

LITERALLY SPEAKING

CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL OF LITERATURE
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TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

RODDY DOYLE

TOWN HALL/115-2.15PM

The Booker-winning author is back with more tales of Henry.

MICHAEL ROSEN

& ADRIAN MITCHELL

PLAYHOUSE/2.30-3.30PM

Two of today's finest children's poets read their new collections.

PETER HALL

BACON THEATRE/2.45-3.45PM

The superstar of British theatre re-examines Shakespeare.

HANIF KUREISHI

TOWN HALL/5-6PM

The author of *My Beautiful Laundrette* returns with a memoir of his father.

DOM JOLY

TOWN HALL/8.45-10PM

The comedic revolutionary presents extracts from his forthcoming autobiography. Be prepared!

DAMNED DYKE FIGHTS BACK

JON ANDRIESEN

At seven minutes past six on May 29, 2003, Andrew Gilligan made his now infamous broadcast. It is unlikely that anyone listening that day could have foreseen what happened next, but for Greg Dyke, and a few others, things would never be the same.

Those involved in what became The Hutton Inquiry have continued to deny any attempts of misleading, mistaking or making a 'horlicks'; on the contrary, nine months on they're still blaming each other and some, like Dyke, have made new careers for themselves writing books.

Inside Story should be seen as Dyke's unapologetic response to The Hutton Report and everything it entailed. 'I'm still very angry,' he told us yesterday, while conceding to have made 'one mistake; the rest was simply a set of circumstances.' Believing that the whole affair would blow over, he ignored Alistair Campbell's demands for an apology when, in retrospect, he 'could have demanded a BBC inquiry'.

The government and their shadier set of advisors were never going to leave it there, he now realises. 'They are not nice people,' he said,

Greg Dyke, the controversial ex-Director General of the BBC, who spoke at the Cheltenham Festival of Literature last night.



describing how they set out to destroy completely the life and reputation of Andrew Gilligan, the BBC Radio 4 reporter briefed by Dr David Kelly and central to the whole affair: 'They tried to kill him, Campbell hated him...they said, "we're now going to throw the whole PR operation of the government against you."' Clearly, Dyke was not alluding literally to death threats, but he fully believed the government would not stop until the BBC had backed down and rolled over.

Neither media nor politics are games. They exist to instruct, advise and inform, but far too often become

the preserve of ego and conceit. We should also remember that the man claiming that the intelligence dossier was in many ways false and largely 'sexed up' died following the stress and extreme pressures of being played like a pawn by both sides. And there was no 45-minute threat and there were no 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' and yes, we did go into a war where thousands continue to die.

Dyke's account should be seen as a cautionary tale, something to ensure such events never take place again, but with Hutton's report still accused of half-truths by all sides, I doubt the lessons have been learnt.

GRANDMOTHER SPICE

ROBERT MORELAND

'She must learn to speak politely when her requests are refused,' said her school report. Could anyone in the packed Town Hall imagine refusing a request from the absolutely fabulous Avenger and Bond girl, Joanna Lumley?

Yet the highly articulate, humorous and glamorous Joanna was a convent girl and is (can anyone believe it?) a granny. She loves her south London home with its three bathrooms, and likes being alone on a desert island (but not when she has no book to read). She also deeply admires the Dalai Lama, whom she met recently.

An 'army brat' born in India, she was brought up in the Far East. She tried for RADA but ended up in the Lucy Clayton modelling school. Her acting start was provided by Richard Johnson who gave her a one-line role in a film as a robot ('a dead ringer for Lady Penelope'). The Avengers



brought her to fame (and a false image as a Karate expert) and later Patsy in 'Ab Fab' brought her to immortality in the annals of humour and even to popularity in the New York gay culture.

Joanna Lumley is a lady of many parts; she is a vegetarian and she even makes shoes for walking on volcanic rock from her bras. And she really is absolutely fabulous.

LATE NIGHT AND LIVE

EMILY KOCH

For voices off's event of late night exhilaration three quirky comedic poets were welcomed into the Town Hall's Pillar Room. First up was Malika Booker, a London lass who takes a subtly witty look at life and makes inspirationally simple observations. Having been Poet in Residence at Hampton Court, she made daily unsuccessful attempts to master the maze. We heard of an 'angel' who helped her escape one day, in a poem filled with cleverly cute imagery as she describes him; 'his halo a Nike cap'. Petite and ponchoed, she stylishly initiated The Last Word.

