

## Letter From Australia

by R.J. Stove

### Love It or Leave It?



As ululating headline after ululating headline blares forth Wall Street's apocalypse; as Obamamaniacs promise race riots to break whitey's collective spirit once and for all; as concepts like Peak Oil move from the fringes to the mainstream of media discourse; as America is forced to apprehend, in Fay Weldon's droll aphorism, that "the *fin* has come early this *siècle*"—a line from Chesterton's short story "The Arrow of Heaven" takes on ever-greater significance for us outside Americophiles. That line is this: "He [Father Brown] realized that he was among foreigners, even if he was among friends."

Never has America appeared more incomprehensible in other lands than she has in the last month. We who are routinely published in America, who read for preference American books and magazines, who live and sleep and breathe and indeed dream America, who above all treasure our American friendships, are as baffled by what to expect as if we were contemplating Nagorno-Karabakh. All we can predict is that the mass culture will increasingly bear the same relation to a genuine culture that the Soviet-era Lake Baikal bore to a viable ecosystem. Now that this long-operating development has been quickened and sharpened by economic crisis of the most visible kind, we find ourselves wondering: For American paleoconservatives, has American residence now passed the point of tolerability? Will entire intellectual classes, rather than mere ornery individuals, start emigrating?

Some years ago Joseph Sobran decided, with characteristic *élan* and

verve, that he would give President Bush's empire the two-fingered salute by moving to Haiti. After all, as he argued, illegal immigration is not a problem that Haitian regimes have ever had to cope with before, and there is no reason to suppose that they have acquired any efficiency at suppressing it now. His plan for an expatriate city upon a hill at Port-au-Prince seems to have been frustrated by events; but others will take the notions of international (instead of merely intra-urban) white flight very seriously.

We all—American and non-American readers alike—have become so accustomed to the chauvinistic honking of David Frum and his wretched kind as to have forgotten a straightforward historical truth: There have been times when exile has seemed like the natural condition of *Homo americanus'* authorial contingent. For proof of the truth, we need not even look at Melville's Polynesian preoccupations, or the Mediterranean obsessions of Hawthorne and Margaret Fuller. Simply imagine literature between the wars without its American exiles: Hemingway, Eliot, Pound, Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, Kay Boyle, and the rest. It just cannot be done. We saw a similar, though much smaller, self-imposed American migration during the Vietnam War, afflicting such artists as Robert Lowell, useless to any draft board by virtue of age. There is no reason why a similar trend could not happen afresh, especially when intercontinental travel is easier to arrange *via* the internet (and no more expensive) than it has ever been.

Among traditional Catholic online discussion groups—the same thing could well be true of online discussion groups for traditional Lutherans and Orthodox—the question of where the remnant should emigrate, to escape a totally rather than merely nominally post-Christian America, has become a topic of almost feverish, and uniformly dyslexic, discussion. Malta and Poland recur as possibilities. A

few benighted souls imagine that they might find a welcoming home in Australia, being presumably unaware that on the present (or any future) Australian government's immigration wish list, white skilled Trinitarian English-speakers rank well below the tempest-tossed products of teeming Third World shores. New Zealand is a marginally more plausible refuge, her devotion to proportional parliamentary representation having had the unintended consequence of giving legislative power to individuals with sane immigration policies. Even now, the demographic difference between New Zealand and eastern Australia resembles the demographic difference between Hartford and South Central Los Angeles.

The old hard-hat slogan ran: "America: Love it or leave it." Burke adopted a more intelligent credo: "For us to love our country, our country ought to be lovely." If not lovely, then at least bearable. What happens when a country has ceased to be bearable, so that no further accommodations with the *Zeitgeist* can be made, no further rationalizations exhibited, without destroying precisely that cognitive power which made the intellectual an intellectual in the first place? We foreigners should not presume to tell Americans where their tipping point is. Yet Americans themselves should. Perhaps *Chronicles* could contemplate organizing a symposium on the subject of whether expatriation should be deprecated, ignored, or roundly encouraged. A working title could be adapted from *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: "Silence, Exile, or Cunning?"

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# Letter From Burma

by Harry Nicolaides

## Checkpoint Child Porn



In a small, dimly lit room at the Burmese immigration office, on the border of northern Thailand and Burma, there is a large, luminous portrait of Gen. Than Shwe, festooned with medals and ribbons.

His steely gaze surveys the hundreds of foreign tourists who cross the Thai-Burma border bridge to visit the ramshackle, open-air market at Tachilek each day. He is also the embodiment of strict and relentless censorship, from poetry to the latest Rambo film (set in Burma)—everything controlled by his Orwellian regime.

