

Norman Nicholson v. The Book of Common Prayer

By U. A. Fanthorpe

My favourite Nicholson poem, by a short head from many others, is 'Epithalamium for a Niece'. I first heard it from the lips of Norman Nicholson himself, in a college in Lancaster, and I was quite overpowered by its simplicity, heart, depth and wit. I praise all these qualities, but Norman Nicholson has a richness of them that testifies to his humanity and his poetry. From the familiar Prayer Book tetrameter of the beginning he's in absolute control, though I suspect that given time he'd have come up with something better than 'questionnaire'.

At 'the wind might say...' the poem rockets into true imaginative territory. This is the part I like best. And so to the majestic conclusion: 'She gives herself'. This is of course a properly feminist conclusion. A woman is not something to be handed to and fro, like a baby at a Christening. But she is also not just her own woman; she is the creation of light,

Soil and humus, stem and bone

Carbohydrates, minerals, those

Hormones and genes and chromosomes...

Above all, this is a humane poem. Thank you, Norman, who so touchingly signed it for me.

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