
STAMPS OF EUROPE: STICKING COMFORTABLY? THEN WE'LL BEGIN...

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/stamps-of-europe-sticking-comfortably-then-well-begin-2105007.html>

Time: 17:26

Europe's annual batch of themed stamps celebrates our heritage of children's stories this year. Victoria Summerley on a cultural feast

Wednesday, 13 October 2010

Considering that the nations of Europe have spent the past 2,000 years invading, pillaging and generally beating hell out of each other, one might be forgiven for greeting initiatives such as the Europa stamps project with a wry smile.

The scheme was launched in 1956 – at the height of the Cold War – with the laudable if somewhat earnest aim of symbolising "Europe's desire for closer integration and cooperation".

Initially, every country used the same design, but since 1974 the designs have had a common theme, allowing far greater individual interpretation. The theme this year is "Children's books", commemorated today in the UK with a set of stamps by the Royal Mail bearing illustrations from A A Milne's classic, Winnie-the-Pooh.

The honey-loving bear was created by Milne for his son Christopher Robin in 1926, and the collection of 10 stamps features the original illustrations by E H Shepard. Milne was not initially impressed by Shepard's style, describing his drawings for Punch as "perfectly hopeless".

He loved the first sketches for Pooh, however, and insisted that Shepard went on to illustrate more of his books. For his part, Shepard found Pooh rather a tedious teddy, describing the character as "that silly old bear".

Some of the 48 countries in the Europa scheme have also used stories that will be familiar to British children. The Macedonian stamps, for example, feature Peter Pan – a very English character – while Jersey's are inspired by Kipling's Just So stories and Alice in Wonderland. Gibraltar also flies the British flag with illustrations from Roald Dahl.

Vatican City, appropriately, has stories from the Bible, while France uses Beauty and the Beast and Cinderella – both first published in formal storybook form by Charles Perrault in the 17th century.

For some countries, the choices reflect national pride, such as the Turkish stamp bearing an image from The Book of Dede Korkut, an epic story that dates back to the 8th century. On other stamps, you can trace common ancestries: one of Ukraine's beautiful stamps illustrates a folk tale, The Golden Slipper, that is not only familiar in Russia but is also a Slavic version of Cinderella.

Ireland has chosen two authors – Jonathan Swift and Oscar Wilde – who, while undoubtedly Irish, are also associated very much with the political and social salons of London.

Perhaps given Europe's turbulent past, this blurring of national boundaries – and a shared love of a great story – can only be for the good.

SAVOY REFURB: RATHER FINE, GUESTS AGREE

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/travel/hotels/savoy-refurb-rather-fine-guests-agree-2103171.html>

Time: 17:28

Tom Peck sees the first guests check in to a £220m refurbishment project

Monday, 11 October 2010

"It's a bit like being back at school," said Tony Cortegaca, the head doorman at London's Savoy hotel, which reopened yesterday after a three-year

refurbishment. Some £220m has been spent renovating the hotel, around £2m for each of last night's guests; only 55 of the hotel's 268 rooms have re-opened so far.

At 10 minutes past 10 yesterday morning – 10/10/10 – in front of more than 100 staff and almost as many photographers, Mr Cortegaca opened the door of an embarrassingly colossal Rolls-Royce, registration number S8 VOY, to welcome the new hotel's first – albeit non-paying – guest, Stephen Fry.

As Fry – who has himself undergone a transformation since the Savoy shut its doors in December 2007 (back then he was yet to embrace Twitter) – made his way into the grand lobby, it fell to one of Mr Cortegaca's underlings to bellow at the driver of the departing Rolls-Royce as it came within inches of the crystal art-deco fountain that now stands before the main entrance.

In the expansive Thames Foyer, complete with grand piano in a giant metallic gazebo below a glass domed ceiling, there was no shortage of seating options for the hotel's solitary guest (for those actually paying, check-in time wasn't until noon). To the left sits the art-deco Beaufort Bar, a completely new addition.

"It wasn't about changing the hotel. It was about restoring it," said Simon Gilkes, the director of sales, standing next to the bar on the hotel's old cabaret stage, where George Gershwin premiered his "Rhapsody in Blue" in 1925. "We wanted to keep its soul, but elevate it, and make it the best hotel in the world."

Slovakian Erik Lorincz, this year's winner of the Diageo Reserve World Class Bartender of the Year, and thus the world's finest cocktail maker, has been installed in the restored American Bar, long considered the purveyor of the best cocktails in London.

The place certainly has an illustrious history, not merely through its extraordinary guest list, from Edward VII to Marlene Dietrich and the Beatles. "Oscar Wilde stayed here for some time," said

Fry, now checked in to his river-view suite on the sixth floor, priced at a modest £2,500 a night. "It was staff from here who testified at his trial for gross indecency." Wilde, portrayed by Fry in a 1997 film, conducted his affair with Lord Alfred Douglas in the hotel.

Fry was a guest for six months in the 1980s, suite-sitting for Carry On film producer Peter Rogers who had to dash and couldn't face emptying all his things, a stroke of good fortune not visited on too many gentlemen in their late twenties.

"I have seen and heard things in this hotel that your eyes and ears would not believe," he said, but was unconcerned by the prospect of an indecency trial of his own. "My friends Hugh Laurie and Rowan Atkinson both had their wedding breakfasts here where I gave the best man's speech, so I will always have a special affection for it."

Among the first guests were the Lincoln family from Epping, Essex. "It's fabulous, isn't it," said Mrs Lincoln, 53, who had checked into a suite on the ninth floor. Her niece, Julianne Heard, 25, and her fiancé, Nicholas Rowe, a trainee lawyer from Suffolk, will be back again in December, for their wedding breakfast in the imposing ballroom.

It is not the first time the Savoy has required a lick of paint. In 1381 John of Gaunt's Savoy Palace, which stood on the same site, was burned to the ground by Wat Tyler's rebel army. But with rooms starting at £350 a night, and finishing with the £10,000 Royal Suite complete with specially ventilated shoe closet, any peasants in the vicinity, no matter how revolting, are unlikely to make it through Mr Cortegaca's revolving door.

BATTLE LINES DRAWN AS LIB DEMS FIGHT TUITION FEE RISES

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/battle-lines-drawn-as-lib-dems-fight-tuition-fee-rises-2103170.html>
Time: 17:35

Vince Cable has already ruled out a graduate tax in advance of Lord Browne's report on student finance. Richard Garner reports

Monday, 11 October 2010

Plans for a massive rise in student fees are in danger of being defeated by rebellious Liberal Democrat MPs.

The long-awaited inquiry by the former BP boss Lord Browne into student finance is set to recommend the current £3,290 cap on top-up fees be lifted when it is published tomorrow. Most universities are expected to charge students £7,000 a year. The report will rule out a graduate tax as originally favoured by the Liberal Democrats.

Lord Browne also suggests allowing some of Britain's most selective universities to charge even higher fees. However if they charge more than £7,000 they will have to find bursaries to pay for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to meet the costs – with the money coming out of their own coffers. Higher education analysts say this could lead to charges of £15,000 a year being levied.

Time to apply elsewhere?

Ireland

Trinity College, Dublin, with alumni as famous as Jonathan Swift, Oscar Wilde and Samuel Beckett, can offer European Union students an undergraduate place for €1,657 (£1,454) a year.

Scotland

Most BA courses at Edinburgh, Scotland's top-ranking university, cost £1,820 for the 2010-11 academic year for students from elsewhere in the UK, with Scots paying nothing at all. That could soon change, however, as the Scottish government is due to publish before Christmas a Green Paper on the future of higher education funding.

The Netherlands

The University of Maastricht charges £1,500 in fees for courses and is ranked 116th in the world – higher than many of the UK universities charging twice as much. It is already recruiting students from the UK.

Germany

An undergraduate course at the Technical University of Munich, ranked 55th in the world, costs only £845.

France

The Ecole Normale in Paris is even better value, offering courses at the snip of £160 and ranked 28th in the world.

Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland

All listed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as not charging tuition fees for domestic or EU students.

However, Iceland does charge for places at its private universities.

Sweden says it is introducing charges for international students from next year. Youngsters from EU countries would not be affected. The good news is that courses in Finland and Sweden offer a wide range of courses in English.

Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico

All listed as charging lower tuition fees than the UK at present. Many of their courses are also

offered in the English language.

REVEALING WILDE LETTERS SOLD FOR £30,000

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/revealing-wilde-letters-sold-for-30000-2088751.html>
Time: 17:37

By Theo Usherwood, PA

Friday, 24 September 2010

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/revealing-wilde-letters-sold-for-30000-2088751.html>
Time: 17:37

A series of rare letters in which Oscar Wilde appears to proposition the editor of a ladies' magazine sold for more than £30,000 today, an auction house said.

In one of the five letters to Alsager Vian, the poet and playwright asks whether they could dine at his club before staying in his room.

But nothing appears to have come of Wilde's advances in 1887. Two years later, Vian fathered a son Philip, who went on to become one of Britain's most decorated admirals during the First and Second World Wars. In 1895, Wilde was imprisoned for homosexuality.

