EUREKA STREET

Vol. 2 No 4 May 1992 \$4.00

Facing Australia

Margaret Simons on the outback

Jack Waterford on the payback

Frank Brennan on the backoff

The real Madonna Dorothy A. Lee

War and the national memory Peter Pierce

France's territorial imperatives Brett Evans

Anzac Day
Photo by Andrew Stark.
See 'An institution of dreams', p30.

Andrew Stark, a Sydney photographer, was one of several *Eureka Street* winners at this year's Australasian Catholic Press Association awards. *Eureka Street* staff and contributors also won these awards in the 'magazine' section: best feature article, best design and layout, best three headlines, best editorial (Andrew Hamilton SJ), and best piece of local graphic art (Dean Moore). Nor were the plaudits all on home ground—the association's ecumenical counterpart, the Australasian Religious Press Association, gave us its award for best design and layout.

EUREKA STREET

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

Volume 2 Number 4
May1992

Naked man dropping from a wall, Peter Paul Rubens, after Raphael. See p38.

Cover photo and photos pp2, 9, 15, 30 by Andrew Stark.
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CONTENTS

EUREKA STREET

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

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MICHAEL KELLY

The way after Wills

MAY IS THE LONGEST MONTH in Canberra. The cold sets in. The autumn parliamentary session does not provide enough of the circus to distract from the abiding issue of bread. It is the month for final horsetrading in constructing the budget. And this year's budget is pivotal for Labor.

The meaning of Phil Cleary's victory in the Wills byelection on April 11 is ambiguous. Paul Keating can console himself in the knowledge that Cleary's win was no victory for the Liberals and, he will argue, a rejection of John Hewson's *Fightback!* plan for the economy, goods and services tax and all. The Prime Minister might even try to say, convincing none but the party faithful, that Cleary's victory has been a 'sort-of' Labor win. Earlier, Immigration Minister Gerry Hand had wanted Phil Cleary to get ALP preselection in Wills but let his preference lapse when a fellow Socialist Left minister, Brian Howe, favoured one of his staff as the Left's candidate.

But the reality Keating can't avoid is the judgment of growing numbers of traditional ALP voters: Labor has lost them. And with the continuing erosion in union membership, Labor, as the political expression of a broadly based social movement is in eclipse. This reality, after all, has been the basis for Keating's tactics since Christmas.

When he assumed the leadership, the prospect was daunting: an economy in severe recession; a divided parliamentary party, an Opposition in full cry after the initial success of its *Fightback!* plan, unemployment higher than at any time since the 1930s. The Labor government, in its fourth term, had lost much of its traditional support and had the stench of death about it.

Wills has brought some relief. The goods and services tax, whatever its economic appeal to some, has become a political liability. The swing against Labor was not a swing to the Liberals, who lost most of their gains from the last general election. But this can provide no consolation to Paul Keating. In an election in which they were asked to make a clear choice, voters in Labor's heartland went elsewhere.

The budget will be the Prime Minister's last chance before the next general election to re-establish Labor on its traditional ground. If he doesn't, there will be more results like Wills, with the victory of populist candidates and the rise of social movements that render Labor irrelevant. The lead-up to the 1992 budget is crunch time. ■

Michael Kelly SJ is publisher of *Eureka Street*.

DOROTHY A. LEE

An image problem

AT HOME I HAVE a Greek Orthodox icon depicting the day of Pentecost. In it the Twelve are seated in two vertical rows opposite each other, and at the top in the centre is the Mother of God. She sits on a throne-like chair, presiding over the whole event, arms extended as though in prayer, her face serene and authoritative. At the bottom, also in the middle, though in a separate compartment, is the Risen Christ. Because this icon hangs in my lounge room just over the fireplace, I often find my eyes turning to it and to the compelling stance of Mary.

