

LITERALLY SPEAKING

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Sunday 15th October 2000

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

•
**Pete McCarthy
& John Walsh**
Everyman,
1-2pm

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**Robyn Davidson
& Andrea Levy**
Town Hall,
3.30-4.30pm

•
**Zadie Smith, Tim
Pears & Miranda
Sawyer**
Everyman,
6-7pm

Our Winterson of discontent

BY MICHAEL ANDERSON
& TOM LOUGHLIN

Like most speakers here, Jeanette Winterson has a new book to promote. Unsurprisingly, after a brief introduction explaining her fascination with the Internet - "You can be a leather queen" - she proceeded to read an extract from *The PowerBook*. Having been informed that after 45 minutes she would be open to questions from the floor, we reasonably expected the reading to be brief. However, when her averagely written and badly read 25-minute piece came to an end, the audience's applause was more relieved than rapturous. Her novel includes the line "Strangers often like hearing writers talk... it saves them reading the book" - an all too accurate observation. The following interview with Francine Stock was slightly better, if only for the dubious claim that she hasn't read a review since 1989. It's possibly for the best.



Craft work

BY ZARAH HIBLE

To a female dominated audience, Janet Todd delivered a vigorous and humorous talk on the 'Mother of Feminism', Mary Wollstonecraft. To write a biography of an C18th figure was a safe option, as "the dead can't sue", yet Wollstonecraft's contemporary significance shows that the 'F' word doesn't relate solely to embarrassing and suspect ageing women.

The 'Grandmother of Frankenstein' preached 'reason to women and avoidance of romance'; however, her scandalous life eclipsed her books. If Janet Todd's audience wanted 'feminine' and 'feminist' united, they were bluntly informed that it hadn't happened yet. The message was a familiar one: 'Education, education'.

Getting back to basics

BY JON ANDRIESEN

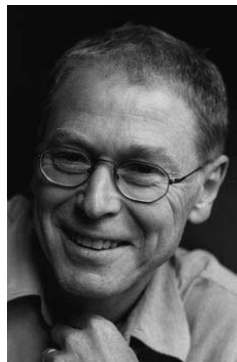
What better way to start the weekend than a lunchtime of poetry with Carcanet clan Alison Brackenbury and Jeffrey Wainwright. With the previous night's Slam final still tinkling in my cochlea I made my way to The Beehive for something more subdued.

Alison Brackenbury read first from her new collection *After Beethoven*, a series of poems spanning the Humber, meandering through Lenin Park and flitting through Hanoi. She never lost the audience once. Her diction as precise as her writing, and

imagery, romantic or industrial, left us inside the poem breathing in her words long after she left the stage.

Jeffrey followed with sections from *Out of the Air*, a series of elegies examining the simplicities and complexities of life and exactness of death. Its power derived from an understanding of our 'real' bodies in all their strength and ultimate frailty. We are, he says 'forever floating or falling.'

Jeffrey and Alison gave us a lesson in the power of poetry, spoken smoothly and delivered without props or party tricks, just a little purging and a head full of ideas.



Marked Land

BY TOM LOUGHLIN
& MICHAEL ANDERSON

We have a confession to make: pre-10:30am, we were agricultural ignoramuses. We knew nothing of Paul Heiney or Nick Crane; Jane Gardam was vaguely familiar. Bill Bryson alone (more specifically his beard) was recognisable.

The decline of farmers was highlighted by a Cornish farmer in the audience, via his entire life story. Heiney brought balance, mentioning Swiss part-time farming, while Gardam, who 'treats the landscape as an extra character', and Crane both found the time to plug their new books. Repeatedly. And Bryson? "There's nothing epic about England" - thanks, Bill. But with that beard...

Prancing Demons

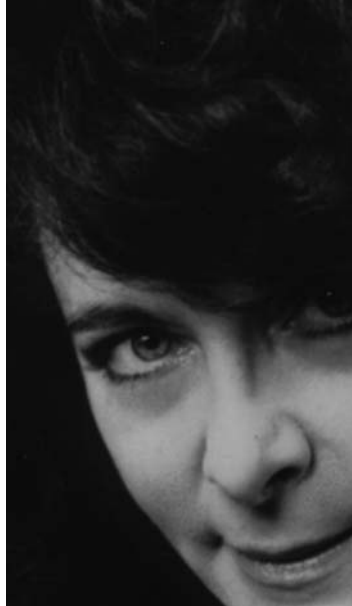
BY CANDY ROBINSON

Perhaps only Cheltenham could produce such a genteel chat exploring the decidedly un-genteel world of sex, drugs and rock n roll. Perhaps the predominantly female audience had no-one to rail against so that Ruth Padel's claim that all music is a male construct, and that rock, in particular, is aggressively misogynistic, were meekly accepted and barely commented upon.

