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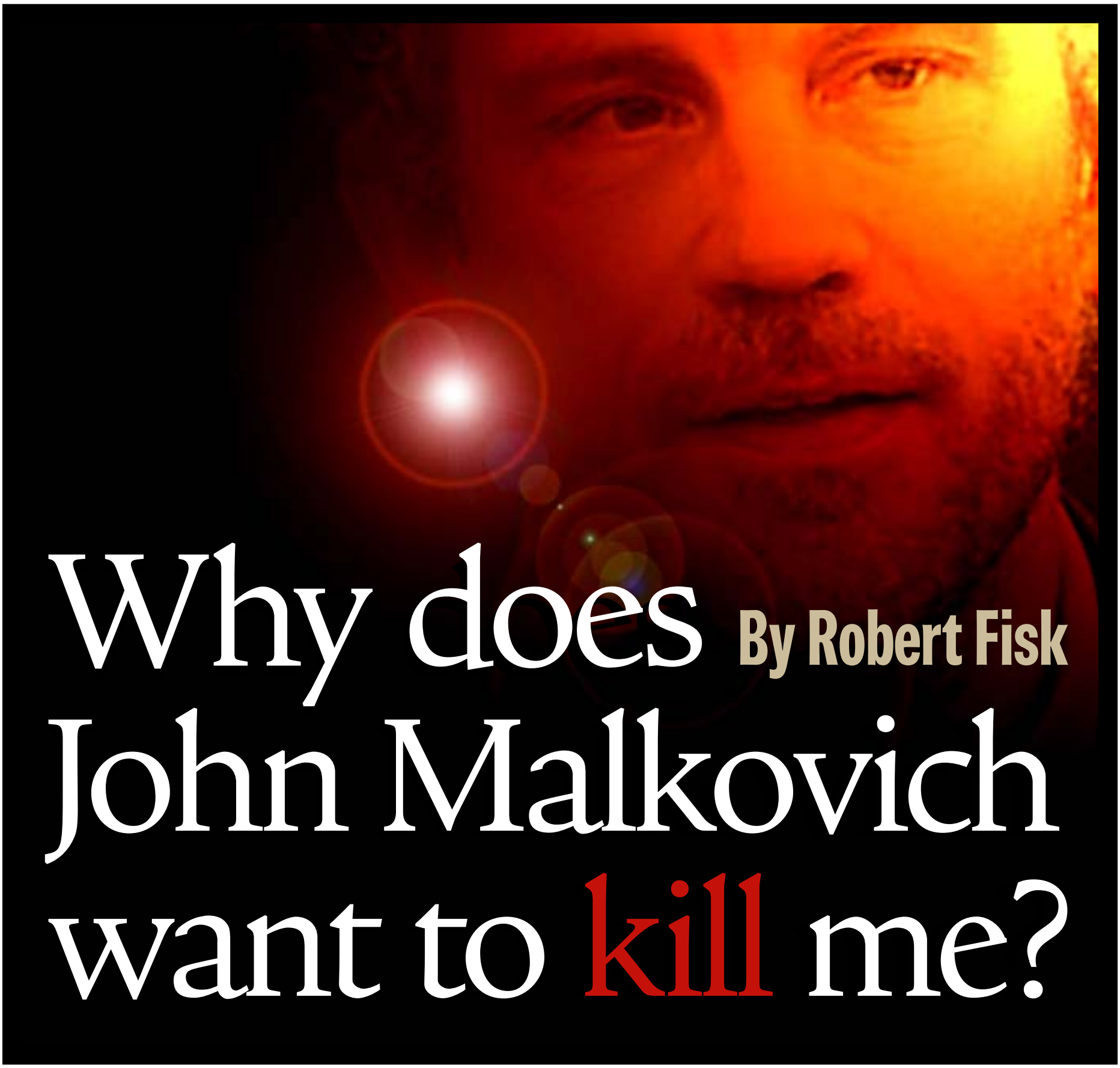

Why does John Malkovich want to kill me?

By Robert Fisk

PLUS: *Rian Malan* / *Ian Jack* / *Denis Beckett* / *Lesley Riddoch* / *Michael I. Niman* / *Warren Gerard* / *L.E.Baskow*

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S NEWSPAPER ■ WINTER 2001

MAURITIUS

Battered woman ends nightmare

Never in the history of Mauritius has a suspected murderer received so much sympathy. The Minister of Women's Rights and ministry officials not only visited Narma Issah in her prison cell but promised her all legal, moral and logistic support. The woman admitted killing her husband with a kitchen knife on 2 October 2001. Page 3

GHANA

Saucy campaign helps reduce AIDS

"If It's Not On, It's Not In," is the saucy strapline that has become one of the most effective family planing messages in Africa. It's almost the first image that greets the traveller at Accra airport – now researchers say it has led to increased condom sales as part of the government's "Stop AIDS Love Life" campaign. Using radio, television, music videos and testimonials from people living with HIV/AIDS, the campaign – is much bolder than ads used in other African countries – and it seems to be working. Page 5

MALAYSIA

Law a threat to mothers, babies

A survey by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists places the caesarean rate in the UK at 21.5 per cent – much higher than the WHO recommendation of 10 to 15 per cent. But the lives of British women aren't likely to be placed in danger by medical intervention. Not so in Malaysia where the industrialised attitude towards childbearing and childbirth has spread with devastating consequences. Page 5

ENGLAND

Peacebuilding minus women in Afghanistan

George Bush appears to have decided not to push for women to be involved in any coalition to succeed the Taleban regime in Afghanistan. "Right now we have other priorities," a senior Administration official has said, "We have to be careful not to look like we are imposing our values on them." Women's groups have demanded the UN intervene after a security council resolution was adopted last year which requires women to be involved in peace negotiations. 50 Afghan women will meet in Brussels next month to decide their own agenda – the event is likely to see demands from UN human rights high commissioner Mary Robinson and MEP Glenys Kinnock for women to be brought in to all peace moves in Afghanistan. Page 3

SCOTLAND

Why Linn was banned from playing rugby with boys

Scots rugby chiefs have blocked a top Swedish player from a Schools international because she might get hurt. 17 year old Linn Offerser was selected to play for the Eskoping team in Sweden but banned from taking to the filed when she arrived in Edinburgh last month. A Scottish official said, "The game is too physical. There's no way a guy should have to hold himself back from a full-blooded tackle if a girl had the ball. It would change the nature of the game. It's common sense." Page 4

ICELAND

What's in a name? Not a lot, it seems

It's one thing to marry a man and make a mistake – it's another to be saddled with his name for the rest of your life. With divorce now a fact of life across the world, women change their lives, addresses and appearance when they change partners. But millions stick with an acquired surname they might prefer to dump. Not in Iceland. Page 2

ZIMBABWE

No condom, no sex, says Rudo

Talking about aids in public usually earns a social boycott. Trying to force a husband to wear a condom usually earns divorce or violence or both. One Zimbabwean woman has done both - now she helps run the country's HIV/AIDS prevention campaign. It started – unlike most political campaigns – in a Harare hairdresser. Page 9

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Worldwoman, Edinburgh, Scotland


FIRST ISSUE

Africawoman

FOR AND ABOUT WOMEN IN AFRICA ■ FEBRUARY 2002

Ghetto living – for the rich

Mugabe resorts to witchcraft

Inside

1. Professor backs stoning of pregnant Nigerian woman
3. Bush can't to break Sept. 11 pledge to world's poor
4. Can women end corruption of big business?

