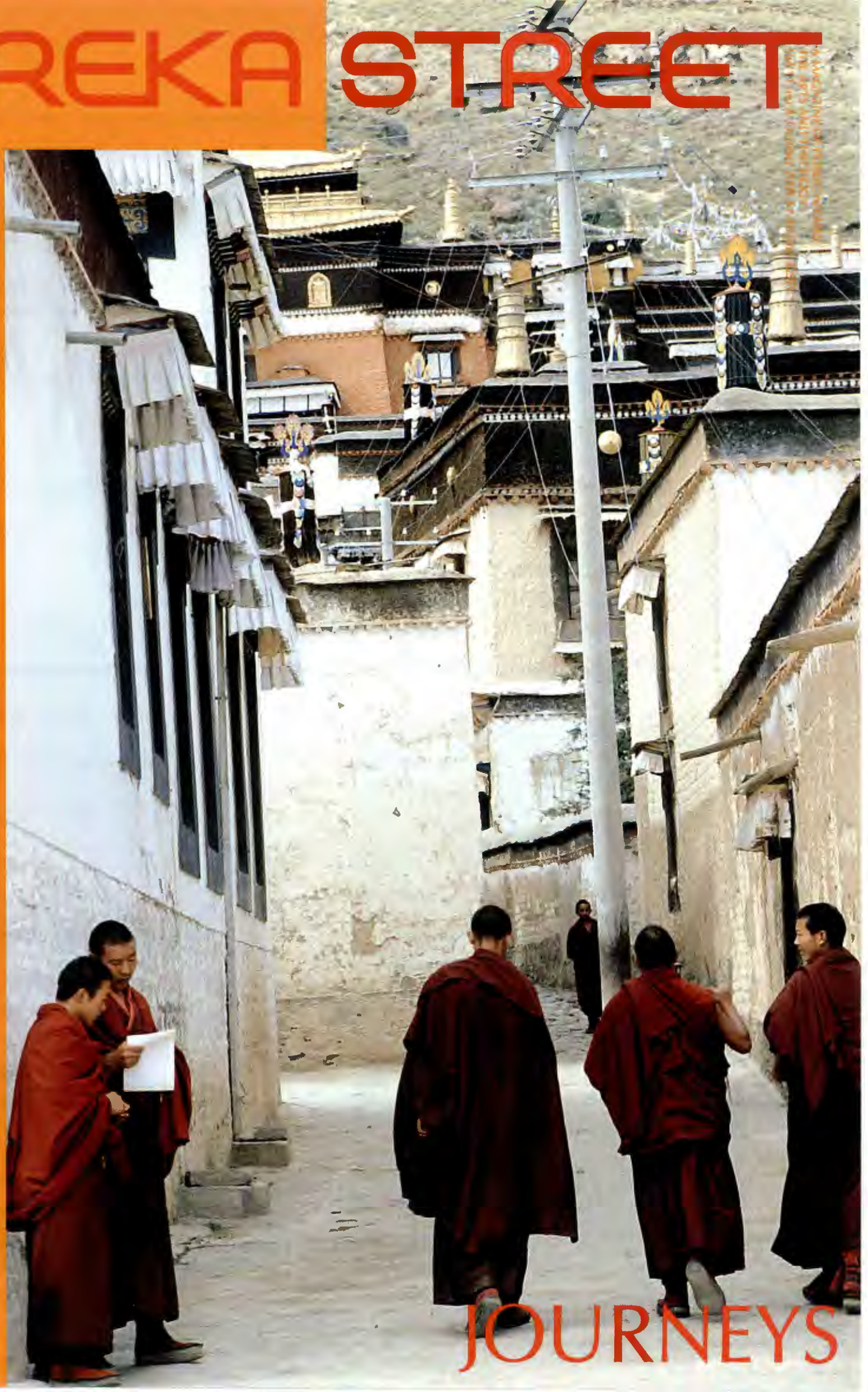
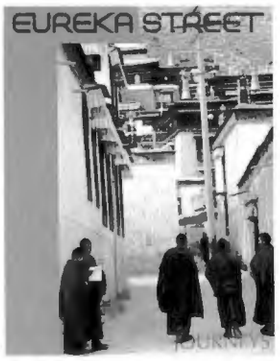
EUREKA STREET



JOURNEYS



EUREKA STREET

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Cover design by Siobhan Jackson. Cover photograph by Peter Davis: monks at the monastery in Shigatse, Tibet.
Photographs, p3: Libya, by Anthony Ham; Tibetan pot, by Peter Davis.
Graphics pp 6, 10, 26, 28, 31–32, 38 by Siobhan Jackson.
Cartoon p11 by Shelle Miller.
Cartoon p15 by Dean Moore.

The New York skyline, 11 September 2001, as television captured it.

Above: Twelfth-century granary store, Libya. Below: Welcome pot on the boil at Punu Meggna village, Tibet. See *Eureka Street*'s series on 'Journeys', pages 20–33.

Face value

THE IMAGES OF THE World Trade towers collapsing seemed to leave nothing to the imagination. But at a deeper and fateful level they left everything to the imagination. On the quality of imagination we bring to these catastrophic events and to the smaller daily afflictions suffered by Jews and Palestinians, much will depend. Not least the way in which we remember the dead. And most of us will acknowledge that our imagination is not pure, not undivided.

One part of our imagination is readily seduced by the big picture: the scale of devastation, the mechanics of terrorism, the sheeting home of blame, the calculus of rights and wrongs of aggrieved parties, the demands of national honour, and the technicalities of suitable reprisal. This way of imagining violent events is nourished by the standard action movies. It is a way of coping, but it ultimately demands and condones death in response to death.

Another way of imagining atrocity is to focus on the faces of those who are affected by it. These are for the most part ordinary people: passengers in planes, cleaners leaving office buildings, office-

Noted

Anthony Ham, *Eureka Street*'s correspondent and photographer, won the 2001 Australasian Catholic Press Association 'Best Feature' award for his series on Africa. The judge's comment: 'At its best, his story on Niger put me in mind of the travel writing of V.S. Naipaul. Ham writes about the forces of history that have made the country, but always stays close to the people who live through that process.'

Eureka Street won the 2001 award for best magazine layout and design.

In the Australasian Religious Press Association Awards, Maggie Helass was highly commended for her report, 'Divided family', in *Eureka Street*, May 2000.

workers arriving. And for each of these bloody faces of the dead and injured, there are many faces of grief: those of spouses, children, friends. A network of pain and incomprehension.

These faces are relatively easy to imagine. We may have to work harder to keep in focus the features of those who will suffer in reprisal—women, men and children who die and are injured in acts of retaliation. And in our own societies, the faces of members of ethnic and religious groups who are abused and shunned because they are held responsible.

When the dominant imagination of a society is technological and impersonal, it is trapped in violence. It looks for security in overwhelming force and inviolable defences against enemies too small to be intimidated by force or kept away by large shields. It comes to respect the dignity neither of its own dead nor of the victims of its retaliation.

The Christian imagination is personal. It is compassionate, beginning with faces, domestic and foreign, and their claims on us. On such an imagination are built policies that can alone promise security. ■

COMMENT:2

Moment of choice

NADEZHDA MANDELSTAM, wife of the poet Osip, left one of the great memoirs of the Stalinist period. Of her journey into exile, she wrote memorably:

> There is a moment of truth when you are overcome by sheer astonishment. So that's where I'm living, and the sort of people I'm living with! So this is what they're capable of! So this is the world I live in!' We are so stupefied that we even lose the power to scream. It was this sort of stupefaction, with the consequent loss of all criteria, standards and values, that came over people when they first landed in prison and suddenly realised the nature of the world they lived in and what the 'new era' really meant.

Many people will find familiar the shock, disillusionment and loss of moral bearings in her words. These will have been their own responses on seeing the Australian treatment of those on board the *Tampa*. The strength of this minority reaction has led some commentators to ask if this might be a defining moment in Australian national life.

Mandelstam's writing suggests that 'defining moment' is perhaps too portentous, too breathless a phrase to do justice to the dealings with the asylum seekers taken on to the *Tampa*. For what she experienced was neither new nor a turning point. The beginnings of the terror she experienced at first hand lay in the ideology of total state control adopted even under Lenin. That was the defining moment.

Nor do the barriers erected by legislation, diplomacy and propaganda against persecuted people represent a defining moment. If such a moment in Australian treatment of refugees can be named, it occurred when Cambodian boat people arrived in the late 1980s. The government of the day adopted an ideology that identified Australian sovereignty with absolute control over those who entered Australia. As a logical consequence, it demanded that governments deterred any who would seek asylum on-shore. The symbol of this ideology is detention, in which one group of suffering people is mistreated in order to deter others.

For those who accept this ideology, Australia must do what it takes to deter asylum seekers. Standards of decency and humanity are flexible. The *Tampa* affair certainly shows how far they have been relaxed. Because asylum seekers will continue to arrive, the ideology of control will demand further deterrence. And if it comes to pushing away boats, we may be sure that voices will be heard assuring us that this policy, too, is humane and decent.

Mandelstam's legacy, however, suggests that, while the Australian government response to the *Tampa* is not a defining moment, it offers a moment of choice. No longer protected by illusions about the values of the society in which she lived, Mandelstam had the choice to remember and write, or to be silent. If any ennobling memories of Stalin's Russia remain, they recall the witness of those who refused to close their eyes, and stubbornly held to their hope in a human dignity that was not for crushing or trading. Eloquent spokesmen for an expedient barbarism are now forgotten.

The condition of Australian public life is mercifully less corrupted. But the *Tampa* incident is significant because it has opened many eyes and offered a moment of choice. Australia will be blessed as a nation if we find strength to reflect coolly on what is being done in our name and, like Mandelstam, to answer the question, 'Who will speak if we don't?' ■

Andrew Hamilton SJ is *Eureka Street*'s publisher.

SNAPshot

In a word

As a word, 'sovereignty' has puffed itself up like an adder. Originally *souverain*, from the Latin root meaning above, it added *reign* to its patrimony for the sake of grandiloquence. And like many snakes, it prefers to mount high horses to make its hissing heard.

The scope of 'sovereignty' was honed in theological debate. The good argued that God's reason was sovereign, so that in dealing with the world, God was limited by what was reasonable and by the laws which express what is reasonable.

The mighty argued for an inflated view of God's power, identifying sovereignty with God's will. Divine law simply expresses what God wants, and whatever God wants is by definition just.

When conversation turned to the sovereignty of kings, the mighty normally won. Sovereignty became seen as the right to do whatever you will, whenever you will, and to whomsoever you will. And all that naturally passed into laws against which there could be no recourse.

For kings, sovereignty sat well with a surfeit of sartorial dignity. In democracies, national sovereignty is usually invoked when, like snakes, governments wish to bite unprotected heels without interference. At such times the dignity of those who would be sovereign and the human dignity of those whom they bite are alike casualties.

Head in gear

One kind of sartorial dignity found its own style during the recent equinoctial gales—and no surfeit about it.

The lollipop man at an outer-suburban Australian school crossing in early spring wore a sparkling white turban that sat well with his silver, untrimmed beard. On his white dustcoat he wore uniform bands of luminous orange tape. On fine days he circled his turban with glowing strips. They looked like an ingrained golden diadem—Sikh splendour on a clay track under a gum tree. When the rains came, he cocooned the turban inside a great translucent plastic bag and held the whole confection down with the same luminous loops. Children walking to school must have thought they were stepping into a fable. But it was just one man, adapting and enchanting, with a plastic bag, a length of cloth and a roll of industrial tape.

Real estate's flawed plans

Building a house? Planning to get in there in time for the government's $14,000 grant? You'll doubtless have been round the display centres. But the plethora of designs offered by large project builders such as A.V. Jennings, Henley and Simonds belies the lack of real variation in their floorplans.

All sport a garage lumped wen-like at the side, destroying any character or symmetry. And though the house sizes and outer styles range from meek-and-cramped to gargantuesque-wedding-cake, the inner proportions are all very similar. They all have huge central kitchens overlooking most of the living areas. This is understandable—these floorplans are aimed squarely at young marrieds who'd want to keep an eye on the littlies while rustling up the gourmet banquets that the dimensions of the kitchens suggest.

But there isn't much on offer for people who want the kitchen out of the way to make room for a library or office unaffected by cooking smells. And the bedroom accommodation assumes that we all want a master suite big as an assembly hall, with all other bedrooms the size of broom cupboards. Display houses aren't so much real living-places as shops selling illusions of space and light, mostly wasted.

Maybe the answer is to pay the extra couple of grand per square it costs to use a good small builder, who'll design something closer to home.

Plugging the gaps

The *Tampa* incident drew some initial attention to the health problems of asylum seekers who risk the high seas.

Closer to home, access to medical services for asylum seekers and refugees in the community is a problem of another kind. What happens to those invisible people who have no access to Medicare, jobs or Newstart?

Public hospitals will generally provide emergency care and attempt to get payment from the patient or the government. But for basic medical care people must rely on the generosity of medical staff.

The Red Cross Asylum Seekers Assistance Centre in Melbourne has a list of health-care workers willing to provide their services for free. If X-rays or pathology are required, a call is made to labs and radiology asking them to waive their fee. Fortunately, enough people in the medical community believe in universal health care and will provide a free service. Sadly, our national rhetoric and actions after the Christmas Island stand-off have failed to reflect this compassion.

Observer at large

If you don't catch one of the current exhibitions of work by Australian painter Rick Amor you might look up this extraordinary artist of urban isolation in Gary Catalano's Miegunyah Press monograph, *The Solitary Watcher*. Amor, also one of Australia's war artists in East Timor, is pictured above in his haunting self-portrait, painted in his early teens.

Capital Letter

Jack Waterford

End games

HAVE FATE, OPPORTUNISM and John Laws taken it all away from Kim Beazley? Riding so comfortably only a few months ago, he now risks being done over by an artificially confected refugee crisis, mounting hysteria about invasion, fear of Muslims in Australia and, finally, an act of unparalleled terrorism in the US which has us panting for war—as soon as we can find a country to attack and some targets to bomb. If Beazley's chance has slipped away, he can blame only himself and the Labor Party's habit of looking for an opinion poll to follow.

John Howard has always insisted that he could come from behind to win this election. Only a month ago, well before the refugee 'crisis', he was reminding supporters that Menzies had won comfortably in 1963 after a debacle election in 1961.

What won it then? The received wisdom is that it was a combination of the fear and uncertainty that gripped the electorate in the aftermath of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and a security crisis affecting Indonesia which saw Australia ordering its first F1-11 so that it could, if necessary, bomb Jakarta. Labor's ineptitude over whether Australia should allow the US to open a communications station in Western Australia, and the '36 faceless men' episode, did Menzies no harm either. Superbly opportunistic, he cantered to victory, with some extra insurance from a hand grenade he threw into Labor Party ranks by giving the first federal state aid. Three years later, Menzies' successor, Harold Holt, even further demolished the ALP over Vietnam. Labor, on the wrong side of the opinion polls, continually gave mixed messages. The electorate rewarded it with the worst hiding it had ever experienced.

The lessons from these elections help explain Labor's pathetic responses to the crises of August and September this year. Even before the radio shock-jocks sounded the alarums, Philip Ruddock and John Howard were actively mining working-class discontent about the presence of refugees in the community. Out in the electorate, the notion that the freshest 'invaders' are Muslims who will not readily assimilate into our culture has become settled, with the fact that the boat people are refugees from fundamentalist authoritarian regimes almost ignored. The Sydney *Daily Telegraph* has been throwing petrol on to the fire with claims that not a white Christian woman in Sydney is safe from Islamic rapists. NSW Premier, Bob Carr, who always panics and rushes to the right when law and order issues are involved, has been lending legitimacy to the fear.

It soon became clear that the government's refugee decisions—made at cabinet level without, or against the advice of, the Departments of Defence and Foreign Affairs and Trade—had not been thought through. The government fumbled through confrontation with the *Tampa* captain, invaded the ship with Special Air Service soldiers, asked East Timor, then Papua New Guinea and finally Nauru to accept the refugees, and was then held up in the courts. Meanwhile, Labor's own capacity to show leadership had been undermined by the fact that Beazley did not want to appear offside on the sovereignty issue. Consequently, he failed to neutralise the John Laws audience while alienating core constituencies that Labor needs.

The assault by terrorists on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon could hardly have been better timed for John Howard, though he was circumspect in seeking immediately to use it to any partisan purpose. Beazley's background in defence—which the Coalition is reluctant to attack—might have stood him in good stead. In deploring the attack and endorsing calls for justice, he might have made some statesmanlike comments about the seedbeds of discontent which inspire such terrorism. Instead, Beazley succumbed to me-tooism. This has limited his freedom of action yet left him prey to charges of being less determined and less leader-like. Meanwhile, Howard behaves however he chooses.

BUT THE FATES ARE EVEN-HANDED, even to the undeserving. The collapse of Ansett, and the shockwaves it will send through the economy (adding to the short-term ripples that the US terrorism will cause) create fresh uncertainty in the economy that Labor will exploit even as Howard plays the statesman. Down the track, the disaster may be seen as owing rather more to the government's airline competition policy than to its foreknowledge of the state of the Ansett and Air New Zealand accounts. But, in either story, the government is vulnerable, especially in rural and provincial areas. If a world 'crisis' swings people back to the devils they know, an economic and social crisis like the Ansett crash ought to work in the opposite direction—more because voters would think the government should be punished than because the interventionist nostrums of Beazley make better policy. But better policy is not served by Labor's seeking to 'neutralise' important international issues by aping the government so that the electorate votes on the (domestic) point of difference. Rather it is served by having principled positions—necessarily involving difference—which allow voters to put matters into perspective.

My guess is that most voters at the next election, confronted by the two least impressive political leaders ever simultaneously in office in Australia, will vote on domestic issues, because neither party has an international policy any person of intelligence could support. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

Eureka Street welcomes letters from our readers. Short letters are more likely to be published, and all letters may be edited. Letters must be signed, and should include a contact phone number and the writer's name and address. Send to: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au *or* PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121

The garden path

You report the view of a federal minister that, if the government gave the universities any more money, they would just spend it on their gardeners ('Education blues', September 2001).

There is surely an unconscious irony in this remark. No place in Australia receives more lavish attention from gardeners than Parliament House, Canberra. Its constantly groomed lawns, its lush environs, its coiffured shrubbery and its manicured courtyards reflect not only the skilful dedication of the workers but the unlimited indulgence of politicians when their own comfort and interests are in issue. From office computers to VIP aircraft, no expense is too great, and the Parliament House gardens are but an incidental example.

Stephen Brown
Forrest, ACT

Legal perspective

Liz Curran's article 'Refuge in the law?' (September 2001), and more recent events with the *Tampa*, are most disturbing.

While one can well understand the desire of any country not to be 'invaded' by uninvited people, the magnitude of the problem in this country is modest compared with that in Europe and the USA, for example. Australia is at least in part protected by being an island and the journeys that the 'illegals' undertake are costly and hazardous. One might thus assume that those who make the journey are strongly motivated, whatever that motivation may be. Living in a developed, relatively prosperous society, and not having been in their position, it is hard to envisage their situation. Perhaps that is all the more reason to deal with those less fortunate than ourselves as we would like to be dealt with ourselves. Compassion, decency and understanding (even if firm) would be appropriate. The schoolyard bullyboy tactics used to deal with refugees are shameful.

Although this approach may be fodder to talkback radio presenters and listeners, it is a sad reflection on our society. It is likely to be much more divisive in the long term than short-sighted politicians, with their eyes on the polls and forthcoming election, envisage. So much for the great Australian euphemism of the 'fair go'—redefined as 'go elsewhere'.

No-one would pretend that Mr Ruddock has an easy task in either of his portfolios—Immigration and Reconciliation. However, with the punitive way in which refugees are being treated in this country, it seems incongruous that the Minister should have these two portfolios—they surely cannot be reconciled.

Neil Buchanan
Hornsby, NSW

Three heads

Andrew Hamilton's editorial ('Taking the high road', June 2001) highlights tensions in the Governor-General's role and within Australian society. He asked about what a bishop, as Governor-General, might be expected to say to the cabinet and departmental heads about any maltreatment of asylum seekers.

He might say, 'I intend to visit asylum and refugee centres over the next 12 months to form my own views.' This would be an interesting exercise in the 'symbolics' of national life. He might choose to visit a number of nursing homes for the aged to dispense the symbolic and real goodwill of the nation. He might choose his 'public symbolic acts' with great care and decide to shape government delivery of services and policies by conversation in private, rather than by 'one sentence media soundbites'.

Theory begins when we ask, 'How many Anglicans does it take to run the country?' The answer 'three—one to be Prime Minister, one to be Leader of the Opposition

and one to be Governor-General' is possible. It is an accident that one of these happens to be a bishop.

I do not think that a particular tension arises because a bishop as Governor-General might have a unique responsibility to members of the body of Christ to say something to a government of the day. All office-holders in our nation have an opportunity and obligation to speak up on matters of value and to suggest practical response to difficult situations. The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition have as much obligation to any Australian people 'defined as the body of Christ' as does a bishop. How can this be?

The pre-Christian thinker Varro, then St Augustine and finally John Locke can be consulted. From Augustine, I would draw the distinction between the Human City (in which we all participate as citizens) and the Divine City (which to some extent overlaps the human city and invites participation as Christian, Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Atheist and so on). I would stress Varro's dictum, 'The human city comes before its Gods', to focus on our need as humans to participate in a common earthly city or 'common-wealth'. In this human city, 'the three Anglicans' have indistinguishable and identical obligations to a common humanity. It is not an add-on dimension that only appears when God or Gods, or Christ, are introduced.

Locke, whose 1697 *Letters on Toleration* 'canned' 150 years of chaos in the human city over religion, sought to privatise religious opinion with respect to the state. He tried to keep theology from releasing conflicted forms of disharmony out of the literal market-place. The tendency to dualism of soul and body is avoided by understanding the Varronic intent 'to place the human city before its Gods'.

