



## CHOICE WORDS Just Jeffrey

**Jeffrey Archer, is one of Britain's best-known authors, politicians and tabloid stars. Chris Granlund went to his Thameside apartment to investigate his reading habits**

To be honest I don't remember being taught to read. My mother was a very keen reader. I think she taught me. Her favourite was always Jane Austen. We already took *The Daily Mail* in those days. I don't think that's changed except that it was a great big broadsheet then. I started reading the newspapers at boarding school when I was 13. We were allowed one each and I read *The Daily Mail*.

I was mad about *Just William* by Richmal Crompton. That's my first memory of doing a whole book on my own. I was about eight. I thought he was an evil little Turk. And I suppose I thought I was a bit like him. Yes, I did identify with him and his surroundings, although / was an only child. I loved the idea of his sister having boyfriends and everything going wrong and William getting in the way and being a menace and not understanding that women were beautiful creatures and treating them as menaces that had been placed on earth to get in his way. I liked that very much indeed. It was a theme that ran through every book but I always enjoyed it. The Arthur Ransome books were always about as well. They're sort of children's travel books ... very popular at the time. I

don't look at those books anymore now but I do read what I call grown-up children's books. I've recently read *Through The Looking Glass*.

I take *The Times*, *Independent*, *Telegraph*, *Mail* and *Express* and get through them all before breakfast, between 6:30 and 7:30. I skim read them but if there's an important political story or a feature article that is going to be informative, then I read that slowly and carefully. On Sundays I take *The Sunday Times*, *Sunday Telegraph*, *Mail on Sunday* and *Sunday Express*. I usually start reading at about 9:00 when the papers arrive and it'll be over by 11:00.

Of course one does read the tabloids because one comes across them, but they're not on order. If I go to someone else's home or to a club or if I'm waiting somewhere ... railway stations, I can't resist picking them up and seeing what they're on about. I definitely fall very much into that category. No, I didn't make a special effort to read them when I was regularly featured in them. Not at all.

I like *Time*, it's still the best weekly. I also take the *London Illustrated News* and *Punch* but I have a tendency just to glance through them. I haven't gone in for many of the modern ones. There are so many of them now, you look on the news-stands and there's an acre of modern magazines. Staggering. I'd never come across *Marxism Today* before. No. Never. I've now glanced through some copies and I saw that Edwina was there ... she wasn't the only Conservative. I think that would have been impossible some years ago. I should hate to see anything like that suppressed. Nobody actually objects to views as long as they're out in the open and honest. You should say in *Marxism Today* whatever you like, in *Fascism Today* whatever you like ... Let people judge for themselves. There should be no censorship. Now, pornography is something quite different. One must be very careful with pornography because of the young. Soft

porn bestsellers? Well, they're rubbish aren't they? But they don't do any harm.

I have lots of books here, art books mainly, which I love. I'm mad about art. I buy a lot of books for myself. I bought two today. The Kingsley Amis and the Mortimer which I will take to the Olympics with me. They're not long novels. I looked at all the new ones. The last lengthy book I read was Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire Of Vanities*. An outstanding book. I'd particularly like to recommend *The Captain And The Enemy* by Graham Greene (Reinhardt £10.95). It's just so beautifully written. It's almost a novella, more of a character study than a novel. I greatly admire him. He's certainly the greatest living author. I can only say that he has shown me what one should be aiming at as a writer, and made one realise that it's impossible because he's in a different class.

I don't read in bed. I tend to



watch *Newsnight*, which I like immensely, it's my favourite programme. Yes, television is an alternative to reading but of course book sales are up on 10 years ago! Books are still popular. People have got more money and more leisure time so they can take television and books. Mary and I recently went on holiday in America and came back on the QE2. It was a wonderful chance to read. We both read two books in\* five days. In the future? I intend to continue writing but most of my life is spent as a politician, going around the country supporting the Party. I don't think that will change. •

## Bookdata

**Much Ado About Bill: The Earl of Oxford will question the authorship of Shakespeare's works in a televised trial this autumn. Peter Levi, Oxford's professor of poetry and author of *The Life And Times Of William Shakespeare* (Macmillan £16.95), describes the Earl's claims as an 'insubstantial fantasy' typical of the 'mad fringe which gathers around Shakespeare scholarship.'** Levi, who attributed some new verses to Shakespeare while researching his book earlier this year, is confident that he can also reveal the identity of Shakespeare's next-door neighbours. But does any of it really matter? Terry Eagleton, recently granted Oxford's first lectureship in critical theory, thinks not. He is not surprised that such 'old style issues raise their head just at the time when doubts are being cast on the traditional approach to literature.' Unimpressed by obsessive concern with Shakespeare's life story, he also dismisses the Earl's campaign as the work of 'ridiculous people with nothing better to do'.

**Filo-Fay: After ring-bound condoms, road maps and accounts why not Filofiction? Eight bestsellers are now available for insertion into the filofax (Pyramid £4.95). They include a collection of Fay Weldon's short stories *Watching Me, Watching You* 'depicting modern women - their lives, their culture and their men'. The stories can be snapped into the modern reader's personal organiser. But who will buy them? 'Yuppies of course!', she explains, 'Watch out for Porsches at traffic lights, drivers hurriedly reading another instalment. It's very practical.' And what effect will this new medium have on fictional form? 'We may all end up writing specially for filofax. It could lead to a revival of the Dickensian serialised novel - lots of short episodes with cliff-hanger endings.' This might shake us out of the current trend towards sedate and introverted fiction. •**