



NEWSLETTER

April 2003

Edition 8

Dark days

The harvest, two thirds done and erstwhile dominant in our lives, has been darkly overshadowed.

Two weeks ago I chanced upon an accident on the New England Highway seconds after it happened. Two young lives unnecessarily lost due less, I suspect, to the confusion of the elderly driver of the second vehicle than to society's petulance that ranks road safety below traffic flow, a cultural choice that would be unacceptable in most workplaces.

Thus the scene was grimly set for the Bush boy's exploits in Iraq in which claret of a godforsaken kind stained the desert and reminded us how much easier it is to start war than finish it.

In such circumstances, even the vines are not as inviting as usual. The steady snip snip separates one from the immediacy of events but even knowing that bunches piling up in the bin will become good wine does not obliterate the sense of hopelessness and impotence that many of us feel. The vines, by the way, are oblivious to tragedy.

The eyes have it

Not a trace of hopelessness in the piercing eyes of Dubya, disturbingly close set, that meet ours during the television war. Saddam's peepers (no weepers, he is only eponymously sad) seem saner by comparison yet are as black and vacuous as his heart may well be.

In a welcome break from television, the Granite Belt Shakespeare Society convened, drank bluid red wine and read the last two Acts of King Henry the Fifth (Once more unto the breach, dear friends... Yes, that's the one.)

From Iraq's pall it is worth reviewing what Henry or Harry, as he is better known, says in Act IV Scene 1, in a speech in which he refutes that the sins of a son may be blamed upon the father's prior actions.

Try the following with a dynastic Texan accent:

So, if a son, that is by his father sent about merchandise, do sinfully miscarry upon the sea, the imputation of his wickedness, by your rule, should be imposed upon his father that sent him...

Hmm. Later in the same speech...

Therefore should every soldier in the wars do as every sick man in bed, - wash every mote out of his conscience and dying so, death is to him advantage; or not dying, the time was blessedly lost wherein such preparation was gain'd; and in him that escapes, it were not sin to think that, making God so free an offer, he let him outlive that day to see his greatness, and to teach others how they should prepare.

With such an attitude, anything is possible. "You have a problem, soldier? Hey, just wash your conscience. You'll feel great."

Should we pass this on to General Brooks at Qatar Central Command or is this something the coalition force already knows?

The play even has a character called Westmorland – this English earl easy to picture as an American general.

Brought to you by Al-jazeera

Imagine Montjoy's speech in Act IV Scene 3 coming from the mouth of Iraq's information minister broadcast live by Al-jazeera with simultaneous translation:

*Once more I come to know of thee King Harry (Dubya),
If for thy ransom thou wilt now compound,
Before thy most assured overthrow:
For certainly thou art so near the gulf,
Thou needs must be englutted. Besides, in mercy,
The Constable desires thee thou wilt mind
Thy followers of repentance; that their souls
May make a peaceful and sweet retire
From off these (oil) fields, where, wretches, their
poor bodies
Must lie and fester.*

/continued over

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N E W S L E T T E R

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He may well have added, "Curse your moustache" as the Kuwaiti oil minister did to his Iraqi counterpart at a pre-war OPEC meeting.

As always, Shakespeare is alarmingly relevant: from unpalatable suggestions - when the French rally, Harry orders "every soldier kill his prisoners" - to sound advice - the marriage of the loser's daughter to the victorious king promises lasting peace.

Dubya wedding?

Would that President Bush tripped down the aisle with Saddam's eldest. Heck, make it a double and include Ariel Sharon and Miss Arafat the younger. Kofi Annan can officiate.

Pipe dreams? But of course - the Shakespeare group wonders if the world is yet civilised enough to find such pragmatic solutions.

Pluck on

Enough! It is off my chest. Back to wine.

Pleasant Plucking scenes. Left: Adriana from Slovenia. Below: EB and Georgie.



The Pleasant Pluckers were delighted to welcome John and Kerry van Pelt (and Champagne Harry, their puppy) to the ranks during the harvest of the Block Two Shiraz.

We took it off a day after half an inch of rain that apparently did not too much damage and it settled in the shed on its skins at 13.3 Baume (sugar level).

Thus far, everything has harvested well. The Chardonnay was picked immediately before the February rain. It was very clean and registered 13.1 Baume and pressed as good fruity juice. We worried about the French Colombard

which, until the rain, attained about 12 Baume but fell back rapidly. In the event it came off at 12.7 Baume about four weeks later and promises to be pleasantly aromatic.

We harvested the Block Five Cabernet Sauvignon at the same time as the French Colombard because we were concerned about the capacity of the young vines to mature fruit in the drought affected year. By taking the fruit off early we would give the vines a chance to develop stronger wood for next year. I believe this was a good move.

Clockwise from left: Angelo Cutuli, yours truly, Ray Pople, Roger Jeffries, Iain Meers and Griff Hodges. The snapper was Peter Meers.



Pluckers at play

The fruit we got was young and acidic with a lively greenness at 11.4 Baume. We have, as I foreshadowed, made Róse with it - Frosty's Róse, in fact - a little dark, which may or may not be fixable.

So, now we have just Block 1 Shiraz and Block 3 Cab Sav to go for the year. Expectations are that the Shiraz will be ripe in the second week of April and the Cab Sav about two weeks later: perfect.

May the war pass quickly. May you celebrate with wine.

John Arlidge

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