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A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS,
THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY
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Arisings

'BOOKS HAVE THEIR OWN destinies,' they say, and the same is true for paintings. These days, since I am writing poems about paintings, I tend to look at them with an opportunistic eye. Even though homage is usually the main agenda, the question remains whether they will serve my turn. But at least that agenda encourages attention to detail, to handling of the subject.

As we move through the Easter season, I think of two striking paintings of the risen Christ. One of them, displayed in the Art Institute of Chicago, is by Caravaggio's junior comrade and emulator, Cecco. In it, we have a briskly athletic Christ, who wields the statutory flag of triumph. In effect, he is treading down the representative figures and emblems of a corrupt and obsolete past. Cooperation is provided by a resolute angel, who marshals unwanted personnel offstage.

It is a striking piece of work, and I am glad to see it again whenever opportunity

presents itself. And I suppose that, for all its Italian origin, it has found an appropriate lodging in Chicago. This is the city that invented the skyscraper, and continues to showcase the fact: the city comfortable with being perched between opulent plains and a lake as big as Tasmania: a great broker of commodities, finance, and political power: a city ingenious and copious in its musical, intellectual and literary life: and also a city with sizeable tracts which reek of racism, illiteracy, poverty, and despair. Cecco's risen Christ, even though by definition the embodiment of goodness, is still a man for imperium, a dealer in the grand. It is as if his painter had been thinking at once of Olympus, of the Olympic Games, and of the Apocalypse.

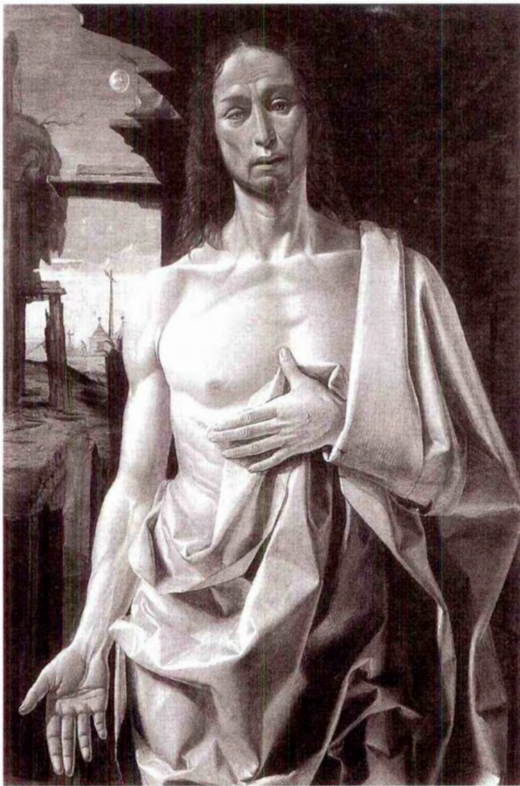
The other painting is by the Milanese, Bartolomeo Suardi, known as Bramantino. This one is lodged in that showcase of splendours, the Thyssen-Bornemisza,

in Madrid. This Christ too has emblems of ruinage behind him, though this time they look rather as though it has happened through the sheer passage of time. The man is as handsome as one could wish, and he is equipped with an elegantly composed garb, something between shroud and cloak. The spear-slit is in his side, and discreet nail-prints are in his hands. But to me the striking detail is the strained and reddened eyes. If he is not still weeping, it is because he has no more tears to shed.

How Bramantino's *Cristo Resucitado* came to the Thyssen in 1999 I do not know: but it too might be thought to belong there. One city may succeed another as momentous in the public imagination, but certainly Madrid stood, for some of the crucial years of the 20th century, as a reminder of what is called, in a common Catholic prayer, 'this valley of tears'. The Civil War, and much that preceded and succeeded it in Spain, generated tears beyond counting. Its memory could also carry a freight from, for example, those earlier civil horrors of which Goya was the masterly portrayer; and it could in turn foreshadow greater vilnesses in other countries since that time. Bramantino's man back from the dead is someone with death permanently inscribed in his psychic as well as his physical being. Alas, he does belong in Madrid as well as in many other cities.

The apostle Paul made no bones about the fact that belief in Christ's resurrection was the making or breaking of Christianity. Like millions of others, I join him in that conviction. But just how this is to come home to us, and what such a realisation entails, is a crucial question for every generation, whatever letters or labels it may adopt to characterise itself. As I write, retrieval from an enormous death-pit is a task still being pursued in New York; but it is not only New Yorkers or other Americans who ask themselves about the current relationship between mortality and vitality, whether in their private, their communal, their national, or their international fortunes. There is rubble, of a kind, in both Cecco's and Bramantino's paintings: and there is an awful lot of social and psychic rubble for many of us to deal with nowadays, however briskly, or with whatever tears, we approach the task.

These paintings, and the array of others which address the same topic, may in their variety at least serve this purpose: to lessen glibness, even while they foster hope. Good painters after all are always trying to come clean about something, just as good poets



Cristo Resucitado by
Bramantino.

are. They may be coming clean about their own would-be-triumphal urges, or about their oh-so-poignant delicacy of spirit: if so, in the long run, it will matter to nobody else. But the paintings, as blessedly sometimes the poems, may also take right over, and rear up disconcertingly before the gazer a fusion of command and vulnerability—that condition, in fact, which is the normal state of most men and women every day.

When this takes place, paintings such as Cecco's and Bramantino's are certainly testimonies to resur-

rection in the traditional Christian sense; but they are also—and perhaps in the end indistinguishably—inspections of our permanent condition and of our historical challenges. Pontius Pilate, bringing the scourged Christ out to the crowd for estimation and verdict, said, 'Here's the man', perhaps hoping that they would receive this as, 'Here's your man.' If so, and even though Pilate lost his gamble, he was right. ■

Peter Steele SJ has a Personal Chair at the University of Melbourne.

COMMENT: 2

MICHAEL McKERNAN

Defence mechanisms

IN MARCH 2001, the managing director of a Melbourne-based management firm, the Value Creation Group, announced that his company had been hired by the Department of Defence to help 'realign' the leadership of Defence with the aims of the defence minister of the time. The report in the *Canberra Times* continued:

Dr Hawke [secretary of Defence] and former defence minister John Moore decided some time ago that top officers and their civilian counterparts needed more political savvy. Some officers thought they served the Queen. Others thought they served the Governor-General. Others thought they owed loyalty to the national interest.

In fact, as both men passionately believed, defence officers served the minister.

There are many sceptics, of course, in the public service and elsewhere, when it comes to the value of

management consultants. While we do not know yet the cost of the Value Creation Group consultancy, the most recent annual report from Defence tells us that, for example, Keystone Corporate Positioning was paid \$105,000 to 'advise on the formation, design and development of a balanced scorecard-based business planning and quality management system' and that the Phillips Group was paid \$113,336 to 'develop a plan to help improve Navy's reputation internally and externally'. That might now seem to be money wasted.

Many in Defence may not yet know what a 'scorecard-based business plan' is but presumably few are unaware that the 'realignment' of senior officers with the minister worked brilliantly in the months leading to the last federal election.

Yet spare a thought for those who are confused about their role in the military forces; there is as yet no developed symbolism to show this essential link

Clockwise from top left: Kim Beazley, 'that most intelligent of Defence Ministers', according to Arthur Tange; John Moore, Defence Minister 1998–2001; Arthur Tange, Secretary of the Department of Defence 1970–1979; Allan Hawke, current Secretary of the Department of Defence. (photographs from *The Department of Defence* by Eric Andrews, The Australian Centenary History of Defence, Volume V, Oxford University Press, 2001)



between Defence and its minister. Unfortunately, as the leadership may believe, the older symbols still prevail. The Governor-General is still designated as the Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Defence Force; he still signs officers' commissions and, as rank increases, so does the prominence of the Crown on the officer's uniform. As for the national interest, doesn't the army still have as its motto 'Serving the Nation', the motto that used to adorn even its vehicle registration plates?

It might come as a shock to many in the military, and in the wider community, that the noble profession of arms has been realigned to be simply doing the bidding of the government of the day.

With typical Australian irreverence we have taken some glee in the conflict between politicians and the military across time. Indeed in our history there has been a certain tension, not to say a distrust, between the military and politicians in Australia. Was General, later Field Marshal, Sir Thomas Blamey showing ultimate realignment with his minister, Frank Forde, by appointing Major-General 'Gaffer' Lloyd as Adjutant-General in the last years of the Second World War? It was General Berryman who commented that 'Gaffer' appealed to Blamey because 'Lloyd could lie to Frankie Forde'. A nation at war

may not want the minister in the dark; but soldiers then liked at least to sidestep fussy ministers.

In Eric Andrews' government-sponsored history of the Department of Defence in the Australian Centenary History of Defence Series (Oxford 2001) there are so many examples of tensions between ministers and the defence hierarchy as to defy easy counting. And there is no index entry for 'ministers', 'realignment' or otherwise. To pluck a couple of examples to stand for all the others: for a fortnight Malcolm Fraser, minister for defence, and his secretary, Sir Arthur Tange, were not on speaking terms because Tange believed that Fraser had trespassed into his areas of responsibility; Fraser also had a legendary falling out with the Army Chief, Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Daly, in 1971. Men such as Daly and Tange knew how to fight for their corner. They also knew why they should do so.

SOME HAVE SPOKEN OF the 'politicisation' of Defence, best exemplified by Admiral Chris Barrie's pathetic press conference when he finally admitted that he knew what everyone in Defence had known for months about the 'children overboard'. Barrie had to restore his standing with the Defence leadership group, especially after the prime minister, so adept at wedge politics, had opened a gap between the Chief of Defence Force, Barrie, and the Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Angus Houston. 'Last night,' Howard gloated in parliament the day before Barrie recanted, '[the opposition] thought they had an Exocet from the air marshal. I think you have had a decent torpedo from the admiral.'

This is the politicisation of the Defence Force: my admiral against your air marshal. A strong minister and supine Defence leadership had meant that what might have been spoken of, in the national interest during an election campaign, went unspoken. 'Political savvy' meant not inconveniencing the minister with facts. And it was done in the name of managerialism. Of making Defence responsive.

Perhaps the Defence Force is only halfway down the path of reform. As the annual report explains, in 2000–2001 defence capability would be strengthened in three ways: building alignment with government; building accountability for performance; building trust within and toward the senior leadership of Defence through the creation of a shared value base.

Few would now doubt that the realignment, the political savvy, has worked in the way the minister wanted. But there does seem to be room for more work on building trust towards the senior leadership. How the Value Creation Group will work that one out is anyone's guess. ■

Michael McKernan is the author most recently of *This War Never Ends: The Pain of Separation and Return*, published by University of Queensland Press, 2001 and reviewed on page 44.

ABR

AUSTRALIAN BOOK REVIEW

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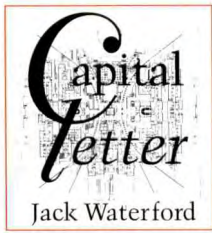
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Character references

IS THERE A SIMILARITY in some of the scandals that have racked Australia these past weeks? A football player commits adultery with his best friend's wife and is forced out of the game. A Governor-General is under siege for inaction and prevarication over his handling of paedophilia allegations by his clergy, when he was an archbishop. Three former senior Howard government ministers take lucrative jobs in the private sector which involve peddling the influence and access they once had. At the same time, ministers, including the prime minister, are accused of misleading the population during an election campaign, knowingly—at least by the end.

And then a High Court judge, Michael Kirby, is attacked, accused of allowing his homosexuality to influence his judgment about the treatment of paedophiles, of conduct unbecoming (allegedly for picking up male prostitutes), and for the alleged abuse of his Commonwealth car privileges.

Each scandal may have something in common with the other, but the outcomes seem to vary. Wayne Carey may have transfixed half of Australia, and taken some of the other stories from the front pages, but is being treated as a classic morality tale. (Perhaps not all that classic—most of the analysis I have read seems fixated on disloyalty to a friend rather than infidelity in a marriage, or about promiscuity as such.) By whatever standard, he has paid the price. Peter Hollingworth is only obliquely under attack for his own sense of morality, but his general character is very much in question. Sexual morality is not an issue in the scandals affecting the Howard ministry; quite fundamental ethical issues *are*, but they are being brushed aside.

With Michael Kirby, the underlying allegations went directly to his character. As framed by Senator Bill Heffernan, the allegations were inextricably linked with the judge's homosexuality. Until Howard realised how utterly unreliable Heffernan's 'facts' were, his impulse seemed to be to reframe the allegations as being of unwise promiscuity, which might go to the question of the good character required of a judge.

Bill Heffernan produced no evidence justifying his allegations, most of which had been investigated and dismissed before. But even those whose instincts were to be entirely supportive of Kirby were somewhat circumspect as the attack widened—not necessarily because they believed the allegations but because they had experience of coping with those who have made a life of obsession with paedophilia. Fending them off is a debilitating process and almost inevitably damages the accused as much as the accuser. Even as separable vague allegations are disposed of, fresh vague allegations emerge; mud sticks even after formal vindication. For those who were out to get the judge,

there were no defeats, only reverses; for Kirby, at least as they saw it, one defeat was victory for them.

Is this really the problem that Peter Hollingworth has? Not really, though the Hollingworth case has given some of the zealots the same sort of field day. Hollingworth's problem is not that these zealots are striking blows against him. Rather it is that he has condemned himself from his own mouth and that even former close colleagues have demonstrated that they think his conduct blameworthy.

Was nobbling Kirby as a judge a part of a plan? It would be tempting to say so, and one can point to some evidence, including the fact that Kirby was appointed to the High Court by Labor and that he is generally more radical in his judicial approach than most of his colleagues. There was also resentment by some ministers, from the prime minister down, over comments Kirby made about public education and about human rights. It might also be said that the attack was some form of payback for attacks on Justice Ian Callinan, whose tactical conduct as a barrister in a fraud case was strongly criticised by the Federal Court.

ALL THESE CONSIDERATIONS may have made some conservatives more reluctant to defend Kirby, but they hardly established a reason for knocking him off the court. There are few cases of any real constitutional significance up before the court system, and, in any event, Kirby's general centrism is usually a plus for government.

This was the most puzzling aspect about the government's sanctioning of a general attack on the judge's character. Kirby was in the gun because a politician who is obsessed with homosexuality and paedophilia chose to attack him in public, as he had done before in private. Howard, and some of his ministers, disowned the accuser only when it was clear that he was insupportable; before then their actions were designed to save him, at Kirby's expense.

The charge against Howard, in the end, will be similar to that against Hollingworth: of failing to appreciate the importance of issues, of failing to show the leadership expected from a person in his position, of listening to the wrong advice and of doing too little that was good. John Howard has always discriminated carefully between the sort of conduct he excuses, and that which must be punished. A decade from now, it will be from this in particular—and his unerring instinct to be wrong—that most judgments will be made about his own character. ■

Jack Waterford is editor-in-chief of the *Canberra Times*.



Detracting tracts

One of the subtexts of Adelaide Writers' Week discussions was whether authors should try to change the world—become, in Shelley's phrase, 'The unacknowledged legislators of the world'. Jim Crace, British novelist and Labour Party member, disagreed, arguing that writers should put their politics into politics. He scorned those who answered questions like, 'Did you vote?', 'Will you join the picket line?' or 'Will you sign this petition?' with the convenient reply, 'No, I put my politics into my novels.'

Crace (and the audience) applauded Alan Bennett's advice to a young man who said he wanted to write a 'political' novel: 'Oh, you don't want to write a novel; you want to write a leaflet.'



Game of the name

Needing one of his books, Jim Crace went into a New York bookshop and asked for 'Quarantine by Jim Crace'. 'That's Crahshah,' said the bookseller Italianically. 'No, Crayse,' said Crace. 'No,' insisted the bookseller, 'Crahshah' ... as Jim is now known to his friends.



Dance of the lords

We were watching Soledad Barrio dance at Melbourne's Athenaeum in February, and sometimes our peripheral vision would meet—half-seen eyebeams crossing to share the moment. A turn of the

head would have missed a minute gesture, a tiny stillness, a sudden acceleration in the dance that took the heart. Barrio's company, *Noche Flamenca*, is dedicated to the integrity of flamenco, so there are no stage sets, no fancy lighting. Chairs, a spotlight, are enough to showcase *duende*, the untranslatable something that means no non-Spaniard could ever do properly what Barrio does. The rest of the company—two guitarists, two singers, some more dancers—are all fine practitioners, but she set the pace. The singers are wonderful: able to do the harshness of *canto hondo*: the 'deep song' that wails 'Aaii!' before launching into the dark beauty of love-death-grief-desire. Barrio's body is made for this: lithe, strong, short, with a wide-boned pelvis and the shoulders of a swimmer. Her every move was a miracle of panther grace, and that is where *Noche Flamenca* succeeds, because it shows us how flamenco's art is that supremely difficult thing—the perfect fusion of nature and the human spirit. It is as awesomely simple as a meteor spearing precisely along its ordained trajectory. No animal power is diluted in the skill of the moves, and the human spirit in its sung poetry cries out lucidly, artfully, taking every melisma to its limit, showing every cigarette in its tone.



Dicey moves

Shock-horror of a relatively muted kind broke out among ordinary people when they heard that the Treasury had lost billions speculating on currency movements. The naive called it gambling; the experienced also called it gambling, but knew that gambling is the trade of finance people and could not understand the fuss. Unlike other gamblers, Treasury would not have to settle its debts.

Gambling has a long history, but the word itself derives from the early 18th century, maturing just in time for the extensive call on its services in the Regency period. In the measured words of the dictionary, gamblers are those who

take a risky action with a danger of loss and a hope of profit.

When Treasury gambles, we should exclude from our minds any connection with the similar-sounding and earlier word, gambol. People who gambol jump about playfully and gratuitously; unlike financiers, they are not found with brow furrowed in the pursuit of profit. Gambol is derived from the Italian word *gamba*, the leg on which gambollers jump for joy. Gamblers who gambol can be expected to lose an arm and a leg. In the case of Treasury, however, the loss is not realised, and so amputation merely threatens, hovering like the dagger before Macbeth's eyes.



Spiked at last

Spike Milligan is dead. Last of the Goons, first among comic geniuses. We were all the beneficiaries of his unique gift, which was to respect no pieties while never losing sight of sacredness. Tom Utley, writing in Britain's deeply sane and terribly conservative *Daily Telegraph*, asserted that Spike was never funny, that to laugh at him was unkind because the poor fellow was mentally ill. Such patronising demeaned both Spike and his illness, and by implication all human pain. His madness and pain were real, and caused enormous disruption to his personal life; but madness and pain never disqualify from genius. He capered on the edge of the abyss and yet escaped its nothingness. Spike was the great fool of recent times: his ability to see the absurd and undermine it with its own banalities defied all greyness, all anomie. Utley's sanctimonious sentimentality would have been an easy target for the man who could have Eccles singing, 'I talk to de trees, dat's why dey put me away.' His influence was huge; Michael Palin and John Cleese both said many times how much they owed him. *Monty Python*, itself now a classic, was a creature of the permission that Spike gave to his myriad heirs: that of being sanely mad in a madly sane world.



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Who wants what

I am moved to write by reading Philip Mendes' letter (*Eureka Street*, January–February 2002). He is absolutely right in speaking of fatal defects in the assumptions of peace possibilities through conflict resolution.

Whatever the Oslo process required, there were assumptions made about what one might laughingly call reasonableness on both sides. It is not often said, so I will say it now, that Israel has been closer to reason than Palestine has. What has been said recently by the Palestinians has been simple: 'We want the lot!' This has been known by both sides for a long time. Those who stand outside the process, like you and me—whoever you are reading this—have thought that there was a peace process. That's what we've been told. And we always believe what we are told. We are good little boys and girls.

The problem with that is that we are not involved, and therefore what we believe has nothing to do with anything.

On the other hand, we are all biblical scholars, I would imagine. The actions of the Palestinians and their offshoots in Hamas, Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad look to me suspiciously like the description of the type of things that the people of Egypt and Canaan engaged in. If you read that passage (see Leviticus 18:21) they sound like the suicide bombers—'sending your children through the fire to Moloch'? God says that such people will be 'vomited out' of the land (verse 25). Pretty strong stuff.

The question of whether the Israelis have been engaging in similar things might be raised. I am sure that someone could find something to complain about. But the fact remains that history is on the side of the Jews. Ever since Nebuchadnezzar in 600BCE (when the Jews fell by the wayside) there have been loads of big nations who have fallen by the wayside while the Jews carry on. The Nazi Holocaust was only the last instance. And now the Jews are home. And they intend to stay there.

My reading is that they are quite happy to let Palestinians live, provided they are allowed to live themselves. The problem was, is now and continues to be that the Palestinians want the lot! Well, I have news for them. It's not news to you, if you know



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your Bible. But they probably don't. This land is given by God to the Jews. In perpetuity. For *ever*. (That's a long time.) See for starters Genesis 17:8. And Zechariah 14. (Etc.)

Tony Helm

Tootgarook, VIC

Beyond torts

Australia is now being rated in some quarters as the second-most litigious country in the world, after the United States. It seems that we no longer have accidents, merely torts for which compensation must be claimed!

Juliette Hughes' comments (*Eureka Street*, March 2002) are a welcome and sensitive contribution to the debate currently being argued, particularly her comments on the ways some communal activities are being negatively affected, even cancelled, as a consequence of ever-increasing insurance premiums. This then raises another aspect of the issue for debate.

Could it be that the increase in public liability claims is directly correlated with a failure of the communal sense and its corollary: the increasing alienation of people from the community?

As a generalisation, happy people do not make claims, unhappy people do. From my experience, it seems to be that in a lot of cases, claims are made by people who are clearly alienated from their communities for any number of reasons. One might argue, then, that insurance or tort claims become a *cri de cœur* from people who want, rightly, to be noticed and treated fairly. Whether the legal process involved in bringing a claim brings about such a result is another question.

If my hypothesis is correct, then risk managers in different organisations will need to pay more attention to all people with whom they deal, not just to those who meet some predetermined standard of

conformity, which often includes an unwritten agreement not to question the decisions of those tasked to make them. A true community ought to celebrate difference and encourage debate.

Perhaps, then, the current debate needs to turn from concern about rising premiums to something more basic: the welcoming of people into the community.

Peter C. Gaughwin

Adelaide, SA

Instituting change

If only Peter Hollingworth, a man whose life has been dedicated to helping others, had placed the interests of people ahead of those of the church institution or organisation when it came to helping those abused in the care of the church. He will probably be sacrificed now—the last antelope caught out of thousands before him in authority—but will it ultimately change the self-defensive culture of institutions with responsibility towards individuals, be they churches, councils, communications companies or others? Will institutions change their culture of automatic denial or act on reasonable complaint from individuals? Will they now refuse to place their guarded image, money and insurance considerations, ahead of people, ethics, and indeed their own teachings and charters? Or will they continue to let individuals be betrayed, defamed, and continue as sacrificial lambs to protect the institutions? I question whether the church institution has learned from the Hollingworth saga. Had we seen church leaders speaking with such concerned passion about the damage done to abused children as they have about the damage done to the church by the saga, perhaps the mess would never have happened because children would have been the priority. The answer for all institutions, including Victoria's media institutions which have a history of swaying to political pressure, is to nurture a culture of openness, to apologise for mistakes—in a word, honesty, instead of cover-up and denial. The church, any church, might help itself best if it turned directly to the words of Jesus the man and became more Jesus-like, rather than like an institution which can become the religion itself. And come to think of it, Jesus didn't

want organisations and institutions anyway.

John Dobinson
North Balwyn, VIC

Keeping on caring

It is now five years since the Kennett Liberal government in Victoria first promised to introduce transitional and after-care support services for young people leaving state care. This commitment was renewed by the state Labor government on their election in 1999. Yet today there is still no specific funding for services to assist those leaving state care.

