

## Hot type

The deals, steals and snubs from the world of books

Today Richard and Judy reveal their eight "summer reads", with viewers choosing their "most riveting" at the end of August. Books is rooting for *Salmon Fishing in the Yamen*, Paul Torday's comic first novel. In an interview he told us of an unlikely influence — the Hutton report. "I thought a pastiche of that would be rather a good way forward."

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There is writing novels, and being a fiction brand. Margaret Atwood, novelist. Katie Price (Jordan), brand. That is the context for the announcement this week that Kerry Katona is to be "a major fiction brand" for Ebury Press. Her three-novel series — "a fantastic blend of *Footballers' Wives* and *Shameless*" — begins this autumn.

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The Newham Bookshop has become a staging post for prizewinners. Zadie Smith and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the past two winners of the Orange Prize, appeared at the East London shop before their victories. Peter Hennessey, another guest, will look to continue the run on Monday, when he is up for the BBC Four Samuel Johnson Prize.

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Our boys took a lot of positives, but no silverware, from the Writers' World Cup, losing to a "really flukey" Italian goal in injury time, and again, two hours later, to a "fresh" Hungary team. But they did beat Denmark 2-0. Result, fifth out of six: "Not great on paper, but spiritually comforting." Sweden won for the second year running.

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The latest Oprah Book Club choice is Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*. Marking the honour is a new edition with an "Oprah" sticker replacing a far less prestigious boast. That said merely: "Winner of the Pulitzer Prize."

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At BookExpo Canada this month children's booksellers revealed the tricks of their trade. One admitted telling parents: "I love this book, but it's really for gifted children." **NICHOLAS CLEE**

# Still living for the city, 18 years on

The residents of Barbary Lane are back, now grappling with Aids, growing up and families. Armistead Maupin tells **Tim Teeman** about the return of *Tales of the City*

THIRTY PAGES FROM THE END of *Michael Tolliver Lives*, a stray tear bubbles up. I am not alone. Sir Ian McKellen told Armistead Maupin that he "giggled and blubbed all the way through it". One friend took a picture of himself crying and sent it to Maupin. "I try to balance comedy and pathos," Maupin says in his beguiling Southern drawl. "Like Wilkie Collins said, 'Make 'em laugh. Make 'em cry. Make 'em wait.'"

Maupin has certainly made us wait for the seventh in his successful *Tales of the City* series. It's been 18 years since *Sure of You*, the sixth and, it was assumed, final chapter in the deliciously soapy lives of Michael, Mona, Mrs Madrigal, Brian and Mary Ann. Maupin's tale of San Francisco life started as a newspaper column in 1976 and followed the residents of that bewitching oasis 28 Barbary Lane through Aids, romance, body-swapping, betrayal, and so many outrageous, convoluted plots that it made *Dynasty* look like *Postman Pat*.

They were utterly radical in their portrayal of gay rights and relationships, transsexualism, Aids — but Maupin's skill is to never write about issues, but people; warmth, humour and melodrama always come before, but never obscure, overt politicking.

*Michael Tolliver Lives* is a departure of sorts: it's written exclusively from the point of view of Michael, or Mouse as he is known. The outrageousness is down a notch. It isn't particularly soapy, but Michael is settled with a younger partner, Ben; he's still a gardener, the other characters return, including that most regal of landladies Mrs Madrigal. In this book, more so than before, Maupin interrogates gay coupledom and gay men's relationships with their families.

"I whitewashed my family's supposed so-called acceptance of me," Maupin says. "That notion they 'for-

gave' me but never accepted me." Family, he makes clear, can be about a lot more than biological relations.

Michael is now in his mid-fifties and, thanks to the drug combinations available these days, living with Aids. "Instinctively I wanted to write a gay male *Mrs Miniver*, the minutiae of gay life with Michael Tolliver as the observer," Maupin says. "The longer the writing went on, the more insistent the other characters became. They auditioned one by one, demanding to be let back into the fold."

It is a responsibility, given people's attachment to the books, to return to *Tales*, I say. Maupin responds sharply: "My only responsibility is to the characters. If readers come along for the ride, then fine." He clearly feels protective and proprietorial towards his cast; *Tales* characters have popped up in his two non-*Tales* novels, *Maybe the Moon* and *The Night Listener* (filmed starring Robin Williams).

