

**ON THE PAGE- The Times Cheltenham Literature Festival
Friday 14 October 2005**

Michaela Crimmin.

Good afternoon and welcome all of you to the Times Cheltenham Festival of Literature my name is Michaela Crimmin and I run the Arts programme at the RSA and in partnership with the Arts Council of England we have embarked on a programme focusing on the point where the arts and ecology meet. Having rubbed shoulders with environmentalists over the past couple of years it seems incredibly apparent to me, or even more apparent to me, that politics, commerce and our own self-denial are major players in the procession into the parlour state of the planet. The subject today has a significant degree of urgency and we need and welcome people in the arts to address the challenges alongside environmentalists, scientists, government people, media and the others. However I didn't actually say 'perhaps art can save the world after all' as it says in here [Cheltenham programme brochure]. It is a great pleasure to introduce our Chair, poet and author, fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, Chair of the UK Poetry Society, Ruth Padel who will in turn introduce the panel. Eminent, thoughtful and thought provoking in their respective work, thinkers and in a sense kind of activists I think. There is a slight change, I'm afraid Kathleen Jamie is poorly so she is not here, we have Richard Kerridge instead who has wonderfully taken her place at the last minute. Ruth's recent book, *Tigers in Red Weather*, you must read, if you haven't read it, its about a threatened eco-system but importantly its about beauty and vitality and survival. I look forward to the reflections and issues that will now follow. Thank you.

Ruth Padel.

Thank you. Well I am very much looking forward to what our panel might say. We are very sorry that Kathleen Jamie is not here and I hope you will look at her book *Findings* in the book tent anyway because it is a wonderful example of what we all ought to be doing. I have here Mark Lynas who has written a book called *High Tide: How Climate Crisis is Engulfing our Planet* and he lives in Oxford and he has got a new book on the stocks called *Six Degrees* which is six degrees of warming which is how much the planet is supposed to be warming now and exactly the same degrees as when all the extinctions started to happen in the Pleistocene Age.

Mark Lynas.

It takes up from where the old book ended up which is all the doom and gloom and says ok what is doom and gloom exactly? And try and actually quantify it and think about what it means for us all, anyway I can talk about that later.

Ruth Padel.

Then we have Ian Jack who is Editor of *Granta*. He didn't like to be described as an environmental journalist and I said you wrote a wonderful piece on the environment the floods were in Scotland last year. He has also written a book on

the railways, *The Crash that Stopped Britain* about the Hatfield rail crash. He has a weekly column on the *Guardian Review* issue on Saturdays. And finally last minute instead of Kathleen Jamie, at the very very last minute, Richard Kerridge who lectures in English and Creative Writing at Bath Spa University but he also specialises in this new genre of Eco-criticism so he brings two very interesting points of view at once.

I wanted to start by begging Kathleen's pardon, but I will have to beg it in absentia because I want to read you, very shortly, a poem that she wrote in her lovely collection of poems called *The Tree House* which won the Forward Prize and it seems to me to sum up what this about. *Frogs*.

Reading from the poem:

'But for her green palpitating throat
 They lay inert as a stone
 The male fastened like a package
 To her back
 They became as you looked
 Almost beautiful
 Her back mottled to leafy brown
 His marked with two stripes
 Pale as over-wintered grass
 When he bucked
 Once neither so much as blinked
 They're oval gold-line eyes held
 To some bog-dull imperative
 The car that would smear them into one
 Belly to belly tongue thrust utterly into
 Soft brain
 Approached and pressed on.
 Oh how we press on.
 The car and passengers,
 The slow creatures of this earth,
 The woman by the verge
 With her hands cupped.'

So this is about how we press on and how artists and in particular writers – this is a literary festival – can do their bit to halt the pressing on.

I thought I'd start by asking Mark a bit about his journey. The first edition of this book was a journey through various places including China where there are dust winds where once there was knee high grass everywhere. Florida, hurricanes, Hurricane Katrina hadn't happened but others had. He said well when I begun no one believed in global warming, now they are believing in it, Mark.

Mark Lynas.

I probably came to this issue as a campaigner really. I put my hands up and I admit to being one of those people who put up tree houses and tried to stop the bull-dozers laying waste to the British countryside and from that I progressed on to the campaign against GM foods. So I couldn't ever claim that I came at this