But the intention of the letters is clear.

In his final four-page correspondence, Wilde writes: "Come and dine at Pagani's in Portland Street on Friday - 7.30.

"No dress - just ourselves and a flask of Italian wine - afterwards we will smoke cigarettes and Talk over the Journalistic article - could we go to your rooms, I am so far off, and clubs are difficult to Talk in.

"This however is for you entirely to settle. Also send me your address again like a good fellow - I have lost it."

The letters were kept by Vian from the Society Magazines era until his death in 1924 when they were found in the locked drawer of his bureau.

They have stayed in his family until they were sold today to a British woman for £33,900 at an auction in Derby.

The auction attracted bids from America, Canada and Turkey but the letters will remain in Britain in the buyer's private collection.

Alan Judd, from Bamfords Auctioneers, which held today's sale, said: "Letters from Oscar Wilde are very rare, particularly at this time as he wasn't writing great plays and novels but very trite little pieces for ladies' magazines.

"What's interesting is that he appears to be propositioning Vian. It was only eight years later that he (Wilde) had his problems with homosexuality and was imprisoned.

"The letters were in perfect condition. There was only one intention in the letters, Wilde was hoping to meet up with him. If they could have shown anything happened, they would have made twice as much."

BOYD TONKIN: DUBLIN BANKS ON ITS WRITERS AGAIN

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/boyd-tonkin-dublin-banks-on-its-writers-again-2100698.html>
Time: 17:54

The week in books

Friday, 8 October 2010

As we talked in the sepulchral lounge of one of the chic hotels thrown up by Ireland's vanished boom, the Dublin writer Paul Murray told me what Neil Jordan had said at a recent conference. The novelist-turned-film director had a simple point to make: that creative artists had been "the one element of Irish life that didn't let people down". Unlike the bankers, developers, politicians and (of course) the priests, "they hadn't betrayed people".

Murray, Man Booker-longlisted this year for *Skippy Dies*, his exuberant tragi-comic carnival of a novel about Dublin schooldays and their adult upshot, also recalled the moment when, in 1999, he left Ireland to spend three months in Spain. He returned to find a land "transformed" by the lure of easy money and rocketing wealth. At the febrile height of the "Celtic Tiger" mood, "people were just buying things, from jeeps to jacuzzis".

We all know the final act of that drama, with the country's deficit now scheduled to rise to 32 per cent of the entire GDP, and a wave of public rage directed at the betrayals perpetrated by a very un-literary property-and-politics elite. "No one thought that it would end quite as badly as it did," said Murray. "It was horrible – like a fable."

Who better than a writer to make a fable stick? Dublin has just been named as one of Unesco's first "Cities of Literature". It wants to celebrate that honour. So it should: no reader should need reminding that, block for block, this city can command more literary firepower than almost any other place on earth. Simply a walk around the tall Georgian terraces of Merrion Square yields, from Oscar Wilde's family home at No 1 to WB Yeats's 1920s residence at No 82, more traces of genius than the whole territory of many larger nations.

Yet several of the titans that Dublin now cherishes it once either neglected or reviled. Even Oscar, the black sheep for so long, has a statue of his own now in a corner of the square – slouching languidly on a rock.

It took time for some of Ireland's literary prophets to find official honour in their own country. But the depths of a slump might prove the perfect moment to stroke the heads that bit the hands that fed them. In public monuments, the evidence of this new-found reverence already abounds. Three elegant hi-tech bridges over the Liffey (two designed by the visionary architect Santiago Calatrava) carry the names of James Joyce, Sean O'Casey and Samuel Beckett: each in turn a voluntary exile from the cramping conventions of empire, church and then Free State.

I caught the last night of the Abbey Theatre's uproarious new production of O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*, with its audacious, pugnacious satire on the pieties of nationalism. It was first staged, in 1926, before an audience packed with outraged veterans of the 1916 Easter Rising. At the wonderfully evocative Dublin Writers' Museum on Parnell Square (housed in the former home of a whiskey-distilling Jameson), I was reminded of what had happened on the first night.

Parts of the audience erupted in fury. Yeats himself – referring to the 1907 riots over Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* – strode on stage to defend the play. "You have disgraced yourselves again," he thundered. "Is this to be an ever-recurring celebration of the arrival of Irish genius?" Magnificent – and pure Dublin theatre, in every sense.

Raised in a tenement, O'Casey brought into the limelight the deeds, and words, of those Dubliners who scraped a living far from the literary salons of the Celtic twilight. From Brendan Behan to Roddy Doyle, many local writers have followed his democratic lead. The challenge of connecting an abundant heritage with everyday life persists. As Paul Murray put it, "On the one hand you've got literary Ireland; and on the other, you've got

Ireland" – that "normal" European consumer society where, when I visited, the hotels were crammed for sell-out stadium shows by the Canadian crooner Michael Bublé.

I strolled around the city on "Culture Night", the annual open evening for (this year) 132 Dublin arts-related locations, from galleries to libraries. The project encourages wary citizens to cross new cultural thresholds. Last year, 152,000 of them took up the invitation. For me, a highlight was the ornate interior of the National Library on Kildare Street. There, among balloon-toting kids released from the rules of solemn hush, I remembered the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode of *Ulysses*. Joyce has his everyman Leopold Bloom blunder into these hallowed halls after Stephen Dedalus's fanciful debates with the scholars. So reality and imagination must converge: part of the novel's purpose, but also a fruitful aim for a metropolis of writers who, however provocative, have never let their people down.

FOR SALE: LETTERS FROM A LOVE-SICK WILDE TO THE OBJECT OF HIS AFFECTION

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/for-sale-letters-from-a-lovesick-wilde-to-the-object-of-his-affection-2080457.html>
Time: 17:56

Correspondence reveals the burgeoning homosexuality that would land writer in prison

By Andy McSmith

Thursday, 16 September 2010



Oscar Wilde's eye had been caught by a bright young journalist years before he embarked on his disastrous affair with Lord Alfred Douglas – at least, that is the conclusion which can be drawn by reading between the lines of a recently unearthed series of the playwright's handwritten letters.

Sent by Wilde to a young man named Alsager Richard Vian, the letters are due to be auctioned later this month and are expected to fetch £10,000. Ostensibly they are business letters in which Wilde undertakes to write pieces for the *Court & Society Review*, which Vian edited.

In one letter, reproduced above, Wilde suggests he write about amusing answers given by American school children. This part of the letter seems innocent enough, but the next paragraph reads distinctly like a proposition.

Wilde invites Vian to dinner for two with wine at a London restaurant, going on to suggest the men retire after dinner to Vian's house, the address for which Wilde requests. Before he signs off, "Truly yours, Oscar Wilde," he writes: "This is all wrong, isn't it."

Other letters concern the often mundane professional exchanges shared between editor and writer, but often end with further invitations to meet.

In one such missive, Wilde complains about being overworked by "slave driving Editors", before adding: "Will be at home tomorrow afternoon – so glad if you come down for tea." Another letter, which, like all the correspondence up for sale, also carries the "truly yours" sign-off, ends, simply, "Till Tonight."

Homosexuality was against the law in Victorian Britain. Eight years after he apparently propositioned Vian in writing, Wilde was sentenced to two years in prison after a jury found him guilty of a sexual liaison with another man. The record does not say how Vian responded to Wilde's invitation, sent in 1887, to spend an evening dining, drinking and smoking together.

In 1885, at the time when the first of the letters in the collection was written, Vian was a 22-year-old graduate of Balliol College, Oxford, while Wilde was in his 30s. The last and most suggestive of the letters was written two years later.

But when Wilde's life became engrossed in scandal in 1895, Vian was a married man and the father of a boy named Phillip, who rose to be an admiral and commander of the Home Fleet.

Wilde had by then moved on from journalism to be the greatest dramatist of his generation, and the author of the novel *A Picture of Dorian Gray*. His lover, Lord Douglas, could not match him as an artist, but he did write a poem containing the phrase "The love that dare not speak its name", which entered the language as a euphemism for homosexuality.

Wilde's downfall began after Lord Douglas's father, the Marquess of Queensbury, had left a calling card at the Albemarle Club addressed to "Oscar Wilde, posing sodomite" (his misspelling).

Accused of something which was then a felony, Wilde sued, and lost. He was bankrupted by the court case and promptly hauled back to court where he was tried for homosexuality.

He and another man, Alfred Taylor, who ran a male brothel, were convicted and sentenced to two years in prison. Wilde emigrated after his release, and died abroad.

The collection of five letters is to be sold by the fine art auctioneer Bamfords on 24 September.

A revealing handwritten invitation

My Dear Vian

Shall I do for you an article called the "Child Philosopher"? It will be on Mark Twain's amazing and amusing record of the answers of American children at a Board School.

Some of them such as Republicans – "a sinner mentioned in the Bible", or Democrat – "a vessel usually filled with beer", are excellent.