The last was gruelling to write and watch, as it focused on the break-up between Maupin and his long-term partner Terry Anderson. He intimates that today the men — after maintaining contact after the break-up — are no longer friends.

Maupin became a writer after reading English at university and serving briefly in the military. "My father wanted me to be a lawyer," he told me once. But Maupin preferred Fellini double bills to lectures and moved to San Francisco in 1971. The *Tales* characters are not based on real people but "inner drives and aspects of myself", he once said — "Mary-Ann my ambition, Mona my world-weariness. Michael was a romantic, Brian the sexual predator. Mrs Madrigal was the wiser me."

Mrs Madrigal has a real life forebear, Maupin's maternal grandmother, Marguerite Smith Barton. "She was a suffragette in 1913 and a theoso-

phist, palm reader and vegetarian." At 14, Maupin remembers he and his grandmother seeing a woman "looking like a giant pink powder puff tottering along in high heels. My grandmother said, 'Any woman who is all woman, or any man who is all man, is a complete monster — unfit for human company'. That was radical back then."

Maupin is an autobiographical writer; even if not all the events in *Tales* actually happened, the emotional journey of Michael is one that he has undergone: the churchy, Southern upbringing, coming out, living as part of a generation devastated by Aids. "I plunder what I have going on in my life and put it into fiction," he says. "I can't think of any major confessions I've left out."

Readers tell him how "real" his fic-

## 'I plunder what is going on in my life and put it into fiction'

tion seems, although he needs to take long breaks between books, to "fill up the tank" of experience again.

Michael speaks with Maupin's voice, although Maupin is not HIV positive. For three years, he has been happily settled with Christopher Turner who, at 35, is almost 30 years Maupin's junior and is HIV positive. "I met Chris on the street as Michael meets Ben. Chris runs a website called daddyhunt.com which is geared to gay men over 40 and their admirers and contains mostly younger men looking for old. I'd seen his picture on daddyhunt. Then I saw him on 18th Street in the Castro (San Francisco's gay area) and said, 'Didn't I see you on a website?' and he said, 'I am the website' — he owned it."

In the book, Michael and Ben are smug-marrieds, although Maupin hopes the reader "doesn't drown in treacle. But Michael's suffered enough, I was ready for him to be joyful. He is essentially who I am and I think I am relatively optimistic."

Like Michael and Ben, he and Turner are very happy, although, as in the book, that happiness is predicated on absolute honesty — they are not sexually monogamous and when Turner occasionally has sex with another guy, Maupin (like Michael) does find himself at home, drumming his fingers, wondering who he's met.

"Chris is very sweet. He'll come in and sweetly deny the sex was that good. Our love is deeper than sexual fidelity. What we have is far beyond an individual orgasm. I feel extraordinari-

ly blessed to wake up every morning in love with the person next to me."

Maupin grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina, and Turner is a Southern boy from Nutbush, Tennessee — probably, notes Maupin, the only place in the South to have a highway named after a black woman (Tina Turner). "He took me home for Christmas last year," Maupin says. "It was OK. Southerners are quite sweet" — a slightly rueful pause — "to your face." It might have been odd for Turner, Maupin laughs, to reflect on his partner being a year older than his father.

"I'm on a number of old-age meds," he laughs, "Lipitor to cut down my cholesterol and Viagra to keep my pecker up." Ageing is such a thorny issue for gay men, he laughs: "Forty is considered over the hill."

In the book, Michael's mother is seriously ill. Maupin lost his father the summer before last. "He connected with Christopher and told him, 'Take care of that boy' — which is an odd thing for a 92-year-old to say to a 34-year-old about his 62-year-old son," Maupin says. "I don't think he was ready to leave and it was terribly sad. One night, we were sitting on the sofa and I went over and kissed him on his cheek. 'Remember that?' I asked him. I did that every Saturday after an episode of *Guns, Smoke*, which we both loved, before I went to bed."

Maupin says that there will be more *Tales of the City*. He has decided to write an eighth book: Michael again will be the narrator and it may include at least a partial return to the multi-stranded form of the earlier *Tales*. So expect more confessions "from the front line", as he puts it, "even as I stare into the abyss."

