

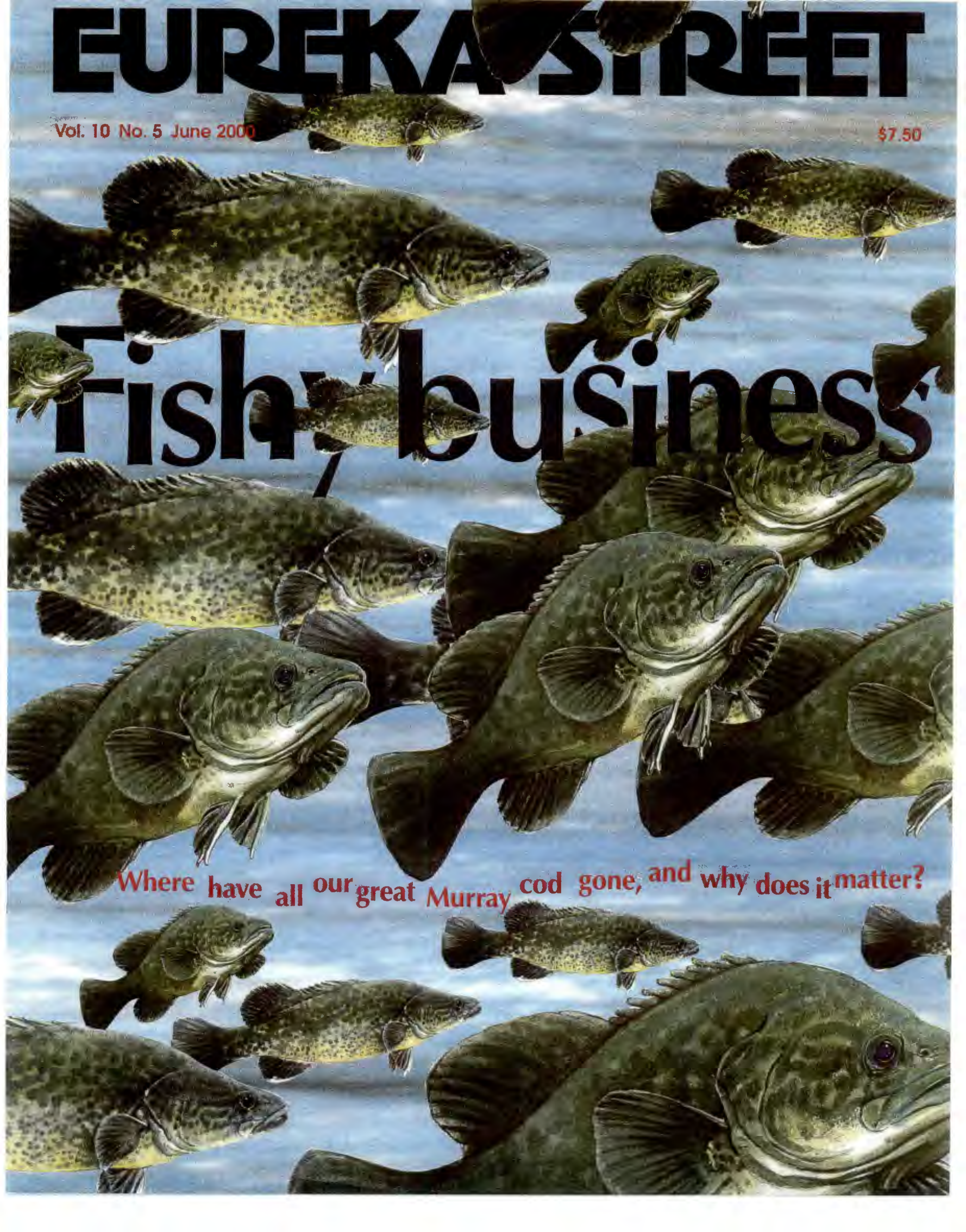
EUREKA STREET

Vol. 10 No. 5 June 2000

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Fishy business

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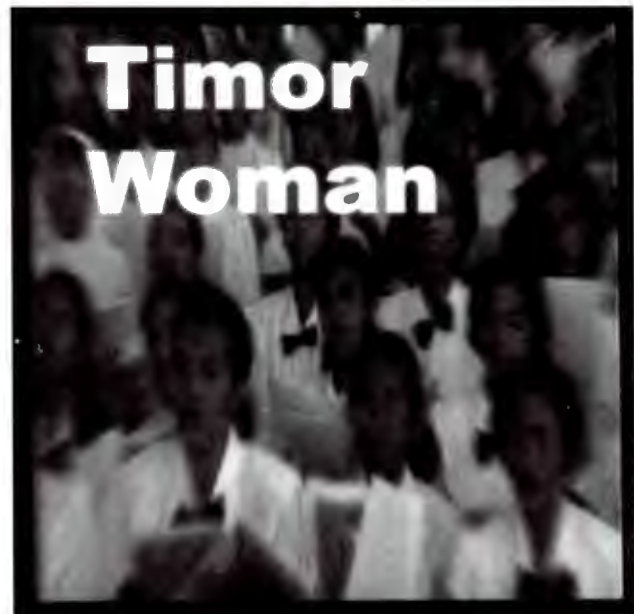
The CD is available at The Last Record Store, Smith Street, Collingwood, Melbourne, for \$20.

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(See page 8 for winners of the April Book Offer)

EUREKA STREET

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'Tieless in Bligh Street' by Brett Evans, 'Up the Creek' by Paul Sinclair, and 'The Truce' by Kate Llewellyn, have been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

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Heading into winter

IN EARLY MAY, Xanana Gusmao was asked a question about reconciliation.

It was a steely day. From where I was sitting you could see concrete trucks barrelling across one of Melbourne's new bridges. Inside the corrugated iron Events Warehouse—a



Leader and launcher: Xanana Gusmao and Bishop Hilton Deakin at the May launch of To Resist is to Win!

world away from East Timor, with its importunate tropical growth—the guest of honour began tentatively. (He has a poet's impatience with his lack of fluency and precision in English.) But the answer, when it came, was given in a language that you might call global or international. We are familiar with it from human-rights talk. But it was also familiar and ancient in its way. The people will want justice, he said. And the business of forgiveness and reconciliation is very difficult, but essential. Where there has been violence, people must sit down together and talk until they come to an understanding of one another.

The occasion was the Melbourne launch of Gusmao's writings and autobiographical reflections, *Resistir é Vencer!*, *To Resist is to Win!* Bishop Hilton Deakin did the honours, speaking not from his position of ecclesial authority, but from long experience of East Timor. Then there were Timorese songs in Melbourne's brisk air.

The media, doing their job, asked the questions they'd been sent to ask. Would Gusmao become president? Would he be entering an East Timorese team in the Sydney Olympics? And what would he say about Indonesia during his conversation with Prime Minister John Howard the following day?

Gusmao had warned beforehand that he would only answer questions about the book, or about education initiatives set up between RMIT University and East Timor. Nonetheless, it was fascinating to watch a seasoned campaigner transform the usual press-conference frenzy into a sudden and unexpected moment of quiet and thought. Gusmao pauses for as long as it takes to formulate the phrase, the idea he wants to convey. Radio and TV journalists, anxious for their sound bite, tapped and squirmed, anticipating the time that would be needed in the edit suite to get the East Timorese resistance leader into shape for the evening news bulletins.

But eventually even they began to listen. Not because the rhetoric was golden—although he is charismatic enough—but because the man was talking about circumstances we are beginning to understand here. We have read the news reports, seen the television coverage, listened to people at marches and demonstrations. We've heard the measured tones of Major General Peter Cosgrove and the voices of young soldiers sent to keep the peace on the border with West Timor. We have also heard some of the less edifying tales of Australian profiteers moving into East Timor where there is money to be made out of unregulated property development, out of the structural chaos that followed last September's violence.

But the launch was not the place for recrimination. In any case, the presence of a sizeable East Timorese community was testimony to more positive relations between our two peoples. And there was a further connection: Gusmao was talking a language of reconciliation that Australia is also trying to learn. When he first came on to the platform he was greeted, in a smothering hug, by a young desert man, Russel Smith, who was, as he put it, the 'honorary Wurunjeri' for the purposes of the welcome to country on the day. Gusmao showed that he can hug back with conviction—sometimes the physical gesture speaks the language as well as or better than words.

THESE HAS NOT BEEN much hugging going on between the parties in the Australian reconciliation process. Some polite dinners, some discussion, finally. But it would be an optimist who would describe the current state of relations between indigenous and settler Australians (even the language is contentious) as gracious, let alone reconciled.

One week after the launch of Xanana Gusmao's book, I was talking to a group of Year 11 students at a school in Melbourne's inner west. The question we had to consider was whether indigenous Australians should be explicitly acknowledged in the Australian Constitution.

The morning was acid bright. It was also the day that saw the culmination of the formal reconciliation process, marked by the release of the document of

reconciliation which has been in the making, in community groups all across the country, for almost a decade. Dimity Fifer, a member of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, was there to read out the document and to encourage the students' commitment to the process.

But there was another document, as we all knew, released that day, by the Prime Minister, Mr Howard. It gave his preferred emphasis on some crucial elements: the question of an apology, the issues of Aboriginal self-determination and the acknowledgment of customary law. These are all important, still contentious issues, and warrant broad discussion. The tragedy is that we should still be at the calculating stage of issuing contending documents instead of putting in the effort of spirit and will required to issue a single one. No-one denies that there is still work to be done. But at least we might not have set ourselves on two different tracks, leading inevitably to conflict.

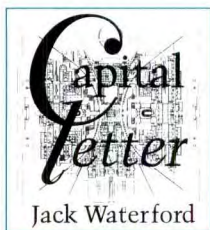
A WEEK BEFORE both events, I was briefly in New York, in one of the cracks of time between one issue of *Eureka Street* and the next. Late each afternoon I would walk with my husband down to the corner of Sixth Avenue (grandly titled the Avenue of the Americas) and West Fourth Street to watch the boys working out on the basketball courts. It's a crammed, busy space, just above the subway entrance.

The play is of an extraordinary standard, and in consequence there is a lot of negotiating going on: managers trading players, entrepreneurs doing deals. I was never sure which to watch—the men in suits or the tall genius who could shoot in any direction while keeping his eyes strictly to the front. He was grace in action.

One evening I was on my own when a young woman walked up from the subway and stood near me, wearing the most wonderful coat—red, yellow and striped. Joseph would have envied it. Her hair was close-cropped and she wore turned-up jeans and spectacular red high-heeled shoes. For a moment I was so distracted from the play that I smiled at her and gestured towards her coat, murmuring something like 'so beautiful'. She smiled back in such an open-hearted way—I thought of her again when I saw Russel Smith embrace Xanana Gusmao. Then we both turned back to watch the play.

Afterwards I crossed the Avenue and nearly ran into a white man who was jabbing vigorously across the traffic to the basketball crowd. 'Just look at that vulgarity over there!' he shouted to his companion. 'Why did you bring me down here?' Then he hurried off up the Avenue, hauling her behind him. He had missed out, I thought, on the smile from the woman in the miraculous coat and on the manoeuvres of a man who could make a ball talk a language that spoke to all comers. ■

—Morag Fraser



PMs, GSTs and IOUs

JOHN HOWARD WILL BE in London on 1 July playing the statesman, along with most of the state premiers and a large caravan of politicians, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the passage of the Australian Constitution through the British Parliament. At home, Kim Beazley will be playing the politician, maximising for Labor the antagonism flowing to John Howard from the chaos of the introduction of the goods and services tax. The fate of each leader now depends on accountants and small business people, and the messages they give their customers.

Someone remarked recently that the last time the fate of a government turned so much on the actions of people in the finance sector was with Ben Chifley and bank employees in 1949. The bank johnnies couldn't even organise a decent defalcation these days, he added.

Actually, that's not strictly true. For most of the past few decades, the fate of governments has rested on snap judgments made by operators on the international money market. On those judgments have hung movements in the Australian dollar, interest rates and our lines of international credit.

Those markets do not care very much about whether or not Australia has value-added taxes, though they put a great deal of store by whether the nation has a low tax regime. By which standards one might say that a holding budget put down by Peter Costello in early May—holding the fort until the GST regime and tax cuts were in place—achieved its end.

But it is voters who make the final decision, and whether they have been appeased is another matter altogether. The government had already stripped much of its natural surplus in tax cuts designed to soften the GST, but knows that rising interest rates have made many people feel already worse off. What discretionary money exists has been focused in rural and regional centres, but whether these feel that their concerns have been addressed is also doubtful. Government has treated the problem as primarily one of access to doctors. For much the same money, they might have widened their focus to rural health resources, particularly for older people, in a way that created work for nursing hostels and small hospitals in rural communities—thus doing something for community development.

If there were an election in the next few months, the signs are that the Coalition would be down to about 30 seats in a 148-seat House of Representatives. John Howard must swing the present opinion of one in every 12 voters even to hold on.

His biggest problem is not that he has lost the confidence of ordinary voters, but that he has alienated the natural base he now needs most, small business. The GST is already a liability, and voters have not even experienced it yet. It is unpopular

with the accountants—even as, no doubt, it is making them a fortune—but rather than wooing them, the government is abusing them. A lot of local opinion-leaders in communities are bagging the GST. Whatever the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and its zealous head, Alan Fels, do to monitor price movement, one can be pretty sure that most price changes over the coming few years will be blamed on the GST, and on compliance regimes. The unpopularity with many small business people is aggravated by the fact that many will now be paying a lot more income tax because it will be, for some, more difficult to feed themselves from the till.

Labor is taking a big gamble, because if things do settle down, it is going to look very naked. But if I were betting on an outcome for the next election, I would say that, at the moment, Labor must be very heavily favoured.

HOWARD IS A VERY CLEVER POLITICIAN, one who fights best with his back to the wall. So he should not be discounted. He will fight with every dollar in his Treasury, spending it not only directly on voters, but on public relations campaigns. A government which once prided itself on its economic rigour is now back into fairly conventional pump-priming and Keynesian economic policy. The tap is now back on. As with the last Fraser-Howard budget of 1982, the Howard-Costello budgets of 2000 and 2001 have shed most of their reforming zeal because Howard is in survival mode.

That he has not yet given up, however, can be shown by the stubbornness with which he still plays the game—against Labor, against his political enemies in his own party, and against the general political culture he hates so much, has worked so hard to dismantle, but which still mocks him about issues such as reconciliation. For John Howard, this is a continuing obsession. Much more than mere stubbornness, I think, it determines his attitude to things such as reconciliation and Australian history.

It is hard to see Howard as Prime Minister next time about, but dangerous to make too many guesses beyond that. The succession is far from certain and I cannot imagine his doing Peter Costello any favours. In any leadership succession, the moderates in his party do not have the numbers to get their own candidate up (if they had one), but they probably have the numbers to veto anyone they do not like. In that sense, the very wounded Michael Wooldridge may well be the king-maker. Right now, he might figure that he owes John Howard a lot. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

Time after Time

From Tom Errey

Six years ago, when East Timor was hardly flavour of the month, I submitted to *Time* magazine my nomination of Xanana Gusmao as 'Man of the Year'. I put no great store by such 'elevations' of outstanding individuals to stardom by populist publications, and this was the single occasion on which I'd put a name forward. Moreover I had no reason to believe at that time there would be any notice taken of my eccentric preference. And so it turned out: indeed Xanana might still be in the shadows of Jakarta but for the South East Asian economic implosion of 1997 and the political tremors thus generated.

But even *Time* today would find a reasonably prominent place for Gusmao in its firmament. Heigh ho!

Tom Errey
Fern Tree, TAS

Snared care

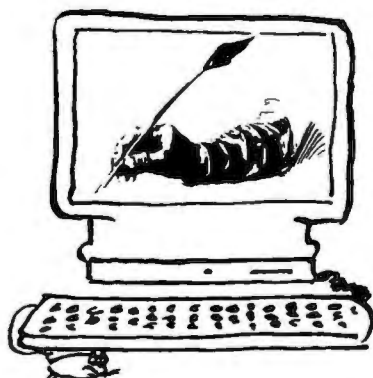
From Rick Norwood

From 1 January 2001, when the whole country will be reaping the benefits of tax reform, there will be one group substantially better off thanks to a little-publicised piece of Commonwealth legislation.

This group consists of non-custodial parents who earn more than \$78,378 a year. At the moment, the Child Support Agency collects a set percentage of the non-custodial parent's income up to a cap of \$101,153. For a decade the cap was \$88,000, and was brought up to the current level for reasons of equity and fairness. Now, although it beggars belief, the cap has been brought down below the levels of over ten years ago. The richer a non-custodial parent, the smaller the proportion of income demanded for the children.

The fact that custodial parents are overwhelmingly mothers, many of them single mothers, has another twist: single mothers form one of the most underprivileged groups in our society. A Departure Order from the standard formula is hard to get and an Appeal to the Court unlikely for money reasons. An unwilling and aggressive ex-partner, who may be able to write his income down at tax time, can easily intimidate the now-single mother so that she is unable to even think of exercising her legal rights. Legal Aid? Forget it! Thus emerges a

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situation too familiar to family lawyers, of a child who spends most of the time in near-poverty, only to be treated with a nice car, nice house, Playstation and holidays by the 'nice uncle' father at contact time.

It looks like the terrier-like lobbying of those men who, for whatever reason, oppose the proper payment of child support, has met with extraordinary success. We should all join with the Council of Single Mothers in urging the repeal of this shameful legislation which contains yet other similar changes. Where was the Opposition when this was pushed through?

Rick Norwood
Northcote, VIC

This month, the writer of each letter we publish will receive a *Eureka Street* bag. Perfect for books, bananas and beach towels.



Have a heart

From I. Goor

I quote from Lynn Ryan, National Courage Co-ordinator's letter, *Eureka Street*, May 2000: 'Also, Courage members do not identify themselves as "gay and lesbian" but rather as children of God who struggle with varying degrees of same-sex attraction and who wish to live chaste lives.'

I ask, does Lynn by implication mean that a) gay and lesbian people cannot be children of God, and b) does she then consider sexual attraction which leads to sexual activity, including between heterosexuals and/or within marriage, to be unchaste?

I. Goor
Tamworth, NSW

Sorry state

From Ted Watt

What was the point of the bishops' sorry statement? It did nothing to satisfy the spokesmen for organised homosexuals, or for the ordination of women; did the bishops expect that it would? Besides, repenting has to be done in person, and the bishops were mainly saying sorry for other people's sins, not for their own. 'O Lord, I give thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, whose efforts have often been misguided and have led to unintended but harmful long-term consequences.'

But if the bishops are planning to issue another sorry statement more relevant to the present and the recent past, and to matters which the bishops who are still in office have permitted and could have prevented, here are a few suggestions.

We have now had two generations of Australian Catholics who, after 12 years in Catholic schools, know almost nothing about the teachings and the history of the Catholic religion, because of the dumbed-down RE syllabuses to which they have been subjected. Will the bishops say sorry for that?

Parents who have approached schools about what their children were being taught (or not taught) have often been patronised and seldom listened to. Will the bishops say sorry for that?

Church bureaucrats who are openly patronising and dismissive towards parents, and openly contemptuous of church teaching, have been left in their influential

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AUSTRALIAN BOOK REVIEW

JUNE

An essay by Morag Fraser

Marion Halligan on Cowan's

A Troubadour's Testament

Kerryn Goldsworthy on

Elizabeth Stead's *The Fishcastle*

A round-up of literary magazines by

Peter Pierce

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jobs to continue the process of dissolution of the church. Will the bishops say sorry for that?

Priests, with a few honourable exceptions, have preached the Gospel of Life only occasionally and hesitantly, fearful of being confronted by a parishioner. Will the bishops say sorry for that?

Priests, with even fewer honourable exceptions, have for several decades not proclaimed the church's teaching about sex, so that married people have been deprived of authentic sex, the body language of total commitment, leading to impoverished marriages. Will the bishops say sorry for that?

Catholic medical ethics centres and hospitals have become infected by notions from the surrounding world that the lives of people who are ill and cannot be cured are futile, and that it may be all right to kill those people by withdrawing their food and water. Will the bishops say sorry for allowing the infected bioethicists and hospital directors to remain in their jobs?

Catholics who still go to church have been left to the mercies of liturgical directors and committees, and undirected parish priests, whose impoverished rites convey no feeling for the tremendous reality which they enact. Will the bishops say sorry for that?

People who have approached their bishops for protection from these people in authority who are pushing their own agenda have seldom received any protection. Instead, bishops have usually imagined that their first duty is to defend the staff against all complaints, even justified complaints. Will the bishops say sorry for that?

In all these cases, and in many more that could be mentioned, real repentance would have to entail not merely expressions of regret, but also a firm purpose of amendment.

Ted Watt
Claremont, WA

No news

From Geoff Hastings

How inspiring it must be for 'Electronic News-gatherers' to read Brian Johns' address to the International Institute of

Communications (*Eureka Street*, May 2000). ABC News & Current Affairs must have been delighted to learn that a person of such high calibre was recruited to the ABC as General Manager, coming as he did from SBS where he left what was and probably still is, the best TV news in its class.

Johns appeared inspired by the term 'One ABC' and mentioned 600 journalists in Australia: in my day there were, and probably still are, over 6000 personnel in the six states and territories and overseas bureaus. Departments such as Sports, Rural, Drama, Light Entertainment, all believing that they had interested viewers and listeners, and not just residuals awaiting the next news broadcast. Each department hoped that any new Managing Chief recognised their interests and allocated monies accordingly. The technical updating for Radio News can be justified because of its immediate nature of reporting, but TV news, because of our 'time-zoning' and broadcast times, is at least 'yesterday's' news and in the case of some stories from Africa, a voice-over archival wallpaper.