Come and dine at Pagan's in Portland Street on Friday – 7.30. No dress – just ourselves and a flask of Italian wine – afterwards we will smoke cigarettes and Talk over the Journalistic article – could we go to your rooms, I am so far off, and clubs are difficult to Talk in. This however is for you entirely to settle. Also send me your address again like a good fellow – I have lost it.

I think your number is excellent, but as usual had to go to S. James' Street to get a copy. Even Grosvenor Place does not get the C&S. Till Thursday night! This is all wrong, isn't it,

Truly yours, Oscar Wilde

JOAN SMITH: MIGHTY FASHION GRINDS SCIENCE UNDER ITS HIGH HEEL

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/joan-smith/joan-smith-mighty-fashion-grinds-science-under-its-high-heel-2089888.html>
Time: 18:36

Sunday, 26 September 2010

Any research combining the words "shoes" and "women" is guaranteed to make headlines. So I wasn't surprised to read last week that "women who hope a pair of killer heels will help them attract a man are wasting their time", a revelation which was illustrated in at least one newspaper by a photograph of Victoria Beckham in a pair of platform boots with spike heels. Now, I'm far from certain that Ms Beckham was trying to attract a man – she works in the fashion industry, so she's hardly likely to step out in trainers – but I can say with confidence that nothing to do with shoes is ever that simple.

This research comes from evolutionary psychologists, who are the people who've told us in the past that girls like pink because our female ancestors used to spend much of their time foraging for berries (not blackberries, obviously). Evolutionary psychologists relate everything modern humans do to the long-ago past, supposedly demonstrating the primary role of unconscious reproductive urges; they're very keen on gender difference, even when what they're studying is as likely to have a cultural explanation as a biological one. This lot have studied male reactions to the way women walk and concluded that men can't tell whether women are wearing heels or flats. Apparently it's part of a wider study of attraction, but it's certainly not going to send me rushing to my shoe cupboard to clear out everything with a heel.

Shoes have become so high over the last couple of seasons that eventually there's bound to be a reaction in the opposite direction, but it hasn't happened yet – and it'll be dictated by fashion, not something as feeble as biological urges. Footwear

that would once have been associated with show business and bondage has become mainstream, but the one thing that's certain about heels, hemlines, waists and shoulders is that they're subject to abrupt change. I love my blue suede cage shoes, but I don't think it'll be long before I'm gazing in rapture at kitten heels and secretly heaving a sigh of relief at not having to balance in five-inch stilettos.

In any case, I've never thought that women wear high heels primarily to attract men; there's something about stepping into them that immediately gives you a lift, psychologically as well as physically. Don't forget that any woman can wear fantastic shoes, no matter what her size, which means they're the one part of a catwalk model's outfit just about everyone can aspire to. At the same time, I don't think women take shoes quite as seriously as researchers and newspapers think we do – or that men are as uninterested in fashion as they claim to be. (Oscar Wilde pointed out in 1882 that men pretend not to care about their own clothes. "I am bound to reply that I don't believe them," he observed, "and don't think that you do either.")

Experience leads me to believe that men think they don't notice what we're wearing, but they're pretty quick to react if we turn up in something they don't like. And we're all conscious of gender stereotypes these days: women love talking about shoes and men love to laugh about women talking about shoes. Look, if heterosexual men suddenly started taking an interest in heels, it would totally spoil the joke.

**HOW I LEARNT TO LOVE MUSICALS:
MICHAEL BYWATER ON THE PUREST FORM
OF THEATRE**

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/how-i-learnt-to-love-musicals-michael-bywater-on-the-purest-form-of-theatre-2080161.html>
Time: 18:38

Don't be a snob, says Michael Bywater – musicals are the purest form of theatre, and they're booming. But why? Could it be, simply, that they cheer us up in these recessionary times?

Saturday, 18 September 2010

the recession's biting. No. The recession's bitten. Savings gone, job on the line, pension up the spout and the only sign of economic life is bankers running for cover. Change of government? As Pete Townshend wrote, "Meet the new boss/ Same as the old boss".

What to do? Here's what: put on your best clothes, head up to town, and take in a show. Not a drama of domestic turmoil. Not a Jacobean tragedy. A show. A musical.

Theatrical wisdom has it that in hard times, people turn to musicals. To songs, to dances, to chorus-lines and show-stoppers. So we shouldn't be surprised at this month's London opening of a musical based on *The Remains of the Day*, nor that the author, Kazuo Ishiguro, said that he liked the idea, and that it had occurred to him while he was writing the Booker Prize-winning novel, but everyone thought that he was joking.

Obviously, the composer/lyricist, Alex Loveless, and his brother Chris, the director, and everyone at the Union Theatre in London, are in tune with the spirit of the times. There was a time when I would have declared that they must be deluded, mad, working towards the fall of Western high culture, and, in all probability, in the pay of Satan. The book, as Ishiguro himself says, is about repressed emotion and thwarted ambition. And in this, there's a musical?

The redoubtable critic Nicholas Lezard agrees, too. Pausing briefly to describe "I Dreamed a Dream" from *Les Mis* as "carcinogenic", he has

tremendous sport in a recent review with the imaginary chorus of servants singing "Isn't There a Lot of Silver For Us To Polish?" and the butler, Stevens, singing "My Master is a Nazi" to the tune of "My Old Man's a Dustman" before briefly congratulating Ishiguro for not being "prissy" and hoping that people will "read the original and generate a little extra income".

This is High Culture, in rollicking denunciation of the Low. The subtext is obvious: read the book; if you really can't manage the book, go and see the film; but if the best thing you can do is sit like a berk absorbing the musical, then best you bugger off, because there's no place for you here.

I'd have agreed with him for a while, when I was a serious, bespectacled lad, not much good at life, sublimating my anxieties in a loathing for the common taste.

But that was before I fell in love.

When you're in love, you're in a musical. A musical where you've waited, in vain, for the composer and lyricist to deliver the goods. But a musical all the same. The twilight torch song. The mocking chorus line. The strings-and-woodwind swoop when at last she says, "And I love you". Oh set change! Oh lighting cue! Oh coup de théâtre!

Far from being a surprise that the Loveless brothers have chosen to make a musical about a book which deals with "repressed emotion" and "thwarted ambition", it seems to me the most obvious subject. The moment where language is no longer enough, where something needs to be said, and understood, which cannot be said and understood, is exactly the meat of musicals.

And most of us have been there. Most of us have sat, sweaty-palmed, sensing that our entire existence hinges upon what we are about to say, until we are drunk enough to say it but too drunk to speak. Words collapse under the pressure of emotion. If we have no sense, we blather repetitively. If we have only a little sense, we quote poetry or put on a record: employ someone

else – a professional, recollecting emotion in tranquillity – to speak for us. If we are very experienced in life, we draw the girl towards us and kiss her, though by that point the force of the original emotion may have been lost by time.

In a musical, we sing.

We sing because music is the only art that can paint, in real time, the widest sweeps of human emotion. It does so in a way words cannot. Even the most accomplished of poets occasionally has to call a halt, change register and speak plainly. At the moment where the pressure of feeling upon rhetorical register becomes so great that the edifice must collapse into silence, in a musical someone sings.

It doesn't matter whether the song is simple or complex, whether it is a plain diatonic tune over a three-chord bass or the mad glittering ornithological pyrotechnics of a Messiaen; they sing. They sing because words alone have nowhere else to go. Repressed emotion? Thwarted ambition? Of course.

Think of the famous scene in *Carousel*. Julie and Billy unable to declare themselves, she from shyness, he because he's a bad boy, a carousel barker, and bad boys don't fall in love. The force of unspoken emotion pushes them into one of the loveliest – and most skilful – conceits of all love songs. Not only has plain speech failed them, but even song can't quite do it, so instead they even sing conditionally:

If I loved you,
Time and again I would try to say
All I'd want you to know.
If I loved you.

This is the love that cannot speak its name, except by pretending it isn't real, and even when the song gets dangerously close to a confession, it veers away again at the last moment as they sing of how the other would go away:

Never, never to know
How I loved you
If I loved you.

The high culture/low culture argument is meaningless here. Rodgers and Hammerstein place us all where we belong, all on the same level: helpless and hopeful. We are Lear's "unaccommodated man", the "poor bare forked animal"; our kinship extends even to Auden's grandee, who "wept his pints for love like you and me". (See how I feel the need to keep my end up, citing high culture? Odd, isn't it?) The musical articulates, the plainer the better, what in our own lives we can only approach with such tentative convolutions that we're damn lucky if we're even vaguely understood, let alone requited.

