

THE INDEPENDENT

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John Walsh: Btw

Published: 18 August 2007

So who is this Robert Barnett, the American literary agent signed up by Tony Blair to negotiate with publishers here and in the US for the rights to handle his memoirs? Barnett isn't just a book agent, he's one of the 100 most powerful people in showbiz, according to Entertainment Weekly. Though he has represented some dizzyingly important figures in the past - both Clintons, Bob Woodward, Alan Greenspan, Benazhir Bhutto and Queen Noor of Jordan - he has an interesting sideline. He has been involved in "debate preparation" in every presidential campaign since 1976. His website proudly proclaims that he role-played George Bush senior in "practice debates" with Geraldine Ferraro and Michael Dukakis, and later "played the role of Dick Cheney" to sharpen the arguments of John Edwards. Nice to imagine him doing impersonations in late-night Washington cabarets? What's his "Hillary Clinton" like?

Just because the civil war is over, don't assume everything's hunky-dory in former Yugoslavia. A play called *Not Like Me*, performed in the town of Zadar by the Via Negativa company, is a sensitive teasing-out of the issues that still divide Serb from Croat. In a tense scene, two characters confront each other across a table and stab the wood between each other's splayed fingers, a feat of dexterity with an under-tow of threat. Throwing themselves into the part, the actors, Boris Kadin (Croat) and Al-Drouby (Serb) seized the kitchen knives and stabbed each other so enthusiastically that, after a flurry of metal from both sides, the table was covered in blood and Kadin was missing part of a finger. The audience headed for the doors. The stage combatants were taken to hospital. Now that's what I call method acting.

Most amusing sight on YouTube recently is that of Cynthia Izaguirre, newscaster on the American Action 7 News programme, informing thunderstruck viewers about a US mountaineer who, with a partner, recently achieved the feat of scaling Everest. "But," says Ms Izaguirre, raising an admonitory forefinger, "He's gay." Her co-anchor Craig Negrelli looks at the desk and mutters: "I think it's 'blind'." "But," Ms Izaguirre corrects herself, "He's blind." Waiting in the wings, the (blind) mountaineer can be heard insisting, to no one in particular, that he has a wife and two children. Priceless.

Stephen King, author of *Carrie* and *The Shining*, thought local readers would be grateful when he popped into Dymocks Book Store in the Northern Territories of Australia. He decided to keep his visit low-key, arrived unannounced, found the Horror section, took out his pen and signed half a dozen copies of *Lisey's Story*, his latest novel. Unfortunately, browsers took one look at the 6ft 4in mad-eyed visionary as he glanced furtively around the shop and hurried to report him to the manager. Just as well he wasn't caught arranging his books in front of his rivals' work. Now that would've been horrible for him.