Mr Johns overlooks that some of his ABC cameramen have earned some worthy honours for their work and one or two have received Oscars for major motion pictures. The designations 'News & Current Affairs' does indicate two departments both in TV and radio where cost over-runs are jealously watched. I imagine that many novenas are lying in the Dead Letter Office next to many of Juliette Hughes' (see *Eureka Street Letters*, May 2000).

Geoff Hastings
Watsons Bay, NSW

Winners of the April 2000 Book Offer

R. Brady, Middle Park, VIC; D.A. Campbell, South Hobart, TAS; A. Crocombe, South Lismore, NSW; T. Cullen, Morningside QLD; W. Du Vé, Deepdene, VIC; B.G. Edwards, Springwood, NSW; T. Errey, Fern Tree, TAS; C.J. Fleming, Narrabundah, ACT; R.M. Galbraith, Healesville, VIC; H. Grenfell, Croydon, VIC; C. Jackson, Yokine, WA; J. Jones, Port Macquarie, NSW; A. Knight, Campbell, ACT; M. Laczó, Bangkok, THAILAND; J. Moore, Warradale, SA; G.H. O'Byrne, Bellbrae, VIC; Q. O'Halloran, Malvern, VIC; M. Power, Albury, NSW; K. Riggall, Heathfield, SA; C. Sherlock, Clifton Hill, VIC.



Field of flowers

AT THE END OF THE 16TH CENTURY, excitable Dominicans in the South of Italy were a cause of considerable bother to ecclesiastical and civil authorities of more phlegmatic temperament, who might have thought Giordano Bruno had done them a favour in 1576 by fleeing both the Order and Italy.

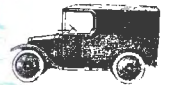
But the Inquisition had a long memory as well as a long arm, and before Bruno was burnt alive in Rome's Field of Flowers on 17 February 1600, the precaution was taken of securing his tongue in a gag. Garrulity was a besetting sin for Bruno, and not a little of what he had to say was as silly as it was long-winded, but even so, this seems a gross refinement of cruelty. Still, it falls a long way short of the spectacularly unusual punishments inflicted some months earlier on the Cenci family, from whose dark history of incest, intrigue, and murder Shelley was to construct an eminently forgettable melodrama. Perhaps the secular arm of the papal government felt less threatened by heresy than by parricide; perhaps it took a little more seriously than has usually been allowed the Inquisition's customary exhortation to mercy. One is still left wondering what Ippolito Aldobrandini was thinking of, apart from the understandable appeal of something short and snappy, when on becoming Pope in 1592 he took the name Clement.

Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Vatican Secretary of State, marked the fourth centenary of Bruno's execution this year by bringing it within the scope of the Pope's seeking of pardon for the past and present sins of members of the church. Bruno's views are still judged to have been 'on certain decisive points, incompatible with Christian doctrine'. No change there then. But 'some aspects of the handling of his case ... cannot fail to be a source of profound regret for the Church today'. For, even in the presence of doctrinal error, 'truth itself demands an absolute respect for the conscience and the dignity of every person'. Cardinal Sodano is careful, as are all the texts associated with the Pope's 'Day of Forgiveness', not to sit in judgment over the consciences of those whose deeds are now reprobated. There is no suggestion, for example, that the Jesuit Cardinal Inquisitor, Saint Robert Bellarmine, should be 'uncanonised' for putting his signature to the sentence of condemnation,

where it was shortly followed by that of the Dominican Master General. (Bellarmine might have inked his quill with more than customary *brio*, and the Master General been even more chagrined, had they known what has recently been alleged—that Bruno had spent some of his years of liberty spying on Catholics for Queen Elizabeth's Secretary of State, Sir Francis Walsingham.) All that needs to happen is the acknowledgement that what was done to Bruno, and to so many others, was evil; that there is something profoundly disturbing in Bruno's being told by his judges, 'we cast you out of our holy and immaculate Church, of whose mercy you are no longer worthy; that this was itself unworthy of the church, and properly an occasion of sorrow and regret.

IT HAS BEEN OBSERVED that some of the newspapers which have found cause to sniff at aspects of the Pope's seeking of forgiveness have small claim to unalloyed pride in their own past—in their initial appraisal of Hitler's regime, for example. But no-one would seriously expect a newspaper to apologise for its remote past, for such an apology implies continuity of moral consciousness: from a newspaper it would be both pompous and ridiculous. But matters are different with the church. The church's understanding of its past is crucial to its self-understanding. As with an individual, it is only in its memory that the church can recognise itself, and hence have a conscience, at all. To confront the evils of the past, to acknowledge their wickedness, to be sorry for them, and to seek forgiveness is not a mark of mawkishness. Quite the reverse, it is a seeking of healing—the Pope calls it a 'purification of the memory'—which is essential if the memory is properly to serve its vital role as the home of a good conscience. A morally mature church needs a healed memory quite as much as any morally mature individual. Whether a nation needs one also, or whether a nation is more suitably compared with an institution like a newspaper, which nobody would expect to have a conscience—mature or otherwise—is, I gather, still a matter of debate in Australia. ■

Denis Minns OP is *Eureka Street's* United Kingdom correspondent.



The Month's Traffic



Still flows the river

JIMMY HAS LONG, dark eyelashes and curly black hair. He walks quickly with a kind of limp. He lives with Rachel and Cheryl and his street mother Jade in the park above the Kings Cross parking station. He is 22 and has lived on the streets since he was 14. He has lymphatic cancer and another cancer in one eye. He is on methadone. He is a dancer and performs for school groups in a company.

A month or two before Easter, Jimmy asked me if I would baptise him. 'At the Easter vigil mass,' I replied. He sometimes comes to the presbytery to have his clothes washed and so we keep in touch. The night before the Easter vigil, Good Friday, I went looking for him to see if he was ready. I was having my doubts and decided I had better ask him why he wanted to be baptised. We walked back from the park and were sitting at a table in the presbytery. Jimmy had made himself some toasted cheese and tomato sandwiches. Before eating he had prayed: 'Thank you Lord for all the wonderful things you have done throughout the world.'

When I asked my question, he said, 'I want to get to know the Lord better before he comes. I don't want to be left behind with all the other sinners when he comes.' He was lifting the melted cheese off the toasted bread to eat the tomato underneath and then folding the bread around the warm cheese and eating it. 'They are all just turning against each other, being nasty and greedy and they're all just stabbing each other. I've got no-one to talk to but the Lord. The only person who really wants to hear you is Jesus, no matter what happens.'

I thought of Cheryl in the park when I went to find Jimmy. 'Do you talk with people?' she asked me. 'Can I have a talk with you in private?'

'Where did you get all your knowledge?' I asked Jimmy later in the night. We were in the parish 14-seater and I was driving to the airport. Maurie had rung and asked if I would put up 14 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders for a few days. They were flying in from Darwin. I told Jimmy that he would have some supporters at the vigil mass.

'My uncle was a minister,' he told me, 'and my mother a Catholic.' Jimmy hadn't been baptised because he was scared of the river. 'I used to go down to the river with my uncle, but I would hide. I didn't want to go under the water.'

We walked towards the security check across the wide and white open spaces of the airport. Jimmy was shuffling behind me in his oversize jeans and runners. I emptied my pockets of keys and money and went ahead. Jimmy turned out his pockets: broken cigarettes, a lighter, jelly beans and a white bag. The security man seized the bag and emptied it—chocolates. Then he frisked Jimmy. I watched, angry and shocked at the extra attention he was being given. I don't think he was aware that he was being treated differently. I don't know whether he had been in an airport before.

I had misunderstood Maurie and had come to the airport on the wrong night. Jimmy and I came home along the new underground freeway. 'Can the devil make you fight with your best friend?' he asked. I could only feel the pain behind the question. 'What will I wear? They pinched the bag with all my clothes in it.' I told him that I would try to find him something. 'They won't laugh at me will they?'

The next day, Easter Saturday, I went looking for him again. I found him with Rachel, coming out of the methadone clinic. 'I think we will wait till the mob from Darwin come,' I said to him.

'That's good Father. I've got nothing to wear.'

'Maurie told me that they would do a dance for us if we wanted them to,' I said. 'We'll ask them to dance you to the water.'

—Steve Sinn SJ

Rwandan reprisals

IN THE FOUR MONTHS since I visited Rwanda and met four government ministers, the signs for justice and reconciliation have become less hopeful.

It was my third visit to Rwanda. During the genocide in 1994, I was on the Zaire-Rwanda border and, in 1995, toured the country for the Anglican Church. The world's biggest genocide since the Holocaust was fading in the public memory by the time of my third visit last January.

But many Central African experts continue their interest, believing that unrest in the Congo-Rwanda-Burundi-Uganda axis would destabilise the geopolitics of the whole of Africa. Political unrest compounds the natural disasters which Africa keeps suffering—disasters like the current Mozambique floods and the Ethiopian famine. The experts are concerned at the moment about Rwanda.

In January, while I was in Rwanda primarily to conduct an AusAID-funded workshop for a local non-government organisation, one minister after another in the government expressed their concern.

Secretary-General of the Commission on Unity and Reconciliation, Ms Aloysea Nyumba, explained the new grassroots justice system called *gacaca*, which has trained village courts, set up to prosecute misdemeanours, to handle the much more serious charges of involvement in the genocide. All is ready, she said, for 70,000 prisoners to be dispersed to these local courts for speedy justice. Reconciliation will follow when people see justice done.

Minister for Justice, M. Jean de Dieu Mucyo, tutored me in the schedule of punishments for various crimes—mass killings, rape, a single homicide, destroying a house. The courts would even exercise 'grace' if true remorse is shown and some

compensation offered. Minister Mucyo was adamant that the village court would not have the power of capital punishment. There had been too much international criticism of death sentences carried out in the central courts in Kigali.

But in the last four months there have been signs which make outsiders uneasy.

First, the Prime Minister resigned, allegedly after corruption was exposed. Two previous ministers had been deposed last year for the same reason, and were replaced by Muslims. I brought back a request from the Minister for Justice to the Australian Government for aid funds to help with the *gacaca* justice process. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said no, Australia had already contributed \$1.2 million to the International Court in Arusha, Tanzania, and had switched future legal aid to East Timor. Are other countries doing the same, leaving Rwanda to go it alone?

Then in April the President of Rwanda resigned, 'under pressure' according to the wire services. This is not a good signal, as he was the symbolic Hutu leader in a 'non-racial' government. Vice-President Paul Kagame became Acting President. As he

was the Tutsi liberator of Rwanda in 1994, it will begin to look like a totally Tutsi government. This could seed resentment within the Hutu majority.

Worst of all recent events was the announcement of the results of the first village trials: six received life sentences, eight death sentences, which were carried out immediately. So much for the minister's assurance. So much for the right of appeal.

No-one viewing Rwanda from a distance can say that it would be easy to govern after the devastation of the genocide. The economy was wrecked by the mindless destruction of crops; the pre-1994 government left an international debt which consumes 60 per cent of the government's tax income; community services are overwhelmed by a million widows and orphans. And this list does not even mention HIV/AIDS, which is near-epidemic because of the breakdown in social mores among militias on all sides.

Political hopes within Rwanda now rest firmly on Paul Kagame and his relationship with Uganda's President Museveni. While this holds, the country will be at peace on

its borders and within. But reconciliation will be tougher if it becomes apparent that a Tutsi minority government or their agents are prepared to carry out the death penalty on thousands of genocide perpetrators.

Where are the churches in this scenario? The Anglican Church, having got over its embarrassment at having four bishops in exile afraid to go home, has been doing prodigious community work in schools and hospitals for five years. Unfortunately, Anglican bishops have been diverted from the big picture by an internal squabble. Archbishop Emmanuel Kolini, without consulting his fellow bishops, illegally co-consecrated three priests to 'shepherd' conservatives in the US Episcopal Church opposed to women's ministry and to homosexuality.

The Catholic Church, twice the size of the Anglican, was deeply shamed in 1994 by allegations that their Archbishop and President of the House of Bishops were directly involved in genocide propaganda. Both were assassinated by the liberation forces and their bodies were left unburied.

The shame has continued, with continuing allegations about foreign nuns, indigenous priests and bishops. A White Father was extradited from France last December to stand trial in the International Court in Arusha for inviting parishioners into his church compound at Ntarama and then calling in the Presidential Guard. Five thousand were slaughtered. Their unburied remains are the principal 'museum of the genocide' to which foreign visitors are still taken.

All of this will take years for the churches to live down. Yet, away from the cities, local churches are busy repairing, evangelising, teaching and building community. So they have not quite dealt themselves out of the game.

Right in the game—and maybe it's easier for them—are non-government organisations and para-church agencies. One such group is the Barakabaho Foundation, a nationwide foster care agency founded in 1995 by Anglican Bishop Alexis Bilindabagabo. It is held in much higher regard than the church which gave it birth. The same applies to African Enterprise, a South African-based multi-racial team of evangelists which lost its entire Rwanda team during the genocide because they preached reconciliation. The Jesuits likewise lost their entire household in Kigali, and are revered heroes of reconciliation. Perhaps the renewal of the church in a country under pressure will be based on such ministries.

—Alan Nichols



Episcopal ticker

THE EASTERTIME media appearances of new Primate Archbishop Peter Carnley catapulted the Anglican Church into public consciousness.

An article by Dr Carnley, published in *The Bulletin* during Holy Week, prompted the Archbishop of Sydney, Harry Goodhew, to take issue with his brother archbishop over remarks which he feared could be understood to compromise the uniqueness of Christ as Saviour of all humankind. A difference of theological opinion is nothing new in the Anglican Church, but this dispute became public property after it was posted on the Sydney diocesan website.

Headlines that week predicted a boycott of Dr Carnley's inauguration as Primate. A few protesters stayed away but Australia's Anglican episcopate gathered in force at Sydney's St Andrew's Cathedral on 30 April, together with the Primates of South East Asia, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia and New Zealand. Archbishop John Bathersby, as President of the Australian National Council of Churches, represented other churches at Dr Carnley's commissioning.

The position of Primate bestows moral rather than executive authority in the Anglican Church. Dr Carnley believes his role includes interpreting the views of the national church, with the media as a normal channel of communication. He hopes to bring the church into the modern world by airing real issues in a theological context. To date he has commented articulately in the secular media on drug reform, homosexuality in the church and indigenous land rights. He tackled national economic management head-on in his inaugural address as Primate.

But he does not want to sustain this public dialogue on his own. The Anglican Church retired its Social

Responsibilities Commission in 1998 for financial reasons, so the church has had no national voice on issues such as mandatory sentencing and GST. With an intellectual's zest for debate, Dr Carnley encourages 'bright young minds' in the Anglican Church to engage with contemporary society.

'I think, generally speaking, protest has replaced conversation as a way of expressing a political point of view. I think the Enlightenment so stressed the individual as against the community that any kind of community conversation designed to come up with conventionally agreed-upon standards of morality and belief was shelved, as the individual was given the right to do his or her own thing.

'I think that's come home to roost. We don't believe in community conversation because we believe in protecting individual rights ... I think the excessive individualism of the Enlightenment leads to an ethic, not of virtues, but of rights—individual rights—

and the responsibilities of the community get elbowed out of the way.'

In the context of the Anglo-Catholic/Evangelical debate within the Australian Anglican Church, the Primate accepts a divergence of views with conscientious theologians in the Sydney Diocese, but he will not condone 'bullying'.

'The Anglican Church is a very diverse body and we cannot have one group dictating to the rest, insisting that their interpretation of things is the only one.'

He is delighted, if somewhat mystified, by public canvassing of his own views on the resurrection, which he defends as orthodox. 'The points at issue really aren't hugely intellectual. It's between resuscitation and Lazarus and the unique resurrection of Christ. It's a very important thing for people to get under their belt if they're going to have faith at all.'

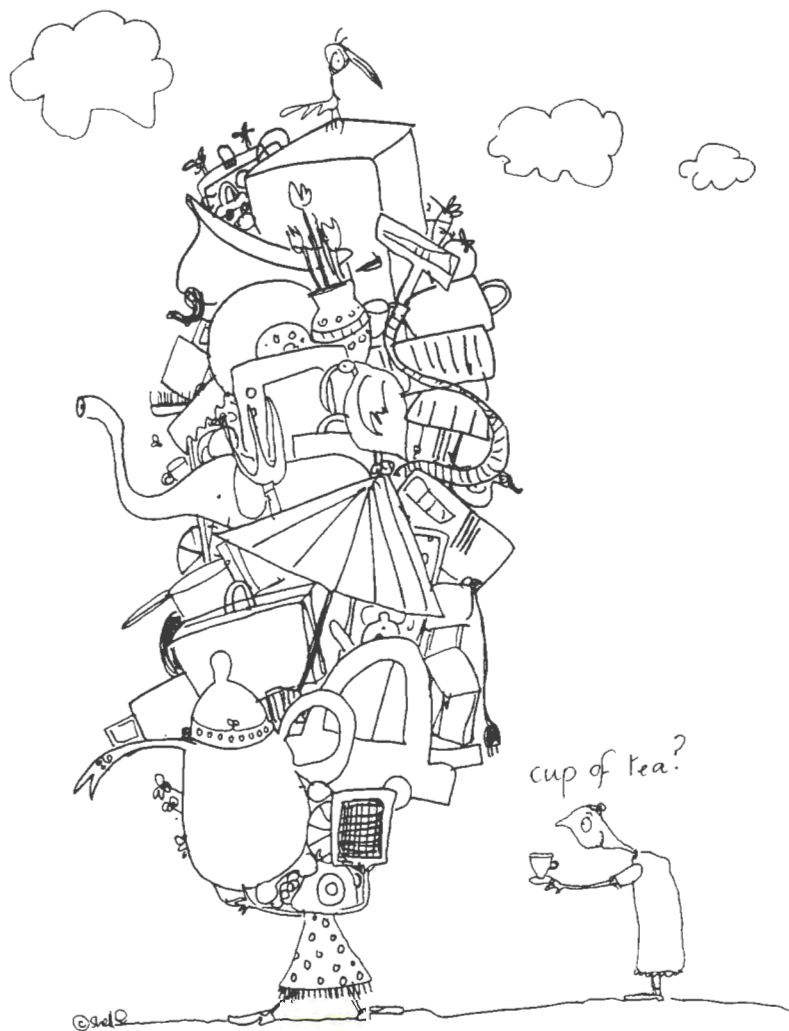
Dr Carnley describes himself as 'progressive orthodox', a term used by sections of the Jewish community to distinguish between conservative and liberal orthodoxy. He has both the intellectual agility and the 'ticker' to become a figure of reference in the Australian national community.

But a certain naivety colours Dr Carnley's hope for public dialogue in the secular media. During Easter week, *The West Australian* rebuked Anglican Church leadership in an editorial remarking that for all the good this 'childish squabble' does for those seeking Christian guidance in their everyday lives, they might as well be arguing about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. *The Australian* commented that Easter seems a strange time to wash the soiled altar linen of doctrinal difference.

The new Primate's style is attractive and his wit engaging, but honeymoons with the media tend to be brief. It remains to be seen how he will navigate Anglican diversity through ten-second grabs and gutsy headlines.

This month, he embarks on the ecumenical pilgrimage to Uluru.

—Maggie Hellas



All debts off

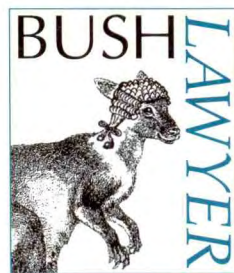
IN AN INTERVIEW on Good Friday, Mr Howard was asked about the government's announcement, made that day, that it had forgiven bilateral debts owed by Nicaragua and Ethiopia. He called it a 'small but important contribution to relieving the debt burden of the very poor countries in the world'.

How important is this step, and how small? Australia is now matching a number of other countries which have made similar promises—Norway, Holland, Canada, the US, UK, France, Italy and Germany. The move is in line with calls from left, right and centre for debt cancellation as an urgent key step in the fight against poverty. There is a chorus from such diverse notables as United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Harvard Economist Jeffrey Sachs, the Pope, numerous Archbishops, the US conservative Meltzer Commission, South African President Thabo Mbeki and Bono of U2.

In one respect Australia has done better than some of the big players. Our contribution to financing multilateral debt relief through the IMF has been \$55 million; the USA and Japan managed only \$200 million or so each.

But it remains true that Australia's step of promising debt cancellation for Nicaragua and Ethiopia is a small one. Even if the \$18.3 million write-off came into effect today, the amount of money in question 'would not be significant in overall macro-economic terms', as Senate Foreign Affairs spokesman, Senator Robert Hill, put it. (Australia's GDP is around \$400 billion.)

The fact is that Treasury will be not one cent out of pocket for some years yet, at least while the promise is safely tied to the Heavily Indebted Poor Country Initiative, mark 2 (HIPC2). HIPC2 was to be the new debt relief program agreed upon at the G7 summit in Cologne, intended to deliver debt relief faster, more generously and to more countries than HIPC1. The new 'improved' version of HIPC is ostensibly more focused on making sure that any money released through debt cancellation would be used on poverty reduction. But ten months later, of the \$100 billion bilateral debt promised to be cancelled, less than \$1.3 billion has actually been delivered. By April 2000, the Managing Director of the IMF had



Hard cases

THAT LIFE IS UNFAIR IS, of course, a given, but sometimes it can be brought home more forcefully than usual.

