110), with its echoes of Pablo Neruda's 'Tonight I Can Write', demonstrated the emergence of a more lyrical voice. Entirely at ease with the powerful emotions it expresses, the 'I' of 'Words, Wide Night' is no longer the ventriloquist-persona of *Standing Female Nude*, but an infinitely more personal speaker whose protestations of love are at their strongest in the vulnerable honesty of the closing lines:

I close my eyes and imagine
the dark hills I would have to cross
to reach you. For I am in love with you and this
is what it is like or what it is like in words.³⁶⁸

Perhaps the strongest of all Duffy's *Ambit* contributions, 'Words, Wide Night' certainly justified Linda Kinnahan's view that 'the "like" is where we operate as humans in language. It is a place not of nihilism but of exploration into the structures of the self, the grammar of the world.'³⁶⁹ After *Ambit* 110, Duffy would largely prove a subject for *Ambit's* review team, and the Nineties brought two more collections, *Mean Time* (1993) and *The World's Wife* (1999), in which homosexuality, never more than implied in the earlier love poems, comes to the fore; Duffy's *Selected Poems* appeared in 1994.

Both as a poet and as a poetry editor, Duffy's involvement with *Ambit* was to leave a lasting impression upon the magazine. Promoted vigorously as a Liverpool poet, a feminist poet and a socialist poet, Duffy was a central figure in the

³⁶⁸ Duffy, 'Words, Wide Night', *Ambit* 110, 1987: 52.

³⁶⁹ Linda Kinnahan, "Looking for the Doing Words": Carol Ann Duffy and Questions of Convention', in James Acheson and Romana Huk (eds), *Contemporary British Poetry. Essays in Theory and Criticism*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1996: 266.

Liverpool Special and in the *Ambit* 'Women's Poetry' readings of 1983. As an editor, she played a significant role in introducing a number of female contributors to *Ambit* at a time when the magazine was struggling to broaden its readership in an attempt to limit the impact of drastic funding cuts. Without Duffy's input during the Eighties, *Ambit* might have persevered with the combination of science fiction, pornographic writing and apocalyptic post-modernism that had defined it for much of the Seventies. In his valedictory editorial for *Poetry Review*, Peter Forbes described the Eighties as the first decade in which 'a female poet was the representative poet of the age: Carol Ann Duffy'.³⁷⁰ By turns lyrical, satirical, surreal and witty, Duffy's work was also broadly representative of *Ambit's* poetic preferences during the Eighties.

The Art of Ralph Steadman

(Born: 15 May 1936, Wallasey, nr. Liverpool)

Ralph Steadman's association with *Ambit* began in the early Seventies at a period when the magazine was beginning to assume a satirical tone discernible in the fiction of Ballard, the poetry of Ewart and MacBeth, and the visuals of Paolozzi. As *Ambit* gradually moved away from the Pop Art collages of the late Sixties, Steadman was to prove instrumental in establishing the new visual style of the Eighties by placing a new emphasis upon line drawing, caricature and the grotesque. Between 1961 and 1965 Steadman had studied at the London College of Printing under the tutelage of the joke cartoonist and illustrator, Percy Bradshaw. A keen admirer of the simplified line drawings favoured by the nineteenth-century cartoonist Phil May, Bradshaw was also particularly adept at finding work for his students among the London presses and Mark Bryant has since suggested that 'by

³⁷⁰ Peter Forbes, 'Full Circle', *Poetry Review*. London: The Poetry Society. Vol. 92, No. 1, Spring 2002: 3.

1943 more than 4000 drawings by [Bradshaw's] pupils had appeared in *Punch* alone'.³⁷¹ Following Bradshaw's death in 1965, Steadman started making the regular contributions to the satirical fortnightlies *Private Eye* and *Punch*, and the national dailies *The Times* and *The Telegraph* that soon marked him out as one of Britain's most promising young cartoonists. Much like his contemporary Gerald Scarfe, Steadman looked to the German cartoonist George Grosz for the grotesque forms and violent themes that have now become key features of Steadman's distinctive style.

In addition to his work as a press cartoonist, Steadman was employed on a number of book-illustration projects throughout the Sixties and Seventies, producing designs for Richard Ingrams's *The Tale of Driver Grope* (1969), Ted Hughes's *In the Little Girl's Angel Gazem* (1972) and Edward Lucie-Smith's *Two Poems of Night* (1972) during this period. Critical acclaim was not slow in coming, and Steadman was awarded the Frances Williams Book Illustration Award in 1973 for his work on Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1967). While Steadman's grotesque depictions of a mischievous Alice and an implausibly bosomed Duchess perfectly mirrored the temporal and spatial contortions of Carroll's original tale, they were also made to serve a more satirical purpose. Commenting in his introduction upon the all-encompassing mass of power and authority symbolised by his drawing of the Queen, Steadman declared:

THE MONARCH [has] evolved or developed into a shapeless mass of hangers-on, the State, H.M. Forces, the Church, the establishment walking on one pair of very-worn legs. The King and Queen [are] born into it and enveloped by it and lost in it, obliged to go through the motions automatically but [surprise] even themselves by their own outbursts.³⁷²

³⁷¹ Mark Bryant, 'Percy Venner Bradshaw', *Dictionary of Twentieth-Century British Cartoonists and Caricaturists*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2000: 34.

³⁷² Ralph Steadman, 'Introduction', Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*. London: Dennis Dobson, 1967: 7.

Steadman's satirical eye was further sharpened by his collaborations with fellow *Rolling Stone* contributor Hunter S. Thompson on illustrations for *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1972) and *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail* (1974). While Steadman's bestial caricatures brilliantly captured the hallucinatory exuberance of Thompson's first-person perspective on the dope-filled Sixties and the protest politics of the early Seventies, they also anticipated the contents of his own savage critiques of U.S. culture, *America* (1974) and *Scar Strangled Banner* (1987). In 1979 an irreverent biography of *Sigmund Freud* not only demonstrated Steadman's talents as a comic prose-writer, but further showcased the flamboyant, violent style that was to epitomise his *Ambit* contributions of the Eighties.

Steadman's skills as a caricaturist were highlighted most powerfully in the Poetry Special (*Ambit* 54), where Steadman appeared as the issue's sole illustrator with a series of pen portraits of the featured poets. The ink drawing of MacBeth that fronted the cover was a perfect visual representation of the poetic persona responsible for the anarchic experimentalism of *The Doomsday Book* (1965) and the editorial personality behind *The Penguin Book of Sick Verse* (1963): thus two mad, almost hypnotic, eyes stare out through the circular lenses of a pair of minimalist spectacles and a chaotic bush of hair. Similarly the rabbit-like mouth and nose suggest at once the amiable and animalistic impulses of its subject's verse. As an ensemble, Steadman's caricature embodies the combination of chaos and control, menace and mirth associated with the archetypal MacBeth collection. In the same issue, Steadman presented Bax as an impossibly slender vampire-like figure; Nuttall as a rotund drinker; and Cutler as a form of human scarecrow, his straw-like hair poking out from beneath a tweedy hat to equally comic effect.³⁷³ By *Ambit* 84,

³⁷³ Steadman, drawings, *Ambit* 54, 1973: 1, 2, 8 and cover.

Steadman was turning these abilities towards illustration, as he provided the sinister pen and ink drawing that accompanied Bax's *British Medical Journal* article on 'Sleep disturbance in the young child'. In a style reminiscent of Steadman's drawing of MacBeth, a small boy is wrapped up in bed, his grotesque mouth fixed in a grimace of fear as three demons with wings and fangs wait to descend upon him.³⁷⁴

In *Ambit* 103, Steadman initiated a brief series of visual-textual freak-shows entitled 'Extraordinary People', which combined a tale in the manner of *Believe It or Not* with a graphic illustration of its typically deformed subject. Thus 'The Enormous Baby' concerned the case of Thomas who, 'though not remarkably large when born, [...] began, when six weeks old, to grow apace, and attained a most extraordinary size'.³⁷⁵ Deviating from his source text, which describes a 'comely' child with 'very fine hair, [and] pure skin, free from any blemish', Steadman's illustration depicts a thin, plain-looking mother kneeling before the blubbery 'nine stone' infant giant. Recalling the techniques employed in *Alice in Wonderland*, Steadman's monstrosities are generated by a conscious rejection of conventional bodily proportions, as the mother's spindly arms and broad shoulders belie the smallness of her head, while the sheer bulk of the baby's torso in comparison with the length of its arms and legs achieves a similar effect. The same technique is employed in Steadman's illustration of 'The Astonishing Pedestrian' as the man who, in 1773, 'walked from London to York and back again, a distance of 400 miles, in five days and eighteen hours' is drawn with legs two times the length of his torso.³⁷⁶ Other freakish individuals to receive the Steadman treatment included

'Claude Ambroise Seurat: The Living Skeleton' (*Ambit* 104); 'The Wonderful Two-

³⁷⁴ Bax and Steadman, 'Sleep disturbance in the young child', *Ambit* 84, 1980: 68-69 and cover.

³⁷⁵ Steadman, 'Extraordinary People', *Ambit* 103, 1986: 72.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid*: 72, 76-77.

Headed Girl' (*Ambit* 106); 'Charles Domery: The Remarkable Glutton' (*Ambit* 110); and 'Mr Mathew Buchinger: The Little Man of Nuremberg' (*Ambit* 113). By far the most gruesome images, however, were reserved for Steadman's account of 'Miss Atkinson: The Wonderful Pig Woman' (*Ambit* 106) and 'Mathew Lovat: Who Crucified Himself' (*Ambit* 108): the former presented a line drawing of a figure in nineteenth-century dress with the arms and bodily proportions of a young woman and the head of a pig; and the latter carried a drawing of its emaciated subject nailing himself to a cross in some bizarre act of blasphemous suicide. Undoubtedly the centrepiece of Steadman's *Ambit* contributions, the 'Extraordinary People' series—with its graphic representations of physical abnormality and its nineteenth-century found texts—offered a gruesome counterbalance to the exotic landscapes and fairytale themes of Foreman's watercolours.

Unlike Foreman, Steadman appeared comparatively rarely as an illustrator to *Ambit's* prose contributors, despite the fact that the violent themes and explicit anatomical descriptions found in much of the *Ambit* fiction of the Seventies and Eighties might seem tailor-made for Steadman's unforgiving eye. The first of two exceptions to this were Steadman's drawings for the homoerotic violence of Coleman Dowell's 'The Drought Ends' (*Ambit* 65). Focusing on the bed in which the main action takes place, Steadman presents some explicit images of homosexual intercourse, culminating in a final messy image of the bed stained with fluids from the battered body of Jabez that lies sprawled across the duvet.³⁷⁷ The second exception was the Steadman illustration that accompanied Jane Deverson's poem 'The Gathering' (*Ambit* 87). While Deverson's poem outlines the anxieties of a nervous party-goer who opens with the declaration 'My place is here by an open

³⁷⁷ Steadman, drawing, *Ambit* 65, 1976: 39.

door / with easy access to the imaginary moorland',³⁷⁸ Steadman's drawing evokes a sense of claustrophobic darkness that emanates from a crowd of faceless individuals engaged in wild dancing or lurking in the shadows deep in conversation, the occasional curve of a smile emerging through the mass of bodies.

Steadman contributed less frequently to *Ambit* during the Nineties, when he began working as a librettist, stage designer and advertising artist. He had also started to experiment with sculpture, some of these works appearing in *Ambit* 123. Although clearly indebted to the assemblage of Paolozzi, Steadman's darkly comic 'Sculptures' also serve as three-dimensional cartoons: consequently a sparse collection of metal objects and mechanical components on an oil-speckled plinth becomes *Dying Black Swan*; a statue's disembodied left foot, a wicker chair and an artificial flower arrangement become *Seated Nude with Grecian Urn*; and a further collection of scrap metal, splattered with paint, becomes the wonderfully absurd *Lovesick Ski Instructor*.³⁷⁹ This interest in sculpture and machinery later informed his distinctly Pop-styled *Vital Reading of the 20th Century* (*Ambit* 154) which, again reminiscent of Paolozzi's earlier collages, appeared as a guide to healthy living illustrated by cut-outs from anatomical diagrams, technical drawings and astronomical charts. Unlike Paolozzi's earlier work, Steadman's piece lacks the sharp satirical motivation of *Why We Are In Vietnam*. With its focus on the human body, factory-based machinery and the dated, almost nineteenth-century, diction of the accompanying text, however, *Vital Reading of the 20th Century* gently mocks the technological obsessions of contemporary society while casting a wry glance towards the cultural progress symbolised by the coming millennium.

³⁷⁸ Jane Deverson, 'The Gathering', *Ambit* 87, 1981: 58.

³⁷⁹ Steadman, 'Sculptures', *Ambit* 123, 1991: 84-86.

Steadman's contributions to *Ambit* were to play a critical role in shaping the magazine's visual style during the Eighties. Although Steadman made few appearances as an illustrator, his high-impact style generated some memorable *Ambit* cover designs including 'George MacBeth' (*Ambit* 54), 'Pig Woman' (*Ambit* 106) and 'Atomic Head' (*Ambit* 123). Working consistently in pen and ink, his 'Extraordinary People' offered a pleasing alternative to the realistic portraiture of Ron Sandford, mirroring some of the more grotesque themes of *Ambit's* fiction contributors. At the same time, his work as a political cartoonist was wholly consistent with *Ambit's* satirical tendencies from the late Seventies onwards. Steadman's wider influence is discernible in *Ambit's* shift from collage, painting and photography during the Eighties, towards the line drawings of artists as varied as Rod Judkins, Elizabeth Pyle, Charles Shearer and Chris Orr. | and extends

THE EIGHTIES: NEW DIRECTIONS

After the provocative experiments of the Seventies, the Eighties saw *Ambit* beginning to establish itself as a home for high-profile members of a growing literary-artistic awkward squad, the achievements of which critics at the *Times Literary Supplement*, the ACGB and the major publishing houses were increasingly to acknowledge, if not approve. Regular appearances by figures like Henri, Adcock, Duffy and Lomas had begun to lend genuine credibility to the magazine, while the design acumen of Birdsall and the colourful contributions of Foreman and Steadman proved instrumental in transforming *Ambit* into 'a highly viable "object" for the marketplace',³⁸⁰ with rare back issues retailing for £15 (seven and a half times the price of a current number) by 1985.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ Fulton, 'Frycount 13', *The International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses 1977-78*. Thirteenth Edition: i.

³⁸¹ *Ambit* 101, 1985: 4.

The Eighties represented a period of renewed creativity for *Ambit*, and this creativity applied as much to its methods of production, distribution and fundraising as to its contents. By appointing a number of (unpaid) corresponding editors in Europe, America and Scandinavia, Bax forged new international connections that expanded *Ambit's* distribution network while attracting new audiences. Another benefit saw *Ambit* being offered first refusal on various collections of contemporary translations produced or edited by the magazine's foreign correspondents. Both the income and the submissions generated abroad were especially valuable when *Ambit*, like many other British little magazines, was desperately trying to prove its 'literary merit' in order to secure the financial support of the ACGB. But *Ambit* was also keen to consolidate its domestic audience, and was successful in receiving the backing of Camden Council for a series of poetry readings inspired by the contents of the Caribbean Special (*Ambit* 91), and by the growing popularity of *Ambit's* women poets. When the ACGB was offering financial support only on a project-by-project basis, *Ambit's* special numbers can be seen as a direct response to a new competitive climate. With their tight thematic unity, such specials not only attracted new readers and advertisers but, as small circulation anthology publications, would become increasingly valuable as rare back numbers.

Ambit's survival was not solely down to clever marketing, however, and the Eighties saw the emergence of a second generation of contributors whose work offered a variety of new directions for the magazine, and the apocalypticism of the Seventies was soon replaced by broadly realistic, domestic settings and everyday themes. The death of Blakeston in 1985 finally brought an end to *Ambit's* interest in the cryptic, surrealist word collages of the Sixties and Seventies. By this point, Marvin Cohen, with the nonsensical 'The Shoe-Foot Mismatch' (*Ambit* 83), the

Cold War satire ‘Two Old People’s Private Happiness Based On Everyone Else’s Collectively Unhappy Predicament’ (*Ambit* 90), and the society commentary ‘A Progressively Perfect Party’ (*Ambit* 88), had already established himself as *Ambit*’s leading exponent of the short, humorous sketch. Apocalyptic impulses survived in Ballard and Paolozzi’s ‘Images for J.G.B.’ (*Ambit* 83), and Ian Watson’s anti-Thatcher piece, ‘The Mistress Of Cold’ (*Ambit* 96), but, due to an influx of women writers, *Ambit*’s fiction became markedly less Ballardian as the decade unfolded. These women were primarily concerned with the dynamics of personal relationships epitomised by Tina Fulker’s ‘Fantasy Fortnight’ (*Ambit* 97), the alternative models of femininity found in Deborah Levy’s ‘Proletarian Zen’ (*Ambit* 96), and the complex bond between mother and daughter examined in Katherine Xavier’s ‘Owls’ (*Ambit* 93). Although the deranged characters favoured by Ballard and Bax reappeared in works like Marianne Wiggins’s ‘Kafkas’ (*Ambit* 107), these individuals were more likely to be found in the bedrooms, kitchens and restaurants of the everyday present than the hospitals, sanatoriums and urban wastelands of a post-atomic future.

The feminine influence extended to the poetry too, with Adcock and Duffy using poetic principles inherited from the Group and the Liverpool Poets to explore female attitudes to marriage, sexuality and gender roles. Indeed, the decade’s poetic highlights included Duffy’s ‘Standing Female Nude’ (*Ambit* 98) and Adcock’s ‘His Not Impossible She’ (*Ambit* 85)—two poems that sought to challenge male-constructed ideals of the feminine propagated by nude painting and love poetry. Duffy’s appointment as poetry editor in 1984 proved crucial in directing the transition from witty bawdiness to personal lyricism that distinguished the better

Ambit poems of the Eighties, and gave encouragement to a new generation of women writers.

After an Art Special (*Ambit* 83) dominated by full-colour prints, drawing experienced a welcome revival as the grotesque line drawings of Steadman inspired some equally bizarre contributions from Rod Judkins, Elizabeth Pyle, Charles Shearer and Chris Orr. Similarly, while the collages of Andrew Lanyon (*Ambit* 89) and the sculptures of Arturo Laskus (*Ambit* 90) and Helen Chadwick (*Ambit* 95) remained grounded in Pop Art principles, the German expressionist style of Steadman's work soon found its echoes in the drawings of younger artists. *Ambit's* Eighties drawings rarely, however, recalled the polemical verve that had marked the Seventies work of Foreman and Paolozzi and, with the exception of Robert McAuley's illustrations to 'Mistress of Cold' (*Ambit* 96), largely echoed the exotic travelogues and life drawing favoured by Foreman and Sandford.

The appearance of *Ambit* 100 in 1985 was a significant event for a number of reasons. Published as a 192-page special, it marked twenty-five years of unbroken quarterly publication and prompted Bax, in *Ambit* 101, to produce the magazine's first index. In his introduction to *Ambit* 101, Bax reflected upon the challenges overcome since 1959, and upon the particular achievements represented by the Newspaper Special (*Ambit* 37), the Stars and Stripes Special (*Ambit* 39), the Art Special (*Ambit* 83) and the Caribbean Special (*Ambit* 91). Such efforts demonstrated the extent to which the *Ambit* team were clearly beginning to view their magazine as a continuous literary-artistic concern of some importance. Moreover, *Ambit* 100 brought a subtle format change resulting in a new logo, a modified page layout, and a more detailed contents page. Aimed at making *Ambit* more attractive to the bookshops, these changes equally contributed to the sense that

the magazine had settled into a stable, coherent and distinctive identity by the mid Eighties.

Ironically, by 1989, this unique identity had become ever more difficult to define. In poetic terms, post-Movement figures continued to dominate the magazine, but this label applied to a much broader range of contributors than it had done previously, comprising Porter, Markham, Adcock, Graham, Duffy and Hacker alike. Similarly, while the irreverent Group wits MacBeth and Ewart continued to appear, many of the poems in the Caribbean Special, the Irish Special and the Liverpool Special grappled with the more sombre themes of racism, political violence and urban deprivation. For James Lasdun, writing in 1984, *Ambit's* fiction ('seldom less than interesting, and sometimes truly inspired'³⁸²) remained the lifeblood of the magazine, yet the decade produced few genuinely outstanding stories and lacked the kind of generic and stylistic unity that had distinguished *Ambit* in the Seventies. Indeed, *Ambit's* Eighties fiction was marked by the kind of catholicity already favoured by *Stand* and *London Magazine*. *Ambit's* visual content and increasingly stylish design element, however, certainly indicated that the magazine was keen to explore new artistic directions. No longer dominated by the science fiction, pornography and polemics of the Seventies, the noticeably more catholic *Ambit* of the late Eighties reaffirmed its editor's opposition to exclusive coteries and reinforced its 'middle position on the little magazine scene'.³⁸³

³⁸² James Lasdun, 'The Periodicals, 14: *Ambit*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 May 1984: 522.

³⁸³ Görtzschacher, *Little Magazine Profiles*: 133.

CHAPTER FOUR. THE NINETIES: CONTINUITIES AND TRANSITIONS

New Maps For A Changing Scene

For those little magazines that survived the economic hardships of the early Eighties, the Nineties were to prove a period of unprecedented growth and prosperity as the drive towards professionalism continued to accelerate with further improvements in design and print technology, the advent of the Internet, and the decentralisation of the ACGB's funding mechanisms.³⁸⁴ By 1993, the scruffy little magazines of the Sixties and Seventies had either disappeared, or remodelled themselves upon the bigger, glossier and more consciously designed products of *Granta* and the major publishing houses to the extent that Waterstones, Borders and other national booksellers were increasingly prepared to give them shelf space. With many of the more established little magazines displayed alongside titles like *Art Review*, *Frieze* and *Wallpaper*, the cover design became a key tool in the pursuit of a distinctive identity, or brand, as a means of encapsulating general editorial preferences and of translating casual sales into subscriptions. Many of the wealthier Eighties survivors incorporated striking photography and other visuals into their designs, and made greater use of high-grade paper, full-colour printing and customised typography so that the typical little magazine of the Nineties was colourful, eye-catching and satisfyingly bulky. This slickness came at a cost, however, as the space allotted to advertisers increased, and cover prices steadily rose beyond the £5.00 mark.

Despite these significant advances, the Nineties were not without their casualties. Ultimately defeated by his own ambitions for *New Departures*, Michael

³⁸⁴ Ibid: 211.

Horovitz turned to performance poetry and anthology editing, publishing *Grandchildren of Albion* (1992) and *The Pow! Anthology as New Departures 21/22* (1996). A similar approach was adopted at *Aquarius*, with Eddie Linden printing a collection of work by women as *Aquarius 19/20* (1992) and a tribute to Roy Fuller as *Aquarius 21/22* (1993). Other titles proved less durable, and *Numbers*, *Global Tapestry* and *Slow Dancer* all succumbed to economic pressures culminating in the recession of 1992.

The loss of a handful of medium-sized titles, while regrettable, did little to dampen the optimism that prevailed among the more established members of the little magazine community, and *Acumen*, *Agenda*, *Ambit*, *London Magazine*, *PN Review* and *Stand* continued to benefit from increasingly generous subsidies. Anxious to avoid the carnage brought about by the drastic funding cuts of the Eighties, the ACGB continued to encourage little magazines to develop sustainable business models as part of its 'client development' schemes for 1989/90, 1990/91 and 1991/92. Under these schemes the Literature Panel's existing clients were given further additional sums to 'improve their marketing, promotion or distribution techniques',³⁸⁵ and the ACGB's Annual Report for 1989/90 shows that little magazines were significant beneficiaries during this period. The £19,100 allocated under the scheme that year was distributed as follows: *Acumen* £1,015; *Ambit* £4,015; *European Gay Review* £5,020; *Interzone* £5,020; Poem Swop Scheme £1,050; The Talisman Trust £3,015.³⁸⁶

Further encouragement came in June 1993 when a specialist committee of the Literature Panel convened 'to establish funding criteria for literary magazines' subsequently 'approved public funding for a national network of magazines, giving

³⁸⁵ 'Literature Department Report', *45th Annual Report and Accounts of the Arts Council of Great Britain 1989/90*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1990: 16.

³⁸⁶ 'Schedule 1 to the accounts. Year ending 31 March 1990', *ibid*: 68.

new or enhanced funding to twelve titles in addition to the eight already receiving annual support from the Arts Council'.³⁸⁷ The 'Magazine Development' scheme came as an immediate response to the committee's findings, and *Bête Noir*, *PN Review*, *Metropolitan*, *The North*, *Panurge*, *The Printer's Devil*, *Rialto*, *Scratch*, *Second Shift*, *Storm*, *Wasafiri* and *Writing Women* would each receive sums of £2,000 or more as 'development clients' in 1993.³⁸⁸ Such generosity followed consecutive rises in the ACGB's overall budget for literature between 1990 and 1993.³⁸⁹ Dissecting a Literature Panel Report for 1993/94 that promised 'increased project funding for poetry' and 'more money for poetry magazines',³⁹⁰ the *Times Literary Supplement* observed:

The Arts Council has announced the allocation of grants for 1993-94. The total government grant it will receive, £225.63 million, is 2 per cent up, and in most cases this increase has been handed on to the Arts Council's clients.

The largest single grant made by the Literature Department will be £147,800 to the Poetry Society (up 2 per cent), followed by £93,700 to the Arvon Foundation (up 13.8 per cent) [...].

The 'annual clients' are to be the *LRB* (£27,100), *London Magazine* (£22,850), the Federation of Worker Writers (£21,420), *PN Review* (£17,240), *Agenda* (£13,720), *Ambit* (£8,570), *Wasafiri* (£6,860) and *Interzone* (£4,290).³⁹¹

By 1993 a handful of little magazines were receiving five-figure sums from their cultural patrons, but such subsidy still fell well short of the money being handed to the Arvon Foundation and to the Poetry Society, which published its own quarterly, *Poetry Review*. Pointing to the failure of the ACGB's own short-lived *New Review* in 1991, John Pick charged the literary mandarins with 'forcing the closure of some useful small magazines whose lifeblood advertising was drained away by this heavily-subsidised competitor', and with holding to a definition of literature that

³⁸⁷ 'Literature Department Report', *49th Annual Report and Accounts of the Arts Council of Great Britain 1993/94*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1994: 16.

³⁸⁸ 'Schedule 1 to the accounts. Year ending 31 March 1994', *ibid*: 69.

³⁸⁹ Richard Witts, 'Appendices: Chronology of Arts Council grant-in-aid', *Artist Unknown. An Alternative History of the Arts Council*. London: Little, Brown and Company, 1998: 543.

³⁹⁰ 'Literature Department Report', *49th Annual Report and Accounts of the Arts Council of Great Britain 1993/94*: 18.

³⁹¹ D.S., 'NB', *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 January 1993: 12.

‘seemed to refer only to an eclectic list of social and economic “initiatives” that included ‘the translation of English works of fiction into Urdu’ and ‘a £30,000 programme [...] to foster “creative writing” workshops in British prisons.’³⁹²

While commentators like Pick criticised the ACGB for its political correctness, its ‘fashionable bureaucratic processes’ and its ‘general adoption of the seamier jargon of the *enterprise culture*’,³⁹³ others argued that subsidy presented specific dangers for the little magazine community. Writing for the *Small Press Review* in 1991, Richard Evanoff declared:

With grants, editors don’t have to worry about building a natural audience for their magazine. Since the funding is already taken care of, there’s no urgent need to do any promotional work, no need to involve others in the project, no need to be responsive to the audience which will presumably be reading the magazine. [...] What such magazines often (although certainly not always) lack is engagement. A grant-financed magazine may have a beautiful design, an attractive cover, expensive paper and look real nice sitting there on the library shelf, but it may not have nearly the reader involvement of a scruffy little litmag being put out in somebody’s basement and distributed among people who are constantly giving feedback to the editors and contributors.³⁹⁴

Despite Evanoff’s fears, the ACGB’s ‘annual clients’ continued to extend their audiences and contributor lists, with regular public readings and poetry festivals providing the ideal opportunity for readers of *Agenda*, *Ambit*, *London Magazine*, *PN Review* and *Wasafiri* to give their ‘feedback to the editors and contributors’.³⁹⁵

By the middle of the decade, the Internet had begun to emerge as a significant tool in the quest for new subscribers. With a reach that encompassed much of the English-speaking developed world, the Internet enabled editors to promote their publications on a global scale without incurring the costs associated with sending sample copies to libraries and sponsors. Similarly, Internet search engines enabled small press colleagues and aspiring contributors to locate the

³⁹² John Pick, ‘Excavating the Arts Council’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 October 1991: 14.

³⁹³ Pick, *Vile Jelly. The Birth, Life, and Lingering Death of the Arts Council of Great Britain*. Gringley-on-the-Hill, Doncaster: Brynmill Press, 1991: 101.

³⁹⁴ Richard Evanoff, ‘How Literary Projects Can Always Be Self-supporting’, *Small Press Review*. Paradise, CA: Dustbooks. Vol. 23, nos. 7-8, July-August 1991: 12.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

smallest of small-circulation titles with a speed and efficiency that far outstripped the retrieval capabilities of the British Library and University College London's Little Magazine Library. In short, the Internet seemed to fulfil Fulton's prediction, first made in 1980, that computers would ultimately prove indispensable to the little magazine editor as a system initially providing 'storage for editing, accounts receivable and inventory management'³⁹⁶ quickly evolved into a virtual shop-window that could be viewed worldwide and remodelled for comparatively little cost.

The Poetry Society were among the first of the ACGB's clients to acknowledge the potential of the Internet, but the medium was not without its technical frustrations as Peter Forbes pointed out in a *Poetry Review* editorial in 1995:

the Poetry Society arrived in cyberspace in February. At the moment, waiting long minutes for graphics files to download must be very like the experience of a former generation listening to early crystal sets: it's magnificent but also pretty awful. But the potential is obvious to see. For *Poetry Review* it will give a much-needed stimulus towards indexing and creating an interactive magazine. [...] At present such useful things are not on the Net, but the Net is not what is there now, but what is about to be put on it. The Internet is at least a useful bibliographical tool and information resource. It will not circumvent existing editorial procedures, and it will not replace a printed *Poetry Review*, but the élan of the idea of it is something we welcome very much.³⁹⁷

As download times tumbled with the development of increasingly fast ISDN and ADSL Internet services, magazine editors gradually began to put more material online. In most cases these websites continued to operate alongside the printed medium, typically presenting the visitor with an outline history of the publication, guidelines on submission, samples of recent work and details of how to subscribe, and *Ambit*, *Stride* and *London Magazine* each developed websites in this vein during the late Nineties. Reflecting upon his decision to launch a website for *Stride*

³⁹⁶ Fulton, 'Past and Future', *The International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses*. Sixteenth Edition. Paradise, CA: Dustbooks, 1980: iv.

³⁹⁷ Forbes, 'Still Life at the Poetry Café', *Poetry Review*, Vol. 85, No. 1, Spring 1995: 3.

in 1998, Rupert Loydell declared, '[we] switched because of the potential readership: we get 6,000 hits a week, as opposed to a print run of 300-500 copies in print each quarter.'³⁹⁸ Similarly, explaining why she had decided to promote *Acumen* online in 2003, Patricia Oxley wrote:

I have had a personal email from around 1998 and I purchased an *Acumen* website which puts up tasters and advertises the magazine generally in May 2003. I did the latter in the hope of a) attracting more subscribers b) getting a universal appeal which I couldn't do via the regular snail mail.

At the same time, she also maintained that online publication was unlikely to completely replace *Acumen's* printed format, insisting 'I still like the idea of "hard copy" magazines which can be felt and touched as well as read'.³⁹⁹ For Oxley, and for many little magazine editors, the Internet was primarily a tool for generating further print sales; however, a new generation of editors, conscious of advances in web-design, digital photography and graphics packages, began to explore the concept of an entirely virtual publication, or e-zine, that could fulfil all the traditional functions of a literary magazine *and* incorporate sophisticated interactive and multimedia elements.

Staffed by volunteers and distributed for free, the internationalist *Born* project, founded in Seattle in 1996, demonstrated how music, film and animation could be integrated with poetry and fiction to spawn new artworks that challenged conventional notions of media and genre.⁴⁰⁰ Despite the potential of the e-zine format, comparatively few British little magazines had followed their American counterparts into cyberspace by 1999, and those that had (most notably *Stride* and *The Argotist Online*) largely eschewed the visual arts in favour of the little magazine's traditional staple of poetry, fiction and critical prose. Ironically, it was

³⁹⁸ Rupert Loydell, from an unpublished email received 24 May 2005.

³⁹⁹ Patricia Oxley, from an unpublished email received 24 May 2005.

⁴⁰⁰ Anon, 'History of *Born*', www.bornmagazine.org/about.html. Last accessed: British Library, 1 June 2005.

those editors who had been at the forefront of the mimeo revolution of the Sixties who seemed most reluctant to commit themselves to the web.

As the millennium approached, *Ambit* and its late Fifties contemporaries were wealthier, glossier and bigger than ever. Once the bane of the literary mandarins, they had gradually become Establishment favourites through canny marketing, calculated risk-taking and a willingness to embrace technological change as a revivifying force. Therefore, while the ‘DIY’ spirit of the little magazine community was all but extinct by the end of the decade, the Nineties certainly demonstrated that the survival instinct remained as strong as ever.

Absent Friends: *Ambit’s* Nineties poetry. *Ambit* 128-153, 1992-98

Ambit’s poetry took a sombre turn during the Nineties as, despite a wealth of new material from Britain, America and Europe, the deaths of four major *Ambit* poets in six years cast a long shadow over the decade. In George MacBeth (d. 1992) and Gavin Ewart (d. 1995), the grave not only claimed two prolific and longstanding contributors whose reputations had been tied up with *Ambit* for more than thirty years, but further deprived the magazine of two of its most consistently humorous, experimental and entertaining poets. In Edwin Brock (d. 1998), the magazine lost an accomplished poet, translator and editor, and another prominent Sixties survivor. The decade also brought the death of the American poet and critic James Laughlin (d. 1997), an *Ambit* contributor since 1976, and a dominant presence in the late Nineties. Indeed, when Asa Benveniste (d. 1990) and Adrian Henri (d. 2000) are added to this list of the departed, it is tempting to conclude that *Ambit* was losing much of its original verve with the approaching millennium. But if these absent friends were to prove irreplaceable, there were enough established survivors in Peter Porter, Alan Brownjohn, Jim Burns and Henry Graham to ensure the spirit of

the early days did not entirely evaporate, and *Ambit's* attractive visuals and rising reputation prompted submissions from such small press luminaries as Peter Finch, Vernon Scannell, Gerda Mayer and David Tipton. Crucially, the Eighties enthusiasm for women's poetry, translation, and the brief, imagistic lyric survived into the new decade and this, combined with the work of those listed above, supplied welcome continuity during an uncharacteristically subdued period of transition for *Ambit*.

When MacBeth died of motor neurone disease in 1992, Bax published Carol Ann Duffy's moving tribute in *Ambit* 128:

There are many who will miss George MacBeth, however briefly he touched their lives. He leaves behind the effects of a rare gift for friendship and hospitality. He encouraged young or neglected poets wherever he found them; the last poets I heard him praise in conversation were Simon Armitage and Mary O'Malley. And the best of his own work will endure. We said goodbye to him in his study at Moyne Park [...]. He opened his frail hands to the room and smiled. 'Ah,' he said, 'the cave of making.'⁴⁰¹

A personal memorial to a man who had continued to write throughout the worst of his debilitating illness, Duffy's obituary was echoed by E.A. Markham's elegy, 'On the Death of G.M. (1932-92)', which closed with the lines:

Your voice was familiar-strange
and good to hear. Your poems took risks like
all your costumes. You might have performed a little longer, man.⁴⁰²

By far the most interesting contributions to *Ambit* 128, however, came from MacBeth himself, as Bax published five of his last poems. Reprinted from the poet's edited typescripts, complete with corrections and amendments, the gloomy sonnets recorded MacBeth's final thoughts: a mixture of love and sympathy for the sacrifices made by his wife; scorn for an ailing body unable to realise his erotic desires; and the faintly discernible hope that death might bring an end to the

⁴⁰¹ Duffy, 'George MacBeth 1932-1992', *Ambit* 128, 1992: 96.

⁴⁰² Markham, 'On the Death of G.M. (1932-92)', *ibid*: 93.

suffering. Consequently, in 'The Confinement', MacBeth considers the life and death of Toulouse-Lautrec, pondering whether life wasn't

better with the prostitutes
In some Victorian brothel, gold and red,
Where men came in to fuck in business suits
And no-one ever thought about being dead?⁴⁰³

But MacBeth ultimately rejects this fantasy of libidinous excess in favour of the homely and the familiar when, addressing his wife, he declares:

I Wonder. It's the best at home in bed,
I think, arranged like spoons, my cheek against your head.⁴⁰⁴

The other MacBeth poems traced a similar movement from frustration to resigned dignity with varying degrees of bitterness as 'The Healthy Wife' and 'The Sick Husband' presented a portrait of a marriage that had survived the 'presumptuous' illness with both partners knowing 'the ache from being one'.

A great deal rawer than MacBeth's poems of the Seventies and Eighties, the sonnets that appeared in *Ambit* 128 suggested that the author of 'The Ski Murders' (*Ambit* 28), 'The Keats Imitations' (*Ambit* 38) and 'The Pornography Poem' (*Ambit* 34) was not merely a witty parodist, but a skilled craftsman capable of infusing traditional poetic forms with an emotional resonance appropriate to life's darker themes. In losing MacBeth, *Ambit* had not only lost a gifted comedian, but a poet of some standing who, on the strength of his *Ambit* contributions over three decades, deserves to be seen as something more than 'the Unidentified Flying Object of British verse' that M.L. Rosenthal dismissed in 1967.⁴⁰⁵ When MacBeth's last poems were collected and posthumously published as *The Patient* (1992), Stephen Knight, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, declared 'nothing in previous collections has quite prepared the reader for the painful candour and unadorned quality of the

⁴⁰³ MacBeth, 'The Confinement', *ibid*: 95.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid*.