dispassionately, I mean I came at this as an environmentalist, somebody who already had this visceral feeling that things were going wrong in our world and that humans were causing mayhem and destruction on a scale that none of us could really quite appreciate. And I was trying to think on the train down, where this started because I think for many of us who are in this movement it started very early on. I remember when I was a kid and we lived in Nottinghamshire and there was a crop field, I think it was an Oilseed rape, behind our back garden, and I remember one day I think I was only 10 or 11 there was a tractor spraying agro-chemicals all along this field and all the bees that were all in our flowers started behaving very oddly and trying to sting us and I think it was as we were under attack from nature because we were attacking nature. I just knew that there was something wrong there and perhaps that was one of the moments that really kicked me off. But the journey for *High Tide* begun when I started to understand a bit more about what global warming meant and just how far off the rails the human species has already pushed the planet. I mean we are now in a new geological era, this is the end of the Holocene which is the post ice-age era and we are now in an era called the Anthropocene which is the first geological era ever to be named after an element of the living biosphere. Humans have multiplied to such a viral degree if you like because of this subsidy of fossil energy which has come from millions of years in the past. Essentially if you think of fossil fuels it is almost like buried ancient sunlight. I mean this was fixed carbon from photosynthesis millions of years ago in the Carboniferous and the Jurassic ages which has been trapped under the earth's sediments as oil and coal and gas and which we as humans are now digging up to form our energy supply and that energy has enabled us to completely transform the way we have lived our lives. We no longer have to use the living biosphere in the sense of having to go and chop wood to heat our houses or go and plant crops using the natural cycles of horse manure and so on. We basically use the land now as a way to transform oil into food. Fossil fuel is at the apex and at the centre of everything we do as a society and it just so happens that these greenhouse gases have been accumulating in the atmosphere to such an extent that now we are outside the scale of what has been the case since humans have evolved so now every breath you take has more carbon dioxide in it than any breath taken by humans during our entire evolution. CO2 levels are higher than they have been in the last 20 perhaps 40 million years and you don't have to be a scientist to understand that we have begun to move the earth outside its safety rails and that something strange is going to be happening. And I have tried to detail in the book just how these strange things are beginning to unfold in different parts of the planet and how they are affecting different people. So my first case study was in fact how the floods came to us back in the year 2000 and this is always a live issue and it is a live issue this year because every single year now we move into what used to be a winter is now sort of a tropical rain season. There were enormous floods down the west half of the UK just this week and I travelled down the country, I went to York, I went to Monmouth I met people there who could no longer sell their properties because they just got flooded so regularly. You know I wanted to bring this home to people that this

was something that would come to us sooner or later it wasn't something that we could just say OK this is the Tuvaluans islanders, this is the Alaskans, other people who we can simply forget about. Climate change will come home to us whether we like it or not, and what I wanted to do in the book was to bring it home to people that while there is still time we should get out there, we should be campaigners, we should switch our electricity supply to green energy and so on. And we have to start taking this issue seriously. So for me this panel is really about how the literary and how writers need to and are beginning to take climate change and environmental issues seriously. I do think there has been a really paucity a terrible oversight if you like from writers and from artists generally who haven't seen, just like the rest of us haven't seen, perhaps it's a reflection of the extent of how our society as a whole is in denial about the severity of this issue, haven't seen the issue coming and so haven't really talked about it. And yet writers have something to contribute which is on a different scale to what other people contribute. I was at a conference where it was scientists meeting climate change writers and it occurred to me that what scientists were doing was producing knowledge and what writers were doing was producing meaning. So that is what I have tried to in *High Tide*, to give meaning to these personal stories informed by science and to try to tell readers of the book just how urgent our situation has already become.

Ruth Padel.

It is wonderful, it is not cheerful but is wonderful and very very powerful. Yes, when I was going to write my book about going to look for wild tigers and discovering why they are dying out who is defending them and who is threatening them every now and then I would come back. And someone from the literary world I live in in London would say to me, oh you're writing about tigers, are you going to do it from the conservation point of view or are you going to be more objective? That is a benchmark of the world that I live in, how people regard it, conservation is still seen as a rather goodie goodie thing, you must have a bit of it in the newspaper but not much. Ian this is your territory.

Ian Jack.

Well I'm from Scotland and I often think that Scotland for all this really because James Watt invented the separate condenser in 1780 or whenever it was, 1760 I guess, then the steam engine would never become the thing that it did become and it was the first great consumer of hydro-carbon fuel and it changed the face of the world. So I think of Scotland and James Watt as the forerunner of very many bad things. I grew up in the 1950's when ecology hadn't been invented really, Thoro(?) may have written *Valdin(?)* but as a kind of thing to talk about it wasn't much talked about, I was into collecting engine numbers and things like that. But I suppose my first awareness of weather as a changeable and sometimes threatening concept in this country at least was the great storm of 1987 which may or may not have anything to do with global warming, I have no idea. A couple of years later there was another big storm in 1989 and I was then helping to found a new Sunday newspaper, which was called *The Independent*