'Sandra', an Aboriginal woman, recently struggled to have her twin daughters restored to her care. Her daughters, who are now nine years old, have been in foster care on and off since 1994. In 1996, they were taken from her by court order, as she was unable to care for them adequately. The children have been with excellent Aboriginal foster parents and supported by Aboriginal social workers and welfare officers, and have been receiving therapy.

'Sandra' was born in 1960 in Queensland. When she was two she was taken from her parents and placed in an orphanage, thus joining 'the stolen generation'. When she was 12 she returned to live with her mother. Unfortunately, her mother was a violent alcoholic who beat her badly. When she was in her late teens she began to display signs of mental illness, and was also beginning to drink heavily. She was diagnosed as suffering from paranoid schizophrenia.

The twins are disabled, both having severe learning and language difficulties. They have, at age nine, the cognitive function of average four-and-a-half-year-olds, and have enormous difficulty in speaking and making themselves understood.

Sandra, though, has made colossal progress since 1996. New drugs without devastating side effects have enabled her to live a more or less 'normal' life. She has reduced her drinking to moderate 'social' levels and is undertaking courses at Aboriginal learning centres. She married a 76-year-old white man in November 1998, and gained some stability in her life for the first time. Together they moved into a Housing Commission home with a spare room which they dedicated to the twins. It was with reasonably high hopes, then, that she applied to have the 1996 Care Order rescinded. I saw her a few weeks ago in court. Her hopes turned to ashes.

The independent clinical psychologist was completely against restoration of the children to her, both for their sake and hers. He said, 'When one talks about restoration, one is not talking about placing intact children back in the care of an intact parent; rather one is talking about placing intellectually disabled children with quite severe language disorders, and with a history of severe behavioural disturbance, back into the care of someone who has chronic schizophrenia and other neurological and intellectual disabilities.'

The representatives of the Aboriginal Children's Service, the Department of Community Services and the children's own lawyer all agreed with the psychologist's assessment. To compound Sandra's difficulties, two days before the court hearing, she and her husband had split up.

The legislation (and common humanity) decrees that the children's best interests be the paramount consideration in child welfare matters. Sadly, the decision was easy to make. Sandra, when she spoke in court, acknowledged that it was for the best that the foster parents care for the children. While she obviously grieved for the kids, and for her own fate, she put the children's interests above her own desires and need for comfort. ■

Séamus O'Shaughnessy is a NSW magistrate.



Theology and Justice Kirby

RECENT DELIBERATIONS BY ANGLICAN BISHOPS on sexuality bring to mind a speech delivered by Justice Michael Kirby to students of St Ignatius' College on 24 February, and partly reiterated in a lecture at Monash University on 27 April. Extracts of both speeches appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. In the earlier address, Justice Kirby argued that, although the churches ultimately 'tend to get it right' on matters that at the outset seem controversial (such as apartheid, and the teachings of science) it often takes them 'a long time to see the errors of their ways'. Homosexuality, he believes, is such an issue—one on which history suggests a belated ecclesiastical apology might reasonably be expected.

While I fundamentally agree with Justice Kirby's opinion, I have some difficulty with his means of arriving at it. Somewhat too modestly, he denies his competence to engage in theological debate with the Anglican and Roman Catholic Archbishops of Sydney about their admonishments over the Mardi Gras. Understandably, Michael Kirby prefers to take up the conversation in terms of justice, in particular the obligation to respect and uphold the human rights and dignity of others.

I am not convinced that such a boundary can be drawn. Indeed, Justice Kirby illustrates this by straying into an overtly theological argument towards the end of his speech:

In my experience, few if any gay and lesbian people choose their sexuality. It is like your gender, your skin colour or being left-handed ... And if that is how you are, that is how God meant you to be.

It is the last sentence that troubles me—specifically, the combination of an appeal to social justice with an argument from existence. Justice Kirby's own position is in danger of being undermined by the association he makes between God and 'the way things are'. As he so rightly points out earlier in his speech, all sorts of evils have been defended on the basis of an assumed divinely appointed *status quo*.

The social justice which ought always to be the political form and corollary of Christian theology is not predicated merely on the way things—or people—are. Nor is a Christian doctrine of creation a form of 'essentialism'. The kingdom of God proclaimed and inaugurated by Christ is not envisaged by the gospel writers as a 'natural' unfolding—or even perfecting—of what already is. Rather it describes and demands a radically new way of being that breaks into, disturbs and transfigures the *status quo*.

In no way am I suggesting that homosexuality is an aspect of 'what is' that requires transformation in the face of 'what will be'. My point is that arguing from 'what is' to 'what must therefore be of God' is not theologically persuasive.

Were it not for the fact that this debate can no longer afford to be conducted in the comfortable spaces of our own disciplines and discourses, this may seem like an exercise in pedantry. Perhaps more of us need to take the risk that Justice Kirby has taken, despite his disclaimer, and attempt to learn and to speak something of each other's language. ■

Richard Treloar is Associate Chaplain to Trinity College, University of Melbourne.

expected eight to 11 countries to start receiving the benefits of reduced requirements for debt servicing. In fact, only five countries made it to this stage in the expected time frame. Those five that made it have their obligations reduced by an average of only 35 per cent.

Tanzania's advantage is only a seven per cent reduction, and it continues to spend as much on servicing debt as on education. Bolivia will be paying its creditors \$240 million a year after coming through HIPC2, while 60 per cent of the population are without access to basic sanitation and one third without access to safe water.

Pope John Paul II has questioned the pace of reform: 'We have to ask why progress in resolving the debt problem is still so slow. Why so many hesitations? Why the difficulty in providing the funds needed even for the already agreed initiatives? It is the poor that pay the cost of indecision and delay.'

HIPC2 means, in practice, that any excuse may be used to delay the delivery of debt relief: delays in meeting structural adjustment targets, not having the perfect Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, a change of government, a border conflict.

The bottom line is that, while debt cancellation is tied to HIPC2, Ethiopia will continue paying Australia \$2 million a year for some time, famine or no famine. Compare this to the \$1.5 million recently boasted for famine relief, and you realise just how small the government's promise is.

And why is Vietnam not among those countries towards which the Howard Government is making a small but important contribution?

Vietnam was the HIPC which owed the largest sums to Australia, now \$57 million. But it fell off the list of HIPCs eligible for debt relief basically because it was performing too well economically and spending too much on social programs.

If the Howard Government is serious about making an important contribution to relieving the debt burden of very poor countries, it needs to act on a number of fronts. It might take a lead in the reform process in international forums rather than lagging behind. It could do some serious lobbying for an HIPC Initiative which actually delivers on its promises of debt cancellation, faster and to a much larger number of impoverished countries. Vietnam could be put back on the books for bilateral debt relief from Australia, and Ethiopia, at a minimum, needs a moratorium on debt repayments. Structural adjustment

programs, which have characterised the HIPC Initiative and which are murderous for the poor, need to be scrapped and replaced with mechanisms by which funds released through debt cancellation are channelled into poverty reduction.

The Howard Government's Good Friday move reflects at least a glimmer of recognition that the world's wealthy have the power, and therefore the responsibility, to do more to alleviate the hardships of the world's poor. But let's leave the champagne until an Australian government is no longer content with 'small but important' contributions and gets serious about poverty. —**Thea Ormerod**

Know your umpire

IN AUSTRALIA, how many people know the identity of their ombudsmen? Even if you happened to come across a name, would you bother to find out his or her background? More to the point, does it matter who it is?

When Indonesia's president, Abdurrahman Wahid, issued Decree No. 44 on 20 March 2000, to appoint the country's first National Commission of Ombudsmen, the array of names on the Commission was so impressive that you could forget their legal power came from a mere presidential decree. The appointment seems to have been based on two criteria: a track record of political fearlessness, and academic achievement.

The head of the Commission, Anton Sujata, is a former deputy attorney-general for special crimes, such as crimes of corruption. He was replaced early last year—during Habibie's government—while investigating the alleged corruption case against former president Suharto, Habibie's predecessor and mentor. Sujata's deputy, Sunaryati Hartono, a professor of law at Pajajaran University in Bandung, was the head of the National Law Development Body.

The six other members of the Commission are no lightweights either. At least two names are still fresh in Indonesians' memories.

Teten Masduki is the co-ordinator of Indonesian Corruption Watch. He's well-known for his allegation that Andi Ghalieb, an attorney-general in the Habibie Government, had tucked away some official funds into his private bank accounts. Masduki's

disclosure led to Ghalieb's suspension as attorney-general. Pradjoto is a banking specialist lawyer who had a leading role in disclosing the Bank Bali scandal which allegedly involved several top aides to Habibie.

Under the March presidential decree, the Commission is an independent agency with power to investigate reports received from the public on irregularities in government bodies. The Commission can then submit recommendations to the departments involved and table reports to law enforcement authorities for further action.

The Commission can also invite the community to take part in a campaign against corruption, collusion and nepotism. In a culture where personalities are important in initiating any public campaign, this role may be one of the reasons behind the appointment of such public figures to the Commission.

People with public 'clout' can also delve into delicate and complicated matters more effectively than those without. Not only will the ombudsmen have to prove that there are indeed irregularities as reported by members of the public, they will also have to penetrate layers of the public service to get to the core of the complaints. The potential to upset powerful people is too real to dismiss.

In most countries with established ombudsmen, the ombudsmen have solid statutory legal powers. Indonesia is yet to reform its legal system, and an act of parliament to provide real legal muscle for the National Commission of Ombudsmen may be a long time coming. So for now, the personal status of the ombudsmen will have to serve the same purpose.

This National Commission of Ombudsmen has to have a high profile, because it is a pioneer and must succeed and prove its worth so the public will come to trust it. Then, corrupt officials, long protected, will be exposed and

forced to change their behaviour. Since the fall of Suharto, the power of public exposure in Indonesia has increased, while law enforcement institutions are still dragging their feet.

And fighting corruption in Indonesia will most likely take a longer time to accomplish than Abdurrahman Wahid's presidential term, even if he seeks and wins a second term. It is not surprising that Wahid has appointed ombudsmen who have enough personal power to carry on without him. —**Dewi Anggraeni**

This month's contributors: **Steve Sinn** is a parish priest at Kings Cross/Elizabeth Bay, NSW; **Alan Nichols** is an Anglican priest and writer; **Maggie Helass** is a Brisbane-based journalist; **Thea Ormerod** is a Sydney social worker; **Dewi Anggraeni** is a Melbourne-based novelist and journalist.

Backtracking: Bill Haskell, who worked on Hellfire Pass in Thailand, here walks out of the Konyu Cutting with his son Doug, after the Anzac Day dawn service, April 2000. Photograph by Jon Greenaway.



'A bundle of contradictions,' says Neil Blewett of his former colleague and Prime Minister, Paul Keating. Brett Evans teases out some of the complexities in this interview.

Tieless in Bligh Street

PAUL KEATING ceased to be prime minister over four years ago, but he continues to fascinate both the public and the Australian media. Whether he likes it or not, Keating is a political celebrity, and to some extent a divisive figure. And like many celebrities in a fame-obsessed culture, he is a tricky personality to get a handle on.

Take this small example. An hour or so after *Eureka Street* spoke to him, Keating encountered Nick Whitlam, who had recently become a sparring partner of the former prime minister due to AMP board matters involving Keating's sister, Anne. When these two men—both bearing names synonymous with Labor—met by chance near Keating's office on Sydney's Bligh Street, it seems a few well-chosen words were exchanged.

We know all this because the meeting was deemed to be worth writing about by Australia's national newspaper of record. Bligh Street's cafés are filled at lunchtime with the best and brightest of Sydney's finance district. Obviously some corporate lawyer couldn't resist reaching for a mobile to quickly call the



Keating being made an honorary chief of the Oro people, Kokoda region: 'It was such a high honour that to refuse it for cosmetic reasons ... would be pretty sad.'

papers before her espresso arrived.

The Australian duly noted: 'Mr Keating, without a tie, stood in front of Mr Whitlam, as passers-by stood aghast at the confrontation ...' A trivial matter, but all good clean Sydney fun. So why bother noting how Keating was dressed? (One can imagine our novice reporter filing her copy ringside, so to speak: 'Yes, and he wasn't even wearing a tie ...')

The absent tie signifies something about Keating's image. The public and the media have a very strong idea of him

and are confused when he does not conform to it. If he doesn't appear in an Italian suit, as if stepping straight from the canvas of Bryan Westwood's Archibald-winning portrait, then it is worthy of note. The clichéd view of the man has gone awry.

In his recently published *A Cabinet Diary*, a former Labor colleague of Keating's, Neil Blewett, tries to get beneath the surface image. According to Blewett, 'Keating was a bundle of contradictions—to some the prince of darkness, to others the inspired and inspiring leader. Courteous,

except when crossed, persuasive, self-deprecatory in private, in public he could be vituperative, abrasive and arrogant. A politician of vision yet a political street-fighter ...'

Whether tieless in Bligh Street or sitting for his prime ministerial portrait, Keating is always the same contradiction: visionary streetfighter, inspiring prince, abrasive leader—you don't get one without the other. You don't get the Redfern speech, without also getting the realpolitik on East Timor.



*Keating: 'People from other cultures are just inherently interesting, it's as simple as that.'
The former PM, photographed with an interesting person from another culture.*

After the 1996 election loss, Keating chose to avoid the glare of public life as much as possible. Family problems and his need to establish a business kept him from the limelight. In the last year, however, Keating has re-entered the public arena of his own volition.

In a new book on foreign policy, *Engagement: Australia Faces the Asia-Pacific*, and in a series of recent speeches on a variety of topics, Keating has shown that retirement from formal politics has not dimmed his enthusiasm for either policy debate or political partisanship. He wants Australia to continue the agenda of change he started in government, particularly with regards to Asia, but also in relation to economic policy, superannuation, and national identity issues.

Keating says that *Engagement* is 'not so much a record of what my colleagues and I did as why we did it', and he argues that the reasons behind Labor's foreign policies are even more compelling today. With regards to domestic and economic policy, Keating is equally convinced that Labor in government was on the right track. In his now-famous speech to last year's NSW Labor conference, he declared: 'Our way was not the Third Way, but the only way.'

Today, many in his own party see Keating as electoral poison; they would argue that his style and policies alienated voters. It will be interesting, nevertheless, to see just how much of Keating's legacy influences a future Beazley Government, should Labor win the next election. The Labor Party reinvented itself in government under Hawke and Keating and it cannot deny the policy legacy of this era. Whether Labor under Beazley can repackage this legacy with a more politically acceptable wrapping is one of the key questions for next year's election.

WHEN KEATING FINALLY achieved a life-long ambition and became prime minister on 19 December 1991, by beating incumbent prime minister Bob Hawke 56 votes to 51 in a Caucus ballot, it was an extraordinary end to an extraordinary year—both domestically and internationally.

The Labor leadership issue had dominated domestic politics in 1991, but in the greater world other, possibly more important, things were happening. The

year opened with the Gulf War and ended with an attempted coup in Moscow and the final overthrow of Soviet Communism. The world scene had altered fundamentally and today 1991 looks like the end of the beginning of a new era.

And at the heart of this change is a process which everyone around the world has a name for. The French call it *mondialization*, the Germans, *globalisierung*; while in Latin America it's known as *globalización*. We call it 'globalisation', and it is leading to declining national sovereignty, weaker states, and trickier domestic politics. Aided and abetted by the information revolution, this process of change is disturbingly rapid. As Keating points out: 'the edition of the *Macquarie Dictionary* published in the year I became prime minister, doesn't have an entry for the word "internet".'

If there is an overarching idea in *Engagement*, it is trying to find a positive, optimistic take on the globalisation process. According to the sociologist Anthony Giddens, 'the battleground of the twenty-first century will pit fundamentalism against cosmopolitan tolerance'. Not surprisingly, Keating comes down on the side of 'cosmopolitan tolerance': 'I think globalisation is a good and exciting development,' he told *Eureka Street*. 'It has helped transform Australia for the better, and it has helped transform Asia for the better as well.'

But isn't this the same man many see as egregiously misguided over the issue of East Timor?

The agony of East Timor has not reflected well on *any* Australian government since 1975, Keating's included. But then, it was probably never going to. Realpolitik dictated the terms of our engagement with this particular part of Asia. And for continuing this tradition Keating is unapologetic.

In *Engagement* he notes, for example, that 'however unattractive or dissembling it seems to the human rights absolutists, relations between governments involve other interests and often require messy, complex and incomplete trade-offs. Governments have no alternative but to pick a careful path among very different, and sometimes contending, issues and to try to remain true to national interests and national ethics while doing it'.

Referring to East Timor specifically, Keating told his audience at last year's NSW State Labor conference: 'When Suharto used to say under pressure "No" to me and "No" to Hawke, what did people want us to do? Invade the place? You see, common sense dictates ... there must be a balance between realism and moralism.'

Despite the criticism he often draws for them, Keating's views on East Timor are at least based on defensible strategic arguments. John Button records in his memoirs that when he went to see Gough Whitlam about the plight of Australia's East Timorese refugee community in the dying days of 1975, he was told by the great man, 'What are you worried about them for, comrade? They're all mulattos.'

A major criticism of Keating's diplomacy towards Indonesia rests on his relationship with Suharto. Though never as fawning as it is caricatured, the relationship was too close. In particular, Keating's desire to strengthen our military ties with Suharto's regime was deeply flawed. But even here the record is not simply black and white. Keating considers as one of his greatest foreign policy achievements the creation of APEC. And, as *Engagement* shows, Australia could not have done it without the support of Suharto's Indonesia.

For human rights absolutists, Keating's passion for APEC has an interesting source: 'I had a Japanese prime minister ask me what the leaders in China were like; he asked me for a sketch of their personalities, because he hadn't met them. And then a prominent Japanese person asked me, "Do you think they'll attack us, the Chinese?"'

Given the history of these two nations it was a worrying thing for Keating to hear. 'Now, of course, they know one another quite well [and] as a consequence there's a whole level of trust that didn't formerly exist.' Not surprisingly, Keating maintains strong ambitions for the institution. 'APEC's destiny is to be a strategic body,' he says.

This gets to the heart of *Engagement's* second main theme: in a globalised world, leadership matters more than ever. Keating, for example, committed a lot of prime ministerial time to setting up the APEC Leader's Meeting in Seattle during 1994. And once it happened, the meeting

'had all the power arraigned at the table; you had the knees under the table: the President of the United States' knees, not the Secretary of State's knees, not the foreign minister of China but the President of China. And once it was decided that certain things would happen [they would get done].'

Besides his belief in principled realism and strong leadership, a lot of Keating's ideas on foreign policy come from an instinctive curiosity about the world and its people. 'I do really enjoy Asia, you see I like the diversity of Asia. This gets back to whether you feel happier in a monoculture. John Howard does, I don't. People from other cultures are just inherently interesting, its as simple as that.' And you can see this when you ask him about areas of foreign policy that are not normally associated with his term in office.

On the South Pacific Forum: 'I think it's very important for the Australian Prime Minister to go because we're the ones with the bag of money ... So I attended every South Pacific Forum—my successor doesn't. I did, because I think it's important.'

On nuclear weapons: 'They're indiscriminate, they're nasty, they leave long-term effects and, of course, while ever we have them we'll have more proliferation of them. So let's understand that we've come to a fork in the road and we should make a decision about them.'

On India: 'It is absurd for those countries and people who run the main commerce of the world to try to ignore or marginalise a billion people, with all the creativity that's there ...'

FOR A LARGE PART of his prime minister-ship, Keating tracked the 50th anniversary of key events from World War II.

In 1992, while laying a wreath at the monument to Victoria Cross winner, Private Bruce Kingsbury, in the town square of Kokoda, Keating, who considered himself to be on 'hallowed ground', broke with convention. 'I thought that placing a wreath was too formal and unfeeling a gesture', he writes in *Engagement*, '[so] I bent down and kissed the base of the memorial so all would know he was not forgotten. Not him nor his mates'. He did this, he says, because our commemorations of war were becoming 'too stylised'. It would be a hard gesture to fake.

Keating took this side of being prime minister very seriously. 'I think the spirituality of the country is in a very large measure within the prime minister's care—and by spirituality I don't mean religious spirituality—but I mean matters of the heart and soul, matters that go to the national character, matters that affect what it means to be an Australian'.

He is, of course, talking to a large extent about the issue of an apology to the Stolen Generation. If Howard simply repeated Keating's Redfern speech word for word a great logjam at the heart of Australia's body politic would be swept away.

A few years later Keating was back in Papua New Guinea for a series of official functions, including being made a paramount chief of Kokoda's Oro people, an appointment not without political risks.

As Keating explains in *Engagement*: 'Head-dresses are the bane of politicians' lives. It is very difficult to look dignified while wearing part of another culture on your head. And the news that the ceremony would take place at the top of a rickety bamboo platform and would involve the feathers of the hornbill, an endangered species, did not reassure my staff.'

But Keating threw himself into the ceremony. 'It was such a high honour that to refuse it for cosmetic reasons I thought, if not an affront, would be pretty sad,' he told *Eureka Street*. 'They hosted the battle for Australia and many were killed ... they were acknowledging that "you're one of us" and you can't really say "well, no I'm not".'

