



ORDER OF THE DAY



THURSDAY 12TH JUNE

In the Marquee

11:00 ~ 11:50 *Anton Gill*

Art Lover - The Life & Times of Peggy Guggenheim.
Introduced by John Baxter. In English with bilingual Q&A.

12:00 ~ 12:50 *Alicia Drake*

After The Beautiful Fall: Lagerfeld, Saint Laurent,
and Glorious Excess in 1970s Paris.
Introduced by Heather Hartley. In English with bilingual Q&A.

13:00 ~ 13:50 *Télé-Michel Kpomassie*

An African in Greenland.
Introduced by Chip Martin. In English with bilingual Q&A.

14:00 ~ 14:50 *Blake Morrison*

Life Writing and Remembered Lives.
In English.

15:00 ~ 15:50 *Carolyn Burke*

Biography and Serendipity: In Edith Piaf's Footsteps.
Introduced by Chip Martin. In English.

16:00 ~ 16:50 *Jung Chang*

My Personal Journey Towards
the Understanding of Mao.
Introduced by Janine di Giovanni. In English.

17:15 ~ 18:30

Jeanette Winterson and Diana Souhami in conversation.

Orlando, The Well of Loneliness and The Ladies Almanack.
In English.

Books are available for purchase at Shakespeare & Company and in French at the independent French bookseller stand outside square René Viviani. There will be a signing by authors following most Festival events.

THE GAZETTE

festivalandco 

René Viviani before the marquee

...The low sun, mounting, splinters the square into amber shards... Sparrows dip between trees on lax lines, or land, and hop about on matchstick legs... A babe, bewitched by Gaia, pulls at grass and turns up soil with blunt fingers as Mother, coldly oblivious, yaps into her phone... A banking Suit on a concrete bench, lacquered shoes by his side, neatly balled socks. Bare toes working the dust... The perfume of damp earth on the air, mingles with soot and with medicine... Old Beard-Wearer peers into a bottle, the coarse contents ribboned like moonshine. His eyes catch fire, electric blue! Another slug... Young flames descant in couplets, and rhyme because they love and love because they rhyme... Zephyrus steals a passing read from a softback's aged, sallow leaves, while its master dreams...

...Somewhere, a dog barks...

*(Real lives caught on site
a week before the festival.)*

real lives

EXPLORING MEMOIR AND BIOGRAPHY

*opens its
tent flaps*

“ ... ”

John Baxter: For a
biographer the facts can
be rather inconvenient.

Written for Festival & Co. by
Adam Biles. A collection featuring
his work
The Place In Which We Find Ourselves
is available instore.

Don't Confuse Biography With The Truth

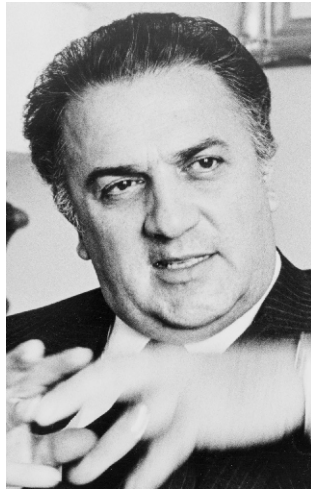
John Baxter Muddies The Water

John Baxter: film critic, biographer, ubiquitous festival participant and, as I'm discovering, ebullient raconteur, is holding forth in his Paris flat. The elegant coincidence of its location – in the very building in which Sylvia Beach made her home – is not lost on this compulsive bibliophile, whose collection of almost ten thousand books is stored in a garage elsewhere in the city. Indeed coincidence is not something that Baxter underrates; for without it his first biography would have turned out very differently. The story – for, as might be expected from such a prolific biographer and memoirist, there is *always* a story with Baxter – runs like this. Having moved to Paris in 1989, after suffering a *coup de foudre* for Marie-Dominique, a French journalist who would become his wife, he was stuck for ideas about how to earn a living. Encouraged by Marie-Dominique he decided to attempt a biography of Fellini...

Fellini

“...and she said: Well, where was Fellini born? Rimini, I said. Now, that was pretty much all I knew about him, at the time. That and that he then lived in Rome. So she said the first thing to do would be to go to Rimini, and I agreed. Then she said: Well... are we doing anything else? She meant *right away*. So we drove down and the next evening we were in Rimoni, which in February is just desolate. However, because no-one there was expecting us, we met a lot of people who knew Fellini, including

his sister, and she gave me his phone number in Rome. After I had done my research I went to Rome and rang him up and got to know him. At first I felt he was throwing every possible barrier in my way – holidays, a new film, a hospital visit – and I thought it wasn't going to happen. Anyway, a little later after meeting his former secretary – an unfrocked Jesuit, just the sort of man you would expect Fellini to employ – I asked the concierge of my hotel to



Fellini. Not Baxter

recommend a place to eat and he suggested I go to Prati, and wrote down a few names. So I got a cab, arrived there at about twelve fifteen and the restaurant was almost totally empty except for two people... and one of them was Fellini! I sort of leapt on him babbling about my project, and he said: Oh you're the chap that rang me. Well, let's get together. Shall we meet tomorrow for coffee? And he was extraordinary, all because of this belief in the idea of

synchronicity. By the end I had fallen under the spell of his world view – his Jungian view – that everything happens for a reason. I have to say, that our encounter exactly parallels that.”

