



Cumbria Humanist Group

Michael Travers on “Humanist Themes in Music and Literature.”

**Meeting at Morton Community Centre, Wigton Road, Carlisle
on Wednesday, 18 March 2009 at 7.30 pm**

Entertaining, informative and challenging – what more could we ask of a speaker? And Michael Travers certainly fitted the criteria when he spoke to the Cumbria Humanist Group on 18 March at Morton Community Centre on the subject of “Humanist Themes in Music and Literature.” Well known as a Philosophy tutor in various adult education courses locally, Mike spent much of his career teaching secondary school French, and he began with a series of hilarious anecdotes about this experience – involving students, parents and a particularly gullible supply teacher!

Mike’s first musical offering was John Lennon’s “*Imagine*”, which we generally agreed offered an unattainable Utopia, in spite of the ‘*brotherhood of man*’ and ‘*no religion too*’ content. Emily Dickinson was an American poet born in 1830, highly influential although only seven of her poems were published in her lifetime. Her unease about the evangelical Christianity of her Massachusetts society is reflected in her largely reclusive life, and her poem “*I heard a fly buzz when I died*” seems to challenge the idea that the soul is seen and heard to leave the body at the moment of death.

Bob Dylan’s “*Masters of War*” posed the inevitable question about the morality of war and led to debate about the justification for arms manufacture on purely economic grounds. Is it better to manufacture the means of mass murder if the alternative is unemployment and social deprivation? Is that really the only option or merely the most profitable? We failed to agree on that one.

“*King Lear*”: the ultimate Humanist play? It certainly offers an allegory of the pursuit of human experience and emotions. In the end, Lear howls for help from above, but none is forthcoming and he dies with the dead Cordelia in his arms. From King Lear to the Theatre of the Absurd, where Samuel Beckett’s plays “*Waiting for Godot*” and “*Endgame*” show us how motionless life can become if we let it. And Mike offered us the gem that Beckett’s favourite activities were chess and cricket, and that he was the only Nobel Laureate ever to be mentioned in Wisden’s Cricketing Almanac.

The meeting finished with Beethoven’s inspiring anthem to humanity “*Ode to Joy*”, and we adjourned to the bar to continue the discussion.

The next meeting of the Cumbria Humanist Group will be on 15 April, 7.30 p.m. at the Eden Rural Foyer, Penrith, when Professor Chris Carr, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cumbria, will speak about “Dispelling the myths: the Church in higher education.”

If you are interested in Humanism, visit our website at www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk or telephone 01228 810592 or 01768 881245 for more information

(436 words)

www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk
email : info@cumbria-humanists.org.uk

☎ Chris Allen (Secretary) 01228 810592 or 07952 213675
☎ Iain Paterson (Chair) 01768 881245

Affiliated to the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society