



# BOOKS

EDITED BY  
ALEX DODD

**NABOKOV MUSEUM UNDER THREAT OF CLOSURE**  
SAINT PETERSBURG — The only home the Russian-born US writer Vladimir Nabokov ever owned, and which was converted into a museum only five years ago, has been threatened with closure for unpaid rent. The museum is devoted to the memory of one of the 20th century's greatest writers and is one of the few in

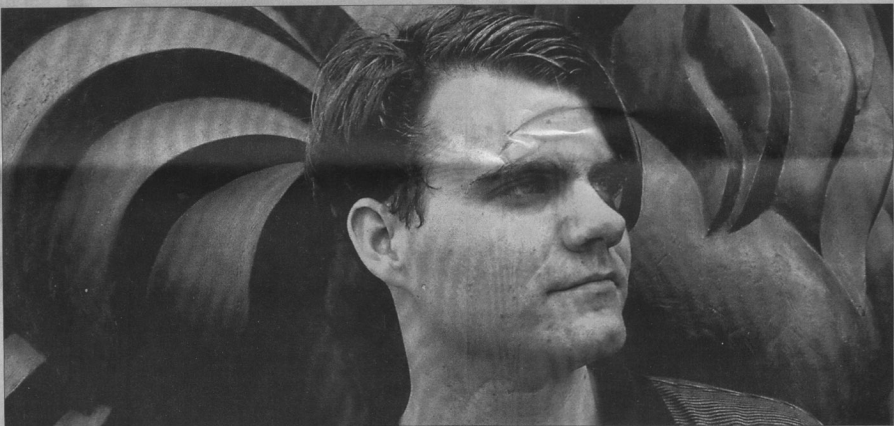
Russia to be privately owned. It opened in 1998 and has built up rent arrears equivalent to \$23,000 (about £15,900), resulting in the city authorities taking the owners to court. The museum spent large sums of money building up an impressive collection of the first editions of Nabokov's works, but no one made arrangements to pay the rent. If

the court finds against them, they could find themselves out on the street. More than 4,000 visitors a year are drawn to the museum in central Saint Petersburg, which organises exhibitions, conferences and concerts devoted to the life and work of the author of *Invitation to a Beheading*. Born in 1899, Nabokov spent some years living a nomadic

existence in Berlin and other European cities, writing in his native Russian, but eventually emigrated to the US where he began writing in English. Nabokov was persona non grata in Russia throughout his life and was mostly unknown there. Only a decade after his death in 1988 did one of his works finally go on sale legally in Russia. AFP

# NO MEDIA KINGS

Canadian culture jammer Jim Munroe was in Cape Town recently to spread the subversive word on independent publishing, writes SHANI RAVIV. After publishing his first novel with HarperCollins, he's now determined to flout the corporation and go it alone



FIERCELY INDEPENDENT: Jim Munroe sees Rupert Murdoch as a perfect example of what's wrong with media consolidation.

PICTURE: WWW.NOMEDIAMAKING.ORG

Jim Munroe is a Canadian-born culture jammer, vegan, anarchist, activist and author. At 31 he has published three science-fiction novels and has just completed his fourth. Moreover he was managing editor of the vanguard culture-jamming magazine *Adbusters* — a loose global network of creative ideologists who claim to be in the business of cultural revolution. But he renounced his "dream job" after a year to pursue a career as a full-time writer and went on to publish his first novel *Flyboy Action Hero Comes with Gasmask* (1999) with HarperCollins. Dissatisfied with the "monolithic" control that corporate giants like Rupert Murdoch exercise, he opted for the self-publishing indie route with his second and third novels. They were called *Angry Young Spaceman*

(2001) and *Everyone in Silico* (2002). In the latter, in the year 2036 a global virtual reality corporation rises a consumption-obsessed society. Munroe makes so many mentions of corporate brands like McDonalds and Starbucks that he invoked the companies for product placement. When they failed to respond he sent them satirical commentary in the form of Post-Due Letters intact with stamps and all. Munroe was in Cape Town recently giving a talk at The Centre for the Book on indie publishing and read some of the controversial invoices. He was off to the UK the following day for the next leg of his promotional tour but was happy to meet me at a restaurant on Long Street where he would be having a vegan breakfast before his afternoon flight. We sat at the counter overlooking Long Street's passersby. Munroe wears a red-collared short-sleeved shirt, the colour of communism, baggy blue jeans and black Doc Marten lace-ups with white socks. His satchel is slung over his shoulders like an obedient schoolboy and his voice sounds like one of the animated characters in *South Park*.