In this, 'the three Anglicans' have a common obligation to the human city, as they would if they were 'the three Muslims'. How the Governor-General fulfils his obligations to the Australian community is a matter for his discretion and the particular obligations and sensitivities of his constitutional office.

A final insight from Locke: Australia's multiculturalism is vulnerable because it does not have sufficient apologists and explicators at the level of symbol and theory who teach it. It has become vulnerable to Pauline Hanson 'straight-talk'. Australia will not just 'work by magic'. What is the symbolic basis on which Australians can ground the truth of the statement 'the Afghan refugees are more like me than different from me' and not 'they are aliens, foreigners and illegals who should go to Nauru'?

A modern Locke might 'privatise' ethnicities with respect to the state in just the way he privatised 'mere theological opinion', and rescued the town square from violence. Meantime, we see 'the three Anglicans' in a 'broad and hazy' Anglican heritage trying to work out the best way of interpreting the old parable of the Good Samaritan.

There are a few tried and trusted ways to implement a more generous universalism.

When Peter Hollingworth speaks as Governor-General, he speaks only accidentally as a bishop. In terms of the human city to which his present office applies, that does not matter. The other two Anglicans in high office have identical obligations to common humanity. Any decent secularist and humanist would be just as forthright for good—even if they had not tracked this through to a theology of the human person.

Revd Canon Ivan Head
Warden, St Paul's College
Sydney University, NSW

July/August 2001 Book Offer Winners

G. Byron, Lindfield, NSW; H. Clay, Charleville, QLD; M. Dowd, Rosetta, TAS; A. Dowling, Wendouree, VIC; P. Dresser, Kandos, NSW; J. Dudley, East Fremantle, WA; D. Hyder, Batlow, NSW; M. Lipsett, Campbell, ACT; B. Marron, North Caulfield, VIC; P. Newman, Ravensbourne, QLD; I. Palumbo, North Geelong, VIC; G. O'Byrne, Bellbrae, VIC; T. O'Hearn, Castle Hill, NSW; M. O'Keeffe, Parkdale, VIC.

THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC

Precedents

OUR REFUGEE IMPASSE IS NOT NEW

THE RECENT EVENTS off the coast of Christmas Island recall a story once told by Paul Hasluck. The year was 1945 and the scene the San Francisco Conference at which the United Nations was formed. Hasluck was there as an adviser to the Australian Minister for External Affairs, H.V. Evatt.

One evening some Australian delegates walked into a bar where they encountered the Czech politician, Jan Masaryk. Earlier in the day, Evatt had criticised Masaryk for failing to support an Australian proposal.

'Here come the Australians,' announced Masaryk jovially, 'the people who have no geography.' When one of the Australians protested lamely, Masaryk walked over to a map of the world on the club's wall. 'Where is Australia?' asked Masaryk in mock puzzlement. 'Ha, here it is, way down here. And what is around Australia? Nothing. Water. No neighbours. A long way from everywhere. And where is Czechoslovakia?' Sure enough, Masaryk found it in central Europe, looking vulnerable to the Soviet giant looming on its eastern border.

These geopolitical realities would have tragic consequences three years later, when a coup brought Masaryk's nation within the communist bloc and he was himself almost certainly murdered by communist thugs. Evatt, on the other hand, died in bed in 1965, the privileged end that most Australian politicians enjoy.

Half a century later, as the Australian government was provoking a diplomatic incident over the arrival of a few hundred boat people, there were millions of refugees and asylum seekers around the world sitting in camps in much poorer countries than our own. Australia, in fact, will never have to deal with anything more than the merest trickle of refugees because she is, as our national anthem tells us, 'girt by sea'.

Australia arguably owes 'Girt' a great debt. She has provided the country with a measure of natural protection against 'cheap' foreign goods, potential invaders and hordes of 'coloured' folk. 'Girt' has also helped to breed insularity, a fear of the foreign and a naivety about the scale and significance of Australia's problems in the global scheme of things.

Two fears have long exercised white Australians, both legacies of our sense of isolation as European peoples in the Asia-Pacific region. One, less powerful today than even 30 years ago, is the fear of invasion. The historian Robert Hyslop has estimated that there were nearly 200 war scares in Australia before Federation. The feared enemy varied, but included France, Germany, Russia, the United States, China, Japan and even occasionally Holland and Spain. In September 1854, at the time of the Crimean War, Melbourne went into a panic when some of its citizens heard cannon fire and rockets appeared in the sky above the city. Word got around that the Russians had landed. It soon emerged that the racket had been caused by a ship celebrating her release from quarantine.

Yet a more persistent Australian dread is that of being swamped by 'undesirables'. This has a long history, which perhaps found its clearest expression in the publicity given to a reported remark of a Chinese man during the gold rushes of the 1850s that all China was coming. In recent times, the threat has been similarly identified as Asian, as in Hansonite rhetoric, but early in the 20th century the intruder was sometimes Jewish or European—particularly Southern European.

The danger has most commonly been perceived as racial, but not always so. Convicts were a particular concern. In 1852 the Victorian parliament passed a bill that sought to prevent convicts with conditional pardons flooding into the colony from Tasmania. Australian governments in the 19th century were also hostile to the presence of French convicts in that country's Pacific possessions because of the possibility that they might end up here. And the appearance in Sydney in 1849 of the convict ship, the *Hashemy*, set off angry protests led by our federation father, Henry Parkes. This agitation ended an unpopular attempt by the British government to renew convict transportation.

Parkes was also in the forefront of anti-Chinese manoeuvres in 1888 when a ship (called, ironically, the *Afghan*) arrived in Sydney, carrying about 250 Chinese immigrants. It had previously tried landing at Port Melbourne, but the Victorian government managed to contrive reasons for sending the ship away. It then moved on to Sydney, where there were violent anti-Chinese protests. Parkes, as premier, rushed through draconian legislation in a single day to stop the Chinese from landing. Sound familiar?

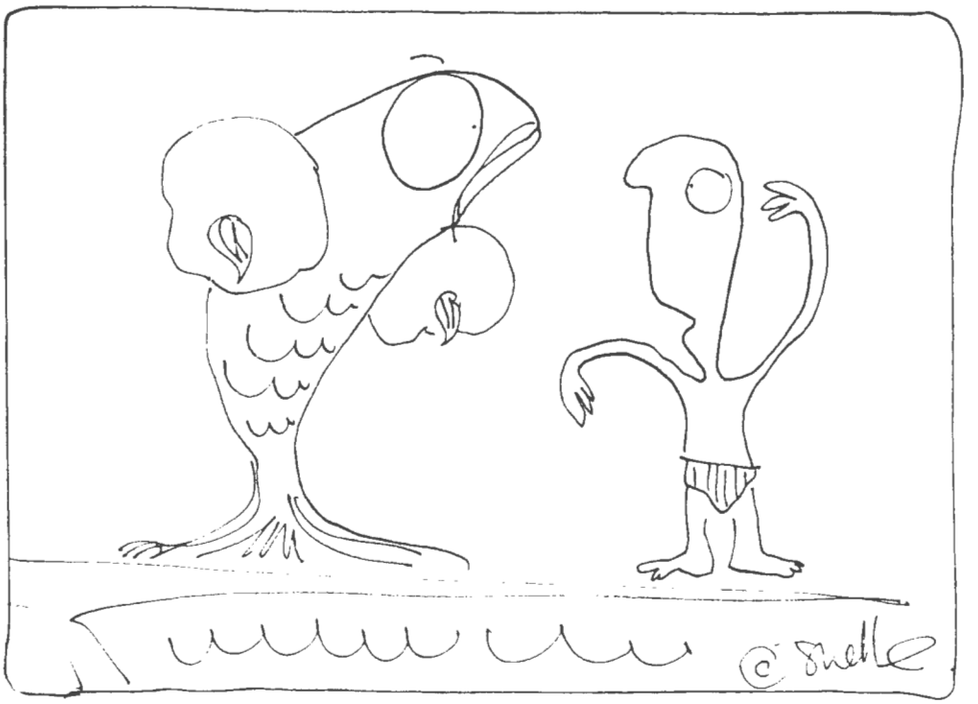
The appearance of a ship carrying 'undesirables' has on more than one occasion in Australian history been the focus of government concern and popular protest. In 1916 the arrival in Australia of a boatload of Maltese immigrants was badly timed as far as Prime Minister Billy Hughes and the advocates of military conscription for overseas service were concerned. Its appearance during the height of the bitter debate over conscription added credibility to the claims of some anti-conscriptionists that employers intended to replace white Australian conscripts with cheap 'coloured' labour. Rather like the appearance of the *Tampa*, the Maltese immigrant ship served a useful domestic political purpose.

In 1885, at the time New South Wales sent troops to an imperial war in the Sudan, a little boy from Manly named Ernest Laurence wrote to the premier sending money to assist the cause. A *Bulletin* cartoonist seized on the event, and created an

Australian symbol—The Little Boy at Manly—who came to stand for a people who had not yet grown up. This Australia was impudent, naive and ignorant of the ways of the world; it was yet to put away childish things. The Little Boy at Manly appeared in cartoons for years, but seems to have eventually disappeared, perhaps at the point when Australians had the Anzacs and Gallipoli to show that they had come of age.

We may have dispensed with the Little Boy at Manly prematurely. He was on display during the *Tampa* crisis, when an affluent Western nation in its centenary year tried to convince itself and the world that it is hard put upon by the world's riff-raff. I would like to advocate that the Little Boy at Manly be taken out of retirement.

—Frank Bongiorno



Closed doors

CHURCH LEADERS SUPPORT ASYLUM SEEKERS

JOHN HOWARD'S doctrine of 'repel all boarders' earned a rebuke from eight heads of churches during the *Tampa* saga.

Anglican Primate Peter Carnley deplored the fractures in community life caused by the government's policy of 'rough-handling' people to deter others from coming to Australia.

'There are huge divisions which have opened up—divisions that are expressed, for example, in letters of hostility ... not just hostile with regard to refugees but hostile to Islam generally. If we were trying to build a multicultural Australia I think our success at doing that is very much called into question by the way people have responded to Islam.'

Dr Carnley argued that churches now have a role within Australia to take inter-faith dialogue much more seriously than they have to date. 'I think we need to begin to make much more positive overtures to the Islamic leadership in this country to try and get some discussion, some inter-faith dialogue going, to build congenial relationships. This will not only be of benefit to Australian society but it will be particularly of benefit to Australian Christians overseas, who are having to struggle for life in very oppressive Islamic cultures. I think if we can break down barriers here, then that will help people elsewhere, given the global nature of the social environment in which we live.'

Dr Carnley says that church leadership has an obligation to speak publicly against potentially dangerous developments in society. 'I think there is a form of racism that has been unleashed ... a sort of latent, low-grade racism that is not very far under the surface. I think it has been set loose by the events of the last week.

'The first thing to do is to take refugees very seriously ... We have to continue to talk from a Christian perspective about the plight of refugees and what our obligations might be. Both our legal obligations and our moral obligations. I think we have to be very clear about what our moral position should be.'

Although the refugees had been removed from public scrutiny by the intervention of the military, Dr Carnley was confident that truth would not be buried in government propaganda. 'It will be difficult to find out what's going on aboard the troopship, but I think, however, that more and more of the truth concerning what conditions are really like in Afghanistan is beginning to come out. You can't complain about the Taliban, and then not expect refugees to want to get away from it.'

Leaders of the Anglican Church, Catholic Church, Uniting Church, Churches of Christ, Quakers, Salvation Army and Baptist Union all endorsed a letter from the National Council of Churches to the Prime Minister. The letter reminded the Prime Minister that the problem of the boat people 'involves moral issues of recognising the common humanity of the other'.

—Maggie Helass

Rocky heights

REMEMBERING SHIRLEY STRACHAN

ONE SUMMER NIGHT in the early '70s I was dancing at one of Melbourne Uni's Union Nights. I was perilously close to the band, enjoying the bass thudding through my chest; but the volume then wasn't as lethal as it is now, when stoned lads get cauliflower eardrums from hugging the speakers during Korn concerts. The singer was good. He was quite short and wore what looked like dyed carpenter's overalls. That's possibly what they were, because the band was Skyhooks and the singer was Graeme 'Shirley' Strachan. He sang 'All My Friends Are Getting Married', one of bass-player Greg Macainsh's trenchant little lyrics.

Through the filter of 30 years I remember that he sang it in a grinding low range, not in the cheeky rock tenor that became his trademark very soon after. The time had come for those voices: something akin to a call-up was happening. Choirs everywhere lost tenors as they deserted old-time religion and embraced the new trinity of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. Where had all the tenors gone, mourned the choirmasters as they shifted reluctant basses into the stratosphere where a chap might fear for his reproductive future, strangling out those Cs. Tenors, long reviled as narcissistic, less-than-macho airheads, were suddenly in a sellers' market. Be you never so talentless,

you could get an opera gig as Don Ottavio or even Pinkerton if you could carry a tune, because the great tenor shortage was on. But only for classical music.

For there they all were, shrieking pheromonally into mikes in front of rock bands, and thriving on it. AC/DC's Bon Scott, the baddest lad of them all, he of the effortless top Cs, whose old videos are an education in performance practice, wore out his wiry little body with too much naughtiness, joining the rock legends who were not so much a dying race as running in one.

But Bon was an exception that proved the rule: most rock tenors were a resilient bunch. It was the baritones that were carried off by their excesses—Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, and The King himself, Elvis. In Britain, Robert Plant survived Led Zeppelin's heroic self-abuse. The Who's Roger Daltrey, another survivor; Keith Moon, their drummer and a gifted actor-baritone, not a survivor. Later, Neil Young, Aerosmith's Steve Tyler and the Gunners' Axl Rose went on to bolster the tenor-survivor theory. Jimmy Barnes, the hard man of Cold Chisel, yells to good purpose still, while the younger (but baritone) Michael Hutchence is forever silent. The Acker Dackers' 'new' singer (20 years on), Brian Johnson, isn't a nicotine patch on Bon, but he's a tenor, a survivor. And Shirley Strachan looked like one too.

He was sociologically perfect for his role: a tradie, and a surfie. Like so many other lads who'd done their apprenticeships, and thought they could sing just as well as those poofs on the radio, he'd joined a band, and been caught up in success. He was ideal for Greg Macainsh's songs, which were intelligent, bolshie, Aussie, ironic and very catchy. They didn't take off in the US because, like so many young Australian bands at the time, Skyhooks weren't well managed. But Shirl had a home to come back to, interests beyond the music world, and a gritty sanity. He would get jobs as a roadie for big international acts like Rod Stewart even when Skyhooks were riding high, because he liked to work; though a rock star, he seemed free of vanity. When an increasingly right-wing and humourless popular culture decreed the end of Skyhooks, he calmly got himself a job hosting a rather good kids' TV show, *Shirl's Neighbourhood*. He opened a carpentry business in Phillip Island, and then found a new *métier* as the handyman on Nine's *Our House*. He seemed one of those lucky people who have the ability to be at home almost anywhere, doing almost anything.

Somehow, I was always expecting him to link up with Macainsh and Red Symons again, but he died when his helicopter crashed in a sudden wind gust. His funeral was simple: his ashes scattered over his favourite surf beach. I never even met him, but I'll miss him. **—Juliette Hughes**

Timor's future

WHO'S MINDING THE KIDS?

On a sunny Sunday, Immaculada, 18, took her first tentative steps into the sea. Although she lives in the tiny village of Alto Hospital, just a few kilometres outside East Timor's capital Dili, she's never been to the beach.

Immaculada has also been blind since birth. She clings to the arm of Sister Michelle Reid, one of the workers in the village, and gives a little jump as each tiny ripple washes over her feet.

Dili children, insouciant as only children can be. Photograph by Katrina Langford.

Twenty-four children aged from only one year to 18 are with Immaculada. Among them is Thomas—who is also blind. Thomas sits on the beach under the shade of an ample palm tree playing East Timorese freedom songs on the guitar he taught himself to play.

Behind him 14-year-old Maria, who has had two horribly deformed feet in need of orthopedic attention since birth, laughs and plays with two of the younger children.

These are the forgotten victims of the 25-year struggle for independence in this tiny half-island country. The children who are handicapped, orphaned or scarred by a war they had no control over. The great fear among the few who care for them is that there is no place for them in the newest country in the world.

'We tried to get some sort of education for the blind children here in Dili. There are not even any braille books for them,' said Australian Volunteer International's Maureen Magee.

'Many have no parents, or only one parent who cannot provide for them. Some have been in abusive homes so they get sent to orphanages.

'They [the new government] are not concentrating on the orphans here ... we work together with other people here to get a voice for the orphans.'

It's a similar story at the Don Bosco Communication Forum for Youth, run by the Salesian Sisters, where every Friday hundreds of children come to play, sing songs and have possibly their only decent meal all week.

Oliveira Cipriano is director of the centre. He too is concerned that the children have been forgotten in the election hype.

'They [the government] have not done anything for the street children, they have

just promised but they have not done anything yet,' said Mr Cipriano.

'We tried to speak to Xanana Gusmao but we could not meet with him or José Ramos Horta because they are busy. They are focused on the impact of freedom.

'We want to ask Xanana Gusmao to pay attention to the street kids because they are the victims of this war ... some of them have had their fathers and mothers killed by the militia.'

The transitional government's two highest-profile leaders both say they are concerned about the plight of children in East Timor.

'It is a big problem ... there are people without because we are only thinking about the elections. It has to be something on which we spend more time—to assist the children,' Xanana Gusmao admitted.

Foreign Minister and Nobel Laureate, Dr José Ramos Horta, was more blunt about where he saw responsibility for the plight of East Timor's young: 'The foreign NGOs have millions of dollars in funding ... they are the ones who should be paying more attention to the kids. Most of the work that has been done for the homeless has been done by the church.

'It will be a priority of the new government to take them away from the streets and the foster homes and set up funds to help the war widows.'

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report *Assessment of the Situation of Separated Children and Orphans in East Timor* released earlier this year, there are 'thousands of children who still remain separated from the families'. The report states that numbers of orphans are lower than expected, given the forced migration of nearly 300,000 East Timorese to West Timor following the 1999 referendum on independence. However, as many as 400 children remain separated from their families, their parents still in refugee camps across the border.

There is renewed hope that many of these children will be reunited with their families if the remaining 50,000 refugees still in West Timor return home in the next few months.

The report identifies three major risks for children in East Timor: poverty, poor formal education and their families' inability to care for their children.

The children of East Timor are, as yet, largely uncorrupted by Western tourism, but the signs are already there. Many children eke out a meagre existence selling phone cards and newspapers or changing

Living on the edge

With the AFL season now behind us for another year, the game that sticks in my mind is that spiteful final round encounter between Carlton and Geelong at Princes Park, during which one of the local heroes was knocked unconscious by late, high contact. As the offending Geelong player was dragged from the ground by his coach (not least, perhaps, for his own protection), he incited an already angry home crowd, some of whom could not contain themselves. Ugly scenes followed as the visiting players' 'dug out' became just that—a barricade under siege.

As a relatively recent fan of AFL (having moved from Sydney to Melbourne some 14 years ago), and a member of Carlton Football Club for just six years, I have often pondered on the adversarial (but 'safely' so) establishment of collective identity which the code seems to provide. This, together with the opportunity ritually to pile the frustrations of the week on to a sacrificial umpire, and banish him with a verbal slap into the wilderness of the rooms, makes for a healthy cathartic experience after which, paradoxically perhaps, one may leave at peace with the world, if not always with the football gods.

But this day felt different somehow. There was a sense of menace in the response to this incident that I had not witnessed before in any AFL crowd—a sort of threatened defensiveness that boiled over into a display of force.

By coincidence, this was the same weekend the controversy over the fate of the *Tampa* reached fever pitch. What was that national turmoil really all about? Human rights? Immigration policy? International law? Certainly these are issues around which the debate turned. But at some level it was surely also about this question of collective identity.

Identity is always to some extent worked out adversarially, that is, in terms of 'otherness'. Twentieth-century French-Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, speaks of *le visage* (the face) as the site, the expression of that irreducible relation with the 'other' by which, in part, I know myself, and am known. One commentator paraphrases Levinas thus: 'The face of the other breaks into my world and calls out to me. I am not an "I" unto myself, but an "I" standing before the other.' (Terry Veling, 'In the Name of Who? Levinas and the Other Side of Theology', *Pacifica* 12.3 (1999), p281.)

This encounter, so Levinas argues, is the origin of all ethical responsibility, insofar as the 'other' demands a response from me, reminds me that I am not in sole possession of the world.

How I respond to the very one who faces—who 'opposes'—me, then, says a great deal about who I am. If Levinas' near contemporary, Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, is right to suggest that we 'author' ourselves at the edges of our lives, by our engagement with that which is not us, then at least the unflattering autobiographical strokes penned that weekend on the boundary line of Princes Park and on our national boundary have the virtue of consistency. ■

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Telling science

It's unlikely that when Ben Hoffman started studying ants in the Northern Territory he ever thought his work would take him to Britain. Or that Jeremy O'Brien considered the possibility that his somewhat esoteric research on quantum computers could lead to his spending time with the ABC's Radio Science Unit. But that's what happened to them, as winner and runner-up of the Fresh Science segment of ScienceNOW!, an annual science forum held for the past four years at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre.

Fresh Science gives bright young researchers an opportunity to learn how to interact with the media (and the public) early in their careers, and provides the media with an annual crop of interesting science stories in a palatable form.

Each year about 80 researchers are nominated as Fresh Scientists by universities, co-operative research centres, professional organisations, medical research institutes, the CSIRO, the Defence Science and Technology Organisation, and other research establishments. A committee of researchers and science communicators selects 16 from all over Australia and brings them to Melbourne so that, with a little coaching in communication, they can parade their work. They are chosen not just on the quality of their work (which is assumed—it must be published or peer reviewed), but also on their ability to tell a story.

