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## Review of The Warwickshire Pen

Gabriel Woolf

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REVIEW

THE WARWICKSHIRE PEN

The 1988 George Eliot Readings by Gabriel Woolf

King Edward VI Sixth Form College, Nuneaton April 27th  
Arts Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry April 29th

Being born in Warwickshire, it seems, confers distinction upon those who write. I can make this statement without giving myself airs, since I was born in another county, and, according to Gabriel Woolf, merely to dwell in Warwickshire is no guarantee of excellence.

Shaking the local dust from his feet with a grand dramatic gesture, so to speak, Gabriel Woolf began his programme with extracts from Henry V on "the vasty fields of France", whither we had been puffed by the breath of Shakespeare's contemporary, Michael Drayton. Back in Warwickshire, a contrast followed from the early pen of George Eliot, quietly dramatising a conversation between neighbours, from Scenes of Clerical Life, which gave us a taste of the local dialect.

The spice of the programme was its variety: favourite sonnets by Shakespeare and Drayton were followed by fishy poems of Rupert Brooke; then we entered the sphere of childhood with an hilarious sticky poem by Paul Jennings full of hard staccato sounds. Children of Michael Drayton Middle School, Hartshill provided up-to-the-minute poems with their Warwickshire bios. What a treat it must have been for those at Nuneaton who heard their own jolly verses read by such a gifted performer! A little lame dialogue from the minor pen of Angela Brazil kept us giggling, with the black-stockinged ones kicking up their legs in the gym; and Maggie and Tom, fishing happily in the Round Pool near The Mill on the Floss, after the shameful episode of the neglected rabbits, brought the first part to a close in a haze of golden sunshine.

In Part Two, childhood was left behind as we heard three poems by Philip Larkin, a cool and pensive poet, followed by a humorous but touching prose piece about a peach Melba, by Paul Jennings in elegiac mood. Our own Bill Adams, described as "a local lad", un-singed by the fire-hazards in his father's workshop, provided a vivid bit of local history, and Marie Corelli, an exotic in-comer to Stratford-on-Avon, gave us the horrors with a sepulchral story. Lyrics by Walter Savage Landor and some Warwickshire Epitaphs and Obituaries brought us to the voluptuous Venus and Adonis of Shakespeare, and, finally, George Eliot carried us back to chilly reality in Middlemarch, where Dorothea and Casaubon were repining in Rome, married, but poles asunder.

This was the nineteenth programme of George Eliot Readings given by Gabriel Woolf, and we have come to expect a superb performance. As usual, we were not disappointed, and someone was heard to say, "That was the best ever." Be that as it may, to devise such a programme and to ensure continuity among birds of such varied feather, or quill, is no mean achievement, but Gabriel Woolf is also a skilled planner and researcher, and a witty link-man, who, with his comments and asides, joined the seams and neatly embellished the whole.

*K. Porter*