"There's a huge niche for the counter culture, society has a place for the iconoclasts," he says. He calls himself a "professional smartass", not a "freedom fighter" and believes that culture jamming is about politics through alternative politics. For the uninitiated, what is culture jamming? "It originated from a band in the US called Negativland who were involved with radio. It's a reference to jamming signals with radio waves and jamming the airwaves with your own pirate radio station." He says it's a way of using the available tools of the dominant culture to criticise the dominant culture. He adds that, most famously, *Adbusters* do it with their spoof ads where they use the language of marketing to criticise marketing campaigns. "Adbusters' publisher Kalle Lasn — a meat eater and car driver — does more to destroy the meat and car industries than 10 granola-munching, bike-riding cynics." Munroe identifies as a culture jammer because he says he's interested in furthering the discourse on corporate responsibility by bringing his politics into the public eye. "If I can deliver interesting and funny books through my writing that get people talking about issues of corporate 'radiation', then that's a kind of activism in itself."

He says that in the US and Canada many people have gone the independent route because, technically, it's getting easier. "One person can be a media outlet whereas before it took a whole company to produce a magazine just because of the technical requirements. People who have the gumption to publish their own work have complete creative control and this makes them madly independent." He is publishing another form of culture jamming. "Yeah, 'cos every time there's one more indie publisher out there it tends to break down the monolithic power of media-consolidated entities. In some ways the best way to fight these media conglomerates is to have a proliferation of indie publishers who are doing it better and with more legitimacy in the eyes of the people." He says he wanted to break down the separation between the legitimate and the illegitimate which he believes is damaging not just for individual artists but for the culture at large. "Indie culture is not purely independent — it's influenced by the mainstream, even when it's reacting against it." He says the more diversity we have in book-writing and publishing, the better, though he prefers the attitude of "I'm gonna publish this without anyone's approval."

"This attitude is often the reason people are prone to viewing the self-publishing route with disdain or as a last resort. But Munroe is someone who had all the options available to him, was recognised author with a successfully published book behind him, chose to go the independent route, and succeeded again. He has dedicated his indie resources website ([www.nomediamaking.org](http://www.nomediamaking.org)) to the DIY of self-publishing. He says it was intended as a starting point for writers. "Publishing is no longer a gentleman's game. All an artist really needs nowadays is inspiration and confidence," he says. "Indie publishers have set up a shadow world that offers clever young marketers an audience and a distribution network." His motivation for spreading his DIY gospel is that he wants more like-minded work to be published.



'NMK Classic. Our most prominent logo connotes a playful, joie de vivre mixed with something darker. Contrasts nicely with books that are ruthlessly slick, reads the blurb accompanying this downloadable logo on Munroe's website.



This saucy little spoof on the HarperCollins identity is a nice counterpoint to rough-and-ready production values. If it's used outside of a satirical context, it has the added bonus of attracting a copyright infringement lawsuit — can you say Free Publicity? reads the blurb on Munroe's website.

He believes corporations have monarchical power because they lack a system of accountability. "Just like kings — they rule absolutely and you don't get to make any decisions." Munroe had been making decisions regarding the publishing process of independent books (zines) for 10 years, even before he self-published *Angry Young Spaceman* and refused to be constricted by the "politics" of the mainstream publishing hierarchy. He is passionate about the zine network and values the connections he makes through the community of individuals he calls "zinesters." "I grew up being inspired by independent zines which are much more satisfying because

you get to see the project from beginning to end and you are totally involved in the design and promotion." He says that in the US and Canada many people have gone the independent route because, technically, it's getting easier. "One person can be a media outlet whereas before it took a whole company to produce a magazine just because of the technical requirements. People who have the gumption to publish their own work have complete creative control and this makes them madly independent." He is publishing another form of culture jamming. "Yeah, 'cos every time there's one more indie publisher out there it tends to break down the monolithic power of media-consolidated entities. In some ways the best way to fight these media conglomerates is to have a proliferation of indie publishers who are doing it better and with more legitimacy in the eyes of the people." He says he wanted to break down the separation between the legitimate and the illegitimate which he believes is damaging not just for individual artists but for the culture at large. "Indie culture is not purely independent — it's influenced by the mainstream, even when it's reacting against it." He says the more diversity we have in book-writing and publishing, the better, though he prefers the attitude of "I'm gonna publish this without anyone's approval."

