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Who's Afraid of the Booker Prize?

author

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Chapter 1

Whether Zob really intended the commemoration of John Andrew Glaze's death, and a celebration of his life, is even now open to question. A great deal went against it as a project, whose demands should have been eased through Zob's own profession - though that in itself is complicated. By whatever chance or accident, those of us at work on the 'inside' - so to speak in the boardroom of English letters - have come to know Marshall Zob as wholly constructed, borne up on the vanes and those many social wing beats first tested by his father - by Zob Snr - two men inclined to act according to the scale of likely reward.

Worse still for me has been Zob Jnr's personal weather map, his London clouds - I mean his sullen brown drizzles - and at certain other times his tumble of intoxicated sunbeams, all bound up with his flight up the fastseller charts. This has made his home - or rather my former place of work - unpredictable atmospherically.

Astonishing, no - but it *is* ironic that Glaze should come under my pen, an instrument I'd hoped to keep free of any such taint. By contrast this is so unlike the golden quill the mercenary Zob is obliged to wield - this by his family's rules of fortune - practically every working day of his life, in a padded cell. In just that ramble through another man's life (and death) is an often unbearable strain on my nib, host to all kinds of opposing forces. This is the point, the sore point, that I note even now.

Do I feel embarrassment, discomfort, shame, when what I have come to spawn, under the privacy of my editorial lamp, is the full revelation of not just any old diary, but *my* diary (excerpts below)? That document of course I kept for scrupulously professional reasons, by which I mean it is not my fault that it tends as its seed the full and vulgar exposé. Plus there has also been the problem: how to contend with the sheer ineptitude of John Andrew Glaze's death....

My name I shall hardly need to stress is Alistair Wye. Apart from having been informed, by a certain ill-dressed inhabitant of a certain misty purple moor, that numerologically this is a sign of passion - that's to say my name in its numerical transposition - I have been, and I admit laboriously, Zob's amanuensis. Marshall Zob, should this not already be known to you, is the perfection of the dead Andrew Glaze, PhD, whose brightest student he was. This was way back in the early 1970s, in the cloisters of ModernCollege, ExeUniversity, where the writer and academic, and incidentally Blagueur Prize-winner (twice), the witty Zob Snr, had passed before him - many years ago.

So. Gloves are off. I shall refute mythologies. Shall prick that iridescent bubble, a falsified lament over Glaze's death. Shall go on saying that this has been no loss, a passing that hardly caused me to put down my coffee cup, or extinguish my cigarette.

I drove Zob, in Zob's silver Mercedes, to the stone parish outside Exe, while over preceding nights I had smiled patiently at his oration, which somehow he always managed to rehearse with a straight face. The priest, a man in a newly ironed cassock, I recall beamed throughout, and remarked of Glaze what bookish soil that gifted peasant had tilled, in a slightly sanified reference to the proletarian origins of a leading academic. Zob, whose pallor through recent small-hours liaisons I

should describe as aghast, had reached that point in his 'literary' success of luring a fabulous procession of womanhood into his Hampstead lair. One, a red-haired girl of twenty, less than half the litterateur's age, sought his assistance in finding a publisher for a thinnish collection of poems. It meant that she, like me, had the pleasure of his funeral oration, though unlike me tested the tog of his duvet. Her night-long amplitude dispatched Zob throughout the next morning to the first, then to the second, then to the third bathroom, I later deduced in search of that cream, potion or palliative for his poor sore phallus. His redhead had tongued, petted, squeezed, caressed - once too often.

I slipped away before Zob's last farewell, and with the engine running warmed up the Mercedes. By now I was pretty well versed in that mendacious act over Glaze's mortal remains, so soon to be incinerated. Zob commended his fumes to the cosmos, assured of the 'greatness' of his achievement, for had he not laid down his lucid path, through 'a continent of English culture', for less certain feet to tread.... Perhaps depressingly that was so, though I cannot be fagged to talk about it now, for here should end the life, work and attainments of John Andrew Glaze, whose second journey in a void I should much rather contemplate across the street, in the Forces Inn, where I could weep into some lovely local beer.

Therefore in some sense our latest Zob masterpiece - a novel he has tactfully called *Gimme the Cash* - is overshadowed by the demise of his distinguished tutor of Exe, a man wholly without insight. May the Lord protect his soul.

(By the way, Merle, what did you think of that capon?)

...excerpt...

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