

[HARDCOVER: UK]

When all others falter, leave it to John le Carré

The master of the espionage thriller keeps his eyes on the spies with this riveting tale of an alleged terrorist

BY EUAN FERGUSON
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

It would be understandable were John le Carré to sit back, plump up the laurels (if you can do that to laurels) and rest up. In a writing career spanning five decades he has, after all, defined the spy novel, lifting it into the realms of literature, and given us some of the most memorable characters, set pieces and films of the post-1945 era. But he is stubbornly, exuberantly determined to keep exploring, in a world beset with wholly new paranoid, the men and (equally crucially) women who do bad and good by stealth. His new novel is basically a tale of guilty anger — on the part of the Hamburg spies who failed so miserably to latch on to Mohammed Atta and his colleagues; and on the part of the Brits and the Yanks who, desperate for success, are prepared to crawl over anyone for the sake of one small triumph, one imam they can “turn.”

Into Hamburg, then, sneaks a tortured Russian, possibly a Chechen, with scars both mental and physical and, most pertinently, the key to a safety deposit box containing the substantial and wholly ill-gotten gains of his late and despised father, one of the KGB colonels who used Western banks to turn black money white in the dying days of Soviet Russia. Enter the likable but hapless owner of the British (but Hamburg-based) private bank that had been used for these “Lipizzaner” deals (the famous horses are born black but turn white with age). Enter a difficult, delicately drawn female human-rights lawyer who sees in Issa, the refugee, the chance to make amends for previous deportations she failed to prevent. Enter, sotto voce, at least three national espionage networks, watching and planning their three-dimensional chess. The Germans, led by the intensely affable Gunther Bachmann, the book's finest character, see a chance to use Issa to compromise a “moderate” Muslim TV cleric whose charities follow some odd conduits. The Americans want to come in all guns blazing, not just figuratively. The Brits want to skulk, threaten, wheedle, double-cross and steal credit.

What Le Carré has always done terrifically is to capture the nuances of the spying game. His spoofs are wonderful. You find yourself believing you are in that room, quietly rooting for whoever commands your allegiance at that moment. He paints the scene so fully in his own mind before

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A MOST WANTED MAN

BY JOHN LE CARRÉ

340 PAGES

HODDER & STOUGHTON

writing that you forget you're reading fiction: every cough, every glance, each sip of bottled water feels as if it were part of a scrupulously honest documentary. It is also a delight to read a man who believes in proper continuity, when so many lesser thriller writers have waiters arriving with the first course three seconds after the diners have met.

Where Le Carré falls down, I think, is in capturing the burgeoning (or is it?) love triangle between the pretty lawyer, the rich but rubbish banker and the (frankly unlikely) refugee. Did Issa boff Annabel? Will Tommy get her instead? Frankly, who cares? This too-huge subplot fails to grip, and simply points up how much more riveting the real action is. Le Carré's minor characters are never less than spot-on, but his three main ones are oddly shoehorned into emotions that we, the readers, fail to share with them. (And besides, Issa is so annoying that if the gung-ho Americans ever did end up fitting him for a dinky orange boiler-suit, I don't think too many readers would be weeping.)

But these failures aren't too disastrous. Relish, instead, the knowledge this book imparts about the men who have learned to talk just below the level of hotel music, and say small things with huge import; about the impossible moral Mobius strip handed to Western liberals by Islamicist jihad. In *A Most Wanted Man* you are, unlike the modern world, in thrillingly deft, safe hands.



Left: A couple check their reflections on the underside of Anish Kapoor's 110-tonne stainless-steel sculpture *Cloud Gate* at Millennium Park in Chicago. PHOTO: AP
Above: An artist's rendering of a 57-story condominium tower planned for New York's trendy Tribeca district, with a stainless-steel sculpture by Kapoor squeezed into the tower's base. PHOTO: AP
Below: Kapoor, right, with actress Juliette Binoche, composer Philip Sheppard, left, and dancer and choreographer Akram Khan, at the launch of *In-I* and *Jubilations* at London's National Theatre in July. PHOTO: AFP

Let there be light

A passageway through a nondescript apartment block leads to artist Anish Kapoor's new home: a quiet oasis filled with sculpture, light and green spaces

BY JONATHAN GLANCEY
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

Looking for the artist Anish Kapoor's new house in Chelsea, London, I decide he might be having a Turner moment. I was expecting a beautifully crafted modern house, with walls of glass, stone and shimmering stainless steel, designed by the architect Tony Fretton. What I didn't know was that all of this would be secreted behind a bland slab of speculative neo-Georgian design.