Africawoman, Nairobi, Kenya


Sunday Times

Sport

DIEGO

Laid back and loving it

Sunday Times, Johannesburg, South Africa


Business Insurance

Airlines may dodge losses

Defense contractor liable after chopper crash

Work/life benefits propagating

Late News

Business Insurance, New York, USA

NDA

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From The Editor

Back again after a five-year break

COLDTYPE was launched eight years ago to counteract a belief – which still continues – that the best way for newspapers to solve the problem of declining readership is to tinker with the design without too much thought to content. The result of this shortsightedness, I pointed out in my first editor's note, was the production of a "generation of newspapers that are often bland and lifeless … and that is not good journalism. An attractive package is desirable, but we should pay as much attention to the quality of the grey stuff as we do to its packaging."

Things haven't changed much in the past eight years; in fact the speed of redesigns has hotted up while circulations fall at a concurrent speed.

ColdType, resurrected after a hiatus of five years – it took nearly four years to persuade my former bosses at Thomson Newspapers to give me the title and another 15 months to decide what to do with it – will continue with its original mission: to reprint examples of excellent writing from around the world in a format that emphasises how a neat and unobtrusive design can enhance, without subsuming, the power of of The Word.

That's the mission, but the point, as always is much simpler: Great writing is wonderful and should be available to as many people as possible – and preferably free of charge, hence our new pdf format and internet distribution. I hope you find this new issue interesting, informative and amusing. If you do (or if you don't), let me know. Your feedback is important.

Tony Sutton
Editor

Special thanks to Ian Jack, Robert Fisk, Denis Beckett, Lesley Riddoch, Rian Malan, Michael I. Niman, Warren Gerard and Paul Duchene, writers of the stories in this issue; L.E. Baskow for his photo essay;and illustrators Rui Ramalheiro and Dušan Petricic.

PRINTING HINTS: ColdType is best read when printed to its full 11" by 14" proportions, but it can easily be read when reduced to 74% of its original on regular printers. Colour printing is best.

READERS' COMMENTS: Tell us what you think of this issue of *ColdType* – content, size, ease of reading, etc. and give us your suggestions for future issues. We also welcome article submissions, although we don't pay for them. Comments to: tonysutton@newsdesign.net.

NOTES ON THE TYPEFACES: This issue is the first publication to feature – heads and text – Goodchild, a new font designed by Toronto type designer Nick Shinn (www.shinntype.com).
The sans serif faces in ColdType are various weights of Brown, also designed by Shinn.

COLDTYPE: Edited, designed and produced by Tony Sutton, President, News Design Associates Inc., 10469 Sixth Line, RR#3, Georgetown, Ontario L7G 4S6, Canada.

WEB SITES: www.coldtype.net www.newsdesign.net

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ENGLAND

As weather and broken railway lines brought Britain to a standstill at the end of 2000, **Ian Jack** *boarded a train, gazed at the cows and wondered if the British had become thick*

Long day's journey into Edinburgh

Somewhere in that mainly flat stretch of country between Doncaster and Grantham the train stopped again – unwontedly, as the Georgian poem has it. Through the carriage window, I could see fields of water and, on a higher stretch of green pasture that had become an island, a couple of cows bending into the grass and chewing blankly. The cows were pretty, black and brown and white, and there was a touch of blue in the sky; the water in the fields shone. No human beings and no houses could be seen. The train's engine idled. As the poem also has it, no one left and no one came.

I imagined this scene as one of those mysterious Victorian story-paintings – The Scapegoat, or a new version of The Last of England – in which every superficially attractive feature suggests something ominous. Stopped train, flooded fields, a couple of marooned survivors from the recent bovine holocaust. I have travelled this way on the east coast main line many times – by my calculation (there being not much else to do at this point), hundreds of times – and this bit of England has always seemed unknowable to me. One part looks much like the next. I continue to confuse Retford and Newark and not be quite certain that the large river, brimming and rippling when we passed it a few minutes back, is the Trent. To the east lies Lincolnshire (Skegness, Cleethorpes), where I have never been; to the west, Nottingham, where I have almost never been. Perhaps this is the real Middle England. Never before had it seemed so fragile and undependable, or so threatened by the biblical punishments of plague and flood.

Eventually, the train moved on. We passed a few broken trees, straddled across the opposite line. There were workers in bright orange coats. One of them was furling a yellow flag: proceed with caution. This was a pioneer train – as far as I could tell, the first sent south from Doncaster on that day, Monday, 30 October, 2000, although the time was after two in the afternoon. At Newark, the last stop, passengers for Grantham had been told to get off and on to a special bus. But then, strangely, the train pulled into Grantham and stopped. I remembered a remark of an older colleague on a newspaper 15 or 20 years ago. Didn't I think that the people of Britain were becoming "thick"? He had noticed that they bumped into each other more, stupidly, like dodg'em cars. This seemed an odd and even offensive remark at the time, but in Grantham, I wondered if he hadn't caught some Naipaulian splinter of the truth. I turned the page of my newspaper and read that the railways are so short of skill that a contracting firm in Scotland is recruiting 14 engineers from Romania.

Somehow, we made do without too many arguments, remarking to each other as passengers do in a country such as India that no public system can be relied on, nothing bloody works

A red signal light shone brightly at the platform's end. When it turned green, we moved down the plain towards the capital. We would get through.

Last weekend I spent, in all, 14 hours on trains. I do not want to describe this as "a nightmare;" that word, along with "cattle trucks," properly belongs with troop trains and transports bound for destinations in central Europe 60 years ago. I travelled from London to Fife via Edinburgh late on Friday and back again early on Monday. Perhaps I was lucky, but the journey didn't even reach the standards of a bad dream. I had no urgent business. I saw my mother. All that happened along the way was that I was stuck on trains or stood waiting for them far longer than I should have been.

