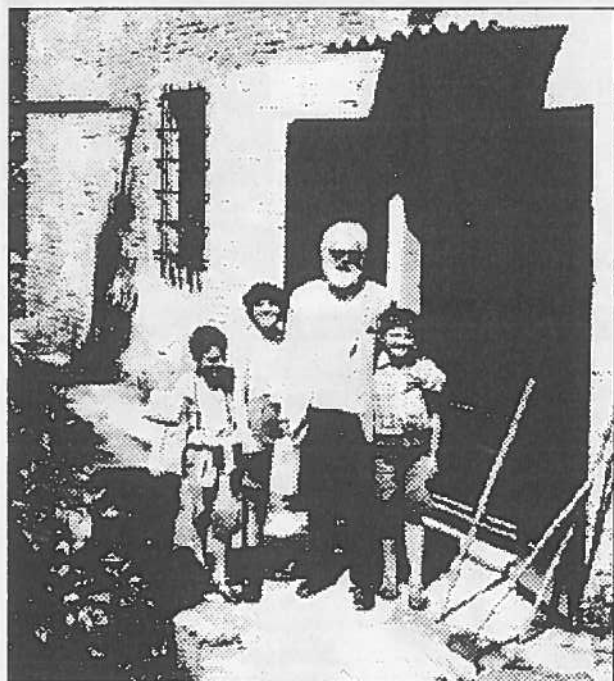


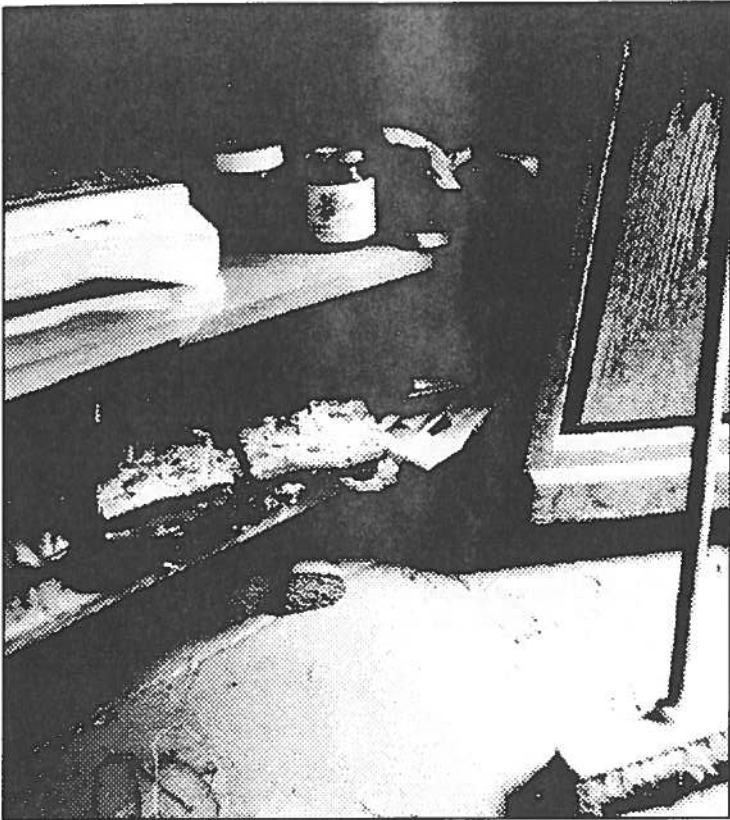
Oct. 30th, 1992: COMING HOME FROM AUSTRIA. Down the garden path to "La Turbina"