And this is the same man who an hour after we finish talking will add to his already bulging clipping files in the news libraries of the nation because of another, very different, spontaneous act. The same man so renowned for his sartorial elegance that his lack of a tie will be commented on. But also the same man who once gracefully accepted the Oro people's invitation as the honour that it was, and entered into the spirit of their ritual with enthusiasm. ■

Brett Evans' book, *Labor Without Power*, will be published later this year by UNSW Press.

Engagement: Australia Faces the Asia-Pacific, Paul Keating, Macmillan, 2000. ISBN 0 7329 1019 6, RRP \$40.



Rewarding experiments

LAST MONTH, the 2000 Eureka Prizes were awarded in an occasion described by the press release as 'glittering'. It wasn't quite the Logies, but perhaps it was a bit more dignified. Among the winners were ScienceNOW!, the national science forum held each year in Melbourne, and Science in the Pub, a monthly event initiated in Sydney, and now spreading across Australia. Together they shared the Industry, Science and Resources Eureka Prize for the Promotion of Science.

The ScienceNOW! award actually went to the man who was the driving force behind its establishment, Ian Anderson, the former Australasian editor of *New Scientist*. With the demise of the annual congress of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS)—the only national event where science, the media and the general public shared common ground—it became Anderson's dream to establish a forum for presenting science to a lay audience. He modelled his ideas on the very successful American Association for the Advancement of Science conference, which has become the largest generator of science stories in the world. And he had the inspired notion of gathering the brightest young unknown researchers from all over Australia to tell the tale of what they were doing to the general public and the media.

Science in the Pub started literally as that—a couple of ABC science communicators, Wilson da Silva and Paul Willis, talking over an ale, and wondering whether they could encourage eminent researchers to solve the world's problems in the same way. Science in the Pub has become an institution in Sydney and has been run in many other places, from Hobart to Narrabri; it is also broadcast on ABC Radio.

But neither of these events would have happened without the advent of another organisation that began in Geelong nearly six years previously at one of the last ANZAAS congresses—a group which calls itself ASC (Australian Science Communicators). In fact, the key people who clothed the bones of Ian Anderson's dream were drawn from (and drawn together by) the Victorian chapter of ASC. Likewise, Science in the Pub began life as an activity of the NSW chapter.

In keeping with the times, ASC is a multimedia association, with members from print, broadcasting, education and museums, among other areas. Science in the Pub is a good example of the ASC's diversity: a performance put on by people grounded in the electronic media, but backed by scientists and other communicators of all descriptions. It has its own website, and involves food and drink and human beings—it is not just words on a page.

ScienceNOW! also involves people from many different areas of science and science promotions. Ian Anderson's role was to harness these different forces and then interest the science establishment and the Victorian Government in their potential.

Ian Anderson died in March. But his memory will live on as a result of the Eureka Prize. At the awards ceremony, his wife Robin announced that, in keeping with his wishes, she will use the prize money to launch a memorial trust in his name to bring an eminent foreign science journalist to Australia each year. ■

Tim Thwaites is on the organising committee of ScienceNOW! and has been involved in the odd Science in the Pub.

Eureka Street reports on the background to Zimbabwe's land battles, on rites of passage in Cambodia, and on fallout from the strife on Burma's borders.

Credit where it's due

JOHN LOUIS MOORE

MUCH OF THE focus during the Zimbabwe crisis has been on President Mugabe.

But we should also scrutinise the Structural Adjustment Programme, sponsored by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and adopted by the Zimbabwean Government in 1990. The Programme's policies—particularly the withdrawal of food subsidies, deregulation of the exchange rate and increased education and health fees—have contributed to the present crisis.

The origins of the present-day poverty lie in the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, passed by the Rhodesian state. It segregated land on a racial basis and granted whites—a mere five per cent of the total population—access to the best half of the country.

Africans were relegated to communal areas, 74 per cent of which were drought-prone and subject to food deficits. Yet they were required to support about 60 per cent of the African rural population.

To avoid mass famine and social chaos, the Rhodesian state adopted a cheap food policy and an industrialisation strategy. Subsidised prices for maize, beef, milk and other food items compensated dispossessed African farmers and lowly paid workers to some extent, while the fixed exchange rate kept imports affordable and sustained industrial growth.

Once elected in 1980, Mugabe's ZANU-PF Government sought to tackle the fundamental distortion inherent in the land question. The 1979 Lancaster House Constitution, at Britain's insistence, crippled the state's capacity to address the inequity fully. Land redistribution was restricted to market

transactions the state could ill afford and any expropriation of land had to be paid for in foreign currency.

Yet despite the constraints, the government managed to reduce white minority ownership of the agricultural land from 47 per cent in 1980 to about 36 per cent in 1990. Some 52,000 families, actually from the poorest strata of Zimbabwean society, were resettled on about three million hectares. But this was only 32 per cent of the target.

Most importantly, the government maintained the cheap food policy, the fixed exchange rate and the expanded health and education services which made life tolerable for the people during the 1980s. The World Bank and the IMF argued that food subsidies and the fixed exchange rate resulted in low producer prices and inhibited growth. Nevertheless, GDP growth averaged four per cent between 1986 and 1990, exports grew about nine per cent and some 28,000 new jobs were being created each year.

For a variety of reasons, not least the tying of World Bank and IMF credit to policy changes as part of the Structural Adjustment Programme, the government, from the early 1990s, removed the food subsidies, floated the exchange rate and increased education and health fees. Under the weight of currency devaluation, food inflation, unemployment and droughts, average GDP growth between 1990 and 1995 slumped to 0.8 per cent per year and job creation to a mere 9,500 new positions annually. Average real wages fell by one third, some 50,000 people were retrenched, school enrolments fell drastically and HIV/AIDS and crime rates shot up. The Harare-based

Central Statistical Office concluded in a 1998 report that since 1990 there had been an 'unambiguous' 23 per cent increase in poverty, affecting 60 per cent of the population—35 per cent of whom did not have enough to eat.

The gulf between the rich and poor widened. Meaningful land reform ground to a halt: in fact, the whole philosophy of land redistribution altered. The World Bank and the Commercial Farmers Union both argued that land in the 1980s was given to those least able to utilise it and that the exigencies of increased production, employment and exports meant selection would have to favour those with capital. The very same argument was used by the government to justify the allocation of farms to members of ZANU-PF in the early 1990s.

Meanwhile, most of the seven million trapped within prevailing land structures failed to meet their food requirements let alone share in the export-led growth hailed by the World Bank and the IMF as their salvation. As they were no longer cushioned by food subsidies or affordable health and education services and were facing grim employment prospects, access to fresh land became a matter of absolute survival. The impoverishment of Zimbabweans, under the Structural Adjustment Programme, became the seedbed for extremist war veterans, squatters, desperate politicians and their thugs.

The mistake that President Mugabe made was to adopt the policies of the IMF and World Bank before resolving the land question.

The Programme dismantled the measures of economic protection—employment and cheap food—that the

Rhodesians knew were necessary to cope with land inequity. By the late 1990s, President Mugabe realised that the policies of liberalisation were a failure and tried to backtrack on the reforms. But it

was too late. From above and below, all things seemed to move beyond his control. Can we now blame Mugabe alone for the terrible situation that has befallen Zimbabwe? ■

John Louis Moore has lived and worked in Zimbabwe for ten years and is currently completing a PhD on the IMF/World Bank Programme in Zimbabwe at RMIT University, Melbourne.



Buddhist monks watching Lao New Year (Pimai) processions, Luang Prabang, Laos.

Photograph by Felicity Volk, an Australian documentary photographer who has been living in Laos for some years.

Monks and mechanics

MARK DEASEY

CAMBODIA'S No. 2 monk died in early April. Ordinarily, people are cremated within 48 hours of death, but when a man of this ranking in the *sangha* passes, the body is embalmed, and chanted over for 14 days before the

ceremonies to see him into the next incarnation. The pavilion where he lived, on the edge of the Mahamuntrei pagoda compound in Phnom Penh, is just across the street from where I live, and when the amplified chants wake me at two or

three in the morning, I look across to the one lighted doorway and the catafalque wreathed in winking lights; monks periodically slipping out to the balcony to re-wrap their robes. Sometimes the chant is in chorus, and the phrases of the

common Pali prayers detectable; sometimes a single voice rises and falls in what sounds more like Celtic keening.

Against the wall that separates the pagoda from the street, there used to be a string of motorbike mechanics doing business. About 30 men, many of them amputees, squatted in the dust under makeshift shade, doing instant wheel tuning, puncture repairs, and the mass of other small maintenance jobs that keep Phnom Penh's scores of motorscooters running. In early January, the city's new governor decided that pavement business was messy and an obstruction to foot traffic, and had the repairmen and thousands of other artisans and vendors cleared out of sight. But no-one walked along the newly unencumbered footpaths (anything more than 100m is pedicab distance, even for the poor); drifts of black hair marked out where barber chairs once stood under tarpaulins, and men in grease-stained rags would beckon you down side alleys, as furtive as if they were selling drugs rather than tune-ups.

With the kiosks gone, it could be hard to find a newspaper. One group relatively unaffected are the shoe-shine kids, whose numbers are increasing as school costs go up and other family income sources are pushed down. They're not stationary on the footpath, but dart in and out of the coffee shops, where the relatively well-off have parked their scooters and are reading the newspapers bought from whichever side-street seller they could find.

The north-east of Cambodia seems a far cry from all this. To get to where the latest village rice bank was built takes two hours in the longboat, and the pilot had better know his channels: the Mekong divides into a maze of islands and rapids, and the weird, water-swept branches of the forest that grows under water for five months of the year. The boat engine is the only noise above the rush of the water, and in the morning's journey, we see five different kinds of kingfisher alone. On the inland road from Kratie to Stung Treng it's another story—checkpoints every 3km in the rattan scrub, though the most notorious act of violence in recent times was a soldier killing his commanding officer in a personal dispute.

Just after Christmas, I was up researching radio programs in the Pailin 'Special Zone', and found all the

ex-Khmer Rouge officialdom who run the gem-mining enclave busy with preparations for the national holiday of 7 January. This holiday marks the day in 1979 when Phnom Penh was liberated from the Khmer Rouge by Cambodian dissidents and their Vietnamese backers. No apparent sense of irony or contradiction among these men. Two years ago they did a deal for immunity and limited autonomy, and demonstrated their loyalty to the newly unified state by celebrating their own overthrow and flight.

New Year: the Thai custom of young people dousing passers-by in water and talcum powder has caught on seriously

in the last couple of years. As in Bangkok, the drenching can be welcome in April's 40-plus heat. The traditional games—decorous courtship rituals with rattan balls—are still played for show in the Wat Phnom park. Not so far into the countryside, they're still serious business.

The rains have come early this year, at least in the parched east of the country, and the good harvest they promise is the best hope against increasing debt, loss of land and the drift to the city. Happy New Year. ■

Mark Deasey is acting Regional Manager—Asia, for Community Aid Abroad.

Burmese daze

JON GREENAWAY

IN LATE JANUARY, a group of rebel fighters from Burma laid siege to a hospital in the Thai province of Ratchaburi. The rebels operated under the banner 'Gods' Army'.

It was yet one more signal that all is not well inside the country that is governed by the world's most intransigent military dictatorship.

At some point in the 22 hours before the ten hostage-takers were executed (by Thai commandos who stormed the hospital), they issued a demand that the Thai army stop shelling their positions (fighting often comes close to the border and Thai army posts will fire warning shots). But it is likely that their demand was a front for other, urgent political demands. Even more likely, given that the leader and key members of the raid were not from God's Army at all, but from the student group responsible for the occupation of the Burmese embassy in Bangkok last October. Their intention was to highlight the Burmese military junta's continuing human rights abuses and suppression of the democracy movement.

If their latest desperate act was another device for drawing attention to

Burma's woes, it was in vain. What the world found interesting was not the mass relocations and forced appropriation of land and resources in Burma but the fact that God's Army was led by a pair of 12-year-old twins with black tongues and supposed mystical powers. Pictures of Johnny and Luther Htoo, with their long hair, smoking 'cheroots' (Burmese cigarettes) were wired around the world, along with claims about their ability to change shape and stop bullets. Little attention was given to the boringly obvious: these boys and the atavistic beliefs they inspire are being used by the adult leadership of this particular God's Army group to rally fighters and lift morale.

As a consequence of the January incident, there has been a crackdown by Thai authorities on Burmese dissidents living in Bangkok, and a hardening of conditions for over 100,000 refugees living in camps along the border.

NON-GOVERNMENT organisations (NGOs) estimate that there are 11,000 recently arrived refugees from Burma who have had their admission into the

camps delayed by Thailand's provincial authorities. In early April, 4000 crossed the border in one week after fighting broke out and the Burmese army began shelling near a village in which they had been sheltering for two years. The refugees will not be admitted into the Thai camps, authorities explained; instead they would be returned to Burma as soon as the shelling stopped. In fact, most of the refugees come across as a consequence of deliberate policy: they are shunted over the border by the Burmese military as they forcibly relocate villages away from rebel positions.

During Easter, some of these recent arrivals were moved from their temporary shelters in one of the camps to a relocation centre attached to a Thai army post within site of the Burmese soldiers' bunkers across the border. Many in the NGO community have objected to this, arguing that it is hardly the ideal environment for those traumatised by armed violence.

'We all feel now that post-embassy, post-Ratchaburi, the situation has got harder for refugees, as the Thais have revisited their policies,' says Sally Thompson, from the Burma Border Consortium, an organisation that provides the bulk of the material aid to the border camps.

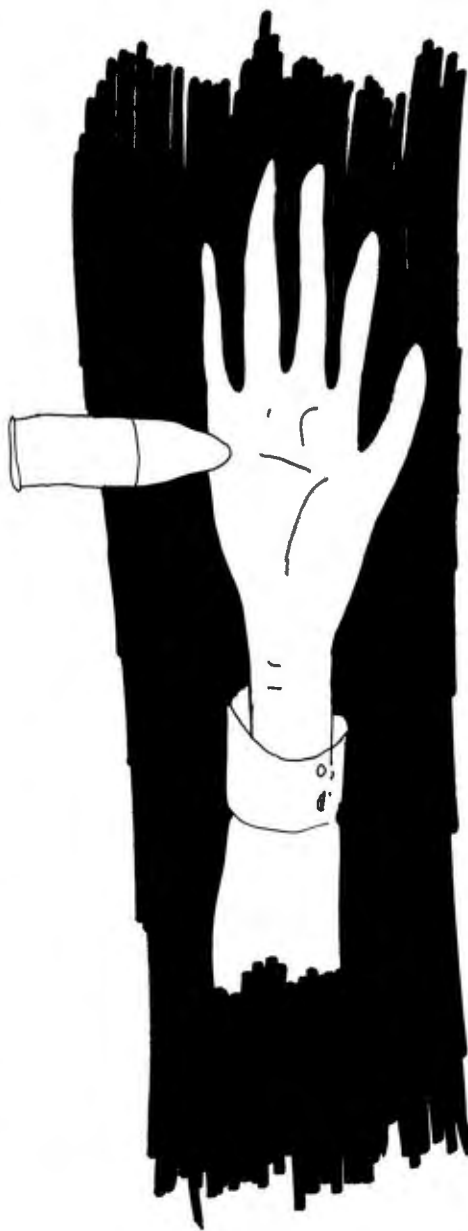
'It has manifested itself mainly in negative language and a hardening of attitudes, but we are seeing more checkpoints and more restricted movement of refugees.

'UNHCR should be asking others for help but they are fighting a lone battle [to get more assistance to refugees and to gain some control of the camps] and they are having no success.'

Students and other Burmese dissidents are no longer welcome in Bangkok, where before their presence, though illegal, was tolerated. Human Rights Watch issued a statement in May regretting that these 'small, radical organisations' have been used by the Thai Government to justify a crackdown on the entire population of urban Burmese. A few days after the hospital siege, the Thai Prime Minister himself made the statement that all Burmese seeking asylum in third countries must go to the facility provided—referring to a camp on the outskirts of Bangkok, already impossibly crowded. The then Interior

Minister said this would be possible as the government hoped that the current case load would be resettled within a year—the implication being that Thailand is safer with fewer Burmese refugees around.

Diplomatic sources say this will not happen—unless the Thai Government lobbies embassies much harder. New



Zealand and Finland have offered to take a certain number of refugees and the US embassy is processing applications quickly. At other foreign missions, however, the practice of dragging out the determination process in the hope that,

as one Bangkok-based diplomat put it, 'the trouble will go away', has not changed.

'The longer it takes to decide, the more likelihood that the persons concerned will give up and look to another country to take them or just disappear altogether.'

The Australian embassy has a reputation for being very good at the 'dragging out' process. And there is also the 'freeze' put on off-shore resettlement applications, announced by Philip Ruddock earlier this year.

Such a decision, made on explicitly financial grounds, does not help the exceptional case of one Burmese in Bangkok. Aung Soe, who worked for some time at the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) assisting Burmese asylum-seekers, was not heavily involved in political activity when he lived in Rangoon. His brother, much more active than Aung Soe, was resettled in Australia a few years ago. The brother, before he left Thailand, was involved in a group which did include some radical elements.

Thai intelligence, eager to atone for having failed to obtain prior warning of the embassy and hospital sieges, have been tracking Aung Soe in the hope that he would lead them to one particular individual with whom his brother was associated and whom they believe to be behind both incidents. As part of this investigation, the JRS office in Bangkok was raided and files seized. Aung Soe has been told by a representative from the Prime Minister's office that when his visa runs out in a month's time it will not be renewed. He will be arrested and sent back to Burma. The problem for Aung Soe is that JRS has been regularly criticised by the Burmese military junta, and his name has been printed in state-controlled publications.

Aung Soe was given person-of-concern status by UNHCR in under five days—it usually takes months for a decision of that nature. UNHCR is promoting his case and approached the immigration officers at the Australian embassy—Aung Soe would like to live with his brother. But, perhaps because of security concerns or Mr Ruddock's freeze until the start of next financial year, UNHCR has been told to look elsewhere. ■

Jon Greenaway is *Eureka Street's* South East Asia correspondent.



THE ENVIRONMENT

The Murray cod swims through Australia's history and culture. But in ever-diminishing numbers.

Paul Sinclair goes hunting for the great fish.

Up the creek

RIVER SKIPPERS WHO TRAVELLED the Murray River during the late 19th and early 20th centuries were contemptuous of farmers who thought the Murray started in a hole just above their property and ended at the most immediate downstream bend.

The skippers' knowledge of great stretches of the river was unusual—not many people have had such an intimate knowledge of the whole of the Murray's 2570 km length. Most settler Australians have known the river only through its specific moments and qualities, or through encounters with particular species of flora and fauna. But often these specifics have offered them columns of light into the emotional, ecological and historical depths of the Murray.

Settler Australians have been particularly attached to Murray cod. These fish have been the focus of many of their memories and stories. They have been the source of metaphors and experiences by which individuals were able to think themselves into the life of the river.

These attachments are now threatened by the demise of once-abundant Murray cod populations.

During the 1940s and 1950s, vast numbers of Murray cod were caught by professional and amateur fishermen. In the first week of the 1953 open season on Murray cod, professional fishermen sent six tons of fish from Mildura to Melbourne markets. In August 1997, the NSW Fisheries Office of Conservation and the Co-operative Research Centre for Freshwater Ecology released the results of a two-year survey of NSW rivers. The survey team used the most efficient types of fishing gear but did not, in two years of sampling 20 randomly chosen sites along the Murray River, catch a single Murray cod.

It is now known that the health of Murray cod populations is an indicator of widespread ecological change. The river has been in severe decline since the end of World War II, largely because of its regulation by a series of locks, weirs and dams. Pollution, over-fishing and irrigation and urban development have also played a significant part. But while concern is regularly raised about the deterioration of the Murray's water quality and biodiversity—we know the whole basin is in deep strife—the broader cultural consequences of this decline are rarely considered.

In the past it was generally accepted that the exploitation and development of the river would exact environmental costs, but those responsible also believed that river regulation and irrigation would create a new river basin so bountiful in agricultural, horticultural and viticultural products that the history of the old, unregulated river would soon be forgotten. The 'development' narrative has long dominated settler-Australian perceptions of the Murray; it has encouraged settlers to think of themselves as conquerors of land and water. But in fact river

regulation and 'development' has not provided the unlimited rewards it promised. Salinity now threatens to destroy the last vestiges of the river's past by poisoning places and species and destroying much of the Murray's symbolic significance.

The decline in Murray cod has closed off many of the old pathways into the ecological and human history of the river. The presence of the cod made people feel that they also belonged to the river. It helped establish their sense of moral obligation towards it, allowing them to feel that they had access to the river's ancient secrets.

Individuals who spent hours searching the river's surface for signs of unseen lives often forged strong relationships with places and species. These people's knowledge of the river and skill as hunters often contributed to their sense of stewardship and belonging, however the Murray's diminishing biodiversity now means that these ways of establishing a connection to the river are no longer sustainable.

The ambivalent stories of care and exploitation told by settler-Australian fishermen tell us a lot about the inter-relationships of ecologies, geographies, and histories. Often the memories of hunters offer more complex hope and understanding—certainly more than the rhetoric of irrigationists, who continue to see the river only as a water-delivery system and drain, or the environmentalists, who think that the decline of the river only reveals destruction.

The fishermen's memories of the Murray are a source of more hope because, unlike many who casually reap the rewards of the river's regulation, the fishermen were witnesses: the death of each fish was the price of their desire to make the river part of their lives.

