

The following discussion is copied and pasted from the British and Irish Poets discussion list, and can be found in the list's archives, which are displayed publically. The discussion took place between 19 December 2017 and 12 January 2018. I have edited this discussion to remove various digressions from the topic being discussed.

The discussion subject was titled 'Where does poetry sit in relation to academia, or vice versa?'

At the time of writing this (12 January 2018), the discussion can still be directly linked to at:

<https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A2=ind1712&L=BRITISH-IRISH-POETS&F=&S=&P=73832>

However, it has sometimes been the case that moderators of the British and Irish Poets discussion list have made linking directly to discussions there no longer possible.

Luke

Where does poetry sit in relation to academia, or vice versa? Obviously, it's difficult to make a living from it without being an academic, and that there's no point in snobbery.

I hope the question is not too broad, I have little experience of these things. I mean sitting a PhD sounds kinda fun, and very motivating, but far too expensive, especially.

Luke

Jamie McKendrick

Auden suggested learning a trade to keep as far from academia as possible. I took that seriously and worked as a plasterer through my twenties. Not really complaining but if I'd kept on I'd be earning nearly 7 or 8 times what I do now as a translator.

Jamie

Luke

Is there a poetry underground outside academia? I mean, I think there is

Luke

Luke

Don't get me wrong, I'm not anti academia, though I've known a couple of punks who seemed to be. I'd just be reassured, if the "underground" didn't reduce to the authority of academia. Not just for me!

Luke

Jeffrey Side

Luke, you might find this interesting regarding the "underground" aspect:

<http://www.argotistonline.co.uk/The%20Academisation%20of%20Avant-Garde%20Poetry.htm>

And Tim Allen's response to it:

<http://www.argotistonline.co.uk/Allen%20essay.htm>

Luke

Thanks.

I supposed the original article by Berry was going the other direction, that academic sanctioning isn't necessary, rather than sufficient. The latter seems difficult to take seriously, at least deliberately so. I mean I'll never be part of any academy, but then for similar reasons I won't be entirely "knowing" either, so probably more useful to think about how opposition to an 'otherstream' impinges on the academy itself.

Luke

Tim Allen

Hi Luke—thanks for reading the article. I haven't got in on this thread because I've been away and a bit busy.

I tried to do too much in that article while not spending enough time on the different issues—so I think some of the issues get lost in the mix. I also tried to be fair—too fair maybe, even though some of the stuff I say in there could be taken badly by some in academia. But very few people have contacted or spoken to me about it so I doubt if many have actually read it to the end. It's really a sociological essay, but one based on my own experience and intuition.

Cheers

Tim

Jeffrey Side

Tim, I think your article was ignored (as was the wider feature it was relating to) because most, if not all, of the people supportive of (and professionally involved with) the "academic avant-garde poetry project" don't want to give any dissenting voices of the project the oxygen of publicity. Even to such an extremely balanced assessment of it that your article proved to be. One can't blame them, I suppose, as no one likes criticism. But that not a single "member" of that "body" came forward to comment, is beyond explanation. For a while, I thought that whoever is in charge of the "movement" told them not to. That last sentence is meant to be tongue-in-cheek, by the way—unless, of course, it is, indeed, some kind of coordinated movement. Will we ever know?

Jeffrey Side

Correct me if I'm wrong, but my understanding of academia as it operates within avant-garde poetry is that it has no real counterpart in mainstream poetry. It seems to me, that mainstream poetry is less centralised—in the sense that it seems more disparately organised and disseminated (almost hobbyist-like—I mean that respectfully) than is the case with academic avant-garde poetry, which seems to me to have become something of a production line in recent years.

David Lace

I've done more reading of the articles on the Argotist and the general consensus seems that the problem isn't to do that much with teaching poetry itself but with possible "favouritism" creeping in between student and teacher and the teacher promoting the student's poems and getting them published in magazines respected by academia. But poets who are not students don't have this advantage and so their poems won't see the light of day etc. This means that only students supported by teachers/academics etc will get their work respected. Leading to an inaccurate picture to the outside world of the state of play about what avantgarde poetry is. In other words, a very limited view of what avantgarde poetry is.

