



# LITERALLY SPEAKING

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Edited by Sara-Jane Arbury & Glenn Carmichael

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

## 50th b'day

BY JON ANDRIESEN



Black velveteen dandy, John Walsh began proceedings with a promise of dark desire. First was an operatic diva from a far-off planet in a part of the Federation. Kirk and Spock would have been comfortable with this alien beauty singing in high pitched wails and elaborate costume. The Scarlet Woman, musical burlesque maestro with modern beat.

Walsh then introduced the main event. Our well-informed compere was obviously over-excited at the prospect of John Cooper Clarke, poet, punk; but Mr Walsh, this Salford lad has seldom been accused of using a "Scouse" accent.

He was confronted by old fans and blue-rinse grandmas, dad in his woolly jumper and a strange heckling fool who Clarke dismissed. "I believe we are divided by the same language," he said. The iconoclastic Clarke slayed his audience with vitriol and vice, still as enigmatic as he is thin. The old poems are still the best, the suit still semi-ruffled and the glasses dark as a dark thing on a dark dark night.

In the end the audience's wit responded in tune with the till behind the bar as a little Cheltenham reserve climbed slowly into pre-war Berlin. Life is, this is, we are (perhaps) Cabaret.

## Marcus Moore speaks

BY LITERALLY SPEAKING

Festival legend, Marcus Moore, has decided to call it a day. Too many late nights and too many early mornings have taken their toll on his poetic virility. So what now? A cottage by the sea in Eastbourne? Or an old people's home in Cheltenham? A task force from *Literally Speaking* cadged a free lunch to find out.

"Much as I love the Festival, the 50 weeks leading up to it are hard work now, it's in my head 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It's an opportunity to work with some fabulous, fabulous people, I'm gonna miss that (but) I want to spend more time with Sara-Jane doing Slams, because that's something I believe very firmly

in. And the *Call my Bluff* writing I do, I want that to become my bread and butter in the way in which



Cheltenham has been my bread and butter. I feel now as though I could write better than I have done.

One of the highlights for me, I think, probably, it's got to be, in the eight years, was that night with Seamus Heaney, his first gig after getting the Nobel. I bumped into Jean Binta Breeze, bottle of wine in hand and huge grin all over her face, saying: "Isn't it wonderful to see the Town Hall full of a very different audience, you know, dreadlocks and people that Cheltenham might have been scared of and has no need to be scared of whatsoever.

So 'It is accomplished', a line I pinched from Dennis Potter. It's a good time to say we've done it. Now, how are you going to get all that down to just 65 words then?"

Sketch of Marcus by Heather Spears

## Schama lamma ding dong

BY MATTHEW ABBOTT

The cultural commentator and broadcaster Simon Schama was specially flown in from Italy to give his lecture and promote his new book *Rembrandt's Eyes* at this year's Festival. In his talk, he was challenged to explore whether a great artist or writer is solely a construct of their time and place or if they can be seen as an individual genius rising beyond their cultural circumstances.



Never an advocate of the G-word, Schama used Rembrandt's pictures and themes from his book to show us how the artist used the political and cultural rivalries of his time, together

with the works of his contemporaries - in particular Rubens - to extend the potential of his art.

He also highlighted Rembrandt's capacity to defy convention and recreate the drama of everyday life.

Schama turned in an excellent performance which enthralled his audience and reflected all the verve and enthusiasm with which his work has become accustomed.

Schama's new book will be released on Thursday 28th October, 330 years to the month after Rembrandt's death. Based on this erudite and entertaining presentation, we're in for an excellent read.

## Previews

BY LITERALLY SPEAKING

What better way to end the 50th Cheltenham Festival of Literature than spending Sunday in a word-added daze? The *Literally Speaking* team here offer a few of their recommendations.

*Literary Utopias* - Town Hall, 10.30-11.30am. *Susan Blackmore* - Town Hall, 12.30-1.30pm. *Marcus Moore, the Farewell Gig* - The Beehive, 12.30-1.30pm.

### LUNCH

*Vanessa Redgrave* - Everyman, 4-5.30pm. *Sue Townsend* - Town Hall, 6-7pm. *Tooth Fairy* - Everyman 7.45-8.30pm. *David Baddiel* - Town Hall, 8.30-9.30pm. OR *The 1954 Booker Prize* - Everyman 8.45-10.45pm.

Thanks for reading. See you next year?



## Morpurgo's Kingdom

BY NICK GOULD

The Drawing Room was full of people yesterday - children and OAPs - listening to Michael Morpurgo talk about his new book *Kensuke's Kingdom*. The book is about a young boy (imaginatively called Michael), who falls off a boat and gets washed up on an island whose other inhabitant is Kensuke, an hermitic old man who does not like any intrusion on his life.

