



THE POOR PRINT



An Interview with John Simpson CBE

William McDonald

A few weeks ago, BBC Foreign Correspondent John Simpson give the Ascension Day sermon in Oriel Chapel. The Poor Print's political correspondent, William McDonald, caught up with Mr Simpson before the service.

Comfortably ensconced in an armchair, John Simpson looks rather like most other septuagenarians. But his kind smile and rugged features disguise a steely resolve that has enabled him to return time and again to some of the most dangerous places on earth. Fifty years of working at the BBC has seen him visit more than one hundred and twenty countries including over thirty war zones.

Educated at Magdalen College, Cambridge (where he edited the magazine *Granta*), Simpson afterwards got a training contract with the BBC. He

would later learn that his tutor had written to the BBC claiming he was confident Simpson would get a Double First. 'The stupid buggers never asked me. In fact, I got a really crap 2.2.'

On his first day as a reporter in 1970, Simpson was sent to follow the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, as he boarded a train at Euston Station. 'Nobody was doing anything or saying anything, they were just smiling ingratiatingly, so I thought, 'Well bugger that!' A terrible mistake. He punched me really quite hard in the stomach with one fist and tried to pull the microphone out with another. In those days you didn't speak to Prime Ministers; you didn't ask them questions. Nobody told me that. By 10.50am on my first day as a reporter I'd been assaulted by the PM and lost my job.' However, Wilson's threatened complaint never materialised.

It was this same bold spirit which enabled Simpson to get into Af-

ghanistan in 2001. Taken across the border by smugglers, Simpson and his crew managed to avoid detection by disguising themselves in burqas. 'Me and my cameraman were sat dressed as women in the back of a pickup truck, so they couldn't see that if we stood up we were the two biggest women in Afghanistan.'

When challenged about the risks he is prepared to take to get a news story, Simpson muses. 'I don't think I'd ever see it in that light. It's quite difficult to encompass the notion of your own death. I'm prepared to take risks, if only because nothing is quite as bad close up as you think it is.'

However, these risks have very nearly seen Simpson killed. When travelling with US Special Forces in Iraq, their convoy was hit in a blue on blue airstrike by a US warplane, killing eighteen people. 'That was a nasty experience. The US commander called in an airstrike on an Iraqi tank and

something got mixed up: instead of dropping the bomb on the Iraqi tank, they dropped it right where we were. My whole team had injuries, but it was a narrow escape.'

Not everyone was so lucky though. 'My poor translator was killed from shock and blood loss. Most of us had shrapnel in us. I've still got quite a big lump in me, and most of us are deaf in one ear. But I'm alive.'

Simpson believes that the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have seen an end to similar Western interventions in the future. 'I suspect we're moving away altogether from the era where we intervene in any given conflict. It's going to become much more difficult than that.'

Before Simpson became a foreign correspondent, he worked as the BBC's political editor, and before that covered the 1975 EU Referendum. He describes the difference between the two as 'depressing'. 'People then

seemed to be absolutely obsessed with the issue, in a rather charming, impressive way. As if everyone felt that it came down to them, as if their own personal choice could influence the whole thing. I travelled around a lot in Great Britain, and most of the people I met took it really seriously and were aware of the issues in a way which now I just don't think has happened. People don't seem to care so much. And worse still they're bored with it.'

Simpson acknowledges that this is in part due to changes in political campaigning strategies. 'It's been a dirty, nasty, personal, *ad hominem* campaign and I don't think that people like that at all. I'm not quite sure why politicians do it; they must realise that it's not popular.'

As to the future of the EU, he says, 'I think [its] unstable, quite unstable. I do think that the grand old idea of the Atlantic to the Urals is probably gone now. Its hard think that Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia are really up to the speed of the others, and that's what's caused some of the problems.'

Smoke and Mirrors

Charlie Willis

They had a tiger at the circus. And when she wasn't on stage inside the big red and yellow tent, she lay in a foul-smelling cage by the edge of the field, panting. The girl didn't believe in tigers. A black and orange cat as big as a horse? It was absurd. So she told Pauly on that rainy evening in October when he'd asked her to meet him in his caravan.

'I'll take you to see her for yourself,' he said. When he spoke, his cigarette jumped up and down in the corner of his mouth. The mouth itself was crooked and pale across his face, like a scar that had healed badly. The girl hated sitting so close to him. But he'd insisted she sat on the little stool in front of his chair. And when he insisted things, jagged threats seemed to flutter behind a gauze of charm like rocks lurking beneath waves. She hated the sour smell of smoke. She could hardly see him in the fog that he'd blown out around himself.

