

LITERALLY SPEAKING

sponsored by

C&G Cheltenham & Gloucester

Issue no. 6 • FREE • edited by Stet Press • Thursday 18th October 2001

Crime capers

BY ALAN MADDRELL

Festival audiences love a warm welcome, but *The Murder Squad* will never give you an easy ride. Which is why the Council Chamber in the Municipal Offices hosted the auspicious meeting of the seven spooks.

The Squad, touting their new anthology, presented their arguments in the framing narrative of a court trial - the setting really came into play here, with the writers loving the chance to wear wigs and robes. Even Sara-Jane Arbury wielded a gavel.

Later, the writers hosted a discussion of some issues in contemporary crime fiction, which has seen a sizable shift in orientation recently. Commercial forces intrude, such as making a book marketable both to America and to the omnipresent television. Nonetheless, modern writers, the *Murder Squad* included, no longer set their stories in London, but in their home towns, using regional characteristics. All the better to convince you with...

Ash Wednesday

BY ADAM HOROVITZ

'Politics always ends in tears - even for Margaret Thatcher' opined Paddy Ashdown in the Town Hall last night. That said, Ashdown revealed little of tears in this supremely politician discussion, and only a pinch of blood and sweat.

Given that his latest volume of diaries only covers the period between Blair's election in 1997 and the end of 1999, much was made of the early possibility of a merger between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, with Nick Clarke badgering away genially at whether or not Ashdown actually liked Blair. 'Yes...' said Paddy, whilst scratching his neck.

Political diaries rarely reveal much about the person who has written them; what there is to be gleaned is taken from their choice of enemies. All the same, Ashdown occasionally

peeped over his political mask (much in the manner of the figure in the *Kilroy Woz Ere* cartoons) to rub a modicum of salt into nearly-healed wounds. His dislike of Iain Duncan Smith became apparent when he deliberately fudged his name in conversation, and by comparing Douglas Hurd speeches (during the Bosnia crisis) to Lord Halifax the

appeaser's, he actually re-opened wounds.

His attitude to the current world situation was revealing - very much that of an ex-soldier. He stated categorically that 'there is no point in having soldiers if they don't take risks'. 'Power,' he said, 'has migrated... to the global arena. The real challenge for our age is to establish a global law... patiently, by precedent and action.' A Liberal in the truest sense of the word, it is to be hoped that politics doesn't end in tears for Ashdown.



That old black magic

BY NICCI SHEEHAN

Fascinating. Benjamin Woolley's biography of John Dee, *The Queen's Conjuror*, was drawn from Dee's coded diaries. The importance of these documents was not recognised until half of them had been used to line pie tins in the seventeenth century.

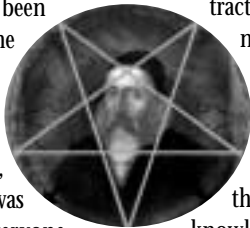
Scientist, astronomer, court astrologer to Elizabeth I and occultist, his range of activities was wide and not everyone

approved. While at university the stage effects he devised to make a giant dung-beetle fly proved too realistic, and rumours of conjuring, witchcraft and calculating (using mathematics) followed him, almost costing

him his life. Despite this he went on to become an important scientist, discovering the infinite nature of space.

He should have stuck to science. His increasing reliance on mediums to contact angels got him involved with a medium named Kelly, an unattractive one-eared petty criminal, whose messages became increasingly extreme and took him abroad on futile missions.

Finally Kelly demanded that Dee should share all his knowledge, including carnal knowledge of his wife with him. Reluctantly Dee agreed, and soon after Kelly skipped off to become a famous alchemist, leaving Dee's wife pregnant and Dee a broken man. Never trust a one-eared angel.



The agony and the Odyssey

BY JON ANDRIESEN

The story of Odysseus is one of the oldest, longest and best known of all the Greek myths, so when the opportunity arose to experience a new interpretation by poet and playwright Stamatis Mesimeris, I didn't need to think twice. If only I had.

James Auden, a man who 'works in television and radio regularly' - according to the flyer - was our ever-present narrator, leading us through a series of extended extracts from the classic story. He was joined on stage by the excellent sitar strumming Jonathan Mayer, whose CV lists such

luminaries as Dave Stewart and the incontrovertible Sarah Brightman.

However, despite their undoubted track records and one of the greatest stories ever told, I felt this was an overlong and uncomfortable performance. Billed as 'Drama', it was rarely more than a reading with music and lighting. The script was poetic and, at times, laced with intriguing modern metaphors, but all too little and often too loose to either re-evaluate or provide new insight to the tale.

Nevertheless, a most impressive example of lighting was provided by the Festival technicians - and appreciated by those who stayed the distance.



TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

•
Dermot Bolger & Mike Phillips

Town Hall
2.30-3.30pm

•
George Monbiot

Town Hall
7.30-8.30pm

•
TXT Appeal!?

Everyman
4.30-6pm
Peppers
7.30-8.30pm

CyberFeast of fun

BY MICHAEL ANDERSON & ARTHUR NEWMAN

Theoretically, *CyberFest* is perfect for filling that awkward hiatus between the earlier events and the big-hitters of Paddy and Sebastian.

