

Literary doubles

Sharing a name with another writer was bad enough, but when their work began to be confused by friends and readers, David Jenkins decided that enough was enough: he had to meet his journalistic doppelganger. Then both men made a shocking discovery ...

By David Jenkins

THE GUARDIAN Thursday July 31, 2008

I'm having an identity crisis, because there's a new David Jenkins on the block, journalistically speaking. There have, of course, been loads of my namesakes; the steroid-smuggling silver medallist has been around for aeons now, and the perhaps heretical Bishop of Durham hung up his mitre 14 years ago - though not before I, then a toiler on a religious affairs programme for Granada TV, had him deliver a 10-minute homily to camera solely so that the credits could read, "Presented by David Jenkins ... Researched by David Jenkins".

As for the David Jenkins who wrote a pre-Lonely Planet guide to Laos - well, I remember shuffling down the main street in Vientiane one sultry day in 1975 with my friend Bruce Palling, then the BBC's stringer in Bangkok. A young man approached: "David Jenkins!" cried Palling. "Meet David Jenkins." Perhaps it was that David Jenkins the Jakarta Foreign Correspondents' Club were looking for when they emailed me a couple of months ago, asking if I had been their founder back in the 70s. They'd lost touch with me (or him) and was I him (or me, if you see what I mean). I wasn't, but if that David Jenkins is out there, the chaps are looking for you.

But this new David Jenkins ... He writes for Time Out, as I used to, and he writes about film, as I have done. At first, I shrugged it off; it was, it's true, mildly embarrassing to have friends ask if I had really liked some particularly dour example of Slovenian cinema, but I could rise above it. After all, when I had first hit the London magazine scene in the early 70s there was another and much revered David Jenkins on the scene, operating as features editor of Nova, the hip 'n' happening periodical of the time.

Anyway, that David Jenkins didn't seem to pay any heed to my acidulous scribbling in IT and Time Out. Indeed, the only contact I had with him was tangential: I once met an attractive young woman at a noisy party. "Hello," I shouted, "I'm David Jenkins." "Yes," she yelled, "I divorced him last week." She was, of course, Valerie Jenkins, now Valerie Grove, sometime writer for all the best newspapers as well as the acclaimed biographer of Dodie Smith and John Mortimer. In fact, it's just possible that her David Jenkins had reacted to the hot breath of my hackish prose for he had by then given up

journalism in favour of writing books - first, *Black Zion*, about Judaism in Africa, and then a study of Patti Hearst that took him to California and marriage to June, who ran the San Francisco Women's Choir. That didn't last, and he ended up in Kyoto, translating haikus. He died, much mourned, in 2000.

So, I decided to take a lofty view of the new David Jenkins. Or I pretended to: actually, the frequency of being asked, "Is it you who writes that stuff for *Time Out*?" was beginning to grate. And then came the remake of *Flight of the Red Balloon*. The 1961 original was itself a byword for nauseating sentimentality but it was at least well made. This year's version wasn't just pass-the-sickbag-Alice twee, it was also abysmal. And David Jenkins liked it. Loved it. Raved about it.

I had to do something. I'd already tried to mess with his mind a little by writing a piece on mumbling in the movies for *G2*, wondering how he'd feel when he saw a piece about film, under his name, that he hadn't written. Would he pale? Think he'd turned to automatic writing, in his sleep? Start worrying about his alcohol consumption? He'd be forgetting his own name next. Then I started publishing pieces about my drug-addled days on the hippy trail; let's see how he'd like to be thought of as a 60-year-old man in a young man's body.

It wasn't enough. So I phoned Tony Elliott, who owns *Time Out* and whom I've known for a long time. What was this David Jenkins like, I asked. Tony emailed me a photo of my doppelganger: fresh-faced, trusting, kind - clearly not me. But I'd scratched the itch; I had to know more. I had to meet him. So I phoned *Time Out* and I got his voicemail and it said, "This is David Jenkins," and I said, "This is David Jenkins," and he called back, and we made a date.

And I prepared myself. I phoned Andrew Martin, journalist and author of the excellent *Jim Stringer* novels. He had an authorial namesake, didn't he? Two, actually: one who writes about sport and one called Andy Martin: "Thank God, it's sufficiently distinct." He paused, and then summoned up the mildly dyspeptic attitude with which he faces the world. "Actually, he's a rather good-looking blond chap who's a very good surfer and a Cambridge don. So when people talk to me, you can sense their rising disappointment when they realise I'm not him." He sighed and told me that his father had nearly called him Martin Martin; he wished he had. Later he sent me a lugubrious email. Since we'd spoken he'd read an article about Cy Twombly; there was a name.