Man Bites Biographer

Baxter's manner, one suspects, would change little whether he was addressing an audience or indulging in postprandial badinage with close friends. He comes across as a kind of placid Rabelaisian, (if the jarring contradiction is permitted), as a man of quick but thoughtful wit. Indeed it can be difficult to imagine how such a talker finds time to research and write as much as he does. In addition to Fellini he has taken on Bunuel, Kubrick, Spielberg and George Lucas, among many others, and has published two volumes of memoirs with a third due out this Autumn. His main event at the festival on Sunday, Man Bites Biographer, concerns the pitfalls of biography writing. Pitfalls he knows very well:

“There's a whole range of things that can go wrong, from falling in love with your subject, which is not rare, all the way through to your subject wanting to kill you. That's the more common of the two. One of the biggest problems, of course, is authorised versus unauthorised. My feeling is that if the subject agrees to talk – unless it's a bizarre situation, like me with Fellini – they normally

want to approve the text, and that's a nightmare. I take the line that I would rather have my book authorised by the first wife than by the subject, because it's always the first wife that gets removed. I don't mind talking to the people provided it's done on the understanding that they don't get to read it.” Generally, then, he won't approach his subjects, but will talk extensively with the various actors in their lives. At times they can be unwilling to cooperate, at other times – like in the case of Kubrick's associates – all too willing. Extensive research naturally yields a wealth of information, and one of the most difficult things can be deciding what goes in and how.

“Anything can go in as long as you can prove it – which does limit you somewhat because there are enormous amounts of things which you can't really confirm. If you can't prove it, then you have to decide whether you hint at it, or whether you just publish it and be damned. A well known biographer once told me he had been writing a book about a former American president and had pretty much established that this guy had an illegitimate son. The problem was, if he published this information, every review would have started with: Wow! It turns out that X had an illegitimate son, and all the other research would have just been ignored. So you have to decide if you want to overbalance your book with a lot of that kind of material.”

Surely you also have to decide how much you fancy being sued? “True, though I've never actually been sued, not successfully. I've been threatened with plenty of suits. The only time I have been to court is for a magazine piece I wrote about Raymond Rohauer, the film distributor. Of course, all of what I wrote later turned out to be true. He sued me for sixty-something

million dollars. It was thrown out of court but it was a pretty worrying moment. I've never been sued over a book though.”

True Lies

In defiance of much of the diverse and laudatory puff that often welcomes the publication of a biography – tag lines such as “the definitive account” or “the truth at last” – Baxter is more circumspect.

“You can't confuse a biography with the truth. A biography is a story about a real person. It has to obey the rules of



John Baxter

all fiction. It has have a beginning and an end, a hero, a heroine and a villain. Who you choose to be your hero, heroine and villain is up to you, but that will shape the book. It won't be true. The facts will be true, but there will be a lot of simplifications, falsifications, sometimes outright lies if you really become obsessed with the character. An example: Two biographies came out about Robert Graves at approximately the same time, and it was like

reading two different, but complimentary books. One told you about what a bastard he was with women and the other was more sympathetic. Neither of them was true.

“I was once hired by a millionaire to turn his life into a novel. Half a dozen copies for his children and grandchildren, that was all, he didn't want it published. There was one big problem though – you realise that a life is not a novel. At every point I wanted to make it a little more like a novel and he would say: No, that's not what happened. Sometimes for a biographer the facts can be rather inconvenient.”

John Baxter will be introducing Anton Gill today, introducing Alistair Horne and participating in the PEN event tomorrow, and delivering his talk “Man Bites Biographer” on Sunday.

Robert Skidelsky: *America & Empire*
The New York Review of Books
FICTION ISSUE
Jonathan Raban:
Jonathan Updike's 'Terrorist'
How to Read Beckett
Jim Hansen:
THE THREAT TO THE PLANET
John Acocella: 'Beware of Pity'
Darryl Pinckney:
'Dancing in the Dark'
Sanford Schwartz:
The Best of Ingres

The *Festival and Co.* team are very grateful to the good people at *The New York Review of Books* for all their support during the organisation of this year's event. We would like to remind our visitors that copies of the latest edition are available in the shop. Thanks.