Nor is it just love, though love is what most frequently and universally reduces us to silence. Songs, in the musical, speak of all that we can't articulate and all that we're unsure of. The future, the past, plans, vengeance, regret, hope, sudden realisation. It's almost a test of a musical song that it only works in context. There's nothing less convincing than a show-stopper that's been shoe-horned in, nothing more convincing than a song that comes just at the right moment. Think of "Food, Glorious Food", think of Professor Higgins singing "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face", think of Brecht & Weill's "Pirate Jenny". Consider Fagin explaining in monstrous burlesque how "You've Got to Pick a Pocket or Two", or Joel Grey in Cabaret singing "Two Ladies", or the Hitlerjugend youth in the beer garden singing "Tomorrow Belongs to Me". The youth who sings "Sixteen, Going on Seventeen" is saccharine but

diverting in the context of The Sound of Music; take him out of context and the intro alone ("You wait, little girl, on an empty stage/ For Fate to turn the light on") is enough to bring on diabetes. Out of context, "The Worst Pies in London" or "A Little Priest" are almost meaningless. In the midst of Sweeney Todd they are horrifying in their jauntiness ("The history of the world, my sweet – 'Ooh Mister Todd/ Yes Mister Todd/ What can it be?' – Is who gets eaten/ And who gets to eat").

Repressed emotion. Thwarted ambition. All those things we cannot articulate. That is the job of the musical.

I have, I must confess, a vested interest in the form. I am currently writing a musical with those two giants of American songwriting, Leiber & Stoller. The bit I am doing is what most people would call the libretto, but what is known in the trade as "the book". What the book does was identified by the former Poet Laureate, Sir Andrew Motion, who asked me: "How do you get from one song to the next, and what happens in between them?"

That's my job. To keep you watching, and build up to the next song. What makes a musical a musical is... the music. The librettist is just driving the bus that gets you there. Publicly, we're a poor shabby thing; if the show is a smash hit, we are instantly unheard of, and if it's a flop, it is entirely our fault.

But professionally, it sets up some very exciting challenges. Not the least, in my case, is the spectre of one of the greatest turkeys of all time, Oscar Wilde by the former DJ Mike Read, which seemed to make the argument that Wilde wasn't a bad chap and what he really wanted was to be left alone with Constance and the children, though it didn't run long enough for anyone to be sure. Mr Leiber (the lyricist), Mr Stoller (the composer) and I (the bus driver) are addressing the same subject – Mr Wilde – but from, to say the very least, a rather different perspective. Being able to deploy an entire London music hall, a chorus of dancing transvestite matelots, the ruined interior

of the Café Royal, another chorus of raucous high-kicking streetwalkers, a red-nosed drunken comedian – Percy "The Powder Puff" Niblo – who is, in reality, God, and a lead character who is, throughout the show, dead... these things give more joy to a writer (or to this one, anyway) than it is possible to describe.

But the delight comes at a cost. Unless the book builds up the emotional pressure so that each song comes at a moment where the only possible answer is to sing, then I have failed entirely. In the case of Wilde, there are also questions of biographical accuracy, historical precision, street slang, the law, ferry timetables, Wilde's own remarkable rhetoric and the certain knowledge that in any given audience there will be people who know far more about Wilde than I ever do, and people who've not really heard of him except that Stephen Fry played him in a movie.

Michael Bywater's five favourite musicals...

CABARET

This shouldn't really be in the list as it's not quite a musical. But the mise-en-scène, Kander & Ebb's songs and the hand of Hal Prince imprint it on the memory for ever.

CAROUSEL

Mad plot with ghosts and fairground barkers, adapted from a 1909 Ferenc Molnár play. The best musical of all time.

SWEENEY TODD

This is musical verging on opera, but with three of Sondheim's funniest numbers gleaming in the darkness like gold fillings in a pie: 'Pirelli's Miracle Elixir', 'The Worst Pies in London' and the macabre 'A Little Priest'.

LES MISERABLES

What can one say about 'Les Mis'? Schönberg, Boubil and Kretzmer's tour de force has enjoyed

a quarter-century run in the West End – though it nearly didn't make it after its first staging closed just 12 weeks in.

WEST SIDE STORY

To open a musical on a dark stage with a finger-click is the act of a genius. Fortunately, everything else that follows in 'West Side Story' is the act of a genius, too.

... and five best forgotten

MOBY DICK

Thar she blows. Or do I mean 'sucks'? It did. A girls' school sixth form stage the greatest novel ever written in their swimming pool. I saw it. The set was good. Er... that's it.

MAMMA MIA

Yes, it shouldn't be on this list because it's not really a musical. It's a jukebox. But, gosh, the depths it plumbs. And I speak as one who loves Abba.

JEEVES

Lloyd Webber and Ayckbourn took on PG Wodehouse. Wodehouse lost. Disaster plucked from the very jaws of triumph.

OSCAR WILDE

Wilde is such a strange character, his life such a tragic arc, his work so extraordinary, that to put on an entire show in which absolutely none of this comes across is a truly majestic achievement.

TWANG!!

Lionel Bart's stumble through the Robin Hood legends couldn't be saved by an extra exclamation mark, and nor could his money, which he invested against Noël Coward's advice. All-round bust. Sorry: bust!!!! MB

TERENCE BLACKER: STEPHEN FRY AND THE ART OF INAUTENTICITY

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/terence-blacker/terence-blacker-stephen-fry-and-the-art-of-inautenticity-2089133.html>
Time: 00:18

Clearly, the creation of a public version of the self is more than mere marketing; it is a method of survival

Saturday, 25 September 2010

In a cynical, marketing-crazed world, it is probably absurd to be distracted by three words on a promotional poster.

All the same, one or two people might have registered the mildest start of surprise at seeing a quote which appears beside the head of Stephen Fry in advertisements for his new one-man show. It reads: "'A towering genius.' Melbourne Age."

If this is one of those clever, semi-ironic, self-mocking jokes, it has backfired. Fry is now so loved by his fans, representing wit and sanity in a mad, humourless world, that the attachment of the word "genius" to what he does poses no problem whatsoever to them. Presumably, though, as someone who cares about the use and misuse of language, the man himself might have wondered mildly where the genius resides. He writes funnily and well, is an engaging performer, and he has the nerve to speak up bravely about matters of public interest – the Pope's visit, the hypocrisy of the press, timorousness at the BBC, and so on.

None of that quite amounts to towering genius. Here, the original Australian review from which the quote is lifted (and quietly given an indefinite article, cranking up the compliment a couple of notches) is of some help. "It seems impossible that such towering genius can be more than a crafted pasteboard mask," wrote the Melbourne Age's John Bailey, "but if the Fry we follow is something of a lie, it is of the sort his personal

messiah Oscar Wilde would approve: a lie that speaks a greater truth. In this case, Fry proves we can take power over, and joy in, the role that is ourselves." Now we are getting somewhere. Fry's genius lies not in any conventional work, but in being Stephen Fry. It is a strange and very contemporary kind of expertise: the highly successful creation of a public self.

Schoolchildren have learned this basic fact of modern life. They want simply to be famous. Ask them what they want to be famous for, and they will be genuinely confused. What is Jordan famous for? Or Paris Hilton? They are simply themselves. Creating a public persona is trickier than it may appear. It requires the right balance between reality and marketing, between the authentic and the created. An element of vulnerability needs to be in the mix, crossed with a capacity to take the knocks. You need to be able to show just enough of your own personality – a loss of temper here, a touch of mild vanity there – to remind fans of your humanity.

On the other side of the compact, the fan gains virtual friendship (more valued sometimes than the real thing) and a sort of reflection of themselves – only wiser, wittier and more successful. To read some of Stephen Fry's fan mail on his own website is to realise how much he means to his followers. What seems to make him genuinely loved is that he neither looks nor sounds as if he comes from another planet, occupied exclusively by the brilliant and the beautiful. He is Everyman writ large, ordinariness made extraordinary.

Few manage this creation of a parallel public version of their private selves with any degree of success. David Beckham did it brilliantly. Tony Blair, in the years before 2003, was a master of it. A few authors – Martin Amis, Zadie Smith, Bret Easton Ellis, Jeanette Winterson – pull it off while others, notably Kazuo Ishiguro, work hard to avoid doing so.

Quite often the public persona becomes hopelessly confused with the real thing. At one point, Ricky Gervais appeared in interviews to

have become the sneering bigot he parodied in his one-man shows. When he tried to explain that that he was impersonating a role, an arrogant celebrity-Ricky who has let fame go to his head, it was too late. Everyone was too confused to care.

The recently released film *I'm Still Here* is a disturbing portrait of what happens when a constructed identity falls apart more dramatically – or, rather, ceases to be the identity which the public has chosen for it. Purporting to be a fly-on-the-wall documentary, the film follows, often uncomfortably, the psychological meltdown of the actor Joaquin Phoenix after he has decided to abandon his acting career in order to become a (hilariously bad) rap singer. Although a few of the scenes in the film have a whiff of fakery to them, the general direction of the various rows and acts of humiliation and cruelty seems entirely convincing. It is, we are now told, a spoof. According to Phoenix, he and his director Casey Affleck "wanted to do a film that explored celebrity and explored the relationship between the media and the consumers and the celebrities themselves". They succeeded, and, weirdly, the fact that the whole thing turns out to be a clever hoax does little to undermine its effect. There is a tug of voyeurism and cruelty, it suggests, in the relationship between an object of fame and his public. Once the star steps out of character and the genuine human being reveals himself to be all too genuine and human – that is, a pain in the arse – admiration quickly turns to contempt.