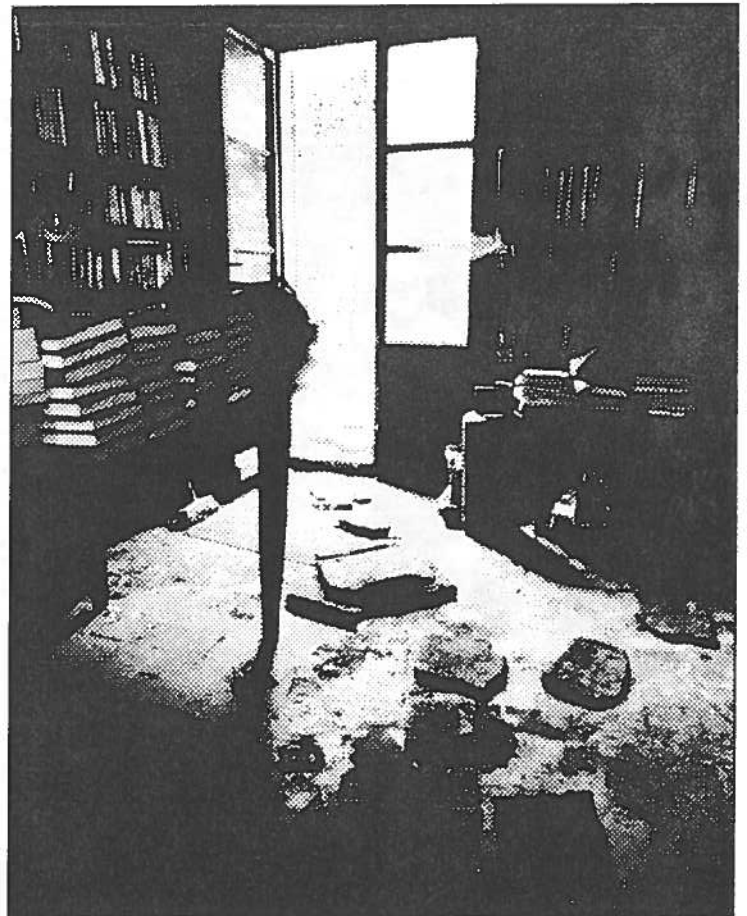
Ante-diluvian, happy days at front-door of "La Turbina" 1987



The entrance-path that was, buried under boulders and rabble eight feet deep



December 1992: The waters have retreated, leaving MUD. And muddled books.



Entrance hall to "La Turbina", December 1992

LAST YEAR JUST AFTER CHRISTMAS it cheered me to compare the opening sentences of two letters received by the same post (January 7th, 1992):

Your letters come as messages from another world, wilder and more honorable. I do not, by the way, mean Italy."

Thomas Fleming, Editor, "Chronicles", Rockford, Illinois.

"In the run-up to Christmas your papers have come like a letter from the real world in the midst of all the wrapping paper and pastry-making..."

Kathleen Raine, Editor, "Temenos", London.

A leading American reviewer has described MARGINALIA as resembling a "personal letter from a brilliant and learned friend". For me it was gratifying that Tom Fleming described my world as "wild". I spent autumn 1990 putting together a five hundred page *Selected Poems* and had already entitled it *My Wild Heart* after the theme poem in my small collection *Pratomagno*. No, I am not *domesticated* like the chickens. I'm glad to be wild even if it doesn't make for comfort in our society.

As I see it, in order to give information about external events and even get some practical results, a man writes circular letters. To communicate or share (*vide* the etymology of "communicate") inner feelings and experiences, a man writes *poems*. The Hebrew Prophet wrote: "Cast your bread upon the waters". I would like to think that MARGINALIA is a circular letter which communicates both the external objective facts, and inner, even "sacred" experiences. I myself feel *incomunicado* in our mass-culture. Simply, I would like to communicate with all the world. This is one reason why I keep the format simple and unadorned and limit each issue to a mere 16 pages, maximum attention span for most of us. In MARGINALIA I reprint many old pieces of mine hoping that they may reach new generations of readers who are unlikely to find copies of the original printings, most of which anyway have been destroyed in revolution, fire and flood!

As for my present situation: after three months I am still living in one small room in the Priest's house here. My home, "La Turbina", is still inaccessible except on foot due to landslides, is still flooded again whenever it rains, and everything in it is wringing wet. Since heating materials cannot be carried down the road even by hand, it is impossible to dry the house out. It will take the whole summer to do that. By next autumn I hope the road and the smashed-up roof will have been mended, but by that time I may well find it beyond my physical powers to manoeuvre myself down that steep rocky road. Our old rugby team used to rent "La Turbina" and they tell me that after a weekend's junketings they could hardly climb up the hill to get back to civilisation!

November and December 1992 have been frustrating months for me: cut off from the world (Fax and telephone, after three months are still unrepaired — this is Italy, no one here writes letters). I have had to send out very many circulars and patiently wait for answers — air mail letters from New York often take three to four weeks to arrive here in these days of super-technology. But even more frustrating because all this disorganisation has robbed me of the *time* I had planned to devote this winter to a comparative study of the Platonism of Thomas Taylor, Shelley and Peacock (and obviously, of Blake). TIME surely is the most precious gift we have, after life and basic health? I've not written a single poem since I got back from Austria on 26th October BUT I HAVE written several hundred scurrilous, satirical, malicious or more or less humorous pieces. "All is not lost" as Satan said.

