

WARTON LECTURE ON ENGLISH POETRY

Basil Bunting and his Masters

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My aim is modest. I intend merely to endorse and amplify two sentences written some years ago by Kenneth Cox: 'Bunting's taste was formed early: he had a lot to discover but little to unlearn. His revaluation of the canon was more radical than Pound's and less erratic.' This was Mr Cox's word to the wise. And one might expect that the wise would have taken note. In that case there would be no need for me or any one else to dot the 'i's and cross the 't's. However, where Bunting is concerned such expectations have been many times disappointed. And for that matter, the exceptionally just and independent and learned criticism of Kenneth Cox has never been collected, but must be sought for in the relatively out-of-the way journals that over the years have given him a hearing. In this case the journal is the twice-yearly, admirably capacious magazine *Bête Noire*. This is published from Hull, that is to say, from north of the Trent; and it is noticeable how many of the journals which pay attention to the pugnaciously Northern poet Bunting are themselves from the North Country—a cogent reason, one surmises, why words to the wise often fail to reach them if their wisdom is that of the metropolis, or of Oxford and Cambridge. It is, I acknowledge, not altogether a matter of received wisdoms but of sensibility, particularly auditory sensibility: a lot of Home Counties readers simply cannot hear, as Bunting knew they could not, the music he makes of vowels and consonants given a North Country intonation.

However, it is not my intention to explore the gulf, not political but cultural, between the North of our small country and the South. My

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humbler aim is to explore and vindicate Kenneth Cox's claim for Bunting that 'his revaluation of the canon was more radical than Pound's and less erratic.' It would be a very innocent person who would ask why Bunting's view of the canon is here differentiated from Ezra Pound's rather than, say, T. S. Eliot's. Those who seek to marginalize the achievement of the author of *Briggflatts* have characteristically done so, as they do still, by presenting Bunting as a slavish disciple of Ezra Pound. In this way, even those who do not nurse a special animosity for Pound (or do not care to confess as much) can still convict Bunting of 'slavishness'. And this is the charge that I, like Kenneth Cox, would absolve him from.

Certainly Basil Bunting loved and admired Pound, as man and friend no less than as writer. But now that we have in print a sufficient body of Bunting's judgments on other writers made both publicly and in private—opinions culled and assembled I'm afraid rather more by Americans and Australians than by us British—we can see that not only did Bunting admit debts to both Eliot and Yeats as well as to Pound; but far more importantly he was in the habit of measuring himself constantly and consistently against poets from long before 'modernism' was thought of. I mean to list these names from the sometimes remote past to which Bunting pays homage, tentatively explaining where I can, honestly confessing my incapacity where I can't (and asking to be enlightened by others). What may emerge is Bunting's personal *pantheon*, significantly different from Pound's or any other's—but with this crucial qualification: this will not be a list of, as Bunting saw it, the world's greatest poets, but of those poets who had instructed him; not 'the master-poets of the world', but 'masters' in a more manageable and semi-technical sense—master artificers in whose notional *ateliers* he, Bunting, had served his apprenticeship and learned his trade. He made the distinction himself in relation to no less a name than Homer; Bunting did not challenge in the least the pre-eminence of Homer in the annals of poetry, merely he testified that, so far as he could see, Homer had been of no particular use *to him* in his writing. In making such a distinction Bunting was every inch a professional poet; and it may as well be said at once that those who prefer their poets to be amateurs, doing they know not what, will find Bunting indigestible.