MURRAY COD EVOLVED for a river that had ceased to exist by about 1966. In that year, A. Dunbavin Butcher of the Victorian Department of Fisheries and Wildlife reflected on how 'relatively few of the natural characteristics of the uncontrolled river system remained'. This fact did not curtail fishermen's dreams of catching one big Murray cod whose age-span could parallel their own lives and soothe doubts about the overall health of native fish.

Post-war fishermen were connected by ephemeral and eclectic memories to an older, pre-regulation river, residually preserved in the present by Murray cod. A mature fish may have been spawned around the same time as its captor was born, although popular and scientific knowledge of the river from which Murray

'Some fishermen believe that skin taken from behind the gills reveals a detailed picture of the part of the river where the fish was caught. A slight variation on this story suggests that the tree-like markings on the cod's swim bladder were an image of the fish's birthplace.'
Photographs, left: the Murray cod and its skin map.

cod had evolved was as fragmented as a fisherman's own childhood memories. Fishing was an intensely contemplative, personal experience which relied on detailed knowledge of currents and snags; of how subtle changes in the colour of the water would affect the catch or how weather patterns influenced fish. This knowledge was not shared readily. When a professional fisherman died recently, no-one knew where to find his nets in the section of the river he had fished, upstream of Swan Hill. It wasn't until weeks later, after the level of the river had fallen and exposed its banks, that his nets, full of decaying fish, were discovered: a rotting eulogy to the old man's skill.

Settler Australians have, like Aboriginal peoples, claimed that the Murray cod is an expression of the river's soul. In Aboriginal stories the Murray cod features as the creator of the Murray. The stories vary between various regions along the river but the general narrative remains similar. One version recounts how a hunter from Creation times chased a giant Murray cod from New South Wales to Lake Alexandrina in South Australia. The bends and reaches of the river were formed as the fish thrashed along the channel. Settlers, following the Aboriginal lead, have called the fish the river's 'wise old man' and its patron saint.

There is also a tradition among settler Australians of going directly to the bodies of individual Murray cod in order to discover empirical and symbolic relationships between people, the river and its fish.

There are parallels here with scientific enquiry: the ability of Murray cod to resume residence of a particular snag months after they left has only recently been determined by radio tracking of individual fish. Using transmitters placed in the body of the fish, scientists can track fish for up to three years, picking up signals from land, boat or aircraft.

But an older, less scientifically rigorous, effort to understand Murray cod's habitat patterns is found in stories about its skin map. Some fishermen believe that skin taken from behind the gills reveals a detailed picture of the part of the river where the fish was caught. A slight variation on this story suggests that the tree-like markings on the cod's swim bladder were an image of the fish's birthplace.

The few documented references to the story claim that it originated in the experiences of old bushmen, and it seems possible that this story may have been absorbed into settler-Australian fishing lore from Aboriginal culture. As the fish bones found near the burial site of the 30,000-year-old Mungo Woman attest, Aborigines have been keen hunters of Murray cod for generations. After invasion and settlement, Aboriginal fishing camps continued to exist along the Murray and the capture and sale of native fish provided a valuable source of Aboriginal food and income well into the 1960s. Perhaps settler Australians absorbed

the cod-skin story into their own lives, just as they had the idea that cod were the soul of the Murray River.

The Murray cod-skin map is a mythical guide to the river which allows people to believe they have access to the fish's otherwise unchartable life. According to the cod lore, each individual fish is inscribed with its own unique map, created from its specific experience of time and space. Each fish holds within it knowledge of the river that remains hidden until a fisherman catches it, thus displaying some intimacy with its life within the river. The skin map is a popular symbol of the profound association between Murray cod and specific places along the Murray River.



Bub and Ray Sebastian with some of the 270 lb of Murray cod caught, with friends, in the Darling River in the early 1960s.

cod which reveal the complexity of settler Australians' attachments to the river. Bub's real name is Ivan Murray Sebastian, but he's been known as Bub since his birth in 1921.

Bub and his wife Flora live up behind the Hume Dam at Mitta Mitta in the foothills of the Australian Alps. Bub makes chutneys and sauces from home-grown vegetables. His produce has won fistfuls of prizes at the Albury Agricultural Show. He bottles his chutneys and sauces in a menagerie of rigorously sterilised peanut butter and coffee jars, with hot wax poured in to seal the jar's contents before a wrist-tight lid is applied. Bub glues his own labels on the jars, indicating the type of sauce and the date of its production. A typical label will have written in copperplate, 'Bub's Tomato Sauce, 20 March 1995', or 'Fruits and Spices Chutney, November 1995'. I've never left Bub's house without half a dozen assorted jars.

THE SKIN MAP STORY is one of a number of stories Bub Sebastian tells about Murray

Bub's second gift is his stories. When he tells a tale he turns to long-dead people, and by changing the tone of his voice, puts words into their dry mouths. His sentences are filled with 'bloody hell!' and 'oh Jesus!', but said with an incredulous wonder that softens the edges of harsh words. Some of his best stories are about Murray cod.

As a child, Bub and his brother Ray spent most of their Christmas holidays camping at a place known to them as 'Tea Trees'. They'd cut saplings to make a crude frame and then cloak the frame with wattle-tree branches. *We used to love being there ... I love the bush.* Most weekends the brothers spent fishing.

In 1995, Bub's brother Ray, who had moved to Queensland, was admitted to hospital just before they were to leave on a fishing trip to the Darling River. Doctors found a lump as big as an orange behind his heart. Ray decided he did not want to be kept alive on a machine. *They'd find a way out of it,* said Bub. Ray died soon afterwards. On the wall of the Sebastians' kitchen is a talismanic photograph of Ray and Bub holding four of the 270 lb of fish they caught on a trip to the Darling River in the early 1960s.

In 1998, I wrote a series of vignettes about people's relationships with the river. One of them was loosely based on stories told to me by Bub.

Each Murray cod has a map of its birthplace inscribed upon its skin. Our father told us this. He worked on the dam and on weekends taught us to love the bush. The skin map was hidden within the cod so the desire to find its home cost the fish its life.

My brother and I caught cod in a drum net. Water fell away from the mesh of the net as we pulled it from the river. We brought the cod into our world and made it part of the love we shared between ourselves. My brother killed and cleaned the fish then held its skin map to the sun and searched for his own likeness amongst the red-gum snags and deep river holes.

Years later, after my brother had died and only my grief travelled with me into the bush, I returned to our fishing place and saw him again. He was big as a wheat bag and moving through the water with the grace of a warm breeze.

For Bub Sebastian, and those like him who have spent a great part of their lives involved with the river, Murray cod are characters woven into memories and life stories. They are repositories of meaning, at once symbolic of profound social and ecological change, but also deeply rooted in specific times and places. Murray cod are tokens of a way of life. People have fished for them because the act of catching them partially defines who they are and the lives they remember.

The stories Bub tells about fish are complicated because they blend exploitation and care, regret and satisfaction. Bub loves Murray cod, thinks there is no fish to compare with it for sweet flavour. For 30 years he went on an annual fishing trip with friends along

the Murray or Darling Rivers. He looks back on these trips with a mixture of pleasure and remorse. *We wouldn't even bring yellowbelly home. We were too bloody proud, we only wanted cod ... Now I get crook on myself ... because no stream could stand the amount of fish [we took] ... We only had lines and rods and we caught them legally, but we came back to Wodonga with a quarter of a ton of cod. We had the boat full, we had the back of the utility full of bloody cod ... it was unlimited.*

Bub knows Murray cod are no longer unlimited. In 1995, John Koehn, Australia's leading expert on freshwater cod, told *The Age* newspaper that saving 'Murray cod goes way beyond conservation. It's part of our culture.' But the trouble scientists like Koehn face is, as he puts it, that 'we don't know anything about this beast that we're trying to save ... There's obviously something wrong, they're going down the tube faster than anything else. They're not going to last the next 200 years unless something drastic is done.'

EFFORTS ARE BEING MADE. NSW authorities have phased out commercial fishing for Murray cod and are trying to improve their habitat by leaving snags in the river. In South Australia, commercial fishermen still fish for Murray cod and a bitter debate is currently raging at public meetings and on the letters pages of local newspapers about their right to do so. Some professional fishermen argue that they, like the fish they catch, are part of the river's heritage. Scientific data collected from NSW would suggest that professionals' use of gill and drum nets allows them to target remnant populations of Murray cod. The decline of Murray cod raises difficult decisions about the sort of river that settler Australians want to live with. How can we foster deep relationships with the river while keeping its fish alive?

John Davis, one of Australia's pre-eminent sculptors, died recently. John grew up near the Murray and considered Murray cod to be a ghost of his own past. He talked of the river and the adjacent mallee as being his country, and gained deep satisfaction when he was able to collaborate with Koori artists who painted their own stories on Murray cod he'd made from bitumen, eucalyptus twigs and calico. He said it was good to celebrate with other people who claimed the Murray cod as central to their culture and their country.

It's time that more settler Australians started valuing these sorts of connections. We need to start telling stories about the difficult and ambivalent relationships we have with particular species, and acknowledge the ways that their lives interconnect with our own and bind us to a deep past. ■

Paul Sinclair is a Research Fellow at the Australian Centre, University of Melbourne, and is based at the Bookmark Biosphere Reserve, South Australia.

Are England's paradoxical street politics a sign of the times?

Down but not out in London

AUSTRALIANS MAKE little of May Day, but elsewhere in the world it was, as usual, a public holiday. In Moscow's Red Square the crowds were small compared with the huge, glum turnouts of the Communist era, but in London, as is becoming usual, many thousands made a day of cocking a snoot—or a green thumb—at authority.

But the streets were not reclaimed by the workers. A planned trade union rally in Trafalgar Square even had to be called off, as what had begun as a peaceful day for 'guerrilla gardening' (mass planting over the tarmac of Parliament Square to 'reclaim open space, protect biodiversity, enhance food security and supplant capitalism', under the banner 'Resistance is Fertile') turned nasty.

Demonstrators of the balaclava-ed kind, protesters who were tattooed, pierced and violently coiffed; middle-aged, middle-class Canadian housewives and, extraordinarily, even an Etonian student, did rather more. The *Times* gave front-page coverage to the remarkable sight of Winston Churchill's statue crowned with a green turf Mohawk. The next page showed masked demonstrators smashing up a McDonald's restaurant and a small, distinctly non-global ticket shop next door.

It had not been unexpected—the *Sunday Times* had sent journalist Justin Rigby underground (in hairy disguise), from whence he warned that London was right to brace itself for thousands of demonstrators who had violence and revolt in mind.

But what kind of revolution attracts an Eton boy? The usual suspects paraded before the magistrate—unemployed anarchists, practitioners of unusual trades, the man who gave the name of a murdered policeman, the frightened and naive housewife who just 'sat down in the road'—but what drew a lad from the

most privileged school in the land?

The 17-year-old was 'withdrawn' from Eton by his parents, after his arrest. His father, a professor, put the boy's philosophical position to the media: 'Although he loves the school and very much appreciates the teaching, his political views don't allow him in conscience to continue at such a privileged institution.' The *Guardian* later quoted a friend of the boy's as saying that what he had really enjoyed about Eton was the potential for 'smashing the Establishment from within'.

The honourable David Thomas, an old Etonian from the '70s, wrote in the *Independent* that the traditions of Eton in fact foment revolt. Eton, he said, valued external conformity—compliance with petty rules about uniform and manners—while not restricting, in any way, opinions. Eton boys, he claimed, grow up expecting the right to hold any opinion, and to participate in every Big Thing. Social reform is, he thought, a public school tradition. Abolitionism, animal rights campaigns, early movements such as socialism and feminism—all were informed by the children of the very rich.

There does seem to be a broad wave of approval for vague, anti-globalist opinions. Perhaps that is why local government is now so important, though it does not explain why Londoners, in May, elected 'Red Ken' Livingstone as their mayor, while the rest of the country swept Labour Councillors out and Tories in.

Is the current unrest a Big Thing? This isn't obvious. Justin Rigby, the undercover *Sunday Times* reporter, wrote that he had seen 'university lecturers, people

from the BBC, wealthy psychology students, Oxbridge graduates, academics and social workers as well as a frightening hard core of activists' involved; and that he feared that 21st-century youth was flocking to a new protest movement, believing that 'market forces, free trade and globalisation, far from making their world a better place, are enslaving the poor and despoiling the planet'.

Perhaps he was spooked into paranoia by his disguise and the grandiosity of the London underground circles he had frequented. There always is potential for berserkers to overwhelm careful planning, high ideals and laudable goals, as they did on London's millennium May Day.

Perhaps anti-global-capitalism could become a long-lived movement. But there is as yet no sign that the 'anti-capitalism movement' is *in fact* global, even though the much better communications—internet, phones, easy and cheap travel—available now compared with 30 years ago could enable it to become so.

The protest movement of the 1960s and 1970s spread through popular art and music, television, student politics and fashion. This one is stuck in pubs, squats and kitchens in a few populous cities, and exhibits little sign of revolutionary ardour in countries other than the US and UK. Asia, China, India, and the developing countries of the Americas seem more interested in climbing on to the promised wagon of prosperity than ploughing its shining path. And Australia is, perhaps, too sedated (chilled out?) by sun, sea breezes and cheap beer to foment protest, let alone revolution. ■

Moira Rayner is a lawyer and freelance journalist, and Director of the Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner for London.



The truce

THE BOY CARRYING A SPEAR AND A BOW WALKED ON AHEAD OF HIS AUNT. She carried a quiver of arrows, a book, apples, field glasses and a piece of long black piping. Cows and bulls paused and stared at these two as they stormed across the paddock. Two small dogs ran ahead. One, a black Scotch terrier called Bridie, the other the boy's dog Tigger, a Jack Russell hunter. The woman and the boy were fox hunting.

The previous day they had found a fox eating a sheep as it lay on the hillside with crows circling. That day they had been out trying to find two motherless lambs seen a few hours earlier. It was their belief that if they could find other sheep with milk they might, if the lambs had not been touched by anyone, feed and rear them.

The lovely gorging fox ate on as they approached. The sheep had fallen over and not been able to rise on the sloping hillside as often happened with weak, sick sheep in heavy fleece. Astonished, the two had stood there watching, unsure of what to do. That day they had neither camera, gun nor bow and arrows. The fox ran off when the boy ran up shouting, waving his piece of black piping, which they carried in case a bull threatened them.

Ever since, the two had been talking of how to catch the fox, the beautiful hungry fox. The woman suggested a net, telling the boy the story of Hephaestus, the metal-working god. 'He made a fine net of metal, Angas, and waited until he caught his wife Aphrodite making love to the god Ares. He flung the net over them and caught them in the act. We could try that.'

The boy suggested digging a hole to trap the fox. He had just read *The Swiss Family Robinson* and told the woman how the family had caught a tiger by digging a hole.

Eating sandwiches at the kitchen table they had made a list of things to take out with them. The boy wrote in biro: *Binoculars. Net. Arrows. Apples.* Their plan was to build a hide near the dead sheep and await the fox.

They were on their way to build the hide when the cattle stood staring at them. They climbed through several fences and crept slowly over the top of the hill where the kill had lain. Crows circling marked where the sheep lay. They whispered to each other, deciding where to make their hide. 'It won't see us if we get behind the rocks,' the boy said. But the rocky ground proved too hard so they gave up and dug a shallow ditch in damp sand among the yellow dandelions. Spreading their things, they lay down together.

'It's no good with that hat,' he said, jerking his chin at the woman's beret.

'Oh Angas, the fox'll think it's a beautiful blue wildflower.'

The boy gave a cold look and said nothing to this but shuffled lower in the sand and raised the glasses to his eyes. The woman already slightly bored, yet mildly excited, took out her book and began to read. The boy turned around and said, 'That hat is a dead give-away.' The woman removed it and tucked it into the pocket of her coat.

After about half an hour the boy stood up and walked down to the kill. As he strode around it the crows flew up.

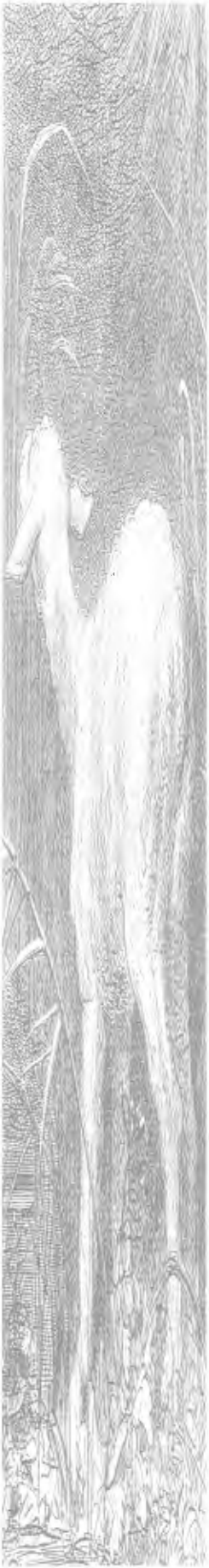
'I don't think it's coming back.'

'Oh, it will come at dusk. That's the best time for us to come,' she said. 'Let's leave some of our things here and come back then.'

She was tired and glad to be walking back. The low hills were covered in yellow dandelions, sheep, lambs and the cattle that stood in great dark clumps.

At eight that morning the woman's brother had driven up to the house and as she walked out of the kitchen door with a dish of food for his dogs, he said, 'Do you want to come out to the maternity paddock?'





She walked back in, put the dish on the table, took her coat from a stand at the door and climbed into his utility. His four-year-old daughter was with him. In the maternity paddock there were cows with and without calves.

'Three times a day,' the man said in answer to her question, 'we go round. Just checking.'

The utility bumped up and down over rocks on the hillside. Suddenly the man accelerated and, to his sister's astonishment, rushed at a cow and knocked her down. The woman said nothing. The cow got up and ran off. Over rocks and hillocks he drove straight at the cow. Again he bumped her down. Four times he did this. Then the cow stayed down. The man got out, took a hobble from the back of the utility and tied one of the cow's front legs back on itself. The woman and girl got out and stood with their hands in their pockets, watching. The man strode around lashing a belt attached to a steel jack on the cow's hindquarters. He put a chain attached to the jack on to the tiny hooves protruding from the cow. He began to screw the jack tighter and tighter. The child stood there with the woman as the man walked slowly around in a quarter circle towards the cow's stomach easing out the grey calf. The cow had only the whites of her eyes showing. Four great shudders wracked the cow. With a slump the calf fell out. Fluid dribbled from its mouth. It lay there dead under the sky.

'Gone before it arrived,' the woman said.

'It drowned,' the man said. 'If we don't get to them, they stay too long.'

The girl and the woman stood there beside the calf as the man released the chain and the belt then walked back to the utility. He tipped the chain into a bucket of white disinfectant where it fell with a small clatter and splash. His cattle dogs stood, puffing, heads hanging over the side of the utility.

The woman wanted to try resuscitation but was afraid to interfere. The calf lay there with the rich life all around it. Breath not entering its body, the waters rushing from its mouth. The mother had run off. The child stood silently beside the woman; neither or them reacting but simply standing staring.

'The calf did not get past the gates of life, Emma. And all around this green grass, this blue sky, birds and these paddocks,' she said, gesturing helplessly with her arms out.

The man began to wash his hands in the disinfectant saying, 'Come on Emma.'

The three of them walked over and got in. He eased the utility into gear and drove off. Steam was rising from the calf as the woman turned to look.

It lay there for the foxes and crows, she wrote in her diary. What she did not know was that for the rest of her life, every time she remembered that morning she would regret not asking if she could pick up the calf, shake it and drain it. She longed to give it a thump, clear it and let in the air, the pure air that bathed them all. As they walked to the utility the

woman said, 'I see you are wearing your beautiful boots, Emma.' At this the girl began to dance. She leapt again and again as if in a broilga's mating dance. Her arms were waving and her little brown boots kept rising from the rocky ground. The man and the woman stood leaning against the door watching while the dogs hung over the side, their mouths open, tongues like flames.

'They're her brother's boots,' the man said when the dance stopped.

All their childhood the man and the woman had fought. Rolling round on the beach, spitting blood and sand.

The woman had had misgivings about coming to the station even though she'd been offered a house separate from his homestead for her holiday.

Next day the man pulled up in the utility as the woman stepped out the door.

'You ready?' he asked. She got in arranging her legs gingerly over two guns leaning on the seat, barrels pointing to the floor. She tucked a tin of muffins below the gun barrels as they drove off. Her brother did not want her to open gates, but opened and closed them himself, getting back in and driving through each time. She was puzzled by this at first, but saw it was his courtesy that made him insist.

After about an hour they drew up at the edge of a wetland that the man had made by flooding his land. A small boat was anchored in the reeds. They got in. After some trouble the engine started. They drove into the centre of the lake where hundreds of ti-trees were standing in the water. Ibis were nesting in the trees. As the boat came nearer nests were visible. In each nest were two or three eggs. These eggs were slightly smaller than a hen's. In each tree there were about a dozen nests.

In a canal between the reeds, birds began to rise in flocks on either side as the boat passed. The man handed the woman his field glasses and putting them to her eyes she could see a mass of birds' necks like rearing snakes among the reeds.

'Each neck represents one nest,' the man told his sister. 'One bird feeds while the other sits on eggs.' As the boat passed, the sky filled with the black and white birds. They wrapped the sky as if it were a gift. They floated on not speaking for a while.

'It's like being in a cathedral,' the woman said.

'What?'

She raised her voice. 'It's like being in a cathedral!'

He nodded and stared out at the water as he guided the boat. Feathers littered the lake and ahead black swans took off like aeroplanes, necks stretched parallel with the water, wings beating as they gained speed.

