

A New Map of Wonders: A Journey in Search of Modern Marvels- Folkestone Quarterhouse

Caspar Henderson's book talk- 'A New Map of Wonders: A Journey in Search of Modern Marvels' which took place at Folkestone's Quarterhouse, consisted of an opening 20-minute reading from his book, followed by a chaired discussion. Taking the position of a hawk-like observer on the theatre balcony through my watch and listening, I grew to wonder whether hearing the text aloud could have the power to change the dynamic of a reader's perception of engagement. Interestingly whilst reading some of the book myself, I could still easily extract a fundamental spark of individuality through a representation of true expertise. In other words, the audience treated him almost as a prophet like figure as he delivered a timelessness like that of Hawking via his work. Henderson created a level of continuous engagement which I tentatively followed through, as the hall became a somewhat public arena space for debate. This focused primarily upon the origins of water on life to then more widely embody and ponder towards sectors of philosophy, history, religion, science, spirituality, and technology through delving and contemplating the 'nature of wonder itself'.

In taking the certain simplicity of the above quote, I found the way in which 'wonder' was played with particularly noteworthy. The term was surprisingly used in the context of fact-meaning not *beyond* the realms of the evident. For example, Henderson opened this hour with the simple phrase- 'science does nothing, absolutely nothing, but be itself'. Yet his method in approaching this teaching concerning such a natural and self-explanatory element, led this authorship to become a product of literary genius by moving over 'characteristics' of genre. The work perceives scientific research through a movement whereby the imagination should relish in feeling metaphorically expanded, in order to capture a similarity or contrast between things that would seem logistically remote from one another- but are by no means any less real. The sheer simplicity of having the ability to wonder as we do as humans is indeed progressive. Yet from this, the hour reminded me of a module I took at University: 'Science, Nature and Performance: from Bio-politics to Bio-art'. The module premised via theoretical text, plays, music and film in policing 'what it meant to be human' through the deployment of say Michel Foucault's work or through animal politics. As Henderson demonstrated, in making comparisons to which the molecules inside a water-bottle would be older than 'anything'... made me feel utterly and mortally human, and with this, came fears of an eroding insignificance within and against my physical being and form.

Yet paralleling this, it was emphasised that we indeed have the power to read, to learn and to take subsequent action- however fleeting this may stand in the grand scheme of time's workings. This led some of the audience members to then automatically wonder, whether intentional or not, towards reasons of aligning a communal consciousness to become ever-more present...like an immediate desire to re-signify in effort with and for the fluid power of water and mother nature itself. I remember one audience member stated, 'we are very lucky to be where we are'. As we delved through the deep history of the earth, the hour became philosophical and political whilst tainted with the innate terror that is carried with the enchanting excitement of being alive *now. Right now.* When our origins are biological, life is what *you* make it through tasks of intentionality within times when the consumer outruns the lines of production. What can *you* do, or are we genetically geared up to simply destroy the earth?

Indirectly then, the book-talk became cramped full of questions which confided in 'us' as humans being 'too late' to prevent rising sea levels for example, which allowed me to visualise time within my own literary imagination that was both full of curiosity yet

plainly realistic. I couldn't help but think towards the most recent series of Blue Planet, which as I would suggest, still contained that folk memory of an abundant ocean where a search of adventure, discovery and heroic spectacle can be enjoyed; yet following this documentary cinema as well as after this fascinating talk, the audience is inevitably slapped, as the survival of such fascination ties in with prioritising such immense plastic pollution in the world's waters. I left questioning, do humans require a theatrical break to listen, or do we mostly choose to be ignorant to what we don't enjoy coming to terms with?

I think Henderson perfectly unveiled this complex, yet for the greater good. He insisted that one should marvel at the world right now, yet here but not elsewhere in order for action to proceed. To embrace the sheer enjoyment of where we are and who we are, yet to prod and study such positions to the point where asking questions falls as second nature. Sometimes the art of the improbable nature of the probably can lead to very fine openings. And it was through this that the theatre became a vacuum to which the expected unimaginable became imaginable. One must wonder in a way of expanding individual reality within such a vast universe, yet through finding an equivalent affinity with nature's needs in order to re-engage and re-centre by what the SALT festival accounted for; an urgency delivered through art in all its forms.

In allowing me to reminisce towards growing up by the sea, I have come to realise that Folkestone is a place of ambient transition; the gateway to mainland Europe, where travellers stop off, as well as where they leave from. A place of possibilities, cross-overs, and goodbyes. As I walked into the night, I felt an urge to think of my hometown more thoroughly- by coming back to that place and to be at one with the sea which shapes it. By looking out and wondering towards what's next. At least it felt like I was starting somewhere.

By Olivia Franklin
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