

LITERALLY SPEAKING

The Cheltenham Festival of Literature's Daily Journal

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TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

George Orwell

Town Hall 2 - 3pm

Steven Berkoff

Everyman 4 - 5pm

Dan Rhodes & Sarah Wardle

Ottakar's, Prom. 2 - 3pm

Festival Challenge

Café Rouge

4.30 - 5.30pm

Christopher Hope et al

Town Hall 5.30 - 6.30pm

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So it goes...

BY STET PRESS

And so it comes, the final curtain. Or in this case, the final double-sided A4 sheet of Festival news, reviews and more. All that remains is for us to thank several reams of people.

Firstly, thanks must go to the Festival itself for helping bring *Literally Speaking* to the massed ranks of literature lovers. Also many thanks to everyone who has contributed, including those of you whose suggestions, for reasons of space, could not go in. Thanks also to Heather Spears for the use of her excellent drawings. Particular thanks are also due to Prontaprint for their wizardly early morning duplication and to Office World, without whom the printing process would have been extraordinarily difficult.

Lastly, and most particularly, thank you to you, the reader. We hope you have enjoyed the festival. See you next year.

Kissing and telling

BY LAURA DAVISON

Give Francis When and Simon Hoggart a Muppet Show-style balcony overlooking the country's political stage and they'd revel. This time in the spotlight themselves, the pair spent a merry hour telling tales from the corridors of power - most of which actually seemed to spring from numerous drinks parties attended over the years. When told of one to celebrate

Michael Foot's 90th birthday at Downing Street. Prescott hobnobbed with the editor of *Tribune* and Blair spoke graciously of Foot. Later, Blair dined with Ariel Sharon and When suggested sorting out the Middle East problem would be simple by comparison.

The pair spoke of politicians they've known and agreed it was best not to get too close for fear of finding out they were

actually quite decent. When admitted that watching Portillo struggle as a single mum had made him think he was sweet. Hoggart talked of an appeal from David

Blunkett, a huge fan of *The News Quiz*, that if panellist Linda Smith met him, even she might agree he had a nice side.

When got the fact that he was separated at birth from Tory leader IDS out into the open early on. TV exec's missed a sure-fire hit with IDS' suggestion that they trade places for a week in a reality show. When asked what would be in it for him.

After a question about another Festival speaker, Clare Short, When developed a misty-eyed look. He confessed that, after a late night party, the romantic air of the House of Commons Terrace and the way she'd lit up a cigar had once led to, if not a meeting of minds, almost certainly a meeting of lips.



Poetry jukebox heroes

BY SOPHIE FAUSET

Fred D'Aguiar, Adrian Mitchell and Liz Lochhead took over the Pillar Room stage for the Poetry Jukebox last night. D'Aguiar began by reading from his selected poems, *An English Sampler*, dedicated to his family, who were in the audience. Like the other poets, his strong attitudes to politics and life came through in his dynamic performance. Through a mixture of fast-paced chanting and singing, D'Aguiar gave those listening an insight into the world of his origins through images of the sun, animals, rain and the danger of oppressive governments.

Adrian Mitchell began by celebrating his assumed status as the 'Shadow Poet Laureate', immediately setting a satirical tone to his performance. The first poem, describing his worst poetry reading in which 'Goliath dressed up as Just

William', gained instant warm recognition from the audience. Mitchell has seen himself as an ambassador for peace and justice

all his working life and his ad lib extension of 'To Whom It May Concern', including references to Iraq, Blair and Bush, brought out the irony of war constantly with us. His avuncular stage presence and the range of themes - from his daughter Beattie to his passionate evocation of William Blake - demonstrated a man of profound feeling.

Not to out-do her male predecessors, Liz Lochhead began with an 'incomprehensible' satire on the necessity of Standard English. In a circular poem about starting school, she expressed strong feelings about writing in 'home-town English'. Standard English to her is 'posh, grown up, male and dead'. Liz Lochhead lived up to her introduction as 'irreverent, funny and feisty'. She engaged her audience with sincerity and humour, culminating in the glorious clichés of 'My Way'.



Out of Africa

BY KATHRYN HARPER

The first Back to Back voices off event featured the Nigerian poet Femi Oyeboade and the Malawian poet Jack Mapanje. Both are UK residents but 'it's the first few years of your life that mark you.'