⁴⁰⁵ M.L. Rosenthal, *The New Poets: American and British Poetry Since World War II*. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1967: 260.

verse that this last volume contains'.⁴⁰⁶ Featuring some of MacBeth's most accomplished poetry, *Ambit* 128 brought an apt conclusion to the poet's association with the magazine and remains a significant memorial to his life's work.

The tribute to Ewart four years later was equally generous as *Ambit* 143 carried an understated obituary in which Bax wrote:

Gavin Ewart sadly died in '95, one of *Ambit's* most prolific contributors and one whom we will sadly miss. In this number we publish an uncollected poem of his from *Ambit* 42, I drew it to his attention recently and he said he would look at it again and consider whether he shouldn't have collected it. Also, a poem that he identified, for a special number of *Ambit* which considered the writer's life's work and writers were asked to select a poem which they regarded as typical of their work, Gavin selected 'Ella Mi Fu Rapita!' The third poem is a recent one which I accepted shortly before he died. Finally perhaps Gavin's most well known poem because it was on the underground.⁴⁰⁷

Ewart had been writing bawdy poems with titles like 'The End of a Dirty Book' (*Ambit* 28), 'An Old Eskimo Monk Fucks A Nun And Finds God' (*Ambit* 60) and 'The Lesbian Lyric' (*Ambit* 71) since the Sixties, yet the work in *Ambit* 143 sounded a more melancholic note. This is especially noticeable in 'The Philosophical Poem' which, while exhibiting Ewart's characteristic passion for the animal kingdom and for outrageous rhyme-schemes in an opening line that reads 'In the ocean where a squid is a squid / the smallest lifeman is a myctophid', is actually a much deeper reflection upon the fragile nature of human existence and mankind's achievements. The 'squid' in his state of anonymity lacks the 'pride' that would prompt the world to mourn his passing, but is none the worse for it. By contrast, a superabundance of 'pride' in human beings simply spurs them on to acts of destruction and violence:

but all
History crumbles, and pretty quick,
the softwet quim and the standing prick;
and no Roman wall
can keep the barbarian gas at bay.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁶ Stephen Knight, 'Terminal Words', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 February, 1993: 23.

⁴⁰⁷ Bax, 'Gavin Ewart (I.M.)', *Ambit* 143, 1996: 2.

⁴⁰⁸ Ewart, 'The Philosophical Poem', *ibid*: 2-4.

The implication is that ‘our bright printer’s ink // might not exist to record our deeds’, and that a man-made apocalypse might ultimately sweep away the very monuments to civilisation that distinguish the human race from molluscs.

‘Ella Mi Fu Rapita!’ focused on Ewart the love-poet, but despite the wry observation that ‘If girls are sugar, God holds the sugar tongs’ this is clearly a love-song written in a minor key, the declaration that ‘Love lasts—or doesn’t last’ suggesting an experienced wisdom rooted in the remembrance of lovers lost.⁴⁰⁹ Evidence of Ewart’s technical skill and mischievous ear are also apparent in his rhyming ‘simple’/‘dimple’, ‘ants’/‘pants’, and ‘come’/‘bum’, and his preference for ‘everyday language’ is reflected in the irregular metre, and the slangy exclamations and epithets that predominate. An adept performer in a number of traditional poetic forms, Ewart made an astute choice when describing ‘Ella Mi Fu Rapita!’ as representative of his poetic output in 1970, and Bax made an equally judicious decision in reprinting it for *Ambit* 143. Ewart might well have been amused by the decision to include ‘A 14-Year Old Convalescent Cat in the Winter’, a celebration of life’s idle pleasures and an appeal for clemency begging that a ‘last fated hateful journey to the vet’ might be put off for just another year:

I want him to lie stretched out, contented,
revelling in the heat, his fur all dry and warm,
an Old Age Pensioner, retired, resented
by no one, and happiness in a beelike swarm

to settle on him [...] ⁴¹⁰

Ron Sandford’s drawing of Ewart in 1985 completed a warm tribute to one of *Ambit*’s oldest friends, presenting the thoughtful face of a poet whose imaginative flair, technical skill and humane humour might yet find favour with a wider audience in the years ahead.

⁴⁰⁹ Ewart, ‘Ella Mi Fu Rapita!’, *ibid*: 5.

⁴¹⁰ Ewart, ‘A 14-Year Old Convalescent Cat in the Winter’, *ibid*: 6.

The death of Edwin Brock prompted the third 'In Memoriam' number of the Nineties which opened, in the customary fashion, with a personal tribute from Bax:

Edwin Brock, who died on September 7th 1997, had been *Ambit's* [principal] poetry editor since 1961. The first poem which he sent to the magazine was 'Certain Flowers', reprinted below, and he continued to publish in *Ambit* over the years. Once he became poetry editor, I initially had to persuade him to include his own work. I used to press him, saying readers and potential contributors should have the opportunity to read material of Edwin's in *Ambit*, so that they would know something of the work of our poetry editor.

[...] Edwin set the tone for an *Ambit* poem over the years [with] Carol Ann Duffy, Henry Graham and I hope to see that excellence continuing. Valé Edwin.⁴¹¹

Having contributed a number of personal and sardonic reflections upon love, death and an insipid secularism exemplified by poems like 'An Attempt at Adultery' (*Ambit* 12), 'I don't want to be called a minor poet, that's why I'm talking to God' (*Ambit* 25) and 'Hymn to the Consumer Society' (*Ambit* 50), Brock was well represented by the collection of published and unpublished material that appeared in *Ambit* 151. Resisting the temptation to reprint Brock's much-anthologised '5 Ways To Kill A Man' and 'Song of a Battery Hen', Bax printed instead the poet's own riposte to the imaginative shortcomings of his anthologists. Growing out of a conversation with Henry Graham, 'Five Ways To Kill A Battery Hen' typifies Brock's poetic style. Although initially inspired by his frustration at 'anthologists always choosing the same two poems of mine',⁴¹² the poem quickly becomes a much more complex creation as Brock discovers that his infamous Battery Hen represents something more than 'a party-piece' recalling

the days when Brock's hen
tugged its leash in traffic
or clucked eggs in
crowded pubs [...]⁴¹³

Rather, the Hen has become a metaphor for a series of personal sufferings. After a downbeat opening in which the 'manageable dangers' of 'Eden' soon give way to 'this murderous freedom', a chicken is killed in ritualistic fashion 'in the yard / of a

⁴¹¹ Bax, 'Edwin Brock (I.M.)', *Ambit* 151, 1998: 2.

⁴¹² Brock, 'Five Ways To Kill A Battery Hen', *ibid*: 7.

⁴¹³ *Ibid*: 6.

London Police station'. This killing brings a shift into the consciousness of the victim as, in a gesture towards Brock's original 'Song of a Battery Hen', the deceased bird cries:

why
am I alone in the shadow?
why is there a red pain

here? Why am I
a red pain screaming in a small shadow?
and why has the screaming stopped?⁴¹⁴

This pathetic scene of ignorant distress provides a crucial turning point in the poem, prompting an immediate outpouring of grief from Brock who, horrified by the pain caused by his own act of savage butchery, is haunted by the dead hen. At first this haunting is manifested physically, the stench of the decomposing carcass following the poet until his 'pocket / stinks of dying'. But later the dead bird gradually comes to penetrate the psychological landscapes of dream and memory, with the poet recalling that

I made you out of [...]
a London wind and the two children
of a broken marriage. Hen,
I made you out of needing you.⁴¹⁵

Having fashioned a surrogate-sufferer in the Battery Hen, Brock is reluctant to relinquish the store of painful personal experiences it so powerfully embodies. Indeed, poet and Hen have become so interdependent that the poem closes with Brock trying desperately to revive the bird, conscious that its death would deprive him of much more than a handful of anthology appearances. 'Five Ways To Kill A Battery Hen', with its easy conversational tone and its gradual movement from violent, black humour to a more sober mode of lyrical self-introspection proved a fitting memorial to a poet who constantly struggled to reconcile his cynical and

⁴¹⁴ Ibid: 5-6.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid: 6.

bitter outbursts against a world of ‘witless man’s humanity to man’⁴¹⁶ with a deeply-felt Christian faith which, on the evidence of ‘Thy will be done’, remained with him until the end.

Ambit 151 also carried an obituary and tribute to James Laughlin, whom Bax described as ‘one of *Ambit*’s oldest American friends’, adding:

Gavin Ewart drew attention to his great merits which had been poorly recognised in the UK and even in America. He was of course also the founder and director of *New Directions Publishing Company* a remarkable list of new names, both national and international.⁴¹⁷

A student of Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound, Laughlin established *New Departures* at Pound’s behest in 1936 as an outlet for the work of Pound, William Carlos Williams and other Americans. Channelling much of his energy into promoting the work of his contemporaries and maintaining ‘the foremost disseminator of modernist and related writing in the English-speaking world’,⁴¹⁸ Laughlin is still primarily seen as a major publisher rather than the poet of some ability that his modestly slim *Collected Poems* might suggest.

Laughlin submitted a handful of poems to *Ambit* in the Sixties but did not become a regular contributor until the mid Eighties, when Bax began publishing extracts from the long autobiographical *Byways*. Predominantly a patchwork of parodies and versions suggested by sources ranging from Martial, Catallus and Marcus Aurelius to Yeats, Pound and Williams, *Byways* constantly oscillates between literary reminiscence and moments of self-deprecating humour exemplified by ‘The Poet’s Apology for His Poems’ (*Ambit* 132):

I hope their liveliness
Does not put anyone, even unimportant
People, in a bad light. I trust I
Have not maltreated the writers
Who have gone before me, or misspelled

⁴¹⁶ Brock, ‘A special offering’, *ibid*: 12.

⁴¹⁷ Bax, ‘James Laughlin (I.M.)’, *ibid*: 92.

⁴¹⁸ R.W. Butterfield, ‘Laughlin, James’, in Ian Hamilton (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry in English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994: 291.

Their names. If fame comes to me,
May it be without cost to anyone
Else. And may it not come simply
From cleverness.⁴¹⁹

Such a pronouncement was entirely in keeping with a man who had sacrificed many of his own poetic aspirations in order to further those of his contemporaries, and who had taken Pound's suggestion to 'do something useful and become / A publisher' perhaps too much to heart.

The five-line 'pentastichs' that appeared in *Ambit* 151, by contrast, reflected the determination of a man anxious to record as much as possible, conscious that 'The spaces in time seem[ed] to be narrowing'.⁴²⁰ Veering towards the epigrammatic, the pentastichs were predominantly wry Ewart-like reflections upon the excesses of war, the amours of youth, and the eccentricities of favourite artists. Where their brevity meets a stricter symmetry of lineation, however, a sculpted lyricism reminiscent of Williams begins to emerge in pieces like 'The Evening Star':

You came as a thought when I was
past such thinking. You came as a
song when I was finished singing.
You came when the sun had just begun
its setting. You were my evening star.⁴²¹

Enthusiastically taken up by Bax, Laughlin's poetry was given the kind of attention in *Ambit* during the Nineties that the poet proved so reluctant to claim for himself throughout his career. On the evidence of the *Ambit* poems, Laughlin is perhaps worthy of a greater place in the history of twentieth-century poetry than he has presently been afforded. One of the most prolific poetic contributors in *Ambit's* history, and the last of the magazine's true modernists, Laughlin would certainly prove a tough act to follow.

⁴¹⁹ Laughlin, 'The Poet's Apology for His Poems', *Ambit* 132, 1993: 94.

⁴²⁰ Laughlin, 'Spring Comes Again', *Ambit* 151, 1998: 92.

⁴²¹ Laughlin, 'The Evening Star', *ibid*: 96.

Given the funereal atmosphere surrounding *Ambit* during the Nineties, those charged with carrying the magazine's poetry section into the new millennium inevitably turned to sombre themes as they sought to continue the work of those they had survived. Images of death and burial recurred in the work of Peter Redgrove, and in his prose poem 'Oysters and Graveyard' (*Ambit* 132) he suggested:

the dead devise their fantasies among their secret boxes of tars and tattered skin, project their images above the soil of themselves in the form of a garden-plot—in this place a face of flowers has formed by apparent accident, and a green body with hands clasped over the chest lies quietly with a small green Christmas tree for an erection.⁴²²

This optimistic vision of death as a state of peaceful repose in which the deceased 'dreamer' gives creative expression to a new organic and spiritual presence symbolised by the 'Christmas tree' is replaced by the sober realisation, so movingly expressed in 'Cleaning the House' (*Ambit* 153), that death is most commonly witnessed as an all-pervading absence. Consequently in 'Cleaning the House' Redgrove's speaker describes returning to the house of a recently deceased male relative to supervise the work of three cleaners. While he waits, Redgrove's speaker examines the 'ancient wooden doll / That smelt of onions' and the photo frames 'Like mirrors with memories since babyhood' that momentarily transport him into a world where 'Windows, balconies and verandas / Had sudden souls'.⁴²³ Yet the poem ultimately closes in elegiac fashion, as the cleaners

Raked down cobwebs, polished the bath,
Basin and taps, scoured—and flushed
The grey soapy water down the broad drains;
His music went with it.⁴²⁴

While Redgrove's poem explored the process by which the deceased lives on in the memory of the bereaved, Peter Finch's 'Aunt' (*Ambit* 131) described a

⁴²² Peter Redgrove, 'Oysters and Graveyard', *Ambit* 132, 1993: 18.

⁴²³ Redgrove, 'Cleaning the House', *Ambit* 153, 1998: 23-24.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid*: 24.

much more depressing reality in which the passing of the nameless aunt is barely noticed by relatives who ‘have forgotten her’, and

fumble silently
with torpid memory
then scatter.⁴²⁵

A note of disillusioned weariness is discernible in the speaker’s initial sigh of ‘Death again, slowly’, and this remains the dominant tone of the poem as, struck by the anticlimactic nature of the cremation service, Finch’s speaker desperately struggles with a ‘mind [that] won’t stay still’ and picks up only ‘fragments’ of the priest’s speech amid the ‘pale sunlight’, the ‘pathetically small’ wreaths and the half-hearted psalms. Nor is there much ceremony in the language of the poem itself, Finch’s unrhymed, short, and largely monosyllabic lines tapering towards the downbeat conclusion that ‘It is as if none of us / knew her at all’.⁴²⁶

By far the most substantial treatment of mortal themes, Peter Porter’s long poem ‘Death’s Door’ (*Ambit* 136) argued that death, so long mythologised by the Church and by artists keen ‘to paint and sing the glories / Of their rulers’, held fewer fears than the hells of

Old People’s Homes and high-rise wards
With surgeon’s scalpels for King Herod’s swords,
Our worst incarceration cancer cells—
No reasoned tone or priestly sign dispels
The loneliness our dying health records.⁴²⁷

Yet humanity needs these grand mythologies of heaven and hell, battlefield martyrdom and ‘the garden agony and cup’⁴²⁸ to assuage the overwhelming sense of futility that would prevail if life were simply ‘a pilgrimage / To nothingness’.⁴²⁹ Proceeding, however, from the view that absolute faith and absolute atheism are ‘two precise unproveable’ positions, Porter seems to find a philosophical humanism

⁴²⁵ Peter Finch, ‘Aunt’, *Ambit* 131, 1993: 49.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁷ Porter, ‘Death’s Door’, *Ambit* 136, 1994: 9.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*: 7.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*: 2.

equally problematic, and is finally forced into defending the familiar truisms: 'We all must die'.

Amid the general gloom, Rupert Mallin and Jim Burns turned their attention towards the lighter aspects of death and funerals. In 'Notes For A Speech At My Funeral' (*Ambit* 135), Mallin's request for a light-hearted and modest testimonial sounded almost like a postcard from beyond the grave, with its greetings to 'Ben Bin, Tony Tip, Obian Bod, / Bobble, Talbot, Chris Chittling, Asmodeus Dust...' and its forecast for the subsequent days ahead:

It's going to get dark. Very dark.
And then very, very dark.

Yes, I shall miss the light bulbs. Tell them.⁴³⁰

In 'A Life And Death Thing' (*Ambit* 138) Burns juxtaposed the solemn image of a neighbour's coffin being carried slowly to the church by 'Neat-suited men' with a second in which 'the young undertakers', waiting outside the church, are concerned with more trivial matters as they

loll against the hearse
sucking ice lollipops,
and eyeing the women
in their summer dresses
as they collect children
from the nearby school.⁴³¹

The mirth did not last long, and 'Dead Bird with Glass' by Susan Wick (*Ambit* 138) and 'Tomorrow Without Me' by Alain Bosquet (*Ambit* 141) brought more conventional treatments of the decade's principal poetic theme.

Despite the best efforts of Gavin Ewart, Roger McGough and Les Coleman, those poems not preoccupied with death were concerned with equally gloomy topics. Thus Sara Jane Tipton confronted anorexia in 'Anorexia: Self Cannibalism 1983' (*Ambit* 124), C.B. Follet analysed childhood violence in 'Some Things You

⁴³⁰ Rupert Mallin, 'Notes For A Speech At My Funeral', *Ambit* 135, 1994: 82.

⁴³¹ Burns, 'A Life And Death Thing', *Ambit* 138, 1994: 4.

Cannot Do For Your Children' (*Ambit* 136), and Colin Nixon reflected upon African poverty in 'Famine in Ethiopia' (*Ambit* 137). Similarly, Henry Graham's long-running 'Bar Room Ballads' sequence (*Ambit* 134), for all its sardonic humour, effectively charted its author's descent into alcoholism. The pessimistic sentiments expressed by many of *Ambit's* longstanding contributors were echoed in the work of newcomers like Deborah Pease, whose poem 'The Shadows Are Long Now' (*Ambit* 134) described the gradual decay of a once-loved garden and traced a movement from daylight and companionship to darkness and loneliness. Love poems remained a significant feature of *Ambit's* poetry pages, but even these tended towards break-ups and disappointments, with a string of contributors from Selima Hill to Mark A. Goodwin concurring with Diana Hendry's depressing refrain from 'Quite' (*Ambit* 154) that 'every passion rottest'.⁴³²

Women poets continued to be well represented throughout the decade, a fact evidenced by the contents of *Ambit* 131, which contained work by Selima Hill, Julie Whitby, Barbara Clarke, Jennifer Olds, Nicki Jackowska, Judi Benson and Sue Hubbard. Inspiration for *Ambit's* women typically came from domestic events and responses to the female body, although the strident feminist tone of Duffy's Eighties contributions was noticeably lacking. Instead Selima Hill, in 'Selima Selima' (*Ambit* 131), asked 'where does shame come from?', before concluding that the source lies no more with male than with female conceptions of the feminine; the speaker of Judi Benson's 'A Necessary Illusion' (*Ambit* 131) wondered how her male partner spent his time while she was asleep; and Barbara Clarke emphasised the erotic qualities of the female body in her lesbian love-lyric, 'The Adulterer' (*Ambit* 131). Otherwise there was little to distinguish *Ambit's* women poets from

⁴³² Diana Hendry, 'Quite', *Ambit* 154, 1998: 84.

their male counterparts, both increasingly turning to a range of personal and domestic experiences as a stimulus for a poetry which tended to dwell on death, disappointed love and the passing of time.

In formal terms, the *Ambit* poems of the Nineties eschewed the exuberant experimentalism of earlier decades and mostly comprised short pieces in vernacular free verse. The death of Brock in 1998 left Duffy and Graham in charge of *Ambit's* poetry pages and, placing a renewed emphasis upon the image, the editors opened up the magazine to a wider range of poetic voices, a policy that saw only Porter, Brownjohn and Lowbury consistently working in traditional rhymed forms. With special numbers restricted to memorial issues, there was little enthusiasm for the kind of feminist and postcolonial anthology numbers that had defined the Eighties. After the death of its four principal hero-contributors *Ambit* emerged from its grief with a newfound maturity, and although the poetry of the Nineties often made for morbid reading, much of it stemmed from an elegiac earnestness that privileged simplicity, sincerity and seriousness more than ever before. Gone but not forgotten, *Ambit's* absent friends set the tone of the magazine during the Nineties and, in doing so, exercised a considerable influence over those destined to follow in their footsteps.

Perverse, Perverted and Peculiar: *Ambit's* Nineties Fiction. *Ambit* 120-143, 1990-96

After the somewhat patchy predictability of the Eighties, *Ambit's* fiction improved considerably during the Nineties as the work of mainstays like Bax, Burns, Markham and Nuttall gradually made way for the frequently outstanding contributions of writers like Geoff Nicholson, Carl Tighe and David Belbin that signalled a return to the standards, if not the themes, of the Seventies. Moreover, as the magazine became less dependent on lengthier novel extracts, the well-written

short story, albeit in a variety of intriguing and often refreshingly inventive guises, began to make a welcome comeback. Marked by an unprecedented degree of eclecticism, *Ambit's* Nineties fiction consisted of five broad types. First, there was the autobiographical or autobiographically inspired account, typically rendered in the first person, which documented mundane details and events within the personal or domestic sphere. This represented a continuation of the Eighties interest in relationships and family tensions, repeatedly pursued in the fiction of E.A. Markham and Victor Annant. Second, there was the erotic or fantasy narrative where unorthodox sexual encounters, real or imaginary, were recounted in occasionally explicit detail, and at which David Belbin and Julie M. Charalambides proved particularly adept. The gothic or thriller narrative, with its foul deeds, hints of the supernatural and unexpected twist—exemplified by the work of Carl Tighe and André Alexis—represented a third major narrative mode. The two remaining styles, an experimental strand in which narrative form was commonly satirised or implicated in the plot itself, and a sort of brief fictional sketch where anecdote replaced more complex plotting, were less regular but interesting features of *Ambit's* Nineties fiction, inspiring some effective work by Geoff Nicholson and Jonathan Treitel in particular.

Much of the fiction that appeared remained firmly within the autobiographical and the erotic modes, with a handful of striking sketches providing stimulating material for *Ambit's* illustrators. This was certainly true of *Ambit* 120, where Bax drew upon past conference experiences as a research paediatrician to present the peculiar 'A Trip To Dublin', in which an 'All Ireland Childhood Disability Conference' provides an unlikely starting point for a tale of sexual adventure when Bax's jaded male protagonist is whisked away for the afternoon by

a flame-headed receptionist. Essentially a sexual daydream, Bax's narrative moves smoothly and inexplicably from the mundane setting of a Dublin conference centre to the passenger-seat of his companion's car, the circus-tent bar where 'he immediately felt her fur and longed to know if it was the same colour as her hair', and to the small living room of the woman's mother.⁴³³ Elements of fantasy are also discernible in the prose style, as Bax's matter-of-fact third person narration is punctuated by passages of intensely erotic description charting the whirlwind seduction of his anonymous doctor at the hands of the enigmatic stranger.

In 'When The Bees Got Out', by Joukko Turkka, this eroticism is transformed into something more disturbing as a swarm of flies becomes the agent of a particularly sadistic punishment visited upon a maverick apiarist who has seduced a young deaconess. After the girl is found with 'her face swollen like a football, and barely alive', the women of the neighbourhood resolve to avenge her humiliation:

They lure him into a kitchen: they choose the young mistress of the largest house, tempting him with fresh teacake and telephone calls. And when he turns up, bearing his honey, they all leap on him. [...]

They rip his trousers off; they smear him all over with honey. And it's summer: the kitchen's full of flies. In a flash he's furred over with them; and when he's pushed out onto the highway, the housewives start shrieking with laughter, as they watch him going along with his retinue of flies.⁴³⁴

Despite this very public indignity, the apiarist refuses to mend his ways and the tale ends with the struggle between the seducer and his female victims poised to continue.

After *Ambit* 120, the magazine's autobiographical fiction returned to the more familiar themes of personal relationships as the narrator of Judy Gahagan's 'The Listening Position' (*Ambit* 125) struggles to help a friend overcome the loss of his wife. Similarly, E.A. Markham continued to concentrate upon the 'permanent

⁴³³ Bax, 'A Trip to Dublin', *Ambit* 120, 1990: 9.

⁴³⁴ Joukko Turkka (trans. Herbert Lomas), 'When The Bees Got Out', *ibid*: 27-28.

temporariness' experienced by British Caribbean families, focusing especially on the tensions between mothers and their children in 'Madeline' (*Ambit* 127), 'President Horace The Second, Howe' (*Ambit* 133) and 'Horace: A Wonder of the World' (*Ambit* 153). Other contributions within the autobiographical mode included 'Vic Chews It Over' (*Ambit* 146), Howard Tinker's wry tale about a freelance writer's limitless capacity to translate his dire love life into material for a stream of successful poems, novels and screenplays; 'U-N Man' (*Ambit* 130), Victor Annant's description of the daily drudgery experienced by a civil servant at the United Nations; and 'Talbot at Sixty' (*Ambit* 129), George MacBeth's unflinchingly direct account of his protagonist's battle with motor neurone disease.

Erotic themes continued to flourish in the early Nineties, although their treatment was typically bizarre. In 'Love, Time Travel' (*Ambit* 132), David Belbin's protagonist travels back in time in a desperate attempt to consummate an affair with his wife's best friend, liberated from the emotional baggage of the present:

If this were one of those videos from the twentieth century, my way to Kath would be simple. I would find her, court her, marry her even, before Ellen and I ever met. No-one would be hurt. The last five years would never happen. That wouldn't work for reasons I've explained. But suppose I was able to find Kath in the past and stay there?⁴³⁵

After failing to seduce the young Kath during her undergraduate days, Belbin's protagonist eventually realises his fantasy when he meets the present-day Kath back in 2022. The rendezvous enables Belbin to take a number of satirical swipes at late twentieth-century television, commercialism and morality as the couple are brought together by their work on *The Branovers* (a soap opera which 'limits itself to ten [product placements] per show'),⁴³⁶ only for both to discover that they really belong in the present. Recalling the melodramatic clichés of television sentimentalism,

⁴³⁵ David Belbin, 'Love, Time Travel', *Ambit* 132, 1993: 51.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid*: 56.

Kath declares: 'Sex isn't the most important thing. Love is. We'll still have each other',⁴³⁷ her adulterous relationship destined to remain a secret.

Rosa Diez had similar fun in 'Blame It On The Boogie' (*Ambit* 142), where a young Spanish woman's letter to a problem page results in the weekly delivery of condoms that sustains her relationship with a black Rastafarian poet:

Next thing, we are anxious to finish each supply of 'Jeans' before the new one arrives. It turns into an obsession and Mike stops singing and writing and focuses on something that sounds similar, if you will excuse my vocabulary. [...] We stop talking to each other and walking in the rain.⁴³⁸

While a quirky humour also informed Jacqueline Lucas's 'Reading the Small Print' (*Ambit* 147), which described an unorthodox courtship between a young woman and a cab-driver, other contributions dwelt on the more sinister aspects of erotic obsession. Robert Hinshelwood's 'His View Of Himself' (*Ambit* 136) represents one particularly extreme example of this trend for, convinced he is living in a film, the male protagonist rents a video camera to record a disturbing sex-act with his wife. Having cooked a meal and waited for her to drink herself into unconsciousness, he carries her body up to the bedroom and sets the camera running:

Her legs spread easily apart when he moved them with gentle pressure; and the handful of small gem stones slipped easily from his fingers into her vagina. Their multiple colouring glistened with the moisture there as he pressed handful after handful from the vast old-fashioned sweet jar into the deepest part of her. [...] Then he took the lips of her vagina to cover over her rich feast by stretching them tightly together; and using a long and elegant hatpin she had made, he ran it back and forth between those lips like sewing the succulent stuffing into the Christmas turkey; the precious stitchwork in the seam of a rich altar cloth.⁴³⁹

The following day the couple recline on the sofa to watch the tape and relive each vivid detail of their elaborate sexual encounter, the exotically sensuous nature of such descriptive passages suggesting a relationship nourished by these secret moments of private pleasure—a sanctuary from the monotonous weekday routines

⁴³⁷ Ibid: 59.

⁴³⁸ Rosa Dinez, 'Blame It On The Boogie', *Ambit* 142, 1995: 10.

⁴³⁹ Robert Hinshelwood, 'His View Of Himself', *Ambit* 136, 1994: 31-33.

endured in ‘the obscure darkness of the Ministry dungeon’.⁴⁴⁰ Drawn into the action by a succession of memorable images, the reader, as vulnerable and innocent as Angie at the beginning of the tale, gradually comes to experience something of the protagonist’s unorthodox sexual pleasure as Hinshelwood succeeds in transforming a rather distasteful event into a bizarre act of sensual adoration.

By the mid Nineties, gothic and thriller stories began to dominate *Ambit’s* fiction pages. The first of these, Ted Burford’s ‘Black’ (*Ambit* 134), concerned a young woman’s encounter with an angelic boy in an art gallery. Obsessed by the colour black, ‘B’ is given a black watch by her boyfriend Fred on the night of a friend’s sculpture exhibition. Going to the exhibition alone, B approaches a ‘bigwinged bat or pterodactyl’ piece that induces a sudden sensation

that she herself had become conjoined, or almost so. A blond boy—perhaps he was a boyish man—standing no higher than her left shoulder and just behind it, had been close to her for some time. ‘But not as close as now!’ she said to herself. He was very near indeed. She thought she could even detect a certain apple-like fragrance, refreshingly male.⁴⁴¹

Feeling herself drawn towards the ‘blond, longhaired, blue-eyed, Della Robbian boy’, B resists the creature’s advances, and runs back to her ‘nice liberal’ Fred. It is only once B has forgotten about the angel that it suddenly reappears in a final sinister manifestation, walking along the street with another Woman in Black, shredding her wrists with its nails. Horrified by this second encounter, B finally decides to renounce her obsession with the colour black, returning to Fred, who furnishes her with ‘a lovely reddish-purple scarf’. The visitations cease as suddenly as they had begun, and Burford offers few clues to the angel’s meaning.

Upon second reading, however, the lecture that B attends on ‘juvenile murderers’ and the powerful image of the angel as attacker seem to gesture towards contemporary debates about innate evil sparked by the murder of toddler James

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid: 30.

⁴⁴¹ Ted Burford, ‘Black’, *Ambit* 134, 1993: 31-32.

Bulger in 1993. Indeed, dwelling upon an uncannily similar image in *The Guardian* on 16 February 1993, Melanie Phillips and Martin Kettle wrote:

The image lingers. A tiny child holds the hand of a much older boy. Their backs are turned to us but it is what the hands express that matters: it is a universal message of trust holding on to protection, of vulnerability giving itself to responsibility. Not for nothing did Start-Rite shoes use that very same image to persuade parents to trust the beneficial effects of its footwear on their children's growing feet.

Another image strikes another chord. A mother stands in a shop with her child by her side. This time the message spells safety, innocence. It reassures us about the natural order of growing things, tells us all is right with the world.

But of course all was not right for two-year-old James Bulger and his mother, out shopping in a butcher's shop in Bootle last week.⁴⁴²

Given the closed-circuit television footage alluded to by Phillips and Kettle, there is perhaps something more going on beneath the surface of Burford's tale as his 'infantile' but 'experienced' and 'rather frightening' angel, walking off in 'neat white shoes' with its adult companion, is finally transformed into a wrist-slashing demon. With its long-established Liverpool connections, *Ambit* would certainly have been in a strong position to reflect upon the implications of the Bulger case by the appearance of *Ambit* 134 in 1993.

Murder was also central to Carl Tighe's accomplished psychological thriller 'Hartland' (*Ambit* 149), an intricately constructed tale of fratricide and adultery set in the rural West Country. Other notable stories that exploited gothic and supernatural themes included Joel Lane's 'Every Scrapbook Stuck With Glue' (*Ambit* 137), where a gay man struggles to overcome the death of his lover before being reunited with him in a necrophiliac dream-sequence; and André Alexis's satirical 'Letters' (*Ambit* 142), in which a paranoid office worker documents the influence of a mysterious red book upon his fellow employees, charting their decline into a zombie-like state while devising elaborate plans to protect himself from this literary pestilence.

⁴⁴² Melanie Phillips and Martin Kettle, 'The murder of innocence', *Guardian*, 16 February 1993: *Guardian* 2 Supplement: 2.

A key feature of *Ambit* in the Sixties and Seventies, experimental fiction experienced a significant revival in the mid Nineties, beginning with the second person multiple-narrative form of Mike McCormack's 'The Occupation: A Guide for Tourists' (*Ambit* 135). Essentially an eccentric updating of the Crucifixion narrative, the story begins with the anonymous protagonist, a member of Amnesty International, arriving in a UN administered zone and being handed a document entitled *The Occupation: A Guide For Tourists*. This document, which is quoted in full, begins:

1.

While travelling in a foreign country you come upon a terrible scene. Atop a hill a young man is being put to death before a small crowd of onlookers. He has recently been nailed to a cross. Blood streams from his side and his body is faced into the full glare of the sun, he does not have long to live. Do you;

- A. Feel outrage and disgust and immediately cut the man down from the cross.
- B. Pass quickly without saying a word, you will not presume to meddle in the judicial procedures of your host country. Besides, the man was obviously a notorious criminal who got what was coming to him.
- C. Admire the skill with which the whole tableau has been staged and resolve to seek out the theatre company and make them a lavish contribution.⁴⁴³

A cynical parody of the popular series of 'Choose Your Own Adventure' books for children, McCormack's text ultimately offers his reader the choice of (A) humouring a New Age lunatic, (B) developing HIV/AIDS while volunteering in a mobile blood transfusion unit and sharing it with the local population, or (C) taking the lead role in an overtly polemical brutalist theatre production, each leading inexorably back to the Golgotha of the opening. This time, however, 'you' play a much more active part in proceedings:

The murmur of ascent grows until a wave of applause breaks over you; it is sustained while the soldiers take you bodily and hoist you onto the cross. As the nails are driven in you feel no pain, your ecstasy has lifted you beyond sensation. From your perch you can see out over the crowd down onto the ruins of the city. This is your kingdom and auditorium, your panopticon, and it remains fixed in your mind until consciousness, like the daylight, drains away to darkness.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴³ Mike McCormack, 'The Occupation: A Guide For Tourists', *Ambit* 135, 1994: 51.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid*: 54.

While McCormack's piece highlights the extent to which the Crucifixion narrative retains its power to disturb, inspire and fascinate—whether as a founding Christian text, a political parable about betrayal, or a central theme in Western literature—the limits of the form prevent McCormack from exploring these themes in any real depth. Consequently 'The Occupation: A Guide for Tourists' remains an interesting, if flawed, experiment in second person narrative form.

A more sophisticated and satisfying experimentalism was at work in Toby Litt's satirical swipe at Internet communities, 'Z-ward, BoJo, Kenneth and the Betamaxboy' (*Ambit* 143). The story begins with 'BoJo' sending 'Z-ward' an email in classic netspeak:

<}:={> zed, my old e-mate. FYUA: this shit. another e-friend brwsd it s/w on the net. MF wont gimme the siteinfo, so maybe hes untruthing me. (homepage s/w, I guess) jst got no netiquette, some gs. flame the fuck, zwot I say. anyways, my co-con o/t wd&wnrfl, thought ya might dig. BWT, its some PFHeavyS. dont let it f with your m, bigbuddy. mail/fax me back when brwsd. quicktime. BoJo.⁴⁴⁵

Intrigued by the 'PFHeavyS' his friend describes, Z-ward tracks down the elusive homepage and the various mundane writings of an avid collector of Betamax tapes. However, just when it seems that BetamaxBoy is going to delve into an all too convincing account of the ecstasies associated with a fuzzy screen and the satisfying 'kerchunk-whirr' of a 'superiorsystem', he takes his readers into a much more disturbing world.

A creature of habit, BetamaxBoy is suddenly shaken out of his comfortable routine of junkshop pilgrimages, evenings in front of the Betamax-player and old episodes of *Crossroads* by the discovery of a mysterious tape among a box purchased from a car-boot sale in Devon:

nothing written on it, no box, no label. I came to it almost last [...] Chunked it in. It was nothing from the tv. Just this guy, pretty nerdy looking, sitting in this weird room—

⁴⁴⁵ Toby Litt, 'Z-ward, BoJo, Kenneth and the BetamaxBoy', *Ambit* 143, 1996: 54.

lavalamps and Hendrixposters—60stimewarp—talking direct to the camera—B/W UK 1992-4, 23mins.⁴⁴⁶

Fascinated by this paragon of nerdishness while strengthening his own claims to that title by immediately cataloguing his latest acquisition, BetamaxBoy watches the film's protagonist deliver a lecture denouncing Jeremy Beadle as the root of all evil, drawing upon anecdotal evidence and an etymological study of the television presenter's surname to support his case. Indeed, BetamaxBoy is so taken with the theories of the man he christens 'Kenneth' that he transcribes them in full. The resulting combination of Kenneth's unedited ravings and BetamaxBoy's illustrative commentary presents a darkly comic vision of two nerds in league against the growing power of the omnipresent 'televisualpoliceman'. Tracing Beadle's career through a series of tawdry home-video surveillance programmes, from *Game For A Laugh* and *You've Been Framed* to *Beadle's About*, Kenneth then turns to a dictionary definition of 'Beadle', highlighting a string of diabolic coincidences:

(Sc.)—that's Scottish, though it should be scumbag or scuzzface—church official officer attending on the minister—yo! Beadle, attend to me!—hence Beadledom—listen up—stupid officiousness—stupid—officiousness—and the next word is beady, like in 'beadyeyes' and the next word is 'beagle' as in trackerdogs and the next is 'beak' like in oldblackandwhitefilms, the headmaster—then 'beam' like xrays and shit—then 'beast'—and that's etymology.⁴⁴⁷

Despite BetamaxBoy's wry asides—'[I, like, like likes like Kenneth's likes]',⁴⁴⁸ '[I think Kenneth goes a little too far here]',⁴⁴⁹ and '[Kenneth, I'm afraid to say, moons the camera]'—⁴⁵⁰ Kenneth's call for the death of Beadle strikes a chord with the passive Z-ward, who finally replies to BoJo's email, vowing to 'FIGHT The Beadle Within, In The NAME of KENNETH'.⁴⁵¹ In an uneasy conclusion, the reader is left with three disturbing portraits of abnormal obsession, an illustration of the

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid: 55.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid: 57.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid: 55.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid: 56.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid: 57.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid: 60.

contemporary myth-making process in action, and a testimony to the unique capacity of the Internet to bring like-minded people together.

