

## Gary Younger in New York



It's easy to make a home from home  
— after a miserable bus ride to Ikea

obsessions. At every step of the investigation, Levy is present — talking about his own Jewishness, his own fears, his developing theories. It is an extreme form of "I-journalism" which has irritated some of his reviewers, but his insights are sharp and the affinity he feels with Pearl is often moving.

Levy sees the book as more than just the history of one man's tragic death. He uses the murder to remind readers that the current obsession with the threat of Iraq is misguided, and argues that the growth of anti-Americanism and antisemitism in Pakistan and across the Islamic world presents a much greater threat to global security.

"I know that the success or failure of a book is never an accident. Perhaps people understood that Pakistan was more important than Iraq and that in many ways the death of Daniel Pearl was a more important issue to highlight than the search for Saddam Hussein," he says.

In the current climate of French anti-Americanism, Levy describes himself as a champion of the anti-anti-American cause. "The book says that hatred of America is becoming an issue of global importance. Second, it says that antisemitism is experiencing, alongside this anti-Americanism, an expansion which hasn't been seen since the second world war. We all have our eyes fixed on the Arab nations, when in fact the really important scene is the Islamic world. Things happen less in Palestine, Jordan in Syria and in Iraq, than in Afghanistan, in Indonesia, in the Philippines, or Pakistan."

Levy has no doubt that the plot's author was Omar Sheikh, who remains in a Pakistani jail waiting to appeal against his death sentence. But he is intrigued by what compelled Sheikh and his al-Qaida associates to choose Pearl. The theory he selects finally is that Pearl was killed with the assistance of the ISI because he knew too much about the exchange of nuclear intelligence between Pakistan (which at that time was already working as a close ally to the US) and al-Qaida. "Pearl was not merely any

journalist who was targeted by a British assassin in a remote part of Pakistan.


An extraordinary narrative has emerged from the laptop of this darling of the French media. In the abstract, it is no surprise that Pearl's death should be recycled as page-turning literature. The circumstances of his assassination remain as compelling as they are mysterious. His kidnap during an investigative assignment for his newspaper, the Wall Street Journal, the shackled video plea for help, the antisemitism of the killers, the desperate appeals for mercy made by his pregnant wife, the final shocking images of his execution — all make gripping reading.

More peculiar is the style that Levy, 55, has adopted to retell the story — part fiction, part journalism, part police-work, part thriller. He describes it as a unique literary genre, which he has awarded a new classification — *romanquête* — half novel, half investigation; he concedes it has its roots in works such as Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*.

The genre allows him the freedom to present precise accuracy when it is available and to make up the areas where it isn't. The death scene is made up. In *Qui a Tué Daniel Pearl?*, the subject spends his last moments, before his throat is cut, thinking about his life, his first ice-cream, his wife, Marianne, the delicious qualities of a loaf of French bread, his mother's laughter. "His eyes closed, Pearl feels the motion of the knife as it approaches his throat," Levy writes. "He is sweating and shivering at the same time. He hears a dog barking, far away. A fly buzzing close to him. And then, the squawk of a chicken that gets mixed up with his own cry, astonishment mixed with pain, inhuman."

Levy abandoned his cafe lifestyle to spend a year interviewing everyone involved in the murder, travelling through the most dangerous regions of Pakistan in his subject's footsteps, making several trips to India and America, stopping off in England, Spain, Bosnia and Dubai.

The book is written as a chronological account of his investigations. He searches for

 The Port Authority bus-terminal is a retailer's dream and a consumer's

nightmare. There is almost nothing you can't buy there, from a laptop to glass flowers; not to mention every kind of ethnic pastry you can think of, from bagels and pretzels to croissants and black forest gateau. You can go bowling, get your hair cut, your shoes repaired and your nails done. In fact, it is easy to get everything you might want, apart from the thing you most want — a bus ticket.

Arrows promising information point either to empty booths or each other. When you find a booth with someone inside they are incredibly unhelpful, dispensing their knowledge so sparingly that they might be rehearsing an interrogation at Guantanamo Bay. "Where can I get the bus to Newark?"

"Gate 240."  
"How do I get there?"  
"Godown the escalator turn left and it's straight ahead of you. Have a nice day."  
"When are the buses?"  
"When do you want to leave?"

those who have generally moved to the city for a while, often from abroad, who are not rich enough to buy bespoke furniture but sufficiently wealthy and lazy to make their temporary dwelling look "nice enough". I speak with some authority, since I am one of them.