I TRY TO ANSWER ALL LETTERS FROM OLD FRIENDS AND THE PUBLIC but it is not always possible. Even when I have the time, often I don't have the cash to post letters.

SHELLEY'S ELOQUENT AND MAGNIFICENT REPLY to Greekie-Peekie is true, but alas only on the spiritual or metaphysical (= noetic) plane, — no living poet could “legislate” a flea, let alone mankind. Peacock’s treatise was entirely correct in terms of “actuality” in spite of all its ironies, and is even more so today. Let us then agree with Peacock but act with Shelley! George MacDonald’s view that a poet writes poems in order to share his joy in life with others is sound enough for me, if others don’t want to share that’s their problem.

How happily prophetic the catchwords of the ‘fifties were: “Are you happy in your work?” “I’m all right, Jack”. Fifty years later, at age 71, I cannot tell you just how happy I am in my work, even if I can’t truthfully say I’m completely “all right, Jack”. But I am nearly.

I feel that we should forget about the sterile controversy about the two cultures raised by Snow and Leavis in the late ‘fifties, and contemplate rather the dichotomy between two other aspects of culture in general, — and after all culture has lost its old sense of creative or imaginative art and now means no more than “what living things do”. Rats and mice have their cultures just as much as behavioural psychologists or film stars and politicians, — we are all democratic now, aren’t we? — we even have cultures of microbes! Just as the old distinction between right and left has long since ceased to have any value, save for that sub-group we mark off as social climbers or radical chic. Rather I want to make a nett distinction between “cultural” activities done primarily for the love of the thing and those done routinely for salary, profit or power.

And all for love, and nothing for reward

as Spenser says in *The Faerie Queene*. Or as Shelley has it in *The Defence of Poetry*: “The end of all corruption is to destroy all pleasure”. State suborned art and the products of the media masquerade as pleasure, but they are a *pain*. Spenser and Shelley are no longer with us. All we have are the DEAF HENS OF POETRY, deafened I suppose by half a century of rock-around-the-clock.

Plato (*Rep.* III) disapprovingly quotes Homer’s

*O strange! in Pluto’s dreary Hell to find
Soul and its image, but no spark of mind.*

We seem to be in that part of the Underworld already. Meister Eckhart says “When the *man* in the soul, that is, the Intellect, is dead, unchecked evil prevails.” Or in more up to date terms, as the eminent psychoanalyst, Ed Dibble Schittburger, puts it, ingeniously calquing Hafez, “Love is difficult, even porn is hard” (*Psychology of the Underself*, p.666).

Christmas Day 1992

MISSING A BUS

The time goes by. I'm talking to myself.
 The birds and bushes speak. And language,
 Which has sprung from them like finer stuff
 Hangs over streets and walls and doors
 As if an atmosphere of mist or cloud
 Were Nature breathing; stones and animals,
 Fish in their aquaria and streams, and trees,
 Insects and lizards and domestic mice
 Stilled for a little spell and uttering words
 As I observe them...

The lamp-posts bend down to me and speak
 And the trees' lower branches, finch-filled,
 Prattle of draughts and rain. On summer nights
 Moths fly in through the windows full of news,
 With scalloped lemon-pale wings with narrow bars,
 Swallow-tailed with long questioning antennae
 And gleaming crystal eyes...

My life's a dialogue with Nature —
 Cats talk to me, birds sing habitually
 When I am listening, and the wind
 Is always grumbling or gently sighing.
 I reply in my own way, dumb for them,
 But talkative, alone at all hours...

Sometimes the magpie rattles late at night.

I sleep; and sleep is energy. I dream.
 And when I dream I'm thinking still
 But with a depth that's different but as great.
 Day's casual thoughts become the night's obsessions
 When Nature tells its actions over again
 And conscious thought becomes a dream of learning.
 The wild valleys are full of signposts, and the hills
 Are wound with pathways that are leading somewhere
 Away from these dead ruins...
 The landscape speaks under a hollow moon,

And time that's full of learning runs backward to the groves
 Where ochre-painted men speak dazzling fables
 To the dark circle of the tribe...

