

LITERALLY SPEAKING

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TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

Mr Hemingway, I presume?

Town Hall 11.30-12.30pm

Robert Crawford & Bernard O'Donoghue

Town Hall 4 - 5pm

Martin Bell

Town Hall 8.45 - 10pm

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Comedy Cryer-genics

By ADAM HOROVITZ

Barry Cryer, avuncular wag and wit factory of some fifty years' standing, came to charm the pants off a capacity audience at The Everyman yesterday; something he could have done standing on his head. He didn't quite do that, although his ossified hair would have easily supported him.

Thankfully that is the only thing about him that has ossified, as he proved with his opening line: 'I shouldn't be here at all as I'm supposed to be taking a drugs test. Funny how these things slip your mind!'

Talking of slips, the book he was sup-

posed to be talking about - *Pigs Can Fly* - was late. Cryer at least had a reason: 'It's like Weapons of Mass Destruction,' he twinkled. 'But my publishers assure me it'll be ready to launch in 45 minutes.'



Cryer is a Yorkshireman - 'The full Brontë' - with a great line in painfully funny stories about all the famous people he's worked with. He told us that

he had once found Rod Hull and Emu alone in a dressing room reading the *Evening Standard* together and that Peter Cook had stopped a bore at a party who

told him he was writing a novel with the immortal line: 'Neither am I.'

'Not that I'm name-dropping - I'm just old,' he said with a jovial leer. 'There's nobody I worked with that I didn't like.'

How can any man keep this sort of equable, sharp good humour up, not only on stage but after the show as well? Can he really live like this? If so, his wife must be made of stern stuff. Even Spike Milligan was said to be scared: at an *Oldie* magazine lunch last year, Milligan apparently said loudly: 'Cryer's here. Take my jokes. Don't hurt me.'

This was a delicious event - the Everyman's rafters are no doubt still littered with jokes and asides - but I don't know if I could cope with the man for more than an hour at a time. Frankly, I value my ribs.

Grayling matter

By ALAN MADDRELL

Peter Guttridge hosted the first event in yesterday's Mind Games series, opening a debate on contemporary and fundamental ethics. AC Grayling (who reminds me of a kindly Latin master) has published *What is Good?* which traces the historic dichotomy between what he characterises as the Humanist and the Transcendentalist definitions of virtue.

Grayling took us quickly through this struggle, citing examples like the Renaissance as important milestones along the way. Stephen Law, author of a book about the 25 'great questions', *The Philosophy Gym*, then took the 'reason' for the existence of the universe as an example of what he is attempting to do for the non-philosophical public. After a shaky start, Law soon got moving, guiding us through the ontological minefield of asking who created our world and who created the creator...

Given the myopic lack of pre-university philosophical study, it is understandable that questions from the floor were hard to answer. In one hour it is hard to get any sense of movement, but a side-effect of this event was to highlight how such basic yet *useful* considerations are for no good reason the domain of academics.

Pinter pulls no punches

By ALEX MACDONALD & AMY WATKINS

Described as a author who 'transformed theatrical language and spoke with political honesty', Harold Pinter had his audience wrapt with a resounding, gravelly, warm voice that moved, humoured and even shocked the audience as they sat captivated by his words.

His own rendition of extracts from his renowned plays sent giggles and shivers through the crowd as he talked of 'cheese sandwiches', 'China and death' and 'black stockings'. The ability to capture his characters through his words astounded the listeners as they sat, fixated, in silence. Through his characters - writing from his own experiences - he reflects his personality and what he has



learnt. He managed to move from humour to sombre mood effortlessly, by simply changing the modulation of his voice. The readings of his poems were equally dramatic, his own struggle with cancer a prominent theme.

But it was during his interview with Nigel Williams that his own political views were aired and met the approval of many members of the audience. He talked of his own left wing views after the coup in Chile when he was 'lurched into the political arena' and met with accusations of being 'crazy' and 'a lunatic'.

His response to the question 'What drives you?' was simply, 'I'm in love with writing.' His modesty led him to state that he was not interested in writing any more plays and that '28 was enough' but he is prepared to write about whatever inspires him: 'I get great excitement from the blank page which fills up.'

Elegiac

By THOMAS FLEMING

Nigel Williams, Natasha Spender, Andrew Lycett and Gwen Watkins gave an entertaining and largely anecdotal discussion of Dylan Thomas and his work in the Town Hall last night. Lycett has just written a painstaking and informative biography of the man, *A New Life*, but it was Watkins, wife of Thomas' close friend Vernon Watkins, who dominated the stage, regaling the audience with her first-hand knowledge of the controversial poet.

He was an 'anarchic cherub' with the charm of a small toddler. It is just a shame that so much of what he said, she concluded wistfully, can't be written down; his personality, much like his poetry, preferred the medium of sound.

Lycett was effusive and expansive when talking of Thomas. There will inevitably be a great deal which is tawdry and unpleasant in his biography but Lycett was careful to avoid charges of judgmentalism, or 'finger-wagging'.

The event ended with the guests reading their favourite poems - Lycett reading some of the earlier poetry and Watkins preferring the later work. It was Spender, though, who stole the event with a moving reading of 'Elegy'; Thomas' last, unfinished, poem.