In the chapel where I worship, there is a stained-glass window that portrays a beautiful and gracious woman, standing with a young child who reaches up to her. It is not officially a Madonna and Child because the child is too old and besides the window is called 'Humanity.' The chapel is Protestant. But when I look at it I see in her the motherhood of Mary. Of course, she is not only that: she is also the motherhood of the woman in whose honour the window was erected by her daughters. As either or both of these women, however, to me she is a symbol of the motherhood of God; because in her compassion lies an authority and a serenity that are human, yet beyond the structures of the world.

This daily confrontation with the face of Mary insinuates itself into my obstinate Protestant mind. I was brought up in a tradition that kept Mary firmly in her place. I was brought up to believe that Roman Catholics really worshipped Mary and were guilty of idolatry. The briefest acquaintance with real Catholics laid that cherished Protestant prejudice to rest, but I still found myself uneasy with the status given to Mary. As a Protestant and as a woman, I found little to admire in an unpractised sexuality and a painless experience of childbirth, both so alien to my own experience.

Then, in my feminist readings, I discovered that Roman Catholic women had taken the image of Mary and turned it upside down. They had done so with a determination that was not destructive, like some of my Protestant heritage, but which fashioned Mary anew: Mary as strong and assertive, Mary as woman of courage, Mary as sign of hope for the poor, Mary as model of liberation.

All of this made me turn back to the New Testament texts that say so tantalisingly little about Mary—and even that little is contradictory. In Mark's Gospel, Mary, with the rest of Jesus' family, is part of a widening circle of rejection that finally engulfs him. But in Luke's Gospel she is the first Christian, who obeys the divine fiat in a way that is vigorous and costly, and who is present at Pentecost at the founding of the Christian community; Mary is the prophet who prophesies the revolutionary dynamic of God's kingdom, who prophesies under the influence of the Spirit at Pentecost. And in John's Gospel, as the 'mother of Jesus', she encompasses the life and work of her son at either end: at the beginning in Cana, where her faith sets Jesus' ministry in motion, and at the end, where at the foot of the cross she and the beloved disciple are given to each other in love and intimacy. And this, according to John, is the founding of the Christian community.

In this diversity I find the roots of our divisions over the person of Mary. I realise that I have seen her through the eyes of Mark, and in the silence of other parts of the New Testament. But now, under the ecumenical influence of icon and stained glass, I begin to see her in a new way. She comes to me through the perspectives of Luke and John, which I and my androcentric tradition have ignored. Luke and John's Gospels allow more space for the feminine, presenting women as models of discipleship, ministry and community.

Suddenly it seems right and proper that we have named her in some of the ways of the great tradition: God-bearer, symbol of the communion of saints, mother of the church. And some of the new ways are right, too, as women reshape her within the same tradition: Mary as model of faith and courage, as representative of the poor whose trust is only in God, a symbol of hope for women in a patriarchal world.

At the same time, I cannot deny the voice of protest from my own tradition: don't confuse her with holy wisdom, don't give her the place of the Holy Spirit, don't distort her virginity into something that is life-denying. Keep her on the human side. And, as these protests continue in feminist theology, don't exalt her above the other women: Mary Magdalene, witness of the resurrection; Phoebe, deacon of a house church in the red-light district of Corinth; Junia, apostle of renown.

I don't know how to hold together the conflicting traditions about this woman. She does not deserve what one Protestant writer has called the 'deafening silence' of my tradition. Nor does she deserve some of the extravagant Marian language of other traditions. All of us have in some way wronged her. What I do know is that the person of Mary—her faith, her holiness, her humanity—is of great importance for us all, women and men alike, whether we find her in icon, stained glass, or the hearts of the poor. She has a crucial role in our search for God, in our struggle for faith and obedience, in our life in the church; above all, in our understanding of the holy mystery that lies within and beyond our lives. ■

Dorothy A. Lee teaches New Testament at the United Faculty of Theology, Parkville, Victoria.

Lynched, and overlooked

From Brian Buckley

As my kindly grandfather of Tipperary ancestry used to say: enough is enough but too much is plenty.

