

# LITERALLY SPEAKING

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## Global village idiocy

BY ALAN MADDRELL  
& ADAM HOROVITZ

In a rare moment of political spunk, the Festival welcomed George Monbiot to the stage twice last night. Among Monbiot's problems with our *Captive State* is the redefinition of public and political space in financial terms. We were shown an array of fat-cats turned industry watchdogs, educators turned focus group leaders and civil servants turned corporate stooges, but the real kicker came later...

In calling for a world parliament, free of 'creeping, subtle corporate take-over[s] of every aspect of government' and 'photocopy democracy', George Monbiot has revealed himself as something rather interesting - an entirely new form of anarchist: an 'Anarcho-Feudalist' (our phrase).

This sounds paradoxical, but Monbiot's clarion-call for a form of world government involves no 'strutting personalities'. It invokes John Maynard Keynes' proposal for an International Clearing Union (thus ending the current 'Third World debt catastrophe'). The ICU would actively promote not only the eradication of debt, but also investment.

Power at all levels would be devolved to those best capable of dealing with it (be they communities or answerable world government) and all



this would seem to justify the title. Under this radical restructuring, existing structures, like the World Trade Organisation, would remain,

but be rescued from unaccountability and made open, fair and democratic.

Monbiot brought his fervent sense of social justice to the *Battle for the Countryside*, a three-way debate between himself, Graham Harvey and Clive Aslet, editor of *Country Life*. This was a somewhat polarised discussion, as Aslet attempted to defend GM foods, whereas Monbiot was able to demonstrate that farm-scale testing by Monsanto has no scientific validity. The trio agreed about the loss of public identification with the land: it has become the domain of farmers who, despite receiving huge subsidies, are hamstrung by a judicial and economic architecture geared towards the destruction of small business and fair trade.

It is time for the Magna Carta to be re-written on a global scale - this time, perhaps everyone should be a Baron.

## Driven crazy

BY BRENDA READ-BROWN

*Australia, Tasmania,  
New York, and Singapore;  
The delights of flying first class;  
GK's thoughts on the poor;  
The navigation system  
In his Jaguar XJS;  
Comments on the driving  
Of this crazy poetess;  
The need for Queen and Abba  
On long-distance signing tours;  
Why 50-year-olds should be  
Outside the bounds of certain laws  
(Though I'm told that I must not  
Reveal the ones he'd disobey);  
His cats' electric collars  
Which will shock them if they stray;  
What he'll have for supper  
(A potato in its jacket);  
Why he keeps on writing,  
When he's clearly made a packet;  
No event at Cheltenham  
Could ever hope to match it;  
Five hours of conversation -  
Driving Terry Pratchett!*

## Wrestling with Russell

BY TOBY JOY

Ray Monk has spent the last ten years compiling his two-volume biography of one of the great minds of the last century. It shows. Monk led us seamlessly through Russell's tumultuous life, and managed to keep all emotion out of his lecture.

The over-riding impression that Monk gave was that he was a man who was interested in Russell, but not one who necessarily respected him. Mozart and George Best have long attracted public interest for their flaws as much as for their genius; perhaps it is time we started to pay more attention to Russell's personal life. 'The greatest logician since Aristotle' had a history of madness in his family; saw parenting as a science and gave lectures on 'How to be free and happy' when he was anything but.

Some hostile questioning described Monk's probing into personal details



as 'prurient' and 'damaging', but was fended off with vigour. In giving an accessible lecture which remained balanced throughout, Monk demonstrated that it's been ten years well spent.

## TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

•  
**Tessa Blackstone**

Town Hall  
2.30-3.15pm

•  
**Christopher Logue &  
Les Murray**

Town Hall, 4-5pm

•  
**Chemical Pleasures**

Town Hall  
7.15-8.15pm

•  
**A Merry Band of Folk**

Suffolk Arms  
8.30pm - LATE!

•  
*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)*

## Joy of TXT!

BY NIKKI SHEEHAN

LO PPL SIT TX to TXT MSGing. But is it an XLNT way to prdce GR8 pomes :-)? or will it make U IOk lIk a pr@? :-)? It's young thms doing T TXTing, bt wil they sOn get fed up w/ T nvltly, lving TXT pomes hi n dry? :-Q

Keates sd R language mst B kept up, n bth guests Andrw Wlson, SMS poet, n GbriEL Mndr, cmplr of T 1st TXT MSG dctionry n T TXT tpng audnce 2NITE agrEd. Bt wot's so GR8 about TXT pomes? Andrw Wlson says it's T way the rstrctns of 160 chrctrs prduces tlt (T cptl mks a vwl long) prose wch rly cncts w/ T wrld we live in. N FYI T prticipnts of the day's wkshp cnfrmd it's nt as EZEPZE as it IOks. :-&

(For translation, come to the *Literally Speaking* office.)