It is convenient, though it risks giving the wrong impression, to start by listing those poets of the English language, writing in England or at least in Great Britain, to whom Bunting declared himself most indebted. Among such poets, Bunting has written or spoken admiringly of Dryden, Burns, Swinburne, D. G. and Christina Rossetti—in each case specifying some of their works rather than others. But none of these, so far as I can see, is accorded the veneration that he consistently reserves for just three names: Thomas Wyatt, Edmund Spenser, and William Wordsworth. Conjoining

the first two of this trio—Wyatt and Spenser—already moves us outside the ambit of received opinion. For long before the late C. S. Lewis famously or notoriously distinguished in Elizabethan poetry between the ‘drab’ and the ‘golden’ (Wyatt belonging with the drab, Spenser with the golden), it had become received opinion that one could esteem one of these poets only at the expense of the other. Wyatt, we were told, was colloquial and dramatic whereas Spenser was ‘ornamental’. But Bunting, if he was aware of such distinctions (as doubtless he was), ignored them. For him Wyatt was great not because he was colloquial and dramatic but because he composed to accompaniment on the lute:

In Tudor music composers were fond of beginning a note just before where we now place the bar and carrying it on over the bar. The technical term for this is syncopation. The effect is to displace a stress or lose it altogether. Wyatt uses this principle very-often. If you read carefully, you’ll find it used in some of Shakespeare’s songs and here and there in other Elizabethan song-writers . . . But it vanished from music, or at least became less prominent in music, particularly popular music, soon after Elizabethan times and did not revive until this century in verse, except among a few highly sophisticated writers.

Less dauntingly technical, more expansive and enthusiastic, was what Bunting said in a 1977 interview where he compared Wyatt with Thomas Campion whom (he made clear) he greatly esteemed:

Before Campion’s day there was Wyatt who is a great poet, a much greater poet than Campion, but we don’t possess his musical settings. His court must have been an astonishing one. There was King Henry VIII, himself a competent poet and a competent composer, responsible for tunes we still sing, responsible for poems which are still readable, and with a queen whom he had chosen, not for beauty (she had very little), but because she was the wittiest and best-educated woman in Europe—Anne Boleyn. And there was Wyatt, who had intended to marry Anne Boleyn before the king took to her, and all of them with their lute in one hand and somebody with a pen beside them, writing it all down while they composed poems. That was the way to do it, and that’s the way Wyatt did it. Right up to 1640 you can say that a poet wasn’t a poet unless he was capable of playing a musical instrument and composing his poems to that. And that applies to the young Milton.

We may suspect that this is a romanticized or idealized account of the murderously insecure court of Henry VIII. And—perhaps more to the point—we may rightly complain that we are given no grounds for agreeing that Wyatt is ‘a much greater poet than Campion’. (We may concede that he is, but Bunting hasn’t specified the grounds on which we may think so.) It remains true that, so far as I can see, no one can prove that the relation between Wyatt’s poetry and his lute-playing is other than what Bunting pretends.

Spenser, in Bunting's sense of the matter, is great precisely because he broke that close relation between poetry and music which Wyatt took for granted, as it was taken for granted as late as the nonage of Milton:

Spenser . . . invented a new thing which has give a complexion to English verse ever since . . . Spenser made the words produce their own music, instead of depending on the musician to do it. It was utterly astonishing to his contemporaries. There's an account in one of Ludowick Briskett's letters of a poetry reading at some village outside Dublin where Spenser read some bits of THE FAERIE QUEENE. They were extremely astonished and worried and called on Spenser to justify doing this sort of thing.

Bunting sees Spenser—he makes the analogy more than once—as the Ezra Pound of his age. The analogy was certainly lost on Pound, as on most of Pound's admirers to the present day. Yet the analogy has its force, particularly if we look where Bunting wants us to, to Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*. 'Spenser began', so Bunting says, 'just as Ezra Pound began, by trying every possible mode that was known to poetry, seeing what could be done in it. In *The Shepherd's Calendar* you have a wonderful collection of possibilities which served English poets for nearly 300 years after Spenser wrote it, and which contained some poems which are exceedingly beautiful in themselves: the "November Eclogue" for instance'. More than once Bunting associated Spenser with Pound in a way less complimentary to either of them: Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, he thought, suffered just as Pound's *Cantos* did, from being composed over a span of years in which historical change was more rapid and far-reaching than either poet had bargained for, or could artistically control. But Bunting's debt to Spenser, if we may believe him, went deeper and was far more intimate. In 1982 a couple of Australian scholars asked Bunting, through the mail: 'In the original drafts of *Briggflatts* were you working in terms of a narrative?' He replied:

