

# LITERALLY SPEAKING

Issue no. 5 • FREE

Edited by Stet Press

Tuesday 17th October 2000

## What are Wordsworth?

BY ZARAH HIBLE

Romantic poets should die young. Wordsworth didn't, and so most biographies stop when he should have 'done the decent thing'. Juliet Barker's new biography presents, for the first time, 'the whole life' and his life was what the audience got. If they expected the focus to be the work not the man, they were misled.

In a talk coloured with anecdotes, she showed us that the man who '...wandered lonely as a cloud' was not a solitary poet. His love of people manifested itself in his campaigning for education, wherein he brought poetry to the multitudes as he championed ordinary language.

Associated with nature, his voice came through not as 'nauseating sensibilities to weeds', but as the poet of the heart.

## TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

•  
**Lucy Irvine & Jane Rogers**  
Town Hall,

1-2pm

•  
**Destination Brazil**  
Casa,  
6-7pm

•  
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](http://www.cheltenhamfestivals.co.uk/literature)

## Gatecrashing

BY CANDY ROBINSON  
& TOM BARFIELD

At last, a discussion that managed to evolve naturally into an animated debate. Whatever you may think about Ann Widdecombe she did, at least, add life to this particular event. Her views were obviously far to the right of both Jeremy Harding, whose book provided the main topic for the discussion, and Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, herself a Ugandan-Asian immigrant. It was a joy to watch the approaching storm on Yasmin's face as she sat patiently waiting for Ann to finish her point, and vice-versa. There was one glorious moment when Ann's eyes lifted to the skies in true exasperated School Ma'am fashion when Yasmin stated her case. Jeremy was much more poker-faced but didn't fail to voice his distrust of Ann's immigration policies, whilst Nick Clarke was masterly in keeping the



discussion moving at a pace.

This evident friction added weight to all that was said, leaving the audience with a lot to think about. One audience member was surprised to find himself defending Ann Widdecombe; a sure sign that minds were being rattled! The sympathy, however, remained on the left. 'I don't believe there's a lack of empathy' Ann said; this was met with a unanimous groan and, unprecedented for a Cheltenham audience, someone was forced to speak out of turn. Marvellous.

Later, Ann Widdecombe held forth about her novel which 6 out of the 400-strong audience had read and was supposedly non-political. However, the questions soon led to lengthy pontification on her drugs policy. Her general attitude was, she said, 'I'm never gloomy!' Her talk certainly was not.

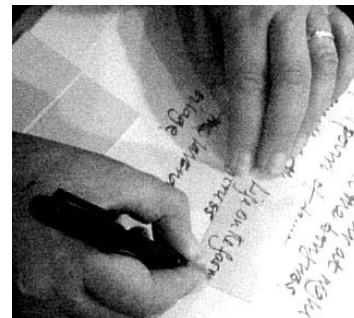
*Sketch of Ann Widdecombe by Heather Spears*

## Petts' Therapy

BY JON ANDRIESSEN

From locker rooms to maternity wards, swimming pools to writers' rooms, children, nurses, bar-staff, journalists, patients, priests and ex-cabinet ministers have bared their inner souls, smells and places to David Petts in the ultimate pursuit of poetry.

Let me explain: David has a mission to turn over 300 people in Cheltenham into poets and exhibit their short pieces of verse at the Town Hall and the General Hospital. By



stimulating our olfactory sensors and combining them with a forgotten special place, David has revealed an aromatic anthology of badge-verse well worth sniffing out.

## Censorship in The House of Lewds

BY DANIEL HAHN

Theatre critic Nicholas de Jongh is famously hard to please - he was described as 'the scourge of mediocrity' in today's introduction. And he was not above a dig at his Cheltenham audience - discovering us to be better informed than he'd expected, he chose not to praise but to offer the comment, 'This is the country - you have more time to read!'

Introducing his book *Politics, Prudery and Perversions*, a history of 20th Century censorship of the English stage, de Jongh presented several anecdotal examples of the Lord Chamberlain's refusal of licenses to classic plays such as *Ghosts*, *Miss Julie*, *A View from the Bridge* and numerous others.

We laughed smugly at the censor's stupidity, short-sightedness and conservatism. But he had, at least, recognised the power of theatre...

Most alarming was the fact that the views of the censors, by and large, represented those of the conservative majority (with a few dissenting voices - Shaw and the like); most people thought that banning *Oedipus Rex* on the grounds that it was an 'incitement to incest' was perfectly reasonable.

It was not until the 1960s that the conservative views of the Lord Chamberlain began to sink into the minority and he began to look very foolish - in 1968 the role was abolished.

One listener today did raise her hand to say 'I'd like to stick up for prudery', but an audience poll found only 3 people (of about a hundred) in favour of greater censorship than there is at present. Perhaps the case is closed after all.

