



DIARY

Out-glittering even Joan Collins at The Sunday Times Literary Banquet last Monday — throbbingly reported in this week's Style section (page 3:2) — was the winner of our first Young Writer of the Year award, Helen Simpson, author of *Four Bare Legs in a Bed*. Reeling slightly from the hail of praise ("cool, jocoserious, wise, original in imagery, startling in effects," read the citation) and resplendent in a Vivienne Westwood extravaganza, Ms Simpson disclosed that she already elaborated various ways of spending the £5,000 prize purse. "I'm going to pay for this dress, get some bookshelves built — and, most important of all, I'm going to buy myself some time to read and write. Since my daughter Julia was born, 21 months ago, I have written only one novella and two short stories and made plans for about 20 stories and several novels. This will make life a heck of a lot easier."

Those interested in the fate of political minorities will thrill to read Australian novelist Thomas Keneally's latest offering in which five airborne aboriginal dancers are hijacked by the PLO. Keneally wastes no time in comparing the plight of the two oppressed groups, a worthy message which has clearly been wasted on Keneally's publishers Hodder and Stoughton, who negotiated a fee with the charmingly named aboriginal artist Clifford Possum, to reproduce his picture *Kangaroo Dreaming* for the book's dustjacket. Sadly, I hear Mr Possum has had quite a wait for his modest agreed fee of A\$1,000. "The hassle to get the money has been terrible," says Possum's agent Rebecca Hossack, whose London gallery is trying to sell the painting. "This man's got 80 dependents. I had to get very angry indeed to get his money. Just because he's an aborigine who lives in the desert and can't read, it doesn't mean people shouldn't pay him."

George Bernard Shaw was far from renowned as a lothario — by all accounts, he thought sex a quite disgusting business — nor much of a romantic. But Michael Holroyd's final volume of the dour Fabian's life, *The Lure of Fantasy*, will tell a different story. Holroyd reveals, for the first time, Shaw's affair with a young American actress, Molly Tompkins. He became entangled with her in his eighth decade, paying her son's school fees, getting her into Rada and advising her "how to model her handwriting, address an envelope and bargain for white oxen in Italy". Did the septuagenarian and the 22-year-old consummate their affair? Pass, says Holroyd. "But the summer they spent together on an island in Italy was really Shaw's swansong. His last romance would make a lovely film — but I couldn't write it. I don't want to have anything to do with old gentlemen with long white beards again."

I*f You Want Me Just Whistle* Dept: now confirmed for The Sunday Times/Hay-on-Wye Festival of Literature is legendary Hollywood actress Lauren Bacall. In the teeth of her countrymen's paranoia about flying, the Divine Ms B will jet in to Hay on Saturday May 25, to address the starstruck literati about the rigours of autobiography and the scarcely less problematic rigours of life with Bogart and after. Unmissable.