

## SVP Intro 22 April 2003

Welcome back to SVP and to the 2003 Eric Mottram Celebration, made tonight by Gilbert Adair, who is, amongst other things, the founder over 20 years ago of *Sub Voicive Poetry*.

Eric Mottram died in 1995, over eight years ago; but he remains a strong presence for many of us here. Many of us would not be here now were it not for Eric's benign influence upon us.

If I say little or nothing more of him myself this evening, it is only to avoid repetition. Having introduced every Celebration, I have said what I have to say which is likely to be of wide interest; and I leave it to others now.

Eight years is a long time, and I have wondered more than once if this sub-series should continue. It is and has been what can be done here. Is it needed?

When Eric died, many of us, in various ways, imagined a physically-established centre of activity which would have been in his memory but would also encourage new investigative restless writing in his spirit. We are a long way from that; and not likely ever to see it.

On the other hand, one does not want to turn living activity into a mausoleum. In many ways, if you would see Eric's monument, look about you. Amongst other things, I am thinking of Will Rowe's ongoing achievements at Birkbeck College. That is not to deny

others their due recognition, but only to point to one strong focus of activity which includes and benefits many of us, and which supports other activity. That attitude of reciprocal creativity is very much in line with Eric Mottram's approach.

Nevertheless, I cannot help thinking that more might be done; and not just by us, whoever "we" are. Much could be done which we are not in a position to do.

I don't underestimate the importance and value of the archiving of Eric's papers by Bill Griffiths under the aegis of Kings College London. There could not have been a more appropriate and dedicated archivist. All due credit to KCL for having facilitated what they have facilitated.

Yet, just as Eric's memory should not be fetishised, neither should it be held only as if a trophy. It isn't enough that his papers are archived. There is unpublished work there which should be widely available. The papers should be in active use.

We need an active memory of Eric Mottram and, officially, we do not have one. It's there, but it's passive now. My personal offer, repeated, of papers and correspondence relating to publication of *Resistances* has not even received an acknowledgement.

So, leaving the dead to bury the dead, I turn to our active memory of Eric and to tonight's Celebration.

It is almost eleven years since Gilbert Adair left the United Kingdom, though we have been fortunate to see him quite frequently since then, as he has made a progress round the world.

Throughout that time, he has continued to write with energy and rigour. I feel that he is still very much a part of these communities, however we might define them...

Whoever said whatever it was they said about waiting to see who is the poet still at 30, and then at 40 et cetera may have been on to something. Gilbert's commitment in his own writing to what I take to have been the perceived necessities which led to the invention of *Sub Voicive* - the addition of the word "poetry" to the name has been my sole innovation, and that at another's prompting - remains strong. Gilbert is, in a number of meanings of the word as used by Eric Mottram, serious.

Some here may be aware of a brief correspondence between myself and Gilbert which is quoted in Wolfgang Goertschacher's small press book, which points to a tentative series beginning.

That's interesting, but no more. What matters is the speed and assurance with which Gilbert found his direction. I may not remember clearly what the series evolved from, but I remember clearly what it evolved into and how fast. I admire and, like others immediately after Gilbert's departure in 1992, have sought to maintain the vigour and the range of what he instituted.

SVP's opposition to the destructively careless and mediocre, and its openness, are reflected in Gilbert's own writing, which has not only evolved, but has developed as Gilbert finds new forms and new techniques.

For me, Gilbert Adair's writing shows an engagement with making which is opposed to compromise, a will to make new and clear, if necessary at the risk of the writing's surface comprehensibility.

It isn't just surviving through the decades which matters, but rather the intellectual stamina and integrity to accept that if you cannot make to the very best of your potential ability, it were probably better had you remained silent, and the courage to make the necessary decision. Fortunately, Gilbert Adair, having faced up to this actually unavoidable crisis, is far from silent as a poet.

That is clear praise and as high as I have ever given anyone... How could I pitch it higher? It has my commitment behind it. Over the years, *Writers Forum* has been the main outlet for Gilbert's work. Adrian Clarke and I now find ourselves curating that imprint and, speaking for myself, slightly overwhelmed by it all. But we have already been in contact with Gilbert with a view to bringing back into print much of his writing from the past, with whatever revisions he wishes; and have offered him the publication of his current work. Pretty well, carte blanche from us both.

I think that's enough from me. Ladies and Gentlemen, Gilbert Adair.