

Making sculpture is surely one of the world's few truly heroic pursuits. The wiriness of the activity, the wrestling with clay, the casting and carting, the expense and risk and length and largeness of a physical undertaking in which the worker must finally wait on the fire to know what he has wrought – all of this must awake in his onlookers an inevitable expectation of heroic statement. Whatever we say, most of us hearing the word 'sculpture' feel our hopes revert to a still-revered archaic world where man's destiny was the only fit subject for the handler of bronze. And whatever he does, the sculptor must lead us into this bronze age, or else betray us.

God knows we have been betrayed often enough in these past years. For far too long sculpture galleries have been turned into temples to the welder. For far too long we have entered them with hope to see again true shapes of our gigantic suffering, only to be rewarded with jungle-gyms. A blasphemous army of brutalists has camped in the arena of civilization, piling up girders to bury the human image.

Let us here therefore celebrate Elisabeth Frink, who believes that as man is made in God's image, so must art be made in man's. Not for her the arthritic tangle of the constructivist junk yard presented as symbol of the human experience. For twenty years now a succession of tremendous and essential creatures has walked out of her furnace, justifying in triumph the toughness of their birth. It seems to me that I have known them all my life, these mythic and modern beings, encasing in primitive lineaments our most abiding strifes.

When I think of Frink, it is first and immediately of heroes and their beasts: huge men standing or running, their cannonball heads impassive, or riding blank-eyed upon obsessive horses. Ten years ago, when I was trying to conjure *Equus* – concerned not with one horse, but horseness itself – it was these riders of hers I saw most constantly, reined and curvetting in the mind's eye. Even in drawings they appear sculptural: the men grave and helmeted for some ritual race of great danger, their mounts imprinted on the paper like fuming ink-blot, curly hides matted with milk and chestnut smoke. I see

these animals still, as I write now, glaring before their dreadful gallop, or lying languid – amazing image – girdling with their legs in their turn their spent and naked riders. Over and over I thank Frink for these images of power. Power infused with gentleness: the twist of suffering deep through the metal.

Over the years I have thanked her for so many images of power. For her bestiary, of course: her flailing owls and clawing kestrels; for her dappled lynx; and for that small wild boar I have seen trotting so trim through English undergrowth, transforming a Dorset garden into the Dordogne, and the Dordogne into the land of the Dogon! I thank her even more for her warriors and sentinels. For her living kings and her dead. Her falling men and spinning men. And most especially for her fliers. Icarus is a Frink obsession. In her pantheon the final heroes are bird men, thick torsos striving over and over to sprout wings, shoulders forever beating truncated spans of bronze against untameable air. These slabby and straining shapes of aspiration are truly hers, and unforgettable.

I even thank her for those other fliers – that squadron of giant aviators whose huge goggled heads so disturbed me when I saw them a decade ago. I say 'even' because at first sight of them it seemed to me that this holy aspiration had grown unholy: that the power had turned sinister, and to such a degree less heroic. The constant wearing of dark glasses always speaks of impotence to me: a fear of having scrutiny returned – the secret terror of the torturer.

I remember writing in my play *Shrivings* about 'The motorcade boys... The slow lookers through documents. The postillions of state in dark glasses, now not even bobbing on cream horses, – just on mobikes! Not even in plumes, – just in perspex, crackling with transistors. Disembodied... Assembled men!' I was surely thinking then of these grim heads of Frink, as much as I was of those state troopers in America, the sadistic children in their boy-scout hats who flag you down on highways and try to intimidate you through staring – eyeless in plastic.

Of course more than ever we live worldwide in the

age of the intimidator. Nothing of our progress has remotely exorcized him. The turner of the rack and the tier of the electrode are the same man; our ever greater refinement in surgery seems almost to mock our ever more numbing savagery of soul. Our current passion for planting bombs in public places, whether made in Tehran or Tipperary, makes the retreat from humanity complete. God is invoked to dismember man, and the dismemberer now need not even contemplate his handiwork: he can sit safely ten streets away, entirely immune from the danger of the stray sight which might startle pity. The torturer no longer stares through glasses darkly: he is dark entirely. He is not just blinkered by bad faith, but blinded. It is not only the sighted who wear shades. I see now that they were prophetic, these monstrous heads. Clearly the Ayatollah's men have no vision at all, nor do those of the IRA. The sculptor knew this when she made them, mating the faces of Easter Island with the Tonton Macoute. They are dreadful images of our time: not heroic, since only the scared would kneel to them, but no doubt inevitable.

The torturing thug is in all of us. He is part of our strength, part of the will which (for example) sculpts. He endures also as our despair: for what is the thug but the insupportable bronze in us, which keeps us forever from flying?

All of this is known to Elisabeth Frink. Like all true artists she labours in the thrall of double vision. She sees with proper stereoscopy through both the male eye and the female. Now in her newest work she has actually taken the goggles off her creatures' eyes, and exposed them nakedly to our view. And what do we see? Vulnerability, of course: a massive vulnerability – vulnerability perpetual. We see the wronged inside the wronger; the wounded inside the wounder; the enduring female in the asserting male. There is nothing strained about this ambiguity. The marks of the hiders' goggles remain on their cheeks when removed. Their gaze we see is lowered and inward, as if ashamed for those eternal torturers whose indispensable disguise must forever stay visible on their flesh, like perverse but undeniable stigmata.

Some time ago I saw these heads in England,

displayed in all the pride of their passivity on a wide flight of steps outside the Law Courts in Winchester. The space around them was large, but they filled it entirely; the sky was large, but they did not shrink under it; they are true icons – figures of unprotected yet indestructible witness. As I looked at them, and at the tall and beautiful *Madonna* beside them – a new figure in the Frink mythology, whose face so much resembled theirs – I was mesmerized by a familiarity. Whose face was this? Then suddenly it was apparent. Impersonal, generalized, monumentalized as it was, I knew it clearly: it was her own. The sculptor's.

And in the essential way in which sculpture is justified – it was mine also.

Peter Shaffer's first major success in the theatre came with *Five Finger Exercise* in 1958 and was followed by a series of widely-acclaimed plays including *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964), *Black Comedy* (1956), *Equus* (1973) and *Amadeus* (1979). As well as being performed in theatres throughout the world, several of his plays have been filmed following his own screenplays.