



LITERALLY SPEAKING

Issue no.15 • FREE

Edited by Sara-Jane Arbury & Glenn Carmichael **Saturday 23rd October 1999**

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

•
Simon Schama
Everyman, 2-3pm

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Harold Pinter
Town Hall, 4-5pm

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50th Birthday Cabaret
Town Hall,
9.30pm-LATE

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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

Radio gaga

BY WINCEY WILLIS

Workshop aficionados will know they usually attract participants of a 'certain age' - not this one. Early twenties to bus-pass plus enjoyed a stimulating three hours. Shaun MacLoughlin knows his stuff, he should - as a script editor for the BBC, he was responsible for *Thirty Minute Theatre* and the Wednesday Play from 1966 until 1971 when he left TV for radio - "After the nerve went out of TV drama."

After listening to *The gun which is in my right hand is loaded*, an hilarious send-up, then some extracts showing the finer points of radio writing, we wrote 30 second drama intros, then cast and performed the pieces. From picnics on the moon to spirit world dogs, imaginations took flight. Everyone left feeling enthused and armed with the name and address of the 'New Writing Co-ordinator' at the Beeb. Look out Lucy.

Coping with Wendy

BY OLIVER BRAID
& NICK GOULD



Beginning with one of her self-confessed favourite poems *By The Round Pond*, Wendy Cope entertained her audience with a performance that was both satirical yet reflective. With her domestic poems

about everyday life, the audience laughed as she told tales of boyfriends, bananas and being boring. She read from both published books *Making Cocoa for Kingsley Amis* and *Serious Concerns* and from a selection of her latest poetry. With her light-hearted jabs at the male species and modern life in general, her delivery reflected her previous job as a primary teacher. Her cures for love were a prime example of her truthful and witty style.

When questioned by the audience, the winner of a Cholmondeley Award admitted two of her favourite poets to be Houseman and Eliot. Her inspiration seems to be taken from her everyday life and surroundings.

Being bored may have been one of Wendy Cope's poems but it certainly wasn't the experience of the audience.

Park life

BY MARK THOMAS

Having attended to the parking needs of various people during the Festival, I have found it necessary to amuse myself with 'people watching'.

Tuesday afternoon, I was witness to the art of courtship between two grey squirrels - lessons to be learnt I feel (mental note: gift for girlfriend - nuts mmm...? Maybe flowers?)

Wednesday, having rubbed shoulders with some of this land's finest writers and speakers (thinking "You look bigger on TV"), only to cross the scale of taste to an event which could be classed as art... (maybe). Not that I mind looking after models who like to disrobe for money!

Thursday finds me back in the cultural world of literature, but can you park? I don't think so.

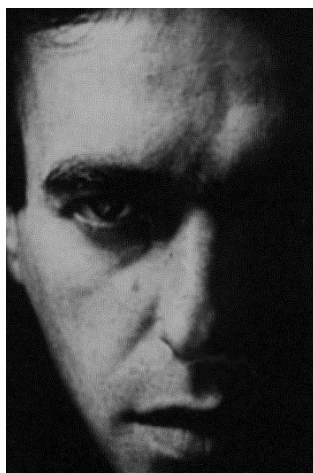
Is there something Amis?

BY TOM ARMITAGE
& JON ANDRIESSEN

Martin Amis appeared at the Everyman Theatre to discuss his work with *New Yorker* editor David

Remnick; what actually followed was a fascinating discussion on the role, function and friendship of writers, especially his father, Kingsley.

Amis' latest project is an as yet unfinished memoir of his father, and for these he has had to



draw on a less than comfortable past. He began by discussing his childhood, in which he described his father as "simply another man who went to work in his study a lot." It is hard not to notice the importance of being the son, but Martin certainly

tried. It was only at the end of his teens that he actually read *Lucky Jim* for the first time, and laughed.

In the questions that followed, Amis revealed what he had learned from his father. He described Kingsley as "more a poet than a novelist", and he clearly feels

that he would have liked to have shared that poetic skill. Unusually for

Amis, as these memories became more and more personal, he revealed a far more emotional side than his works might suggest: he was particularly moved by his father's decline in his later years.

Amis described fiction as the art of



writing about "what it means to be alive at any time." Though there is no question of the importance of *London Fields* or *Money* as products of the Eighties,

they now seem to have lost a little of that relevance.



Future shock

BY ALAN MADDRELL

"Novelists don't write good news" explained Fay Weldon yesterday, referring to the sci-fi writer's tendency to create a bleak outlook for humanity. Maggie Gee's section from her novel *The Ice People* expressed a different viewpoint. Her hero attempts to create an "old-fashioned" life, raising a family in natural settings.

