

Pick of the day



Looking for John Donne: Simon Schama 9.00-10.00 BBC2

★★★★★

If the portrait hanging in the National Portrait Gallery is to be believed, the young John Donne was an Elizabethan Mick Jagger: a handsome, charismatic, rakish presence. Most emphatically Jagger circa 'Gimme Shelter' rather than 'She's The Boss'. According to Simon Schama, he's also 'the most electrifying poet in the English language'. And yet Donne remains strangely underappreciated; known best for 'Meditation XVII' ('never send to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee'), but also capable of

savagely sensual yet disarmingly vulnerable romantic verse such as 'To His Mistress Going To Bed' which is aptly described here as 'a verbal striptease'.

This documentary tells Donne's turbulent life story while convincingly arguing for his elevation in the British literary canon. It makes effective use of the snows of February as Schama wanders thoughtfully through beautifully wintry London scenes pondering Donne's essence. And refreshingly, it never shies away from discussing the poetry itself, even if some of Schama's exchanges with actress Fiona Shaw verge on the florid. Passionate, engaging and persuasive stuff. *Phil Harrison*

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Film picks

American Pie

the Connecticut home Dave shares with