

LITERALLY SPEAKING

Issue no. 2 • FREE

Edited by Stet Press

Saturday 14th October 2000

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

•
Dick King-Smith
Everyman,
10-11am

•
Adrian Noble
Town Hall,
2.45-3.45pm

•
Slam Champs Party
Peppers,
8.30pm-Late

•
Jeanette Winterson
Everyman,
8.45-10pm

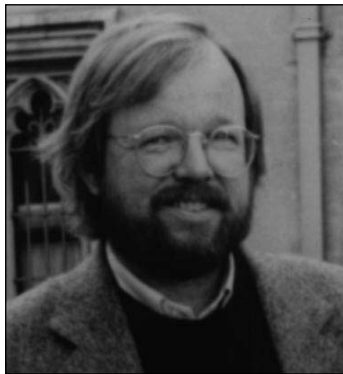
On top down under

BY KIM FARRAR
& BEN GREASY

Star of the first day Bill Bryson, attracted a sell out audience to talk about his new travel book *Down Under*. Littered with jokes throughout, Bryson began with a humorous

account of the mysterious drowning of an Aussie Prime Minister. Ironically, a swimming pool was later named after him in commemoration.

Almost as an excited child, he took a minister-like stance attempting to lead his attentive children to the promised land. He was anything but the travel agent he described himself to be in one of his many moments of jest whilst describing the "hypnotic" Ayers Rock.



Bryson created a mutual understanding between himself and the audience, slandering the likes of tourists, cricketers and the Americans alike. "Humour is dangerous to people who take things literally," he quipped, directly implicating his fellow countrymen. With a skillful

response to a challenging question about the spontaneity of his humour, he described himself as "constantly being in the background... apart from when falling about drunk".

All in all, Bill gave a 'brill' insight into his new book. His parting shot - that he may soon move back to Britain - triggered the loudest and longest applause of the night.

Wherever Mr Bryson concludes his journeys, he's sure to be an asset.

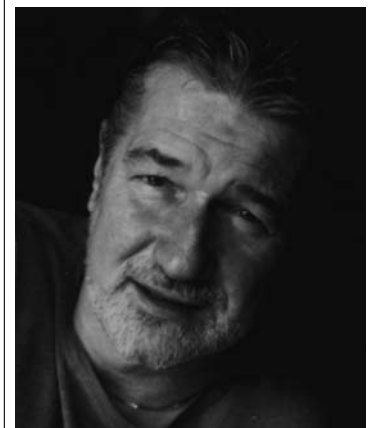
Scouse Nous

BY JESSICA HOOD
& DANIEL BARRETT

The anticipation was killing us as to what Willy Russell actually looks like. Surely nothing like the photo in the brochure? We only knew him as the man who had written *Shirley Valentine*. His appearance was not as we guessed, disproving our theories of him looking like a stereotypical novelist. The most striking thing about him, which carried on bugging us throughout his interview, was his fading Liverpool accent.

The interview was mainly aimed at the release of his new novel, and his transformation from playwright to novelist. The novel follows the story of a 19 year old boy on a journey from Failsworth to Grimsby. During his journey, Raymond writes a series of letters to his idol, and one of Willy Russell's favourite songwriters, Morrissey. The extract he read from was full of elegant humour, all his work is blessed with this page after page. It was highly interesting because Willy Russell himself claimed that he was no master wit, saying that it was the characters themselves who added the wit to his work.

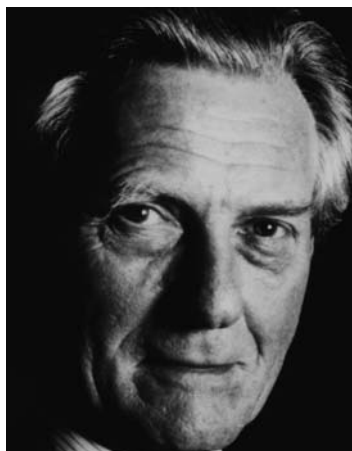
In closing, Willy's advice to budding writers was that "...instead of writing the play you want to write, you end up writing the only play you can write - the play you need to write."



Hezza citation

BY DANIEL HAHN

Discussing Michael Heseltine's autobiography *Life in the Jungle*, veteran ITN newsman Michael Brunson (brandishing his own autobiography, *A Ringside Seat*) was probably, wisely, a benign figure, allowing the former Deputy Prime Minister the freedom to tell his stories, to - in Heseltine's words - "set the records straight, explode the myths about my public life". All the familiar myths were there: waving the mace in the House of Commons, the famous Westland walk-out and the career plan plotted on the back of an envelope. The audience were also treated to a little political bitchiness - "Mrs. Thatcher doesn't like foreigners" - and his rousing



description of his resignation earned him a spontaneous applause.

While there was a lot of self-congratulation, he was not above the odd joke at his own expense; after describing his first campaign (in a safe

Labour seat) his voice rose to full conference address mode as he boomed triumphantly, "And that is how I converted a Labour majority of 19,541 to a Labour majority of 25,500!"