A very short narrative—nine stanzas—was needed to set the key for *Briggflatts*. For the rest, I'd learned from Spenser that there's no need to tell the reader what he can see for himself. Perhaps that assertion might puzzle trudgers through *The Faerie Queene*; but consider the 'Amoretti-Epithalamion' volume. No reconciliation after the tiff, the sequence ends in sadness. Then two pages of time filling. Then straight into the greatest of all processional hymns. The reader feels an enormous elation, which wouldn't be there if he'd had to read all the details of making up. Many times I've read it and still I almost cry aloud with delight. Why waste such possibilities, whether for delight or for something different?

Spenser's 'Amoretti' and 'Epithalamion' were indeed printed together, in 1595, the year after Spenser married Elizabeth Boyle. I'm not clear how Spenser scholars today regard the notion that the poems in this volume

constitute a narrative of the poet's courtship crowned by his marriage. I sympathize with those who might say that, since the question cannot be answered, speculation about it is fruitless; moreover, that the question is raised only by those who have a simple-minded idea of how an artist's experience feeds into, and is transformed by, his art. Bunting was not simple-minded; though he subtitled *Briggflats* 'An Autobiography', he was at pains to say that the love-story told in the poem does not recount occurrences so literally as would be required by a deposition in a court of law. In any case, even if Bunting misconceived these Spenser poems, his misconception (it appears) provided him with the structure for his most ambitious poem—a structure that has baffled and intrigued many who have disregarded this plain directive from the author. I need hardly point out that Spenser's poetry does not, either as a whole or in part, figure so largely in any other modernist's scheme of things—not in Pound's, not in Eliot's, not in Wallace Stevens's, not even in Yeats's.

Bunting's habit, when he applauded a poet of the past, was to base his claim on something off-centre from the accredited monumental centre-piece. This shows up very strikingly in respect of the third of his English 'markers': Wordsworth. He exhorted his Australian interlocutors:

Look at the narrative complexity of 'The Brothers'. Wordsworth could tell a story better than anyone in English at least since the middle ages. His humour, so utterly English, so like Chaucer's. The splendour of his sound, lost unfortunately on people who insist on reading him in the pronunciation of southern English. His economy (not always exercised, but usually). And so on . . . He wrote too much, not all at one level, but the best, say, three-quarters of his work seems to me indispensable.

Here surely Bunting doth protest too much. Wordsworth is mostly *economical*? As much as three-quarters of his work is 'indispensable'? Surely not. Yet Bunting is surely right about Wordsworth's humour. There are accounts of how Bunting had a student audience rolling in the aisles on account of 'The Idiot Boy'. And there is indeed much understated humour in the poem that he singles out, 'The Brothers', a very perplexing fable about the relation between the community (or 'the collective') and the individual. Wordsworth the moral sage extolled by Matthew Arnold, the author of 'The Prelude', fades out of sight behind Bunting's Wordsworth, the sly story-teller with a Cumbrian accent.

Bunting offered a more measured and more acceptable, because more general, estimate of Wordsworth, in an interview he gave in 1977:

. . . Wordsworth, who seems to me one of the very greatest poets certainly—as a narrative poet, the best we have in English. That's not usually noticed, I think, but it's true. I'm afraid Wordsworth is mostly misrepresented as part of the Romantic movement because he was a friend of Coleridge who was the

father of the Romantic movement, the real founder of it. But Wordsworth is really the culmination of the 18th century. All the things they were feeling for and trying for throughout that century he suddenly brings to perfection. You have in him, besides the realism, the acme of the discursive poem that the 18th century was always busy with.