James Walton, chairing the event, showed signs of making some defence but quickly withdrew to the safety of admitting, Nick Hornby style, the inadequacies of men. This was a shame for the discussion itself raised some interesting points that were sadly left unexplored. Some of Penny Valentine's insights into the life of Dusty Springfield gave pause for thought about the role of female victim in music, and led to some interesting comparisons to the relative freedom of the 'butch' KDLang.

So, from Ruth Padel's assertion that the root of the essential maleness of rock lies in Classical Greece, we were led, sheep like, through a whistle stop tour of rock and pop.

Maybe a little raunch, artificial stimulants and a beating bass were really what we were looking for



Seductions

BY DANIEL HAHN

Described by Michèle Roberts in her introduction as "celebrating pleasure", Hermione Lee's confident guidance of this event covered a variety of questions - seduction, betrayal, death - inspired by its general theme - readers seduced by writing.

Exploring first these *Literary Seductions*, the debate expanded to include the cases of women like Mary Shelley, whose relationships with writers were very real. Also mentioned was Laura Riding, who, as Robert Graves' muse, came to control both his work and his life.

These women, in Lee's words, "tread a thin line between being seductive/alluring and being monstrous and demonic."

They are very seductive - as Belinda Jack pointed out, she and her fellow biographers recognise themselves as implicated, seduced by their monstrous subjects.

Noble is as Noble does

BY LUKE KELLY

A surprising youthful Adrian Noble, the artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, spoke with eloquence and passion on the great man to whom he has given his working life: Shakespeare.

He touched on a wide range of topics, including the current cycle of performances by the RSC of Shakespeare's eight early histories as well as the conflict between the private moral thoughts of men and the affect that the translation of these thoughts and ideas have on the real world.

He spoke extensively and sometimes humorously about the RSC's current cycle and about how he intended to create flotilla of produc-



De-mapping

BY MICHAEL ANDERSON
& TOM LOUGHLIN

The title, *Mapping Britain*, was a facade. No, Michèle Roberts informed us, it was being 'mapped metaphorically', although she didn't explain how. We felt misled and used.

Actually this wasn't a problem, as first Roger Deakin and then Mary Loudon essentially ignored the question and unashamedly promoted their books - perhaps the title 'Here's A Map To The Shops That Sell Our Books' would have been more appropriate? Only Gary Younge directly addressed the issue, with articulate intelligence and a relevant extract from his book, telling of his cultural experiences throughout the world. He intriguingly suggested mythology could be used to map both Britain's past and future.

Loudon was less helpful, rendering the discussion pointless with her conclusion: "You can't map Britain". Ordnance Survey employees must be devastated.

tions, all unique, yet unified in vision. Instead of a juggernaut, which would disguise the intriguing differences and individualities of the plays, he proposed varying them in personnel, style and dress.

He followed this by talking informatively and enthrallingly about how

Shakespeare showed his audiences the conflict between the personal beliefs of man and the outcomes of these when translated to the real, complex world, whilst maintaining mass appeal.

Wherever Adrian Noble takes Shakespeare will be justifiably great; just so long as the Bard is treated as entertainingly as this splendid 'lecture' was.

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Magorian

BY AMY TOLLEY
& HANNAH NEWRICK

Michelle Magorian, seemingly unspoilt by adult experience, insists she doesn't write specifically for children; rather than patronising them, she gives them the literary maturity they deserve. Undeterred by the superficial safety net woven by some of today's children's authors, Magorian doesn't feel the need to protect them from real issues - her fictional stories are the truth.

When reading extracts from her novels *Goodnight Mister Tom* and *A Spoonful of Jam*, her natural storytelling abilities lulled the audience into a childlike trance, despite there being a majority of adults in the room. She seemed keen to convey the despair on both sides of a bullying situation and subtly empathised with the 'baddie' - a quality not often found in children's books. Compelled by things like photographs and none of the worldly experience we had expected, Michelle simply writes what she feels she has to and this honesty is reflected in her novels.

The Stoat

A volunteer to Bill Bryson: "The Bill Bryson signing queue's over **here**, sir! Over **here**!"

Two Festival staffers overheard.

"I've never felt violent in a Festival before!"

"Oh, it's only your second day!"

THE TEAM

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