

notion that difficult writers are breaking a bond with their audiences. “Franzen decides that because he can’t enjoy Gaddis then no one can, and his conclusions all revolve around a bizarre belief that he is somehow the ideal reader for complex, difficult writing, when clearly he is not.”

The writing that Marcus himself

considers “difficult”—“horribly so”—is the characterless stuff that could have been written by anyone. He prefers to work with language “as a painter might with color, as a composer might with sound, as a dancer might with movement, to make something come to life inside our heads: experience, thought, action, feeling.” And he will not concede

that allegiance to the undiscovered possibilities of language and form makes him or other writers who share a similar commitment a threat to the survival of literature: “Maybe literature is fighting for its very life because its powerful pundits have declared a halt to all artistic progress, declaring it pretentious, alienating, bad for business.”

## OTHER NATIONS

# Being Australian

**THE SOURCE:** “John Howard’s Australia” by Rupert Darwall, in *Policy Review*, Aug.–Sept. 2005.

**AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER** John Howard’s decision to have his country’s troops join in the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 brought him nothing like the amount of political trouble his British counterpart, Tony Blair, has had to endure. One reason Howard escaped a lot of criticism is that he made Australia’s national interest in being allied with America the centerpiece of his public rationale for the decision. That’s something he wouldn’t have been able to do, argues Rupert Darwall, a consultant director of the London-based think tank Reform, if he hadn’t won a political debate in the 1990s about Australia’s national identity and place in the world.

The Labor Party’s Paul Keating began the debate soon after he became prime minister in 1991. He attacked the Australian attitude that “still cannot separate our interests,

our history, or our future from the interests of Britain,” and he urged his compatriots to embrace Australia’s “destiny as a nation in Asia and the Pacific.”

Well before the 1990s, notes Darwall, Australians had begun to update their sense of who they were. “The collapse of British power in the Pacific following the surrender of Singapore to Japan during the Second World War meant that from then on, American power was to be the cornerstone of Australia’s defense.” Although Robert Menzies, the country’s longest-serving prime minister (1939–41, 1949–66), described himself as “British to his bootstraps,” Australians began in the 1960s to edge away from

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their country’s British roots—without rejecting them. But Keating went much further, ridiculing Menzies’s premiership for having “sunk a generation of Australians in Anglophilia and torpor.”

Howard, a member of the conservative Liberal Party, argued that Australia should build upon its political and cultural inheritance from Britain, not try to exorcise it. He “appropriated for the Liberal Party the working man’s sense of nationalism, which previously had been the preserve of Labor,” writes Darwall. “It is tied to Australia’s war experiences and values such as mateship, . . . a concept based on trust and selflessness and absolute interdependence.”

Keating’s pitch that Australia is an Asian country was a hard sell to most Australians. Even prominent Asians see the country as *in* but not *of* Asia. Nonetheless, many of Australia’s cultural and intellectual leaders applauded Keating. “For them, Canberra’s most important bilateral relationship should be with Jakarta or Beijing rather than Washington,” Darwall says. China’s economic power is growing, after all, while America’s, in Keating’s view, is likely to become less important.

In response, Howard argued that

the U.S. economy's significance to Australia and to the world economy will increase in the coming decades. He called Australia's relationship with America "the most important we have with any single country," resting not only on U.S. might but on shared values and aspirations. And none of those values would preclude Australia from seeking closer economic ties with China.

The "seemingly perpetual symposium on our self-identity," as Howard has termed the debate, ended in 1996 with his landslide victory and the defeat of the Keating government. Howard has won three elections since, the most recent in 2004. "Giving back to Australians the legitimacy to believe about themselves and their country what Keating had tried to deny them and consistently pitching his policies in these terms," writes Darwall, "have provided Howard his political equity."

## OTHER NATIONS

## Was It Genocide?

**THE SOURCE:** "Revisiting the Armenian Genocide" by Guenter Lewy, in *Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2005.

NINETY YEARS LATER, THE MASS slaughter of Armenian men, women, and children driven from their homes by the Ottoman government during World War I remains a hotly disputed issue. Armenia even demands that an official apology from Turkey be made a condition for Turkish membership in the European Union. But were the deaths the result of genocide, as Armenians charge? Guenter Lewy, an emeritus professor of political science



A photograph taken in eastern Turkey documents a tiny fraction of the deaths inflicted on the Armenians.

at the University of Massachusetts, is skeptical.

Much about what happened those many years ago is murky, but no one denies that huge massacres took place. During World War I, the Ottoman Empire feared that the Christian Armenians within its borders were supporting Russia. During 1915–16, the Ottoman Turkish government forced hundreds of thousands of Armenian civilians from Anatolia across mountains to the Syrian desert and other points. Hundreds of thousands perished on the trek, with starvation and disease claiming those who were not murdered outright. There are no authoritative figures on the total number of Armenian deaths.

The key question, writes Lewy, author of *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide* (2005), is, Did the Young Turk regime in Constantinople (now Istanbul) organize the massacres? The case that it did, he argues, rests on three shaky pillars. The first is the actions of the postwar Turkish military courts, which convicted officials

of the Young Turk government of the crime in postwar trials demanded by the victorious Allies. The verdicts were based entirely on documents. In one deposition, the commanding general of the Turkish Third Army testified that "the murder and extermination of the Armenians . . . is the result of decisions made by the central committee of *Ittihad ve Terakki* [Committee on Union and Progress]," which had seized power in 1908. But the courts heard no witnesses, and there was no cross-examination of testimony. Even the Allies considered the trials "a travesty of justice," says Lewy. And all the original documents have been lost.

The second pillar of the argument for genocide has to do with the Special Organization (*Te kilat-i Mahsusa*). Historian Vahakn N. Dadrian, a leading proponent of the genocide thesis, claims that the Special Organization's "mission was to deploy in remote areas of Turkey's interior and to ambush and destroy convoys of Armenian deportees." But Lewy says there's no evidence for that. An American scholar, Philip H. Stod-