

THE GREEN MAN OF BIDSTON MOSS



“stargazer” the Millennium sculpture by Tom Dagnall

By

Jim Bennett

THE GREEN MAN OF BIDSTON MOSS

By

Jim Bennett

Copyright; Jim Bennett 2009

THE GREEN MAN OF BIDSTON MOSS

Copyright © Jim Bennett 2004

All rights reserved

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Neither the whole, nor any part of the work contained in this publication may be adapted or reproduced in any material form except with the prior written consent of the publisher.

THE GREEN MAN OF BIDSTON MOSS

Contents

Poetry

Trees are green sometimes

Too many stars

Custard factory

Stargazer

Earthwork

Article

The Green Man

Trees are green sometimes

someone carved a face
into the trunk
of a sycamore
a smiling face
looking across cultivated gardens
across fields
to a rough wild
tree peopled land
it has been there for years
smile growing
as the tree
digs roots down
into the earth
to suck up water
spread wide broad leaves
to synthesize
the sun into life
and make it
green sometimes

Too many stars

“there are too many stars
can't count them all”
the old guy said
as he stared at
his empty beer glass
“I've tried” he said
“started at the steeple
on the horizon”
he was looking
through the wall
at a distant steeple
“a fixed point see
then you work
your way round”
he pointed his finger
at his horizon
moved it along a bit
then shook his head
“it didn't work
they move
some sink out of sight
others appear
the whole lot moves
before you get anywhere
it isn't fair”

“I tried splitting
the sky into grids”
he lifted his hands
fingers and thumbs
formed something like
a square
“counted the contents
worked out how many
squares would fill the sky
but some grids
had more stars than others
so then I started from the north star”
his arm raised
finger pointed straight
up to the ceiling
“tried to count in spirals”
he said as he moved his arm

in small circles
gradually getting bigger
“never finished always
fell asleep before
I got past five thousand”
he shook his head
looked resigned
thoughtfully he added
“on clouded nights
I counted stars
in bits of open sky
but clouds
play slight of hand
shuffle stars
between each patch of sky
so it means nothing
in the end”

“what about the other half
the ones seen from Australia”
someone asked
the man looked sad
“through a telescope
there’s lots more”
someone else said
as he put a fresh filled
glass of Guinness
down in front of the old guy

he stared at it
and began to cry
“so many bubbles he said
so many you just can’t count them all”

Custard factory

in Birmingham
inside the Custard Factory
which had once been a custard factory
a group of poets gathered and read
to each other
they came from everywhere
to share their work
London
Leister
Amsterdam
Birmingham
Liverpool
they enjoyed the day
read sang smoked and drank
had a good time

outside the sun
chased between the clouds
wheel clampers
hung round
waiting for a wheel
against the wrong pavement

and over it all
against a wall
from floor to rooftop
a green man
stone cast into wood
stood
wondering where the soil had gone.

from his arms
a tree was growing
in the city dust

Stargazer

Stargazer
lies legs spread
arms wide
green grass skin
rippling in the breeze
on a hilltop overlooking
Tesco's

gaze fixed
it watches
and counts the stars
on the globe of night
and in the day
measures shadows
passing across the hilltop
with its length

soil and grass laid over
chewy tyre framework
a modern earthwork
to greet
the third millennium

there it lies still
slowly eroding
back into the earth
as it waits to be seen
and understood

but no one ever comes
and our gift to time
the modern green man
lies in parkland
on a hilltop overlooking
Tesco's
where people
still cannot walk

Earthwork

from the roadway
that runs alongside
the new cycle path
you can look up
and see the outline
of stargazer
moulded against
the hilltop

it has been there
four years now
swallowing clouds
and counting stars
through night and day
in heat and cold
rain and sun
through seasons
rotting down its life
back into the Earth
again

THE GREEN MAN

by Jim Bennett

The Green Man is an ancient symbol standing in one tradition for growth and plenty and apart from the occasional public house sign you might think it has little to connect it to the modern world. But on Merseyside recently I came upon the work of two men one a sculptor, Tom Dagnall and the other a poet, Dave Ward. Each of them has grasped the Green Man as a symbol which figures repeatedly in their work, either overtly or as an influence.

Many artists have used the Green Man as a symbol for the growth and rebirth of the world and in a time seen by many as a Millennium the potency of the Green Man as a symbol cannot be overlooked.

On a hill not far from where I live, Tom Dagnall, a sculptor, spent several months constructing a modern earthwork. It was made solid yet flexible by putting in a framework of tyres, wire mesh and stakes. When this was finished the whole thing was covered with grass and left, so far for about two years. Now the mound looks like part of its environment, but it is the shape of a young female figure lying on the hill and looking out into space. Tom Dagnall called it Stargazer though it is known locally as Tilly after his daughter on whom it was modelled.