They speak and they are Nature speaking
 For the first time articulately,
 As they perform what Nature has performed before,
 Through language and the body, operating on Nature,
 Interpreting Nature and yet subservient to it.
 A first philosophy out of the springs of Science
 Where what men do is a rehearsal of natural force,
 An attempt not merely to control but to *be*
 Earthquake and meteorite, volcano and the storm,
 The moon's quarters and the sprouting seed —
 So that softness and fertility may rule the earth
 And the sky's angers be changed into fields of gold...

And now I wake, and everything is alien to me —
 The chest of drawers that seemed a smiling face
 Guards clothes that are no part of me
 Until I go out on the street to talk to men, —
 This bed-post like a sentinel can be dismissed,
 The door that slams behind me, just a door...

I came out of the gritty earth long since
 As now I rise from sleep, put from me my encumbrances,
 Deny my very provenance, and strut
 Into a world in which the world's excluded
 And only artifices are observed at all.

The flowering almond by the garden gate
 Reminds me that I'm late;
 Slow moving forms rippling the still fishponds
 Beneath the neighbours' talk of *bonds*,
 And the sparrows' barbarous cheeping
 Gives way to the sound of weeping;
 And bloated pigeons' gutter-capers
 Fade beneath — the morning papers.
 A newborn infant starts to squeal —

Something's wrong, I feel —
The crocuses have gone back in their corms.
 What's Love but correspondence of these Forms?

The big-eyed pansies in the flower-beds
 Shake their heads —
 "SOUTH AFRICA ACCUSES REDS"
 "CUBA PLANNING TO ATTACK US"
 — Lord! I've missed the bus.

The time goes by. I'm talking to myself.
 The birds and bushes speak. And language,
 Pours out of sky and tree.

I think — "Ten minutes, and I'm free
 To smell the pollen on the aimless wind
 And hear the blackbird call his kind."

What's Nature but the Poet's Mind? —
 O You, whom the storm refreshes...

Berlin,
 26th June 1964

This poem was first printed in *Kenyon Review* but the New Criticism according to them held that no poem should be longer than twenty-eight lines, so the editor printed the first twenty-eight lines and left it it that. That is, I suppose, what they call "editing". The same editor shortly afterwards joined the staff of *Playboy* where no doubt his talents found more scope.

The poem arose in my mind one evening in Berlin-Tegel when I was on my way to Reinickendorf to lecture at the Volkshochschule. I missed my bus by a hair's breadth and was at first quite furious because I would have to wait an hour for the next one *and* be late for the lecture. The fury passed soon and in the almost rural surroundings with colourful gardens and a marvellous chorus of bird-song I soon felt an extraordinary sensation of well-being. I had to "hold" the poem in my mind from about 6 p.m. till midnight when I got home, but once in my room I got it down on paper in less than twenty minutes. There was a point when I seemed to get "stuck" (end of line 23). Suddenly the uncanny cry of the magpie came through the darkness and gave me a line which I had not earlier foreseen. I had never heard a magpie cry out in the darkness before.

"Missing a Bus" was first printed in full by Peter Jay, then still an undergraduate at Oxford, in his review *New Measure* in 1968.

— P.R.

LYRICS

DREAM SONG

In the castle cats are singing
 Frogs discoursing in the well
 Crows reciting verses
While the drunkard rings the bell

In the courtyard someone's reading
 While the wizard casts his spell
 Also there's a Lady laughing
While the drunkard rings the bell

I am there and you are there
 We hear a madman's yell
 But the Lady keeps on laughing
While the drunkard rings the bell

Venice, 1965

First printed in LITTACK 1972 (ed. W. Oxley)

Reprinted in ANTAEUS (New York)

THE TWO BIRDS

Always in the forest I see two birds
 Opposed on a single tree.
 One is pecking the fruits, the other observes,
 Silently, mockingly.
 One day seeing me come, they utter words,
 The one white as snow, the other as black as coal,
 And in turn they say "I am your body" "I am your soul."

Venice, 1970

First printed in AGENDA 1985 (ed. W. Cookson)

ANOTHER DREAM SONG

A one-eyed woman sat by a well
 With a cat and a hazel-fork.
 She rose, and the hazel-fork fell, —
 Her face was the face of the sparrow-hawk.

A ripe fig on a giant fig-tree
 I fall to the ground and lie still, —
 The sweet river flows down to the sea
 And the wind blows round the hill.

Venice, 1970

First printed in AGENDA 1985 (ed. W. Cookson)

SIX SONNETS

The fantail's wings above the olive whirred, —
 The tree that gave us shelter from the sun.
 Blazing midsummer, when our work was done
 Or partly done, and further toil deferred,
 We'd sit there quietly and have a word
 Briefly together, or exchanging none
 Speak inwardly, in silence and at one.
 Thought of the Atonement would have been absurd.