Jack Mapanje sketched out a 'dummy's guide to African poets'. You start writing in the land of your birth, railing against the dominant Europeans, but you end up with a scholarship to Europe. You get a degree and joyfully go home only to find that it's not as interesting as it seemed from Europe. You are then imprisoned and some friendly Europeans bail you out. So you return to the Europe you railed about in order to write about your own country again. Mapanje's poems both amused and twisted the blade. Oyeboade's poems were more introspective but shared a certain cultural isolation. He read of being 'terrified into my place by gestures and postures' and a time 'before the English rain separated us'.

The 'paper walls' which men build to separate also constitute the pages which bring these two fine poets to us.

Bobbing along

BY TOM BURGIS

Bob, the eponymous hero of Griff Rhys Jones' latest tome, last night joined the ever-febrile Rhys Jones and the ever-stately Rory McGrath on the main stage for a discussion of matters nautical. *To the Baltic with Bob* recounts Jones' journey from Faversham to St. Petersburg - 4,000 miles in four months - in a 45 foot racing yacht, during which, he recalls: 'I turned into a cantankerous old bully. I turned into my father'.

Jones, an accomplished seaman, skippered his crew (comprising Baines, a dextrous and committed engineer, and Bob, a 'useless, lazy waster') through the North Sea and the Baltic to St. Petersburg, where he fell in love with old Russia, and where Bob attempted to acquire an amphibious military vehicle (a snip at £6,000) but failed. The resultant text is 'half a series of attacks on Bob, half a series of fascinating insights into the maritime world'. 'And if you're not interested in that,' interjected McGrath, 'most of the book's about sex.'



Culture swap

BY BEN SANDERSON

Cheltenham: 'a cute and ancient girl with a halo of pink and yellow flowers in her hair'. So said Ayeta Anne Wangusa, the Ugandan writer who, as part of Across Continents, has spent the last four weeks in England.

Struck by the presence of the past, she sees England as a 'museum' where un-sunned people hurry past her with 'fast feet'. She addressed the piece she read to her dead mother, peppering sentences with an emotive 'Ma', but it wasn't all melancholy as Wangusa humorously described her amazement at passengers sitting in the 'navigation seat' of a taxi, rather than 'assassination corner'.

The other half of this exchange, Maggie Gee, spent four weeks in Kampala, Uganda. Her piece described a different land; girls sailing the streets in 'fruit drop colours' and 'pyramids of tomatoes' lining the roads. This vision was undercut by a description of a field filled with 'low, blank, white structures' - a testament to a country until recently wracked by Aids. These slices of life unsettled the listener, but perhaps that is one of the great things about travel.

Wild and free

BY EMILY KOCH

The Pillar Room played host as voices off returned to the Town Hall last night with a flow of energetic, African-inspired wildness and freeness. The breathtaking luminosity of the poet Crisis was magically manifested in forms varying from mantra-like *a cappella* to passionate rap, propelling the audience to a state of utter admiration. His poetry took a look at the world and made something beautiful of it.

Sensational storyteller Jan Blake followed, side-stepping through the audience accompanied by the big bad beats of dazzling percussionist Crispin 'Spry' Robinson. The stories themselves came after songs of meaty, lyrical loveliness, and involved words slickly slipped into the dialect of the drum. Blake mesmerized as much with her voice as with her movement on stage.

Zena Edwards brought us a fantastic fusion of hip hop, smooth jazz grooves and a wealth of gorgeous verbal genius. Incorporating melted down beat-boxing and wistful whisperings, Edwards ripped repetitions down the mic with ease and elegance. The audience sat absorbed and envious. Roll on next year.

Hope and glory

BY ADAM HOROVITZ

John Boorman, one of Britain's greatest film-makers, came to the Everyman yesterday to talk about his youth and his high-octane career.

Ostensibly here to plug his new memoir, *Adventures of a Suburban Boy*, he gave a revealing and fascinatingly anecdotal talk about his life and films, un-distracted by the men of a certain vintage (and hairstyle) who only seemed to want to hear about his high-fantasy films, *Zardoz* and *Excalibur*.

