

In This Corner, Wearing the White Cream Cake, Bourgeois Pig Poet Robert Bly

And everything was going so nicely for poet Robert Bly. He was enjoying a pleasant trip to Chicago, there was a packed house at the Body Politic for his recent Yellow Press poetry reading, and Richard Friedman, one of the directors of the poetry series, had just given him a fine introduction. There were even some admirers present who were so enthusiastic they couldn't wait until the end of the reading to get their book autographed.

As they approached him, three strong, Bly obligingly reached for a pen, but before he could write a word, he discovered these fans weren't fans at all and a book wasn't all they had. Suddenly, shockingly, Bly was pelted in the face with a cream cake; squirted with shaving cream, doused in egg and flour, shoved around, and taunted with shrieks of "Bourgeois pig!" and "Long live Trotsky!"

After the surprise wore off, about a dozen attendees, some of them poets, came to Bly's rescue, jumping on the attackers and then, unknowingly, on each other, with more bodies entering the free-for-all by the minute until a rip-roaring brawl was in full fury. Considering the fact that the brawl took place on the Texas-saloon set of *Who's Happy Now?*, one of the plays currently running at the Body Politic, it all seemed like something out of NBC's *Saturday Night*.

But the hit men, members of a rather bizarre group called the Chicago Surrealists, were not there for the laughs. They were there to consummate a five-year-old grudge against Bly. Seems he committed the unpardonable crime of translating some works by the late Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. Neruda was a Stalinist, the Stalinists took care of Trotsky, and therefore Bly was a traitor to the Surrealists' cause. They dig Trotsky.

Bly, who had received a written "warning" from them a long time ago stating he'd pay for his "transgression," took the whole event rather well. Thoroughly splattered but unharmed, he sat down on a stool, pulled out a dulcimer, and said to the crowd, "You all look a little ruffled. I think I'm going to calm you down." Which he did. Later, he insisted that the Surrealists, who had taken a whipping at the hands of the poets, be released from police custody. No rematch is scheduled.

And you thought poetry readings were dull.

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And You Thought Those Surrealists Were Jerks

To the editors:

For the first time since its establishment, the government-funded rathole known as the Body Politic, on Lincoln Avenue, felt the tremors of authentic poetry on Monday, 22 November 1976, when the surrealists—"suddenly" and "shockingly," in the *Reader's* words—threw a pie in the face of Robert Bly, covered him with five pounds of flour, squirted him with squirt guns and denounced him as a counter-revolutionary swine.

The *Reader's* account of this incident (in its December 10 issue) contained several errors which we would like to correct.

First, our motives in this action were not at all "personal." In our open letter to Bly (published in the second issue of our journal, *Arsenal / Surrealist Subversion* in 1973; reprinted and passed out as a leaflet at the reading) we said that we recognized in him "an enemy of everything that is important to us in the world—love and freedom, for example; a particularly loathsome reactionary cretin who deserves only to be pushed into the grave, along with those unforgivably shitty exercises in stupidity which [his] sickening vanity has led [him] to confuse with the cause of poetry." We sabotaged his reading not because of any "grudge," as the *Reader* pretends, but because Bly is a typical representative of all that is most rotten, most detestable, in American poetry today. The insipid verses of this false poet—reeking with the simpering decay of white, bourgeois, christian, pragmatist America—are nothing more than an apology for impotence, cowardice, triviality and every form of miserabilism.

The *Reader* exaggerates the importance we attribute to Bly's genuflections before the Stalinist thug Neruda. That he long served as Neruda's unofficial U.S. press agent is, to be sure, yet another proof of Bly's complete moral disqualification. For us it is no small matter that

Neruda—a paid functionary of the Stalinist Comintern, an accomplice in the murder of Trotsky, and author of eulogies to Stalin—played a role in Spanish-language poetry as pernicious as that of Ezra Pound in English. That Bly would "line up" with such scum is not without significance. But his servility to Stalin is only one aspect of his overall servility to every repressive value.

The *Reader* incorrectly says that the surrealists shouted "Long live Trotsky!" We shouted, rather, "Long live communism!" and "Long live revolution!" and "Long live surrealism!" The conquest of power by the working class is, for the surrealists, an indispensable preliminary to the creation of a society in which, as Lautreamont wrote, poetry will be made by all. Our respect and admiration for Trotsky, organizer of the Red Army and leader of the Left Opposition, does not alter the fact that we are opposed, here as elsewhere, to the glorification of personalities.

Two last points: None of the surrealists was taken into police custody; Bly's alleged "insistence" that we be released from such custody thus stands unmasked as pompous hypocrisy. Moreover, the "whipping" we are supposed to have received at the hands of the "poets" happens to have been as false as the "poetry" these pipsqueaks produce.

The day after the action Bly telephoned one of us and proposed a friendly get-together, "to talk." He said, "You've entered into a relationship with me." We turned down his repulsive offer, for the simple reason that we have nothing to say to Robert Bly—nothing to talk about with the false poets or any other enemies of human freedom.

the Surrealist Group