Young people leaving care remain one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society. Compared with most young people, they face numerous barriers to accessing educational, employment, and other developmental and transitional opportunities.

First, many entered state care as a result of significant physical, sexual or emotional abuse, or neglect. This problem may have become greater in recent years given evidence that a higher proportion of Victorian state wards are now entering care as highly disturbed adolescents, rather than as babies or younger children.

Second, many have experienced inadequacies in state care, including constant shifts in accommodation. Evidence from recent government inquiries such as the 1997 Australian Law Reform Commission Report and the 1999 Forde Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions suggests that many children and young people have been further harmed, rather than helped, by their admission into care.

Third, many people leaving care can call on little, if any, direct family support or other community networks to ease their movement into independent living.

In addition to these major disadvantages, many state wards currently experience an abrupt end at 16–18 years of age to the formal support networks of state care. This ending of support crucially coincides with either the final years of schooling or the beginning of employment. They are subsequently offered only limited and discretionary support with no formal entitlement to assistance.

The accelerated transition to independence of care-leavers contrasts starkly with the experience of most young people. Many now live at home till their early to mid 20s, and remain financially dependent on their parents. The movement towards independence through leaving home generally involves a long transition period during which young people may leave and return home again on a number of occasions.

The key factor here is the continued availability of most family homes as a 'safety net' to which young people can return over a considerable period of time. It is this safety net of extended support which is currently not available to most young people leaving care. Not surprisingly, local and international research has found care-leavers to be disproportionately affected by homelessness, early pregnancy, crime, and poor educational and employment outcomes.

New South Wales has now had well-funded central and regional after-care services for almost five years. A number of research reports from government and independent sources in Victoria have provided undeniable evidence of the need for action to improve the outcomes for young people leaving care.

Most recently, the November 2001 Victorian Parliamentary Public Accounts and Estimates Committee Report called on the Victorian government to prioritise the development of leaving-care services. When is the government finally going to act?

Philip Mendes

Department of Social Work
Monash University, VIC

Clare Griffin

Create Foundation
Melbourne, VIC

Amanda Jones

The Salvation Army Victorian Social
Programme Consultancy Unit
Fitzroy, VIC

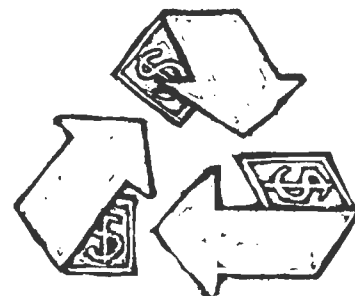
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THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC

Chasing cuts

VICTORIA'S NEW
FOREST POLICY

VINCE PHILLIPS, Corporate Affairs Manager for Harris Daishowa, on 31 January on ABC Southern Radio in Bega: 'We will still be able to get as much timber from Victoria as we want.'

Will there ever be agreement between the two main players in the forest: the logging industry and the conservationists? Will the ordinary person in the street ever be able to get a clear idea of what is going on?

In Victoria, the issue is as polarised as ever. To try to make some sense of the situation, the Bracks government commissioned Jerry Vanclay, Professor of Sustainable Forestry at Southern Cross University, to report on what was actually going on in the forests and to make recommendations on how to make the forests sustainable both for industry and for conservation. Vanclay discovered that there had been massive overcutting of trees and recommended reductions by an average 31 per cent statewide.

Minister Sherryl Garbutt's Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE) took on the report and the result was a new policy document, released on 21 February by the Bracks government: *Our Forests Our Future*. The publication sets out to allay public disquiet over the timber industries' use of Victoria's forests. It announced cuts to logging that were close to Professor Vanclay's recommendations; \$80 million was promised to restructure the industry and assist timber towns.

On 28 February, hundreds of logging trucks descended on Melbourne, and parked around Parliament House. The workers were not alone in their protest: the peak industry body for the state, the Victorian Association of Forest Industries (VAFI), was there to support them. A delegation demanded to see the Premier, and was received. Later Steve Bracks said that 'VAFI and the CFMEU will be key players.'

In the early hours of 3 March, police raided the famous Goolengook blockade in a pristine forest area of East Gippsland. A roster of conservationists had since 1997

blockaded a logging track into the area, preventing logging which was to occur under the Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs). Graeme Gooding, VAFI's Public Executive Director, applauded the move, asserting that the protesters had 'been able to flout the law for five years'.

The RFAs, a Keating government initiative, are still supported by the federal Coalition. But many small logging companies and contractors are now agreeing with conservationists that the RFAs have failed,



delivering neither jobs to timber workers nor conservation of forests to the rest of the population. The RFA process has mainly helped the woodchipping companies such as Amcor, Boral, Gunns, Midway and the totally Japanese-owned Harris Daishowa, since by all agreed estimates woodchipping volumes have vastly increased since the RFAs were set in place.

Few are content: some, though not all, loggers feel that not enough forest is available to them, while most conservationists believe that far too much logging has been going on, that the industries have been working with poor information about what is available.

On 10 March, ABC Radio National's *Background Briefing* looked into the RFA system and how it affected Victoria. Reporter Stephen Skinner found stories of DNRE incompetence that was not only jeopardising sensitive forest but creating hardship for sawloggers. One contractor, Ron Milliken, commented on the police raid at Goolengook:

We as loggers have been pushed pretty hard for a number of years by environmentalists. Whether we understood the full facts of the matter or not is probably not fair to judge. It's unfortunate that these confrontations take place. I blame solely government policy and NRE as the land managers for it, because if these contentious areas are there, why do they push logging contractors into them? If they didn't push logging contractors into contentious areas, there would be no confrontations with loggers and greens.

The conservation movement is dissatisfied, saying that not one tree will be saved

by the reduction in sawlog quotas. Virginia Young of the Wilderness Society said on *Background Briefing* that the position regarding sawloggers' licences was unclear—reassurance was needed that the new policy was not simply going to put sawmills out of business while increasing woodchipping.

A call to Sherryl Garbutt's office elicited a response from a spokesman that 'that was emphatically not the case, on the basis that woodchipping is a by-product of sawmilling, therefore a reduction in sawmilling equals a reduction in woodchips. The 31 per cent stands.' However, there were, said the spokesman, 'important caveats in very rare circumstances' (for example, if fire goes through, the forest can be logged).

When the reductions will kick in is far from clear: some sawmillers are going to be allowed two- to three-year extensions on licences that will expire soon. But Harris Daishowa and Midway, both woodchipping companies, state that their supplies will not be affected by the new policy.

There are no details yet available of what areas, what trees will be saved, if any. *Our Forests Our Future* also contains some disquieting hints, like the following:

VicForests will also work with industry to identify opportunities to process previously non-merchantable and possibly steep terrain timber which should become useable and accessible with technology change.'

That means that the very tall and dense trees, some 500 years old, which are too big for sawmillers and so undesirable to woodchippers that they pay Victorian taxpayers a royalty as low as 10 cents a tonne, will still go, probably to make charcoal, or possibly silicon. Or possibly there will be a return of the scheme to construct a wood-burning power station in Gippsland. And 'steep terrain' technology simply flags cable-logging, which has caused devastating erosion and damage in Tasmania.

Timber workers need a firm launch into plantations, which are now ample for both government and private interests—value-adding industry that creates jobs rather than the highly mechanised woodchipping that provides fewer than 500 jobs Australia-wide. *Our Forests Our Future* has raised many questions that still go unanswered.

—Juliette Hughes

Growing tall

LAND OF THE GIANTS

ON 21 FEBRUARY 1872, Victorian government surveyor and Inspector of State Forests William Ferguson reported on his inspection of 'areas that had not been penetrated by the timber splitter or the woodcutter':

Some places, where the trees are fewer and at a lower altitude, the timber is much larger in diameter, averaging from 6 to 10 feet and frequently trees to 15 feet in diameter are met with on alluvial flats near the river. These trees average about ten per acre: their size, sometimes, is enormous. Many of the trees that have fallen by decay and by bush fires measure 350 feet in length, with girth in proportion. In one instance I measured with the tape line one huge specimen that lay prostrate across a tributary of the Watts and found it to be 435 feet from the roots to the top of its trunk. At 5 feet from the ground it measures 18 feet in diameter. At the extreme end where it

has broken in its fall, it [the trunk] is 3 feet in diameter. This tree has been much burnt by fire, and I fully believe that before it fell it must have been more than 500 feet high. As it now lies it forms a complete bridge across a narrow ravine.

In other words, Ferguson measured the tree (in an area near Healesville, east of Melbourne) from its base to the point where it had broken off in its fall to be 435 feet (133 metres) and did not measure its crown. Even at 435 feet, there is no tree on earth known ever to have surpassed it. However, the information that the tree was still three feet (a metre) in diameter at this point supports the estimate that the tree had been over 500 feet (152 metres) high. This tree has become known as 'the Ferguson tree'. It is generally accepted to be the tallest living thing ever measured by humans.

Mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*—monarch of the eucalypts) is still today the world's tallest hardwood and flowering plant.

The tallest Californian redwood (*Sequoia sempivirens*) currently standing

is the newly measured 'Stratosphere Giant' of the Humboldt Redwood State Park, at 112.7 metres tall. The tallest North American tree ever known was a Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) which was measured (not professionally) at 122 metres.

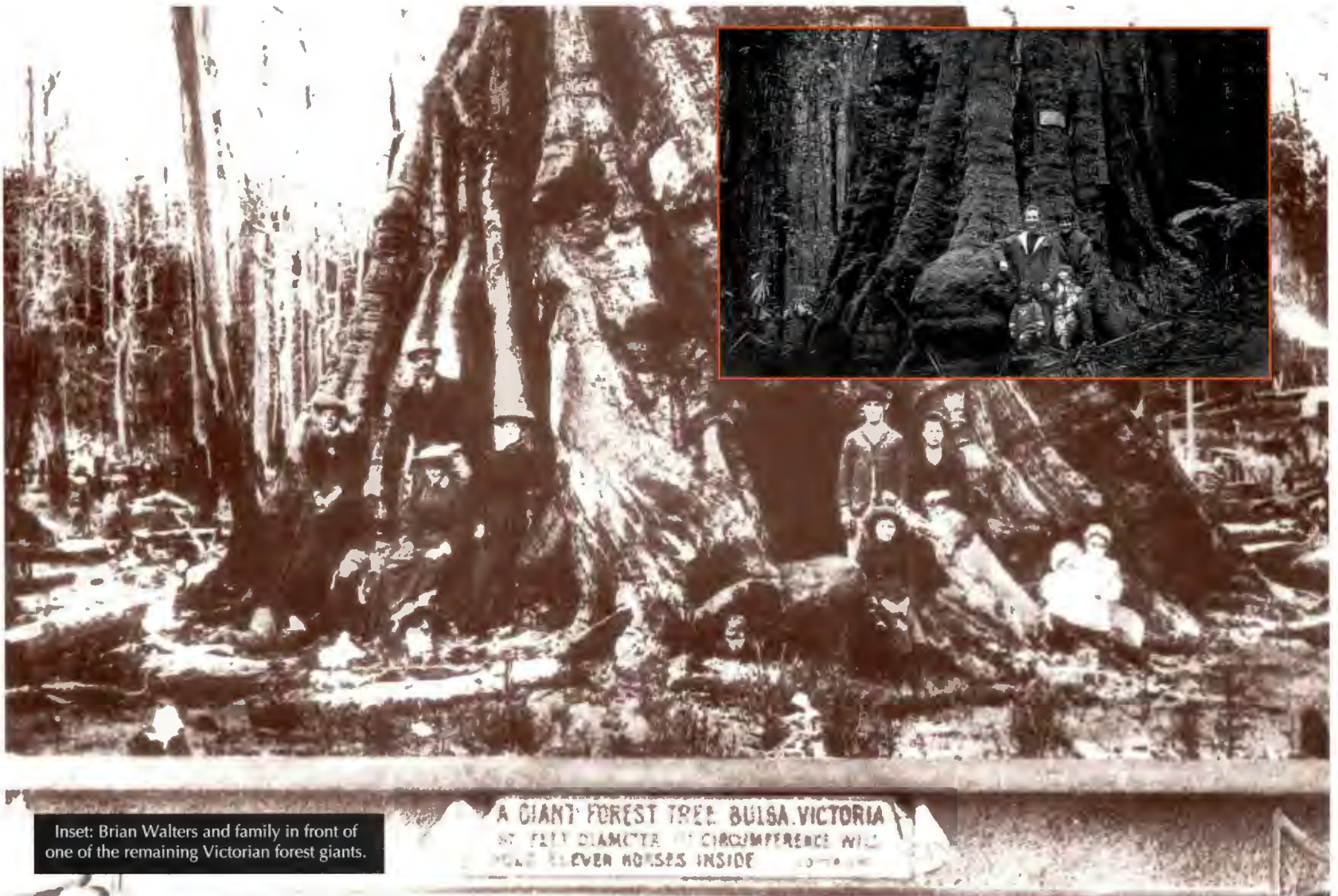
Other trees measured and reported in the 19th century are:

- ◆ A tree at Mt Baw Baw measured by surveyor G.W. Robinson prior to 1889 to be 143 metres in height.

- ◆ The Centennial Exhibition Tree from the Menzies Creek area, which was measured after felling at 122 metres. This tree was felled so that its spectacular trunk could be dismantled and then reassembled to form a display in the 1888 centennial exhibition in Melbourne.

- ◆ A fallen tree in the Dandenong ranges measured by surveyor David Boyle in 1862 to be 119 metres. However, again the tree had broken in its fall, and Boyle estimated that the top would be another 30 feet, giving a total height of approximately 128 metres.

The Thorpdale Tree in South Gippsland, felled in 1880 and then measured by surveyor G. Cornthwaite to be 114 metres.



Inset: Brian Walters and family in front of one of the remaining Victorian forest giants.

A GIANT FOREST TREE BULSA VICTORIA
1872. 112 FEET DIAMETER. 112 CIRCUMFERENCE WILL
HOLD ELEVEN HORSES INSIDE



Holy role models

THE LATE SPIKE MILLIGAN commented that he was not averse to heaven, but if Jeffrey Archer was going to be there too, he would prefer to go to Lewisham. His much-publicised remark resonates with many Catholics' attitudes to saints.

Under Pope John Paul II, the procedures for making saints have been so streamlined that many and various candidates have been canonised. As a result, some people are displeased to be reminded of the company they may later keep. The Chinese government had problems with the Chinese martyrs; few were happy with Pius IX, and now the imminent canonisation of José Maria Escrivá de Balaguer, the founder of Opus Dei, has provoked grumbles as well as cheers.

Canonisation, however, does not provide a list of the occupants of the penthouse suites in heaven, nor declare them infallibly to be good role models. It simply authorises the public cult of those who are canonised. In the formal phrase, saints are 'raised to the altar'. As a result, people may distribute holy cards, put statues in churches, and gather there to pray for the saints' assistance.

But canonisation does not guarantee that people will do any of these things, much less oblige them to do so. They will do so only if their saint is respected, loved and admired locally, and held to have some power in heaven. This does not depend on accreditation—in El Salvador the popular devotion to Archbishop Romero forced the local bishops to apply for his canonisation. But local enthusiasm alone can also lead to dodgy results. The very popular St Philomena was found later not to have existed, and if there were open slather on images in churches, one hates to imagine whose effigies would turn up the first Sunday after the Grand Final.

The process of accreditation does test whether the saints took their faith seriously. Its expense and complexity also tests local demand, but favours strongly organised groups which see in the canonisation of their members evidence of divine providence. These groups also present their saints as examples for Christians to follow. The early Jesuits put great resources into their efforts to have St Ignatius canonised, and promoted his cult among their public. Later, they pressed for the canonisation of their young saints, Stanislaus, Aloysius and John Berchmans, whom they then promoted as role models for youth. Other groups in the church have acted in the same way.

When saints are seen as role models, their lives inevitably come under close scrutiny. We like our role models to be like ourselves. And that is why the diversity of canonised saints is not a bad thing. They provide a list, a skewed list certainly, of people who took faith seriously. Their diversity speaks of an inclusive church and of varied forms of living faith. But whether they are seen as role models and whether people will think of them and God in the same breath, depends not on canonisation but on popular acclaim.

In the window of a church in Richmond, Melbourne, Mary MacKillop is shown surrounded by children. One of them wears a Tigers footy jumper. In the glass, official and popular saint-making coincide. ■

Andrew Hamilton sj teaches at the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne.

In 2001, access was obtained to the Wallaby Creek Catchment in Victoria to conduct accurate measurements of tall trees. An unnamed 'Wallaby Creek Giant' was discovered and measured at 91.6 metres. This is now the tallest known tree on the mainland.

In October 2001 the Mount Tree in the Andromeda Reserve Group, Styx Valley, Tasmania was measured at 96.5 metres—making it Australia's tallest known tree. Although this tree is not subject to logging, the forest about it is. Other tall trees of note are:

- ◆ The extraordinary manna gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) in the Evercreech Reserve in North Eastern Tasmania, which is 90 metres high.
- ◆ The Geeveston Tree in Tasmania, a tourist attraction at 87 metres, despite being broken at the top.
- ◆ 'The Big Tree' in the Cumberland Tall Trees Reserve near Marysville in Victoria, which now stands at 84 metres, but which was 92 metres prior to a storm breaking off its top in 1959.
- ◆ 'The Ada Tree', near Powelltown, which is 76 metres tall.

Our forefathers destroyed giant trees which, if they were living today, would be wonders of the world. Many huge trees were destroyed, and for most there are no measurements. In some cases, the trees were cut down and simply burnt, often in places so inaccessible that they would never be useful for grazing. Perhaps the uncivilised immensity of the forest was something strangers felt compelled to tame.

What does it take to have tall trees grow? One factor is time. Mountain ash grows exceptionally quickly: there is one stand of trees on the Acheron Plateau in Victoria (available to be logged) which has regrown from the 1939 bushfires. The trees are already a staggering 70 metres high. But hundreds of years are needed for trees to top the lofty heights early settlers witnessed—and this is after millennia of nutrients building up as trees grow and decay. Another factor is a large area of forest. Trees grow upwards when competing for light, and can grow very tall when protected from wind and storm by a large number of other tall trees.

Is the world's tallest tree still out there somewhere? Who knows? In recent years we have discovered a new species of eucalypt in East Gippsland, as well as the Wollemi Pine in the Blue Mountains, and the world's oldest known tree on Mt Dean in Tasmania. We are still learning secrets of the Australian bush. —Brian Walters

Across Jordan

THE NEW FRONT LINE

FROM QUEEN ALIA International Airport, the road into Amman, the Jordanian capital, passes by a large billboard. It shows a young girl of perhaps 12 years. The caption, in Arabic and English, reads: 'I am top of my class in geography but I still can't find Palestine on the map.'

The significance of such words is difficult to escape in this country where over 60 per cent of the population is Palestinian—refugees from the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the Six Day War in 1967 and the 1991 Gulf War. The billboard and Amman itself lie just 50 kilometres from the King Hussein (or Allenby) Bridge, which marks Jordan's border with the Palestinian Territories, and less than 100 kilometres from Ramallah, Hebron, Jerusalem—the battlegrounds of a conflict that has claimed more than 1000 lives and shattered any semblance of a peace process.

At times, however, Amman can seem a million miles from the fighting.

The city, like Rome, was originally built on seven hills, or *jebels*. With a population approaching two million, Amman now sprawls across 19 hills. Residents of the capital speak openly about two Ammans. Eastern Amman, home to the city's urban poor, is considered more religiously conservative. Its ancient Roman monuments strain under the modern chaos of traffic congestion and jumbled town planning. Western Amman, especially in the leafy suburbs of Shmeisani and Abdoun, stretches out above the downtown area. It is a genteel world apart, with its Western-style cafés, wine bars, galleries of contemporary art and tranquil residential districts. Here, young men and women in the latest Western clothes walk arm in arm on the streets and conduct not-so-secret liaisons in the hangouts that were once the preserve of Western expatriates. In trendy internet cafés you can find youth magazines jointly put together by Jordanian, Israeli and Palestinian writers.

After Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War that followed in 1991, as many as 500,000 Palestinians fled the conflict and the Kuwaiti retribution that followed Yasser

Arafat's refusal to condemn Iraq. Most of them settled in Amman. The strain on Jordan's resources was inconceivable. But the educated refugees—Palestinians have one of the highest proportions of PhDs of any nation in the world—are now credited with having transformed the city's social fabric. They, along with a new generation of young Jordanians, have led a process by which Amman has become a modern, outward-looking, international city with an unmistakably Arab flavour.

I had last visited Amman in 1998, after two months in the Syrian capital, Damascus,



one of the truly great Arab and Islamic cities. Every Damascene stone tells a story of Umayyads, caliphs, Saladin. Although hostility towards Israelis is extremely rare among ordinary Syrians, an awareness of grievance and lost territories seemed to dominate the national debate. Official government newspapers refused even to mention Israel by name, referring to it as the 'Zionist Entity'.

By contrast, Amman lacked the same obvious sense of history. In 1998, I felt alienated by its embrace of the modern and stayed only a few days before hurrying onwards towards another of the great Arab capitals, Cairo. Amman was not what I had imagined; its orientation seemed an affront to the significant events taking place just across the border. High in the upper tiers of Amman's 6000-seat Roman amphitheatre, the centrepiece of ancient Philadelphia, I had sat in discussion with disaffected young Palestinians. One young man, Ahmed, was particularly articulate and angry, but all of them expressed anger that Jordan's 1994 peace treaty with Israel had won nothing for the Palestinian people.

Four years on, I met with Fayez, Ra'ed and Suheil, among many. Two of these youngmen are Palestinians, sons of refugees. Both have made their home in Jordan and

are successful businessmen but still they share the frustrations expressed by Ahmed in 1998—every Palestinian has an awareness of a homeland lost.

These are men who have profited from Jordan's relative stability flowing from the peace treaty. Yet the overriding emotion is one of bewilderment, sometimes bordering on despair, that the Palestinian people, as victims of occupation, are considered the aggressors, the threat to peace. They ask with disbelief and genuine curiosity how a country that uses assassinations with impunity and without due process of law can be portrayed internationally as the aggrieved party.

Such anger as exists alongside the dismay is complex. These men and other Jordanians and Palestinians with whom I have spoken react to the hardline Israeli Government of Ariel Sharon with scarcely concealed contempt. Yet they welcome Israeli tourists as guests in Jordan with genuine warmth. They are critical of the double standards of the US Government, its supporters and the media, but they overwhelm with kindness the Americans in their midst. And they direct a powerful anger towards Osama bin Laden and the suicide bombers whose acts of terrible violence have channelled so easily into the prejudices of a Western world too ready to believe that they—Fayez, Ra'ed and Suheil—are to be feared because they are Muslim.

Not far from Amman, Mt Nebo rises up from the East Bank plateau. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, Moses—considered a prophet in Judaism, Christianity and Islam (where he is called Musa)—stood atop this mountain and looked out over the Promised Land. It was a land he would never visit but one in which his people would make their home. Some 4000 years later, the domes, minarets and spires of Jerusalem, the Palestinian Promised Land, can be seen through the haze.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is on record as saying that the Palestinian homeland should be Jordan, not Jerusalem. He is widely believed in diplomatic circles still to prefer a population transfer of this kind and for the Palestinian Territories to become a permanent part of a Greater Israel. The assassinated Israeli Tourism Minister, Rahavan Ze'evi, openly advocated this as the solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

On their reading of the future, the Palestinian Promised Land lies to the east, not west of Mt Nebo.

Jordan's greatest success thus far has been in transforming itself from a nation largely comprised of disenfranchised refugees into a moderate and modern nation at peace with itself and its neighbours, actively engaged with the world, whether it be Christian, Jewish or Muslim.

The current leadership of both the Palestinians and Israelis were born out of the bloody battles for supremacy of decades past. Sharon and Arafat, bitter enemies to the last. These two old warhorses, each reviled as a terrorist among their opposed peoples, seem unable to understand that violence will not bring victory nor allow their people to enter the hoped-for land of peace.

