

Francis Plug

How To Be A Public Author

Kazuo Ishiguro surprises me by extending his hand. Although a pro of the public author circuit, it's a rather amateur mistake. Anyone who's seen a televised 'Slam Down' title will know all too well of the naïve opponent handshake.

by
Paul Ewen

GALLEY BEGgar BRITAIN

Francis Plug: How To Be A Public Author

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In the most controversial year in the history of the Man Booker Prize comes a book certain to add fuel to the fire. *How To Be A Public Author* will take the debate to another level. It will get everyone talking – and laughing – even more about Britain’s biggest annual book bonanza.

Francis Plug is a troubled and often drunk misfit who causes chaos and confusion wherever he goes – and where he most likes to go is to real author events, collecting signatures from the likes of Salman Rushdie, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Eleanor Catton.

As he adds to this collection of signed Booker first editions, Francis – a wannabe author himself – is also helpfully writing a self-help manual. This is devised with the novice writer in mind, and full of sage wisdom and useful tidbits to help ease freshly published novelists into the demands and rigors of author events, readings, and general life in the public eye.

So, “If you’re provided with a hands-free mic, clipped to your lapel, don’t forget to turn it off when you visit the toilet, or if you need to vomit before your event.” Likewise, it’s always good to be wary of the germs of fans – and “considering the use of elbow-length dishwashing gloves at book signings, and a large, easy-wipe kitchen apron.” And so too, cultivating a photographic ‘look’ for the many publicity shots you will be subjected to is also a good idea – Francis’s personal choice being that of Macaulay McCulkin in *Home Alone*.

With advice like this, and Francis’ warm and deranged personality, *How To Be A Public Author* will prove ESSENTIAL reading for anyone with an interest in the literary world.

How To Be A Public Author is a brilliant slapstick comedy, blurring fact and fantasy to astonishing effect, and it is also a surprising and touching meditation on loneliness and finding a place in the world. The Man Booker Prize becomes a springboard to explore what it means to be an author – and a human being – in the twenty-first century.

Francis Plug: How To Be A Public Author Details

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Author : Paul Ewen

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From Reader Review Francis Plug: How To Be A Public Author for online ebook

Michael Reffold says

Painfully unfunny and one-note.

Neil says

Upfront, I love Galley Beggar Press. Forbidden Line, We That Are Young, Tinderbox, Lucia, especially Lucia - just wonderful!

But sadly, I did not love Francis Plug. I decided to read this book because the next book in my Galley Beggar subscription will be Francis Plug's second outing. I now rather wish I hadn't bothered.

Plug is a fictional author created by real author Paul Ewen. He is an alcoholic and slightly autistic and he is writing a book that details his encounters with Booker Prize winning authors which he believes will prepare aspiring authors like him for life in the public eye. To help make ends meet, he also works as a gardener, mostly for a banker whose first editions of Booker winners he "borrows" to take to author events for them to be signed (with a dedication to Francis Plug, of course). The book includes pictures of signed pages of all the books: it is possible Ewen met these authors in character as Plug, but the details of the encounters cannot be true given what happens at some of them.

The scene is set for what could be a very funny book. And it seems, on a quick scan of reviews, that many people have found it funny. I think the only bit I laughed at was the person who knew the answer was Scooter towards the end of the book (not sure I should admit to being a Muppets fan). For the rest, I have to say that I don't find alcoholism funny. I kept reading hoping to find some point that would make it all worthwhile, but it never came and I feel rather like I've wasted a couple of days of my life.

1.5 stars rounded up to 2 because of some of the comments about Booker books that I have read and could relate to.

Gumble's Yard says

Plug (a fictional alcoholic and slightly autistic part time gardener and aspirational author) decides to write a book to prepare authors for their increasing requirement to appear in public at book readings, book signings and literary festivals by attending such events. The book is themed around Booker Prize winners – with Plug's story of his interaction with the winner to get his book (actually his banker employer's first editions of the book) signed and dedicated and the short surreal conversations he has with the authors.

Not a book which completely worked for me - and I would like to claim (and did at first) that it was because the book was a little too lightweight and repetitive.

However - as someone who queues up every year to get the Booker shortlist signed and (literally) dines out

for the rest of the year on the resulting 1 minute conversations with each of the authors who I then like to pretend are my best friends ("well as Ali said to me ..." etc.) - on reflection it is more that I simply don't want to admit to how much of this may ring rather too close to home!!!