So what did I feel? I suppose a kind of irritable melancholy. I am interested in railways. It is a sad thing these days to be interested in railways. By this, I don't mean that an interest in railways indicates a sad personality, repression, infantilism and so on (though it may do), rather that to be interested in railways, to believe in them as an effective, reliable and environmentally necessary mode of transport, is to be made sad by the lethal muddle they have become. I used to be angry. How could politicians (Tory) have got away with such a crazy privatisation, such a careless and perverse scheme? How could politicians (Labour, and contrary to their pledges) have persevered, keeping the scheme intact?

But as I made my way to King's Cross in London, I hoped I would be shielded by the iron of fatalism – adjustment to new conditions. There may be a train, or there may not. If not, then I would try to behave with the dignity of a poor man on a platform in, say, Bihar. I would walk away with my bundle and try again another day.

I had booked a seat on the four o'clock to Edinburgh. I collected my standard saver return (£77) at the ticket office and then went to consult the departures board. The four o'clock was listed with a revised arrival time in Edinburgh of 21.19 rather than 20.20, the extra time to allow for a detour to avoid the Hatfield crash site and the consequent speed restrictions further up the line.

There were queues in the concourse, marked with small signs at their head: queues D and C and E for Newcastle, Edinburgh and Leeds. The 3.30 to Newcastle had been cancelled. Queue D joined queue C. No platform had been announced. At four o'clock, the train to take us out still hadn't come in. The people queuing behaved admirably but also, in a survival-of-the-fittest sense, foolishly. Less obedient people hang around the entrance to the likeliest platform and become the front of the queue, if they've guessed rightly. By the time platform number three was announced, the crowd around its end was so big that passengers leaving the train were blocked by those trying to get on.

A voice over the Tannoy said we were not to run – it was dangerous, there would be room on other trains – but still we ran

Porters, if they are still called porters, came and cleared a way. Then we began to run down the platform. A voice over the Tannoy said we were not to run – it was dangerous, there would be room on other trains – but still we ran. Thick, as my old colleague might have said; after all, most of us had booked seats. Or perhaps not so thick, given the capricious booking arrangements. I had seat 38 in coach B, but the seats in coach B were ticketed for coach A. And, a thrilling double layer of confusion, the seat numbers on the tickets did not correspond to the numbers on the seats to which they were attached. Seat B40 had a ticket for A38, going only as far as York.

Somehow, we made do without too many arguments, remarking to each other as passengers do in a country such as India that no public system can be relied on, nothing bloody works.

The train left late and got later, three hours later than its original time, two later than its revised time. There were many apologies – this country has become brilliant at apologising. I was at my mother's home by midnight. She is 93. "I wonder," she said, "why trains have to travel so fast. A hundred miles an hour! That's surely dangerous."

On my way back, I thought about her question. The little train from Fife was late and crowded, standing room only. On board the nine o'clock to London at Edinburgh, we were advised to get off unless our journey was "really necessary" – shades of 1940 – because the train might get no further than Doncaster. At Newcastle, we were told it would advance no further than York. "Deteriorating," or sometimes just "adverse," weather conditions had cut off southern England from the north. At York, we got off, only to be told that the train would in fact go to London.

Back on, we were told it would go only to Doncaster. At Doncaster, we waited on a windy platform where pleasant officials of the Great North Eastern Railway company (the best of the new railway operators, in my experience, although perhaps I've been seduced by the olde-worlde hokum of the name) told us that they were as much in the dark as we were, but with any luck we could expect a train from Leeds. After an hour, one came along, nearly empty.

We reached London at half past five, a journey of eight and a half hours from Edinburgh rather than the advertised four. My mother would have approved, and the truth is that I didn't mind too much.

A warm and empty carriage, work to do, some compensatory free coffee, and time to look at the cows. In 1910 – according to the Bradshaw of that year – the journey time would have been thought satisfactory. Even in the 1960s, the fastest trains took six hours and there were far fewer of them: five a day, slow or fast, from Edinburgh to London, whereas now there are more than twenty. Or would be, were it not for broken rails.

But *pace* my mother's question, we think we live in a modern European country. We expect trains to travel fast, motorways to be clear, schools to educate, hospitals to care and cure, food to be safe. This is not so much rising as risen expectations. It may be no more than a brief illusion: this country is brilliant at illusions – new uniforms for the Underground, escalators that crack, stations that close. All of us, even the thickest, now know that the underfunded ice we skate on is very, very thin. ◆

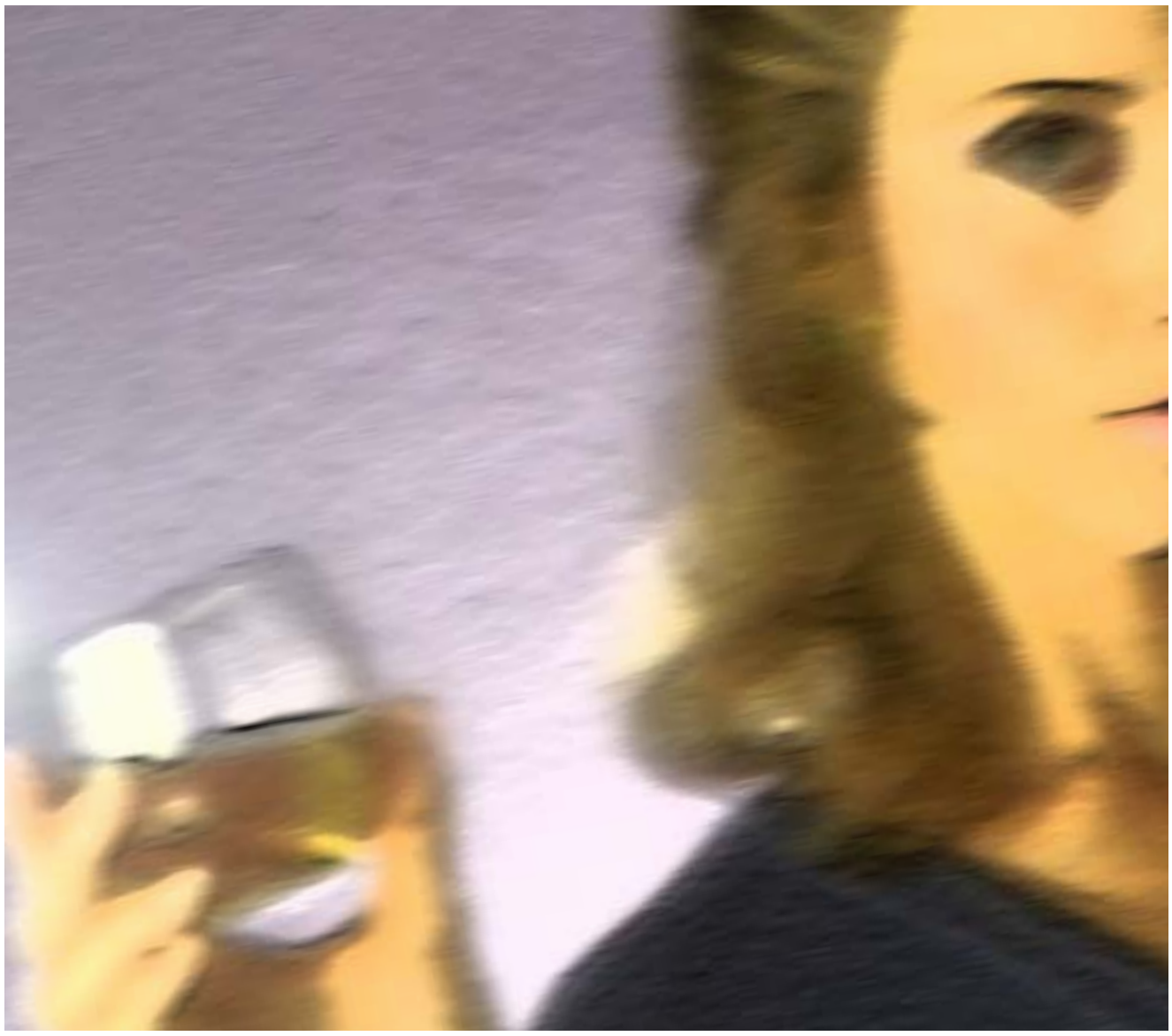
This article first appeared in New Statesman

