standing of the Latin American dilemma. On the one hand, it is obvious that capitalism has not triumphed in the region, not even for the wealthy. They live either in fear of the revolution which will confiscate their assets or of the bandits who, by force, will begin to accumulate their own capital. There is precious little consensus anywhere in Latin America, nor is there a vision of an acceptable capitalist society despite the momentary triumph of neo-liberalism.

On the other hand, there is no satisfactory socialist project at the moment nor, frankly, is there much support for one. I was struck during a recent visit to Argentina by the enormous political and economic space available to capitalism. And the election results in Nicaragua speak for themselves. Yes, there is mass protest in Latin America—but that is just the problem: it is protest. Everyone knows what they are against, but only a handful know what they are for—or how to get it. With the collapse of the regimes, and the system, in eastern Europe, combined with the enormous difficulties confronted by the experiments of Cuba, Chile and Nicaragua, there are few directions for the Left in Latin America.

I do not share the optimism of Petras and Morley. While we agree that US hegemony is in decline, it is arguable whether capitalism itself is in decline. True, there are serious warnings of an impending crisis but the leading capitalists of Europe and Asia with their vastly increased wealth, have resources and ideas with which to combat the difficulties. They are not fools and their major task, it would seem, is to pull the US back into line. That means getting the US government to reduce its destabilising budget deficit and to divert capital from speculation into production.

They may not be able to do so, and that is worrying for all of us. Not only does it leave the US with a huge military which has nowhere to go, but it also leaves that huge deficit which must be at least partially paid off. Why does the US leadership fail to do the obvious? The answer to this is only partly the result of the triumph of speculative capital over productive capital, and of the military intelligence and coercive agencies of government over the economic and commercial bureaucracies. Rather, it is because domestic politics in the US, profoundly affected as they are by the development, regionally as well as ideologically, of the military-industrial complex, simply will not permit its rapid demobilisation. These are the economic, political and social forces which contribute so decisively to the making of the budget and to the re-election possibilities of the senators and representatives. Thus, on one level (that of control over the market) US hegemony is under siege. But militarily the US is triumphant, dominant, invincible—and likely to remain so for the time being.

This does not leave a lot of space for the Latin American Left. What is available is the niche wherein some justice may be achieved. It may allow, for example, the controlled use or elimination of pesticides in an area, or better child care facilities in a community. But thoroughgoing changes to the system seem to be out for the time being. And besides, change to what? Here the Left is in grave difficulties. It is not just a matter of recognising that we can no longer afford utopias (let alone dream them up); rather, it is recognising that we live in a capitalist world which will not disappear quickly or easily.

It is doubtful that capitalism will develop in Latin America even remotely along the same lines as in Western Europe. So far, it has produced misery for the masses and benefits for possibly 30% of the region’s population. Yet the difficulties of defining an effective socialist program are immense. When the PT claims that it will tackle inflation effectively and with justice, just how will that be accomplished? The admission by Sader and Silverstein that the party has not yet developed a coherent economic program emphasises the tragedy confronted by the Left in Latin America. The old ideas and practices have been found wanting; the old enemies remain as powerful as ever; and the Left agenda needs a total renovation. The problem is not distribution; it is clearly production. In the meantime, the struggle will be long and difficult and, based on the evidence of the past, the changes will be gradual.

JIM LEVY teaches in Spanish and Latin American Studies at the University of NSW.

**Trial and Terror**


It seems a strange thing for me to write a review on a political thriller set among the chaotic zones of the Israeli-Palestinian feud. Firstly, I have probably read fewer (official, back-cover verified) thrillers than I am able to count upon one hand; and secondly, my knowledge of Middle Eastern politics is, to say the least, embarrassingly flimsy.

Yet, despite these gaps in knowledge—and perhaps, to an extent, because of them—I found myself enjoying Simon Louvish’s new novel *The Silencer*. It is not a book in which the reader is supposed to feel steady; rather, one flaps and flounders among the manic descriptions of politics and espionage, and the often wild use of language. The confusing plot reminded me of a novel by another Jewish author, Kafka’s *The Trial*—in which the central character, K, is arrested and put on trial for a crime which is never explained, either to K or the reader.