The film shows the nastiness of online critics and the show-business establishment in the face of what appeared to be mental illness. Indeed, by playing a heartless game with the audience, Phoenix and Affleck are part of the same process. In the end, everyone feels less. Any sympathy for the suffering actor turns out to have been misplaced. He was having a laugh at our expense all along.

Clearly, the creation of a public version of the self is more than mere marketing; it is a method of survival. The effect on the rest of us is more debatable. By putting inverted commas around everything which is said and done, the process

turns human beings into consumer items, with all the contradictory, embarrassing stuff of normal, everyday life removed – or at least buffed up and glamorised.

When the image slips, as it does (or appears to do) in *I'm Still Here*, the reaction of the world outside is ugly. We want our celebrities to be vulnerable, but not that vulnerable. When they do the unforgivable, and show contempt for the PR-fuelled merry-go-round of celebrity, there is a bitter sense of betrayal.

It is, in other words, a game, not a lie that tells any greater truth. The idea that a famous person can, by acting the part, show ordinary mortals how to gain control over their lives is a comforting and slightly dangerous illusion.

INDEPENDENT CLASSICAL: OPERA NORTH: A NEW PRODUCTION OF BRITTEN'S THE TURN OF THE SCREW

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/classical/features/independent-classical-opera-north-a-new-production-of-britten-the-turn-of-the-screw-2086706.html>
Time: 00:42

Thursday, 23 September 2010

"It is a curious tale. I have it written in faded ink, a woman's hand, governess to two children, long ago....." So begins Benjamin Britten's operatic reimagining of Henry James' ghostly chiller *The Turn of the Screw*.

Oscar Wilde called it "a most wonderful, lurid, poisonous little tale" but how are we supposed to interpret it? In a remote country house a governess fights to protect two children from menacing spirits. But are these spirits real or imagined? Are they figments of a fevered imagination? Did evil really occur at Bly before the governess's arrival and, if so, what? So many questions, so many or so few answers. Opera North's new staging is the work of a fresh young creative team eager to find its own way to the heart of James' psychological thriller. Director Alessandro Talevi talks to Edward Seckerson about his approach to this perennially challenging masterpiece. How many dark secrets shall be revealed; how many forever hidden?

LISA MARKWELL: FASHION'S TOOTHLESS VERSION OF IMPERFECT STYLE

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/lisa-markwell-fashions-toothless-version-of-imperfect-style-2083255.html>
Time: 00:55

Sunday, 19 September 2010

Oscar Wilde once said "a fashion is merely a form of ugliness so unbearable that we are compelled to alter it every six months".

One such alteration is happening as you read this, in London. For it is the time of fashion shows and new clothes, of trends for next spring and the newest hot thing.

Speaking of ugly, many in the fashion industry are heralding the perceived preference for models with a big gap between their front teeth. In New York, where last week the seasonal catwalk shows kicked off, the Wall Street Journal noticed and

reported it, and the chatter became a roar. (These seemingly insignificant developments carry great importance when the right model can shift many thousands of wool-mix camel coats or "premium" jeans).

POISONED PENS: LITERARY INVECTIVE FROM AMIS TO ZOLA, ED GARY DEXTER

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/poisoned-pens-literary-invective-from-amis-to-zola-ed-gary-dexter-2073913.html>
Time: 01:02

Reviewed by David Evans

Sunday, 12 September 2010

From Aristophanes, who attacked Euripides in his play *The Frogs* (Euripides was safely dead by that point), to the critic Harold Bloom, who recently consigned Harry Potter to the "vast concourse of works that cram the dustbins of the ages", Gary Dexter's book compiles pithy put-downs and waspish jibes from writers.

It can be a rather ugly spectacle – literary pugilism from men you suspect wouldn't have been much cop in a real fight – but it is always compelling: Kingsley Amis writes of Dylan Thomas that he'd like to "walk on his face" and "punch his privy parts" in return for the "gonorrhoeic rubbish" of his poetry; Noël Coward calls Oscar Wilde a "tiresome, affected sod".

THE WEEK IN RADIO: WON OVER BY THE FAST AND FURIOUS LIFE OF BRIAN

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/features/the-week-in-radio-won-over-by-the-fast-and-furious-life-of-brian-2074046.html>
Time: 01:07

By Jane Thynne

Thursday, 9 September 2010

There's a famous Monty Python sketch called *Philosophers' Football*, in which Greece, represented by Socrates, Archimedes and Plato take on Germany, with Hegel, Kant, Marx and Nietzsche. High culture meets low. It's brilliant. Anyway, I was reminded irresistibly of this when listening to the distinguished art critic Brian Sewell on his passion for stock-car racing. The BBC has a habit, let's call it Stephen Fry syndrome, whereby once they've found a presenter who can do something, they want them to do everything, witness Mark Lawson and Andrew Marr. Good at politics? Here's a history series. A doctor? Why not take on some wildlife, and archaeology while you're at it. Famous for fashion? What about a book programme. It's as though we're suffering some worldwide presenter shortage and all those bright young things emerging from media courses and YouTube simply needn't bother. It's a conundrum. Programme-makers complain that without a big name, their pitch won't get commissioned. Journalists need to prove their versatility. Older presenters cry ageism if they are sidelined. Yet there are times when stretching the talent is justified and Stock Car Sewell was one of them.

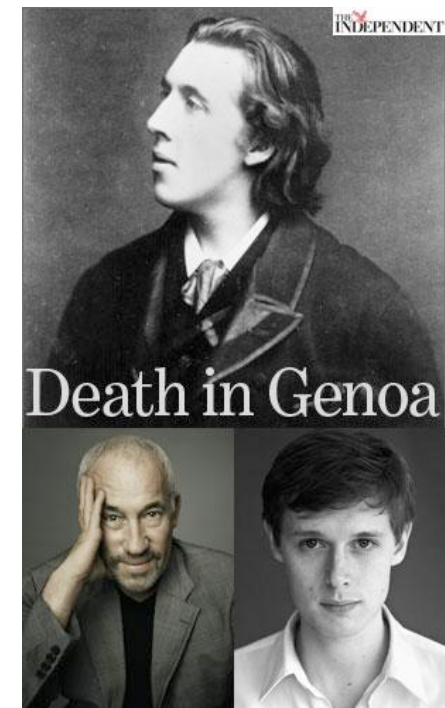
While the idea of Brian Sewell enthusing over stock cars is as weird as Jeremy Clarkson on, say, Poussin, Stock Car Sewell was a success because Brian did not modify his aesthetic judgements one jot when appreciating a procession of rusty hotrods and bangers. "When you get the exhaust spitting flames out, it does seem like a Turner sunset in November," he enunciated in that uniquely fluting delivery that is straight out of Oscar Wilde. "It has a kind of bright vulgarity in terms of colour." He was arch. "The smell of the exhaust is exactly like being exposed to a vast quantity of evaporating gin." He was knowing, describing a fellow banger aficionado as "Virgil to my Dante if you will". And though I would a hundred times rather listen to him on old masters than old bangers, his explanation of how he came to be spending nights at Wimbledon stadium was beguiling. "Like most men, I've never grown up and I've always been in love with cars. I'm fascinated by how beautiful and aggressive and wonderful they are. And how nasty. They evince

every characteristic of the human male in my view. Pure aggression."

FREE INDEPENDENT DRAMA: DEATH IN GENOA, FEATURING SIMON CALLOW AS OSCAR WILDE

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/free-independent-drama-death-in-geoa-featuring-simon-callow-as-oscar-wilde-1833609.html>
Time: 01:48

Friday, 4 December 2009



In the week of the 109th anniversary of Oscar Wilde's death, The Independent is giving you an exclusive chance to listen to and download a new drama by Made in Manchester/Dark Smile, written by Thomas Wright, about the 19th Century writer, wit and raconteur.

In 1895, Oscar Wilde was sentenced to two years' imprisonment. On his release, he settled on the continent under the name of Sebastian Melmoth.

He wrote to his wife, Constance, but he saw neither her, nor his two young boys, again.

She died in Genoa in 1898 and he visited her grave just a year before his own death in 1900.

Death in Genoa imagines what might have happened to Wilde during that visit...

Listen to Death in Genoa or download here:

WARNING: Death in Genoa contains adult language and themes

FAMOUS WILLS: THEY COULDN'T TAKE IT WITH THEM...

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/famous-wills-they-couldnt-take-it-with-them-2049101.html>
Time: 01:52

The last wishes of some of history's most eminent figures have been released. Kevin Rawlinson surveys their legacies

Wednesday, 11 August 2010

A record of more than 6 million Victorian and early 20th-century wills has been made public for the first time, revealing the last wishes of some of the most important figures of the age, including Charles Dickens, Karl Marx and Charles Darwin.

The documents, dating from 1861 to 1941 and

now available on-line, show that eminent Victorians Dickens and Darwin left estates worth the equivalent of millions of pounds today. Perhaps fittingly, Karl Marx left the more modest equivalent of about £9,000.

The index also lists the wills of the Conservative politician Neville Chamberlain, and the writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes.