Tim Allen

That's about the size of it David. That's one of my points anyhow.

First time I've ever posted on Christmas Day.

So happy Christmas to all.

Tim

David Lace

Tim, glad I summed it up ok. I don't know why the Argotist essays on it were ignored seeing as it seems to be a very important issue. Almost like cancer running through academic poetry.

Jamie McKendrick

Though I struggled with the print format of your Argotist piece, Tim, I gathered your initial objection was the introduction of poets reading via a series of irrelevant academic accolades. I think we're in agreement about that.

Geoffrey Hill, Craig Raine and J. H. Prynne have all been academics but that says nothing (at least to me) about their work as poets. I remember one poet being introduced as Sir Professor X Y (or was it the other way round) and thinking in Quakerish mode just the name would do fine.

Jamie

Tim Allen

The term 'academic poetry' was always pretty vague but I suppose back in the day it came to mean a type of poetry that was usually formally exact and self-consciously learned, with a classical bias and references etc.—something that was never expected to be popular outside of the coterie, but I'm not sure if I ever read such a thing so maybe it never really existed.

In my article I make a distinction between the post-avant (never mind the terms—it's what they stand for that counts) poetry written from mostly within higher education establishments and systems and post-avant poetry written mostly outside of that. Among the polarities between the two I described the former as smooth and the latter as jagged etc. I am not going to repeat here all the other differences, my point being that there ARE noticeable differences.

Cheers

Tim

Peter Riley

Has anyone thought of not classifying poetry?

p

Jamie McKendrick

A recurrent thought for me, I'm afraid. I've expended rather too much time and effort hereabouts in that enterprise.

Jamie

David Lace

Tim, I think "academic poetry" can also mean in today's context poetry written by post avant poets 'within higher education establishments and systems' as you say. Poetry that is no longer 'formally exact and self-consciously learned, with a classical bias and references' but is still held as being more "superior" than the same poetry written by post avant poets outside of higher education.

This has reminded me that the term "theory" in relation to post avant poetry doesn't necessarily refer to prosody and other aspects of poetic composition but more to the ideologies and concepts underlying the way

poems are written and received by readers. The term is used more “philosophically” than it is in mainstream poetry, which uses it to refer to close reading, and traditional analysis of metaphors and similes etc. From what I can gather, post avant/avantgarde poets and academics are more heavily into theory than their mainstream equivalents. Is that right?

Tim Allen

I'm here David, but have had my mind elsewhere. I think there are multiple reasons why the issues I raise in the article are not being talked about, and most of those reasons are connected with the problem itself, so it's a Catch 22. I have friends who privately agree with me but who for understandable reasons prefer not to debate it.

Thanks for your support as well.

Cheers

Tim

Peter Riley

Yes, but are all academics actually “academics”?

Is Tim one? Carol Anne Duffy? Simon Armitage? J. H. Prynne? Keston Sutherland? Robert Sheppard? Peter Hughes?

It makes sense to me to think in terms of an older word, “learnèd”. Some poets are learned and some are not and some are half a dozen of one and six of the other. You're then talking about features of their poetry rather than their income.

P.

David Lace

Peter, you've missed the point. It's not about what “academic” means and who can rightly be called one. It's about avantgarde poets employed by academia giving their poetics students an unfair publishing and promoting advantage because they are operating from within academia.

In the list you give Carol Anne Duffy and Simon Armitage aren't avantgarde poets. The others could or not be learnèd. What does that word mean anyway in this day an age? The point is that avantgarde poets who work in academia (whether they are learnèd or not) have influence and prestige in avantgarde publishing, conferencing and networking circles, which is helpful to them and any of their students whom they choose to promote.