Like the longer fiction, the sketches oscillated between the formally innovative and the straightforwardly anecdotal, typically characterised by liberal doses of the morbid, the macabre and the fantastic. In 'The Apartment Block' (*Ambit* 122), Richard Dyer presents an unsettling account of an individual suddenly struck by the implications of infinity. Lying on the sofa with his partner, the protagonist, Michael, stares out of the window of his apartment and into the lives of those living opposite. The events he witnesses include a thirteen year-old boy admiring himself in a mirror; a black woman struggling to breast-feed her white baby; and the surreal sight of three blind people who, with 'Eyes like oysters', are 'feeling different objects for a few moments then passing them onto the person on their left; a swan's egg, a soft round camembert, uncut, and the cast of a man's left hand in wax.'⁴⁵² Dyer's text gets more surreal still as Michael's microscopic eyes roam other rooms until, in a final bizarre twist, his own image is reflected back at him by the jet black eyes of a charm found in a chocolate egg, lying on a table in one of the adjacent apartments. Michael's realisation that he is watching himself watching himself triggers

a sensation in his stomach like hot wax poured into cold water. He feels the warm breast under his fingers, he looks into his own face, not as in a mirror but as if at a lover, in his eyes he sees reflected the myriad lighted windows of an apartment block.⁴⁵³

Rather than offering closure, Michael's observations expose 'a geometry of chaos', where 'the windows extend outwards to infinity in every direction'.

A similar formal cleverness marked Jonathan Treitel's 'The Winter People' (*Ambit* 138) where, in a world entirely composed of snow, legions of snow-children

⁴⁵² Richard Dyer, 'The Apartment Block', *Ambit* 122, 1990: 85.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid*: 86.

come out to build ‘fleshmen’ after a substantial fall of ‘fleshflakes’. Other sketches explored less innocent themes. Sue Flynn’s ‘Disabled Vows’ (*Ambit* 127) offered a slightly tasteless account of a wedding between the narrator’s disabled brother and his paraplegic bride. Dragooned into helping her new sister-in-law prepare for the ceremony, Flynn’s narrator is thoroughly appalled by the experience as, staying ‘with the bride on the eve of her wedding’, she is repelled by

Her whiny voice with its burble of mucus,
Her slimy cajoling,
Her utter contempt of men,
Her self pity,
Her expectations; enslaving all with their own embarrassment at being able.⁴⁵⁴

Nor is Flynn’s narrator in any mood to congratulate her own brother whom, she rather resentfully notes, ‘can have it all, now. Marriage and kids and a home and sex. She has a special flat and a mobility allowance to pay for his petrol.’⁴⁵⁵ Flynn again flirted with controversial themes in ‘Of Dolls and Games’ (*Ambit* 131), as a twelve-year-old falls pregnant with what she believes to be ‘a gift from god’, before giving birth to a dead foetus, alone, on the toilet. Equally sinister, Dai Vaughan’s ‘Meat’ (*Ambit* 145) shows a neighbouring butcher’s shop and contemporary art gallery to be engaged in a disturbingly similar trade, while Johnny Strike’s ‘Ha Ha Ha’ (*Ambit* 157) sees a man walk into a bar and demand, with menaces, a funny story from the bar-tender.

In a decade during which *Ambit*’s poetry was veritably funereal, its fiction extended from the chilling to the darkly comic and displayed an unprecedented level of technical accomplishment as the well-crafted short story became the magazine’s primary fictive mode of the Nineties. The input of Nicholson, Lykiard, Litt and Tighe saw *Ambit* adding obsessive collectors, paranoid office workers,

⁴⁵⁴ Sue Flynn, ‘Disabled Vows’, *Ambit* 127, 1992: 68.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

computer-nerds, and scheming murderers to its growing list of disturbed protagonists, while the work of Treitel and Burford brought a supernatural dimension that offered a satisfying alternative to the twisted realism and stylish surrealism that had characterised *Ambit's* earlier fiction. These authors also provided some of the decade's most entertaining experiments, with Nicholson's 'Beetamorphosis' (*Ambit* 153) offering a witty version of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, and Belbin's 'Love, Time Travel' (*Ambit* 132) reviving the science fiction genre as a vehicle for a tale of forbidden love. Somewhat overshadowed by *Ambit's* well-known poetic contributors during the Eighties, *Ambit's* fiction writers had, by the end of the Nineties, become the chief standard-bearers for the magazine's distinctive brand of 'the shocking, the erotic, the comic, [and] the provocative.'⁴⁵⁶ Paying tribute in *Time Out* to the 'linguistically agile and imaginative stories' that made *Ambit* 'as reliable as a quartz clock without ever being boring',⁴⁵⁷ Nicholas Royle rightly saw *Ambit's* fiction as central to its editors' dedication to 'the best, previously unseen new fiction, poetry and art'.⁴⁵⁸ With Bax determined to steer clear of 'tales of domestic boredom (or bliss), detective/horror/ghost/school/fantasy stories or anything that ends "it was all a dream"', the quality of the stories that appeared during the Nineties certainly suggested that *Ambit's* fiction had regained much of the standing it had enjoyed during the Seventies.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁶ Anon, 'Writers Guidelines', *Ambit* webpages, www.ambitmagazine.co.uk/Submit.htm, 2003. Last accessed: British Library, 7 December 2004.

⁴⁵⁷ Nicholas Royle, quoted by H.P. Tinker in 'Ambitious Outsider: An Interview With *Ambit* Editor Martin Bax', 3:AM Magazine Webpages, http://www.3ammagazine.com/litarchives/2002_jun/interview_martin_bax.html, June 2002. Last accessed: British Library, 7 December 2004.

⁴⁵⁸ Anon, 'I Think Therefore I *Ambit*...', *Ambit* webpages, www.ambitmagazine.co.uk/Reader.htm, 2003. Last accessed: British Library, 7 December 2004.

⁴⁵⁹ 'Writers Guidelines', see note 456.

Retrospectives and Revivals: *Ambit's* Nineties Art. *Ambit* 120-150, 1990-97

If *Ambit's* art section had been increasingly dominated by drawing during the Eighties, the Nineties brought an unprecedented variety of styles and media to the pages of a magazine which, celebrating 'Thirty Years [as] Part of the Scene' with *Ambit* 120, was keen to prove that 'Decoration Brings More Charm To Your Career'.⁴⁶⁰ For thirty years, the visual arts had played an important part in cementing *Ambit's* position as a meeting-point for the mainstream *and* the avant-garde with a mixture of Pop Art shock, photo-documentary, cartoon humour and academic drawing by artists as diverse as David Hockney, Michael Foreman, Ralph Steadman and Helen Chadwick. Yet the standard of the visuals would improve considerably from 1994 as photo-quality reproduction and full-colour lithography brought a fresh vibrancy to the work of *Ambit's* painters in particular.

Ambit's artists began the decade in confident mood with a number that, despite appearing in monochrome, proved at once an exhibition of the familiar and a template for the stylish eclecticism that would characterise the magazine during the Nineties. Fronted by a line drawing taken from Ron Sandford's series of kimono-clad Chinese women, *Art Decoration Brings More Charm to Your Career*, *Ambit* 120 opened with a charming watercolour of contented animals at play by Laura Knight, evoking the simple innocence of the 'well-behaved sheep' described in Edwin Brock's poem 'At The Musée d'Art Naïf'.⁴⁶¹ This innocent world-view was soon dispelled by Ken Cox's gritty charcoal illustration for Bax's 'A Trip to Dublin' story, in which a young couple are entwined against the wall of a gloomy, scruffy bar,⁴⁶² and by Foreman's nightmarish illustration of a bee-headed man for

⁴⁶⁰ Bax, *Ambit* 120, 1990: front cover.

⁴⁶¹ Knight, illustration, *ibid*: 2.

⁴⁶² Cox, illustration, *ibid*: 1, 10.

Joukko Turkka's bizarre sex-fantasy, *When The Bees Got Out*.⁴⁶³ Nor were Sandford's Chinese nudes any less sinister, hiding their faces before almost reluctantly revealing thighs, breasts and vagina to both painter and viewer.⁴⁶⁴ Elsewhere Pop influences lingered in Robert McAuley's sci-fi collage of two tigers conversing in clip-art symbols upon the competing themes of 'telephones' and 'food and drink',⁴⁶⁵ and in Foreman's humorous image of a cross-eyed Napoleon.⁴⁶⁶ *Ambit* 120 also included a retrospective for the painter, sculptor and performance artist Bruce McLean, with *Possibly a Nude by a Coal Bunker* (1980)—a photograph of a nude woman flanked by a coal-scoop and other assorted props—epitomising McLean's interest in the 'pose', and the performative aspects of sculpture.⁴⁶⁷ Bringing *Ambit* 120 to an attractive close, Ken Cox focused on circus themes with a series of paintings featuring jugglers, dancers and acrobats before the more sombre images of *Puppet State* and *The Last Prince*, the latter showing a young man offering up a globe to three shadowy crows.⁴⁶⁸

In 1991 Bax published the first of three Art Specials designed to foreground *Ambit's* commitment to the visual arts. Billed as a Pop Art Retrospective, *Ambit* 126 carried the same *faux-naïve* nude that had generated so many complaints when it had graced *Ambit* 14 in 1962, although in the context of the early Nineties this early Hockney appeared more an experiment in primitive doodling than an exercise in pornography. Between the covers this retrospective proved something of an anti-climax for the seven-page section of Sixties and Seventies reprints from Patrick Caulfield's *Black and White Flower Piece*, Peter Blake's *Albert Einstein* and a

⁴⁶³ Foreman, *Bee man*, *ibid*: 26.

⁴⁶⁴ Sandford, *Art Decoration Brings More Charm to Your Career*, *ibid*: 13-16.

⁴⁶⁵ McAuley, untitled, *ibid*: 18.

⁴⁶⁶ Foreman, illustration, *ibid*: 48.

⁴⁶⁷ Bruce McLean, *Possibly a Nude by a Coal Bunker* (1980), *ibid*: 51.

⁴⁶⁸ Cox, *The Last Prince*, *ibid*: 78.

Paolozzi collage did scant justice to the work of these Pop Art luminaries. Moreover, in the absence of a shared thematic context, the relationships between the paintings of Caulfield, the sketches of Hockney and the sculpture of Anthony Donaldson were by no means immediately obvious. Instead of a critical commentary Bax published a paragraph-length advert where a thoughtful review article detailing *Ambit's* relationship with the British 'Pop' painters might have done considerably more to recall the spirit of *Ambit's* youth. There was nothing noticeably 'Pop' about the other contributions, and the most noteworthy were a series of female nudes in ink by John Emanuel and some sketches of the Irish landscape by Charles Shearer. Consequently, while some of the works in the 'Pictures from the Pop Era' section were interesting examples of Pop by *Ambit* contributors, they did little by themselves to establish *Ambit's* position within the contemporary art scene of the Sixties and Seventies.

Despite the shortcomings of *Ambit* 126, the Pop styles of the early Seventies found their echoes in a handful of Nineties contributions as the cartoon strip of John Watson (*Ambit* 125); the bold, black-and-white prints of Andrzej Klimowski's *The Story So Far* (*Ambit* 127); the untitled nude collages of Richard Dyer (*Ambit* 127); and the *Found Things* of Robert McAuley (*Ambit* 130) each evoked the popular, the mundane, and the ready-made. At the same time Paolozzi's line drawings for *Ambit* 129 explored his characteristic obsession with collage and the continuities between mechanics and anatomy. These concepts later proved a strong presence in the paintings of David Smith, whose *High Priestess* and *Fire Elemental* (*Ambit* 130) saw female heads grafted onto various machine-parts to create an ensemble heavily indebted to Paolozzi.⁴⁶⁹ By the mid Nineties Pop had given way to a variety of

⁴⁶⁹ David Smith, *High Priestess* (1991) and *Fire Elemental* (1992), *Ambit* 130, 1992: 54, 55.

contemporary styles. Some pieces, like Ian Pollock's illustrations for Sue Flynn's 'Disabled Vows' (*Ambit* 127) and 'Of Dolls and Games' (*Ambit* 128), and his controversial *Miracles of Christ* (*Ambit* 128) showed a penchant for the same grotesque themes favoured by Steadman.⁴⁷⁰ Others, such as Kim Bach's *Recording the Moment* and *Studio Still Life* (*Ambit* 133), registered the influence of abstract expressionism. Conversely, Jan Faul's photographic contributions *Spirit of Yaddo* and *Dari '24 Chrysler* (*Ambit* 135), with their combination of veiled nudes, staircases and vintage motorcars, evoked the Surrealism of Man Ray and his Dada associates.⁴⁷¹

1994 marked a crucial turning point in the magazine's approach to the visual arts as *Ambit* 136 brought the high-gloss, full-colour reproductions that enhanced the presentation of work in oils, acrylics and watercolours. Indeed, the paintings of Frank Auerbach selected for *Ambit* 136 from an exhibition of *Recent Works* in New York are brought to life in a way that vividly registers the 'blobs, rutted strokes [...] marbled blends of colours' and the frantic impasto of the artist's personal idiom.⁴⁷² The impact of the densely expressionistic *Mornington Crescent Night* (1991-92), with its bustle of traffic and pedestrians, and the more subdued cityscape of *From the Studios* (1993), would have been dramatically diminished by monochrome reproduction, while the figurative *Julia Seated II* (1991), without the warm flesh-tones of its nude subject, would have made similarly unsatisfying viewing. Thus Auerbach's paintings immediately stand out in a number that also included some etchings of African scenes by Eliza Kentridge and some abstract expressionist paintings by Sebastian Morpurgo.

⁴⁷⁰ Ian Pollock, *Miracles of Christ*, *Ambit* 128, 1992: 32-37.

⁴⁷¹ Jan Faul, *Spirit of Yaddo* and *Dari '24 Chrysler*, *Ambit* 135, 1994: 86, 87.

⁴⁷² Catherine Lampert, 'Auerbach and His Sitters', Catherine Lampert, Norman Rosenthal and Isabel Carlisle (eds), *Frank Auerbach: Paintings and Drawings 1954-2001*. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2001: 19.

David Remfry's watercolours were next to benefit from the full-colour treatment as *Ambit* 137 carried five colourful evocations of the London party scene.⁴⁷³ Remfry's realistic works were then followed by the romantic richness of Christopher Le Brun's *Allegory—The Green Knight* (1991-93) in *Ambit* 138, Le Brun's luscious blend of greens, reds and whites suggesting an attractive youth touched by a melancholy beyond his years. The *Brünnhilde* studies, three luminous depictions of the Germanic warrior-queen fleeing Valhalla on a pure white mount, were marked by a similarly eye-catching combination of bold reds and softer greens, and provided *Ambit's* first full-colour cover-design.⁴⁷⁴ As full-colour became a regular feature, the high standards of Auerbach, Remfry and Le Brun were upheld by Paula Rego's 'dog woman' paintings (*Ambit* 139), Francis Bacon's small portrait studies (*Ambit* 141) and Robert Franzini's lithographic nudes (*Ambit* 145), before the appearance of Laura Knight's strikingly colourful tribute to 'Fifty Years of Midnight's Children' (*Ambit* 149).

In 1997, *Ambit* 150 appeared as a 140-page special in which the magazine's visual aspect was again highlighted with Remfry's full-colour *New York Watercolours: 95-97*. Populated by a cast of 'Night Club singers, dancers, transvestites and exotic dancers',⁴⁷⁵ Remfry's latest paintings continued to focus upon New York nightlife. A young black couple dominate the first of these scenes: lost in the music, the male cuts a particularly striking figure in bright red jacket, red shoes and striped waistcoat. The final scene focuses on the more formal dancing of a couple stepping through a tango or waltz, the shapely woman pressed tightly to the waist of her slender partner. Alongside these attractive figurative paintings, Peter Blake contributed some shadowy wood engravings for *Under Milk Wood*,

⁴⁷³ David Remfry, 'A Little Night Music', *Ambit* 137, 1994: 18-22.

⁴⁷⁴ Christopher Le Brun, 'Details', *Ambit* 138, 1994: 18-22.

⁴⁷⁵ Remfry, *New York Watercolours: 95-97*, *Ambit* 150, 1997: 25.

although, described as working proofs, these pieces lacked the completeness of Remfry's work. A section entitled 'Blocks from Bermondsey' yielded some attractive designs, with John Dougill contributing the neo-primitive *Acrobat*, the print's subject flinging three limbs into the four corners of the page while executing a headstand; and the menacing *Warriors*, with its two combatants crouched in readiness, a knot of bulging sinews. Vanessa Jackson contributed various untitled abstract prints with their roots in graphic communications and typography, and Norman Ackroyd produced some highly evocative seascapes. *Ambit* 150 also featured some attractive drawings by Foreman entitled 'Ways of Carrying Children', a study beginning with mule-riding in Mexico, and covering basket-riding in China, before concluding with camel-riding in Inner Mongolia. Some cartoon sketches of 'Smart Dressers' by Posy Simmonds; Ron Sandford's portraits of Vanessa Jackson, Derek Birdsall and Stan Smith; and the usual mixture of pencil, ink, and charcoal illustrations completed the visual aspect of *Ambit* 150.

Ambit's third Art Special, appearing in 1998, was an equally diverse affair. Fronted by a detail from a Steadman drawing, *Ambit* 154 carried Steadman's *Vital Reading of the 20th Century*, an interesting ensemble of Paolozzi-esque technical and anatomical drawing dominated by a sketch of a human skeleton shaking itself into pieces. Gestures to *Ambit's* Pop past were also present in Sarah Raphael's *Strip!* full-colour paintings: taken from an exhibition at the Marlborough Fine Art gallery in 1998, Raphael's paintings are a colourful patchwork of shapes and symbols from the lexicon of graphic design. Thus speech bubbles, thought bubbles, flashes, lightning-bolts and arrows are accompanied by various swirls and squiggles, and presented in the neat rows of graphics source-books. Upon closer inspection, however, the freehand nature of the compositions becomes apparent as,

in a detail from *Strip Page 8*, the curves become less exact, the brushstrokes become visible and the surface loses its printed appearance.⁴⁷⁶ *Ambit* 154 featured more Remfry watercolours for Geoff Nicholson's 'Lori: A New York Story', some drawings of fruit by Sandford, and some attractive and surreal Foreman illustrations for Porter's poem 'Sassetta: Scenes from the life of St Francis'.

As the Nineties drew to a close, eclecticism increasingly became the hallmark of *Ambit's* approach to the visual arts. In addition to the Arts Specials *Ambit* 150 and *Ambit* 154, Robert Scriven's bronze sculptures of his baby daughter at play (*Ambit* 151), Evelyn Williams's corpse-like life studies (*Ambit* 152), and Chris Orr's playful drawings of scrap-metal farm-animals (*Ambit* 153) are noteworthy, for they represent some of the magazine's best work. By distancing itself from the more offensive visual experiments of earlier years, *Ambit* significantly enhanced its reputation as a magazine dedicated to the best of the mainstream and avant-garde traditions. While *Ambit's* drawings of the Nineties still registered the Pop styles of the Sixties and the more grotesque themes of the Seventies, steady improvements in print quality had created a medium in which painting could genuinely flourish. The move towards full-colour reproductions of contemporary artists like Francis Bacon and David Remfry suggested that *Ambit* was no longer simply an outlet for aspiring art students and illustrators, but was making significant strides into the world of 'serious Art'. With illustration no longer providing the magazine's principal visual content, painting, sculpture, drawing, collage and photography all found a place in *Ambit's* art pages and, in the absence of a regular cover artist, figures as varied as Michael Foreman, Paula Rego and Posy Simmonds each played a part in fashioning *Ambit's* defining images of the

⁴⁷⁶ Sarah Raphael, *Strip!*, *Ambit* 154, 1998: 25-27.

Nineties. Vital, varied and vibrant, *Ambit's* arts section bore all the characteristics of a magazine looking forward to the twenty-first century with confidence and pride.

AMBIT'S KEY NINETIES CONTRIBUTORS

The Poetry of Selima Hill

(Born: 13 October 1945, London)

Introduced to *Ambit* during Carol Ann Duffy's spell as poetry editor, Selima Hill made a handful of appearances in the magazine during the Eighties and Nineties. Spanning the years between *The Accumulation Of Small Acts of Kindness* (1989) and *Violet* (1997), Hill's *Ambit* poems reflect her characteristic interest in personal and family relationships, and the surreal imagery that has invited comparisons with two fellow *Ambit* contributors, Stevie Smith and Carol Ann Duffy. Unlike Duffy, Hill did not begin to publish seriously until her late thirties and, having studied Moral Sciences at Cambridge during the Sixties, worked as an F.E. College tutor and as a bookshop manager before her first collection, *Saying Hello At The Station*, was published by Chatto and Windus in 1984.

Saying Hello At The Station, with its relaxed, free-verse style, its everyday themes and its occasional gestures towards the surreal, proved an assured debut as memories of a rural childhood evident in poems like 'The Flowers' and 'Among the Thyme and Daisies' appeared alongside more consciously literary pieces like 'Above Tooley Mountain' and 'Flaubert Writes a Letter Home'. It also registered Hill's interest in painting, with 'Private View' recounting the experiences of 'the wife of the man who won first prize' and who, virtually ignored by the 'Shoals of

visitors [moving] in and out of the exhibits', eventually finds the space to record some vibrant images of her own:

Outside in the garden,
a foxglove leans against the trunk
of a tall sanded plane tree.
The evening sky is pale and magnificent.⁴⁷⁷

Lasting a mere four lines, this outburst of creative expression remains short-lived, and Hill's speaker soon returns to her role as the supporting lady, both defined and confined by her status as 'the wife of the man who won first prize'. In 'Questioning Mr Bonnet', Hill indulged her love of ancient mythology, her speaker remembering a 'helpful Egyptologist' who had explained how the moon had gained its place in Egyptian cosmology:

Horus, the god of light, hid his semen
in a dish of chopped lettuce leaves,
and greedy Seth, the god of darkness,
pig-headed, metal-boned, swallowed it,
and so, by trickery, the moon was born⁴⁷⁸

This mythological narrative provides the starting-point for an imaginative journey into the Egyptian underworld, populated by various immortals, which concludes with the speaker wondering whether Mr Bonnet will be there to meet her before her own descent into 'the corridors of night / into the Judgment Hall'.⁴⁷⁹

Another highlight was 'Chicken Feathers', a restrained but moving account of the poet's relationship with her mother. Essentially a series of poetic snapshots, Hill's poem captures a number of significant moments in the life of its subject. The mysterious keeper of chickens who, 'wearing a blue linen dress / the colour of summer' reminds the speaker 'of Brunhilde— / alone, bronzed, unfamiliar', is subsequently presented as dancer, school-gate mother, housewife, bereaved widow,

⁴⁷⁷ Selima Hill, 'Private View', *Saying Hello At The Station*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1984: 21.

⁴⁷⁸ Hill, 'Questioning Mr Bonnet', *ibid*: 9.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid*: 10.

and finally departed matriarch.⁴⁸⁰ Through this neo-Cubist technique, Hill generates a convincing portrait of a woman admired but never quite understood—an emotional detachment suggested by the lines ‘She doesn’t look like anybody’s mother’, ‘Tonight I kissed my mother, / for the first time that I can remember’ and:

She comes to collect me from school,
on time, silent,
and I hand her my coat and satchel—
avoiding, even then, her lovely eyes,
that look down on my world
like distant stars.⁴⁸¹

The end of the poem brings some sense of reconciliation, but this is unable to exorcise earlier disappointments.

Hill’s second volume, *My Darling Camel* (1988), included many of her Eighties periodical contributions and a number of new poems in which a more ironic tone was discernible. Covering similar ground to Hill’s debut collection, *My Darling Camel* revisited the themes of personal relationships, family problems and childhood memories with some poems like ‘Saying Goodbye to the Suzuki Man’ and ‘Mother Stone’ looking back to the memories that had inspired ‘Chicken Feathers’. Also notable was a new enthusiasm for the animal kingdom, and Hill devotes a significant proportion of the collection to memories of zoo visits and the camel of the title. ‘Diving at Midnight’, however, with its female protagonist and its compact, imagistic lyricism, epitomises the general stylistic and thematic direction of the volume, as Hill’s diver

takes her T-shirt off,
to feel the sun shine on her breasts.
It touches her like sleepy babies
when your milk comes in.
It isn’t true, she thinks to herself—
[...]
that suffering in empty solitudes
is all man has to bring him close to God⁴⁸²

⁴⁸⁰ Hill, ‘Chicken Feathers’, *ibid*: 45.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid*: 45.

⁴⁸² Hill, ‘Diving at Midnight’, *My Darling Camel*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1988: 7.

In Glynn Maxwell's view, *My Darling Camel* firmly established Hill as an accessible poet with a gift for 'stringing together apparently fragmented details so that they not only portray a state of mind, but also create a tableau, a glimpsed scene.'⁴⁸³

In *The Accumulation of Small Acts of Kindness* (1989), Hill turned to the long poem and to the diary form to relate the experiences of a young woman detained in a psychiatric ward. As Hill's protagonist records her daily thoughts and feelings, long-repressed memories of 'Ginger ale, paddling, menstruation' and 'Hampstead in the autumn, lost for ever'⁴⁸⁴ are juxtaposed with the sinister images that signal a yearning for escape. Parted from a mother who said 'Goodbye' at Intensive Care, then 'waited [...] patiently in VISITORS' for 'Seven years', Hill's speaker struggles to bond with her infant son and to submit to the examinations of the doctors. By the end of the text, some of these psychological hurdles have been overcome, and the result is a final journal-like section, 'The Last Week', in which many of the protagonist's sufferings have been translated into a highly surreal, but spiritually uplifting, form of miniaturist verse. Thus 'Sunday' reads:

The river-bank is thick with summer flowers,
as stiff as pigs, as pink as fruit; massed flies
stroke their wings against the fluted sky
whose height, as sweet as hay, rings like an axe
and dyes the spotted cows a million blues.⁴⁸⁵

In a satisfying conclusion, the disturbing chaos of earlier chapters is reined-in, and the protagonist signs off with nine poems that, in their formal order and their predominant lightness of theme, suggest their author has finally regained emotional and psychological equilibrium.

⁴⁸³ Glynn Maxwell, 'Selima Hill', in Riggs (ed.), *Contemporary Poets*: 528.

⁴⁸⁴ Hill, 'Chapter One: Boys', *The Accumulation of Small Acts of Kindness*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1989: 14.

⁴⁸⁵ Hill, 'Chapter Three: The Last Week', 'Sunday', *ibid*: 43.

Despite *Ambit's* longstanding obsession with mental institutions and schizophrenics, Hill's contributions were firmly in keeping with the themes of *Saying Hello At The Station*. 'On Being Introspective', Hill's first *Ambit* poem, was certainly notable for its surreal edge and lingering sense of menace. Describing the private lives of Mr and Mrs Barnsley, Hill's poem opens with the suggestion that 'everything seems to be normal and delightful'. But it soon transpires that this is not the case, as Mr Barnsley chides his wife for 'getting a bit too introspective', an innocuous observation which triggers a bizarre sequence of events culminating in a closing scene of grotesque surrealism. Thus Mr Barnsley is launched into a landscape composed from fragments of paintings by Van Gogh, walking

in time to a sonorous piano
step by step across an orange field.
The sky is full of menacing black crows.⁴⁸⁶

The Van Gogh motif is further underlined by the bold blues, blacks, oranges and yellows that lend a tangible luminosity to Hill's lines as she draws on images from the Impressionist's *Crows over Wheatfield* (1890) and *Sunflowers* (1888) to evoke the world as perceived through the consciousness of the brooding Mrs Barnsley. Just as the gloomy *Crows over Wheatfield* anticipated the death of its Dutch creator, its presence in Hill's poem portends a similarly violent conclusion as Mr Barnsley witnesses his wife 'stirring a yellow stew of human ears'.

Equally disturbing, 'Salvation' presented a pathetic vision of a lonely woman who, having arrived at a bar to meet someone who never appears, finds her only companions in a stray dog called Hilda and a bottle of spirits. Like 'On Being Introspective', the poem begins in a recognisable setting—a deserted bar—before abruptly moving into a surreal world of quasi-psychoanalytical symbols. Here

⁴⁸⁶ Hill, 'On Being Introspective', *Ambit* 118, 1989: 62.

alcohol becomes the gateway into the over-active imagination of Hill's female protagonist who, leaving the bar through a yellow curtain, discovers:

a room like a parlour
containing an unmade bed
and a plastic basket of oranges
and a picture of the queen.⁴⁸⁷

Recalling images from Hill's earlier work, these oranges are invested with a gloomy significance, being closely linked in poems like 'Chicken Feathers' and 'Saying Goodbye to Suzuki Man' with the death of the poet's father. Similarly, the bed in *The Accumulation of Small Acts of Kindness* is variously associated with illness, paternal rejection, and labour pains, and serves as another depressing omen. Like Hill's schizophrenic diarist, her alcoholic does find temporary escape in the vivid landscapes of her imagination ('she threw herself onto the bed / as the room filled up with stars'). Upon being woken by 'the dog / she had met in the street outside', however, more mundane concerns intervene:

she rummaged about in her bag
to try and find something to eat,
and she found a bottle of gin,
as small as her bald-headed lover.⁴⁸⁸

The bitterly ironic conclusion seems to suggest that 'a bottle of gin' represents the literal size and scope of the protagonist's romantic aspirations: having gone to the bar in search of a man, she has left with a bottle of spirits.

Hill's contributions to *Ambit* 123 in 1991 anticipated the contents of *A Little Book of Meat* (1993) and *My Sister's Horse* (1996), as well as her *Trembling Hearts in the Bodies of Dogs: New and Selected Poems* (1994). In 'And You, Selima, What Would You Choose?' memories of childhood are reawakened, although the mood here is one of contented bliss as the speaker yearns for a rural existence akin to that of Hill's youth:

⁴⁸⁷ Hill, 'Salvation', *ibid*: 63.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid*.

I would choose a cooling-tower,
with a tin door opening onto hay-fields,
and surrounded by a wooden trellis.⁴⁸⁹

Here images of thatched roofs, cows and mountain goats find their echoes in the long vowel sounds and languorous phrases that predominate as the contented speaker imagines

cows grazing far below,
and myself, in a flowery dress,
kissing the farmer.⁴⁹⁰

In 'Conversation With My Sister', Hill's love of the surreal was in strong evidence. Despite its title, the poem offers few details concerning the conversation between Hill and her sister, and focuses instead upon a striking simile that suddenly causes the speaker's mind to wander:

And as I spoke, I saw my words
congregate around her ears like goldfish,
then dart into her wavy hair.⁴⁹¹

Having christened some of these 'goldfish' 'Bobby', Hill's speaker is reminded of an overweight swimming-instructor by the same name, and this prompts a pitying reflection upon Bobby's crème-egg-fuelled existence. The goldfish finally return in the closing lines as the speaker observes her words 'slithering in and out of [the] head' of her listener, and although a rather underdeveloped piece, 'Conversation With My Sister' recalled the comic surrealism of Hill's earlier work.

Surrealist tendencies are also evident in 'The Flesh of the Giraffe', although here they are turned to more unusual ends as a bizarre love story featuring a tiny girl and an anonymous 'you' (who is compared to a giraffe) emerges uneasily from a dense impasto of arresting images and suggestive phrases. Something of a riddle, the poem closes with the lines:

Last night you wrote I LOVE YOU

⁴⁸⁹ Hill, 'And You, Selima, What Would You Choose?', *Ambit* 123, 1991: 92.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹¹ Hill, 'Conversation With My Sister', *ibid.*: 93.

on a moth.
You found it in the gravedigger's hut
you keep your ladders in.
You may well whisper secrets with your elongated lip
and hide her in strange sheds:
she's only happy when she's tucked up warmly.⁴⁹²

Again a somewhat unsatisfying piece, 'The Flesh of the Giraffe' anticipated a number of later animal poems in which birds, wolves, hares and reindeer become both emblems and projections of the poet's human emotions. Indeed both *Trembling Hearts in the Bodies of Dogs* and the Whitbread Prize-winning *Bunny* (2002) are marked by a desire to find continuities between the human and the animal kingdoms.

Hill's contributions to *Ambit* 139 in 1995 were to prove her last of the Nineties, and her last before the appearance of *Violet* (1997). 'Marigolds' returned to the rural scenery of 'And You, Selima, What Would You Choose?', although a note of foreboding is discernible in the behaviour of the speaker's 'two bad-tempered-looking dogs' who 'solemnly change places, / and then go back to how they were before'.⁴⁹³ Similarly, 'May 18th 1994 (I.M. E.D. Wood)'—an elegy bizarrely cast as a limerick—looked back to the emotional territory surveyed in 'Chicken Feathers':

My mother is finally dead.
I visit her grave instead.
You could have been nicer,
at least once or twice a
little voice whines in my head.⁴⁹⁴

Perhaps appropriately, the ambiguous phrasing of the italicised lines suggests that unacknowledged mutual failings were responsible for the estrangement of mother and daughter.

⁴⁹² Hill, 'The Flesh of the Giraffe', *ibid*: 92.

⁴⁹³ Hill, 'Marigolds', *Ambit* 139, 1995: 96.

⁴⁹⁴ Hill, 'May 18th 1994 (I.M. E.D. Wood)', *ibid*: 96.

A prolific poet of some standing, Hill remains one of *Ambit's* most popular contributors. Included in the feminist anthology *No Holds Barred* (1985), and *Making For The Open: The Chatto Book of Post-Feminist Poetry 1964-1984* (1985), she seldom echoes the polemical feminism of Duffy and Adcock, but interrogates the complex experiences of modern women as daughters, mothers, lovers, wives and writers. Hill's *Ambit* contributions of the Nineties may not necessarily rank as the most technically accomplished of her poems, however they do register many of the thematic concerns of her later volumes and certainly highlight *Ambit's* continuing commitment to the work of women writers.

The Artwork of Ian Pollock

(Born: 1950, Cheshire)

In 1977 *Ambit* added another recent Royal College of Art graduate to its list of visual arts contributors. Illustrating themes suggested by extracts from the Old Testament, Ian Pollock's pencil drawings for *Ambit* 72 represented unlikely territory for a magazine then dedicated to the satirical and the risqué. But while the Old Testament remains 'a repository [...] of religious "truth"',⁴⁹⁵ it is also noted for the darkness, apocalypticism and violence epitomised by the test of Abraham in *Genesis* 21.1-18 and *The Book of Job*, and it is these qualities which find their echoes in Pollock's drawings.

In 1975, Pollock published a series of black and white prints entitled *Seven Stories About Jesus*.⁴⁹⁶ Beginning with *The Birth Of Jesus. Matthew 1: 18-25* and concluding with *The Resurrection of Jesus. Matthew 28: 1-10*, Pollock's Pop style drawings were composed using a combination of drawing, collage and printing

⁴⁹⁵ Jane Kingsley-Smith, 'Bible', Michael Dobson and Stanley Wells (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001: 45.

⁴⁹⁶ Ian Pollock, *Seven Stories About Jesus*. (Prints). London: Royal College of Art, [1975?].

techniques that recalled the early *Ambit* covers of Michael Foreman. By no means a traditional nativity scene, *The Birth Of Jesus* depicts a man in a Fifties-style suit gazing at a pair of long female legs. Perversely, the infant Jesus is a notable absentee, while the Mary and Joseph figures are displayed on two individual plinths amid an otherwise featureless landscape. Equally bizarre were *The Baptism Of Jesus. Matthew 3: 13-17*, which featured two young boys waist-deep in a swimming pool flanked by images of hallucinatory mushrooms, and *The Temptations Of Jesus. Matthew 4: 1-11*, which depicted a nude female in flight above a neo-classical tower and a military-style Jesus turning his haloed head away from the tempter's erotic exhibitionism. Other pieces were more sombre in their imagery. *The Last Supper. Matthew 26: 17-30* presented an image of Jesus looking distinctly lonely amid his array of faceless disciples in their nineteenth-century costumes, the divine chalice a rather pathetic cut-out of an art deco cocktail glass. By contrast, the Christ figure in *The Death Of Jesus. Matthew 27: 27-50* is presented as a superhero, his muscle-bound body stretched out upon an enormous cross while a crowd of mourners remain shadowy, indistinct presences beneath him. Noticeably influenced by the Pop style of the Sixties, *Seven Stories About Jesus* certainly suggested Pollock's artistic vision was in sympathy with that of *Ambit's* art editor Michael Foreman by the mid Seventies.

Despite the Pop affinities of *Seven Stories About Jesus*, Pollock's first set of Biblical drawings for *Ambit 72* was characterised by an irreverent grotesquery rooted in the press caricatures of cartoonists like Steadman and Scarfe. Consequently, *Ruth and Naomi. Ruth 1-4* depicted two anaemic women walking across a barren landscape, their faces shrivelled and twisted, and their legs scarcely thicker than the walking sticks supporting them. Ruth and Naomi proved the most

naturalistic of Pollock's Biblical figures, and his subjects became less recognisably human as the sequence evolved. Thus *Story Of Samson. Judges 13-16* placed its protagonist amid a *faux naïve* crowd scene in which a multitude of featureless onlookers watch the Neanderthal-style Samson struggling with two enormous pillars. This dehumanising vision was developed further in *The Blessed Man. Psalm 1*, where a comparatively straightforward portrait of an elderly man playing a cello is twisted into grotesquery by Pollock's unorthodox use of perspective and by an array of heads in glass jars that uneasily blend the human and the bestial. By *The Fall of Jericho. Joshua 6: 15-21*, even Pollock's principal subjects had taken on bestial forms, four reptile-like figures processing across the page with their weird bugles. Pollock's grotesquery finally reaches its peak in *David Anointed King. 1 Samuel 16: 1-13*, where a throng of tortoise-like figures are assembled to greet an equally reptilian leader.

After his bizarre *Ambit* debut, Pollock began working as a freelance illustrator for *Rolling Stone*, *Penthouse*, *New Scientist*, *Country Life* and *The Daily Telegraph*. He also published a handful of cartoon collections that blurred the boundaries between man and beast, with *Beware of the Cat* (1977) containing a series of innocuous drawings of cats eating, sleeping and at play; and the more adult *Couples* (1978) probing the murky sex-lives of Mr and Mrs Frankenstein, Mr and Mrs Dracula, and Adam and Eve in a playfully voyeuristic fashion.