The future does not belong to these men. A future Israel might, if it looked closely at Jordan, see not the Palestinian Promised Land that Sharon hopes for, but a model for peace with its neighbours led by the new generation of Palestinians. Jordan's Palestinians are living proof that, freed from the alienation fostered by daily occupation and humiliation, the Palestinian people are as capable of peaceful coexistence as any people on earth.

In the meantime, Amman may feel far from the battlefields of Palestine and Israel. But perhaps it is a new front line of a different kind, one critical in convincing Israel that it need not fear.

—Anthony Ham

Grey areas

(NOT) SEEING RED

THAT RED AND GREEN should govern all traffic and navigation by land, sea and air, is diabolical and discriminatory. These two colours devoted to stop and go, left and right, port and starboard, happen to be those decidedly least visible to colour-blind people. Who knows how far this conspiracy reaches?

At 13, I was prevented from joining the Royal Australian Navy as a cadet midshipman when the family doctor, with an untidy basket of wool of various hues, discovered that I

suffered from this disability. My father bought me a dog and recommended continuing in the civil stream to university. As far as I know, I thus became the first person to join Australia's foreign service because of being colour-blind.

There is no doubt that colour blindness is a disability, and I now see clearly that colour-blind citizens are discriminated against and disadvantaged in a number of public services. They are also the butt of a never-ending party game, where answers to 'What colour is this?' unfailingly yield amusement, awe, or amateur philosophy.

The public neglect of the condition may well be attributable to the medical profession which, as I found, is quick to weed us out and consign us to our greyish limbo. Even my friendly ophthalmic surgeon recently dismissed me as an extreme case. A check through medical reference books yields a pretty small take on the subject, normally not more than one or two obvious paragraphs. All retailing the same stale research, the books usually offer that one in eight Caucasian males (there's a colour problem there, too), and one in 30 such females, are colour-blind. Particularly on the male side we are a significant minority, deserving, on the numbers alone, of wider recognition. Ironically we are placed in this position by the female carrier who, while not herself afflicted by her colour-blind

father, also spares her daughter but may transmit the curse to her son, and generally does. So there's also gender discrimination involved.

In wartime, the colour-blind soldier, almost certainly a private, was sacrificed as a spotter or sniper. He was sent up a tree to sit like a koala peering into the enemy trees in search of camouflaged objects that were almost certainly acutely dangerous to him. Why? Because the camouflage was irrelevant. Those cunningly coloured stripes and blobs did not distract him from seeing whatever solid shape was visible. Likewise, he, even if camouflaged, would be visible to his opposite number in the enemy trees. There is no known correlation between colour blindness and pacifism.

The expression 'colour coded' is familiar. A code is a system for transmitting messages secretly. And this disadvantage is being inflicted on colour-blind people. For them it is a hostile, secret code more impenetrable even than the famous German Enigma. Colour codes or rainbow maps are used with all the thoroughness of apartheid to deny the colour-blind equal, if any, access to public entertainment, public health, public transport, and even retail sales.

Tickets to sporting events and other entertainment are coloured according to price, and seating zones are identified by colour. And think of the difficulty in following a football match when you can only pick the teams by their plain white or dark shorts, and both sides wear the same. Even the church distinguishes its hierarchy and seasons by colour. Cardinal Red, forsooth.

Consider the disadvantage suffered by good tax-paying colour-blind citizens as they enter a hospital in search of casualty, to be reached by following the red line on the floor, or the cashier at the end of the green line. And yellow for gynaecology with orange for urology isn't funny either. Then throw in a few decorator touches that confront the one Caucasian male in eight by using lines in purplish blue or bluish green. Deliberately to choose colour as the key to easy movement around an enormous hospital must verge on criminal negligence, and the first damages case on the



grounds of this discrimination cannot be far away.

The limit is reached, however, in the use of colour for schematic displays of public transport systems like metropolitan underground railways, and bus systems. The former in particular closely resemble the noodle knowledge chart—that maze embroidered by Barry Jones—with loops, connections, parallel lines and usually the need to know the terminus in order to identify the route. There is an utter failure in communication when brown, red, and green lines, or pink and blue, converge and separate beyond any hope of being read by the colour-blind. And pedestrian traffic lights, unless brightly lit and animated, provide the *coup de grâce* for any colour-blind passengers reaching the street.

Follow the few survivors into a discount shop. To save on overheads, all prices are shown by colour tags, or mark-downs by coloured dots. They can neither shop nor save without assistance. Allan Fels, where are you? —Duncan Campbell

Unto the breach

WELFARE FORUM

IN PARLIAMENT and the departmental headquarters of Canberra, the stage is being set for the rollout of the Commonwealth's welfare reform package.

Called *Australians Working Together*, the plan promises additional resources for personalised Centrelink support, increased employment and training assistance, return-to-work incentives, and other initiatives for vulnerable job-seekers, sole parents and people with disabilities.

At first glance, *Australians Working Together* appears comprehensive in its strategy and range of programs. However, the much-publicised \$1.7 billion in gross funding allocated over four years will amount to only \$770 million after the Commonwealth recovers savings from within the welfare system itself. This in itself raises questions.

But of more immediate concern is the likely source of the savings.

Despite assurances that the *Australians Working Together* strategy is about 'striking the right balance between incentives, obligations and assistance', there are well-founded fears that the savings will be made largely through the imposition of social security penalties (which already yield the government well over \$200 million



Two wheels good

THE WHOLESALE ADOPTION of low-powered motorbikes in Vietnam provides a fine example of the intimate relationship between technology and society.

Countries like Thailand and China are moving from pushbikes to cars. But the Vietnamese, for interconnected reasons of government policy and affordability, have opted in their millions for the motorcycle. Two- and three-wheeled vehicles powered by 110 cc motors make up about 90 per cent of the traffic in Ho Chi Minh City. The motorcycles give the city much of its distinctive character. They flow down the streets like schools of fish, dividing around pedestrians and surging across intersections, seemingly playing with frustrated drivers of cars and trucks.

The preponderance of motorcycles slows everything to about 30 kilometres an hour. There are few traffic lights and, in the tradition of bicycle couriers in Australia, motorcyclists mostly ignore them. But what looks like chaos actually resolves into a set of rules.

Safety is based on prediction. As a pedestrian, it is important never to make a sudden move—neither to stop, nor to run—because this prevents the individual drivers in the maelstrom from making the necessary projections to avoid you. Flexibility is the watchword. It is not unusual for drivers to travel against the flow of traffic on the wrong side of the road. But if they do it in a predictable manner, their perversity can easily be accommodated.

Motorbikes are perfect for negotiating dodgy road surfaces, narrow lanes and hawkers' barrows. They transport almost anything; whole families are a common sight. On a recent visit, Archimedes even saw a dozen geese tied on the back of one—a white, feathered pincushion with necks and yellow beaks craning.

But motorbikes mean more than getting from A to B. They represent independence and freedom in a crowded society, a portable seat on which to sit and observe life, and a bed or a hammock post when tired. In addition, owners can make money from them. In a city with little public transport, for the equivalent of a dollar travellers can score a lift almost anywhere.

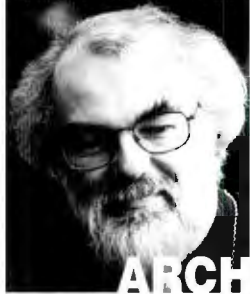
Vietnamese society is now geared around the motorcycle. But the Vietnamese are desperate for the luxury of four-wheeled transport. As their economy improves, it is going to be hard to deny them. But the cost may well be huge.

Roads would have to be widened and improved, and a real commitment made to traffic regulation. But even so there would be gridlock, despite the latest elevated freeways like those in Shanghai, and even worse air pollution. The free-wheeling chaos of motorbike society would be replaced by the regimentation of the car.

That future can be seen in Bangkok, where people spend two hours travelling a few kilometres in their air-conditioned cars rather than 15 minutes on the new elevated railway. It's easy to suggest that a society balanced on two wheels may have long-term advantages for Vietnam, but probably only from the comfort of a family sedan in Australia. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

HUGHES-CHEONG LECTURESHIP TRUST



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Tuesday 14 May, 8pm — *"Living Baptismally"*
Thursday 16 May, 8pm — *"Living Eucharistically"*
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No charge — Supper to follow

**INSTITUTE OF
SPIRITUAL STUDIES,
ST PETER'S EASTERN HILL**

ALL DAY SEMINAR

"Anglican Origins:

Prayer and Holiness:

William Temple to George Herbert"

Saturday 25 May, 10am–3.30pm
Fee \$30 including luncheon (\$25 concession)
Pre-booking preferred: (03) 9662 2170

**CONVERSATION WITH
MICHAEL LEUNIG**

Friday 17 May, 7.30pm
St John's Church, Southgate, Melbourne
No charge

PREACHMENTS

1. PENTECOST

Sunday 19 May, 11am
High Mass, St Peter's, Eastern Hill, Melbourne

2. EVE OF TRINITY SUNDAY

Saturday 25 May, 6pm
Trinity College Chapel, Parkville, Melbourne
Choral Eucharist to mark the 125th Anniversary
of the Trinity College Theological School

FURTHER INFORMATION

from Trust Secretary, Dr Brian Porter
Tel (03) 9868 7157; Fax (03) 9868 7188
email: bporter@mgs.vic.edu.au

annually). Penalising or 'breaching' the unemployed is a money-spinner. The total annual number of breaches imposed has increased from 113,000 in 1996 to 386,000 in 2001.

There is no question that it is the government's responsibility to ensure wise use of tax dollars through its administration of the social security system. However, the 342 per cent increase in breaches imposed under the Howard government is out of all proportion to this responsibility. That *Australians Working Together* may be driven by a desire to further limit entitlements and clear the welfare rolls through the punitive treatment of recipients does not augur well for older job-seekers, sole parents and people with disabilities who will now be subject to the activity requirements of mutual obligation.

Judging the true intentions of government in this area is not easy. There is a divergence between the compassionate language used in policy documents and the hard-edged 'dole bludger' rhetoric regularly employed by senior ministers. Policy documents indicate that 'helping people to move forward is part of the Australian way ... Our system embodies the Australian values of a fair go and of helping those in need'. Meanwhile, past and present ministers for employment and family services—the drivers of welfare reform—have variously described recipients as potential 'job snobs', prone to 'long-term idleness' and 'abusing the essential decency of the Australian community'.

The government has used the alternating compassionate and hard-edged rhetoric to great effect when playing to particular audiences and propping up electoral support. The straight-talking Amanda Vanstone (Minister for Family and Community Services) and Tony Abbott (Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations) are two of the more adept federal ministers when it comes to playing the 'good cop/bad cop' routine.

In mid-January, Senator Vanstone was reported as saying that, now that her pursuit of Christopher Skase had ended, she was turning her efforts to catching welfare cheats. Announcing the introduction of client 'profiling' to identify those most

likely to defraud the system, Vanstone suggested that cheats would be weeded out in much the same way that airport security officials identify drug importers. Note: despite the government's best attempts over the years at catching the supposedly large numbers of rorters, far less than 0.1 per cent of all recipients consistently defraud the Commonwealth in any given year. The integrity of the system is not under threat.

So, what do the hard words of the ministers signal for those struggling on income support? The scene continually played out in the media is sub-Shakespearean: the main protagonists espouse the worthiest of intentions, only to confide their real motivations in well-timed asides to the punters. The message: those relying on income support are not always 'deserving'.

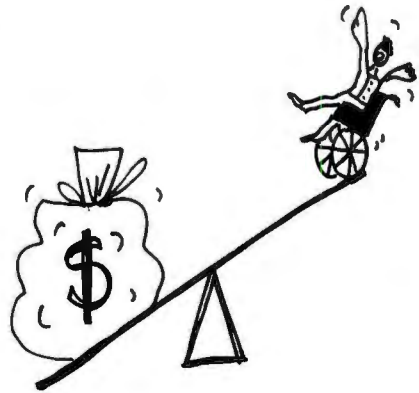
As the curtain is raised on *Australians Working Together*, it would be well not to forget what is being played out in the lives of people already living on payments 20 to 40 per cent below the Henderson poverty line who are then penalised for failing to satisfy a complex range of administrative and activity-test requirements.

But to give credit where it is due: Senator Vanstone recently announced some changes to breaching arrangements aimed at reducing the exposure of the most vulnerable job-seekers. Her proposals include the temporary suspension of payments rather than their outright reduction or cancellation—where valid reasons can be given for the failure to meet established requirements.

It is encouraging to hear the minister's acknowledgment that the government's breaching policy is too tough on the most vulnerable. Vanstone might just be the person to deliver a fairer response to the struggling citizens of this country. But much more needs to be done to address the injustice of this system—and quickly.

—John Ferguson

This month's contributors: Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer; Brian Walters is a barrister and conservation activist; Anthony Ham is a *Eureka Street* correspondent; Duncan Campbell is a freelance commentator and former diplomat; John Ferguson is Director of Policy and Research at Catholic Welfare Australia.



What lies beneath

Has 'government accountability' become an oxymoron?

THERE ARE big lies and little lies, big failures and little failures lying behind the recent turmoils of state.

The politicians started: big lies first. In making the big lies work, the armed forces and the bureaucrats allowed themselves to be used to steal an election. Some protested, all too ineffectually. Others kept their mouths shut.

In the wider world, the focus has been on the lies of the politicians. In Canberra, there is as much distress about the feeling that both the armed services and the public service failed in their duties. Is this the new, politicised, public service? An older, corrupted, public service? Or simply one that is incompetent?

The biggest lie—which well preceded the interception of what navy acronymophomaniacs christened Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel 4 (SIEV4)—derived from the picking up of refugees by the *Tampa* and the confection by the prime minister of a sense of crisis about an invasion by 'boat people'. The navy and the SAS were sent to intercept and board *Tampa*. A top-level committee of bureaucrats from the Departments of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Foreign Affairs, Immigration, and Defence was established to run a war room in Canberra to carry out the bidding of the prime minister—not one boat person was to land upon an Australian shore. One of the bureaucrats entered the room commenting that 'we've won the election'. The 'we' was noted by a number of participants.

Rules of engagement were established which permitted boats to be fired upon, rammed and boarded. The objective was



not only to repel the boat people, or to 'send a message' to refugee camps, but also to send a message to Australians. The first people to get the message were in the Labor Party, thrown into complete panic by John Howard's discovery, at last, of an issue he could go with. As Labor scrambled to neutralise the issue, he had them wrong-footed from the start. Howard acted shamelessly, Labor acted shamefully.

Perhaps Howard is right in insisting that the image of refugees throwing children overboard did not win him the election; it was the wider notion of repelling them that did. Even so, however, there was no image that encapsulated it so well as the claim of children being thrown overboard; no rhetoric that underlined it so much as Howard's statement that Australia did not want the sort of people who would do such a thing.

It never happened—something that was clear very soon after. The claim that

it *did* happen came from a misunderstanding of communications by an officer who had, by political arrangement, interposed himself in the chain of navy communications so as to keep the war room and the politicians briefed about what was happening between the HMAS *Adelaide* and SIEV4. He told the war room; it was reported as fact to the bureaucrats in it; that was what the politicians heard—first Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock, then Howard, then Defence Minister Peter Reith—and that was what the public was told.

At the naval interception, some people, but no children, had jumped overboard. The next day, while the overloaded ship was under navy control, it began to sink, and its passengers, including children, entered the water. Some sailors on the *Adelaide* jumped into the water to help get them on to the *Adelaide*. Photos were taken, and sent by a proud captain, anxious to trumpet the heroism of his crew, back to Canberra. The captioning made it entirely clear that it involved an incident 24 hours after the alleged 'children overboard' affair.

By the time the photographs arrived in Canberra, there were people in the Department of Defence who knew no children had been thrown overboard—or, to use an inverted sentence that some will claim to be significant, knew 'there was no evidence that children had been thrown overboard'—and there were people who protested when the Minister for Defence and his staff proposed to issue the photographs, minus their captions, as evidence that they had. The

minister and his staff were informed and, from this point on at least, it must be said that there was conscious understanding that the public was being lied to. Peter Reith says that he never told Howard; Howard says the same, although he has admitted that he was told something vaguely about some doubt about the photographs.

Strictly, the minister and his private office are subject to the same public service ethical code as ordinary public servants. But the role of the ministerial office is often poorly documented, with a strong focus on oral, rather than written advice, and with the direct role of the minister often left deliberately vague

Soon after, the *Adelaide* docked at Christmas Island and the captain and the crew became aware of how they were being used. Many were deeply upset, and fresh communications and protests began coming up the official channels. And they gossiped to Christmas Islanders, who passed the message on to reporters, who published reports of the doubts.

During all of this time, there were not only meetings in the war room, but a host of other defence and security meetings, involving much the same people as on the interdepartmental committee, but, apparently, no-one from Defence told any of the other bureaucrats about the storm blowing up inside their department. One Defence paper expressed a reservation, but in a footnote only, about whether there was evidence of children being thrown overboard, and a Defence bureaucrat claims to have expressed a doubt about it. But all of the bureaucrats, apparently, agreed on written advice to the government that asserted children had been thrown overboard. As people duck for cover and individuals claim they were not 'advised', they will be seen to claim that only formal written advice mattered and that scuttlebutt and gossip did not count.

Jane Halton, the Prime Minister and Cabinet deputy secretary in charge of the war room, says that any doubts expressed about whether children were thrown overboard were dissipated when the photographs emerged. She, and the Immigration and Foreign Affairs officials, claim to have been completely ignorant of the kerfuffle about the history of the photos. Max Moore Wilton, head of PM&C, claims much the same.

Eventually, Jane Halton got to hear about the photographs and informed the prime minister's office, but this message was not, it is said, passed on by the minder concerned to the prime minister, because it was speculation and gossip. John Howard hedged his words on the subject very carefully, particularly with phrases like 'I have been advised'. When

he was tackled about the discrepancies, he cited recent conversations with Peter Reith (who now more or less admits that he lied) and a briefing paper (based on press reports) by the Office of National Assessments as proof of facts now known, by every bureaucrat involved, to be false. The bureaucrats and officers held their tongues, and, several days later, Howard won the election. Even the airing of doubts helped Howard, because it helped bring refugees to the fore again.

Back in Defence, a number of officers, right up to the Deputy Chief of Defence Force, put their careers on the line by trying to have the record corrected. But the Chief of Defence Force, Admiral Chris Barrie, who now claims that he was at the time preoccupied with Australia's engagement in Afghanistan, assisted in keeping the matter obfuscated by arguing that, in case of doubts, one should accept the initial reports. Later he recants, being forced to humiliate himself in public as it became clear to him that he had lost the confidence of his services, his officers, his bureaucratic colleagues, and even the politicians.

As the inquests continue, it should be clear that the bureaucrats should not be condemned because they carried out orders of the government, even orders conceived for purely partisan purposes. There are certainly grounds for thinking that independent public servants did what many would regard as less than their duty in warning politicians of the risks and dangers involved, but so calculated was the government's action that it seems clear they would not have listened to any contrary advice. The government, in short, was willing to

abuse its armed services and its public administration, and, probably, orders are orders at the end of the day.

But did those involved do all that they could have done to set the record straight and to hold back their masters from the lying and the manipulation going on?

One thing that we can be sure of is that a whole chapter of the affair will be concealed from public gaze as the Senate committee begins its investigations. Only a few glimpses—mostly unsavoury—have been seen of political minders, and for what they said, what they knew, and what they told their masters, one will have to rely on ministerial assertion, not on submission to cross-examination. Strictly, the Senate insists that it has a right to question such people, but faced with government opposition, it has traditionally run away from a confrontation. It will almost certainly do so again because Labor (which in government defied the Senate on such issues) will recognise that the precedent will operate upon it if and when it ever gets power again.

BY NOW, HOWEVER, most of the facts that serve to discredit the bureaucracy and the defence forces are known. It is obvious, however, that there have been many people busily engaged in maintaining the lie and covering up. It is obvious, moreover, that more than the usual spinning by a ministerial private office was involved. This all occurred in the middle of an election campaign when the prime minister's strategy was being driven as much by his pollsters and the Liberal Party bureaucracy as by his own minders. In one sense, of course, the minders are irrelevant: what really matters is how much Howard, Ruddock and Reith knew, and when. That, however, cannot emerge until the role of the political staff emerges. It was, after all, designed that way.

The prime minister operates behind a screen. Paul Keating did too. Howard has a large and protective staff whose job it is to keep him on the big issues, to keep away people whom he does not want to hear, to resolve problems he does not want to be involved with, and to add the political focus to bureaucratic advice. Most matters cleared through the prime minister's office never reach John Howard or, if they do, no-one would

know, because the consultations and discussions involve staff alone. The prime minister keeps a clear desk, and, at any one time, is working on only a few issues.

Behind the staff is a highly politicised Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), organised, as it was in Malcolm Fraser's time, to shadow all of the other departments and keep the prime minister's office informed about what all of the agencies are doing. It also has the task of adding in the politics and of having a wider perspective on events than will be found in single agencies. The first, and the last, job of a public servant in this department consists of protecting the prime minister. It does not necessarily involve lying or cheating. Indeed, PM&C staff often have just the sort of political detachment that directly political staffers lack.

Experience, not least the experience of working with the other side, has taught them that the cover-up rarely works, that ultimately the truth comes out, and that managing the truth, and letting it out on one's own timetable, generally works better and is more controllable than if it is allowed to emerge by leak, from hostile sources or by accident. Experience, generally, has taught them that the best politics come from good policy. But politics goes with the job, and prime ministers often need quick and dirty solutions to get the heat off issues: a well-trained PM&C officer, even one honourable by old standards, is focused on problem-solving. In recent decades, a spell at PM&C has been regarded as a critical part of the career path for an ambitious officer—for it is there, or at Finance or Treasury, that one acquires both a political feel and a whole-of-government approach. On the other hand, career PM&C officers without direct program experience out in agencies tend, ultimately, not to prosper: the hands-on experience of managing the politics has to be married with some hands-on experience of managing people and the service in question.

The development of an army of political advisers in ministers' offices has, to a degree, shielded most public servants from direct politicisation, but it has made public administration far more political. Increasingly, bureaucratic advice is only one part of the advice being considered, and the bureaucracy has little role in

higher-level decision-making. Increasingly, it is advisers who are listening to the lobbyists, doing the deals with interest groups, and co-ordinating with other offices about the political spin. Increasingly, the ministerial office has been developing direct links into departments and agencies, managing the nature and quality of advice, and, frequently, giving directions about what is to be done, often completely away from the formal channels. Strictly, the minister and his private office are subject to the same public service ethical code as ordinary public

not know; I was not told; I should have asked'—is still recited.

