

nightly on TV. He explains that the example of his grandfather, a Slovenian survivor of Mauthausen and Dachau, impelled him to act, and in April 1999 he travelled to Albania under the auspices of the independent charity International Medical Corps.

Jurisevic's explanation of his decision to help the Kosovars raises questions. His veneration of his grandfather is sincere, as is his profound humanitarianism, and his courage: no one would deny that. But in 'the parliament of my skull' (as no doubt his ghost-writer, Robert Hillman, put it) he does not acknowledge that he finds danger attractive. Some acquire a taste for single malt, some for base-jumping or big-game hunting. But skilled as he was, Jurisevic



but not unduly sensational. But Jurisevic soon detected the stink of corruption as well as the reek of gangrene in his wards. He learned that the hospital's Albanian director, in league with local mafia, ran an extortion racket. Patients unable to pay simply disappeared, dumped to die. Jurisevic bravely denounced him, and was persuaded that leaving town might save him from being murdered.

He found refuge with the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), a shambling outfit itself later indicted for war crimes and corruption. He found himself moving closer and closer to the front line, where KLA volunteers faced Serbian forces on the mountainous frontier between Kosovo and Albania. Jurisevic justifies each step

of his seven weeks in Albania as gripping and profoundly moving. The KLA's leaders stayed safely out of Serb mortar range while leaving their naive volunteers exposed to murderous fire for no worthwhile reason. Trading on the idealism of their own volunteers, they also exploited Jurisevic's naive humanitarianism.

As well as treating casualties while under fire himself, he witnessed and

writing and knowing yourself. I have travelled extensively around Europe, with much more humble ambitions than Tumarkin's but in the company of a child roughly the age of her Billie. Unlike Tumarkin and her daughter, we did not keep diaries but we did write articles about where we had been and what we had seen. Always, the addition of a young person's perspective shifted the angle of view, stripped away stereotypes, won us many more friends, and – in every way which mattered – deeply enriched the experience.

The same seems to hold true in *Otherland*. Together, mother and daughter test (on a provincial train) how far a woman might be prepared to go to keep her bladder from bursting. Together, they encounter the infatuation Russian women sustain for high heels, then kick on to numerous other misadventures. Tumarkin does allude to a few more esoteric, academic interests on her part. As one example, she laments, although a reader

A fetching way into the metamorphoses in another culture

NON-FICTION

OTHERLAND: A Journey with my Daughter. By Maria Tumarkin. *Vintage Australia*. 313pp. \$34.95.

Reviewer: MARK THOMAS



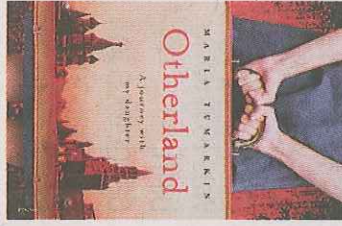
numbers, dates and ages represent not simply milestones but quite significant readers' guides in this story. Maria

Tumarkin left the then Soviet Union for Australia in 1989, when she was 15 years old, a month after the fall of the Berlin Wall but before the dissolution of the USSR engendered a decade of turbulent economic, political, social, ideological and demographic transitions. She returned, to visit six spots in Russia and Ukraine in fewer than six weeks, when her own daughter was a bit younger than she had been in 1989.

Tumarkin emigrated just when things

were getting interesting, in every facet of Russia's national life, in her family's standing as Jews and Russians, and possibly in her own process of growing up as well. She readily acknowledges that perhaps the most intriguing story for her lies on a road not travelled: "I left too early. I missed the whole point. I was not there when my generation was connered by history."

As for the return to "otherland", to what used to be home, Tumarkin offers two conventional explanations for her journey, one for each person taking the trip. The first was to connect her daughter with her family's past, "to set that history going again – to get its blood pumping and its joints moving, make its connective tissues elastic but firm". The second was Tumarkin's judgment that the journey home was an archetypal narrative, "a literary bridge that I must inevitably cross". Both objectives might seem a little high-blown or old-fashioned, but each draws on venerable traditions in exploring,



might not share her concern, that "the great, tragic history of the emasculation of men in the twentieth century is yet to be told".

Largely, though, the book is grounded with and in and through Billie, and it is all the more solid for that juvenile bedrock. Throughout the Tumarkins' trip, various scenes and incidents stimulate intelligent inquiries about disparate issues. Tumarkin writes about glamour, her habit of identity-cracking, about buildings "rotting alive", bureaucratic S&M, pushing on the Moscow metro, and the notion of heroism in war-time Leningrad.

If a reader is seeking a profound appraisal of Putin's Russia, the late Anna Politovskaya's writings would be a better place to start. In *Otherland*, though, the blend of background historical and cultural ballast with personal family anecdotes offers one fetching way into the metamorphoses in another culture's way of life.

Mark Thomas is a Canberra reviewer.