This is a view of Wordsworth that was contended for by others in Bunting's lifetime, notably the late F. W. Bateson. And I may as well come clean, and confess that I think Bateson and Bunting were right about this great poet. Romanticism is, and has always been, a stumbling-block in our understanding of Wordsworth at his true worth. Bunting launched no philippics against Romanticism, because it was not his way to deal in such abstractions. But his notable coolness towards William Blake, and his irritable dismissing of 19th-century poetry apart from the nonsense-poems of Lewis Carroll, the translations of the *dolce stil nuovo* by Rossetti, and the metrical *bravura* of his fellow-Northumbrian Swinburne, tell their own tale. In his view, all Romantic theories of poetry were tainted by what was for him the ultimate heresy: self-expression. Eliot and Yeats and Pound all bought into and temporized with that heresy in a way that Bunting could not condone. And that is why an 18th-century Wordsworth figured largely in his pantheon as notoriously he did not in Pound's or Eliot's or Yeats's.

I turn now, in considerable distress, to two bodies of poetry of intimate interest to Bunting, as to which I must declare myself incompetent. The first such *corpus* comprises the poems of Manuchehri and Firdausi and other poets esteemed as classical in Persian and Arabic. The momentousness of these for Bunting is more than literary: he married an Iranian lady, and his sympathy with an Iranian way and quality of life is evident throughout his poetry, at its most generously explicit in the slim volume he made out of his World War Two experiences, *The Spoils* (1951). This is a matter that may be thought topical just now, when we seem poised to unleash on the Persian Gulf dogs of war more mordant than ever before. In any case, Bunting nowhere represents his Persian sympathies as in any way exotic; he is not in that sense an Orientalist. He does not offer classical Persian culture—for instance in architecture any more than in literature—as making good what is lacking in Western European culture. What he admires in Manuchehri and Hafiz and Firdausi, as in the architecture of Isfahan, is not offered to us as a challenge; the notion of 'Eurocentrism' as a condition we inherit and should seek to correct, is to him quite alien. What he learns from Firdausi is what he learns, or had learned, from Spenser. The iron laws that govern poetic composition are the same under Islam as within Christendom.

The other body of ancient precedents as to which I must plead ignorance is that of Old English, Old Norse, and Northumbrian Cymric.

Here fortunately we have help, in an admirable essay by Andrew McAllister (in *Bête Noire*, 2/3 [1987]). By citing at all points chapter and verse McAllister shows how intimately each of these archaic strands is woven into the texture of *Briggflatts*. And so he earns the splendid flare of partisanship that he ends with: '... it is a poem which performs one of the most important tasks of our day ... , appropriating from language and social history the identity and self-respect necessary to any region or culture which would set itself in opposition to the feckless and feculent hegemony perpetrated these nine hundred years from the southeast.' The learned and Latinated 'feculent', alliterating so sonorously with the Scotticism 'feckless', betrays McAllister into proving, even as he seems to deny it, how North and South-east have co-operated in the making of our language and our literature. And Bunting is aware of that, as some of his intemperate admirers are not.

Bunting indeed must be thought a thoroughly *Latinated* poet—in the crucial sense that he seems never to have doubted that Roman Latin and its derivatives (the Romance languages) were the principal conduits through which was transmitted to him the sort of poetry that he sought to perpetuate and further adorn. If this should seem something that can go without saying, it is not so. For Bunting, fiercely and often resentfully aware of the North European poetic traditions that had been and still were marginalized in public esteem, there was every temptation, which others in that situation had succumbed to, to try to locate a centre for Western European poetic culture somewhere in Germanic or Scandinavian Europe. If that alternative ever presented itself to Bunting, he dismissed it out of hand. It helped that he had spent as many years among Italian-speakers and Spanish-speakers as among speakers of Persian. For him the centre, if 'centre' in this perspective has any meaning, was still the Mediterranean. Accordingly, his dealings with the ancient Latin poets constitute a matter of the first importance. Those dealings prompt two overwhelming questions: why did Bunting consistently prefer Lucretius to Eliot's marker or 'banker', Virgil? and why, among lyrical poets, did Bunting consistently prefer Horace before (Pound's favourite) Propertius, and (Yeats's favourite) Catullus?