on *Sunday*, and one day I got a piece from a lecturer at Durham University, just on the slush pile, unsolicited it just came and it was about the changes to the flora and fauna of Northern England as perceived from county Durham, Durham University, it was a very interesting piece and we published it. That same year Bill McKibben, the American writer, wrote a book called *The End of Nature* which I think was the first layman's guide to the notion of climate change or global warming, at the time it was considered to be wildly radical and probably much exaggerated. I think everything in it has come to pass and more than just come to pass its kind of come to pass in spades and things are even rather more alarming than that book said they might be. In 2002 by which time I was editing *Granta Magazine*, and was trying to put together an issue on global warming, now if you edit a literary magazine like *Granta* you in some way just have to respond to what you can commission from capital 'W' Writers, writers who are paid to write, writers with reputations, and I found that trying to steer any of them towards the notion that global warming was a literary issue, something that could be described in literature was really quite hard. We did do it but it wasn't easy and there was a piece of Mark's book in it. It was quite hard to find people who would see it as a literary subject, I don't mean that in the sense of a poem or novel, there are various ways of doing non-fiction, in fact Mark has chosen doing one of them very well. There are various ways of using narrative non-fiction, literary non-fiction to describe important things and to make an impact, you hope to make an impact anyway on the people who read it. Now the interesting thing for me about global warming is this really, in so-called artistic terms, things like nuclear war which was a great threat and still is a great threat really, produced a literature, they produced films like *Doctor Strange and His Incredible Years of Service*, Martin Amis wrote about nuclear war very well, I am sure there are many others. The future kind of H G Wells-ian future, *The War of the Worlds*, has always been part of our understanding of what writing is, which is kind of futurology. But this so far, as far as I can see, although a few writers are beginning to write about it to talk about it and are beginning to write about it in fiction, especially in the short-story, hasn't really appealed, now why should this be? My answer to this very briefly just now is that it's too incremental, it is kind of unpredictable, it is hard to write about changing nature before it has changed. And I think the other thing which might be more telling is that, unlike nuclear war or even famine, you cannot blame anybody but yourself for global warming, it is a self-blaming condition I think, you can blame politicians or for nuclear war, but blaming politicians for global warming just isn't good enough, it is all our fault. I think it's a lot to take on board because it would require you, if you were a moral writer anyway, to change your behaviour as well as change the things you write about. I came by train today, but I could easily have come by car, and I think changing people's behaviour in the circumstances, if that is what we agree is required and I think it is required personal, would require a kind of Gandhian universal movement for that to happen and I see no sign of that yet unfortunately.

Ruth Padel.

Do you think that that explanation is why, I mean people have already started to write about 9/11, Jack Jonathan, Saffron Fur(sp?), people have already started to write about terrorism all the time, yet that also seems to be such a big that we as individuals can not control, but yet writers are taking it on like lemmings?

Ian Jack.

Well are taking on 9/11 and I think quite seriously, because it is a nice big dramatic thing which involves good human beings, bad human beings, human beings in trouble and it's a symbol of something and its vibrant and we've all seen the pictures. I mean Disney did do a film called *The Day After Tomorrow* which is about a frozen New York, I haven't seen it yet.

Ruth Padel.

Richard what do you think about it?

Richard Kerridge.

I teach English Literature and Creative writing and for many years to be interested in nature or writing about nature meant that you were regarded as rather conservative and probably rather soppy, and that is surprising because representations of nature are central in English literature and have been for hundreds of years as long as there has been any English Literature. But I think particularly in the inter-war period when it was an extremely popular genre in Britain and there were a lot of writers who had experienced the First World War took refuge in English pastoralism, I think it became identified with a sort of horrified rejection of modernity itself and thus it became extremely unfashionable, I think that is one problem. And I think if we look at the literary traditions that clearly possibly helpful, they all have difficulty in encompassing this subject. First of all one might think of Pastoral, that very diverse very ancient tradition perhaps the most ancient we have. Pastoral represents the nature world or ordinary rural life, as sort of timeless and gentle, a place of retreat where people can rediscover themselves and return to health after their dangerous or miserable experience in cities, so Pastoral assumes right in its deepest bones that nature is there as a permanent condition. And then we have Romanticism. Romantic poets were interested in wild nature and particularly in the solitary experience of wild nature, again, as a kind of self-discovery, a way of discovering the infinity of oneself, one's most deepest feelings, one's most powerful imagination through the contemplation of the wildest and greatest landscapes. And again I think that both of those traditions are still with us in all sorts of ways, I mean we can see them in a lot of advertising for example, but again, there is still something about that which is still suck in that notion of celebration of nature which is not able to perceive nature, the natural world as temporary, as under threat and in need of our help and control, rather than admonishing us for excessive faith in our own control. I suppose the other genre which is worth thinking about here is Apocalypse, the visions of the end of the world, and that would seem to have an obvious relevance to global warming, not that global warming exactly means the end of the world, but it certainly conjures up apocalyptic visions of biblical scale,

famine, flights of refugees, inundations of whole coastal areas, drowned cities etc (yes its strange to mention that this week isn't it). But apocalypse of course in its tradition extremely ambivalent about the disasters it imagines, it sees them as a kind of millennial climax of life, in a sense it exalts in them and welcomes them. So I think all these important literary traditions would have to be modified radically to encompass the subject of global warming and I am not sure writers have yet very much begun to do that. The best novel I know of about this although it was published about 20 years ago so its not strictly about global warming but it's about archetypal environmental catastrophe, that's the novel *White Noise* by Don Dillilo in which a rather complacent American academic suddenly finds himself and his family menaced by an chemical spill, a local environmental catastrophe and what he has to confront because he has been exposed to these chemicals is the radical uncertainty, the range of possible consequences from nothing at all to the catastrophic and the scale of his customary perception, his own life, the kind of narratives he uses to make sense of his own life, cannot cope with this; its off-scale and its partly the incrementally of it that Ian was talking about. So I think we need new narrative genres that are able to make contact between the particular human scale and the long term and large scale, beyond the narrative human life that global warming conjures up for us.

Ruth Padel.