Peter Riley

Surely what you say about avant-garde poets and their relation to the academy is the same as for any other kind of poet. Of course creative writing tutors promote, as far as they are able, what they think are brilliant students. Before CW it was done through personal extra-mural contacts, and still is. If there is a problem, it is the same problem for non-avant-garde poets.

Some avant-garde practices were invented within universities and have never been anywhere else.

Some avant-garde poets claim to scorn the success which is attained through networking, conferences and all that, as a model of a corrupt society. Possibly some non-avant-garde poets do too.

Thanks for clarifying the issue. I missed some earlier contributions, including Tim's essay. Not being an A-G poet I have little to say.

pr

David Lace

Peter, I agree, the problem does exist within mainstream academic poetry circles but according to the original Argotist piece about the issue, the problem manifests itself more concerted and is more organised than any individual academic mainstream poetry tutor giving a helping hand to one or two of his/her promising students.

I think Jeffrey earlier alluded to it being something along these lines, rather than the haphazard way it operates in non-avantgarde academic poetry circles.

Another thing that the Argotist piece seems to be saying is that this problem is not one that is associated with avantgarde poetry per se, but is connected to avantgarde poetry as it manifests itself and is taught and promoted in academia. So I don't think the Argotist piece is anti-avantgarde poetry in principle.

Tim is an avantgarde poet and he too is critical of the situation, as are his friends (who might also be avantgarde poets), as he said earlier: 'I have friends who privately agree with me but who for understandable reasons prefer not to debate it.' Presumably they prefer not to debate it because they feel that doing so might damage their standing within avantgarde poetry circles.

Tim also said earlier: 'I think there are multiple reasons why the issues I raise in the article are not being talked about, and most of those reasons are connected with the problem itself, so it's a Catch 22.' I agree with him.

Tim Allen

It depends on who is doing the talking David. While I suppose I am one side of a certain line the term covers such a wide variety of different poetic practises these days that the only real pointer it gives is to a kind of community of names, not tribal exactly but similar. As I've said here before I don't particularly mind what my stuff gets called but I am interested when people try to eek out particulars. In some respects I don't think some of my work is any closer to the avant than a poet such as Peter Riley, but it depends on what work we are referring to. Peter Riley says he is not an avant-garde poet and I suppose he is right, but the 'community of names' he is associated with, and who tend to be the ones who appreciate his work most, definitely include many who get so labelled etc.

Cheers

Tim

David Lace

Tim, I always assumed Peter was an avantgarde poet for the reasons you give, that the poets who like him are among those associated with the avantgarde. If that is so, I wonder why they like him, then? Maybe they are more catholic in their poetic tastes than I assumed.

Peter Riley

Because the distinction avant-garde/not avant-garde was not taken as an indicator of quality but more objectively. And because I hovered between one and the other, as did others. What's A-G about most of the poetry in those years of John James, John Hall, John Riley, Tim Longville, Douglas Oliver? I don't think any of the poets involved would have liked to be called avant-garde or experimental, They were clearer that they were not what is now called mainstream, but that was largely a result of adversarial treatment by others. JH Prynne sent his poem on the death of Paul Celan to The Times as a news item, and was surprised and dismayed that they rejected it.

pr

Jamie McKendrick

Another way of looking at this would be to doubt the objectivity of any of these bipartisan assumptions. Even if the criteria for Tim's reading site is mainly conditioned by the idea that 'a' is 'a' because it is not 'b', it would

be a mistake to assume most people who read and enjoy poetry feel obliged to take any notice of these categories.

Jamie

Tim Allen

Agree, mostly—not quite sure though about John Hall. So John if you are listening—????

And this matches my own point about identity being determined by what something is not, not by what it is. Back to shades of Saussure.

