



LITERALLY SPEAKING

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The man in the Frayn

BY MARY FAUSET
& NISHA KUMAR

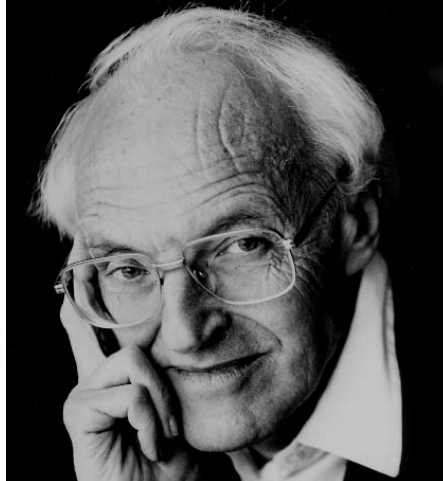
Introduced as one of the most prolific British novelists and playwrights, Michael Frayn's work is of a very diverse nature. It ranges from satirical columns and plays, both serious and comic, to Chekhov translations. His latest offering *Headlong* has just been shortlisted for the 1999 Booker prize. "Does this weigh upon your shoulders?" asked Michael Billington. Frayn replied "It's like having a wall fall on your head."

Inspired by a trip to an art gallery in Vienna, the novel is a variety of "moral tests, madcap comedy and art history." It centres around a lost painting by Breughel, part of a six-part series illustrating different times during the year.

Frayn, who usually resists producing work which requires research, found the process remarkable. "I did begin to see why people become so compelled." *Headlong's* main character becomes as obsessed with Breughel as Frayn himself did.

His fresh outlook towards the paintings from an original historical context challenges the traditional view of art scholars. His great fear before the publication of the novel was that the missing Breughel would be found.

When Frayn saw his play *Copenhagen* in Copenhagen, he was moved to tears and was unable to give an interview to the cast; the only time that this has happened during his



career. Fortunately, he managed to maintain his equilibrium this evening.

"The best interviews are those in which the audience feel that they are listening in on a private conversation." This was our experience...

CODE BOOK

BY NATHAN BROOMHEAD

Codes and ciphers are as old as language itself and an integral part of the Modern World. Without the security they provide, many of today's means of communication would be useless and much of global commerce impossible - the world would be a very different place.

Cryptography throughout the ages is the subject of Simon Singh's *The Code Book*. Its captivating stories invite the reader to decipher encrypted passages, marking a movement by the author of the best-selling *Fermat's Last Theorem* into the realm of 'popularisation'.

Singh's obvious interest in the subject is infectious. Catch him this afternoon at the Town Hall where he will be discussing cryptography with Clifford Cocks from CESG at GCHQ. C U there!

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

•
Dick King-Smith
Everyman,
10.30-11.30am

•
Simon Singh
Town Hall, 2-3pm

•
Ted Hughes:
A Celebration
Town Hall, 8.45-10pm

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Back issues of 'Literally Speaking' are available from the Front Desk in the Town Hall, or visit our website on: www.cheltenhamfestivals.co.uk/literature

End of Time

BY RICHARD NICHOLLS

"13 billion years in the making" was how Tim Radford, science correspondent of *The Guardian*, introduced yesterday's discussion on the nature of time; ready to solve the "ultimate paradox" were Julian Barbour and Sir Martin Rees.

Time is usually understood as a dynamic quality of the universe; Barbour disputed this, with a model of eternity consisting of a triangle made of sticks and string. All possible configurations of the universe could fit into this model. His argument that time does not exist as we understand it was controversial yet watertight.

Rees gave a summary of the history of stars and the universe, before demonstrating that the structure of the cosmos depends on 6 fundamental numbers; not entirely convincing, but enlightening nevertheless.

Blessed are those that grab life with both hands

BY HANNAH FERGUSON

The well-loved Brian Blessed has written yet another book about his extraordinary life. By the age of 63, he has climbed Everest (charted in *The Turquoise Mountain*), starred in *Z Cars* and *Black Adder* and provided vocals in *Star Wars Episode 1*. Yesterday he was out of breath with the enjoyment of sharing his life to a packed auditorium.

Blessed's new book, *Quest for the Lost World* takes us through the jungles of Venezuela, looking for the lost world of Conan Doyle. Brace yourselves; it is easy to fall in love with this huge character.

Blessed is a great believer in the future. Sick to death with people making a pact with old age, his philosophy in life is "think about how



you are old, not how old you are."

Blessed feels the greatest danger in life is not taking chances. He preaches that books must never die, but with authors like him, how could they?



A cross Frontier?

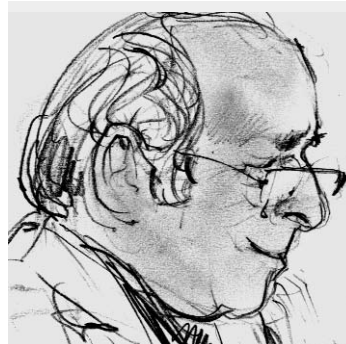
BY NADIA COCKLIN

Perched on his stool in the Drawing Room yesterday, Arnold Wesker discussed what he termed the "DNA structure of a play" and asked "What makes a work of literature last through time and able to cross frontiers?"