'She's the only reason people come to this damn place,' Pauly said. He leaned forward with his elbows resting on his knees. The glowing butt of his cigarette bounced a few inches away from the girl's face. Drops of rain began to beat on the roof of the tent.

'So do you want to see her or not?'

Now the girl knew he was teasing her. He must have heard her playing on the patch of yellow grass out by the ice cream stall. He'd heard her talking to her dragons, and he'd seen her running beneath the shadow of her flying phoenix and he knew she didn't have a tiger. She didn't know whether to play along. She thought she could run away if she got up quickly. But he'd have people waiting in the wings, reaching out of the rain to grab her.

'Yes, I want to see her,' she said.

Pauly stood up, stretched his neck to one side, and took the cigarette out of his mouth. He blew a plume of smoke out through pursed lips and then took the girl by the arm. She flinched but he only tightened his grip.

'Where are we going?' The girl had to shout over the hissing of the rain. Pauly didn't hear her. As they weaved their way along the narrow paths between the

tents, Pauly turned and smiled at the girl. She'd never seen such crooked, yellow teeth. The orange light from the lanterns inside the tents wobbled on his face and made his flesh ripple and squirm. Deep ridges and ditches appeared and deepened and disappeared around the crumpled edges of his eyes.

'We're nearly there now,' he leaned down to whisper in her ear. His breath was hot. The girl's heart stamped in her throat. Pauly spat out the sodden butt of his cigarette and trod it into the wet mud with the heel of his boot.

The tiger's cage was at the end of a string of carriages and boxes and carts. Two white horses were standing out in the rain, their ragged manes stuck to their necks. They had stopped pulling at the hay bag that was tied up in front of them and were dozing with their eyes half-closed. The rainwater trickled off their rumps in little rivulets and streams.

'Why haven't these two been put away?' Pauly shouted somebody's name. A tall man with a black beard came lolloping out from behind a carriage. His jaw was slack, but his brow was tight with panic.

'She's loose,' he said, but they couldn't hear him over the rain.

'She's loose!' he cried.

Then there was much caterwauling and howling and swearing. Men ran about on the watery grass carrying spools of thick rope and lanterns. The girl saw the glimmer of a rifle. She heard a fearsome rumble like thunder in the distant night sky. She guessed Pauly must have forgotten about his little game. She went in through the flap of a nearby tent. A fat woman, coiled up in coloured scarves, was lying on a low bed.

Purple threads of sweet-smelling smoke curled out from a lamp beside her and twisted around and around her arms like a trapeze artist's ribbons. A parrot with a rainbow of feathers rested its talons on her round, bare shoulder.

'Why are they running?' the girl asked, and the woman laughed a hollow laugh that crumbled into dry coughing.

'Why?' said the parrot, and the woman continued to cough.

'What's happening?' said the girl, her cold, wet hair hung in tendrils around her shoulders. The woman waved her

hand that was heavy with tight rings with jewels that glinted sharply behind the thick haze.

'She's escaped, sweetheart,' the woman said, 'and it's all over.'

The girl went out into the rain again. She went away from the screaming and the clanging of metal to the fence that lined the edge of the field. She climbed onto the fence and looked out at the grassy land that flooded into the black night before her. She stretched out her arms and she was at the stern of a ship, like one of those wooden mermaids, flying over a black sea. In the distance, to the east, she saw the warm glow of the town and she jumped off the fence and made her way across the field. Her footsteps were quiet on the damp grass and the rain began to fade.

When she came to the other side of the field, she climbed over another fence and dropped down into a forest. The clouds had moved away from the moon now. A soft white light slipped across the tree trunks and the wet leaves in the thicket. She heard a slithering of feathers, and her phoenix landed beside her. His feathers were blood red in the darkness.

'And where are the dragons?' she wondered aloud. When she had gone on a few more steps, she heard their familiar growl. They scurried across the path in front of her, their black wings crookedly folded against their spiny, arched backs.

As they went deeper into the forest, a shadow swelled on the path up ahead. The girl narrowed her eyes, but it was too dark to make out shapes in the distance. She carried on walking. The cold night air made her skin bristle. In the blackness, her breath swirled in front of her. Then, above the shadow, she saw a flash of orange like the glow of amber and a slash of black that was deeper than the sky's. She saw a beast as big as a horse beneath the light of the moon.