A blasphemous thought at which we'd have demurred
 At any other time when blood and tears
 Are the day's order. True, the cock crowed thrice,
 But the old shoemaker of Görlitz heard
 At the hour of death the music of the spheres,
 And knew that he was entering Paradise.

At sixty-four I feel I haven't started.
 Life's all a preparation. You may ask
 What for, — scornful perhaps, take me to task
 For quitting, or for being too chicken-hearted
 To run with the rats. (Astraea has departed).
 Must I put on a clown's or sage's mask,
 Feign ignorance or drain the learned cask —
 By stolidness complacently outsmarted?

I am my own buffoon, Touchstone and Jacques,
 My own Don, my Falstaff, my Aaron's rod.
 I let the serpents come and bite my cod.
 It's stuffed. The exterior's artificial, makes
 The wily snakes rear up like they were God.
 Heartaches? The heart is where the good news breaks.

We have so many things to worry about —
 A running nose, the household bills to pay,
 The neighbour's radio. None will go away.
 Just as I start my work the lights go out.
 I'm furious. "Trade unions, no doubt!"
Bêtes noires, red herrings, prejudices sway
 Judgment, and shame! — sheer petulance wins the day.
 Even in Paradise the children pout.

But in the night naked obsessions dress
 For battle. Then it's no good shutting eyes
 To the realities that rear their heads.
 Will Death, Last Judgment, sort out all this mess?
 This world's dead God, the Father of All Lies,
 Rise once again and drag us from our beds?

My wild oats scattered in imperial times
 Out of the garrisons at Empire's border,
 Heart's skirmishings, barbarian disorder,
 Mind's broader conquests of the legion crimes —
 The repetitions of the pantomimes,
 Proconsul's awful progress, sanctions, murder,
 The captive slave-girl, soul's eternal warder,
 Forced marches, exiles, plunder, — sundry rhymes —

All latitudes conspire at length to meet,
 Perspectives of eternity, accord,
 And all into its opposite transmutes:
 Von Alzey of the Nibelungenlied
 The bow of his *vielle* into a sword,
 The Samurai their scabbards into flutes.

Sometimes I read my bloody sonnets over
 And feel I've lost a lifetime writing trash.
 I might have lived illiterate in clover
 Like the good Joneses, making quite a splash.
 They dub me scornfully "ineffective rover",
 Shaking their heads: "A man must have some cash",
 (Mammon's no different really than Jehovah),
 But even ruminants have teeth to gnash.

The Joneses too have secret gnawing sorrows,
 And outer darkness presses them as close
 As inner gleams afford me constant hope.
 Jones keeps his interest up on what he borrows —
 Based on advances his ostentation's gross:
 God give each man at least a yard of rope.

Sometimes I wonder what it is I'm for,
 And I despair, or curse, or simply shrug;
 At others I make idols to adore
 Or sweep my troubles underneath the rug.
 Body a grave these sixty years has dug,
 Soul spun a tapestry of metaphor;
 It seems there's nothing now but holes to plug,
 A leaking jug. *The eternal waters roar!*

Almost I feel that I have ceased to be
 As all my thoughts add up to nothingness.
 It's no good now belatedly consulting
 Encyclopaedias of philosophy.
 Better yawn back defiant at the Abyss,
 Despair itself occasion for exulting.

Reprinted from Inklings-Jahrbuch 9, 1991 (Aachen, Germany)

NOVALIS
GEISTLICHE LIEDER 15

ICH SEHE DICH in tausend Bildern,
Maria, lieblich ausgedrückt,
Doch keins von allen kann dich schildern,
Wie meine Seele dich erblickt.

Ich weiß nur, daß der Welt Getümmel
Seitdem mir wie ein Traum verweht
Und ein unnennbar süßer Himmel
Mir ewig im Gemüte steht.

SPIRITUAL SONGS XV

I see you in a thousand images,
Painted or carved, Maria, all beautiful.
Yet your true likeness none of them can seize
As I do the original stamped in my soul.