And what stories they have to tell. Working for the CSIRO, Ben Hoffman has been using ants to assess the environmental health of slabs of the Australian landscape. Typically there are up to 20 million ants from 100 different species living in a hectare of Australian bush. But when the land is disturbed by human activity such as agriculture, mining or industry, those figures can change dramatically. Ants are a great judge of the success or failure of land remediation or reafforestation.

Jeremy O'Brien, a PhD student at the University of New South Wales, has been pushing single atoms around a silicon surface. His studies may lead to computers billions of times more powerful than today's. The field is known as quantum computing, and Australia is a world leader—the more so, now that it has a researcher who can explain what it's about in everyday language.

And each year there are plenty of others. Donna Ramsay from the University of Western Australia has been using ultrasound to study the mechanics of breastfeeding—as it happens. Her discovery that milk is released not just at the start, but several times during a feed, will assist mothers. Matthew Jeffrey from Monash University may have found a non-toxic replacement for cyanide in extracting gold, which would prevent environmental disasters such as occurred recently in the rivers of Romania and Hungary.

It is no surprise that the nations with the most effective science and technology programs are among those most interested in science communication—particularly the US, but now also countries like Singapore and Israel. After four years of Fresh Science, Australia now has 64 potential research leaders who know how to tell a story. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

money on the street. One fear is that, as the tourism industry grows, these children will forsake formal education for the short-term profit to be made from the tourist dollar.

Those responsible for planning a viable tourism industry hope East Timor can learn from the mistakes of other countries in the region and protect the pristine environment—and Timor's children—from exploitation.

'We have places like Bali as an example of what not to do and how not to develop things,' said UN Tourism Officer Ellen Psychas.

'We don't want to compete with Bali. We'll be focusing on adventure tourism and sustainable eco-tourism, not high-level resorts and luxury holidays. We don't want all tourism focused on Dili ... that will only bring the wrong sort of problems to the country.'

Youth worker Laurentino Guterres, 22, who will travel to Cambodia next year for an international forum on training the handicapped, believes it will take time for the situation for all East Timor's children to improve.

'Many of these children were fighting in the mountains and living with Fretilin. They have never had anything done for them,' he said.

'Some NGOs I have been in touch with tell me UNTAET [United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor] doesn't want to set up places for the disabled.

It's very, very sad for me if they don't want to assist these people, we must do it—for their future.' **—Tim Stoney**

Words at work

WHEN POLITICS FLAILS, TRY A WRITERS' FESTIVAL

Once upon a time, when universities were places of yearning and learning, there were frequent lunchtime talks given by celebrities and politicians, whether local or occasionally from overseas. But these days the Governor-General addressing Newman College students is sufficiently newsworthy for posters announcing it to be plastered all over Carlton. Universities everywhere have ceased to be a Paddy's market for ideas. At Oxford even Rhodes Scholars—traditionally chosen for their breadth of interests—have been told to trim their sails and focus their energies on the curriculum. So thank God for writers' festivals, particularly one such as Melbourne's, where the definition

of writer is sufficiently broad, and the number of attractions sufficiently large, for many public issues to be discussed. Indeed there were over 120 listed events; what follows is an account of how one man used his ten tickets.

The keystone occasion for many must have been the conversation between V.S. Naipaul and Robert Dessaix. On they came, the slight slump of the famous novelist belied by an immensely confident gait; Dessaix followed as erect and anxious as a surgeon about to perform a difficult operation. And who would say it wasn't? There are things which one is not allowed to mention—such as the late novelist brother, or Paul Theroux (since Sir Vidia is spooked by his *Shadow*). Then there is the thing one is expected to have done, namely read the whole corpus. And certainly, once they were seated in their pair of armchairs, Sir Vidia took control. The surprise was the warmth in the voice, in which Oxford precision combines with energetic Indian articulation to produce something rather like the agreeable modulations of an English country squire. But behind it all there lurks a Brahmin fastidiousness, a decided impulse to reject, outpaced only by an apparent openness to experience.

Naipaul also embodies (and mines) another contradiction, inherent in the journey a Trinidad boy has made to become a knighted English novelist. The man who in *In a Free State* was a pioneer postmodernist now deplores the universal decline of everything. Perhaps he always has; certainly the whole performance has been sustained by vigorous prejudice. Even so, it is somewhat amazing to hear dumbing-down in contemporary Britain being attributed to '40 years of socialism'. (What, no Thatchbitch?) And a bit of a shock to hear the people of mixed blood in a lately Portuguese colony being so totally written off as 'second-rank people'. There are shades here of the railing against 'infies' (inferiors) which Theroux has remarked upon. Small doses of infie-dom, of course, can be quite exhilarating, and Naipaul described how, when writing his travel books, he often spends a couple of hours talking to the humblest of people, preferably unreflective types who are prepared to go with him through their lives in detail. Intent on being magisterial, Naipaul in defining others is also defining himself. At one point he was asked whether he was a non-believer. 'Yes,' he replied, 'I have nothing.' His sublime self-confidence filled the Melbourne Town Hall; a purple jersey beneath his jacket already proclaimed him his own bishop.

In the course of his exchange with Naipaul, Robert Dessaix quoted a sentence from the most recent novel: 'Our bluff in Africa will one day be called.' 'Some people,' he added, 'feel that Australia's bluff is about to be called.' Immediately there was electricity in the air: the *Tampa* had hit the headlines only the day before. 'How? How? How?' interposed Naipaul, effectively channelling the tension away. But for the remainder of the festival the refugee ship kept popping up like a porpoise. Robert Manne, in the session on 'The Creeping Right', said that, 'In the past few days a sinister corner in our history has been turned.' Then in question time, an angry Malaysian advanced on the chairperson and claimed that he had been deliberately ignored, and that this was racism. Rather than be 'patronised', he stormed out.

The view was expressed, in this panel and elsewhere, that we were in such a mess now, with such an embarrassing degree of popular support for the government's action, precisely because—in the words of Henry Reynolds—we 'snuck away' from White Australia. Population policy has never been properly discussed since. Someone who has contested it, a determinedly affable Geoffrey Blainey, refused to be drawn on the matter in his conversation with John Button. If he did, he assured us, the papers would immediately run it under the headline PROFESSOR FANS RACE DEBATE. Another sometime columnist, Shane Maloney, had no such scruples: when opening the session he was chairing, he was glad to see that there was obviously room for another 436.

You can never quite tell which sessions are going to work, and which not. 'Whaddya Mean, Postcolonial?' looked promising, but all four authors followed the lead of the chair in diving into their books to read us a bit for inspiration—theirs, or ours, wasn't always quite clear. Only Amitav Ghosh distinguished himself by addressing a few serious questions, as well as being the most humorous. It was a pomo poco shambles. Somewhat better was the discussion of history, but the topic, a consideration of why it was 'hot', in effect flattened it out. There are other equally important issues, relating to heritage, nostalgia, public history, changing resources, or history's conscription by various causes, but these were hardly touched upon.

They cannot now be avoided in the world of museums. A very good session was led off by prehistorian John Mulvaney, who, as a major contributor to a revolutionary

report in 1975, told us with a certain relish how bad Australian museums once were. Some of the oldest bark paintings in existence were being used at the Museum of Victoria as trestle-table tops; and, since museums then never changed much, there was a display case in Adelaide headed 'Some of our recent acquisitions', which had clearly lain undisturbed since 1908. Not that Mulvaney was entirely in favour of what has come since. He noted that these days, in an Aboriginal context, it is anthropologist Baldwin Spencer who is now patronised; but also that those bark paintings—if no longer trestle tables—are not on display either.

The director of the new Museum of Australia, Dawn Casey, articulated the new concerns: her institution focuses on the environment, on Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, and on waves of migrants. The museum, she made plain, is not about famous people, because 'that's not what Australia is about'. (Since it proudly displays Phar Lap's heart, an exception is clearly made for famous horses.) What it set out to do, though, was not to capitulate lamely to populism; rather, she wanted people to be brought to question their own attitudes. But to do that, things have to be presented convincingly—and by a variety of techniques. (The postmodern museum is a noisy place.) Ninety per cent of the people who go there, she claims, are enthusiastic about it.

Occasionally one gets a glimpse of how shallowly traditional European-style culture is rooted in Australia. Hearing Humphrey McQueen, Frank Moorhouse and David Malouf in triangular conversation, it soon emerged how relatively late each of them came to full-time writing. In McQueen's case, it was only after he got a job as a lecturer in art history in 1979 that he realised that this was not what he wanted, and that to be a writer one had to go full-time—even if it meant that one might have to be prepared to live on $13,000 a year. The year before, Malouf took the plunge by resigning from the University of Sydney, taking his superannuation and buying a run-down cottage in Tuscany. With two novels written, and another three turned out while on a Literature Board grant, he was launched. Both men were around 40 when they took these decisions.

For his part, Moorhouse had puzzled a vocational guidance officer in a country school when he declared that he wanted to be a short-story writer ('creative dancer' was his second option), but he managed to sidle into the role of writer a little earlier, from journalism.

And how does the writer approach politics, or his role in the community? McQueen—perhaps surprisingly, given his concerns—took a long-term view and referred to Dorothy Green's opinion at the time of the Vietnam War: be wary of the policies that, however intensely followed, do not last a decade. We are slaughtering a people deemed the enemy, when tomorrow or the day after the politicians will say they are our friends. Then, McQueen continued, there are matters of class—people's struggle for improvement, their right to a decent living. He had but to think of the lives of his own parents and grandparents; no-one should have to live lives like that.

Literature may particularise, and of course it fictionalises; but it also connects with the deepest and broadest aspirations people have. It can articulate things for them, too, providing a template which gives a shape to feelings, almost permission to have them. Recently Helen Garner was approached at a concert and thanked by a woman for having written about her love for a granddaughter, in a way the woman had recognised as describing how she felt about her own. Similarly non-fictional McQueen learned, from the doctor who broke the news of his mother's death, that his book on racism had helped the young man identify the situation around him when living in a small Central Queensland town.

Given these examples, it is not surprising that often during the festival concern was expressed about the current lack of public debate. Henry Reynolds pointed to a tightening political party discipline, so marked that divergent opinion even within Caucus is now discouraged. Against this shutting down of discussion stand the ideals of the literary world, where Naipaul can describe civilisation as 'the ability to stand outside yourself', and where Geoffrey Blainey can stand beside the grave of the Communist Judah Waten and deliver a funeral oration. All this comes like news from a distant planet. Never have we needed writers' festivals more.

—Jim Davidson

This month's contributors: **Frank Bongiorno** lectures in Australian History at the University of New England, Armidale; **Maggie Helass** is a freelance journalist; **Juliette Hughes** is a freelance writer; **Tim Stoney** is a reporter for Network Ten and was in East Timor for *Eureka Street* at election time; **Jim Davidson** teaches in the department of Asian and International Studies at Victoria University of Technology.

JACK WATERFORD

And all the rest

Jack Waterford analyses the role independents and minor parties will play in the forthcoming federal election.

If recent experience is any guide, one in every five Australians will vote first for an independent or minor party candidate at the House of Representatives election and one in every four will vote first for an independent or a minor party in the Senate.

That will be a record, but perfectly in line with a trend now running for 60 years, and with the recent trend in state government elections which has seen the three major parties struggling to win 70 per cent of the vote between them.

That could see four or five independents sitting in the House of Representatives and guarantee that neither major party will be able to pass legislation through the Senate without Democrat support for at least another six years.

The potential independents able to exercise a balance of power, should Labor fail to win more seats, are Peter Andren, Peter Cochrane and Tony Windsor in rural NSW, Peter Macdonald in Sydney and Bob Katter in rural Queensland. If Natasha Stott Despoja could make peace with her enemies within the Australian Democrats, particularly in her own state of South Australia, the Democrats would again have a reasonable chance of upsetting Alexander Downer from his seat of Mayo, assuming that the Labor Party (which has almost no hope of winning the seat, even in a landslide) would run dead, or at least for a third place.

In the Senate, the odds are that the Greens will win at least another seat and that the Democrats will hold their numbers. At the other end of the spectrum it is not impossible that One Nation could increase its present one seat to two. The mathematics are quite against One Nation having a chance in any House of Representatives seat, but they can be expected to be giving strong support to Bob Katter and Peter Cochrane. One Nation would also provide passive, anti-incumbent support to Tony Windsor, whether he runs against National Party leader, John Anderson, in Gwydir or—more likely—in New England.

Though Bob Katter flirts with One Nation, he is no secret supporter, least of all on racism or immigration issues. Like One Nation, he has a critique of globalisation, competition policy, economic rationalism and rural decline—which is what has split him off from the Nationals. But, like Peter Cochrane, another defecting National, his real roots lie in the old Democratic Labor Party of the 1950s and 1960s. Good old Bob just wants more socialism out in the bush, preferably with National Service and the restoration of the cane.

By contrast, Peter Macdonald is a former high-profile state parliament independent somewhat in the Ted Mack mould, likely to stand against Tony Abbott in a conventionally safe Liberal seat. Labor could never

From left: Pauline Hanson, Bob Katter, Natasha Stott Despoja and Bob Brown. *Photographs courtesy the* Canberra Times.

win it, but an anti-politician of character and reputation can hope to win on Labor preferences—as shown by Ted Mack in the seat next door, Peter Andren in central NSW, and Tony Windsor in the state seat nearby.

These are all high-profile candidates who, win or lose, can expect primary votes of more than 30 per cent. This is enough, on a good day, to have them running number two before preferences are distributed, and likely to be pushed over the line by the third-running major party candidate. These candidates aside, however, it is still noticeable that the average combined vote for independents is starting to get into a zone that indicates others may succeed. Once the combined major party vote has slipped below the 70 per cent mark, the chance of an independent being elected increases exponentially.

While the Democrats played pragmatic games with power, the Greens—anarchists at heart—seemed to remain pure and, to some, became the beacon for those who say that there is a politics of the post-materialistic age.

So why are so many rejecting one or other of the major parties? The increasing bastardry and point-scoring of much of what passes for politics is one reason. So is the apparently increasing incapacity of governments, on either side, to achieve outcomes. Then there is the rising tide of cynicism about politicians' perks and intention to keep their promises. On many issues that matter to voters—globalisation and competition policy, for example—the gap between the major parties is very slight, more often than not only a matter of emphasis. Meanwhile, many voters are somewhere else altogether. Twenty-five years of relentless economism and focus on tax cuts has disillusioned many who see the role of government primarily in social terms, or whose main points of concern are health, welfare, education and environment.

It is not only in Australia that many voters have lost faith in old-style parties. One might find parallels with the rise of One Nation, populist politicians such as Katter, and anti-politicians such as Andren, in the progress of Ross Perot in the United States or the National Front in France. Green groups have had significant success throughout Europe. There are parallels between the Australian Democrats and groups such as the Social Democrats in Britain and some of the Democratic coalitions in the United States in the 1990s.

The voter may be frustrated with the venality, incompetence or impotence of the modern major party politician, but does not necessarily set the same standards for the minor party candidate or independent. First, of course, the voter does not necessarily expect a policy on everything, even if the representative is to be expected to vote on everything. It is rather more important to know about the candidate's character, and their broad disposition on a number of key issues. Natasha Stott Despoja's Democrats are travelling a lot better at the moment, now that they are identified with vibes and general feelings, rather than with the passage of a compromised GST or unfair dismissal laws. The more focus there is on the party actually exercising power (which it undoubtedly does) and the less there is on the general principles which are supposed to motivate them, the more the Democrats appear as yet another grubby player.

Second, the smart independent or minor party candidate, apart from One Nation, is not actually pitching for 50 per cent of the vote, as any major party must. One Nation has to, at least so long as major parties remain pledged to putting them last in their preferences, but generally, either major party will prefer an independent or minor party before it gives a preference to the other major party. Moreover, if it is uncertain that it can win 50 per cent, a major party must persuade the minor parties and independents to preference it ahead of its major rival, but most independents will divide votes among themselves ahead of either party. When the goal is really only to get 30 per cent or so, the smart independent can more skilfully play to the constituencies that can deliver the 30 per cent, without worrying so much about the people who are turned off.

Suppose, for example, that it is true that a majority of Australians actually support the forcible turning away of refugees from our shores. I have my doubts about the statistics, but the fact that Labor has been so craven on the debate suggests that its own polling is telling it that a majority agrees with the government line. Whatever the actual proportions, there are many people of both Labor and Liberal inclination who are positively sickened by the Howard-Ruddock stance and by the weasel words of Labor spokesmen as they refuse to condemn government actions. Indeed, for some, the question of whether either party could be given a first-preference vote must almost be a moral question.

In any event, the fact that both the Greens, in the form of Senator Bob Brown, and the Democrats, through Stott Despoja and others, have been outspoken in their condemnation of the policy makes either attractive for a first-preference vote, if only as a gesture of protest. For would-be Labor voters, Beazley's me-too bellicosity after the New York and Washington terrorist incidents might well produce the same result. Even if only 40 per cent of the population agreed, but a significant number thought the issue important enough to prompt a change in vote, an outspoken minor player who could capture most of that feeling would end up running second before preferences were distributed.

A Labor or a Liberal Party must consider what a majority might want, where the middle ground is, or

how much an issue is 'on-' or 'off-message'. All too often, the price they pay for a blatantly populist approach to policy is alienation either of core supporters, or of just the sort of swinging voters they need, particularly in the suburbs. An artful minor player, however, need worry only about whether her view can command a third of voter support.

Populist dissatisfaction, particularly with the National Party, has passed its zenith, but is still a significant factor. Rural economic conditions have improved; there has been a major spending effort in rural and regional centres, and not a little of the anti-immigration rhetoric has been cynically adopted by the Coalition, and thus denied to One Nation. It is unlikely that many seats will be greatly affected by a One Nation vote, or that too much attention will be paid to Pauline Hanson. Yet resentment continues to run deep, not least because of the failure of the NSW and Victorian National Parties to separate themselves from the market-driven policies of the Coalition. There are fears of a continuing decline in services—fears which have focused on Telstra but which will now be much aggravated by losses of regional airline services.

There is also continuing resentment against the complexities of complying with the GST. Labor, moreover, may well create a rural scare campaign based on income imputation plans implicit in the new tax system, but not yet in action. The key seats Labor needs in order to win power are in rural and regional centres; some it needs may fall to anti-politicians.

It is in major cities and the suburbs that the Greens and the Democrats can expect to do best—if only because cynicism and disillusion with politics there is focused on political incapacity to concentrate on social and environmental issues, and questions of the honesty and integrity of the political process. The danger for both minor parties is not that their views will be rejected for running against the tide if there is a khaki election based on a fight against Muslim terrorism, or a boat-people election based on keeping out Muslim refugees. The danger is, rather, that minor parties tend to be squeezed whenever there is a genuine contest or a seriously polarising election. Labor's own efforts to avoid being marginalised in such a process—despicable as they may appear to those who expected some principle—may save the Greens and the Democrats even as John Howard plays the statesman in what he would portray as a time of crisis.

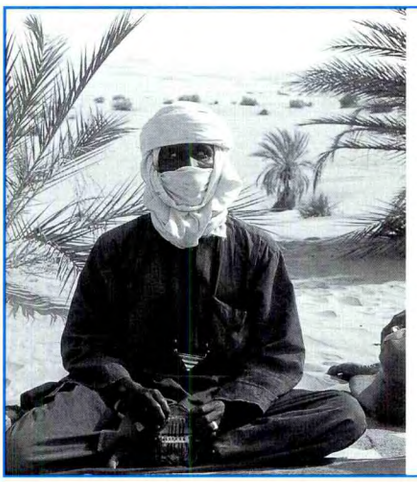
SIX MONTHS AGO, the biggest risk that the Democrats faced was of punishment for its brokering role in the Senate, particularly after the GST. Now the biggest risk comes from turmoil within the party—the barely concealed dislike of Natasha Stott Despoja by most of her parliamentary colleagues, her poor relations with some key outside Democrats, and wider questions about the vulnerability of the party to infiltration. The brothel and pornography industry has moved to a position of control of a number of branches. How much this will embarrass her probably turns less on the risk that the adult industry will immediately attempt to set policy than on the willingness of her opponents to exploit it. In one respect, Stott Despoja has proven to be everything she promised: she is publicly personable and a vote magnet, particularly with younger voters. In another respect she has proven to be everything that her opponents in the party feared—policy-lazy and inconsistent. A lack of sororal feeling is not the greatest handicap in politics—the Howard Cabinet hardly bubbles with fraternal feeling—but disunity in such a tight group threatens the co-ordination of the campaign.

That disunity could well see the Democrats outflanked in one of its core constituencies by the Greens, who have scarcely put a foot wrong politically in flying the flag for the environment. While the Democrats played pragmatic games with power, the Greens—anarchists at heart—seemed to remain pure and, to some, became the beacon for those who say that there is a politics of the post-materialistic age. The Democrats, of course, need more than this to hold on to their power base. Unlike the Greens, they cannot survive in the long run by being to the left of Labor on both social and economic issues. They must take votes from Liberal constituencies as well, and with the virtual disappearance of an articled liberal view on social issues from within the Coalition, they may never get a better chance. But where the Greens command greater support on environmental issues than the Democrats, the Democrats stand to lose seats.

Two months ago, the general community expectation was that Labor would romp home. The stronger any such expectation, the more any independent or minor party candidate has to take it into account in formulating an election strategy. To play the moods right one has to work hard at explaining how one will temper and brake a new government's decisions. One also has to put the right spin on one's record of doing just that with the previous government, or the right spin on denouncing its excesses. As confidence in a massive Labor victory declines, the Democrats in particular will probably soften their anti-Labor rhetoric and up the volume on the venality of the Coalition—if only to snare more votes in the middle. ■

Minor parties tend to be squeezed whenever there is a genuine contest or a seriously polarising election. Labor's own efforts to avoid being marginalised—despicable as they may appear to those who expected some principle—may save the Greens and the Democrats.