The received wisdom between the two writers and surprise chair Antonia Byatt was that the future would resemble a three-way mutant between 1984, *Brave New World* and something as yet unwritten. But that's female "future fictionalists" for you. Future-based fiction is a playground for them, rather than a forum for the prophecy of doom. Similarly, the genre opens up wider authorial concerns than their own personal neuroses. With these three at the helm, the future might not be bright, but it certainly won't be purple.

The Cooke Retort

BY JON ANDRIESEN

As a child I remember Sunday mornings and my father's old radio, the theme tune to *Breakaway*, but most of all Alistair Cooke's *Letter From America*.

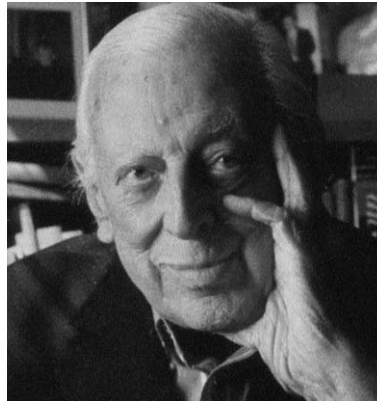
Now 91, Cooke has cooperated with Nick Clarke on an 'unauthorised' biography, examining the life of our most idiosyncratic correspondents.

Cooke could not be here tonight, instead a specially arranged interview had been filmed showing him to be more fit and lucid than is natural. It was strange to see a man so associated with radio so perfectly at home on celluloid. The voice still rolls out like

chocolate and with a cheeky self-satisfaction at that.

His old friend, journalist John Cole remembered how, on first meeting Cooke, it had been his apparent apathy and love of procrastination that had defined his inimitable style; Cooke would never happily search out his stories if it was possible to watch them on TV. Famously he reported on the Kennedy assassination from the comfort of his home, via CNN. He got the story first as his colleagues in Dallas saw nothing from the press bus half a mile away.

Cooke's literature is not of the page, it lives within the ethereal level of radio and long may it continue.



Coward by name, coward by nature?

BY ROWLAND BYASS

John Lahr's insights into Noël Coward, his deployment of charm as both instrument of power and as defence, and his significance as "a new kind of human being" for the age of mass media, offered interest on two levels. He analysed Coward's celebrated wit and knowing frivolity as both an awareness of futility and a "refusal to suffer" through it.

As an American, Lahr also gave an English audience a view of itself, mediated through Coward, the "embodiment of deluxe Englishness."

Coward was a figure who both contradicted and expressed the spirit of his time. Immensely vain, yet aware of his own ludicrousness, he demanded attention through fame, but his seamless charm repelled intimacy.

Lahr explained Coward's desire for visibility as a fantasy of omnipotence. "They've got to do what I tell them",

he once said of his audiences.

Yet the critical failure of some of his later plays helped prompt three nervous breakdowns and demonstrated the vulnerability of his public persona.

Coward's genius for self-invention makes him perennially fascinating, though; Lahr suggested "if he was alive today he'd be an MTV star."



First Edition

BY ADAM HOROVITZ

George Weidenfeld, Nigel Nicolson and Antonia Fraser last night gave a very interesting lesson in the appraisal of historical sources; they disagreed continuously about the history of the publishing company Weidenfeld & Nicolson. Not that the discussion was in any way acrimonious - they were too busy interjecting affectionately into each other's anecdotes for that.

The event had a rather Pooterish charm to it; somebody was missing the joke somewhere, but it didn't really matter. The disputes themselves were trivial, though never tedious, and one only got a vague sense that Weidenfeld & Nicolson had ever published any books. According to Fraser, her updates of the *Robin Hood* and *King Arthur* myths (written for the company) had almost entirely consisted of the word THWACK.

A bizarre and charming, if mildly befuddling, event.

Holy spots

BY HANNAH FOUNTAIN

I must confess to feeling a little dubious when Simon Jenkins first enthused about "the romance and excitement of the English parish church." However, over the course of the next hour those fears were proved unfounded, as we were taken on a serene journey through Jenkins' "virtual museum of British history." The places he described were brought to life by a combination of stunningly vivid photography and even more colourful historical anecdotes. These featured the usual selection of wrathful abbots and dashing knights, but also included tales of lost Chagall masterpieces and topics as bizarre as dog breeding or the origins of wrestling holds.

One troubling thing remains, however. In the 15th century, it was considered advisable for women to die appearing to be the same age as Christ - about 30. This leaves me with approx. 8 years to go. Enough time to get round 1000 churches?

The Stoat

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Martin Amis on Kingsley being stranded one night in Newcastle: "He had to get a taxi all the way back to England, err I mean London."

•
Antonia Fraser: "Oh you really shouldn't believe a word Harold Pinter says about the past."
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THE TEAM

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