Maupin laughs as he says this, although he admits to hating "the notion of my own non-existence but not afraid of the act itself, unless it happens on a windy mountain road."

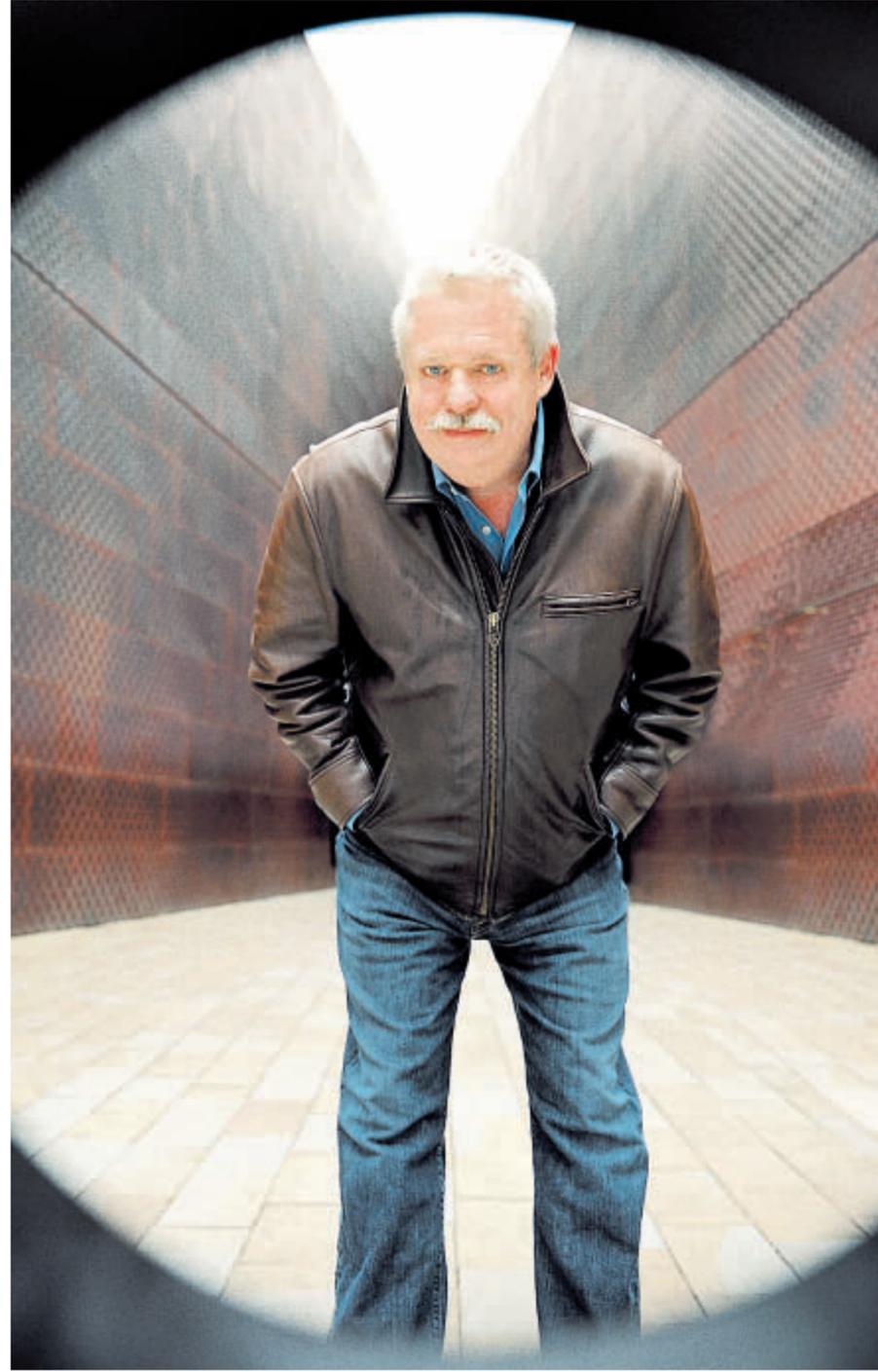
This is pertinent: the day after we speak it is Maupin's 64th birthday and he and Turner are off to their new place in the mountains outside Markleeville, in California's least-populated area, Alpine County. "In the 1970s the Gay Liberation Front had a plan to populate Alpine County," he says. "We're the second wave."

