

Poetry

CRITICISM

VOLUME

93

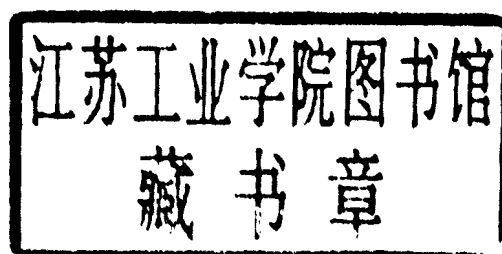


# Poetry Criticism

*Excerpts from Criticism of the Works  
of the Most Significant and Widely  
Studied Poets of World Literature*

## Volume 93

*Michelle Lee*  
Project Editor



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**Poetry Criticism, Vol. 93**

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*Gale*  
27500 Drake Rd.  
Farmington Hills, MI, 48331-3535

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 81-640179

ISBN-13: 978-0-7876-9890-4  
ISBN-10: 0-7876-9890-3

ISSN 1052-4851

## Preface

*P*oetry Criticism (PC) presents significant criticism of the world's greatest poets and provides supplementary biographical and bibliographical material to guide the interested reader to a greater understanding of the genre and its creators. Although major poets and literary movements are covered in such Gale Literary Criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*, PC offers more focused attention on poetry than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries on writers in these Gale series. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the generous excerpts and supplementary material provided by PC supply them with the vital information needed to write a term paper on poetic technique, to examine a poet's most prominent themes, or to lead a poetry discussion group.

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PC is designed to serve as an introduction to major poets of all eras and nationalities. Since these authors have inspired a great deal of relevant critical material, PC is necessarily selective, and the editors have chosen the most important published criticism to aid readers and students in their research. Each author entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that author's work. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's Literary Criticism Series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a PC volume.

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections and book-length poems. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. For foreign authors, the editors have provided original foreign-language publication information and have selected what are considered the best and most complete English-language editions of their works.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems and poetry collections by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.

- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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Linkin, Harriet Kramer. "The Language of Speakers in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*." *Romanticism Past and Present* 10, no. 2 (summer 1986): 5-24. Reprinted in *Poetry Criticism*. Vol. 63, edited by Michelle Lee, 79-88. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005.

Glen, Heather. "Blake's Criticism of Moral Thinking in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*." In *Interpreting Blake*, edited by Michael Phillips, 32-69. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978. Reprinted in *Poetry Criticism*. Vol. 63, edited by Michelle Lee, 34-51. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005.

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# D. J. Enright

## 1920-2002

(Full name Dennis Joseph Enright.) English poet, novelist, essayist, critic, and memoirist.

### INTRODUCTION

A prolific writer of both poetry and prose, Enright is best remembered for his talents as an observer of the many cultures he encountered in his international academic career, and for his sympathetic rendering of the experiences of the working class and the underclass.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Enright was born March 11, 1920, in Warwickshire, England, to George and Grace Cleaver Enright. His Irish father was a postman and a lapsed Catholic, while his mother was an occasionally church-going Methodist. Enright's working class upbringing is the subject of *The Terrible Shears: Scenes from a Twenties Childhood* (1973), one of his most well-known works of poetry. After distinguishing himself at the local Leamington College, Enright won a scholarship to Downing College, Cambridge, where he earned a bachelor's degree (with honors) in English in 1944 and a Master's degree in 1946. In 1949 he earned a D. Litt. degree from the University of Alexandria, Egypt. That same year Enright married Madeleine Harders, a French literature teacher at the university; the couple had one daughter. For the next twenty years, Enright held teaching positions at a number of European and Asian Universities, including Birmingham University; Konan University, Kobe, Japan; Free University of Berlin; Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand; the University of Singapore; and the University of Leeds, Yorkshire, England. From 1975-80 he served as honorary professor of English at the University of Warwick, Coventry, England. Enright was a successful and popular teacher, esteemed by students and colleagues alike. In addition to his teaching, he held editorial positions at *Encounter* magazine in London from 1970-72 and Chatto and Windus, publishers, from 1971-73; he then served as a member of the board of directors at Chatto and Windus until 1982.

Enright's many years as an expatriate clearly influenced the thematics of his poetry and prose. Many of his experiences abroad are reported in *Memoirs of a*

*Mendicant Professor* (1969). These experiences included a number of unfortunate encounters with local officialdom, some of them the result of misunderstandings. Enright perhaps contributed to the misunderstandings by publicly discussing his occasional opium use. The most serious of these incidents was the result of his remarks on government attempts to influence the direction of cultural development, given during his inaugural address—entitled *Robert Graves and the Decline of Modernism*—at the University of Singapore in 1961. Enright was publicly chastised by an official of the Singaporean government, defended by advocates for free speech as well as his students, and encouraged by many colleagues to resign his position in protest. However, he accepted a compromise involving a written statement to the effect that he had no intention of interfering in Singaporean politics—a statement that was published alongside a conciliatory reply from a second governmental official.

