

DT004 - Oxford Professor of Poetry: Heaney, Sisson or Zephaniah?

Patriotism, since the days of Newbolt and Kipling, has had little to do with poetry. Every Oxford MA now has an opportunity to reconsider this lost connection. He or she has the right, perhaps duty, to proceed to the Convocation House and help elect a new Professor of Poetry. Voting is on 1 and 3 June 1989. The strong favourite is Seamus Heaney. He was born and brought up in the United Kingdom but rejects the description 'British' and lives in the Irish Republic. His poem *An Open Letter* contains the lines-

. . . be advised
My passport's green
No glass of ours was ever raised
To toast *The Queen*.

Also standing is 75-year old Englishman C. H. Sisson, whose last chance this undoubtedly is. His chaste and cerebral poems have given much quiet pleasure. The third candidate is the Rastafarian Benjamin Zephaniah, whose chief claim to fame is finding the functions of the bowel a suitable topic for verse.¹

¹ *Daily Telegraph*, 17 May 1989. DT4