The Eighties brought a number of significant book illustration projects that would prefigure some of the formal and stylistic features of Pollock's later *Ambit* contributions. In 1981, Pollock and fellow *Ambit* artists Anne Howeson and Robert Mason contributed to a joint exhibition at the Thumb Gallery entitled '*Business?*' *Three views on sex for sale*. Introducing himself as 'A self-confessed voyeur; a

critic of the street theatre which, unlike the real theatre, is always interesting and never staged', Pollock went on to explain his graphic ink and watercolour contributions:

These images of the 'Red-Light District' are responses (if they contain vision or comment then that is entirely accidental) to scenes witnessed in Amsterdam, Paris and London, cerebrally digested, sometimes for many months before being pelleted out onto paper and buried in frames. I wish, too, to avoid any judgement either moral or political: I am no judicator for human behaviour, I shall leave that to more stupid people—people who know what's best for us. My only mandate is my own insolence and a certain flair for drawing.⁴⁹⁷

Pollock's work begins with *Two Prostitutes and Client, Rue St. Denis* (1981), which features one matchstick-thin prostitute smoking a cigarette. Her face, already distorted by Pollock's grotesquery, is suggested only by heavy smears of make up around the eyes and mouth, and she presents a distinctly unglamorous image as her spindly limbs look to a grimy wall for support. Her partner is fuller and more conservatively dressed, but her face is equally inhuman as a thin lipstick-smearred mouth is set upon an abnormally square head. Pollock's client fares little better, and largely conforms to the stereotypical image of the 'dirty old man'. Half in profile with his back to the viewer, the client is noticeably moustachioed, balding, middle-aged, and slightly overweight as he stands, hands in pockets, ogling the two women on a gloomy back street. Together, these sad figures epitomise the degrading and depressingly unerotic aspects of a 'business' that thrives on mutual exploitation and dependency.

In *Prostitute, Amsterdam* (1980) Pollock presented another unsparing portrait of a prostitute. Here, viewed through a window or doorframe, Pollock's subject is even more monstrous than his earlier models. Thus an oversized, square head with an implausibly large mouth, long nose and small eyes is grafted onto a shrunken torso barely concealed by skinny arms and legs. Posed in a chair,

⁴⁹⁷ Pollock, in Anne Howeson, Robert Mason and Ian Pollock, *'Business?' Three views on sex for sale*. London: Thumb Gallery, 1981: unpaginated.

Pollock's subject seems disturbingly at ease with the role of nude model, but the bare walls and ceiling in the background, adorned only by a single light bulb, are by no means the conventional characteristics of the artist's studio. A similar figure reappears in *Stripper and Hand* (1981), although here Pollock is gesturing towards the soulless exhibitionism associated with the strip club as another insect-like woman writhes on stage, legs wide apart, while the paying punter watches on from the audience, the cigarette in his hand suggesting a desire for sexual congress that must remain unfulfilled. More disturbing still is Pollock's closing full-colour image, *Sex Shop, Old Couple and Dog* (1981), which shows an elderly couple shopping for sex toys.

After the pornography of *'Business?'*, Pollock turned to Shakespearean tragedy for inspiration with a comic-strip version of *King Lear* (1984) which, although ostensibly a children's book, featured a typically monstrous cast and a number of unremittingly violent scenes. While the implausibly freakish bodies of Edgar and Edmund certainly helped to distinguish the identities of the two brothers, such grotesquery also softened the impact of Shakespeare's bloody *denouement*. And when the violence finally comes, Pollock appears to revel in it. Having restricted himself to a sombre palette of dark greens, browns and fiery reds, Pollock relates the blinding of Gloucester in particular detail as the Earl's eyes are first kicked, then pulled, from their sockets amid streams of blood and gore.⁴⁹⁸ Later Oswald meets a similarly bloody fate as he is beaten to death by Edgar's bare fists, although here the violence is limited to just three frames and the corpse is quickly dragged off-stage.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁸ William Shakespeare, *King Lear. The complete text illustrated by Ian Pollock*. London: Oval Projects Ltd, 1984: 91.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid*: 115.

Somewhat surprisingly, certain formal and stylistic aspects of 'Business?' and *King Lear* recurred in Pollock's second significant engagement with Biblical themes, as *Ambit* 128 carried six ink and watercolour images from the major *Miracles of Christ* series. Inspired by New Testament passages, the *Miracles of Christ* is marked by a clear fascination with contorted and dysfunctional bodies. Perversely, given the title of the work, Christ remains a background figure throughout *Miracles of Christ* as, rather than presenting a succession of reverential iconographic *tableaux*, Pollock presents six voyeuristic sketches within which the diseased sufferer consistently proves the focus of the artist's distorting gaze. Although some of its impact is diminished by black and white reproduction, *Malthus Ear Healed Lk 2: 50, 51*⁵⁰⁰ depicts a pig-like head on an amorphous torso awaiting the divine intervention described by Luke. Dominating the picture, the head is a patchwork of incongruent features comprising a large mouth, two narrowed, close-set eyes, and a snout-like nose. The deformed ear is represented by a single round hole on the right-hand side of the head and five indistinct outlines indicating where the ear once was. The miraculous narrative is implied by the descent of two hands from the top left-hand corner of the picture that bear the new ear and represent the picture's sole gesture towards the presence of Christ as Healer.

In *Blind Man's Sight Restored Mk 8: 22-28*⁵⁰¹ the healing Christ is absent altogether, as the viewer is confronted with a second grotesque visage. Here two large, unseeing eyes serve as darkened mirrors through which the blind man's shrunken eyeballs struggle to emerge, the rest of the face conforming to the hideous characteristics and proportions of *Malthus Ear Healed*. In this instance, however,

⁵⁰⁰ Pollock, *Malthus Ear Healed Luke 2: 50, 51, Ambit* 128, 1992: 32.

⁵⁰¹ Pollock, *Blind Man's Sight Restored Mk 8: 22-28*, *ibid*: 33.

the viewer witnesses the sufferer cured, the tangle of legs the blind man sees upon recovering his sight suggesting a crowd of eager onlookers.

Echoes of early Blake and early Hockney are evident in the *faux naïve* subjects of *Dumb Demon Cast Out Mk 9: 32-34*⁵⁰² and *Man With Unknown Spirit Mk 1: 21-28*.⁵⁰³ Thus the former work depicts a slender, nude male being restrained by two other subjects, with a certain homoerotic quality lingering in the fragility of the sufferer's frame, the expression of innocent passivity on his face and in the abnormally amplified proportions of his engorged penis. The latter is a more complex composition presenting healer and sufferer in a crowded temple. Christ makes a third rare appearance in *Syrophoenician's Daughter Cured Mw 15: 21-28* as, complete with halo, he prays over a naked and emaciated human form. Again the sufferer and the sickbed dominate the foreground, while the meek Christ remains a peripheral figure at work in the background. Pollock's most vivid use of the sickbed motif, however, is found in *Woman's Haemorrhage Cured Mw 9: 20-22*,⁵⁰⁴ as a sick woman is laid out across three chairs, her limbs extended at impossible angles with six large containers brimming with blood beneath her.

With its intense focus on the suffering subjects of Christ's healing, Pollock's *Miracles of Christ* successfully casts each sufferer as a surrogate Christ enduring extreme physical torments analogous to the Crucifixion, before ultimately achieving peace through an unshaken faith in the Holy Spirit. Thus the viewer consistently sees each figure on the verge of a physical resurrection from corpse-like illness to full bodily health. Despite its religious sources, however, *Miracles of Christ* also sits uneasily within the voyeuristic freak-show tradition established by Steadman's controversial 'Extraordinary People' contributions, which dwelt with similarly

⁵⁰² Pollock, *Dumb Demon Cast Out Mk 9: 32-34*, *ibid*: 34.

⁵⁰³ Pollock, *Man With Unknown Spirit Mk 1: 21-28*, *ibid*: 36.

⁵⁰⁴ Pollock, *Woman's Haemorrhage Cured Mw 9: 20-22*, *ibid*: 37.

graphic detail upon the bizarre deformities and abnormalities of the human body during the mid Eighties. The freak-show theme was even more apparent in Pollock's drawings for 'Disabled Vows' (*Ambit* 127), which cast Flynn's self-pitying paraplegic bride as a monstrous blob in a wheelchair;⁵⁰⁵ and the equally disturbing 'Of Dolls and Games' (*Ambit* 131), which powerfully evoked the physical fragility of Flynn's pregnant twelve-year old with an uncomfortable blend of fascination and repulsion.⁵⁰⁶

Pollock's *Ambit* contributions of the Nineties certainly offered an antidote to the sanitised, Sunday School versions of the Christian narrative and the Biblical sources that have informed mainstream Anglican understandings of the 'Body of Christ'. At the same time, Pollock's violently expressive images, like those of Steadman, signalled *Ambit's* continuing commitment to the German Expressionist principles that remained an important, if waning, influence upon the magazine's younger illustrators. Pollock's unique style of surreal grotesquery has recently found a much wider audience following commissions from the Royal Mail for a set of stamps in 1997, and from the London Dungeon for a set of posters designed to emphasise its gory history. In Pollock's *Ambit* contributions of the Eighties and Nineties, the viewer finds some of the most significant products of a distinctive and arresting artistic personality.

The Fiction of Geoff Nicholson

(Born: 3 April 1953, Sheffield)

Making his first appearance in 1980, Nicholson quickly established himself as one of *Ambit's* most prolific and accomplished contributors with a distinctive brand of black humour, quirky surrealism and controversial subject matter that recalled the

⁵⁰⁵ Pollock, drawing for 'Disabled Vows', *Ambit* 127, 1992: 69.

⁵⁰⁶ Pollock, drawing for 'Of Dolls and Games', *Ambit* 131, 1993: 44.

daring of Ballard during the Seventies and restored much of the subversive spirit that had characterised the magazine during its infancy. Like Ballard, Nicholson's writing skills were initially honed in the pages of Britain's little magazines with many of his contributions providing thematic and stylistic blueprints for a succession of innovative and experimental novels. Like Ballard, Nicholson has attracted both acclaim and censure for his intricate plots, his archly ironic tone, and his typical cast of misfits, nymphomaniacs and other deviants. Yet Nicholson was also unquestionably *Ambit's* hero-contributor of the Nineties, redefining the magazine's fiction section as surely as Ballard had done during the Sixties and Seventies before joining the editorial board in 1996.

Having become an active member of a student theatre group while reading English at Cambridge in the early Seventies, Nicholson, inspired by the work of Harold Pinter, William S. Burroughs and Jack Kerouac, had initially set out with the intention of becoming an avant-garde playwright and director. After taking an MA in Drama at Essex in 1987 that culminated in the BBC radio play *Sleeping Dogs* (1982) and a string of stage plays produced for the Edinburgh and London fringe festivals including *Oscar* (1975), *Don't Blame It On The Moonlight* (1978), and *Angst for the Memory* (1987), Nicholson abandoned dramatic writing in favour of the serious comic prose that appeared in *Ambit* during the Eighties. Although Nicholson's early *Ambit* contributions registered some of the principal concerns of his later work, they lacked the formal organisation that gradually became the hallmark of Nicholson's approach to the novel and, for all their wit and allusiveness, remain very much the experiments of a literary apprentice. Consequently 'Teens on Heat' (*Ambit* 85) was notable for its deviant protagonists, its consistently dry irony, and some arrestingly surreal imagery, but it was a series

of bawdy, witty, comic one-liners rather than a fully realised short story. Some of Nicholson's best work appears in the first few lines, as he presents one of many bizarre character descriptions:

Ruth was restless and hungry for sensation.
She selected her friends according to their decorativeness.
Ruth says; 'I think my favourite foods in the world are sausage and cheese.'
Her new acquaintances ask what she is having to eat today.
'Why, bierwurst and Wensleydale,' she retorts and asks them for their birth signs.
[...] Later she recounted how her Yiddisher momma caught her fellating a salami
in her pyjamas.
'So you see Jonathan,' she intones, 'Perhaps I could love you but only perversely.
And one swallow doesn't make a summer.'⁵⁰⁷

After this intimate introduction to the appetites of Ruth, Nicholson's focus shifts to an alcoholic 'sexual gymnast' and sodomiser of foodstuffs called Louie and his relationship with Gabriella, a health-conscious yoga-practitioner who enjoys a 'healthy pansexual love life' and finds Louie strangely reminiscent of her father. Despite some entertaining comic moments, however, the inherent unlikelihood of the central relationship rather undermines the credibility of the narrative, while the formal fragmentation of 'Teens On Heat' causes additional problems as Nicholson romps through his gallery of social caricatures.

Other Nicholson contributions revisited similar ground with 'Burning Her End With Both Candles' (*Ambit* 90) offering a detailed insight into the lives of eight consummate debauchees, and 'Beige Accessories' (*Ambit* 97) marking a development of this technique as Nicholson presents a highly ironic account of life in a bohemian commune through a self-conscious and wittily allusive prose that mocks the avant-garde pretensions of his multiple protagonists. Nowhere is this clearer than in Nicholson's presentation of Lester:

Rachel met Lester outside a milk bar. Lester was counting his loose change to see if he had enough money to submit his latest poems to a little magazine.
He had just staged a rehearsed reading of his latest dramatic piece at a little-known fringe venue.

What the papers said:

⁵⁰⁷ Geoff Nicholson, 'Teens On Heat', *Ambit* 85, 1980: 39.

‘Soiling.’
‘The colostomy bag of the London fringe.’
‘I’d rather be forced to wallow in a tub of pig’s vomit than spend another evening
with this.’
‘Nothing human did this.’⁵⁰⁸

Partly an acknowledgment of Nicholson’s own shortcomings as a dramatist, ‘Beige Accessories’ also demonstrates his emerging talent for the literary burlesque as an exploration of the curious relationship between Rachel and Lester ultimately concludes with Rachel declaring over wine: ‘Oh Lester, [...] I’m as lonely as an estate agent’. Nicholson has much fun at the expense of his characters throughout with Kingsley’s speech restricted to gnomic proclamations, Gavin the concert pianist’s lovemaking limited to a number of ‘slow wistful ballads’ for the benefit of the ‘cheery’ Myfanwy, and Luke Parnell (‘a nervous boy with bad skin’) compelled to satisfy his sexual desires at the keyhole of prostitute Yvette’s boudoir.

In 1984 Nicholson married Tessa Robinson and learned to drive, two events that had an eccentrically wide-reaching impact on his writing as the purchase of a Volkswagen Beetle launched Nicholson and his wife into the peculiar social world of the Volkswagen enthusiast—a world that would afford rich material for many *Ambit* contributions and prove an important catalyst for Nicholson’s novelistic career. From 1984 the Volkswagen proves a key motif in Nicholson’s writing, with ‘Big Blondes, An illustrated history of the Volkswagen’ (*Ambit* 100) relating Walter’s adulterous flight from his wife Jackie to the arms of Rhoda, a Happy Eater waitress who, Walter declares, ‘likes my car’ and is ‘making me a customised dashboard in ocelot formica at her woodwork class.’⁵⁰⁹ Yet, with definite echoes of Ballard’s ‘Crash’, it seems that the primary love-object in this adulterous relationship is the Volkswagen itself, Walter confessing: ‘Sometimes [...] when I’m

⁵⁰⁸ Nicholson, ‘Beige Accessories’, *Ambit* 97, 1984: 63.

⁵⁰⁹ Nicholson, ‘Big Blondes, An illustrated history of the Volkswagen’, *Ambit* 100, 1985: 145.

driving home through the tunnel, with a cassette of Johnny “Guitar” Watson playing, it’s almost as if, oh you’ll call me a fool, it’s almost as if the car and I have become one.’⁵¹⁰ Thus the Volkswagen frequently serves as a metaphor for the isolated male’s quest for self-realisation, complicated by its wider cultural associations with Nazism, the Hippie lifestyle, and sexual liberalism. This certainly proved true of Nicholson’s debut novel *Street Sleeper* (1987), which combined an homage to the Volkswagen and a witty satire on the ‘road novel’ while tracing an ex-librarian’s attempts to find himself in his brand-new Beetle. Although Ishmael’s progress from disenchanted librarian to sexual adventurer, spiritual leader and eventual road warrior provides the main focus of attention, Nicholson also intersperses his text with a number of diverting anecdotes and trivia facts drawn from the extraordinary history of the Volkswagen Beetle. This narrative model would later inform *Still Life With Volkswagens* (1994), where Nicholson continues to wrestle with the paradox that while the Beetle ‘is wielded by [his] characters as a weapon for tolerance and “new age” causes against far-right racial and social bigotry, [...] the vehicle itself [...] is a product of Nazi values, Adolf Hitler’s own “strength through joy” car’.⁵¹¹

After *Street Sleeper* Nicholson turned his satirical eye upon the murder-mystery in *The Knot Garden* (1989), mimicking the labyrinthine twists and turns of the classic Agatha Christie novel with an aplomb that risked undermining Nicholson’s objections to the ‘whodunnit’ mode—namely that the smallest clues often hold the greatest significance, and that the detective is always blessed with an implausibly infallible insight into the methods and motives of the suspects. Thus Nicholson’s narrative is an intricate structure in which multiple narrators, numerous

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ Jane Thexton, ‘Geoff Nicholson’, in Merritt Moseley (ed.), *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 271: British and Irish Novelists Since 1960*. Detroit: Gale, 2003: 271.

bizarre clues and more than sixteen distinct characters are implicated in Mrs Wisden's quest to ascertain whether her husband's death was a murder or a suicide.

With Nicholson's literary career finally beginning to take off, his *Ambit* contributions were predominantly limited to extracts from his longer works-in-progress. 'Herbs In Bondage' (*Ambit* 106), for instance, pointed towards *The Knot Garden*, while 'The Food Chain Diaries' (*Ambit* 118) comprised the thematic kernel of Nicholson's black comedy, *Food Chain* (1992). Other contributions, such as 'Smart Remarks' (*Ambit* 109), signalled a return to the short, sketch-like compositions of his earlier work, but with a noticeably polished narrative style and a much-improved sense of comic timing. The farcical opening section of 'Smart Remarks', therefore, describes the consequences that ensue when John Fantham accompanies Mrs Josie Dickens to a Computer Stationery Fair and accepts her invitation to 'take five at her maisonette and have some Earl Grey and bran muffins'.⁵¹² From an unlikely beginning, Nicholson recounts a modern version of Chaucer's *Miller's Tale* as with mock-amazement he writes:

But the kettle was scarcely on the hob before she implored him to ascend the stairs and admire her fitted bedroom furniture. Call him naïve, but it sounded like innocent enough fun to John Fantham. He admired her mouldings, her mirrored sliding doors, her fully adjustable shelving system; and he was about to say it must all have cost a pretty penny when Mrs Dickens stoppered his mouth with kisses and suggested that he quell the fire in her trim bosom.⁵¹³

While the antics of John provoke a violent response from the returning Mr Dickens, Nicholson's sketch races towards a less predictable conclusion as Mrs Dickens's wardrobe becomes the focus for a mock-epic struggle between husband and rival that is finally resolved when John unwittingly discovers a favourite pair of cords that Mr Dickens had long given up for lost. Once this symbolically masculine act of

⁵¹² Nicholson, 'Smart Remarks', *Ambit* 109, 1987: 35.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

gift giving is completed, both men are reconciled with a firm handshake and the cause of their disagreement is swiftly forgotten.

Nicholson's work of the Nineties was noticeably less light-hearted, and a steady stream of novels treating darker human obsessions further served to enhance Nicholson's reputation as a daring and experimental author. This darkness initially manifested itself in *What We Did On Our Holidays* (1990), which follows the trials of Eric and his family as they struggle to overcome the horrors of Tralee Carapark, Skegness and its population of perverts, 'homicidal Spaniards' and 'sexually rapacious dwarves on unicycles'.⁵¹⁴ When Eric finally snaps, it is with bloody consequences and, estranged from his family, he runs amok with 'a small, improvised armoury',⁵¹⁵ to exact a terrible revenge on his fellow campers.

In *Hunters and Gatherers* (1991) Nicholson presented a comic study of writers, archivists and collectors that centres on the recently divorced Steve Geddes. During his research for a book on collectors, Steve becomes obsessed with the obscure author Thomas McCain, and this obsession continually threatens to undermine his original project, pushing his own literary collection of eccentric collectors into the background. Having begun as a determined 'non-collector' trying to understand 'why people had the urge to collect things',⁵¹⁶ Steve is eventually forced to acknowledge that his own study

had become a museum of meta-exhibits, exhibits about exhibits, a collection about collections. There were my notebooks, tapes and manuscript pages. There were collectors' year books, guidebooks, handbooks, auction catalogues and specialist magazines. On the walls I'd stuck newspaper clippings, letters from the collectors I'd interviewed, postcards, photographs. [...] Every item was a reminder of some collector's diligence and sustained concentration. [...] If somebody could dedicate twenty years of his life to collecting garden gnomes, then why couldn't I buckle down and devote a few hours each day to the creation of this blasted book? The room was a dungeon, a permanent accusation. Who could blame me for not wanting to go in there?⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁴ Thexton, in Moseley (ed.), *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 271*: 272.

⁵¹⁵ Nicholson, *What We Did On Our Holidays*. London: Sceptre, 1990: 151.

⁵¹⁶ Nicholson, *Hunters and Gatherers*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991: 16.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid*: 138.

Featuring a series of profiles on Steve's obsessive collectors of gnomes, quiz answers, jokes, beer cans and unusual sounds, the book also contained a number of Nicholson's favourite motifs. Therefore while negotiating a complex plot in which Steve is both voyeur and protagonist, Nicholson indulges his passion for rock music and bizarre ephemera as Steve's case studies become ever more peculiar. Similarly, the pairing of an obsessive questing male and a nymphomaniac female has, by *Hunters and Gatherers*, become a familiar one.

During the Nineties Nicholson's *Ambit* contributions consistently reflected the themes of his novels and demonstrated a new enthusiasm for experiment. Thus 'The Catalogue of Love' (*Ambit* 121) continued Nicholson's fascination with the car as an erotic symbol, but it also anticipated the minute account of a foot-fetishist's pleasures that shaped his controversial *Footsucker* (1995). Another series of short sketches, 'The Catalogue of Love' begins by following a young couple on an odyssey of sex, alcohol and bad driving, as the male narrator gleefully recalls the day his partner 'came home with a red basque she'd bought':

And she spent the whole evening wearing nothing but the basque.
And I dared her to drive the car dressed like that.
And she dared.
We drove all the way to Braintree and back.
And we overtook a Panda car.
And nobody noticed a thing.⁵¹⁸

Later the focus shifts to a male whose love life is equally bizarre if somewhat more discreet. Like the sexually dysfunctional protagonists of his early *Ambit* contributions, Nicholson's foot-fetishist is yet another solitary individual depicted in a graphic act of sexual gymnastics:

He knows what he likes: savagely high heels, ankle straps, *double* ankle straps, sling backs, peep toes. He likes long, thin, veiny feet with bones and tendons moving visibly beneath the skin. He likes long, lean, even toes, nails lacquered the colour of ox blood.

⁵¹⁸ Nicholson, 'The Catalogue of Love', *Ambit* 121, 1990: 7.

The turn on is neither solely the foot nor solely the shoe, neither nature nor art, but the interaction of the two.

He wants to lick them, fondle them, ejaculate over them, feel them on his skin, his tongue, his balls.

But you try explaining that to the average girl.⁵¹⁹

A clear prototype for the anonymous narrator of *Footsucker*, Nicholson's protagonist is saved from simple caricature by the degree of thought and self-criticism he applies in interrogating the psychological origins of his obsession.

While Nicholson took his analyses of the obsessive personality further in novels like *Everything and More* (1994), *Bleeding London* (1997) and *Flesh Guitar* (1998), his *Ambit* work continued to be divided between extracts from developing drafts, a handful of comic sketches, and a couple of well-observed literary parodies. The illustrated homage to Hunter S. Thompson, 'Day Trips To The Desert', that appeared in *Ambit* 124 became part of the larger *Day Trips to the Desert: A Sort of Travel Book* (1992). Similarly, 'The Guitar And Other Animals' (*Ambit* 130) and 'A Little Night Moisture' (*Ambit* 138) later comprised *Flesh Guitar* (1998), a plotless novel about one fan's passion for the fictional rock star Jenny Slade, and liberally seasoned with snippets of rock trivia.

The highlight, however, was 'Beetamorphosis' (*Ambit* 153), a literate parody of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* that took Nicholson's interest in the Volkswagen Beetle to new extremes. Shadowing Kafka's original throughout, Nicholson begins:

Greg Wintergreen woke from uneasy dreams one morning to find himself changed into a giant Volkswagen Beetle. He was resting on his tyres which were white-walled and with plenty of tread, and when he turned his headlights a little he could see his body of a lacquered, metallic hardness, with flared wings and louvered engine lid.⁵²⁰

Opening with this surreal image, Nicholson succeeds in putting Kafka's plot to ingenious use as Greg's boss, a second-hand car salesman, arrives at the family

⁵¹⁹ Ibid: 10.

⁵²⁰ Nicholson, 'Beetamorphosis', *Ambit* 153, 1998: 92.

home to give him a lift to work. When Greg's father discovers the bizarre reality of his son's condition the family gradually turn against him and, in a tragi-comic tale of neglect, Greg is forced to give up his room to a lodger who 'as a condition of getting the room [had] agreed to take Greg to pieces and then reassemble him in the family garage'. Exiled from the family home, Greg is then ejected from the garage to make space for his father's 'newish Montego'; offered for sale to his ex-boss; and given away to a circle of Beetle enthusiasts. With Greg on the verge of salvation, disaster finally strikes in the form of a fatal journey to the Essex coast:

Later that same night poor Greg was stolen from his place outside the family home. They never heard a thing. Greg was used in a raid on a jeweller's shop in east London, then driven to the Essex coast where he was stripped of resalable parts and pushed off a cliff.

The family were invited to collect the empty shell of what had been their Greg but they preferred to leave him where he was, to let the waves and the salt corrosion do their work and return him to the ecosystem. Greg's mother said it had been a terrible and tragic end, but Danny, Greg's old boss who perhaps knew more about cars and Greg than any of them, insisted it was just the way Greg would have wanted to go.⁵²¹

Infusing the horror of Kafka's classic with a new level of absurdity, 'Beetamorphosis' was certainly the most accomplished piece of comic fiction to appear in *Ambit* during the Nineties.

After 'Beetamorphosis' Nicholson began to contribute a number of documentary pieces that appeared as the regular 'Letter from New York' series, introducing the unusual characters he encountered in the bars and clubs of back street New York. Upon his appointment to *Ambit's* editorial board in 1996, Nicholson's contributions began to tail off. His passion for writing remained undiminished, however, and *Female Ruins* (1999) and *Bedlam Burning* (2000) marked the end of a particularly productive period that had spawned a travel book, a history of the rock guitar, and eleven novels in eleven years. A master of the blackly comic thriller and the intricately plotted quest narrative, Nicholson had developed many of his ideas in the pages of *Ambit* long before they found their way into his

⁵²¹ Ibid: 95.

paperbacks. Arguably the most talented of *Ambit's* Nineties fiction contributors, Nicholson continues to serve as a model for the aspiring young novelist and remains one of the magazine's most popular, commercially successful and critically acclaimed authors.

THE NINETIES: CONTINUITIES AND TRANSITIONS

The Nineties represented a fourth consecutive decade of expansion for *Ambit*. As one of the ACGB's annual clients, Bax had dedicated his regular grants to extending the use of full-colour printing, improving the quality of photographic reproduction, and expanding the magazine to 96 pages. *Ambit's* selection policy had been kept lively and fresh with the addition of new corresponding editors, and the magazine's public profile had been maintained through a combination of regular readings and festival appearances. While the Nineties saw *Ambit* making significant progress in areas of design, production and presentation, its fiction, art and poetry sections each underwent dramatic changes. In terms of fiction, many new contributors began to appear with work a good deal more varied, accomplished and exciting than the autobiographical texts and novel extracts favoured during the Eighties. Thus Carl Tighe and André Alexis injected an air of mystery rarely associated with *Ambit* in the past; Geoff Nicholson and Toby Litt brought a renewed emphasis on black comedy and formal ingenuity; and Sue Flynn and others revived an appetite for the more controversial themes rarely explored since the late Seventies. *Ambit's* fiction section also witnessed some of the decade's most extreme literary experiments with Litt using multiple narrators to excellent effect in 'Z-Ward, BoJo, Kenneth and the Betamaxboy' (*Ambit* 143) to satirise the world of paranoid Internet communities, and Mike McCormack presenting in 'The Occupation: A Guide for Tourists' (*Ambit* 135) an interesting, if less successful,

variation on the Crucifixion narrative. These contributions were a dramatic improvement upon those of the previous decade, and Geoff Nicholson's appointment to the editorial board in 1996 coincided with a further rise in the standard of *Ambit's* fiction.

The achievements of Nicholson and others were more than matched by those of *Ambit's* artists and illustrators as the magazine sought to reaffirm its commitment to a broad spectrum of the visual arts. With drawing, caricature, sculpture and photography all well represented, variety remained the overriding characteristic of *Ambit's* art section. Painting, however, also enjoyed a major revival following the reproduction of oils from Frank Auerbach's exhibition of *Recent Works* (*Ambit* 136). Partly a demonstration of the benefits of full-colour reproduction, and partly a reaction against the German Expressionist tendencies that had dominated the magazine in the Eighties, painting quickly became *Ambit's* principal visual medium and the paintings of David Remfry, Christopher Le Brun, Paula Rego and Francis Bacon proved striking and colourful additions to *Ambit's* art section. At the same time, the magazine's long association with the grotesque survived in the form of Ian Pollock's *Miracles of Christ* (*Ambit* 128) and Chris Orr's *New Testament Dogs* (*Ambit* 133), while Foreman and Paolozzi occasionally returned to the Pop Art styles of *Ambit's* early days. A similar eclecticism was evident in the work of *Ambit's* illustrators, as Blaise Thompson, Anne Howeson, Sophie Morrish and Mark Foreman took on a growing amount of work in ink, chalk, charcoal and graphite. Responsibility for the cover design was shared between an unprecedented number of artists, and this further underlined the inclusiveness of *Ambit's* multimedia approach to the arts. Describing *Ambit* in an interview with Görtschacher in 1993, David Grubb credited Bax with creating 'a

brilliant, very pleasing to look at production [...]. *Ambit* is a gorgeous thing to hold in your hand'.⁵²² Similarly, Edward Lowbury identified *Ambit* as 'a poetry and art magazine which already existed in the Sixties', again picking up on the magazine's strong visual dimension.⁵²³ By the mid Nineties the visual arts, always an important part of Bax's editorial mission, had become one of *Ambit's* defining strengths, and a clear demonstration of its growing ambition.

While *Ambit's* painters, illustrators and storytellers went from strength to strength, the progress of its poets was somewhat less assured. The deaths of MacBeth, Ewart, Brock and Laughlin were a major blow, depriving the magazine of four of its most prolific and long-standing poets. MacBeth and Ewart had been especially influential in setting the mood of *Ambit's* poetry from the mid Sixties onwards with numerous bawdy, witty and experimental works, and had featured prominently in the controversial Newspaper Special (*Ambit* 37) and Stars and Stripes Special (*Ambit* 39) of the Sixties, and the Poetry Special (*Ambit* 54) of the Seventies. *Ambit's* standing had been tied up with the reputations of these two poetic mavericks for so long that the magazine suffered a brief loss of momentum in their absence. Those contributors charged with replacing them seemed unwilling or unable to revive the subversive comedy and formal experiments that had defined the work of Ewart and MacBeth, and many turned to the less spectacular themes of personal relationships and everyday domesticity. Moreover, the subverted ode, sonnet, limerick, haiku and villanelle forms, frequently used to satisfying parodic effect by Ewart and others, virtually disappeared as a younger generation rejected the well-crafted metrical verse practised by Brownjohn, Porter and Redgrove in favour of a lighter free-verse lyricism. By the mid Nineties a new sombreness was

⁵²² Görtschacher, *Contemporary Views on the Little Magazine Scene*: 572.

⁵²³ *Ibid*: 541.

evident in the work of Porter, Peter Finch and Henry Graham, the overwhelming majority of their poems focusing on themes like death, alcoholism and disappointed love affairs. Duffy and Graham tried to create a more upbeat mood by introducing the work of Selima Hill, Judith Kazantzis and others, but failed to rekindle the kind of experimental exuberance that had flourished under Brock's editorship.

Another victim of the Nineties was the themed special; replacing the anthology-style numbers of the Eighties, the short-lived '*Ambit* Abroad' section briefly sustained *Ambit's* enthusiasm for foreign writing by showcasing poetry from America (*Ambit* 136), Germany (*Ambit* 140) and India (*Ambit* 145). This artificial division was soon swept aside, however, as international writing became an integral part of *Ambit's* fiction and poetry sections. While *Ambit* had become increasingly internationalist in its outlook, it had also become distinctly less masculine, and the sharp rise in the number of women making regular contributions ensured there was no need for the all-female numbers of the Eighties. The decade's most notable special numbers included the In Memoriam specials for MacBeth (*Ambit* 128), Ewart (*Ambit* 143), and Brock and Laughlin (*Ambit* 151), and the three art specials (*Ambit* 126, 150 and 154), as *Ambit* sought to build on its past achievements with a characteristic blend of the fresh and the bold.

The Nineties were generally a successful era during which *Ambit* appeared to have grown up. Well produced, with an array of respected contributors, *Ambit* had managed the evolution from scruffy little magazine to glossy literary-arts quarterly better than many of its rivals and, although more likely to amuse than to shock by the mid Nineties, *Ambit* had successfully positioned itself midway between the extreme avant-garde and the contemporary mainstream. Although carrying fewer unknowns than it had in the past, the magazine still encouraged new

talents like Nicholson, Pollock and Hill who, in turn, injected new life into *Ambit's* fiction, poetry and arts sections. In 1999, Bax completed his fortieth year as editor, his dedication to the project undiminished.

A publication that reflected the idiosyncrasies of Bax's editorial personality, *Ambit* remained a visually striking magazine with a penchant for the surprising and the unusual. Finally, by the turn of the millennium, *Ambit* had established itself as an influential, if occasionally awkward, member of the London literary scene.

CONCLUSION: THE LITTLE BECOME BIG?

***Ambit* and London's Little Magazines 1959-1999**

Since 1959, Martin Bax has overseen the regular quarterly appearance of a magazine initially founded upon little more than the money donated by a small circle of friends and acquaintances and the vague sense that an editor should be primarily concerned with putting 'good things together'.⁵²⁴ At a moment when contemporary rivals like *X* and *New Departures* were seeking to remake post-war poetry in their own image with blistering denunciations of avant-garde gimmickry and Establishment elitism respectively, *Ambit* was content to offer a personal pledge from Bax that the magazine's editors would strive to publish the best poetry, fiction and visual artwork that reached them through the post. There were no visionary manifestos, no blazing creeds, and no 'hip' pretensions. Instead, for more than four decades, *Ambit's* editorial policy has been guided and shaped by the idiosyncratic tastes of Bax, a practising paediatrician, novelist and self-proclaimed anarchist, whose deep-rooted interests in psychology, surrealism and the bizarre, and whose sustained opposition to the Academy's stultifying influence upon contemporary art and letters have remained constant themes in the development of a distinctive *Ambit* identity.

After 1959, both *Ambit* and London's little magazines changed dramatically as editors, contributors and readers alike witnessed significant developments in print technology in the Sixties, economic recessions in the Seventies and Eighties, and the emergence of new institutional patrons in the Nineties. Similarly, the rise and fall of the Underground Press, the carnage of the Vietnam War, and the outcome of the Lady Chatterley trial each played as important a part in *Ambit's*

⁵²⁴ Bax, see note 27.

evolution as the Cold War, the demise of the ACGB and the emergence of Thatcherite economics did in the years that followed. Against the odds, and occasionally against all the expectations of Bax himself, *Ambit* managed to come through these tests, constantly reinventing itself for a new generation of readers and contributors, and, in doing so, became a valuable cultural barometer registering some of the most significant shifts in poetry, fiction and the visual arts in late twentieth-century Britain. Moreover, while it remains in rude health, *Ambit* also represents a uniquely comprehensive chronologue of the evolution of the little magazine as a literary medium that sustains the production of a distinctive cultural artefact and promotes the cultivation of a vibrant and dedicated literary-artistic community. Thus having overcome the difficulties that have traditionally seen the little magazine associated with fragility, folly and transience, *Ambit's* longevity poses a major challenge to such definitions of the medium while demonstrating the continuing demand for a distinctive and diverse quarterly prepared to engage with some of the most exciting aspects of literary-artistic production in modern Britain.

***Ambit's* Achievements 1959-99: Poetry**

During a period that began in 1959 with David Sladen noisily trumpeting the innovations of a new avant-garde in the first number of *New Departures*, and that ended with Andrew Motion's appointment to the Laureateship in 1999, *Ambit's* greatest achievement has been to rise above the kind of posturing and factionalism favoured by so many of its rivals to promote an alternative line in contemporary verse that valued novelty over empty experiment, craftsmanship over formless improvisation, and catholicity over creeds. By the mid Sixties there was certainly no shortage of poetic prophets seeking to lay claim to the soul of British poetry. Following the appearance of his *New Lines* anthology (1956), Robert Conquest had

set himself up as the enemy of Forties Apocalypticism and its neo-Romantic excesses by advocating a return to rationalism, restraint and a more rigorous formalism. At the other extreme Michael Horovitz and his disciples at *New Departures* were aggressively promoting a brand of neo-Romantic poetry that looked to the American Beats for its models of protest, performance and passion. By contrast, a third distinct vision of contemporary poetry was being advanced by David Wright and Patrick Swift who, in *X* magazine, sought a return to the Modernist models offered by the poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid and Samuel Beckett. However, when Edward Lucie-Smith's *A Group Anthology* (1963) appeared with a declaration that his poets all shared 'a willingness to see that art is intimately, though sometimes uncomfortably and painfully, linked to the business of living',⁵²⁵ it seemed that the fault-lines within British poetry were based on something more complex than the simple tension between romanticism and rationalism on the one hand, and poetry's competing oral and written traditions on the other. Indeed, on a fundamental level, the very 'business of living' had changed dramatically between 1959 and 1963 alone, and British poetry began to register a wealth of new cultural, social and political stimuli prompted by the experiences of women, Afro-Caribbean, and Commonwealth writers; by the developments in print design that inspired the first Concrete poets; and by the growth of a small-press community determined to champion a handful of unacknowledged talents. These stimuli have proved instrumental in shaping the current course of contemporary British poetry, which is presently marked by a pluralism, diversity and inclusiveness that mirrors the selection policy of *Ambit's* poetry editors and reasserts the vigorous dynamism of the contemporary imagination.