Enright's awards include the Cholmondeley Award (1974), the Society of Authors traveling scholarship (1981), and a Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry (1981). He received honorary doctorates from the University of Warwick in 1982 and the University of Surrey in 1985, and was named a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1961 and an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in 1991. Enright spent the last twenty years of his life writing, publishing a number of volumes of poetry and prose until his death on December 31, 2002, of cancer; he was 82.

### MAJOR WORKS

Enright began writing during his college years, regularly contributing essays—mostly on German literature—to *Scrutiny*, the journal founded by his Downing tutor, F. R. Leavis. His first poetry collection, *Season Ticket*, appeared in 1948 and was followed five years later by *The Laughing Hyena and Other Poems*, considered his first major collection. Many of its poems, such as "The Egyptian Cat," "Arab Music," and "University Examinations in Egypt," involve his experiences in Alexandria from 1947 to 1950. It also includes the poem "The Chicken's Foot," praised for its remarkably realistic detail and sometimes compared to the later works of T. S. Eliot. Many of the poems written during Enright's tenure in Japan are contained in the collections *Bread Rather than Blossoms* (1956) and *Some Men Are Broth-*

ers (1960). These poems, many of which examine the lives of the poor, are considered Enright's finest work. The first volume contains two of his most famous individual poems, "Akiko San" and "The Short Life of Kazuo Yamamoto." The second volume, also inspired by his experiences in Berlin and Bangkok, includes "Apocalypse," "Entrance Visa," and "The Noodle-Vendor's Flute."

The autobiographical volume, *The Terrible Shears* (1973), was written after Enright returned to England, abandoned teaching, and began working as an editor and director of a publishing house. The poems contained in the volume attempt to recreate his childhood experiences in a working class environment in the 1920s. His representations of his Midlands childhood are realistic and unsentimental, but have been considered rather flat by some critics. *Paradise Illustrated* (1978) and *A Faust Book* (1979) are satirical interpretations—at the linguistic level—of *Paradise Lost* and *Faust*.

In 1981, Enright published *Collected Poems*, which he followed with *Collected Poems 1987*, *Selected Poems 1990* and *Collected Poems 1949-1998*. In addition to his poetry, Enright also authored four novels: *Academic Year* (1955), *Heaven Knows Where* (1957), *Insufficient Poppy* (1960), and *Figures of Speech* (1965). He also produced several essay collections, a journal, and a memoir, *Injury Time: A Memoir* (2003).

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

One of the most defining characteristics of Enright's poetry is his humanism, evident in the typical subject matter of his poems—described by Philip Gardner as "the inescapable involvement of the man of conscience with the lives and sufferings of his fellows." Douglas Dunn contends that "more than any other poet of his generation, he has been consistent in confronting social and political subjects with passionate intelligence and abundant feeling." Janet Montefiore finds that Enright "seeks the common ground of shared humanity without denying difference," difference here taken to encompass not only race and culture, but also economics.

Children often figure as central players in Enright's poems; Walsh reports that for Enright, "the child . . . faithfully represents the common run of men . . . because he is, like them, and more than most of them—the victim of power." The poem "The Short Life of Kazuo Yamamoto" was inspired by a newspaper report of the suicide of a 13-year-old shoeshine-boy. Enright ironically contrasts the "headaches" of the "great ones" with the headache experienced by the unfortunate child, who ended his suffering with rat poison rather than aspirin. The poem is considered one of Enright's finest, and in general, his representations of children have

been well received. However, critics have been less favorably impressed by Enright's portrayal of his own childhood. Michael Wood, in his review of *The Terrible Shears: Scenes from a Twenties Childhood*, admires Enright's "scrupulously unaccented version of his past," but believes that "it rapidly becomes clear that Enright's virtues as a tough-minded rememberer don't really help his poetry much, indeed, tend to do it in." Dunn also criticizes *The Terrible Shears*, claiming that Enright's "attempt to write about social class is largely unconvincing."

Besides children, other powerless individuals are the typical characters inhabiting Enright's world; according to Walsh, these characters include "the noodle-vendor, the trishaw driver, the one-eyed boy, the aged woman." Montefiore cites Enright's poems about Asian beggars as well as one of his most famous poems about a prostitute, "Akiko San." She also notes his concern for the common laborer, evident in "Processional," which relates the story of construction workers killed in an accident caused by a contractor's refusal to adhere to safety regulations in the interest of speed.