Clearly at ease, with no signs - but for the greying of his trademark mane - of having been slowed down by his 67 years, Heseltine clearly relished his chance to put forth unopposed his version of life in the world of politics; the *Jungle* this particular Tarzan has chosen to make his home for three decades. And although he is to stand down from Henley at the next election, today he left us in no doubt - as he gave us his big end-of-conference wave and looking out for babies to kiss - that we will be seeing Michael Heseltine again.

Wood tees off

BY ANDREW PRIMROSE

The question of national identity and what it means to be English has resurfaced as an important issue, especially in the wake of the Runnymede Report. Michael Wood's incisive and informative talk on the topic raised many interesting points. His most controversial conjecture was that as England was the first country to emerge from the Industrial Revolution it might also be the first to dispense with identity.

Michael Wood defined 'allegiance' as the key characteristic of identity and used examples drawn from history and mythology to support this statement. Using this benchmark he showed how 'Englishness' as a sense of cohesive national identity stretched back to the 8th Century, and this sentiment survived the 'Norman Yoke' and re-emerged in the Chaucerian age when English regained its place as official language.

He told us how he received over 3,000 angry letters after he dared to question the existence of King Arthur, showing the emotive response such figures can still evoke.

'You don't know who you are,' he said, 'unless you know your past.'

SLAM!

BY ADAM HOROVITZ

Bouncing onto the stage of the carved-marzipan bedecked Town Hall to the sounds of The Good, The Bad And The Ugly, Marcus Moore and Sara-Jane Arbury unveiled yet another glorious Cheltenham All-comers Poetry Slam confection.

Twenty five poets struggled through an intense afternoon qualifier to get to tonight's Sambalimbued final.

They struggled valiantly under the glare of lights, television cameras and a full auditorium. Rants about mobile phones being carriers of extra-terrestrial gonorrhoea were followed by poems about Bungee Humping. Don Barnard did a splendid impression of Samuel Beckett writing scripts for Carry On films. Carl Dhiman complained that 'Waiter / there's a rhyme in my poem'.

Throughout it all the audience rocked like a host of coracles fishing for laughs on a high-rising sea. Happily, a great many were caught.



The three finalists - Mel Denne (sexual agony aunt Pam Ayers), Skatz (free-flowing ice cream sex poet) and James Quinn (accented and wry Mancunian) - were swept in on a huge wave of enthusiasm.

There has to be a winner, and that was James Quinn, whose self-referential Slam poem performed in the style of football commentary ('Well, it's free verse / and quickly taken') had the audience stamping and hollering in the aisles. Truly, a splendid night was had by all.

The only question that needs answering is: who was good, who was bad and who was ugly?

Sketch of James Quinn by Heather Speares

Good gothic

BY WIL MATHER

& SUZIE EVANS

Miranda Seymour is passionate about her biography of proto-feminist Mary Shelley. It became immediately clear that Seymour knows her subject well, confidently announcing that Mary "would not want to be seen just as the author of *Frankenstein*." Seymour has not merely collated journals and memoirs - she has gone the extra mile and empathetically visited the places that were influential in Mary's writing.

Seymour delved into the circumstances into which Mary Shelley was born. She gave insight into the events in Mary's life that were obvious influences on *Frankenstein*, such as galvanic experiments on severed heads and growing up adjacent to an abattoir. The gruesome Gothic horror novel that came as a result was no surprise.

Seymour is a very enthusiastic storyteller. However, some audience members felt that her material became a touch repetitive and would have benefited from a new and wider angle.

Perhaps it could have been a different story if she had not spent the entire hour exploring only a fraction of an amazing and real life story.

The Secret Gaarder

BY CHRISTIAN PAYNE &

SHONA MCNEAL-WATSON



Jostein Gaarder spoke yesterday with genuine passion about his life and the issues his work has raised. His latest work, *Maya*, is about the arguments surrounding evolution. It came as little surprise to his fans to discover that it has again been written in the guise of a mystery novel.

In conversation with Christopher Cook, Gaarder spoke of his own reaction to the global fame that followed philosophical meditation *Sophie's World* - something he had not anticipated at all.

Naturally, his audience was curious to learn which of his many works he favours: his instant response was *The Solitaire Mystery*.

He is certainly a man with a lot to say and you often felt that he would like to have shared a lot more about his experiences and writing.

In reaction to questions about *Maya* he stated that "religion is trying to answer the same questions as philosophy." He fully appreciates that his books have a beneficial impact on

democracies across the globe.

Gaarder (a Norwegian) discovered his profound interest in matters cerebral when he was only sixteen years old and felt astounded by the world around him: a feeling which carried him directly into the study of philosophy and writing his books. To him "consciousness is more to celebrate and investigate than comets, black holes and other things of this nature", though curiously he feels himself "an alien" each morning as he awakes and looks in the mirror.

Gaarder seemed surprisingly completely down to earth, yet still filled with wonder at the world and the unending debate between fiction and reality.

The Stoat

Overheard at Bill Bryson's signing: "He's very hairy, isn't he?"
"Yes, I think he's one of those travellers!"

THE TEAM

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