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HENRY MILLER ON THE ROLE OF THE POET IN SOCIETY:


Never was there a time when the existence of the poet was more menaced than today... The status and condition of the poet -- I use the word in the large as well as the strict sense -- unquestionably reveal the true state of a people's vitality... What we lack in this country, what we are not even aware that we lack, is the dreamer, the inspired madman. (viii)

In the whirlpool of coming darkness and chaos, a veritable TOHU-VO BOHU,* the poets of today are withdrawing, embalming themselves in a cryptic language which grows ever more and more unintelligible. And as they black out, one by one, the countries which gave them birth plunge resolutely toward their doom. The work of assassination, for such it is, will soon reach its end. As the voice of the poet becomes stifled, history loses its meaning and the eschatological promise bursts like a new and frightening dawn upon the consciousness of man. Only now, at the edge of the precipice, is it possible to realize that "everything we are taught is false..." The past is engulfing us... the future always has and always will belong to the poet. (ix-x)

Now that we have succeeded in breaking down the atom, the cosmos is split wide open. Now we face in every direction at once... Either, like [Rimbaud] we are going to renounce all that our civilization has stood for thus far, and attempt to build afresh, or, we are going to destroy it with our own hands. When the poet stands at the nadir, the world must indeed be upside down. If the poet can no longer speak for society, but only for himself, then we are at the last ditch. (33)

How like the wanderers of the heavens are the poets! We live amidst dead fact whereas they live in signs and symbols. Their longings coincide with ours only when we approach perihelion... It is [the poet's] mission to seduce us, to render intolerable this limited world which bounds us... The signs and symbols which the poet employs are one of the surest proofs that language is a means of dealing with the unutterable and the inscrutable. The language of the poet is asymptotic; it runs parallel to the inner voice when the latter approaches the infinitude of spirit. (54-55)

Conditioned to ecstasy, the poet is like a gorgeous unknown bird mired in the ashes of thought. [His] greatest desire is to burn with ecstasy, to commerge his little flame with the central fire of the Universe. If he accords the angels wings so that they may come to him with messages of peace, harmony and radiance from worlds beyond, it is only to nourish his own dreams of flight, to sustain his own belief that he will one day reach beyond himself, on wings of gold... The outer man dies away in order to reveal the golden bird which is winging its way toward divinity. (75) I call that man a poet who is capable of profoundly altering the world (38-39)

* Hebrew for "void and without form," from the Book of Genesis
BERN PORTER INTERNATIONAL MISSION STATEMENT

Welcome to BERN PORTER INTERNATIONAL, A Literary Newspaper and Bulletin of the Institute for Advanced Thinking. In addition to providing a forum and worldwide venue for experimental poetry and prose writing, BERN PORTER INTERNATIONAL is an info-organ of the Institute for Advanced Thinking, founded by Andrew Porter near Houlton, Maine, in 1830. To quote Bern:

On Tuesday morning around 9:18 of March, 1830, my great grandfather Andrew Porter at the Porter Homestead in Porter Settlement said in the presence of twenty-three of my Porter relatives, "Life has three acts -- eating, sleeping, thinking. When you do the latter, do it creatively in a stimulating environment." (1)

With those words, apparently, the Institute for Advanced Thinking took birth. Its current director, Bernard Harden Porter, is a widely known author, scientist, visual artist, performance artist, and publisher. His life long mission has been to create a global awareness in the twentieth century (Bern was born in 1911) of the essential unity of two apparent dichotomies -- the hard sciences and the hard-to-pin-down humanities. He has written essays which have been published under the titles, “SciArt Manifesto” and “SciArch, SciEd, SciPoe, SciEng,” whose themes should be intuitively obvious to anyone with a working understanding of Orwellian Newspeak (!)

Mr. Porter received degrees in physics from Colby College and Brown University, and, as a young man in the 1930's and 1940's developed his career as a research scientist. He worked on the team that developed the graphite process which created the picture tube, thus pioneering television technology. For the Manhattan Project he worked on the separation of plutonium isotopes in the invention of the atomic bomb.

But, like so many scientists and technicians who were involved

(continued page 7)

(1) Porter, Bern & Holtz, Sheila, A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE: A PHOTO TOUR OF THE SCULPTURE GARDEN AT THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED THINKING, Ann Arbor, MI: Roger Jackson, Publisher, 1997
DON'T FORGET THE SALT

Evaporate 5 Qts. polluted salt water in sun in shallow pan
Pour off water
Scrape crystals
Can be used for trade or barter

Don't forget Don't forget Don't forget
Do not forget
Do not four get
Do not
Do not!
    Do nothing
    Do no thing

Janelle Viglini

WINSTON CHURCHILL IN THE NIGHT

Winston Churchill,
my cat, went out
    last night.
Scooting through the door
    not held wide.
(It was cold outside)
as the dog came in,
sniffed at him.
passing sentries in the night for the thousandth time.

If things go right,
    he'll be back.

Paul Luria

"Exploitation is the problem. Violence is a side-effect. You don't have social pathologies in egalitarian societies. At least, the fairer the society is, the fewer of them you have. We're getting less fair, not more. Exploitation is institutionalized. The violence is going to increase, not go away."

Jack Saunders (1)

(1) Saunders, Jack, FORTY, Eugene, OR: Popular Reality 1987 (118-119)
The most exquisite class of performers: the performance poets

The performance poet is the poet who transforms the page to the stage, flips the script and poetizes from the heart. He/she is the most powerful of the so-called "performance artists."

