Bernstein makes a case for poetry of dissent

By R.D. POHIL

"We have to get over, as we're getting over, the idea that we can affrak to one another in the universal voice of poetry," writes poet and critic Charles Bernstein in his most recent collection of essays, "A Poetics" (Harvard University Press, 1992). "When we get over this idea...I think it will begin to be possible, as it always has been, to listen to another, one at a time and in the various voices that present themselves, or that we find the need to make."

The significance of the unprintable article "a" in the volume's title is implicit in Bernstein's opening essay, "State of the Art," which begins, "There is of course no state of American poetry, but various states, modes, sub-genres, and states..." Bernstein's vision of poetry is one of a universe of poetic voices, each with its own perspective and expressivity, capable of speaking in its own distinct and unique form.

For Bernstein, co-founder of the influential journal A.N.O.S.G. (A New Order of Speaking and Speaking) and a leading theorist and poet in the "movement" loosely associated with "Poetry is the assertion of a distinctiveness of the poem in the context of new forms..." his work is about poetry that disrupts the status quo and challenges the boundaries of traditional forms. He calls for a poetry that is not simply another form of "speech," but a "different" voice, one that is not only poetic but also political.

In the same vein, Bernstein also explores the concept of "disguised passages" in his essay "In the Middle of Modernism," where he argues that "the absence of any coherent or determinate place for the poetics of the avant-garde" is a result of the "intertwining of the avant-garde and the political." He suggests that the "disguised passages" are a way of "disguising" the political in poetry.

Diversity as status quo

In "State of the Art," Bernstein presents a series of ahistorical and ahistorical models of diversity, including "theatre of the absurd" and "theatre of the political," as the only way to "engage the diversity" of contemporary poetry. He suggests that the "theatre of the absurd" is a way of "disguising" the political, while the "theatre of the political" is a way of "disguising" the absurd.

In his essay "Coincidence and Critical Plots," Bernstein argues that "theatre of the absurd" is "a response to the failure of the political" and that "the theatre of the political" is "a response to the failure of the absurd." He suggests that the "disguised passages" are a way of "disguising" the political in poetry, as well as a way of "disguising" the absurd.

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Elsewhere in this volume, Bernstein offers a compelling argument that, all of the symposium, the writer's role in the "disguised passage" is not simply to "disguise" the political, but to "disguise" the absurd.

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