

# LITERALLY SPEAKING

The Cheltenham Festival of Literature's Daily Journal

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## TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

### PG Wodehouse

Everyman 4 - 5pm

### Rod Liddle

### & Gordon Burn

Town Hall 7.30 - 8.30pm

### Tobias Hill & Mauricio Montiel

Town Hall 7.30 - 8.30pm

### 9th UK Allcomers Poetry Slam

Town Hall 8.45pm - late

Back copies are available from the Town Hall information Desk or at [www.stetpress.co.uk](http://www.stetpress.co.uk).

## Brit-poems

BY EMILY KOCH

Daisy Goodwin kick-started voices off with a promise to prescribe the perfect poem to solve whatever your problem may be (let's assume you have one). She introduced selected verse from her many anthologies, colourfully relayed by Marcus Moore and Sara-Jane Arbury.

Daisy has been defining what it is to be British in her new book *Essential Poems for Britain*, with obscure gems such as Milligan's *Teeth* and Wendy Cope's *How to Deal with the Press*. The poetic world's answer to Nigella Lawson, seductive Goodwin also compelled her audience to ditch the self-help books – all the guidance and consolation you will ever need can be found in the right poem, she said.

'Don't get drunk either,' she suggested, making the helpful observation that 'poetry won't give you a hangover.' Whether you're making a career-changing decision or dealing with the death of a beloved pet, Daisy's got the poem for you.

## Jung Chang: thank you m'am

BY HELEN WILLIAMS

For years Jung Chang was forced to write with an imaginary pen in her head. In 1968 she had to tear up her first successful poem and flush it down the toilet because Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution made it illegal to write in China, even for personal practice. Hearing Chang on stage was all the more remarkable for knowing these facts. The eloquence and enthusiasm she exuded while talking about *Wild Swans* brought a whole new meaning to putting pen to paper.

Chang is as arresting in her speech as she is in her writing. She opened with some captivating anecdotes about her arrival in London. There were some inevitable disappointments when she realised that the pubs she was banned from entering were not indecent places with gyrating women, but merely places for old men drinking beer. She also

offered some humorous insights into Chinese perceptions of the West. As a child she was warned by her nursery school teachers not to waste food and that she should think about the poor starving

children in the capitalist world.

Coming to London was on the whole a liberating experience for Chang; however it was far from being easy. Chang was the first woman from Mainland China to venture out on her own, leaving her 'dizzy with tension.' Now Chang loves Britain with 'reason and emotion.'

Chang is clearly perpetually moved by the gift her mother offered when she opened her 'heart and mind' to her daughter. She poignantly recalled the six months they spent together collecting stories which 'had to be written down.' She described this as a spiritual act where a new degree of understanding was developed between mother and daughter.

The act of telling is crucial to Chang's work, which seems an obvious reason why her next project is to complete a biography of Chairman Mao, the man who is to blame for the continuous ban of *Wild Swans* in Chang's homeland.



## The journey of the word

BY ADAM HOROVITZ

The 54th Cheltenham Festival of Literature, replete once more with a fine and eclectic selection of literary types in the flesh, pounding the flesh and exercising their signing muscles, is this year exploring journeys in all their forms, from the voyages of Captain Cook to the personal, political and spiritual journeys of individuals with remarkable stories to tell.

This year's Festival guest directors are the poet and novelist Fred D'Aguiar and filmmaker and novelist Nigel Williams, who have a weekend each in which they have programmed a selection of events. This weekend, Nigel Williams has '...simply invited writers I like and admire. If there is a theme uniting them, it's simply the enjoyment I find in their company both on and off the page, which I hope you'll share', whilst Fred D'Aguiar believes that 'Cheltenham is famed for its mix of local, national and international literature.'

'I wanted to maintain the tradition and augment it by presenting writers who embody aspects of all three fields,' he said.

The line-up includes such luminaries as Harold Pinter, Julian Barnes, Philip Pullman, Griff Rhys Jones and George Monbiot, with world premieres by Maggie Gee and Tobias Hill being broadcast from the Festival on Radio 4.

Another innovation is the Across Continents strand, a groundbreaking international series featuring leading African and Latin American writers. More information is available from [www.acrosscontinents.org](http://www.acrosscontinents.org)

Returning once again is voices off, the out-there literature jamboree that infiltrates the parts of Cheltenham that the rest of the Festival sometimes does not reach, with a mixture of performance poetry, music and much, much more.

What else can be said? The Cheltenham Festival of Literature - a journey in itself.

## Go Goya!

BY CLAIRE TRACEY

The audience in the Cheltenham Town Hall Pillar Room, who were expecting an exploration of the Spanish artist Goya by international art historian Robert Hughes, were surprised to be introduced instead to Sarah Simmons, a lecturer in art history from Essex University who was standing in for Hughes due to ill health.

Her delivery, concentrating on the letters of Goya, began falteringly but gained in confidence as she warmed to her subject. The audience was captivated by both the projected images and the surprising content of the artist's letters, particularly one describing Goya's phallus – of which he was rather obviously proud.

Ms Simmons, who recently published a collection of Goya's letters, exuded enthusiasm for her subject, although the audience showed initial reluctance to ask questions – happily a young art fan got the ball rolling.

The role of understudy is never easy but the audience hid their slight disappointment, allowing Ms Simmons to progress from lecturer to informative presenter in the space of an hour.