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*, and *Eureka Street*'s Canberra correspondent.



Other ways

Travel broadens the mind, says conventional wisdom. Not always, argues travel writer **Anthony Ham**.

RECENTLY, I WROTE A Lonely Planet travel guide to Libya. My final task before submitting the manuscript was to write an introduction that would 'sell' the book. It had been a long month, with a rapidly encroaching deadline. Almost without thinking, I concluded: 'Get there before it changes.' A self-fulfilling prophecy.

Eight months before, a travel writer had told me about the trouble he'd had convincing the travel editor of a national newspaper to print a story documenting tourism's negative impact on environment and local culture in India's Andaman Islands. The editor could not see how this was a travel story.

And back in August 2001, I agonised over whether to include in a guidebook a wonderful traditional teahouse in the Iranian city of Isfahan. It was one of few remaining places where locals could enjoy a traditional pastime free from inundating tour groups and inflated tourist prices. Was I responsible to the tourists who depended upon the guidebook for discovering pockets of an 'authentic' Iran? To the proprietors dependent upon income from tourists? Or to the local cultures that seemed at risk from mass tourism?

In a recent edition of *Granta*, Robyn Davidson, author of *Tracks* and *Desert Places*, describes travel writing as 'literature to accommodate a longing for the exotic in an increasingly homogenised, commercialised and trivialised world'. In doing so she points to the dilemma at the heart of such writing.

Travel writing at its best explores the rich diversity of the world. It draws people to travel and encourages a greater understanding of other cultures. It also sheds light on the environmental and cultural devastation that mass tourism can wreak. The irony, or dilemma, is this: the more perceptive the writer, the more he or she will become aware that the writing is part of the problem. Whenever literature about a place encourages large numbers of visitors to arrive, the place changes. There is a further danger: readers also imagine that they can know, from the writing, all that there is to understand. The result: the onslaught of mass tourism and the myth of omniscience smother the very difference for which we are searching.

Discouraging travel is no solution. To do so would be to abandon the cultural encounter to the all-you-need-to-know media soundbites and to the filtering of the privileged few.

Above: Tuareg man at Mavo Lake, Idehan Ubari (Ubari Sand Sea), Sahara Desert, Western Libya. The turban (*ashaersh*) is worn by Tuareg men as protection against the elements, as an indicator of status or as a way of showing submission to elders.

Right: Tuareg man in the Idehan Murzuq (Murzuq Sand Sea), Sahara Desert, Southern Libya. The man, whose name is Sheikh, features in 'Saharan songs', *Eureka Street*, July/August 2001.

Photographs by Anthony Ham

The yearning to leave home, to seek out the world's diversity, to travel beyond the confines of our own space and world view, is an ancient and positive impulse, part of a process of growing up, of finding an independent way in the world. The fear of leaving home and the retreat behind familiar walls make for a short walk to insularity. Seeking out new ways of looking about us also signals a realisation that what we read about, for example, Islam, or the Middle East or Africa, may not be the full story.

When East Timor imploded in 1999, the outpouring of sympathy here at home arose from the fact that many Australians had first-hand experience in the country, we had a shared war history, and the persecution of the East Timorese people had been widely and reliably reported and documented through moving footage. There is no such coverage and hence no such understanding of the plight of, for example, Afghans or Congolese. To travel and to meet the people from these countries, to hear their stories, is to be constantly challenged by what you thought you knew.

The genre of travel writing should nonetheless be interrogated.

Travel writers often seem to be providing readers with a substitute for discovery. Wittingly or unwittingly, they allow for an abdication of critical responsibility in those who, as Robyn Davidson writes, 'wished to experience my experience before they felt confident enough to experience their own'. I have encountered people who, upon hearing that I write for Lonely Planet, gush, 'You guys are my Bible; I'd be lost without you.'

Such a reluctance to see the world through new eyes, or at least one's own eyes, ensures that travel thus conceived contributes little to understanding between peoples. Instead it encloses people within the restrictions of someone else's predetermined understanding. The cultural encounter, the sense of discovery, the mutual understanding travel can foster are lost when travellers suspend their own imagination, allowing someone else's to take its place. Diversity becomes an abstract concept rather than a lived experience.

The most damaging consequence of seeing the world solely through the eyes of the travel writer is that one person's picture of a certain place at a particular moment acquires a truth detached from its context; the writing takes on a mantle of apparent objectivity. After listening to V.S. Naipaul, recently in Melbourne for the Writers' Festival, one member of the audience assured me that Naipaul is all you need to read to understand India—as if the man had captured some overarching truth or essence of one of the world's most polyglot nations.

Robyn Davidson speaks of a desire to edit herself out of the story. She finds the task impossible because her very presence in the places she writes about is part of the narrative, as it is for any of us, and her writing cannot be divorced from her perspectives, prejudices, priorities. V.S. Naipaul, at that Festival talk, remarked that travel writing is not about the writer but about the people he or she encounters; elsewhere he describes his own travel writing as the 'writing of enquiry'. These are noble ideals, but disingenuous to some degree; the very people whom a writer chooses to include, and the questions he or she asks, derive from a particular view of the world. The decision about what to include and what to omit is a choice. But so often opinion is read as fact. A piece of writing can become the 'last word' on India, rather than one person's illumination of one of many Indias.

Travel writing is also read by people who will never visit the places in question, the armchair travellers wanting to learn about worlds they will never see. When so much travel writing is given a veneer of objectivity, writers are faced with some disturbing questions. Do you include a negative image when you think that it will reinforce a stereotype, and help perpetuate a larger misunderstanding? Do you fall in with the demand for the sensational? You can sell more books with an epic tale laced with potentially disastrous or life-threatening incidents. They may make for a good read, but they may also form the readers' lasting impression of a place. This may be their only 'information' about a country, a people or a culture. Questions of light and shadow too easily become issues of black and white.

Equally significant are the customary omissions from travel writing, most notably the stories of exile, of forced migration, of the mass movement of peoples. Robyn Davidson has called for a redefined 'literature of movement'. Travel writing thus conceived could then engage with the broader debates about migration. The privilege of travelling comfortably anywhere in the world might not be so artificially divorced from the desperation of those fleeing persecution. A 'literature of movement' might infiltrate the fortress mentality of Western countries when it comes to the migration of other peoples. There is something anomalous about exalting journeys of pleasure over a journey to save one's life; doing so entrenches in the genre of travel writing the ethnocentric view that only white-faced Westerners have a right to shed uncomfortable light on other cultures.

If travel writing does not reconfigure itself, and embrace broader thinking, the genre will remain confined within a 19th-century definition wherein the maps of the world contained blank spaces for travel writers to fill in. It will produce little more than one-sided, voyeuristic visions of the 'other' which are not encounters at all. We will go on looking in the mirror that shows us what we already know. Worse still, we will end up right back where we started, as if we never left home at all. ■

Anthony Ham is a *Eureka Street* correspondent.

Moving mountains

Tibet continues to exist in political limbo, but at a more basic level, life may be improving. **Peter Davis** reports.

It's mid morning. And beneath the intense Tibetan sun, children from Genu school, 100 kilometres west of the Tibetan capital Lhasa, stand in ragged lines in a field. They wait patiently as Dr Ga Li from the Lhasa City Health Bureau moves along each line. He pauses beside each child, places his hands gently around the child's neck and feels for any swelling. Some children giggle but most are restrained. They appear to understand the seriousness of the occasion.

Of the 56 students examined, 16 are ushered to one side (privacy is a privilege here). These are the children with signs of thyroid goitre—a condition resulting from lack of iodine. 'Thirty percent of the population in this region has some sort of iodine deficiency disease,' says Dr Li. 'If the goitre is detected early, it can be cured. But the problems become more serious among adults. In pregnant women it can result in acute deafness as well as mental and physical retardation in the newborn child.'

In Tibet, iodine levels in the surface soil have been eroded over millions of years by rain and by snow glaciation. The more mountainous the region, the greater the problem, and the Himalayan plateau is one of the most affected regions in the world. Problems of geography lead in turn to problems of diet, as the majority of Tibet's 2.5 million people eat food produced in the iodine-deficient local soils.

One of the main threats to the disease-eradication project is the continued consumption of non-iodised salt. For centuries Tibetans have used inferior salts from rocks or lakes as a currency in exchange for much-needed grains. The Chinese government has responded by simply declaring trade in non-iodised salt illegal, but such declarations do little to change centuries-old behaviour.

Previous page:
The Lhasa salt factory produces iodised salt to help eliminate iodine deficiency.

This page, clockwise from top:
Sisters Shangi and Tsomo suffer from goitre and deafness resulting from iodine deficiency. 'Our young people mustn't end up like us.'

Dr Ga Li tests children at Genu School for signs of goitre.

Harvest time in a village west of Lhasa.

Iodised salt is the solution to iodine deficiency. It sounds simple, but producing it, distributing it, and encouraging people to consume it is highly complex. An iodised salt factory has been established with support from an Australian aid project. 'The factory is making a difference but even at full capacity, it cannot meet the needs,' says Dr Li. 'We are hoping that a second factory will eventually be built.'

Iodine pills are distributed as an interim measure until the production and distribution of iodised salt becomes more widespread. Dr Li hopes that Tibet will eradicate the problem in the next few years. 'Such diseases have been virtually eliminated in the rest of China. We have a long way to go but we now have the commitment of all levels of government.'

After concluding his examination of the schoolchildren, Dr Li introduces me to two elderly sisters in a neighbouring village. Shangi, 68, and Tsomo, 76, are both afflicted with extreme goitre, deafness and other conditions resulting from iodine deficiency. 'Our young people mustn't end up like us,' says Shangi. 'We need to make people aware of the need for iodine.'

SEVEN HOURS WEST by jeep is Shigatse, Tibet's second-largest city. The fourth floor of the drab-looking Shigatse City Water Supply Company serves as HQ for the Tibet Primary Health Care & Water Supply Project. The project has helped bring safe drinking water to nearly 40 villages in the Shigatse region. Water is abundant in Tibet, but safe drinking water isn't. The traditional way is for villagers to gather drinking water from streams near where the cattle graze and the people bathe. Diarrhoea from bad water is prevalent in rural Tibet and each year children die from acute symptoms.

The new water systems are simple yet powerful. The water source is positioned at some distance from human or animal habitation. A trench is dug, a small reservoir is constructed, heavy-duty plastic pipes are laid and taps are installed at strategic locations around the village. The villagers can maintain these systems and each family contributes around two dollars a year to a maintenance fund.

At a 'turning on the tap ceremony' in Kunggo village, east of Shigatse, all 118 residents gather near the reservoir. Women display their finest jewellery. Someone lights a mound of incense and as the village elder descends into a manhole to turn the system on, the crowd releases a collective squeal of delight before tossing barley flour to the wind. There is singing, dancing and applause. Then come the offerings of the ubiquitous white scarves (an expression of gratitude) and of yak butter tea. At one of the three village taps, children scream with delight as they wash their hands, old men look on in disbelief and women gather with their water-carriers. 'I've lived here most of my life,' says Ga Drolma as she watches water gush from the shiny new taps. 'This will make a difference.' ■

This page, clockwise from top: Children in Kunggo village delight in the tap water.

Children at Genu School.

In Kunggo village, Ga Drolma watches safe drinking water flow.

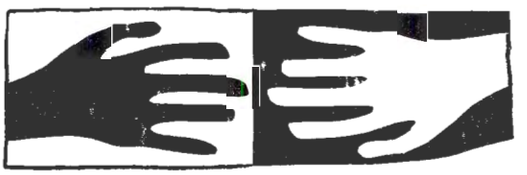
Photographs by Peter Davis.

Peter Davis is a Melbourne writer and photographer.

The Tibet Iodine Deficiency Elimination Project and the Tibet Primary Health Care & Water Supply Project both receive funds from AusAID, the Australian government's aid arm.

Through the barriers

Reconciliation is an abstract word, but when people meet face to face in the right circumstances, the connections may be as real as they are surprising. **Brian McCoy** reports.



'I DIDN'T THINK they would like us.' Her words shocked me. At the end of a successful three-day gathering they came so plainly and directly.

We had come as a small group from the desert to join a meeting of young adults. A family—wife, husband and two young children—another young man and myself. We had travelled a long way to one of our major cities. It was a tiring trip by dirt road and plane and we were not sure how the gathering would go. But we felt it was a good chance to meet other young people, share some Aboriginal culture and experience something of a city that our group had never seen.

She was obviously pleased her expectations had not been met. She and her husband and her children had all enjoyed themselves.

There was an evening session when our group swapped stories about their lives, their community back home and their culture. The sharing began with some reticence, but it gradually relaxed and developed. There were some sad and funny stories, a few songs in English and in a desert language, and gradually a deeper discussion developed about the struggles of growing up as a young Aboriginal person in Australia today. Some of the stories brought tears. Some of the people listening recounted their own histories of growing up uneasily in the country with Aboriginal people. But most had never met or spoken to an Aboriginal person.

The talking that evening prompted a number of conversations and encounters over the following days. People came and sat and ate with us. They helped mind the two young children, told their own stories and showed genuine interest in our group.

Yet her comment still disturbed me. Why wouldn't people like her? Why wouldn't people like her family, her people, her culture?

I remembered the first time I travelled, as a young student, to a northern community. I had not been there long when I was invited to go out camping with a family. On my return, a man who had lived in Aboriginal communities for some years asked me quite seriously, 'Did they feed you?'

Twenty-five years later his question still shocks me. It was as though he felt that in my place he would have been left to himself, left uncared for. I have never forgotten all those layers of doubt and anxiety. What is it that we fear in the other?

A few years ago I picked up a young man on a dry desert road and took him into the local town. I had never met him before, but he was happy to chat as we went along. He wanted to talk about 'that woman', the one he had seen on TV, the one who was trying to get into parliament. She did not like Aborigines. In his view she would get rid of them all if she were elected. It took me a while to work out who he was referring to. She hadn't visited the Kimberley, certainly not where we lived. Her name was not important here. But he had seen her on TV. Her very strong, negative messages about him and his people had touched and hurt him.

ANOTHER TIME, when I was visiting a desert community, I received a phone call asking me to pass on a message to them. The message was that a car-load of the Ku Klux Klan was coming. They were wearing tattoos. Somehow—I am not sure why—people believed it was the KKK. I am still not sure of the significance of the tattoos. A few years before, when I was working with the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, I had seen KKK signs painted on various road signs in the Pilbara. Occasionally I would hear from Aboriginal people that they thought the KKK were still alive and active. But I had never seen or met anyone identified as belonging to them. I delivered the message as simply and off-handedly as I could, making it clear that I didn't think there was anything to worry about. Then I camped for the night.

The next morning, when I visited the community's store, I found that the people had moved from their homes during the night and gone bush. They were most surprised to see me. Word had gone out that on my way back home I had encountered the KKK group at the local river crossing and had been assaulted. The tale was not true, but at least it was good to know on what side of that racial fence I was seen to be standing.

What is this relationship that exists between us if some, perhaps many, Aboriginal people remain to be convinced that we non-Aboriginal people actually like them? We admire them as sports people, artists and songwriters, but do we convey to them that we like them just as they are? As one of my artist friends says, 'We buy Aboriginal dot art and hang it in our homes, but not art depicting Aboriginal faces.' It is as if it is safer to have the dots in our houses than the people themselves.

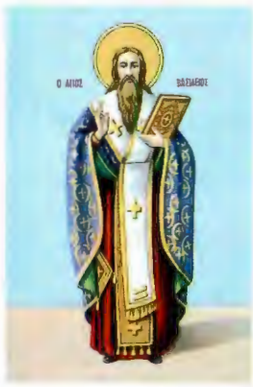
At the end of last year I went to the AFL Grand Final with two Aboriginal friends. Getting tickets had been difficult and we were separated by some thousands of seats. Something happened that afternoon which deeply touched the three of us. When Essendon's Michael Long tackled Melbourne's Troy Simmonds, I was stunned and worried, like many other spectators. It was not that such a serious incident could not happen in a Grand Final, it was that this one was different. This involved an Aboriginal player, someone the three of us had met, someone we respected. The crowd's anger was palpable. But it was one thing to hear articulated fears for a fallen player, quite another to hear the abuse that came with it. It was as if the incident prompted a further level of violence, one where race suddenly became the central and significant issue.

Later, my two friends told me what they experienced that day. They told me the hurt and frustration they feel when they hear words that remind them of an ancient but still living memory of mistreatment and prejudice. I don't know those feelings from the inside as they do, but I do know how easily dangerous forces can be unleashed when people feel judged by their colour, and how powerfully those forces can affect those who feel judged.

Yet I feel hopeful still. As our group prepared to leave the city for their desert home, the young mother summed up the value she saw in coming south. It was a good chance to go shopping, see the latest film and try some novel foods. It was also a time for her and for our whole group to learn that, given the chance, we can share more than our pasts might suggest. We can hear each other's stories. We can begin to understand one another. We can even discover that we like each other. ■

Brian McCoy SJ has lived with Indigenous people in the north of Australia for many years. He is presently studying Indigenous health issues.





Believing in Greece

Gillian Bouras explores the spirit of her adopted country.

February 10th. The Peloponnese.

IN THE VILLAGE HOUSE in the South West Peloponnese, Greece, a seeping cold wakes me up far earlier than I plan or wish. Searching for warmth, I stagger into the main room to find the television set blaring already. Not unusual, this. What is unusual is the fact of the liturgy (and it will last three hours) being telecast on a Saturday morning. But I've forgotten: today is the Feast Day of the Holy Martyr, Saint Charalambos, protector of the town of Filiatra, in western Messinia. Gold-clad clergy move in stately fashion across the screen while the large congregation watches: Orthodoxy is in large part ancient theatre, and so audience participation is minimal. Occasionally lips move as snatches of psalms are recognised, and the sign of the cross is sketched by all at appointed times, according to signals learned by the faithful in childhood.

Saints, clockwise from top left: Konstantine and Helen, John, George, Charalambos, Nikolaos, Basil, Fanourios and Dimitrios.

I am neither Greek nor Orthodox; by birth and conditioning I am Nonconformist, so that saints (how can I put this?) took a back seat in my spiritual life, such as it was, for a long time. Way back then we recited the Apostles' Creed occasionally, and I have a vague recollection that the communion of saints got a slight look-in in the old Scottish Psalter and Presbyterian Hymnary, but that was about it. Saints, as I recall, were rather suspect, and usually ignored. Certainly the notion of petitioning individuals or viewing them as personal protectors was considered dangerously papist. But at the age of 20, going on about 14 by today's standards, I made my first tentative steps towards an acquaintance with Orthodoxy and a steep learning curve, which continues steep, not to mention rocky, even now, decades later. And at the age of

35 I migrated, somewhat unexpectedly, to Greece, where it is impossible to ignore saints.

To this day Greek parents have the choice of giving their children ancient or Christian names, with many priests expressing disapproval of the former, let alone anything more adventurous or modern, so perish the thought of a *Tracey* or a *Troy*, even in the diaspora: a Greek-Australian couple of my acquaintance had to shop around in fairly desperate fashion when they wanted to christen their daughter *Marilyn*. My three sons are called Dimitrios, Nikolaos and Alexander. I finally got my choice of name with the youngest, but suspected that, while Saints Dimitrios and Nikolaos/Nicholas were documented historical figures, Saint Alexander was a Christianised version of Alexander the Great. But no. There are two Saints Alexander, it appears. Don't ask me which is which: they're both fairly minor compared with SS D and N, whose respective Feast Days on October 26th and December 6th are always celebrated in style. My baby, the only one of my sons born in Greece, now a strapping six-footer of 19, has been moaning for years that nobody *ever* remembers August 30th. He's not particularly concerned about shut churches, unlit candles, and unsaid prayers, you understand, but regrets the lack of presents and parcels of very sweet and gooey cakes brought to those whose name-days are better known.

My sons' childhood and mine could not be more different. Take, for example, the matters of geography and topography. They are used to mountains and valleys, but I spent my formative years in the Wimmera district of Victoria. Huge skies and unlimited flatness are the things I remember. I also remember finding it hard to believe that the world was actually round. Despite what teachers and parents said, there was no visual or visible evidence to support this contention, and I had a sneaking fear that it could be quite an easy matter to drop off the edge of desert or paddock, even if your average merino managed to stay somehow glued on. All these years later I have no idea whether my children have ever thought about the fact that the village, like most villages in Greece, is protected by a kind of spiritual ring, for marking the outskirts of settlement at various points in a modest architectural punctuation, there are chapels named for saints: John, Konstantine and Helen, Dimitrios, George, Basil and Nikolaos. It is as if they are guarding the villagers and the much larger central church of the Saints Theodore. The boundaries are thus clear: no fear of vast space, unexpected edges, or flat-earthness here. Oh, and on top of a high hill there is the chapel of the Prophet Elijah.

My mother-in-law, the redoubtable Aphrodite, now gone to her eternal rest and reward, was the daughter and wife of Orthodox priests. She stood five-foot-nothing in her stockinged feet, had a gaze of basilisk intensity, and exuded a power connected with status, custom and received knowledge before which I quailed very regularly. She was illiterate, and this fact alone led us to have many an odd and tense conversation. One of these concerned Elijah, and because she always considered me an ignoramus of the first water, it was a relief to us both that I knew said prophet had risen to heaven in a chariot of fire. But consternation arose when I said something about Elijah's land of origin. *Are you telling me he wasn't Greek?* she queried. And that is precisely what I was telling her, but later I realised that once again she was probably right, if you consider that *Elijah* is *Elias* in Greek, and that the similarity, much more marked in pronunciation than spelling would suggest, between *Elias* and *helios*, meaning *sun*, is surely not a mere coincidence. The link joining Elijah and Apollo the sun-god, also a rider in a chariot, seems quite secure. In any case, Elijah/Apollo always has his chapel on a hill, and fire-leaping is an ancient way of celebrating the name day on July 20th.