Ian Jack is editor of Granta, the international literary magazine.

SCOTLAND

It's her shout!

A new survey suggests that alcohol consumption by British women is likely to soar by 30% by 2004. Does being a woman in the UK drive you to drink? asks **Lesley Riddoch.** *Or is that just a lazy, outdated excuse for New Women aping Old Lads?*



Time was when I could conceive of no greater reward for a job done than a large G&T. The sort you pour yourself – bigger than the pub measure with an extra little kick. No better way of getting out of the doldrums than a large dram – preferably an island malt, not cooking whisky.

No better way to spend an hour on the shuttle than to sample a wee bottle of wine – or two. Well, their little measures are so mean. No better way to enjoy the last episode of a favourite TV detective series than alone with a bottle of Chardonnay. No better way to explore intimacy than over wine. No possible way to bond deeply with fellow human beings than with a drink in hand. And another one waiting.

Then on August 1, 2000, something changed and now I don't drink any more. In fact, with a year's ban for drink-driving in 1998, the penny should have dropped much earlier. The shock certainly forced a separation of drinking and driving but if anything that just increased drinking opportunities.

In the country area where I live nobody gave me lectures on the error of my ways – or even the dirty looks I expected and felt I deserved. At first I wondered if they knew I was only just over the limit and had scaled their reaction down accordingly. But if I had a dram for every person who said "it could have been me," I'd be very ill.

Whatever southern sophisticates say about less being more, the Celts firmly believe more is more. We are out to have the ultimate experience

Truth is, in Scotland 2002 you can drink or drive yourself to a virtual standstill without doing serious damage to your social standing or self esteem. In fact, in serious drinking quarters there is no upper limit.

Whatever southern sophisticates say about less being more, the Celts firmly believe more is more. We are out to have the ultimate experience. Scots, like the Irish, have an almost mystical belief in the possibility of self-discovery through drink. Any brave explorer is applauded – even if the journey occasionally ends at base camp. The real crime I've committed in the eyes of those big drinkers who have been and still are my best friends is to quit the quest and abandon the adventure by stopping drinking.

So what made me change? Well the aftermath of my turning 40 was probably a factor. I celebrated my birthday with a valiant party of friends who crossed the choppiest Minch in (my) living memory for a night of bacchanalian excess on Eigg. I've spent most Hogmanays on the Hebridean island since becoming a trustee of their Heritage Trust seven years ago.

On June 12, 1997, when the community finally bought the island I was drinking and dispensing drams to all and sundry until the last head hit the kitchen table at Kildonan at about 11am. By 4pm we were all up again for more. And so it went on for several days – that is the Hebridean way. And I was proud that my staying power meant I could witness the music, dancing and patter right till the bitter end.

Looking forward to more of the same on my birthday, I arrived at the Eigg tearoom to be solemnly handed a birthday card by a couple of friends – aged 10. On the front a mini-skirted stickwoman stood legs astride with a whip in one hand – spelt wipe but I got the drift – and a bottle in the other. The caption: Be a party animal!

I insisted they had got me all wrong. "But you only ever come here for parties," said young Cailean. "You never just come to see us." And I realised it did look that way. Other people came to drink tea, ponder the ways of the universe and chat to people without a ceilidh for accompaniment. I always waited for an alcohol-related opportunity. Why?

It set me thinking. Would I even consider a night on the isle without a hospitable bottle of whisky to hand? How much were we all overlooking the downside of drink to keep the image of the incorrigible, dram-swilling but loveable highlander alive?

I started thinking but I kept drinking. Not massively. I don't think I was or am an alcoholic. I could lay off when I wanted. Sometimes I would have a rule not to drink on my own. For almost a year I didn't drink during the week. For a while I made sure there were at least two booze-free days a week. But a big social occasion followed by a piece of serious work would mean trying to reschedule work or skipping the gig rather than going but not drinking. I would take two or three bottles of wine when visiting friends – just in case – and they were always finished. I never bought the gadget that removes air from an opened bottle – wine didn't stay around that long. I do now recall good friends having to make sure we met on Fridays – they always needed a day to recover.

I, on the other hand, felt no pain. When others had hangovers I felt only a great lifting of the logical barriers that keep ideas separated and compartmentalised. I often had my best lateral thinking programmes – I believed – after a night out. While others were unable to move at 7am, I was up and functioning. Friends kept marvelling at my capacity for drink, and I did too, instead of wondering what real marvels might be in store if I wasn't wasting time, brain cells and emotional energy through alcohol.

Did I get my thirst from my parents? No way. I saw my dad under the influence once in 35 years – even though he was brought up in the shadow of a distillery in rural Banffshire. Mum has had four sherries to my certain knowledge, and maybe a few glasses of wine, in her life. Brought up in Wick, a temperance town, she has always taken a very dim view of her daughter's "unnecessary" excesses.

But then thanks to her encouragement I had rather different opportunities and terrifying experiences to face in life. I am almost certainly the first female member of the family on either side to go to university. I was the first person from my school to go to Oxbridge and the first family member to leave home for England aged 18. I was the first female president of Oxford University Student Union – the first non-Conservative president at that. Thereafter, I was very often the only female at meetings, on boards, behind lecterns, on platforms and in the public eye. I thought I took it all in my stride, but as I moved further into the male public world I started dealing with the strain like the males around me – by relaxing in the pub afterwards.

