



# AA Gill is Away

By A.A. Gill

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A. A. Gill is one of the most feared writers in London, noted--according to the *New York Times*--for his "rapier wit." Some even consider the mere assignment of a subject to Gill a hostile act. But when the notice "AA GILL IS AWAY" runs in the *Sunday Times* of London, the city can rest peacefully in the knowledge that the writer is off traveling.

"My editor asked me what I wanted from journalism and I said the first thing that came into my head--I'd like to interview places. To treat a place as if it were a person, to go and listen to it, ask it questions, observe it the way you would interview a politician or a pop star," Gill writes.

Upon his return, readers are treated to an account of his vacations to places like famine-stricken Sudan, the pornography studios of California's San Fernando Valley, the dying Aral Sea or the seedy parts of Kaliningrad.

The result is one of the most fascinating, stylish and irreverent collections of travel writing.

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## AA Gill is Away By A.A. Gill Bibliography

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Imagine Evelyn Waugh reborn as one of Nick Hornby's endearingly superficial protagonists, and you have London's *Sunday Times* television and restaurant critic Gill: droll, astute, irritable, irritating and always cleaver-sharp. Moving from Hiroshima to Kyoto, Gill carps about the Japanese, with their ways that differ greatly from Gill's own, being "the people that aliens might be if they'd learnt Human by correspondence course and wanted to slip in unnoticed." He barnstorms through Ethiopia, Russia, Argentina and elsewhere before heading home to England. The anthology of travel essays opens with arguably Gill's finest section—on Sudan, whose current horrors make his root-cause impressions from 1998 required reading—arguing how even those who care about mass suffering are "protected by the one-way mirror of news." In Los Angeles, he makes a porn film: life on the set teaches him argot like "kung fu death grip" and some unusual uses for pineapples. Compilations inevitably draw episodes against one another, and this one is no different. Yet it maintains a high batting average from start to finish. Gill's aim isn't always on (only a Brit would search for authentic barbecue in California), but usually it's his bald foreignness that makes him such a skilled marksman. That, and the fact that he himself is such an original.

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From [Booklist](#)

*\*Starred Review\** A self-described "mongrel Scot"--part English, part Indian, born in Edinburgh--Gill has here collected 21 essays (dating from 1995 to 2001), presumably from his work as a columnist for the *Sunday Times of London*, "AA Gill Is Away" being the notice the paper runs when Gill is out on assignment. His interests are omnivorous and take him places as diverse as Sudan, India, Cuba, Bethlehem, Japan, and even the San Fernando Valley, where the author helped create a porn film. Gill can be mischievously funny, as when he describes Westerners who do yoga in India as exercise, "which is a bit like walking the Stations of the Cross as aerobics." Yet he can write with the most penetrating tenderness and humility, as when he shares his visit to the most destitute part of Sudan: "It is not staring at the face of starvation that thuds like a blow to your heart, it is having starvation stare back at you." This is not conventional travel writing--not that of the newspaper travel section, or even that of such classic writers as Simon Winchester, Pico Iyer, and Jan Morris (see *By the Seat of My Pants*, reviewed on p.24). It somehow feels more interactive, riskier, and more enduring. *Alan Moores*

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Review

"A. A. Gill gives us a highly personalized and thrilling romp through the world's wild side."

--Christiane Amanpour, CNN

"This is passionate, funny, heartfelt, superbly crafted writing on places and things he clearly feels strongly about...I'm always happy when A. A. Gill is 'away.'"

--Anthony Bourdain, author of *Kitchen Confidential*

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