Val Noone, in his review of my biography of Phillip Lynch (*Eureka Street*, Jan/Feb 1992) says there is 'no mention of his mother'. Lynch's mother is described on pp42-43, and is listed three times in the index. Among other things, the book narrates that she was a Reilly from a Tullamore (yes, 'the Dew') background, whose father was a bookie's clerk married to the daughter of a brewery vet. That combination would interest your publisher, if not your reviewer.

Val Noone says I 'shared Lynch's views'. It is clear from the book that on many occasions I did not. If it is not clear let me state for the record that Lynch and I disagreed on many issues of policy: he called it, with a grin, 'creative tension', among other things.

Val Noone says 'making war in Vietnam was central' to Lynch's early career. This is rubbish.

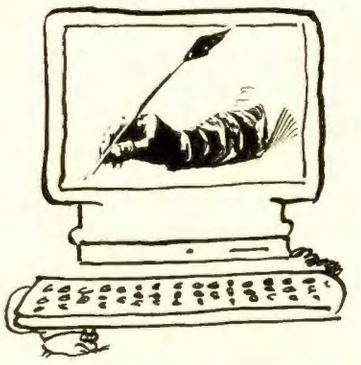
There is no evidence for the allegation in the book, and Lynch was never happy with 'making war in Vietnam'. True, he believed that the war was basically an attack on the South by the North, as is now agreed by almost everyone who can read documents, but he was deeply worried by the way the US political and military commands conducted their part in the war. In any event, the war in fact nearly finished Lynch's career.

Val Noone says Fraser 'dumped Lynch as his deputy ... after allegations that Lynch bought a unit on the Gold Coast with profits from crooked land deals involving the Housing Commission of Victoria.' This series of confusions must be straightened out:

1. Lynch was dumped as Treasurer, not as deputy leader (he retained the latter position because it was controlled by the parliamentary party).

2. The unit on the Gold Coast was bad political (and financial) judgment but was not bought with the proceeds of any Victorian land deals. (Lynch only put a deposit on the unit, in any case.)

Eureka Street welcomes letters from its readers. Short letters are more likely to be published, and all letters may be edited. Letters must be signed, and should include a contact phone number and the writer's name and address.



3. The land Lynch bought in Victoria, known as the Stumpy Gully land near Balnarring, was not Housing Commission land.

There was no allegation that this land involved any crooked deals on Lynch's part.

I could go on, but let me make a more general point. If *Eureka Street* has a fault it might be described as a tendency to moralise: that is, to take one side on an issue on which three or four positions might be fairly and reasonably held, and to pronounce that the *Eureka Street* side of the argument is the moral side.

Before doing this it is not a bad idea to see if your facts and your logic are correct.

Brian Buckley
North Carlton, Vic.

The quest of quests

From John P. Meier, professor of biblical studies, the Catholic University of America

Through the kindness of a friend I have received a copy of Andrew Hamilton's review of my book *A Marginal Jew* (*Eureka Street*, Jan/Feb 1992).

His review is both careful and insightful. I have found that, almost inevitably, reviewers tend to mangle my positions as they summarise them in a review. He has masterfully avoided that pitfall.

Hamilton is quite right about the 'restricted scope' of the book. The restriction was—as he suspects—intentionally chosen. Looking at the projects of Küng and Schillebeeckx, I have grown convinced that, within the context of Roman Catholic theology, the quest for the historical Jesus must be done in two distinct steps.

The first step is the dry and infuriating step I am stuck on: the attempt to use the available sources merely as sources of ancient history, making only those assertions (with endless provisos) that the empirical data will support and that an honest observer of any persuasion could in principle investigate and accept. In my view, only after that first step is finished should the second step be attempted—more properly by a Catholic systematician well versed in Scripture studies than by a Catholic biblicist.

I insist on this two-step approach because I think that the projects of Küng and Schillebeeckx were skewed by their attempts to merge the two steps in one book. The whole question is too complex for that. Perhaps I am showing my Lonerganian roots by calling for 'functional specialisation' in the 'Catholic quest' for the historical Jesus. It does seem to me that the 'Catholic quest' must and should proceed somewhat differently than the Protestant or Jewish versions.