Until recently, however, it was assumed that a minister would know everything that had occurred inside his or her own office. If an agency had formally told the minister's office, the information was assumed to have gone to the minister. For a decade or two, however, ministers such as Gareth Evans, Ros Kelly and Alan Griffith, and now, in another government, the prime minister, John Howard himself, have developed a habit of denying that information given



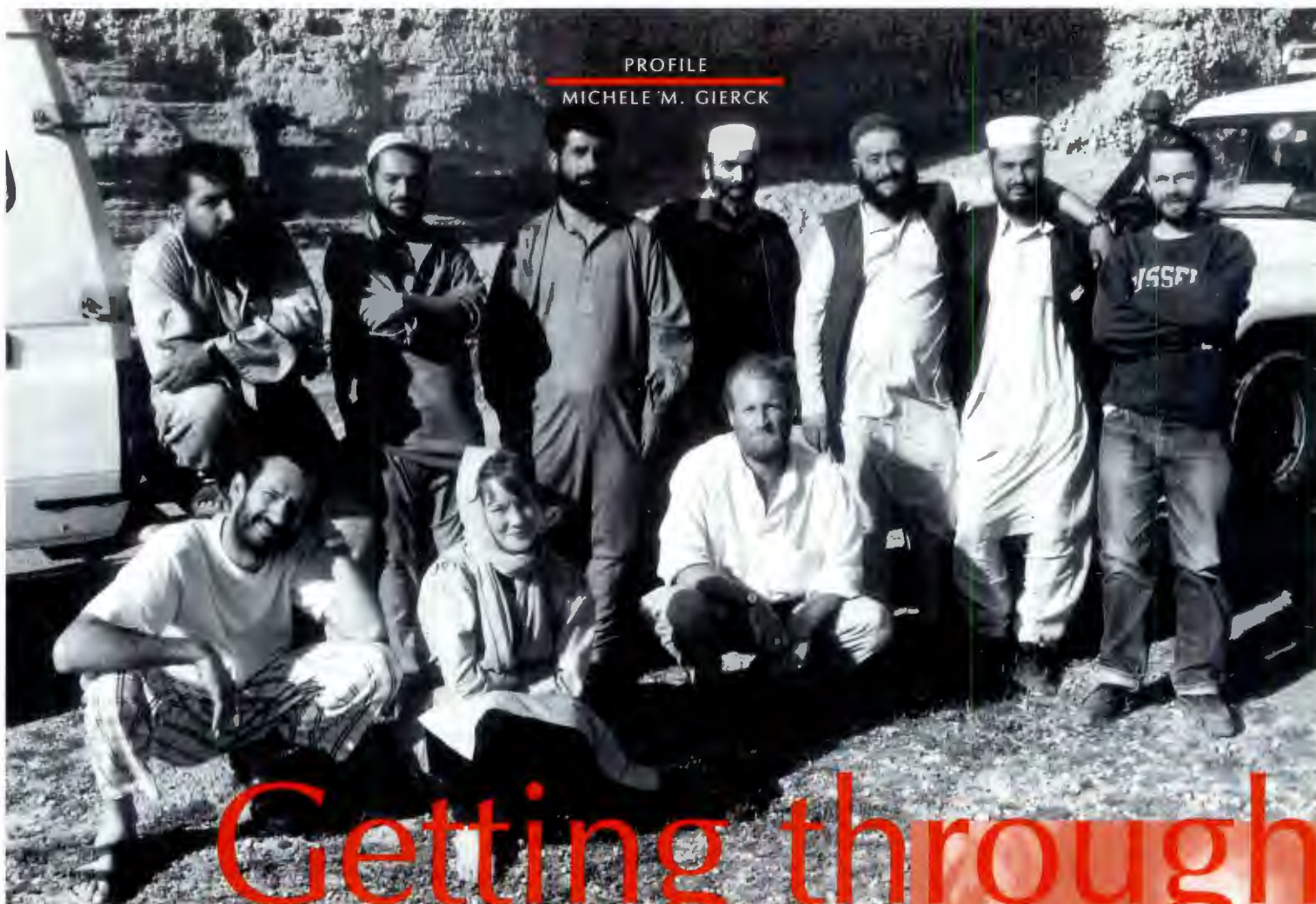
servants. But the role of the ministerial office is often poorly documented, with a strong focus on oral, rather than written advice, and with the direct role of the minister often left deliberately vague—whether for deniability, or so as to confuse the extent to which decisions have been influenced by directly political considerations, or so as to protect a minister's flexibility should things go awry.

The strict Westminster code made a minister responsible for everything that occurred in his or her department. In practice, it has come to be recognised that ministers cannot know everything that has occurred within departments, and they will be held to account only for actions in which they were directly involved or where it can be said that they ought to have known. The Churchillian comment about Singapore—'I did

to their own officers has been passed on, and refusing to accept the responsibility for their ignorance. On an earlier occasion with Howard, over travel rorts, a prized adviser, Graham Morris, fell on his sword (as, later, did staffers in the office of the deputy prime minister, John Anderson) over alleged failures to pass on advice. In the 'children overboard' affair, however, Howard has made no criticism of his staff over such a failure, if failure it was. Perhaps the evidence that the information, if not the direct advice, did reach him is too compelling for him to pretend any virtue; perhaps his sense of triumph in pulling off the result means that he thinks he can brass it out; perhaps he genuinely does not accept any notion of wrongdoing or accountability. ■

Jack Waterford is editor-in-chief of the *Canberra Times*.

PROFILE
MICHELE M. GIERCK



Getting through

An interview with Nick Lawson of Médecins Sans Frontières.

Logistics: The detailed co-ordination of a complex operation involving many people, facilities, or supplies. The New Oxford Dictionary of English



THERE'S AN OLD strategy vital to any military operation—maintenance of the lines of resupply. For humanitarian organisations working in emergency situations around the globe, this strategy may be just as crucial.

Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), is an independent international medical organisation active in many of the world's hot spots. Rapid medical response and advocacy are a key part of its mandate, as are 'witnessing' and 'being there' on the ground.

MSF is perhaps best known for its emergency international medical responses. But it is also operational in post-emergency, chronic and developmental situations. With chronic issues such as HIV/AIDS, it focuses on issues of access and non-access to medical treatment. Whatever the operational stage, the entire program is undergirded

by an extensive and complex logistics operation which, one suspects, would at times be reliant on vast reserves of diplomacy.

Keeping the lines of supply and resupply intact through natural disasters, militarised zones, food crises, epidemics, massive population movements, aerial bombardments and terrain with limited infrastructure, is no easy task. Added to this, some medical supplies—vaccines, for example—require a 'cold chain'. This means refrigeration, usually between 2–8°C, from the MSF operational centres in Europe, until the supplies are administered weeks or months later, often in remote regions. Failure to maintain the cold chain would render the vaccines unusable. Since vaccines are shipped in the thousands, the cost of any such loss would be enormous, not simply in economic terms.

Nick Lawson (above, centre, with co-workers) is the Active Recruitment Officer for MSF, located in its Sydney-based Australian headquarters. Active seems an apt description. While Lawson is more often in the office these days, for close to four out of the last five-and-a-half years he has been an MSF logistician in South Sudan, Afghanistan and East Timor. His first humanitarian assignment was in 1997. Still passionate about the work, he is a man who knows what is required to keep projects ticking over in the field, thereby ensuring delivery of services to the most vulnerable sectors of the population. He also knows what qualities to look for when recruiting staff for the field: calmness, flexibility, tolerance and an ability to cope in stressful situations.

The MSF Australian office is down-to-earth, while still remaining functional. It seems this no-frills approach flows

through to international field workers' remuneration. Medical and non-medical field personnel work for a stipend only—a small figure in comparison with the salaries they could command back home.

I ask Lawson to explain the role of a logistician. It seems to cover almost every non-medical aspect of MSF projects. Transport and supplies are the largest component—getting resources (human and material) to the right place at the right time.

When Lawson arrived in Sudan, the ongoing civil war had displaced millions of people. As the conflict dragged on, infrastructure was almost non-existent. Getting supplies that were held in a medical and logistical base in Lokocho, just over the Kenyan border, could be difficult. Goods had to be flown in on a two- to three-hour flight. Overland transportation through the conflict zone was out of the question. Monthly flights were scheduled and operational equipment and medical supplies were ordered well in advance to ensure the running of MSF projects: three primary healthcare clinics, an existing tuberculosis clinic and the construction of a new one, as well as a 45-bed rural hospital. Yet supply flights could be delayed for weeks or months as permission to fly in was denied by those in control of the militarised zone. That is when the logistician's role becomes critical, ensuring adequate backup so that medical projects are not interrupted.

Keeping vehicles running can also make or break a program. It's a top priority on the logistician's agenda. In South Sudan, Lawson had to keep four vehicles, four generators, several water pumps, radios and computers operating. No doubt, relationships with regional staff, including drivers, mechanics and an array of entrepreneurial locals would be mandatory. The greatest danger to international staff working in humanitarian situations is not war or epidemic but road accidents.

There's even the issue of security. 'As sad as it is to say, hospitals are a target.' In such zones, logisticians must ensure that evacuation shelters are built.

Administration is also a component of the logistician's lot and can cover a multitude of issues. Take something as simple as payment for work. At one stage in South Sudan, some local MSF workers

were paid at the end of each month in scarce commodities—soap and salt. They in turn sold the goods to the surrounding community. Not only did this generate income for local staff, but it ensured that iodised salt (which can prevent goitre problems) and soap were distributed through the economy. There were hiccups—a glut at the end of the month decreasing prices and a scarcity by the third week after payday. Yet the cost of bringing in soap and salt became so high that as soon as the fledgling cash economy could cope, workers were paid in cash.

What did Lawson learn from his first nine months in Sudan? 'The need to listen, to understand, and the need for diplomacy.' And as a logistician? 'The importance of excellent logistical backup.' It's not difficult to understand why.

MSF has medical projects in over 75 countries. They include oral rehydration programs, HIV/AIDS treatment, massive vaccination programs, primary healthcare centres, tuberculosis and rural hospitals, and emergency medical needs in conflictive areas. Yet the power of logistics is certainly not underestimated in any MSF context. As Lawson explains, 'Logistics is a trademark of MSF.' It needs to be. Any breakdown in logistics could be an issue of life and death.

MSF also has the capacity to move massive amounts of emergency supplies at extremely short notice. MSF's lines of supply extend from operational bases in Europe to hot spots around the world. Kits such as those for cholera, burns, emergency family supplies and vaccines are prepared for thousands or tens of thousands. Yet even at great speed, in emergency situations, they can never be delivered fast enough.

LAWSON'S SECOND assignment was Afghanistan. One senses it was not just the projects he was involved in, but the people that enamoured him to this stark mountain region. He speaks of the Afghan drivers with such respect: of their capacity to speak English, their mechanical skills, and the way they so often got international staff out of tricky encounters with the Taliban. Even so, Lawson was caught in the July 1998 Taliban offensive.

When the offensive began, the MSF operation at Panjao was reduced to four

international staff and over 30 locals. Then came the news to evacuate—with-in 36 hours. A request to stay by the MSF doctor and Lawson were refused. Local staff would continue running the 30-bed hospital—an important project in the Hazarajat region, as the minority Hazara people had suffered under the Taliban.

Internationals and Afghans from outside this Hazarajat region were to be evacuated. There was a strategy. A two-day drive to meet UN evacuation flights went to plan but two of the four evacuation flights did not. As the second plane left, the Taliban opened fire on the town (500 metres from the airstrip), bombing and strafing. Seven internationals, including Lawson and a number of Afghans, were caught on the ground. Radioing the UN did not lift spirits. 'No. No clearance. Not coming back. You are going to have to sort yourselves out.' They did.

In what could only be called a logistical nightmare, the convoy met up with evacuees from the south and expanded to 13 vehicles with 78 passengers as it made its way through the Afghan terrain. It came under fire, dealt with vehicle breakdowns, crossed the front line and was met by the Taliban, before eventually arriving at the UN base in Kabul and then on to Jalalabad, where half were evacuated to Pakistan, Lawson among them. It would be a while before MSF international staff could return. Lawson went back six months later.

When preparing to leave Afghanistan in late 1999, he wrote:

It's an addictive country. The Afghans draw me back. They're the most friendly, humble and dignified people I've ever met. They've managed to hold on to their dignity despite all the traumas ... But I think now they're starting to lose their coping mechanisms ... They have no hope in the future of their country; their only wish is to make better lives for themselves and their children by leaving ... social services like education and health are non-existent and the country is now facing a terrible drought.

Logistics and maintenance of lines of resupply are vital to the success of MSF projects, but on a par must be the commitment of their field workers—national and international. ■

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Trevor Hay first visited China in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. Thirty years later, he goes back, in search of the China that has survived, and maybe thrived on, Mao's revolutionary exhortations.

FOR ALL THEIR PRIDE in the enduring nature of Han civilisation, the Chinese are the first to caution against the illusion of permanence: 'You live for 30 years on the east bank of the river and one morning you wake up and find yourself on the west bank.' Live long enough and you cannot expect to find even a river where you last left it.

I last visited China in August 2001, and it is now nearly 30 years since my first trip, in the wake of those exhilarating days when Madame Mao said, 'The great powers are knocking at our gate'. It's just possible she meant Richard Nixon rather than Gough Whitlam (or perhaps it was Shirley MacLaine?) but nonetheless it felt good to be Australian at the time. Things have changed a lot since, so that image of a great meandering river, and east banks and west banks, is very much with me. In fact, my first real view of a Chinese city was from a clammy and dilapidated room in the People's Hotel, on the banks of the wondrous Pearl River in Canton (Guangzhou) towards the end of the Cultural Revolution. I was a young secondary school teacher, accompanying a group of eminent educators on a study tour of Chinese educational institutions which, it seemed, had rid themselves of 'bourgeois educational authorities and experts' in favour of revolutionary committees representing workers, peasants and soldiers. Everywhere we went we were

reminded of the Maoist blueprint for educational reform:

In this great Cultural Revolution, the phenomenon of our schools being dominated by bourgeois intellectuals must be completely changed ... we must thoroughly apply the policy advanced by Mao Zedong of education serving proletarian politics ...

Last year I found myself passing by the Pearl River once more, but this time in a private taxi, on my way to a private vocational college to lecture a group of pre-school teachers and parents on bilingual education, on behalf of a Singapore millionaire who believes a foreign education is the only product he can make better, faster or cheaper than the Chinese. The venue was not the 'Down with Confucius' kindergarten for the children of workers, soldiers and peasants, as it might have been in the 1970s, but a private college with attached 'international' kindergarten (for 'international' read 'Chinese-English bilingual emphasis') for the children of private fee-paying parents keen to prepare their children for success in highly Confucian entrance examinations for private fee-paying primary schools. And my own status as a 'bourgeois educational authority' was precisely the drawback. I was there to give a motivational talk intended to boost enrolments.

Back to the river. My Singaporean colleague, Meiling, who speaks English but whose first language is Hokkien, who learnt Mandarin in school, picked up Cantonese from her neighbours, and studied Japanese in night school, earnestly enquired of the driver the name of that great murky torrent of east-west confluence, the biggest watercourse in southern China, and received what is, sadly, a fairly commonplace answer these days. 'Oh, that? That's just a river, you know, it has no name.' I must have looked dumbfounded as she dutifully relayed this to me in English. She repeated it and I responded with a widely used Chinese oath suggesting that this information had emanated from the depths of his colon. These days some locals can be the most ignorant 'foreigners' of all and taxi-drivers seem to be the worst. Even if they do manage to recognise some perfectly well-known landmark they are astonished when you expect them to know how to get there. Why would any rational person get into a taxi if he doesn't know where he's going? Anyway, thanks to Meiling, we made it to the 'international kindergarten' which was festooned with ribbons, balloons, streamers and a big notice announcing the forthcoming address on the advantages of bilingualism. I wondered idly if

it was an advantage to be irritated in two languages.

I BEGAN MY TALK with the heresy that no five-year-old is likely to be enthused about the English language by parental exhortations to plan for a postgraduate scholarship to the University of Melbourne in 2018. There are certainly some parents who are uneasy about the pressures placed on their children these days, but in general we have returned to the rule of the imperial examination system, when, as the 19th-century missionary, Henry Doré SJ, put it in his celebrated work on Chinese superstitions, 'Families of official standing and literati frequently invoke the God of Literature, and beg him grant them talented offspring, who may win academic laurels at the examinations.'

These days the God of Literature expects his invocations in English. But I was distracted by some sort of commotion involving a bus that had pulled up in the street, its occupants apparently intent on attending the lecture. I suspended my talk in anticipation of these late arrivals, but they never materialised, and when I asked where they had gone I was told they had been sent away. Why? 'Because they are spies. They come from another college.'

For the first of many times during the trip I was reminded of the 'three old articles', three short essays written by Mao between 1939 and 1945, which were quoted and displayed everywhere in the 1970s. I remember labouring over these as translation homework: In 'Serve the People'—the first of the articles as they appear in a little Cultural Revolution edition that had once been in every bookshop—Mao had written a memorial to a simple, dedicated soldier who had died in rather unromantic fashion when a kiln collapsed as he was engaged in making charcoal. Mao took the opportunity to remind his colleagues that

from the bottom to the top, they were all in the revolution together and that everyone's contribution was worthy of respect:

We hail from all corners of the country and have joined together for a common revolutionary objective. And we need the vast majority of the people with us on the road to this objective.

But these people had come from another college, down the road, to steal the secrets of bilingualism, just as rival healers had once tried to steal secret herbal cures for rheumatism and arthritis.

That night I was taken to the Street of Nine Ups and Nine Downs, a modern, renovated

version of an old Canton street, which looms unexpectedly out of the muddy chaos of construction sites for new high-rise buildings. This is a nicely restored, attractive pedestrian street with traditional Chinese and 19th-century Chinese-European style architecture, featuring clothing shops, herbal clinics, modern international fast food places and genuine Cantonese restaurants. But not a foreign tourist to be seen. In a great noisy dining hall serving delicious and genuine Cantonese food I firmed up in my view that, while the city was largely unrecognisable from the maze of sooty rubbly buildings I had seen from my tour bus all those years ago, the extent of foreign presence had changed little, if at all. In stark contrast to Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing and even less tourist-friendly cities like Tianjin, Canton was foreigner-free. I had not seen another round-eye since I left the airport, and ever since then I had been acutely aware of matters of race and alienness.

The reception at the first hotel we tried said they did not take foreigners, and when the magnificently indignant Meiling denounced this feudalism in alternate Cantonese and Mandarin (this combination, rather than Mandarin, now actually seems to be the local lingua franca), she was told that they might reconsider, but only if she and I occupied different



floors. The dread shadow of miscegenation had been cast across the reception desk, but I suppose they contemplated my girth and decided that in this case a flight of stairs might be enough to discourage even a foreigner's appetite for depravity. Meiling tore up her registration slip, flung it into the bin and turned on her heel with a superb flourish. She paused on the doorstep to afford them a final contemptuous stare and a withering burst of moral outrage about how to behave to foreign guests if they ever expected to make any money out of them, and left with me in tow, lost in admiration.

LATER IN THE afternoon, after we had found a completely unprincipled hotel which allowed foreigners and overseas Chinese of different sexes to stay in the same building, I tried to mingle unobtrusively in a market and buy a simple, nicely carved wooden comb, no doubt at four times the local price, but still only about A\$4. One of the local teachers accompanying me on this excursion snatched the comb out of my hand, flung it back at the stall-keeper and cursed him and several generations of his ancestors for trying to 'cheat' THE FOREIGNER. He never got his money and I never got the comb, and a pleasant

interlude ended in embarrassment and dissatisfaction all round, but the foreign guest had been treated to a certain kind of obligatory Chinese display of host-guest relationships—excessive, ostentatious, insufferably patronising and in nobody's real interest. Worse was to come at breakfast on the second day.

I was sitting at a table, separated from the people at an adjoining table by a dense row of lush, shiny indoor plants, discussing the day's itinerary with Meiling. Suddenly the undergrowth parted and I was aware of the disembodied face of a 60-ish female wedged absurdly between the leaves, and grinning enthusiastically at me. The face addressed itself to Meiling, in Mandarin. 'I'm usually frightened of foreigners. They look so fierce. But he looks quite friendly.' 'Well, why don't you speak to him?' says Meiling. 'He speaks Mandarin.'

I could have murdered her. I hate this game. There is a certain type who thinks the Chinese language comes as a package with epicanthic eye-folds and unlubricated armpits—and certainly not with round eyes, long nose and red beard. If you don't have the genes for it, it doesn't matter what you say, it will not be treated as 'language'. I sometimes think, as I break my silence and utter a first tentative Chinese sentence under these sort of circumstances, that I'm

having much the same effect on my audience as Francis the Talking Mule.

Along with my surprise that this sort of thing should still be going on, I must admit to a certain pleasant excitement and nostalgia about it too. It stimulated me, if I'm honest, took me back to the kind of orientalist fantasy that had prompted me to study Chinese in the first place and even made me go so far as to buy a blue safari suit from an Indian tailor in Hong Kong. Here I was reliving my 1970s Cultural Revolution experience in 2001, not in the backblocks of Anhui, but in a great city upstream from Hong Kong. In 1914, M. Kennelly SJ, Doré's translator from the French, wrote:

Real China exists little in the Open Ports. Civilisation has there done its work, and raised the Chinaman to a higher level than his fellow countrymen. Whosoever, therefore, would study him in real life, must needs see him in the remote regions, the quaint old towns, and the secluded villages of some distant province.

But this piece of 'real China' was in the dining room of a large hotel, and 'the Chinaman' was a doctor from the faculty of medicine at Jinan University. Still, the nice thing about old Dracena Face and her kind is

that, for whosoever would study her, she has far more curiosity than hostility, envy or suspicion. But I began wondering how the *self*-perception of the foreigner has changed over these years.

There was a sort of 'friend of China' syndrome in the 1970s and 1980s in which many foreigners became almost obsessed with compensating for ignorance and prejudice about Chinese history, Chinese people, and socialism. This brought me to the second of the 'three old articles'—'In Memory of Norman Bethune'—about an idealistic Canadian doctor and communist who worked at the front for the anti-fascist cause in Spain in 1936, and then as the head of a medical team working for the People's Liberation Army in northern China in 1938. He died of blood poisoning while operating on wounded soldiers and became, for Mao, and for the Cultural Revolution, a model of internationalism. According to Mao's article, this kind of internationalism was the weapon with which to attack 'both narrow nationalism and narrow patriotism'.

The world I saw on television in my hotel room that evening is international enough—in fact, I was able to watch *The Weakest Link* and *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*—but there is also a lot of the most depressingly narrow nationalism and patriotism, employed in the interests of a ruling elite who never



tire of talking not about 'serving the people' but serving the motherland—namely themselves. On the other hand, I was cheered by the thought that outside my window, despite the depressing maze of motorways and flyovers and ugly piles of concrete, there is still a 'real' Canton. I did not see, as I had expected, another Shanghai, or an international, entrepreneurial city just a ferry ride from Hong Kong in the Pearl River Delta, a multilingual Mandarin/Cantonese/English-speaking city port geared up for the 21st century. Instead, I saw a real, indigenous, Chinese city, with a clear, genuine and unapologetic regional identity—a sort of Glasgow, rather than a sort of Dublin.

Yet even my ancient guidebook says:

Cantonese have always been keenly aware of foreign thinking and techniques. Long before Shanghai became established as China's greatest international business and banking centre, the merchants of Canton were doing big business with distant countries.

So how come I can't change the Chinese notes in which I have unfortunately been paid for any other sort of currency and how come Singapore airport is the only place that will take it? And where are all the foreigners? And why can't I get a beer in my hotel room, and when I persist with my entreaties to stock the mini-bar I get chocolates, peanuts, sample bottles of XO brandy, toothpicks, tissues, fruit, even a bloody floral arrangement, so that the top of the fridge looks like a Chinese funeral altar, but nothing actually *inside* the fridge? And why is the place so drab and difficult to get around in—downright intimidating in fact? This is no place for tourists, but if only they would stock the mini-bar you could at least stay indoors, drink heavily and watch *Survivor*.

LATER THAT NIGHT I went to Beijing Road, another shopping area. Like Bilbo Baggins the hobbit, I am a reluctant adventurer really, to be coaxed out of my hobbit-hole only by the lure of food and drink. But Beijing Road, another street with a nearby market, revived for me the third of the 'three old articles'—'The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains'. As I was about to enter a bookshop I noticed a little girl of about seven or eight, sitting on the footpath, head cast down, and a baby, less than a year old, crawling about between her legs, picking up gravel and putting it in his mouth. She was writing painstakingly on the footpath in chalk; beautiful, well-formed characters conveying a flowing narrative. I don't mean

I was suspicious she was not a genuine beggar; just surprised and intrigued at her literacy.