He grew up during WWII in Shepperton, watching films being made around him. Asked whether this had influenced his career, he said: 'It seemed a very good idea to rearrange the world in a better state than you found it.' This has been a long-running theme in Boorman's work, from *Point Blank*'s emotional rescue of Lee Marvin (the film was written about and around him) to *Deliverance* - into which, Jon Voigt said, Boorman 'seduced' him (he also claims it saved his life) - to



Excalibur's underlying theme of the human world's continuing divorce from nature.

Boorman has always seemed a somewhat pagan film-maker: there is much made of the brutally redemptive nature of violence in his best work, be it *Point Blank* or, abstractly, *Hope and Glory*, and he himself implied as much tonight.

'The great wound of the British psyche is the Industrial Revolution,' he said, 'which tore the UK away from the land.' He likes Ireland, where he now lives, 'because everyone born there is only one generation away from the land'. Boorman made *Excalibur* there because 'it matched some inner landscape'.

What most truly revealed his stance was his description of a childhood epiphany: 'out on the river, sun playing on the water,' he realised that both the Protestant and the Catholic churches 'might be wrong'. Landscape is intrinsic to Boorman's work, as one might expect from a suburban boy who escaped. Long may it continue to be so.

Short shrift for war

BY JON ANDRIESEN

Nick Clarke verily skipped on to the Main Hall stage yesterday, obviously in as much anticipation of this event as the audience. Slightly slower, but with as much conviction, came Clare Short, sporting the rarest of wry smiles and carrying a metaphorical 'weapon of mass destruction' in her head - but was she prepared to launch it?

Here to discuss the harrowing conditions in Africa, Short clearly laid the majority of blame on the West and was unconvinced by recent statements from George Bush and Tony Blair declaring their dedication to resolve the area's problems of poverty, genocide, HIV and money laundering. Europe and America are largely driven by 'self-interest', she said, before emphasising that there 'are very rich oil resources in Western Africa'.

The question of her resignation, or rather the manner of it, only surfaced after an audience member accused her of being 'feeble' for 'not getting her act



together' with Robin Cook. Short, looking slightly perturbed, argued that her 'resignation was not made for impact', but because she 'could no longer defend the Government' and that the promises

Blair had made to her had been broken. She insists that she 'tried everything' she could before standing down and wouldn't have been able to live with herself if she hadn't. She clearly had no regrets.

Strangely, there was no mention of Jack Straw or Geoff Hoon when discussing Iraq. It was as if these two had had no influence or, indeed, anything to do with the decision to go to war or its subsequent execution. A cynical mind might conclude that Blair is not taking the advice of his Ministers, or anyone else for that matter, bar Mr Bush of course.

As for now, Short will remain on the back-benches, outside the 'New Labour' cabal, but she is determined to fight for a change in party policy. First, she's going to persuade Blair to resign before the next general election and after that, well, anything is possible.

A book of Billy

BY AVRIL STAPLE

Pamela Stephenson had no intention of writing a follow-up to her best selling autobiography of Billy Connolly, but having received thousands of letters from people who empathised with the abusive upbringing she described in *Billy*, she was eventually moved to do so.

As a child, Connolly was continually chastised for his lack of attention, but has since used his unique perception of the world to his advantage. 'He creates a sealed-off unit, him and the audience; and the rest of the world is out there somewhere,' said Stephenson. 'There is nothing fake, he is absolutely who he is, only reved-up.' She goes on to say that he likes to be alone with his banjo.

Self-educated, he has since been made a Doctor of Letters by Glasgow University. Right now he is in Italy playing Dolly Parton's dog. Billy will be 61 in November, not old but chronologically challenged.

'He's really sexy and he always will be,' said Stephenson. Ahh!

The Stoat

Clare Short's tirade against the premiership of Tony Blair culminated in a question from Nick Clarke: 'Do you fancy the job?' 'I could do a lot better job than the present incumbent,' replied the modest MP for Ladywood.

Seconds out, round one...

John Boorman, deflecting a particularly genuflecting question in praise of the artistic content of *Deliverance*: 'Let's keep art out of the cinema, that's my view.

We don't want to get too pretentious.'

Err... that's it. Thanks.

THE TEAM

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