Nevertheless, some of the things that currently mark out a poet as being called 'experimental' or avant are pretty obvious—those who incorporate technology as an integral part of the work (and not just a means)—those whose work appears to cross boundaries with other artforms (this would include the performative)—those whose processes of composition include methodologies associated with artificial forms, found texts, restrictions and chance—and those whose work appears to break the usual rules of language etc. But after that it becomes a bit more difficult but thinking of a lot of work that has appeared over the past decade I would include—those whose work seems to be engaging with issues of language itself, especially as those issues relate to political and cultural questions about gender and identity.

So, have I left anything out?

Robert Hampson

Thanks, Tim

This sounds like a useful outlining of the contemporary 'experimental'.

Robert

Jamie McKendrick

My rather general remark wasn't meant to be merely obstructive. I can see how practises in poetry evolve out of shared projects, and acknowledging what's shared and held in common might be helpful to a reader. And Tim, among others here, must be wearied by my periodically expressed opposition to these classifications. Perhaps I ought to preface these statements by personalising them and saying that I find the divisions mainly unhelpful, only I very much suspect that I'm not alone in that, and that a whole generation or two of younger poets will have discarded them.

Still I have to say, that like Robert, I find Tim's last post describing a series of cross-over poetic manoeuvres clear and helpful. Sadly, I find myself stranded on the wrong side of this divide.

Jamie

Tim Allen

With regard to 'younger poets' Jamie, I don't think you are right, not from what I've been picking up anyway. What I find is that elements of the old arguments are coming out unchanged in essence but dressed in different clothes. On the wider front, yes, there has been a coming together of the different poetics (hybrid etc) with a more adventurous use of language from some of the young mainstream merging with a greater accessibility (in terms of subject) from some of the young avants, BUT, on the avant side there has also been a recent increase of both activity and a sense of 'we are not doing what that lot are doing'. The reasons for this are, as always, very difficult to work out, but it does seem to have something to do with the social groups that an individual finds themselves mixing with and sharing ideas with—again, this is where the influence of higher education networks become evident.

Cheers

Tim

David Lace

We seem to have drifted off-topic again.

Peter Riley

I think what Tim says about recent convergences is quite right. The question is, then, how do you recognise a poetical writing as “mainstream” when it no longer has the necessary characteristics?. (For that matter how do you define Geoffrey Hill’s *Clavics* is a stylistic contrary to, say, Jack Spicer’s *Holy Grail*? (without proposing, of course they they actually agree about anything.)) Is associative definition (such an university emplacement, scale of reward) enough? Is mere assertion (“We still are not one of that lot whatever they do”) sufficient?. I think what Jamie says about the obsolescence of binary conflict as basic condition of production is quite right.

pr

Jamie McKendrick

Tim, in reply to yours and somewhat parallel to what Peter says below, I’m not really talking about convergence though that might be the case. I suspect you too have a problem with the term ‘hybrid’ though for different reasons. We understand a hybrid to be the product of two different kinds of plants or animals which each have determined features. For me, these two camps have no such determined features unless we’re willing to accept caricatures or very generalised tendencies. The trouble for me is that I can’t see poets meaningfully engaging with either caricatures or generalised tendencies. In terms of the literary—leaving aside other contributory experiences—what poets engage with (and by this I mean learn from) are particular poems, particular poets. I take back what I said earlier about the ‘theoretical’! This experience is personal, grainy, magnetic, intimate, intensely focused (though I suppose all that could be theorised). There is nothing stopping a young poet, or an old one for that matter, learning a great deal from both Hill and Spicer, or from both Roy Fisher and Elizabeth Bishop. This isn’t hybridity—more like serendipity.

I have far more concern, vaguely returning to that CW topic, about its teaching if it were to perpetuate these kinds of binaries, explicitly or otherwise, as I think it sometimes does, than I’d have about the hegemony of university networks. You found your way, Tim, to a whole set of

preferences, gradually, without being steered in this manner, as I suppose all of us from an older ‘untutored’ generation did. (Yes, I know that raises other questions about an exclusionary canon, but nothing quite as restrictive...)