*No article in this issue may be reproduced elsewhere without prior permission from Stet Press.*

## Powerful Art

BY WILL MATHER  
& OLIVER BRAID

'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can hurt and harm you inside'. The Rushland Poets assembled last night in the Drawing Room to give a powerful delivery on their thoughts and feelings of restrictions, ignorance, equality and love.

All of these people have a disability in some form or other, and they gave a moving insight into how they were segregated and labelled 'backwards' as children.

With the use of songs, poetry and animation, the Rushland Poets discussed their feelings on being classed as 'subhuman' and how they have each discovered a power that goes beyond physical strength.

Summing up the evening's message was a reading of the poem *The Stronger Our Love Is*. Involving all the poets from the event, they conveyed their final point in unison. 'The more we're seen, the stronger we are'.

## Speaking Proper

BY SHONA RAMCHANDANI

Beryl Bainbridge's talk last night was 'an awfully big adventure' for all concerned. She took us from the heart of Liverpool in her early days to the Crimean War and on further to The South Pole, in a witty and humorous talk about the writing that has fascinated so many of us for years. 'There was never a wasted word', said a member of the audience, and we were kept in splits of laughter at her perceptions of human nature.

Grammar and 'proper speaking' played an important part in her social views - 'Misuse,' she said with a twinkle in her eye, 'creates people who are not nice'. From death ('The end of course, is death'), to an ex mother-in-law who tried to shoot her ('My theory is, there's no point making anything up!'), her chat quite brought the house down! All in all, it was 'a jolly good show!'

## Missed Amissive?

BY OLLIE GARRETT

'What a feast is awaiting chaps when we're both dead and our complete letters come out...' wrote Kingsley Amis to Philip Larkin. He was right. The event, featuring discussion of Amis' and Larkin's letters by their editors (respectively) Zachary Leader and Anthony Thwaite, was guided by Jeremy Treglown and ranged widely across the correspondence of Larkin and Amis.

The letters, introduced as 'illuminating, humorous and disgraceful', and the readings chosen, exemplified the characters of the author and the poet as multi-faceted and beyond their public personas. Anthony Thwaite stressed



that it was inaccurate to consider Larkin 'a child-loathing misogynist' when his own friendship and experience of Larkin suggested otherwise. The biographical background of Amis and Larkin was formulaic and put in the shade by the letters themselves which exuded wit, cruelty and, of course, the scatological! The reading of an Amis letter, that showed his emotional state prior to his marriage



with Hilly, served to indicate the variety and scope of these epistolary collections. The outcome of the discussion was an intimation of the characteristic verve with which Amis and Larkin wrote letters, both to entertain each other and criticise their contemporaries.

## Jenny's Lavinia Longtime

BY CAMILLA BOUNDS

Childhood experiences inspired Lavinia Greenlaw's first poems, characterised by a direct yet resonant tone. One vivid and startling poetic description was a dream of a conversation with her brother, which continued when she woke up. Her clarity set the precedent for the rest of the reading, in which she covered themes of travel.

Greenlaw translated her experiences into poems which described landscape and the human interpretation of it. Subjects ranged from an ice-storm to the oppressive darkness of the Arctic and in sharp contrast, the uplifting effect of the

Northern Lights. Her sense of wonder at the world was encapsulated in the phrase 'we're flying over our lives'.

Jenny Joseph continued the theme of travel, exploring in one poem the delicate balance between beauty and mortality. She also celebrated nature as a reflection of her feelings: 'A blackbird sings because I love you'. Her final poem, about trying to contact a ship in the middle of an ocean, was more light-hearted.

Behind its humorous satire of technology, though, was the more serious underlying message of nature's continuing power over us.

*Sketch of Jenny Joseph and Lavinia Greenlaw by Heather Spears*



## Journastics

BY ALIYAH MADHARY

The 'journalist's hat' is without prejudices to the ambitious freelancer. With a brief reflection on her 'unusual entry' into the field of journalism, Maureen Freely conducted an interactive workshop on Writing Journalism, to inspire, inform and invigorate.

An exercise designed to expand our reservoir of knowledge and establish our opinions on national debates entailed writing a 'timed' article about a personal experience that formed our view on the decriminalisation of cannabis. One participant, who was convinced she had led a sheltered life, politely requested a 'sniff' of the soft drug so she could complete the activity effectively!

'A successful form of an article can sell its contents whether it qualifies as 'news' or not,' Freely claimed. This article may not reflect the ideal journalistic 'form', but I'm not sorry to waste your time, and this column space, in congratulating Freely on her workshop and wishing the participants good luck in trying to get their work published.

## The Stoat

Ann Widdecombe overheard in the Writers' Room: "Why am I so kind and generous?" Answers to Stoat at the usual address.

Contrary to popular belief, *The Clematis Tree* cannot be rolled up and smoked.

### THE TEAM

#### EDITORS:

Sara-Jane Arbury, Adam Horovitz & Jon Andriessen

#### LAYOUT:

Glenn Carmichael

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