Critics often comment on Enright's keen powers of observation covering a wide variety of subject matter, his commitment to realism and avoidance of romanticism or sentimentality. For Dunn, Enright's early poems "are quite self-consciously about facing up to reality and achieving a viable angle of approach to recent history and topical, observable scenes and people." This almost clinical commitment to realism, however, does not preclude the passing of judgment. Dunn contends that Enright's "acceptance of life is plain, ordinary, and critical in its recognition of human suffering; his detachment is an enabling artifice that creates a sympathetic angle of observation, a literary lens that makes it possible for him to record the scene while leaving room for comment." Similarly, while noting Enright's "sense for the reality residing in, defined by, the exact and lucid detail," Walsh notes that "the observation of the poet is not, of course, the neutrality of the mirror. It depends on a particular attitude and carries a special tone. In Enright's case . . . the attitude is pitying, the tone ironic."

Many critics contend that Enright's best poetry was written during his years in Japan. According to Philip Gardner, the Japan poems—dealing with "overpopulation, poverty, landslides, suicides, streetwalkers rather than Geisha,"—best exhibit Enright's talent "for X-raying through the public 'face' of a country to the bones beneath." Gardner reports that Enright typically avoids references to stereotypical representations of the country involving temples, tea ceremonies and cherry blossoms. Dunn maintains that "stating that Enright's Eastern poems are his best is not enough. They stand among the best poems of their time."

## PRINCIPAL WORKS

## Poetry

*Season Ticket* 1948  
*The Laughing Hyena and Other Poems* 1953  
*Bread Rather than Blossoms* 1956  
*The Year of the Monkey* 1956  
*Some Men Are Brothers* 1960  
*Addictions* 1962  
*The Old Adam* 1965  
*Unlawful Assembly* 1968  
*Selected Poems* 1969  
*In the Basilica of the Annunciation* 1971  
*The Typewriter Revolution and Other Poems* 1971  
*Daughters of Earth* 1972  
*Foreign Devils* 1972  
*The Terrible Shears: Scenes from a Twenties Childhood* 1973  
*Rhyme Times Rhyme* 1974  
*Sad Ires and Others* 1974  
*Paradise Illustrated* 1978  
*A Faust Book* 1979  
*Walking in the Harz Mountains, Faust Senses the Presence of God* 1979  
*Collected Poems* 1981  
*Instant Chronicles* 1985  
*Collected Poems* 1987 1987  
*Selected Poems* 1990 1990  
*Under the Circumstances* 1991  
*Old Men and Comets* 1993  
*Collected Poems 1949-1998* 1998

## Other Major Works

*Commentary on Goethe's "Faust"* (criticism) 1949  
*Academic Year* (novel) 1955  
*Literature for Man's Sake: Critical Essays* (essays) 1955  
*The World of Dew: Aspects of Living Japan* (essays) 1955  
*The Apothecary's Shop: Essays on Literature* (essays) 1957  
*Heaven Knows Where* (novel) 1957  
*Insufficient Poppy* (novel) 1960  
*Robert Graves and the Decline of Modernism* (address) 1961  
*Figures of Speech* (novel) 1965  
*Memoirs of a Mendicant Professor* (essays) 1969  
*Fields of Vision: Essays on Literature, Language, and Television* (essays) 1988  
*Interplay: A Kind of Commonplace Book* (prose) 1995  
*Play Resumed: A Journal* (journal) 1999  
*Signs and Wonders: Selected Essays* (essays) 2002  
*Injury Time: A Memoir* (memoir) 2003

## CRITICISM

## Philip Gardner (essay date winter 1968)

SOURCE: Gardner, Philip. "D. J. Enright Under the Cherry Tree." *Contemporary Literature* 9, no. 1 (winter 1968): 100-11.

[In the following essay, Gardner discusses Enright's humanism with particular attention to the poems written while Enright was living and teaching in Japan.]

In a wry little poem, "The Fairies," D. J. Enright neatly sums up his response to the foreign countries in which he has worked:

Hard up at the time, the fairies gave me  
     what they could: the gift  
 Of laying the right hand on the wrong door-knob . . .  
 As I muse on the goodliness of my hosts,  
     the capital food and wine and  
 The right-minded discourse, that hand goes out  
 And takes hold of the knob and turns it gently  
     and the closet door swings eagerly open  
 And out falls a skeleton with a frightful crash.<sup>1</sup>

Enright's inaugural lecture at the University of Singapore, on which this poem presumably comments, aroused governmental hostility by criticizing the banning of jukeboxes. Such a skeleton appears to an outsider comparatively small; it is his poems about Japan that display to the full his talent for dropping bricks, for X-raying through the public "face" of a country to the bones beneath.