Louvish’s prose is more anarchic than Kafka’s, but *The Silencer*’s Joe Dekel, a leftwing journalist and one-time
novelist from Israel, finds himself at the centre of a similarly absurd labyrinth. As the story begins, Dekel is sent out to New York by his newspaper to cover an Israeli-Palestinian peace conference. While there he meets Didi Schaffer, a young American Jew, who politely informs Dekel that he is his 'silencer'. Didi represents a rightwing organisation named the Anti-Slander League, whose agenda includes keeping pro-Palestinian literature from being published in the United States. This includes Dekel's only novel, an espionage thriller based around the 1982 war in Lebanon and which supported the Palestinian resistance movement.

Led by Didi Schaffer to a secret rendezvous, Dekel finds only an old Jewish man with a bludgeoned head who, in his last breath, accuses Dekel of being a traitor and 'hater' of his 'people'. To quote Dekel: "...after that, it gets a bit strange". In fact, pure craziness. The novel tracks Dekel's Jewish man with a bludgeoned head attempts to make sense of a very twisted tale of an Australian town. This at least is somehow remains more than this will be to give away the incredible conspiracy—one so weird I can believe it actually could happen.

Joe Dekel is, even at the most dire moments, a shit-hanger. He inflicts insult upon just about every political and religious group within the confines of his expansive story: peacemakers, rightwing Israeli warmongers, the PLO, the Israeli secret service, fundamentalist evangelical Christians, the CIA, the FBI, and so on. He presents a picture of Israel as a schizoid land torn apart by its many different groups, a country whose fragrantation is even more apparent in the face of a seemingly unified and constant Palestinian resistance against occupation. But towards the end of the book, Dekel cannot refrain from making the rest of the world a target for his loathing:

The people, my people, are just a microcosm of the squabbling heap of humanity...Our arrogance, our terror, our insecurity, our boycotts and excommunications, are not, at the end of the say, an ethnic inheritance. The global state. La Condition Humaine. We are fucked up, therefore we exist. There is nothing inherently Jewish about this. It is a bipedal problem.

Despite such damning monologues—which, one might think, offer humanity very little chance—the narrator of The Silencer somehow remains hopeful. Having witnessed a very disturbing world of spy-scandals, power games, fear and hate, Dekel and his wife still choose to have a child. Life must go on, even in the face of so many problems; even when the world seems on the brink of ending. At the end of the book, Dekel is brave enough to sing: "Come out, come out whoever you are! The more of us malcontents the better."

This book manages the inspired: to remain very funny while, at the same time, cramming in many intelligent, insightful and cynical views of the Israeli-Palestinian feud. I left the novel with a somehow clearer perception of the complexity and enormity of this very current and often debated problem. A shit-stained view perhaps—murky and chaotic—but what else would one expect?

MATTHEW SCHULZ is a Sydney poet and writer. He is currently working on a murder mystery set in colonial Australia.

Language Landscape


It seems a bit misleading to describe Bernard Cohen's first book as a 'novel'; for while it is certainly novel in its form, it isn't exactly a novel. It is divided into 149 sections, each less than a page long. Each bears the name of an Australian town. This at least is reassuring, but on reading the text underneath these headings disorientation sets in.

The section headed 'Darwin', for instance, begins: "If only we received visitors, we too would eat. This is the land of possibility." At Adelaide, it says, "There is a battle for stasis, and we are its objects. Decisions are made here but never enacted. The truth is different. Everything else seems the same. This is because we have not learned to differentiate sound."

These places, then, are more like Calvino's invisible cities than the Australian landscape we know. The seemingly interminable series of 'landscape novels' that passes for Australian literature. Cohen is having his little joke here. The landscape of language can be more interesting than the landscape of rustic rural towns which populates Australian TV drama and travelogues.

This is a very contemporary sort of fiction; one might even call it avant garde. Yet it is engrossing, funny, amusing, saturated with wit and Cohen's unique style. Breaking with the tedium of Australian fiction need not be a leap into the high seriousness of 'experimental' (i.e. unreadable) prose. But then, as Cohen would say, "In Yass, one always overtakes on the inside."

McKENZIE WARK writes for the Australian's Higher Education supplement.