Others took drugs. I was too wary and northern for that. Moreover, I regarded relaxing in pubs as an achievement – and in the late 1970s it was. Women like me were breaking down barriers in the classroom, at the ballot box and in the workplace, but were still standing outside pubs in the rain to meet pals. hoping they wouldn't be late.

Pubs may have been "public houses" for men, but there was nothing public about them for most women. It was a challenge – a social challenge many talented women chose to ignore. I couldn't resist. I had no penis envy, but I did have bar-stool lust.

A dietician pal working in schools tells me the No 1 question she gets asked is: Which alcoholic drink has the fewest calories?"

The writer Kate Atkinson recently put her finger on the way that women drink now. In the 1980s, she said, women went beyond biology. Our use of the pill, growing physical strength and competition with men in almost every arena impacted on our drinking.We decided that what was sauce for the gander would now be sauce for the goose – even if it was addictive and destructive. And it is.

Women's bodies, even robust 5ft 11in ones like mine, cannot handle alcohol as well as men's. It may not be fair but it is true. For every drug-related death in Scotland there are 10 alcohol-related ones. Women damage their livers far more through drink than men and there's an increased risk of breast cancer. Drunk women put themselves more at risk of unprotected sex, as well as sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, rape – and certainly badly damaged self-esteem.

But we're soused in the culture of drinking. A dietician pal working in schools tells me the No 1 question she gets asked is: "Which alcoholic drink has the fewest calories?" Another friend toyed with writing a book about the reality of breast cancer treatment entitled "Can I Still Drink?" – the question most women are too embarrassed to ask when the doctor talks them through chemotherapy.

Booze unquestionably encourages the dramatists amongst us to make emotional mountains out of molehills. What we cannot face is failure. And boredom. We cannot bear to manage the day-to-day problems that afflict everyone. We want excitement but we don't want to plan for it. Far simpler to abdicate responsibility, set no goals, drift along, have a drink and moan or dream along with all the other de-motivated creative people in the bar/ceilidh/kitchen/party.

So what's happened since the demon drink has stayed in the bottle? I've had a joined-up life and more energy and focus. And more late night trips as a chauffeur than I can recall. Now I'm relentless. I go to more social functions – no matter how awkward the time or location, I can drive home – though for the first few months I still found myself racing on a pre-abstinence autopilot for the last train home from Edinburgh.

Am I stuck in an endless and grimly earnest drive for self improvement? I'm enough of a realist to know I may never tame my own excessive tendencies sufficiently to have even one drink again. But now that feels more like a reprieve than a life sentence. No single drink is worth more than the sense of purpose and genuine confidence I've gained.

Being sober is habit-forming. ◆

Lesley Riddoch has a radio program with BBC Scotland. She is founder and editor of international internet newspapers Worldwoman and Africawoman.

This article first appeared in Worldwoman

ENGLAND

Why does John Malkovich want to kill me?

British journalist **Robert Fisk** *is used to receiving hate mail attacking his reporting of various conflicts in the Middle East. It's getting worse, he says, as venomous letters have turned into calls for his death*

It used to be just a trickle, a steady drip-drip of hate mail which arrived once a week, castigating me for reporting on the killing of innocent Lebanese under Israeli air raids or for suggesting that Arabs – as well as Israelis – wanted peace in the Middle East.

It began to change in the late 1990s. Typical was the letter which arrived after I wrote my eyewitness account of the 1996 slaughter by Israeli gunners of 108 refugees sheltering in the UN base in the Lebanese town of Qana. "I do not like or admire anti-Semites," it began. "Hitler was one of the most famous in recent history." Yet compared to the avalanche of vicious, threatening letters and openly violent statements that we journalists receive today, this was comparatively mild. For the internet seems to have turned those who do not like to hear the truth about the Middle East into a community of haters, sending venomous letters not only to myself but to any reporter who dares to criticise Israel – or American policy in the Middle East.

Much of this disgusting nonsense comes from men and women who say they are defending Israel …

There was always, in the past, a limit to this hatred. Letters would be signed, with the writer's address. Or if not, they would be so ill-written as to be illegible. Not any more. In 26 years in the Middle East, I have never read so many vile and intimidating messages addressed to me. Many now demand my death. And at the beginning of May, the Hollywood actor John Malkovich did just that, telling the Cambridge Union that he would like to shoot me.

How, I ask myself, did it come to this? Slowly but surely, the hate has turned to incitement, the incitement into death threats, the walls of propriety and legality gradually pulled down so that a reporter can be abused, his family defamed, his beating at the hands of an angry crowd greeted with

laughter and insults in the pages of an American newspaper, his life cheapened and made vulnerable by an actor who – without even saying why – says he wants to kill me.

Much of this disgusting nonsense comes from men and women who say they are defending Israel, although I have to say that I have never in my life received a rude or insulting letter from Israel itself. Israelis sometimes express their criticism of my reporting – and sometimes their praise – but they have never stooped to the filth and obscenities which I now receive.

"Your mother was Eichmann's daughter," was one of the most recent of these. My mother Peggy, who died after a long battle with Parkinson's three-and-a-half years ago, was, in fact, an RAF radio repair operator on Spitfires at the height of the Battle of Britain in 1940.

The events of 11 September turned the hate mail white hot. That day, in an airliner high over the Atlantic that had just turned back from its routing to America, I wrote an article for *The Independent*, pointing out that there would be an attempt in the coming days to prevent anyone asking why the crimes against humanity in New York and Washington had occurred. Dictating my report from the aircraft's satellite phone, I wrote about the history of deceit in the Middle East, the growing Arab anger at the deaths of thousands of Iraqi children under US-supported sanctions, and the continued occupation of Palestinian land in the West Bank and Gaza by America's Israeli ally. I didn't blame Israel. I suggested that Osama bin Laden was responsible.

But the e-mails that poured into *The Independent* over the next few days bordered on the inflammatory.

The attacks on America were caused by "hate itself, of precisely the obsessive and dehumanising kind that Fisk and Bin Laden have been spreading," said a letter from a Professor Judea Pearl of UCLA. I was, he claimed, "drooling venom" and a professional "hate peddler." Another missive, signed Ellen Popper, announced that I was "in cahoots with the arch-terrorist" Bin Laden. Mark Guon labeled me "a total nut-case." I was "psychotic," according to Lillie and Barry Weiss. Brandon Heller of San Diego informed me that "you are actually supporting evil itself."

