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What started out as casual discussions between Rick and myself began to take the form of serious concern and note taking in the hope of eventually churning out a controversial article/manifesto on the subject of poetry. So in this issue we embark on a journey through the art, to expose its countless possibilities and the potential it holds in contemporary South Africa. We want to share the product of our discussions with you and the prospective poets who contribute to A Look Away as we believe that there are fundamental basics which need to be studied, through personal learning and reflection. In future issues we will discuss the importance of style, rhyme-or-not, structure, intent and touch on the important figures who have been crucial in the evolution and exploration of the art. Through this article we hope to stir up a response from you the writer, reader and appreciator of poetry and invite you to reflect and inform yourselves on the infinite laws and possibilities of condensed thought, metaphor and sensitive versification.

Rachel Krueger

## THE RIGHT QUESTION

Rick de Villiers

What do we want from today's poetry? To ask this places an unbearable (not to mention regressive) strain upon our art. It is a question that cannot lead beyond the irresolution of diverging prejudices, assumes the homogeneity of our society and implies a selfless ideal. We should rather ask: what can today's poetry offer us?

In this instance, the proposition can hover no higher than the realistic capabilities of poetry and dwindle no further than the limits of our time. Unfortunately, the quest for an answer still demands a definition of 'us' (a passive construction may bypass purposes of this article, the first person plural will represent only two groups (however politically incorrect): readers and writers of poetry.

As twenty-first century readers, we still demand the "best poetry". However, unlike the generation of Matthew Arnold, we can no longer expect poetry to have the power of "forming [and] sustaining" us. The main reason for this rests upon a gross generalisation, yet one which can hardly be denied. In this modern age poetry has become the indulgence of an ever-diminishing minority and, to an even more despairing extent, poetry is the study of a select few. Prose, on the other hand, in its vast reach that extends from the novel to television, has superseded verse as the formative vehicle in literature. What then, is the function of poetry? Beyond expecting it to provide luxurious and private pleasures, beyond asking it to "move our emotions [and] excite our intellect", what can we extract from the seemingly depleted veins of this art?

Poetry, throughout the ages, has always had the power to inform language as to its own capabilities. It has at times been a torturing machine, stretching word beyond meaning, and at other times it has assumed the shape of a woman's handbag - a neat carrier into which anything can enter and from which even more can escape. Poetry possesses the immortal nature to show a language the extremities both of its beauty and crudity, its formalism and its practicality. In this sense, we are able to deduce that poetry's main function,

today, is that of aesthetic didactics: a river that should feed all the diverging streams of literature. If we adopt this view our responsibilities doubly redouble.

As readers, we should demand impersonality from contemporary poets. As writers, our progress must be marked by a "continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality". The validity of T.S. Eliot's statement is assured by the quiet fact that 'poet' and 'poetry' are still spelled differently. Our concern does not lie with the individual and his private experience; we are interested in words that unite thought and feeling in a way which does not merely stir in us the vague sense that we have discovered the beauty of sentiment - perhaps the beauty of truth -, but which also satiates our desire for aesthetic appeal. The artist should thus creep inside our hearts and minds with the planned stealth of a faceless thief - relieving us of temporal baggage and impressing upon us the knowledge that our sphere of existence is neither isolated nor impenetrable.

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What does this imply for the poets of A Look Away? Firstly, it demands awareness that the phrase "raw artistic talent" is not merely a slogan, but also a reminder for the featured poet. The young mind often labels itself as free and new, yet it is, in fact, at no other time more confined and unoriginal than in its developmental stage. Imitation, whether consciously intended or not, commonly pervades the early work of a poet. As young artists, we are prone to attach ourselves to the philosophy of a certain literary movement and to produce similar work to that of our "fathers". This period is not only a natural, but vital rite of passage the writer of poetry undergoes in becoming a poet and is the exodus between the poetic meditation of interests and the metamorphosis of interests into poetry.

The profundity of imitation is nullified however, if our admiration for a group of poets is superficial and incomplete. It is not enough to merely absorb the thought of a specific school through osmosis. Our study must be active since growth is only possible through an intimate knowledge and understanding of the formal elements within which a poet expresses himself. Thus, in comprehending both the sentiment and aesthetics which pervade an artist's work, we can consciously assimilate or divert. The sooner we appreciate all the elements which make a poet appealing to us, the

sooner our voices will become distinct.

Although we all have our own literary preferences, it is simply not good enough to limit our field of study to those likes. It is imperative to "drink deep" of the whole of English literature so that our poetry will not be corrupted by a "shallow intoxication", but rather restored by the perspective that accompanies the consciousness of what has passed. Parallel to an historic awareness is our knowledge of the mechanics of poetry. As the dentist can explain the difference between a molar and an incisor, so the poet should be able to elucidate the differences between the Italian and Shakespearean sonnet. Our responsibility is to know the science behind our art, because, if we do not know what exists already, how can we expect to be original?

Another responsibility of the young poet is to keep away from the alluring lights and flickering flames of the published poem. If we have committed ourselves to mindfully studying the science of poetry, we should be able to distinguish between good verse and prose in block form. A Look Away is not a vehicle for personal gratification but a portrait of potential. Neither the magazine, nor the reader demands instant classics; there is room for error and thus room for growth.

There is not, however, room for laziness. One of the primary functions of the poet has always been to question. As critical poets, we should thus question our own work. Why did I write this poem? (Purpose); why did I use this rhyme scheme? (Style and Structure); are my images and symbols clichéd (Originality); have I revised, revised and revised? These are only a few of the questions to be asked before submitting a poem. It is a responsibility the serious poet cannot and, hopefully, would not want to shirk since it ensures his/her own success.

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## a lonesome triptych of the senses

#1 - chant to the glory of Blake's god

gently thriving on adoration,  
her family-chise eyes straight from Mohammed's paradise,  
offer me a heart warmed by a handhold on happiness,  
as she bares herself with a charming impunction  
a faint girlish whisp her only protection...

my heart halved by hoofbeats,  
a perfect flank turns my eyes to heaven,  
& my lust like her honey-gold skin,  
is fired by her girlish gaze awaiting  
penitently innocent,  
the harness of my heart.

#2 - his sweet sunday

sweet opetatic orange juiced vodka sunday after noon porno epiphany  
sweet self satisfaction to soothing string sounds

sweet memory rejuvenated by photographs scratched from the bottom of socks  
revising long lost letters of long lost friends  
some long, dead, some newly

sweet bitter tears of regret on seeing long lost looks in these ageing images  
sweet repentance at forgetting so fast  
this sweetly pictured youth forever posing here, whimsy bottle forever in hand,  
the girl at his side and he forever gazing out of eyes shielded from the glare  
of the eternal camera's stare

all these fine times now long since drowned in responsibility in accountability,  
in attempts at adulthood only momentarily side-stepped in these  
sweet operatic sunday-afternoon orange juiced vodka porno epiphanyes

#3 the knave

feeding on images framed by heavy lids,  
he regards the world as she studies by,

impatient and sated,  
the knave misses his hunger  
and finds his swollen jaws  
can never open up  
quite wide enough  
to accommodate all available flesh

and so tantalizingly new seems  
must daily be passed by  
the wolf must methodically, aesthetically, refuse  
the slim skin smilingly professed  
by the eyes of the puer young things  
who invite him between their thighs

for he has long since stopped hoping  
for more than what he sees

Anton Krueger