The "humanism," the concern for individuals rather than governments, that conditions this response first made its appearance in *Academic Year*, a novel based on Enright's experience as a lecturer at the University of Alexandria. This description of the novel's most significant character, Bacon, the "unofficial kind of man" who has taught in Egypt for twenty years, clearly suggests the practicality of Enright's response to human problems:

His life was comfortable, reasonably full, and—the few who knew him well suspected—might turn out to be valuable. He thought so too: a urinal here, fresh milk there, one or two human beings temporarily freed from debt.

The personal effort is humble, within the limits of the possible, and so not to be shirked, despite the largeness of the issue itself, which Bacon expresses more abstractly: "the idea of the individual would have to be salvaged from the mud, and soon—before it sank entirely out of sight." Enright reiterates this problem in his preface to *Poets of the 1950's*,<sup>2</sup> and says that "the

poet's task . . . is to get beneath the mud"—a task which requires "a fairly tough intelligence and an unwillingness to be deceived."

These qualities are admirably in evidence in the Japan poems which make up his volume *Bread Rather than Blossoms* (1956) and comprise the largest "ethnic group" in *Some Men Are Brothers* (1960). The tensions of a Japan in transition, in the years 1953 to 1956 when Enright was a visiting lecturer at Kōnan University near Kōbe, seem to have bred an equivalent tension in the poems which makes them a significant microcosm of his verse: certainly the fact that they far outnumber his poems about any of the five other countries in which he has taught indicates how deeply Japan got under his skin, and the pointed observations of his prose commentary *The World of Dew*<sup>3</sup> confirm this diagnosis.

One looks in vain among these poems for testimonials to the Japan of the tourist brochures, the Japan of cherry-blossom, Mount Fuji, Kyōto temples, Nōh, Tea Ceremony, Flower Arrangement, and Zen. All these aspects appear, but as a background against which Enright asserts the human beings and the human values which, for him, they negate. James Kirkup, who came later to Japan and taught at Tōhoku University in Sendai, is more soothing, more pictorial, imitating *haiku* in English;<sup>4</sup> for Enright the tiny *haiku* is "Art for the sake of Something Very Misty Indeed." He prefers the less honored *senryū*, which "at least . . . manages to contend with vulgar and undignified situations"; or, I should suspect, a more idiosyncratic *haiku* like this one by Issa:

Three ha'pence worth  
Of fog I saw  
Through the telescope.<sup>5</sup>

Here is the kind of authentic response which Enright misses in so much Japanese art: the thing described as it is, not as officialdom or a "thin mystique" would like it to be. Enright's approach to Japan is in the same spirit; he is unwilling (and, as we have seen from "The Fairies," unable) to follow the face-saving injunction of "Amplifier": "For honorable hearts can abstain from remarking / What honorable eyes may happen to see." What he remarks, and remarks on, is a Japan of overpopulation, poverty, landslides, suicides, street-walkers rather than geisha, and

Concentration campuses, throbbing with ragged  
uniforms  
And consumptive faces, in a land where the literacy  
Rate is over 100%, and the magazines  
Read each other in the crowded subways.<sup>6</sup>

For Enright, the enigma of the mysterious and inscrutable East is so much obscurantism manufactured by a national vanity to distract attention from inadequacies that, if pointed out, could perhaps be dealt with:

The only enigma that I saw  
Was the plump sayings of the politicians  
Against the thin faces of the poor.<sup>7</sup>

This sharp contrast, in various guises, recurs throughout the Japan poems, so that, in the words of William Walsh, they lack "the unflurried simplicity of a single, total experience" and are "harassed by disagreement and protest."<sup>8</sup> But this comment is intended as description rather than denigration, and Enright himself obviously finds such tension poetically necessary: "Poetry is written on a battlefield," he says; and again: "No man at peace makes poetry." In *The World of Dew* he describes Japan as "the testing ground of humanism. An excess of man and an insufficiency of man's means: if your faith in man survives this test, it is impregnable." This "faith in man" is the positive pole which prevents Enright's poems from seeming to bite the hand that fed him, however much they may have embarrassed his Japanese hosts; and it is apparent that it emerged not too damaged: "If the Japanese can finally liberate themselves from the past and survive the present, they should do great things. There is an unused fund of virtue in them."