Every day is a Feast Day in the Orthodox world. Diaries and calendars list this information as a matter of course, for there are so many saints that the sharing of days is mandatory. Devout people are supposed to know and celebrate the important days without consulting any diary, and one old man I once knew seemed to have the whole calendar off by heart: you could choose a day at random and he would recite the listed saints without a falter, and was never wrong. Various occupations and professions claim a patron saint. St Nicholas is the obvious one for the Greek Navy, while the Artillery chose St Barbara. When I first came to Greece, I was bemused to find the post offices closed on February 10th, for the aforementioned St Charalambos is the patron saint of postmen.

As I am a devotee of the gentle and dying art of correspondence, as in *snail mail*, I have fond feelings for St Charalambos. But he is an interesting and important personage anyway, and well-documented as a bishop with actual dates, having been born in 85AD in Magnesia, Asia Minor, and martyred in 198AD, early days for Christianity within the enormous Roman Empire. He obviously gave the lie to the notion that the good die young, for legend insists that he retained youthful vigour and liveliness for all of his 113 years. His life was one of virtue and philanthropy, spent in fasting, prayer and ministering to the poor, the weak and the suffering. But as what the Greeks call 'a genuine diamond' he was inevitably bound to provoke the rage and envy of the enemies of Christianity.

He had a very narrow escape when he was arrested by the provincial authorities who were determined to force him to renounce the true faith and turn to idolatry. This he steadfastly refused to do, and consequently endured a flaying by means of prayer and chanting. On that occasion public pressure forced the governor of the province, one Loukianos, to have him freed. But fate and destiny caught up with

Charalambos when Septimus Severus, a Roman emperor of north African origin, ordered him beheaded: the number of conversions he had made was apparently over the pagan limit. Moments before the axe fell, so tradition would have it, Charalambos' soul left his body. Divine intervention was of course responsible, and so this very deserving person was spared the specific agony of a violent death. He has always been a very popular Orthodox saint and many miracles have been attributed to him.

In July 1944, a German convoy carrying supplies from Kalamata, the capital of Messinia, to the troops at Filiatra, was attacked by members of the Greek resistance. More than a hundred German soldiers were killed, as against a mere 17 Greeks. The orders went out from HQ at Tripolis in the central Peloponnese: 50 Filiatra locals were to be executed for every dead German. And the town was to be burned. The man in charge of this operation was an Austrian Protestant called Kontau, thought by all to be a hardened officer of the Occupation forces. Kontau applied himself to the task of readying his troops to carry out these orders, and the inhabitants of the town endured a night of suspense while under strict curfew.

But on the morning of July 20th, St Elijah's day, while the dreadful suspense continued, Kontau demanded, to the general mystification of his staff and an accompanying group of Greek priests and teachers, to be taken on a tour of the town's churches.

The expedition took some time, and it seemed, all the while, as if Kontau were on a mysterious search, for in every church he peered at all the icons very closely. At last, when he and his party arrived at the Church of the Entry of the Mother of God, things changed. After a brief interval Kontau found the icon of St Charalambos and saluted it, and then remained as if in prayer, with his face, according to the very curious observers, contracting in emotion.

A slight digression to explain, probably unnecessarily, that iconography is rather like a treasure hunt or a jigsaw or a trail that a detective could follow: St Peter clutches the keys to Heaven, St Nicholas wears the robes of a bishop, St John carries his own head on a platter, the warrior saints like Dimitrios wear armour, St Fanourios, the saint of illumination and revelation, carries a lantern, and so on. Kontau found the long white beard he was looking for. All the previous night, in far from peaceful sleep, he had dreamed of an old man with a long white beard who had repeatedly asked him to spare the inhabitants of Filiatra. The spectre emphasised that the result would be that Kontau, his men and their families, would get through the war safely. Very much shaken, Kontau cancelled the orders. I do not know what the immediate consequences of his action were, but this is the story as I have both heard it and read it. And everything occurred as the saint had promised. After the war Kontau returned to Filiatra on an annual pilgrimage to the icon that, as a Protestant, he had once had no idea about, and eventually, when he could no longer do so, his children did the same.

February 19th. Athens.

I am still very muddled with regard to the topic of saints. I light candles when in Orthodox churches, but certainly do not kiss icons. But in some strange way the graft has taken. My middle son, who is a serving NCO in the SAS section of Greece's regular army, is undergoing tests in a military hospital in Athens. He doesn't know that this morning his heretic mother lit candles and wrote prayer notes for him in the Cathedral. He does know that I have just bought him a postcard picture of St Nicholas. But I feel a bit awkward, just the same. 'Here's your mate,' I say. A man of few words, he grins and says thanks.

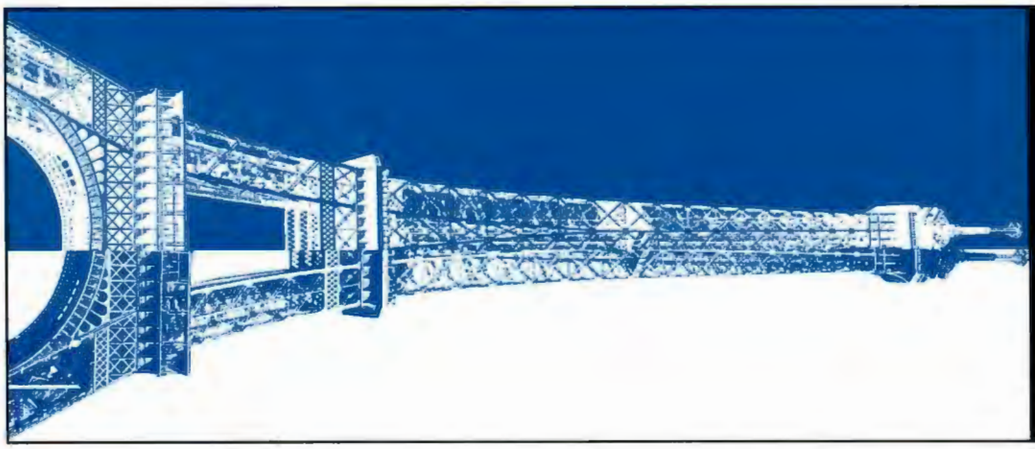
I visit again the next day. There he is, my Niko, sitting up in bed and whiling away the long hospital hours by reading. And, 'Look at him,' he says, grinning again: St Nicholas as bookmark. It is obviously only a short time since St Charalambos' Day, and bound to be the Feast Day of an obscure saint I know nothing about, for I have not bothered to check my diary. I do, however, know a little about the saint of the new year, Basil the Great, who wrote that 'Life without Feast Days is like a long road on which no inns are to be found'.

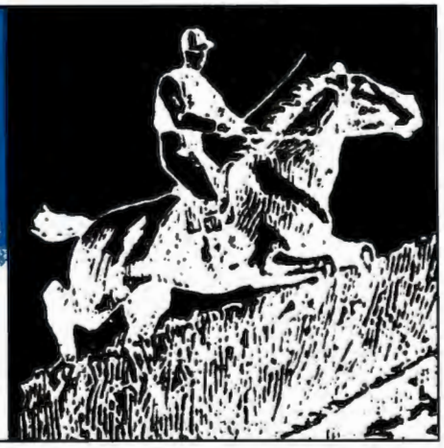
Gillian Bouras is an Australian expatriate whose latest book, *Starting Again*, is published by Penguin Australia.

The last time I saw...

Peter Pierce revisits the city of his—and everyone else's—dreams.

'C'*'EST FOU, PARIS*!' (Paris is mad!) grumbled the genial landlord of the Hôtel des Arts in Montmartre, not for the first time in our hearing. He was reflecting on the city's traffic, the hampered linguistic state and poor manners of some of his foreign guests, pickpockets in the Métro, and of much else that was different from the home region of Corrèzes to which his family makes an annual retreat. While in Paris, he never seems to stray more than a block from the hotel. Thus he missed the chance for another confirmation of his opinion of the city. This was the rash of *Chopper* movie posters, from which Eric Bana smiled out with blood-stained mouth on passers-by in Pigalle, in the grand boulevards, and even near the tacky shrine to Princess Diana, above the Alma Tunnel where she was killed.





Arriving late in May this time, after what seemed like a week of travelling, we went once more for dinner to Le Bateau Lavoir, where we'd eaten on our first night together in Paris, in 1975. At that time the restaurant, named for the laundry women's boats once moored on the Seine, was run by a shrewd old lady who also did the cooking. She had died some time between our visits in 1979 and 1992. Now, installed in the kitchen, was a mute, round-faced woman whose features were set in subdued suspicion of those who came to eat her food. Nonetheless it was good: a *prix fixe* menu for $25 (also stated in Euros at the easy-to-remember conversion rate of one to 6.55957 francs); plain food—onion soup, grilled fish, *bœuf en croûte*, apple tart.

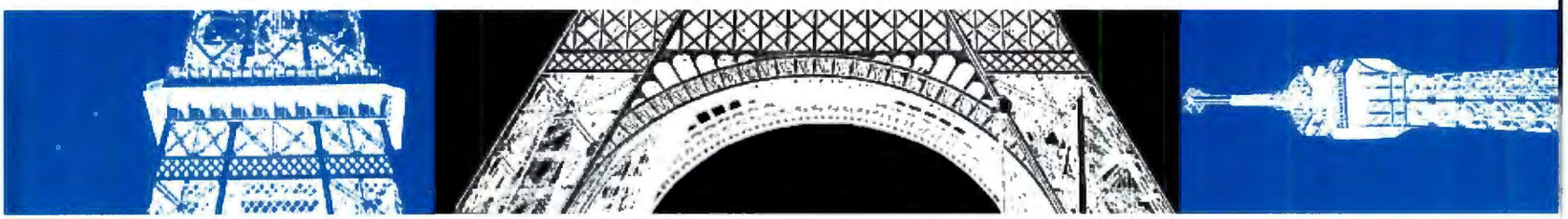
Unhappily the ambience, at least for sentimentalists like us, had been lost. In place of the cheery middle-aged fellow who'd greeted us on previous occasions, a cocky young man was now front of house. The geraniums had gone from the window boxes. And at the next table, a sexual predator pressed his attentions on a young woman. He was actually offering her French lessons. Putting aside the Calvino novel that she had been reading, she introduced herself as Kimmy from New York and began to do what he wanted.

ON EVERY VISIT we have stayed at the Hôtel des Arts, in the narrow, steep Rue Tholozé, which runs up the Montmartre hill from the splendid food market in the Rue Lepic in the direction of Sacré Cœur. Naturally, the street was known to Maigret. In 1975 a room at the hotel cost nine dollars a night. Now renovated, with a lift, colour television and lavatory by Villeroy and Boch, the price is still reasonable. And this time, as two years ago, we were rewarded for loyalty by having attic rooms with a view of the Eiffel Tower.

The surroundings are as busy and crowded as ever. Repugnant little dogs still tow their doting owners, but excrement is seldom to be seen. *J'aime mon quartier. Je ramasse.* (I love my district. I pick up.) the signs wheedle, and they appear to be working. The denizens of this part of the 18th *arrondissement* number the same ageless waiters and small business proprietors we first encountered many years ago, together with early-morning beer drinkers, imperious pseudo-intellectuals with dirty hair, very tall transsexuals and a range of performing beggars. The latter include those plaintively slumped on pavements with messages about their destitution written on cardboard; others who theatrically announce their needs in carriages of the Métro; some who open the post-office door and demand a gratuity before making way. For in this quarter, indeed

everywhere in Paris as the year moves into June, there isn't much room. One consequence is a disciplined courtesy in the occupation and crossing of space. But little can be done about queues for the Louvre that extend for a kilometre and for standing-room only (and barely that) inside Notre Dame.

What still speaks simply and inexpensively of plenty is the fresh food that can be bought in this quarter (and not only here). Mad cows have probably kept the horse butcher in business, although the



disease has tormented chefs to the extent that Alain Pascard, who runs Arpège (three Michelin stars) has turned his restaurant vegetarian. The horse butcher is flanked by a wonderful pastry shop (try the greengage tart; try to remember greengages ...) and by a fish stall. There, one afternoon, I counted for sale 17 kinds of shellfish alone: *crevettes roses* and *crevettes grises*, *araignées de mer*, *bulots cuits* and *vivants*, *bigorneaux cuits* and *vivants*, *langoustines*, *étrilles*, *St Jacques decortiquées*, *tousteaux cuits*, *coques*, *moules d'éspagne*, *téline*, *fines de claire*, *fines de morue*, *palourdes* and *amandes de mer*.

The *charcuterie* shops also incite salivation. In the last decade they've been unexpectedly complemented by Asian *traiteurs* (essentially decent quality fast-food places)—four of them within 200 metres of our hotel. The nearest McDonald's is a kilometre away, in Barbés-Rochechouart, one of the centres of African and Arab Paris, of fabric shops and the breathtakingly cheap Tati stores (veritably *Tati, c'est chic*, as it claims, and what a place for cotton underwear). There is a Bovéesque pleasure in revealing that the Barbés McDonald's is dirty and—this being France—has to sell alcohol. (Bovéesque: adjective from José Bové, farmer, political activist and dung-strewing, implacable enemy of the fast-food chain.)

On every return to Paris there are things previously left undone that now there might be time for: in our case, the Musée Nissim Camondo near the Parc Monceau, *les égouts* (the sewers), African art at the Musée Dapper. The Camondo museum is named for a young French Jewish pilot who was killed in the Great War. It houses, to the point of suffocation, furniture, crockery, carpets, tapestry and paintings from the 18th century. The sewers—across the river from the Diana shrine and refuge of Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo's *Les Misèrables*—have tours conducted by the men who work there. The visitor is encouraged to inspect what is flowing beneath her feet. Euphemistically it is described as waste water and grit. An excellently conceived small museum, placed literally on top of one of the drains, it integrates sewerage developments into the long history of Paris and proclaims how far the city has come.

REVISITING PARIS IS also to want to do familiar things again. Thus we took the Métro from Pigalle to Père Lachaise, to the cemetery where Héloise and Abelard are commemorated; Wilde, Proust, Piaf, Collette and scores of other celebrities are buried there; we saw the wall against which the last of the communards were shot in 1871, imagined Balzac's Rastignac looking down at the city from this point of vantage and warning, 'It's you and me now!'

We walked back from the cemetery through the newly trendy area—at least for intellectuals who have abandoned Montparnasse—of Oberkampf and Belleville (where Piaf was born on a doorstep), past earnest young people at coffee preparing for Monday's compulsory philosophy examination in the *baccalauréat*. The weather was unseasonably warm and the skies above the City of Light—at this time of year—never really darkened. We continued along the Canal St Martin, beloved of the directors of *film noir* in the 1940s, but soon to be emptied for cleaning. The waste problems of Paris have never been more earnestly addressed.

A couple of weeks earlier, work had taken me to Toulouse—one of the most enjoyable of middle-sized European cities—with its fifth-century necropolis, Church of the Jacobins, 11th-century Romanesque cathedral of St Sernin and inviting bars along the Garonne. Subsequently we went to Bayeux, Brussels, thence to Ypres, where the In Flanders Fields Museum features a simulated gas attack while a recording of Wilfred Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum Est' is played. Nearby is the largest of all Commonwealth war cemeteries, Tyne Cot, at Passchendaele, with its 12,000 graves.

For pleasure, a shorter journey was on the agenda. I'd been racing in Paris at three of its tracks: Longchamps, most spacious and grand of any in the world (where in 1975 I backed a filly called Ivanjica which won the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe—but the next year); to the jumps at Auteuil, at the other end of the Bois de Boulogne; and twice to the trots at Vincennes, in the wood on the eastern outskirts of Paris. Perhaps because it's been happening for more than 150 years, the French classics are run 40 kilometres from town, at Chantilly. There, on the first Sunday in June, Anabaa Blue decisively won the Prix du Jockey Club, or French Derby. His sire, Anabaa, one of the shuttle stallions transforming the breeding of thoroughbreds, has just had his first crop racing in Australia. I'd watched on television, albeit determined to get to Chantilly a week later for the Prix de Diane, the French Oaks.

Not that this was easy. We arrived at the Gare du Nord thinking that no station could be more disagreeable and inconvenient than Montparnasse (I had suppressed the weekend *Independent* guide to train travel which said that the worst mainline stations in Europe include every one in Paris). We tried to get a suburban train. Chantilly was off the map. Tried Information: closed. Tried to get out of the station: impossible. Somehow there was no way of escaping the black hole, the ramshackle building site into which we'd

erred. A kindly cleaner offered his pass card for a single exit. I had to squeeze through the turnstile, an unlikely exertion that desperation alone made possible. Finally we received advice: take a main-line train at 2.01pm. What time does it come back from Chantilly? How would I know? Ask when you get there.

Against the odds we arrived for the 156th running of the Prix de Diane, walking from the station under a lovely wooded canopy. Soon the track appeared: Cannon Park or Kyneton with a château. Yet this small, run-down country track with its little old grandstand had mysteriously been ordained as the course for France's three-year-old classics. The often-renovated château is overshadowed by the 186-metre-long Great Stables, built early in the 18th century and now the Living Museum of the Horse. French Oaks Day brought out fashions in the field, but Flemington need not blush. Typical of the hat range was a one-metre-high cage with a live bird inside on its perch.

Fortunately there were horses to see. We climbed on to a mound below the stewards' tower to watch the Prix de Diane. Against the grain I'd backed the favourite, Acquarelliste, by Danehill, which—in Australia—is champion of the shuttle sires. Acquarelliste settled last, but then sprinted brilliantly to catch Nadia not far short of the post and win going away. Jockey Dominique Bœuf cried. Trainer Daniel Wildenstein wondered if his lucky family had another champion like Allez France. The Marseillaise was played. Down the straight, Hungarian hussars staged a mock cavalry battle with sabres as part of the program's sponsorship and the Magyart Festival. I backed the next winner. The clouds came in, young men began to fall over and we headed back to Paris.

We travelled back to the city which Ernest Hemingway ardently called 'a moveable feast', a place that he believed was with one always and anywhere. To admit the stylised simplification of his memory (and one's own) is never an impediment to being engrossed by the grit, the human jostling for space and a hearing, the marvels of art and the marvels of daily living in Paris, now. ■

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Red Rover All Over

First we pick our teams
somebody decides—
two of the big kids.

I am on a team
and not the last one chosen.
Each team lines up
either side of the yard.
Someone yells 'Red Rover all over!'
We storm towards the other line
and meet in a melee in the centre.
We simply must break through.

At Borodino
Napoleon stands on a hill
a glass up to his eye
and watches as his lines break.
The horses scream and fall
the air is full of noise
blood soaks the ground.
Banners flutter
some are tattered.
A great white horse thuds down
and pins its rider
he is screaming
'M'aide! M'aide!'

We reach the other side
some of us are captured
taken finished.
We're puffing
a plait has fallen down
the saxe blue ribbon
flutters on my shoulder
but we're off again
the cry's gone up
'Red Rover all over!'
We storm across the asphalt.

The pepper tree stands guard
drooping in the heat
the captured sit on benches
built around the trunk
and fewer of us now
have reached the other side.

Both lines have thinned
but we must run again.
Practising our lives
we rush and flee apart.

—Kate Llewellyn

PETER MARES

No mouths, only ears

Living Silence: Burma under Military Rule, Christina Fink, Zed Books 2001 (distributed in Australia by ASTAM Books). ISBN 1 85649 926 X, RRP $39.95

EVER SINCE the student uprising that began at 8.08am on 8 August 1988, it has been obvious that Burma's military regime has enjoyed little support among the population.

Those six weeks of nationwide protest were eventually crushed by the military, but not before forcing the concession of a promise of elections.

The ballot was held almost two years later in May 1990, although the regime only allowed it to go ahead because it thought it could skew the result through coercion and meddling. Aung San Suu Kyi was disqualified from standing as a candidate and placed under house arrest. Thousands of her colleagues in the National League for Democracy (NLD) were imprisoned. The government kept all media outlets under tight control, vetted all campaign literature and fostered the establishment of hundreds of small political parties in a bid to split the opposition vote. Despite the best efforts of the regime, the NLD won 392 of the 485 seats. The military-backed National Unity Party won 10.

The election results were never honoured. More than a decade later, the military remains in power, and is probably more firmly entrenched than ever before. The SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) has been replaced by the SPDC (State Peace and Development Council), 'Burma' has officially become 'Myanmar', and little of substance has changed—at least not for the better. Troop strength in the Tatmadaw, the government armed forces, has been boosted from 180,000 to 400,000. Most of the ethnic armies that challenged the regime in the border regions have been temporarily neutralised, coerced or enticed into ceasefire agreements. The organisation structure of the NLD has been smashed, many of its best members imprisoned, killed or forced into exile. The only glimmer of hope has come from a series of secret talks over the past year between top regime officials and Aung San Suu Kyi, who is once again living under house arrest. The talks have coincided with the release of scores of political prisoners, but there seems little prospect of a dramatic breakthrough towards democracy.

Tatmadaw soldiers being trucked through Rangoon. *Photograph by Nic Dunlop.*

How does a regime manage to stay in power when it is so universally hated by its own people, and shunned by significant sections of the international community? Some of the answers can be found in Christina Fink's *Living Silence*, a detailed and moving account of life under military rule. Part journalism, part political science, part oral history, it renders Burma's struggle in engaging and human terms through the individual stories of its people.

On one level there is naked oppression. The general outline of the horror stories that emerge from human rights reports on Burma—torture, imprisonment, the torching of villages, forced labour—are given shape and character through personal testimony.