In any event, those are my musings of the moment as I inch through Volume Two (there may be a Volume Three!)

John P. Meier
Washington DC, USA

Beware the slippery slide

From Paul Mees

This lay reader found Frank Moloney's 'Seeking the living among the dead' (*Eureka Street*, April 1992) a little confusing. What did he mean when he said that what happened to the disciples at Easter was more important than what happened to Jesus, and talked of 'the death which is failure'?

A popular 'demythologiser' was the Anglican bishop, John Robinson,

whose *Honest to God* created such a stir in the early 1960s. The way I read him, Robinson wanted to create an ethically based, non-supernatural Christianity. He wrote of 'God' and 'resurrection', but the meanings he gave those words was so different to traditional usage that they became almost redundant.

How 'demythologised' is Frank's Easter? Is he simply making room for people with a range of views? I find the subtleties difficult, but maybe they are part of Frank's concern for a religiosity 'without too many quirks or dogmas', one relevant to the religion that somehow survives in the hearts of unchurched Australians.

If so, I suspect the effort is doomed to failure, like that of Robinson in the 1960s. I didn't notice much evidence of values that could remotely be described as Christ-like in Australian culture in the 1980s. Neither did Manning Clark, who opined: 'We are being told every day in the media that there is no alternative to our present greed and titillation society.'

I don't think a Catholic version of liberal Protestantism will fare any better against this juggernaut. As Tom Wolfe observed as early as 1973, 'it is precisely the most rational, intellectual, secularised, modernised, updated, relevant religions that are finished, gasping, breathing their last. What the Urban Young People want from religion is a little ... Hallelujah!' Anyone seeking an Australian parallel could compare the Uniting Church with pentecostalist groups.

Liberalism seems most popular with people old enough to remember the pre-Vatican II church. It defines itself largely by negating what went before. This is quite ineffectual at attracting, let alone motivating, people of my generation (the under-35s), for whom the 'old' church is ancient history and liberalism is, more often than not, the start of a slippery slide from belief to agnosticism.

The Australian church needs a faith that avoids the Scylla of liberalism while shunning the Charybdis of fundamentalism. That won't be found by dodging hard questions with soft language, or by appealing to the minimal religious beliefs of most Australians.

Paul Mees
Fitzroy, Vic.

A tackle from Notre Dame

From John L. Neill OP, member of the University of Notre Dame Australia board of governors.

Having read the article 'Touchdown Notre Dame' (April 1992), I write to offer the following advice.

1. To understand the *raison d'ètre* for Notre Dame Australia, it is well to begin with the statement of the Congregation for Catholic Education on the Catholic school. Though centered on the school, the statement expounds the distinctive character of Catholic education. It speaks of achieving a double synthesis of culture and faith, and faith and living. This must occur first in the teacher and be reflected in the organisational structure, and be freely internalised by the students. The supreme model in Catholic education is Jesus, the Christ.

2. To appreciate Catholic universities as the highest form of Catholic education, one should also study the apostolic constitution issued by the present Pope in August, 1990. It explains what a Catholic university has in common with all universities, namely, that it is 'an academic community which in a rigorous and critical fashion assists in the protection and advancement of human dignity and of a cultural heritage, through teaching, research and various services ...' (para 12).

The constitution goes on: 'every Catholic university, as Catholic, must have the following essential characteristics:

(a) a Christian inspiration, not only of individuals, but of the university community as such;

(b) a continuing reflection in the light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge, to which it seeks to contribute by its own research;

(c) fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church;

(d) an institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal which gives meaning to life.' (para 13).

Study of the constitution will also provide an answer to the question of academic freedom and theological research and teaching. (cf para 29). Indeed, the place of theology in a Catholic university is substantially different from the place of that discipline in a secular university. In a Catholic university it plays 'an important role in the search for a synthesis of knowledge as well as in the dialogues between faith and reason. It serves all other disciplines in their search for meaning ... ' (para 19).