Slightly condescending as those final sentences of *The World of Dew* sound, they still convey the tenderness, the sense of human likeness, which underlies Enright's frequent criticisms of Japan; the condescension is perhaps a naturally irritated reaction to the "smug conviction [of 'certain Japanese'] that they and their country are so peculiarly unique and so unfathomably deep that no foreigner can hope to write successfully about them." For Enright "nothing is exotic if you understand," and his poetry attempts to correct the overbalance of interest in *Japonaiserie* by stressing that the Japanese are not "human dolls" but "real people, real people, real people." In "Purchas His Pilgrimes" he emphasizes the fact that the closed windows of Tokugawa Japan were once and for all shattered by the atomic bomb, whose effects were not entirely destructive: the lesson has emerged that "children of the gods" and "sons of men" are basically the same:

We peer into that dust, speechless and undressed,  
to glimpse the final proof  
That none of us are gods, thank God, that all  
of us are human, at the best.

This humanity, this "fund of virtue" Enright finds preeminently in the ordinary Japanese people, rather than in the upper classes with their constricting code of decorum and "expected" behavior; certainly one feels that the twisted hypersensitivity of the kind of people depicted in Yasunari Kawabata's novel *Thousand Cranes* is markedly different from the friendliness—despite the language difficulty—displayed towards the foreigner by taxi-drivers, small shopkeepers, and country people on local trains in remote parts of Japan.



Enright's poem "**Happy New Year**" pictures the money-worries of the traditionalist banker which debar him from the simple pleasures accessible to those with no worries of *that* sort:

He showed his ancient incense burners, precious  
treasures, cold and void.  
His family too he showed, drawn up in columns,  
and his fluttering spouse.  
We bowed and wept together over the grim new year.

The characteristic pun, "drawn up in columns," emphasizes the tongue-in-cheek politeness of the poet's sympathy; his admiration is for the eternal resilience of the poor and their ability to enjoy themselves:

The poor are always with us. Only they  
can find a value in the new.  
They are the masters of their fourpenny kites  
That soar in the open market of the sky.  
Whatever wrongs await, they still preserve some rites.

The pun here, one feels, is not merely a device which Enright frequently cannot resist, but a neat shorthand for conveying his sense of the essential rightness of the human claim on enjoyment, a quality all too often subordinated to the cold correctness of "proper" behavior.

The "wrongs" which await include earthquakes, landslides, and typhoons. "**House Down**" employs a pattern of sound-repetitions which vividly conveys the flurry of activity into which every year many Japanese are thrown by natural disasters:

eyes are dry and open, quick to spy out every  
able-bodied splinter,  
Splint the lintel with a fractured table, match  
Up ancient patches, prop the falling with the fallen,  
and with sad and sure dispatch  
Place the displaced within an altered jigsaw.

An "insufficiency of man's means" indeed! Yet even in the face of this the ordinary virtues of common humanity and its will to survive still show through:

Only the back, common or garden,  
Can bear a lifetime of this ever-breaking burden.  
Only the unprized eyes could face those winds  
unflinching.  
Only the heart, so inexpensive, so well-wearing,  
Would run to pluck from utter ruin  
a fresh, familiar poverty.

Sometimes, though, the burden is too much, particularly for a child, and in one of his finest and most economical poems, "**The Short Life of Kazuo Yamamoto**," Enright's admiration for Japanese resilience turns to pity for one who no longer found himself able to "bear the unbearable." The newspaper report on the thirteen-year-old orphaned shoeshine-boy who "wanted to die

because of a headache" needs no more underlining than the first two verses provide to emphasize the horror of his suicide and the baffled inadequacy of his reason. But in the last verse Enright tightens the screws and with controlled but scathing irony lays this one of many unnecessary deaths at the doors of politicians who are trying to run before they can walk:

Elsewhere the great ones have their headaches, too,  
As they grapple with those notable tongue-twisters  
Such as Liberation and Oppression.  
But they were not talking about you,  
Kazuo, who found rat-poison cheaper than aspirin.

The poem's allusive title makes us aware of the omitted word: "happy," the adjective missing from Kazuo Yamamoto's life. And though the poem may seem politically naive in a world where only "international incidents" cut any ice,<sup>10</sup> it is a naiveté which the poet has a license, and a duty, to assert: underneath the political complexities, we feel the acuteness, the poetic truth of Enright's juxtaposition. For him the only meaningful abstraction is one without capital letters:

Only a silly shamefaced poem dare propose  
That happiness is all that really counts—  
least abstract of abstractions.<sup>11</sup>

Politics is one ivory tower which seems to Enright to be blind to the fate of individuals; the other is Japanese tradition and Japanese art, with their stylization and precise rules which are for him a denial of the merely human and an attempt to pretend that the real physical world and its inconveniences are only an illusion of the unpurified mind. In "**A Kyōto Garden**" Enright describes the neatly-planned miniature world of Japanese landscape-gardening where everything is designed to purify the viewer and bring him the peace of an aesthetic contemplation in which "the eye need never be averted, nor the nose." This viewer, however, refuses to be so purified, and asks, as usual, the awkward question: "What feeds this corpulent moss, whose emptied blood, / what demon mouths await?" Peace of mind, where so many are debarred from it, is too conscience-pricking a privilege, and the only aspect of the garden which brings Enright any satisfaction is the one which connects it to the disorganized world outside and to the common man:

but then you notice that the pines wear crutches—  
typhoons show no respect for art or craft;  
you sigh with happiness, the garden comes alive:  
like us, these princelings feel the draught.