⁵²⁵ Lucie-Smith, 'Foreword', Lucie-Smith and Philip Hobsbaum (eds), *A Group Anthology*. London: Oxford University Press, 1963: ix.

In many respects, *Ambit's* poetry section serves as an alternative canon of British verse within which avant-garde, experimental, feminist, confessionalist and neo-formalist strands are all equally represented. One reading of *Ambit's* poetic legacy, therefore, might trace a line of inheritance rooted in Lucie-Smith's *A Group Anthology* (1963) that includes Taner Baybars, George MacBeth, Alan Brownjohn, Zulfikar Ghose, Adrian Mitchell, Peter Porter, Peter Redgrove, Shirley Toulson and David Wevill. This would certainly account for the main current of *Ambit's* poetry between 1959 and 1989, as epitomised by the Dada cut-ups, brooding apocalypticism and rawer autobiographical confessionalism of MacBeth's 'Fin du Globe' (*Ambit* 17), 'The Bamboo Nightingale' (*Ambit* 44) and 'The Sick Husband' (*Ambit* 128); the elegiac abstraction of Porter's 'Meanwhile' (*Ambit* 54), 'The Killing Ground' (*Ambit* 82) and 'God: Filling in the Form' (*Ambit* 147); and the sombre formality of Redgrove's 'Cleaning the House' (*Ambit* 153). Yet *Ambit* also clearly endorses a series of secondary lines, with Henry Graham's world-wearily cynical 'A Social Sexual Primer for Children of All Ages' (*Ambit* 37), Ivor Cutler's comically silly 'My Mother Has Two Red Lips' (*Ambit* 54) and the jesting word-games of Gavin Ewart's 'In The Land of Vowel-Reversed Rhyming' (*Ambit* 81) belonging to a comic, light verse tradition that remains a key component of *Ambit's* developing poetry section. Similarly, the presence of works like Adrian Henri's 'The Entry of Christ into Liverpool' (*Ambit* 38), Michael Horovitz's 'Flower Power Cutback' (*Ambit* 53) and Roger McGough's 'Gone Are The Liners' (*Ambit* 92) suggests a commitment to Pop poetry that endured until the early Nineties.

Other readings might highlight the emergence of a strong group of women poets comprising Marilyn Hacker, Fleur Adcock, Carol Ann Duffy and Selima Hill; the influence of American models upon the work of Anselm Hollo, Jim Burns,

Robert Angus and Gunnar Harding; or simply reinforce the variety of American verse itself, with James Laughlin, Robert Sward and Marilyn Hacker ranking among *Ambit's* most prolific transatlantic contributors. Since 1959 *Ambit's* poetry editors have pursued a general policy of openness, considering all but the most extreme forms of confessionalism, Martianism and neo-Romanticism for publication. Although *Ambit's* principal loyalties have been to those poets associated with The Group, Bax's magazine has ranged far and wide in search of material, with J.G. Ballard's parodic 'Love A Print Out for Claire Churchill' (*Ambit* 37), Alan Riddell's Concrete poems (*Ambit* 47) and Christopher Evans's computer-generated aphorisms (*Ambit* 43) among the more bizarre illustrations of this determination.

The benefits of catholicity were most notably realised in the Eighties, and the decade spawned three anthology-style special numbers dedicated to writing from Liverpool (*Ambit* 92), Ireland (*Ambit* 115) and the Caribbean (*Ambit* 91). The strongest and most tightly edited of these special numbers was undoubtedly the Caribbean special (*Ambit* 91), which featured contributions from Linton Kwesi Johnson, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Grace Nichols, A.L. Hendriks, and David Nathaniel Haynes among others. A response in part to the narrow Englishness advanced by Morrison and Motion's *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* (1982), *Ambit* 91 not only proved the inspiration for a number of black anthologies including James Berry's *News For Babylon* (1984), Stewart Brown's *Caribbean Poetry Now* (1984), Paula Burnett's *Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse* (1986), and E.A. Markham's *Hinterland. Caribbean Poetry from the West Indies and Britain* (1989), but also highlighted some of the principal talents endorsed by Fred D'Aguiar's selections for *The New British Poetry* (1988). Moreover, since

appearing in *Ambit* 91, Linton Kwesi Johnson's 'Wat About Di Workin Claas' and Grace Nichols's 'I is a long-remembered woman' have become synonymous with a type of British Caribbean poetry recently acknowledged in mainstream anthologies such as Simon Armitage and Robert Crawford's *The Penguin Book of Poetry from Britain and Ireland Since 1945* (1998). Therefore, both for its services to Caribbean poetry in general and the strength of its contents in particular, *Ambit* 91 is certainly a poetic achievement of some distinction.

Ambit's engagement with contemporary Irish verse was somewhat different in nature, for the majority of contributors to *Ambit* 115 were already reasonably established names. Indeed, the poetry of Patrick Fiacc and James Liddy was already familiar to British readers of Brendan Kennelly's *Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Verse* (1970), and the work of Macdara Woods and Theo Dorgan had previously appeared in a number of British little magazines. *Ambit's* Irish poets, therefore, seemed to lack the exotic novelty of their Caribbean counterparts. Equally, *Ambit* 115 appeared to lack the tight thematic unity of *Ambit* 91, with Ireland itself a muted, if metaphorical, presence in a collection of poems ostensibly concerned with love, violence, and personal loss. Among the highlights of *Ambit* 115, however, Theo Dorgan's 'Speaking To My Father', Patrick Fiacc's 'Belfast Elegy 1981' and Sam Burnside's 'Six Loughs' certainly stand as some of the most accomplished poems to appear in *Ambit* during the Eighties. Similar deficiencies were apparent in the Liverpool special which, despite Patten's ironically lyrical 'The Obsolete Nightingale' and McGough's abruptly direct 'Gone Are The Liners', never quite recalled the vitality of *The Mersey Sound: Penguin Modern Poets 10* (1967), nor seemed to explore the greater significance of this cultural legacy.

Instead the contents of *Ambit* 92 merely served to demonstrate the extent to which the two leaders of the Liverpool Scene had moved on.

Another important feature of *Ambit's* poetry section is its commitment to translation, and since 1959 *Ambit* has brought the work of more than thirty individual poets from Central Europe, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia and Latin America to the attention of an English readership. Although Bax's magazine has carried original translations of Risto Ahti by Herbert Lomas (*Ambit* 138) and Christoph Meckel by Agnes Stein (*Ambit* 86, 89), *Ambit's* translators have typically tended to focus on poets already available, if not widely so, in English editions. During the Eighties, Europeans like Pier Paolo Pasolini, Jacques Prèvert and Sarah Kirsch dominated the poetry section. The reviews section, by contrast, ranged much further afield, engaging with poetry from Czechoslovakia, Russia, Mexico, South Africa and beyond. Lacking the academic tone of *Modern Poetry In Translation*, *Ambit* has generally seen translation as a means of encouraging readers and contributors alike to engage with a broader range of poetic models than those afforded by a narrow British tradition. In these terms, *Ambit's* commitment to translation remains primarily an antidote to the insularity and uniformity associated with Movement poetry of the Fifties and Sixties.

On a more fundamental level, *Ambit* has continued to promote a number of major poetic talents, whether by printing the more experimental work of poets like Porter, Ewart and MacBeth in the Sixties and Seventies, or by nurturing emerging talents like Adcock, Duffy and Hill in the Eighties and Nineties. *Ambit* has also given poets like Markham the time to solve a variety of formal and stylistic problems and to arrive at a distinctive poetic voice, and granted others, like Graham, the opportunity to transform a range of private sufferings into a poetry fit

for the public gaze. Perhaps the most potent demonstration of *Ambit's* loyalty to its major contributors can be found in the tributes to MacBeth, Ewart, Laughlin and Brock carried in *Ambit* 128, 143 and 151, these 'In Memoriam' numbers urging a re-evaluation of four contemporary poets whose reputations are still far from secure. Over the years, a number of less familiar names have used *Ambit* as a stepping stone towards small-press and pamphlet publication, with Tony Dash, Coleman Dowell, Anthony Edkins, Gunnar Harding, Jim Mangnall, Madeline Munro and Jeff Nuttall subsequently being picked up by outlets like London Magazine Editions, Migrant Press, Hearing Eye and Dragonfly. Equally, *Ambit* has continued to grant a multitude of complete unknowns their first, and occasionally last, appearance in print. This policy, while not guaranteeing the discovery of another Duffy, at least offers the talented novice a fair hearing.

Ambit's poetic achievements must ultimately be measured against the service the magazine has provided to dedicated writers and readers of British poetry during the latter half of the twentieth century. In steadfastly refusing to tie itself to any one particular poetic creed or faction, *Ambit* has managed to promote an alternative canon of British poetry that largely avoids the worst aspects of 'experimental' and Movement poetics respectively, and has been endorsed by a growing number of anthologists since the Sixties. In his surprisingly varied selection for *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century Verse* (1975), Philip Larkin included as many as thirteen *Ambit* poets, ranging from Gavin Ewart and John Heath-Stubbs to Barry Cole and Roger McGough. In a shorter selection for *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* (1982), Michael Roberts and Peter Porter whittled the number of *Ambit* poets down to four, placing Gavin Ewart, George MacBeth, Christopher Middleton and Peter Redgrove within a tradition that begins with

Gerard Manley Hopkins and W.B. Yeats and ends with Douglas Dunn and James Fenton. More recently, anthologists have appeared to reach a consensus on certain names: Carol Ann Duffy and Selima Hill are well-represented in Michael Hulse, David Kennedy and David Morley's *The New Poetry* (1993) and Edna Longley's *The Bloodaxe Book of 20th Century Poetry From Britain and Ireland* (2000); Linton Kwesi Johnson and Peter Reading feature prominently in both Hulse's *The New Poetry* and Keith Tuma's *Anthology of Twentieth-Century British and Irish Poetry* (2001); while Stevie Smith appears in both the Longley and the Tuma anthologies. The clearest endorsement of *Ambit's* selection policy, however, came with the appearance of Armitage and Crawford's *The Penguin Book of Poetry from Britain and Ireland Since 1945* (1998), which featured no fewer than twenty-four *Ambit* poets, and gave particular prominence to the work of Porter, Redgrove, Adcock and Duffy.

Although the contents of such anthologies do not necessarily suggest that *Ambit* has been responsible for a wholesale shift in poetic taste or wider assumptions about the contemporary canon (none of the *Ambit* contributors included in Tony Dash's *Anthology of Little Magazine Poets* (1968), for instance, found their way into any major anthologies of British poetry), they certainly suggest that gradually, over the course of four decades, *Ambit* has managed to achieve a degree of representativeness unmatched by the avant-garde experimentalism of *New Departures*, the High Modernist pretensions of *X* magazine, or the unadventurous coterie verse of *Outposts*. The fact alone that *Ambit* has managed to transcend the manifesto-ethic and coterie-mentality that claimed so many of its rivals, and pursue a selection policy that has proved generally representative of the course of late twentieth-century British verse must stand as an achievement of some note in a

contemporary literary culture still divided over the relative merits of formalism over free verse. In his first editorial, Bax pointedly refused to promise his readers an endless supply of great Literature: in its place, *Ambit's* readers have had to content themselves with more than a few accomplished poems by some of the twentieth century's leading British poets.

***Ambit's* Achievements 1959-99: Fiction**

As Randall Stevenson has pointed out in *The Last of England?* (2004), the Sixties seemed to mark the beginning of the end for the English short story. At a moment when publishers and authors were increasingly beginning to realise the economic benefits of producing the next best-seller, and when readers were looking to invest their own ever-diminishing 'resources of time, concentration, or energy [...] in the more substantial form of the novel', the decline of the short story appeared, in all likelihood, to be a terminal one.⁵²⁶ By the mid Sixties, these socio-economic factors, coupled with the demise of a number of high-profile literary magazines in the late Fifties, had conspired to reduce the number of outlets for the dedicated writer of short stories to a handful of titles like *London Magazine* and *Stand*. With prospects for publication so bleak, authors were forced to compromise their style in order to satisfy a dwindling band of anthologists and magazine editors, to target their work at special interest publications, or to abandon the short story altogether. Such strategies had a catastrophic effect both upon the variety and the quality of magazine fiction in the late twentieth century as authors typically sought security in a particularly unadventurous form of social realism or resorted to the equally predictable formulae of 'genre fiction'. Given these constraints, it is not entirely

⁵²⁶ Randall Stevenson, 'Longer Shadows and Darkness Risible: The 1970s to 2000'. *The Last of England? The Oxford English Literary History. Volume 12. 1960-2000*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004: 436.

surprising that *Ambit's* fiction lacks the wide-ranging inclusiveness of its poetry section. Faced with a constant shortage of high-quality fiction, *Ambit* has tended to rely upon a relatively small number of regular contributors to fill its pages since the mid Sixties; and this, combined with *Ambit's* longstanding opposition to realist fiction, has been responsible for cultivating and sustaining a group of young writers characterised by a powerful obsession with the bizarre, the quirky and the macabre. What is surprising is the extent to which these writers managed to shock, amuse and entertain by bringing a new spirit of playful innovation to a short story form in desperate need of renewal and, in doing so, inspire others to take up the challenge of revivifying a dying form.

Much of the fiction that appeared in *Ambit* between 1959 and 1999 tended to spring out of a surrealistic or apocalyptic worldview epitomised by a recurring fascination with abnormal psychology, perverse sexuality and high technology evident in the work of regular contributors like Bax, Ballard and Nicholson. Taking their lead from Burroughs's notes on cut-up composition that appeared as 'Martin's Mag' (*Ambit* 20) and arch-surrealist mosaics like Blakeston's 'Trapped' (*Ambit* 7), Bax and Ballard found their materials for 'Night Round' (*Ambit* 50) and 'You: Coma: Marilyn Monroe' (*Ambit* 27) respectively amid the warped and shattered psyches of the asylum inmate and the clinical psychopath. In the same way, Ballard's vision of the automobile as an emblem of sexuality, modernity and transgression, so powerfully articulated in 'Crash!' (*Ambit* 55), would later echo in the work of Nicholson, whose 'Big Blondes: An Illustrated History of the Volkswagen' (*Ambit* 100), 'Day Trips To The Desert' (*Ambit* 124) and 'The Driver's Manual' (*Ambit* 144) revisited similar themes during the Eighties. Despite demonstrating a less obvious commitment to surrealist principles, the work of Toby

Litt and Christopher Evans might also be located within the dominant current of *Ambit's* fiction since the Sixties. Engaged in a one-man struggle against the surveillance culture personified by Jeremy Beadle, the chief protagonist of Litt's 'Z-Ward, BoJo, Kenneth and the BetamaxBoy' (*Ambit* 143) is every bit as frightening as Ballard's calculating psychopaths. Similarly, the computer-generated 'The Yellow Back Novels' (*Ambit* 51) and 'Machine Gun City' (*Ambit* 60) texts, with their visions of alien invasion and gang warfare, testify to a more general mood of apprehension prompted by the Cold War rhetoric of the Seventies. In later years this apocalypticism became a less urgent presence in *Ambit's* fiction, although it still afforded fertile ground in the Eighties for Ian Watson's anti-Thatcher satire, 'The Mistress of Cold' (*Ambit* 96), before being translated into a more sinister violence that emerges in the Nineties with pieces like Sue Flynn's account of juvenile miscarriage in 'Of Dolls and Games' (*Ambit* 131), and Joukko Turkka's tale of erotic revenge, 'When The Bees Got Out' (*Ambit* 120).

Alongside *Ambit's* surrealist and apocalyptic writings, a less eye-catching quasi-autobiographical strain was discernible in the work of authors like E.A. Markham, Victor Annant and Judy Gahagan. A constant, if secondary, inspiration for *Ambit's* writers following the appearance of Desmond Skirrow's tale of adolescent love, 'News from Home' (*Ambit* 2), this quasi-autobiographical mode reached its height in the Eighties in stories like Annant's 'U-N Man' (*Ambit* 130), Markham's 'Madeline' (*Ambit* 127), and Gahagan's 'The Listening Position' (*Ambit* 125), as well as extracts from longer works by *Ambit* novelists like Tina Fulker and Sophie Frank. Principally concerned with themes around work, family and relationships, the fiction of Markham, Fulker and Frank was grounded in the experiences of a familiar everyday present, thereby providing a comfortable retreat

from Ballard's nightmarish visions of a post-apocalyptic future. Yet, perversely, the personal, domestic struggles explored in such works merely served to illustrate just how much was at stake in a Cold War society poised on the brink of destruction. Thus the emotional bonds of love and family so powerfully explored in Gahagan's 'The Listening Position' and Markham's 'President Horace The Second, Howe' (*Ambit* 133) are invested with a new fragility in the light of a Ballardian future marked by violence, disconnection and detachment. Against the backdrop of an all-pervasive apocalypticism, the fiction of Gahagan in particular reaffirms the human values of love, compassion and self-knowledge so savagely undercut in Ballard's 'The Intensive Care Unit' (*Ambit* 71). As a check to some of the more pessimistic impulses of *Ambit's* apocalypics, the contributions of Markham, Gahagan, Fulker and others enabled *Ambit* to transcend the sort of simplistic nihilism that destroyed *Bananas* in the Eighties.

The third significant form that appears in *Ambit's* fiction section is that of the short sketch, or set-piece, within which some perverse twist or formal experiment is typically played out before the reader. A strong presence in *Ambit* from the outset, this brand of ultra-short fiction grew out of the grotesque, inexplicable violence of Merrill Ferguson's 'The Return' (*Ambit* 2) and the perverse surrealism of Blakeston's 'Trapped' (*Ambit* 7) and 'Ladies Only' (*Ambit* 13) during the Sixties, before becoming a powerful vehicle for the comedy of Marvin Cohen and Miles Burrows in the Seventies and Eighties, and the disturbing mixture of menace and whimsy that surfaced in the fiction of Toby Litt, Jonathan Treitel and Dai Vaughan in the Nineties. Some of the work done within this form has been particularly accomplished, and Belbin's 'Love, Time Travel' (*Ambit* 132), with its re-appropriation of science fiction themes; Treitel's 'The Winter People' (*Ambit*

138), with its clever defamiliarisation of a winter world popularised by Raymond Briggs's *The Snowman* (1978); and Vaughan's 'Meat' (*Ambit* 145), with its uncomfortable comparisons between art and butchery, are undoubtedly among the strongest fiction contributions to appear in *Ambit* since its inception. Offering an alternative to the apocalypticism of Ballard and his disciples, and to the everyday distractions of Markham, Annant and others, *Ambit's* sketch-writers ensured that, no matter how grave the personal or political concerns of their readers, *Ambit* retained its sense of humour.

Inevitably, given the relative enormity of their themes, *Ambit's* apocalypics and surrealists have continued to supply the magazine with its most memorable writings since the Sixties. Whether as allegorical or satirical responses to the assassination of Kennedy, the prospect of Mutually Assured Destruction, or the less obvious dangers of everyday life, texts like Ballard's 'The Assassination of J.F.K. Considered As A Downhill Motor Race' (*Ambit* 29), Watson's 'The Mistress of Cold' (*Ambit* 96), and Flynn's 'Of Dolls and Games' (*Ambit* 131) certainly retain an immediacy and impact which, for all their strengths, the more sedate works of Markham, Annant and Gahagan cannot match. Thus *Ambit's* strongest fiction contributions have consistently come from those writers inspired by apocalyptic themes, with William Burroughs's 'Johnny 23' (*Ambit* 37), Ballard's 'Crash!' (*Ambit* 55), and Litt's 'Z-Ward, BoJo, Kenneth and the BetamaxBoy' (*Ambit* 143) epitomising *Ambit* fiction at its best. By far the most ingenious piece to appear in *Ambit's* fiction section, Geoff Nicholson's 'Beetamorphosis' (*Ambit* 153) embodies, more than any other single contribution, the key features of the quintessential *Ambit* story as, in his witty, literate and stylish parody of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Nicholson achieves a level of sophistication and closure unmatched by his peers.

Relentlessly tracking the twists and turns of Kafka's nightmarish original, Nicholson's absurdist text describes the consequences that ensue when Greg, a second-hand car salesman, finds himself transformed into a Volkswagen Beetle. In the space of four pages, Nicholson ruthlessly exploits the humour of Kafka's text for his own ends, while remaining true to the narrative arc of *Metamorphosis* and its tragic themes of persecution, dehumanization and exile. Evoking the same dark surrealism at the core of work by Bax and Ballard throughout the Sixties and Seventies, 'Beetamorphosis' remains a literary achievement of some merit, and a clear testament to the continuing capacity of *Ambit's* storytellers to shock, surprise and amuse.

For *Ambit's* fiction editors, as for its poetry editors, translation brought a temporary escape from the familiar forms and themes of contemporary British fiction, and a welcome, if infrequent, dash of exoticism. In keeping with the dominant concerns of British contributors, however, *Ambit's* translated fiction was characterised by a strong surrealist strain initially signalled by J.D. Roberts's renderings of I.V. Bizarrov's 'Select Slavonic Tales' (*Ambit* 8, 12 and 16), Irwin Linsky's versions of Paul Eluard and André Breton's *The Immaculate Conception* (*Ambit* 45 and 47), and Christopher Ligota's translations of Artur Leczycki's 'Tonight the butterflies will be back again' (*Ambit* 72). Other translations, such as Christina Pribičević-Zorić's versions of Sonja Besford's 'How To Catch The Thalasson' (*Ambit* 134) and 'Todor' (*Ambit* 139), proved less successful, but despite the occasional lapse *Ambit's* prose translators typically offered fluent and compelling insights into the variety of contemporary Eastern European writing and the continuing legacy of European Surrealism.

Arguably *Ambit's* greatest achievement within the field of contemporary fiction stems from its tireless and dedicated commitment to its talented young writers who, in view of the limited market for the short story in late twentieth-century Britain, might well have abandoned the form in despair. In making the short story a key feature of *Ambit's* wider editorial vision, Bax has steadily increased the amount of space available to his fiction contributors as the magazine has grown, and has remained unswervingly loyal to a group of writers as diverse as Annant, Blakeston, Ballard, Nicholson, Markham and Litt. As a consequence, *Ambit* has been rewarded with the greater part of Blakeston's surrealist *oeuvre*; first refusal on key texts from Ballard's controversial *Atrocity Exhibition*; and the first publication of extracts from Ann Quin's drug-inspired *Tripticks*. By enthusiastically endorsing the apocalyptic vision of his most influential fiction contributor, Bax gave Ballard the opportunity in his *Ambit* stories to develop and refine the major themes of his later work and carve out a reputation for himself as one of Britain's most unique contemporary novelists. Over the years, Nicholson has benefited from a similar generosity, with pieces like 'The Food Chain Diaries' (*Ambit* 118) and 'The Catalogue of Love' (*Ambit* 121) charting the emergence of an exciting new talent and anticipating a string of acclaimed novels. The sense that Nicholson was poised to become Ballard's heir apparent was further signalled by his appointment to *Ambit's* editorial board in 1996, Nicholson being responsible for carrying *Ambit's* commitment to the bizarre, quirky and macabre into the new millennium. Other authors to benefit from their association with *Ambit* since the Eighties include Litt, who has gone on to publish a number of formally innovative novels, and Markham, who has brought out a handful of short story collections to accompany his poetry.

In the field of contemporary fiction, *Ambit's* achievement has been essentially two-fold. First, it has continued to provide an outlet for aspiring short story writers whose work, for whatever reason, has failed to find favour with the editors of other titles. Second, in doing so, *Ambit* has managed to sustain a distinctly perverse, perverted and peculiar brand of fiction by challenging its authors to develop new formal and thematic strategies to stimulate an increasingly unshockable readership. Those readers not scared off by Merrill Ferguson's 'The Return' (*Ambit* 2) or Ann Quin's 'Tripticks' (*Ambit* 35) were subsequently treated to the psychopathic sexuality of Ballard's 'Crash!', the violent computer-generated fiction of Evans's 'Machine Gun City', and the geeky paranoia of Litt's 'Z-Ward, BoJo, Kenneth and the BetamaxBoy', not to mention the macabre blasphemy of Flynn's 'Of Dolls and Games', the mordant satire of Watson's 'The Mistress of Cold', or the stylish comedy of Nicholson's 'Beetamorphosis'. It is highly unlikely that these pieces, accomplished as they are, would have been accepted for publication by any of *Ambit's* rivals during the Seventies, Eighties or Nineties. Thus as steadfast champions of the short story and vigorous advocates of its renewal, *Ambit's* editors have left the British short story in much better shape than they found it in 1959.

***Ambit's* Achievements 1959-99: Visual Arts**

The extent of *Ambit's* achievement in the field of the visual arts remains extremely difficult to gauge. On a superficial level, visuals have always played a key part in distinguishing *Ambit* from its more literature-based rivals, yet the very diversity of an arts section which has embraced drawing, sculpture, painting, photography, collage, cartooning and illustration over the years seems to rule out the concept of an archetypal *Ambit* form, style, movement or artist. In these terms, *Ambit's* passion

for Pop Art sculpture during the Sixties was no more a rejection of Abstract Expressionism than its enthusiasm for life drawing during the Eighties was a retreat from Conceptualism. In short, *Ambit's* art section never sought to formulate a polemical critique of the established Schools, preferring instead to offer a wide-ranging survey of some of the more exciting talents emerging from Britain's art colleges.

In the early years, primitive printing and reproduction standards limited the scope of *Ambit's* visual contents to the black-and-white ink drawings of M. Piercy, Oliffe Richmond and Andrew Fergusson (*Ambit* 1 and 2). The move to Lavenham Press in 1961, however, brought a major transformation in the way *Ambit* treated its visual contents. A high-gloss art paper was introduced for *Ambit* 10, and this, together with the coloured cover of *Ambit* 15, served to make the magazine much more attractive to artists and readers. During the Sixties, Pop Art was particularly well represented in *Ambit's* pages, and Peter Blake (*Ambit* 13), David Hockney (*Ambit* 14) and Michael Foreman (*Ambit* 18) each made significant contributions in this regard. Yet this was also the period when erotic photography began to make its first sustained impression upon the magazine (*Ambit* 24-27) and during which Foreman's Statue of Liberty cover cartoon (*Ambit* 39) attracted censure from Randolph Churchill. These contributions, alongside Carol Annand's grotesque line drawings of children squeezed into bottles (*Ambit* 13), Bruce McLean's *A Series of Drawings for a Sculpture to be entitled Vickie Kennedy will You be my Friend* (*Ambit* 24), and Robert McAuley's *Three Deaths: 2. J. F. K.* (*Ambit* 21), seemed to suggest that *Ambit* art was synonymous with the kind of witty, high-impact self-reflexiveness favoured by Pop Art's principal proponents.

Ambit's fascination with Pop Art continued well into the Seventies, with Foreman's cover image for *Ambit* 42 and Paolozzi's polemical *Vietnam Symphony* (*Ambit* 63) making sustained use of collage, photomontage and screen-printing techniques pioneered by the likes of Richard Hamilton, Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol—a debt notably acknowledged in the tribute to 'The American Poster 1945-75' (*Ambit* 66). The style of *Ambit's* visuals changed somewhat with the emergence of Ron Sandford, whose irreverent work owed more to the surreal humour of Terry Gilliam than the allusive collages of Hamilton; and with Foreman's switch to the lyrical watercolours deployed for his regular series of exotic travelogues. From the mid Seventies onwards *Ambit* continued to diversify, and Susan Sterne's fantastic *Magic Cakes in the Dark* (*Ambit* 57), Helen Chadwick's body art (*Ambit* 69) and Janina Lech's *Drawings for Cold Comfort Farm* (*Ambit* 74) seemed to offer an alternative to the apocalyptic violence epitomised by *The Invisible Years* series (*Ambit* 66-79), Foreman's *Atrocity Exhibition* drawings (*Ambit* 44), and the gruesome performances of Hermann Nitsche (*Ambit* 58).

The most significant transformation in *Ambit's* visuals came in the Eighties as a number of younger, predominantly female, artists and illustrators began to emerge. While pieces such as Carolyn Gowdy's *Theatre of Women* (*Ambit* 83) and Helen Chadwick's *Objects* (*Ambit* 81) took up feminist concerns about the 'ideal woman' as a myth perpetuated by advertising executives, works like Vanessa Jackson's neo-Celtic *Blocks for Centos* (*Ambit* 100), Hannah Firmin's woodcuts for Adrian Henri's 'Death In The Suburbs' (*Ambit* 80), and Laura Knight's chalk illustrations for Howard Young's 'Notes for 37 Fish' (*Ambit* 97) brought a softer, lyrical quality to *Ambit's* visuals. Against this trend Ralph Steadman's *Extraordinary People* drawings (*Ambit* 103) and the work of Rod Judkins, Charles

Shearer and Chris Orr signalled a return to grotesquery, while the collages of Andrew Lanyon (*Ambit* 89) and the sculptures of Arturo Laskus (*Ambit* 90) testified to *Ambit's* continuing, if diminishing, interest in Pop.

By the Nineties, *Ambit's* artists had firmly established themselves as an indispensable part of the magazine's broader literary-artistic vision. During this period painting benefited enormously from the kind of full-colour reproductions that enabled the watercolours of David Remfry (*Ambit* 137), and the oils of Frank Auerbach (*Ambit* 136), Christopher LeBrun (*Ambit* 138) and Paula Rego (*Ambit* 139) to be appreciated in terms of their texture, materiality and status as unique art objects. This relatively costly improvement in production standards—combined with the appearance of three substantial Art Specials dedicated to Patrick Caulfield, David Hockney and Eduardo Paolozzi (*Ambit* 126); Peter Blake, Michael Foreman and Vanessa Jackson (*Ambit* 150); and Sarah Raphael and Ralph Steadman (*Ambit* 154)—reaffirmed *Ambit's* ongoing commitment to the full spectrum of British contemporary art. In these terms, *Ambit's* art section soon became a significant showcase for all manner of Pop, Conceptualist, Surrealist and German Expressionist tendencies.

Despite the apparent eclecticism that characterised *Ambit's* visual contents between 1959 and 1999, it is possible to identify a set of key continuities upon which the magazine's artistic achievements rest. In the first instance, the reputation of *Ambit's* arts section has risen with that of its three major contributors: Paolozzi, Foreman and Steadman. As one of Britain's first Pop Artists, Paolozzi set the tone of *Ambit's* art section for much of the Sixties and Seventies with his distinctive collages and drawings and his general enthusiasm for Blake and Hockney. Adapting Paolozzi's collage methods before developing his own unique watercolour

travelogues, Foreman's work dominated *Ambit* throughout the Seventies and Eighties, providing a link between the Pop Art designs of the Sixties and the more realistic illustrations of the Nineties. Steadman, by contrast, remained the champion of grotesquery, his violent caricatures and freak-show drawings of the Eighties inspiring Ian Pollock and others during the Nineties. The *Ambit* artistic tradition, in so far as it exists, is rooted in the work of these major contributors: one a Royal Academician, one a prize-winning illustrator, and one a leading cartoonist. the

The editorial influence of Paolozzi and Foreman also explains *Ambit's* general preference for drawing and new realist painting over other art forms for, while remaining sympathetic to the grotesquery present in Hockney's *faux-naïve* nude (*Ambit* 14), Steadman's *Pig Woman* (*Ambit* 106) and Pollock's *Miracles of Christ* (*Ambit* 128), *Ambit's* art section has proved particularly receptive to figurative and representational modes that valued realism over abstraction. Holding to this basic editorial line, Paolozzi and Foreman introduced a number of Royal College of Art graduates to the magazine, granting emerging artists like Hannah Firmin, Elizabeth Pyle and Carolyn Gowdy the opportunity to build up a significant portfolio on the way to a successful career in book illustration. Similarly, contributions from Royal Academicians like Chris Orr, Christopher LeBrun and Paula Rego showed that *Ambit* had by no means neglected the established names in its support for the young British artist.

Ambit's principal artistic achievement remains grounded in its longstanding commitment to a range of contemporary art forms and its status as an increasingly attractive showcase for a variety of emerging and established talents. A champion of Pop in the Sixties before turning to German Expressionism and new realist painting in subsequent decades, *Ambit* continued to develop a unique model of the

little magazine that sought to combine some of the most interesting aspects of contemporary literary and visual arts culture. Despite the sustained objections of the ACGB's Literature Panel, who typically viewed the visuals as a costly luxury, *Ambit's* literary-artistic model proved particularly influential with young, aspiring magazine editors during the Eighties and Nineties. By turns lyrical, provocative, alluring and grotesque, *Ambit's* art section has delivered some of the magazine's most memorable work since the early Sixties, echoing and amplifying themes in the poetry and fiction, and offering a unique cross-section of contemporary British art since the Sixties. *Ambit's* art section has certainly played a major part in the emergence of a distinctive *Ambit* identity.

The Little Become Big? From Idealistic Amateurism to Entrepreneurial Pragmatism

In *The Little Magazines: A Study of Six Editors* (1976), Ian Hamilton proposed a startlingly clear definition of the little magazine based upon a historio-descriptive account of six titles published in Britain and America between 1914 and 1949. Placing a heavy emphasis upon the function of the modernist magazines and their immediate post-war successors, Hamilton revised the earlier definitions of Hoffman *et al* to set out the distinctive features of the little magazine. In Hamilton's view, the little magazine embodies a form of idealistic amateurism that makes points, supports gifts and promotes 'tendencies which would otherwise have been fatally neglected', while rejecting 'the usual business structure of magazine production and distribution' synonymous with the commercial presses. Inherently 'independent, amateur and idealistic' by inclination, it remains a medium dedicated to the expression of marginalised voices and the development of alternative publishing

strategies.⁵²⁷ Yet, somewhat problematically, this idealism necessarily diminishes during the lifetime of any single title:

There are the opening years of jaunty, assertive indecision, then a middle period of genuine identity, and after that a kind of level stage in which that identity becomes more and more wan and mechanical. Around this stage, the editorial impulse begins to founder, issues become thinner, more infrequent, political commitments more half-hearted. The editor at this point has to make a choice: to stop altogether, or to allow his journal to slip into a faceless survival.⁵²⁸

This 'faceless survival', Hamilton suggests, stems from a magazine's inability to square its founding principles with the need to 'confront subsequent periods, subsequent challenges'. Citing *The Little Review*, *Poetry*, *The Criterion*, *New Verse*, *Horizon* and *Partisan Review* as examples of this phenomenon, Hamilton boldly sets 'the ideal life-span for a little magazine' at 'ten years', before concluding that 'each magazine needs a new decade, and each decade needs a new magazine'.⁵²⁹ While such conclusions broadly hold true for the majority of Hamilton's modernist and post-war examples, they certainly do not reflect the changes in the medium that have occurred since the rise of the contemporary little magazine in 1959. Thus in view of *Ambit's* continued longevity and the wider cultural developments that have sustained this remarkable run, Hamilton's definition of the little magazine is no longer sufficient to 'cover most of the whole field', and needs reassessment.⁵³⁰

Unlike Hamilton's modernist and post-war models, *Ambit* has never subscribed to a view of littleness that sees transience as its 'true imperative'. The same might also be said of Jon Silkin's *Stand*, William Cookson and Peter Dale's *Agenda* and Alan Ross's *London Magazine*, which were still appearing regularly in the late Nineties. Indeed, Bax attributes much of his impetus as editor to a genuine need 'to keep it going', to maintain the momentum built up over the decades, and to

⁵²⁷ Hamilton: 7-8.

⁵²⁸ Ibid: 9.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Ibid: 7.

the 'frisson of excitement' that stems from the search for 'something fresh and exciting with each number'.⁵³¹ While such longevity was not in itself proof of a magazine's continuing vitality, it certainly suggested that the kind of economic, artistic and ideological challenges that had claimed *My Own Mag*, *Origins Diversions*, *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse* and *Resuscitator* by the early Seventies could be overcome. Yet the robustness that distinguished *Ambit*, *Agenda*, *London Magazine* and *Stand* from their fallen contemporaries was as much a symptom of external economic and ideological forces as it was a triumph of the editorial will and posed new questions about the status and function of the contemporary little magazine.

By the end of the Seventies much of the amateurism that Hamilton had associated with the little magazines of the Sixties had disappeared. Consequently, although *Ambit's* editorial staff continued to serve the magazine in a voluntary, unpaid and part-time capacity, the magazine itself began to bear all the hallmarks of a professional publishing operation. Following the switch from two-tone lithography to hot metal printing in 1961, *Ambit's* production standards improved dramatically with the advent of a clear contemporary typeface, sophisticated photolithographic imaging techniques, the first three-colour cover designs, and the transition from centre-staple to gum binding. These production improvements, together with the emergence of a distinctive logo and a unifying design element, gave *Ambit* and its contemporaries a professional edge unmatched by the transient ephemerals of the mimeo revolution. This professionalism also extended to the day-to-day running of the magazine with the introduction of a rigid three-month production cycle, a small network of specialist corresponding editors, and a

⁵³¹ Tinker, 'Ambitious Outsider: An Interview With *Ambit* Editor Martin Bax', 3:AM Magazine Webpages, see note 456.

standard rejection slip all playing a critical role in reducing manuscript turnaround times, driving up editorial standards, and meeting quarterly proofing and print deadlines. A similar impulse underpinned *Ambit's* increasingly sophisticated marketing strategies. Writing to Bax in 1989 about possible designs for a new advertising leaflet, Edwin Brock observed:

We need a kind of baseline like No FT no comment, but I don't know what it is. *Ambit*—a big bit of I am. *Ambit*—just a little bit better. *Ambit*—a bit of what's around. Etc. Etc. Play with it, it'll come. Perhaps. [...] *Ambit*—a life insurance policy. *Ambit*. Armpit. A bit of good. Bit Bit Bit. Am Am Am. There has to be something there. Bitten by *Ambit*. Once bitten twice bitten, to quote Porter. Iambit is nearly Iambic. [...] But it has to be the most something-or-other leaflet ever. The most funny, surprising, outrageous ... I don't know ... but what's important (if we take that route) is to enthuse Birdsall, Steadman, Foreman et al with the idea.⁵³²

The two 'baselines' arising from this period of self-reflection, 'I think therefore I *Ambit*' and '*Ambit*—just what the doctor ordered', have proved remarkably successful in encapsulating some of the key aspirations of the *Ambit* project. The former, with its witty evocation of Descartes and its logical equation between *Ambit* and the intellect, suggests the cultivation of a select, enlightened readership and *Ambit's* self-proclaimed opposition to the 'unthinking mainstream'. The latter, with its emphasis upon diagnosis and cure, presents *Ambit* as an antidote to boredom and ennui while offering more than a passing nod to the sick humour associated with regular contributors like Gavin Ewart, George MacBeth, Ralph Steadman and Geoff Nicholson. Simple, unpretentious and witty, such baselines testified to the rise of a new entrepreneurial spirit that saw the little magazines, by the late Nineties, aspiring to the standards of production, organisation and distribution set by the major publishing houses, the big reviews and even the national dailies.

