



# LITERALLY SPEAKING

Issue no.12 • FREE Edited by Glenn Carmichael & Sara-Jane Arbury Wednesday 20th October 1999

## TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

• **Angry Young Men?**  
Town Hall, 2.30-3.30pm

• **Homelands**  
Town Hall, 4-5pm

• **Brian Keenan**  
Everyman,  
8.45-9.45pm

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](http://www.cheltenhamfestivals.co.uk/literature)

## Slamtastic!

BY STACEY REDMAN  
& LUCY SERIES

A merry Marcus Moore played ring-leader in top hat and tails at this jolly circus. Accompanied by the lovely Glenn Carmichael, he stirred the audience into a frenzy of anticipation, as performer after performer delivered their creations to a sea of school uniforms. The power of the presentation was reflected in the applause of their peers.

We were captivated by the confidence and sheer talent of these young individuals. The poems covered a variety of topics ranging from Daisy's *Great-Aunt Mavis* to the London rail crash. All subject matters were performed with an unexpected blend of humour, subtlety and wisdom. Glenn commented afterwards "the quality is the highest it's ever been." Our congratulations go to Anna Jacobs, the winner; we firmly expect to see her and others on the Cheltenham stage in the future!

## What a Gemma!

BY SIMON WARREN

Posy Simmonds, the popular author of *Gemma Boverly*, a tale of "adultery and soft furnishings" yesterday appeared live at the Everyman. Simmonds started drawing cartoons almost as soon as she could read, inspired by *Punch* cartoons which were in publication at the time.

Her first, somewhat mundane drawings, were of loft insulation and from there she went on to draw strips for *The Sun*, *The Times* and eventually *The Guardian*.

*Gemma Boverly* came about when, while in Italy, she spotted an Italian woman who looked a lot like Flaubert's heroine, Madame Bovary. Simmonds said "Flaubert did all the hard work", having invented the storyline, and described her working process as "drawing a novel."

The various slides of her initial sketches illustrated how her ideas developed. She got a lot of response



to her cartoons and was often asked "Where are the soft furnishings?"

Some people may think that she is merely repeating what Raymond Briggs has already done, but Simmonds replied that although there was a similarity between their work, she "would hate to be out-Brigging Briggs." When asked if she got involved with her characters she answered simply "Madame Bovary, c'est moi!"

## Sailing into the dark

BY JON ANDRIESEN

In 1954, Iris Murdoch published her first novel, *Under the Net*. In 1995, she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and died earlier this year.

John Bayley, academic, novelist and most importantly her husband, was here to "celebrate" his late wife and share some special memories from his book *Iris*.

Nothing was spared as he spoke of their own relationship - "not very passionate." At their first meeting "she did not seem very pretty" and there was always the influence of her many previous lovers.

Bayley found it hard to watch her

deterioration, particularly during the writing of her last novel, *Jackson's Dilemma*, where he said, "it became obvious that she was no longer the same person." She admitted to him "she no longer knew what any of it



was all about." For a writer that had never allowed her editors access to her

## Tight genes

BY RICHARD MERRILL

The new Millennium shall commence, according to Matt Ridley author of *Genome, the autobiography of a species in 23 chapters*, with "the greatest intellectual moment in the history of time bar none"; the first draft of the human genome unveiled.

Joined by Evan Davies, Ridley discussed the massive implications of a map that will contain the fundamentals of humanity. Even in its uncompleted form, the work on the genome has brought huge revelations, such as the fact that our species shares genes with mice and even amoeba.

In the future, a mass of technology will be made available which, Ridley argued, should be neither feared nor embraced blindly.

Will the next millennium be one of genetically modified foods, gene dependent insurance policies, little genetic disease and designer babies? We shall have to wait and see.

texts, this was a defining moment.

The fact that they both coped tremendously well with Iris' illness was a tribute to the childlike core of their relationship. As her condition became worse, "if she acted silly," said Bayley, "I would just be sillier. She seemed happy with that." Although he says he "was never her child, she was never maternal." He does not feel their union was barren; he is happy to consider her 26 novels as proof of a fertile relationship.

With a reflective smile on his face, Bayley talked of how, close to death, she had turned to him and said, "I am sailing into the dark"; how apt for a lover of words to be remembered so fondly in metaphor.



## Handy Chas

BY ROWLAND BYASS

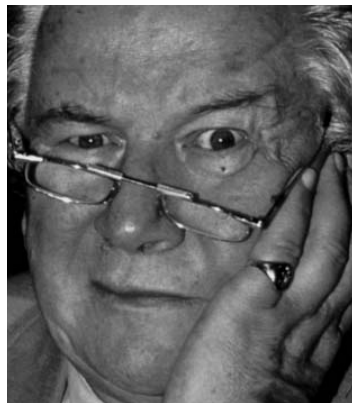
"The most unusual book about organisations that you have read." With this modest claim, Charles Handy described his new book *The New Alchemists*, at an event where the atmosphere bordered on that of an evangelical meeting. Large organisations ("elephants") are eating each other up in mergers, disgorging surplus employees. However, large entities don't foster originality, so it's up to the "fleas", individuals who "dream in the daytime" to fill niches, creating enterprises which are more likely to create new jobs than corporate elephants.

