

LITERALLY SPEAKING

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Coming Back Gently

BY TOM BARFIELD

50 years after visiting the Festival, Dylan Thomas spoke again last night through the medium of his letters and of his biographer, Paul Ferris. Having gone to the same school 15 years after Thomas, Ferris wrote the definitive biography of him in the 1970s. In this he delved behind Thomas' (mostly self-created) caricature of 'the feckless, hard-drinking poet' and dispelled many myths.

Ferris read excerpts from Thomas' letters, the wit of which often led the audience to laughter. In his first letter to his wife Caitlin, Thomas ends: 'Write to me. If you don't I shall cut my throat or go to the pictures.' However, the darker, more desolate side of Thomas was also exposed. In one of his last letters to his wife, Thomas constantly repeats 'I love



you, I love you. I have lost you because I am bad.' He was about to begin an affair.

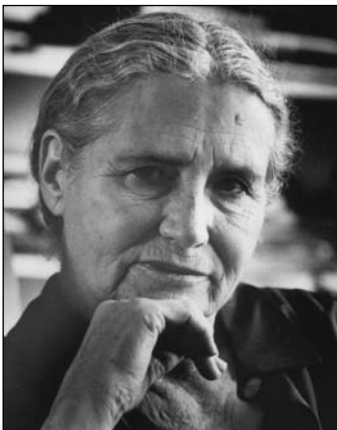
Ferris added to the anguish and physicality of Thomas' writing by adding evidence from 'behind the scenes'. Although we learnt very little of his literature, Ferris's sympathetic commentary left us with an idea of the stubbornness and despair that was Dylan Thomas.

Mrs Magnifica

BY RON CAPELL
& BARBARA FAUSET

At eighty, Doris Lessing is learning Russian. The girl who left school at fourteen has written in practically every genre in the catalogue. From her promontory she looks into the myths of the distant past and sees the world emerging from the next ice age in *Mara and Dan* where Europe is just 'an incredible memory'.

Doris Lessing also read from *Ben in the World*, sequel to *The Fifth Child* and *The Old Age of El Magnifico*, a short story about her 'enormous' cat, Big Butch. 'Well, you can't call your cat Rover!' Her perfor-



mance had the ring of authority born of decades of writing: good writers read.

She used the questions to educate the audience into the complexities of African politics; how the Russian novelists of the nineteenth century

had informed her understanding of the relationship between the master and the peasant: black and white. Ironically, the third volume of her autobiography cannot yet be written as too many people would be offended. Her new novel will be panoramic, a Utopian view of the sixties, dispelled by experience.

His story revisited

BY CHRISTIAN PAYNE
& JOCELYN WALBRIDGE

Philippa Gregory opened a stimulating discussion with Blake Morrison and Lawrence Norfolk. Thoughts flowed freely in the relaxed setting, as the event began with readings from the author's books. Lawrence Norfolk's concept that 'most of history is lost', with writers having to 'fill in the gaps', was easily followed as the audience was carried along by his thoughts; however Blake Morrison appeared to be thinking on an incomprehensible wavelength, concerning his 'strange and exotic world' that needed a clear dialect to give a 'twist to language'. He later built on Norfolk's comments about the amount of Greek literature available, saying that he 'felt a freedom that there were so few texts', so he had to 'invent' history.

Roddicking good read

BY FREYA MARSHALL
& CHANTAL ORANGE

Anita Roddick was received rapturously by a full Cheltenham audience and made raging activists of all of us. Speaking primarily about her book, *Business as Unusual*, she highlighted her work promoting human rights and community trade. The book reflects her life in its combating the 'bizarre' industry of the make-up world and the effect that social pressures have on women to act, look and be a certain way, like 'coat-hangers', as she put it.

Her angry persona came through in her talk, and comments such as 'get a face-lift, shut up and diet', referring to the message given to women by

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www.cheltenhamfestivals.co.uk/literature

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

•
Junior Poetry Slam
Everyman,
2-3.30pm

•
This is Modern Art
Town Hall,
7.15-8.15pm

•
Patience Agbabi & Roddy Lumsden
Subtone,
8.30pm-late



men, aroused positive support from the audience.

With radical, subversive and angry attitude, she responded confidently to challenging questions concerning The Body Shop, answering them knowledgeably. Overall, this was an enlightening and educational insight into not only a business, but also a revolutionary movement designed to improve the human condition.

Man Bites Zombie

BY DANIEL HAHN

Kenan Malik's new book *Man, Beast and Zombie* asks the question 'What is it that makes us human?' He was joined by fellow human beings Roy Porter and Steve Jones tonight to discuss this question. Both Porter and Jones can be found enthusing on the back jacket of Malik's book, so no radical differences of opinion were expected...