As they drew near to them, flocks of ducks began to run across the surface of the water, faster and faster until they too rose into the air. The water fell back from their wings in sheets. For an hour or so the man steered the boat around the lake.

As they drew into land and the engine fell silent among the lapping water, still moving from the progress of the boat, the woman said, 'Whatever

happened to you in your life you'd feel better if you came here.'

Again the man said nothing, but pulled the boat up among the reeds and walked off through the dandelions. The woman followed, noticing her shoes were yellow from the pollen of the flowers. She lay down among them and stared up at the blue sky, shading her eyes with one hand, watching the small white clouds. Her yellow shoes were pointing to the sky. The brother took one of the guns from the utility and put it to his eye pointing over the lake.

'Do you want a look?'

She stood up and he handed the gun to her. In the telescopic sight she could see the ibis nests in the trees in the water. Birds were returning to the nests, lighting on to the branches. Their big wings flapping down and then folding like hands clasping with a certain air of satisfaction, elegant and eloquent in the silence of the act.

They drove off and after half an hour at the edge of a small river, stopped and got out. Water was rushing, frothing over a weir. Turning to his sister the man said, 'You can come across if you like.' He turned and walked across on the mossy wet planks that linked the cement pylons crossing the rushing river. In parts the planks had fallen away and only one thin frail one remained. In one portion nothing stood between the pylons. Gingerly she began to cross. Her brother, watching her over his shoulder, returned.

The planks were only the width of a human hand. With his feet firmly anchored on the boards, he reached out and took her hand, leading her over the empty space above the rushing water. He led her onwards. She felt her hand in his big working-man hand, strong as a tree trunk and unswerving as a pylon. Only the stilling of his heart, she thought, would stop him in his urgency.

As they reached the river bank he released her hand and strode off toward another lake nearby. The woman stood looking around, noticing a jabiru nest in a dead gum tree. Egrets and crows sat in branches of other gums. She watched a flock of pink galahs fly over. After a few minutes, the man returned. Together, hand in hand they made their way back over the rushing urgent water. A white bird fluttered alone high over the lake behind them like a truce.

When they got to the utility she opened the tin of muffins and proffered them. Her brother took one and so did she. They drove back through the yellow and green paddocks. Sheets of water reflected the sky and clouds on both sides of the road. Blue cranes rose in pairs.

The dogs stood in the back, their legs planted four-square. From time to time they licked their lips and then let their tongues hang free as flags. ■

Kate Llewellyn is the author of *The Waterlily*. Her latest books are *Burning: A Journal* and *Sofala & Other Poems*, published by Hudson.

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Social capital and welfare reform

What builds one, what drives the other?

Social Capital and Public Policy in Australia, Ian Winter (ed.),
Melbourne, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2000. ISBN 0 642 39470 9, RRP \$30
Participation Support for a More Equitable Society, The Interim Report of the Reference
Group on Welfare Reform, March 2000. www.facs.gov.au

ECONOMIC REFORM,' Prime Minister John Howard told the Liberal Party National Convention in April, 'is about achieving social goals.' In a second speech on the same occasion he explained, 'If economic reform doesn't deliver benefits for people, then it's not worth embracing.' The Convention was then described by the Prime Minister, in a third address, as having its 'focus very heavily on social policy'. Further, Mr Howard twice rejected the 'rather naive notion that if you had an unrestrained market approach to everything, that through some kind of miracle of trickle down economics every problem would be solved'.

The days of the big dry are apparently over. Social policy is on the government's agenda. But can fruitful social policy be achieved without a change of social heart? The move to welfare reform provides a case in point.

★

On 29 September 1999, Senator Jocelyn Newman, Minister for Family and Community Services, delivered a major speech on the future of welfare policy in Australia. Modernising the welfare system, she declared, was now a 'first order issue' for the Howard Government. A month later, precisely, Senator Newman announced the membership of a high-level Reference Group commissioned to draft the Green Paper on welfare reform.

The group of seven was broadly based ideologically, if Sydney-centric, but it was bound by terms of reference which included 'adopting the reform principles established by the Government' and giving 'particular consideration' to 'the broader application of Mutual Obligation'. The group was also constrained by the requirement to circulate an interim report early in the New Year and to submit their final draft by 30 June 2000. The tight timelines were necessary, it has

been said, to allow the Department room to prepare its bids for the 2001–2002 budget.

With great dispatch, after considering over 360 submissions, the Reference Group released its interim report, *Participation Support for a More Equitable Society*, on 28 March 2000. The report proposes not just modifications to the welfare system, but genuine reform, a 5–20-year plan aimed at rebuilding networks in society so that participation in the economy and society is available to all. In a nutshell, welfare as income support is to be replaced by welfare as participation support.

While applauding the direction taken in the interim report, the welfare sector is sceptical about the lack of detail and suspicious of how the vision splendid might be implemented. The Australian Council of Social Service's response, 'Renewing Welfare', expresses many of the sector's concerns. ACOSS argues first and foremost that adequate financial support remains essential for participation in society and economy.

The welfare sector is also concerned that the principle of mutual obligation will be applied more coercively to welfare recipients than it will be to businesses and governments when they fail their social obligations to maintain services, training and employment in areas of need. Many other concerns are detailed, and the sector cannot help but point to the gap between the current realities of welfare practice and the ideal models proposed in the interim report's case studies. Furthermore, the interim report does little to specify levels of investment and service delivery.

Policy often has to be made on the run, details may have to come later, and this government may not get another chance at welfare reform. The pressure to complete such a major project by 30 June is nonetheless unfortunate. The government has to find

room for attention to at least some of the detail. It also needs to be clear about the drivers to reform. Are they economic or social?

★

The two key drivers to reform had been identified in a departmental briefing paper as 'welfare dependency' and increased spending on welfare. As the formidable appendices to the interim report show, spending on welfare in Australia has quadrupled in the past 30 years. Statistics can be selective, however, for spending on welfare over that period has, according to ACOSS President Michael Raper, increased merely from 6.0 per cent to 6.5 per cent of GDP. What is uncontested is that the gap between the 'job rich' and the 'job poor' continues to widen, poverty continues to become more entrenched, and social exclusion increasingly appears endemic.

The concern about 'welfare dependency' is double-edged. True, there are increasing numbers of Australians who are spending longer periods of their life in receipt of welfare support, but 'welfare dependency' can be a value-laden term implying that recipients have become dependent on welfare, as if welfare were an addiction. Recent research indicates that there is no such thing as transgenerational welfare dependency, and it is significant that the interim report talks about 'growing reliance' rather than 'welfare dependency'. In fact, as noted in Appendix 3 of the report, 'most social security recipients are not economically and socially inactive'. The report thus recognises that problems may lie more in the system than in the people who use the system.

★

What remains relatively unscrutinised is the interim report's assumption that social participation can be achieved by changing

the welfare system alone without encouraging broader strengthening of the social fabric. The introductory pages are peppered with talk about 'social participation'. The term 'social capital' is also employed, though dubiously expanded to include 'networks of mutual support and obligation': obligation cannot create social participation. Social inclusion or exclusion arise from energies more deeply embedded in our culture. Social policy reform must therefore also attend to the forces which strengthen or corrode society.

Since Eva Cox popularised the term 'social capital' in Australia in her 1995 Boyer Lectures, many efforts have been made to unpack the term. In February 1999, the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) hosted a social capital conference in Canberra, and the many contributors were asked to develop their presentations in the light of the conference and subsequent discussions. The resulting book, *Social Capital and Public Policy in Australia*, aims not just to gather ideas about social capital, but also to make some connections with the shaping of public policy. Serendipitously, it appeared in print just a week or so before the interim report on welfare reform was released.

Ian Winter, editor of the AIFS collection, notes that the idea of social capital has become 'part of the battle to find a new social contract between governments and citizens to replace the embattled welfare state'. The book offers substantial evidence that the term 'social capital' has real anchorage. There is an inner tissue or ecology of society. The marriage of socialism and capitalism in a single term may seem somewhat too convenient, if not an oxymoron, but the identification of social capital highlights the need for governments to take into account the effects of their policies on the fabric of community. This is particularly the case when the focus is on the economy rather than on society.

Social capital can, of course, help the economy. Robert Putnam, prime mover of social capital thinking, has demonstrated that networks of trust and the acceptance of reciprocal responsibilities contribute much to mutual benefit and economic progress. Eva Cox thus described social capital as 'the factor which allows collective action in the public sphere and for the common good'.

But what lies beneath this description? Can social capital be measured? Does it belong to individuals or to society? Is it a pattern of superficial behaviours, or does

some sort of social virtue underlie its manifestations? Is its vitality so essential that governments should think of citizens primarily as makers of society rather than as makers of economy?

While some theorists consider social capital in utilitarian terms—'we trust and respect one another because it will be for the benefit of both of us'—the majority hold that social capital is meta-empirical. Jenny Onyx and Paul Bullen argue that social capital is 'an emergent measure of an emergent concept', and more than utilitarian. In their search for an underlying 'common theme' they explore the 'empirical' rather than 'theoretical'

productivity will not encourage social capital. Nor can social capital be expected to grow among the socially disadvantaged. Onyx and Bullen's research indicates that 'material conditions are a necessary but not sufficient condition for the generation of social capital' and that 'where groups and communities are traumatised or operating under duress, they will cease to develop generalised social capital'.

If there is to be welfare reform, it is imperative that adequate income be provided for welfare recipients and that the application of the principle of mutual obligation be reassessed. On this latter point the authors of the interim report come to



Photograph by Andrew Stark

coherence of social capital through a set of detailed questionnaires which compare levels of trust, tolerance, and social interaction. Social capital, they conclude, is 'more than the sum of its parts', and more about people than government policy. More colourfully, Mark Latham describes social capital as an 'inner spring ... beyond the bounds of rationality'.

Government pressure, it is concluded, cannot create social capital. The real issue is that government policy can harm existing social capital. Giving too much latitude to market forces, for example, will be to the detriment of community. Removing resources from a community that already suffers social exclusion will increase rather than decrease the breakdown of communities. Valuing people only for their

much the same conclusion: a 'broad interpretation' of the concept of mutual obligation, must include 'all parties in society'.

BUT THERE REMAINS a deeper issue, and it has to do with communal spirit and values. Social capital is not a material commodity. While their research is entirely empirical, Onyx and Bullen admit that they are dealing with something that is essentially not measurable: social capital 'is an attribute of networks of people' and 'it is nonsense to try to reduce the value of connectedness in the life of the community to a number!'

Eva Cox and Peter Caldwell observe that social capital is not value-free but normative: if we think we know what makes

for good society then we have implicit ideas of the good. Thus, 'social capital theory and practice are closely linked to the arena of ethics'. They point to neo-liberalism's neglect of morality and to the opposition between social capital and 'the type of abstract individualism that has informed most of our culture in the modern epoch'. Latham likewise sees investment in values education as a key to the generation of future social capital. Researchers Philip Hughes, John Bellamy and Alan Black find that education is 'the strongest factor relating to trust' and stress the importance of moral thinking and values training.

★

But what values? Individual values or community values? Mr Howard reminded the recent Liberal Party Convention that his party is the trustee of both the liberal and the conservative traditions in politics: one stands for 'the values and virtues of individual liberty' and the other for 'the bedrock institutions of our community'. The balancing act is admirable but difficult. Where the individual reigns supreme, society is likely to suffer. For some, like Margaret Thatcher, 'there is no such thing as society, only individuals'.

Thatcher's mentor, directly or indirectly, was surely John Stuart Mill. 'The object of this Essay is to assert one very simple principle,' wrote Mill in *On Liberty*, 'as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual ...' His conclusion, though not without nuance: 'the individual is sovereign'. The British libertarian tradition and its values have influenced much neo-liberal policy, peculiarly in the United Kingdom and its former colonies. Economic rationalism has flourished, after all, particularly in Britain, America, New Zealand, Canada and Australia. Only in these countries have policy issues been primarily economic and secondarily social. Scandinavian and Catholic European nations have developed models of welfare that rest much more on a collective social and moral sense (see Gosta Esping-Anderson, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*). Does Australian social policy need to reconsider its roots?

The myth of Australian egalitarianism and mateship remains a myth. The pragmatism of looking after number one has overtaken the irrationality of looking after others. Geert Hofstede's *Cultures and Organisation* thus reports that Australia now ranks second only to the United States

as a nation of individualists. Social policy reform needs to attend to reversing this trend.

Local community groups and not-for-profit service providers can make a major contribution. MacKillop Family Services has made 'Building Community' a primary focus for all its work with families at the edge of society. Resources are thin, however, and most services are underfunded. Organisations like MacKillop face a dilemma: how much of their resources should be devoted to meeting immediate individual need, and how much should go towards strengthening the wider community and social fabric, ultimately working towards the elimination of poverty and disadvantage?

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Economic pressures and social changes have led to the transformation, if not dismantling, of Australia's health, education and welfare. The bulk of the electorate may be

financially better off, but there are many in our society who are much worse off. Equally seriously, the social fabric has suffered. Mr Howard observed at the recent Liberal Party Convention that government has 'a limited but strategic role in our community'. This role includes not just creating new structures in early intervention, education, and social participation support, as recommended in the interim report. It also demands offering leadership in the values that build up community. The cool reasonableness that marks the government's defence of its policies on reconciliation and refugees will not suffice. There is such a thing as 'society', and the intangibles of the interconnectedness of the human community must be acknowledged and strengthened if reform of social policy is to bear lasting fruit. ■

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BOOKS: I

CHRIS MCGILLION

Witness for the prosecution

Who is Worthy? The Role of Conscience in Restoring Hope to the Church, Ted Kennedy, Pluto Press, 2000.

ISBN 1 86403 087 9, RRP \$24.95

ON PENTECOST SUNDAY in 1998, a group of gay and lesbian Catholics and their supporters donned rainbow sashes (a symbol of unity in diversity) and presented themselves for Holy Communion before Archbishop George Pell in Melbourne's St Patrick's Cathedral. Pell refused the members of the group the eucharist, offered them a blessing instead, but also rebuked them for orchestrating such an obvious challenge to church teaching and ecclesiastical authority.

Many in the congregation applauded his response. To Father Ted Kennedy, parish priest of Sydney's inner suburb of Redfern, however, Pell's response to the group was insensitive, un-Christian, and a sign of how

far the church has departed from the essential message of the gospel. Many people will agree with this judgment and praise Kennedy's courage for saying so in his book, *Who is Worthy?*. Others will be outraged by such a public criticism of a senior Catholic cleric and question the sincerity of Kennedy's vocation as a priest and his loyalty to the church. This is the sort of book that draws battlelines; that is its strength, but also its weakness.

Kennedy would like the reader to believe that the church's treatment of the marginalised (specifically homosexuals and Aborigines) is the measure of its authenticity. Fair enough, but how measured is his treatment of the issue raised by Rainbow

Sash? The author fails, for instance, to mention that soon after the incident in St Patrick's, a similar confrontation occurred in St Christopher's Cathedral, Canberra. On that occasion, Bishop Patrick Power also refused to dispense the eucharist to those wearing rainbow sashes—the problem was not their unworthiness so much as his fidelity to his office—but he made a point of welcoming the group into his church, urged his congregation to do the same and acknowledged the pain the church's sexual teaching had caused so many people for so long.

Two bishops, two quite different responses, but each of them a product of one and the same church.

By focusing on Archbishop Pell's response to Rainbow Sash, Kennedy tells only part of the story of this struggle for inclusion and exaggerates the importance of one of its characters. It is true that Pell is a powerful influence in the church—well-connected in Rome, responsible for the most populous diocese in the country, and possessing a force of personality none of his fellow bishops can even begin to match. But it is also true that George Pell is not the Australian Catholic Church, that he is widely disliked within the hierarchy (witness his staggering under-employment by committees of the National Bishops Conference) and that he wields less influence even in Melbourne than many people like to imagine. At one point, Kennedy makes the point that bully bishops and parish priests appear in every generation and 'the memory of them seems to fade with a finality proportionate to their penal severities'. That would suggest that they are best ignored. In time, who will remember George Pell?, Kennedy asks, as if in agreement with this sentiment. But then the author proceeds to contribute to the Archbishop's already inflated reputation by making him virtually the sole witness in his case against the church.

One other initiative Bishop Power undertook after his encounter with Rainbow Sash was to set up an ongoing dialogue with representatives of the group. To my knowledge, that dialogue has only fallen silent on occasions when those clamouring for inclusion have failed to take up its (albeit limited) invitation. There are demands, including the demands of justice and of the gospel, but there are also agendas. By not acknowledging and investigating these, Kennedy over-simplifies what this dispute is all about and how it might eventually be resolved.

The author is on stronger ground when he accuses the church of a gross injustice in its treatment of Aborigines. Here, after all, he is drawing not only on the raw facts of history but also on his own experience of 40 tough and gritty years in Aboriginal ministry. But is Kennedy overlooking something significant here as well? It is true that the Australian church has produced no Bartolomé de Las Casas (the bishop forced out of Mexico in 1547 when Spanish settlers tired of his thirst for indigenous justice) or Samuel Ruiz Garcia (Bartolomé's recent successor who dodged the assassin's bullet several times in pursuit of the same cause). But it has produced Ted Kennedy and many other men and women (both clerical and lay) like him. Again, different people, different responses and all of them products of the same church.

HOW ARE THESE differences to be explained? How might they be reconciled? *Who is Worthy?* is a book of passion, not analysis. It therefore has little to offer by way of answer to the first question. Its answer to the second is to suggest that no-one is worthy but that everyone has worth. Thus, instead of acting as the gatekeeper who protects God from humanity by fostering a sense of sin in the faithful and imposing legalisms on them

enforced by hard-hearted clerics, the church should, Kennedy says, once again become the vehicle through which men and women encounter God. Include, don't exclude. Restore informed conscience to its rightful place as a guide to individual moral choice.

Again, that is fair enough, indeed overdue and well worth striving for. But what does it mean for those people who applauded Archbishop Pell's response to Rainbow Sash? What about those conservative Catholics who have been instrumental in the recent suppression of the Third Rite of Reconciliation? Is it time to take to the barricades in defence of the church's integrity or time to recognise—and celebrate—the pluralism that already exists in the church and, in practice, is the way most Catholics accommodate themselves to its contradictions and imperfections?

Nothing is achieved by ignoring these questions and, in provoking them, Kennedy has done the church a considerable service. But *Who is Worthy?* is less the voice of prophecy than of the partisanship that calls the prophets forward. ■

Chris McGillion is a religious affairs columnist with the *Sydney Morning Herald*. He teaches in the School of Communication at Charles Sturt University.

BOOKS: 2

CAZ WRIGHT

Jesus in context

Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity, Paula Fredriksen, Macmillan London, 1999. ISBN 0 333 78582 7, RRP \$25

PAULA FREDRIKSEN is probably best known for her contribution to the documentary, 'From Jesus to Christ, the First Christians', aired earlier this year. However, her latest book, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*, is an interesting departure from the current contributions to the historical Jesus debate.

I read *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews* during Lent. The timing was not intentional and the content a little more detailed than the usual Lenten study, but

the outcome has been a challenging reflection on the life and death of Jesus.

Fredriksen draws on a variety of sources as a 'standard of judgement and an interpretive criterion' in order that the conflict and confluence of the Gospels may be addressed. Drawing on all four evangelists, the letters of Paul, early Jewish sources such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and rabbinic writings, as well as the works of the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, she

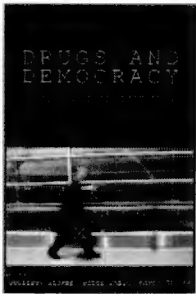
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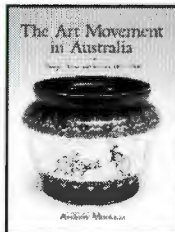
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gauges the reliability of claims made across such texts.

From the outset, she highlights the plethora of contemporary approaches to the sources that may reveal the historical Jesus, noting the conflicting images that arise. Relying on historical criticism, she turns to the fixed points, the facts that we know to be historically true. In doing so she attempts to reconstruct the Jesus of history and address, in new ways, the question 'Why was Jesus crucified?' The facts that Fredriksen highlights are rarely disputed, but when put together they constitute an anomaly that has not often been addressed. The two conflicting parts are these:

- Jesus was put to death by crucifixion—a political death.
- His followers were not touched—suggesting that Rome was not concerned with them as a revolutionary group, a fact that contradicts the political death of Jesus.

Given, as Fredriksen claims, that Jesus' death is the single most solid fact that we know about his historical life and that this death was of a style usually reserved for political insurrectionists, it is puzzling that it was Jesus alone who was identified as the troublemaker. If he posed such a threat to Rome, surely his followers would have been dealt with also?

In exploring this dilemma, Fredriksen delves into the historical context of the community of the first century. She moves backwards from the movement that formed following Jesus' death (more specifically, the mission to the Gentiles through Paul's letters), to Jesus in the context of early first-century Judea and Galilee and finally to the days in Jerusalem leading up to his death. She considers the social context of Jesus and his contemporaries, but, oddly, fails to draw upon any of the key contributors who utilise social-scientific criticism, not just archaeological data, to arrive at an understanding of the first-century Mediterranean context.

Ultimately, Fredriksen determines that a mix of factors lead to Jesus' death as 'King of the Jews'. The excited acclaim at Passover in Jerusalem, specifically at the time when Pilate was present to observe and control the crowd, leads her to conclude that Jesus was executed neither for his teaching nor for his discourse on Jewish practice. Rather, his crucifixion was a political caution to the crowds in Jerusalem at the time of Passover and was calculated to deflate the intense excitement and expectation building among the pilgrims who had flocked to the city.