## Betty the devil you know...

By JON ANDRIESSEN

Cheltenham has seen many speakers this week, but none so well known and worthy of the title than Betty Boothroyd. About to embark on a gap year - 'if the kids can have one, then why not me?' - she stopped by to share, sign and ultimately sell her contribution to the political diary bank, before a well earned holiday 'in Cuba.'

'After giving up a career in dance', she told us, it was necessary to find something worthwhile to do and so began a 'humble' journey, finding work as a Labour activist and losing five elections before finally getting elected to the house in 1973. These were difficult times for a new Labour



MP and she did seem genuinely unsettled when remembering the rifts and resignations that led to her 'friends' forming the SDP.

On becoming the first female speaker in 1992, she pronounced that there would be 'no wig for Betty', a stance that caused both outrage and admiration. She spoke of the difficulties in learning the faces and names of MP's in the commons, 'the women were no problem, they had personalities and colour', whereas the men were merely 'a collection of grey suits.' She insisted that the British parliament is not 'rowdy, but robust' and admired its capacity to challenge and debate. She asserted that it is 'a system to be cherished' and is proud to have served in 'one of the highest offices in the land.'

She is first and foremost, an extremely proud woman and as honest as the day, and yet she is also a politician. It's a crazier world than I thought!

## Bread and butter philosophy

By BRENDA READ-BROWN

'Philosophy,' said Anthony Grayling, 'bakes bread'; this encapsulated his talk. Throughout, he showed how we can learn by thinking about thinking, and how discussion generates ideas; relating philosophy always to the practicalities of living, and our attitudes to ourselves and others.

The essence of 'the meaning of things' was Socrates' view that 'the unconsidered life is not worth living'. If we give no thought to life, we are like a stranger mapless in a foreign land, at the



mercy always of the choices of others. Considering the things that matter can give a purpose, and taking a general

view - on love, hatred, war, suffering - enriches our opinions on particular contemporary problems.

Grayling took us from Thales to Russell, stressing the importance of reading the classics of philosophy - 'if we run with the swift, we learn to run faster'. As physics and chemistry are the essence of scientific thought, so metaphysics and epistemology are central to philosophy.

Grayling defused the fear held by many people of topics given long names; nobody is frightened of 'marmalade' or 'television' - one benefit of which, he said, is that nobody has the time Thomas Aquinas had to write twenty volumes of logic-chopping.

He drew a distinction (apparently philosophers are professionally obliged to draw a distinction once every ten minutes) between ethics and morals. Ethics concerns the totality of how we live our lives, down to what colour we paint our houses; morals (not murals) covers a much narrower field.

Dropping entertaining anecdotes and footnotes along the way as little gifts for his audience, Grayling danced our thoughts over the history of perception of the world - perhaps a little simplistically for members of the audience who already had some knowledge of philosophy. As an introduction to the subject, however, it was entrancing.

## The rhythm method

By TOBY JOY

'Populist, simplistic and too many rhymes.' That's what I thought after ten minutes of listening to Wendy Cope's poems. Slowly though, the gentle, calming rhymes and light-hearted tone of Cope's work began to grow on me.

Those in the audience, evidently fans already, were lapping it up, and soon, so was I. *I Blame Men* could have been the title for a whole book of her poetry, but she doesn't hold it against us.

Cope introduced each poem with a context and introduced the mood, packaging together themes smoothly

and sensibly. Limericks and haikus contained short gags, whilst even her downcast poems hid a wry grin somewhere.

Cope's now put together *Heaven on Earth*, an anthology of one hundred and one happy poems, starting with Chaucer. A couple of nuggets from the book were served up to us, and if the collection is anything like the samples we heard, the book should have no trouble selling.

Cope concluded with a sensitive and tender poem about September 11th; a pleasant surprise, given Blake Morrison's injunction against writing anything about that terrible day for three years, but it's all in an evening's work for our Wendy.



## The Stoat

Children's author Jenny Nimmo gave a Q & A session yesterday. One young lad asked, 'How many books are in the Snow Spider Trilogy?'

'Um, three', she replied.

The Stoat definitely did not hear a member of Festival staff gushing over the 'gorgeous' George Monbiot last night. Nor will The Stoat be writing... oops!

Drawings in this issue by Heather Spears

### THE TEAM

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