Chamberlain, before serving as Prime Minister from 1937 to 1940, lost £50,000 of his father's money in an attempt to become a farmer in the Bahamas, but later bought a manufacturing firm with funds from other relatives. On his death in 1940 he left £84,013 – worth just over £4m in today's money. Conan Doyle, a physician who turned to writing as his medical practice faltered, was relatively successful. He left his widow and one of his sons £63,491, or almost £3m today.

The database, released online by the genealogical website Ancestry.co.uk, is a collation of the England and Wales's National Probate Calendar – a summary of all of wills processed each year.

It shows that the popularity of D H Lawrence's writings came too late for the author to benefit fully. He left behind a relatively paltry £2,438 on his death in 1930, worth around £113,000 today.

Ernest Shackleton's Antarctic expeditions brought him fame but ultimately not fortune. The explorer, who led the ill-fated voyage of discovery on the ship Endurance, died leaving his widow a rather meagre bequest of about £20,000 in today's money. By contrast, Darwin left a will worth the equivalent of £13m, and Dickens left £7.1m in today's money.

Dan Jones, of Ancestry.co.uk, said the data "is a fantastic resource for family historians, but is also fascinating to anyone with an interest in social history or just in famous names".

It offers "a great insight into the social standing of people in their own time... The details can add to the legend: people would probably be fairly upset if they found out that Karl Marx was secretly

squirrelling away vast sums of money."

"We've only just started digging," Mr Jones added. The wills can provide "evidence of unknown transgressions or scandals in the private lives of people who, in many cases, we thought we knew all about," he said.

Oscar Wilde, £250

The playwright, who was sentenced to two years' hard labour for gross indecency, is famously reported to have said: "I have nothing to declare but my genius." He was almost right. He left behind only £250 (approximately £20,000 in today's money) after his death in Paris in 1900.

TODAY'S WEATHER WILL BE MOSTLY DRY, WITH SCATTERED PROFANITY...

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/tv-radio/todays-weather-will-be-mostly-dry-with-scattered-profanity-2055393.html>
Time: 01:57

BBC presenter gives one-fingered salute

By Jonathan Brown

Wednesday, 18 August 2010

It was Oscar Wilde who described conversation about the weather as the last refuge of the unimaginative. But then he had never met Tomasz "Shufflepants" Schafermaker.

Since joining the BBC a decade ago the Polish-born meteorologist has outraged the Scots by describing the Outer Hebrides as "nowheresville", collapsed into fits of giggles after predicting "muddy shite" for a rain-lashed Glastonbury and turned on a whole new audience to the delights of his occluded front by revealing his bulging pecs and rippling abs while posing in a pair of skimpy shorts for a magazine.

Schafermaker's latest exploit on the rolling News

Channel was yesterday earning him thousands of hits on the internet after he was caught delivering a one-fingered salute to the BBC news anchor Simon McCoy after McCoy's bantering ironic suggestion that his forecast would be "100 per cent accurate and provide you with all the details you could possibly want".

Schafermaker, 31, is seen flipping the presenter the bird and then appears to hide his hand in his mouth, as if trying to destroy the evidence, as McCoy's co-presenter Fiona Armstrong squeals in dismay.

McCoy, a former BBC royal correspondent, tries to gloss over the incident remarking: "Every now and again there's always a mistake and that was it." A BBC spokesman said the Corporation was sorry if anyone had been upset by the brief incident yesterday morning: "Tomasz was not aware that he was on air, and whilst the gesture was only shown for a second, it was not acceptable. The News Channel presenter live in the studio acknowledged a mistake had been made, and we apologise for any offence caused."

The dozens of Schafermaker video clips running on YouTube bear testament to the forecaster's growing celebrity, though the BBC insists he remains a serious scientist having joined the Weather Centre as a broadcast assistant in 2000 with a degree in meteorology from Reading University and, at 22, becoming the youngest man to present the regional forecast.

As well as being a civil forecaster he has also undertaken training at RAF Lyneham in aviation forecasting and this year was named best TV weather presenter at the Tric (Television and Radio Industries Club) Awards

CAN PUBLIC ART REALLY REVIVE THE MOST DISMAL PLACE IN SCOTLAND?

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/can-public-art-really-revive-the-most-dismal-place-in-scotland-2061169.html>
Time: 01:59

The reviled new town of Cumbernauld pins hopes on giant sculpture costing £250,000

By Jonathan Brown

Wednesday, 25 August 2010

The post-war politicians, planners and architects who built Cumbernauld had a utopian vision: for future generations to create a happier, more gracious life away from the filthy tenements and sectarianism of decaying Glasgow. And in the 1960s and early 1970s the people answered their call, relocating in their thousands to enjoy the wide open spaces, plentiful jobs and modern homes.

Recent history however has proved a cruel judge of that dream and the Lanarkshire new town has found itself one of the most reviled places in Britain. The home of the UK's first shopping mall has been named Scotland's most dismal place and likened to Kabul. In 2005 the shopping complex was nominated by the public for destruction as part of Channel 4's Demolition series.

But Cumbernauld is fighting back. Yesterday, a vast galvanised steel woman named Arria was erected in the sporadic sunshine at a hillside cemetery. It is hoped she will be a symbol of change for the town. Created by the Scottish artist Andy Scott, whose works include the celebrated Heavy Horse on Glasgow's M8 and the Thanksgiving Square Beacon in Belfast, the 33ft female figure, with a retro hairstyle suggestive of the town's 1960s new arrivals, will be seen by 70,000 motorists on the A80 each day.

Arria cost £250,000 of public money and is intended to help reverse the town's negative stereotypes. The name was selected by local people and is taken from Arria Fadilla, mother of Emperor Antoninus who built the nearby Antonine Wall.

The real sign of public acceptance, as with other public statues, will come with the acquisition of a nickname.

"It is a great idea," said Geraldine Reilly, a 31-year-old civil servant in Cumbernauld. "People don't see the good things about the town like the people or the beautiful countryside on our doorstep – they just see the shopping centre. This is a great place to bring up kids."

Others were not so convinced. Billy Zanieri, 44, unemployed, said: "It has been a waste of money. Housing is very bad here and the money could have gone on schools." And beautician Amanda McGuinness, 25, believed it was impossible ever to love Cumbernauld. "It needs burning down and rebuilding – especially the town centre. It needs new shops, new restaurants and new bars – something to liven the place up at night."

Naming rights...

When a public artwork receives a nickname, it is a sign that people have come to know, if not love, the work.

Molly Malone, Dublin

The statue of the celebrated fishmonger is alternatively known as the Trollop with the Scallop or the Tart with the Cart. Dubliners have demonstrated a disrespectful genius in re-christening their public artworks. Oscar Wilde in Merrion Square has been dubbed the Queer with the Sneer while even the lofty James Joyce brandishing his walking stick has been called the Prick with the Stick.

FORGOTTEN AUTHORS NO 18: OSCAR WILDE

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/forgotten-authors-no-18-oscar-wilde-1219716.html>
Time: 02:05

By Christopher Fowler

Sunday, 4 January 2009

Hang on. Hang on. Dear Oscar? Never off the London stage, Dame Judi, a handbag, that Oscar? There's another type of forgetfulness that occurs when we choose to remember authors by their most famous books or plays. Their lesser works get lost or sidelined. Few readers of Oliver Twist recall Dickens' round-robin collections such as The Haunted House. Tennessee Williams is treasured for A Streetcar Named Desire but not for "The Mysteries of the Joy Rio", one of around 50 exquisite short stories he penned. The collected fairy tales of Oscar Wilde are almost unknown. Although still available, they are rarely bought and read aloud any more, as they were designed to be.

Even now, it seems there are readers who have trouble squaring the unrepentant "somedomite" Wilde with these morally didactic stories, many containing overtly Christian messages. How do you deal with the repeated appearances of God? "Bring me the two most precious things in the city," says God to one of his angels at the conclusion of "The Happy Prince". The angel brings a leaden heart and a dead bird, a swallow who died in the service of a statue that gave away its finery (and heart) for a vain, unappreciative populace. Wilde uses God as a simple moral absolute, because it is needed in a story about degrees of selflessness and purity.

Many of the tales are so heart-wrenchingly sad that they may now be too upsetting for times. Yet it sometimes seems as if the real Wilde resides here, rather than in his barbed, brittle plays. The Selfish Giant refuses to let others enjoy his garden, so everlasting winter invades it. The Nightingale pierces its heart with a thorn and bleeds upon The Rose, only for the gift to be dumped in a gutter, wasted by society. The Remarkable Rocket is a supercilious snob convinced of success, but who instead suffers the humiliation of exploding unnoticed. Intimations of the tragedies of Wilde's life, if you seek them,

are tucked into such forgotten corners.

FRY'S NEW SHOW SCRIPTED BY HIS TWITTER FANS

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/comedy/news/frys-new-show-scripted-by-his-twitter-fans-2051334.html>
Time: 02:07

By Arifa Akbar, Arts Correspondent

Friday, 13 August 2010

The idea that an entertainer would organise a 5,000-seater solo gig with no script and only a hazy plan to amuse the crowd, brings to mind images of creeks and paddles.