Fredriksen suggests that Pilate did not see Jesus as being dangerous in himself, but believed that the crowds who had attached themselves to Jesus could easily become so. Such a conclusion resolves the anomaly of Jesus' death and the relative safety of his disciples, and offers an explanation for crucifixion as the chosen method. I found it fascinating that it should be from the Gospel of John that Fredriksen ultimately draws material to support her thesis, in the itinerary of Jesus' mission that the evangelist outlines. She argues that it can only be the itinerary provided from the gospel of John, and not from the Synoptic gospels, that explains how Caiaphas and Pilate both knew of Jesus and therefore decided that it should be Jesus alone who would be dealt with as the troublemaker.

Fredriksen does not discount the movement that ensued after Jesus' death nor the experiences of his continued presence. She explores the title, 'Messiah', and its attribution to Jesus, as well as the significance of his life. From a historical perspective she investigates what Jesus meant to those who followed him in their own lifetime and explores this through the facts surrounding his death and the disciples' survival. And she notes a number of questions that remain unanswered—from Jesus' own response to John the Baptist, to the disciple's claim of the risen Christ and commitment to the continuation of Jesus' mission outside the Diaspora. Fredriksen notes also the limitations of the historical investigation, and highlights the important difference between interpretation, and historical reconstruction.

The book has an easy-to-read style and, to oblige the general reader, avoids detailed bibliographical annotation and argument in the main text. There are, however, adequate notes and references for further investigation of the relevant ancient texts, as well as a glossary of all those terms we think we're meant to know but can never quite get a handle on.

Fredriksen has been criticised for her fictional interludes but I'd defend her particular blend of literary analysis, socio-religious reconstruction and narrative 'snapshots' because it provides lively access to the first-century context (generally absent in the current historical treatment of Christianity). I have always maintained that stories and pictures are a fine way of capturing history. Fredriksen provides both. ■

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Making for the inner ocean

Passage to Juneau: A Sea and Its Meanings, Jonathan Raban, Picador, London, 1999.
ISBN 0 330 34628 8, RRP \$45

ONE OF THE ATTRACTIVE things about Jonathan Raban's writing is that he puts his cards on the table. True, the books are skilfully designed, and give a sense that what is offered is something crafted. But they also mediate a companionable spirit, even if one much given to solitude and sometimes afflicted with loneliness. Early in *Passage to Juneau: A Sea and Its Meanings*, he offers this:

I am afraid of the sea. I fear the brushfire crackle of the breaking wave as it topples into foam; the inward suck of the tidal whirlpool; the loom of a big ocean swell, sinister and dark, in windless calm; the rip, the eddy, the race; the sheer abyssal depth of the water, as one floats like a trustful beetle on the surface tension. Rationalism deserts me at sea. I've seen the scowl of enmity and contempt on the face of a wave that broke from the pack and swerved to strike at my boat. I have twice promised God that I would never again put out to sea, if only He would, just this once, let me reach harbour. I'm not a natural sailor, but a timid, weedy, cerebral type, never more out of my element than when I'm at sea.

Yet for the last fifteen years, every spare day that I could tease from the calendar has been spent afloat, in a state of undiminished fascination with the sea, its movements and meanings. When other people count sheep, or reach for the Halcion bottle, I make imaginary voyages—where the sea is always lightly brushed by a wind of no more than fifteen knots, the visibility is always good, and the boat never more than an hour from the nearest safe anchorage.

The essayist E.B. White said once, 'I have read a great many books about small boat

voyages—they fascinate me even though they usually have no merit': he could scarcely deny merit to Raban's writing. As in most of his earlier books—among them *Arabia*, *Old Glory*, and *Hunting Mister Heartbreak*—we are looking at a double expedition: into a country or a continent, and into the climate and the contours of the self. Raban, like many distinguished predecessors, goes out and on as a way of going in. The last sentence of *Passage to Juneau* reads, 'Crossing the tracks of the disused railroad, I took a deep breath before I climbed the last suburban quarter-mile and faced the rougher sea', a 'rougher sea' borrowed from William Cowper's 'The Cast-Away', and wholly of the mind.

To use an outbound voyage as a way of making for the inner ocean is not of itself to guarantee interest or success. There is no such thing as a magical trope—least of all, perhaps, when so many haunting verbal voyages have been brought off, and are there for comparison. And indeed, immediately before the passage quoted, Raban tells us of the books he carried on his craft, which 'reflected a promiscuous addiction, to the sea in general and to the one on my doorstep in particular'. But Raban works with the possibilities of his chosen verbal milieu, as for survival's sake he has worked with those of the sea. The first of the paragraphs here mimes the experience of being the ocean's immediate subject—'abyssal' in one way and 'weedy' in another help to carry that off—while the second appropriates a different kind of subjection. There is a confident play of mind here—imaginative strength at ease.

'I looked the sea up in Freud and, more usefully, in the Book of Revelation.' It is the remark of someone who knows that, in Marianne Moore's words, 'it is human

nature to stand in the middle of a thing,/ but you cannot stand in the middle of this.' Freud was apt in his citation of an 'oceanic feeling', in which we are keyed to the unbounded—apt too in the sense that to name is our first, and perhaps our last, method of keeping under weigh through the ungoverned; and the Book of Revelation answers to at least subliminal hopes when it promises, in heaven, 'no more sea'. Raban's practice as a writer does indeed keep those cards on the table, in that he never lets us forget that our 'standing' in the middle of experience, above all mental experience, is always provisional.

Often one for the emblematic, Raban sailed off from Seattle on April Fools' Day in 1996, bound for Juneau in Alaska, and back. His book traces the journey at the level of the palpable, and of the emotional, the speculative, and the imaginative. It also charts the experience of his father's dying—the father who has been a cardinal figure in earlier of Raban's books—and of his waxing and waning relationships with his wife and his young daughter. 'Never less alone than when alone'—the old saying has a new cogency with Raban, whether we find him out on the water or playing the observer ashore. He is fascinated by, if not always attracted to, solitaires of the past, as of the present. In that sense, the famous phrase about the sea's being a mirror comes true again.

Sometimes what fastens Raban's attention is a known individual, and sometimes a representative figure. Here he is, speaking firstly of the coming of a new kind of navigator, and then of the anthropologist Franz Boas:

But the external compass—the magic gizmo in a box—put man at a remove from

his surroundings. A compass course is a hypothesis. It has length, but no width. It can't be seen or felt (though once, perhaps, we could feel it, as the rainbow trout appears to). It cannot even be steered ... The real track of the boat through the sea is a weaving zigzag path whose innumerable deviations define the idealized pencil line of the course as it appears on the chart. Steering a compass course, by machine or hand, it is by indirection that one finds direction out.

So the helmsman looked away from the sea, wedding himself instead to a geometrical abstraction that had no tangible reality in nature. Possession of a compass soon rendered obsolete a great body of inherited, instinctual knowledge, and rendered the sea itself—in fair weather, at least—as a void, an empty space to be traversed by a numbered rhumb line.

Too little has been made of this critical moment in the history of navigation. Because the compass has been with us for a thousand years, we've lost sight of the mental revolution it caused. The figure of the helmsman, his eyes glued to the tilting card in its bowl, turning the spokes of the wheel to keep the assigned number on target against the lubberline, is an early avatar of modern man. The compass has turned him into a steering machine ...

[Boas] was an arresting anthropological specimen in his own right: short, wiry, with black eyes, black hair, an aquiline nose, and a bushy black moustache. His face was deeply incised with duelling scars, from his student days in Heidelberg (that must have interested the Indians). His personality was forbidding. He had an ascetic relish for physical hardship; detested frivolity in any form, but especially light opera; and his grim prose style reflects a mind of such flinty seriousness that one quails at meeting it on the page. The man was a research engine. Not a glimmer of warmth shows in his writing, which reveres the cold fact to a degree rarely seen since Mr Gradgrind made Sissy Jupe define a horse.

What can the Indians have made of him? He looms craggily over the field of Northwest ethnology, with his dictionaries and grammars, his collections of native myths and stories, his relentless tabulation of motifs in Indian art and oral literature. Somewhere there must be Kwakiutl or Tsimshian stories of Franz Boas—Scarface, with fountain pen and ledger, meatgrinding their whole world into volume upon volume of the *Columbia University Contributions to Anthropology*.

'The compass has turned him into a steering machine', 'The man was a research engine': over 130 pages separate the passages, but the metaphors collude instructively. For Raban is exercised, commonly and sometimes obsessively, by the question of human liberty and its relation to human drivenness. One formidable ghost in much of his book is that of George Vancouver, investigating navigator of those parts, of whom Raban says:

His meltdowns were triggered by the slightest affront to his authority. An unpunctual rendezvous, a flicker of insubordination from a midshipman, a mention of Menzies' accursed quarterdeck greenhouse—and Vancouver would explode,

scalding everyone around him with the lava flow of his rage. Yet when it came to the tedious and frustrating business of nautical astronomy, an eerie calm came over him ... So quick to blaze up at any man-made impediment to his will, George Vancouver was benignly tolerant of the vagaries of the weather and the stars.

RABAN DEVOTES PAGES TO Vancouver in his own right, and in his dealings with his crew and with the Indians. I sense that he does this in part because, as he says when making his bow to Barry Lopez and other Northwest nature writers and taking his departure from them, 'Lopez was too good for me. Perhaps I was disqualified from following him because I had led a morally inconsistent life. Turner's whirling abyss seemed to me a true picture of reality as I generally experienced it; Lopez's version of it struck me as improbably tidy and benign.' Homer's word for 'the sea' is, simply, 'the salt', a very un-conceding designation, and Raban's attention both to the great physical bath in which we are all moored and to life's 'sea' is commonly of the salt, salty. He has an ample lyricism, but it is always in part that of the blues.

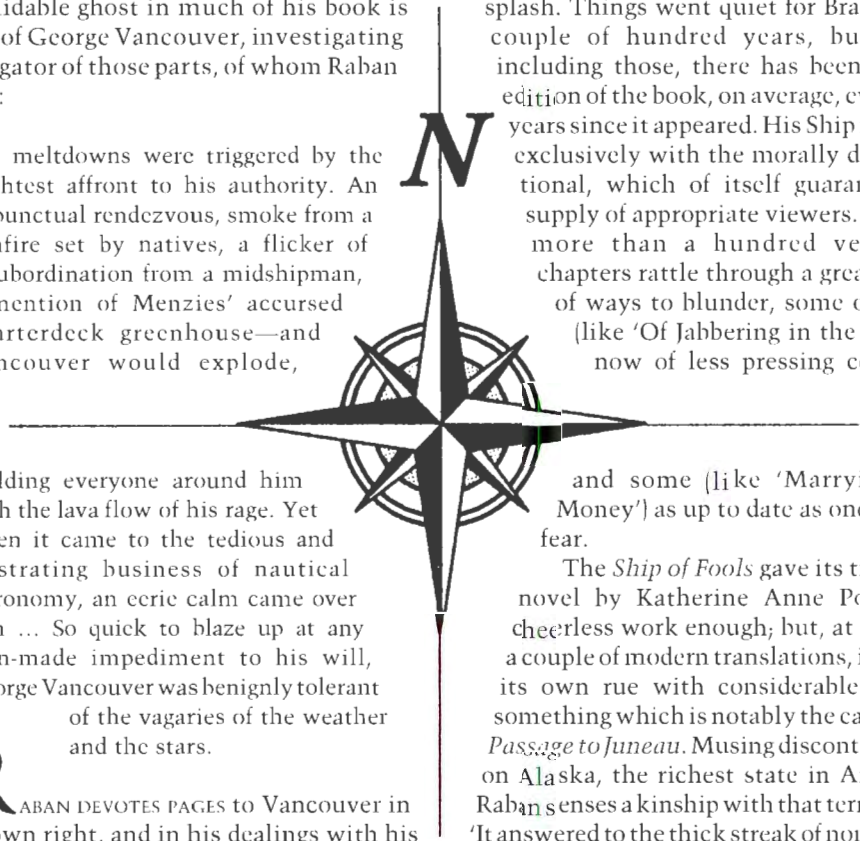
He is far from alone there, of course, but what is perhaps rarer is that it should go with a certain lavishness of spirit. From almost the first of his writings to the present book, Raban has been the sort of chronicler and reflector who prompts the reader to

wonder whether he has come across certain other writers, and what he would make of them. *Passage to Juneau* called two of that hand to my mind. One, much given to ebullient sternness, is Sebastian Brant, whose *The Ship of Fools*, first published in Basel in 1494, neatly following Columbus' run to a new world, made an immediate splash. Things went quiet for Brant for a couple of hundred years, but even including those, there has been a new edition of the book, on average, every six years since it appeared. His *Ship* is laden exclusively with the morally dysfunctional, which of itself guaranteed a supply of appropriate viewers. Brant's more than a hundred versified chapters rattle through a great range of ways to blunder, some of them (like 'Of Jabbering in the Choir') now of less pressing concern,

and some (like 'Marrying for Money') as up to date as one might fear.

The *Ship of Fools* gave its title to a novel by Katherine Anne Porter, a cheerless work enough; but, at least in a couple of modern translations, it wears its own rue with considerable flair—something which is notably the case with *Passage to Juneau*. Musing discontentedly on Alaska, the richest state in America, Raban senses a kinship with that territory—'It answered to the thick streak of nomadism in my own makeup. It mirrored all my slovenliness, my taste for the temporary and the makeshift, my weakness for crazes, discarded almost as soon as embarked on. Were I ever called on to construct and populate an American state, it would look a lot like Alaska'—but he finishes his sentence with the words, 'and I wouldn't care to live there'. If this has a customary human ration of misgiving about the self, it also has a saving touch—the salt again—of wit.

The other writer who comes to mind is the 17th-century Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher, whose subject might be said to be The Lot. Kircher was avid for, in particular, the arcane and the mysterious, but his appetite for the factual—and for its construals—seems to have been insatiable: he was an encyclopedist's encyclopedist. He was also richly ingenious—as when, for instance, in his *Noah's Ark*, dedicated to the 2-year-old Charles II of Spain, and handsomely illustrated with woodcuts, he assigns the planet's menagerie in



appropriate order (hospitable to unicorn and mermaid, though hedging his bets about the gryphon), without neglecting provision for a year's supply of food, and for excrement sluiced into the bilge and sealed off with tar.

Raban, partly sceptical in temper, would cock an appropriately ironic eye at this performance: but he would, I think, salute the ranginess of it all, most of all because ocean is the element. He might, in fact, offer Kircher, in return, a passage like this:

A teaspoonful of Puget Sound water yielded a whole world of Hollywood monsters: copepods; rotifers; flagellates, their whips flailing on the glass. Each time I dipped the slide in the bucket, the cast changed: new wriggles waved spiky antennae, inflated their balloon-like luminescent torsos, flexed their cilia, flapped rubbery watery wings, or gazed up at me with vacant soccer-ball eyes. They put me in mind of Hieronymus Bosch. Imported to Venice from Holland by some doge, Bosch was so impressed by the scampi from the Venetian lagoon that his painted Purgatory (in a triptych in the Doge's Palace) is administered by an officious bureaucracy of giant prawns. If plankton were a little bigger, they would figure in everyone's bad dreams.

The phytoplankton—diatoms, spores of green algae—provide food for the shrimp-and jellyfish-like zooplankton. Zooplankton are food for fish. Fish are ... It takes only two or three links in the food chain to arrive at the killer whales, sea lions, bald eagles, black bears. At the bottom of the whole animal hierarchy lay the ceaseless tumbling of the water in the basin, as it answered to the drag of the moon.

Kircher, who addressed the matter of the Tower of Babel, was of the view that it would have been logistically and economically impossible, and also that, had it been brought off, it would have had the effect of pulling the very earth from its place in the centre of the universe, to the ruin of the cosmos. Raban is untroubled by just that prospect, but he shares plenty of imaginative territory with the earlier writer. Unlike Kircher, he may not have had himself lowered into the crater of a Vesuvius threatening to erupt, but his seas are convulsive enough—the bright one off Puget Sound, and the dark one whose sounds we all know. ■

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The Atheist's Comedy

Variety's the life of spice words say
Stumbling from the oracle of dreams
Once more misled by sound's confused decay.
This rocky hinterland has only streams
Of consciousness, The Boyg of Underuse
Leads firelit dancers on his gamepath haunt;
'Ah, c'est Le Radeau (vrai) de La Méduse',
Our education's boast become a taunt.

And that's the lolloping of Heaven's hounds;
Their hot breath stinks of childhood's aniseed,
They hunt used condoms in your Prep School grounds—
Ridiculousness is forced to intercede
In every tragic option; fear alone
Maintains its rugose countenance; we die
In earnest but pallidity of bone
Is all the colour of the empty sky.

But don't complain as poets do too much
That while we're doomed we don't rate very high
Among the villains and that none we touch
Is cured of anything. For how could I
(I dare say you as well) be self enough
To earn as Quisling or as Tamburlaine
A singularity: there go the rough
We knew at school, as natural as rain.

The play ends happily—that is, it ends.
It's left to tragedy to champion hope
And promissory time to make amends.
Sheet-lightening (punning on the darkened slope)
Reveals a joking face, abandoned now
By its fair-weather friend, ironic doubt,
But still for closure keeping to its vow
To see the Inward outed by the Out.

Peter Porter

Strauss without stress and no Verdi-gurdy

Opera Australia, 2000. *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Giulio Cesare*, *The Pearl Fishers*, *Capriccio* and *Don Carlo*.

YOU CAN'T WIN 'EM ALL, I suppose, but Opera Australia's first three productions in the Melbourne season drove me to think of a line of Turgenev's—that after 40 the only real pleasure lies in renunciation.

First up was *The Marriage of Figaro*, done into English. This can work extremely well, as the company demonstrated five years ago; but for that to happen everything else needs to be in order. This was not the case. The Cherubino over-acted her part, as perhaps did Figaro, although that was partly a matter of too much stage business. The Count—sung by an understudy on the night I went—was too young for the countess, a role now sadly beyond the capacities of the once-distinguished singer who took it. In the end, this was a *Figaro* without much resonance: the poignancy was lacking that can make for one of the most moving finales in all opera.

Giulio Cesare represented another problem. To put on the same production with some of the same singers four or five years later can provide a sad commentary on the nature of mortality, and indeed neither of the two leads was quite as compelling as when they first appeared in it. Still, the sets had been brightened up. But people are so convinced of the merits of Handel opera that I suspect it doesn't much matter what they do. We've had rather a lot of them in Melbourne lately: six down, only 41 to go.

A ready audience certainly explains why *The Pearl Fishers* is trotted out so often. A bland little piece, the fact that its Mexican setting was transposed to Sri Lanka—without missing a beat—seems to have emboldened director Ann-Margret Pettersson to change it further: Zurga is now a retired gent from the French colonial service, musing in an armchair on a key incident of his youth. Apart from the violence his newly acquired Frenchness does to his relationship with the rest of the Sinhalese, this is a stale idea anyway, having been seen in a recent production of *Lakmé* (Tamil for *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*). At other times, through the gauze darkly, there's the hint that Leila is, after all, a soprano on stage in a 19th-century opera house. The sets were pretty, even delicate; but this added to the sense of insubstantiality. As for the main trio, their performances

were adequate, but unremarkable. David Hobson's voice is no bigger than it was, and seems a little darker; Lisa Russell sang attractively, but is still very much at the beginning of her career.

RENEWAL OF FAITH in the art came from an unlikely source, namely Richard Strauss. Immediately after the overblown Wagnerism of the early works, he interrogated theatre and its contrivance in *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Here, in his swan song *Capriccio*, the composer deconstructs the very notion of opera in a way that might almost please a post-modernist. It is a wonderful work, with the usual Straussian lush vocal lines, but this time with astringent orchestration; characteristically the only time the orchestra overwhelms the singer is when the Director accuses it of doing just that. Drawn ineluctably back to the pre-

revolutionary French 18th century—*Ariadne* began in music written for *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*—Strauss' pretext this time is the emergence of the opera-reforming Gluck. So the very essence of the form is analysed: which is more important (or more generative), the music or the words? The relationship between the two had always troubled Strauss, prompting him to approach the best (and most literary) librettists available—a problem Berlioz and Wagner had solved by turning to themselves.

The opera presents a poet and a composer pushing their respective claims,



Art Deco sources for *Capriccio*'s design. Here, George Barbier's *Au Revoir* (1924) and above right, his *La Danseuse aux jets d'eau* (1925).

straightened out from time to time by a theatre director, and by a count (who is the most articulate expositor of the audience's view) together with the countess, a most equivocal muse. *Capriccio* is elliptical, delighting in paradox: an opera that admits the shortcomings of the form, that notes how satisfyingly a full melody can give expression to the saddest sentiments—then throws in worldly-wise comments such as the countess' remarks that hope is sweet, achievement transient; or that when there are two suitors, choosing one means losing the other. So she declines to choose; composer and poet are to be left in limbo. The opera's the thing, even the opera postulated about the frivolous events the audience has just been watching (an almost Proustian ending), but ultimately the question as to which component is the more important is unresolvable. And irrelevant.