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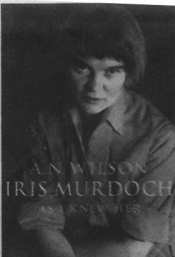
## ALEX DODD BOOK SUSHI

### Haddon bags the Whitbread

MARK HADDON's novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* walked off with the Whitbread Book of Year prize last week. Told from inside the mind and heart of an autistic teenager, the book, which has captivated about 80,000 readers, was the clear popular favourite. DBC Pierre's Booker prize-winning *Vernon God Little*, is said to have held little sway with the judges who were gaga over Haddon's book. One judge rhapsodised that the writer had "used disability to throw a light upon the world." Last year, Haddon, who has published 16 children's stories, netted the *Guardian* Children's fiction prize for his book which doubled as his first adult novel. His win last week gives momentum to the worldwide trend in crossover literature — books that capture the imaginations of adults and children alike. The writer said he was in talks with a production company over a film of *Curious Incident* featuring the star Brad Pitt. Haddon is reported to have buried his face in his hands when his triumph was announced: "This really is a dream come true." And then in a wry quip on the subject of his book, he said: "Or, as my wife pointed out, it's a delusional psychotic fantasy come true."

### The dark mystery of Iris

IN A recent literary spat, the British press lashed out at the latest biography of celebrated writer Iris Murdoch with the *Observer* newspaper describing the book as a "treacherous act of 'Judas-like proportions'." *Iris Murdoch: As I Knew Her* is penned by AN Wilson, whose study of the Victorian age, *The Victorians*, was published to massive critical acclaim. Many will remember the animated, intelligent, highly skilled Murdoch depicted by Kate Winslet cycling around Oxford in the *Richard and Judy* film. *Iris*, based on Murdoch's husband John Bayley's memoirs. And many will remember repressing their sobas as they extolled the cinema having witnessed the great writer's decline at the mercy of Alzheimer's into a confused and dependent old tramp in a dry caridigan. This book takes the decline one step further, questioning the central premise of undying *faithful love* around which the film's narrative revolves. Wilson is cynical about Bayley's intentions and takes him to task for betraying his wife's memory with his best-selling accounts about her tragic decline. An interesting irony is that the book was written at Murdoch's unrelenting insistence. Wilson goes into great detail about how reluctant he was to accept the legendary writer's request that he take over the role of her biographer. For starters he knew her personally, having socialised with her and Bayley at Oxford for many years. But when he did finally accept the offer, Wilson went in boots and all, sparing no awkward truths. It is Bayley who seems to fare worst. Wilson represents him in part as a "screaming, hate-filled child" who never read Murdoch's books beyond a pained perusal of *The Bell* in 1966. Bayley is portrayed as being tortured by Murdoch's ongoing infidelity. Wilson paints their relationship as a kind of protracted psychological S&M pact without the sex. And the plot thickens when you factor in the knowledge that it was Bayley who interviewed Wilson for his place at Oxford in 1968, tutored him and promoted his early academic career. In this sense, the book is reminiscent of Paul Theroux's *Sir Vidia's Shadow* in which the travel writer lashes out at his early mentor VS Naipaul, a man he once viewed with great awe and admiration. Wilson's book is not quite the compelling read that the Theroux book is. It starts out well, but the author's ego seems to get tangled up in an already complex biographical project. I could have done without all the churchy stuff, which felt like a projection on the writer's behalf. He once wanted to be a priest. Not much chance of that now.

