



LITERALLY SPEAKING

Issue no.13 • FREE Edited by Glenn Carmichael & Sara-Jane Arbury Thursday 21st October 1999

Sex changes

BY ROWLAND BYASS

Dramatic music set us up for a discussion of Changing Values between John Mortimer, Paul Bailey and Michèle Roberts which was more frank than many of the largely retired audience could have expected.

Roberts chaired a wide-ranging survey of attitudes towards morality, food, pornography, sex, and more sex, since the war.

Bailey's candid reminiscence of growing up gay in the era of "sensitive" and "Is he musical?" euphemisms seemed in itself proof of an infinitely greater openness towards sexuality today. This, and Roberts' questions about his and John Mortimer's tastes in porn, did provoke some ripples of disquiet from the audience.

For the unflappably serene Mortimer, however, there is "nothing new under the sun."

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

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**UA Fanthorpe
Frieda Hughes**
Town Hall, 4.30-5.30pm

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**Laurie Lee:
The Well-Loved Stranger**
Town Hall, 6-7.15pm

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Evening of Pleasure
The Beehive,
8.30pm-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

Look back in anger, old men!

BY SCOTT JEFFERY
& PHOEBE COBB

Alan Brownjohn, John Bayley and Alan Sillitoe discussed the "Angry Young Men" movement as personified by John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger*. Touchingly, much of the talk seemed like an apologetic tract for the title; the speakers taking time to reiterate the important role of women writers during the period.

The writers almost dismissed the whole movement as a media contrivance and were keen to emphasise their own works as free standing individual achievements.

Alan Sillitoe revealed that when he wrote *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* he was "kept by a woman for eight years" (a reference to his subsidies from the Queen), and living "the life of Riley" in Spain. He explained that *Look Back in Anger* was more a reinforcement of his feelings than a stimulus.

John Bayley felt that rather than works of protest, their writings were more a

left-wing and over-educated. Rather than being driven by malcontent, these writers seem to have been spurred on by a good, old-fashioned love of literature.

The lasting impression is that these once politicised writers seem to have settled down into happy middle-class

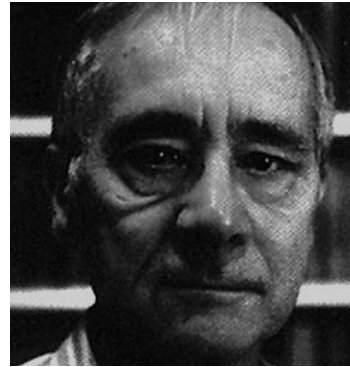
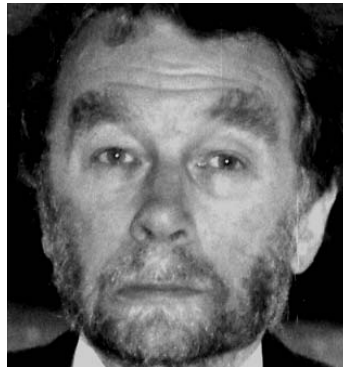
lifestyles. They don't even appear to be mildly peeved.

These gentlemen are, though, responsible for some of the most important

working class realisation that they could express themselves, and be listened to.

Personal politics were always secondary to the story despite the public's view of the movement as angry,

and interesting work of the late twentieth century. Gone is the articulate indignation of their characters, only to be replaced by the apathetic whines of the Nick Hornbys and Douglas Couplands.



Parsons knows

BY CANDY ROBINSON
& MICHAEL ANDERSON

Nigel Williams opened this discussion by asking Blake Morrison and Tony Parsons "are we different from our fathers?" Yes and no would seem to be the answer.

Morrison envied his father's ability to go the pub at will, but felt being emotionally literate is more important.

Parsons finds himself mirroring his Dad's actions and opinions but has got there via a different route; anti-drugs now, but took them with

the Sex Pistols first!

All agreed that post-feminism woman has had a major impact on the world of '90s man'. Now women are just as likely to be out earning the bacon as making the bacon sandwiches.

Unlike working women of the past, she refuses to defer to her husband in the home.

Overall it was felt that life is better now, and getting better for their sons.



Hi Faulks!

BY MARY FAUSET

Unlike most writers appearing here, Sebastian Faulks does not have a new novel to talk about - "I am not here on any disguised commercial venture." He deals with extreme circumstances, particularly during WW1.

For Faulks, war writing covers big events, yet avoids melodrama. About the writer's perspective he said, "In literature you have this marvellous outlook - before, after, inside and outside that you never have in real life." Faulks read from examples that illustrated these points well - Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Laurie Moore's *Birds of America* - for him, a pleasant change from reading his own novels.