3. If conditions allow, the diligent enquirer should seek a meeting with the vice-chancellor of Notre Dame Australia, so that he/she can grow in a factual understanding of the quite specific origins, character and current development of this university. He/she could learn how the intermeshing canon and civil law structure safeguards both the university's independence and the teaching authority of the church.

Such a discussion should help him/her to appreciate why the University of Notre Dame (USA) was chosen as the model for the authentically Australian Catholic university now emerging. It should explain Notre Dame Australia's commitment to a liberal educational experience, including the reading of philosophy and theology by all undergraduates. From its model, Notre Dame Australia has taken a commitment to such elements as wholistic [sic] education, unabashed Catholicism, including community worship, social justice outreach and, progressively, residentiality as a means of informal interdisciplinary education and community development. In conversation, he/she could learn also how these ideals are clearly and firmly held, and how the university is striving to be faithful to them in a very difficult financial climate.

I commend to your readers the words of Pope John Paul II in his apostolic constitution: 'I would like to manifest my deep conviction that a Catholic university is without any doubt one of the best instruments the church offers to our age, which is searching for certainty and wisdom.' (para 10). If your readers are willing and able to follow the advice contained herein, they will be considerably better informed about Notre Dame Australia.

John L. Neill OP
East Camberwell, Vic.

MICHAEL KELLY

Fearing for their lives

WHY IS A CAMBODIAN NOT LIKE a Yugoslav, a Sri Lankan or a Chinese? Immigration Minister Gerry Hand thinks he knows, but he can't quite convince anyone else. On 13 April Mr Hand was forced to set aside decisions on 37 of the 340 Cambodian asylum seekers held in detention centres in Sydney and Port Hedland. Their applications to stay in Australia had been rejected by the Australian Refugee Status Review Committee and they were awaiting repatriation. In the committee's view and in the minister's view, Cambodia is returning to normal and people there have no basis for a 'well-founded fear of persecution'—the United Nations' criterion for refugee status—even from the murderous Khmer Rouge.

Mr Hand did not procede with the deportations, however, because of 'administrative bungling' on the part of Immigration Department officers which, he claimed, denied natural justice. It is curious that Mr Hand and his advisers did not discover this blemish in the review process until 12 hours before the department had to respond, in the Federal Court, to an appeal by the Cambodians against the committee's decision.

On 6 April the committee had rejected claims, made on behalf of the Cambodians, that repatriation meant return to a war zone. Legal advocates for the Cambodians argued that the uncertainty and volatility of the Cambodian situation meant their clients were entitled to treatment similar to that which the Immigration Minister was ready to give people from other war-torn nations. The minister has said that he would not forcibly return asylum seekers to war zones such as Yugoslavia or Sri Lanka. The government's decision, after the Tienanmen Square massacre, to grant temporary residents' visas to Chinese students recognised the dangers they would have faced in China.

But for Mr Hand, Cambodia today is different. In 1991 he wrote to supporters of the Cambodian boat people, asking them to abide by the ordinary processes of the review committee, and reminding them that even at the conclusion of this process he, as minister, could still make discretionary decisions on humanitarian grounds. This, Mr Hand claimed, allowed the 'fairest process in the world' to be carried out, while still maintaining a place for compassion in the application of policy. Acquiescence among the Cambodians, their lawyers and agency workers has turned to outrage.

There is a broader policy issue at stake in these decisions. Australia has taken a laudable initiative to resolve a 20-year war in a small and desperately poor country, a war begun in mendacity and maintained by the ruthless self-interest of contending superpowers. A delicate moment in the restoration of peace has arrived, with the start of the relocation or repatriation of more than half a million Cambodians, who for more than a decade have been displaced internally or lodged at the Thai border. As well, the troops of the three guerrilla factions and of the Phnom Penh government are beginning to disarm.

