

Philip Hobsbaum:

An Inventory of His Collection at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center

Descriptive Summary

- Creator:** Hobsbaum, Philip, 1932-
- Title:** Philip Hobsbaum Collection of Correspondence and Manuscripts of The Group
- Dates:** ca. 1955-1968
- Extent:** 1 box (.42 linear feet)
- Abstract:** This collection contains letters received by Philip Hobsbaum from other founder-members of The Group writer's workshop—Martin Bell, Alan Brownjohn, Edward Lucie-Smith, George MacBeth, Peter Porter, and Peter Redgrove—as well as critical and personal correspondence. Other papers include typescript and handwritten manuscripts of poems by The Group members, typescripts of letters to the editor sent to Hobsbaum for proofreading, and a "Group Address List" of members and advisors to The Group.
- RLIN Record #:** TXRC03-A22
- Language:** English.
- Access:** Open for research
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Administrative Information

- URL:** <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/research/fa/hobsbaum.html>
- Acquisition:** Purchase,1974 (R6118)
- Processed by:** Lindsey Peebles, 2003
- Repository:** [Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin](#)
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Biographical Sketch

Philip Hobsbaum, poet, critic, and teacher, was born in London on 29 June 1932 and raised in North and West Yorkshire. He attended Downing College at Cambridge under his mentor F. R. Leavis and did research at Sheffield University under William Empson. In 1962, Hobsbaum taught at Queen's University in Belfast, but left in 1966 when Northern Ireland was on the verge of civil war—a time and place that pervades his poetry. Hobsbaum was lecturer and reader at the University of Glasgow from 1966 to 1985, and later Professor of English Literature there, from 1985 to 1997. He was instrumental in beginning Glasgow University's M.A. in Creative Writing. His four published collections of poetry are *The Place's Fault* (1964), *In Retreat* (1966), *Coming Out Fighting* (1969), and *Women and Animals* (1972). Hobsbaum's main influence, however, has been his two major works of literary criticism, *A Theory of Communication* (1970) and *Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry* (1979). He resides in Glasgow, Scotland.

Hobsbaum is perhaps most famously known as the originator of several writing workshops in Cambridge, London, Belfast, and Glasgow. The first of these poetry forums originated as a verse-speaking group while Hobsbaum was at Cambridge in 1955. Eventually the group developed into a kind of writer's workshop, focusing on, but not limited to, poetry. Typically meetings of The Group were held on Friday evenings at either Hobsbaum's flat or Edward Lucie-Smith's home, and often preceded by a visit to the pub. Each meeting focused on an individual writer. The writer for that week would read aloud generally six or seven poems, which had been cyclostyled and dispersed throughout The Group's membership the week before. This procedure allowed for intense and lively discussion of the poems, as members could prepare specific textual criticism beforehand and then participate in an open dialogue at the meeting with the poems right in front of them. In the epilogue to *A Group Anthology* (1963), Hobsbaum argues for the importance of discussion to any writer, and the writer's need for "community to keep him in touch with his audience."

The Group had no manifesto per se and was not tied to traditional formalism, but Hobsbaum and consequently The Group itself were influenced by a university approach to close readings of the text. Lucie-Smith characterized The Group as one of diversity and freedom: "This is a group of poets who find it possible to meet and discuss each other's work helpfully and without backbiting or backscratching...we have no axe to grind—this isn't a gang and there's no monolithic body of doctrine to which everyone must subscribe" (Lucie-Smith to Hobsbaum, Nov. 1961). Hobsbaum later established a similar group in Belfast, one that has been credited with facilitating the emergence of, among others, Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, and Seamus Heaney.

Sources:

Levenson, Christopher. *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 40: Poets of Great Britain and Ireland Since 1960*. The Gale Group, 1985: 216-226.

Lucie-Smith, Edward and Philip Hobsbaum, eds. *A Group Anthology*. Oxford University Press, 1963: 115-123.

Scope and Contents

The collection contains primarily letters received by Philip Hobsbaum between 1955 and 1966. The bulk of the letters are from other founder-members of The Group, namely Martin Bell, Alan Brownjohn, Edward Lucie-Smith, George MacBeth, Peter Porter, and Peter Redgrove. These letters focus predominantly on members' poetry and professional careers, the affairs of The Group, as well as specific, often line-by-line criticism of each other's work. The collection is arranged alphabetically in a single series.

