



LITERALLY SPEAKING

The Cheltenham Festival of Literature's Daily Journal

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TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

Julian Richards

Town Hall
4 - 5pm

•
Will Self
Everyman

6 - 7pm

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Spot On Lit
Pittville Campus
7.30 - 9.15pm

•
Ian Rankin

Town Hall
8.45 - 10pm

Back copies of Literally Speaking are available from the Press Desk. Thanks to Cheltenham College for the use of computer equipment.

Eden calling

BY HANNAH GRIFFITHS

One man in tan and two men in black sat down to discuss how relevant John Steinbeck is in the world today and whether or not he deserves his iconic status. Alastair Niven directed the debate between Boyd Tonkin and the author Robert Edric in an attempt to decide which is the greater novel - *East of Eden* or *Grapes of Wrath*. Although Steinbeck is best known as a novelist, it was his prolific journalism which led to the creation of characters such as Lennie and the Joads. Niven said that Steinbeck's greatness was that he 'understood how normal people lived'.

The conclusion was that he was 'an artisan', an insecure writer whose style continually changed as he constantly worked towards perfection.

Life's a breeze with Mike TV

BY NIC WALENTOWICZ

To spend an evening in the company of Michael Parkinson, grand master of the celebrity confessional and professional Yorkshireman, is like flicking through the pages of *Who's Who*.

Parkinson has, in his career, interviewed the great and the good and of course the evening was liberally sprinkled with titbits of information about these 20th century icons. Yet such is the manner of the man that, before disclosing confidences from the confessional, he was prepared to tell us a little about his life.

His opinion of those he has interviewed, the ones he 'adored', is that they all have their own hinterland, have experience of 'real life', and that

that is what makes them a different breed. Yet Parkinson has evidently endured his own rites of passage.

Forbidden to follow his father down the coal mines of North Yorkshire, he learned his trade as a journalist reporting on society weddings and beetle drives for a provincial northern paper, before becoming, in his own words, a 'feeble celebrity'.

Perhaps it is this awareness of his own roots that enables him to discover the human being behind the celebrity facade of his interviewees, and it is the ability to reveal the person behind the 'mask' which has made him, arguably, the finest chat show host on television.

This evening's event was a refreshing glimpse of the man behind the interviewer, and further proof, if proof were necessary, that Parkinson's passion for humanity is a trait that many aspire to, but few achieve.



Once upon a time...

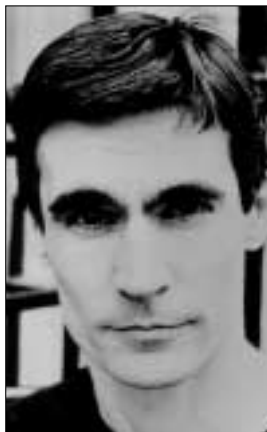
BY RACHEL BARWICK

'This will be fun!' Marcus Moore declared, setting the ball rolling for Beryl Bainbridge and Andrew Miller's discussion on the art of book beginnings, a discussion which proved to be the perfect way to brighten up a rainy Monday afternoon. Despite some handy hints for aspiring writers, the most memorable part of this discussion was the comedic value of the writers anecdotes about their own experiences; anecdotes which prove that the world of the writer is indeed a very strange one.

Bainbridge recalled how her first book, unpublished and written at the age of eleven, was dedicated to the 'sufferers of the opium war', while

Miller mused that perhaps his career as a writer was in fact a cover for a long and strange obsession with stationery. Laughs aside, both writers provided a fascinating insight into the art of crafting a novel. Bainbridge remarked that she gets the ideas for her plots by writing about newspaper stories in the light of her own life. Miller's technique however is altogether more mystical, his books begin as 'a cloud, an atmosphere' that he builds upon.

Both writers agreed that the beginning of a novel is, in the words of Miller, 'a come-on; you need to seduce the reader'. If the enthusiastic response of the audience was anything to go by, Bainbridge and Miller certainly succeeded in seducing the crowd with their witty memories of their 'beginnings' as writers.



Tenderised

BY JON ANDRIESEN

Woody Allen once fantasised how he had met the Fitzgeralds returning 'home from their wild New Year's Eve Party. It was April.'

This may be how we like to remember them, but according to Sally Cline's biography of Zelda, the myths never made up for the madness and dysfunction of 'two impossible people, sharing chequered, impossible lives.' Much is made of Scott's genius, she argued, but so little is known of the would-be ballerina, under-published writer and hardly exhibited painter, Zelda. Cline claims, it was Scott, and not Zelda's infamous illnesses, that held her back and, given the transcripts she recounted between Scott, Zelda and her psychiatrist, you'd have to be pretty thick-skinned not to believe her.

As an admirer of Scott's writing, I felt like seeking out my old copy of Barthes' *Death of the Author* to re-find solace in the text beyond biography.