"Mr Markleeville invented the toll bridge 150 years ago you know," he tells me, "and he got shot for it." A great one for stories, Armistead Maupin.

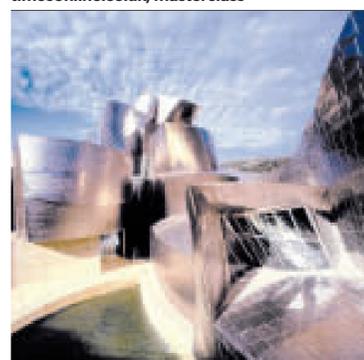
### MICHAEL TOLLIVER LIVES

by Armistead Maupin  
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## Meet the legendary Sydney Pollack

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Throughout his career, Sydney Pollack has been a major force in the movie industry. From early classics like *The Swimmer*, through hits such as *Tootsie* and *Out of Africa* to the present day, he has produced a hugely influential body of work.

His new film, *Sketches of Frank Gehry* (released on June 29), is a revealing portrait of his great friend.

## Writing's on the wall for Joyce landmark

As *Ulysses*-lovers celebrate Bloomsday, **Brenda Maddox** considers the fate of an iconic piece of Dublin architecture

AS THE DUBLIN OF James Joyce disappears under an avalanche of skyscrapers and sushi bars, one ghostly relic survives like a message from the past. High on the gable-end of a red-brick building overlooking Trinity College, large painted letters proclaim Finn's Hotel. The sign (left, with its now faded lettering enhanced to make it readable) advertises the dingy hotel on South Leinster Street where Nora Barnacle, red-haired and 20, worked as a chambermaid in 1904, when she was courted by the 22-year-old Joyce.

Their first date was 103 years ago today. Joyce considered it the turning point of his life, so much so that he set the entire action of his great novel *Ulysses* on June 16, 1904. Joyce-lovers around the world now celebrate June 16 as "Bloomsday".

The name "Finn's", with its echoes of the legendary Celtic hero Finn MacCool, burnt itself into Joyce's consciousness. He wove it into the title of his final book, *Finnegans Wake*.

Joyce often came to Finn's Hotel to collect Nora in the summer of 1904. They were in love, and she had agreed to leave Ireland with him. But, as she later told a friend, when he entered the hotel, shabbily dressed in canvas shoes and an old yachting cap, she wondered if she was right to entrust herself to him. But she did. As they left Dublin by boat on October 8, 1904, one of her main thoughts was of what people at the hotel would say when they found out that she had gone.

Five years later, when they were settled in Trieste where Joyce taught English, he returned to Ireland with some businessmen to found Ireland's first cinema. Without explanation, he booked the men in to Finn's Hotel. It had not changed. "The place is very Irish," he wrote to Nora. "The disorder of the table was Irish."

Missing her, he was moved to tears by the sight of the room. In his emotional letter, he told Nora how he pictured her as she had been in 1904, "standing silently by the fire, or gazing out of the window across the misty college park".



The building ceased to be a hotel and the sign was obscured by branches of the trees in the college park. David Norris, an Irish Senator, claims to have been the first to decipher the words Finn's Hotel behind the foliage. He says that he showed Richard Ellmann, Joyce's biographer, a photograph of the sign, which Ellmann included in the revised 1982 edition of his biography of Joyce.

In time Trinity College came to own the five-storey building. Recently, however, Trinity sold it, along with several others, to the Dublin Dental College. The Dental College has just appointed the Dublin architects McCullough Mulvin to redesign the upper floors, paying special attention to preserving and possibly enhancing the lettering. But how to protect an al-fresco icon? It is a difficult assignment. Repainting the words would take away their charm, yet time and the weather must take a toll.

Half a million visitors a year jostle past the Trinity railings to see the Book of Kells. They would be well advised to turn away from the tourist shops and to raise their eyes and cameras for a good look at Finn's Hotel while it is still there.

### ULYSSES

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