Foreign Affairs officers believe Australia's peace initiative would be compromised if the Australian government allows Cambodians to stay in Australia because their lives would be at risk in Cambodia. There is no such threat, according to the review committee's decision, so comparisons with Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka or China are deemed inappropriate.

There is also the issue that preoccupies the Immigration Department, where the logic runs like this: if we don't repatriate now, and things get worse in Cambodia, we will have not only the Cambodians who are in Australia at present but the prospect of more to come. Repatriation now will send a stern message to intending boat travellers that Australia won't have them. Such a message will cease to have any impact if the fragile peace in Cambodia falls apart in the coming months.

And fall apart it might. With 200,000 combatants to be disarmed—many of them undisciplined, opportunistic and little more than highly armed bandits—peace may be hoped for but is far from guaranteed. As well, the country possesses minimal transport, communications or administrative services, and has to relocate vast numbers of people who now live in poverty in camps along the Thai border.

The Immigration Department's policy is incoherent. The Cambodians' fear of returning is unfounded, the department says. But it is a related fear of things getting worse that provokes the department to act now before more Cambodians, driven by fear of the Khmer Rouge, decide to flee to Australia. In these circumstances the only conclusion possible is that the Cambodians *do* have 'a well-founded fear of persecution'.

The volatile mix in Cambodia has caused the federal opposition to query the safety of Australia's troops in the UN peacekeeping force, and the Prime Minister to concede that they may be withdrawn if their safety is endangered. It has led Hun Sen to reply that if Cambodia were at peace he would not have invited Australia and other countries to send troops, but tourists to observe a colourful changeover.

And it has led Cardinal Clancy, a recent visitor to Cambodia, to say that the lives of the Cambodians in Australia would be in danger if they returned now. ■

Michael Kelly SJ is publisher of *Eureka Street*.