Keep Kipling Keen on Keenan

BY STACEY REDMAN
& LUCY SERIES

Poet and academic Craig Raine gave us an in-depth analysis of the writings of Rudyard Kipling: women, race, "literary vulgarity" and dialect, relating these to the concept of "the perfect gentleman". He concentrated particularly on common misconceptions regarding Kipling as a racist, and put his work in the context of the age, giving an insight into Kipling's controversial attitudes regarding his hatred of Germans - the grief of a man who lost his only son to the war.

Raine used a selection of sources from what would now be perceived as Kipling's most politically incorrect ("A woman is only a woman, but a good cigar is a smoke" - *Betrothed*) to using a recording of the changing elocution of Baroness Thatcher as an example of dialect. After the talk, many of the audience felt they would now read Kipling with renewed eyes.

BY MIREIA TYSOE

A full house filled the auditorium this evening in anticipation for Brian Keenan.

In 1986, while teaching in Beirut, Brian Keenan was captured and held hostage for four and a half years by a group of fundamentalist Muslims. His book, *An Evil Cradling* is an account of his experiences in captivity. It is seen as a classic of its time - an horrific episode of one mans life which speaks of his amazing ability to survive such suffering.

The book deals primarily with his understanding of himself and life, how he dealt with his own fears and the meltdown of identity which terrified him the most. The retelling of his years in captivity enables us to experience his fears and hopes and to enter into a world which we would never wish to imagine.

It is clear from Keenan's talk at the Festival today that it was a "life



changing experience." It was a very emotional talk in which he rubbed his eyes and forehead frequently. His recent journey in Patagonia, explored in his latest book *Between Extremes*, is a way of coming out of the past. Together with John McCarthy (his fellow hostage back in 1986) he took this late voyage and "shared experience." McCarthy went with him as a kind of "spiritual guide" as they took time to find a place among themselves.

Sketch by Heather Spears

The Stoat

John Cooper Clarke, as quoted by the beautiful Thom the World Poet yesternight: "When it came to Margaret Thatcher, I chose heroin."

Ben Zephaniah, attempting to flee a signing to drive south for the winter, was amazed to be nobbled in the corridor by an entire queue of eager folk clutching books. Try that again, Benjamin.

Superheroes

BY SUZIE EVANS

What is a hero? Someone you idolised as a child, someone you idolise now, or someone that you want to be? *20th Century Heroes*, a discussion led by Lisa Jardine with author Michèle Roberts and cultural professor Sadie Plant, helped me form some clearer ideas.

The event involved audience participation, including a survey in which we were asked to vote on our own personal male heroes - top of the list came Nelson Mandela. The three panelists discussed their ideas of the qualities a male hero should have - and realised that the combination of fortitude, endurance and fallibility was not only a tough one to find, but it was much harsher than the aspects they looked for in their female heroes.

It appears that at the end of the 20th century, heroes are not the macho stereotypes they once were.

THE TEAM

SUB EDITORS:
Adam Horovitz, Alan Maddrell.

STAFF JOURNALISTS:
Lucy Series, Stacey Redman.

ROVING REPORTER:
Jon Andriessen.

Ben and the art of originality

BY ARTHUR NEWMAN

"When a policeman stops me and asks me for my identity, I look in the mirror and I say 'That's me.'" (Benjamin Zephaniah)

Homelands, featuring Zephaniah, Jean Binta Breeze and Fred D'Aguiar was a fascinating discussion concerning writerly identity, particularly in the face of race and culture.

First up was Benjamin Zephaniah, vegan poet and political force. He was born in England of Caribbean parents and was illiterate until the age of thirteen when he was infamously branded "a born failure." At the time, however, his performing earned him more money than many of his teachers. His



natural wit and humour allowed him to make instances of racism in his childhood memorable.

Zephaniah explained how, when Mohammed Ali was at his peak, everybody expected him to be able to box. "I can actually box like Mohammed Ali," he explained, "but not twenty people at once!"

D'Aguiar, in contrast, was born in England but lived in Guyana until the age of twelve. He is now a professor at Miami University and flew in from the States for the performance.

Much less a political poet, his speaking had more of an academic tone than Zephaniah's



easy humour. He does not write about politics because he considers that "writing is hard enough without being told what to write about."

The apex of the triangle was Binta Breeze. She came to England as an adult and has yet to write about England as she feels she "hasn't lived it enough." Her chairing of the event was majestic. Zephaniah's political understanding gave us one prediction to think about. There's an area of Africa called Western Sahara which is controlled by Morocco. In ten years, says Zephaniah, this will be another East Timor. We can only hope that for once he is wrong.