Yes. I remember in *White Noise* he is exposed to it because he takes his family out in the car and at some point he gets out of it may be in a petrol station and he doesn't think about and gets back in and then later on when they are all refugees and the 'man says has anybody been out in it?' he says 'yes' and the man says 'ah' and he says 'is there anything wrong with that' and the man says 'well then we have a *situation*'. That very word 'situation' which is of course a euphemism and an abstract, a way of gliding over and evading the fact that yes you are different from the others because you are possibly going to dye and they are not. So its Dillilo's way of saying the whole system is inadequate to deal with this because the language that they are using is, its wonderful [Yes – Richard Kerridge].

Richard Kerridge.

Yes he goes to the doctor, he feeds his data into the machine, the computer, and the doctor says 'ah you're generating big numbers', he says 'what does that mean?', the doctor says 'hold on I'm getting flashing numbers and pulsing stars' and he says 'what does that mean?' and the doctor says 'you'd rather not know'.

Ruth Padel.

My journey was only Asia because the tiger is an Asian animal and of course it is about the most extreme form of wildness, which is the tiger, which also threatens people's livelihoods and their lives and their children, and sometimes they are in conflict with it, obviously. And so then there are all sorts of problems about that, wherever tigers live you've potentially got problems. So I came up against a lot

of different arguments and I thought I'd just share some from my friends, the kinds of hostile questioning were these: one 'what does conservation really matter anyway?' I'm sure nobody here today needs that, but actually tigers live only in forests and one thing we haven't feed into this, which Mark I'm sure could talk about, is that forests perform the most basic eco-system service, which is the oxygen and the tigers are dying out and the bottom line is that tigers are dying out because people are cutting down the forests. And forests are also connected with rivers, you can't have the river without a forest and you can't have a forest without a river. The great forests of Asia hold the banks for the great monsoon fed rivers and if they were all cut down they would silt up as they are doing in China, you would have great mud slides as you are having in the Philippines and also the floods would go everywhere like flames or like demons causing great famine and drought everywhere. So if you preserve the tiger you are preserving the forests, you have to preserve everything in it and therefore you are also preserving the eco-system. So that's one thing.

Then people say, 'come on you're just being patronising to the third world', the Malaysian President has said 'well you've chopped down all your trees, why shouldn't we chop down all our trees?' and you know people have said that to me, 'why shouldn't they?'. And the answer to that is 'we're sorry we chopped down all our trees.' I mean, there is a wonderful book here called *A Forest Journey* published, in the 80's I think, in California. Its about the role of wood in the development of civilisation and it makes the point absolutely clearly that one after the other civilisations rose when they used their wood, the Samarians, the Babylonians, and they fell when they used all they're wood up. The Greeks, the ancient city states, Rome, all of them and indeed England, you know, James I said if people go on cutting down trees at the rate they are there won't be any wood left. So what we can do, what conservationists and activists can do is advise the third world how to not cut down they're trees and what's in it for them. Then people say, 'why should we be interested in tigers, there aren't any here'. Well the answer is they are all connected and the same sorts of things that I saw going on illegally, as well as legally, in Asia, Indonesia, India, Russia, is happening here. I mean a couple of years ago *Network Rail* cut down a little triangle of woodland which was scheduled to be protected, but wasn't yet protected, where there were nesting birds in spring, and all the local inhabitants saw them doing it, couldn't believe their eyes, tried to get on to the phone to the local council, but by the time anybody had got out there they had done it all and they said 'Oh well, we are doing it because they put leaves on the line'. In fact they left a whole mess and they left woodchips on the line which are a far worst hazard than leaves. But anyway, it was *illegal* and vested interests of people doing that sort of thing are happening just as much as in Sumatra, well perhaps not just as much, but a lot much, [As the poet says – Ian Jack], yes as the poet says.

The final thing, but I'm not sure if this is so important, but it does lead on to something that I really want to ask about. Another reason that tigers are dying, for tigers of course re the wild, wilderness everywhere, globally, is Asian medicine, people want they're parts (and wildlife crime), they think that tiger bone

is a good medicine, there is absolutely no scientific evidence for this and even if it does work all it is a mild analgesic, not as good as *Aspirin*. Its very big business in China, China is getting richer and richer even though 12% of it's population are getting poorer and poorer and having a tougher and tougher time, well perhaps not historically, but having a tougher time than 5 years ago. So people say 'well you mustn't be patronising, people believe in this medicine so why worry?' And the answer is, well you are not going to have the animals, you are not going to have the wild animals and you are not going to have the birds, this is going to destroy the landscape. But I'm going to ask you about China, because China nearly gave me a nervous breakdown on its conservation policy; and its going to take over the world anyway.

Mark Lynas.