Jamie

Robert Hampson

In response to Jamie’s last point, there is the issue of where the students themselves situate their work—and the kind of networks they might already be part of. I am thinking here of some of my own research students. Some of these i have co-supervised with Andrew Motion and Jo Shapcott, where i have had responsibility for the critical component of the PhD. Two I co-supervised with Andrew Motion were Declan Ryan and Robert Selby—one working on Ian Hamilton; the other on Mick Imlah. The positioning of each can be read from this—and my networks are no use to either. Another, co-supervised with Jo Shapcott, was already published by Carcanet (however we/you want to read that) before she started and had an extensive network in place. She has produced some work (not prompted by me) with found material. (thinking of Tim’s earlier email), though most of her work is not in this mode. (She has also used the term ‘hybrid’ from time to time for this practice.) Another, supervised solely by me, would not identify herself as ‘avant-garde’, but, after working on Forche, Notley and Berssenbrugge (by her own choice), is now producing poetry which her previous publisher is regarding with suspicion... and puts down to my bad influence. Again, these are poets with their own well-established networks, and ‘the hegemony of university networks’ doesn’t apply.

Robert

Jamie McKendrick

Good to have some detail on this, Robert. I meant to say 'the supposed hegemony of university networks' in that sentence, but it was probably

pompous enough anyway...

Jamie

Robert Hampson

Thanks for this, Jamie. Somewhat ungratefully, I was going to pick further at that 'supposed hegemony'. In my sense of the current 'avant-garde' scene in London, there are obviously clusters of practitioners around Royal Holloway, Birkbeck, and Roehampton (for example), and this is embodied in various events organised in these institutions. However, most of the poetry readings in London take place outside the institutions: Jeff Hilson's Xing the Line or SJ Fowler's various projects seem to me to be apart from the official institutions, though both individuals have university affiliations. Writers Forum, the most influential of the London 'avant-garde' poetry institutions, has always been outside the university system, and there are a number of less well-known reading series (like those run by Mischa Foster Poole and others) which are outside the academy. The field of 'avant garde' publication (presses and magazines)—with the exception of Veer press—is also largely outside the academy. One more thing: after a certain point, one of the features of 'avant-garde' publication is that influence is generally in inverse relation to age. No country for old men.

Robert

Tim Allen

Interesting evidence from the concrete world Robert. Thanks.

And of course the hegemony (I never used the word 'hegemony' by the way) of university networks does not always apply. But I am wondering here what exactly constitutes an individual's well-established network, and just how distant it is from institutions and professional contacts, including second and third hand contacts through likeminded friends etc.

Cheers

Tim

Tim Allen

Robert, I think the 'university affiliations' you mention below are just as important with regard to the issue as are things from within the system. But in general what direction do you think it is going?

Very interesting final sentence too. Tell me about it.

Cheers

Tim

Michael Peverett

Just to say that I've been belatedly reading through this discussion and enjoying everyone's thoughts. It took me forever to track back to the link to Tim's essay so I'm putting it here again, solely for my own convenience.

<http://www.argotistonline.co.uk/Allen%20essay.htm>

While I differ strongly from Tim (and perhaps most folks here) in taking a basically relativistic view of literary value, to me the corollary of this is not universal indifference for all poetry but, on the contrary, reverence. The challenge as a reader is to find the meeting-point with a poet where that reverence becomes genuine and not just a theoretical concession. A high number of the modern UK writers that I keep going back to are notably un-academic (though I'll run away from defining that)... whether it's Maggie O'Sullivan, Allan Fisher, Bill Griffiths, Ken Edwards, Richard Makin.. or Elisabeth Bletsoe who is not usually considered A-G despite

her important Torrance connection. ... as well as some people on this list, who I won't embarrass. Of course I'm also an Andrea Brady fan, but there you go.

Upset to learn of Robin Hamilton's death. I was wondering why we hadn't jostled about Shakespeare or Donne recently.