When she saw the girl, the beast turned and slunk along the path. And so they walked away from the circus, with the phoenix flying up ahead, followed by the dragons, followed by the tiger, followed by the girl.■

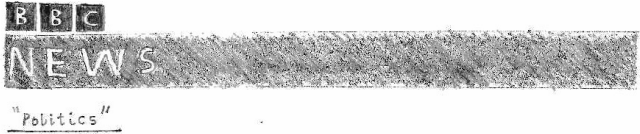
‘Goodbye’

Chloe Cheung

fingertips warm lips—
parting is such sweet—sorrow
i say(dreams
really do come true)

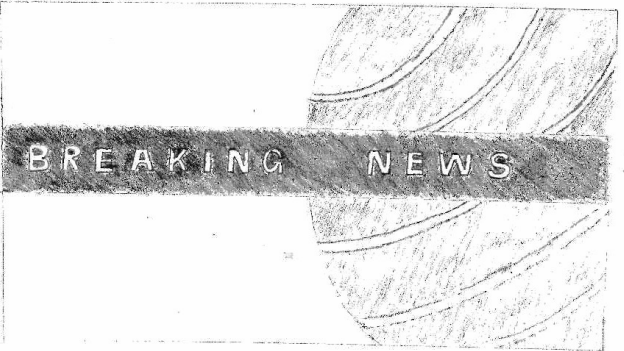
icecold river dissolves
past/present/future
take me back now;
rewind three years:
tick, tock, tick, tock, tick ...

it's not 'goodbye' my dear,
but a promise that we'll meet again—



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SLOW TRAVEL: The End of the Road?

Tobias Thornes

In the midst of the unimaginably vast, empty expanse that is the surface of the Pacific Ocean – the thin, glittering film across which we have slid for nearly a month – the first, precious sighting of land feels like the fulfilment of one’s every hope and dream. For days I have feared that I would never reach this moment: that memories of solid Earth were nothing but the fantasies of a deluded mind, or worse that time would play some cruel trick upon us, standing still, so that every day we’d be doomed to relive the ‘last’ day again and again on this unbroken sea for all eternity, supposedly close to our conclusion but never actually reaching the end.

But my groundless fears were vanquished by that gratifying vision: a tiny spec growing, undeniably, hour by hour. We would not be lost, tossed on endless un navigable waves: as soon as we saw that sumptuous sight we knew that we’d be saved. I simply stood and stared for many minutes, at my heart’s content just to see undeniable land. No longer did I will the wishful hours away; no longer did I mind, were it to take a day or week or another month to reach it. All that mattered was that land was assured, and that one day we’d be home.

Never had I thought to greet so gratefully the shores of Hawaii, a life-saving outpost in the midst of the sea. As we disembarked, stumbling on my shaky sea-legs I almost felt like tumbling down and kissing the very ground. I grasped for a handful of dirt; to me it felt like gold-dust, and the sound of waves on rocks, of birds, of crowds of people was like all the music I’d ever want to hear. It’s places like this, after a long, slow, landless voyage, that make one appreciate how, on an Earth three-

quarters covered by water, just how precious and exceptional is solid ground.

Hawaii is unusual in that here the ground is growing, welling up in an effusive eruption from Earth’s secret heart. The first thing that I want to do is to explore the remaining idylls of these islands, to see the hope-inspiring symbol of new natural creation for myself – a perfect antidote to the artificial archipelago of waste I’ve just witnessed.

Hawaii is much larger than I’d imagined it. The northernmost group of islands in Polynesia, it is spread across one and a half thousand miles, with a human population of one and a half million. It was annexed to the USA as long ago as 1898, and around me I see the usual signs of imported American culture: cars, roads, shopping centres, fast food, obesity – the ugly faces of capitalism are a recent plague on this once pristine place. But there’s also an astounding amount of surviving natural beauty, as I’m about to discover. The erupting volcano of Kilauea is in the Volcanoes National Park in the south of ‘Big Island’, and it’s not difficult to find somebody to lead me there. But on my way there’s a stop I simply can’t miss making, and quite by chance I come upon the perfect guide.

This man isn’t from Hawaii. He’s from Tuvalu, half-way to Australia. But now he works as a tour guide, trying to raise awareness for his homeland’s plight at the same time as earning a living. For Hawaii is truly unusual in its continual growth; ten million years ago this was open ocean. Elsewhere in the Pacific, the trend is almost entirely the other way: in perhaps only a hundred years, Tuvalu will be gone, swallowed by the sea. And the clinching evidence to pin down the culprit of this sudden catastrophe is on display right here, at

the Mauna Loa observatory on top of the world’s most massive volcano.

It wasn’t for nothing that Charles Keeling chose this site to begin making his measurements of carbon dioxide in 1958. High above most of the murk emitted by mankind, the air is clear and well-mixed by fresh westerly winds. We’ve had to come most of the way by car, but are able to make the final ascent by foot, spurning the slick road for a rockier ascent. It’s a beautiful sight before us, gleaming atop the mountain: the place that proved that humble humanity does have the power to change the planet, and pinned the blame for climate change squarely on us.