Oryx says

3.66

Jonathan Pool says

Is writing like a clockmaker or an escaped horse?" Michael Ondaatje (a genuine audience question!!)

This is a niche book; a book that will appeal to those of us who derive genuine pleasure from author appearances and readings- it's like live theatre, right?

That certainly describes me, and so there is lots to like in this original 'Francis Plug' tale of literary celebrity in the face of anarchic social misfit in the person of Paul Ewen's alter ego Francis Plug.

I loved:

* The concept of asking authors genuinely bizarre questions. Its Alan Partridge cringe worthy *The hand dryer in the Gents is a Dolphin Hot Air Dryer*” (255)

* The description of the venues (many of which I have visited) and the clientele in attendance. The uncertain etiquette of the attendee

"I'm not sure if I should look at him as he reads, or direct my eyes elsewhere. It's a dilemma I've often faced at author readings. Where to look. Some people stare at their shoes. Others zone out towards some non-distinct point in the distance...some of the more 'zen.' People even close their eyes completely. Usually I state transfixed at the author, getting my money's worth"(263)

* The genuine knowledge of the novels that Paul Ewen brings to the narrative account of each book. The reader will miss a lot, I suspect, unless you have also read the books of Penelope Lively at Daunts:

“My constant co-

The full list of books/authors featured is listed below (a classic Booker Prize collection of big names in

The full list of books/authors featured is listed below (a classic Booker Prize collection of big names in the literary world)

I wasn't so keen on

* The alcoholism, and the down-and-out sadness
of George of the high hills, page 1-11. (1)

* Some of the high jinks, comedy club capers (though to be fair it is still hard to detect which of the encounters are pure fabrication, and those based on actual exchanges)

The support and delight that Paul Ewen gets from his publisher, Galley Beggar press, is fabulous, endearing. I went along to the public launch of **Writer in Residence** at Ruskin House and the event reflected the personality of Paul Ewen. He's not a man to seek out the limelight, but the air of fun and laughter was all pervasive.

It may be bubble bursting to say it, but Paul Ewen is not in actuality disrespectful to authors at all. I asked him about one particular (and difficult imo) writer featured in Public Author and Ewen recalled a part of the talk in question that revealed a very different, and vulnerable, side of the writer.

The full list of writers and events featured:

Salman Rushdie *Midnights Children*
Ben Okri *Famished Road*
Hilary Mantel *Wolf Hall + Bring Up the Bodies*
A.S. Byatt *Possession*
Julian Barnes *Sense of an Ending*
G John Berger
Kazoo Ishiguro *Remains of The Day*
Anne Enright *The Gathering*
Keri Hulme *The Bone People*
Arabians Adidas *The White Tiger*
Thomas Keneally *Schindler's Ark*
John Banville *The Sea*
Howard Jacobson *The Finkler Question*
Pat Barker *The Ghost Road*
Roddy Doyle *Paddy Ha Ha Ha*
Penelope Lively *Moon Tiger*
James Kelman *How Late it was, How Late*
Yann Martel *Life Of Pi*
Ian McEwan *Amsterdam*
Kirin Dessie *Inheritance Of Loss*
V.S Naipaul *In a Free State*
Nadine Gordimer *The Conservationist*:
Margaret Atwood *The Blind Assassin*
DBC Pierre *Vernon God Little*
Alan Hollingshurt *Line Of Beauty*
Michael Ondaatje *English Patient*
Arundhati Roy *God of Small Things*
Graham Swift *Last Orders*
JM Coetzee *Life & Times of Michael K*
Peter Carey *Oscar/Lucinda- Kelly Gang*
Eleanor Catton *Luminaries*

Francis Plug cannot be described as great literature, and it's an outlier in the Galley Beggar catalogue. It's well worth the read for the laughs, and for those of us who follow that same circuit and those writers featured here.

Colin says

I was very disappointed with this. Leafing through it in the bookshop, it seemed to promise insight into the mind of a compulsive reader and the whole process of the Booker Prize, together with plenty of laughs along the way. In reality it proved to be a mildly amusing (at first) comic novel which gradually turned in to an increasingly deranged story of alcohol-fuelled self delusion, with any attempt at storytelling receding into the background. The laughs became more and more forced until eventually drying up altogether and the whole concept just became irritating.