It seems her Granny had left the children there in the street. They had, like millions of other internal refugees in China, struggled down from the provinces (in this case the beautiful but grindingly poor Anhui). Dad had got himself in a fight and wounded someone with a knife; now he was in jail, Mum had left them and disappeared, Granny was working picking up litter in the streets in another district and would return to collect them next morning ... So please have pity and make a small

donation. I have no more idea now how to deal with this kind of thing than at any other time in my life, other than to make a small donation, but Meiling took me on an excursion to the market to buy food and clothes for the two children. On our return she gave the little girl some money and some instructions on what to do with the packets of milk she had bought, and why she should not allow the child to put rubbish in her mouth. We attracted a considerable crowd, who chatted, understandably, not so much about the children as about the foreigners. These were not the only beggar children in the street.

When Mao wrote 'The Foolish Old Man who Removed the Mountains' in 1945, he was alluding to a fable in which an old man decides to remove two huge mountains blocking the path beyond his southern doorway. Of course everyone knew this was impossible and he was mad to try, but he pointed out that the mountains would never get any bigger and with every stone he removed they would only get smaller. And after him would come his sons and their sons and so on, and they would just keep on whittling away at the mountains until they disappeared. Mao identified the mountains as imperialism and feudalism. He was not so much interested in poverty except as a credential for revolutionary purity, so he can hardly be held up as a model of compassion and equity by contrast with the present rulers, who have at least created the prospect of wealth for many, along with the reality of poverty for millions. But in Beijing Road I was reminded of the mountain of misery, and I could not even, like the foolish old man, console myself with the thought that it would not get any bigger. ■

In the next episode, Trevor Hay goes in search of more powerful relics from the Cultural Revolution, some of which have been secreted in Australia.

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Regarding children

Calls for a Royal Commission into child abuse are a distraction from the more important issue of establishing and defending the rights of children.



THE PRIME MINISTER was 'warming' to the idea of calling a Royal Commission into child sexual abuse before his friend Senator Heffernan turned up the gas under Michael Kirby.

A 'Royal Commission' sounds impressive, unjustifiably. It is a formal executive investigation with very broad powers to make witnesses answer questions and produce documents, and to spy on suspects, reporting to the executive. But a Royal Commission is only as broad, straight and apolitical as the government of the day decides. Political editor of *The Australian*, Dennis Shanahan, would accept something as narrow as a 'systemic review' of procedures for dealing with child sexual abuse, but this wouldn't satisfy Hetty Johnston (Peter Hollingworth's *bête noire*)—or Senator Heffernan, or me.

A Royal Commission might allow mistaken child-abuse accusations by damaged young men—the same kind as NSW solicitor John Marsden proved defamed him—to be run again against

one or other of the gay judges in our courts. It might encourage a useful retirement or resignation, opening up a vacancy on the High Court.

A Royal Commission might allow the Coalition to show it cared about family values, without focusing on children's rights. This is, after all, a government somewhat battered over its 'children overboard' lies, and its detention of children with adult asylum seekers in conditions found by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission to breach Australia's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

A Royal Commission into child sexual abuse would allow everyone to say how disgusting, shocking and repellent such crimes are. It would provide tabloid tales of tragedy and revenge. It would distract the lobbying activities of children's activists and non-government organisations. It might reasonably be expected to discover a shockingly high prevalence of child sexual disease and

assaults in Aboriginal and other deprived communities, which would facilitate further criticism of Indigenous political leadership.

A Royal Commission would probably have Labor's support, because they haven't got a children's policy and seem as uncomfortable with the moral obligations that UNCRC imposes on government as the present lot is. It would fit with what has been done before: the Woods Royal Commission in NSW led to NSW's establishment of many kinds of anti-paedophile rules and a children's commissioner; the Queensland government created a children's commissioner too, after excruciating revelations on a sex-abuse crisis line in the mid 1990s; and this year the Western Australian Labor government called an administrative inquiry, chaired by Aboriginal magistrate Sue Gordon, after an inquest into a child's suicide at an urban Aboriginal community.

A Royal Commission would tell us what we already know: children are easily exploited by adults in positions of

authority. They are rarely rehabilitated. Both the assaults and the subsequent denial and neglect of the victims breach Australia's UNCRC obligations.

The Commonwealth would not have to act on a Royal Commission's findings. The federal government has no direct responsibility for addressing child sexual abuse, or indeed any other sexual crime, other than through its ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child using its constitutional external affairs power. Attorney-General Daryl Williams has made it clear there will be no implementation of international treaty obligations in Australian domestic law while he retains his present post.

A Royal Commission into child sexual abuse would also squander a unique opportunity to do something about Australia's children. They deserve better than prurient interest. John Howard should be asking the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the Law Reform Commission and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) to advise him jointly on what it would take to change Australian attitudes to child victims of sexual exploitation, and save them from it.

Why put our faith in a Royal Commission's improving the life of a single child? We did not follow up on the findings by the HREOC Homeless Children Inquiry 14 years ago that thousands of Australian kids were homeless and sexually exploited by strangers because they had already been abused at 'home'. The NSW Woods Royal Commission findings of entrenched paedophilia have not eradicated the sexual exploitation of children or given state wards a voice or a decent level of services.

Though church, school and government organisations can train their staff in children's rights and participation and how to address child-abuse suspicions, they don't. These programs remain optional extras, as do the multitude of un- or under-funded preventative and early-intervention programs, research, training and complaints mechanisms that are 'recommended' and unused. No wonder Hollingworth didn't know what to do. We don't even teach children that they have the right to the protection of their own bodies. We teach them to obey.

The Governor-General's gift to the nation is the proof that powerful institutions must be required to defer to an authoritative, independent and outstanding source of advice on children's rights, and their responsibilities to respect them.

We need a Children's Rights Commissioner. We need someone with the character and our trust that they will speak out at any time on children, and be taken seriously at the highest levels of government; an office that listens and is accessible to children and that operates with a clear understanding that children have human, moral and social rights, more than mere vulnerabilities. We need a national voice for children.

IN 1995 the Minister for Family Services published my report (I was then Acting Deputy Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies) on *The Commonwealth's Role in Preventing Child Abuse*.

This pointed out that the Commonwealth has a legitimate constitutional role in child abuse prevention because it used the external affairs power to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Though the states and territories are responsible for child protection—surveillance, investigation and intervention—this has led to gross inefficiencies (eight different child protection regimes and abuse-reporting requirements) and complexities. The states are also responsible for the eight different criminal laws, rules about how children give evidence, sentencing options, legal services for children (NSW has been sitting on recommendations for child legal advocacy for five years), and the delivery of education and other services that directly affect children and their families. Three states have set up 'children's commissioners'—Queensland, Tasmania and NSW. Even there, the failures of child protection systems are endemic and cyclically scandalous.

The Commonwealth's role is leadership. This does not require a Royal Commission. Government has a responsibility to develop structures that will effectively prevent child abuse before it has been perpetrated. This is achievable by the Commonwealth, states and territories dropping their jurisdictional and philosophical battles over a divided policy arena. We don't need to argue

about smacking. We need to ask why it's okay to sell baby T-shirts that proclaim, 'I'm too sexy for my nappy.'

Two years ago I established the first Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner for London, to work with the new regional government of Greater London to make sure that children's voices were heard in every level of public and community life. When, in our adult organisations, we listen to children saying things we don't want to hear, it changes the ways we respond and make policy.

A Children's Rights Commissioner monitors what government does; is accessible to children; is independent of government yet integral to its decision-making; advises on its laws and policies; and focuses public attention on the state of their children and duties to them. A Children's Rights Commissioner makes us look on children as moral equals. Such an office is a natural part of, and requires, a national overview and strategy for children. We should surely expect, now, a response that promises to lift dramatically the quality of life of all children, so that they are not abused or left to heal alone.

Uniform laws on child abuse or mandatory reporting—often called for—do not prevent the misuse of power by authoritative adults, or powerful institutions treating complainants like whistleblowers. Like Royal Commission findings, tough laws and mandated reporting just make us feel better because we have named the beast: but we have not chained it.

Child abuse prevention can only be achieved in a community where all of the rights of children are respected and where child abuse prevention policies and programs are monitored by a body whose 'standard' is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Now is a time when it is uniquely in the political interests of Mr Howard, the personal interests of the Governor-General, our interest in the preservation of the rule of law, and the interests of children and children's rights advocates, that the federal government establish a federal Children's Rights Commissioner with the power to make a real difference. ■

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Sheeting home

AFTER D.H. LAWRENCE and Frieda Weekley were married, they went to earth for a while, no doubt to take marriage a day at a time, have a good, long, hard look at themselves, and prepare to take the next step. Some time later, Lawrence published a slim volume entitled *Look! We Have Come Through*, of which Bertrand Russell remarked, 'I'm so glad they've come through—but must we look?' The question whether we should look or not has become what the old-time footy commentators used to call a *mute point*. After all, there have been quite a few events and revelations during the past months at which various people have been desperately seeking to make us look or, alternatively, not to look.

These complex matters, and the Lawrence anecdote, entered my normally torpid consciousness at an odd time, the way such things do. As a result of uncharacteristically maladroit domestic footwork, I recently found myself wrestling with one of those laughably named 'fitted sheets' and the queen-size mattress around which, my consort assured me before leaving for the afternoon, it would snugly wrap itself with only minimal cajoling from me. I knew this to be the grossest oversimplification. While I have generally managed to avoid this exasperating operation, it's not as if I have never had to 'fit' a fitted sheet. It's not unlike replacing a truck tyre on its wheel using tyre levers, which I have also done, taking only about a morning and a small part of the afternoon to stop that top bit springing out just as you get that bottom bit on.

But, for greater clarity, let's adapt DIY practice here. Let's call the Top Left-Hand Corner of the fitted sheet not TLHC-1 but 'Howard'. And the Top Right-Hand Corner becomes not TRHC-2 but 'Hollingworth'. That's the pillow end looked after. And down at the foot, the bottom left-hand corner is called, let's see, 'Kirby', and the bottom right-hand corner is—well—'Heffernan'. Getting 'Howard' to wrap around his corner in a relaxed and comfortable way is easy. And if 'Howard' is spot on, then only a bit of stretching and adjusting will see 'Hollingworth' securely ensconced. But now—what's happening down the bottom end? Should we look?

'Kirby' and 'Heffernan' are twisted into an intractable knot. So: extricate 'Kirby' and secure round the bottom left corner, taking no notice of 'Heffernan' for the moment. This will take some brute strength, but as 'Kirby' falls into place—must we look? Yes. 'Howard' has sprung off his corner and is twanging across the queen-size towards 'Heffernan'. This will make it very easy to seat 'Heffernan' in his place, but at what cost? 'Kirby', until a moment ago so stable, is now unravelling. In all this advancing disintegration, as 'Howard', 'Kirby' and 'Heffernan' threaten to snap elastically together in the middle of the

expanse of mattress, the only positive is that 'Hollingworth', top right, pillow end, remains in place and unnoticed.

Start again. Fix 'Howard' at top left. Check 'Hollingworth'. This time, with lateral cunning, secure 'Heffernan' next, at bottom right. Now it is apparent that no amount of stretching, straining and grunting, or even a tyre lever, will see 'Kirby' into his proper place at bottom left and the huge tensions engendered as all corners are strained beyond their elastic limits might even disturb the temporarily solid 'Hollingworth',


Start again—at the bottom. Secure 'Kirby'. Secure 'Heffernan'. 'Howard' will now only 'fit' if 'Kirby' is unseated. And something has happened to 'Hollingworth', whereby the little pocket thing that fits over the corner of the mattress seems now to have moved along the hem somehow. 'Hollingworth' is impossibly out of place: is it conceivable that we have here a factory reject—not a 'fitted sheet' but a 'mis-fitted' sheet? Just my luck.

THERE ARE INSTRUCTIONS that go with just about everything and while mostly one shouldn't even look, sometimes it really is helpful to consult them. I don't mean impenetrable and inscrutable DIY prose such as: 'Insert flange AA into plinth B8 below the pediment line marked Z2 while holding architrave VV away from the groyne G at an angle of 33.7 degrees to the right side of the transom TT.' I mean something that might be worth a look, might be even at a pinch illuminating. I looked. I went back to the original packet, resurrecting it from the 'Old Fitted Sheet Packets' section of the 'Recyclable Paper and Cardboard' bag, and all was revealed. The sheet I was struggling with was not the Howard/Hollingworth/Kirby/Heffernan (HHKH) model but the WayneCarey/ WayneCarey/ WayneCarey/ WayneCarey (WWWW) which had not only completely superseded the HHKH but also the TKNR (Tampa/KidsOverboard/ Navy/Reith), the DOTWS (Death Of The Westminster System—an even bigger failure because it had five corners) and the LFFA (Lying For Fun & Advancement).

The WWWW sheet fitted so neatly and quickly, was so time-honoured and uncomplicated, that it allowed me to feel morally superior to the whole tawdry exercise of fitting sheets.

With that done, it remained only to fake 'hospital corners'. This is some cabalistic ritual governing how the top sheet tucks in at the bottom. I have no idea how to do hospital corners but have learned over the years to fake them. They're fine, so long as you don't look too closely. Like much else going on at the moment. ■

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A better way
 Mark Raper and Frank Brennan, in the Jesuit Lenten Seminar series given around the nation, make the case for a new attitude to asylum seekers.

RECENTLY a friend in Melbourne wrote in a letter: 'It must be 20 years ago that we ran a film and luncheon for the fledgling Jesuit Refugee Service. I remember drawing barbed wire on a poster; little did I dream refugees would be behind wire in my own country!' She expresses, I believe, the dismay of many Australians.

We see ourselves as a part of the modern world and of the global economy. We are an ethnically, religiously and culturally diverse society. Tens of thousands of new settlers are welcomed here each year from a host of countries. Many Australians travel abroad. Each year 40,000 Australians depart to live and work abroad. We pride ourselves on favouring a fair go for all.

All the more surprising then are the Australian fears at the arrival of a few thousand foreigners seeking safety. Those who made the most difficult journeys to seek safety here are greeted with compulsory and prolonged incarceration, an offence by Australia against humanity and against international human rights law. Australia breaks with impunity the very international convention for the

protection of refugees that it helped to put in place 50 years ago. Even the time-honoured rescue-at-sea agreements that have been the salvation of countless souls lost and adrift have been abandoned.

Is there not a better way?

A good asylum system must accomplish two goals. First, it must give protection to those who leave their home because they fear persecution or serious danger, such as civil conflict or human rights violations. Second, it must preserve the integrity of the state which welcomes these foreigners at risk. In order to maintain public support for both goals, it must be seen to deter abuse. The asylum system holds in balance the state's international co-operation and its sovereignty over its own territory. Border control has to be reconciled with the asylum system's basic purpose, which is human rights protection.

Of all modern states, Australia, because of its island character, remoteness, and natural boundaries, is arguably one of the least threatened by the contemporary mass forced displacement of people. But during last year's federal election, this issue was treated with

unbalanced rhetoric. Instead of an equilibrium between the protection of refugees and border control, the slogan became exclusively 'border protection'. Our prime minister threw overboard the rights and needs of asylum seekers.

Today the election is history. Now it is time to get the balance right.

IN RECENT TIMES, in its asylum policy, the government's determining concern has been border control, to the exclusion of protection. This has included the costly, ad hoc arrangements with the Pacific countries; the attempt to diminish the territorial zone within which our international obligations apply; the practice of interdiction at sea and forced removal of boats from Australian waters; the aid packages given to Iran, Pakistan and Indonesia; and the punitive nature of the so-called 'temporary protection visas' that are ultimately and grudgingly granted to refugees who have succeeded in jumping through all the hoops.

These measures waste the honour of Australia's defence forces, the esteem of its neighbours, the trust of its citizens,

and over a billion dollars of its taxpayers' currency.

Let me mention just two of these actions.

First, there is the ad hoc policy of holding and processing asylum seekers in Pacific countries, now apparently being reconsidered. The cost of this approach (leaving aside the defence forces costs), is conservatively estimated at five times the expense that would be incurred in holding and assessing the asylum seekers in Australia. The applications of the *Tampa* boat people could have been assessed and dealt with by last Christmas. Yet they remain needlessly

Somali? According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which keeps these statistics, out of 29 industrialised countries that received asylum applications over the last three years, and judging by numbers of applicants per 1000 citizens, Australia ranks 19th, just behind Slovakia and just ahead of Bulgaria. (See www.unhcr.ch under 'Statistics'.) In 2000, when compared with all countries, Australia ranked 32 for the number of refugees it hosts. On a per capita basis, Australia ranked 39. Armenia hosts 74 per 1000, Guinea 52, and Australia three per 1000. Compared with 31 industrialised countries,

The Australian government is not alone in using harsh rhetoric and punitive measures against asylum seekers in order to win electoral support. Yet no others have yet dared to use mandatory detention. As asylum procedures are harmonised across the European Union, the Council of Europe has worked hard to outline basic principles governing the treatment of asylum seekers, based on human rights norms. As far as possible, asylum seekers are to be kept in the community and have the right to work, they are eligible to receive social benefits, and they have the right to appeal decisions concerning their applications and to be represented in those appeals.

There is an overwhelming human rights argument against potentially indefinite detention of non-citizens and asylum seekers without judicial review. Moreover, the human costs for the detainees and their families are great. But the excessive expense of this method must ultimately persuade governments of its folly.

There are many alternatives to mandatory detention. In my own view, the best alternative to detention is simply liberty. However, to meet the concerns of governments about the need to keep track of asylum seekers and ensure their compliance with asylum procedures, there are still many alternatives that stop short of imprisonment. These non-custodial measures include the supervised release of children and young adults to community services; the supervised release to a non-government organisation; release on bail to an individual citizen; release with restrictions on place of residence and with reporting requirements; accommodation in open centres to which the asylum seeker returns each evening. In the USA, where there is widespread use of detention of asylum seekers awaiting hearings or deportation, there have nonetheless been many experiments with release to community groups and release on parole. The Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service maintains a website called the 'Detention Watch Network News', which lists successful alternatives that have been established by non-government organisations together with the immigration agency of the government. (See www.lirs.org.)

It is true that direct, on-shore boat arrivals are relatively new for Australia.

Our immigration officials in fact have a fine reputation for their methods of refugee status determination. Teams flew to Macedonia during the Kosovo crisis and gave a remarkable service in helping to assess the claims of people and moving the most needy to safety. Why misuse this capacity now?

incarcerated, to their great anguish and our great expense, except for those lucky enough to have had their claims assessed by New Zealand.

Second, the 'temporary protection visa' (TPV). Even this temporary and controlling visa (granted to those who make it through this *cordon sanitaire* and who are finally accepted as refugees) has 'border control' as its rationale rather than true protection and asylum. Officials of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs freely admit that the TPV is intended as a deterrent to unauthorised arrival. The TPV holder is denied access to crucial services such as English lessons, and work and housing assistance. Medical assistance is limited. These conditions could trap its holder into poverty and dependence, since he or she might not ever receive a permanent visa. The most punitive provision is that the TPV holder might never be reunited with family members abroad, even with wife and children. As a consequence of denying this most basic of human rights, the wives and children often seek out the help of smugglers.

HOW DOES AUSTRALIA'S situation compare with other countries? Is Australia the only oasis of security in the dreams of every exiled Afghan, Iraqi, Kurd or

Australia is eighth. Sweden, Denmark and Germany are one, two and three.

The target figure of 12,000 refugees and humanitarian cases accepted into Australia per year is rarely met, and in any case this target has remained unchanged for three years.

Considering that Australia is one of a handful of countries with a long experience in receiving immigrants, it cannot reasonably be argued that we are more threatened or at significantly greater risk than other countries by the arrival of a few thousand asylum seekers each year.

Comparison of our practice of detaining asylum seekers with that of other countries is also revealing. After Australia, Britain is the country most criticised for having a harsh detention policy. Yet Britain, which received almost 90,000 asylum applicants in 2001—about seven times Australia's applicants—has around 800 (less than one per cent) of these in detention at any one time, for an average of 65 days each, and normally they are those who have failed to qualify in their asylum application and are awaiting deportation. Australia holds about 3000 people, near to 25 per cent of its asylum applicants, incarcerated for months. Detainees in Britain must receive the reasons for their detention in writing and have an automatic bail hearing within a week of being imprisoned.

But we cannot cut ourselves off from the world. This is one of the ways refugees seek safety. This is one of the 'queues' available to them. Indeed, Australia is better equipped than most states to handle this situation.

Our immigration officials in fact have a fine reputation for their methods of refugee status determination. Teams flew to Macedonia during the Kosovo crisis and gave a remarkable service in helping to assess the claims of people and moving the most needy to safety. Why misuse this capacity now?

In the recent past, Australia has contributed creatively and constructively to achieve regional solutions in ambiguous refugee situations. The development in the 1980s and early 1990s of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indochinese Refugees is a classic example. Peter Mares, ABC *Asia Pacific* presenter and author of *Borderline*, argues that the Comprehensive Plan of Action could well be a useful model for international co-operation in dealing with the twin crises of Afghan and Iraqi refugees now in the Middle East. No alternative has been offered to relieve the stress in the major contemporary source areas like Jordan, Pakistan and Iran. Why, instead of taking a lead by collaborating with other countries in meeting this need, does Australia spend a fortune, at least two-thirds of the total annual global budget for UNHCR, on isolating ourselves up a dead-end street?

With all our experience and proven capacity to receive refugees and migrants, why is Australia now, at a time of need, cutting back rather than expanding its refugee and humanitarian program?

There is no call to appear strong by attacking the weak. To attack the most vulnerable people on earth is not strength, it is cowardice. In fact the strength of any society is shown by how it protects the weak. Refugees and migrants have been this country's history. They may for a time appear weak. But in the long term they are the strength of our nation. ■

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I AM ONE OF A minority who think Australia needs a more generous refugee policy and that we should abandon mandatory detention and the 'Pacific solution'.

For the moment, there is bipartisan support in the parliament for a strict quota on our refugee intake and for detention of adult males who arrive by boat without a visa. Even if mandatory detention remains a feature of Australian border protection, the system needs to be made less capricious, less arbitrary, more transparent and more efficient. But mandatory detention and the Pacific solution should be subject to judicial scrutiny, given the doubts about the constitutional validity both of long-term detention in Australia and of the cheque-

book approach in Nauru and Papua New Guinea.

Australia is unique in being a nation that has exclusive sovereign control of an entire continent, sharing neither land boundaries nor close proximity to any other nation state. Our isolation is complemented by a very sparse population across a vast coastline in the north, much of the population being Aboriginal people who until very recently were deprived of their rights to land and political participation in the new nation state.

Australia has always been a country for migrants. We continue to receive 75–80,000 migrants a year, the majority of whom come under family reunion or special skills categories. But we also lose up to 40,000 people a year through

emigration, and almost half of those who emigrate permanently are Australian-born. Our natural birth rate has fallen below the replacement rate. We need to be a net migration country if we are even to maintain our present population. Most economists would insist on the need at least to maintain our population if we want to maintain present lifestyle and growth. Most of our migrants come under the non-humanitarian banner, being skilled migrants or people being reunited

attention on unlawful entrance to Australia it is worth recalling that we have 50,000 overstayers a year, the highest grouping coming from the UK and the US.

The third route is the direct help line—coming by boat with the assistance of ‘people smugglers’. Most of those coming this way at the moment are found to be bona fide refugees. In the 50 years since Australia became a signatory to the Refugee Convention, we have received

came from mainland Chinese. Meanwhile, the second wave of boat people started arriving in 1989, from China, Vietnam and Cambodia. The welcome mat was then taken away. Mr Gerry Hand, then Labor Minister for Immigration, spearheaded the new policy of detention and individual determination of claims. He and his successors Nick Bolkus and now Philip Ruddock have been strong advocates for mandatory detention of boat people and strong critics of the courts for being too soft on asylum seekers.