In other respects, *Ambit's* increasingly entrepreneurial approach was simply a necessary response to the economic realities of the Eighties and Nineties.

⁵³² Letter from Edwin Brock to Martin Bax, 23 October 1989. *Ambit* Archive at Penn State University: Series I: Correspondence; Part II: Special Sequence B-BU, 1987-95. Box 30, Folder 17.

Following the Conservative election victory of 1979, the relationship between the ACGB and the little magazines changed dramatically. In the light of the ACGB's decision to terminate its popular library subscription scheme, magazines could no longer rely upon the bulk purchasing power of subsidised public libraries and had to compete head-to-head for private subscriptions in a market both marginal and minuscule. Nor could editors depend on the reliable and relatively automatic handouts they had received from the ACGB for much of the Seventies. Instead, the ACGB's annual client and self-sufficiency schemes forced editors to bid for a smaller number of lucrative grants tied to the adoption of specific business practices. Moreover, with applicants obliged to submit projected budgets for the year as well as information on subscriber numbers, anticipated sales, and copies of their most recent back numbers, the application process itself demanded a business-like attitude that seemed at odds with longstanding definitions of the little magazine spirit identified by Hoffman and Hamilton.

The inevitable result of this 'competitive tendering' was a 'downsizing' and 'rationalisation' of the little magazine community as the ACGB's chosen clients flourished while unsuccessful applicants, such as Michael Horovitz's *New Departures*, either significantly scaled down their operations or folded altogether. Yet, perversely, a successful application posed problems for a little magazine like *Ambit*, for although the ACGB's annual client scheme made significant sums available to ambitious editors, it also had the negative effect of establishing a whole new audience: the ACGB's Literature Panel itself. Under the funding regimes of the Sixties and Seventies, a successful editor had only to concern himself with satisfying the demands of contributors, subscribers and printers while guarding against actionable libel, blasphemy and obscenity, confident that the support of his

readers already represented a general endorsement of his editorial strategy. Thus an editor was essentially free to print whatever he liked as long as the subscriptions and submissions kept trickling in. By contrast, an editor of an 'annual client' publication during the Eighties and Nineties also had to appeal to the diverse interests of the publicly accountable ACGB and Regional Arts Boards, concerned that by alienating his mighty patrons he risked financial ruin. Given the relative flux that characterised the nature of the Literature Panel's committee structures and the formulation of its policies, there was no guarantee that any committee would automatically uphold the decisions of its predecessors. In these terms, a number of annual clients felt compelled to tone down their contents, adopting a more pragmatic editorial line that sought to appease regular readers and placate institutional patrons. In *Ambit's* case this shift from idealism to pragmatism is most notably demonstrated by the contrast between the mood of satirical rebellion that informed the Drugs and Creative Writing Special (*Ambit* 35), the Broadsheet Special (*Ambit* 37) and the Stars and Stripes Special (*Ambit* 39) during the Sixties, and the kind of community-building social concern evoked by the Caribbean Special (*Ambit* 91) and the Liverpool Special (*Ambit* 92) during the Eighties. By making little magazine editors submit to an annual funding review, the ACGB had in effect instituted a new policy of censorship by stealth, and *Ambit*, in common with a number of subsidised titles, grudgingly accepted medium-term economic security in exchange for some of the wide-ranging editorial freedoms enjoyed in its youth. By the mid Eighties, therefore, *Agenda*, *Ambit*, and *London Magazine* had abandoned Hamilton's spirit of idealistic amateurism in favour of a highly developed sense of entrepreneurial pragmatism.

One of the earliest indicators of this shift towards pragmatism was the demise of the platform magazine and a general retreat from polemics during the Eighties and Nineties. Ushered in with the rise of the Underground Press during the Sixties, magazines like *Allotrope*, *Amazing Rayday*, *Anarchy* and *Assassinator's Broadsheet* were killed off by the same kind of financial problems, internal disputes and disillusionment that had accounted for the alternative periodicals *Oz*, *IT* and *Black Dwarf*. Those magazines concerning themselves with experimental poetics in the Seventies fared little better, and *Stereo Headphones*, *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse* and *Spanner* disappeared with the Concrete and Fluxus movements that had spawned them. In the Eighties, platform magazines like *New Departures* found little favour with the ACGB, who consistently backed those titles that conformed to a model of apolitical catholicity epitomised by *Agenda*, *Ambit*, *London Magazine* and *Poetry Review*. Indeed, of those annual client publications listed above, *Agenda* was the only magazine to carry its regular editorial column into the Nineties; *London Magazine* carried significantly fewer editorials after Alan Ross succeeded John Lehmann as editor in 1961; while *Ambit* had axed its formal editorial altogether as early as 1966. The ACGB was by no means opposed to the promotion of 'nonconformist, experimental and adventuresome work', but it certainly seemed reluctant to endorse some of the more polemical readings of British contemporary poetry favoured by Horovitz and others.⁵³³ Such evidence suggests that the transience associated with the little magazines of the Sixties and Seventies was not, as Hamilton and Fulton have suggested, an intrinsic feature of the little magazine medium *per se*, but rather the inevitable effect of trying to defend a specific coterie or manifesto against the continual challenge of the new. What distinguished *Ambit*

⁵³³ Horovitz, 'Subsidizing Magazines', *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 June 1982: 639.

and *London Magazine* from Ian Hamilton's *The Review* was the ability to transform this challenge into a catalyst for modernisation and improvement, as titles like *Ambit* and *London Magazine* placed their faith in the new blood that gave them the authority to respond to the particular demands of each 'new decade'.

Ultimately Hamilton's insistence upon transience stems from his opposition to the 'half-hearted', 'faceless survival' that he associates with longevity.⁵³⁴ Although the contents of Roland John's *Outposts* in the Eighties and Nineties amply illustrated the dangers posed by staid predictability and editorial complacency, *Ambit* has never been anything other than enthusiastically whole-hearted in its ongoing search for new material. While it is true that the Eighties and Nineties saw *Ambit* retreating from some of the more aggressive and controversial work associated with the magazine's youth, there is little to suggest that this development was prompted by anything more sinister than a recognition of *Ambit's* wider responsibility to its readers and contributors. Indeed, what comes through in much of the editorial correspondence since the Sixties is a relentless need to improve and refine *Ambit's* distinctive vision, and this has led to some rather frank editorial debates at times, as illustrated by one particular exchange between Brock and Bax during the late Seventies:

I think that *Ambit* stands or falls by the standard of its poetry, and I think we often let work through for no other reason than that we have pages to fill and a press-date to meet. Personally, I don't give a fuck about the number of pages we fill nor the date we go to press, but I do care about the *raison d'être* of the poetry we print. [...]

I want to talk to you about this. I feel it very strongly. Either we make ourselves THE poetry mag, and carry all the rest of that crap you insist on filling our pages with on the back of good poetry, or we acknowledge that *Ambit* is trying to do something else—like a trendy arts mag—and you get another poetry editor.⁵³⁵

In the event, Brock remained *Ambit's* chief poetry editor until Carol Ann Duffy joined the editorial board in 1984, but it was precisely this kind of creative tension

⁵³⁴ Hamilton: 9.

⁵³⁵ Letter from Brock to Bax, 30 March 1976. *Ambit* Archive at Penn State University: Series I: Correspondence; Part II: Edwin Brock, 1965-88. Box 3, Folder 13.

that sustained the magazine's reputation during the Eighties and Nineties and dispelled the kind of editorial complacency that had blighted a host of *Ambit's* Fifties predecessors. Moreover, given the particularly high standard of *Ambit's* poetry in the Eighties and its fiction in the Nineties, there was little to suggest that Bax had allowed his magazine to 'slip into a faceless survival'.⁵³⁶ Far from it: as *Ambit* prepared to face the challenges of a new century, there remained something fundamentally Ambitesque about Bax's magazine for, despite its superficial affinity with *London Magazine*, no one else could do poetry, fiction and art in quite the way that *Ambit* could.

A New Form of 'Littleness'? Some Distinguishing Characteristics of the Contemporary Little Magazine

As the evidence of the preceding chapters demonstrates, *Ambit* represents a unique chronologue of the evolution of the little magazine in Britain, registering many of the economic, cultural and technological changes that have affected the medium between 1959 and 1999. During this period *Ambit* went from a scruffy, mimeo-printed pamphlet to a colourful, catholic miscellany, before becoming one of Britain's principal arts quarterlies. Along the way *Ambit* and its contributors have been praised, denounced, mocked, feared and imitated in equal measure, as Bax championed Pop Art and satire in the Sixties, Apocalypticism and eroticism in the Seventies, women poets and translation in the Eighties, and surrealism and grotesquery in the Nineties. At the same time *Ambit* and its contemporaries instituted a new form of littleness that resisted the kind of simple equations that Hamilton and others have drawn between the little magazine and amateurism, independence and transience. Indeed, by the end of the twentieth century, littleness had clearly become a much more complex concept.

⁵³⁶ Hamilton: 9.

In her cautious introduction to Alvin Sullivan's *British Literary Magazines. The Modern Age, 1914-1984* (1986), Muriel Mellown described the period after 1960 as 'the most nebulous and difficult to define, not merely because time has not yet set events in perspective and made the broad outlines clear, but also because in these two decades the process of change speeded up at a bewildering rate.'⁵³⁷ Given that more than twenty years have now elapsed since the publication of Sullivan's seminal work, it seems that the 'broad outlines' by which we might recognise the contemporary little magazine have recently begun to assume a distinctive shape.

1959 represents a critical turning point in the history of the twentieth-century literary magazine in Britain. Marking what Görtschacher has described as 'the beginning of a new, experimental, and [...] booming phase of little magazine publishing',⁵³⁸ this year saw the emergence of a new form of literary periodical that embodied the cultural and political aspirations of a younger generation of editors, contributors and readers. But the rise of *Ambit*, *Agenda*, *New Departures* and *X* symbolised much more than a simple changing of the guard. As ambivalent heirs to a post-war literary legacy characterised by the demise of *Horizon* and *Poetry (London)*, the contemporary little magazines were responsible for sustaining a periodical tradition synonymous with some of the most interesting features of British art and literature in the twentieth century. However, they also needed to respond directly to the immediate cultural challenges of the Swinging Sixties, and at the very moment editors like Bax and Horovitz turned their backs on the neo-Georgianism and Movement verse of the Forties and Fifties in favour of Beat, jazz, Pop, Concrete and Surrealist styles, the contemporary little magazine was born.

⁵³⁷ Mellown, 'Introduction', Sullivan: xxvi.

⁵³⁸ Görtschacher, *Little Magazine Profiles*: 122.

A second cultural shift came in 1981 when the ACGB introduced its distinctly Thatcherite ‘self-sufficiency’ scheme and the little magazines were compelled to professionalise or die. By this point, the contemporary little magazines had developed a very particular set of characteristics that distinguished them from their post-war forebears. Those titles aspiring to the annual client status enjoyed by *Agenda*, *Ambit* and *London Magazine* therefore were typically characterised by a professional approach to issues of design, production and distribution; an apolitical selection policy that eschewed literary polemics in favour of catholicity; a new willingness to accept subsidy payments from public or semi-public institutional patrons; and an unprecedented emphasis on longevity over transience. Thus in bringing a new spirit of entrepreneurial pragmatism to little magazine editing, the ACGB’s self-sufficiency schemes were responsible for spawning a new type of apolitical miscellany that flourished during the Eighties and Nineties.

By 1999, it seemed that a third ‘new, experimental phase [...] of little magazine publishing’ might be about to emerge with the advent of the Internet.⁵³⁹ But despite the obvious benefits a little magazine might derive from a virtual shop-window accessible worldwide by a potential audience of millions, the chief protagonists of the mimeo revolution were surprisingly reluctant to embrace small-press publishing’s latest technological leap forward. Deterred perhaps by the cost of upgrading and maintaining a commercial website, the difficulty of protecting copyright material online, or by an emotional attachment to print and print culture, little magazine editors would not fully begin to exploit the potential of the Internet until the development of high-speed broadband services in the early twenty-first century.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

At the end of the twentieth century, Britain's leading little magazines were bigger, wealthier, longer running and more sophisticated than they had been at any time since the Forties, yet they still remained faithful to the most fundamental principles of littleness laid down by Hoffman *et al* in 1946. Although *Ambit*, *Agenda*, *London Magazine* and *Stand* each received significant levels of subsidy from the ACGB and the Regional Arts Boards, they remained essentially 'not-for-profit' ventures catering for a specialised and select audience. Similarly, conscious that the reputation of their magazines was ultimately bound up with that of their contributors, editors like Bax, Dale, Ross and Silkin continued to seek out the emerging talents that underpinned the ongoing quest for new subscribers and distribution outlets. Therefore, by dedicating themselves to the 'non-commercial' publication of 'artistic work from unknown or relatively unknown writers', the contemporary little magazines continued to signal their commitment to the traditional aims and values of littleness well into the Nineties.⁵⁴⁰

Little magazines continue to play an important, if often undervalued, role in the formulation of provisional literary-historical narratives. With each 'new discovery' an editor makes he secures for his magazine new power, new authority and new influence in the ongoing process of canon formation, prompting academics, anthologists and critics alike to continue to strive for a 'truer' literary history that registers the most significant achievements of the contemporary imagination. Recording the major and minor literary-artistic trends of their time, as well as the various stages of the contemporary little magazine's evolution, *Ambit*, *Agenda*, *London Magazine* and *Stand* proved as vital and dynamic a force in twentieth-century English letters as their illustrious Modernist ancestors, *Blast*,

⁵⁴⁰ Hoffman, Allen and Ulrich: 2.

Soma and *Wheels*, had before them. It remains to be seen whether twenty-first century literary historians will be prepared to give Bax, Dale, Ross and Silkin the true recognition their efforts deserve.

APPENDIX 1. A selection of correspondence from the *Ambit* archive, Penn State University, Pennsylvania, USA.

A letter from Charles Osbourne, Literature Director of the ACGB to Bax on the subject of payments to authors.

Ambit Magazine, Correspondence, Box 2, Folder 24.

Series I: Correspondence, Part: II: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1974-88.

2 June 1976.

Dear Martin,

It has recently been agreed by the Arts Council with the Writers' Guild and the Society of Authors that the Council's own publications, and those magazines which it subsidizes, should pay contributions at not less than the following minimum rates:

£20 per thousand words for prose, and an equivalent amount for poetry, assessed on the amount of space occupied by a poem, with a minimum of £10.

I should like to see these rates introduced as from September 1st of this year. If this makes a difference to your estimate as presented to us earlier in the year, I should be glad to have a revised figure from you, showing the difference in costs between six months' expenditure (i.e. 1st September 1976 to 31st March 1977) at the new rates. I should like to have these figures as soon as possible in order to consider a supplementary grant to your magazine and enable you to pay at the higher rate as from September.

Yours sincerely,
Charles Osbourne.

Bax's response to Osbourne on the subject of payments to authors.

Ambit Magazine, Correspondence, Box 2, Folder 24.

Series I: Correspondence, Part: II: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1974-88.

7 June 1976.

Dear Charles,

I am naturally stunned by your letter of 2 June about the rates of payment to authors.

The short answer to the question is that it would cost me another £400-£500 a number to pay the rates you suggest. However, the issue doesn't seem to me quite as simple as that. Up until now I have, as a policy, not paid artists whose work has appeared in the magazine. The reason for this is that many of them might, with luck, sell the material, and of course they get the original work returned to them. As I was paying the authors so little, this seemed reasonable. However, if I were to pay authors at the sort of rate you suggest, I think I would have to start paying a reproduction fee to the artists, and this would mean that another 30 pages of the magazine would come into the area of payment, but I do not know whether the Literature Panel would want to subsidize me for paying artists.

Secondly, I myself would be very alarmed about the reaction from the commercial magazines when they heard of this form of subsidy. Until now I have usually purchased material by going directly to the author, very often cutting out the agent and practically always the future publisher. Agents and publishers have been reasonable about this, knowing the difficulties of running a magazine like *Ambit*.

but they might be less willing when they heard that their authors were earning substantial sums from us. I have also had special policies with regard to editors who have published in the magazine, namely that very often we haven't paid them anything, or at least at a very low rate; this is in order to pay other authors more.

A final worry: if this does go forward, can the Arts Council give a guarantee that a grant at this sort of level will continue over the next two or three years? My experience is that once you start paying people at a higher level it is much more difficult to stop than it is to start, and I can see myself being in a very awkward situation if the Council were to decide next year that it could not afford to continue its subsidy at this rate.

I have no doubt the Council has thought through all these issues, but I would like some advice about them. [...]

Yours,

Martin Bax

A letter from Bax to Melvyn Bragg, Chairman of the Literature Panel of the ACGB, on the subject of *Ambit's* grant.

Ambit Magazine, Correspondence, Box 2, Folder 24.

Series I: Correspondence, Part: II: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1974-88.

3 April 1978.

Dear Mr Bragg,

I am writing to you because I have just been informed that the Arts Council is proposing to terminate *Ambit's* grant after supporting the July number of the magazine.

Up to four years ago the sums of money the Arts Council had given to the magazine were very small, never more than £400 a year, but it was then indicated to me by the Literature Director that the Council had decided to give more money to the magazine and the grant was raised quite substantially, so that last year we were guaranteed some £4,400. I have never officially been told since then of any dissatisfaction the Council feels with the magazine, although I have discovered this informally by reading of your predecessor's objections to it in the public press. It seems utterly unreasonable, therefore, for the Council to be so totally inconsistent as to change its policy and destroy the magazine which for three years before it has been so generously supporting.

When the Council extended its support I made no changes in the editorial policy, believing that that was what the Council was interested in (and of course it was what I was interested in). The Poetry Editors have remained Edwin Brock and Henry Graham, and I have continued to have the advice of J.G. Ballard on prose. The Art Editor has remained Michael Foreman. In expanding the magazine I made two changes: one was to invite Irving Wardle to help us collect material from the theatre, and the second was to ask Derek Birdsall to redesign the magazine in an expanded format. I do not know how the council can conceivably disapprove of the influence of Mr Wardle on the magazine, in so far as he has obtained for us the work of writers such as Edward Bond, Tony Harrison, Ann Jellicoe and Trevor Nunn, apart from the Joint Stock Company's playtext. I am frequently told by lecturers in art colleges that they use the magazine as an example of good design in terms of layout and format, and if the Council objects to Mr Birdsall occasionally putting young ladies on the cover, I would point out that Miss Bliss has appeared

from time to time on the cover of the magazine since *Ambit* 50, and as I want the magazine to sell in shops I like it to have designs which will attract attention. You can ask the managers of Claude Gill, Dillons and Compendium Books how many copies of *Ambit* they sell in comparison with any other magazine that the Arts Council supports.

In so far as the magazine has continued to develop as it was when the Council decided to give it more support, it seems to me utterly unreasonable for the Council to withdraw that support, and I think that at least some explanation of the Council's behaviour is called for, and I hope that it is not too late for you to reconsider your decision to destroy the magazine.

I did not correspond with the Council when I saw the remarks made by the late Chairman of the Literature Panel, Professor Fuller, that the magazine was pornographic, as these seemed to be so absurd as to be not worth responding to, and I took it that this was the view of most of his colleagues, as he had resigned. However, I am quite happy to come and discuss that issue with the Council, if it was ever a serious one, but I find that hard to believe.

I would also like to suggest that the Literature Panel should review the way in which it gives grants, and perhaps borrow something from the scientific councils. My own professional job is aided by a grant from the DHSS, and in common with MRC and SSRC policy, we are on a five-year rolling contract, which is reviewed three years before it terminates, so that if termination is decided we have a reasonable amount of time to obtain other jobs. As one can obtain a job as a doctor fairly easily, this is very reasonable. On the other hand, as it is very difficult to obtain support for a literary magazine, it seems even more necessary that the Arts Council should make some arrangements to see that these sudden choppings do not take place.

Yours sincerely,
Martin C. O. Bax
Editor.

A letter from prospective poetry contributor Samuel Sensation to Edwin Brock.

Ambit Magazine, Correspondence, Box 41, Folder 7.
Correspondence, Rejections N-Y, 1995.

7 October 1995.

Dear Mr Brock,

Five years ago I became known for an idea—a quasi-neologistic condensification called—‘Omni-Stratospheric-Hyper*Reality’ that defined the aesthetic of space itself—the crystalline liquidinity of air, of atmosphere, of ambience—the outthere of everything, the quantumnal magnitudinality of the concept of ‘space’ on it’s [*sic*] most abstract level. This was as a result of a poster campaign to galvanise new forms of creative expression, and take a stand for aesthetics, for language, for beauty, as I was convinced the advertising media with it’s [*sic*] grotesque over-simplicity was threatening to cretinise and infantiliticisitise [*sic*] society and that the then prevalent desire to make money merely for the sake of making money was sucking all the fiction energy glossule particles of lavender haze plasma from the atmosphere and was steamrolling anything of meaning, subtlety, complexity, artistry. Thus ‘OSHR’ as well as being an evolutionary

catalytic exercise to encourage expression and ideosynchrony [*sic*] for the sake of expression—was a stance against mediocrity and an advocacy for literary panache. Now, I represent grass roots evolution in Britain. I distribute leaflets that contain the fundamental components for perceptual enhancement compressed into leaflet form—these leaflets are little combustible flares of revelation, and when I distribute them I am the beneficer, the incandescer, the illuminator and my ideas are new, are original, and out of the ordinary. But these leaflets stem from writing, from the necessary invert reclusion for achieving levels of detail and insight that go far beyond credulity, and into the realms of the fantastic. And that is my goal—to represent, to be the progenitor [*sic*] of a new visionary aesthetic—to detonate, to annihilate [*sic*] the mediocre and the mundane. I have written poetry since my adolescence. My principal influences have been George Barker, parts of T.S. Eliot, Elizabeth Jennings and Robert Graves. I would like to get an anthology published, but I need to be more prolific. Poems do not just flow out of me, uneffortfully. I enclose several poems I would like you to consider for publication in your magazine. I am convinced that ‘The Mechanism of Desire’ and ‘Epoch’ contain some kind of outstanding brilliance, some kind of literary ability beyond the norm. I should like you to give these your very serious critical scrutiny. I know that there may be the odd stylistic inconsistency, but the overall cohesion, and conceptual thrust behind all of these poems is such that you should publish them regardless of the fact that they do not obviously conform to a metrical or stanzaic ideal. What are trivial technicalities when you are confronted with something *out of the ordinary*? Although I appreciated the fact that you replied to the previous poem I sent—I would like a critical response. If you are not willing to immediately publish one or two of them I really need to know your opinion of the poems, what parts are outstanding, which parts are not as outstanding, so I may improve my style; this is important. I need critical feedback. I realise that you are probably very pre-occupied but nonetheless any amount of time you could spare to giving me a balanced critical response would mean a lot to me. That is if you’re not immediately willing to publish a poem as outstanding as say—‘The Mechanism of Desire’ (which is so damned good it just has to be published—don’t you think so? Really.) I know I have a lot of talent. It’s a raw, new talent. Will you give me a chance, and take the time to give me an idea of what you think of these poems. I want to resonate through time.

Yours faithfully,
Samuel Sensation (that is my name)

Editors’ note: Reject. Say ‘read more poetry by your contemporaries. Get a new typewriter ribbon’.

A letter from Edwin Brock to Bax on the subject of *Ambit*’s marketing strategy.

Ambit Magazine, Correspondence, Box 30, Folder 17.

Series I: Correspondence, Part II: Special Sequence B-BU, 1987-95.

23 February 1989.

Dear Martin,

[...]

Anyway. Yes. Looking objectively at the current leaflet it is unbelievably dreary. I think what comes across immediately is that it is humourless and pretentious—both of which must surely be the kiss of death to the young, and I'm surprised that young Tim didn't tell you so.

I agree that folded A4 would be a better size and that a second colour would help. I think it must have some humour. Why don't we get Steadman to draw it? After all, if you want to show his association with the magazine it's better to show it than say it! I'm thinking of his pig on the cover of 106. I don't know how he works, i.e. whether you simply say 'Illustrate *Ambit*' and leave the rest to him, or whether you spell out that *Ambit* covers the visual arts, poetry, prose and ask him to take an aspect of one or all. For instance, I'm sure he'd like to have a go at 'real' artists (like sending up Eduardo) or real poets (take your pick) or, for that matter, a doctor, though that might be obscure for general readers. Anyway, you know him and can see the way I'm thinking. Let's not look as though we take ourselves so seriously. I'm sure we don't need all that stuff about how wonderful Bax, Ballard, Brock and Foreman are. If the names don't mean enough without an accompanying publicity blurb we're flogging a dead horse anyway. Regular contributors' names probably help (if only because it gives people an idea of what they're buying) but don't let's flog the 'Look how famous he is now and we published him first' line. In other words, let's not be historical; it's irrelevant. Remember how boring Howard became about *Outposts*' longevity! And don't let's say *Ambit* needs regular readers—that's self-evident if you're asking people to fill in an application form, and it sounds too much like begging to say so.

Can we offer anything? Like a free back number with every year's subscription, like a cheaper rate if you make out a Banker's Order, like a special rate for bona fide students. Anything, but you have to give some incentive for someone to fill out a form and post it off. I wouldn't do it, would you? What about a free *Ambit* Christmas Card or Calendar with every new subscription (that wouldn't cost much since Mike and Steadman would do the illustrations for free). Once someone makes out a bankers order they'll probably just let it run on, because it's just as much of a sweat to cancel it as it was to take it out in the first place; so we have to give them some incentive. I don't know what it is, but it has to be something.

We need a kind of baseline like No FT no comment, but I don't know what it is. *Ambit*—a big bit of I am. *Ambit*—just a little bit better. *Ambit*—a bit of what's around. Etc. Etc. play with it, it'll come. Perhaps.

Finally, get someone to design a less boring-looking coupon. One that looks easy, fun, and doesn't take up so much of the leaflet. Or, if you want to, make it the *whole* leaflet. You must go one way or the other—either tuck it away or make a big (visual) deal out of it. I've done ads (so has everyone else) which are simply one big coupon. Maybe Steadman should be asked to draw an *Ambit* coupon ... dripping with Steadman blood ... *Ambit* wants blood. I don't know ... but it has to be livelier than 'The words and pictures of the future' which is both meaningless and pretentious.

Please, I'm not getting at your copywriting so much as trying to jerk myself awake. KnowwhatI mean. *Ambit*—a life insurance policy. *Ambit*. Armpit. A bit of good. Bit Bit Bit. Am Am Am. There has to be something there. Bitten by *Ambit*. Once bitten twice bitten, to quote Porter. Iambit is nearly Iambic. The more I think about designing the leaflet like one big coupon, the more it seems it could be right. It's honest and it may be less boring than yet another bloody leaflet. But it has to be

the most something-or-other leaflet ever. The most funny, surprising, outrageous ... I don't know ... but what's important (if we take that route) is to enthuse Birdsall, Steadman, Foreman et al with the idea.

Think about it. Bounce it around. You'll probably get me to write something eventually—but not until we're sure of what we're trying to do.

Christ I sound like an adman.

[...]

Love,
Edwin.

A letter from Joyce Dunn to Bax on the subject of Ballardian satire and *Ambit* poetry.

Ambit Magazine, Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 7.
Correspondence, Do-Dy, 1964-88.

14 December 1970.

Dear Mr Bax,

Thank you very much for your letter of 4th September: I am sorry I did not find it until I opened the magazine yesterday: my apologies.

I think *Ambit* is beautifully produced and an art-poetry magazine very well worth supporting. Having said that I am terribly sorry I don't know if I shall renew my subscription. Usually there is something I like or find of interest, particularly the lithographs, and I have always liked the policy of giving any poet sufficient room for one to gain perspective.

But sometimes I close the magazine with a feeling of malaise and this issue I found the poetry not sufficient in feeling to outweigh one article which is completely at odds with everything I feel.

The lengths some women (and men) will go to in order to 'improve' themselves seem to me to be a measure not of vanity but of unhappiness: satire is all very well in small amounts but the contributor called Ballard I thought went far beyond what could possibly be of any use in reforming or deterring. When I lived in Lagos the Hansa men used to offer little figures variously mutilated, sometimes with nails stuck in them, 'from the old times'. I did not care for them and I do not care for Mr Ballard's article now and sometimes I wonder if 'the old times' will ever be ended.

I do not imagine that you ever run short of contributors. I wonder if Mr Paolozzi knows the lithographs *La Guerra Poetica* by Iago Pericot: they were shown two festivals ago and perhaps deserve to reach a wider public (I don't know the artist but admire his work). I liked the work of Michael Foreman, particularly *Marilyn Monroe*, and the *Export USA* was well done in form: but the massive decaying cities of the States I find as tragic and pitiful as Vietnam, nor do I feel detached enough to hate. We are not 'an island'.

I'll send my subscription some time in the New Year very probably.
Yours sincerely,
Joyce Dunn.

A letter from prospective poetry contributor E.M. Haas to Bax.

Ambit Magazine, Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 12.
Correspondence, H-HE, 1964-87.

20 December 1965.

Dear Sir,

The following poem is submitted in the hope that you will wish to publish it in *Ambit*.

A new movement is underfoot in America, starting in the East Village, that will sweep through America and the world. Some will say that it is a mature Existentialism, maybe they will be right? It's a movement towards honesty and a renewed faith in the self, away from the nihilism we've wallowed in since the war.

Editors are afraid to publish my work; afraid to take a chance because of its power; because its emotional and intellectual impact is so forceful. The poet is ordained and consecrated by his very act of writing poetry, to speak for man, not just for one nation or one race of people, but for all men; to try to alleviate human suffering by oppression, be it by man or by nature, by giving an understanding not only of the conditions, but of the source; and probably the greatest of all gifts, love! But if the only way a poet can get published is to conform to the particular literary prejudices of each editor, literally he's dead, and so is this nation; for the pain of what he understands and its rejection will force him to terminate that pain by suicide.

Are we all cowards in the West? Has the body politic so subjugated our minds that we are completely indifferent to the pain of ourselves, much less the agony of the World? Has George Orwell's prognostication become a reality without our even being aware of it; without a protest or a struggle, even for ourselves if not for the world?

The 'Beats' have been the only ones to protest, but theirs has been a futile and bitter road of accusations and denial; filled with hostility and selfishness; a ridicule of any and all who did not agree or conform with them.

If my poems are powerful it is because of what Dostoyevsky taught me: the only way nihilism can be resolved is to plummet to its very depths of agony and misery; there to commit suicide or decide that you want to live, and fight that long and bitter battle, of the self pitted to the death against the self, to maturity. And what Dylan Thomas taught me: how to break into the subconscious, though it may cost him his life; for he could not resolve his guilt.

I have rewritten each poem from twenty to anywhere up to forty-five times, and have rewritten from seventy-five to a hundred hours a week, trying to say something that all men can feel and understand.

They say Yeats was always rewriting, never satisfied with the quality or quantity of his poems. He understood that the only way to penetrate the barriers and blind spots of the mind, was through hard and constant struggle; there is no easy way to poetry: the penalty is death for such efforts; satisfaction with a poem is death to the poem and to the poet.

If we are leaders of the Free World, and we are, then we must find values in our Art, and give hope to a frightened world, caught in the clutch of the bomb, that looks to us for guidance.

Only unification of the world through love, can ever dismantle the Hydrogen Bomb. We, the younger generation born out of the despair of the Second World War, know and understand this. We are the ones that must and cannot fail;

no longer is it just the individual whose life is dependent upon his personal decision, but the world's.

Einstein and the men who developed nuclear energy, believed that it would be used for peace. They had no idea that it would be used, through its powers of annihilation, to force Japan into unconditional surrender or face destruction; George Orwell wrote 1984 and laid down and died in agony and despair; for he saw no possible hope of a resolvment of the power struggle that ensued, of the eventual enslavement of all peoples by the power structure. As they could no longer wage war upon their neighbors and allies. This is the legacy, the understanding, they gave to us at the cost of their lives; may their lives not be in vain!

In August I was accepted for publication in *Diversion*; in September accepted in *The American Bard*; in October accepted in *Bitterfoot*; and in November in *Breakthru* in England.

I enclose an International Coupon response for return of the poem if you should choose not to publish it in *Ambit*.

Yours truly,
E.M. Haas.

A letter of complaint from Ellay Mort to Bax.

Ambit Magazine, Correspondence, Box 2, Folder 3.
Correspondence, More-My, 1965-88.

2 July 1980.

Dear Martin Bax,

I received issue number 82 of *Ambit* today, thank you. I have been a subscriber for nearly two years, and have certain back issues. I thought you would like to know why I am about to withdraw my subscription. Perhaps I should start at the beginning, the cover.

1. The cover never allows the actual artwork on it to breathe, or be itself. It is often treated by a horrendous fading-bleaching technique and is stamped as being an *Ambit* cover rather than a work on its own merits (due to this treatment and by the intrusion of the terrible logo). I dislike logos at the best of times, especially when the contents are so varied from issue to issue. One would expect the cover to reflect the contents or to stand on its own, but to do neither seems mundane and boring (a few covers have had promise but have been Ambitted badly). The wrap-around cover is never used to any great value and the paper is always the same, which isn't necessarily bad, but in *Ambit's* case it is a very 'particular' sort and so intrudes on the identity of the work on the cover. And why all the writing on the cover every issue?
2. Contents page. The contents page is uninspired, visually uninformative and badly ordered, so badly so it could pass for the usual 'blurb' that actually appears at the bottom of the page.
3. The use of a velum coloured paper throughout your publication gives a sticky, creamy feel to the overall visual effect, not inviting at all, rather like eating 96 cream cakes!

I like your use of the classical typeface for the longer pieces of writing; but I do not like the way the text 'boxes' are uniformly positioned and proportioned for all the works. This adds more to *Ambit* being 'Ambit' rather than 28 pieces of individual work being *Ambit*. The poems suffer this same fate of being boxed in the same positioned and sized boxes using the same typeface, this time a rather clinical Swiss variety, which has its place, but surely not for every single poem! This would be understandable if your resources were limited, but as they are actually typeset you must have had a larger choice. I have also never liked the one-on-top-of-the-other presentation of poems, it is crowded and uninviting. As for the purely visual sections, the idea of which I think is admirable, I think they are utterly atrocious, absolute rubbish, quite abysmal! They are quite well reproduced, although made all the more hideous on the cream paper. You rarely seem to have anything which hasn't got some sort of narrative content, usually pseudo-German-expressionist-sick-rubbish. Except for Peter Blake—sideshow, Paolozzi; Berlin reliefs; Patrick Caulfield—prints.

The haphazard fling of yellow or blue pages is also mindless, unnecessary and meaningless. I am a great admirer of Ballard's work but *The Invisible Years* to look at was the worst piece of graphic-crap I have ever seen.

I well appreciate the work and struggle involved in putting *Ambit* together. It is noble to be giving so many writers and poets a public voice (the visuals I cannot excuse—except those mentioned). All in all I find *Ambit* dull, tedious, visually lacking in any sympathetic understanding towards the contents. There seems to be very little questioning at all, everything, but everything should be questioned. The use of paper—the way it feels—the way it sounds—the colour—the layout—the typeface—the proportion of text to open space—the interval one experiences leafing through a publication—the light and dark—the tones—reflection of content in everything—whether every author should be credited by their piece—the positioning of illustrations—whether an illustration should be an illustration. The publication should be bejewelled with careful and meticulous thought and debate, work and rework, no compromises...

I hope you do not mind me viewing these opinions, I feel very strongly about what I have said, and for these reasons I do not want to buy *Ambit* in the future.

Yours sincerely,
Ellay Mort.

I shall enclose a SAE as I would be interested to know what you think of this criticism and how you would defend the existence of *Ambit*?

Bax's reply to Mort.

Ambit Magazine, Correspondence, Box 2, Folder 3.
Correspondence, More-My, 1965-88.

8 July 1980.

Dear Ellay Mort,

Thank you for your splendid letter. I wonder whether you write as detailed criticisms to the Editors of other magazines and cancel your subscription to them. You are obviously most interested in the visual aspect of the magazine, but although you mention the contents are varied you really say nothing about the poetry and prose writers we publish and I wonder whether poets like Peter Porter, Gavin Ewart, Edwin Brock and Henry Graham don't have something to recommend them. You obviously don't like the work of Michael Foreman who is the Art Editor of *Ambit*. I'm sorry about this because I think he's marvellous and the three-colour fold-ins which were in the back of *Ambit* 75 seemed to me some of the best material we've ever put in the magazine. Of the younger artists we use many of them have of course recently left the College or the Slade and it is true that the Post-German Impressionist school has a big influence at the moment but that begins to fade fairly rapidly as they go their own individual ways and I would have said that there is plenty of variety in the magazine visually.

Some of your criticisms and indeed the splendidly elaborated aims of your last paragraph simply reflect finances. There are only two typefaces at the printers. We can't afford to set out. We have to use one standard paper which we buy in bulk and which is also very cheap. We do actually like the paper and think it has a nice heavy 'feel' to it. The wrap around cover must be printed in only two colours which limits the work the designer can do on it and the layout inside is standardised as all the paste-up work has to be done by myself at night as I earn my living in other ways and it seems wiser to us to use a standard clear layout which we think displays the text legibly and readably than to try and do something different with every poem which would cost money at the printers and here which we don't have. One criticism I don't understand is that you seem to accept the fact that the magazine has a character of its own and I would have thought that was a good thing these days when most magazines look exactly alike without any distinctive characteristic. Anyway, given our huge debt at the printers, we are sad to lose your subscription but thanks for the criticism.