Take the case of Cho Zin, who stepped on a landmine, after being forced to walk in front of a Tatmadaw column, clearing their route with his legs:

> Cho Zin was lucky. Fellow villagers got him to a hospital in Thailand, his lower leg was amputated, and he survived. The Tatmadaw offered him no compensation or assistance. After Cho Zin was well enough to get around on crutches he staged a one-man protest against the ongoing civil war on the Thai side of the Thai–Burma 'Friendship Bridge' which links the two countries ... According to Cho Zin, in the four or five villages near his own, there were over a hundred amputees. 'If you count those who died,' he said, 'there will be about three or four hundred.'

Brutality breeds fear, and the regime has created an atmosphere where neighbours do not trust one another enough to speak their mind. It is reminiscent of the communist regime in the former East Germany, where after the fall of the Berlin Wall, activists often discovered from the Stasi files that close friends and colleagues were the ones who had betrayed them. In Burma the use of informers is also widespread:

> Htway Win, a student activist in 1988, told how one of his fellow student union members had switched sides after the failed demonstrations. His family was poor, and he needed a job, so he joined the military and was assigned to intelligence work ... At first Htway Win's friend warned him and his colleagues that some intelligence agents were shadowing them; later he identified Htway Win to other authorities who had Htway Win's name but did not know what he looked like. Htway Win was taken to one of the military intelligence's interrogation centres, where he suffered brutal torture. At one point his former friend brought him fried noodles and apologized.

As one Burmese writer tells Fink, 'We have no mouths, only ears.' People keep their thoughts to themselves, and in so doing, unwittingly bolster the regime. Obedience becomes a habit. As a Burmese psychiatrist now living abroad puts it, being 'immunised' to hardship helps people to survive, but it also renders them so helpless that they no longer

see any point in resistance. Parents who were once activists themselves will often pressure their children not to join demonstrations or challenge authority.

Burma's problems are not contained within its frontiers. Thailand hosts more than 200,000 refugees from Burma's political and military conflicts, and perhaps as many as one million illegal immigrants, forced across the border by poverty. Many women end up in the sex trade, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic is spreading along the heroin trafficking routes from the Golden Triangle, into Thailand, India and southern China. The drug lords are now branching out into the production of huge quantities of methamphetamines.

Members of the European Union have sought to bring about change by isolating the regime, and pressure groups in the US have convinced major companies like Pepsi to halt their business operations in the country. By contrast, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has sought 'constructive engagement', arguing that economic growth is the best agent of change, and that reform is more likely once Burma is more fully engaged with the international community. This is not a disinterested position of course. The ASEAN states have their own economic agendas to pursue. But Burma's more immediate neighbours are also acutely aware that shutting the door on contact is likely to drive the regime deeper into its embrace with China, which has furnished Burma with military training and equipment in exchange for access to Burmese territory to monitor its rival India.

There are no easy answers. Australia's much-maligned provision of human rights training to Burmese officials seems risible in the context of a regime that harbours such an extraordinary capacity for brutality. However, Fink will not dismiss it. As she points out, by its very size, the army must be part of any 'solution' in Burma and, as the election results in 1990 showed, there are many soldiers in the ranks who desire change. Burma is waiting for its version of the Philippines' Fidel Ramos, an influential General who is willing to switch sides, not necessarily with the purest of motives, and open up some space for the restoration of civil society. Only then will the silence be lifted. ■

Peter Mares presents *Asia Pacific* on Radio Australia and Radio National, and is the author of *Borderline: Australia's Treatment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers* (UNSW Press).

BOOKS:2

JOHN BUTTON

The pen and politics

'Friendship is a Sheltering Tree': John Curtin's Letters 1907 to 1945, David Black, John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library, 2001. ISBN 1 74067 040 X, RRP $29.70

In his 1991 Placido Domingo speech, Paul Keating characterised Australia's prime ministers as a bunch of lacklustre John the Baptists. 'We've never,' he said, 'had one leader.' John Curtin was a 'trier', Ben Chifley a 'plodder', Bob Hawke 'tripped over television cables in shopping centres'.

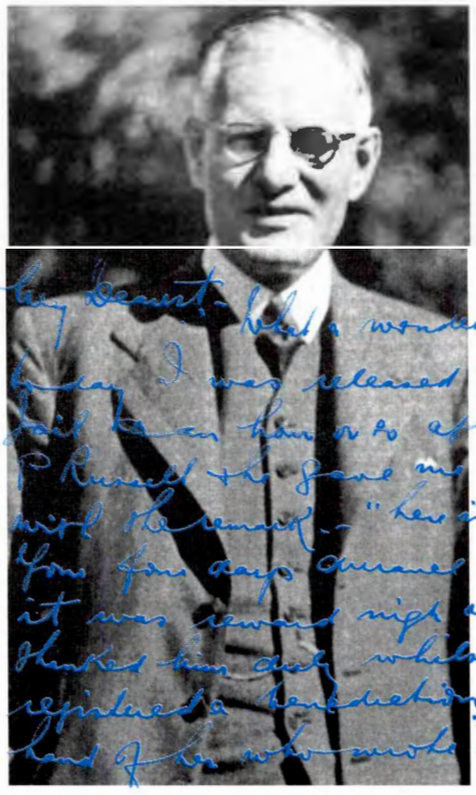
It was a speech which irritated Hawke. A 'spin-doctored' version of subsequent discussions between the two men suggested that Hawke was most upset by Keating's dismissal of Curtin as a 'trier'. Hawke was an admirer of Curtin and a student of his career.

In 1991 Keating could not have read Curtin's letters or David Day's excellent biography, both published subsequently. His view of Curtin probably came from his early mentor, Jack Lang, a more than usually venomous politician, who undermined both Curtin and Chifley.

A cold reading of Curtin's published letters (without annotations) might justify the conclusion that Keating's view had something going for it. Sadly it is a rather scrappy collection, overweighted with letters written when Curtin was a young man, to Jessie Gunn, some eight years his junior. There are no published replies. It is a one-sided correspondence, apart from a tantalising quote in which the young girl refers to a death, and writes 'of the vanished hands and the voice that was still'.

The letters to Jessie Gunn constitute the first section of *Friendship is a Sheltering Tree*. The second section is devoted to letters to Elsie Needham, a young woman with whom Curtin enjoyed a protracted and somewhat distant courtship before she became his wife in 1917. This correspondence continued throughout their marriage, but again there are no published replies. The third section contains more letters to Elsie, letters to long-time friends, to political colleagues like Frank Anstey and Ted Theodore, and some friendly exchanges with Robert Menzies and President Roosevelt.

Both Geoffrey Serle, in his 1998 monograph *John Curtin: For Australia and Labor*, and Lloyd Ross, Curtin's first biographer, thought the letters to Jessie Gunn were a means by which Curtin clarified his own ideas and sought to improve his literary expression. It is uncertain whether

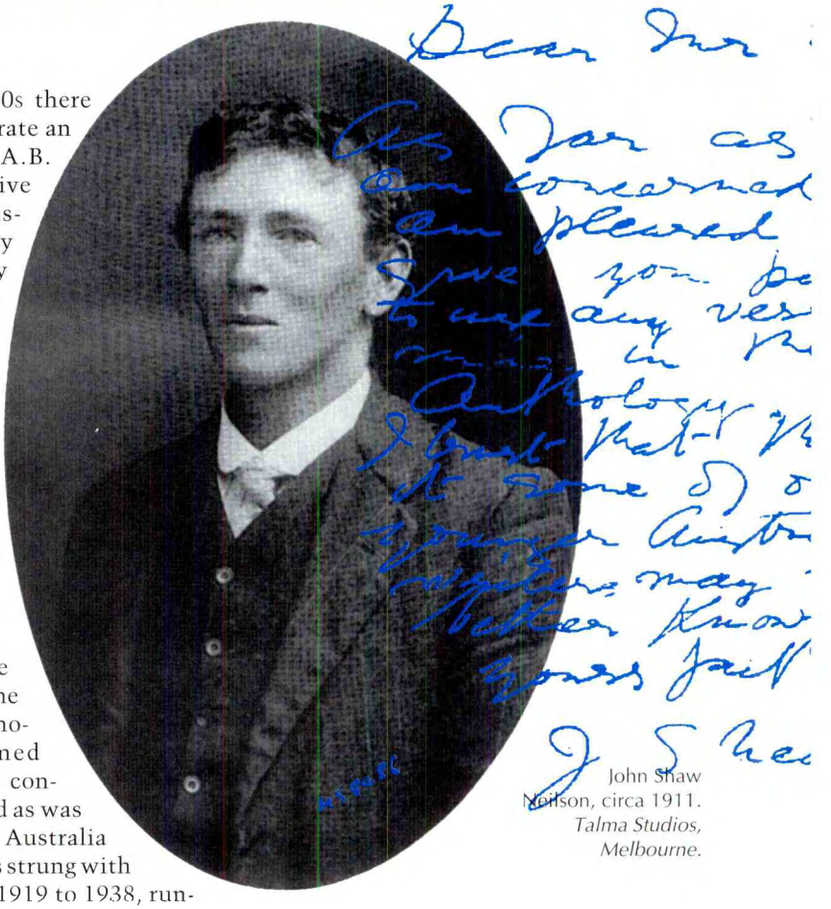


John Curtin, 1945.
JCPML00376/29, Curtin Family Collection.

JIM DAVIDSON

Lettered life

John Shaw Neilson: A Life in Letters, Helen Hewson, Miegunyah/Melbourne University Press, 2001. ISBN 0 522 84920 2, RRP $69.95



John Shaw Neilson, circa 1911. *Talma Studios, Melbourne.*

IN THE EARLY 1930s there was a move to celebrate an Australian poet. A.B. Paterson was still alive (an unfortunate disqualification), Henry Lawson only recently dead—and emphatically vernacular. Adam Lindsay Gordon, on the other hand, had been a dashing figure on horseback and a cousin of Lord Byron, and so a commemorative tablet went up in Westminster Abbey's Poet's Corner, while in Melbourne his statue displaced the Eight-Hour Day memorial. Gordon seemed ready-made for the conservative agenda; and as was said at the time, in Australia the lyre of poetry was strung with horsehair. But from 1919 to 1938, running parallel to these manoeuvres, appeared the books of John Shaw Neilson, a half-blind, quietly spoken labourer from the Mallee. To a more discerning (and particularly female) public, these lyrics, with their intense scrutiny of the environment, seemed to hold something of the secret of Australia. (No pun on Ern Malley for them; rather, a case of from deserts the prophets come.) Among the poet's early champions were Mary Gilmore, Nettie Palmer and Louise Dyer. A.G. Stephens, Neilson's encourager and agent, lost little time in dubbing him 'first of Australian poets'.

Contemporary critical opinion, assembled in an appendix to this collection, was by no means inclined to fall in line. One critic was not alone in remarking that 'the commonplace seems continually to be missed by a mere hairbreadth.' But against that there was Nettie Palmer's later comment: 'His work has the dew on it.' Quite early on, Symbolist elements were found in Neilson's verse, and a refreshing originality at a time when most Australian poetry was 'bookish in its inspiration and imitative in its manner'. But, as Stephens repeatedly told the poet, the very fineness of the verse told against it, particularly as the corpus was not large. Even at the end of his career, Neilson's publishers found they had hundreds of copies of the *Collected Poems* on their hands.

This volume draws together nearly 500 documents, mostly letters, and a few telling subsidiary accounts, such as Hal Porter's insightful description of Neilson when he met him in the Exhibition

Curtin ever met Jessie. She was, indeed, a 'pen-friend' and his letters are full of allusions to his reading at the time, and his affection for poetry and romantic novels. One letter is an account of the plot of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, another of a novel by Robert Buchanan, a largely forgotten 19th-century novelist and poet.

There is an element of 'the trier' here, but it would be unfair to conclude that Curtin was merely practising his writing. The letters have the warmth and sagacity of a man in his early 20s introducing the cares of the world to a younger sister. She is advised to stay at school beyond the age of 14, to persist with her education. 'War', he wrote, 'is an abomination, a creature of the devil. Hate it Jessie for it is an iniquity.' And from time to time there is a hint of life's shortcomings, of the 'tired feeling' and the 'futility of doing'.

The letters to Jessie Gunn ended in 1910 but he continued to correspond intermittently with friends and associates from his early formative years. They were clearly important to him and none more so than Elsie, whom he adored and depended on. His letters to her were always affectionate, gentlemanly in a charming and old-fashioned way, and at times full of rich descriptions of his activities as a unionist and political activist.

At a conscription meeting, which he attended for 'entertainment', 'the Chairman was an old whiskery lunatic who spoke in spasms'. Curtin feared Labor's 'quicksands of expediency' and his short prison term for defying conscription, 'nerves our hearts and steels us to the great cause'. Certainly the letters improved as time passed.

It is a pity that this is such a disparate and fragmented collection. Fortunately it is accompanied by a detailed and scholarly commentary by Professor David Black which sets it in context and provides some narrative consistency.

Nonetheless from the letters themselves one gains some understanding of Curtin's caring qualities, his loyalty, his passion, his intellect and the growing sense that there is a destiny to be fulfilled. Through the letters Curtin evolves from the young radical to a man who reluctantly accepts that politics is at best a form of palliative care for the human spirit.

Alone and in isolation few of the letters are remarkable. As a collection they illustrate part of the fabric of Curtin's life and add to an understanding of his great achievements. ■

John Button was a senator and minister in the Hawke and Keating governments.

Gardens. It is, as Helen Hewson claims, 'a life in letters'. There are about 300 written by Neilson, or written out for him, given his persistent eye trouble. Most of these are in public collections; the only significant group which is not is the Louise Dyer correspondence held in Monaco. But it is most unlikely that many more will ever be found: there are no letters at all for the whole period 1872–1907. Since the family was often on the move in search of work, there would have been periodic clear-outs. Some too would have gone in the Chinkapook mice plague of 1917. ('We have often been eaten out by rabbits', Neilson noted in comparison, 'but the rabbit is clean & gentlemanly and may himself be eaten.') So the first hundred letters take you as far as 1924, for a life which ends in 1942. Nevertheless the collection extends our knowledge of the poet considerably, despite being addressed primarily to publishing matters, whether editorial or contractual. We now have a supplementary volume to Neilson's autobiography, something less even-handed or ironed out by a single act of recollection. Elements of spontaneity are present, balanced by a persistent quiet forcefulness.

We learn much from these letters. Some of it should not surprise us: Neilson tolerated his harsh navvy life, but often found the atmosphere, with its constant talk of beer and two-up, 'oppressive'. Similarly, when he finally came out of the Mallee to literary gatherings in Melbourne or Sydney, he was a great success, with an ease of manner and a capacity to converse with newly met people that often surprised his hosts. In fact, as is made plain here, he was much more broadly informed than people imagined—one letter establishes the much conjectured-upon link with Verlaine, while others show an interest in art and an assuredness in literary judgment. He had little time for Lawson's poems, but admired the short stories; thought C.J. Dennis a poet in spite of himself; and felt it 'a pity Tennyson didn't knock off when a few of his best things were written'. And although he was not tempted into free verse himself, he understood that it might suit young poets better. Occasionally he comes close to aphorism: 'Books are really other people's mind[s] spread out before us.'

Somewhere around 1930 the letters gain in amplitude; but this may be the result of a greater resort to amanuenses rather than of an increased confidence. Neilson remained a timid man, terrified that the anti-capitalist element in his poem about a typiste could imperil his job at the Country Roads Board. But if he had difficulty in negotiating his way through the world, this was partly because of a superabundant spiritual life. In his first letter to Mary Gilmore he said that, like a diviner, he might be 'the means of suggesting to you something that I cannot understand myself'. A man of monkish temperament, he shied away from things sexual. His needs were simple. He had no bike, and thought a car basically 'an improved wheelbarrow'. Friends he usually met in public, as his lodgings were so basic there was nowhere to entertain them at home. A man who made light of his poverty, his frequent attempts at humour were often laboured. But then wit rarely stems from a deep equanimity.

One of the most valuable things in the volume is the correspondence between the poet and his editor, A.G. Stephens. Neilson was aware that he needed guidance, since—and it arose directly from his concern with rhythm in composition—he was 'more likely to be right in the sound than in the sense'. Dependence grew as his sight became worse. The exchange of letters is interesting for the brisk, rational advice the poet was repeatedly given in business matters, and shows too how very considerably Stephens helped to shape such verse as the splendid 'Song for a Honeymoon'—perhaps too much so. For all the considerable good he did Neilson—including sinking £60 of his own money in publishing the poet's first book—Stephens was a control freak, always inclined to insist on his pound of flesh when it came to permissions and fees. In the end, when discussing a new contract, they reached a stalemate; then Stephens suddenly died. Despite the editor's increasing autocracy, Neilson was well aware of what he owed him.

This volume is a landmark in Neilson studies. It is admirably conceived and alertly edited; the introductory essay is marked by a sureness of judgment. Appropriately illustrated, the book has been attractively produced by Melbourne University Press. ■

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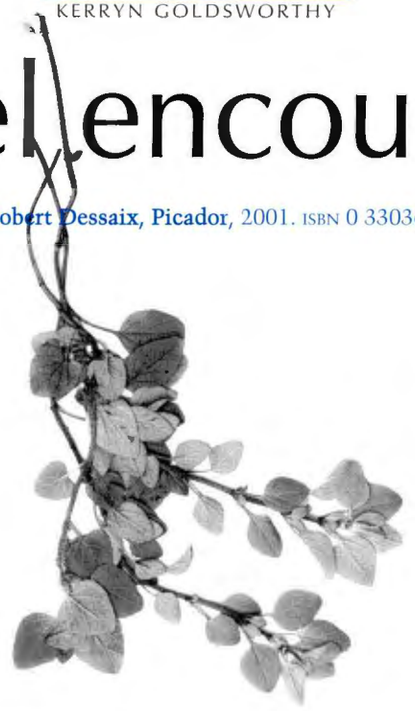
KERRYN GOLDSWORTHY

Novel encounters

Corfu: A Novel, Robert Dessaix, Picador, 2001. ISBN 0 33036 278 X, RRP $35



Corfu is the first of Robert Dessaix's books to lay explicit claim to the status of fiction: the (very beautiful) cover says 'Corfu: A Novel', as does the title page. This claim is undermined almost at once by the information that the book contains at least one significant character who was a real historical personage and who is identified in the book by name; this information appears even before the title page. Shortly after it, there appears as an epigraph a quotation from *The Odyssey*, glossed thus: 'Odysseus, a notorious if spellbinding liar, recounts his arrival on the island of Corfu on his way home from Troy.'

So, even before the book proper has begun, the cautious reader has been well warned, in three different places, against the making of easy assumptions: about what sort of book this is, about who its narrator is, about who the central character is, about who is speaking.

Readers of this novel who have also read David Marr's 1991 biography of Patrick White may not realise that they have already briefly encountered Kester Berwick, the shadowy, absent, real-life character around whose absence this novel revolves. In the White biography, Marr describes the theatre director John Tasker thus: 'The son of a coal-miner, he was rescued from the Hunter Valley at the age of eighteen by a lover who took him to London ...' This briefly evoked and unnamed lover was Kester Berwick, born Frank Perkins in Adelaide in 1903. The prefatory note says, 'Although this novel was inspired by the life of the Australian writer and actor Kester Berwick, the narrator is as fictional as the characters he encounters.'

The commentary on the novel that I've seen and heard so far seems determined to ignore this last remark. I can't ignore it because I've met someone very like this narrator before, in a short story by Dessaix called 'A Clear Conscience' that was first published in 1986. The narrator of that story, like the narrator of this novel, is a man with a mannered if not positively gabby way of talking, given to the repeated use of verbal tics like 'quite frankly' and scornful reflections on what other people mean when they talk about love. The narrator of 'A Clear Conscience' turns out to be a very nasty piece of work indeed, and I'm not saying that the two narrators are 'the same'—only that I think readers of this book need to be very careful not to be lulled into thinking that its narrator is in any way a reliable one, or is in any way to be easily associated with what the author might say or think.

And this is one of the things that make the book heavy going sometimes. The reader/narrator relationship sometimes gets vertiginous as the reader is shoved off balance by various things, like the moment when the narrator deliberately steps on a child's toy for no better reason than that he happens to be in a snit, or the point at which the reader realises that this narrator says 'to be honest' and 'to be frank' and 'to tell the truth' so often that he must surely have something to hide (for who but the most sneaky draw attention so insistently to their own acts of truth-telling?). The narrator is an actor, which makes him in effect a deceiver by profession. He actually spells it out, at the end of Chapter Nine: 'Nothing I say is to be trusted.'

The narrative shape of this novel is a kind of spiral, which would work better if the three main strands—the story of Kester Berwick; the wanderings of the narrator, which eventually resolve themselves into a journey home; and, lastly and to my mind least, what for want of a better word I'll call the love story—were stronger. As it is, the love object is a pretty but irritating boy called William with whom the narrator is, not surprisingly, usually furious; he's a cute drifter with no apparent desires, ambitions or ideas beyond instant gratification of various kinds. The lovers (or whatever they are) fight, they make up, they have sex, they don't have sex, they arrive, they leave, all in no apparent order. Kester Berwick, the narrator's absent landlord, is described so differently in different places that it is difficult to get any clear sense of him at all.

And the narrator's home town of Adelaide, to which he's eventually moved to return, is evoked in the simple strokes of caricature; Dessaix seems to have been unable to resist the temptation to reinforce the idea of Adelaide as a small and dreary place to which nobody in their right mind would want to go. He's not on his own there, either; Patrick White liked Adelaide so much that he contemplated moving there, but he still couldn't resist making it the destination of the momentarily desperate Florrie Manhood in *The Eye of the Storm*: 'Well, she would take her child and go to buggery, or Adelaide.'

