

“I do not think,” remarked the late Friedrich Dürrenmatt a decade ago at a so-called European Festival of Literature in Strasbourg, “that ‘Europe’ is a very interesting idea.” This was more than the lofty independence of a Swiss on his Alp, and more too than an understandable irritation at a festival – advertised as European – at which over a hundred of the hundred-and-fifty featured authors were French. Dürrenmatt was the first to acknowledge common European roots in the Graeco-Roman legacy, and to value the shared experience, for better or worse, of many centuries of trade and exploration; of war and peace; of religious, cultural, scientific and social endeavour. If he was dismissive of the label “Europe”, it was not through any denial of the profound continuities that link even the culturally more disparate nations of Europe, but from a deep distrust of the hijacking and brandnaming of the word in recent decades. To speak of “Europe” in our time is exasperatingly difficult because it implies opting into, or rejecting, a complete polity-package designed by politicians and bureaucrats, some of them true visionaries but many mere apparatchiks on a roll.

If it is problematic to identify “Europe” as a single entity, it can be still more problematic to locate the continent in relation to the rest of the world: in the one scale of the European balance are the glories of Shakespeare, Michelangelo and Beethoven, certainly – but in the other the atrocities of crusaders, conquistadors, colonists and Nazis. This is mined territory. But at a time when Europe is often perceived as an enemy by others – from those living in the aftermath of colonialism to (say) farmers around the globe incensed by the EU’s common agricultural policy – it is worth seeking a position neither Eurocentric nor Europhobic. *Stand’s* position is that the centre is not in any one continent, not in any single London or Paris or New York or Buenos Aires, but wherever imagination and language are used with vividness and power. This was the position of Goethe, a great European but one whose engagement with other cultures world-wide was dynamic; we mark the 250th anniversary of his birth (on 28 August) with Martin Swales’ elegant essay on Faust and Don Juan. It was the position of Eugenio Montale, now the poets’ poet (in the English-speaking world) as Cavafy arguably was in the Eighties and as Rilke indisputably was in the Thirties; and it has been the position of Peter Porter, who turned seventy earlier this year and could fairly claim more plausibly than most to have married the “old” world and the “new”. Our feature celebrates his two-volume *Collected Poems* (OUP, 1998).

This issue of *Stand* not only prints poetry of great vigour by some of Europe’s finest and most diverse practitioners – from elder statesmen such as Różewicz,

Tranströmer, Holappa and Enzensberger, to young talents such as Oleschinski, Schrott and Grøndahl – but also implies throughout an understanding of Europe that goes beyond the centric or phobic. In the pages of this issue there is work by or about Indian, Australian, New Zealand, Nigerian, South African, Israeli and American writers – as well as English, Irish, Scottish, French, Spanish, Italian, Austrian, German, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, Hungarian, Russian, Polish, and Greek. In this interplay of Europe and the world at large, which upholds a *Stand* tradition, we may be understood as offering a silent riposte to (say) Günter Grass, who once spent several months in India with his nose buried in the works of Theodor Fontane, and who proves in his new book, self-effacingly titled *My Century*, to be immured in a world-view which is Eurocentric at best, at worst Teutocentric, and has little left of the authority that made *The Tin Drum* one of the continent's twentieth-century classics.

Readers are reminded that entries are now welcomed in *Stand's* poetry competition, judged by Maura Dooley and Dennis O'Driscoll. The deadline is 31 March 2000, extended beyond the end-of-the-year deadline previously announced in our pages because of the anticipated turn-of-millennium bedlam, which we're confident entrants will agree is best avoided.

*Stand* is also holding its first UK reading series, at selected venues in Britain. At the time this editorial went to the printers, dates had been set at the King's Lynn Poetry Festival (24 September), at the University of Warwick (12 October) and the Bolton Institute (25 October), and more were in preparation. Full details will be advertised in the *London Review of Books* in the latter half of September.

And finally, *Stand* and *Books en Route* are glad to offer an ordering service for readers wishing to buy books reviewed in our pages. For details, see page 41.