Then there's the Duncan Campbell who writes for this paper. He's famously confused with Duncan Campbell, the expert on espionage and surveillance. Once, *Guardian* Duncan told me, they'd worked together on a story about arms dealers. When they went to interview their subjects, espionage Duncan said, "Hi, I'm Duncan Campbell and this is my colleague, Duncan Campbell." Their interviewees never recovered their poise. At one point espionage Duncan used to write for the *New Statesman* while *Guardian* Duncan played for the *Statesman* cricket team. Opponents would ask *Guardian* Duncan how to tell if their phones were tapped and be shocked when he said he hadn't got

a clue. Each has been invited to lecture, only to discover that their audience was expecting the other Duncan Campbell. And of course Guardian Duncan has long been the partner of Julie Christie; a South African magazine once ran a "where is she now?" piece, illustrated by two photographs. One showed a former Christie boyfriend, Warren Beatty, gorgeous in bow tie and dinner jacket; the other showed espionage Duncan, in glasses, on a bike, wearing a nerdy university-style striped scarf. "From this (Beatty) to this (Campbell)" the caption read.

Who else? Well, Natasha Walter had a younger Natasha Walter snapping at her journalistic heels, but her double got married and changed her name. But, still in the world of letters, there are Dan Franklin, publishing director of Jonathan Cape, and Dan Franklin, assistant editor at Canongate, who on his first day at work was made to ring up his grander namesake. In fact Franklin Major suspects Canongate hired Franklin Minor so that Franklin Minor would get Big Dan's emails. Big Dan also gleefully remembers a launch party he gave that was attended by him, little Dan and Dan Franklin, the august writer for the Economist.

All those I spoke to seemed to accept the situation with good grace, but it was chipping away at my sense of authenticity. When I finally met the young David Jenkins, how would I cope? In the flesh, he seemed a very pleasant fellow - if a little insensitive. An example: he had, he said, been told by his tutors on the City University journalism course that "there is another, big David Jenkins" out there, writing, but he'd soldiered on regardless. What, I asked, if he had been called Martin Amis? "Oh yeah, of course I'd have changed my name. Or if I'd been called Brad Pitt - it's not going to do me any favours." (Too right, sonny. In fact, it reminds me of the experience my friend Charles Sturridge had at LA airport. "So, you're a film director, are you?" said the immigration officer. "Yes," said Charles. "Why do you ask?" "Well, I write scripts," said the official, entry stamp in hand. "And what's your name," asked Charles, smarmily. "Paul Newman," the officer replied, "but I can't call myself that.")

My David Jenkins had sound views on Eric Rohmer, a wobblier take on Jean-Luc Godard and a very po-faced attitude to Judd Apatow. What else? He had never met anyone of the same name before, and he had never read Scoop, Evelyn Waugh's brilliant satire of journalism, the plot of which turns on one namesake being sent to do the other namesake's job. That piece on mumbling in the movies? "It was the first time I got general recognition from my peers - lots of emails, phone messages. That was pretty exciting." And someone had come up to him in the Time Out lift and congratulated him on a profile of Eva Green I'd written for Vogue - that had been amusing.

He was, he said, enjoying our meeting, now; when he had got my call, he had thought it all a bit mysterious. Indeed, he and his section editor had worried that I might serve a writ on him. His background? Born in Edmonton, lives in Highbury and Islington with his girlfriend, read history at Liverpool, wrote some DVD reviews there for the student newspaper: "Golly!" he said. "The first time you see your name in print ..." Make that my name, buster.

I had one more thing to ask him about. A friend of mine had mentioned a travel piece about Havana, by David Jenkins. It didn't, she said, seem much like me ... I'd called the piece up online, and pretty ropey it was too. And at the end it had said, "David Jenkins' debut novel, *The Four-Letter Countries*, is published by ..."

So, I said to my newfound namesake, what's this novel of yours about? "What novel?" he said. "I thought that was you." It wasn't me, and it wasn't him, and it wasn't in fact a novel; but there is a travel book out there, called *The Four-Letter Countries*, and it's being plugged on the radio by yet another David Jenkins. And he's not the steroid smuggler. And he's not the bishop. And he's not the men's figure-skating champion of the 1950s. He is, he claims, from Manchester, and his interests include Rod Stewart and crocodiles. He's the *Third Man* - and this has got to stop.