Yes, in fact Aubrey Mayer, who is the proponent of the Contraction and Convergence model of solving climate change which I outline at the end of the book, said to me just in passing, look by the way, the fact is we are all going to be cleaning toilets in Beijing in 2050, you know. Things are changing that rapidly and China is getting that dominant because of the rapidity of its economic development and because of the sheer sort of pressure of the human entrepreneurship which is all out there and latent, just waiting to kick start everything. Its already happening at such a pace that China is building something like, one new power station every single week, which will burn coal. Now these power stations have a lifetime of forty or fifty years so they are locking us into a dirty development path on a global scale which we already know we need to be moving away from. And the difficulty there is well how can we go around lecturing the Chinese, when the Chinese actually have a law for promoting renewables which is far better than anything the Americans could dream of getting into their system at the moment, so the Chinese are to some extent aware of the global warming issue and are to some extent trying to leap-frog the dirty development path of the Western nations. But its impossible to lecture a poor country from the perspective of being a rich country that they should not have our standard of living. Actually in my view the fossil fuel based standard of living is not all it has cracked up to be, you can do perfectly well by enlarge without your car and without jet flights and without all the over-heating and so on and so forth. Actually we have just got rid of our car, we had one just for visiting my mother-in-law, the car got rid of itself actually, it had a cylinder crack and it was going to cost us a £1000 to fix and I thought well this is the time we actually stick by our principles and get rid of the car for good. It just occurred to me when you see the problem of childhood obesity for example, lets just do the energy equation there, you see all the local kids getting ferried around in the cars or they can't play in the streets because of the traffic problem, actually all the energy in their bodies which they should be burning in exercise is actually being burnt as fossil fuels in their car engine to get them from A to B. So rather than burning their own energy it is being stored in, you know, fat cells, not to put too finer point on it. And this in a some ways is a metaphor for what is happening to our whole society, the energy isn't coming from ourselves and it isn't coming

from living systems, its coming from this great big fossil source and we've got to change not just our consciousness but actually the whole basis on which our society is built to begin to move away from this. So that's why tackling global warming and the ecological crisis is such a big deal, its not just something we can graft on to our existing policies and its not something that politicians or the general public have quite begun to wake up to, unfortunately.

Ruth Padel.

Ian what about what can art do? I mean, Czeslaw Milosz, the great polish poet Milosz, wrote a book called the *Witness of Poetry* and I suppose in the incredibly depressing things that I was finding out, I felt well I can't do anything at least I can be a witness to what is happening.

Ian Jack.

Art is a big thing, writing I suppose I could talk about [Yes I meant writing – Ruth Padel]. You know, I would hate to be the man with the placard with the End is Nigh walking down Oxford Street, I suppose that might be art, it might even get into the Tate Modern if he was walking constantly and moving. But I mean, what can writing do? Is there such a thing as literature of alarm? Does literature have a role to wake people up? Now you could say that the Book of Revelations did that or was meant to do that and I suppose there must be other instances of writers saying 'come on wake up do not go down this path'. I have an old print from a Baptist Welsh Chapel on my wall at home, it's a kind of Sunday School print saying 'Broaden the narrow path' and the broad path is full of people having fantastic fun, playing cards, dancing, drinking, consoling with women and reaching Hell and the narrow path is full of really really nice people not doing any of those things and reaching Heaven. Where you get to unfortunately in this discussion, I think, or I have found and I'm sure you might find the same thing, is can propaganda be art? Because this is propagandist art of a kind.

Ruth Padel.

What about Dickens, I mean *Bleak House*, you know dying amongst everyday day, like the death of the crossing sweeper and so on?

Ian Jack.

But do you think he was saying rise up and get the lawyers?

Ruth Padel.

Well there is a bit of that in his writing.

Ian Jack.

Yes I suppose so, I suppose so. What do you think Richard?

Richard Kerridge.

Well, when you talked about the literature of alarm what I actually thought about was John Bunion's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the puritan tradition where it is

precisely a wake up call and the question at the beginning of that book is what shall I do to be saved? However, I mean, Puritanism is another tradition isn't it with its own ambiances about this sort of thing, its own relish for the idea of catastrophe and apocalypse. The philosopher Kate Soper who has written about definitions of nature has said that what environmentalism needs more than anything else is to get away from this puritan message of always telling us to stop doing things that we are enjoying, especially driving our cars, which is simply in opposition to our most dominant ideas of pleasure and desire, regret those as we may, and what Soper suggests is that we need is a new kind of hedonism, new kind of environmental hedonism and alternative notions of pleasure and I think alternative notions of humour as well, as *White Noise* showed a bit. Now, where could that pleasure come from? I think its sources might be there in art and might particularly be there in romanticism, in what is still alive for us in the romantic tradition, of joy in nature and joy at the infinity of life. That tradition arose in western Europe and in a different way in the United States very much as a reaction and a reaction against two things; against the emerging industrial society and a reaction against the emerging Enlightenment rationality, science. It shows a kind of early environmentalist consciousness from one point of view, romanticism, in that it is already fearful for what will happen to the natural world in an industrial society. What we need, I think and I think this is particularly relevant in terms of what you have been saying about China and other developing countries, we began to develop our romanticism and our environmentalism long after the absolute transformation of our environment by industrial society. We are asking other economies to skip that phase to develop their romanticism or something equivalent to it *before* its too late.

Mark Lynas.

Do you think that's true? I mean how about the poetry of say, John Clare? I mean there is this tradition about opposing enclosure and that was very much based on the identification of land and of place which was being taken away. I go back and I read some of these poems and I think that's environmentalism, I mean it may be romantic and it may be traditionalist but that speaks volumes to me right now because we can see the same processes happening on a global scale.

Richard Kerridge.

