

LITERALLY SPEAKING

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Thursday 19th October 2000

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

•
The Chaucer Man
Town Hall,
10-11am

•
Max Hastings
Town Hall,
1-2pm

•
Exploring Jane Eyre
Cheltenham Ladies'
College
6-7pm
or 8.30-9.30pm

•
Steve Tasane: (sic)
The Beehive
8.30pm-late

Keane on Bell

BY JON ANDRIESSEN

Politics and journalism came to the Town Hall last night in a packed-beyond-the-rafters event in front of over 1,000 people.

David Aaronovitch, occasional BBC man, led a question and answer session with Martin Bell, MP and ex-BBC, and Fergal Keane of the BBC; something of a mutual appreciation society. Bell, as is now a tedious standard, was introduced as 'that man who was confronted on the heath by the Hamiltons'. When will we be allowed to forget those people and consider Bell as a true politician, 'leader, chief-whip and rank and file of the most united party in Parliament'?

Much was said about the 'purity' of journalism in an age where the sched-



uling of the news seems more newsworthy than the news itself. For Bell there is still hope for the profession with people like Keane, 'a throwback to the golden age'; all three were adamant that their blessed BBC stands firm against 'dumbing down' and political bias - nice to know.

Parodying the great political cliché 'only time will tell', Bell was non-committal about his political future, but acknowledged that there will always be 'new crusades'.

Entertaining stuff chaps, but please leave the Beeb at home!

Home truths

BY CHRISTIAN PAYNE
& JOCELYN WALBRIDGE

David Linley visited the festival to try to promote his work as a designer. Linley delivered a talk and a slide picture show about his shocking mutilations of beautiful homes.

Many of his slides were based on his own home; he explained this away saying that 'furniture is the most important ingredient in reflecting who we are'. No prizes for guessing what he's like; his black and white flat was particularly disturbing!

As the 'show' continued, the audience's minds began to drift, causing Linley to try hard to regain their attention with attempts at making them laugh.

The slide of a supposedly perfect ten-year-old boy's room, containing a collection of *FHM* magazines, was a perfect metaphor for the paucity of this talk.

Subtonal poetics

BY ADAM HOROVITZ

Patience Agbabi and Roddy Lumsden, two of the hottest poets on the circuit at the moment, took to the stage at The Subtone last night in front of a somewhat subdued audience. Reading first, Lumsden laboured valiantly, 'each image fresh / as if (he'd) forged it yesterday'. He is a fine poet, wistfully accented but tooled up with punchy metaphors and tough sensuality. Reading from his latest release, *The Book of Love*, he told us of 'the night-



morgue man who clips his nails... among the bin-bagged stiffs' (*Against Naturism*) and 'the raunch of eggs' (*Geography*). 'Fact, dear children' he proclaimed, 'is the new religion'.

Patience Agbabi, 'high on a feather boa', performed from her new book *Transformatrix*. She gave us vignettes of London life - poems about transvestites, speed-freaks and disco divas, all following themes of change and celebrating creativity. Her poetry treads a '...delicate frequency / pulsing between lust and envy...' and she can 'enrapture your soul like Queen Latifah'. Two fine poets. More audience next time, please.

More strangers come!

BY DANIEL BARRETT
& OLIVER BRAID

Ou est les sketches? We went expecting performed extracts from the cult television series. However, the four men sat before us were unrecognisable in their everyday clothes. With few impressions and no performance, the hour was spent promoting their new book, which promises to be ruder than the television programme, and hopefully better than this evening.

The development in to *The League of Gentlemen* was not immediate and many of the characters were founded on the street. Their influences as children were classic comedy programmes such as *The Two Ronnies* and *Fawlty Towers*.

The men themselves were very witty people talking mainly about

their pre-League lives and experiences, which inspired the fictional town Royston Vasey. Much of the humour of the evening seemed to derive from a private joke shared between 'local people'.



Back issues of 'Literally Speaking' are available from the Front Desk in the Town Hall, or visit our website on:
www.cheltenhamfestivals.co.uk/literature

Is this really Modern Art?

BY JOCELYN WALBRIDGE
& CHRISTIAN PAYNE

Stepping in at the last minute, Ruth Brandon related an absorbing history of surrealism in the early 20th century, particularly focusing on André Breton. A man with many complicated ideas, acknowledged by many as a leader, Karl Marx believed 'Breton is Surrealism'.

