

## ARTS

If you have a story to tell, get in touch with Shaun Shackleton on 240210 or email [sshackleton@guernseypress.com](mailto:sshackleton@guernseypress.com)

Novels, short stories, radio dramas and stand-up comedy are all feathers in A L Kennedy's cap - she's even penned a Dr Who book. The author loves writing and has plenty to say, as **Nick Le Messurier** discovered when he spoke to her ahead of her workshop and talk at the Guernsey Literary Festival in September

# Writing for love

GUERNSEY  
LITERARY  
FESTIVAL

**A**WARD-WINNING writer A L Kennedy is not someone who limits herself to one particular literary form. She has written six novels - one of which, *Day*, won the Costa Best Book of the Year Award in 2007 - seven collections of short stories, non-fiction, drama, including radio plays, contributions to newspapers and a Dr Who novel this year. Her latest novel is a love story set just before the most recent general election in London. And if all of that weren't enough, she also performs as a stand-up comedian. Alison Louise Kennedy, a Scot born in Dundee, will speak about her writing at the Guernsey Literary Festival in September. She will also lead a beginners' prose writing workshop.

Writing has always been an important part of Kennedy's life. 'I always told little stories in my head - it was like a hobby. And I was always a fairly constant reader. That meant I never really decided to be a writer. I'm very happy that I can earn my living by doing something I love, but it was never a plan.' She has twice been included on the Granta list of best young novelists, but when asked if it is important for her to have the respect of fellow writers she says, 'I suppose it depends on the writers. I'm not sure. I tend to keep away from the literary scene - it can get a bit airless in there. I do what I do and I hope that readers of whatever type enjoy it.' Her short stories have been highly acclaimed and, rare for such collections, sell well. Why does she keep coming back to the short story, which many writers would say was an especially difficult form to get right? 'There are stories that need to be told at that length and so I tell them at that length. The form itself is immensely



demanding and testing and it's - apart from drama - what I've been working with longest. 'I think it's probably the supreme test of prose. But basically I write short stories when I have an idea that needs to be expressed at that length.' Noted writers who have influenced her include Chekhov, Stevenson and Raymond Carver, but she admits to being influenced by 'this or that beautiful book. But even the material I've read that I haven't liked has taught me.' A writer with strong views, when asked by the Guardian newspaper to comment on the state of Britain today, she was characteristically direct. 'Britain today is afflicted by a kind of perfect storm of problems. Our access to accurate and timely information is poor. This has allowed our political class to degrade almost completely. Pain, hardship and waste are more and more acceptable. Activities that don't make a profit are presented as laughable indulgences. Caring for the sick, protecting children, ensuring we have breathable air and potable water, carrying out effective work for a fair charge - we are intended to find these things bizarre.'

Although known for taking her craft very seriously and teaching creative writing, she admits that there are aspects of it which can't be taught. 'You can't teach most of it, but if someone has a predisposition and the character for it and the determination then you can help them avoid common pitfalls a little - making mistakes is necessary and educational, but people need to know that. And people probably need somewhere to find out if they can do this thing or not. If they can't then they can move on.' Kennedy is looking forward to her visit to the festival. 'Festivals give us the chance



to meet readers - who are always much more interesting than media responses to culture, or representations of culture. 'It's the only time I get to hang out with other writers and that can be fun. I also love the islands - Herm and Sark in particular - so it's a great excuse to get away and scramble about on cliffs and look at the sea.'

● A L Kennedy's writers' workshop will be at Les Cotils at 9.30am on Saturday 19 September and her talk will be at 3.45pm on the same day at the Town Church. Go to [www.guernseyliteraryfestival.com](http://www.guernseyliteraryfestival.com) to book tickets for all festival events.

● The Guernsey Press supports the Guernsey Literary Festival as media partner.

**'I think it's probably the supreme test of prose. But basically I write short stories when I have an idea that needs to be expressed at that length'**

AL Kennedy

## Stepping out

**F**AST-PACED, hilarious and Pythonesque are just three ways to describe Gadoc's upcoming production of *The 39 Steps*. 'It's still on in the West End, so this is a real coup for Gadoc,' said director Dennis Burns. Adapted from John Buchan's 1915 novel and the 1935 film by Alfred Hitchcock, the play calls for a cast of just four - one actor plays the hero Richard Hannay, one actress takes on the roles of his three love interests, and two others play all the show's other characters. Dennis's interest in directing the production stems from seeing the West End version. 'I came out of the Criterion Theatre and thought, "That was a really different piece of theatre". Four people and just a bit of furniture. It's very Monty Python. You can just imagine Graham Chapman coming on stage and saying "OK everybody, it's all getting rather silly now".' Simon Corble and Nobby Dimon came up with the original concept and production of a four-actor version of the story. It premiered in the Georgian Theatre Royal in Richmond, North Yorkshire, then toured villages across Britain. Patrick Barlow rewrote this adaptation in 2005 and it premiered at the West Yorkshire Playhouse. It has been at

the Criterion since September 2006. 'Our version has Stephen Rouxel as Richard Hannay, his three romantic entanglements by Stephanie Andrijasevic and every other part - heroes, villains, women and children, as well as the occasional inanimate object - is played by Ethan Hitchon and Michael Sproule.' Dennis admitted that rehearsals had been challenging but fun. 'The cast learnt their lines very early so that they could put scripts down and cope with the huge amount of physical business the comedy requires. 'It's certainly the most technical show I've been involved with, as so much depends on the sound and lighting effects, so I'm very lucky to have a great stage manager in Judy Moore and a small but talented backstage crew dealing with a mountain of props and costumes.' Despite the props, the play is a testament to the actors' skill and the audience's imagination. 'Staging, among other things, a chase on the Flying Scotsman, an escape on the Forth Bridge, a pursuit by Tiger Moth, and a death-defying finale in the London Palladium, requires a large amount of imaginative theatrical trickery, but hopefully we'll pull it off.'



Left to right are Ethan Hitchon, Steve Rouxel, Michael Sproule and Stephanie Andrijasevic. (Picture by Adrian Miller, 9822658)

● Gadoc's production of *The 39 Steps* runs nightly at 7.30pm from Tuesday 4 - Friday 7 August at Beau Sejour Theatre. Tickets are £15 and £12 concessions available from [www.guernseytickets.gg](http://www.guernseytickets.gg) and all Culture and Leisure outlets.