Mat Fraser was the night's differing second. Bringing us a 'mish-mash' of jokes and songs and poems, he intrepidly declined to tone down his usual act aimed at an audience of 'militant disabled activist friends' and opened by asking 'how many able bodied people does it take

to change a light bulb?' Answer: 'Who cares?' Launching into an persuasively angry attack on all things highly offensive to the disabled, including Lionel Richie and his blind-girl-doing-ballet 'Hello' video, feisty Fraser sang, rapped and recited us through his amusing views.

Next up was Chloe Poems, whose poetry has been described as 'so filthy it's educational'. Half the time she did indeed seem to be an over-excited teacher, but clad in gingham and pearls and declaring 'I've been an effeminate homosexual since I was knee-high to an effeminate homosexual', we soon realised she was not. She slammed her poems with passionate genius, delighting her audience with characters, such as her proposed companion to *Dr Who*, a gobby Glaswegian who, when ordered by a Dalek to hand over money, says 'I'm no' getting taxed by a pepper pot!'

BOOKER IT! CLEVER TREVOR

DANIEL HAHN

Five books, five advocates fighting to win, for their allocated nominees, the prestigious Booker Prize for 1934.

Will it be *Tender Is the Night*, a novel of 'exact sense of time and place', by a writer working 'at the peak of his powers'? Or *A Handful of Dust*, cruel and bitter, 'but also warm, and terribly, terribly funny'? The 'poet's prose' of Robert Graves' *I, Claudius*; the sexy, trailblazing pre-feminist *Tropic of Cancer*, lauded by its advocate Boyd Tonkin as 'the first Beat novel'; or Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, a genre novel that 'transcends and subverts, even deconstructs the genre novel'?

After a few early rounds of lively discussion, some sneaky tactical voting meant that the first book to be culled was not *Murder on the Orient Express* (as widely expected) but Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*, to the consternation of its advocate, Festival Director Christopher Cook. Christie went out soon afterwards, with Ruth Padel (who'd tried gallantly to make a case for it hitherto) finally admitting the book wasn't quite up to it and falling nobly on her sword, after the Roman fashion. Which brought us appropriately to *I, Claudius*, which Adrian Mitchell had championed; in the third round of eliminations it took four of the five votes.

From the initial vote, the audience support was always with *A Handful of Dust*. But just as early on the judges had taken against it – even its advocate, Deborah Moggach, was swayed from her conviction of its greatness, having to be re-convinced by some impassioned proponents in the audience. But at the last hurdle she and the audience were defeated, the mighty stop-the-Waugh coalition of Cook, Tonkin, Mitchell (voting against Waugh because he's a Tory) and Padel giving their votes instead to *Tropic of Cancer*. It's a book that has given pleasure to millions, we were told; Adrian Mitchell recalled being excited by it as a schoolboy, musing fondly 'Yes, we used that one a lot...'

FESTIVAL CHALLENGE

REBEKAH CANE

Twenty members of the public have taken up yesterday's voices off challenge to write a poem or a mini-saga in 24 hours. Set by novelist Jane Bailey, the theme of the challenge is 'The Usual Rubbish'. All those that accepted the task will be gathering at Jim Thompson's at 5.30pm today to read the results of their rooting around in amongst the theme. The event is open to the public and entry is free.

KATE NICHOLLS

With the Festival drawing to a close, it's a temptation to relax and put your feet up. So it was a rare treat to be rewarded with the short story 'The Piano Tuner's Wives' by master storyteller William Trevor last night.

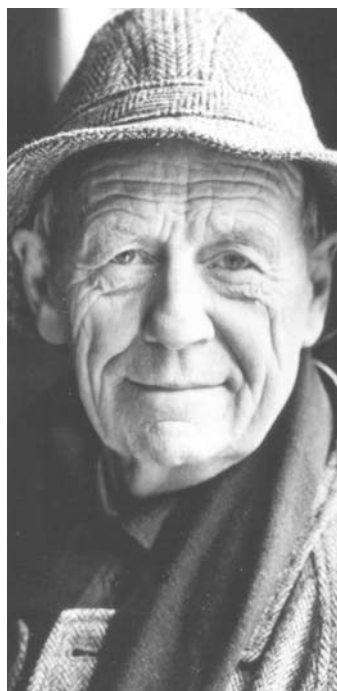
Winner of almost every literary award going, and a knighthood, the pressure was on, but Trevor undoubtedly delivered. With the Pillar Room full to its 300 capacity, thunderous applause, and a book-signing queue forming at an alarming rate, William Trevor, phenomenal literary success, proved that the best is often saved until last.