Actually this is an important problem, because the novel (which is called *Corfu*, after all) is largely about the importance of place and its significance to identity. The story of the Odyssey, more specifically Cavafy's poem 'Ithaca', and most specifically of all the meaning of 'home', are what holds this story together, and a more complex representation of the narrator's home might have made his journey there a more convincing story, or at least one that the reader could care about properly. That going home to Adelaide is a difficult fate is something nobody, least of all me, would deny; and Ithaca, of course, is represented in Homer as in Cavafy as poor and barren, a rocky place. But neither is a comic destination and neither is a dull one; Dessaix makes Adelaide seem like both, which I think he may not quite have meant to do, and it pulls the whole narrative trajectory out of shape.

Three things kept me reading. One is the novel's frank literariness: the way that it uses Homer and Cavafy to talk about home and Greece and journeying, and Chekhov to work through ideas about the meaning of homely detail and everyday life.

Another is the sensual and poetic evocation of Greece, with its oregano and white buildings and heat and Easter lamb; to complain that it's been done before is churlish, and like saying that you already have a photograph of Greece and don't need another one. The third—and I think this is the most skilful thing about how this story has been put together—is the way that a subtle and slightly sinister doppelgänger relationship develops between Kester Berwick and the narrator, culminating in their brief encounter in the airport. It's the only direct sight we ever have of Kester, and even then he may be only an illusory reflection: '... like me he was wearing a crumpled mackintosh and holding a small, brown suitcase in his right hand. Neither of us moved.'

Where the two characters differ sharply is in the end of their respective stories. Kester Berwick never went home, and died on Corfu after living there for 23 years. The narrator, on the other hand, finds that going home to Adelaide has been the correct move, and his final sentence is an affirmation as he looks out at the morning view: '... blinking in the glare, I lean out across the geraniums to see what I might see.' In such an overtly literary novel, Dessaix could almost have got away with T. S. Eliot by way of farewell: 'We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time.' ■

Kerryn Goldsworthy is an Adelaide writer.

BOOKS:5

PETER STEELE

The wordsmith

Electric Light, Seamus Heaney, Faber and Faber, 2001.
ISBN 0 5712 0798 7, RRP $19.95

IF THERE WERE such a thing as an unassailable Irish poet, it would be Seamus Heaney. For anyone so far unfamiliar with his work, *Electric Light* could show how this is so. It was said of a 19th-century man of letters that he 'never lived his life at all; only stayed with it and lunched with it'. Heaney's poetry is emphatically the work of someone determined to live his life in it. Ranging in spirit from the elated to the dismayed, and in pitch from the domestic to the international, it keeps on feeling for the nerve of life, the quickness amidst mortality.

Heaney, true to his heritage, has always delighted in story-telling, and does so here again in many of the poems. But his peculiar gift is for succinct formulation and for the revelatory moment. In a set of 'Ten Glosses', 'A Norman Simile' goes in its entirety:

To be marvellously yourself like the river
water
Gerald of Wales says runs in Arklow
harbour
Even at high tide when you'd expect salt
water.

It is all there—the zest for analogy, the blend of history and geography, the admiration at the surprising, the savouring of an element in its vitality. 'Small is beautiful' might, as an expression, have been made for Heaney.

This ability to offer much in little is accompanied by an enthusiasm for the sizeable and the fluid. 'The Fragment' ends with the words, ' "Since when," he asked, / "Are the first line and last line of any poem / Where the poem begins and ends?" ' Heaney is a great one for continuities, for outreach and inrush, for the world's and the word's plenty. 'And' is the fugleman of his idiom's words; over the years, it has often begun segments of poems or whole poems, standing not only for added items or events but for the scope and scale of experience itself.

At the same time, Heaney has made the most of 'But', of all those mental countervailings which help to deliver knowledge of things as they go. In 'Known World', he writes at one point, 'Allegory, I say, but who's to know / How to read sorrow rightly, or at all?' The Hopkins who greatly influenced the young Heaney speaks in 'The Windhover' of 'the achieve of, the mastery of the thing', seeing that accomplishment is often onerous and precarious; Heaney's poems are similarly attended by an awareness that insight can be hard-won, can be fugitive. 'Vigilant' is a word which occurs often in his poetry and in his prose; it can refer either to life's choices and policies at large, or to the ways in which forms of language are indeed forms of life. 'But' is the sibling of 'And', all the way.

Chesterton said that to love anything is to see it at once under lowering clouds of danger, and this is often Heaney's way. The first poem in *Electric Light*, 'At Toomebridge', goes:

Where the flat water
Came pouring over the weir out of Lough
Neagh
As if it had reached an edge of the flat earth
And fallen shining to the continuous
Present of the Bann.
Where the checkpoint used to be.
Where the rebel boy was hanged in '98.
Where negative ions in the open air
Are poetry to me. As once before
The slime and silver of the fattened eel.

'The Bridge of Toome' has been roared through, in pubs and out of them, in both hemispheres, with that rebel boy as its hero: but Heaney has the event, and its milieu, in a quieter, more intense keeping, which accommodates the legendary flat earth, its pairing with the flat water, the open air, and silver fire of the eel—traditional elements, once again, framing a modern moment and, as it were, the issuing of the poetry itself. The moment is loved, the poetic act is loved, but danger's claims are also acknowledged.

I am tempted to say that this is Heaney's most personal book, though the term is itself such a shape-changer that it may be useless. Certainly it is a book marked on virtually every page by a reappropriation of signal moments in the poet's life, and by allusions or tributes to what Auden called 'our good dead'. Another of those 'Glosses', 'The Bridge', goes:

Steady under strain and strong through
tension,
Its feet on both sides but in neither camp,
It stands its ground, a span of pure
attention,
A holding action, the arches and the ramp
Steady under strain and strong through
tension.

This might be an emblem of poetry itself, or of Heaney's version of it, but it can also stand for the way in which the living

named by this book is braced between birth and death. There are elegies (each distinctive in form) for Ted Hughes, for Zbigniew Herbert, for Joseph Brodsky; there are poems called 'Would They Had Stay'd', 'Late in the Day', 'Bodies and Souls', 'Seeing the Sick'; there is a tender, trenchant poem called 'Out of the Bag' in which this eldest child of his family relates the supposed arrival of each of them 'in Doctor Kerlin's bag'. Characteristically, this last poem gives its due to the mortal vulnerabilities which make it necessary for there to be new births at all: and equally characteristically, Heaney is plainly not daunted by these.

In *The Tempest*, the sottish Stephano, listening to his own song, acknowledges that 'This is a very scurvy tune to sing at a man's funeral', and any poet worth the name must feel something of the kind about even the best of elegies. But Heaney's elegies—and by now they are many—are commonly sustained by the sensed comradely presence of those saluted. The souls, or shades, of the dead are convoked into a cloud of witnesses, themselves benign sponsors of the poems, and indulgers of human inadequacy. Heaney is as aware as anyone else of language's many frailties and humiliations, but unlike some others he does not suppose that this must induce resentment or desperation. To be, as he says early in his poem in memory of Ted Hughes, 'Pounded like a shore by the roller griefs / In language that can still knock language sideways' can be dismaying but is not disabling.

Heaney has given new vitality to the notion of 'crediting marvels', by which he means more than conceding that they are there—he means that we are in credit to them, and can be made the more creditable by them. All of his mature poetry is driven by this notion, even when circumstances are dire. First to last he wants to find out the marvels, as when, awaiting a new birth, he sees that 'Planet earth like a teething ring suspended / Hangs by its world-chain', or when he sees the bereaved 'Set apart. First out down the aisle / Like brides', or like boys out of school early for music practice, 'And then the savagery / Of the piano music's music going wrong.' He has, as he says of his father, 'The assessor's eye, the tally-keeper's head': he also has, as he says when anticipating a new birth, 'a born awareness / as name dawned into knowledge.' The water still runs fresh into the harbour. ■

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DAVID McCOOEY

Man at work

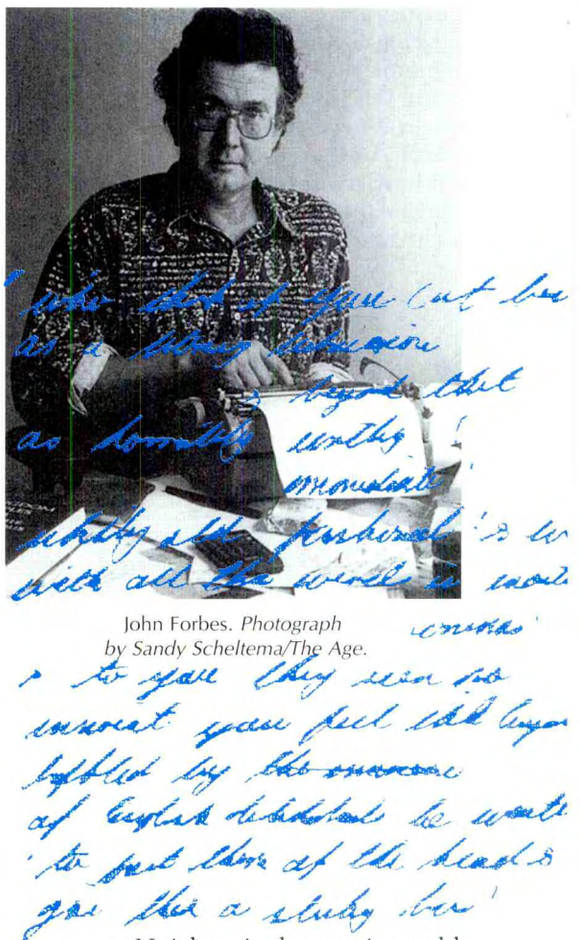
Collected Poems 1970–1998, John Forbes, Brandl & Schlesinger, 2001. ISBN 1 87604 027 0, RRP $27.95

SINCE JOHN FORBES' death in 1998, obituaries, essays, and two major profiles of him on radio and television have produced something like a myth of Forbes. This work centres on Forbes' poetic life: his ambition (or otherwise); his ironised sense of vocation; his postmodern influences (especially Frank O'Hara); his mentorship of younger poets. But more personal details intrude: Forbes' tropical childhood; his love for unattainable women; his use of drugs (and cough mixture); his knowledge of military and cultural history; his 'un-literary' jobs (like furniture removalist); his betting on horses; his money troubles; the bike he rode around Melbourne; his death at the age of 47 of a heart attack.

Biography tends to intrude on posthumous reputation, even the reputation of a poet as 'impersonal' as Forbes. Here some poems refer to historical individuals, and catalogue interests that now seem biographical: poetic vocation in 'On the Beach: A Bicentennial Poem'; military hardware and unrequited love in 'Love Poem'; cough mixture *and* Frank O'Hara in 'A Dream'. And we find comments like this one in a late poem, regarding love: 'continually disappoint / the expectations of others, / this way you will come to hate yourself / & they will be charmed by your distress' ('Lessons for Young Poets'). Meanwhile Forbes' tastes seem apparent throughout: his interest in popular music, television, smoking, philosophy, Sydney and nostalgia.

But Forbes insisted that poems shouldn't simply be vehicles for the poet's attitudes. His poems show him avoiding the idea of the poet as 'presence', a transcendent authority within the poems. So how useful is biography when reading Forbes? Knowing that he was Australian and born in 1950 seems enough. The trick is to get to know the poems, to go 'on your nerve' (to quote O'Hara), and to know when to think and when to give thinking a miss.

Now that Forbes is regarded as a major poet it may be hard to remember that early reviews tended towards the dismissive. As Martin Duwell wrote nearly a decade ago, Forbes is *not* 'a lightweight, jokey poet, despite the tone of many of his best-loved



John Forbes. *Photograph by Sandy Scheltema/The Age.*

poems ... Neither is he an ice-cold aesthetician, constructing formalist, soulless poems lacking all reference other than language'. A joker or a formalist/rhetorician—they *were* the early standard lines on Forbes. And he *is* funny, as you can see in his surreal associations and brilliantly off-hand jokes, like suggesting that Sydney Harbour 'should be covered in concrete / to bring real-estate prices down / and make parking at the Opera easy' ('thin ice'). And 'Europe: a guide for Ken Searle' shows how bizarrely spot-on he can be even as he's taking the mickey: 'We pity the English, though they get on / our wick, pretending to understand us // & Scotland is old-fashioned like a dowry / but unusual, like nice police'.

Forbes' formalism is part of his interest in language as a game, not as something

that reflects 'reality'. 'TV' is the best-known example of this, with its opening injunction, 'dont [*sic*] bother telling me about the programs', and its engagement instead with the television as an object. Forbes is nothing if not clever, although given the place of 'theory' in universities in the last two decades, his linguistic turn probably now seems less radical and tendentious than at first.

Those early characterisations (joker/formalist) are interesting in the way they downplayed Forbes' interest in Australia, the use of idiom, the range of reference, and the stylistic variety. And of course the joker and formalist positions needn't be mutually exclusive. Chris Wallace-Crabbe made this clear (in his review of *The Stunned Mullet*) when he noticed Forbes' 'disconcerting or rug-pulling enjambement, a rhetorical and rhythmical gesture which weakens the line you have just read by revealing its reliance upon the line which follows'. However unlikely this sounds, Forbes was a postmodern Philip Larkin. Both married wit with form to devastating effect (and both were poetic perfectionists who were also outsiders).

IF THERE IS ANY doubt that Forbes is a 'major' poet, his *Collected Poems* should dispel that. With a foreword by the poet Gig Ryan, and an introduction by the critic Don Anderson, this is a major publication, containing all the poems in Forbes' five previous collections, and 30 previously uncollected poems. Ryan's claim that critics have over-emphasised Forbes' limitations is right: the *Collected* shows a diversity of style, technique and content.

The mix can be seen in Forbes' idiom, with its intermingling of 'high' and 'popular' cultural references and the deep suspicion of 'artiness' while being most artful. 'Love Poem' demonstrates this. Beginning as the familiar Gulf War poem (the safe and distant poet, musing over the televised, technological war) the choice of genre only appears inapposite. The military hardware that features in the poem is a political critique that has wedged itself, like an unexploded bomb, into the lyrical subjectivity of love poetry. Having been rejected by the loved one, the poet watches CNN: 'I watch the west / do what the west does best // & know, obscurely, as I go to bed / all this is being staged for me.' Forbes was a master of such political obliquity.

It has been clear for some time that much of Forbes' poetry is interested in national culture. In 'On the Beach: A Bicentennial Poem', the poetic vocation is seen as absurd and shameful in Australia in 1988: it looks 'more like a blurred tattoo / or something you did for a bet / & now regret, like a man / walking the length of the bar on his hands / balancing a drink on his shoe'. Forbes' concern with vocation and nation suggests earlier Australian poets, especially Wentworth, whose odes and public poems evoke and parody the project of nation-building. In 'On the Beach', Forbes deflates and satirises. Poetic vocation ultimately slides down to the beach, like a thing from outer space, or evolution in reverse. Forbes was a public poet in an age that has no call for such things.

It's not surprising, then, that there are few *Collected Poems* by Australians. Forbes' *Collected* is well-produced, authoritative and timely, reminding us how many of his poems could be considered 'classics': 'Ode to Tropical Skiing', 'Four Heads & how to do them', 'Ode/"Goodbye Memory"', 'To the Bobbydazzlers', 'Stalin's Holidays', 'Speed, a Pastoral', 'Death, an Ode', 'Watching the Treasurer', and 'Anzac Day'. And that's not all.

I DO WISH, THOUGH, that the book had been organised differently. Arranging the poems chronologically adds little to our understanding of Forbes, especially since the chronology is based not on date of composition but first publication date (and dates are only given for the uncollected poems). As these uncollected poems are hived off at the end, this organisation is doubly odd, since the previous sections simply jumble up the order of the poems in Forbes' five earlier books. The uncollected poems are always interesting, though Forbes was probably right to omit most of them from his collections. The main exception is '3 Songs for Charles Darwin'. The compiler of this *Collected*, the poet's father, E. Len Forbes, tells us that the reason it was left out in the posthumous volume, *Damaged Glamour*, 'remains unclear'. Another quibble: why is this *Collected Poems: 1970–1998* when the earliest poem in the book was published in 1969?

That the two last poems of Forbes' *Collected Poems* are 'autobiography' and '3 Songs for Charles Darwin' illustrates nicely Ivor Indyk's argument that Forbes' poetry shifts between 'private injury and public spectacle, the one acting as the indictment of the other' (see 'The Awkward Grace of John Forbes', *Heat* 8, 1998, pp138–50). (And notwithstanding Gig Ryan's disappointment with commentary on Forbes, he has had some excellent critics, though—as in Indyk's case—their insights sometimes appeared after his death). The apparent autobiographical references in 'autobiography' (furniture moving, drug-taking) are less revealing than the poem's final lines: '& all this more blessed / than any happiness / feral or domestic, / that I've been granted yet.' Maybe not Forbes' best lines, but they are poignant in their mix of charm and distress. This personal tone is offset by the '3 Songs'. Something of a reprise of 'On the Beach', this sequence is less subtle (perhaps suggesting, as some have argued, that Forbes' poetic was beginning to play itself out). For me it shows Forbes' wit unaltered, as in the replaying of the landing of the First Fleet: 'The First Fleet's first mistake— / i.e. leaving the beach'. The reference to the First Fleeters' 'pink / as yet unzinced pale faces' reminds us that Australia (as Darwin predicted) is a maritime nation. The beach always has figured largely in Forbes' poetry.

It figured not only in his poetry, but also his dreams. *A Layered Event*, the profile recently repeated on Radio National, includes an archival recording of Forbes recounting a dream 'about going in a Balmain-Push organised Iron Man run from Sydney to Wollongong and meeting Henry Lawson at one stage, and seeing him washed under the waves and being given a bottle by him like a baton that he was passing on to me'. This is quintessentially Forbesian: it gestures at literary history and poetic election just as it shows its grotesquerie. The elder poet is both national icon *and* a drunk. What he passes on (a bottle) represents both inspiration and destitution. That this happens in the surf echoes the ending of 'On the Beach'. That the event is an Iron Man contest (in which Forbes takes part) organised by the bohemian Push shows Forbes' gift for the absurdly comic.

Were he alive, Forbes might look upon the biographical process with some scepticism. But, then, scepticism was Forbes' Penelope, faithfully unravelling certainties while the Ulysses-poet was out smashed on Actifed CC. And the dream? Forbes won the race. It was of course only a dream, but even Forbes—so suspicious of transcendence—seemed to suggest, life is a kind of embodied dream: 'Hello the yellow beach & the beauty / that closes a book. Hello the suntanned skin / & underneath that skin, the body. / Goodbye Memory!' ■

David McCooey lectures at Deakin University and is the author of the 'Contemporary Poetry' chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature* (2000).

GEOFFREY MILNE

Callas on stage

AMANDA MUGGLETON began her Australian career as Chrissie Latham in the cult TV series *Prisoner*. She was born in England, where she trained at the Guildhall School. However, most of her remarkable success has been in Australia. She settled here in 1975, and spent four years on *Prisoner*. This established a pattern, and she has continued to land roles in long-running gigs, often touring all over the country.

Her early stage shows included Nell Dunn's bathhouse play, *Steaming*, in which she played Josie. The original Australian production toured the country in 1983, 1984 and 1985. Then in 1988 she began a fruitful association with plays by English writer Willy Russell. She did *Educating Rita* for Peter Williams in Sydney and then *Shirley Valentine* for the Hole in the Wall in Perth.

As lonely Liverpool housewife Mrs Joe Bradshaw, *née* Shirley Valentine, Muggleton started her assault on Australian box-office records. The play was a raging success over several seasons in Perth. Over the next few years it was sold on for productions and tours for Michael Edgley, Paul Dainty and the Melbourne Theatre Company.

More recently she appeared in *The Book Club* by NZ playwright Roger Hall. Muggleton plays a middle-aged, lonely woman again (with a wild interior spirit). The role seems tailor-made for her particular talents. Don Mackay's production, for International Concert Attractions and the Victorian Arts Centre, opened in Melbourne in late 1999. It soon went on the road for a national and regional tour.

In between she's been involved in *Master Class*, by American playwright Terrence McNally. It portrays a series of master classes by the legendary opera star Maria Callas. Callas gave the lessons to singers at New York's Juilliard School of Music between October 1971 and March 1972. *Master Class*' Australian life began in Brisbane in 1997. Directed by Rodney Fisher, it had Robyn Nevin as Callas. When they reached Adelaide in 1998, Amanda Muggleton had taken the leading role and has remained in it.

Simon Gallaher bought the production, with Muggleton aboard, and presented it in Melbourne in January 1999. Now Andrew Kay has picked it up for International Concert Attractions, touring this year. They do two weeks in Canberra, from 18 October, and four in Perth, from 3 November. *Master Class* moves on to Melbourne for a season beginning on 13 December.

CALLAS TAUGHT 23 classes at Juilliard but McNally collapses it down to three—classes given to two sopranos and one tenor. The play gives the impression that elements of many of the classes are rolled into the three. Callas' voice was long gone by the early 1970s, so apart from a tiny fragment, at one moment, the Callas character doesn't sing. Her presence in these sessions is to help her three 'victims' find their own, full-throated, natural voices. This was how she sang herself, she says, but in no way does she want them to imitate her.

The play opens on an uncluttered stage. There's a grand piano, a stool for the diva and a couple of little tables, one strewn with music scores. In sweeps Callas, wearing an elegant trouser suit. A mane of black hair is pulled back from her expansive forehead. She imperiously quells any hint of applause, takes out dark-rimmed glasses and—after a bit of banter with the school accompanist—is ready for her first student. This is Sophie de Palma, a soprano who has great promise but is too technically correct. Callas' view, frankly expressed, is that she needs to be shocked out of her comfort zone. The girl launches nervously into an aria from Bellini's *La Sonnambula*. She scarcely gets out a couple of bars before Callas is needling and challenging her to greater freedom of voice, and a deeper understanding of what the score and the role demand.