For this production, John Cox decided to move the period from the late 18th century to the 1930s: the effect is to turn Richard Strauss' escapism into denial. In practice, apart from what now seems a preoccupation with references to 18th-century composers, little harm is done: the work is remarkably self-enclosed. John Stoddart's set in fact opens it out: the curvaceous portico of a small rotating stage contains an echo of a pavilion, while carved figures in a frieze are ambiguously styled between *art moderne* and neo-classicism. Nonetheless, the neatness of the transplantation comes through at a number of points: Strauss' final set of quirky chords becomes the cue for the lights to be switched off, tact determining that the last chord should have no visual counterpoint to detract from its mischievous ambiguity.

The commanding performance was Yvonne Kenny as the Countess. It is a magnificent part: dominant, yet elusive; intellectual, but preferring the shallows of epigrams; gracious, but with a shrewd sense of self-preservation. The flexibility of Kenny's voice was fully equal to these twists and turns, and to the often demanding music; elsewhere her magnificent phrasing seemed to glide, bringing out the amplitude of the vocal line. As the two suitors, Nicolai Schukoff brought a pleasing light tenor to the role of Flamand the composer; as his opposite number, the poet Olivier, Angus Wood



seemed a little constricted, as if over-directed. Quite otherwise was Conal Coad as La Roche, the theatre director: his unkempt presence was forceful and vigorous. Jeffrey Black as the Count sang and acted well, but once seen in profile in brown velvet he looked like nothing so much as Jeff Kennett passing himself off as Little Lord Fauntleroy.

Mention should also be made of Douglas Mitchell, the Melbourne man who put up the money to stage *Capriccio*. His generous enthusiasm carried over to the whole production: it was as if everybody was doing their best to rise to the occasion.

IN *CAPRICCIO* there is a commendatory reference to the power of Gluck's *accompagnato*: instead of spindly recitative accompanied by a harpsichord, a fuller declamation is intensified by the tone-colouring of effective orchestration. The music for *Don Carlo* has much the same characteristics, so much so that it does not readily break up into arias and ensembles. There is little Verdi-gurdy here. The opera's sombre subject matter—the suppression of heresy, Dutch liberty and filial strivings alike under Phillip II's patriarchy—has retarded its acceptance, despite its ease on the ear and the unusually clear and forceful plot taken from Schiller. For all the leavening of a little doomed love, the work is a monochrome: Joseph II would have said that there are too many blokes. Nevertheless there are some who place *Don*

Carlo above all other Verdi operas.

The new OA production cuts the Fontainebleau scene—as is often done—but this still leaves seven tableaux and runs for three-and-a-half hours. In practice, a more serious objection arises from the heavy-handed sets and costuming: some scenes have colour schemes that would have been rejected for po-mo flats in Fitzroy. Velazquez has been appropriated as the guiding visual principle, which is to move half a beat ahead; when the women stand about in their black hoop dresses they look like moths, and on moving about seem to be rehearsing to be galleons. But the *auto-da-fé* scene worked well: the brutalist approach of the sets, quite simple apart from a spectacular light and a pair of golden doors, served the purpose brilliantly as the procession curled its way around the stage. The eeriness of the well-executed music made this a steely scene of genuine horror.

Maestro Cillario's conducting was always pointed and instructive, so that together with the confident direction of Elijah Moshinsky the production was in safe hands. This was all the more remarkable as both the Carlo and the King were far from ideal. Anson Austin's way of coping with a waning voice was to go for broke with Carlo, and present him as faintly demented from the very beginning, which worked. Similarly Donald Shanks, whose voice now has a wobble as wide as Port Phillip Bay, nevertheless bullied us into accepting it by the sheer authority of his presence as Phillip II. The other principals were outstanding: Bernadette Cullen was fiery and yet controlled throughout, her 'O don fatale' one of the highlights of the evening. Michael Lewis was crisp, focused and convincing as the loyal Posa. Leona Mitchell, as the Queen, sang with a wonderful ease that enabled her voice to move with seeming effortlessness from an alto register to a soft pianissimo: even when it was most velvety, she soared above the others in ensemble.

To sum up: the OA needs to bring to Melbourne more of the first-class singers that are flown in to Sydney. And perhaps some of the present cast need to mull over that line of Turgenev's. ■

Jim Davidson is *Eureka Street's* opera critic.

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FLASH IN THE PAN



Misery loves company

Angela's Ashes, dir. Alan Parker. The discussion around me at the preview suggested that I was the only person there, or indeed in the whole world, who hadn't read Frank McCourt's book. A great read it must be; Pulitzer Prizes for non-fiction don't grow on trees.

Then the publicist urged us to check our supply of tissues and I remembered that someone had told me that compared with the book, an audit from the ATO was an enjoyable experience. And so it proved to be. For two-and-a-half hours the movie depicted an episodic litany of woe, in which in the '30s and '40s the Poor of Limerick in general and the McCourt family in particular (above and right), are battered from pillar to post.

When I came out I wondered whether I had missed something. A renowned movie crier myself, I had been unmoved by the parade of juvenile and family deaths and general human degradation.

The director, Alan Parker, has a fine pedigree of achievement. But the trouble, of course, is that in adapting what must be a beautifully written book for the screen, the screenwriter loses the safety net of elegant prose and the director has to rely upon an entirely new form of communication—image.

The voice-over tells us at the outset that 'worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood'. The screenwriter and director set out to demonstrate the truth of this statement, but a surfeit of misery is always

unwatchable and predictably the highlights of the movie are the humorous episodes. Whether it is group masturbation, fake Irish dancing, first communions, adventures in the confessional or some engaging dialogue written for the children, those moments stay in the memory. Unfortunately, they prove to be rare raisins in an otherwise tedious plum pudding.

Limerick of the '30s and '40s is the ultimate slum. Frankie McCourt's dad, Malachy (Robert Carlisle), is a drunken, irresponsible no-hoper who copulates recklessly with the saintly Angela to bring children into the family to replace those who are dead or dying. Carlisle makes the character interesting, if annoying, but Emily Watson is a less-believable Angela. Dirty fingernails, implanted grime, ragged clothing and streaked hair somehow fail to quell her luminous beauty and freshness.

Two things become clear during the movie. First, in late '30s and '40s Limerick it must have rained for ten years without stop, and second, the Catholic Church didn't do much to help anyone. Indeed, there isn't a caring or compassionate priest in sight, except for Franciscan Father Gregory who personifies credible dignity.

At the risk of having to wash my mouth out, I thought there were several occasions when McCourt's tale was utterly unbelievable. One episode which comes to mind is when the feckless father repairs the boys' shoes from a rubber tyre, but doesn't bother to trim the edges of the shoes and they clump off to school and derision, as though they were wearing snow shoes.

After you have seen *Angela's Ashes*, life will seem far less grey and home so much more comfortable. —Gordon Lewis

Good looking

Looking for Alibrandi, dir. Kate Woods. The opening sequence of *Looking for Alibrandi* may make you a little wary. It shows an extended family bottling tomatoes in a small backyard. The young narrator

calls it 'national wog day'. She'd rather be some place else. You begin to feel a little bit the same, fearing that the film has already begun to trade in stereotypes.

In fact, *Looking for Alibrandi* turns out to be a wonderful film about making choices. Josephine Alibrandi (Pia Miranda) is in her final year at an expensive Catholic school in Sydney. She is there on a scholarship because she happens to be bright. Her family circumstances are far removed from those of many of the girls in her class, who are dropped off in the morning by fathers who drive BMWs and Mercs. Josephine doesn't have a flash car. She doesn't even have a father. Her mother, Christina (Greta Scacchi), fell pregnant to the boy next door when she was a teenager herself. The boy next door went to Adelaide. Josie's dad did not know for years that she even existed.

Melina Marchetta has done well in translating her own novel to the screen. It says a lot, especially about youth culture, that a book published as recently as 1992 needed so much updating, at least in incidentals. But Marchetta has preserved the belief of her novel that Josephine Alibrandi has a wide range of choices at her disposal. The narrative shows her learning how to use them. In order to do this, the film shows sympathy for people struggling with all sorts of backgrounds, whether that is the burden of expectation on a boy whose father is a politician or the burden of the past on Josie's grandmother. *Looking for Alibrandi* is a wise and generous film. It's one we've needed.

—Michael McGirr SJ

Mansfield lark

Mansfield Park, dir. Patricia Rozema. The warm reception of this poorly conceived and inelegantly executed film presents the reviewer with a problem: her comments may be seen to be a reflection upon the judgment of many critics who, for whatever reason, have commended inferiority. Mindful of the qualifications of others, and fully aware of the awful merits of their previous writings, this reviewer can only ask whether some other reviewers have been sufficiently attentive to the claims of their optometrist for more frequent and regular appointments.

When one loved sister has to be restrained by urgent gesture and whispered remonstrance from throwing her iced confection at the screen; and the other, no less loved sister, has been betrayed by strong

feeling into open argument in a public place with an inanimate representation, it is probable that something more than the mere desecration of a novel is taking place.

'Yes, dear sister, it was indeed most dully photographed. There was a lack of brightness in the film which made me wonder if the makers of this work had paid sufficient attention to the vagaries of the English climate; they were certainly not competent to remedy these deficiencies in interior scenes. And as for the art direction, I ask myself, too, why it was necessary to introduce the child Fanny Price into a Mansfield Park drawing room that was more akin to a dilapidated garage, fit for the inhabitants of a gothic novel but certainly not demonstrative of the many comforts of that great house. And when a character in a film exclaims, in an appeal to a false contemporaneity, "Remember this is 1806!" one shudders.'

'Do recall, dearest Geraldine, the almost complete absence of *servants* in the film! Were the young ladies to fend for themselves?'

'I feel, dear Lucille, that such considerations were beyond such a director. Were the female characters to be allowed to dress appropriately for the situations in which they found themselves, I would have had more confidence in the work.'

'Ah yes, the almost total absence of *hats*. How irritating to see bare-headed young women *outside*. Such a want of propriety and good sense.'

'And the story, too, my dear Geraldine! So strangely unconvincing, so lacking in sympathetic characters, so gratuitously improper!'

'Indeed, my love, the slanders upon the characters of Sir Thomas Bertram and Mr Price are outrageous. To impute unnatural feelings of the two men towards Fanny was an inexcusable clumsiness as well as an insult to the taste of the filmgoer who, it must be deduced, is assumed by the adapters to relish such vice in a story. And to suggest that Sir Thomas was a slave-master who behaved immorally with the unfortunates is so far to misinterpret the original author as to confound understanding. I quite wonder at Mr Harold Pinter's allowing himself to be portrayed as such a travesty of the character.'

'How well I agree with you, my dear Lucille. To think that I had scruples over the recent BBC adaptation of the novel. How trivial and unkind do my then criticisms now seem to me! In fact, the main fault with this film is that the original

plot has been so meddled with as to be unintelligible to those who have not read the book.'

'We are more to be pitied than they, my dear sisters. *They* have only wasted a little time and money; *we* have witnessed mindless vandalism.'

—Juliette Hughes

Sounds off

The Straight Story, dir. David Lynch. David Lynch's last film, *Lost Highway* (1997), perhaps more than any of his other films, addresses the darkness and horror that lies within and beneath the everyday, to the point of impossibility or incoherence. To this extent, it is almost a summary of his work to that point (if a slightly cryptic one). Oddly enough, however, his latest film, *The Straight Story*, is as simple and direct



and pure-hearted a tale as one could hope to imagine (it's even G-rated).

Richard Farnsworth plays the 73-year-old Alvin Straight, who sets out to cross from Ohio to Wisconsin to patch up a 10-year-old feud with his ailing elder brother, Lyle (Harry Dean Stanton). Of course, he does so on a motorised lawnmower. On his way he dispenses wise-old-man knowledge to all around him, in his wise-old-man way, pronouncing homely homilies about how family is like a bunch of sticks tied together, and offering a very cogently argued pricing structure for lawnmower repairs. Finally, he reaches his brother, communes with him wordlessly, and shares some manly weeping with him at being re-tied to this particular bit of old stick.

Frankly, it's all a bit saccharine. What redeems it (slightly), and what connects it finally to his other work (especially the R-rated *Lost Highway*), is Lynch's attention to the things *outside* the story, the things that don't collapse down easily into a plot description. The texture of a wheat field, the sound of a grain elevator in the distance, the empty spaces within a scene, the particular colour of the darkness in a shadow—these things take on an overwhelming importance in a film whose one 'action' scene consists of a man rolling down a hill on his lawnmower and not getting hurt. Just as the vast background hiss that pervades the soundscape of *Lost Highway* seems to encapsulate a meaning always just out of reach of words, so these elements seem to offer us the unspoken, unspeakable voice at the heart of *The Straight Story*. You can see how important sound is to the film in the fact that David Lynch credits himself as 'sound designer' as well as director. Is it enough to outweigh putting up with Alvin's crotchety wisdom for 111 minutes for a finale of cheek-wetting between brothers? Not for me, in the end. Give me *Lost Highway's* R-rated incomprehensible, violent ravings before a trip on the ride-on mower of redemption any day.

—Allan James Thomas

Cut and paste

Fantasia 2000, various directors. Disney made a huge mistake when it decided to keep *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* from the 1940 original *Fantasia* in its new millennium *Fantasia*. The 60-year-old animation was lively, clever; there was a complexity of facial expressions and even some depth and power in the portrayal of the magician. (Whatever rare technical felicities the animators achieve in the new *Fantasia* are negated by the sheer banality of the minds behind the storyboards.)

But it was the conducting of the Dukas piece that really showed up the shallowness of the new effort. Stokowski was so stratospherically above the leaden carefulness of James Levine and the Chicago Symphony that someone should have noticed and said something. Stokowski's conducting made the orchestra a live, playful entity, so far above worrying what notes to play that it was released into expressive freedom. In his *Sorcerer*, light piece of fluff that it is, you hear *life*, not academia, *music*, rather than musicology.

—Juliette Hughes



Brought up on the box

TELEVISION WAS STILL A NOVELTY when I was a child in England. The large (14 inch) Pye, in an oak cabinet with two doors to close its blind grey eye, was a window into a monochrome world of fantasy and fact. Its acquisition was a milestone in our family—it was 1953, the war was over, rationing was over and a new monarch was to be crowned. And a lasting change in family politics was achieved because my mother invited scores of friends and relatives to the house to watch the telecast of the coronation. It was irresistible: aunts and grandmothers from both factions came and Actually Spoke to each other after icily ignoring each others' existence for decades. Outrageous bequests, imprudent marriages—all were put aside as they watched together in our darkened sitting room.

In those days, television viewers were citizens, taxpayers, as often in need of education and information as entertainment. The big, the overriding difference between Keynesian, idealistic then and Friedmannian, materialistic now was No Commercial Channels. The viewer was not yet a commodity. I watched, some of it, and still have memories of a flickering darkness, a sense of occasion. The children's programs were *Andy Pandy*, *Bill and Ben*, *Rag, Tag and Bobtail*. You graduated after that to *Hopalong Cassidy*, *The Cisco Kid*, numerous adaptations of novels and plays, quizzes and game shows. The question of what was suitable viewing for children was always hotly debated, but against a backdrop of a general culture that hadn't been as blunted as it is now. The task of guarding a small child's psyche from horror, grue and sleaze is a major undertaking these days.

A colleague's 11-year-old daughter was telling me recently about the programs she enjoys. Jemima is a bright, well-brought-up kid, unlike my two sons who, after watching various unsuitabilities at friends' places, would creep into our bed till the bogeymen went away. My lads' considerable mental powers were used for the dark side from earliest toddlerhood. Their vocabularies were far beyond their years but tended to find their outlet in the spoken rather than the written word, and manifested mainly as argument:

'Why can't I go to the sci-fi marathon at the Valhalla?'

'Because you're 12, and most of those things are M-rated.'

'But you took me to see *Excalibur* when I was only five.'

'Did I ever regret it! I had to spend half the time covering your eyes, and your father and I didn't get a night on our own till, well, last week, wasn't it?'

'You're exaggerating again, Mum. And anyway, you encouraged me to watch *Hamlet* last year and that's really violent, or didn't you notice? And *La Traviata's* about a—'

'Shakespeare and opera are different.'

'So it's OK to have sex and violence as long as it's Shakespeare and opera?'

'It's different.'

'Nathan's only three weeks older than me and *he's* going.'

'Well, you're not.'

'You don't care if I get bullied at school because my mother thinks I'm too sooky to see the sci-fi marathon, do you?'

One day I hope he'll be a union negotiator.

Jemima is unusual among her friends of the same age in that she isn't allowed to watch programs such as *Friends*, or *Dharma and Greg*. I agree. They shouldn't be on at 7.30 or 8pm because their humour is adult, and sometimes quite sleazy. Jemima's family has Foxtel and so she can watch the excellent Nickelodeon channel. Her favourite programs include *Shirley Holmes* (Canadian-made, about a girl detective who is related to Sherlock) and *Sister, Sister* (a comedy drama set in Detroit about reunited twins). Foxtel can be a mixed blessing: it shows a blithe disregard for timing. A parental lockout is available, but it's all wrong that it should be needed to lock out Discovery Channel or the Lifestyle Channel, both of which show violent or sexually explicit material at times when children are watching.

IT'S NO ACCIDENT THAT SO many good young people's programs are from Canada, where there still seems to be money and a commitment to public broadcasting. Excellent local programs such as *Round The Twist* never seem to be on often enough. The ABC will soon be screening *Tweenies*, the successor to *Teletubbies*. *Tweenies* is aimed at 3 to 5-year-olds and will doubtless be a similar hit: colour, movement, but what seemed to my 50-year-old ears as very boring music. Earlier this year the ABC showed *Daring @ Grace*, a very good Canadian-made series for younger teens. It was a sort of *X-File*-ish plot and very well put together. I hope they repeat it. It seemed a pity to put it on every day at 5pm, because it was really not a soap; it deserved the compliment of a weekly slot.

But for adults (definitely for adults and sophisticated teenagers), *Smack the Pony*, screening on Wednesdays at the very suitable time of 10pm to avert any misunderstandings, is the new must-watch. It's British comedy at its best, and reminds me of a darker, more savage version of *Big Girl's Blouse*. Watch it and laugh. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance reviewer.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 84, June 2000

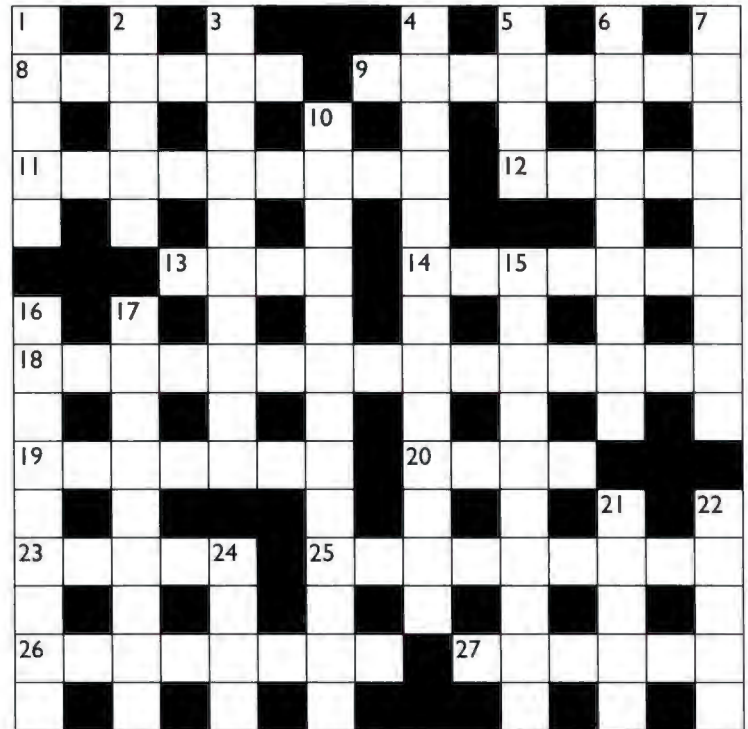
Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

8. Beginners' text is of first importance—right? (6)
9. Solid body organised in exposed area for an outside grill. (8)
11. Rose containers, perhaps, for easy decanting. We may use sac or skin! (4,5)
12. Drank heavily on returning to the warehouse. (5)
13. What a pleasant pastime—to include wine! (4)
14. Some hard scrubbing makes pan gleam and glitter like sequins. (7)
18. Maintaining the section sounds like an ongoing task—after bringing hostilities to an end. (7,3,5)
19. Eternal bliss in heaven? Which one? (7)
20. In brief, a soft product of the dairy industry. (4)
23. Works the account out, eager for the figures to tally. (5)
25. Diplomatic planner? (9)
26. Though 'bough' is an example of this poetic strategy, so is 'tough cough'. (3,5)
27. Lined up and prompted the actors on stage, we hear. (6)

DOWN

1. Generate second mortgage. (5)
2. She was regarded as great in Ephesus. (5)
3. With this kind of instrument, of course, spin out the time? No, beat it! (10)
4. Approves the money and avoids responsibility. (6,3,4)
5. You have to be in one to be so described, when not yet up, perhaps. (4)
6. Work out cost. A page advertisement should help locate fall-guy. (9)
7. Descriptive of normal flier—might be tarred too, if punished. (9)
10. When ruling theme contained it, somehow, there was need for seeking information about the period. (5,3,4)
15. I can navigate on sea and land because I'm pious! Bah!! (10)
16. Cloud paintings, for instance, spoiled by speck, says critic. (9)
17. Twisted environment report by green journalist? (9)
21. His blanket returns nothing to you and me. (5)
22. Denis makes derogatory remarks in an insinuating way. (5)
24. In high-tech office, the sound should not reverberate. (4)



Solution to Crossword no. 83, May 2000



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