Dear Diary

BY KATHRYN HARPER

Why keep a diary? Despite having been commissioned to do so, choreographer Shobana Jeyasingh, intensive care doctor Kevin Fong, scientist Mark Lythgoe and playwright Shelagh Stephenson normally wouldn't. But when asked, they obliged. They read us excerpts from this 'experiment' which appears as two books entitled *Art, Not Chance* and *Science, Not Art*.

What emerged was that these were extremely interesting people who led fascinating lives - the diary-keeping was just a device for gaining access to their inner workings. How much do you really expose when you are writing for a publication?

'I'm actually a fraud and writing this diary is a way of exposing the truth', said Shelagh Stephenson, who later admitted that: 'I'm too vain to be seen as so vain as to keep a diary.'

While the intent is laudable and the books might be interesting, somehow you can't help but feel that a real chance for exchange was missed here - and did we really need the gimmick?



Whodunnit: a murder most horrid was discovered in Cheltenham Library last night. Fortunately the crime scene was a fictitious one created for would-be sleuths as part of voices off's Body in the Library.

Women in the news

BY JON ANDRIESEN

In a lunchtime event programmed to chart the trials and tribulations of female journalists, Pamela Armstrong chaired an enlightening and sometimes revealing discussion in the company of Jennie Bond and Angela Rippon.

On the 20th of June 1960, Nan Winton became the first woman to read the news on television, although her stint was cut short when she was sacked with no explanation after only six weeks. Nearly fifty years on, female presenters are still fighting to maintain a position beyond the eye-candy accompaniment to paunchy, wig-wearing males with seemingly no sell-by date. Remarkable, then, that Bond, and particularly Rippon, have managed such long and successful careers.

Bond, renowned for her work as the BBC's Royal Correspondent, was surprisingly offhand in her attitude to her sub-



jects, admitting that many saw the job as 'the shallow end of journalism', but was happy to take on the position if only to 'pay off the mortgage.'

Rippon started in television in 1967 and spent years writing, producing and directing the news before being given the opportunity to present (which ironically became news in itself). The press wrote constantly about an apparent feud with ITV's Anna Ford, whilst in reality the two would regularly meet up for curries in Islington. What with all the tabloid tittle-tattle and the infamous Morecambe and Wise Show appearance, it's taken a long time for Rippon - here also to promote her new health and beauty book, *Fabulous at Fifty and Beyond* - to be taken seriously as a journalist.

It's sad that we should need to discuss the difficulties for women in journalism, or any profession in the 21st century, but as long as glass ceilings exist, then someone must be there to smash them.

Re-Creating poetry

BY AVRIL STAPLE

It would help, when listening to UA Fanthorpe's poetry, to have prior knowledge of Latin and ancient history. Thankfully she gave plenty of explanation and, with the assistance of her long-time collaborator, Rosie Bailey, she also gave an interesting translation into Geordie for *The Bible's* Creation story.

Fanthorpe came quite late to writing, triggered when she began working in a psychiatric hospital as a receptionist. 'A poem would fold up quite neatly into a forty minute break; prose took up too much paper,' she explained.

When asked about 'Safe as Houses', she replies that 'It's about what war does to a child. We ought to stop fighting. Everyone. Everywhere.'

'Poems exist independently, it's out there somewhere, you just have to find it. There's no point in deconstructing a poem when it's in the process' she

explained when talking about the need to clarify. For her the process doesn't stop with publication. She said that she always wants to revise a poem.

Hugo Williams, on the other hand, believes in collaborating with a poem. He has a 'brutal best friend' to help shape the poem, though he believes a poem could



Picture by Heather Spears

be over-revised. 'Eventually, you have to become the reader as opposed to the writer,' he advises. He avoids using anything deliberately poetic: words like 'dream', 'echo' or anything Latin - to which Fanthorpe gave a sideways glance, her work being peppered with Latin reference. Williams looked illuminatingly at the world of boarding school life, interspersing poetry with anecdotes. Williams' motivation for writing, he says, is to get things published, not just for the sake of self expression.

The session gave a good insight into the process of writing from these two very different poets.

Feud 4 thought

BY EMMA PERSAND-CARTER

Michael Leapman delivered a fascinating lecture based on his biography of the 17th century architect Inigo Jones yesterday. He concentrated on the bitter feud between Jones and playwright Ben Jonson, describing their intense rivalry which spanned 20 years. Ultimately the row between the two men centred around who had top billing; was it Jonson's written word, or was it Jones' elaborate set designs and costumes that were the essential ingredients for the success of the Royal Masques?

The similarities between them made it all the more interesting; both were the same age and revered as geniuses in their respective careers. Inigo Jones produced magnificent buildings such as Saint Paul's Church in Covent Garden, whereas Ben Jonson's name was made with such plays as *Bartholomew Fair*. Despite these impressive credentials both men conducted vitriolic smear campaigns against each other, resulting in both men dying defeated without resolving their differences.

The Stoat

'I'm at that stage of life where the first thing I do each morning is check that nothing's fallen off.' - John Harvey Jones celebrating his 80th birthday yesterday in style.

Barry Cryer said last night that, at an Oldie luncheon, he introduced his wife to a particularly attentive man who kissed her hand and said 'Who is this charming woman?' When the man went to get drinks, Cryer's wife asked 'Who was that?' On hearing that it was Klaus von Bulow, she decided against accepting the drinks.

THE TEAM

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