Only days after Malkovich announced that he wanted to shoot me, a website claimed that the actor's words were "a brazen attempt at queue-jumping"

It got worse. On an Irish radio show, a Harvard professor – infuriated by my asking about the motives for the atrocities of 11 September – condemned me as a "liar" and a "dangerous man" and announced that "anti-Americanism" – whatever that is – was the same as anti-Semitism. Not only was it wicked to suggest that someone might have had reasons, however deranged, to commit the mass slaughter. It was even more appalling to suggest what these reasons might be. To criticise the United States was to be a Jew-hater, a racist, a Nazi.

And so it went on. In early December, I was almost killed by a crowd of Afghan refugees who were enraged by the recent slaughter of their relatives in American B-52 air-raids. I wrote an account of my beating, adding that I could not blame my attackers, that if I had suffered their grief, I would have done the same. There was no end to the abuse that came then.

In *The Wall Street Journal*, Mark Steyn wrote an article under a headline saying that a "multiculturalist" – me – had "got his due." Cards arrived bearing the names of London "whipping" parlours. *The Independent's* website received an e-mail suggesting that I was a paedophile. Among several vicious Christmas cards was one bearing the legend of the Twelve Days of Christmas and the following note inside: "Robert Fiske (sic) – aka Lord Haw Haw of the Middle East and a leading anti-semite & proto-fascist Islamophile propagandist. Here's hoping 2002 finds you deep in Gehenna (Hell), Osama bin Laden on your right, Mullah Omar on your left. Yours, Ishmael Zetin."

Since Ariel Sharon's offensive in the West Bank, provoked by the Palestinians' wicked suicide bombing, a new theme has emerged. Reporters who criticise Israel are to blame for inciting anti-Semites to burn synagogues. Thus it is not Israel's brutality and occupation that provokes the sick and cruel people who attack Jewish institutions, synagogues and cemeteries. We journalists are to blame.

Almost anyone who criticises US or Israeli policy in the Middle East is now in this free-fire zone. My own colleague in Jerusalem, Phil Reeves, is one of them. So are two of the BBC's reporters in Israel, along with Suzanne Goldenberg of *The Guardian*. And take Jennifer Loewenstein, a human rights worker in Gaza – who is herself Jewish, and who wrote a condemnation of those who claim that Palestinians are deliberately sacrificing their children. She swiftly received the following e-mail: "BITCH. I can smell you from afar. You are a bitch and you have Arab blood in you. Your mother is a fucking Arab. At least, for God's sake, change your fucking name. Ben Aviram."

Does this kind of filth have an effect on others? I fear it does. Only days after Malkovich announced that he wanted to shoot me, a website claimed that the actor's words were "a brazen attempt at queue-jumping." The site contained an animation of my own face being violently punched by a fist and a caption which said: "I understand why they're beating the shit out of me."

Thus a disgusting remark by an actor in the Cambridge Union led to a website suggesting that others were even more eager to kill me. Malkovich was not questioned by the police. He might, I suppose, be refused any further visas to Britain until he explains or apologises for his vile remarks. But the damage has been done. As journalists, our lives are now forfeit to the internet haters. If we want a quiet life, we will just have to toe the line, stop criticising Israel or America. Or just stop writing altogether. ◆

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INDIA

Television trekker **Denis Beckett** *takes a camera crew from Johannesburg to India and winds up strangely relieved that he was not, after all, able to run away from it after Day Three*

Shit, spit, squalor and lessons for all of us

The passing wheels keep you on your toes – and thank heaven for all those sober drivers – but there is no thought of attack, assault, guns, knives, boots, aggression in any guise whatever

After three days in India I had three things in mind: shit, spit and squalor, each in the dictionary definition. That India has squalor, everyone knows. But knowing it is only knowing it. Being in it makes the worst we have in South Africa look cosy. In Mumbai we met the South African delegation to an International Homelessness Conference. The delegates, shack-dwellers, said repeatedly (a) "how is this possible? Our Indians are so organised," and (b) "we never knew we were so lucky."

The other two S-words, I was even less prepared for.

Spit: what got to me wasn't so much the motion of a globule of gob scuttling into the dust; it was the sound effects. People hawk up gluey golfballs of phlegm with such energy that the uninitiated think they're having seizures. Several times I was ready to catch a passer-by as he fell. But he'd regain equilibrium, calmly roll the wodge around his mouth, and expectorate. Mumbai newspapers debated a new rule against spitting on the buses. A letter-writer said it was the people's birthright. Another, that if they couldn't spit on the floor they'd spit out the window, which from the top deck meant spitting blind onto innocent pates below.

The faeces factor was more original. In many countries a degree of public spitting is common. The other thing, not so much. In South Africa the segment of the populace that contributes to the irrigation of concrete walls and tarred alleys draws the line at full-frontal cacation. (Yep, real word, from the Latin cacare.) In India it's routine to glance around a busy place and find half a dozen men squatting in quiet contemplation, penis and scrotum dangling imperturbably before the world like turkey-neck and gizzards, steaming pile rising on the ground below.

I know we children of the millennium are supposed to be sensitive to other people's customs, but this can be difficult when a squashed heap of human excrement has just flowed over your sandals and is squishing between your toes. As Musa Radebe the sound man said, if you don't look for it all the time you step in it.

Mumbai has a nomenclature problem. The visitor politely applies the new non-colonial name and is startled that half the locals fiercely correct him: "Bombay!" He adjusts and is startled that half the locals fiercely correct him right back: "Mumbai!" He retreats to "the city," but with his fingers crossed because he doesn't truthfully see the city as a city, he sees it as a squatter camp with severe elephantiasis.

You can travel for hours through undifferentiated slumland. Pavements do not exist. Where they once were, are now endless human pigeon-holes, with sides, back, and open front. Unlike the industrial packaging and bits of road-sign better known in Africa, these units are concrete, or they wash away in the monsoon. But they're catacombs. Middle-class Africans are pained that a squatter African family can live in a space the size of their kitchen. Squatter Africans, like the Homeless ladies, here felt pain that two Mumbai families live in a space the size of their kitchen. A family unit might be two-storey. Downstairs a ten-year-old can stand up straight. Upstairs, only a baby can sit up.

Washing, weeing, cooking and life takes place in the potholes outside. To walk down a street – if the process of dodging scooters, bicycles, rickshaws and 1960ish Fiats may be called "walking" – is to feel perpetually embarrassed at invading somebody's bathroom. Naked children scrub, brush teeth, dry, oblivious to the maelstrom and evading death by Fiat with unconscious deftness. The first day in India my heart stopped twenty times, at a hasty bumper bearing down upon a toddler with apparently inevitable results. By the end I'd adjusted to Indian life: a miss by millimetres is still a miss. So? The same miss in Johannesburg, never mind Stockholm, would leave both parties shaking.

