

# Here today, gone tomorrow

WEEKEND

by Martin Foreman

Third House, 172pp, pb, £4.95

Review by Mark Coton

THE DARK-HAIRED young man on the front cover of *Weekend* carries a semi-threatening, semi-inviting expression. The buttons on his shirt are suggestively undone. There are posters of other men on the wall behind.

The immediate impression is of another disposable gay novel, another literary one-night stand: fumbling, occasional good moments, ultimately empty and unsatisfying. But, despite the cover and an unadventurous title, *Weekend* goes far, far deeper than this. Martin Foreman has plenty to say and says it exceptionally well.

Crammed into the novel's 172 pages is real, honest experience, not, as so often, merely the haphazard wanderings of figures with whom we do not wish to identify and from whom there is little to learn.

Mark Robertson is 29. He teaches, has a mortgage and a sense that 'life and its possibilities stretch far beyond the rut of work he finds himself in'. In his spare time he writes songs and dreams of being discovered.

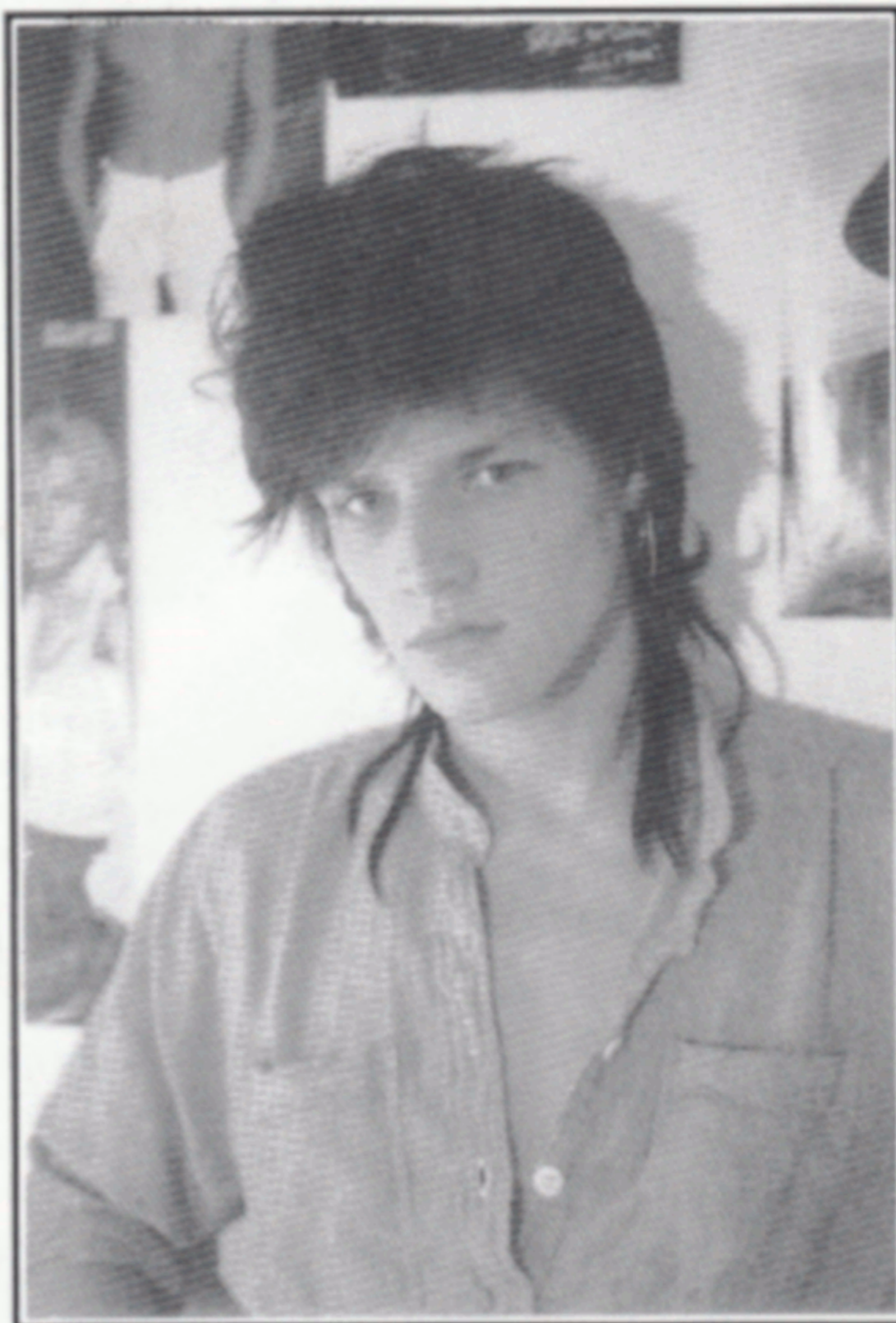
The novel begins one Saturday morning with Mark brooding over his relationships past and present. His current lover, Robert, is a successful and talented dancer, with a body to match. Robert is impetuous, careless, given to professing love and then disappearing on the nightbus home. But then he is only 19, and beautiful.

There was Carl, deeply devoted Carl, who prepared Mark's dinners in the afternoon, left to work as a barman in the evening, then came home. Carl didn't do much else, or even want to. He was in love with Mark and wasn't that enough? Gene was an American in

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Paris (cliché forgiven), a self-absorbed painter, seemingly independent and self-assured, a fascinating figure, prone to mystical insights.

Carl and Gene have gone and Robert will probably follow. But this is no pessimistic story. By piecing together his experiences (the novel is made up entirely of flashbacks) Mark finds himself on the verge of a discovery far more important than any one of these lovers or even the sum of the best of them.

Mark's dreams amount to more than a

search for happiness. He wants control over it. But happiness appears no more than an illusion, like the moment when he stares into a mirror and seems to see 'through the turbulence of his emotions an inner strength and peace, the person he might have been, the person he might yet be'.

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tion. Mark knows the joys of being in love, the thrill of good sex, glimpses of freedom. But they have never been enough. He needs more, but what more?

The temptation, as ever, is for more of the same. The sex which will be 'as momentous, as awesome as searching for and finding another's soul', the dreams of escape to a happy-ever-after paradise, with lover in one hand and suitcase in the other. The problem is

that Mark *did* escape to Gene in Paris. He discussed escaping with Carl to a bar in Greece, but it didn't work. He is trying the same with Robert, but 'like all dancers, he seems to exist on a higher plane of existence'.

Alongside Robert, Mark's life seems to him altogether mundane. But as the book progresses he begins to realise life is not and need not be so. The novel may lack the dreamlike style of Holleran

or the cleanly wrought emotions of Leavitt, but it is well-written and altogether convincing and at times moving. With its interchanging flashbacks it requires concentration, but this is a story which deserves and demands such effort.

Martin Foreman has hit the nail on the head with his first novel. *Weekend* deserves the widest possible audience and must not be missed. ●