In stark contrast to his difficult character, his friend Jacques Vaché held style and openness which enchanted Breton, who wished to achieve the 'sincere detachment and cynicism' he felt surrealism warranted. Brandon's obvious great passion for this subject was conveyed to the attentive audience through the detail

included and knowledge she showed of Breton.

Aware of the need to move away from Breton's personal life though, we crossed the Atlantic with Marcel Duchamp to New York, and the foundations of the art movement we see today in the forms of pickled sharks and black sheep among others.

She concluded that however it may



seem, 'artists aren't trying to shock the audience, they are trying to express their sense of shock'.

This is excepting Damien Hirst, however, a man who 'is just enjoying himself, trying to shock and is there-

fore pointless', she mused.

Sporting life

BY RALPH WINDEATT
& JAMIE STREET

Cheltenham's racing finest gathered for the doublet of Robin Oakley and Richard Dunwoody to present their upcoming books, *Valley of the Racehorse* and *Obsession* respectively. Oakley reflected on racing in a tight-knit community. Dunwoody's autobiography appeared to stem from the gap left in his life by his retirement from racing, a gap betrayed by his wistful reminiscences of the camaraderie between the National Hunt jockeys.

Their contrasting views from either end of the binoculars combined to paint a rounded picture of all forms of racing, from the physical strains in the saddle - 'all jockeys are masochists' - to the patient cultivation of the training fields.

THE TEAM

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The mountain image incorporated in our logo © Michael Martin from *The Deserts of Africa*

Catch some falling Stardust

BY SHONA RAMCHANDANI
& RUPERT ALCOCK

'Where do we think we come from?' asked John Gribbin in his star-spangled talk on the beginning of 'life' as we know it. 'We are a kind of product of our Universe' he said, instantly destroying any hope of that uniqueness we imagine we have. He eloquently stated 'Stuff has to come down to Earth'.

From the magical star dust that floated gently down to create animation, to supernovas in the sky and nebulae that created planets, he took us all on a fascinating journey through the Universe. We travelled back to our roots to days when we were no more than a mass of burning gases and 'metals'.

'Rocket science is possibly the easiest thing there is!' stated John boldly, shocking us in our seats, and then calmly claimed that to know the history of our Universe to even a trillionth of a second after the Big Bang, was common knowledge!

Truly, we feel he 'left nothing out'!

True to form

BY ZARAH HIBLE

The Sonnet - the 'key with which Shakespeare unlocked his heart' - was fully appreciated in John Fuller's fascinating celebration of the form. His technical discussion was brought to life in Gabriel Woolf's powerfully dramatic rendering of sonnets spanning 450 years.

Whether it was the ponderous thoughts on love's inconstancy by Sidney, the triumphant meditations on religion and politics by Milton or the reflections of Wordsworth, he captured the individual voice. Yet, however daunting a performance to follow, Fuller's talk was by no means 'the harsh words of Mercury after the songs of Apollo'. He engaged the audience and sold the sonnet. But the hero of the talk was Shelley with his thrilling poem *Ozymandias*.

He illustrated 'the levels of implication' which were possible in this short form, proving that it's worthy of more than 'short views'. The impulse behind the sonnet is 'some lonely feeling developed', making it a 'perfect form for modern poets, especially women', whose passion and pain were relayed in Woolf's final readings.

Slam junior

BY KAREN WALKER

Hosted by Festival favourites Marcus Moore and Glenn Carmichael, the 5th Junior Poetry Slam was one of the noisiest, most energetic events The Everyman can have seen for a while. The auditorium was packed with kids from 5 local schools, making as much racket as possible in support of their friends.

The first round consisted of 25 young poets competing in various states of nervous confusion, but the overwhelming atmosphere was that this should be as fun as possible. And indeed it was, with poems on a wide range of subjects, from school and teachers to boyfriends and even war.

The 10 finalists all received a book of poetry, but the grand prize was a portable television, donated by Telewest Communications, which was won by Saskia Stainer-Hutchins from Thomas Keble School. Her descriptive and well-observed account of the double life of her cat ensured that she came through with flying colours, much to the raucous delight of her friends from school. The runners-up were Kirsty Sivell and Katie Costigan. However, as we all know, it's not the winning but the participating that matters, and we hope that this event has given these young poets the chance to express, and overall, enjoy themselves, through poetry.

The Stoat

David Aaronovitch, hosting Fergal Keane and Martin Bell: "The man with a beard at the back who has been waiting a long time... or is that a woman at the back with a beard who has been waiting a very long time."

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