I absolutely agree and I don't mean to say that romanticism doesn't have that potential at all. And I think Clare is a wonderful of that. I think that's right and I think in Clare one finds a poetic example of very very intense identification with a particular place and what we might now call the sustainable agricultural practices with which he had grown up in that place which were destroyed by enclosure. I suppose, could we have an equivalent of John Clare now? It couldn't simply take the form of nostalgia for the pre-industrial which was really what Clare was about although of course he was simply writing from his own personal catastrophe.

Ruth Padel.

Isn't that word nostalgia another reason why environmentalism is not fashionable, people say oh you are looking back. When my daughter first went to school and her reading book, I gave her all my old books and her friends laughed at her and said why are you reading all those *old* books and the sense of 'the old' in my daughter's generation, she is now 19 and they just don't want anything that looks old, that smells old, the old ways of doing things...

Ian Jack.

Yes and I suppose there is political romanticism too, if you think of William Morris in this country, or if you think of Ghandi (I as a reporter in India for a very long time), Ghandi was a remarkable popular mass leader in India and a remarkable philosopher, I think. He was certainly looking back to something which he called 'the village raj' in which each village would have its head man and they would do things very democratically locally, he was originally against railway trains but became converted to them as he realised they could spread his message. He was an amazing man, and yet, and yet Ghandi as an influence on economics and Indian financial and to a great extent cultural life is dead now. And one of his things was the renunciation of need, you do not need as much, I think that is a very powerful idea, but it has found very very few takers in India or anywhere else.

Ruth Padel.

The gym, the idea of the gym, going back to your idea of children not exercising, this belief that you can drive to a gym then go on various expansive machines and then go back and not eat so much because you want to stay slim, I mean all that is a very expensive industry based kind of, technology. You said something when we came in, I mean Bush now seems to be gradually believing that may be we are warming the planet up a bit, but the thing t do is not to stop doing that but to develop lots of lovely lovely technology so that we can see how to deal with what we are doing.

Mark Lynas.

Yes. Well the case with the gym is even worse than that because, you know, I know people who will drive half a mile to the gym, go on an exercise bike and drive back again, now if they had cycled that half mile there and back again they would not have had to pay their gym fees. Actually that would make financial sense as much as anything. I see this almost as a form of societal denial, we can't psychologically face up to the global warming problem or the fact that our society is running up against the ecological buffers in all sorts of areas, you know whether it comes to fresh water or fisheries or whatever, climate change is cross-cutting but its one of many different issues. And the Bush administration sort of exemplifies, is really the apex of everything that's wrong with the world, I think its difficult to have a different view of it, I mean what was Bush's answer to 9/11, his mum said 'what can I do to help all these people?', he said 'Barbara go out there

and shop', get the economy going again. So basically consumerism is the way out of all of our problems, technology is a way out of all our problems and getting richer is the way out of all of our problems when in fact they're going to make them worse. So this *reversal* of reality is no way to run a country and its no way to run a planet.

Ruth Padel.

Yes. I love Ian's idea about we should give up need or refine our idea or need so that we need less and we might actually enjoy the things we do have more while we do it. But politically how can you get people to do this?

Ian Jack.

Well I am a Ghandian with a *Volvo* so, so much for that. I only fill up the tank once every 6 weeks.

Mark Lynas.

Do you spin your own suits?

Ruth Padel.

Ok at this point I think I'd like to throw it over to you if you'd like to ask some questions. Lets start at the back, right there.

Questioner.

I have a couple of questions really. The first is that I have a resistance to the idea that there is a moral obligation for writers to instruct and I wonder how the panel feels about this sense of expectation that they have a duty to engage in these issues, or if that's how they feel at all. And secondly, I also wonder whether or not literature is the media through which the message can be effectively conveyed in the sense that I think of Jamie Oliver's recent success in terms of school dinners, I wonder if Jamie Oliver had been selling a book on the *Sainsbury's* shelves whether things might have taken place quite so quickly as they have done.

Ian Jack.

I don't think all writers have a duty but it would just be nice if some of them did want to take up this subject, but I certainly wouldn't want to lay down the law saying every writer has a moral duty to his fellow citizens in the future or anything like that. Although having said that this is a very very large problem, this is probably the biggest crisis the world has ever faced. Many writers get told off for trying the other way, with the holocaust for example, so writers can behave badly as well as well so I wouldn't dream of asking them all to be moral exemplars or didacticians in their writing. And I agree with your second point I mean publishing a book to change anything, don't think of it, get it on television, I mean if there was a Jamie Oliver in this kind of literary environmental movement how happy would we be.

Richard Kerridge.

Bill Oddie

Ian Jack.

Bill Oddie, yes, but not quite as sexy.

Richard Kerridge.

In a sense I take your point the most popular media may be the most politically effective and one of the most popular genres in British television, ever since it began almost, has been the wildlife program, very much neglected by the sort of literary and cultural and media studies critics who tend to analyse TV programs actually and its certainly worth think about what those can do and the limits of what they can do. Though as a more general response we all have duties in so far as we see these problems as serious and perhaps as well as the duties of writers we ought to think about the duties of readers because it is as much to do with the kind of books which we prefer and which we take the trouble to read and which we but that will make the cultural change which ripples out in all orts of directions whatever your particular kind of art.