It is no surprise, therefore, to find that he scornfully dismisses the detached ritual of the Tea Ceremony and the Zen mystique of unworldliness which surrounds it:

This garden is not a garden, it is an  
expression of Zen;

The trees are not rooted in earth, then,  
 they are rooted in Zen.  
 And this tea has nothing to do with thirst:  
 it says the unsayable.

Typhoons, we have seen, give short shrift to this view; and even if they did not, the existence of so many more pressing demands on human time and effort should be enough to reduce the cult of Tea to a selfish luxury: "Beyond the bamboo fence are life-size people, / Rooted in precious little, without benefit of philosophy."

Like the Tea Ceremony, the aloof, aristocratic Nōh drama, with its extreme stylization of gesture and austere use of stage properties, is an art-form for which Enright has only a frigid regard: "it is art-cum-religion, a mixture which always fills me with misgivings." But even Kabuki, which he clearly enjoys, feeling that it has "that right kind of stylization which has not lost touch with its human origins," does not always succeed in reinterpreting for its audiences the life to which they return when they leave the theatre; their pity is reserved for the daughter they have seen on the stage "sold into a brothel with a modest groan," and is quickly forgotten in the flurried scramble for a taxi home:

Art's not so long, it seems, that its drawn tears  
 extend across the footlights to the same distresses:  
 here in small rooms while actors doff their robes,  
 there in small rooms the daughters doff their dresses.<sup>12</sup>

It seems to Enright that, in Japan, value is attached not to how closely art approximates to life, but to how near man comes to being himself a "work of conscious art." Just as the government declares certain historic temples or gardens to be "National Treasures," and therefore subject to special protection, so, when a man has refined himself into a consummate artist, will it extend the same dubious honor to him. "**Psalm 72: Man Declared a Treasure**" broadly satirizes this strange tendency. Bunraku—the Puppet Play—is now a dying art; the puppets used in its performances are highly prized. Mr. Yamashiro-no-Shōjō, as a result of his prowess of voice as a reciter-accompanist of Bunraku plays, has, though a mere human, attained the same treatment—a treatment which, because they do not possess his artistic skill, the mass of "junior workers round the cloaca" do not receive:

Let Mr. Yamashiro-no-Shōjō be heard in the lanes of  
 Tophet,  
 Let Mr. Yamashiro-no-Shōjō be honored as a prophet.  
 Clap hands, all you who suffer from the buffets  
 Of fate. For one of your fellows is prized as highly  
 as one of his puppets.

But life can sometimes have its revenges on art: it is an ironic comment on this topsy-turvydom that, a few years ago, a junior puppeteer of the same Ōsaka theater destroyed a number of puppets, perhaps envious of their privileged position.

Although Enright's humanism was already present in his Egyptian novel, *Japan*, by providing the contrasting friction of a traditional formalism, sharpened and defined it in his poetry; it is in *Bread Rather than Blossoms* that we first truly find his characteristic subject-matter: the inescapable involvement of the man of conscience with the lives and sufferings of his fellows. His dissatisfaction with Japanese poetry springs from its apparent lack of this kind of concern: "in no western literature of any period has the gap between art and ordinary life been so wide."

But whether this gap becomes either too wide or too narrow depends on the poet's vigilantly maintaining within himself the precarious equilibrium of man and poet. This double loyalty is not easy: just as the Japanese poet errs in the direction of art for its own sake, so "a sharp reaction" against this orientation in favor of truth to life "can throw one into a narrow preoccupation with the more obvious hardships and miseries of contemporary Japan and so lead to an inordinate amount of moralizing."<sup>13</sup> A warning, "intended for myself," against undue moralizing is conveyed in the poem "**Busy Body under a Cherry Tree**." In one sense the cherry tree may stand for much in Japan that is shallowly pictorial, "a tree / Whose fruit is eaten only by the eyes";<sup>14</sup> but it is undeniably beautiful, and in another sense symbolizes the enviable perfection which only that kind of art which is free of propaganda may attain:

the cherry's body all year round is busy  
 Against one week of showered gifts without advice,  
 For it is silent, for its deeds suffice.