Given the sight and smell of the water, and the guide-book's assertion that the e-coli count was 250,000 times the safe limit, I took it they were keen to hasten the route to heaven

Respite is depressingly absent. All of Mumbai is the same, a long chaotic sprawl. South or old Mumbai is supposedly classy Mumbai, but the class is back-handed – run-down colonial leftovers. Half a century of independence seems to have delivered the city nothing inspiring or impressive or even a momentary counterpoint to the morass; not as much as a shopping mall. Well, maybe the super-class district, Malaba Hill, is an exception. It's a drab flatland, with pavements.

We left Mumbai without tears, for Varanasi – fierce correction "Benares!" – holiest of the holy cities of India. Varanasi is the place on the Ganges that people go to die, so as to short-cut the interim incarnations between this life and heaven. Its principal livelihood is waiting-to-die. Thousands of people are waiting to die, and vigorously importuning tourists to keep them alive until the wait is over. They are in competition with hawkers of anything batteries and cellphone kits to shrines and gods. Gods are available in every shape, size and material.

With ears echoing to "only 100 rupees" and "special price" it becomes awkward to tune to the mystical side of affairs, but once we got on a boat and the din subsided a sense of the spiritualism began to make itself felt.

Men were bathing in the river. Given the sight and smell of the water, and the guide-book's assertion that the e-coli count was

250,000 times the safe limit, I took it they were keen to hasten the route to heaven. In case they failed, their women did the laundry from the shores. On the banks dozens of sects engaged in prayers involving dramatic physical contortions.

The spiritual impact wore in gradually. Everybody was high on the Ganges; bathers and laundry-women and all. Not only were these people getting something out of this river and its magical properties but there was a contentment here, a contentment of a kind that eludes we of more secular persuasion, a contentment not to be scoffed.

Our local host, a professor at the Hindu University of Benares, (its only and official name) explained the philosophy of contentment. You take things as they are, was the bottom line. You accept your lot, and swallow whatever indignities it entails, and bask in the knowledge that however lousy this life might be, if you handle it alright you'll come back next time in a higher life. Much of what we were seeing began to make sense.

For example, if South African driving was half as wild as Indian driving, Road Rage would be our leading cause of death. In India temperatures weren't raised. True, every driver spent 40 seconds per minute leaning on his hooter. If his hooter broke he'd be immobilised (if his indicator broke he wouldn't know), but he didn't hoot in anger, he hooted to be manly, and nobody got cross.

At Varanasi I began to see a plus side to India, though overlain by the Three S's. Moreover our Prof had placed us in the most off-putting hotel I have ever known (which, since I'd rather stay where locals stay than stay where tariffs are in dollars, is saying a lot). If I'd left India after two days of Mumbai and one of Varanasi, I'd have left feeling solely an almighty relief to be leaving.

That thing nearly happened. Next stop was Delhi, where our connection had checked us into a youth hostel (I imagined them expelling me for false pretences, but the manager laughed: "you can be young at 100 if you want to.") I called home and found that two of my children had been hospitalised from two mishaps, one fairly dire. I was for instant return, but Superwife insisted that no-one was dying, I should run the course. (Next day her mother was under the surgeon's knife too, and the day after, one of our dogs – more operations in half a week than in the preceding quarter century.)

Despite a suspicion that the cosmic order was sending me a message, I stuck it out and learned that there's more to India than the S's. Delhi for a start was an antidote to Mumbai. New Delhi is spectacular, if not that new. Its pride of place is Raj Path, with the old Viceregal – now Presidential – palace as its anchor. Under the last Viceroy the palace famously maintained a domestic staff of 1,000, of whom 60 chased crows off the lawns. Current employment figures were not available but are presumably not much different, given India's employment habits.

Retrenchment mania hasn't got here yet. Factories look like refugees from DH Lawrence – teeming hordes of manual workers and giant black clouds spraying carpets of soot. Health & Safety regulations are science fiction. Status comes from how many people you employ, not how many you cut off the payroll. Everyone has an assistant or five – taxi drivers have assistants, porters have assistants, assistants have assistants.

Many jobs, pathetic pay. I accompany a girl to school, by rickshaw. A mile trip for five rupees, a US dime. In Durban, rickshawmen are protected from such exploitation. They make fifty times as much for giving a tourist a jaunt down the esplanade. But Durban's rickshaws are down to twenty and its jobless is up to half a million. Delhi has half a million rickshaws. 500,000 x 10c = $50,000. 20 x

To walk down a street is to feel perpetually embarrassed at invading somebody's bathroom

$5 = $100. The girl's rickshaw driver has a career. He provides a service, which to the girl's father is satisfactory – you never wait more than a minute for a passing rickshaw; she does her homework as she rides; robbery or danger does not enter the equation.

The Taj Mahal is three hours from Delhi in a lusty 4x4 with a double-dose of 4x4 arrogance: if vehicle ahead failed to notice our hooter, we nudged him with our bumper. Had we passengers been ECG-wired there would have been peaks on the graph.

Everybody had said that the Taj is indescribably bigger and better in real life than in reputation, and I was surprised to agree. European tourist palaces tend to be tacky close up, with furniture glued up and chandelier bulbs missing. The Taj is nothing but marble. There are no accoutrements to wear out. In the pattern of grandeur it has a bloody history, with craftsmen press-ganged to build it and rewarded by having digits amputated to thwart rival tomb-builders.

