

Editorial

Orange. Landscape. The first issue of *Stand* (16:4) which made an impression on me as an undergraduate student in Headingley in 1975 offered a symposium of young writers and contained two contributions which epitomised the magazine's political edge. The first was Jeffrey Wainwright's extraordinary persona poem 'Thomas Munzer' which entered the mind of a sixteenth-century German radical visionary with a sensuously convincing imagination and a distancing critique clinched in its startling epigraph from Machado: 'I have seen in my visions very clear things which are not true.' That combination of revolutionary idealism and a historically informed scepticism captured the best of *Stand* in the next few years.

In the editorial of that same issue Douglas Dunn tackled the fraught topic of poetry and commitment with combative gusto. There's even a touch of William Hazlitt in his salutary reminder that: 'Poetry, of course, has nothing fundamentally to do with democracy'. Dunn seizes the opportunity to articulate the working-class poet's response to the requirement for a '*critical poetry*' (following Sartre) by reference to his 'grudge'. This he illustrates in the form of a

childhood memory of sitting on a wall beneath the extravagant blossoms of suburban laburnums and promptly being told to move on by the owners of the wall. (For 'wall', he asks us to read 'poetry'.) Dunn imagistically conjures uncomfortable bad feeling to stand for his kind of poet's coupling of self-awareness and social reality. His grudge is one of the more creative responses to *Stand's* proclaimed championing – and soul-searching questioning – of the idea of a 'poetry of the committed individual' which persisted well beyond the next five years. Jon Silkin, Jon Glover and E.P. Thompson were some of the more notable contributors to editorials and symposia featured in the magazine which engaged head-on with the possibility (and impossibility) of a link between social change and the workings of the poetic imagination.

In his 'Comment' column for *Stand* 20:2 E.P. Thompson revisits the state of disenchantment he first considered in *Outside the Whale* in 1959. Witnessing what he perceived as a break-down in the necessary connection between poetry and politics and even going so far as to forcefully state his 'distrust' of the term 'commitment', Thompson makes a passionate plea for poets to 'demand less of structures and institutions' and urges them to make more of 'creative resources'. On a note of anxious, qualified, and tentative optimism informed by his extensive reading of poetry in the 1790s his column ends with a hope that 'the imagination

would explore into the dark ahead of us once more, instead of lagging a few paces behind’.

More than a quarter of a century after I saw in the pages of *Stand* such impassioned and persistent inquiry into the possibility of a poetry of commitment, today’s poets inhabit an even more dispersed and diverse set of possibilities. In this first issue of the new series to be entirely composed of submitted rather than commissioned poems, we hope our readers will nevertheless find ample evidence of those creative grudges which can enable the poetic imagination to walk on ahead of us.

John Whale

Forthcoming issues of *Stand* will include a translation issue, a competition number, a Leeds poets special and, at the end of 2003, a symposium for young writers.