As well as *Kensuke's Kingdom*, Morpurgo read another story and poem, which were "for children from five to ninety-five." But in amongst the laughter there was a serious message for the children; some books are sad because life can be too. Morpurgo wasn't going to hide this from them.

With children sitting on the floor at the front, the storytelling atmosphere was welcoming and enjoyed by all who saw him.

## The Stoat

The Stoat would like to congratulate Mary Fauset, our Staff Journalist Emeritus. She was the first name drawn from the hat for our Stoat prize. She correctly answered Marcus' riddle (double letters in the first word - see issue 11) and the book is with her as we speak.

A big Stoat thanks to all of you who, wittingly or otherwise, made this column such fun to write.

Happy 18th birthday, Mary Fauset.

### THE TEAM

SUB EDITORS:  
Adam Horovitz, Alan Maddrell.

ROVING REPORTER:  
Jon Andriessen.

## Armitage and Duffy

BY LAURA SHEPHARD  
& CLAIRE FAUSET

Simon Armitage performed various pieces of his work including an extract from *Killing Time*, a poem written for the millennium, which dealt with the delicate issue of the Columbine massacre in a hauntingly witty way by substituting floral imagery in the place of violence.

Each reading was preceded with anecdotes of his life, balancing the more serious issues and providing us with a valuable insight into the mind of one of Britain's leading poets.

Carol Ann Duffy's new collection *The World's Wife* is an energetic and



witty rewriting of legends, fairy stories and modern mythology, taking mythology away from the masculine, heroic language of quest and conquest and bringing it firmly into the real, domestic world - "a secret biography of someone not unlike herself, though the more unpleasant women tend to be the least autobiographical." It is a hugely entertaining collection, empowering and unapologetic without being an invective against men in general. Her performance gave real life and bite to the work. As always the best description of the event is one of Duffy's own: "Words, words were truly alive on the tongue, in the head, / warm, beating, frantic, winged; music and blood." (*Little Red Cap*)



## A pregnant pause

BY PAUL BALLARD  
& LAURA SHEPHARD

By nature, history can be said to be slightly archaic - to inject life into it is a rare skill. Antonia Fraser has honed that skill over the 30 years since her first historical biography was published, and was at the Festival to discuss her work.

Although the bulk of the talk concerned Cromwell, Fraser offered the audience a great insight into the writing of historical works in general. With each biography, she has the aim to "bring back the individual character", and to do so needs to make a modern analogy. By recreating the people she writes about, she can overcome the "black and white myths" that often surround names such as Mary, Queen of Scots, and Cromwell. Either empathy or sympathy is required to be able to write about them, and she concedes that the only real thing she has in common with Mary, Queen of Scots is

that they are "both tall, both women."

Harold Pinter began with readings from his latest book *Various Voices* in which he highlights his concerns over world affairs. This session was strongly political; contempt for America and its foreign policies was evident. When questioned on the Kosovo crisis he said he was "ashamed on behalf of his country."

Pinter's reading of *American Football* particularly stood out as he considers this sport grotesque enough to become a suitable metaphor for the bombing in the Gulf War. He said that he hated his poem - what it represents and what it reflects.

It was clear that Pinter is a very angry man, however poems about his wife and late English teacher showed us that he is a man capable of deep tenderness and emotion. This is what makes Pinter's work so ingenious. In his own words, "If drama isn't packed with emotion - what is it?"

## Fool Britannia?

BY SCOTT JEFFERY  
& CANDY ROBINSON

The *New Yorker* team of David Remnick, Anthony Lane and Simon Schama opened with the proposal that America will be the cultural centre of the world in the 21st century, arguing a passionate defence that it is the centre of power and commerce and therefore, by extension, culture.

The response from *The Independent* team of Howard Jacobson, David Aaronvitch and Terence Blacker was to point out that this opening speech was given by the only American on the team, leading to the belief that the *New Yorker's* strongest argument seemed to be that ex-pats thought they were right! Jacobson went on to say that America was, culturally speaking, the most frightened nation on Earth; too terrified of offending to produce anything of real value, and so couldn't be the leading light, only a flickering candle.

Jacobson (and his colleagues) are of course wrong. As the *New Yorker* team so intelligently pointed out, America has given us Bellow, Updike, *The Sopranos*, *McDonalds* and Bill Gates. Like it or not, American culture has saturated all others.

Once something is saturated, though, its only way forward is to be wrung out. This, it was said, is where American culture is now; it has reached its zenith, it must now recede to allow for a truly global mix. This point was best summed up unwittingly by Andrea Crandell, one of two student speakers, when she described an Asian branch of *McDonalds* changing to an egg/rice menu. In this instance local culture was needed for survival.

The gist of the *New Yorker's* argument was that this may be so, but that rice was still McRice.

This was an intelligent and hugely entertaining debate which was warmly received by an enthusiastic, if somewhat biased audience. The final verdict was an overwhelming denial of the American proposal.