Yet even while he indulges his nostalgia Enright betrays, in the ambiguity of the last phrase, the complexity of his commitment. What, for a poet, are his "deeds"? Do they, in fact, "suffice"? If the deeds are literal ones, the kind which for Bacon seemed within the limits of the possible, are they ever enough to abolish the misery of others more than "temporarily"? Obviously not—which does not remove the need to do them. But in the poem "**Where Charity Begins**" Enright, by juxtaposing two separate confrontations with beggars, suggests that in the twisted context of world politics kindness may be so risky that the first response of "a little money" may become calloused into the highly vicarious sympathy of the roving cameraman:

Charity. Oh yes, all this we'd seen was charity.  
 Make a picture of where your heart once bled,  
 Move the world's conscience, or provoke an incident—  
 All simpler than to fill an empty mouth with bread.

Yet though poetry may be a poor substitute for money, it is better than nothing at all. Yet, again, because the poet is a man, the "deeds" which metaphorically are his

poems clearly do not suffice either, especially if they draw too much attention to themselves and away from the occasions which provoke them. So the poet-man is continually trying to compensate for the inadequacy of one kind of "deed" with the inadequacy of the other kind. The cherry-blossom suffices because the cherry is only a tree, not a man.

Asked, in 1962, "Do you see this as a good or bad period for writing poetry?" Enright replied that "in a scientific and technological age, many writers are bound to feel doubts about the usefulness of [their] writing."<sup>15</sup> One can see that the humanist poet, with his particularly strong sense of the real, objective existence of human problems—and his feeling that, while as a poet he may be called upon only to describe them, as a man he is partially responsible for helping in their solution—would begin to have misgivings about his art qua art. Certainly Enright's Japan poems show that his occasional hankerings for poetic purity are outweighed by his doubts about poetry itself: for him, literature is subordinate to life. In "**The Poet in Retirement**" he says:

The poet has prepared himself for when he will  
No longer write.  
In that new darkness, what new light?  
After words, people: that's how all art should end.  
For art is short, but life is long.

It is no hypocrisy that, despite his inversion of the old adage, Enright has continued to produce volumes of verse: the artistic impulse does exist. But the attitude expressed here has important repercussions in the kind of poetry Enright's is: it explains his lack of emphasis on "style." Not that his poems, particularly those of his Japan period, have no style; but it certainly consists far less in quotable passages of fine writing than in an habitual ironic stance and a system of careful and often punning cross-references which heightens by repetition the significance of key phrases. For Enright too much "appliqué" style is felt to be a betrayal of subject-matter, as this mention of the opposite view, in *Academic Year*, makes clear. Bacon and Packet are discussing a dilettante volume of poems completely insulated from the grittiness of Egyptian everyday life:

"What *does* he write about then?" Packet had asked.  
"He doesn't write *about*. Sensibility, refinement, and money: when one has all that, one does not write *about*—one just writes. Subject matter, El Hamama would say, is the betrayal of style: it should be left to journalists, who need it to conceal their lack of style."

Enright is no mere journalist; but he does feel that poetry should be "*about* something" and that the something should be "people, preferably other people."

This being so, the humanist poet has a special duty not to "tart up" experience but render it straightforwardly so that the reader's response will be less one of admira-

tion for poetic skill than one of sympathy for the person or situation described. Even "humanism," in the wrong hands, can become a mere gimmick; the Japanese poet whom Enright advises, in "**Changing the Subject**," to deal with human themes instead of "the moon, and flowers, and birds and temples, / and the bare hills of the once holy city" dresses up his portrayal of "those who sleep in the subway" with so much rhetoric that the real becomes the artificial:

"Are they miners from Kyushu?" Neither he nor I will  
ever dare to ask them.  
For we know they are not really human, are as apt  
themes  
for verse as the moon and the bare hills.

Enright fully realizes the dangers: the reproof is for himself too. When William Walsh says:

the poet-observer has the privilege of not enduring  
what those he watches suffer. And isn't there a touch of  
pretension, a degree of conceit, in translating human  
suffering so directly into art?

Enright has anticipated him, in a poem about a human derelict, called "**Written Off**": "The shame would be to write of such a thing."

Despite, however, Enright's scruples about the possible pitfalls of humanist poetry, one's final judgment is decidedly not that he falls into them. Rather one admires the unending effort to balance the respective claims of life and art, realizing that the emphasis placed on the former demands of the poet considerable artistic self-denial without bringing the man the compensating sense of having solved the problems of the world in which he lives. As Enright has ruefully put it in "**To an Alexandrian Poet**":

And so it seems I'm poorer, in the end, than you—  
Have lost what you have found, and nothing gained  
beside  
(The beggar fidgets in his rags and eyes me sullenly)  
—neither a cure for beggars'  
legs,  
Nor your large graceful house and manners.<sup>16</sup>

If this last line is true, the limitation it describes is, in the circumstances, an honorable one. As for the "cure for beggars' legs," that will take a long time to discover. All the poet can do is to point to the facts, recommend such humble attempts as are within the grasp of any one human individual, and, like "the poet in retirement," hope

that those who close one of his books  
will pause, before beginning on the next.