The very conspicuous preference for Lucretius over Virgil opens up very long historical-cultural perspectives which I have adumbrated in another place, and will not now rehearse. Very briefly Bunting, as a heterodox but never formally alienated member of the Society of Friends, was a nonconformist churchman who could not fail to be affronted by T. S. Eliot's attempt to enlist Virgil, on the score of the *Pollio* eclogue, as an apologist for the Anglo-Catholic reading of ecclesiastical history. This argument, though I believe that it alone accords with the recorded facts, is

as unwelcome to those who would make of Bunting a secular humanist as to Roman Catholic or Anglo-Catholic apologists. Bunting was a religious poet; and his religion was in large part that of Lucretius, whom we certainly misread if we see in him a secular humanist born several centuries before his allotted time. Lucretius's materialism/epicureanism was not, in his time and place, irreligious.

This matter of Lucretius, who is a presence in Bunting's verse as well as in his conversation, opens up what may be legitimately considered Bunting's *ideology*. And anxious though I am to follow Bunting himself in discussing poetry only in its own terms, yet his honourable reluctance to transgress those self-imposed limits has led to the misconception that he had no ideology, for instance no politics and no philosophy of history. This is quite wrong. As a responsible temporary citizen of societies like Iran and the Canary Islands under General Franco, as well as of the UK, Bunting had arrived at firm political opinions and sentiments. He set great store, we may say, by bloody-mindedness; by the right and duty of the individual to mutiny against an imposed consensus, inside a State or a Church or a Trade Union. This is a stance often affected by irresponsible Bohemians; and there are colourful anecdotes, particularly about Bunting's youth in Paris, which taken by themselves suggest that Bunting's ethics and politics were those of Bohemia. But Bunting's attitudes were far more firmly based than that, especially in his historic awareness of the civic and religious tradition which nurtured him, which he honoured by naming his most ambitious poem, *Briggflatts*, after an ancient Quaker meeting-house. With impressive quietness, very late in his life, he remarked of Eliot, Yeats and Pound: 'What these poets and many other writers really had in common was a love of order'—a love, he goes on to acknowledge, 'shared with Dante and Shakespeare and probably far more than half of the world's great poets . . .' This is a love that, he implies, he cannot share—which does not mean that he is in favour of disorder, of anarchy, only that he looks for an order in society far more flexible, less overbearing, than what Eliot and Yeats and Pound dreamed of and tried to will into being.

Of course, no linguistic or poetic procedure, still less any conspicuous change in such procedures, is without ideological implications. 'Horatian' is a term we apply to a way of life practised or recommended, as readily as to a way of constructing a poem. However, Bunting's other Roman, Horace, is recommended to us in terms not ideological at all but strictly technical. The Horace whom he admires is, it should be noted, the lyrical Horace: the poet of the *carmina*, not of the *sermones* (satires and epistles). Why is it Horace rather than Catullus (as with Yeats) or Propertius (as with Pound) who is pre-eminent for Bunting among Roman lyrical poets? One main part of the answer is: Horace's grammar. Thus, he tells the

Australians in 1982: 'Young, I liked Horace's way of changing the whole mood of a poem in a single line. Now I am astonished at the feats he was able to perform with Latin syntax.' It was along the same lines that Bunting in 1948 admonished Louis Zukofsky:

Horace works wonders with a word order which was crabbed even to his contemporaries, as one may see by reading Lucretius and Ovid on either side of him in time. It is not right to banish such effects, which have their place, one I think too much neglected now, even though we and especially I follow Yeats's example of plain diction and plain syntax.

And this must be taken along with a remark later in the Australian interview: 'Certainly Pound was right to say that poetry ought to be written at least as well as prose. Translated, that should mean: Learn syntax'.