Like any good management guru, Handy used colour slides with bulletted points and buzzwords. "What's your dream? Go forth, be alchemists" he exhorted the audience, each member of which left clutching a copy of his book as if it were the touchstone for their dreams.

## Not enough Ustinov

BY STEPHEN HILL

Yesterday Sir Peter Ustinov discussed his life and times, sharing some of his secrets of the acting profession - "Breathe with your forehead, think with your stomach and sing with your eyes." Ustinov is one of this century's most talented and versatile actors, producers, directors, novelists, playwrights and raconteurs: "I act for a living, I write because I must." With such a long and varied career,



no wonder he has accumulated numerous awards, including a knighthood from the Queen in 1990.

His new book, *Monsieur René*, "an antidote to *Lolita*", is a tale of love and intrigue in an age when it was never presumed possible. "Life was more than good, it was interesting" for retired hotelier Monsieur René, as he plans espionage on a grand scale. He enlists help from hotel staff, past and present, to spy on politically powerful visitors. René is awoken by his new life and responsibility to "The Brotherhood of Concierges and Hall Porters." Life takes an unpredictable turn when his close monitoring leads him to dangerous situations and he eventually finds love with a fellow co-worker. The story concludes with René deciding whether his life is over or has just begun.

Ustinov is a humanitarian and a goodwill ambassador for UNICEF, from whom he received a medal for his distinguished service.

## Sweet Lisa

BY SARAH MALCOMSON

Lisa Jardine's charisma and enthusiasm brought to life the intellectual revolution of the seventeenth century in her talk yesterday. It all started with a free handout of chocolate - a winner in anyone's book! And so unfolded the story of Sir Hans Sloane (doctor, botanist and biologist) who introduced hot milk chocolate - originally as a cure for all ills. However, it soon became the seventeenth century's sushi!

Through the threads of his story, Jardine introduced us to Newton, Halley, Hooke, Boyle and Wren - the "villains and heroes" of history; the ground-workers and the glory-seekers. This was an age where art and science combined - a seemingly forgotten concept. Robert Hooke not only researched Boyle's law and invented microscopy, but was also a trained artist refraining from practice due to "an allergy to paint fumes." With such insights, Lisa Jardine managed to capture the life and excitement of the times. I was inspired.

## Raeve with Maeve

BY VANESSA OWEN

As the lights dimmed and Maeve Binchy stepped onto the stage, the revelations began. Typically Irish, a born raconteur, Maeve left the audience enraptured, amused and almost shocked. As a popular novelist, selling millions of books worldwide, a brazen and extrovert character should have appeared, but the extraordinary lifestyle of this amazing woman was exposed beneath the humblest fashion.

She admitted to the audience that at a young age she had "no interest in storytelling", but this proved to be ironic, as her storytelling skills dominated the session. Her life story was told,



bearing a bold, yet understandable resemblance to Benny in the best-seller, *Circle of Friends*. University graduate, teacher, editor, author and brazen feminist who has angled her way into society through her works, it is obvious that Binchy's success has derived from her immediate relationships between herself and her characters; the plausibility giving any reader a link with their own lives.

Binchy explained that her books have had film offers - it is clear that fame has not affected her ideas, and this bodes well for her future books as her link with normality and ordinary human nature gives her the perfect backdrop for countless more bestsellers.

## Unauthorised biography

BY ADAM HOROVITZ

Looking back over the Cheltenham Festival of Literature is no mean feat, it transpires. Surprisingly, there are almost no records before 1970 and scant few thereafter. Nonetheless, Nicola Bennett has written *Speaking Volumes* (Sutton, £4.99), a fascinating overview of the first Literature Festival in this country.

Speaking yesterday with Humphrey Carpenter, she highlighted some of the more entertaining moments from fifty years of the Festival, such as Dylan Thomas' opinion of Kipling's poem *If* - "A militant boiled pudding made of cement and handcuffs" - and the chaotic Poetry Olympics day in 1981, which Linton Kwesi Johnson refused to attend because Enoch Powell was also on the bill that year.

The chaos of organising such a Festival was wittily sketched. May the next fifty years be as fun.

## The Stoat

Humphrey Carpenter (former Festival Director) was heard yesterday asking whether anyone else had noticed that Gardner Merchant (the Festival's caterers) shared initials with a certain, unpopular breed of research. We have, Humph. Perhaps this could explain the scientific bent to this year's Festival.

### THE TEAM

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