Gate 222 is the home of the globalised middle class, wearing Gap jeans and clutching Starbucks and a copy of the New York Times to while away the 45-minute journey on route 111 to the Easyjet of furniture out by Newark airport. "We just moved here," says

Claudia Schneider, from Stuttgart. "My boyfriend's got a job but we don't know how long we'll be here and we need something to sit on and eat off while we decide."

Did it not seem strange to come all the way to New York and end up in Ikea?

"Well I don't like shopping but I don't hate Ikea. At least you know what you're getting."

But not necessarily what you are getting into. The only sight more dismal than those going

are those coming back. By that

worked on these very specific subjects. My thesis is that his death was connected to the issues that he was investigating," Levy says.

It is not a thesis subscribed to by the Wall Street Journal, which points out that if Pearl had been making progress on such a sensational theme he would probably have discussed it with his editors. His father, Judea Pearl, is also sceptical. "This was a propaganda exercise," he says. "The motive, I believe, was the fact that for four months since 9/11 the US had been bombarding Afghanistan and there had been no reaction from al-Qaida. They felt the need to strike back and the easiest way to do this was to pick up an innocent US reporter. Especially given that he was Jewish."

Nevertheless, he is delighted at the book's appearance. "I appreciate the efforts of BHL in bringing this crime to the attention of the world and emphasising its importance," he says. He is also grateful at Levy's decision to donate half the author's rights in the English editions to Pearl's only child, Adam, who was born a few months after his father's death, and to the Daniel Pearl Foundation - which works to "minimise the hate of which he was a victim".

"I wrote it for the son - wrote it thinking of Adam Pearl," Levy says. "I think that one day or another, this child will discover the details of how his father died, regardless of the family's vigilance, their attempts to keep it secret. I wanted him to have two perspectives - that of the assassins expressed through the videos of the execution, but also, through the book, the point of view of someone who has taken the part of the victim."



**Captive . . . Pearl in January 2002**

Who Killed Daniel Pearl? by Bernard Henri-Lévy is published by Duckworth, price £20. To order a copy for £17 plus p&p call the Guardian book service on 0870 066 7979.

"Do you have a timetable?"

In short, unless you know what you're doing at the Port Authority it is an incredibly frustrating place where it is easy to get lost and end up spending a lot of money on stuff you don't really want.

All in all it is wonderful training for a trip to Ikea, which is just as well because it is from here that the bus leaves for Ikea. This is not a bus that is going somewhere else and happens to drop you off at Ikea, you understand. This is the Ikea bus, with all the relative privilege and absolute misery that goes with it.

Generally speaking, and with caveats for all exceptions, those who take the buses to outlying areas of New York tend to be poorer, darker-skinned and more marginalised. With an extensive subway system and suburban rail network, if you're taking the bus it's probably because you can't afford a car or do not live near a subway stop. After the rush hour, it is not uncommon to see people in the terminal lugging around huge boxes of belongings held together with string, wearing coats that look as if they barely made it through last winter.

In the middle of it all, there is Gate 222, which, compared with the rest of the terminal, offers a wealthier, lighter-skinned and more mainstream queue. It houses

time most have had at least one blistering row with their partners and one with an Ikea employee.

To save on delivery, people carry as much as they can on to the bus. Having overanticipated what they can carry - just as they did how much it would cost - they lumber it all on to the bus with neither grace nor good humour but at the risk of giving someone a serious head injury with a 4ft lamp with a name they cannot pronounce.



**Overheard in a Brooklyn hardware store:**

**Shopkeeper:** "Is it a Jewish holiday tomorrow?"

**Customer:** "Yes, its Rosh Hashana."

**Shopkeeper:** "Oh well, it'll be quiet then. Are you Jewish?"

**Customer:** "No."

**Shopkeeper:** "I didn't think so with that red hair. Two of my children have red hair and we're Italian I don't know where it comes from. Do your parents have red hair? Are they Irish?"

**Customer:** "No. There were a lot of milkman jokes where I was growing up."

**Shopkeeper:** "What's your nationality?"

**Customer:** "German. But on my mom's side it's all mixed up and they've been here for generations, so who knows?"

**Shopkeeper:** "You know what? Whatever it is. Enjoy it."