But this is extraordinary! For among the modernists whose names are most often coupled with Bunting's, such a respect for syntax, for the grammar of the simple sentence, is conspicuous by its absence. Particularly is this true of his American peers and co-workers. The command of syntax by William Carlos Williams is rudimentary; George Oppen comes to distrust it completely; and Pound himself in *The Cantos* treats it as, at all points, dispensable. It is a very large and intractable subject this, as I learned nearly forty years ago, writing a book called *Articulate Energy*. For present purposes, it is enough to remark that very few of the modernist poets, at least in English, write at all often *in sentences*. (Yeats is the great exception, as Bunting was at pains to point out to Zukofsky, who took the point or else endorsed it, for he too wrote verse that mostly can be parsed.) Bunting, apart from a youthful aberration in his 'Villon', always writes in sentences, though his conciseness—especially his excision of needless connectives—obscures the fact, even for his admirers. It is a salient feature of his poetry, which in this respect is deeply conservative. And this stylistic conservatism he learned, by his own account, chiefly from Horace.

Instead of proceeding at once to explore other places where Bunting fed from Latinate or Romance sources—from Dante in Italian, and Malherbe in French—this seems a good time to grasp the nettle of Bunting's relations with the tradition of American poetry. Because he spent so much of his life outside Great Britain, and also because sixty years ago he was the sole non-American member of the poets' group who called themselves 'Objectivists', it has always been possible for ill-disposed people to present him as essentially an American poet who merely happened to carry a British passport. This is possible only to those who regard Northumberland as nearer, culturally and in imagination, to Nantucket than to Sussex; and unfortunately such people exist. In fact Bunting's relations with American poetry were always fraught and vexed, though one must read between the lines to discern this. It was American,

not British, opinion that accorded Bunting as much recognition as he came by in his lifetime; and it was mostly American friends and correspondents who assured him through his worst times that he was not forgotten. Accordingly, he had every reason for being tender towards American poetry. On the other hand his dislike of the self-expressive strain in Romantic theories could not help but set him at odds with most American justifications of their poetry, since these recognize effectively no precedents earlier than the Romantic Movement. The strain shows up, if we look at all closely, in what Bunting has to say about his one-time Objectivist colleague, William Carlos Williams. Though Bunting obviously regarded Williams with affection, and pays him compliments wherever he can, it is plain that he could not endorse the very high valuation now generally accorded to Williams in the United States. He is particularly severe on *Paterson*, William's attempt at a sort of epic. And there is a more illustrious name about which he pleads inconspicuously to differ: Emily Dickinson. Her eccentrically sparse punctuation permits and invites syntactical uncertainties such as Bunting the Horatian could not approve. He preferred to her the obscure and humble mid-Westerner Lorine Niedecker, who was sustained through long years by letters from Zukofsky and Bunting and a couple of others. If Bunting had a pupil in poetry apart from Tom Pickard in this country, it was probably Ms Niedecker.

Even the one American poet of the past whom Bunting commended loud and often—I mean, Walt Whitman—seems to me not a clear-cut case. Bunting told the Australians that he did not write *vers libre*:

'Free verse' is a French 19th century term, at first mere slackening of the very strict conventions of their alexandrines, which has gradually degenerated into bad prose chopped up. That gets confused with verse that is derived from Walt Whitman (mostly by Pound and me) which is contrived by modifications of the musical phrase, which seems 'free' to people who don't have ear enough to detect the principle. Quantity is no doubt one element in it—there are semibreves as well as crochets etc. in the music. To write purely quantitative poems in English . . . is very difficult because the stress in English is so strong that people, at least in the south of England, don't notice anything else. Besides, the stress sometimes modifies the quantity. English phrases with stress on a short syllable are not common. But a poet ought to be always aware of the quantities and it is very good exercise to imitate quantitative patterns.

