Mr Symes Addresses the Book Launch

His approach to the stage has the hint of swaggering dance about it, head bent low, contentment swollen in his paunch, self-satisfaction sweltering a halo, the seasoned wood-carved gameshow smile ready to meet the imminent applause.

There is something beyond praise in this clapping—a hunger or an expression of power that cuts and shapes one’s image no matter what is said or done.

But the man in the Hawaiian shirt is measured and cool, armed with a few ice-breaking jokes and the eternal in-house critic, a kind of paranoid literary Columbo who scuffles suspiciously across his mindscape and taps a cigar on his cranium every time he threatens a wrong move.

Julian Zytnik