

## Letters

Dear Sir,

Mr Somlo [issue 17] is under the impression that I, together with “Leavis himself” and “his school”, focus “on the manner, and not the matter, of [Shelley’s] verse”. He also supposes that my letter of 23rd April to the Edgeways discussion group shows that I—as one of “the more doctrinaire adherents of the Leavis school”—“would claim that there is no matter” (sc. in poetry). What basis there is for attributing this last absurdity to me (Leavis’s work speaks for itself), the interested reader may judge by referring to the letter in question.

I myself would respectfully suggest that Mr Somlo needs to develop an interest in Shelley as a poet. If he were to do so, it just might perhaps force him to do some real thinking about the application of the distinction between matter and form—what is said and the way in which it is said—to poetry.

Shelley is a poet, and is only of interest as such to us as readers of poetry. As a philosopher or a social theorist, he is not our business. And, in any case, from the standpoint of those disciplines, he doesn’t even begin to exist. Try bracketing him with Kant or Marx, for example.

Mr Somlo, whatever he himself may fondly imagine, doesn’t value Shelley as a poet (still less as a philosopher, for all his empty talk of Platonic Form), but as a source of aid and comfort in his crusade against “postmodernism” (whatever exactly that may be)—or, to put it bluntly, as a propagandist for his pet phobia. Perhaps writers of advertising copy will be impressed by his version of Shelley. However, to believe, as he evidently does, that anyone who prefers Leavis’s account of Shelley to his must be blinkered or brainwashed is, to borrow a phrase, “a feat” that “requires considerable presumption”. As to his misguided attempt to browbeat the opposition by enlisting (*inter alia*) Yeats in his cause, wasn’t it Yeats who gave Edith Sitwell and James Turner pride of place in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*? Thankfully, Yeats’s poetic talent was of a different order to his critical gifts.

I am sorry if Mr Somlo finds me “peremptory”, but his indifference to logic and open contempt for the discipline of literary criticism have defeated my efforts to extract a discussable position from his remarks.

Richard Stotesbury

Ad nauseam, ad nauseam

Part XXXIII

(To Apple Nodham, on Lyte)

Dear Apple,

I will not claim to make a grand argument. Many of the words you used only leave imprinted meanings, and I can't handle language in the way you do, whether that make me lesser or greater. Some things do strike me though, from what you have written here. You spend such a considerable amount of your energy criticising the work of someone you are not in any reverence of. Why not try on Kierkegaard? He certainly merits trying on.

I cannot disagree with what you are writing about Professor X, but I cannot see your real wish to do it. Shouldn't the daftest man be able to see, and be able to write in simpler terms, that Professor X is some kind of a poorly cooked pancake? You have gone on, at least to some personal distress and agitation, to worry about the sources that he uses, and what he might think about the state of language in the twenty-first century. There is some preoccupation with time. Whether it is his, or yours, it becomes difficult to tell in places. Please, do try on some Samuel Johnson, then. He will at least crack you on the head about "then was" enough times so that what Professor X says about it would seem completely useless. If you need a man about time ... well, this isn't an advert for Sam Johnson, so I'll quit.

I don't have the discipline to challenge "successfully" what you say, to refute it with sources and evidence, or to put you on a better path, of sorts, but I must write something in the least, even if nothing good comes of it.

I hope this writing you do might be some entertainment for those of us who might encounter Professor X. It has been for me, I've encountered such a thing. If you mean to be serious, I think you might want to check that you have not gone off one end of the pier before you realize the other end was attached to land.

I am struck most by this choice of *subject*, for such a lengthy dissertation. When you are acting the playground bully, must you pummel the easiest target?

Cameron Kroetsch