#### Notes

1. *Addictions* (London, 1962), p. 61. All poems quoted are to be found in *Bread Rather than Bloss-*

*soms* (London, 1956) or *Some Men Are Brothers* (London, 1960), except where otherwise indicated.

2. Tokyo, 1955, p. 12.
3. London, 1954. All quotations are from the First Japan Edition, Tokyo, 1956.
4. *Refusal to Conform* (London, 1963), pp. 84-89.
5. Translation by Geoffrey Bownas and Anthony Thwaite, *Penguin Book of Japanese Verse* (Harmondsworth, 1964), p. 124.
6. "In Memoriam," *Addictions*, p. 11.
7. "Oriental Politics."
8. *A Human Idiom* (London, 1964), p. 167.
9. *The World of Dew*, pp. 207-208.
10. "News," *Addictions*, p. 29.
11. "Tourist Map."
12. "The Popular Theatre."
13. *Poets of the 1950's*, p. 103.
14. "Samisen Music."
15. *The London Magazine*, February 1962, p. 38.
16. *The Laughing Hyena* (London, 1953), p. 30.

#### William Walsh (essay date 1974)

SOURCE: Walsh, William. "Poetry I: 1953-60." In *D. J. Enright: Poet of Humanism*, pp. 21-39. London: Cambridge University Press, 1974.

[In the following excerpt, Walsh discusses the philosophical and ethical concerns that motivate much of Enright's early poetry.]

Becoming a poet in the 1950s must have been one of the severest disciplines anyone could put himself to. That difficult, dangerous period when a talent is forming had to be passed in a time governed more than most by fictions of status, affluence, acceptance. A sensibility had to be constructed not in a society whose system ran with and supported a current of genuine life but in a marshmallow world with convictions hardly robust enough either to accept or reject. But if it was hard, it wasn't unpopular. There was a clutch of poets who began to arrive in the 1950s. They called themselves *The Movement*. But I am inclined to think that what they had in common wasn't motion—they had no agreed point of departure and certainly no concerted destination—but rather a posture, a negative stance.

After so many (in so many places) words,  
It came to this one, No.

Epochs of parakeets, of peacocks, of paradisiac birds -  
Then one bald owl croaked, No.

(*'Saying no'*)<sup>1</sup>

These young poets who depended above all on a freshness of contact with actuality, but who lived in a world infatuated with illusion, developed, had to develop, a cool evasive skill and an aptness in the tactics of disengagement. This was part of the success many of them had in devising a sensibility in keeping with the times, together with the voice through which it could be projected. The sensibility was agile and fluent, the voice casual and intelligently modulated. There was nothing stark or grand in the one, nothing inflatedly poetic in the other. A detached and modest manner, a dry decency of feeling, an utterance, in which, at its best, the contours of the verse are fitted exactly to the curves of contemporary speech—these are the marks of a poetry which strikes the reader as being authentically and altogether naturally modern.

There are, of course, traces in these poets of strain and youth and earlier manners—the jagged and impeded line, the blatantly cerebral energy, the laborious construction. But in all of them at their best, and especially in the one who seems to me one of the most individual in character and most representative of the times, the poetical movement is light and gliding and unreluctant. Here are some lines from *'The Laughing Hyena by Hokusai'*<sup>2</sup> which show the skilful manoeuvring of a liquid, lively rhythm:

For him it seems everything was molten. Court-ladies  
flow in gentle streams,  
Or, gathering lotus, strain sideways from the curving  
boat,  
A donkey prances, or a kite dances in the sky, or soars  
like sacrificial smoke.  
All is flux; waters fall and leap, and bridges leap and  
fall.  
Even his Tortoise undulates, and his Spring Hat is  
lively as a pool of fish.

The events of the poet's life play an important part in a poetry which has a solidly objective character. On the whole the poets of the 1950s do not look on a sequence of poems as a variety of poses best calculated to display aspects of the fascinating ego. Enright himself, as I have explained, has spent most of his career since Cambridge abroad, and this international experience seems to have a peculiar relevance to modern life. To be so closely in touch with the intelligent young of several countries gives access to a sensitive part of the modern world: as a teacher of a self-conscious generation he is in direct touch with people's intimately human concerns; as a post-imperial Englishman his human shape is un-muffled by the toga, his relationships undistorted by the hypocrisies of power or obedience. He writes in *'Entrance Visa'*:<sup>3</sup>