Stargazer became a focus for me. I loved the idea, the core of discarded material which in turn reflected the hill on which it stood, which had been a landfill site. I find the idea of bringing natural elements together in a sculpture which will blend

art with its environment and in turn become part of it, very powerful. I see this blending as a new form of environmental art which has grown from decades of awakening awareness to the danger to the environment. But the earthwork covered in grass is also the Green Man gazing out forever into space and to the future. So for me this is a very optimistic piece.

The natural world has always been a rich source of inspiration for artists, and projects are emerging in many art forms which brings the artist closer to the subject and the subject and the art together. Environmental art is the fusing of these two elements and it is the conscious use of their art by the artists to express themselves and their relationship with their environment which creates new possibilities. Tom Dagnall is an artist who often creates his art from the surroundings, and importantly it is art which does not diminish his subject or his material but rather helps it to achieve a potential which although it there from the start took the artist to recognise it and set it free. A boulder for example stays in place and is reshaped with a face gazing out across the Beacon Fells to reflect other aspects of its nature and surroundings. In many ways it is an art which recognises and pays homage to an earlier time but using modern references.

This form of environmental art draws on the earliest tradition of the cave painters who drew their aspirational hunting scenes. Some believe this was a form of magic, a way to visualise and therefore influence the outcome of a hunt. Perhaps there is still a need for human beings to express themselves in this way to touch something at their core. After all cave painting has evolved into numerous strands of art, the wanted and the unwanted, some of which is recognised as art and some seen as graffiti.

But visual art is not the only expression this environmental art finds today. Poetry has long sought to find a voice which would carry the same impetus. About a year ago I attended a poetry night in Liverpool and amongst the poets reading was Dave Ward who performed a poem called The Green Man Dances. This piece originally written as a poem to be read or spoken has found a new expression as a part song part chant piece which in the confines of a subterranean room in Liverpool stunned everyone with its clarity and vision.

Dave was one of the founders of The Windows Project and remains as the person running it on a day to day basis. The Project seeks to bring the community and its writers together in unique creative events. It acts as an interface between groups and writers and where a school or a group express the intention of having a writers workshop, Dave will attempt to find the most suitable person to meet the workshop needs. The Windows Project works with visual and performance artists, musicians, writers, poets and story tellers to create unique synergies of creative art and events where children and adults can explore their own creativity.

I recall working on a Windows summer scheme where I was sat at a table in an inner-city park, and children were invited to write a poem or story which they could illustrate. The joy expressed in the children's work and the references to the natural world they could see around them could not have been achieved to the same extent in a classroom or community centre. Tom Dagnall also works with children in schools and workshops, bringing in portions of trees that the children can carve and work with in a very tactile way. The relationship between human beings and the natural world is far more obvious in children.

In many respects Windows is an extension and another example of Dave's own art. Dave is a poet and his poetry is unique. It is rooted in the popular poetry scene of the 60's and 70's but it transcends the self-conscious self interest that all but the best of that time descended into. When I read or hear Dave's poetry it is like hearing the whisper of the same Muse that drives Tom Dagnall and perhaps that is the secret of their work. Their Muse is older than recorded time it hints at magic and mystery beyond the everyday, as Dave writes in THE GREEN MAN DANCES

The Green Man has danced out under the stars
Under changing skies for a million years
Silver in the morning and the coal black night
Waking again for the last long fight

This is a poem which draws on the roots of human experience and explores the relationship between people and the world they inhabit. It is a poem which like much of Dave's writing resurrects and reassesses ancient symbols and sees in the everyday the echoes of tradition and rite. In the Green Man he had touched and recreated the same myth as Tom Dagnall.

It is a word sculpture something which goes beyond the immediacy of the post-modern and which uses the images of the realists in a magical way, yet it also is too close to the source of practical knowledge to be magical realism. This is poetry rooted in the core of our being, we hear it and its truth, in that respect it becomes real. It is the poetry of a new age a poetic which attempts to deal with mankind's relationship to their world by reassessing what we know or think we know and by digging out the roots of fable and legend as sources of human truth.

We have in many respects reached a point of contact with the primal roots of art where the artist looked in awe at the world around them and used art to create a magic which would help bring order and control to their world. Both Tom Dagnall and Dave Ward in their own way have reached this point of accommodation with the world. Both will ultimately change the way people who come into contact with their work view the world around them. Tom's work is romantic, forward looking and ultimately strengthened by his view of the dignity of the working man, woman or child. And the Green Man is seen as the guardian with whom we share the

world. Dave's work is bleaker, realist with a streak of optimism but at the same time sounding a warning.

We'll whip him and scourge him
And nail him like a thief
To the highest branch
Of his last oak tree
With blackbird, dunnock, jackdaw and crow...
But when the Green Man dies
We all die too.