David Lace

Good point, Tim. I think Robert's outlining of things is perhaps a bit naive. Your point about 'second and third hand contacts through likeminded friends etc.' is probably how the "influence" really operates.

Also, Robert's hint (complaint?) that the old are in some way excluded is interesting.

<https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A2=ind1801&L=BRITISH-IRISH-POETS&D=0&P=53810>

Tim Allen

Yes. Exactly. This is a point I try to make in the article but I think it gets lost.

Cheers

Tim

Tim Allen

Yes Michael, the continuing mystery that is Elisabeth Bletsoe. Because she was a close friend I feel a bit guilty talking about her in forums like this but it is a fact that she remains one of the most underrated (or rather 'relatively unknown') poets in the country. She was never prolific and her poetry has always gone hand-in-hand with other interests but nevertheless I think it is true that all those who know her work well rate it really highly and are perplexed by her lack of public success. Shearsman in particular have always supported her work to the full. I could say more on this to do with the different poetry groupings and their prejudices and blind-spots but I would only be inviting more trouble.

Cheers

Tim

Luke

What no-one has explained yet, is how academics can sponsor their students, how that works beyond a good reference. Spill it!

I've ordered some books, off of this discussion. I trust that is not how it works.

Cheers,

Luke

Jamie McKendrick

But I still think Luke's question about how this patronage is actually supposed to function deserves an answer. (Patronage or in Bourdieu's terms 'institutionalised cultural capital'...

J

David Lace

Jamie, “patronage” is a good word to use. There’s nothing wrong with literary patronage per se—literary modernism probably wouldn’t have happened without it. Nor would many now historic artistic movements. I think Tim’s point and the Argotist’s is that such “patronage” has become too organised and almost factory-like. Almost serving as a PR campaign for avantgarde poetry that is seen as “the acceptable sort” as opposed to that which isn’t. This is what the general gist of the Argotist piece seems to be getting at when it says:

‘The ultimate concern regarding the academisation of avant-garde poetry, is that a two-tier system is being created, comprising of experimental poetry that is officially sanctioned, or legitimised, by the academy, and an experimental poetry that is not.’

The recent mentioning of Elisabeth Bletsoe by Tim as being underrated/ignored seems to illustrate what the quote above seems to be saying.

Jamie McKendrick

David, the quote you give sums up the issue well. Though I’ve trespassed onto the conversation, I’m sure others here know more than I do, as I’m situated on the periphery of the academy, and I’m not particularly signed up to any camp.

Michael and Tim’s point about Elizabeth Bletsoe may well be relevant, but there are quite a number of poets we could all think of that may have been overlooked for other reasons than the lack of academic endorsement.

So the question doesn’t have to be skeptical, but I too was wondering how much difference being in some kind of academic circle actually makes for individual poets, how it helps them find an audience. If I hear some poet praised by what I consider a trustworthy source I’d be disposed to look at the work. This process was traditionally done by reviewing, but that seems an activity in decline. What we’re calling the avant-garde does seem to have a far higher profile with regard to critical articles, research etc. so perhaps it’s there that the exclusion for some is more keenly felt.

Jamie

David Lace

Jamie, I think you are right in saying ‘What we’re calling the avant-garde does seem to have a far higher profile with regard to critical articles, research etc. so perhaps it’s there that the exclusion for some is more keenly felt.’ I think this aspect is a good measuring tool to gauge things with. Mainstream poetry doesn’t seem to have an equivalent set of yardsticks—or if it does it is never seen as such.

So because of this it would be very easy for an “outsider avantgarde” poet, who had no links to academia, no academic contacts or academically affiliated peer-group network to be noticed by academia. And should he/she try to “break-in” to all of this he/she would probably be seen as a “gatecrasher” who hasn’t “properly gone through the system (avantgarde postgraduate writing courses, going to avantgarde academic conferences, reading their poems at “sanctioned” avantgarde poetry readings and informal avantgarde poetry reading get-togethers etc). He/she would stand no chance of any a consideration.

