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## Tea and Sprouts

Gabriel Woolf

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## TEA AND SPROUTS

The 1987 George Eliot Readings by Gabriel Woolf

King Edward VI Sixth Form College, Nuneaton April 29th  
Arts Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry April 30th

Does the Englishman eat and drink only to stay alive?  
Using evidence provided by George Eliot, Charles  
Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, Jerome K.  
Jerome, Lewis Carroll and the poetic ponderings of

mighty and minor poets, Gabriel Woolf took a light-hearted look into the English cornucopia, trying to determine whether it contained any more than our national beverage TEA and a vegetable he clearly does not savour himself - SPROUTS ! Are the English the only people daft enough to eat sprouts, he clearly wondered - and we still don't know, for no evidence has appeared which proves them to be part of any European, American or Oriental menu.

With the theme of food and drink, the programme was, inevitably, fairly light-hearted, although the death (in which lack of food and drink played no small part) of Jo, the crossing-sweeper in 'Bleak House' was poignant and moving. But other tears - of laughter - were shed at Jerome K. Jerome's hilarious contretemps with an unassailable can of pineapple.

Someone was heard to say that there was not enough George Eliot; indeed, only two passages - the much loved piece about Mr. Edward Freely's new but corrupting shop in 'Brother Jacob' and the Harvest Supper in 'Adam Bede' - but these took a larger slice of the nearly two-hour programme than any of the other writers.

From the sublime work of George Eliot, Dickens and Hardy to the ridiculous of Belloc, Chesterton, Thurber (even to the ghastly verse of James McIntyre on Cheese!), Gabriel read them all superbly. He changed voices and characters so easily that the listener almost believed that there must have been others on the stage with him. As always, his selection of material had been thoroughly and meticulously researched and, no doubt, what the audience heard was only a very small proportion of what he had read while choosing the content of this eighteenth instalment of the series.

The nineteenth George Eliot Readings are already being planned, and will be based on Warwickshire writers - William Shakespeare, Rupert Brooke, Philip Larkin to mention but a few and, of course, a large slice of our own George Eliot.