Somewhere swirling around this mountain, I think guiltily as we gaze, those fumes our car has just disgorged are making a slight but not inconsequential contribution to the climbing concentration of carbon dioxide, a trend Keeling noticed with horror and which for more than sixty years we’ve continually failed to check. The air even here isn’t so pristine as it might look, after all. That’s the terrifying truth that he found. And in a chaotic system such as our atmosphere, even single particle of invisible pollutant can have profound effects.

As we journey on towards Kilauea, my companion tells me more about the plight of the millions most undeniably affected by climate change because of the needless greed of others far away. The island atolls – Pacific paradises inhabited for millennia – are drowning alarmingly quickly. Tuvalu has already lost one of its islands, and every year the sea encroaches a little further, like a lengthening shadow before the setting of the sun.

The losses are catalysed by deteriorating reefs and inadequate conservation measures, but there can be no denying

the major driving factor: global sea-level rise. Water expands when it warms; melting glaciers over land leek millions of litres into the oceans every day. The combined effect could be a death-knell, and not just for Tuvalu. The twenty-nine atolls of the Marshall islands are on average just six feet above sea level; their inhabitants are already reduced to creating their own islands of rubbish, shoring their land up with trash to hold back the tide. The Maldives are even lower. Nowadays, the stormy season brings such severe floods that their thousands of inhabitants are forced to flee their homes.

And sea-level rise is slow to start but hard to halt; this is just the beginning. Even if the world’s emissions stopped today the ocean’s encroachment might continue for a century. Soon, there’ll be no higher ground to which to flee.

We drive on through the fertile forest of Hawaii, marvelling at the multitude of life thriving on its rich volcanic soils. All these birds and flowers, some unique to this island, must have had hardy ancestors that braved the winds and seas to colonise this remote corner. But once established, life clings on, even in the harshest of environments. It will survive, whatever we do, in some form or another, to flourish again in a future aeon.

But as my guide and I reach an abrupt halt where the road suddenly stops, buried beneath a wall of magma that erupted several years ago now, I ponder. This century could well be the final farewell for Pacific islanders, as well as for many of the species that call our planet home.

My path has been blocked; I can go no further. Has humanity, too, reached the end of the road? Is it time, my friends, to say ‘goodbye’?■

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Thanks

The Editorial Body of The Poor Print would like to offer their thanks to all those who have read and supported Oriel College’s fortnightly newspaper throughout the year.

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Join the Team for Michaelmas Term 2016

The Poor Print team is looking for new editors, photographers, writers and a whole team of talented people to begin in Michaelmas Term 2016. To find out more, email thepoorprint@oriel.ox.ac.uk



‘When Dreams become Reality’ In Conversation with Oriel’s Will Tant

Jacob Warn

Will Tant, 1st year MPhil in Theology, comes to Oriel after a career in pro-surfing and as a professional model.

Surf’s Up

Will’s surfing career began in Florida, where he would surf with his brother. By his sophomore year in high school, Will had made the national team and began to compete seriously. He won the East Coast Championships in his senior year.

‘I would surf before school – before the sun had risen – then come home and surf after school, then go to the gym and train. I would compete every weekend.’

After high school, Will turned pro, heading across America and living for two years in California.

Surfin’ USA

I asked Will what kind of money there’s to be had in the sport:

‘One of the best quotes I’ve heard about being a professional surfer is *Being a professional surfer will make you rich, just not in dollars*. It’s a different form of wealth, an appreciation for life and people and circumstances.’

The physical strain required of surfers is enormous. ‘It’s an interesting mix of fitness,’ he explains. ‘A lot of upper body – ninety percent of what we do is paddling. Then core strength, but, I think most importantly, a general love of what you do. If you love it, it helps out a lot with the pain that you’ll go through.’

Surfin’ Safari

During these years, Will travelled around the world, to the coasts of Indonesia and the Philippines, living on the edge of society, bartering with local tribes. ‘Bartering for what?’ I ask, ‘Bartering for fresh fish!’ he replies,

laughing. ‘I basically traveled around the world every year for ten years’.

I asked him if he searches for waves or follows competitions when travelling around the globe? ‘For waves. My style of surfing lent itself to photography. I travelled with a photographer and a cinematographer and had companies pay me every month. It’s all based on your performance – on the size of the waves and moves you do.’

It’s like being Special Ops. You train your whole life for these moments.

‘It’s all about the weather patterns. You’re chasing storms. That’s what you get paid to do. You’re chasing hurricanes and typhoons. You try to surf the waves produced by the storm, and ideally it won’t hit you, but it can. It’s like being Special Ops. You train your whole life for these moments. It’s imprinted in your mind forever.’