However, less than 50 meters away, under the bridge on the Burmese side—and for a little over a dollar—you can buy films depicting the sexual abuse and torture of British, American, European, and Asian children. Some are aged as young as four, while none is older than twelve.

And unless you are a saffron-robed monk, you will not be searched on the way back across the border into Thailand.

While the market at Tachilek is notorious for fake designer goods, dubious precious gemstones, the teeth, skulls, and skins of endangered animals, and phony, placebo-inducing pharmaceuticals, the child pornography is real.

The chilling tears and shrieks are not the result of dubbing or digital manipulation.

The graphic footage of a five-year-old Cambodian girl having her arms strapped to her legs with electrical tape before being subjected to unspeakable violations is unrehearsed.

The diminutive seven-year-old British girl who is raped by a 200-pound, black-hooded man while another man films has been deceived by someone she trusts.

The Indian girl, aged about six, wearing only school socks and shoes,

has not been groomed to look like a primary-school student: She is a primary-school student. And she is violently raped.

Unlike the ubiquitous image of Saddam Hussein on playing cards and cigarette lighters, peddled by the hundreds of panhandlers who whisper conspiratorially to tourists about sex with children, no two girls or scenes of abuse in dozens of different films and hours of footage are the same. And while the fake designer goods are mass produced for a large, diverse market, the record of abuse of these young girls is sold exclusively to a dedicated, hardcore group of connoisseurs by the world's most malevolent cottage industry.

The Tachilek market and the bridge crossing at Mai Sai, where naked children swim in the muddy waters below, are well known to international human-rights groups, NGOs, and law-enforcement bodies as strategically important to regional human trafficking and narcotics smuggling.

On the Burmese mountains and in the dark ravines, there are dozens of makeshift camps where ethnic minorities, uprooted, persecuted, and displaced by Burma's military regime, seek refuge. Many of them make their way to Thailand to find work.

On the Thai side, in the lowlands of rice and corn fields, are hundreds of crumbling orphanages where thousands of children are sent to become another name on a large rickety chalkboard that, as one aid worker said, does not reflect the real number of transient children in care. And while Thailand has set up roadside checkpoints on the highway between Chiang Rai and Mai Sai, in reality they consist of life-sized, fiberglass figures of Thai police officers in their regulation white motorcycle helmet, sunglasses, and brown uniform, signaling to drivers to stop.

Sadly, unlike the fake designer goods at the Tachilek market, the Thai police dummies lack verisimilitude.

Burma is a party to the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) but has not yet signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography

(2000). States that are parties to the convention and optional protocol are, in addition to protecting children from all forms of abuse and exploitation, obliged to take appropriate measures to thwart the production and distribution of child pornography.

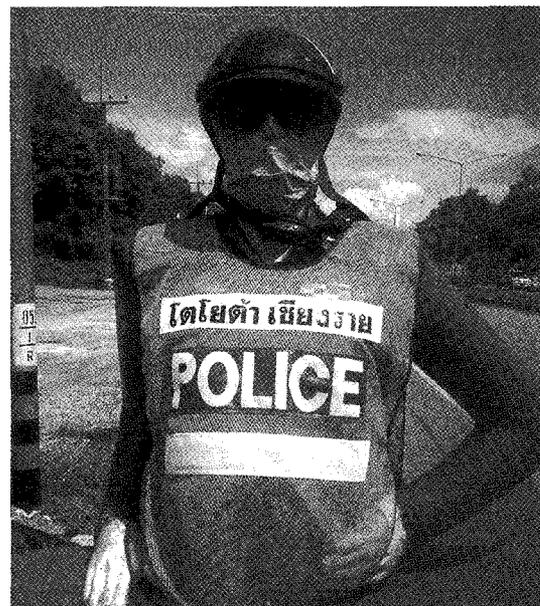
Burma's own child laws state that it is a punishable offense to use children in the making of pornographic material, while its penal code makes it illegal to exhibit or distribute any obscene material. The penalties range from fines to terms of imprisonment of up to two years. However, with Burma's state infrastructure and law-enforcement bodies riddled with corruption, it's no surprise the Tachilek market is honeycombed with illegal goods.

Behind legitimate shop fronts are secret doors and false walls leading to hidden inner rooms where thousands of films depicting the most depraved, unspeakable social taboos are displayed and sold.

The abhorrent trade in child pornography flourishes while the omniscient Burmese regime scrutinizes the plots of the latest Hollywood films for conspiracies and subversion against the state—when the greatest subterfuge is within.

There are no borders or checkpoints *en route* to the heart of darkness.

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