I guarantee you—one word (poetic, spoken from the inner core) is worth more than a thousand antics, histrionics and gimmicks put together.

Anybody can write poetry, but only the performance poet can become the poem itself (poetry-in-motion).

KETAN BEN CAESAR
Philadelphia
Prologue

Bare stage. 2 men facing each other. One is wearing a white shirt and black pants and the other is wearing just the reverse although that is not exactly their roles; they merely represent 2 sides to any given question. A newspaper is on the floor.

-This is a play about a play.
-Ad nauseum.
-Why do they call it a play? This is serious stuff!
-Relatively speaking.
-Relative to what?
-Relative to what you just said.
-But I'm a real person, aren't I? Well, aren't I?
-Speak for yourself.
-Look, just because I'm an actor in a play, doesn't mean that I'm not a real, live, human being!
-Ha, ha, ha, that's a good one: how to act like a real, live, human being!
-Well, does it?
-Does what?
-Mean that I'm not a real, live, human being?
-It takes one to know one.
-Just who the heck do you think you are, anyway? (Picks up a newspaper). Look at this! It's just a goshdarn prop!
-Don't push it! (Pause).
-There's absolutely nothing to do.
-You've only got yourself to blame for that. (Pause).
-(Fumbles for a cigarette). Got a light?
-I don't smoke.
-Damn!
-Look, you think your'e real, but your'e not. It's time to face reality, whatever that is.
-If only I could get my hands on the goshdarn author!
-That would only make things worse. If you think your'e suffering, what about the audience?
-What audience?
-The real people who paid real money to see this shit.
-So that's why they call it a play!
-Your'e catching on. Quick, someone hold up a mirror before the moment is lost.
-The moment is lost.
-Then let's begin, shall we? (Pause. The actors switch sides and repeat the play, taking on the other's role. They do this a third time, but after the line, 'Why do they call it a play?', a cane comes out from under the curtain which the actors try to dodge while saying their lines. Finally the stage manager comes out to escort them off the stage followed by people in mourning. Someone in the audience shouts 'Bravo! Bravo!' and someone else shouts 'Author! Author!'. Someone stands up and takes a bow and then gestures to the audience to do the same. The last of the dialogue is heard offstage).
in the dawn of the Nuclear Age, Bern was, at the time, uniformed as to the true purpose of his labors and the political agenda of the governments behind the work. The truth became clear to him only after reading of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the NEW YORK TIMES, along with millions of other Americans. Devastated, he abruptly abandoned science and took refuge in the arts -- as a kind of psychic healing process. Details of this period can be gleaned from Bern’s treatise, “I’ve Left” (Marathon Press, 1963; Something Else Press, 1971) and from two Porter biographies by James Scheville (THE ROAR OF THE MARKET AND THE SILENCE OF THE TOMB, 1956, and WHERE TO GO, WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU ARE BERN PORTER, 1991.)

During the next five decades Bern nurtured the Institute for Advanced Thinking as a collective interdisciplinary “Think Tank.” Through his activities as an alternative publisher, mail artist, and performance artist / performance poet he gathered a total of forty-four international “scholars” of the Institute with whom he communicated by mail, eschewing such technologies and telephone, e-mail, and internet.

One aim of this publication is to provide a means of closer communication among these “scholars” as well as other affixionados and interested parties. In addition, we intend to publish a variety of “literature at the fringe,” in the tradition of Bern Porter Books and Bern Porter Publishing -- work that might not otherwise find an audience in the highly commercialized, highly competitive, post-modern world of letters. In the 1940’s and 1950’s, Bern Porter was one the first American publishers to offer titles by Henry Miller, Rober Duncan, Parker Tyler, and other San Francisco / Big Sur / Berkeley writers. He was also involved in CIRCLE Magazine, and BERKELEY: A JOURNAL OF MODERN CULTURE, both pioneer organs of the alternative arts.

In the 1970's, '80's, and '90's, Bern has channelled much of his creative effort into the International Mail Art Network, a loose affiliation of artists and writers which traces its roots to the experimental movements of the early-to-mid twentieth century -- Fluxus, Praxis, Futurism, Surrealism, Dada, visual and concrete poetry, as well as an area in which Bern was especially seminal: Found Art and Found Poetry.
Each issue of BERN PORTER INTERNATIONAL will include as a closing message, an essay or other written statement by Mr. Porter, as well as an update of the Institute's activities. Interested persons may write to Bern Porter, Institute for Advanced Thinking, 50 Salmond St., Belfast, ME 04915; or to N. Bernstein & S. Holtz, Editors, BERN PORTER INTERNATIONAL, P.O. Box 553, Royersford, PA 19468 USA

From WALK ON THE WILD SIDE, by Bern Porter:

In physics we are taught from the very beginning: look, look, look; mainly at small, small unnoticed things, patinas, odd shapes, seeking truths, facts. Thus, the “found principle” largely associated with my name is no different than walking over a beach of millions of pebbles and spotting one of such color, brilliance, or shape that one is moved to not only pick it up, but to take it home to the mantle piece, or carry it around as a pocket piece, charm, or good luck piece. Hence, with me, going through all manner of printed matter I find exciting word combinations (Found Poems) startling shapes (Founds) or going through the dumps of Maine towns, I find all manner of forms (Contemporary Artifacts -- Found Art) which find their way into the galleries and exhibition spaces of the Institute... The eyes are the most receptive, the most sensitive, the most useful tool in our bodies. -- B.P. (2)

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(2) ibid.

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