Steve says

This may be the funniest book I've ever read; I certainly can't think of another that had me stopping so often to laugh. It's a catalog of narrator Francis Plug's attendance at readings and lectures by Booker Prize winners, and those invariably wine-soaked misadventures are absurd and hilarious. But the novel is much more than "just" funny as it punctures the bubbles of pretension and illusion that insulate the cult of the "literary author" (the chapters recounting Francis' visit to the Hay festival do this with particular verve). Francis' behavior, while shocking, is also the kind of thing we used to *expect* from literary people, from writers and would be writers, and the gap between the placid gentility of the events he attends and the wild (Wilde, even) interruption he repeatedly brings made me wonder when literature and its celebration became so safely professionalized, and how the danger and excitement were all wrung out.

I'm not generally prone to novels about novelists and such "inside baseball" reading, funny or not, but the depth of *How To Be A Public Author* comes from the desperation of Francis Plug to enter into this insulated world, in all his drunken, delusional, chaotic glory. That desperation is painfully familiar to me as a someone who has himself spent years trying to break into the bubble, simultaneously mocking and daydreaming of being feted at the kinds of events Francis renders ridiculous. And that overblown, defining desire of an outsider to become an insider is likely to make any reader cringe in recognition, whether from the world of writing or elsewhere. So yes, this is a novel about a writer and familiarity with the world of readings and prizes and contemporary authors will go a long way, but I suspect this book could be just as hilarious and provocative for a reader who knew nothing about all of that.

Stephen Fitzsimons says

This book takes you into the world of Booker prize winners and author events, seen through the eyes of a rather inebriated guide, Francis Plug. Full of wit and surreal humour, this will have you laughing out loud.

Iain Martin says

listen to my review at www.fiveminutefiction.libsyn.com

Paul Fulcher says

What motivates the event author participant? What makes them seek out the quivering human flesh, blood and bone marrow of the author? The fiction author in particular? Surely they, the audience, have the prerequisite imaginative skills necessary to follow the author's invented work in the first place, and yet they seek to crush their flight of fancy by exposing themselves to the factory machinery as it were. They have to follow Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse back to the changing rooms and smell the sweat from the red-face puppeteers.

As someone who on the one hand attends to such events, yet on the other fully supports the Ferrante view that a book, once published, has no need of its author, that is a very interesting question.

But for Francis Plug, the "author" of this book but actually a fictional creation of the real author Paul Ewen, the answer is: to get free wine of greater value than the entrance price, disrupt the proceedings and to point out to the authors all the rude bits of their books. E.g. to Ben Okri:

*I liked that bit in *The Famished Road* where Madame Koto is moving a table in her bar and she farts.*

Plug is the Dennis Pennis of the book world, and the book follows his encounters with a spectrum of Booker Prize winners as he visits their readings in search of a personalised dedication on his (or rather his employer's) collection of first editions. The choice of Booker prize winners is particularly apposite given that one of the prize's rules actually requires the publisher to make best efforts to ensure the author takes part in various publicity events; a requirement double-winner JM Coetzee notably refused to fulfil.

Except I suspect Plug's encounters didn't actually take place, at least in the form described. The book does come with copies of the title pages signed by the authors 'to Francis Plug' and Paul Ewen may well have gone to the readings 'in character' but I doubt he caused the chaos he described. Which leaves this as if Paul Kaye, rather than actually, in character as Dennis Pennis, making witty quips to film celebrities (to Demi Moore: 'Are there any circumstances, if it wasn't gratuitous and it was tastefully done, would consider keeping your clothes on in a movie' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rdW9f...>) had simply written a fictional book as if he had.

Francis Plug: How To Be A Public Author actually has some interesting character sketches of the different authors featured, demonstrates a real knowledge of the authors' books (in takes that to be able to dig out all the parts dealing with alcohol or bodily functions) and some laugh-out-loud humour.

The problem is that, to make a novel, it is all rather padded out with fart and poo jokes, rather wearing tales of Plug's drunkenness, a side story about his inept gardening career and some wearing and gratuitous banker bashing.

An opportunity missed.

Leonie says

Funny but watching Plug descend (ascend?) into madness is a little unnerving for the prospective public author...

Kerry Mannion says

Awful - not funny, no real plot and very uncomfortable at points

Jackie Law says

Francis Plug: How To Be A Public Author, by Paul Ewen, is unlike any other book I have ever read. Full of humour, pathos and insightful observations on the literati, it is a book that should appeal to all who are interested in successful writers and the world that they inhabit.

It tells the tale of Francis Plug, an aspiring author with a vivid imagination. He is often drunk, meaning that it can be hard to tell at times how much of what he sees is real. This book is his attempt at offering fellow authors instruction on how they should be conducting themselves at the increasingly popular, public, literary events. His research involved attending talks where he listened to Booker prize winners discuss their writing before signing copies of their work. I would love to know if authors ever encounter the likes of Francis Plug at such events.