Hosted by a distractingly compelling young lady with glasses and a lovely smile, the free internet access is very fast but, strangely, once you know you have unlimited time, you can't think of anything you want to look at - you're spoiled for choice.

With the 'geek' stigma originally surrounding the web now virtually evaporated, the question remains: is it any good? Ask, perhaps, the man perusing the Scottish Tourist Board website (not a writer here, honest) or the lady teased for her 'CyberIgnorance' (apparently, not everyone has heard of *Google*).

Regardless, it's the best way to idle away the time without being arrested.

The Stoat

Festival caterers, Sodexho, served up a special for Ashdown's pre-speech supper. Ringing his plate of smoked salmon sandwiches was the word 'PADDY', carved out of red (yes, red) peppers. Not yellow?

Calendar expert Nick Clarke had to correct Mr Ashdown yesterday. Recounting tales from his diary, Paddy introduced a new day, April 31st. Ashdown Day anyone?

THE TEAM

EDITORS:
Jon Andriessen, Sara-Jane Arbury & Adam Horovitz

DEPUTY EDITORS:
Michael Chirgwin, Alan Maddrell

© on articles remains with the authors

Banner photograph sponsored by
Oxford Scientific Films / Hjalmar R. Bardarson
Tel: 01993 881881 www.osf.uk.com

Blake's heaven

BY TOBY JOY

Blake Morrison introduced himself as a poetry enthusiast rather than an academic, but he certainly knew his stuff. Slides of the work of Rollie McKenna (which can be seen in full at the Art Gallery and Museum) accompanied Blake as he led us through British poetry since the war.

The importance of the inter-relationships between different generations of poets was particularly emphasised, with reactions, responses and ripostes key to poetic advancement. Dylan Thomas provided Kingsley Amis and D.J. Enright with ample opportunity to scorn, and they seemed all too eager to take up the challenge. As Hughes and Plath emerged, the focus changed, and a



new eagerness to be bold and different developed.

Morrison took time to point out how attitudes towards woman poets changed as society did, and how the removal of social barriers led to a more diverse, less cliquey generation of poets. Quite what the duty of the poet is, and what the effect on the reader should be was sensibly left unanswered. In answer to a question on September 11th as a subject for writing, we were instructed not to hold our breath; poetry, it seems, needs time for perspective.

Blake peppered his lecture with intelligent use of material, along with some well-received quips, and there should be no shortage of punters at The Art Gallery to see McKenna's sensitive work in full.

Why Massingberd sings

BY DANIEL HAHN

In July 1986, Hugh Massingberd, who has appeared at Cheltenham aged 60-ish, was brought into *The Daily Telegraph* to be their first Obituaries Editor. But there was concern among management; they were hoping to attract a younger readership, and - as a senior figure pointed out - 'obituaries tend to be full of old people'.

To his (predominantly Telegraph-reading?) audience, Massingberd explained that he soon determined that his pages should not just be 'reserved for the great and the good', but should celebrate other more eccentric characters too. He also believed that the articles should not be bald rehearsals of facts, nor censored of a subject's failings and



foibles, but that they should be 'warts and all' portraits.

Under Massingberd's lead, *The Telegraph* did indeed become the home of some of the most colourful obituaries, specialising in military figures (Brigadier So-and-So, long and distinguished service...), showbiz personalities and eccentrics of all kinds ('Lord Moynihan, bongodrummer, brothel keeper and police informer').

Massingberd expressed concern that one day he might himself come to appear in those pages. Certainly many subjects would be less than pleased at the lack of piety with which they are described (fortunately the chances of their finding out are slim), but at least they're likely to be remembered...

Who killed Kit Marlowe?

BY BRENDA READ-BROWN

Conspiracy or cock-up? Everyone stands on one or the other side of this question as it applies to events in history; Mike Trow is firmly a conspiracy man. Not that this is surprising. He is, he admits, 'not a serious historian', but a writer of crime stories, and *Who Killed Kit Marlowe?* was intriguing and vivid throughout.

The précis given in the inquest report claimed that Marlowe, known for his short temper, was killed during a quarrel over payment of the bill at an inn in Deptford Strand, where he had spent all day with three other men. But the others involved were two con-men and a spy, and the inn was owned by Eleanor Bull, a relative of William Cecil, government spy-master and one of the most powerful men in the Privy Council.

Marlowe was infiltrating anti-establishment propaganda into his plays. Did he know that four members of the Privy Council were atheists, heretics, and couldn't bear to keep this secret? Marlowe had already committed crimes enough to be tried and executed, but this would have given him an opportunity to blab. Murdering him semi-openly would send a message to others without allowing him to damage the government. His murderer was found to have acted in self-defence, and pardoned after only 28 days. The coroner had trained with Cecil; the leader of the jury rented property from another Privy Council member... these were dangerous times, and trial-rigging is no new phenomenon.

Mike Trow's wealth of circumstantial evidence entertained the large audience, while alienating many Shakespeare-lovers (he believes that WS stole Marlowe's ideas). His reply to 'Don't extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence?', one of many questions, was 'No' - but this talk whetted the appetite for his book, and any more to come; his next venture is already planned. Its subject? That is, of course, a secret...