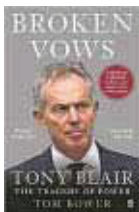
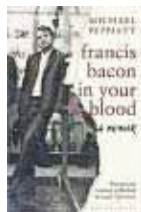


Non-fiction



Broken Vows
by Tom Bower
(Faber, £9.99)



**Francis Bacon
in Your Blood**
by Michael Peppiatt
(Bloomsbury, £9.99)



**This Is the
Place to Be**
by Lara Pawson
(CB Editions, £8.99)

Tom Bower starts from the assumption that Tony Blair was nothing more than a gameshow con artist and, after 700 pages of character destruction, he ends there too. The author is nothing if not assiduous. He has interviewed dozens of former ministers and 200 ex-civil servants, some perhaps with a score to settle. The book is replete with priceless vignettes. Bower portrays the former prime minister as a charlatan, a man who is easily bored and cannot think through complex issues of public policy. But, in his search for a denunciation on every page, he struggles to acknowledge a single significant success in a decade of public policy. That is an unsustainable analysis. On Iraq, Bower offers fresh anecdotes but no spectacular smoking gun. He uncovers fascinating detail about Blair's under-reported life after Downing Street, but again not the killer single fact. What justifies the visceral loathing felt by so many towards Blair? To get a better understanding of his mind, and our responses to him, it is surely time to turn to the psychiatrist's chair.

John Kampfner

Francis Bacon in Your Blood is a memoir of Bacon and Peppiatt's friendship over 30 years and an account of Peppiatt's own development in his mentor's shadow. It is partly a record of its subject's table talk, which Peppiatt sets down as though recalling it verbatim. While Bacon was indisputably a great painter, his was not a great mind, and the deeper one reads into the book the more threadbare and repetitious its contents appear. And yet as a host, fortified by drink and company, he could be genial and generous and waspishly funny. Peppiatt makes a starry-eyed chronicler, as besotted with his patron's fine wine and grub as he is with his closeness to the throne. The underlying tension between master and protege keeps the pages turning, though Peppiatt's prose seldom quickens the pace. He shows no great resistance to a cliché and his dipping in and out of the present tense doesn't lend his narrative the freshness he intends. Peppiatt is at his most readable on Bacon's painting. Elsewhere his pride and his gratitude smudge the portrait. **Anthony Quinn**

Lara Pawson has already written a non-fiction book about Angola's violent history - the Orwell prize-longlisted *In the Name of the People*. This is something different, a memoir partly about her time reporting on that country's civil war for the BBC, and partly about her life before it and afterwards. It is fast-moving, fragmentary and often aggressively candid. Pawson tells her story in isolated paragraphs that come at you with opening lines like a boxer's best left hooks: "I've been hit by a boyfriend once in my life, and I hit that one back"; "Because I've been mistaken for a man so often ..."; "I'm tempted to delete that paragraph, but there's more." As an examination of the realities and ethics of war reporting, the book says much about what exposure to violence can do to people, about the kind of person who would seek such experience out, and about what turning away from it does to you. Above all, it challenges the reader to examine their own beliefs and decisions as closely as Pawson has examined hers. Brilliant and uncompromising. **Jonathan Gibbs**

