

Peterborough Arts Cinema

Films that make you think

Thursday 8th February at 7:30 pm

Stephen Fry and Poetry
Cardinal Cox

The Hippopotamus (2017) UK

15 | 1h 29min

Director; John Jencks

Stars; Roger Allam, Tim Charles, Rod Glenn

The Hippopotamus is a rollicking adaptation of the best-selling novel by Stephen Fry. It centers on a lapsed poet, failed drama critic, redundant husband and hard-working drunk, Ted Wallace (the melliflously voiced Roger Allam in a rare starring role). Fired from his newspaper job, Ted leaps at the chance to drown his sorrows at his old friend's country estate, Swafford Hall. A series of spiritual healings have recently put the household in a tizzy.



The film **Hippopotamus** is adapted from Stephen Fry's 1994 novel of the same name about a dissolute washed-up poet and theatre critic investigating events at the Norfolk country home of his old friend Lord Logan. Stephen Fry's family moved to Norfolk when he was young and his education included Uppingham School in Rutland (from which he was expelled when he was 15) and later the Norfolk College of Arts and Technology in King's Lynn. This was followed by three months on remand for credit card fraud. He has said that public school prepared him for prison. He later studied English Literature at Queens' College, Cambridge.

His career has included tv, radio, film (including the title role in **Wilde** 1997) and authoring books and in 2005 he had *The Ode Less*

Travelled published. In this book he sets out everything a poet might need to know to master the field. Six chapters are given over to metre (the dumpty-dum of lines of verse) and offers 28 forms of metric feet (arrangements of stress within the line). Rhyme (a relatively late addition to English verse) has three chapters devoted to it. This is followed by eleven chapters on verse form such as ode, ballad, sonnet, haiku, etc. In all these chapters he illustrates points with examples of his own poetry and includes exercises for poets to try. In a piece near the end of the book he complains that "...much poetry today suffers from anaemia. There is no iron in its blood, no energy, no drive."

In 2008 he started presenting the Radio 4 series *Fry's English Delight* about the English Language. At the Pride of Britain Awards in 2012 Fry took part in a recitation of Rudyard Kipling's poem *If* as a tribute to the country's Olympian and Paralympic competitors. On *Desert Island Discs* in 2015 his choice of book was T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. His most recent book is *Mythos* (2017) that re-tells the myths of Ancient Greece.

Poetry is clearly an important facet of Fry's persona but one he chooses to infrequently share. Perhaps one day he will allow us to see more of this.

*Cardinal Cox, poet and playwright, has been attending the Peterborough Arts Cinema for over thirty-five years. His column on the local literary scene, **Pub Scrawl**, is approaching its eighth*

anniversary.