The coaching is blended with anecdotes of Callas' own teachers and career. They're mixed with acerbic and often very funny one-liners about other singers of her age. According to the program notes, this was more or less how the master classes actually unfolded. But at this point the play moves away from documentary drama.

McNally goes back, in fictional form, to some crucial moments in Callas' past. We learn of the part of her childhood spent in Greece as a fat, ugly kid. Callas' bitter battles with her mother led her to take emotional refuge in her music studies. The high point of the first act is another interesting flashback. While the second student is attempting something from Verdi's *Macbeth*, Callas supplies the usual interruptions and encouragement. Eventually, she lets the girl sing on. The lights tighten on Callas. Slide projections transform the stage into La Scala, scene of her great triumphs years ago. Callas' own recorded voice takes over the aria, and her onstage alter ego tells the sensational story of her debut.

It's a spectacular device, but it appears in almost identical fashion in the second half. The tenor's session leads back to a later period and the appalling treatment Callas received from her lover Ari Onassis. The repetition

makes it predictable, and less effective. The second act is also strained by Callas' (or the playwright's?) insistence on the almost sacred vocation of Art and the Artist. This becomes tedious.

Master Class, then, does have weaknesses. Muggleton has a harder task than in some of her other roles. But audiences have not been deterred; it's a case of 'never mind the play, feel the performance'. Rodney Fisher is a practised director, which helps to some extent. He is an expert at massaging awkward or wayward dramatic material (some of Dorothy Hewett's work springs to mind).

But it is Amanda Muggleton who makes *Master Class* memorable. The role demands the full battery of her considerable range. Many reviewers didn't even bother to say that Muggleton plays Callas, preferring the notion that Muggleton *is* Callas. Callas is always centre stage and commands our attention. For an accomplished monodrama actress this is nothing new, but it's *how* she controls our focus that counts. Callas is by turns imperious mistress of the grand gesture and humble, even self-effacing, facilitator of the master-class process. She is bitchy and she is jovial, tempestuous and matter-of-fact, passionate and cool, acid and sweet.

Whether Muggleton looks or sounds like Maria Callas is not the issue. If *Master Class* were ordinary docudrama, the 'Muggleton *is* Callas' headline would be the telling factor. But what she has to deliver in McNally's fiction is a taller order. She has to capture the extreme vulnerability of a woman in a position of enormous power. It is an astonishing performance. ■

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FLASH IN THE PAN

Good stock

He Died With a Felafel in His Hand, dir. Richard Lowenstein. For a film that's ostensibly about the raucous, filthy, anarchic life of the share-house dweller, this is a surprisingly gentle and reflective piece of work. I guess this is partly because its main character, Danny (played by a fabulously battered-looking Noah Taylor), is so fundamentally detached from the circus that surrounds him, often seeming not even to notice it, let alone act upon it. When neo-Nazis on motorcycles cut the back off his house with chainsaws, while his housemate is being ritually sacrificed on the hills hoist for the winter solstice, and the two women he's most attracted to start kissing each other rather than him, his only response is to shrug his shoulders and move on to house #48.

In fact, the film is mostly about this love triangle—a love triangle in which only one player will actually admit to being in love with anyone at all. Sam (played by English actress Emily Hamilton) admits to loving Anya (French actress Romane Bohringer), and possibly loves Danny as well. Anya considers love, any kind of noise during orgasm, in fact any expression of fun or emotion, to be simply too much of a cliché to be borne. Danny wants Anya to be his existentialist muse (at least until she shags Sam), and even in the pit of his emotional despair never admits that Sam is any more than his 'best friend'. Everything else—the Nazis, the Goths, the drugs, the cane-toad golf, the neurotic/psychotic housemates, the bulimia, the police brutality, the felafel, the dead housemate—all this is just local colour for a not-quite-love-story, which never-quite-goes-anywhere.

There's actually something rather nice about the film's lack of ambition. There are few jokes, a bit of slapstick, some mood swings (the most emotional moment is probably when wannabe writer Danny drops his typewriter in Sydney Harbour), a decent soundtrack (I never twigged until this film that the old Stranglers' song 'Golden Brown' was actually about heroin), and some solid performances—but there's nothing BIG about any of it at all. In fact, it probably says it all that the most exciting part of the film for me was the look and texture of the film stock—a beautifully dry and chalky, high-contrast feel, which managed to convey the feeling of a post-speed-binge hangover better than any performance or art direction.

—Allan James Thomas

Don't bank on it

The Bank, dir. Robert Connolly. Everybody who hates the banks should love *The Bank*. With this huge potential audience in mind, writer-director Robert Connolly has crafted a dark corporate fairytale spiced with a powerful element of wish fulfilment.

Simon (Anthony LaPaglia) is the CEO of Centabank (it could be based on your bank, and probably is). He's a take-no-prisoners, Al 'Chainsaw' Dunlap kind of guy who believes that people work better with his 'foot against the back of their neck'. But he's under pressure to increase profits and he's running out of branches to close. One day a solution to this pressing problem pops out of the fax machine. Jim (David Wenham), a mathematical genius on the verge of being able to predict the next stock-market crash, is offering to place his equations at the disposal of the bank's bottom line. Simon sees dollar signs and the fix is in.

Unfortunately the script gods have decreed that our enigmatic hero has to have someone to bonk. (Banks aren't stupid: they'll only finance a movie with a love interest.) So Michelle (Sibylla Budd), a suspiciously sexy bankteller, is wheeled on to supply some bedroom action and a number of clunking plot points. More's the pity, because Jim's undeveloped relationship with Vincent (Greg Stone), the bank's nerdy in-house numbers man, is potentially far more interesting. When the scheme finally falls apart he's the one left feeling most like a fool.

There's a neat twist in the final reel which delivers an emotionally satisfying conclusion, but the awkwardness of the plotting up until this point undermines our unconditional acceptance of the film's world. Yet, even if *The Bank* doesn't quite match the warm afterglow given off by classic caper flicks like *The Sting*, it's good to see an Australian film taking a risk by dramatising such a meaty political issue.

—Brett Evans

Dinostars

Jurassic Park III, dir. Joe Johnston. My eldest son could say and spell 'Tyrannosaurus Rex' before he got a handle on 'please', and that was before the first *Jurassic Park* in 1993.

That film, which was over two hours long, represented the best and the worst in movie-making. There were some breath-taking scenes which defied time and recreated dinosaurs as splendid, spectacular, living creatures, seamlessly interwoven with the live actors. The disappointment was the live actors themselves who were little more than cardboard cut-outs, and who, apart from being dino-bait, also stuffed up the action with deep and meaningful mumbo jumbo and romantic drivel.

The Lost World sequel in 1997 was even longer, at two-and-a-quarter hours and, largely due to self-indulgent direction by Steven Spielberg, the human characters were wooden to the point of being inedible.

The good news is that this second sequel under new director Joe Johnston (*The Rocketeer*, *October Sky*) has just about got it right. At 90 minutes, much of the moralistic clap-trap has been excised. There is no waffle about the ethics of cloning, and personal relationships are kept to a minimum. From start to finish the dinosaurs star.

A plane crashes on a small island off the coast of Costa Rica where dinosaurs not only flourish, but are evolving into more intelligent beings. They threaten to become the Collingwood supporters of the animal kingdom.

The plane-crash survivors include Dr Alan Grant (Sam Neill) and a bunch of other people so undistinguished that they are best thought of as a T.R. cut lunch. Mercifully the scriptwriters have effectively gagged Dr Grant so he doesn't waste valuable screen time with endless platitudes. (The platitude, you will recall, is the only egg-laying mammal that is not extinct.)

And so in no time at all we are into the dinosaur action, with T.R. playing second fiddle to the new kid on the block, Spinosaurus Aegyptiacus, known to his mates as 'Spino'. And boy is he mean! Even the cameraman wasn't safe, and as for Johnston, he hasn't been sighted since he disappeared while directing the film.

Mercifully the screen is soon full of dinosaurs—Pteranodon, our old mates the Raptors, the pedestrian Diplodocuses and our two heavyweights Spino and Rex. The scene is really set for a bloody showdown.

With a plethora (now extinct) of eaters and eatees, there's a purity about it all, with 30 minutes of pontification gone, and chomp replacing pomp.

The clever mix of animatronics and digital magic has created a new realism that far exceeds anything we could have imagined a decade ago. If you like your earth shaken and your monsters stirred, this movie is your martini.

—Gordon Lewis

Hulks united

Purely Belter, dir. Mark Herman. Unlike Mark Herman's elegiac *Brassed Off*, which looked at the last gasps of a working-class community, his latest, *Purely Belter*, is an odyssey through aftermath. Set in the present-day post-industrial wastelands of England's North, *Purely Belter* takes full cinematographic advantage of the monumental hulks of Newcastle-on-Tyne's abandoned factories and warehouses. Gerry (Chris Beattie) and Sewell (Greg McLane) scamper among the ruins of their heritage. Children of the broken-backed North, they don't know or care about what has been lost. Their only culture is drugs, Newcastle United, pop music and sex.

Gerry and Sewell are two not-very-likely Geordie lads who fanatically support Newcastle United football club, yet have never been to a match in their lives because they can't afford the £500 season tickets. It's impossible to buy a ticket to a single match in this sellers' market. The lads hatch daft schemes to get the money for two tickets within the year. The film follows them through the summer, autumn, winter and spring of their discontent.

In Herman's *Little Voice* and *Brassed Off*, the characters were gifted with knowing and musical talents—Gerry and Sewell have only bucketloads of desperation and likeable stupidity. Gerry is the sharper of the two, which isn't saying much. Sewell's total lack of motherwit and huge hulk provide most of the movie's laughs. Both young actors have great natural presence, and though there may be an edge of amateurism sometimes, it is possible to be such a good actor that you're just irritating (like Brenda Blethyn).

'Let's talk about first times,' says the teacher in one of the necessarily few classroom scenes. Gerry recounts his earliest memory of being taken to the football by his Dad, so eloquently that there isn't a dry eye in the house. Later on, his friend Sewell tells the same story as his own, the construction of a past with a loving father seemingly too valuable not to be shared. Gerry's Dad is an itinerant alcoholic and mean with it, only turning up for long enough to steal booze money and bash anyone who happens to be around. Gerry's chain-smoking mum (thankfully not played by Brenda Blethyn) spends her life dispiritedly moving house to escape him. Sewell reveals shamefacedly that his 'Dad' is really his grandfather, his real parents having drifted away too early in his life for him to remember them.

Oddly, the film is full of hope, unrealistic hope perhaps (as the inclusion in the soundtrack of 'Happy Ending Lies' by the Lightning Seeds suggests), but the hope that youth and newness gives to everyone.

Purely Belter gives the impression of being made in a rush; its plot is not without holes; the ending is anodyne; yet it is an absorbing and enjoyable shemozzle of a film.

—Lucille Hughes

Entanglements

Lantana, dir. Ray Lawrence. This is only Ray Lawrence's second film and there are 15 years between it and his first, the much-praised *Bliss*. Moviegoers have clearly been the poorer for the absence of his major talent from our screens. It seems to take a writer to lure him to the cinematic task. *Bliss* was based on a Peter Carey novel and *Lantana* is derived from a play by Andrew Bovell.

Lantana is an outstanding achievement, a thoroughly serious and absorbing exploration of emotional complexity. So many good Australian movies embody the ironic, deflecting humour with which we typically view ourselves that it sometimes seems comedy is our only form of filmic expression. *Lantana* is one of those films that prove this mere appearance.

This is no simple 'relationship' film; it is an engrossing essay on the complexities of love, pain, desire and aging. Like the plant from which it takes its name, the love explored is bright on the surface and spiky-tangled beneath. The plot revolves around a small group of troubled couples. At its heart is Leon (Anthony LaPaglia), a dogged cop, given to outbursts of rage and guiltily negotiating an affair with the febrile Jane (Rachael Blake). A mysterious disappearance and a couple of unexpected twists add to the intrigue.

The acting is splendid, especially from LaPaglia, Geoffrey Rush and Rachael Blake. The Sydney settings are neatly integrated with the unfolding exploration of the characters' interior lives. Andrew Bovell's script cleverly combines mystery, surprise and psychological nuance. One of the film's strengths is the way it delves into the guarded emotions of men. There is a striking scene where Leon collides with another man while out jogging. The scene and its complex emotional tone seem irrelevant at the time but its climax is beautifully echoed much later.

Perhaps the tight circle of the principal players is made too tight by a series of coincidences. Yet even here the implausible artifice works to good dramatic effect by insinuating darkly that the casual acquaintance is really deeply involved and the intimately known is unfamiliar.

—Tony Coady

First impressions

I WAS WAKENED GENTLY ABOUT midnight of 11 September. 'You'll want to see this, love.' The planes had hit the World Trade towers and the Pentagon, and the images were there, the ones you knew would be the 'sexy' ones to splash over the print media the next day. The sense of unreality was there: already the CNN and SkyNews commentators were mentioning the novels of Tom Clancy (plane hits the White House), the films of Bruce Willis (New York skyscrapers destroyed). Because it wasn't something that was ever supposed to happen in the US. Other countries would know what it is like to be bombed by a foreign power while you're working at your office desk.

'It has cleared the air to some considerable extent.' Dr Henry Kissinger, former US Secretary of State, interviewed on ABC Radio's *PM*, said this on 12 September, the day after the terrorist attacks on America. In the midst of all the rightful sympathy for the victims of the atrocity, his Darth Vader voice reminded me why some people might hate the US. It's not in human nature to become a mass murderer without some deep injury to one's emotional development, and we can only speculate about how Kissinger got to be the way he is. But the terrorists who killed thousands of innocents on 11 September were of a generation that had to grow up under foreign policies whose foundations were with Dr Strangelove, who has long since learned to stop worrying and love the bomb.

Some of the commentators were level-headed and informative, but there was no Walter Winchell to draw the country together. Colin Powell, holder of Kissinger's old job, had a statesmanlike demeanour. With George W. Bush in Airforce One somewhere en route, Powell was the reassuring voice that said to a frightened country that it would be OK, we'll protect you, we'll get them in the end, stay calm. People have come through this before. It was the sort of thing Winston Churchill used to say when death rained down on my parents' town in the north of England during the Blitz. My mother, who as an 18-year-old worked at a post office, would be stranded at work all night in the winter when the air-raid sirens would go off in the dark of late afternoon before knock-off time. So she would often take her chances and dodge her way home on foot for five miles, because the bombing wasn't always heavy. She was forced to stop this when she got home one night. (By then the all-clear had sounded and they'd left the shelters.) 'What's happened to your sleeve?' gasped my grandmother. Mum looked, and saw that the thick tweed sleeve of her overcoat was neatly slit, with burn-sealed edges, from padded shoulder to gathered cuff. She hadn't heard, seen or felt the tiny piece of shrapnel as she'd dashed home, feeling immortal.

The fear in some commentators' voices was palpable, as though the US had never seen terrorist violence before, as though the systematic elimination of the Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King had not been war waged on their soil.

But this was, after all, the worst thing for them: worse than their earthquakes and tornadoes and forest fires and school murders. The US has felt insulated from the outside world, and that perhaps gave the country the same kind of young, immortal feelings that led my mother to be so damn silly in 1941.

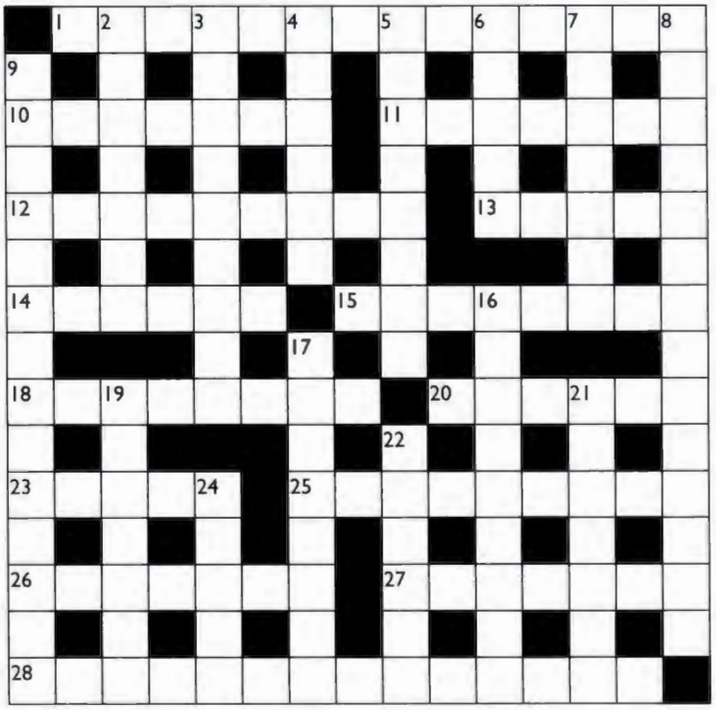
THE ANALYSIS ON CNN and SkyNews has been very patchy at the time of writing, with BBC World only slightly better. Interviews with Middle East specialists and terrorism experts abounded on the last. The nadir was the man on SkyNews who said, 'It's September 11—that's 911 emergency day.' This contrasted with some superb analysis by the ABC. The TV networks channelled CNN and ABC (US) news during the crisis, and the same images recurred: that plane hitting the second tower was wound back and replayed again and again in rapid succession, like a video game or a sports replay. Stuff like that made you remember that TV studios are full of cynical technicians and crisis-hardened producers.

But when the ABC ran a special evening of commentary, it was all it should be. Kerry O'Brien, the doyen of current affairs broadcasting here, was admirable in his pursuit of hard questions that looked to the future and didn't simply dwell on the sensational parts. Mark Colvin on ABC Radio showed that he is a presenter of enormous resource and intelligence, his correspondents all sharp in analysis and clear in focus. Colvin's program, *PM*, was the one that got the Kissinger interview, which gave so much background, intended and unintended, to the crisis, for it was the Herr Doktor himself who told the world on *PM* that we'd been 'living in a fools' paradise' since the end of the Cold War. He looked forward to a time when America would be more practical, and invest more in what was necessary to keep the rest of the world scared. For the rest of us, it's an opportunity to say to the US that we know too well how you feel and we do feel for you. It would be a tragedy if the opponents of democracy succeeded in making America lose faith in it. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 97, October 2001

Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM



ACROSS

1. Seemingly, during an age, Sal called on the heavenly helpers. (8,6)
10. More vacuous words uttered by English parliamentarian on order. (7)
11. Mountain pool his fumbling actions may discolour. (7)
12. Rearrange harp logo on eastern wall—it may be print of old master. (9)
13. From the beginning, the word 'above' had different ending. (2,3)
14. A true Aussie calls this fair. (6)
15. The hour when the decision was taken—at the last moment, perhaps! (8)
18. The professor's a contemptible fellow, cutting up mice. (8)
20. Tease, in short story, is decidedly clannish. (6)
23. In part, demonstrates the one opposed to 1–across. (5)
25. Triple pleat there, somehow, follows a pattern. (9)
26. Initially, heavenly bower provides a haven. (7)
27. On an empty day, turning, for example, to art can bring disaster. (7)
28. In this unfortunate phase, men see car as the means of getting to the Italian city for something to go with the pasta! (8,6)

DOWN

2. Referee and youngster, both short, come upon a great many. (7)
3. Measuring device for the downpour on the railway? (4,5)
4. Such an encroachment is not the way out of the problem. (6)
5. He is more of a head case than a hard case—to put it in summary! (8)
6. Standard of achievement attained by a girl. (5)
7. Kept record in zoo, as arranged, of animal parasite. (7)
8. Rest from training enjoyed at Michaelmas, for example. (6,8)
9. Time-keepers on the move bound into store. (10,4)
16. Add colours to the mixture, or average it out otherwise. (9)
17. In archaic era I knew the climbing plant. (8)
19. Being somewhat mad I err in becoming her fan! (7)
21. Cleaned out Royal Society for the middlemen. (7)
22. Quote literature that is arousing, or cite other sources. (6)
24. Put your head in it and bring about your downfall? (5)

Solution to Crossword no. 96, September 2001

S	P	R	I	N	G	F	E	V	E	R	■	A	F	L
I	■	A	■	A	■	U	■	I	■	E	■	U	■	A
G	R	I	M	M	E	R	■	C	U	B	I	S	T	S
H	■	N	■	E	■	R	■	E	■	U	■	T	■	S
S	E	C	T	A	R	Y	■	R	E	F	E	R	E	E
■	■	A	■	B	■	■	■	E	■	F	■	A	■	T
■	S	T	A	L	L	I	N	G	■	■	G	L	E	E
E	■	S	■	E	■	N	■	A	■	P	■	I	■	R
S	T	A	Y	■	■	T	O	L	L	R	O	A	D	■
S	■	N	■	S	■	E	■	■	■	E	■	N	■	■
E	N	D	O	W	E	R	■	N	O	S	T	R	I	L
N	■	D	■	I	■	G	■	A	■	E	■	U	■	I
D	I	O	P	T	E	R	■	M	U	R	I	L	L	O
O	■	G	■	C	■	O	■	E	■	V	■	E	■	N
N	U	S	■	H	A	W	K	S	V	E	R	S	U	S

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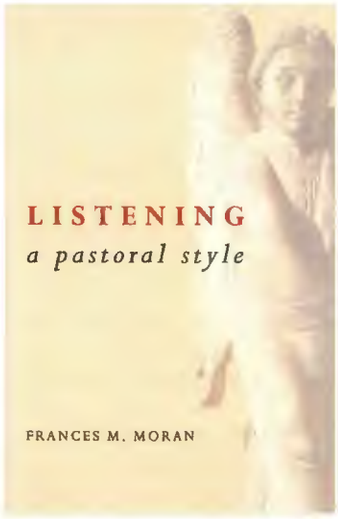
by Frances M. Moran



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