Amrit Singh and the Birmingham Quean: fictions, fakes and forgeries in a vernacular counterculture


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Abstract

For a literary critic preparing a scholarly edition of a text like this within an épistème that disparages the theory underpinning it for being tainted with the gestural idealism of 1968 and the neon-glare of 1980s high postmodernism, the crucial question is how to reconcile the commitment to authenticity ingrained in historicist textual studies (perhaps the critic’s only viable disciplinary inheritance) with the author’s implicit antagonism to any such quietist approach. The encounter inevitably becomes a battle of wills. In the course of the current project, this theoretical struggle escalates exponentially as doubts concerning the authenticity (and indeed the existence) of both writer and manuscript are multiplied.

If a thesis can be retrospectively extrapolated from this project, it is the argument that fiction is demonstrably a tractable forum for research in the Arts and Social Sciences: all the more tractable for its anti-authenticity. The critic’s loss is the novelist’s gain. Specifically, in this case, the faithful historian of late twentieth century literatures, languages and cultures can solve the key dilemma of the subject by working under the auspices of Creative Writing. Only in this way can justice be done to the most cogent intellectual trend of the posmodern period (perhaps its defining feature): one that revelled in its own pluralities, ambiguities and contradictions, and resisted all the unifying, teleological models of ‘history’ that had been implicated in the century’s terrible ‘final solutions’. In other words, only fiction can tell the history of a culture that rejects history. If this means condoning forgery… so be it.
The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition is a work of non-fiction by Theodore Roszak originally published in 1969. Roszak "first came to public prominence in 1969, with the publication of his The Making of a Counterculture" which chronicled and gave explanation to the European and North American counterculture of the 1960s. The term "counterculture" was first used by Roszak in this book.