Yours sincerely,
Martin Bax.

A letter of complaint from Mrs J. Nichols, Miss A. Grimshaw and Mrs E. Somerville to Bax.

Ambit Magazine, Correspondence, Box 2, Folder 4.
Correspondence, N, 1964-89.

[February 1974?].

Dear Sir,

As three far from narrow-minded Library staff, we write to protest about the rubbish which you publish as an excuse for poetry. We wonder how, in the present paper shortage, you can justify printing these so-called 'poems'. We would be most interested in hearing your comments and reasons for doing so. If the 'poems' were at all amusing we would accept them for comedy, but, in our view, they are neither entertaining, clever nor funny.

We look forward to hearing your explanations.

Yours faithfully,

Mrs J. Nichols, Miss A. Grimshaw and Mrs E. Somerville.

Bax's response to Mrs J. Nichols, Miss A. Grimshaw and Mrs E. Somerville.
Ambit Magazine, Correspondence, Box 2, Folder 4.
Correspondence, N, 1964-89.

19 February 1974.

Dear Mrs Nichols, Miss Grimshaw and Mrs Somerville,

I am sorry you dislike our poetry so much, but pleased that you feel so strongly about it that you write to us. It is a little difficult to answer specifically as you don't mention which number of *Ambit* gave you particular offence. If it is the current number, *Ambit* 57, yes, I do think that Ivor Cutler, who is the first poet in this issue, is a genuinely comic writer, one of the few about. Although there is humour in some of the other poems I didn't think that was a major intention of many of them. Some of the other poets are Jim Burns, of whom I am a great admirer: he is a working class poet with marvellously simple vernacular language and in this number both 'Hanging on the Old Barbed Wire' and 'The Business' seem to me particularly good Burns poems. To pick out one other poet in this issue, I think the American Barbara Riddle's poem about her father's death was a marvellously moving poem.

However, you may be referring to the two previous numbers of *Ambit*, 56 and 55, one of which was largely devoted to pictures and the other to prose. If you really wanted the views of some of the poets, there was a special poetry number, *Ambit* 54, and you'll find it contains a lot of statements by poets, most of whom have several collections out by well-known publishers, about why they are writing poetry.

It is difficult to conduct a long argument through the post. I am sure Henry Graham, who is one of the Poetry Editors, would be delighted to come to Wakefield to read and discuss his poetry and the sort of poems we look for when we put the magazine together. In case you have not seen *Ambit* 54 I am enclosing a complimentary copy.

Yours sincerely,
Martin Bax.

A letter from Brock to Bax on the subject of *Ambit* poetry.

Ambit Magazine, Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 13.
Series I: Correspondence, Part II: Edwin Brock, 1965-88.

30 March 1976.

Dear Martin,

Herewith: Two Brocks, Four Josephs and Seven Cutlers—which seems about right for the talent involved.

Actually, I think neither the Cutler nor the Joseph are up to their full potentials, but still think they are better than most at their best—if you see what I mean.

In fact, I have a great regard for Jenny Joseph's recent work, i.e., her last book, but don't think any of these match that ability—but I still think she is worth encouraging since, at her best, I would put her second only to Fleur among lady poets writing here and now.

I can't reach you on any of the phone numbers I've tried today. But give us a ring—despite my yawning blasé, I am actually concerned with the standard of poetry we print—especially when I feel we are falling short of a kind of basic minimum talent.

Start again... I think that *Ambit* stands or falls by the standard of its poetry, and I think we often let work through for no other reason than that we have pages to fill and a press-date to meet. Personally, I don't give a fuck about the number of pages we fill nor the date we go to press, but I do care about the *raison d'être* of the poetry we print.

If, as appears likely at the moment, Henry is to become a sleeping partner (albeit in a drunken stupor) and I am to become the only poetry editor, then I feel I want to take it more seriously than I have in the past. I know I have often been difficult to work with and have sounded as though I don't give a fuck about *Ambit* poetry, but often this was the frustration of spending time which I wanted to put to other uses and not having the choice of material one would have wanted. But I do feel strongly that *Ambit* has no claim upon readers other than its poetry—the prose is usually a wank and we can only get Hockney drawings once in a blue moon—for the rest of the time we are conning the people who buy *Ambit* to read the latest poetry.

I want to talk to you about this. I feel it very strongly. Either we make ourselves THE poetry mag, and carry all the rest of that crap you insist on filling our pages with on the back of good poetry, or we acknowledge that *Ambit* is trying to do something else—like a trendy arts mag—and you get another poetry editor.

No, that isn't Brock becoming tetchy and temperamental and trying to stamp his stiletto heel, it's just a sudden realisation of approaching my fiftieth birthday and wanting to apportion the years that are left accordingly. I would love to start again and take *Ambit* poetry more seriously than I have done before—and do more about getting outstanding poetry for each issue. But the present setup doesn't do much to encourage it.

Lotsalove,
Edwin.

PS. I'm pissed, but that doesn't mean I'm not aware of what I've written.

A letter from Bax to *Encounter* in response to Douglas Dunn's criticisms of *Ambit*.

Ambit Magazine, Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 8.

14 June 1977.

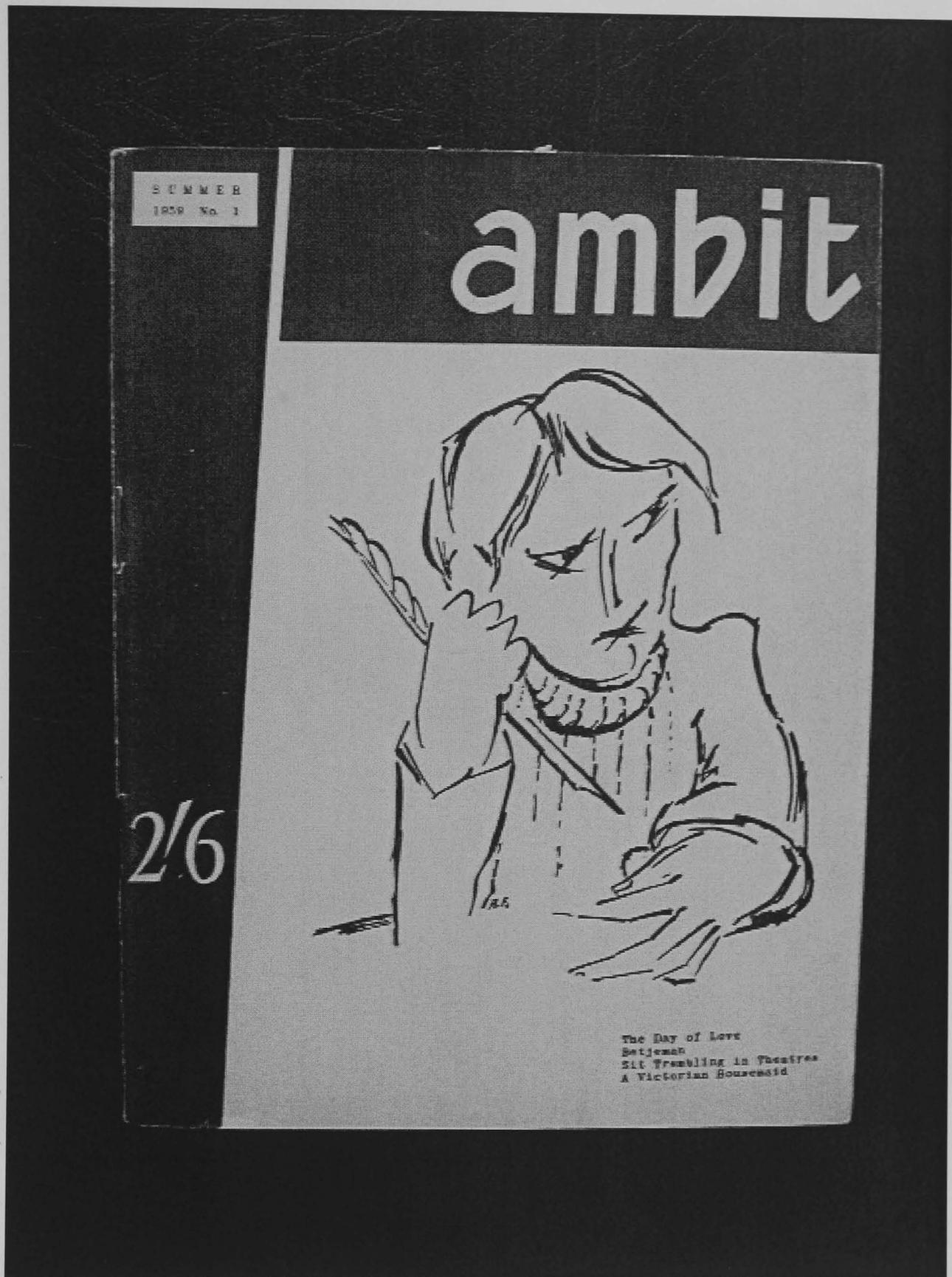
Sirs,

Even a 'relaxed editor' (as I am described by Douglas Dunn in *Encounter*, June, p. 61) must sometimes, on behalf of his authors, complain about a review which is not only critically wrong-headed but wrong. The curious linking of *Ambit* with *Bananas* must, I suppose, have something to do with the fact that *Ambit's* prose editor, J.G. Ballard, has also advised *Bananas*, but there the association surely ends. OK, Ballard has published in both magazines, but then he has also appeared in that well known little magazine E*C*U*T*R, and I would guess *Ambit's* authors overlap with the *London Magazine* and the *New Review* as much as with *Bananas*. But a cursory look at the two magazines, with, for example, *Ambit's* emphasis,

under art editor Michael Foreman and latterly designer Derek Birdsall, on visual material, would surely suggest there were some editorial differences between the two magazines. (A thought: perhaps Douglas Dunn is picture-blind and can only read.) As regards the absence of 'real politics', I rather thought that the Joint Stock Company's playtext *Yesterday's News*, based on tapes collected from some Angolan mercenaries (*Ambit* 68) had something to do with real politics, but then I never did understand literary critics' language. Vernon Scannell has never been closely associated with *Ambit* (although I'd be delighted to publish more of his work). I guess he has appeared as often as the literary editor of *Encounter*. No doubt George MacBeth will be amused to hear his poems described as 'playful' and Gavin Ewart does hide his high seriousness, but to describe Fleur Adcock's, Edwin Brock's and Peter Porter's contributions to the magazine as from 'their playful moods' is nonsense. Peter Porter's *The Delegate* (*Ambit* 66) was, I thought, the best poem that any English magazine, let alone *Ambit*, published in 1976. Mr Dunn should read it.

Yours faithfully,
Martin Bax.

APPENDIX 2. A selection of annotated cover designs.



Ambit 1

Date: Summer 1959.

Price: 2/6.

Pages: 32.

Size: 15.5 x 19.4 cm.

Printer: Camden Printing Ltd, 138 Camden St, London, NW1.

Masthead: M.C.O. Bax (Editor); R. Harland (Asst. Editor); A. Fergusson (Art Editor); A.E. Worster (Advertising); J. Harland and R. Cook (Distribution); J.M. Bax (General Manager).

Cover description: White text on black field, with black-and-white ink drawing on beige low-quality card.

AMBIT

A stars and Stripes Special with Martin Bax, Gavin Ewart, Michael Foreman, Giles Gordon getting in a few blows at the old U.S. image and then from the good old U.S.A. itself come Michael Benedikt, Marvin Cohen, Bob Kaufman, John Keys, Gary Kissick, David Ray, Uncle Bob Sward et al.

1969

Number 39

Three shillings or two francs



Ambit 39

Date: 1969.

Price: 3/- or 2F.

Pages: 52.

Size: 17.8 x 23.9 cm.

Printer: Lavenham Press Ltd.

Masthead: Martin Bax (Editor); Edwin Brock (Poetry); Michael Foreman (Art); J.G. Ballard (Prose); Tony Connor and Eduardo Paolozzi (Corresponding Editors); Judy Bax (Business); Claire Walshe (Adverts); Ron Rubin (Music Director); David Trotter (Editorial Assistant).

Cover description: Black-and-white ink cartoon and black-and-white text on high-gloss white card.

AMBIT

HAVE YOU GOT BREASTS. HAS MYRA BRECKINRIDGE GOT BREASTS. HAS MAE WEST GOT BREASTS. HAS J. G. Ballard GOT BREASTS. HAS Tony Connor. Has George Macbeth. HAS Jeff Nuttall. HAS Ivor Cutler. Alan Brownjohn HAS NUNS. Marvin Cohen HAS EVERYTHING. Step inside for SURGERY, Folks.

1970

Number 44

Three shillings or two francs



Ambit 44

Date: 1970.

Price: 3/- or 2F.

Pages: 48.

Size: 17.8 x 23.9cm.

Printer: Lavenham Press Ltd.

Masthead: Martin Bax (Editor); Edwin Brock, Henry Graham (Poetry); Michael Foreman (Art); J.G. Ballard (Prose); Tony Connor, Eduardo Paolozzi, Rolf John (Germany); Jannick Storm (Denmark); Anselm Hollo (USA/Finland) (Corresponding Editors); Judy Bax (Business); Claire Walshe (Adverts).

Cover description: Black-and-yellow ink drawing and black-and-yellow text on high-gloss white card.



Ambit 69

Date: 1977.

Price: 60p.

Pages: 96.

Size: 18 x 23.9cm.

Printer: Lavenham Press Ltd.

Masthead: Martin Bax (Editor); Edwin Brock, Henry Graham (Poetry); Michael Foreman (Art); J.G. Ballard (Prose); Irving Wardle (Theatre); Judy Bax (Business); Henry Lowther (Music); Vanessa Jackson (Worker); Tony Connor, Eduardo Paolozzi, Jannick Storm (Denmark); Gunnar Harding (Sweden); Anselm Hollo (USA/Finland); John Bing and Tor Age Bringsvaerd (Norway) (Corresponding Editors); Derek Birdsall (Design).

Cover description: Black-and-white photo cut-out and black text on matt-textured white card.

MBIT 92

200p



O UNIVERSE! O WORLD! O LIVERPOOL! HERE WE ARE AT THE CENTRE OF IT ALL AND WHAT DO WE FIND — KIDDIES STUFF. CHILDRENS CORNER FROM ROGER McGOUGH. ADRIAN HENRI PLAYS WITH HIS CAT AND BRIAN PATTEN IS INTO CAGE BIRDS — OBSOLETE NIGHTINGALES AT THAT. TONY DASH PLAYS GAMES WITH SAMUEL BECKETT. CAROL ANN DUFFY IS INTO THE LOVE GAME BUT DINAH DOSSOR HAS HAD HERS. JOE McCOY JONES WATCHES THE FOOTBALLERS. JEFF NUTTALL LOOKS AT THE MARRIAGE GAME. JIM MANGNALL IS PULLING FACES IN A MIRROR. CHRISTINE TONGUE IS INTO THE CLUBS. RON SANDFORD DRAWS THE HEROES AND GIVES US THE MISE-EN SCENE. HENRY GRAHAM PROVIDES THE END GAME. O BOMB! O LIVERPOOL! O MERSEYSIDE. BYE-BYE.

Ambit 92

Date: 1983.

Price: £2.00.

Pages: 104.

Size: 16.9 x 23.8 cm.

Printer: Lavenham Press Ltd.

Masthead: Martin Bax (Editor); Edwin Brock, Henry Graham (Poetry); Michael Foreman (Art); J.G. Ballard (Prose); Irving Wardle (Theatre); Judy Bax (Business); E.A. Markham (Asst. Editor); Henry Lowther (Music); Tony Connor, Eduardo Paolozzi, Jannick Storm (Denmark); Gunnar Harding (Sweden); Anselm Hollo (USA/Finland); John Bing and Tor Age Bringsvaerd (Norway) (Corresponding Editors); Derek Birdsall (Design).

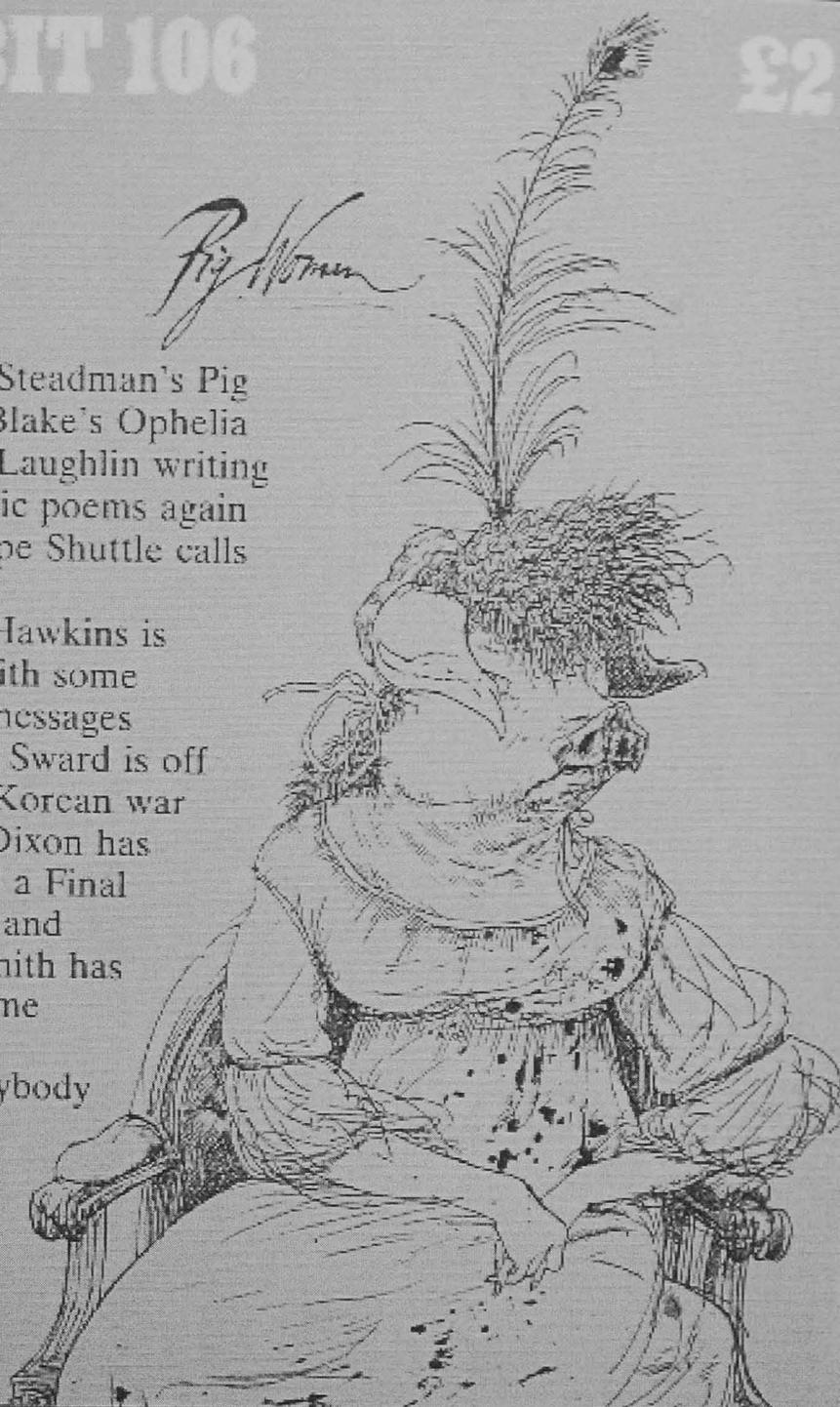
Cover description: Brown poker design and text printed on thin brown paper.

AMBIT 106

£2

Pig Woman

Ralph Steadman's Pig
Peter Blake's Ophelia
James Laughlin writing
romantic poems again
Penelope Shuttle calls
it Love
Spike Hawkins is
back with some
quick messages
Robert Sward is off
to the Korean war
Steve Dixon has
crossed a Final
Bridge and
Ken Smith has
met some
nastics
Is everybody
a Pig?



Ambit 106

Date: 1986.

Price: £2.00.

Pages: 96.

Size: 17.3 x 24.3 cm.

Printer: Lavenham Press Ltd.

Masthead: Martin Bax (Editor); Edwin Brock, Henry Graham, Carol Ann Duffy (Poetry); Michael Foreman (Art); J.G. Ballard (Prose); Irving Wardle (Theatre); Henry Lowther (Music); E.A. Markham (Events); Vanessa Jackson, Nicola Gray, Richard Dyer, G.M. Coles (Distribution); Liz Graham (Publicity/Advertising); Tony Connor, Eduardo Paolozzi, Jannick Storm (Denmark); Gunnar Harding (Sweden); Anselm Hollo (USA/Finland); John Bing and Tor Age Bringsvaerd (Norway) (Corresponding Editors); Derek Birdsall and Alan Kitching (Design).

Cover description: Black-and-white ink cartoon, and black-and-white text set on pink field and printed on white matt-finish card wraparound.

AMBIT 136



Frank Auerbach is in New York bar Peter Porter and Michael Foreman are leaving Paradise by the only known door. Henry Graham has slid into the bar again where he found Judy Cahagan eating ice-cream. Alastair Waker is home from abroad but a tidy group of Americans are with us. Fred Voss is at his machine bench, Cosmevitch is on the phone and James Laughlin is out in the desert with a lovely lady.

Ambit 136

Date: 1994.

Pages: 96.

Printer: Lavenham Press Ltd.

Price: £5.50.

Size: 16.8 x 23.9 cm.

Masthead: Martin Bax (Editor); Edwin Brock, Henry Graham, Carol Ann Duffy (Poetry); Michael Foreman (Art); J.G. Ballard (Prose); Irving Wardle (Theatre); Henry Lowther (Music); E.A. Markham (Events); Vanessa Jackson, Nicola Gray, Richard Dyer, Dave Calder (Distribution); Liz Graham (Publicity/Advertising); Tony Connor, Eduardo Paolozzi, Taner Baybars (France); Jannick Storm (Denmark); Gunnar Harding (Sweden); Anselm Hollo (USA/Finland); John Bing and Tor Age Bringsvaerd (Norway); Giuliano DeGo (Italy); Ron Sandford (Pacific Rim) (Corresponding Editors); Derek Birdsall and Alan Kitching (Design).

Cover description: Black-and-white charcoal drawing, and blue text printed on white matt-finish card wraparound.

AMBIT 150 is *life* and death (as almost always), Edwin Brock takes a last walk with **PLINTS**, *revolve* and **turkeys**. Peter Porter knows the **RATS** are *bailing* out to **Marr**. Rozewicz found Francis Bacon in a **dentist's** CHAIR, Jim Mangnall is a *dead* figure in *old postcards* and Peter Blake has been to Llareggub. In between these is **StreetLife**. Remfry, and Nicholson are in the **big apple**. Julie Charalambides in the byways of **MILAN**. Anant is up a *Palm Tree* and Scannell knows the **doctor's** won't help. So dress UP with *Loxy* Simmonds to be ready for the **END**. Laughlin knows those **PARIS Crashes**. There is *Life* and *Death* in **Ambit** – When **Childhood ENDS**. **Ambit 150**

Ambit 150

Date: 1997.

Price: £6.00.

Pages: 140.

Size: 16.8 x 24.1 cm.

Printer: Lavenham Press Ltd.

Masthead: Martin Bax (Editor); Edwin Brock, Henry Graham, Carol Ann Duffy (Poetry); Michael Foreman (Art); J.G. Ballard (Prose); Irving Wardle (Theatre); Henry Lowther (Music); E.A. Markham (Events); Geoff Nicholson (Development Editor); Julia Casterton (Reviews Editor); Richard Dyer (Asst. Editor); Judy Bax (Finance); Kate Pemberton (Editorial, Events and Publicity); Pamela Courtney (Advertising Manager); Tony Connor, Eduardo Paolozzi, Vanessa Jackson, Nicola Gray, Taner Baybars (France); Gunnar Harding (Sweden); Giuliano Dego (Italy); Ron Sandford (Worthing); Satyendra Srivastava (India) (Corresponding Editors); Derek Birdsall and Alan Kitching (Design).

Cover description: Red and yellow text printed on matt-finish white card wraparound.

APPENDIX 3. A complete alphabetical contributor list.

Abdellah, Stephen
Abse, Dannie
Acharya, Shanta
Ackerman, Diane
Ackroyd, Norman
Adams, Kenneth
Adcock, Fleur
Agard, John
Ahern, Maureen
Ahti, Risto
Aitken, Tom
Ake, Edward
Albuquerque, Pat
Aldiss, Brian
Alexeyev, Mihail
Alexis, André
Allan, R.N.
Allen, Don
Allnut, Gillian
Alvarado, Herman
Amsden, Candida
Andrews, Allen
Angeles, Peter
Angus, Robert
Annand, Carol
Annant, Victor
Anon
Anthony, Steve
Artman, H.C.
Ash, John
Ashley, John
Askwith, Richard
Atkinson, David
Atkinson, Donald
Auerbach, Frank
Austin, Annemarie
Baby, A.
Bach, Kim
Bacon, Francis
Bacovia, George
Bagg, Terry
Bailey, Dennis
Bailey, Peter
Bailey, William
Bain, Fiona
Baird, Vanessa
Baker, Andrew
Bakowski, Peter
Baldock, Carole
Baldwin, John
Ballard, J.G.
Bardwell, Leland
Barnes, Keith
Barnett, Anthony
Barnett, Snowdon
Barnfield, Peter
Bartlett, Elizabeth
Bassett, John
Bateman, David
Bax, Judy
Bax, Martin
Baxter, Glen
Baybars, Taner
Bayley, Michael
Beattie, Pamela
Beauchamp, Charles
Beaumont, A.
Beckmann, G.
Beeson, Lois
Belben, Rosalind
Belbin, David
Bell, Shirley
Belli, Guieppe
Bendon, Chris
Benedikt, Michael
Benveniste, Asa
Bennett, Roy
Benning, Kurt
Benson, Judi
Bergman, Mara
Bernard, Oliver
Berry, James
Besford, Sonja
Bessant, Don
Bevan, Nick
Bevan, Tom
Bewick, Pauline
Bidmead, Christopher
Bie, Beverley
Bindman, J.S.
Bing, Jon
Bingham, Samuel
Birney, Earle
Bizarrov, I.V.

Blair, R.	Caldecott, Julian
Blake, Peter	Caldecott, Moyra
Blakeston, Oswell	Calder, David
Bland, Peter	Caldicott, Karen
Blathwayt, Thomasine	Caldwell, Joseph
Blundell, Tony	Callow, Philip
Bond, Edward	Calvert, Robert
Borkowski, Andrej	Camon, Ferdinand
Born, Anne	Campbell, Janet
Bosquet, Alain	Campbell, Sandra
Boss, Laura	Cannon, E.
Bowen, Phil	Cannon, Max
Bowes, Barry	Carey, Jack
Bowler, William	Carey, John
Bradfield, Scott	Carman, Cathy
Brandt, Judith	Carr, D. C.
Brandt, Rolf	Carson, Anne
Brathwaite, Edward Kamau	Castellanos, Rosario
Brecht, Bertold	Casterton, Julia
Breton, André	Cather, Willa
Bringsvaerd, Tor Age	Caulfield, Patrick
Brock, Edwin	Chadwick, Helen
Brock, Michael	Chaloner, David
Brocquy, Louis le	Chambers, Duncan
Bronowski, Judith	Chan, Kitty
Brooks, James	Chandra, Sharat
Brown, Jonathan	Charalambides, Julie M
Brown, Marcia	Chester, Stuart
Brown, Paul	Chinaka, Lynda Nkem
Brown, Sam	Chowdhry, Maya
Brown, Stewart	Cilento, Meredyth
Brown, Stuart	Cisneros, Antonio
Browne, Michael	Clanchy, Kate
Brownjohn, Alan	Clancy, Deirdre
Bulla, Hans Georg	Clare, Josephine
Burbridge, Nicholas	Clark, Brian
Burford, Ted	Clark, John Charles
Burgis, Allan	Clark, Robert
Burns, Jim	Clarke, Barbara
Burnside, John Cameron	Clarke, Ian
Burnside, Sam	Clarke, Roy
Burroughs, William S.	Cleverly, Henry
Burrows, Michelle	Clifford, Gay
Burrows, Miles	Cockle, John
Bush, Duncan	Cockrill, Maurice
Butcher, George	Coe, Mandy
Butler, Bill	Cohen, Marvin
Butterworth, Michael	Cole, Barry
Buttress, Derrick	Cole, Cornelius
Cairns, Francis	Cole, Robert

Coleman, Les	Dearden, Liz
Coleman, Stella	Deelder, Jules
Coles, Gladys Mary	Dego, Giuliano
Colverson, Ian	Dent, Alan
Conn, Stewart	Denvir, Catherine
Connor, Tony	Denvir, Sarah
Conry, Stephen	Derbyshire, Paul
Cooper, Eileen	Dersley, Keith
Cooper, Valerie	Deverson, Jane
Cope, Suze	Devine, Steve
Corbett, John A.	Dezso, Tandori
Corke, Hilary	Dick, J. P.
Cotton, John	Didsbury, Pete
Couzyn, Jeni	Diez, Rosa
Cox, Ken	Digby, John
Cox, Margot	Dimitranovo, Nelly
Cram, David	Dixon, B.
Crang, Alan	Dixon, Stephen
Crick, Phillip	Dodgson, Elyse
Cronyn, Hume	Dodman, Martin
Crosland, Stanley	Donaghy, Michael
Crossley-Holland, Kevin	Donaldson, Anthony
Crucefix, Martyn	Donnelly, Paul
Cruse, Lizzie	Dooley, Tim
Cskay, Mick	Dorgan, Theo
Cudworth, Nick	Dos Santos, Bartholomeu
Cuevas, Luis José	Dossor, Dinah
Cunningham, C. C.	Dougill, John
Cunningham, Tim	Dove, Stephen
Curry, Duncan	Dowden, George
Curry, Neil	Dowden, Prosper
Curtis, Clive	Dowell, Coleman
Curtis, Tony	Dubnow, Eugene
Cutler, Ivor	Dudley, A. E
Dahlberg, Per Oscar Gustav	Dudley, Ian
Dannatt, Adrian	Duffy, Carol Ann
D'argenson, Jeanne	Duffy, Steve
Darlington, Andrew	Duhig, Ian
Daruwalla, Keki N.	Duncalf, Stephen
Dash, Tony	Dunn, David
Daughtery, Michael	Dunsdon, Robert
Davide, Adele	Duran, Jane
Davies, Anthony	Dyer, Richard
Davies, David	Eason, Amanda
Davy, Madeleine	Eason, Judith
Dawkins, Brian	Easter, Peter
Dawson, Jennifer	Edkins, Anthony
Dawson, Jill	Edmond, David
de Lomellini, C. A.	Edwards, John
Deane, John F.	Edwards, Paul

Edwards, Peter	Foreman, Michael
Eichenberg, Fritz	Fowler, Alastair
Ellis, Arthur	Frank, Sophie
Elon, Florence	Franks, Mav
Eluard, Paul	Franzini, Robert
Emanuel, John	Fraser, Peter
Embleton, Jane	Freeman, Richard
Emmerson, Roy	French, Lynford
Evans, Christopher	Fulcher, Lindsay
Evans, Humphrey	Fulker, Tina
Evans, Martina	Fuller, Martin
Evans, Paul	Fulton, Alice
Evans, Richard M.	Fulton, Graham
Ewart, Gavin	Fulton, Robin
Fahey, Diane	Furey, Gerard V.
Fainlight, Harry	Furley, Bill
Fainlight, Ruth	Furlong, Richard
Falk, Agneta	Fytton, Frances
Farrazzi, Patricia	Gablick, Suzy
Farrell, Kevin	Gaess, Roger W.
Farrell, Michael	Gahagan, Judy
Farrell, Pat	Galbraith, Iain
Farrelly, John	Galeta, Robert
Faul, Jan	Gardiner, Sam
Faulkner, Armaiti	Gardner, Donald
Fawcett, Robert	Garfitt, Roger
Fearnley, Clare	Garner, Christopher
Feaver, Vicki	Garnham, Chris
Felstead, Cathie	Gascoyne, David
Fergus, Howard	Geddes, Gary
Ferguson, Merrill	Geras, Adele
Fergusson, Andrew	Ghose, Zulfikar
Fern, Dan	Gibbens, John
Fetherling, Doug	Gibbs, David
Fetherstone, Patrick	Gibson, Simon
Fiacc, Pdraic	Gilmartin, Howard
Fiddler, Martin	Gioseffi, Daniela
Figueroa, John	Gladwell, John
Finch, Peter	'Glenda'
Finch, Roger	Gloag, Daphne
Finzi, Gilberto	Gogarty, Paul
Firmin, Hannah	Goldar, Malabika
Flint, Roger	Goldblatt, David
Floyd, Robert	Goldensohn, Barry
Flynn, Tony	Goldsmith, John
Fogden, Barry	Golucky, Harry
Foley, Kate	Goodwin, Mark A.
Follett, C. B.	Gordon, Giles
Forbes, Duncan	Gordon, Harry
Foreman, Mark	Gordon, Margaret

Gorman, Gerard
 Goss, Rebecca
 Gourevitch, Philip
 Gowdy, Carolyn
 Gower, John
 Graham, Fiona
 Graham, Henry
 Graham, James
 Gramigna, Giuliano
 Grandmont, Dominique
 Grant, James Russell
 Gray, Ann
 Gray, Stephen
 Green, Caroline
 Greer, Patrick
 Gregory, Jenny
 Gregory, R. G.
 Greidinger, Clive
 Greutert, Kevin
 Greygoose, David
 Griffin Smith, C.
 Griffiths, Sally
 Grimes, Oona
 Grimmett, Neil
 Groves, Paul
 Grubb, David
 Grunberger, Richard
 Guest, Harry
 Gunsekera, Romesh
 Gunn, Thom
 Gunnell, John
 Gustafson, James
 H [ilda]., D [oolittle]
 Hacker, Marilyn
 Hadari, Atar
 Hadas, Pamela
 Haggard, Stephen
 Haldane, Jim
 Hales, Madge
 Hall, Barry
 Hall, Hugh
 Hall, Kit
 Halligan, Peter
 Halliwell, David
 Halter, Aloma
 Halton, Raymond
 Hamberger, Robert
 Hambling, Maggi
 Hampton, William
 Handal, Nathalie
 Hanson, Dian
 Hardcastle, Nick
 Harding, Gunnar
 Hardwick, Adam
 Hardy, George
 Harland, Robin
 Harmer, David
 Harmer, J. B.
 Harris, Alan
 Harris, Mark
 Harris, Martin
 Harrison, Michael
 Harrison, Tony
 Harrop, Leslie
 Harvey, John
 Harwood, Lee
 Hassam, Andrew
 Hattersley, Geoff
 Haufs, Rolf
 Havekamp, Katherina
 Hawkins, Spike
 Hayes, Daniel
 Haynes, David Nathaniel
 Hazeldine, Peter
 Healey, Linda
 Healy, Dermot
 Heath-Stubbs, John
 Heidenstam, David
 Helm, Peter
 Helman, Cecil
 Hendriks, A. L.
 Hendry, Diana
 Henri, Adrian
 Herbert, Albert
 Herbert, W. N.
 Heringman, Susana
 Heron, Patrick
 Heron, Tom
 Hewish, John
 Hewitt, John
 Heywood, Terence
 Higgins, Aidan
 Hikins, Sylvia
 Hilboldt, Lise
 Hill, Dick
 Hill, Douglas
 Hill, Richard
 Hill, Selima
 Hill, Tobias
 Hilton, Jane

Hinshelwood, Bob
 Hobdell, Roger
 Hobsbaum, Philip
 Hobson, Jamie
 Hobson, Ruth
 Hochman, Sandra
 Hockney, David
 Hodgkin, Howard
 Hodgkins, Rosalind
 Hodgson, Tony
 Hodkin, Mary
 Hofmann, Michael
 Holcombe, Colin
 Holden, Glyn
 Holden, John
 Holdstock, Pauline
 Hollo, Anselm
 Holloway, Geoffrey
 Holmes, Liz
 Holroyd, Michael
 Holzer, Alan
 Hope, Danielle
 Horan, Martin
 Horbury, Michael
 Horder, John
 Horovitz, Michael
 Horsefodder, Emmanuel
 Horsfield, Nicholas
 Howard, Steve
 Howe, Peter
 Howell, Anthony
 Howeson, Anne
 Hoyem, Andrew
 Hubbard, Geoffrey
 Hubbard, Sue
 Huffman, Bennett Tracy
 Hughes, Charmian
 Hughes, Glyn
 Hughes, John
 Hughes, Patrick
 Hulse, Michael
 Hulson, Eric
 Hunt, John Dixon
 Hunter, Jane
 Huson, Eric
 Hutchinson, Alexander
 Ingham, Brian
 Isler, Ursula
 Ivory, Helen
 Ivry, Benjamin
 Jackowska, Nicki
 Jackson, Sue
 Jackson, Vanessa
 Jacobs, Arthur
 Jacobs, David
 James, Anthony
 James, Bruce John
 James, Emmanuel
 James, Martin
 Jamieson, Michael
 Jansen, Arno
 Janssens, Paul
 Jarrett, Clare
 Jay, Peter
 Jellicoe, Ann
 Jenckes, Norma
 Jenkins, Heinke
 Jenkins, Jan
 Jenkins, Robert
 Jennings, Elizabeth
 Jentzsch, Bernd
 Jillings, Harriet
 Johnson, Amryl
 Johnson, B. S.
 Johnson, Colin
 Johnson, Linton Kwesi
 Johnson, Michael
 Johnson, Peter
 Johnstone, Keith
 Joint Stock Company
 Jolliffe, Peter
 Jones, Allen
 Jones, Christopher
 Jones, Deryn Rees
 Jones, Isabel
 Jones, Joe McCoy
 Jones, Justin
 Joppien, Rudiger
 Jose, Nicholas
 Joseph, Jenny
 Joseph, Rosemary
 Judkins, Rod
 Jury, Clifford
 Kalkur, Ramesh
 Kantaris, Sylvia
 Kasper, M.
 Kaufman, Bob
 Kaven, Bob
 Kazantzis, Judith
 Kearns, Lionel