I only know, life at sixes and sevens
For me now is a thing of the past.
And an indescribably sweet heaven
Reigns in my heart.

translated by Peter Russell

In countless pictures I behold thee,
O Mary, lovelily expressed,
But of them all none can unfold thee
As I have seen thee in my breast!
I only know the world's loud splendour
Since then is like a dream o'erblown;
And that a heaven, for words too tender,
My quieted spirit fills alone.

translated by George MacDonald (1824-1905)

QUINTILIUS

SICK SURLY POEMS

*Six early poems from the period
of vagrancy*

CAMPASPE IN BABYLON

The beautiful Campaspe, they say,
Wearing a long plain purple gown
Chastely slashed from neck to navel
Rode not on a snow-white ass
Or like the Virgin on a unicorn
But on one Aristoteles
Philosopher on all fours

It may not be true
But "I know how he felt"
Even if young Alexander and I
From the top of David's Tower
Laughed our heads off

translated 1985

First published in *The Scotsman*

VERBA NON RES

Aurora, Erinna, Hero, Melité, Hersé?

Girls are not words

No girl

Would run away with me

translated 1984

A LINGUISTIC CONTRIBUTION TO WOMEN'S STUDIES
A fragment of Quintilius

Odd that the Arcadian is never used for verse
 And that the Amazons spoke not in Lesbian

I suppose

Pelasgian numbers rippled off their tongues as they advanced
 One-breasted into battle

Chanting what slogans
 In what shrill dialect
 Of that lost tongue

Glorious Man-free

Save for one month a year...

translated 1985

AN EPODE (?) OF QUINTILIUS

Cassandra of the Lesbic mafia,
 Charaxes pirate, Rhodopis's slave
 Her brother, — SAPPHO, deftest mistress
 Of choked bells picked upon
 Her kithara, approached
 The tenderest, the most evocative
 Possible in mortal language.
 SOLON, the wisest of the Greeks,
 Begged Exekestides his young
 Nephew then and there to teach
 These words, that melody, to him
 Others thought merely strange.
"I want to sing that song, then die..."

translated 1984

THE FOLDED ROSE

Theogenes who thinks he could rape Aphrodite?
 Or Conon who is convinced she would silyly concur?
 Which of these two types, Aeisa, would you prefer?

Aeisa is amused, she smiles sweetly as she sews,
 Confident of being intact, to these coarse suitors
 Unattractive. Her flesh glows inward, she's entailed,
 Legs, heart and breasts, her wrestling muscles all
 Contained in unseen fervent motion at the core.
 What shudders rend the unmoving rose's frame
 None but the unconquerable gods can know,
 And few perhaps of them. The most intuitive
 Of Gaetic gods, like Aesculapius, was killed by the Gods.

translated 1984

PUELLA QUAEDAM

Her body is moonlight dimming the fluorescence
 Of freshly blanched bed-sheets fuled by white hands
 Of Byzantine or Babylonian laundresses.
 She's Hersé, a snowdrop to the partial mind's
 Progressive exploration of earth's seasons.
 She glistens with invisible dew of the night,
 Her flesh is a candour of dawn and petals,
 And rivals the first wild-apple blossom
 Dazzling cerulian March.

translated 1984

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Peter Russell, "La Turbina", 52026 Pian di Scò (Arezzo), Italy.

Think or shrink!

SALINAE

HAUD QUICQUAM POSTEA

The modern poets
Are hardly quick

The post moderns
All but dead

1992

A SONG FOR YESTERDAY

Child of the post-modern world,
(Five figures in the red),
His eyes are glazed, not pearled,
He's dazed at being dead.
Who wouldn't be —
With Harold Gloom and Boundary Three?

1992

EVERYONE ELSE HAS
PROBLEMS why
shouldn't I?

1991

Many the poet's warning cries!
The rabble merely hiss'd 'em.
Did any win the Nobel Prize
Who ever fought the system?

1992

WORRY

Nothing is more
worrying than
having nothing

to worry
about

1990

ECO DI ECO

I seme
therefore
I am

1990

NOT ALL THE NOBELS

are dynamite

1991

LIFE?

The Gods pushed
us into
the world head
first and ever
since have been
pulling our
LEGS

1990

POETRY CLIQUE

There was a time when every honest swain
Wrote verse, — “to teach, to move, and to delight”,
These Oxbridge half-wits cultivate the trite,
Untaught, unmoving, and a *pain*.

1990

DRAG

Being down
on his luck

He's down too
on other people's

1990

BE DEMOCRATIC

Let us
be democratic

Let us
believe we are
as good as
our betters

1990

THE WEALTH-MAKERS

They define what the will of their God is,
Their minds flash from Fiat to roles:
They condemn women for selling their bodies —
They commend men for selling their souls.

1990

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