This certainly seems to mean that Bunting counted Whitman among his masters. And if I confess that I've never been able to match up these sentences with any passage of Bunting's verse, that may be taken to prove only that I 'don't have ear enough'. What may be more betraying is that the Whitman poem that Bunting always cites is 'Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking', which any one can see is very untypical in being an almost

regular and scannable dactylic measure. Bunting told Eric Mottram that when he was fifteen years old he was sought out by Whitman's friend Edward Carpenter, on the strength of a prize essay he had written on Whitman, 'a more or less national prize—a national prize for Quaker schools'. That would have been in 1915, when Edward Carpenter's vigorous propaganda was making Whitmanesque poets out of writers only a few years older than Bunting: Ivor Gurney, Edward Thomas, D. H. Lawrence. The enterprise was discontinued when this generation of poets died; Bunting looks like a lone and eccentric survivor from that climate of opinion.

About Bunting's masters in the Romance languages it seems I shall have to be brief. It may appear that his devotion to Dante can go without saying, but we forget that there have been generations of English poets, and not so long ago at that, for whom *The Divine Comedy* was by no means required reading; Father Gerard Hopkins thought it manifestly unserious when set beside *Paradise Lost*. Bunting testified: 'When I became acquainted first with the work and then with the persons of Pound and Eliot, what astonished me and made me so enthusiastic was that here were men who were doing and had been doing all the time . . . the things which I had painfully worked out for myself were the things necessary to do with poetry, but we'd arrived by quite different roads at this conclusion. Only a very small part of my road to these ideas coincides with Pound's road or Eliot's road. The chief part of that would be that we were all three very enthusiastic readers of Dante.' Eliot's concept of Dante depended, as we have seen, on a view of historic Christendom such as Bunting could not share; and Pound of course came to *The Divine Comedy* from outside Christendom altogether. If Bunting seems to insist too loudly on his independence from the two older poets, these radical divergences among them must be borne in mind.

I have now spoken for the best part of an hour about a poet, without speaking a single line of his verse. That is not my usual practice, nor a procedure that I commend. But I have not been offering an introduction to Bunting's poetry, nor trying to win new readers for it. I have done that in other places. On this occasion I have assumed that Bunting's status as a poet of the first importance is by now, or ought to be, assured; and I have been concerned rather to define what sort of poet he is. That sort should now be clear; unlike say Hardy or Yeats, poets who do not require that we revise the canon. Bunting belongs with Pound and Eliot (and Wordsworth), poets who do make that demand of us. The demand that Bunting makes is seen at its most intransigent when we turn to the last and most surprising of Bunting's declared masters: François de Malherbe (1555–1628), whom he was extolling in *The New English Weekly* as early as

1932. Only six years before that St John Lucas, introducing a revised and expanded version of his *Oxford Book of French Verse* (originally 1907), had written of 'the cold cleverness of Malherbe'. And 50 years later D. G. Charlton was still telling British readers of Malherbe: 'however, even in practice, he was seldom more than a conscientious craftsman'. It was in the face of a consensus thus unquestioningly based on a romantic idea of the lyrical afflatus that Bunting first found, and then declared (as late as 1969), Malherbe among his masters. There is a great deal that could and should be said about this, I will throw out only two hasty observations: first Bunting saw himself as a lyric poet, vigorously scotching for instance any suggestion that in *Briggflatts* he had indulged epical ambitions; but secondly, it seems certain that he conceived of 'lyric' in uncompromisingly pre-romantic or anti-romantic terms. We can get access to his lyricism out of Horace and Malherbe, or Spenser and Wyatt, sooner than out of John Keats. And yet it was—was it not?—the Romantic Movement that notably demanded attention for those Celtic and Scandinavian poets of long ago whose cadences are lovingly re-created in *Briggflatts*. How can this be? Not for the first time I confess myself out of my depth; but the possibility surely arises that we misconstrue bardic and skaldic poetry if we read it too much through the spectacles of folklorists and antiquaries of 200 years ago. Bunting's canon comprehends Taliessin *and* Horace, Manuchehri *and* Malherbe; it is more radical than Pound's and more consistent, because even more than Pound Bunting honours that status of 'conscientious craftsman' which the romantically inclined will always speak of slightly.