Keefe, David
 Kell, Richard
 Keller, Ray
 Kelly, Ann
 Kelly, Michael
 Kenneally, Peter
 Kennedy, Brian
 Kennedy, Keith
 Kentridge, Eliza
 Kercheval, Jesse Lee
 Kerr, Declan
 Kerrigan, Anthony
 Keys, John
 Keys, Leila
 Khinoy, Nina
 Kilraine, Michael
 Kilworth, Gary
 Kirkup, James
 Kirsch, Sarah
 Kissick, Gary
 Kitson, Linda
 Klimowska, Danusia Schejbal
 Klimowski, Andrez
 Knight, John
 Knight, Laura
 Knight, Mary
 Kodolanyi, Gyula
 Kolar, Jiri
 Kramer, Lotte
 Kramer, Lyn
 Kruger, Michael
 Kuipers, Francis
 Kulman, Andrew
 Kunert, Gunter
 Kunze, Reiner
 Kurvenal, Christian
 La Rose, John
 Laing, Gerald
 Lambert, Steve
 Lan, David
 Lancaster, John
 Lane, Joel
 Lang, Kenneth
 Lanyon, Andrew
 Laskus, Arturo
 Latham, John
 Latif, Tariq
 Lauer, Mirko
 Laughlin, James
 Lauterbach, Ann
 Lavieri, Jon
 Lawson, Hannah
 Lawson, Virginia
 le Brocquy, Louis
 Le Brun, Christopher
 Le Grand, Antoine
 Lea, Nerissa
 Leale, B. C.
 Leanse, Robin
 Leatherbarrow, Linda
 Lech, Janina
 Lechtape, Edith
 Leczycki, Artur
 Lee, Adrian
 Lee, Lance
 Lehane, Michelle
 Leibert, Margitt
 Lemman, Martin
 Leonard, Simon
 Leven, Dieter
 Levenson, Christopher
 Levertov, Denise
 Levick, Vivian
 Levine, Gabriel
 Levy, Deborah
 Lewis, Beverley
 Lewis, Jenny
 Ley, Jacqueline
 Liardet, Tim
 Libling, Thelma
 Lichtenstein, Roy
 Liddy, James
 Lieber, A. L.
 Liffen, Lorna
 Lifton-Zoline, John & Pamela
 Light, Nicholas
 Ligota, Christopher
 Lilly, Rebecca
 Linden, Eddie
 Ling, Kate
 Lister, Stephen
 Litherland, Mike
 Litt, Toby
 Litvinoff, Emanuel
 Lloyd, Errol
 Lloyd-Thompson, K.
 Lock, Norman
 Locklin, Gerald
 Logue, Christopher
 Lomas, Herbert

Loncke, Roger
 Lorca, Gabriel
 Lovelock, Yann
 Lowbury, Edward
 Lowenstein, Alice
 Lowinger, Leslie
 Lowinger, Margaret
 Lowinger, Paul
 Lucas, Jacqueline
 Lucas, John
 Lucas, Russell
 Lucas, Tony
 Lykiard, Alexis
 Lynch, P. J.
 MacBeth, George
 Macdonald, Robert
 MacKeith, Stephen A.
 Mackie, Peter G.
 MacKinnon, Stewart
 MacSweeney, Barry
 McAuley, Robert
 McCarthy, Justin
 McCarthy, Penny
 McCarthy, Thomas
 McClure, Michael
 McCombs, Judith
 McConaughy, Margaret
 McCormack, Mike
 McCoy-Jones, Joe
 McDonald, Johnny
 McGough, Roger
 McGrath, Maureen
 McGrath, Tom
 McGregor, Malcolm
 McGrinder, M.
 McKinlay, Donald
 McLaughlin, Bill
 McLean, Bruce
 McLean, Michael
 McMahan, Brendan
 McMillan, Ian
 McNeill, Christine
 McSeveney, Angela
 Magee, Wes
 Magonet, Jonathan
 Magowan, Robin
 Mahapatra, Jayanta
 Maher, J. C.
 Maher, Mary
 Majtényi, Erik
 Mallin, Rupert
 Malroux, Claire
 Manck, Hans-Gunther
 Mangnall, Jim
 Manning, Nichola
 Marais, Michael
 Marion, Marcel
 Markham, E.A.
 Markham, Jehane
 Marks, Alan
 Marley, Brian
 Marley, Christopher
 Marriott, Jack
 Marsh, Paul
 Martin, Jill
 Martin, Philip
 Martindale, Beryl
 Martindale, Joseph
 Marx, Karl
 Mason, Gordon
 Mason, Neal
 Mason, Paul
 Mason, Robert
 Mathieson, Eric
 Matthew, Antony
 Matthews, Bernadette
 Matthias, John
 Maxwell, Douglas
 Maxwell, Glyn
 May, Derwent
 Mayer, Gerda
 Mead, Matthew
 Meckel, Christoph
 Mensching, Steffen
 Meredith, Owen
 Meredith, Ralph
 Metz, Holly
 Mew, Peter
 Meyer, Bruce
 Michael, Christine
 Michelson, Joan
 Micklitz, Klaus
 Middleton, Christopher
 Middleton, Simon
 Migura, Stuart
 Miles, John
 Miller, John
 Mills, Paul
 Mills, Russell
 Mills, Stuart

Millward, Jonathan
Milne, Ewart
Minhinnick, Robert
Mitchell, Adrian
Mitchell, Irene
Mole, John
Molnar, Steven
Montalbetti, Mario
Mooraj, Anwer
Moorcock, Michael
Moorcock, Richard
Moore, Hubert
Mora, Tulio
Morgan, Edwin
Morgan, Pete
Moriconi, Alberto Mario
Morpurgo, Sebastian
Morris, Frances
Morrish, Sophie
Moses, Emanuel
Moules, Sue
Moyse, Arthur
Mozley, Abigail
Muende, Jane
Munro, Madeline
Murphy, Aidan
Murphy, Michael
Murry, John Middleton
Musgrave, Susan
Musgrove, Keith
Napier, Felicity
Narbona, Pla
Nassar, Raduan
Naylor, Pat
Neagu'P
Neale, Emma
Neill, Edward
Neill, Quentin
New, J.
Newman, David
Newman, Sol
Newton, John
Nichols, Grace
Nicholson, Geoff
Nigroni, Donald F.
Nixon, Colin
Noren, Lars
Norman, Rosemary
North, Jack
Notley, Alice

Nunn, Trevor
Nuttall, Jeff
Nye, Robert
O'Brien, Michael
O'Callaghan, Conor
O'Casey, Breon
O'Connell, Eilis
O'Connor, Mark
O'Connor, Patric
O'Driscoll, Ciaran
O'Halligan, Peter
Olds, Jennifer
Oliva, Jorge
Oliver, Douglas
Olson, Kirby
Onwuka, Chidi
Orpwood, Jerry
Orr, Chris
Ounsted, Christopher
Over, Marita
Owens, Andrea
Oxley, William
Oxtoby, David
Page, Jeremy
Page, Lucy
Pakenham Walshe, Mabel
Palazuelos, Juan-Agustin
Pallant, Cheryl
Palmer, Timothy
Paolozzi, Eduardo
Park, William
Parker, Robert Andrew
Parsons, John
Pasolini, Pier Paolo
Passmore, Victor
Patel, Raksha
Paterson, Alasdair
Patten, Brian
Pavese, Cesar
Peacock, Alan
Pearce, Bryan
Pease, Deborah
Peccinotti, Harri
Peel, Michael
Pelz, Lotte
Pelz, Werner
Pemberton, Nick
Perkin, Michael
Peskett, William
Petit, Pascale

Petrucci, Mario	Redgrove, Peter
Petty, W. H.	Rees, Ann
Phelps, Kieren	Rego, Paula
Philips, Nicholas	Reichardt, Jasia
Phillimore, Robert Godfrey	Reidy, Gerry
Phillips, Caryl	Remfry, David
Phillips, Nicholas	Retallack, Joan
Phillips, Tom	Reyes, Heather
Piercy, M.	Reynolds, Martin
Pietar, Pavel	Rice, Nicky
Pilling, Christopher	Rich, Vera
Place, Milber	Richardson, Caroline
Planer, Nigel	Richardson, Daphne
Platt, Mary	Richmond, Oliffe
Please, Keith	Riddell, Alan
Plowman, Chris	Riddell, Barbara
Pogson, Patricia	Riley, Patrick
Pollock, Ian	Riley, Peter
Porter, Peter	Rilke, A.M.
Porthmeor Print makers	Rimbaud, Dee
Poulson, Joan	Ritchie, Malcolm
Povey, Ray	River, Justine
Power, Derek	Roberts, Graham
Preece, Laurie	Roberts, J. D.
Prestwich, Edmund	Roberts, Michael Symmons
Prèvert, Jacques	Roberts, Sally
Pribičević-Zorić, Christina	Robinson, Colin
Primrose, Francis	Robinson, George
Prockter, Patrick	Robson, Jeremy M.
Prosser, Bill	Roche, Michael
Prowse, Geoffrey	Roff, Charles
Pudney, John	Rogers, Nick
Pybus, Rodney	Roggemans, Willem
Pyle, Elizabeth	Rokeah, David
Queneau, Raymond	'Rolf'
Quin, Ann	Rose, Colin
Radmall, Peter	Rose, Harriet
Rahm, Linda	Rosenberg, David
Raimes, James	Ross, Mike
Randell, Elaine	Rossabi, Monique
Raphael, Sarah	Roth, Friederike
Rapoport, Susan	Roundhill, Paul
Rarme, André	Royle, Nicholas
Rathenow, Lutz	Rozewicz, Tadeusz
Rauschenberg, Robert	Rubinfeld, Florence
Ravilious, C. P.	Rubio, Julieta
Ray, David	Rucker, Venetia
Ray, Judy	Ruger, Henry
Ray, Robin	Rumens, Carol
Reading, Peter	Rundall, Jeremy

Russo, Alberto
Ruth, Sibyl
Rutsala, Vern
Saba, Umberto
Sabbell, D. Garcia
Salkey, Andrew
Salmon, Chris
Salzman, Eva
Sanders, Sue
Sandford, Ron
Sansom, Peter
Santer, David
Sargif, Eve
Satyamurti, Carole
Saul, John
Saunders, Raymond
Savage, Sam
Sawyer, William
Scannell, Vernon
Schejbal, Danusia
Schneider, J. L.
Schofield, Adam
Schonzeit, Ben
Schuetz, John
Scott, D. Giles
Scott, William
Scriven, Robert
Scudamore, Mary
Seabrook, Michael
Sedgwick, Fred
Segal, Jan
Selvon, Sam
Sen, Sudeep
Sequin, Ken
Sergeant, Howard
Sewell, John
Seymour, Pip
Shaner, Timothy
Share, Bernard
Sharp, Evlynn
Sharp, Michael
Sharpe, Philip
Shaw, Phil
Shaw, Roger
Shearer, Charles
Sheers, Hilary
Shepherd, W. G.
Shorcock, Paul
Short, John
Shuttle, Penelope

Sillitoe, Alan
Simmonds, Posy
Simpson, Christine
Simpson, Matt
Sinason, Valerie
Skelton, Robin
Skinner, Knute
Skinner, Paul
Skirrow, Desmond
Sladek, John
Smart, Carolyn
Smith, C. Griffin
Smith, Caroline
Smith, Copland
Smith, David
Smith, Elizabeth
Smith, Joanne
Smith, Julian
Smith, Michael
Smith, Sheila
Smith, Stan
Smith, Stephen
Smith, Stevie
Smith, Sydney Bernard
Snow, George
Snow, Michael
Snyder, Diana
So, Meilo
Sodergran, Edith
Soupault, Phillippe
Spanel, Ann
Spangol, Jessica
Sparrow, Paul
Spingarn, Lawrence P.
Sprackland, Jean
Srivastava, Satyendra
St. Vincent, Paul
Stallybrass, Oliver
Stannard, Julian
Stannard, Martin
Stanton, Jane
Starkey, Muriel
Steadman, Ralph
Stein, Agnes
Steinberg, Eira
Steinberg-Tolkien, T. P.
Stenberg, Eira
Sterne, Susan
Stewart, Peter
Stewart, Sue

Stone, Nancy
Stone, Tom
Storey, Richard
Storm, Jannick
Strato
Straus, Margaret
Strike, Johnny
Sutherill, Colin
Sutherland-Smith, James
Sutton, Linda
Swan, Michael
Sward, Robert
Sweeney, Matthew
Sweeney, Nick
Sweeney, William
Sweetnam, John
Syder, Diana
Symes, Gordon
Symons, Jean
Szitres, George
Taborski, Boleslaw
Tarn, Nathaniel
Tate, Bill
Taylor, David
Taylor, I. P.
Taylor, Susan
Teschke, Holger
Thomas, D. M.
Thomas, Dylan
Thomas, Henry
Thomas, Stanley
Thompson, Blaise
Thompson, Jan
Thompson, K. Lloyd
Thompson, M.
Thompson, N. S.
Thompson, Nigel
Thorn, Michael
Thorpe, Adam
Thwaite, Anthony
Tighe, Carl
Tindle, David
Tinker, Howard
Tipton, David
Tipton, Sara Jane
Tokely, Alison
Toklas, Alice B.
Tolfree, Barry Reay
Tolkien, Michael
Tomlinson, Geoff

Tongue, Christine
Tonks, Rosemary
Toulson, Shirley
Trakl, Gerog
Tranter, John E.
Tritel, Jonathan
Trocchi, Alexander
Trotter, David
Tucker, Chris
Turkka, Joukko
Turner, Joel E.
Turner, Joyce
Tyrrell, Richard
Vallejo, Cesar
Van Der Duim, Gerrit Jan
Van Noord, Barbara
Varney, Noel
Vatine, Louise
Vaughan, Dai
Vaughan, Michael
Vennberg, Karl
Vollmar, Jim
Voss, Fred
Vulgar, Jenny
Wade, Seth
Wadlow, Trevor
Wait, Dave
Wake, Brian
Wakelam, Alan
Wakeman, John
Walker, Fiona
Walker, Richard
Wallace, Norman
Wallace, Piers
Wallis, Dave
Walters, John
Walton, James
Ward, Colin
Ward, Dave
Ward, Donald
Ward, Geoffrey
Ward, Graham
Ward, Velox
Wardle, Irving
Warner, Val
Watanabe, José
Waterman, Andrew
Watson, Ian
Watson, Joe
Watson, John

Watt, Lucy Ann
Watts, Colin
Weber, Antoine
Webber, Janet
Weinman, Irving
Weiss, Jason
Weissbort, Daniel
Welch, John
Wells, Michael
Welsh, P. A.
Werner, Peter
Westbury, Debbie
Wevill, David
Whalley, Shella
Wheatley, John
Wheatley, Steve
Whitby, Julie
White, Amanda
White, Barry
White, Edgar
White, Ivan
White, Joseph Blanco
Wicks, Susan
Wiggins, Marianne
Wilde, Helen
Wiley, Martyn
Wilkes, Paul
Wilkie, Pamela
Willett, John
Williams, Evelyn
Williams, Francise
Williams, Simon
Williams, Tennessee
Wilson, Franklin
Wilson, Jackie
Wilson, Josephine
Wilson, Peter
Wilson, Raymond
Winstanley, Paul
Winter, Alistair
Winwood, David
Wiseman, Christopher
Wisker, Alistair
Wlaschin, Ken
Wolstenholme, Eugene
Wood, Frank
Woods, Macdara
Woodward, Gerard
Woodward, Mary
Woolf, Henry

Woolford, Simon
Working, Claude
Worster, Alec
Wright, Barbara
Wright, Freire
Wright, J. D.
Wright, Kit
Wright, Paul
Wroe, Philip
Wyatt, Mark
Wynard, Derek
Xavier, Katherine
Yashin, Mehmet
Young, Alan
Young, Howard
Zanzotto, Andrea
Zeck, Greg

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Books and Reports

- Acheson, James and Romana Huk (eds), *Contemporary British Poetry. Essays in Theory and Criticism*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1996.
- Adcock, Fleur (ed.), *The Faber Book of Twentieth Century Women's Poetry*. London: Faber, 1987.
- Allnutt, Gillian, Fred D'Aguiar, Ken Edwards and Eric Mottram (eds), *The New British Poetry 1968-88*. London: Paladin, 1988.
- Arts Council of Great Britain, *45th Annual Report and Accounts of the Arts Council of Great Britain 1989/90*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1990.
- , *49th Annual Report and Accounts of the Arts Council of Great Britain 1993/94*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1994.
- Ballard, J.G., *The Atrocity Exhibition*. San Francisco: Re/Search Publications, 1990.
- Barker, Sebastian, *Who Is Eddie Linden?* London: Jay Landesman Ltd, 1979.
- Blamires, Harry, *Twentieth-Century English Literature. Second Edition*. Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1982.
- Bleiler, E.F. (ed.), *Science Fiction Writers*. New York: Scribner, 1982.
- Bleiman, Barbara (ed.), *Five Modern Poets*. London: Longman, 1993.
- Bloom, Clive and Gary Day (eds), *Literature and Culture in Modern Britain. Volume 3: 1956-1999*. Edinburgh: Pearson, 2000.
- Booker, Christopher, *The Seventies: Portrait of a Decade*. London: Allen Lane, 1980.
- , *The Neophiliacs. The Revolution in English Life in the fifties and sixties*. London: Pimlico, 1992 [London: Collins, 1969].
- Booth, Martin, *British Poetry 1964-84: Driving Through Barricades*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.
- Brown, Andrew, 'The Toxteth Aftermath', in Philip Marsden-Smedley (ed.), *Britain In The Eighties. The Spectator's View of the Thatcher Decade*. London: Grafton Books, 1989.
- Bryant, Mark and Simon Heneage, *Dictionary of British Cartoonists and Caricaturists 1730-1980*. Aldershot: Scholar Press: 1994.
- Bryant, Mark, *Dictionary of Twentieth-Century British Cartoonists and Caricaturists*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2000.
- Burroughs, William S., *Naked Lunch*. London: Flamingo, 2001 [Paris: Olympia, 1959].
- , 'Preface' to J.G. Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition*. San Francisco: Re/Search Publications, 1990.
- Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, *Patron Or Paymaster? The Arts Council Dilemma*. Second Conference of Commonwealth Arts Councils in Montreal, Canada, 12-15 April, 1981. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, UK Branch, 1982.
- Carroll, Lewis, *Alice in Wonderland*. London: Dennis Dobson, 1967.
- Charters, Jane and Michael Foreman, *The General*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961.

- Chielens, Edward E. (ed.), *American Literary Magazines. The Twentieth Century*. Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1992.
- Clyde, Tom, *Irish Literary Magazines: An Outline History and Descriptive Bibliography*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003.
- Dawe, Gerald and Aodán Mac Póilin (eds), *Ruined Pages. Selected Poems [of] Padraic Fiacc*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1994.
- Dego, Giuliano (ed.), *Directions In Italian Poetry: Prospice 6*. Breakish, Isle of Skye: Aquila Publishing Company, 1976.
- Delchamps, Stephen W., *Civil Humor: The Poetry of Gavin Ewart*. London: Associated University Press, 2002.
- Delville, Michel, *J.G. Ballard*. Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998.
- Dobson, Michael and Stanley Wells (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Duffy, Carol Ann, *Fleshweathercock, and Other Poems*. Walton-on-Thames: Outposts, 1973.
- England, Gerald and Vivienne Finch (eds), *British Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses. First Edition*. New Malden: Dustbooks UK, 1974.
- Ewart, Gavin, *The Deceptive Grin of the Gravel Porters*. London: London Magazine Editions, 1968.
- , *All My Little Ones*. London: Anvil Press, 1978.
- Fallon, Peter and Derek Mahon (eds), *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990.
- Fisher, Clive, *Cyril Connolly: A Nostalgic Life*. London: Macmillan, 1995.
- Fletcher, John, 'J.G. Ballard', in Merritt Moseley (ed.), *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 207: British Writers Since 1960, Third Series*. Detroit: Gale, 1999.
- Foreman, Michael, *Moose*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971.
- , *Panda and the Odd Lion*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981.
- , *War Boy: A Country Childhood*. London: Pavilion Books, 1991.
- Fountain, Nigel, *Underground: The London Alternative Press 1966-74*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Fulton, Leonard V., *Directory of Little Magazines. First Edition*. El Cerrito, CA: Dustbooks, 1964.
- , *International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses. Ninth Edition*. Paradise, CA: Dustbooks, 1973; Tenth Edition. Paradise, CA: Dustbooks, 1974; Thirteenth Edition. Paradise, CA: Dustbooks, 1977; Sixteenth Edition. Paradise, CA: Dustbooks, 1980.
- Goddard, James and David Pringle, *J.G. Ballard: The First Twenty Years*. Hayes: Bran's Head Books, 1976.
- Görtschacher, Wolfgang, *Little Magazine Profiles: The Little Magazines In Great Britain 1939-1993*. Salzburg: University of Salzburg Press, 1993.
- , *Contemporary Views on the Little Magazine Scene*. Salzburg: Poetry Salzburg, 2000.
- Graves, Peter J. (ed.), *Three Contemporary German Poets: Wolf Biermann, Sarah Kirsch and Reiner Kunze*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1985.
- Greenland, Colin, *The Entropy Exhibition: Michael Moorcock and the British 'New Wave' in Science Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1983.

- Hamilton, Ian, *The Little Magazines: A Study of Six Editors*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976.
- Hamilton, Ian (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry in English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Hansard*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Fifth Series, Vol. 762, Session 1967-68, 11 April 1968, Col. 1573; Fifth Series, Vol. 764, Session 1967-68, 9 May 1968, Col. 591-2.
- Haugaard, Erik (trans.), *Hans Anderson. His Classic Fairy Tales*. London: Victor Gollancz, 1976.
- Hayes, Michael G., *Unemployment in Liverpool. 1. Unemployment Change 1982-1985*. Liverpool: City of Liverpool Council, 1985.
- Hewison, Robert, *In Anger: British Culture in the Cold War 1945-60*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- , *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties 1960-75*. London: Methuen, 1986.
- , *Under Siege: Literary Life in London 1939-45*. London: Methuen, 1988.
- , *Future Tense. A New Art for the Nineties*. London: Methuen, 1990.
- Higson, Andrew (ed.), *Young and Innocent? Cinema and Britain 1896-1930*. Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2002.
- Hill, Selima, *Saying Hello At The Station*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1984.
- , *The Accumulation of Small Acts of Kindness*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1989.
- , *My Darling Camel*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1998.
- Hockney, David, *David Hockney*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1976.
- Hoffman, Frederick J., Charles Allen and Carolyn F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946.
- Hoggard, Richard, *The Way We Live Now*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1995.
- Hollo, Anselm, *St. Texts & Finnpoems*. Birmingham: Migrant Press, 1961.
- Hopkins, David, *After Modern Art 1945-2000*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Horowitz, Michael (ed.), *Children of Albion. Poetry of the 'Underground' in Britain*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969.
- Howeson, Anne, Robert Mason and Ian Pollock, *'Business?' Three views on sex for sale*. London: Thumb Gallery, 1981.
- Hutchinson, Robert, *The Politics of the Arts Council*. London: Sinclair Brown, 1982.
- Huxley, David, *Nasty Tales: Sex, Drugs, Rock 'n' Roll and Violence in the British Underground*. Manchester: Critical Vision, 2001.
- Institute of Contemporary Art, *Modern Dreams: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop*. New York and London: MIT Press, 1988.
- Kenny, Michael (ed.), *Royal Academy Illustrated 1999. A Selection from the 231st Summer Exhibition*. London: Royal Academy Publications, 1999.
- Kingsley-Smith, Jane, 'Bible', in Michael Dobson and Stanley Wells (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

- Kinnahan, Linda, "Looking for the Doing Words": Carol Ann Duffy and Questions of Convention'.
in James Acheson and Romana Huk (eds), *Contemporary British Poetry. Essays in Theory and Criticism*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1996.
- Kitson, Peter J. and Elaine Treharne (eds), *The Year's Work in English Studies. Vol. 4, 1993*.
Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.
- Klein, Holger, Sabine Coelsch-Foisner and Wolfgang Görtschacher (eds), *Poetry Now. Contemporary British and Irish Poetry in the Making*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1999.
- Lampert, Catherine, Norman Rosenthal and Isabel Carlisle (eds), *Frank Auerbach: Paintings and Drawings 1954-2001*. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2001.
- Lehmann, John, *The Whispering Gallery*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1955.
- , *I Am My Brother*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1960.
- , *The Ample Proposition*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1966.
- Levin, Kim, *Beyond Modernism. Essays on art from the 70s and 80s*. New York: Harper and Row, 1988.
- Lucie-Smith, Edward and Philip Hobsbaum (eds), *A Group Anthology*. London: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Lucie-Smith, Edward (ed.), *The Liverpool Scene*. London: Donald Carroll, 1967.
- Lucie-Smith, Edward, *Art in the Seventies*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1980.
- Luckhurst, Roger, 'The Angle Between Two Walls'. *The Fiction of J.G. Ballard*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997.
- MacBeth, George, *A Form of Words*. Swinford: Fantasy Press, 1954.
- , *The Broken Places*. London: Scorpion Press, 1963.
- , *A Doomsday Book*. London: Scorpion Press, 1965.
- , *Shrapnel*. London: Macmillan, 1973.
- , *Buying A Heart*. London: Omphalos Press and J-Jay Publications, 1978.
- , *Poems of Love and Death*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1980.
- , *Poems from Oby*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1982.
- , *Collected Poems 1958-1982*. London: Hutchinson, 1989.
- , *The Patient*. London: Hutchinson, 1992.
- Markham, E.A., *Cross-Fire*. Walton-on-Thames: Outposts, 1972.
- Marsden-Smedley, Philip (ed.), *Britain In The Eighties. The Spectator's View of the Thatcher Decade*. London: Grafton Books, 1989.
- McKillop, James, *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Melia, Paul (ed.), *David Hockney*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.
- Moore-Gilbert, Bart and John Seed (eds), *Cultural Revolution: The Challenge of the Arts in the 1960s*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Moore-Gilbert, Bart (ed.), *The Arts in the 1970s. Cultural Closure?* London: Routledge, 1994.

- Morgan, Ted, *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs*. London: The Bodley Head, 1991.
- Morrison, Blake, *The Movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- Morrison, Blake and Andrew Motion (eds), *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982.
- Moseley, Merritt (ed.), *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 207: British Writers Since 1960, Third Series*. Detroit: Gale, 1999.
- , *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 271: British and Irish Novelists Since 1960*. Detroit: Gale, 2002.
- Neville, Richard, *The Hippie Hippie Shake*. London: Bloomsbury, 1995.
- Nicholson, Geoff, *What We Did On Our Holidays*. London: Sceptre, 1990.
- , *Hunters and Gatherers*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991.
- Nuttall, Jeff, *Bomb Culture*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1968.
- O'Brien, Daniel, *SF/UK. How British Science Fiction Changed The World*. London: Reynolds and Hearn, 2000.
- Osborne, Harold (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Art*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Osterwold, Tilman, 'Pop Art in Britain', *Pop Art*. Köln: Taschen, 2003.
- Palmer, Tony, *The Trials of Oz*. London: Blond and Briggs, 1971.
- Palmowski, Jan (ed.), *A Dictionary of Contemporary World History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Paolozzi, Eduardo, *Eduardo Paolozzi*. London: Tate Gallery Publications Department, 1971.
- Pick, John, *Vile Jelly. The Birth, Life, and Lingering Death of the Arts Council of Great Britain*. Gringley-on-the-Hill, Doncaster: Brynmill Press, 1991.
- Riggs, Thomas, (ed.), *Contemporary Poets*. Detroit: Gale, 2001.
- Robertson, Geoffrey, *The Justice Game*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1998.
- Rorimer, Anne, *New Art in the 60s and 70s. Redefining Reality*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2001.
- Rosenthal, M.L., *The New Poets: American and British Poetry Since World War II*. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Ross, Alan, *The Forties*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1950.
- , *Blindfold Games*. London: Collins Harvill, 1988.
- Rowbotham, Sheila, *Promise of a Dream: A Memoir of the Sixties*. London: Allen Lane, 2000.
- Sansom, Ian, 'The Twentieth Century. Poetry—Post 1950', in Peter J. Kitson and Elaine Treharne (eds), *The Year's Work in English Studies. Vol. 4, 1993*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.
- Schmied, Wieland, 'Bunk, Bash, Pop—the graphics of Eduardo Paolozzi', in *Paolozzi: Sculpture, Drawings, Collages and Graphics*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976.
- Schneede, Uwe M., *Pop Art in England: Beginnings of a New Figuration 1947-63*. Braunschweig: Waisenhaus-Bruchdruckerei und Verlag, 1976.
- Sergeant, Howard and Dannie Abse (eds.), *Mavericks: An Anthology*. London: Poetry and Poverty Editions, 1957.

- Sexton, Jamie, 'The Film Society and the Creation of an Alternative British Film Culture in the 1920s', in Andrew Higson (ed.), *Young and Innocent? Cinema and Britain 1896-1930*. Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2002.
- Shakespeare, William, *King Lear. The complete text illustrated by Ian Pollock*. London: Oval Projects Ltd, 1984.
- Sherry Jnr, Vincent B. (ed.), *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 40: Poets of Great Britain and Ireland Since 1960*. Detroit: Gale, 1985.
- Shrapnel, Norman, *The Seventies: Britain's Inward March*. London: Constable, 1980.
- Solt, Mary Ellen (ed.), *Concrete Poetry: A World View*. London: Indiana University Press, 1968.
- Stableford, Brian M., 'J.G. Ballard', in E.F. Bleiler (ed.), *Science Fiction Writers*. New York: Scribner, 1982.
- Stangos, Nikos (ed.), *Concepts of Modern Art*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1991.
- Steadman, Ralph, 'Introduction' to Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*. London: Dennis Dobson, 1967.
- Stein, Agnes (ed.), *Four German Poets: Günter Eich, Hilde Domin, Erich Fried, Günter Kunert*. USA: Red Dust Inc., 1979.
- Stevenson, Randall, *The Oxford English Literary History. Volume 12. 1960-2000*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Stewart, Paul R., *The Prairie Schooner Story: A Little Magazine's First 25 Years*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1955.
- St Vincent, Paul, *Lambchops*. Leicester: Omens, 1976.
- Sullivan, Alvin (ed.), *British Literary Magazines. The Modern Age, 1914-1984*. New York, Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1986.
- Sutherland, John, *Offensive Literature*. London: Junction Books, 1982.
- Sweeting, Elizabeth, 'Keeping Our Balance', in Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, *Patron Or Paymaster? The Arts Council Dilemma*. Second Conference of Commonwealth Arts Councils in Montreal, Canada, 12-15 April, 1981. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, UK Branch, 1982.
- Thexton, Jane, 'Geoff Nicholson', in Merritt Moseley (ed.), *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 271: British and Irish Novelists Since 1960*. Detroit: Gale, 2002.
- Tracey, Michael and David Morrison, *Whitehouse*. London: Macmillan, 1979.
- Tsai, Eugenie, 'The Sci-Fi Connection: the IG, J.G. Ballard, and Robert Smithson', in Institute of Contemporary Art, *Modern Dreams: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop*. New York and London: MIT Press, 1988.
- Vaizey, Marina, *Peter Blake*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1986.
- Vale, Vivian and Andrea Juno (eds), *J.G. Ballard*. San Francisco, CA: V/Search Publications, 1984.
- Waugh, Patricia, *Harvest of the Sixties. English Literature and its Background 1960 to 1990*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Whitehead, Philip, *The Writing on the Wall: Britain in the Seventies*. London: Michael Joseph, 1985.

Witts, Richard, *Artist Unknown. An Alternative History of the Arts Council*. London: Little, Brown and Company, 1998.

Wright, Adrian, *John Lehmann: A Pagan Adventure*. London: Duckworth, 1998.

II. Periodicals, Journals and Magazines*

Times Literary Supplement

- Anon, 'Periodicals and Miscellanies', *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 March 1947: 145.
- , 'Periodicals and Miscellanies', *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 February 1948: 145
- , 'Image Makers', *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 May 1949: 347.
- , 'Poetry In England', *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 August 1950: Article xiv.
- , 'Literary Periodicals', *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 August 1950: Article xxxvi.
- , 'Themes For Poetry', *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 February 1955: 86.
- , 'Current Periodicals', *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 September 1956: 530.
- , 'After Commitment', *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 November 1959: 693.
- , 'Periodicals', *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 June 1960: 407.
- , 'Style Out In Space', *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 June 1965: 469.
- , 'Liverboom', *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 July 1967: 614.
- , 'Little magazines in reprint: the profits of patronage', *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 February 1970: 177.
- , 'A Bumper Fun Book', *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 July 1973: 797.
- , 'NB', *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 January 1993: 12.
- Buford, Bill, 'Take me to your reader', *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 January 1982: 13.
- Horovitz, Michael, 'A Circle for the Square World', *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 August 1964: 710.
- , 'Subsidizing Magazines', *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 June 1982: 639.
- Kirkup, James, 'Modern Poetry: East and West', *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 May 1982: 540.
- Knight, Stephen, 'Terminal Words', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 February 1993: 23.
- Lasdun, James, 'The Periodicals, 14: *Ambit*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 May 1984: 522.
- Masterman, Margaret and Robin McKinnon Wood, 'The Poet and the Computer', *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 June 1970: 667.
- May, Derwent, 'Little Magazines', *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 January 1968: 41.
- , 'Some literary magazines', *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 February 1970: 181.
- Pick, John, 'Excavating the Arts Council', *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 October 1991: 14.
- Scammell, William, *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 February 1983: 134.
- Vas Dias, Robert, 'Subsidizing Magazines', *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 June 1982: 695.
- Wardle, Irving, a letter to *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 March 1955: 133.

* References to primary sources in *Ambit* magazine are excluded from this list.

Others

- Anon, 'Millions To Spend', *Daily Mail*, 5 April 1968: 6.
- Anon, 'Looting unlimited', *Daily Mail*, 8 July 1981: 2.
- Ballard, J.G., 'Editorial', *New Worlds*, May 1962: 117-118.
- , 'Interview with Lyn Barber', *Penthouse*, Vol. 5, September 1970.
- , 'An Interview with Thomas Frick', *The Paris Review*, Vol. 26, No. 94, Winter 1984: 148, 154.
- Bennett, Alan and Mike Parry, 'The flames of hatred', *Daily Express*, 6 July 1981: 16.
- Brownjohn, Alan, 'New Poetry: Subways', *New Statesman*, 14 November 1969: 701.
- Davie, Donald, 'Correspondence', *The London Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 2, March 1954: 75.
- DiMarco, Danette, 'Exposing nude art: Carol Ann Duffy's Response to Robert Browning', *Mosaic. A journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba. Vol. 31, No. 3, September 1998: 37.
- Eliot, T. S., 'A Message', *The London Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 1, February 1954: 15.
- Evanoff, Richard, 'How Literary Projects Can Always Be Self-supporting', *Small Press Review*, Vol. 23, nos. 7-8, July-August 1991: 12.
- Forbes, Peter, 'Still Life at the Poetry Café', *Poetry Review*, Vol. 85, no. 1, Spring 1995: 3.
- , 'Full Circle', *Poetry Review*, Vol. 92, No. 1, Spring 2002: 3.
- Hamilton, Ian, *The New Review*, Vol. 4, No. 48, March 1978: 1.
- Hope, Christopher, 'Time and the Developers', *London Magazine*, Vol. 19, No. 3, June 1979: 78.
- Humphreys, Brett, 'The Law that Dared to Lay the Blame...', *Gay and Lesbian Humanist*. The Pink Triangle Trust: Summer 2002. <http://www.galha.org/glh/214/humphreys.html>
- Jackson, Stella, 'Correspondence', *Stand* 9, [1955?]: 16.
- Lehmann, John, 'Foreword', *Orpheus* 1, 1948: vi.
- , 'Foreword', *The London Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 1, February 1954: 11-12.
- , 'Foreword', *The London Magazine*, Vol. 3, No. 5, May 1956: 13.
- Morris, Harry, 'The Passions of Poets', *Sewanee Review*. Sewanee, Tennessee: University of the South. Vol. LXXIX, No. 2, Spring 1971.
- Morris, Richard, 'Goodbye Brain, I NEVER REALLY LOVED YOU. I ONLY WANTED YOUR CHEMICALS', *Small Press Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1971: 7.
- Phillips, Melanie and Martin Kettle, 'The murder of innocence', *Guardian*, 16 February 1993: Guardian 2 Supplement.
- Platzner, Robert L., 'The Metamorphic Vision of J.G. Ballard', *Essays in Literature*, Vol. X, No. 2, Fall 1983: 216.
- Sidorsky, Phyllis G., 'War Boy: A Country Childhood', *School Library Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 5, May 1990: 116.
- Silkin, Jon, 'Editorial', *Stand* 2, 1952: 2.
- Sladen, David, 'Credo', *New Departures*, Summer 1959, No. 1: 7-8.
- Wright, David and Patrick Swift, 'On The Margin', *X*, November 1959, Vol. 1, No. 1: 79-80.

III. Related Internet Resources

3:AM Magazine Webpages, <http://www.3ammagazine.com>

Ambit Webpages, <http://www.ambitmagazine.com>

Ballard, J.G. Webpages (A spikemagazine.com website), <http://www.jgballard.com>

Born Magazine Webpages, www.bornmagazine.org

British Library Little Magazine Collection Webpages,
<http://www.bl/uk/collections/british/litmag.html>

Contemporary Authors database, Gale Group, <http://galenet.galegroup.com>

Literature Online database, ProQuest Information and Learning Company,
<http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>

McGrath, Rick Webpages, <http://www.rickmcgrath.com/jgb.html>

National Poetry Library Collections Webpages,
www.poetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/collect/txtmag.html

Neville, Richard Webpages, <http://www.richardneville.com>

Nottingham Trent University Little Magazines Project Webpages,
<http://english.ntu.ac.uk/littlemagazines/main.asp>

Oxford Reference Online Premium database, Oxford University Press,
<http://www.oxfordreference.com>

Penn State University, *Ambit* Poetry Archive Webpages,
<http://www.psu.edu/speccolls/FindingAids/ambit4.html>

University College London, The Little Magazines, Alternative Press and Poetry Store Collections
Webpages, <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/Library/special-coll/litmags.htm>

Xreferplus Online database, <http://www.xreferplus.com>