You also get known for a certain style. ‘For me this was power-surfing, which is essentially a fundamental kind of surfing. It’s having good technique and power.’ But it’s all about pushing yourself and the sport in front of the camera: ‘if you can find new waves, that magazine is going to run the article quicker. If you get that wave and its ten feet bigger than anyone else has done it, that’s a story.’

Will describes the feeling: ‘Training your entire life to be in that one moment. When your dreams become reality. Surfing those iconic waves in Hawaii, Indonesia, Japan, South Africa...’

Help Me Rhonda!

Will reminds me that Florida is the shark-bite capital of the world. Hammerheads, bull sharks, tiger sharks, thresher sharks, and even great white sharks patrol Florida’s coast. ‘I’ve never been bitten, but I’ve been chased a number of times.’ When a fin pops up, he explains, you watch which direction they’re heading in. ‘If it turns

towards you, then you’ve got to go. It’s every man for himself. It’s like lettering a tiger loose in a zoo.’ Will laughs and I can almost imagine the countless near-death scares he’s experienced.

But Will assures me that the shark danger isn’t half as bad as people think. ‘The rate of dying by selfie is greater than dying from shark attacks.’ How’s that? ‘Getting hit by a bus, eaten by an animal, just being stupid.’

Sharks aren’t the only worry out on the waves. There’s the jellyfish too. ‘Portuguese man-of-war are the worst kind,’ Will says. ‘They’ll send you into the beach crying.’ Then there are other kinds, those you can actually pick up and throw at the friends, without being stung yourself.

I Get Around

As his surfing career progressed, Will began modelling during those moments he wasn’t travelling. ‘I did all kinds of stuff,’ he says. ‘Everything from high fashion, editorials in Italian Vogue, right down to those daily catalogues you get every day in the mail.’

‘They treat you really well. Unlike surfing. When you’re surfing, you’re pioneering an expedition across the world where everything could and did happen. Modelling is a catered experience. All you do is sit there and someone takes a photo of you.’

I ask Will if he’s ever been on a catwalk. He erupts with laughter. ‘No! I’ve never been on a catwalk. I have to draw the line somewhere.’

Till I Die[?]

But being a pro-surfer also brings death right to the forefront. ‘I’ve seen surfers die right in front of me. I’ve almost died at least a handful of times myself.’ How do you cope with those moments? ‘It might be a day, an hour, ten minutes, but you need to get yourself back out there in the same situation and catch another wave- conquer it.’

At the age of thirty-two, Will was diagnosed with a heart condition that made him choose between his life as a professional athlete and his life. ‘It may seem like an obvious decision, but it wasn’t. My identity, my self-worth was all wrapped up with surfing. It was hard to find value in life without it.’

Choosing to give up surfing, Will underwent the second most invasive heart surgery possible.

God Only Knows

In the two years that followed, restricted from doing any form of physical activity, studying offered another outlet. ‘In surfing, like studying, there’s a lot of time spent isolated training. It’s hard work.’

‘Having to find value in life without doing what I loved to do made me ask some big questions about my own life.’

He made the decision to walk away from the surfing career and, finding himself in New York, applied for a BA in Religion at Columbia University, where he was accepted as a mature student.

‘For me, having all those experiences and travelling the world and spending time in the ocean, it always begged the question: why is this here? Everything is just too incredibly beautiful, whether it’s a sunset, or the waves, or just all that creation.’

What similarities are there between studying theology and surfing? ‘Well, you can’t compare the two. Surfing is kind of an interactive art, it’s about the experience.’ And the tutors? ‘Well, I have a natural anti-authority streak. I’m a surfer.’■

‘Goodbye’

Luke Sheridan

I said goodbye to a friend today.
A mirror.
A rainforest well of the same unknown depth.
A crystal cave undrained by men with ropes and suits.
Unvisited by the thousand eyes
Devouring the monthly publications
Extolling the great wonder of the hidden
Deep, displaying in photographs ‘untouched’ nature with a Proud man in the bottom left corner for reference.

I said goodbye to the same lapis rock
Which, ground into powder and hung
In our galleries
Looks so different to the ambling spectators who chance upon us.
How does that same mineral
Furnish the unfolded Wilton in Angelic invitation
And yet lay in the darkness of the Madonna a corridor away?

I said goodbye to a friend today.
A surprise, who had long remained an alien.
A relief from the monotony of blue laminate floors,
and plastic tables, and standardised notes.

A clear reflection on a train from Stratford.
I said goodbye to the summer I grew up with today.