

Erik Bauersfeld: In the States we hear a great deal about the importance of the subject matter. For instance there's a feminist movement, a gay movement, a third world movement, and so we have the gay writers, the feminist writers, the third world writers. Do you think that these people are being true to art or being true to their movement?

Eric Mottram: That's funny, this afternoon a student of mine was asking questions about this. She'd been looking at Virginia Woolf. She was talking about one particular feminist writer and she was saying that the trouble with this woman that she was writing about is she's forgotten what Keats called negative capability, and that is the idea of not writing propaganda, by which I mean writing not being an exclusive action but rather an inclusive one. So apparently Virginia Wolfe understood this: that you may be writing in fact not a work of art but only a propaganda piece for a singular cause. I think that issue is still very strong. It's no more difficult than if you're writing an ideological argument of any kind. If you're trying to write Christian hymns and are trying to make them into poetry rather than just more Isaac Watts—it's the same problem.

Erik Bauersfeld: Great artists have always done that. They've always combined the artistry with some kind of concern about life. And that's where the magic comes from.

Eric Mottram: Singularity is the problem, isn't it? It's like that poem of Yeats, *Easter 1916*. He's saying that the problem was, they sacrificed themselves to the cause. If you're an artist and you sacrifice yourself to a cause, you probably won't be an artist: you'll become a martyr who writes propaganda. And that's something I don't want to be! [laughter]

My great hero is a French poet, not an American one, I'm sorry to say, and that is Rene Char, someone who was a Maquis leader, a leader of the Resistance, who managed to be at the same time a magnificent poet. There's that sense that in his poetry you feel that what he meant by resistance is a radiating thing, not a restricting thing, that he really is a man of negative capability in that sense of endless range. Somehow he never gives up the Resistance idea, not yielding to some passive authority. I respect that an awful lot. It's an ideal for me.