But if that entertainer happens to be a wizard of digital technology with a sizeable Twitter following and a grand plan to crowd-source his material, the scheme may just float.

Stephen Fry, writer, comedian and raconteur, has announced that his solo show at the Royal Albert Hall, in London, next month will remain, for the best part, unscripted. Fry will rely on his Twitter fans to suggest topics for his monologue.

If the idea sounds like an entertainer's equivalent of a bungee jump, at least it's a tried-and-tested one, in Fry's case. Last month, he performed two sell-out shows at the Sydney Opera House based on the same Twitter principle, and blew the crowd away, according to Australian reviewers.

Yesterday, Fry admitted that while the idea held an element of risk, he had found himself riffing quite happily in Sydney. By popular demand, he performed a second show, while a Facebook campaign was set up urging him to do a turn in Melbourne, where he held an additional two shows.

"It was a little unnerving as I hadn't scripted it but Twitter followers asked me to talk about things like Oscar Wilde, P G Wodehouse and writing, so I began by talking about things beginning with 'w'.

"I enjoyed the experience, all [the shows] were different. I was on for about two hours; they couldn't get me off," he said.

For his 'Evening with...' show in London on 20 September, Fry will put out the same request to his million-plus followers to tell him what they want to hear. Nothing would be "off limits", he said, and he would take in serious discussions about depression, of which he has personal experience, as well as more whimsical material.

"I'm not going to move among the audience but I will ask people on Twitter if they have any questions or subjects, and I will respond accordingly," he said.

Fry is arguably the most high-profile of entertainers to have harnessed the power of digital media, with increasing numbers of comedians beginning to use Twitter to expand audiences.

Gary Delaney, currently performing at the Edinburgh Festival, said he often tested his one-liners on his Twitter followers, sometimes just minutes before a gig. "You can use Twitter for crowd-sourcing but what I do is test funny ideas," he said.

"People have come to see me, who haven't seen me before, because of Twitter. I have noticed in Edinburgh this year that more comedians are on Twitter, because they see it as a powerful tool."

His followers: 'I just have to say we love you. Fact'

At teatime yesterday, 1,679,221 followers were hanging on Stephen Fry's every tweet. But what does Fry get from them? And if they are to provide the inspiration for a gig next month, how hard can we expect to laugh?

Well, if yesterday's unscientific dipping of a toe into Fry's digital stream is anything to go by, he'll have to draw on all his famous brain power to turn the banal into the hilarious.

Things actually started quite well, when Fry linked to an online report of a survey that suggests people who use iPhones have more sexual partners than those who have a BlackBerry or Android smartphone.

"Who could have doubted it?" he asked in a morning tweet. Among a torrent of replies (Fry gets hundreds of "@s", or mentions, every hour) came an Irish tweeter called @dubiousgenius with the moderately witty "Don't you have both iPhone and Android? You must be exhausted."

How we laughed! Elsewhere, Fry's legion of fans (and we'll admit they haven't yet been invited to provide comic fodder) were rarely amusing. "How was inception? i LOVED it!" asked @cjayssessions.

@GillianMcShane was watching Dave (the television channel). She said: "catching up on QI [which Fry presents]. Anderson, Reeves & Clarkson on the panel. Magnificent!"

Indeed, fawning seemed to be the order of the day. Arguably the most nauseating example came from @FallenToblakai, who "@ed" Fry with: "I just have to say on behalf of myself, wife and children, we love you. FACT." Flattering for Fry, but hardly side-splitting.

ENDANGERED SPACES: CAN OUR WILDEST PLACES SURVIVE TOURISM?

Our wildest places are overrun with tourists. So how can nature-lovers justify visiting them?

By Stanley Johnson

Monday, 23 August 2010

Eco-tourism. Is this now-fashionable concept basically a contradiction in terms – on a par, as cynics might say, with "business ethics" or "compassionate conservatism"? "Adventure travel" is, of course, a concept as old as the hills, even if some of our greatest adventurers, such as Captain Scott, took great pains to proclaim their serious scientific purposes.

Nowadays, much "adventure travel" is given a deliberately green tinge. Organisations like Earthwatch send young (and increasingly frequently old) people to the four corners of the earth to study and protect endangered wildlife of every sort and, yes, to enjoy themselves in doing so.

But just how realistic is it to imagine that increasing numbers of people can visit the wild places of the earth, and the animals, trees and plants that live there, without destroying them? Oscar Wilde famously wrote that "each man kills the thing he loves". Have we reached, or are we approaching, the limits of sustainable wildlife tourism? Should there be a strict rationing of visitors in sensitive areas? Should "return visits" be banned? Should there be total no-go zones?

There are no easy answers to such questions, but it is important that they should be asked. Take the Galapagos Islands, for example. Historically, British visitors have formed the second largest group. Even with the recession, there were still 14,000 British visitors last year.

When I first went to the Galapagos, 600 miles off the coast of Ecuador, in 2006, I did ask myself whether it was altogether appropriate to visit, but the sheer excitement of being offered a bite at this incredible cherry won the day.

THE VATICAN WAKES UP TO THE WISDOM OF OSCAR WILDE

The Catholic Church has found an unlikely pin-up in the homosexual writer

By Jerome Taylor, Religious Affairs Correspondent

Friday, 17 July 2009



He (Oscar Wilde) was a man who asked what was just and what was mistaken, what was true and what was false" L'Osservatore Romano

With his outrageous wit, clear disdain for figures of authority and openly homosexual lifestyle, Oscar Wilde is an unlikely pin-up for the Catholic Church. Persecuted and imprisoned for his sexuality, gay rights campaigners have long idolised the 19th century writer as one of their own.

But the Vatican, it seems, is equally enamoured of Ireland's greatest wit. In a glowing review of a new study of Wilde by the Italian writer Paolo Gulisano, L'Osservatore Romano – the Vatican's official newspaper – praises the Irish playwright for being "an aesthete and a lover of the ephemeral".

Scant attention is paid to Wilde's well-publicised relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas and the ensuing sodomy trial which sentenced him to two years' hard labour in Reading prison. Instead the paper's review eulogises Wilde for his "lucid analysis of the modern world" and his eventual conversion to Catholicism as he lay on his death bed.

Labelling Wilde as "one of the personalities of the 19th century who most lucidly analysed the modern world in its disturbing as well as its positive aspects", L'Osservatore's writers say a different side of Wilde's life must be taken into account.

"[He was] not just a non-conformist who loved to shock the conservative society of Victorian England," the paper writes, "[he was also] a man who behind a mask of amorality asked himself what was just and what was mistaken, what was true and what was false."

The Vatican's image of Wilde-the-aesthetic-moralist is a far cry from the playwright's more usual depiction as a flamboyant and robust homosexual who delighted in outrage and scandalising Victorian society.

Pope Benedict XVI has continued to uphold the Catholic Church's strict teachings on homosexuality, which is still very much viewed as a sin that should not be practised. But part of the Vatican's willingness to gloss over Wilde's more "sinful" proclivities may stem from his little known conversion to Catholicism as he lay dying in a Paris hotel room.

Irish-born and fascinated by the ritualism of the Catholic Church, as a young man travelling through Rome in 1877 Wilde had managed to secure an audience with Pope Pius IX. During his time in prison he was also known to have devoured the writing of St Augustine, Dante, and Cardinal Newman. When he left prison in 1897 in frail health, Wilde exiled himself to Paris and continued to engage in the sort of behaviour that

the Vatican would certainly have frowned upon. But just before he died three years later a Catholic priest – Father Cuthbert Dunne – baptised him into the Catholic Church. It was, perhaps, a likely end for a writer who once remarked: "I'm not a Catholic – I am simply a violent Papist".

L'Osservatore Romano described the writer's conversion as a "long and difficult path" to the Promised Land – "a path which led him to convert to Catholicism, a religion which, as he remarked in one of his more acute and paradoxical aphorisms, was 'for saints and sinners alone – for respectable people, the Anglican Church will do'".

The Vatican's favourite Wildeisms, printed in an anthology of witticisms for Christians by the Vatican's head of protocol, Father Leonardo Sapienza, include: "I can resist everything except temptation", and: "The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it."

Wilde's wit

* There is only one thing in life worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about.

* It is absurd to divide people into good and bad. People are either charming or tedious.

* Ordinary riches can be stolen, real riches cannot. In your soul are infinitely precious things that cannot be taken from you.

* The only thing that sustains one through life is the consciousness of the immense inferiority of everybody else, and this is a feeling that I have always cultivated.

* What is a cynic? A man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

* A little sincerity is a dangerous thing, and a great deal of it is absolutely fatal.

