

Loved or loathed, Fisk is at forefront of

BY CHRISTINA
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"I am dead. I've been dead for some time. I died upon arrival in your eyes." The

simple words of a child portray so strikingly the violence in our time, the cries that fall on deaf ears to a blind world. This horror, this unimaginable atrocity is the misery that Robert Fisk has seen first hand and talks about in his newest book.

In an overcrowded lecture theatre at NUI, Galway on Tuesday night, Robert Fisk, award winning foreign correspondent in Beirut for the Independent, spoke to an enthusiastic, spellbound crowd. From college students to people from the community, people came to see the award winning author and journalist speak about his new book.

The combination of efforts by the Irish Centre for Human Rights, NUI Galway and Amnesty International (Ireland) made for much interest in Fisk's talk and

resulted in some attendants even having to carry their own chairs in to be seated in the packed out lecture hall, while others sat on the steps or lurked in the doorway.

"Robert Fisk is a true investigative journalist, utterly independent, fearless in where he is willing to go and what he is willing to write," Sean Lowe, Executive Director of Amnesty International Irish Section said.

As many recognise, the first casualty in war is truth and the audience seemed delighted by Fisk's ideas and points of view in relation to the War in the Middle East.

"Fisk is one of the very few reporters that challenge the propaganda that is very often professed," Dr. Kathleen Cavanagh from the Irish Centre for Human Rights said. "The duty (of journalists) is to either investigate and provide us with forensic or indicate that their sources are official sources. He challenges the status quo and isn't worried about making statements that challenge us."

Beginning the lecture with

a clip from a documentary he made some years back, Fisk shows himself with an elderly woman, asking her how she felt when she looked at her old photographs.

"You already know the answers to these questions," she said. "Why do you continue to ask?"

Damaged by war, many lives have been torn apart, and the difficult question that Fisk asks is why? Fisk continues to probe, to delve to the bottom of these issues, and he continues to challenge those in positions of power, in the Middle East and in Western Society, holding them accountable for their words and deeds.

Hailed as an advocate of Human Rights, as a brilliant writer, as a man who uses his voice to write the first page of history, Fisk is admired by many, hated by some, but across the world he is recognised as a powerful and passionate reporter.

With nearly three decades of experience in the field, Fisk recently published the book that took him 16 years to



War correspondent Robert Fisk shows a picture he took of Asama Bin Laden, to Connacht Tribune Photographer Stan Shields, from his book "The Great War for Civilisation: the conquest of the Middle East prior to his lecture at NUI, Galway in aid of Amnesty International.

write. Entitled "The Great War for Civilisation: The Conquest of the Middle East," it

compiles 328,000 notes, documents and dispatches. Partly an apology to his father,

and partly a reflection about what he has seen in the Middle East in the past 30 years,

this massive book studies the way in which history traps us and governs our lives.

"History repeats itself in Iraq," Fisk said. "Not just one repeats, but repeats and repeats like fingerprints."

Fisk focused much of his talk on criticising the way Western media covers news, maintaining that showing the facts of what happens is vital to understanding.

"In a war - an actual war, people being blown to pieces by shells, aircrafts and so on - you see terrible wounds and people who are really torn to pieces, and if you saw what we saw, you would never ever support a war," Fisk said.

"But when television goes there they cut out bits which show they are too terrible to show and effectively clean up the war. But they ought to show it, this is what war is about. I think people should see this, because it's in our name, we do it!"

Taking an adamant stand on the issue of US military planes landing in Shannon, Fisk earned an exuberant and thunderous round of

applause. "Sio, the one got tort. T Fisk the erit he! "

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applause from the audience.

"I feel that the Garda Síochána should go on board these planes and take off anyone who is trussed up and going to be shipped off to be tortured," Fisk said.

Towards the end of the talk, Fisk grew philosophical on the role he has played in covering history, reflecting on what he has seen and where he has been.

"I always thought that it was a great adventure to see history," Fisk said. "But sometimes I see families and children happy and living safe lives. And I think to myself, 'I can't go back to being 29.'"

And yet, Fisk is determined that he has a job to do and regardless of the circumstances is resolute to do it.

"I find that with young women and children, I'm more troubled about it than I used to be when I see them dead. But I took the view that they would want you to record their point of view.

They're not my enemies and I'm not theirs. I've seen thousands and thousands and I can still go out to lunch. I'm

not callous. It's like a doctor working in a hospital sees terrible things but he doesn't weep over it, he gets on with the job."

And yet now, Fisk says that working in the Middle East has become a danger to all involved. With terms on the rise such as 'Mouse Journalism' – quickly darting in to get the sound bite and leaving just as fast – and 'Hotel Journalism' – journalists that stay in their hotel for safety and get their reports from officials – the pen is no longer mightier than the sword, and Fisk is questionable about if or when he will return.

"If it comes to a point where the risk is not worth the story or the story is not worth the risk then you have to ask yourself if it really is worth going for," Fisk said.

"So I'll make an awful prediction. America's war of 'liberation' is over. Iraq's war of liberation from the Americans is about to begin, in other words the real and frightening story starts now. All I can say is 'watch out.'"