The painter J.M.W. Turner set up home in Chelsea more than 150 years ago, when it was a poor and unfashionable suburb — but one where wonderful light was cast every day over the Thames. The Indian-born Kapoor belongs to a very different generation of British artist, one that thrives on celebrity. In moving to Chelsea, he has chosen to make his family home in what is now one of the most expensive and least bohemian parts of London.

Kapoor and his wife Susanna's home in Notting Hill was designed by an architect friend, Pip Horne, in the late 1980s, so the idea of building a new house was not in itself a challenge. What was new was the idea of a modern house hidden from the street — “as you might find in Paris or Barcelona,” Kapoor explains. A passage below the neo-Geo apartments leads you into a world of unexpected courtyards, gardens and trees. There are enormous rooms, sudden stairs, cleverly constructed views and a richness of low-key materials. The narrow entrance gives way to a star-shaped courtyard, open to the sky. The kitchen and dining room are at one end of this courtyard; the other is faced, down a few wide steps, by a long living room. This is as much a private art gallery as a space in which to relax or entertain.

“The idea of the courtyards was a given, really,” says Kapoor. “This is a long, narrow site and we wanted to get as much daylight into the rooms as possible. The idea developed so that the house became a way of walking in and out of fresh air



PHOTO: AP

and gardens, on the way from one side to the other.” Kapoor has collaborated with a number of architects over the years; a series of striking curved and mirror-finished entrances for subway stations in Naples, which he developed with Future Systems, will open later this year. His most radical work on an architectural, and indeed monumental, scale has been in partnership with the structural engineer Cecil Balmond. Their *Marsyas* sculpture, installed in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in 2002, was an extraordinary stretch of voluptuous red fabric. Next year, another Balmond-Kapoor project will transform the landscape at Middlesbrough in the industrial north east of England: *Tenemos*, a kind of voluminous windsock stretched between apparently delicate posts, is the first of a series of five vast public artworks, with sites in Stockton, Redcar, Hartlepool and Darlington (also all in the north east) next in line. “All these projects,” Kapoor says, “are about interrogating form, and making large-scale objects that manage to be as ethereal as they are substantial.”

Where Kapoor's sculptures are often richly colored and sensuously formed, his new home works around a limited palette. At first glance, it is as cool as a cucumber. “I am naturally playful,” Kapoor agrees, “while Tony [Fretton], though he has a dry sense of humor, can be almost comically dour.” The principal rooms have been designed for books and artworks. These, and family

life (the Kapoors have two children), will provide all the color needed. Fretton has worked with Hopton Wood limestone and Mandale Fossil stone, two materials much loved by British sculptors and architects since the 1930s. Hopton Wood limestone, quarried near Matlock, Derbyshire, central England, is creamy, warm and studded with fossils; Mandale Fossil limestone, from a quarry close by, comes in shades of gray and is immensely hard-wearing.

Kapoor and Fretton have known each other for years, since the artist's work was first shown in the Fretton-designed Lisson Gallery. “We've enjoyed a healthily detached relationship,” says Kapoor. “As a client, you need some sense of distance from your architect. I thought of keeping out of the way while he built the house — he's a craftsman by nature and very involved in construction — but I couldn't help myself, and ended up coming down nearly every morning on my way to my studio.”

Kapoor doesn't intend to work from home. “The house is a quiet object,” he says. “This is a family home, not a place for me to make a mess — I have a studio for that. For me, architecture is about the essentials of light, space, proportion and materials. I don't want to live in a sculpture designed by an architect. I go crazy when I hear people say that the best new sculpture is by architects — meaning overexpressive buildings. I love making sculptures, and collaborating with architects, but I want to live in a house that's a happy home, not an artwork.”