Malik and Jones both talked about the limitations of science; Malik recognised the potential gains from the 'naturalistic' approach, but stressed that this could only examine humans as objective, not subjective beings. We are partly like machines, but it's the different part that science can't deal with. Jones' arguments were the same; he concluded that 'science can tell us everything about ourselves, apart from the interesting stuff.'

Where there was dissent at all, it came from Porter; the only non-scientist in the group. By his definition, the sciences are broadly defined to include 'natural, human, historical,



linguistic, cultural sciences...' - every kind of stud, in other words. Yes, the 'natural sciences' are limited, but with enough weapons in our armoury perhaps we'll find some answers.

Of course, no single answer came out of this conversation - we could hardly expect one. Malik tried to sum up by suggesting that there is something 'transcendental' about humans, something 'subjective'; only humans, in other words would think of spending an evening sitting, talking about it...

Carnival!

BY ADAM HOROVITZ
& JON ANDRIESEN

Celebrating 500 years of Brazilian history, Natan Baretto and a troupe of actors and musicians brought fragile South American ecstasy to a packed, clattering Casa last night.

In a brief history, conducted through poetry and song, we experienced the birth trials and bloom of a nation. The indigenous population were easy fodder for an armada of Portuguese sailors. Fear of change and the paranoia inherent in invasion and slavery was well expressed in *The Monster*; 'Whose sails are these I brush against?' asked the poem.

Latin jazz, harmonies dripping like honey from the tongue ensured that no one left with a bitter taste. Closing with a euphoric Carnival song, Natan Baretto told us that 'Carnival counterbalances the misery of daily life, which is perhaps why we Brazilians take Carnival so seriously'. Serious or not, we were 'kissed and fluttered by a Brazilian breeze' at a beautiful, refreshing Voices Off event.

Mind Music

BY ZARAH HIBLE

Renowned philosopher Bryan Magee, probed by Michael Berkley, gave us a fascinating insight into the philosophy that shaped Wagner's music. Known as a 'right-wing megalomaniac', Hitler's favourite composer was in fact a disillusioned left-wing 'revolutionary' both politically and musically.

Unappreciated and bankrupt, his ideal friends allowed him to borrow from the husband whilst bedding the wife. As a result, he embodied (in his operas *The Master Singers*, *Parcival* and *Tristan and Isolde*) the themes of music, mysticism and sexual love.

As a voracious eater of ideas, he desired to 'plumb the depths of philosophy'. This manifested in his theory that Opera could be a work that united all art forms equally. However, he gradually succumbed to the idea that music was the highest form; not merely representational but transcending mortality.

Café Philo

BY ANDREW PRIMROSE

Café Philo, featuring Brian Magee, was hosted by Gerard Kilroy and another gentleman who hijacked the microphone for a brief dissertation on space, time and super-space. Magee observed that it would be a fabulous coincidence if what we can apprehend is all that exists. What is beyond *Space and Time*? And if we don't know what it is how can we know if it is 'beyond' space and time?

This lead to the linguistic philosophers pointing out that we can't even discuss what we can't comprehend as no language exists to discuss it, especially when sitting beside a noisy kitchen. Space and Time, both defined by the eminent guests as immeasurable, were clearly measurable to Le Petit Blanc, as we debated space in a severe lack of it and questioned time before it was called.

Some Sceptered Isle

BY KAREN WALKER



'Everyone dreams of islands' - with this in mind, Lucy Irvine and Jane Rogers treated an enchanted audience to extracts from their new books, *Faraway* and *Island* respectively.

Lucy Irvine has lived the dream of island life, most famously when she answered an advert for a 'wife' to live on a desert island for a year; immortalised in her book *Castaway* and the film of the same name. As she shows, the idea of the island as paradise is often far from the truth, a theme which is echoed in Jane Rogers' book.

Having listened to some quite magical readings, the discussion,

chaired by Nicolette Jones, was opened up. Islands were examined as places of simplicity, danger, beauty and isolation. The island is a microcosm where moral and emotional events can occur which wouldn't seem so dramatic elsewhere.

While the island is a place of outstanding beauty, it is often an unforgiving place where rules are flouted; where order cannot be imposed. We all dream of islands; it seems they should feature in nightmares as well.



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The Stoat

Freedom of the press does not mean the freedom to steal other people's stories. You know who you are! Make payment to 'The Stoat' at the usual address.

Following Ann Widdecome's first poem, rumours abound that she is to appear at next year's Slam.

THE TEAM

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