It's a family affair

BY DANIEL HAHN

A decade on from his genre-bending memoir *And When Did You Last See Your Father?*, what could have made Blake Morrison want to retreat uncomfortable family territory with (this time) a book about his mother?

For one thing, 'having done my father there was in some sense a curiosity to do one about my mother.' There must be more to it than that...

'Saying "giving voice to the silence" would be over-dramatic, but my mother was contemplative, introspective - she didn't express herself to the same degree as my father. Hence the desire to express the things she never did, things my mother never told me.'

You might think that Morrison's experiences with Father would have made Mother easier...

'It doesn't get easier. Each book is more difficult than the last one. They all have different challenges, throw up different difficulties. And I really wanted to do a different kind of book - I couldn't do "a son's grief" again! I had to find a way to tell the story which was quite different from the way I told the other.'

And the verdict? 'It's not such an instantly accessible book as the other. I like to think it's a bit more grown-up. There's quite a lot in it, but these things don't all come screaming out at you. The other is a raw book, written quickly, full of emotion to carry it through. This book is a kind of quest. And though I may not have found the Holy Grail, I do feel like I've got to the end of something.'

So what next? Aunts? Cousins?

'Can I put my hand on my heart and say I would never write a book that was in some way autobiographical, in some ways about my family, and non-fiction? No. But on the whole I think I'm going somewhere else.'

Don't forget *Literally Speaking's* Personified Poetry Competition. The closing date is Wednesday October 16th 2002

Orbach to mine

BY NIKKI SHEEHAN

You know things are bad when we will pay good money to be told to eat when we're hungry. Psychotherapist Susie Orbach is back on the bookshelves with a follow-up to her hugely influential 70s hit *Fat is a Feminist Issue*.

FIFI, as she affectionately calls her first work, raised important issues on food and self-image and told us the frightening truth that diets don't work. Orbach continues her fight for sensible eating in her latest book *On Eating*. But she admits it will be tough to reach a generation who aspire to catwalk size-six looks and for whom bulimia is as normal as the ring in their emaciated bellies.

The diet industry has now become, she fears 'just too damned profitable.' Admirably undaunted by the fact that the horse has probably already bolted

and is heading for the nearest Weight Watchers (an association Orbach would like to see prosecuted as, she claims, their success rests on their clients' failure), the audience was treated to an hour of good common sense.

We were told there is no such thing as 'bad' food, and encouraged to tune into what we actually need, when we need it, even if that means having dessert first. Now, that's my kind of diet.



Teatime Time Team Treat

BY DAVID RAGGETT & MICHAEL WILSON

Tony Robinson and Mick Aston strolled out to a warm reception, for what turned out to be a breathtaking hour crammed full of archaeological facts and insight.

The presentation was full of witty humour and light-hearted banter as Robinson mocked Aston in between archaeological facts and discussion. 'That isn't Noddy Holder,' Robinson remarked, looking back at a photo of



Aston engaging in an archaeological discovery.

Aside from the laughter, Robinson and Aston did have a more serious message to relay to the audience: to explain the dangers, and joys, encountered in archaeology. They spoke about meeting in Greece where they instantly 'got on like a house on fire', recalled Robinson.

When reminiscing about their experiences on *Time Team*, Robinson spoke with great confidence explaining that it had gone from an interest to a full-time occupation. Aston, sporting his usual striped jumper, enthused about boundaries, medieval town plans, and 'trashing people's back gardens.'

A quarter of sites came from letters from members of the public asking them to dig up their back gardens, emphasising their remit to use local areas. They went on to say that their audiences were much larger when they excavated domestic sites as opposed to those abroad.

Finally, when asked whether he liked turnips or had a cunning plan, Baldrick refused to answer!

Park & Lark

BY HELEN WILLIAMS

Pregnant Sophie Hannah hid her weariness in a display of her favourite works by Dorothy Parker including *Unfortunate Coincidence* and *Comment*. These more cynical poems Hannah described as being made less depressing through the fact they make you laugh.

In Roddy Lumsden's presentation he insisted that Larkin is 'too good a poet to fade away' and 'people who think that Larkin is unfashionable are really denying themselves.' I'm sure that an audience specifically interested in Larkin didn't need convincing.

Both performers' own poems complement those by Parker and Larkin. Yet they resisted the suggestion that their own poems were influenced by them. So the resonance of these poets lies in our ability to continually appreciate them, not to try and be or write like them.

The Stoat

On a recent book tour, Michael Parkinson was asked to sign a copy of the New Testament. 'You do know I didn't write this,' said Parky, who'd been signing everything except his own book.

Sally Cline's inspiration for her biog. of Zelda Fitzgerald: 'I was in hospital recovering from a nervous breakdown. A friend gave me a previous biography remarking: 'You'll like this; she's madder than you.'

Award-winning author Robert Edrich: 'I don't never not write'. No never, no more...

THE TEAM

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