Ruth Padel.

But isn't your word 'duty' playing to the hands of what you thought we should get away from?

Richard Kerridge.

Yes the Puritanism, yes it is.

Ruth Padel.

Yes the Puritanism. Yes there was a question from the lady at the front, this lady here...

Questioner.

Thank you. I too have a couple of questions if I may or comments. The first is relates to the Sumatran tiger and today the biggest threat is our consumerism here because 1 in 10 products brought in the supermarket contains palm oil and the forests where the Sumatran tiger lives are being cut down and destroyed and replaced with huge palm plantations. In terms of the common writer if you like and the everyday reader if you like, I think that most of the discussions that take place at this festival are not there. The books that many of us pick up and carry around in our pockets are very much here today and gone tomorrow, they are daily novels. And there to me seems to be the place where this should be. Not books that are specifically about environmentalism. But I was thinking about the reading a novel this morning which I nearly throw in the bin because when the lady in the book went to make a coffee no she didn't make a coffee she made a Nescafe, nobody in this conversation goes and makes a *Nescafe*. I don't know if writers get paid for product placement but they sure as hell keep calling coffee *Nescafe* in the books that I read. So it seems this is the very place for the

everyday novelist to include, you know Mark talks about not having the car, many of us actually do make the decision, do we take the car, do we take the bus, how are we going to get to wherever we're going on a particular day based on those sorts of arguments you know these are the sorts of things that characters can be doing in their books because we do do that. And also you can have situation placement, you know can have a novel that is set in Baucus around the time of the flood and it can still be the same old romantic, he she this that same old same old, but it can be set in that situation and have conversations about global warming. Very simple stuff. And it's different from moralising or environmental writing, it is just where you place your everyday romance or whatever it is that many of us read hundreds of every year.

Panel.

General agreement.

Ruth Padel.

Yes.

Questioner.

Do you agree with me that there is a strong streak of Buddhism in environmentalism in that we have several technologies such as nuclear, such as GM that can make a major contribution. France generates 80% of its power from nuclear, you know, it seems to me that the people on this stage are all wanting to go backwards in technology to solve this problem, it won't happen. Grab new technologies they are the solution, even wind power is a high-tech thing.

Mark Lynas.

I think there is. But I would first of all like to challenge your pejorative use of the word luddite actually, I would highly recommend a book to you by a guy called Kirkpatrick Sale called *Rebels Against the Future* which actually talks about the luddite history. How these were ordinary working men and women across a whole swathe of central and northern England who were basically trying to protect their livelihoods against the rampant march of factories and industrialisation because they knew that the cottage industries and their whole way of life and all of their sustenance was going to go out of the window so that the mill owners and mill barons could run the show [But it didn't work did it - Questioner]. No it didn't it failed because the whole machinery of the state came in, there were more soldiers at that time in northern England than there were fighting in the Napoleonic wars and dozens of them were hanged. And when it came down to it the state, in defence of the capitalists, you know see it how you want to, was prepared to execute people to force the industrial revolution to go ahead. Actually let's not just accept the arbitrary use of terms like that. And I think you're absolutely right there is a streak of luddism in environmentalism in fact and for many good reasons. Technology has given us many problems, I don't want to have a debate about nuclear power but no one can say that that is without its pitfalls and the same goes for GM and so to pretend I think that any

technology is going to be the salvation of all of our problems is perhaps the mindset that has got us into our problems in the first place. Actually there is no technology which can simply give us the great white hope that we all want. We are going to have to change society because society, as I keep saying, has run up against the ecological buffers and no amount of human ingenuity will save us. No doubt technology will help us get through this but we have to admit to ourselves just what a critical situation we are in and just what an unprecedented situation we are in. Humanity has never been there before and we can't just go our traditional ways about this and I do think that this focus on technology is in some ways a form of denial I'm afraid.

Ruth Padel.

Next, yes.

Questioner.

Thanks very much. A couple of things if that's OK. I just ask the question, what would be so wrong if we were all cleaning the toilets in Beijing in a few years time? Because we are quite happy to have foreign people clean our toilets now. If we go round office blocks, or factories or universities in the evening its just self-evident. So when we laugh at that I think there is an underlying problem with that issue. And another issue I would like to raise if that's OK was that the chair appeared to be very keen to draw an initial distinction between a journalist and a writer with regard to the person that was asking about objectivity. But it seems to me that there is an amazing overlap between journalist and writers [Hear hear – Ian Jack]. And I think that the writer, to my limited knowledge on this, that is reaching the widest audience as regards to environmental issues was a journalist and is now a writer and also still carries on as journalist and that was Carl Highson (sp?) writing about environmental issues in America. He has taken over the mantel that was formally I think Ross MacDonald or John MacDonald writing about environmental issues in Florida. But in the review of Carl Highson's latest book the reviewer said, 'this issue is done to death isn't it time we moved on to something else?'

Ruth Padel.

I apologise for that distinction, but what I meant was this was someone who had not trying to do what Ian was hoping writers would do, put something out there, he was a news journalist rather than a...

Questioner continues.