Kapoor says that if he could have chosen any architect in recent history to build him a house, he would have chosen Louis Kahn. “No disrespect to Tony. Kahn is long dead, and anyway, I'm not sure I would be able to live up to one of his designs. He made everyday buildings somehow mythic, and my family and I need a healthy dose of reality to make everyday life comfortable. Tony and I also share a huge admiration for the work of [American conceptual artist] Dan

Graham, and this house is partly a homage to him. We'll be installing a Graham pavilion in the garden courtyard here, so house and artwork will play off one another.”

Fretton has designed homes and studios for artists throughout his career. From the Lisson Gallery in Marylebone, west London, through the Camden Arts Center (in 2004) in north London, via modest and beautiful spaces including the Holton Lee Studios on England's Dorset coast, Fretton's subtle designs have been handmaidens to modern British art. Each is quietly powerful, none gets in the way. Kapoor describes his own home as “a reflection of a quiet modern vernacular.” “It has traditional rooms, even if some are pretty big. And, look, we've even got skirting boards! They're made of strips of stainless steel rather than traditional timber, but which modern architect would put skirting boards in a new house? They hate them.”

In a sense, Fretton and Kapoor are following in a tradition of creating just such houses in Chelsea — artists' homes that play a subtle game of balancing new and age-old designs, plans and building materials. In the late 19th century, artists such as William Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and John Singer Sargent came to live and work in Chelsea. A generation of radical artists and architects (Richard Norman Shaw, CR Ashbee) teamed up to shape the look of the area. The 1921 census reveals that nine out of every 1,000 people living in Chelsea was an artist. Today, the borough has become so expensive that the Chelsea College of Art and Design has left, moving to nearby Westminster.

Will the artists return here? If they make Hirst-loads of money, perhaps. In the meantime, Kapoor's secret hideaway, a brushstroke or two away from Turner's old house, is a fitting retreat for a contemporary artist quietly in love with the best — but not the noisiest — modern architecture.

[HARDCOVER: UK]

‘The going is still good,’ even if the world is worse

Cheeky, knowledgeable and merciless in his treatment of wicked people and cruel governments, Paul Theroux is America's modern Mark Twain

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Two books from Paul Theroux in three months — what a bonanza! And in this new account of re-traveling the route (with a few minor changes) of his *The Great Railway Bazaar*, published in 1975, we see him writing the stories in *The Elephantia Suite* I reviewed in July [Taipei Times, July 20, 2008, Page 14]. In one story, he says, he's venting his feelings about India, as well he might — India is one of the Asian countries he finds most fault with, along with Burma and Singapore. But then no book from this stable would come up to expectations if it didn't have its share of sarcasm and doubly barbed invective.

Theroux is now 67 and aware of it — references to his age are frequent. He's had double cataract surgery, he says, and buys sleeping pills en route. And he muses on how the world has changed, largely for the worse, in 33 years — “shrinking to a ball of bungled desolation,” he concludes. His last sentence is nevertheless

“The going is still good.” The book is crowded with references to his travel-phrase predecessors and this phrase probably remembers Evelyn Waugh's 1946 selection from his travel writing, *When the Going Was Good*. He ambles round Japan's Nara Prefecture with Pico Ayer, and the pair evaluate all the great travelers they can think of, implying an imaginary company of which they are both part (and Theroux certainly is). He frequently mentions his old mentor V.S. Naipaul, as well as his interview with Jorge Luis Borges in Buenos Aires, and in this book he interviews Orhan Pamuk in Turkey, Arthur C. Clarke in Sri Lanka and Haruki Murakami in Tokyo. (“Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional,” quotes Murakami, a man who once ran a 100km marathon).