The Hawke government decided on a policy of humane deterrence with this second wave. With bipartisan support in the parliament, the government decided that boat people would be locked up so as to send a signal and deter others from setting out for Australia. The policy was justified on the grounds that these boats often landed on other shores—Indonesia, for example—where they were refuelled and repaired, and encouraged to move on to Australia. Government conceded that some of these people may have been refugees, but was adamant that the majority were economic migrants and queue-jumpers. The government saw only one way of maintaining a fair and ordered migration program: make an example of the queue-jumpers and make it clear that a boat trip to Australia without papers was no way to gain entry. Australian politicians deliberately fuelled the public anxiety that uncontrollable boatloads of people were arriving on our shores from Asia and that it was difficult to maintain the sovereignty of our borders. Despite the floodgates perception, during the course of this second wave, only one person a day, on average, arrived in Australia. In the early stages of the second wave, new arrivals were flown the length and breadth of the country by government, partly in an attempt to keep them away from lawyers and ‘do-gooders’.

In June 1993, Mr A, a Cambodian boat person who had arrived in Australia in November 1989, made a communication to the UN Human Rights Committee. The Committee processes took almost four years. Mr A spent time in detention centres at Villawood near Sydney, a bush camp south of Darwin, and finally at Port Hedland, 1500 kilometres north of Perth. By May 1992, the federal parliament had

Border protection and respect for our national sovereignty can be achieved without abandoning the rule of law, the separation of powers, judicial supervision ... and basic Australian decency at home and abroad.

with their family members who are Australians. The Howard government has retained a modest 12,000 places a year—in addition to our annual migration intake of 75–80,000—for those who are to come under our humanitarian program, which is for refugees and other people who need humanitarian assistance and who have some existing connection with Australia. In 1999–2000, only 9960 of those places were filled. However, in 2000–2001 the quota was exceeded by 1733 places, which included an increase in the onshore component from 2458 in 1999–2000 to 5777 in 2000–2001.

THOSE WHO GAIN access under our humanitarian program come through one of three routes.

The first route is the off-shore protection program, where successful applicants have joined a queue in a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office or at an Australian embassy with migration processing facilities. This route is not available to refugees who have fled from Afghanistan. They were informed last year that we had closed our queue facility in Islamabad. Applicants would need to go to Bangkok to join the queue, with the warning, however, that the customary level of service could not be assured because of increased demand.

The second route is lawful entry to Australia followed by an application in the queue, during which time the person will be permitted to remain in the community even if they are then overstaying their visa time limit. With so much

650,000 refugees (more than 12,000 per year) but in recent years we have taken only about 4000 refugees a year through our offshore humanitarian program. After World War II there was an equal emphasis on fundamental human rights and state sovereignty. World leaders committed to the establishment of the United Nations conceded that the sovereignty of the nation state would be sustainable only if the community of nations made provision for those people fleeing their own nation state with a well-founded fear of persecution ‘for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion’. Prior to 1989, fewer than 500 people a year who had arrived in Australia would claim to be refugees. And refugees from overseas came in an orderly fashion, by plane or passenger liner, having been processed before boarding. Things started to change with the end of the Vietnam War, and the first wave of ‘boat people’ turned up on our shores.

The first wave of 52 boats came after the fall of Saigon in 1975 and lasted until 1981. The people on these boats were recognised as refugees without the need for individual determination of their cases. They were welcomed and given protection. In June 1989, Prime Minister Bob Hawke, like many of his fellow Australians, was moved to tears by the plight of Chinese students studying in Australia who were afraid to return home in the wake of the Tiananmen Square confrontation. He promised they could stay. By 1990–1991, the government had received 16,248 on-shore protection applications for the year, most of which

changed the law so that courts had little power to review migration decisions and circumstances of detention. Basically, once a boat person was classed as a 'designated person', the door was closed and the judges could do nothing. When the High Court found that some detentions were unlawful, the parliament retrospectively legislated to limit damages claims to one dollar per day. The government described the boat people's entitlement to damages as a 'windfall'. Then, when doubts were raised about the constitutionality of a law retrospectively taking away the right to common-law damages, the government lawyers drafted another retrospective measure, to make the detention lawful.

The UN Human Rights Committee found that in Mr A's case, Australia was in breach of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (which provides that no-one shall be subjected to arbitrary detention). The Committee also found Australia to be in breach of the provision that entitles anyone in detention 'to take proceedings before a court, in order that the court may decide without delay on the lawfulness of his detention'.

The public hysteria about and government obsession with controlling borders without court supervision in Australia is highlighted by looking at the recent UK litigation regarding asylum seekers. In *Saadi & Others v Secretary of State for the Home Department*, the UK Court of Appeal had to consider the lawfulness of detention of Kurdish asylum seekers for more than ten days while their applications were processed. Meanwhile, here in Australia, we have legislated a regime for long-term detention in faraway places. Australia has been receiving, on average, 13,000 asylum applications a year while the UK has been receiving 84,000. The UK has been keeping some applicants in detention for a week to ten days. Some are even kept for up to 65 days. Australia has been keeping some applicants in detention for over four years.

In the UK, people are usually detained only if there are problems with their security or identity. However, the Oakington Reception Centre was set up to process people quickly while they were detained, usually for no more than ten days, regardless of whether there were problems with their security or identity.

The European Convention on Human Rights, which is now incorporated into UK domestic law by operation of the *Human Rights Act 1998*, sets strict limits on detention of people. Having considered the position in 1951 when the European Convention was finalised, the Court of Appeal concluded 'that the exception to the right to liberty ... was intended to preserve the right of the member States to decide whether to allow aliens to enter their territories on any terms whatsoever'. But the court then went on to consider modern developments, including the decision of the Human Rights Committee in the Australian case of Mr A. Three paragraphs of the decision are quoted in the Court of Appeal decision. Meanwhile, back in 1997, the decision was disregarded by Australian politicians on the basis that it was simply the opinion of an international committee. Our Attorney-General, Daryl Williams, defended the four-year detention of Mr A in these terms:

After giving serious and careful consideration to the other views expressed by the Committee, the Government does not accept that the detention of Mr A was in contravention of the Covenant, nor that the provision for review of the lawfulness of that detention by Australian courts was inadequate. Consequently, the Government does not accept the view of the Committee that compensation should be paid to Mr A.

Mandatory detention and the Pacific solution should be subject to judicial scrutiny, given the doubts about the constitutional validity both of long-term detention in Australia and of the cheque-book approach in Nauru and Papua New Guinea.

The Committee is not a court, and does not render binding decisions or judgments. It provides views and opinions, and it is up to countries to decide whether they agree with those views and how they will respond to them.

The Court of Appeal noted the UK government's policy decision 'that, in the absence of special circumstances, it is not reasonable to detain an asylum seeker for longer than about a week, but that a short period of detention can be justified where this will enable speedy determination of his or her application for leave to enter'.

Though conceding that 'the vast majority of those seeking asylum are aliens who are not in a position to make good their entitlement to be treated as refugees', the Court of Appeal went on to state its unanimously held belief 'that most right-thinking people would find it objectionable that such persons should be detained for a period of any significant length of time while their applications are considered, unless there is risk of their absconding or committing other misbehaviour'.

The Australian problem now is that we have no equivalent of the European Convention in our domestic law, that a decision of the UN Human Rights Committee is simply disregarded, that our politicians pillory our judges for applying strict scrutiny to the detention of asylum seekers, and that our parliaments (dominated by either side of the political spectrum) have enacted specific laws for the long-term detention of asylum seekers, thereby separating Australia from the contemporary UK reading of the common-law heritage.

THE THIRD WAVE OF boat people have come mainly from Afghanistan and Iraq. On arrival, they are held at one of the three Immigration Reception and Processing Centres in remote locations at Woomera, Port Hedland or Curtin. The tragedy of this third wave is that government hysteria and bipartisan disregard for the well-being and human rights of these

boat people flies in the face of their bona fide refugee claims. Over 90 per cent of those assessed in the third wave have been found to be refugees.

The problems of long-term, isolated detention of people who have fled persecution and who are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance is highlighted in the situation at Woomera. There are about 150 Afghan detainees in the Woomera Immigration Reception and Processing Centre who have not yet received primary decisions in relation to their applications for protection visas.

Each of them has now been in detention for more than six months since they applied for their visa. Meanwhile, the government claims that the average time for a determination is 15 weeks. Given the uncertainty and change in Afghanistan since 11 September 2001, it is unlikely that credible adverse decisions

was the most pressing claim some months ago but that they now have a well-founded fear of persecution by the new government, linked as it is to warlords. There are some detainees who, having exhausted all appeals from a primary decision, are still in detention because the government is unable to

It is unlikely that the government will be able forcibly to return any detainees to Afghanistan in the foreseeable future. Having been party to the bombing of their country, we do have some humanitarian obligations to those who are here and fear returning at this time.

could be made against those who establish that they are Afghan nationals (as distinct from Pakistanis), and this would be especially so in the case of those who belong to the persecuted Hazara group.

It will be a long time before non-detention countries and the UNHCR start processing Afghan claims, so it would be in the public interest that bridging visas be granted once Afghans are held in detention longer than other applicants or once there is no prospect of their applications being credibly processed within a reasonable timeframe. After all, sustained detention when there is a suspension of visa processing through no fault of the applicants is not in the public interest. In the absence of judicial review or warrant, such sustained detention could even be unlawful.

If the situation in Afghanistan remains intractably unstable, there may be a need for a special category visa for those awaiting determination of their refugee claims or for those deserving special humanitarian assistance once their refugee protection claims have been rejected. It is unlikely that the government will be able forcibly to return any detainees to Afghanistan in the foreseeable future. Having been party to the bombing of their country, we do have some humanitarian obligations to those who are here and fear returning at this time. We should at least wait until the dust has settled before sending back those on our shores who are unwilling to return.

There may be a need to reopen some cases in light of the changed circumstances in Afghanistan. Some detainees say that their claim to persecution by the Taliban

return them home in safety or to remove them to a third country. Four Palestinians recently wrote to Minister Ruddock saying:

We are being held in detention here at the Woomera Immigration Reception and Processing Centre. Each of us has had our application for a protection visa rejected by the Refugee Review Tribunal. We want to go home when it is safe but we have been told that your government, at this time, is unable to return us home in safety or to take us to a third country.

We do not want to be kept in isolated detention here at Woomera indefinitely. We cannot go to any court. We are no longer being detained to assist with the processing of any claims nor to assist with our removal or deportation in the foreseeable future. We understand that we cannot be released from detention unless you issue us with some form of visa. We think it would be very unfair to be kept in prolonged detention as punishment for having come to Australia or as a deterrent to other Palestinians thinking of coming here. After all we have not been convicted or even charged with any criminal offence. We can see no reason for our continued detention. Please release us into the Australian community until it is possible for us to go home or to a third country.

If you insist on keeping us in some form of detention, we ask that you provide us now with alternative detention arrangements similar to those being provided for some of the women and children in the Woomera township.

We hope the officers of your department will be able to help us now that we have come to the end of the road in applying for protection from your government.

Such people should no longer be detained. Their ongoing protracted detention is unrelated to the processing of claims or to the preparation for removal or deportation from Australia. Except for a constitutional challenge to their detention, they have no recourse to the courts. And they can be released from detention only if the minister grants them a visa of some description. Once again the minister could consider substituting the decision of the Refugee Review Tribunal or issue a special category visa. The only other option would be more humane detention in a less isolated place unless and until the Palestinians can return home in safety.

IN 1992, the High Court considered the lawfulness of detention of those in the second wave of boat people. In *Chu Kheng Lim and Others v The Minister for Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs and Another*, three of the judges observed that migration detention laws would be valid:

if the detention which they require and authorize is limited to what is reasonably capable of being seen as necessary for the purposes of deportation or necessary to enable an application for an entry permit to be made and considered. On the other hand, if the detention which those sections require and authorize is not so limited, the authority which they purportedly confer upon the Executive cannot properly be seen as an incident of the executive powers to exclude, admit and deport an alien. In that event, they will be of a punitive nature and contravene Ch.III's insistence that the judicial power of the Commonwealth be vested exclusively in the courts which it designates.

It is these observations of the High Court which explain the tenor of the present minister's remarks to the Australian Anglican Synod on 27 July 2001:

Detention is not punitive nor meant as a deterrent ... Detention ensures that they are available for processing any claims to remain in Australia and that importantly they are available for quick removal should they have no right to remain.

The situation for people who overstay their visa is fundamentally different. We know who they are and have already assessed that they do not constitute a

danger to the Australian community ...

Nobody is forced to remain in detention. Detainees can choose to leave detention by leaving Australia. They can go wherever they wish to any country where they have, or can obtain, the right to enter, and we will do our best to facilitate that.

Mr Ruddock offered a similar comment in the *Medical Journal of Australia* on 21 January 2002: 'Detention is not arbitrary. It is humane and is not designed to be punitive.'

These ministerial comments about deterrence and the non-punitive intent of the detention are related to constitutional issues. There are doubts about the validity of legislation that authorises administrative detention of people without access to the courts when their detention is neither relevant nor incidental to the processing of their claims, and when the detention is neither relevant nor incidental to their removal or deportation in the foreseeable future. But one should also note the minister's more recent remarks to the parliament on 19 February 2002:

Late last year ... we were able to pass certain laws which strengthened our territorial integrity. This strategy has been successful in deterring potential illegal immigrants from making their way to Australia.

We now have a publicly acknowledged deterrent regime and, in the case of Iraqis and Palestinians, no-one could credibly claim that they are not forced to remain in detention. They cannot go home. The government cannot find a third country for them. In light of the present government's detention policy, the minister could be acting in the public interest by creating a special class of visa permitting release of those people whose ongoing detention would undermine the constitutionality of the mandatory detention regime and seriously call into question the claims that detention is neither punitive nor meant to be a deterrent and that 'nobody is forced to remain in detention'.

Since the end of the Cold War, there have been at least 20 million refugees a year, most of whom have not been able to find protection because of a balance-of-power arrangement between the superpowers. Many of them are fleeing internal racial and ethnic conflicts which have

been exacerbated by the new world order. Since 1997, we have received a modest 6000–9000 refugees a year—less than our 50-year average at a time when there are more refugees than ever. Our injustices to women and children in remote detention centres are simply a stark reflection of the injustices meted out to all asylum seekers whose detention is not required for migration, health or security purposes. Humane deterrence does not work because it is only one more deterrent and it pales into insignificance beside the risk of the sea voyage. It is immoral because it treats people, including the innocent and most vulnerable, as means rather than ends.

THE BLANKET detention policy and the Pacific solution are morally reprehensible. But we live in a democracy where that is neither the prevailing public opinion nor the moral assessment of our lawmakers. Given that detention is an integral component of the government's present border protection policy, it is essential that the time delays, uncertainties, and psychological trauma exacerbated by the events of September 11 and the federal election now be put behind us as quickly as possible. Because of those events, every inmate in Woomera

kilometre fence to show ordinary Australians the sight of women with little children behind razor wire in the middle of the desert, many would surmise that there must be a better way.

For limited enhancement of our sovereignty and border protection, we have forfeited much of the Australian heritage, including respect for the courts, long-term detention *only* under judicial supervision, and a measured welcome for those deserving our protection and humanitarian concern. With our Pacific solution we have even flaunted the constitutions of Nauru and Papua New Guinea, which prohibit detention in these circumstances without ready access to a lawyer.

Any policy that results in a 12-year-old boy harming himself in Woomera when his father is living in Sydney is inhumane. If detention is not punitive and not a deterrent, it should not be practised as universally and callously as it is in places such as Woomera. It is also unacceptable for us to engage in people-trading around the Pacific, skewing our aid assistance to our poor, small island neighbours.

Border protection and respect for our national sovereignty can be achieved without abandoning the rule of law, the

Any policy that results in a 12-year-old boy harming himself in Woomera when his father is living in Sydney is inhumane. If detention is not punitive and not a deterrent, it should not be practised as universally and callously as it is in places such as Woomera.

(including the bona fide refugees) will have spent an additional five months in detention—five months of despairing isolation which drove people to sew their lips so that they might be heard. Surely it is time for government and the community to respond with a renewed commitment to a determination process that is 'fair, just, economical, informal and quick'.

It will not be too long before protracted detention of children in the heated isolation of Woomera will be seen to be a moral obscenity, especially when some of them have fathers living in Sydney and Melbourne, happy to resume their parenting responsibility. If the media were allowed inside the one-

separation of powers, judicial supervision of life-determining decisions, and basic Australian decency at home and abroad. We Australians should pull our weight and behave decently by granting due process and protection to refugees who warrant our assistance either because they are in the queue—where a queue for orderly off-shore processing exists—or because they are on our shores or in our waters seeking a place in a queue for orderly on-shore processing. The present system is too costly and demeaning for all of us. ■

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Playing it in

Blak Inside, a season of Indigenous drama.

IN 2000, Playbox Theatre Company extended its subscription season with a developmental-workshop program called 'Inside 2000'. Associate director Tom Healey curated a five-week season of mostly new and short works, each performed by a fine ensemble of actors on a cleverly designed standing set. Each play, or double-bill, had a one-week season, then it played in repertory in the last week before an all-day marathon on the final Saturday. It was followed by a similarly structured 'Inside 2001'.

This year, Playbox stretched the 'Inside' concept by co-producing a season of nearly all-new Indigenous drama with Ilbijerri Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Theatre Co-operative, following their previous collaboration with the widely toured *Stolen*. This season was called 'Blak Inside: 6 Indigenous Plays from Victoria'.

In 2002, each week was a separate event. There was a standing set—a grey rear wall and a pair of doorways (designed by Robyn Latham, but varied by others to suit individual shows)—and an ingenious, flexible lighting design by Rachel Burke and Michele Preshaw. But each play had a separate cast; there was no repertory season and no marathon. Only the last play, *Conversations with the Dead*, was extended into a second week at the Beckett Theatre after a week at the Carlton Courthouse before the Blak Inside season.

First up was *Enuff*, by John Harding, a founding member of Ilbijerri with several successful plays under his belt. Some critics gave this a hard time, but I found a lot to like about it. It is set in the future (about 2028 in the Currency-published text, but a more confronting 2007 in performance—one parliamentary term after the current one, by which time many Indigenous Aus-

tralian have 'had enough'. There's still no apology, still no treaty, but Aborigines are called Postcolonial Hosts and a hollow 'Reconciliation Day' has crept into our calendar. On this particular day, there's to be a massive, co-ordinated assault on Australia's major cities from a string of 42 al Qaeda-style Aboriginal guerrilla camps, designed to inflict mass terror and maximum revenge.

The camp in the play is run by a 'white' Lieutenant, who is supervised by a mysterious superior whose work in Bougainville, Afghanistan and elsewhere underlines his experience and his useful links with international revolutionary movements. Ominously, and worryingly to some of the Indigenous revolutionaries, there's no sign of the official Aboriginal leadership anywhere.

All the Koori 'soldiers' are strongly motivated for battle (one is a reformed drug dealer; another a rape victim; yet another is an alcoholic whose daughter has been taken from her) but there are tensions within the camp. A complex plot shift involving betrayal and corruption of the movement develops, and then another in which a rather-too-neat narrator's resolution rights the situation in the nick of time. Despite the weak ending, this is a strong play which lets no-one off the hook: neither the multinational organisations, the abusive 'white dogs' nor the Aboriginal leaders themselves. I expect it to resurface, after another draft.

Next was a double-bill pairing Tracey Rigney's new *Belonging* and Tammy Anderson's outstanding solo show *I Don't Wanna Play House*, first seen in the Malthouse last year and toured widely since. Rigney's play, unusually, views the world through the eyes of three teenage girls—two Koori and one 'Gub'—at first with

adolescent confusion and a lack of sense of belonging but later with growing confidence and purpose. Though under-developed at times, it is very fresh in its approach and deserves a wider audience.

I Don't Wanna Play House is one of the strongest Indigenous performance pieces seen for some years. Anderson's disarmingly simple but emotionally compelling narrative spans her 30 years, from an abused childhood in serially dysfunctional family units in Tasmania and on the mainland, to her more settled present in Melbourne. She plays a dozen characters on a bare stage (aided by stylish musician Don Hopkins: some of their C&W songs make telling comment on the action), including her dad, her steadfast Nana in Tassie, her siblings, her non-Indigenous mum (and her string of hopeless and abusive lovers) and others. Anderson's performance is exquisite: she packs a powerful punch, but delivers it with grace and lightness of touch; she is by turns deadly funny and serious and her character-transformations defy description. *House* is touring regional Victoria in May (and will go to Tasmania this year or next): if you have the chance to see this beautifully crafted piece, don't blow it.

THE THIRD PROGRAM was a slightly anticlimactic and over-long double-bill. Jadah Milroy's *Crow Fire* is a dense but confusing piece about a young urban Koori bureaucrat and her relationships with a desert Aborigine in town to redeem a promise, an Aboriginal agitator, a white government minister and her troubled husband, and a mythic black crow figure. There is some good writing here, especially when dealing with mixed racial heritage, but this production failed fully to master all of the nuances involved.



Tammy Anderson in *I Don't Wanna Play House*. Photograph by Jeff Busby.

Maryanne Sam's *Casting Doubts* is an entertaining piece about a casting agency which looks after its trained Koori actors well, as long as they're 'black' enough to look like the 'real Aborigines' needed in a film industry trading on the current popularity of Indigenous issues and history. Alas, most of its clients are too pale and urban, and the plot's interesting but dubious arguments are underlined in a production whose actors are nearly all too pale to make the point.

Film-maker, poet, playwright, songwriter and activist Richard J. Frankland's *Conversations With the Dead* was the last and most substantial play. Commissioned by La Mama, this is a largely autobiographical account of Frankland's ten years as the only blackfella field investigator employed by the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody. It reveals how the job takes

over the central character Jack's life, ruins his marriage, threatens his sanity and even challenges his faith in his Aboriginal heritage. He traverses two states getting to know the lives, families and case histories of the increasing flood of mostly young men who died in police cells, through their official files and interviews with their relatives (some of them his own) and others.

Jack is a huge, Hamlet-scale role and actor Aaron Pedersen brought it powerfully to life. The play's trajectory is relentless (reflecting Frankland's own experience), but the writing and Pedersen's luminous performance are moving, as Jack imagines conversations with the bodies of the spirits whose fates he often felt inadequate about and of whom he frequently seeks forgiveness for not having 'done enough'.

Experimental workshop seasons like these are bound to be patchy by their very

aims and natures. But there was more than enough in *Blak Inside* to suggest that there are many stories yet to be heard from black Australia. Frankland's play was a striking finale to a highly enterprising and valuable project. ■

Geoffrey Milne teaches theatre and drama at La Trobe University.

Catch up with playwrights and *Eureka Street* writing fellows, John Harding and Tracey Rigney, in the May issue.

Scordatura

A Few Musical Re-Tunings

Looking through the catalogue of works by Liszt
provokes the thought, he can't have spent
the whole of his life making love.

Spain, land of bullfighting and lacerating drought,
must have helped mould Scarlatti's style. Take Kk 208,
the sonata where he skins the keyboard.

'Musical Permafrost' says Jonathan Keates
of old Spontini. Yes, and in the deep freeze
Gurrelieder's past its use-by date.

Some say, in his last quartets, Shostakovich
is composing death. Not quite the case. Rather,
he's writing music for the dead to hear.

What fell on Alkan wasn't only his library
but the need of specialists to find an overlooked
and spurious genius.

'Lassù in cielo'—not just a Verdi heroine
going home, but the suppressed transcendence
of her creator's ruthless doubt.

'Lucifer's greatest work of art'. Why did Stockhausen
apologise? 'Man-made' catching up with 'God-made'
deserves acknowledgment.

When Schönberg orchestrated Brahms's G Minor
Piano Quartet, he paid a debt to the composer
who gave him all his rhythms.