And as Robert alluded to earlier, if the said poet was also “the wrong age”—over 40, he/she may as well pack-up and go home. It is probably no coincidence that most (if not all) newly recognised avantgarde poets are young, as it is predominantly the young who go through the higher education system.

So all of this has a lot to do with class, age and which avantgarde academic peer group network you are part of. I can’t put it all down, as Peter alluded to, to just one or two university tutors giving their favourite students a helping hand. That sort of thing does go on, but isn’t that significant to this wider problem.

<https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A2=ind1801&L=BRITISH-IRISH-POETS&D=0&P=84302>

David Lace

I should have said:

So because of this it would be very easy for an “outsider avantgarde” poet, who had no links to academia, no academic contacts or academically affiliated peer-group network to not be noticed by academia.

and not:

So because of this it would be very easy for an “outsider avantgarde” poet, who had no links to academia, no academic contacts or academically affiliated peer-group network to be noticed by academia.

Jamie McKendrick

David, yes I'd added the negative in that sentence. As I said it's not an area I feel qualified to comment on. I'd say it's a general affliction of poets to feel overlooked, common even to those we might feel have received an undue amount of attention. And there's often a reality to it, when the media only bother if there's a large cash prize or a squalid quarrel involved.

It's all a bit speculative as the conditionals in your 2nd paragraph register, so it might be worth hearing from someone who has some real evidence of exclusion. When you say such a poet— ignored, uninvited, and old to boot (though 40 sounds young to me!)—‘may as well pack up and go home’, my response is that (apart from the age) this is the condition in which all poets begin, and most continue. It goes with the territory so you keep on only if it matters enough to you.

Jamie

David Lace

Jamie, I agree that the media and poetry prizes can make some poets feel ignored, but I think this sort of “being overlooked” is mainly the situation with individual poets (most probably mainstream ones, who see prizes as something worth having). The type of “being overlooked” in the context of academic avantgarde poetry seems to be a problem that affects “types” or “schools” of poetry, as well as individual “maverick” poets (William Blake comes to mind here).

It was very astute of you to note that ‘What we're calling the avant-garde does seem to have a far higher profile with regard to critical articles, research etc. so perhaps it's there that the exclusion for some is more keenly felt.’ And I think it goes some way in illustrating the more “professional” approach academic avantgarde poetry takes in perpetuating itself as opposed to the more “relaxed” way mainstream poetry does. The constant need to “create content” for the subjects of the ‘critical articles, research etc’ forces the academic avantgarde poetry “king makers” to constantly look for poets to study—poets presumably drawn from the ranks of the very ones that academic avantgarde poetry academics are teaching. It is a form of “literary inbreeding”.

40 is not old to me either, but I just used that number to say “poets who are not the usual age students are at university”—which is around 23.

From the discussion so far it seems that only Tim and I fully agree. I would say that you are perhaps agnostic on the subject. I think, as Tim said earlier, a few more on this list agree but are too afraid to say so for obvious reasons.

It reminds me a bit of the debate about racism in the Metropolitan Police Force—police officers who knew it went on never came forward until the media exposed it all.

Jeffrey Side

David, I've been avoiding this discussion in case it resulted in too much of a heated argument. But the discussion has, so far, been generally courteous. What you have said tallies with what I think and have written about in the past; though you have articulated it far more eloquently and forthrightly.

I'm pleased that The Argotist Online feature about this topic has prompted at least this discussion here. I had originally hoped it would have caused more of an online impact, but from what Tim has said I can see why it hasn't.

In the spirit of friendship, I invite those of you here who agree with the Argotist feature but are too wary of making yourselves known here, to contact me privately to express your views. I genuinely want to hear what

other (unrevealed) supporters of the Argotist feature think. It would be good to get the views of some women supporters. The feature was originally criticised because of the predominance of male participants. I did try to get some female ones, but the ones I approached refused to take part.

David Lace

Thanks Jeffrey. Appreciated. Cheers.
