

Words of a Kind

Over the past few years I've discovered to my amazement and often embarrassment, just how out of touch different levels of education are with each other. Perhaps it has been more apparent to me, as for the past ten years I have worked in what arguably could be termed the 'freest' form of education in the country, i.e. in the Faculty of Art and Design of a Polytechnic. Venturing out into schools and other seats of learning has for me at times been rather akin to visiting another planet.

It would be fair to say that the problem has been emphasised though – by one particular area of my creative work that I've been engaged in, namely experimental poetry. Feeling free, as indeed I should be in any artistic pursuit that I undertake, I have experimented with words and images with, it seems disastrous effects. This naturally has offended the purists in some Departments of English Literature in Universities, but what I hadn't bargained for was the reactions of some teachers on the shop floor of education. My subjects range far wider than just literary and visual experimentation, for I have taken subjects which are, I've discovered, frighteningly taboo. These of course include the hairy old chestnuts of sex, politics and religion.

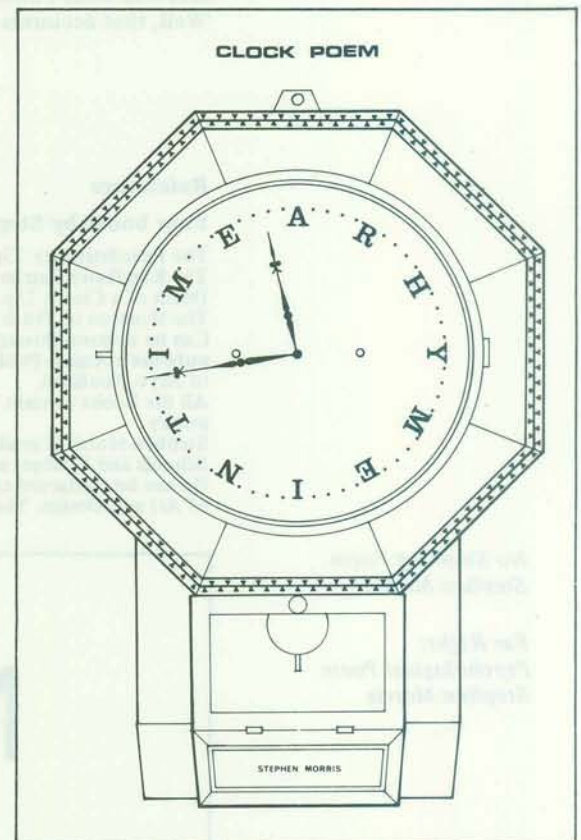
In my complacent belief that all those Victorian barriers had finally been smashed and destroyed in those glorious sunshine days of the nineteen-sixties, I pointed my artistic machine gun in any direction I thought fit. The echoes of dissent and reaction still pound on my eardrums for, having accepted invitations to read and show my work in schools and colleges, I realise, with hindsight, that there lurks in the most unexpected places, sobering condemnation.

In my work I don't set out to shock but what I try to do is to reflect not only my own interests but also to some degree those of society in general. I work with the artist John Sweet who helps, advises and above all encourages me in my work, and when the criticism and the insults are flying around I need all the encouragement I can get.

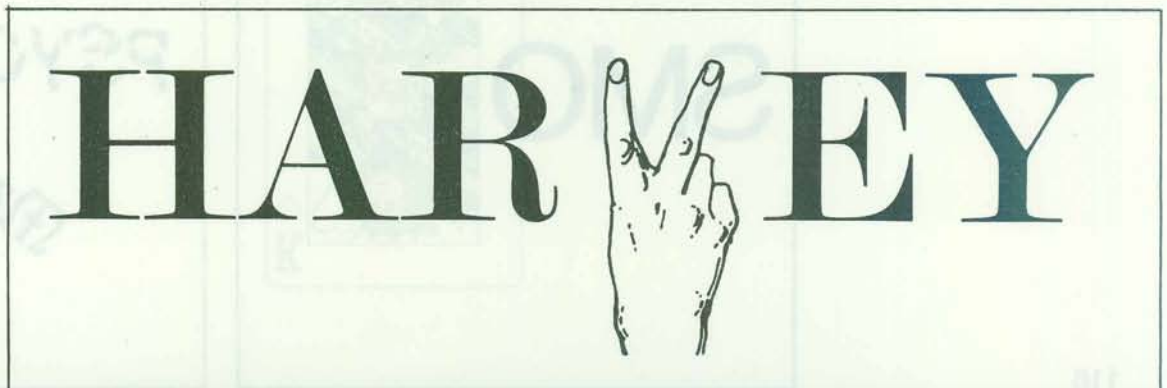
Sadly, when I visit schools now, I moderate my programme which of course is in some ways a pity, for with an artificial presentation it is not only likely to inhibit me but also the children. Visual Poetry is an obvious and immediate way to interest

children and they do respond. One school in Burton-on-Trent surprised me on one of my return visits by presenting their own exhibition of Visual Poetry which was not only very amusing but very original.

Generally, with my own Visual Poetry I try to work on a number of levels. There is of course the basic design which is very important as it must have the effect of being immediate, captivating and of interest. There is the poem itself, what it says, whether it be social, political, humorous, sexual, psychological or religious in comment, and then there is the actual experimentation itself. The Visual Poem embraces three art forms – Literature, Fine



Show Jump Poem
Stephen Morris



Match Poem
Stephen Morris

Art and Graphic Design, and its aim, I feel, is to interest, amuse, stimulate and educate, so there is a great deal to work on and for.

I believe that poetry should be enjoyed, and to be enjoyed it should be understood and not necessarily just at one level. It must, however, attract the reader, or listener, initially and not be read purely to pass examinations; this I think devalues the art form. Poetry can be fun and an individual doesn't have to be a mincing homosexual to write it and he doesn't have to be a seedy academic locked away in a University sipping sherry, or is it port? The poet can be anyone, even the yobbo in the back row of a secondary modern classroom, which in fact was what I once was. As my critics might say 'Well, that accounts for it, doesn't it?'

References

Four books by Stephen Morris.

The Revolutionary 75p.
The Kingfisher Catcher £1.
Death of a Clown 75p.
The Moment of Truth £1.
Can be ordered through any bookshop or directly from the publisher: Aquila Publishing Co., P.O. Box 1, Portree, Isle of Skye, Scotland.
All the books contain Visual Poetry and conventional poetry.
Stephen Morris is available to read and show his work in Schools and Colleges and is on the Writers in Schools list. He can be contacted c/o Dept. of Related Studies, Faculty of Art and Design, The Polytechnic, Wolverhampton.

No Smoking Poem
Stephen Morris

*Far Right:
Psychological Poem*
Stephen Morris