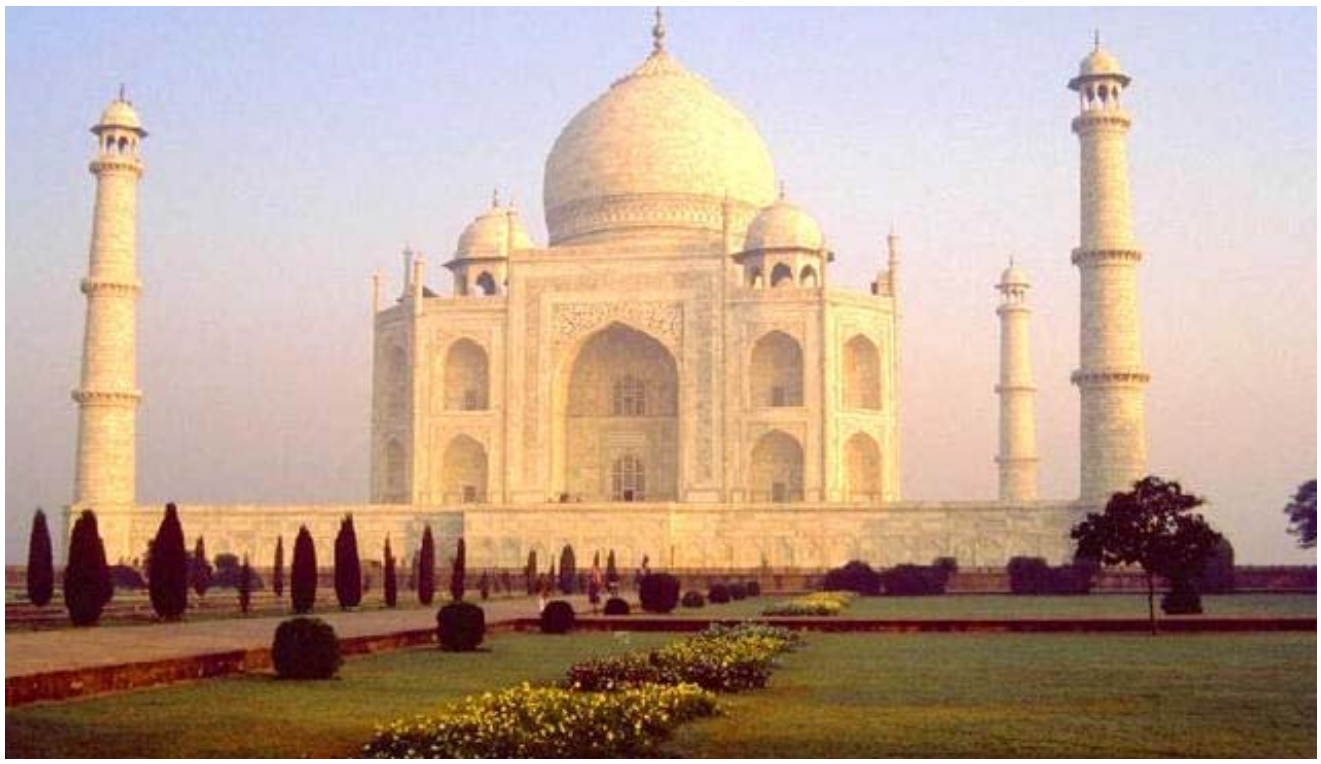
It may not have been fun to live under Shah Jahan, who commissioned the Taj when his wife died giving birth to her 14th child, but he did subsequent generations a favour. Four centuries later they have an immense focus of Indian pride and prestige, as well as continuing income. If kinder and gentler contemporaries put effort into health and education and community uplift, they did not score total success. The average Indian peasant ploughs the same paddy fields standing on the same sled-like contraption drawn by the same oxen as his forebears have been using for a millennium.

Is that a lesson? I don't mean slave labour and hacked limbs, but the principle of going for gold, as it were. If an impoverished society puts all its energy into filling bottomless pits, the pits stay bottomless. Creating things that inspire or ennoble – and are slammed as elitist or extravagant – may do more for the people than for the proprietor. (The Taj did not do much for Jahan's career. He died in jail, imprisoned by his son.)

The Taj entrance fee was 5 rupees – for Indians. For foreigners, 505 rupees. Four of those knocked a hole in the wallet. Still, I persuaded myself, that was right. Tough on backpackers trying to see India as the Indians see it, and tough on South Africans translating their ravaged rands via dollars back to the as-ravaged rupee. But in principle there was something just.

Next day we got into an airplane tangle. The original cause was a monsoon, about which I, not being an American tourist, couldn't complain. However the original cause became compounded by what eventually, 15 hours later, the captain cheerfully described over the intercom as "a lot of bungles and slip-ups."

We sought an alternative flight. The first option was Indian Airlines, at whose hands 100 people had been killed two days earlier. [In a crash that bypassed the western media, which go ballistic about crashes in the west.] The ground-staff person offered solace: "We only have a crash once a year so you'll be fine." Sublime logic but not wholly reassuring. Seat-belted and ready to go, the Indian Airlines flight was cancelled, surprising no-one but us. Option two was Jet Airlines.



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"Sure," said the Jet lady, "three hundred dollars, please." An Indian guy we'd befriended blew up. "What!? For four? It's thirty dollars a seat!" She replied coldly, "for you it's thirty dollars. These people are foreigners." I re-mulled my formerly phlegmatic tolerance of discriminating against foreigners, particularly since "foreign" clearly meant "white." She saw whites and slapped 150% onto the fare. Clearly, too, we weren't meant to know. Our Indian ally bollocksed her for racism but she stood her ground – it was policy, that was that – and then broke into Hindi to bollocks him back for betraying trade secrets to us. I should have had soundman, Zulu Musa, buy the tickets.

In the end that flight also didn't happen. We arrived at Udaiphur on the original plane, a day out of time but worth it to hear the captain's "bungles and slip-ups" candour.

Worth it, too, to have hung on in. By now Bombay memory was several days old and the nostrils were clear. I was becoming gripped by other sides of India. Like ingestion. The average Indian eating house offers neither meat nor liquor, so the average African adult male experiences blind panic upon arrival. Thirty minutes later he's apt to change his tune. An Indian veg-and-lassi dinner is as delicious and filling as anything that comes from butcher shop or bottle store, and much kinder on the liver. Plus there is a profound relief in a virtually drunk-free night-life.

To say nothing of violence-free. There is a solid quota of ethnic and religious barbarities, along with India's private speciality, caste barbarities, but walking the streets of an Indian city, Mumbai included, is peculiarly liberating. The passing wheels keep you on your toes – and thank heaven for all those sober drivers – but there is no thought of attack, assault, guns, knives, boots, aggression in any guise whatever.

In Udaiphur we took on a concentrated dose of another thing – majesty. A British immigrant put it nicely. "With respect," he said, very correct, like a lawyer about to zap you, "with respect, as I ride my bicycle to work every day I pass a dozen castles, tombs and palaces, any one of which, if you had it in South Africa, would be your most famous national treasure. Here, they don't even have names."

Back at Mumbai airport for the Jo'burg flight the departure hall was thick with South African businessmen, plugging in to the opening of India's economy like they're doing to Africa's economies. In one lobe I was proud of them and the way they are making us as a hub of Third-World commerce. In another lobe I shuddered at all the dollar-a-day spade-wielders who are heading for retrenchment under the onslaught of globalism. But the main lobe revolted at my compatriots (of diverse complexions) who ridiculed and derided everything Indian. A few days earlier I might have kept my lip zipped. Now I argued that it wasn't one-way; we had to see beyond the easy three S's to the subtler arenas where India gave us a model. They thought I'd been smoking something strange. ◆

Denis Beckett was presenter of the South African TV series Beckett's Trek for six years. His latest book is Jetlag: SA Airways In The Andrews Era.