## Yellow dog bites

BY JON ANDRIESEN

Notoriety follows Martin Amis like a storm follows calm. For some strange reason we have gifted poor Martin a celebrity status capable of keeping all but the gravest international news out of the papers. So it was a nice change to see him in the flesh, outside of tomorrow's chip wrappers, talking for himself.

Taking the usual novelist path into Cheltenham, Amis began with a reading of his latest hardback novel, *Yellow Dog*, a dark and Amis-esque exploration of all things we like to sweep under carpets. Gangsters, royalty, imminent plane crashes, revelry, tabloid journalism, violence and song; well not song, but just about everything else and more that befits the mantle of sophisticated, swarthy cynicism. Reading has never been his sharpest tool - reminiscent of a Home Counties railway station announcer, perturbed at yet another infestation of leaves on the line - but he keeps



you gripped because, like all the great storytellers you know something is going to happen.

Ably cajoled by John Walsh, Amis became more comfortable in discussion. Swapping the printed page for the Rizla and tobacco, the two talked their way through a choice of modern day dilemmas, chiefly the difficulties of parenthood and the need to find meaning and rationality beyond the current man-made crisis of September 11 et al.

Much has happened in the life of Martin Amis since the launch of *The Rachel Papers* - one of many early novels he now dismisses. There is even a suspicion of him growing up and yet still the awards elude him whilst the books continue to sell. So forget the Booker dinners and the trips to Sweden, Amis will carry on doing what he does best and no dodgy review or glossy mag headline is ever going to change that.

## Life of Spike

BY ADAM HOROVITZ

The Everyman was host last night to a charming and occasionally revealing look at the life of Spike Milligan with his biographer Humphrey Carpenter and one of his children, James.

Carpenter, gooning owlishly throughout, had all the best lines; he came across as something of a cross between Milligan and Harry Secombe. He should have won the free copy of his own book offered up for turning in the best Goon impression.

The three charted Milligan's ups and downs unstintingly - a vile assertion that aging rock stars went for young girls because they 'were free of AIDS' caused a ripple of revulsion - but they were in agreement that Milligan was a comedy genius, if only for his work with Peter Sellers et al on *The Goons*, a relationship '...on a par with Lennon and McCartney' according to Carpenter.

James' relationship with his father - often negotiated via Milligan's 'harpy' of an agent Norma - was intriguing. His father's string of affairs led him to believe that '...I was conceived in his office.'

'Nothing was funnier than *The Goons*,' said Carpenter. 'Some things are as funny - *The Office* and *The Marx Brothers* for example.' Which is almost as fitting an epitaph as 'I told you I was ill.'

## Booking in with Book It!

BY EMILY KOCH

The first Book It! weekend offers the chance to: enter the animated world of *Wallace and Gromit*, Get Crafty in a workshop session with Lydia Monks and learn to draw the *Horrible Histories* way with Martin Brown. There's also something for both aspiring explorers (with a real-life Indiana Jones) and any would-be detectives. For the younger bookworms, Book It! promises fun and games with *Thomas the Tank Engine* (celebrating the launch of the new Thomas Story Library), *The Secret Fairy* and Preston Pig.

Featuring strongly in the Book It! lineup are fairy-tale and fantastical favourites. The second weekend's highlights include John Matthews with fascinating worldwide stories from *The Barefoot Book of Knights* and Ann Jungman discussing her vegetarian vampire creation, *Vlad the Drac*. Much-loved author Jacqueline

Wilson will be talking about her new novel, *Midnight*, as well as some old favourites. For the little ones, *Angelina Ballerina*, Peter Rabbit and friends, *Topsy & Tim* and Nick Sharatt's mischievous *Daisy* will be making an appearance.



Of the Family Events, highlights include the return of the popular Michael Morpurgo who'll be *Ripping Yarns* with Celia Rees and Eleanor Updale. Nicholas Tucker will be talking not only to Philip Pullman but also to other fantasy authors including G.P. Taylor, author of *Shadowmancer*. In one of the weekday events, young adults have the chance to hear a discussion on urban life and how it has inspired Graham Marks and Keith Gray.

Write On!, a series of creative writing workshops for children and young adults, returns for its second year and, if nothing has so far inspired you, then why not have *Fun with Spot!* as part of the Free at Four activities? I'll definitely be there.

## Gone Latino Amigo!



*Salsa del Sol: Thomas Melendez, caught here by Literally Speaking's Emily Koch putting Festival-goers through their salsa paces on the first night. So successful was he that there was dancing in the corridors!*

## The Stoat

Humphrey Carpenter on writing his biography of Spike Milligan: 'A letter to one of his children was intercepted by his ex-girlfriend, who proved most useful. I even printed some of it!'

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Asked which was better, to be loved by your public or to receive awards, Martin Amis's reply was steadfast and to the point: 'Being loved, which is just as well.'

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The Stoat would like to extend apologies to one poor man who has received countless calls for the voices off Director Sara-Jane Arbury today. It seems that the usually efficient Literature Festival information network has been giving out the wrong number. Lets just hope this story doesn't run and run...

### THE TEAM

STET PRESS:

Jon Andriessen & Adam Horovitz

DEPUTY EDITOR:

Emily Koch

Contact us: [editorial@stetpress.co.uk](mailto:editorial@stetpress.co.uk)  
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