Once again, as with so many of Theroux's products, this is an endlessly resourceful and stimulating book. He sets off from London on a gloomy March day and travels through France, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Georgia,

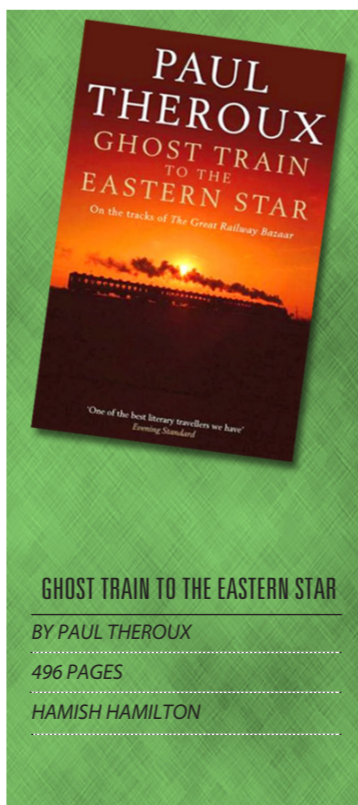
Turkmenistan (“a landscape like cat litter”), Uzbekistan, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Japan, and then back through Russia on the trans-Siberian railway.

He encounters missionaries with disgust, and quotes Mark Twain on *The Book of Mormon* — “chloroform in print.” Indeed, Paul Theroux is America's modern Mark Twain — at least as good a writer, and possibly even better.

The chapter likely to attract most debate is the one on Singapore. This is a place Theroux has a long-standing grudge against, and here he appears to be having what may be his last say on the matter. No holds are barred. “What I have written so far would be enough to get my ass whipped in Singapore. Strange blooms, eh? Cruel and unforgiving government, eh? Drop your pants and bend over, Mister Thorax! You're getting fifty cuts of the rotan!”

The Asian countries he likes best are Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. He considers Sri Lanka's problematic economy has led

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GHOST TRAIN TO THE EASTERN STAR

BY PAUL THEROUX

496 PAGES

HAMISH HAMILTON

back change so that the island still retains much of its old charm, that Thailand is remarkably clean and efficient, and that Vietnam has an astonishing lack of resentment about the war, displaying instead a determination to get on with life (in contrast to the self-pitying pleas for handouts he sees as characterizing Cambodia).

He nowhere spares his own country. The US carpet-bombing of Cambodia in the 1970s “without any authorization from Congress,” killing 600,000 people and “driving the peasants into joining the Khmer Rouge” is only matched in infamy in Theroux's eyes by the bombing of North Vietnam in December of 1972. This was part of the US's “evil-intentioned outrages directed from the air,” he writes, and an “unambiguously genocidal act of pure wickedness.”

He finds things to blame former US presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton for too, but he also defends the US, noting (not for the first time — he said the same in Sudan in *Dark Star Safari*) that people who criticize the place

would often give everything they have to live there.

As for Burma, Theroux's pages on the country are the most moving in the book. He pities the people with every inch of his soul, and befriends a Mandalay bicycle-rickshaw driver who'd spent his life educating the young, but still remained a pauper.

Other countries scarcely fare less badly. He considers Pakistan was (in 2006) too dangerous for an American to visit, and sees Russia as remaining what it had always been, even under the czars, “a pretentious empire with a cruel government that was helpless without secret police.” He visits the remains of the most notorious Soviet gulag prison, Perm 36, and says he wouldn't survive two days in one of its punishment cells.

He talks to ordinary people, stays in US\$10 hotels (though occasionally treating himself to luxury, as at the Eastern and Oriental in Penang), and makes a point of finding out how much everyone earns. He finds that

some graduates in call-centers in Bangalore earn as little as US\$60 a week, concluding that India, far from experiencing an economic rebirth, remains what it was to the British in the 18th century, a place where money can be made by others on the backs of the cheap labor of the locals.

Theroux is everywhere cheeky, knowledgeable, funny, observant (needless to say) and, presumably, scrupulously honest. It appears he's no longer the fish-eating vegetarian he described himself as being 16 years ago in *The Happy Isles of Oceania*, asking then why animals should die so he could paddle his canoe around the Pacific. Nowadays he buys salami and sausages.

But he remains the best of all travelers because he reaches out to ordinary people while remaining deeply skeptical of governments. “Politicians are always inferior to their citizens,” he concludes. There are almost 500 pages in this wonderful book, and not one of them contains a single dull sentence.