Some artists are too great to be other than
names attached to compositions. Thus B flat, A,
C, B natural spells Everyman.

Perfectionism kept Webern's output small.
Odd that so perfect a composer as Haydn should be
both innovative and prolific.

Inherited syphilis ruined Beethoven's hearing.
Tertiary syphilis did the same for Smetana. In Heaven
there'll be music but perhaps no sex.

Joseph Kerman becomes upset if anyone reminds him
of his 'shabby little shocker'. Philippics and atonements
seem equally *de haut en bas*.

'Polka-dotted with Chianti stains': artist-collaborators would do well to beware of the comments of genius's amanuenses.

Scholarship finds it ridiculous to claim that Schubert was the most gifted composer ever, but ears and heart attest it.

Listening to *Chronochromie*, Stravinsky jested of M. Messiaen's 'force-de-frappe.' So many birds sucked into the engines of a jet.

Vivaldi didn't write the same concerto countless times. He was too worldly. But Palestrina's sublimity makes it hard to tell one Mass from another.

Had André Gide been a musician, would he, when asked to name the greatest French composer, have replied, 'Berlioz, hélas?'

At any one time there are only a few geniuses composing, and mediocrities galore. Saddest are those who plead, 'J'avais du talent.'

Having looked into the abyss, true originals make their Swan Songs ordinary and cheerful— not *Der Doppelgänger*, but *Die Taubenpost*.

Setting French has drawbacks and advantages: the language's awful nasal whine; the stressless syllabics of its metres.

Setting German, you are either in the forest or the Nursery, with Goethe looking over your shoulder, plus some very stretchable vowels.

Setting Italian, you are in a practical Arcadia enjoying a brevità like shorthand. The price to be paid: you never escape from euphony.

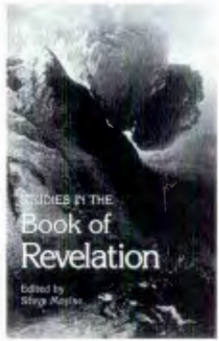
Setting English, you will always be upstaged by your sister art, Literature. In compensation you can howl and bark and vacillate.

Et expecto resurrectionum mortuorum; get through this bit before you let loose the full trumpeting of *et vitam venturi seculi*!

Whatever musicologists say, observing repeat signs is God-like economy. As children, we could never have too much of a good thing.

Peter Porter

THE SHORTLIST



Studies in the Book of Revelation, Steve Moyise (ed.), T&T Clark, 2001. ISBN 0 567 08814 6, RRP \$45

The cover tells the story. A painting of an Afghanistan-like landscape, mountains tumbling and semi-naked human bodies about to become landfill, could only illustrate the Apocalypse. The Book of Revelation, indeed, has inspired great art, much of which speaks more about the personal and cultural fears of the artists than it does about the text of Revelation.

Good commentaries cut away wilder fantasies, and this competent collection of articles illustrates the variety of interpretation of the book throughout history. Some study it as an example of Jewish apocalyptic writing, others look to its reference in the Roman world, while others describe its relevance for later lives and later epochs. The articles offer examples of these approaches to the text, while repudiating any simple or arbitrary strand of meaning. But words can capture only a little of the symbolic power of the Book of Revelation, and its capacity to pose hard questions about any claims to uncritical allegiance. The context for understanding the Beast which bears the name 666 is not the dispassionate study of texts, but experience of the way governments mobilise their various forces to crush the vulnerable.

—Andrew Hamilton sj

Earth Revealing—Earth Healing: Ecology and Christian Theology, Denis Edwards (ed.), The Liturgical Press, 2001. ISBN 0 814 65961 9, RRP \$69.95

Ecology has historically been the passion of minority and ginger groups. So much ecological theology has been strong on exhortation, less strong in argument.

Earth Revealing—Earth Healing in its title catches succinctly the double account any theology must give of the earth: it is the place where we find intimations of God's presence, and the place which bears the potentially fatal wounds of human sinfulness.

Articles by Duncan Reid and Phillip Tolliday illustrate how Christian theological traditions have left the earth out of account, while Denis Edwards, Patricia Fox and James McEvoy explore confidently the theological resources for thinking about the earth. I found the most provoking contribution to be Lorna Hallahan's evocation of theology from the dungheap. The image suggests the importance of getting hands and feet dirty in order to reflect on the earth.

—A.H.



Daughters of the Dreaming, Diane Bell, 3rd edition, North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2002. ISBN 1 876 75615 2, RRP \$34.95

In the Aboriginal exhibition at the Melbourne Museum, the anthropologist Baldwin Spencer stands in a glass case, a specimen to be viewed by the subjects of the exhibition. The image conveys the ambiguity and gap between pretensions and reality of the anthropologist's work.

The third edition of *Daughters of the Dreaming* is welcome especially for Bell's new foreword, in which she reflects on the change in cultural context in the years since the first and second editions. She continues to lament the large gap

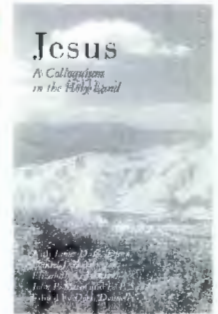
between the detailed reality of Indigenous life and the large generalisations and prejudices that govern both romantic accounts of Aboriginal spirituality and brutal dismissals of Aboriginal culture.

The most significant contribution that Bell has made to the study of women in Aboriginal societies is her grasp of the importance of power relationships, particularly in ritual. Women's rituals are ways not only of expressing a vision of the natural world and of embodying myth, but also of redefining and subverting relationships of power. This analysis also illuminates Christian ritual.

—A.H.

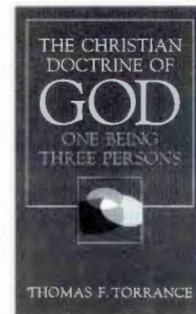
Jesus: A Colloquium in the Holy Land, Doris Donnelly (ed.), Continuum, 2001. ISBN 0 826 41307 2, RRP \$45

This collection of talks by good scholars is addressed to the heart as well as to the head. To speak on Jesus in Israel is to be drawn back both to historical beginnings and to popular devotion. To combine both is a challenge, which the writers in this little book meet. It is as useful for theological students as it is encouraging for pilgrims.



As a whole, the book gives a respectful account of modern scholarship. Daniel Harrington and E.P. Sanders place Jesus in contemporary scholarship about the Dead Sea Community and Galilee respectively. John Meier and James Dunn place Jesus in the intellectual world of prophecy and the oral tradition. Elizabeth Johnson concludes the collection by asking how the faith of Christian readers might be affected by these and similar talks. Her answer is persuasive. Historical reconstructions of the life of Jesus contribute to an imaginative representation in which he is related to the public and human world of our experience. Historical research, and so this book, is helpful because it creates the conditions under which a contemporary form of devotion to the person of Jesus Christ can flourish.

—A.H.



The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons, Thomas F. Torrance, T&T Clark, 2001. ISBN 0 567 08829 4, RRP \$55

Thomas Torrance is a prolific and pugnacious Scottish theologian. This reissue in paperback form of his work on the Trinity indicates the interest in the theology of the Trinity among contemporary theologians. This is a considerable change from a time when the Trinity was seen by many simply as a dogma of faith and not a topic of intelligent discussion.

Torrance's presentation suggests why there is renewed interest. He argues that Christians should stop thinking simply of God, and imagine God in terms of the relationships between Father, Son and Spirit. He contrasts this view of God, based in God's involvement with the world in Jesus Christ, with other views of God as distant and uninvolved, drawn from philosophies or nature.

In common with many other contemporary theologians, Torrance emphasises the way in which the Christian understanding of God turns on its head other understandings. The emphasis on the Christian understanding perhaps indicates how far we have come from the time when Christianity formed the civil religion of the West, and needed to develop a theistic language accessible to all citizens. Now that Christians form a minority in a plural society, their language about God can freely express their distinctive identity.

—A.H.

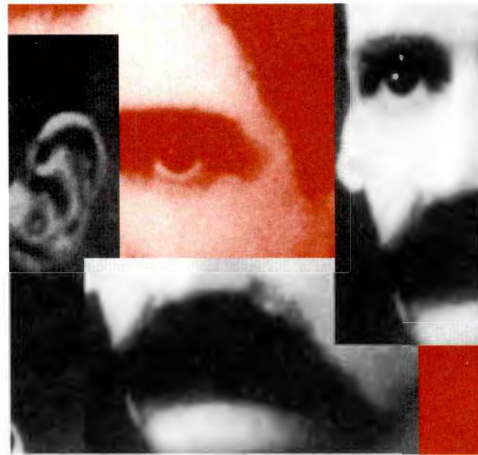
Blainey's Lawson

Henry Lawson: Edited and Introduced by Geoffrey Blainey, Henry Lawson,
Text Publishing, 2002. ISBN 1 87700 811 7, RRP \$27.50

THERE ARE FEW AREAS of social or economic history that Geoffrey Blainey has left untouched. He has written both a short history of the world and a history of the Pacific Dunlop Corporation. Curiously enough, those two books appear to run to about the same length. I imagine there were executives at Pacific Dunlop who felt aggrieved by such brusque treatment.

Blainey has an eye for incidental detail and an ability to make illuminating connections. Speaking towards the end of his tenure as chair of the National Council for the Centenary of Federation, he made the point that the first federal parliament included both a former convict and a man who would survive well into living memory. In *A Land Half Won*, he observes that a member of Hume and Hovell's 1824 overland expedition to Port Phillip survived to be present in Albury for the opening of the Sydney-to-Melbourne railway. The first expedition had taken weeks. The journey could now be done in a day.

It is not surprising then that Blainey warms to Henry Lawson. Blainey's new selection of Lawson's work includes some of the most telling and pithy descriptions in Australian literature. Blainey suggests in his introduction that Lawson's stories tend to be more descriptive than narrative: 'atmosphere was everything'. This does little justice to the ways in which Lawson, when in good form, will patiently build a narrative from small twigs. Blainey has chosen both 'Shall we Gather at the River' and 'The Golden Graveyard'. In the former, a clergyman visiting the bush is described as a 'piano-fingered parson'. The image brings with it an entire narrative of drawing rooms, light entertainment and privilege.



The latter story includes the character of the Mother Middleton, possibly a former convict and certainly a woman to make even Lawson's Mrs Spicer look genteel. Mother Middleton's husband dies. Lawson says baldly that 'she conducted the funeral'. That one detail yields an elaborate narrative of grief, defiance, pride and religious autonomy. I labour this point because Blainey will often create a historical narrative in a similar way.

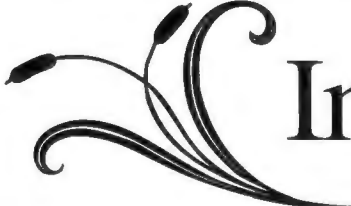
Blainey is often contrasted with our other celebrity historian, Manning Clark. Clark is seen as more visionary, more interested in big themes, more willing to create a grand narrative of Australian history. It is interesting then that both Clark and Blainey have written about Henry Lawson. Clark's *In Search of Henry Lawson* (1978) reflects on Lawson's funeral. Indeed, it is impossible to get far into Lawson's legacy without pondering the strange things that happen to people when they start to dig into the earth's crust, either to find gold or bury the dead or, once or twice, do both at the same time.

The myth of Lawson's lonely death, followed by a most public funeral, is one of the core conundrums of trying to figure out who he really was. And is.

As far as Clark is concerned, those who turned out to mourn Lawson had failed to understand either the turmoil of his spirit or his urge to describe the Australian soul. Clark quotes D. H. Lawrence's words, written about the time Lawson died, that Australians have 'a rather fascinating indifference, a physical indifference to what we call soul or spirit'. Lawson's posthumous admirers had 'no thoughts of Lawson as the victim of the rule of the Kingdom of Nothingness, or of the great Australian emptiness'. Blainey says simply that many people had tried to help Lawson in his fatal battle with alcohol and depression, but 'did not know how to'. He had 'the grandest funeral ever conferred on an Australian writer or artist'. Blainey's Lawson is a scribe, not a prophet. His final judgment is merely that 'no writer can surpass him in capturing large slices of an Australian way of life that has vanished'.

Blainey has a marked aversion to metaphysical themes. His *A Short History of the World* ends with an assessment of the diminishing role of religion in human history: 'religion tended to flourish most vigorously when daily life was perilous and often painful'. Scientific and medical advances have made religion less significant: 'the appeal to gods was partly a reflection of the feeling of personal helplessness'. Blainey is certainly more comfortable when reporting on social, economic or technological change. You just have to wonder what interest he finds in familiar stories such as 'Shall We Gather at the River', 'The

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Union Buries its Dead' and 'The Drover's Wife', all of which he has included in this book. They are all tales of survival. But an essential part of survival means finding an underlying meaning and a ritual to protect that meaning. Take those away and Lawson is pretty lame.

Blainey tends to minimise Lawson's prejudices, especially his racism, but he does acknowledge their existence. His anthology of Lawson is fairly conventional. If the truth be known, you can buy the two-volume collected works of Lawson at most

bargain book outlets for two-thirds the price. And you'd have a lot more fun rummaging through the highs and lows of a varied career. The collected works are full of real surprises. It's understandable that Blainey has chosen from the best of Lawson's work and Lawson was a formidable talent. But he is also worth meeting on some pretty ordinary days when the world did not seem so wide. ■

Michael McGirr is the author of *Things You Get For Free*.

BOOKS:2

PETER PIERCE

Mourning war

Living with the Aftermath: Trauma, Nostalgia and Grief in Post-War Australia,

Joy Damousi, Cambridge University Press, 2001. ISBN 0 521 80218 0, RRP \$45

This War Never Ends: The Pain of Separation and Return,

Michael McKernan, University of Queensland Press, 2001.

ISBN 0 7022 3274 2 (hb) / 0 702 23285 5 (pb), RRP \$50/\$35

IN ONE OF THE primal scenes of Australian literature, a debilitated Jack Meredith makes his painful way back to the family home in Melbourne. It is the depth of the Depression. Jack has worked as a deckhand on a Chilean freighter, laboured on an oil pipeline in the Andes, been shipped out of Valparaiso as a 'Distressed British Subject', walked home from Sydney on bloodied feet. David Meredith, narrator of George Johnston's novel *My Brother Jack* (1964), wonders what has brought him there:

was it that in the blind delirium through which he moved this was, after all, the sanctuary to which those who were flagging always come for help? ... the maimed and the sick and the ruined and the failed and the dying? That one terrible choking cry when the door was opened, 'Mum!'

Two decades earlier, Johnston—a war correspondent with the Melbourne *Argus*—had met newly released Australian prisoners-of-war in Manila. He told their stories: the brutality that they had endured, the names and misdeeds of their tormentors. Jack Meredith had no such fate in store. An injury would keep him from active service, but his homecoming has within it many of the elements common to the experiences of men and women who returned from the Second World War, and of those who welcomed them.

This material is central to two fine, complementary books that were published last year: Joy Damousi's *Living with the Aftermath: Trauma, Nostalgia and Grief in Post-War Australia* and Michael McKernan's *This War Never Ends: The Pain of Separation and Return*. Damousi is principally concerned with how women—wives, mothers, daughters—coped variously with the loss or the return of men who had served in the Second World War, Korea and Vietnam (and sometimes in all three). McKernan focuses more narrowly on how prisoners of the Japanese fared when—at last—they came home. Each is exploring, sympathetically and from different angles and interests, one of the most important figures in Australian cultural history: the revenant. These 'ghosts' (haunted themselves and doomed to haunt others) returned to societies which had long adapted to their absence. Their returns could be disruptive, not least because of the disquieting intelligence of other places that they might bring with them—if they chose to speak of it. Many of these men (and some women) were, in Meredith's words, 'maimed ... sick ... ruined ... failed ... dying'. How they reckoned with these acute problems, and what those on the home front did with them exercises both Damousi and McKernan.

Living with the Aftermath draws extensively on interviews with the wives of service personnel, many of them war widows. They have previously been considered most often in their status as welfare recipients, but Damousi wants instead to examine 'the emotional experience of widowhood during the post-war period'. One of her subjects is 'secondary traumatisation', whereby wives internalise the trauma of their husbands' war experience. (Here she is more interested with the wives of those who came back alive, however damaged they were.) She is also occupied by the changing social and emotional attitudes towards death and grieving, in particular what she identifies as a late-20th-century 'return to nineteenth-century frankness in mourning and grief'. Damousi's third large intention is to challenge any 'sharp periodisation of the war and post-war period' because of the lasting psychological impact of the war not only on returned service personnel, but on their wives and children. This is the matter that her book illustrates at length. McKernan is in accord, writing in his Conclusion of how he leaves men and their families 'somewhere there in the fifties—the health survey completed, some minimal compensation paid, a few of the stories in print or in the archives, but with the nation's attention now directed elsewhere'.

Yet why should it not have been? Were veterans and their families best left to the reconstruction of their own lives, as far as this was possible? McKernan especially writes of the confusions within government policy towards repatriated prisoners-of-war. The Defence Committee had directed that there should be one repatriation scheme for all, whatever the accidents of their war service. Veterans disagreed. McKernan contrasts the attitudes of 'Black Jack' Gallagher, who commanded the AIF in captivity in Singapore, and Brigadier Arthur Blackburn. The former told his men that they were not going home as prisoners, rather they would 'march down Australian streets as soldiers'. Later he refused to associate with prisoner-of-war groups. Blackburn, however, emphasised the special problems facing returning ex-prisoners, and judged that 'nearly every man returning from the prison camps is a neurosis case'. A spectrum of reaction is spanned here. As McKernan and Damousi show, accommodations had painfully to be made by individuals; generalisation is hard.

In an age before widespread counselling, the survivors of war created their own

networks of support. POW associations across the country are one instance, contentious though they were for some, as we have seen. Then there was the War Widows' Guild of Australia, founded by Jessie Vasey. She believed that these widows were slighted and marginalised. Damousi suggests that Vasey wished that women 'be allowed to express their loss publicly and distinctively'. Her tactic was bold: 'to compare their plight with their husbands' sacrifices and to merge their experiences and make the difficulties they faced into part of their husbands' history'. That is, the dead serviceman would share his story with his wife, allowing her to become part of it, palliating her grief and provoking more attention from governments. One wanted to hear more of this, but Damousi pushes on, driven to a degree by the oral testimonies that she wants to put on the record. (Both books are determined to put personal witness to the forefront, listening where public officials had not.)

A couple of the women whom Damousi interviewed, and whose husbands survived, found them infantilised by war. One was 'just like my fifth child', another was 'my eldest child'. The women refer to a sense of helplessness and dependency in their men. Curiously, this recapitulates one of the key relationships in Australian fiction, wherein the wife effectively becomes the mother to a husband who is on the point of disintegration. This is the situation of Henry Handel Richardson's Richard Mahony, of Henry Lawson's Joe Wilson, among numerous instances. Once more this is a phenomenon that Damousi identifies, but on which she chooses not to dwell.

Next she turns back to widows, and to 'nostalgia, and a life-time reluctance to relinquish memories of their loss'. Few of them remarried, and when they did—in the examples cited—the results were not usually happy. 'I wasn't meant to remarry' is the more typical refrain. Typical too is the desire not to be parted from idealised recollections of the lost partner. Some women resented the implication that their union was less important because often so brief. Others were at least comforted by children, even if the children scarcely knew their fathers and may actively have resisted the prospect of a stepfather. Damousi argues that 'women become social outcasts in widowhood'. There is no sign of merriment in the landscape that she surveys.

This is one of the most important parts of the book. Following Freud, Damousi argues that nostalgia can be 'a form of

disavowal' of loss, yet paradoxically can also 'be a way of looking forward'. That is, it can be a means 'of moving between mourning—where the self is affected by loss, but where there is a rebuilding of the inner world—and melancholia—where the mourning is never complete'. Again this spectrum of response is made vivid by those prepared to tell their stories.

Damousi has chosen the right historical moment, a time when the reluctance to speak of war-related experiences has abated. She writes—thinking mostly of the two world wars—of how 'the reticence of the returned man ... is now almost a cliché'. Now the taciturn digger (think of Alan Seymour's 'Wacka' Dawson in *The One Day of the Year*—in another of our primal literary scenes he only once confides his memories of the first morning at Gallipoli)



has been replaced, at least after Vietnam, by the talkative one. Memoirs, collections of reminiscences, unit histories abound. Veterans agitate over their rights and the wrongs done to them. The talking cure is tried, if first among mates. As one wife says of such meetings of her airman husband with men with whom he served in Vietnam—'well, the hangar doors are open'. It is a rare light touch in a sombre and serious book, one poignantly illustrated with photographs of newly-weds who will never smile so readily again.

As McKernan notes in *This War Never Ends*, men might dream of coming home to a 'clean slate and a new beginning', but they were soon disillusioned. Indeed, many of the prisoners-of-war were reluctant to come home—diseased, emaciated, disturbed in mind, feeling themselves to be a burden on their families, if not the state. In words with which Damousi would concur, McKernan says that 'the impact and tragedy of war extends beyond the front-line soldiers right into the homes from which these men and women enlisted'. The POWs, freed at

last from the Japanese, often felt shamed by their surrender and believed that the reaction to their return would be reproachful. The POW, after all, had not previously been part of the Anzac story.

McKernan tells us much of the men's and their families' ordeals before their homecoming. Attempts were made to establish lists of captives, on the assumption that the Japanese would behave like a European enemy. There were quixotic and tormenting contacts that the Japanese allowed: a trickle of mail and the chance for a few wives to hear messages from their husbands broadcast through Radio Batavia. The postscript to one sad transcript that McKernan provides is that the speaker did not survive his captivity; did not live to see the children to whom he had fondly spoken.

He has other stories to tell, of the 'torpedoed men' of the *Rokyu Maru*, some of whom were eventually rescued by one of the American submarines that had sunk their prison ship. Returned to Australia, these men were the 'focus of intense interest as possible bearers of personal news' about others who were still prisoners, or dead. In McKernan's judgment, the government bungled this rehearsal for the later, full-scale return. Preparing for that, authorities knew that they were dealing with thousands of men who 'did not have the language and the knowledge' of the years lost to them in captivity. The well-meaning *Argus* tried to fill some gaps with the pamphlet *While You Were Away*. For a time, it and other papers were full of atrocity stories told by the released men to war correspondents such as George Johnston. Eventually these dried up, to some extent out of consideration for the relatives of the 8000 men and women who did not come back.

McKernan and Damousi cover some of the same territory in exploring the domestic anxieties that preceded and followed repatriation. Would a mother learn that her son would be coming home? What would be his ambivalences? As Lieutenant Ralph Sanderson wrote in an account of his captivity, while on the voyage home from Manila: 'All hands are quietly excited about tomorrow—arrival in Sydney. Or are we?' For nurse Phyllis Briggs—long accustomed to communal living—'it was frightening to be alone', even in her own home. For fathers and husbands, there was the pain and confusion to endure of years that might have been spent with their families, years forever forfeited.

In *Living with the Aftermath* and *This War Never Ends* the likeness of the titles is

matched by a kind of inconclusiveness. Both deal with stories, at first blazoned in public, then soon to be the cause of private anguish within families. We learn the lineaments of some of them; are asked to infer the wider social damage behind the picket fences of the 1950s. That hesitation of

decisive judgments is one of the numerous ways in which McKernan and Damousi honour their subjects. ■

Peter Pierce is Chair of Australian Literature and Head of the School of Humanities, James Cook University.

prematurely of a heart attack; his friends say that he never got over the hanging. Brian Morley [3AW journalist] was so deeply affected by what he had witnessed at the execution that, to this day, he cannot speak about it without weeping.

