

Another fine mess

Cian O'Neill's final London Letter of the year regrets the passing of all kinds of unexpected excitements

► Well. We have been busy, haven't we? There I was, whiling away the hours in the dry-out clinic while the world outside ground onwards on its axis, a blue marbled ball alone amongst the monkey-puzzled stars. Some stars were born, some died. Some went – well, mostly to the bathroom, but to return sniffing and Really Feeling Great quite a few minutes later. Now the year is done, in fact overdone; someone better fetch the HN51 turkey out of the Aga and let us get to picking over the carcass of another fine 'year in paradise' [Phil Collins – our thanks] and separate the white flesh from the grey.

First, though, to the Brown. Phew! It looked ropey, but Gordon finally got Tony to pack his bags. With the bags beneath his eyes looking as fragile as a Sri Lankan riverbank the 'Broom really had to take over before he resembled less a fresh leader and more Davros of the Daleks. When he took over he sure went to work – telling Bush to keep his hands to himself, inspecting the Summer-time flood damage in person and calming the populace, declaring a new and more open politics by announcing policy even before the Summer Recess. He even got a good haircut. Then he got intoxicated by the prospect of a snap election and made a mess of it all [not the hair]. At the moment he looks harried and jaded, some pale flotsam adrift on the tide of affairs, over which he has no longer any control. He has quite heroically proven just how volatile politics are and that even when you think things are going to get better it's rather more likely that they're about to get more interesting, at least for the scribleri. Thanks, Gord. These tranquilizers normally take some beating.

Heather Mills. Two words to make even a rapist's scrotal sac crawl for cover. The breakdown of her marriage to Macca covered the very walls of our eyes this year. She trawled the morning television studios to defame the redtop press for telling the truth. She pitched her tent [if no-one else's] on Speakers' Corner and danced the cha-cha on American television. Ah, but when she did so, she really danced upon the grave of decency. Not to mention sanity. Her paranoia grows apace and for all we know she'll start claiming all sorts: that Hilary Clinton hasn't blinked since Glasnost, for example.

She hasn't, but then again Hilary is tomorrow's woman in yesterday's slacks, so let's wait and see what she does before we condemn her for being so damn perky your eyes run dry. With Oprah having waded in to campaign for her 'dear friend'

Barack Obama on the Democratic Primaries, he could usurp Clinton and become the first ever black man elected as a President of the United States of America who had no lower teeth. Unless, that is, Rudy Guilani drops another tangy prostate bombshell on the political landscape. Bush gets no stars this year, even for his last-hour attempt to get the kikes and sand-diggers speaking to one another about that region where he parks his bombers at. Honourable mention though, for vetoing the will of the world on troop withdrawal from Iraq [or, as he calls it, 'my sandbox']. It's never too late to start unlearning.

Amy Winehouse, la la la! With a missing tooth, jailed husband, frail septum and massive record sales she's got to take a prize for something. Or, maybe just a few downers to take the edge off. Either way, what a champ. Peter Crackerty got even uglier and at one stage was actually green-hued, but not from seeing Kate Moss play siren to some other fool. Pair these pair up, I say, and send them into space. That should stop the Ferenghi invading.

Closer to home [wherever that is], we must think about what we have lost. Northern Ireland is now yuppified and everyone wants dollah'. It won't be long before people other than Jeffrey Donaldson reminisce about the good old days when divisions were clear and man-sized prawns ruled the seas. Traditions like Drumcree, police collusion, the terrorisation of schoolchildren and slaughter of innocents ... one gets misty-eyed; and not from the withdrawal. Spare a thought for those old and sustaining certainties as you sip a yuletide half-caf no-fat mocha in what was once your local piss-house.

No, for remnant certainties you have to go to Seamus Mallon's look of concern, or Paisley, that stolid performer, who with his colourful beachfront promenade ties yet increasingly gaunt figure has come to resemble a seaside cut-out of his former self, through which now peers the face of a perhaps happier man who might have learnt at last to forgive, and found it blessed. He may be missed, when he goes. Full marks to himself for finally this year working with McGuinness. Derry people are subhuman, after all. Hey, just ask Gregory Campbell. Have fun. ■

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