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Introduction

David Heal

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Introduction / David Heal

We have brought eight poets together, provided a procedural structure, and acted as the intermediary. They have done the rest. Each poet has contributed one, two, or three poems, an essay on the work of one of the other poets taking part in the "Symposium," and a response to the particular essay written on his own work.

There were problems. My choice, and ultimately it had to be *my* choice, of "poet subject" for each essay, produced sympathetic exchange, conflict, and, in one case, panic. I should explain this here, rather than break the continuity of the "Symposium." Nigel Wells found Andrew Waterman's two poems alien: eventually he decided that an essay on Waterman's work was beyond him. I must assume some responsibility: imposing deadlines for an essay that does not come easily to an unpractised critic, and giving him work for which he felt little sympathy. But my one idea in allocating poet to poet was to combine the dissimilar, thereby provoking what I hoped would be an interesting and lively exchange. Some choices were difficult for other poets—frankly, it was intended. Without wanting to labour the point, I attempted to give each poet poems that he might find compatible, might not, but that would, I hoped, contact him through their difference from his own work, and draw from him a response within which he felt obliged to objectify some of his own attitudes to poetry. Success depended upon each poet grappling with the work of another, and then responding positively to the comments on his own work. I think that, for the most part, it worked. In the case of the Wells-Waterman exchange we had to make a speedy decision to cover the hole left by Wells' difficulty. We decided to give Waterman the pleasure of writing on his own poems. He obliged.

Having explained the shape of the "Symposium," with its one amendment, I should talk a little more about the ingredients, but briefly, for Ed Brunner's concluding essay is the real study of the product.

All eight poets readily agreed to take part, and submit their work to public scrutiny in this unusual way. Some were uneasy about the ratio of poetry to prose—John Drew overcame *his* unease by including two more poems in his response to Wainwright—but all contributed poems well worth the attention subsequently given. Jeffrey Wainwright's participation depended on "Thomas Müntzer," a much longer poem than any other, but the one poem he had ready for publication. I think its strength more than justifies its inclusion here.

Whether or not the poets are all very young, or very British, was not paramount in our minds when we selected them. They share, as yet, a

small readership, which this "Symposium" will, one hopes, do a little to alter, and are all, at present, resident in the United Kingdom. But here, I think, the similarities end. There is no easy generalization to make about a "Symposium" that includes work by poets living, and writing, in North-East Scotland, Bolton, Devon, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge, Northern Ireland, Manchester, and West Wales. Their areas for concern vary, as do their environments—another reason for interaction, and a strong indication of the differing energies in British poetry.

The job as editor was, as it usually is, a combination of pleasure and frustration, but I hope the result will prove worthwhile to the reader, as it has been to those taking part, in whatever capacity. I must thank Jon Silkin for his considerable support, and, finally, I would like to thank all the eight for their willing cooperation and efficiency, which occasionally straightened my own erratic course.

A Green Man / Nigel Wells

(1) Squirms

Tasting the earth
Out of the loam and the foliage come
Some self to the wood from the ground
Some stuff
Feeling its life starts to stir
Takes to the light
With inkling eye marks its length
Pants by and by to its height
Strains
From the crouch to the bend to the stoop
Stands
The finally straight
The momentary pause
Testing the breath
Then
Hares
Through wild and the wonderwood flares
The streak
Loosely tears like a seam

(2) Stalks

Seeing the world
This thing sees but what it sees
Fastens its feel to the needley mould