Richards was a leader of the student protests about the hanging and has done impressive research. If the detail is sometimes obsessive—particularly in the analysis of the crime, the trial and legal and political processes—we are left with a strong sense of Ronald Ryan, the man, and the place in which he lived. A childhood in the poorer suburbs of any city in the 1930s was always going to have its difficulties, but Ryan was born to alcoholic and abusive parents. His father had been a miner and had contracted phthisis, but despite this—and being a ferocious metho drinker—lived to be 60. His violence was bad enough, but he also forced Cecilia, his wife, to prostitute herself at the docks when money was low. The earlier primary school photographs of Ryan show a small, worried face. The later photographs show a bravado in the smile, a hardening. There was no help available for this child: his story was going to follow the Blakeian pattern: ‘Some are born to sweet delight ... Some are born to endless night.’ The Ryans lived in constant turmoil, forever doing midnight flits to avoid paying rent. Jack Ryan’s pension would have been inadequate to support the family (Ron had three younger sisters) even without the drinking.

The details of Ryan’s childhood are painful and explain much. New research is

BOOKS:3

JULIETTE HUGHES

A final barbarity

The Hanged Man: The Life & Death of Ronald Ryan, Mike Richards,
Scribe Publications, 2002. ISBN 0 908 01149 0, RRP \$39.95

MOST VICTORIAN people in their late 40s onward will remember the death of Ronald Ryan. Some who are rather older will remember the occasion very well indeed: 3000 gathered outside Pentridge on the night before his execution on 3 February 1967. Among the 90 or so arrested was Clyde Holding, ALP member for Richmond and later Victoria’s opposition leader.

Ryan was the last human being to be hanged in Australia, and his case would divide not only popular opinion but the Liberal Party, right up to Premier Henry Bolte’s cabinet. It inspired Bruce Dawe’s famous poem, ‘The Victorian Hangman tells his love’, though the poem is not more chilling than the reality—the hangman was an anonymous man in welder’s goggles who dashed out of his quarters to do the job in haste before any last-minute reprieve spoiled his fun. Tom Prior wrote that he was ‘like a ferret after a rabbit’.

Ronald Ryan, serving a long sentence for robbery, had escaped from Pentridge with another prisoner, Peter Walker. In the confusion, a warder, George Hodson, was shot and killed while giving chase. After recapture, Ryan was charged with Hodson’s murder, although disquiet remained over whether Hodson had been shot by Ryan or by a stray bullet from another warder’s rifle. Ryan was found guilty; an intense campaign to commute his death sentence failed, and he was hanged.

It was the case that would not only break the heart of Ryan’s counsel, Phil



Opas, but would haunt the trial judge, Justice John Erskine Starke, the governor of Pentridge, Ian Grindlay, and many others. Mike Richards writes that:

For the rest of his life, Starke would worry terribly about his role in sentencing Ryan and agonise about whether he could have done more to save him from the gallows. Opas would become so dispirited ... that he would leave the bar that he cherished. ... Ian Grindlay was profoundly distressed ... and he would say a prayer for Ryan every day of his life after the execution. Several years later he would die



The Les Tanner cartoon of Henry Bolte which so incensed Sir Frank Packer that he pulped the entire edition of the *Bulletin* in which it was published.

showing that neglect and abuse cause discernible differences in the brain chemistry of young children. Sadists, addicts, psychopaths, sociopaths, are all wired differently from healthy people. Alan Bartholomew, the state psychiatrist, was later to describe Ryan as having a psychopathic personality disorder, incapable of remorse. His later gambling addiction showed something again of his poor impulse control and inability to take advantage of opportunities. His marriage to a respectable young woman seemed the way to respectability at first: he shed his working-class Catholicism and converted for a time to Anglicanism.

The attempts that young Ronald made to better himself make difficult reading when you know what is to come. He was the kind of person who always got caught: at 11 years old he broke into a neighbour's house and stole a gold watch. For this he was sent away from his family to Rupertswood, a boys' boarding school run by the Salesians. There he began to show some of the contradictory characteristics that persisted to the end. He was able to perceive the way that people wanted him to behave and would be a 'model pupil' just as

later he would be a model prisoner. Richards shows a boy who learned fast, thrived on discipline and seemed to be diligent. Yet he absconded for good at 14, sending an abusive letter to the priests that would destroy any good will that might have lingered. Ryan was a prolific letter-writer; nearly 30 years later, while he was on the run, he wrote an ugly and obscene threat about his ex-wife that would shock everyone and harden the hearts of those who wished him dead.

THERE WAS NO LACK of supporters of capital punishment, and they tended to be powerful, despite the position and influence of the abolitionists. Foremost among the pro-hanging faction was the Premier of Victoria himself. Henry Bolte, the cartoonist's gift, had been infuriated when Robert Tait cheated the gallows some years before. When Ryan's case came up he withstood a barrage of protest that would have caused a less rigid and insecure politician to talk terms. Richards' treatment of Bolte is careful: he chronicles his actions and lets the man speak for himself—until the last two pages, where he allows himself the luxury of comment:

'No, this was Henry Bolte's hanging and, but for the premier, it would never have happened.'

Richards' book is rich in detail and primary sources: letters are quoted in full, conversations verified and reported. Some are mystifying: when Ryan was caught in Sydney he said to his captors, 'Congratulations! Congratulations! A brilliant pinch!' Perhaps the way that he was so able to take on the ideas of authority and mould his words and actions to what he saw as his wishes meant that he had to escape in order to survive psychically. When free, his temper could be explosive—there was no certainty in him. When he was caught, he was docile; there is a sense of him playing out some drama with himself as the tragic hero. The two sides of his personality are understandable only in the exhaustive detail and rigorous context that Richards gives. An incontinent thief, sycophant, forger, gambler, occasional wife-beater, Ryan was a stuff-up who always had a new excuse. Yet all commentators assert he died well, that nothing in his life became him so well as the leaving of it. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

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FLASH IN THE PAN



Grey Gray

Charlotte Gray, dir. Gillian Armstrong. *Charlotte Gray* is essentially an old-fashioned wartime romantic melodrama. When Charlotte (a Scot with a flawless French accent) finds out that her boyfriend's plane has been shot down over Vichy France, she volunteers to parachute in to liaise with the resistance, ostensibly in the hope of finding out some information about his fate (actually, she's a bit bored in London, despite the bombing, and seems to be looking for adventure). She immediately becomes entangled with Communist resistance leader Julien (Billy Crudup) and his father Levade (Michael Gambon), who are sheltering two Jewish boys whose parents have been sent to the death camps.

Cate Blanchett (the eponymous Charlotte, above) is very beautiful, and looks very fetching in 1940s period costumes. Crudup is also very beautiful, and does a great line in 'smouldering yet sensitive'. Gambon is not very beautiful, but does make a satisfyingly smelly-looking French patriarch. They're also all very good actors. The landscape of the film positively glows with provincial French charm. Gillian Armstrong has directed two of my favourite Australian films (*High Tide* and *The Last Days of Chez Nous*). So why don't I like this film very much?

Does Charlotte find her absent flyboy, or does she end up with spunky, courageous, compassionate, right-in-front-of-her Julien.

Who cares? The drama of the film is all driven by the events of the war around them, above all the fate of the children in the Levades' care. The problem for me is that this means that the real stakes of the film are always elsewhere—who cares if Charlotte ends with flyboy or spyboy when entire families are being sent to the gas chambers? I know that the idea of the wartime melodrama is that love is meant to redeem suffering (or at least distract you enough to make you forget about it); it just seems faintly cynical to use that suffering to prop up a flat love story, or in Charlotte's case, a flat love life.

—Allan James Thomas

All things bright

A Beautiful Mind, dir. Ron Howard. As far as Hollywood is concerned, the phrase 'based on a true story' is almost as exciting as 'Mr Spielberg is on line two'. It immediately confers integrity upon a project to know that someone, somewhere, actually lived this life, choked back those tears, and overcame those obstacles. Half the emotional work of the film can be done in the advertising.

The fascinating and sorrowful life of mathematical genius and paranoid schizophrenic John Forbes Nash is certainly worth a film—and maybe it'll get made some day—but in the meantime, we'll have to put up with *A Beautiful Mind*, Ron Howard's syrupy take on genius and mental illness.

Nash (Russell Crowe) is an awkward but gifted West Virginian who arrives at snooty Princeton with the ambition to come up with a 'truly original idea'. And he does. He then encounters the two people who will change his life forever: the mysterious spymaster William Parcher (Ed Harris), and his future wife and saviour, Alicia Larde (Jennifer Connolly). Parcher, it turns out, is a dark force attempting to control his life, while Alicia is the steady hand that guides him into the light.

Real life is notoriously messy—and Nash's real life includes bisexuality, divorce and remarriage to the same woman, and maybe even anti-Semitism. But Howard is nothing if not an astute Hollywood director. He hews from Nash's biography the story that big-budget American films always insist on finding in a person's lived experience: hero overcomes setback, gets girl, and scores the Nobel Prize, or equivalent.

In its favour, the film does paint a sympathetic portrait of schizophrenia—not usually a Hollywood forte. Yet to pick out this aspect of the project as its major redeeming feature is faint praise indeed for a film that's so obviously enchanted with its own sense of significance.

A Beautiful Mind isn't a great film, but it is a great Hollywood biopic. And at its centre is a great performance. Crowe deserves an Oscar, if only because the Academy owes him at least five of those little, neutered statuettes for overlooking his work in *The Insider* back in 1999.

—Brett Evans

Western affront

Black Hawk Down, dir. Ridley Scott. This is the way the Hollywood.com website bills Ridley Scott's new offering: 'The true story of an elite group of US soldiers whose peace-keeping mission to Somalia turns deadly when hostile civilians mount an unexpected attack.'

Now try some fact: in 1993 a group of Delta Commandos and Army Rangers dropped, via helicopter, into a central section of Mogadishu. Their aim was to capture the top aides of Somali General Mohammed Farah Aidid. The mission went terribly wrong: instead of the expected 90-minute high-tech surgical extraction, there was an 18-hour battle, resulting in 17 or 18 US deaths (precise number varies depending on source) and 500 or 1000 Somalis killed (the number varies—wildly—depending on source). The mission was an

ignominious failure. Soon after, with internal strife still raging in Somalia, President Clinton pulled the US troops out. No 'peace' was 'kept'.

Ridley Scott is a technical master, but *Bladerunner* this is not—it lacks that film's imaginative grasp. The battle sequences of *Black Hawk Down* have the kind of grisly authenticity that made the opening sequence of *Saving Private Ryan* so compelling. Bodies shatter into pieces. Perhaps we need to see this to believe it ('hardcore action' the publicists call it). As a film about the bonding of men under fire ('leave no man behind') it seems convincing enough, though never illuminating. It even gestures at Somalia, with credit sequences showing a strange, emaciated people (the Rangers referred to them as 'skinnyes') swaddling their famine-dead in white corpse cloths. Things were tough in Somalia. But no names, no humanising. There is no ambiguity about who are the cowboys and who are the Injuns. In the hour or so of close-focus gun-to-rocket-launcher combat you see every scratch and every spurt of American blood. The Injun/Somalis fall like ninepins—always in the middle distance. There are a few sequences with terrified Somali women and children and US troops behaving nobly. They reminded me of early John Ford, but without any hint of the complexity that was to come in Ford's deepening understanding of the frontier.

Black Hawk Down is a film of its post-September 11 times—another frontier, and so much to learn. —Morag Fraser

Playing for time

L'Emploi du Temps (Time Out), dir. Laurent Canet. Hunched awkwardly in the passenger seat of his car, Vincent (Aurélien Recoing) sleeps by the side of the road. The shape of his bent body is echoed perfectly by the curve of the car's steering wheel. This bleak but beautiful opening shot sets *Time Out* thoughtfully on its way. Unable to admit to his family that he has lost his job, Vincent drives and sleeps alone, along the cold motorways of northern Europe while taking fantasy business trips. When receiving mobile phone calls from his wife in children's playgrounds rather than boardrooms becomes untenable, Vincent begins to invent an elaborate alternative self of quite breathtaking proportions.

The strange beauty of this film is devastating. It is painful to watch a man fabricate a life and then act it out with a

wary self-awareness that attracts immediate suspicion. In part the pain comes from feeling implicated as an audience in the whole tangled web. You feel part of Vincent's betrayals because the direction sits you physically at his side for almost the entire film and because his lies are not simply pathetic, but are recognisable acts of social survival.

Aurélien Recoing's performance is magnificent. His face (not unlike Kevin Spacey, but with more contradiction) behaves like a mask in a Greek tragedy. It expresses a black depth of emotion but never seems to move. The other standout performance is Karin Viard's (playing Vincent's wife Muriel). Her acting displays enormous restraint and subtlety, allowing the character to be angry, in love, sad, disappointed and loyal—all in the turn of a head.

While there are other crucial and beautifully drawn characters in *Time Out* it is Vincent and Muriel's emotional limbo I found most compelling. There is nothing standard in the portrait of their relationship, and we are never humoured by any clichéd 'signs' of love. The question is not whether they are strong enough to remain in love—clearly they are—but whether either is strong enough to live through such a sad tangle of deceit.

Muriel and Vincent walk across a misty, snow-covered hill, one behind the other. Vincent turns to look at his wife but sees only whiteness. He turns again and she is revealed in the distance; he turns again and, again, whiteness. Everything is stripped away—no colour, no air. There are few moments in cinema as deeply layered as this one. —Siobhan Jackson

How and whydunnit

Gosford Park, dir. Robert Altman. Any film made by the creator of *Nashville* is going to be worth a look. Altman uses a who's who cast in a way that subverts not only the British class system but the genre of English country-house whodunnit. But *Gosford Park* is quite a lot more than *Upstairs Downstairs* meeting Inspector Wexford's dopey younger brother. Echoes arise of Dorothy Sayers, Agatha Christie, Ngaio Marsh—all these are deliberate and are firmly stifled by the end.

There are so many ways that Altman is brilliant in this film, but to discuss them would give away a plot that is important. Yet images can be called up without spoiling the story—Kristin Scott Thomas (above,

right) as lady of the manor, coolly contemptuous of Stephen Fry's prat of a detective (the man actually puts the milk in before the tea, and then *apologises* for it ... how can such people live, you wonder). Fry does such a fine, overawed prat that you don't feel for him at all. By this time you are so firmly downstairs in your perspective that Inspector Thompson's lower-middle-class gaffe seems more embarrassing than the psychopathic selfishness of the aristocrats and the self-abasement of their servants. Maggie Smith will amply deserve any accolade she might get for her appalling Countess of Trentham, because, gallery player that she is, she has enough common touch to remind you of some ghastly relative, the kind you all fear to offend, and who never scruples to offend you.



And that is the crux of Altman's vision in *Gosford Park*; he sees utter unfairness and plays it up for you, so that you notice all the myriad pinpricks that deflate healthy self-esteem when one is in a class system as diseased as Britain's. Setting the film in 1932 allows Altman to paint in bolder strokes: the malaise is more controlled these days, but still uncured. Still, for such societies that imagine themselves to be classless, it is a potent evocation of what a truly non-unionised workforce amounts to in the end, when service decays into servility. —Juliette Hughes



Tuning in

In ancient times before the internet and Big Brother, the BBC would not allow new announcers to go on air until they could say 'Peggy Babcock' ten times without hesitation or stumble. (Hearsay @ Rumour, pub. Urban Legend)

TRY THE ABOVE. Open a book on it at work and you'll make decent drinking money. 'Peggy Babcock' makes mockery of the *Guinness Book of Records*' 'most difficult tongue-twister' which is the risibly easy 'the sixth sick sheik's sixth sheep's sick'. It makes you think about the disembodied voices that wake you up in the mornings, giving mellifluously enunciated bad news from home and abroad. And of course you keep the radio on during breakfast, in the shower and in the car: you need the ABC to give you unspun news to talk about at work. But what do you do when you get home?

Lately I've been listening to the radio again at night, escaping happily from the cyclops in the sitting room. I've rediscovered Radio National, and have boosted their minute ratings by one household. It's a treasure trove for people who want to think, and perhaps that is its problem, because many highly effective people who have read the book about their habits come home and want downtime from moving and shaking. So they watch *Blue Heelers* if the ratings are anything to go by.

But after making the umbilical break from the sofa, I can only recommend that you give *Late Night Live* and *Night Club* a try. The former has Phillip Adams, which should be recommendation enough if, like everyone else who reads *The Australian*, you automatically turn to his page first. He has a wonderful rumbly voice and can talk about anything, because he has probably read everything Barry Jones has read and yet kept his sense of humour. And people from everywhere willingly go on his program: John Kenneth Galbraith, Thomas Keneally, Gore Vidal, Michael Ondaatje, Arthur C. Clarke. He also demonstrates the virtue of eschewing faux neutrality to support asylum seekers and wields the terrifying weapon of intellectual honesty on politicians who prevaricate, spin and otherwise manipulate.

Night Club is on at 8.30pm Monday to Friday, and talks about what Les Patterson would call The Yartz but with Bill Leak, an artist, and Michael Gurr, a playwright, talks to some purpose. It really helps to have artists hosting an arts program; there is less intellectual onanism because much of the material is about the art itself: critics chase each other round *Night Club*'s table in an endearing way. Beware; it may excite strong

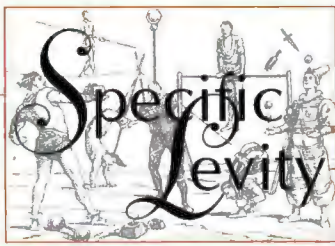
opinions where you least expect them. There was a program about museums that made me boil at the patronising deconstructive twits who have taken over museum curating. And the stoush about installation art in February was great listening: John McDonald, from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, had dissed a book edited by Benjamin Genocchio and Adam Geczy entitled *What Is Installation? An Anthology of Writings on Australian Installation Art*. McDonald accused the book of bad grammar and political correctness. It was on for all parties; keyboards at ten paces, mikes to the fore. I have a special interest in this, with family members who are artists, and who have done installations. Everyone by now must know the story of Damien Hirst's piece which, including as it did, overflowing ashtrays and other party litter, was chucked out by a cleaner last year at the Tate Modern. Hirst was reportedly very amused by it. I have seen the work and the thinking that goes into installation art, so I'm with the installationists here.

But it's such a lot of fun when people get all air-yated about it.

SO GET AWAY FROM THE TV for a while. When you start watching *Charmed* and really worrying about what's going to happen to Julian McMahon, the unfeasibly beautiful scion of one of the country's plainest prime ministers, it's probably time to turn the bloody thing off and do something else. But wait—what is that faint wailing? I hear sofa spuds everywhere pleading their full bellies and empty heads: give us bread and circuses. (Well, not Cirque du Soleil. Watched that on Channel Nine in March, didn't we, and there was no-one getting buckets of porridge down big clown trousers, no squirting lapel flowers at all. Too damn intellectual, wasn't it? Obviously got at by Foucault, Derrida and Bardot—Brigitte that is. No tortured and humiliated animals, no death-defying stuff; and the costumes were so chic, so ironic, so effing self-referential that I almost read a book instead. And not bread—nah, give us McCain Oven Fries, popcorn, Mars Bars, Magnums: chewing, or perhaps just swallowing, is activity of a sort—adipose accretion is a sign the body is doing something after all, and you do start to fit the sofa better ...)

You can do it. It's great to rediscover radio is alive. And the great thing about listening is that you can be washing up, colour-coding your underwear or alphabetising your library while listening. If you're low and unredeemed, you can also be playing Tetris on your computer. Just try doing that during *Blue Heelers*. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 102, April 2002

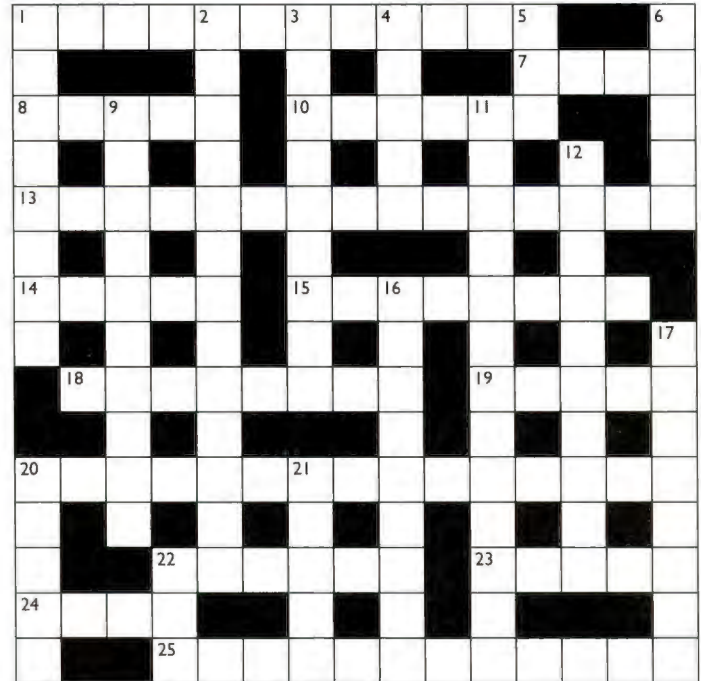
Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

1. Seasonal holiday coincides with 14, 15-across in palindromic year. (6,6)
7. In parliament, for instance, they see and, reportedly, have it. (4)
8. For example, party member returning to talk his usual stuff? Rubbish! (5)
10. Tries at first off. It tantalises. (6)
13. Bird, a friendly type, but with a mischievous spirit—sometimes chased in ice-hockey? (5,10)
- 14 & 15. This issue of *Eureka Street* comes out today, perhaps, but don't believe everything you hear! (5,5,3)
18. You'd be concerned for your ailing liver at a meal featuring this type of wine. (8)
19. Has stood up to mix some aromatic gum. (5)
20. Old-fashioned document written at that period. (5,10)
22. Sometimes I'm pugnacious when subject to attack. (6)
23. Rent out stand for artists. (5)
24. This sort of egg is good taken when retiring. (4)
25. Unfortunately, both Peters with disheartened sister, possibly, could have different fathers or mothers. (12)

DOWN

1. In the season preceding 1-across, such a day occurred several times, remember? Partially, at least. (5,3)
2. The ageless beauty of time-worn dales creatively produced by ...? (7,6)
3. Mature lamb beefy, perhaps. Good for cooking, anyway.
4. Is any wanderer sane? Answer in the negative. (5)
5. What 7-acrosses reportedly say—in the affirmative! (3)
6. Confused WASP climbing the social ladder has, firstly, expressed impatience or disgust, perhaps. (5)
9. Working bee, or celebration for non-university activity? Politics always comes into it! (5,5)
11. Trust search 'e conducted found the precious body-part? (8,5)
12. Fresh faces, possibly, turned up to sample the cheaper wines. (10)
16. Could be a car that lures Robin out, or a heater inside. (3,6)
17. Places at the theatre in the front positions. (8)
20. Defeated relation used to be intimidating. (5)
21. Fit out with gear etc? It sounds like a joke! (1,4)
22. Sit about discussing example of the possessive. (3)



Solution to Crossword no. 101, March 2002



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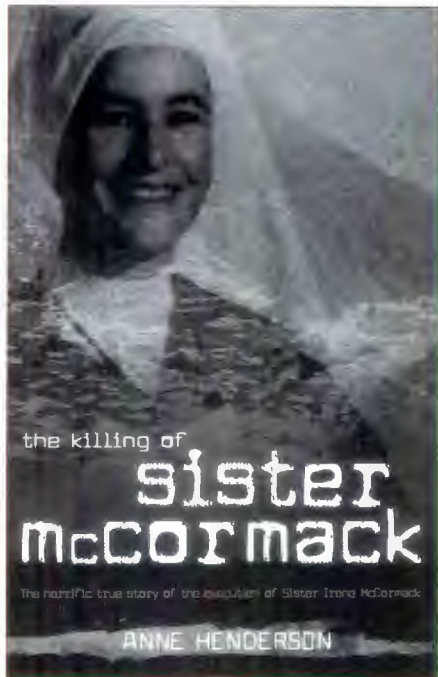
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By Anne Henderson

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