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R E V I E W S

NEW BOOKS

By John Leonard



added English to his Zaghawa and his Arabic but also equipped him with a novelist's eye, which subsequently got lots of practice in ironic perspective on the road, while he was looking for work in Libya and rotting in prison in Egypt. By the time he came home again, Darfur was burning. Instead of picking up a gun, Hari went into the business of assisting diplomats, NGOs, and journalists cross the border in Land Cruisers to report the genocidal truth. By way of reciprocity, those he assisted—among them Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times*, Ann Curry of NBC News, and Paul Salopek of *National Geographic*—later helped to save him from execution as a spy, with a boost from the do-good likes of Jimmy Carter, Jesse Jackson, and Bono.

So *The Translator* is partly a valentine to these reporters who did perhaps drink too much but still came "like cowboys ... to clean up the land," wept at what they witnessed, and could "smell lies just as dogs smell deeply buried bones." And partly an anthropology and geog-



Picture yourself a postcard from Darfur, where, after the Antonov bombers and helicopter gunships have softened up their targets, janjaweed "faith warriors" ride in on horseback to burn down grass huts and murder Zaghawa villagers, for the greater glory of Chinese oil refineries and Sudanese Arab self-esteem:

The Janjaweed man who had tied me to the tree saw my daughter running to me. He lowered his rifle and he let her run into his bayonet. He gave it a big push. The blade went all the way through her stomach. She still cried out to me, "Abba! Abba!"

Then he lifted up his gun, with my daughter on it, with blood from her body pouring down all over him. He danced around with her in the air and shouted to his friends, "Look, see how fierce I am," and they chanted back to him, "Yes, yes, you are fierce, fierce, fierce!" as they were killing other people. . . . What was he? A man? A devil? He was

painted red with my little girl's blood and he was dancing. What was he?

Daoud Hari's *THE TRANSLATOR: A TRIBESMAN'S MEMOIR OF DARFUR* (Random House, \$23) is full of such indelible atrocities—the raped mother who hangs herself from a tree with her own shawl after watching her children die in the desert; a killing field so vile, where eighty-one innocents were hacked to death by machetes, that members of a BBC camera crew need three days in a medical clinic to recover from seeing it. And yet, miraculously, *The Translator* consecrates as much as it horrifies.

Hari was the schoolboy in a family of herdsmen. Reading *Jane Eyre*, *Treasure Island*, *Oliver Twist*, *Animal Farm*, and *Cry, the Beloved Country* not only

raphy of an African tragedy, of camels, goats, red salt, and human bones; of a Sahara as big as the United States and, between Sudan and Chad, a Darfur the size of Texas, where 4,000 villages have been destroyed and two and a half million people displaced, where "torture was the popular new thing because Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib were everywhere in the news at that time, and crazy men like this were now getting permission to be crazy." And also an act of mourning—for dead children whose skin is "like delicate brown paper, so wrinkled," and for songbirds stunned out of the trees by gunships, hiding in the folds of Daoud's robes and shawl, then falling down insensible, "their hearts broken by this noise."

In a refugee camp, a healer wrote some helpful passages from the Koran on small wooden tablets. These tablets were then washed so that the inky water could be swallowed by the father whose daughter had died on the bloody bayonet of the janjaweed. I intend no impertinence when I say that some



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Flying Sparrow, by Giovanni da Udine © AKG Images/Electa

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