Until he succeeds in winning the Booker prize for the novel that he intends to write, Francis Plug works as a gardener. He does not have enough money, yet somehow manages to get to where he wants to go, often by ingenious if unscrupulous means. His encounters with the literati are detailed for the edification of his readers. In his writing he has a proclivity for scattering random metaphors around with abandon, taking inspiration from the works being discussed at the event he is attending.

The book is laugh out loud funny. Small incidents, such as when he adds the friendly dog to his phone contacts list and subsequently texts it, are dropped into each chapter as easily as his discussions on what each author is wearing. The random musings are quirky, sometimes surreal, always perceptive.

Books are for everyone, including an all but friendless, drunk gardener who is not just socially inept but clearly bizarre. His encounters and conversations with the great and the good are awkward and hilarious in equal measure. I was torn between sympathising with those who had the misfortune to meet him, and his underlying loneliness and desire to fit into their world.

This is a light hearted read that will also provide plenty of food for thought. More than anything though it is consistently funny in an offbeat way that should appeal to those who do not take themselves too seriously. I laughed at Francis and I laughed at myself for harbouring some of the thoughts he showed to be ridiculous. I thoroughly enjoyed the book, and hope that I never have to deal with anyone like its protagonist.

My copy of this book was provided gratis by the publisher, Galley Beggar Press.

Marianne says

“Perhaps, with his literary credentials, together with his wild rock ‘n’ roll ways, Nick Cave is the perfect

blueprint for the novelist of the future; quiet, solitary and disciplined, yet loud, crowd-pleasing and mental.”

How To Be A Public Author by Francis Plug is the first novel by New Zealand-born author, Paul Ewen. Gardener and would-be author, Francis Plug has decided to share knowledge he has gleaned from attendance at author events of Booker Prize-winning writers, collating “a rich mine of information pertaining to the public skills of our most noted authors. Stage etiquette, audience questions, book signings, wardrobe, performance”, declaring it “invaluable knowledge for those of us forced to become public authors too.”

In thirty-two chapters, each enhanced by an image of the (in most cases, signed and dedicated to Francis Plug) title page, Francis describes his encounters with these writers at various author events in bookshops, libraries, theatres and at book fairs, giving the reader a unique perspective. At the same time, he relates events in his everyday life as it slowly descends into chaos.

Francis gradually reveals himself to be an earnest, if rather sad and lonely figure, often drunk, self-deluded and perhaps even a little psychotic. While Francis is certainly an unreliable narrator, both his observations and his activities at these events are a source of much humour. The reader will cringe, wince, groan and laugh out loud at what Francis says to those he meets, at his comments and asides and at his (often bizarre) behaviour.

As well as usually consuming a staggering amount of alcohol at these author events, Francis manages to somehow include dirty nails, smelly clothes, Royal horse poo, little bunny rabbits, a wrestling ring, sneaking into fire exits, shouting obscenities, wee-stained trousers, a smuggled microphone, a bucket of eggs, advertising fliers, the rumour of a murdered author, a black bin cover and several fire extinguishers. It becomes apparent that the title of his book could equally be “How To Be A Public Author’s Nightmare”. A hilarious debut novel.

Michael says

The Man Booker Prize winners are the who's who of literacy world. They include names such as Peter Carey, J.M. Coetzee and Yann Martel. Well know we may be adding a new name to this list, Francis Plug, who despite the small fact that he has yet to write a book is adamant he will be joining the author elite. In order to achieve this goal the gardener and wanna be writer will travel the length and breadth of the UK attending speeches and book signing from his idols. Now if only he could remember these events then he would be doing well.

Think a more chatty Mr Bean then you have an idea of what Francis is like. He is a man who will literally take full advantage of complimentary wine, while saying inappropriate and downright hilarious things to the bewildered stars of the show. Despite his goal and his drinking seeing him evicted, he does not stop with his dream no matter how drunk he gets and how many people he bamboozles along the way.

Overall How To Be A Public Author is a light hearted look at the literary circus and also puts loneliness under the microscope. Francis desperately wants to be part of the bookish community, despite having little confidence or the means to carry through. Many of his observations are indeed true such as authors of today needing to be a lot more accessible and outgoing than their introverted forefathers. I even managed to learn a few things about the authors featured and combined with the humour and the touching reflections of Francis make for an entertaining and heart-warming read.