In a rich, gravelly voice and measured tone perfectly allowing the beauty of the syntax to shine through, Trevor read magnificently in a manner seldom witnessed. The hypnotized crowd were drawn into the spell of the story – about Owen Drumgould, piano tuner, and his two wives – which was characterised by subtlety and gentleness. These are Trevor's trademarks. There are no sudden climaxes, no uncontrollable racing towards the end, no need for false dramatisms. For Trevor's writing paints a picture painfully close to life, and in its heart-wrenchingly acute observations of human relations and emotions really does 'hold a mirror up to nature.'

It was a tale focusing on the inability to communicate, insecurities and self-doubt. And the reader is left with uncertainties too. Despite the ending lines, this is a tale with no

winners or losers: 'Belle could not be blamed for making her claim. And claims could not be made without damage or destruction. Belle would win as the living always do since Violet had won in the beginning and had had the better years.'

Powerful, poignant and arousing huge feelings of pathos and sympathy for his characters, Trevor effortlessly creates people that are all too easy to empathise with.



SPLIT PERSONALITIES

PETER WYTON

The person who is Catherine Smith thinks it's boring to be just one person, which is possibly why several poems feature people who are, or wish to be, any number of people. For instance, the woman who was Queen Victoria the day before yesterday, Cleopatra yesterday, Mata Hari today, will be the Virgin Mary tomorrow.

Catherine is also capable of populating her supermarket with dead film stars, has fixed views (for a married woman) on the inadvisability



of marriage, is able to conceive the concept of a close relative being reincarnated as a table. She treated us to the first poem I have ever heard concerning songs associated with the defunct Chinese art of female footbinding. This profundity of subjects explains why her book sold out before the event took place.

I first heard Julia Copus read when I was stewarding in Ledbury. At the end of which a chap asked me where she was appearing next. 'It's not just the poetry,' he said, 'I want to hear her laugh.' The gurgle in question was periodically present during a well-presented programme which included a defence of adultery, ear trouble and quantum physics. Julia doesn't fall in love, apparently. The phenomenon occurs via capillary action, or else is found on the internet while she's looking for short break deals in France. Literary burglars should be aware that she keeps all her spare words under the stairs. Personally, I bought the book.

TYGER TALK

ADAM HOROVITZ

'At university we never have the sense that poems were written by people...they just seem to appear in anthologies,' said Michael Rosen yesterday, hosting the talk on William Blake. How refreshing, then, to hear this fresh-eyed discussion of the great poet that gave, in the hour allotted, a strong sense of Blake the man and Blake the poet.

Rosen was joined by Adrian Mitchell and Blake Morrison who, in their different approaches to William Blake, made clear this practical visionary's lasting appeal; he means so much to so many different people.

His clarity and simplicity of speech, under which are layers upon layers of meaning, were praised by Mitchell, who has inherited much of this in his own work – he read three moving fragments of poetic biography, including the beautiful 'How William Blake Died a Good Death'. Morrison examined the earthier side to Blake; he was 'a man with his sleeves rolled up' who 'believed in argument', contraries and progression, prefiguring Hegel.

That his writing means so much to so many became apparent with the questions from the audience, which took in Jungian interpretations, a polite hunt for Blake's interest in the resurrection and a student eager for an explanation of 'The Tyger'.

That Blake 'found his religion in his heart' and distrusted organisation is without doubt. Perhaps the best answer to the question of why he was so interested in 'violent, angry, groaning, struggling deities' lies in this gorgeous aphorism from the man himself: 'The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.'

THE STOAT

Adrian Mitchell and Michael Rosen overheard in the Writers' Room before their William Blake talk: Rosen asked 'You know Blake, don't you?' Mitchell, looking surprised, replied in the affirmative. 'I mean Blake Morrison!' said Rosen. 'Oh!' replied Mitchell, relieved. 'Yes, I've met him once or twice.'

A Festival volunteer spotted William Trevor in the Town Hall corridors last night. 'I didn't recognise him,' the volunteer said. 'He wasn't wearing a hat!'

The Stoat, on behalf of Literally Speaking, would like to thank all our readers and contributors. It is as it was! There is no piano...