* The only thing to do with good advice is pass it on. It is never any use to oneself

EDITOR-AT-LARGE: HE LURED BOYS. HE'S A

BULLY. NOW HE BLEATS

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/columnists/janet-street-porter/editoratlarge-he-he-lured-boys-hes-a-bully-now-he-bleats-530894.html>
Time: 02:18

By Janet Street-Porter

Sunday, 3 April 2005

In the latest act of the comic opera that is the life of Jonathan King he has unwisely decided to adopt the role of wronged tragic hero. Emerging from prison on parole after serving three-and-a-half years for indulging in sexual activity with boys aged as young as 13, he compared himself with Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson, Michelangelo and Oscar Wilde. In a shameless attempt to curry sympathy Mr King has conducted a no-holds-barred campaign via his website and telephone calls to the media. He has written hundreds of letters to everyone from the Prime Minister to the royals as well as cultivating intense friendships with people as unlikely as veteran Observer interviewer Lynn Barber, certainly not a woman I would like to cross swords with, and (unlike Mr King) I've never packed a flight bag with questionnaires about sex and naked pictures of myself and gone cruising about in a Rolls-Royce looking for boys under 16 to masturbate. If I were being really cruel I might think that Jonathan had applied his undoubtedly successful "grooming" techniques in nurturing his relationship with Ms Barber, especially in the period after her husband died and she was, not surprisingly, grief-stricken.

1065 AND ALL THAT: DAVE'S BOOK OF DATES

David Cameron has been criticised for a string of factual errors – from the date the US entered the Second World War to Iran's nuclear capability. David Randall imagines how the PM might tell the story of the past 2,000 years

Sunday, 8 August 2010

1895 Oscar Wilde jailed He went to prison, so I'm told, for being a smart Alec. No one likes a smart Alec. While there, he wrote "The Ballad of Reading Gaol", a popular song.

KANYE WEST FOLLOWS ONLY ONE – BUT WHO IS STEVEN OF COVENTRY?

By Jerome Taylor

Monday, 2 August 2010

Making friends on Twitter can often be a thankless task.

You might be the 21st century's Oscar Wilde, with an acerbic wit of such magnitude that you can distil the world into razor-sharp aphorisms of just 140 characters. But unless you have people "following" you, no one will even know you exist.

But every so often someone gets lucky through the medium of a whopping celebrity endorsement. That's exactly what happened this weekend to Steven Holmes from Coventry, who saw his Twitter followers jump from just 60 to more than 1,200 people in the space of a few hours.

What could have provoked such a sudden outpouring of amicability? Look no further than Kanye West, who has kept an uncharacteristically low profile since his embarrassing faux pas at the MTV awards in New York last September. Midway through Taylor Swift's acceptance speech for Best Female Video, the American hip-hop star jumped on to the stage to tell the young country singer that Beyoncé should have won instead.

Mr West has a new album to publicise, and what better way than to sign up with Twitter for the first time? (So far he has racked up 350,000 followers in just four days).

But the famously outspoken singer has also taken time out to indulge in a little cyber-altruism by making Mr Holmes his first – and so far only – Twitter friend.

That has, in turn, made Mr Holmes a very popular person (and a punching bag for a select number of furious Kanye West fans who are outraged he was chosen instead of them).

Exactly why Mr West picked Mr Holmes is a mystery. When the man from Coventry tweeted back to his newly found friend, "Holy s**t bro, thx for following!" the rap star replied: "You are the chosen one dun dun dun dun," but gave no further clues.

Like all prophets who have had fame thrust upon them, Mr Holmes is now trying to adjust to the demands of his new audience.

"I feel pressure to say amusing and witty tweets now that @kanyewest is following," was an update at 7am on Saturday morning from a man whose tweets over the previous few hours had included the information that his iTunes wasn't working properly, that the sound quality of Spotify was often "craaaaap", and that it was raining.

Mr West soon moved to shore up his friend, replying: "Tweet strong young man tweet strong!!!"

Since acquiring his new followers, Mr Holmes has treated them to pearls of wisdom such as: "If abuse is love then I've never felt more loved", "feeling hungover and I wasn't even drunk last night," and the news that he had the band Kasabian playing on his stereo at 2:18pm yesterday. He declined a request by The Independent yesterday for an interview, saying things had got "just too weird".

But if fame is something Mr Holmes may take a while to get used to, for Mr West the oxygen of publicity is what keeps his highly successful career going – despite a rather public downfall last year after the Taylor Swift incident. Following his rant against MTV's judges (Beyoncé made it up to Taylor Swift by bringing her back on stage after she won an award) West went on The Jay Leno Show to make a tearful apology, and said he would take some time off.

But now it looks as though the 33-year-old rapper, who is already a prominent blogger, is back to generate as much publicity as possible before his album's launch, and has chosen social networking as the way to do it.

Last week the singer went on a whirlwind tour of "surprise visits" to staff at the offices of Twitter and Facebook, and at the headquarters of magazines Rolling Stone and XXL.

All of which is rather surprising, considering that last year the rapper launched a blistering attack on Twitter when he discovered that a number of impostors were pretending to be him.

"Don't have a f***** Twitter," he wrote on his blog. "Why would I use Twitter??? I only blog five per cent of what I'm up to in the first place. I'm actually slow delivering content because I'm too busy actually busy being creative most of the time, and if I'm not and I'm just laying on a beach I wouldn't tell the world. Everything that Twitter offers, I need less of."

Clearly the rap star's views have changed now that he has got his own Twitter account. Not that Mr

Holmes will mind.

OSCAR WILDE AND THE CANDLELIGHT MURDERS, BY GYLES BRANDRETH

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/oscar-wilde-and-the-candlelight-murders-by-gyles-brandreth-448671.html>
Time: 03:43

I like a well-endowed monkey, don't you?

By Matthew Sweet

Sunday, 13 May 2007

Obliging fellow, Oscar Wilde. Like those bendy chaps in the Karma Sutra, he'll assume any position you like. When Terry Eagleton wrote his play *St Oscar*, Wilde became an Irish nationalist with a thing for critical theory. When Ken Russell put *Salome* on the big screen, Wilde became a goggle-eyed leech who liked watching young ladies gobble bananas. When the former Radio 1 DJ Mike Read turned the playwright's life into a stage musical that closed after one performance, Wilde became a lyric genius nobody truly understood. (The extent of Mike's genius was demonstrated by his decision to rhyme *Speranza* - Lady Wilde's *nom-de-guerre* - with *influenza*.)

So should we be surprised that the Oscar Wilde conjured in a novel by Gyles Brandreth talks like a man booked to be amusing before an break on *Countdown*? Probably not. In Brandreth's version of 1880s literary London, most people sound as if they're vamping just before a commercial for orthopaedic baths.

The *Candlelight Murders* offers itself as a thriller "in the tradition of Arthur Conan Doyle". True, Conan Doyle is a player in the plot - a locked-room mystery involving a rent boy, a razor blade, a severed head and a lot of spent wicks. But Brandreth breaks some of the rules of detective fiction established by Doyle, such as not giving the hero access to information denied to the reader. More disruptively, the book threatens on

almost every page to reveal its secret identity as a toilet-side compendium of quotations.

So the settling of bills is discussed, and Wilde declares that it is only by not paying them that one can hope to live in the memory of the commercial classes. Somebody hints that the playwright is capricious, and Wilde replies that consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative. A glass of champagne is refilled, and Wilde declares that work is the curse of the drinking classes. Then one of the other characters - Doyle or Inspector Fraser of Scotland Yard, or the journalist Robert Sherard, reincarnated by Brandreth as Oscar's Watson - will say something along the lines of, "you never cease to surprise me, Mr Wilde." It takes over 250 pages for someone to tell him to shut his face.

When Brandreth allows himself room to create his own gags, he's often very funny. For example, Gerard Bellotti - a pimp who sits in the primate house at Regent's Park spitting peanut shells into the cages and exclaiming, "I like a well-endowed monkey, don't you?" - is the author's creation, and it shows.

Elsewhere, though, Brandreth overexerts himself as he tries to cram Wilde's best quips into the text and squeeze the murder-plot into gaps between documented events in the biographies of his real-life characters, and that makes his deviations from established history all the more puzzling. Sherlock Holmes's debut, *A Study in Scarlet*, did not, as Brandreth's Wilde enthuses, "cause a sensation." Its failure to do so was a matter of some regret to Conan Doyle. Perhaps Brandreth couldn't bear to admit a character into his narrative guilty of a crime so dreary as writing a book that nobody wanted to read.

STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF THE RENAISSANCE, BY WALTER PATER

URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/studies-in-the-history-of-the-renaissance-by-walter-pater-2033017.html>
Time: 03:46

Reviewed by Christopher Hirst

Friday, 23 July 2010

If he is remembered at all, Pater is known for his influence on Oscar Wilde. In his introduction to this "incendiary" text of 1873, Matthew Beaumont describes it as being seen in the "bourgeois imagination" as "the literary equivalent of Zuleika Dobson".

It is hard today to see how Pater's book was regarded as a fatal temptation towards limp-wristed aestheticism, though it has many arresting passages. Of Botticelli's Venus, Pater ponders, "You might think that the sorrow in her face was at the thought of the whole long day of love to come."

But not everything in Pater is ethereal. We learn that his most famous phrase, "to burn with this hard gem-like flame [is success in life]", derived from an article entitled about chemistry.