Edward Lucie-Smith's correspondence is the most consistent and frequent, and includes editorial communications to Hobsbaum from 1961 to 1963 concerning their work to put together a collection of poems by members of The Group, *A Group Anthology* (1963). Yet Lucie-Smith's often very warm letters also convey the sense of a strong and intimate friendship between the two men, and their mutual love for poetry. On a similar level of intimacy, Peter Redgrove and Martin Bell's letters reveal Hobsbaum's role as advisor and loyal friend, and also his importance to the mission of The Group. Matters concerning *Delta*, a literary magazine started by Redgrove and for which Hobsbaum was second editor, are also included in letters from Redgrove.

A. Alvarez's correspondence is largely in the critical vein, as he responds to several letters from Hobsbaum and others in The Group, particularly in response to his review of *A Group Anthology* for *The London Observer*. David Holbrook and George Fraser's letters center around professional advice and friendship.

Also included in the papers are some typescripts and handwritten manuscripts of poems by Lucie-Smith, Bell, Holbrook, and Redgrove. Most of the poems are contained within letters: "I like letters leavened with poems, and I expect you do too" (Redgrove to Hobsbaum, 29 June 1958). This finding aid includes an index of the works present in the collection. Other points of interest include typescripts of letters to the editor sent to Hobsbaum for proofreading, and a "Group Address List" logging nearly ninety members and advisors to The Group.

Of the writers represented in this collection, the Ransom Center has extensive holdings of papers by George MacBeth, Edward Lucie-Smith, and Peter Redgrove, and smaller collections by Martin Bell, George Fraser, and Peter Porter. The Bell papers contain additional information about the history of The Group and copies of a majority of the poems duplicated for discussion during its existence.

Index Terms

People

Alvarez, A. (Alfred), 1929- .

Brownjohn, Alan, 1931- .

Fraser, George, 1916-1986.

Holbrook, David.

Lucie-Smith, Edward.

MacBeth, George.

Porter, Peter.

Redgrove, Peter.

Subjects

The Group (group of writers).

English poetry--20th century.

Poets, English--20th century.

Correspondence and Manuscripts of The Group, ca. 1955-1968

Alvarez, A., 1961-1963	Box 1 Folder 1
Bell, Martin, 1958-1964	Folder 2
Brownjohn, Alan, 1958-1962	Folder 3
Fraser, George, 1961-1966	Folder 4
Holbrook, David, 1962-1964	Folder 5
Lucie-Smith, Edward	
1958-1961	Box 1 Folder 6
1962-1963	Folder 7
1964-1966	Folder 8
No date	Folder 9
Miscellaneous	Folder 10
MacBeth, George, 1960-1968	Folder 11
Porter, Peter, 1957-1966	Folder 12
Redgrove, Peter	
1957-1959	Box 1 Folder 13
1960-1964	Folder 14
No date and miscellaneous	Folder 15

Index of Works

- Bell, Martin, "Chatto Book of Modern Verse"--1.2
- Bell, Martin, "Festive Mask"--1.2
- Bell, Martin, "High Street, Southampton"--1.2
- Bell, Martin, "High Street, Southampton, Revisited"--1.2
- Bell, Martin, "Hypochondriac Reading Newspaper"--1.2
- Holbrook, David, "Florence (13)"--1.5
- Holbrook, David, "The Lilac Tree"--1.5
- Holbrook, David, "My Character"--1.5
- Holbrook, David, "Only Sad"--1.5
- Holbrook, David, "Ronald (15)"--1.5
- Lucie-Smith, Edward, "The Advocate"--1.10
- Lucie-Smith, Edward, "A Death"--1.10
- Lucie-Smith, Edward, Foreword to *A Group Anthology*--1.10
- Lucie-Smith, Edward, "June Bug"--1.10
- Lucie-Smith, Edward, "A Sort of Sickness"--1.10
- Lucie-Smith, Edward, "La Source"--1.10
- Lucie-Smith, Edward, "A Stone"--1.10
- Redgrove, Peter, "Anniversaire Triste"--1.13
- Redgrove, Peter, "Dr. Immanuel Rath"--1.14
- Redgrove, Peter, "A Field of Thistles"--1.13
- Redgrove, Peter, "The Inheritance (A Father on His Knees)"--1.14
- Redgrove, Peter, "The Inheritors (A Father on His Knees at Easter Service)"--1.14
- Redgrove, Peter, "Lady Gentle"--1.13
- Redgrove, Peter, "A Search"--1.13