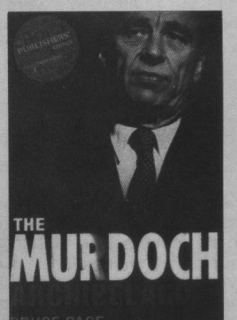


AN WILSON  
IRIS MURDOCH

# Citizen Murdoch and the empire of stories

The latest book about global media king Rupert Murdoch argues that his expansive global power should no longer go unchecked, writes CORNIA PRETORIUS

RUPERT Murdoch has been cloaked in either flattery or insinuation for five decades he has been building his global media empire with a choice of labels: the "whippersnapper of Adelaide", the "Dirty Digger", "Rupert the Rebel", the "Paper Prince" or "Citizen Murdoch". These descriptors — with the half-dozen books that have been written about Murdoch and NewsCorp — prove that whether you love him or hate him, Murdoch is a living legend who intrigues, impresses or horrifies business, media and political pundits. *The Murdoch Archipelago*, a book by Bruce Page in collaboration with Elaine Potter, and the latest addition to the Murdoch genre, explains why if we are not yet worried about Murdoch's empire we should be. Murdoch's newspaper, television and book kingdom stretches from Australia to Britain, the US to China and these authors argue that his power should no longer go unchecked. Page writes: "Governments cannot allocate freedom and perhaps can't do much themselves to protect this least dispensable of public goods. But governments can and must allocate the control and use of other public goods which give liberties material expression. This function is the reason NewsCorp is interested in governments... But governments



THE MURDOCH ARCHIPELAGO  
BRUCE PAGE

reach of a vast market of eyeballs. When Murdoch was confronted about removing *East and West*, a book by Chris Patten, Hong Kong's last governor, from the HarperCollins (a NewsCorp publishing subsidiary) list, he said: "Let somebody else annoy them." Page argues forcefully that the Murdoch empire has no respect for journalism as a craft and a pillar of democratic societies by offering its pseudo-journalism — often based on lies — against the Watergates of the world. Apart from unmaking the Murdoch empire and its far-reaching influence on the media, the book is a well-researched, thoughtful, provocative take on the past, present and future of journalism. At a time when the global media establishment is in crisis — Britain has had Hutton, South Africa has had Hefner and the US has had Jason Blair — practising journalists, journalism students and anyone with an interest in the media would find *The Murdoch Archipelago* packed with Page's insight into the values which should underpin good journalism. But, be warned, *The Murdoch Archipelago* is not a drive-through read. ■ *The Murdoch Archipelago is published by Simon & Schuster, R153*

Page and Potter. Both worked for the *Sunday Times* in London — Page in the pre-Murdoch days when his class' investigative team struck fear into the hearts of crooks and Potter at the time when Murdoch took control of the British broadsheet. They approach Murdoch in a manner which edges away from the biographical — though they do spend time on the shenanigans around the life of Murdoch's father, Sir Keith. He laid the foundations of the Murdoch empire before powering into other territories: the inner workings of an authoritarian personality, and the practice of trading in political favours and the creation of pseudo-journalism. In short, it unmasks what could be called the Murdochite: the Murdoch way of working — a fake ideology that professes to seek freedom, but does so only when there is no risk attached to Murdoch or NewsCorp. It is also about serving those with political clout for as long as they remain in power and dumping them as soon as they are no longer in a position to smooth the way for NewsCorp. "NewsCorp is about eroding the boundaries between the state/owner and media operations," writes Page. Murdoch, for example, appears to be keen to appease the oppressive Chinese government in exchange for Sky Star Satellite TV's

### Schoolgirl erotica shocks Italy

AN EXPLICIT account by a teenage girl of her sexual experiences since losing her virginity at 15 has scandalised Catholic Italy. Italy seems to be appalled and fascinated at once by Melissa Panarello, who was thrust into the limelight last summer in Europe by her book *One Hundred Strokes of the Hairbrush Before Going to Sleep*. At first the book was published under the name of "Melissa P" to hide her identity because she was then under 18. "The shock waves of this schoolgirl's confession — if that is what it is — are still reverberating in Catholic Italy, where such frankness is unusual, to put it mildly," writes Richard Owen in the *Times* of London. But the book has sold a whopping 650,000 copies in a country where 20,000 sales constitute a best seller. The graphic diary of Panarello's teenage sex life starts at age 14 when she explores her body in front of mirrors. It is followed by the loss of her virginity at 15 and an astonishing variety of sexual experiences thereafter, including lesbianism, phone sex, internet sex, group sex, anal sex, sado-masochism, affairs with married men and more. And yet Panarello is quoted as saying: "I think of my book as erotic, not pornographic. But women are attracted by pornography as much as men — it just takes courage to admit it."