Introduced as the man who "changed the shape of English drama", Wesker presented a breakdown of the composite parts of a play and conveyed a "rich and varied" interpretation of his work.

Offering the audience an insight into his methods to the writing (and reading) of a play, he emphasised the writer's "power of perception", suggesting that "perceptions touch hearts and stimulate intellects."

Wesker certainly touched hearts and stimulated intellects as he read from *Love Letters on Blue Paper*, in which a woman writes letters with



"no beginnings or endings" to her dying husband, posting them at the end of the street for him to receive the next morning. His live performance of this letter-writing "process" proved "so moving" that one member of the audience remarked on it during the questions and answers period.

Though Wesker professes to have "moved on" from his early work, it was good to see a vestige of the 'Angry Young Man' about him. Perhaps this is what has helped him "cross frontiers"!

A Klaff a minute

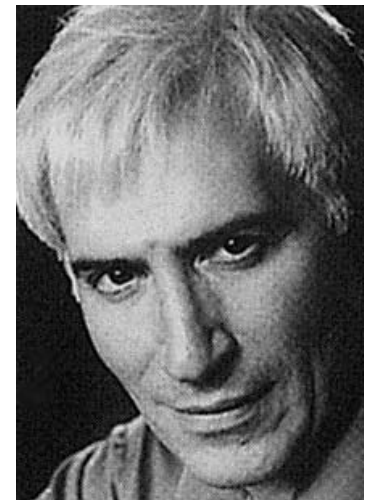
BY CANDY ROBINSON

This was an hypnotically fascinating multi-media event during which Jack Klaff tackled the enigmatic concept of time, whilst simultaneously asking us to think about how we spent ours. He included narratives of love, death, politics and struggle, not least involving his own family in South Africa, and delivered it all in front of a continuous newsreel of historical events, with live music provided by his *Star Lab* colleagues. How, he asked, are we able to pinpoint, or give co-ordinates to, particular moments in time if, as the tick-tock suggests, time is continually moving? "Alas no," Klaff insisted, "time stands still; we pass."

We can't perceive time, it is a framework, we were told; the distinction between past/present/future, as Einstein said, is an illusion. Why, then, are we so frustrated by it, feel we've wasted time as we rush head-

long through it? For the ancient civilisations, time ran differently, in tune to nature; by inventing clocks have we psychologically allowed ourselves to programme ourselves to die?

There were positive points too and many nods of approval during Klaff's non-stop oration, with only occasional shuffling of feet, but as the man said, "only the mediocre are at their best at all times."



Low key Okri

BY SIÂN ALLEN

AND KATE DAVIES

The Booker Prize winner, Ben Okri, made his first appearance at the Cheltenham Festival yesterday, claiming that "Some things are best later than earlier." His performance centred on his obvious fascination with the magic of the millennium.

Okri's latest poetry book *Mental Fight* comprises of a single poem representing the continuation of time and being; his inspiration coming from "A sense of duty to my profession and the random pattern of life."

He feels his style belongs to an age-old genre, "through Shakespeare to Eliot" which highlights the traditional themes contained within his work of race, religion and gender.

Mental Fight challenges the reader, as this epic poem is Okri's personal aim to try and instil a sense of camaraderie - inviting the reader to "step into the ring of my mind, to attempt a mental fight."

Simpson & Humphrys

BY TOM LOUGHLIN

As you get older, you get smarter. And as you get smarter you get quieter. The need to rush around and be the centre of attention declines. As this happens, so your taste in entertainment also changes. In the beginning, you need the explosions, the body count, the chisel-jawed hero. However, with time, as with any good cheese, you mellow. Because I was really looking forward to a slow, informative read I wasn't the least bit apprehensive about reading John Humphrys' new book, *Devil's Advocate* and I was right not to be. It's not exciting, nor will it tell you many things you don't already know - unless you've been in a cave



on Mars for the last twenty five years. But if you find yourself on the couch (perhaps in a woolly yellow jumper), this is the ideal book. The book isn't slow, nor is it fast. John Humphrys writes in a manner that respects your intelligence. It's simply one man, albeit a well travelled man, and his view on society today. Disagree with it, agree with it. It's your call.



I saw John Simpson and John Humphrys on stage and have gained one insight: writer's block is a terrible thing. So what can I put? Entertaining, witty, intelligent and surprisingly humorous. I guess I didn't have writer's block after all.

The Stoat

Audience member to Colin Thubron: "We just heard David Starkey say that the written word is dead. How refreshing to hear you!"

Thubron: "Did Starkey read that out?"

A certain backstage person was heard to say "Has anyone got a barstool? We need it for Arnold Wesker. He's a bit of a Bob Hoskins."

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