Sorry, just one final issue. I think it is own hypocrisy that is the problem because we say may be do without a car because we can do without a car, but how would you go and see your tigers without flying there? We can't get around that. We are riddled with hypocrisy it seems to me.

Ian Jack.

We are riddled with hypocrisy I agree. But the reason I don't want to be cleaning toilets in China is because it is a very unpleasant thing to be cleaning a toilet anywhere. Ghandi, to go back to him, was a great believer that everyone should clean their own latrines, which got him into a lot of trouble with his own caste because of course they would never clean a latrine. But may be there will be an anti-globalisation movement in which we all go back to cleaning our own toilets, I don't know.

Ruth Padel.

I just want to say one more thing. It isn't just cleaning our own toilets it is cleaning them in China because China is destroying it's environment for its own people more than anybody else. And why I brought up China was as a model for the world if its going to be running the world and if its going to be destroying the world more than anybody.

Yes.

Questioner.

Two seems to be the operative number. Just to sort of spread the word about technology I went to a sustainability conference two years ago at which Jonathan Porritt and many luminaries from around the world, sort of took place in Herefordshire, and there is an amazing Canadian called John Todd who has an amazing wife called Nancy Jack Todd and he was saying in a workshop as well as his address showing those us who were in both or either showing that there was no need for any new technology whatsoever. He himself is a biologist and he was showing one of the examples of his kind of work for, that is organisation, where you take the detritus and the contents of the toilets in a school and you pass it through the school from the foyer which has a gorgeous goldfish bowl with all kinds of plants in it and through a series of tanks which on the way to producing pure drinkable water at the other end also produces foods, of course including food including types of fish, shrimps all kinds of things plus fruit which the school then sells and makes a profit on and the children are learning about ecology in a very real sense. But the thing apart from that, because he said no new technologies, we actually have all the technology we need right now, the thing is, I myself have been led to write poetry following some visions and understandings about this about 40 years ago when I was an art student I can't help, this stuff just comes out. And so as someone who doesn't think of themselves as a poet but thinks there might be a point if people could come across more poetry, more literature which will make them think, make them get over that barrier, that inertia and make people realise that what they do can be turned around by slow degrees, is how do you get your stuff to the publisher? Because now I suspect, take poetry, that there is now a kind of dictate that says that poetry must be in a certain form, you know there are free verse there are unmetric verse there's all kinds of things, but if you have any kind of poetry that deals with something uncomfortable like this serious subject or if in fact you might occasionally have metre or you might occasionally have rhyme then of course you don't want to look at it even.

Ruth Padel.

Well actually most of the books of poetry that have won prizes this year have been in metre and have used rhyme. Anyway, one more question, thank you very much for that was fascinating. One more question, I'm sorry I know we could go on all night. Yes.

Questioner.

This is a very quick question hopefully. I personally think we need to take the long view, I mean for example if you look at the Hampshire Downs appreciate that the brown soils there were stripped off, what we're looking at now was essential created about 6000 years ago. John Clare was writing in a context in which part of England had been stripped of its woodland 1000 or so years ago, probably more early than that, may be 400 years ago. I think that what I'd love to ask you is whether. Well I think that one possible solution is to look at, to use 18th century pastoral art, even 18th century estate management, the way they say tried to reconcile architecture to landscape and tried to unite these considerations of beauty and utility and I think we have a complete inability to look at something that is beautiful as something that is useful. So for example we have this crazy debate now that is about wind farms and the idea that wind farms are ugly and therefore useless. I don't know what your views are of that, how we can perhaps use art to reconcile these views of beauty and utility so that you can capture the value of the public on this issue.

Ian Jack.

I think wind farms are bit like what pylons used to be like in the 1930s, they're rather attractive, you can imagine W Holden(?) if he were alive writing a poem about them. I personally am very for wind farms and I'm not particularly against nuclear power either but I'm pretty agnostic about that. What irritates me about environmentalism I have to say is people who hate wind farms, hate nuclear power stations, hate coal fire, so what do they want, I often feel like saying 'what do you want to do?' Wind farms feel OK to me I must say though I don't live next to one of course.

Richard Kerridge.

We talked earlier about nostalgia and certainly the worse thing that environmentalism can be accused of is simply wanting to go back to the past. Ecology is a relatively new form of scientific understanding and environmentalist see environmentalism as a way of completely modernity rather than abandoning it.

Mark Lynas.

Can I just make a quick pitch. You've probably all got leaflets on your chairs about a march coming up. In fact Kathy can you say who you are, if you don't mind?

Kathy.

I am campaigning with Campaigning Against Climate Change and I've put a leaflet on every seat and I'm running a coach from Cheltenham to London for £10 a seat and if you'd like to go on the coach email me at Kathy@climatechange.co.uk.

Mark Lynas.

The point being that this is will be a big march in London on December the 3rd timed to coincide with the next big climate change negotiations which are happening in Montreal and this is sort of the beginning of the political mobilisation which we've all been wanting to see for so many years now in this country and in the rest of the world to actually get people out there and on the streets about climate change to actually force politicians to start taking this issue seriously.

Ruth Padel.

Well thank you. There are huge issues here about art, individual conscience, society, the past and the future. Thank you all for coming and thank you to our panel.