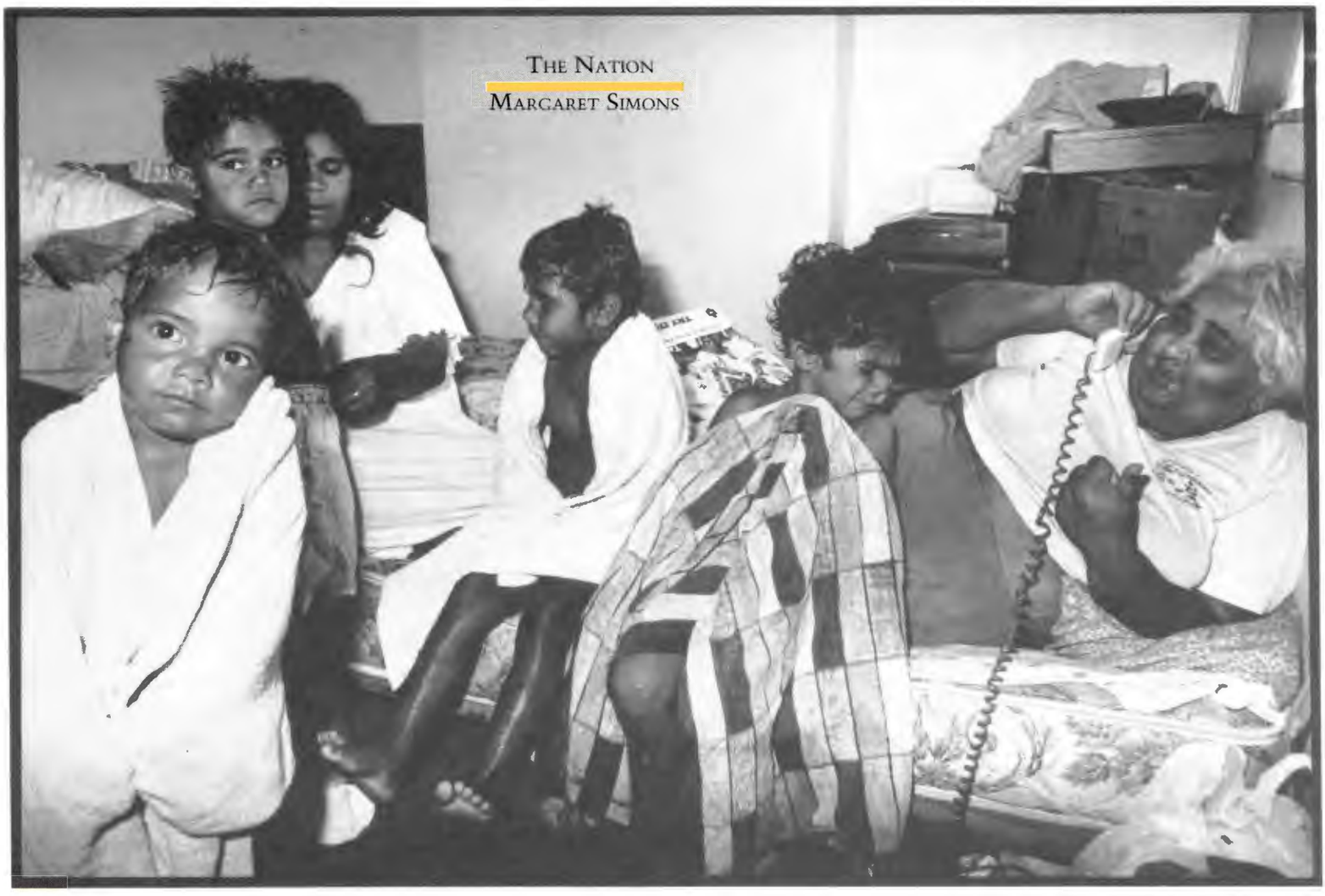


Photo: Andrew Stark

Face to face

WHEN THE LUXURY SHERATON HOTEL opened at Yulara to cater for the tourists visiting Ayers Rock, the walls of the rooms were decorated with Aboriginal dot paintings. The napkins in the restaurant featured a similar Aboriginal motif. One day, I was trying to hitch a lift back to the Sheraton from the rock, and was suffering from hitch-hiker's anger as car after shiny car sped past me. Then a truck pulled up, and the Aboriginal driver invited me to hop in the back. It was loaded down with black men and women. Such was my gratitude for the lift that when the truck belched its way to a halt in front of the doormen at the Sheraton, I invited the families in for a drink. They sat among the prettified motifs of their culture in awful silence, and the chill from the waiters outdid the air conditioning.

When I was at school, we were taught about racism. Anodyne posters were distributed showing happy, well-fed black and white children playing together. The caption announced that we were all the same under the skin. In this country that is patently false, and a dangerous lie. The void that divides white Australians from the Aborigines is wider than just skin color. Tolerating people like you who look different is comparatively easy. It is culture that divides, and recent migrants to Australia—including the Asians now settled in our inner cities—are closer to European Australians than this country's original inhabitants have ever been.

The Prime Minister, Paul Keating, has said it is necessary for whites to come to terms with the Aborigines and to improve their living standards, if we are to develop a proper sense of national identity. Racism is in the news. Some police think it is funny to black themselves up and hang nooses around their necks. Aborigines are jailed for being drunk—while whites get drunk in pubs with impunity. Aborigines die young.

I don't pretend to understand all the problems of black Australia, but I have glimpsed the gulf that divides us. There are certainly no simple solutions, and even stating the problem to the majority of whites, who never speak to Aborigines, let alone see where they live, is difficult.

In the country town I live in, a woman friend of mine recently shamefacedly confessed to me that her sister was married to a black man. Her sister had at first tried to 'keep up standards' but had gradually become 'just like a black woman'.

I wonder if policymakers realise how differently the racism issue is seen in city and country. Urban whites

generally never meet Aborigines, let alone see the awful living conditions most have to put up with. It is easy not to be racist in the city, just as it is easy to believe in freedom of speech when it has never been denied. I don't believe country people are more racist than their city counterparts. They are simply face to face with the gulf, and have no clear way to cross it.

In 1987, I covered the aftermath of race riots in the Queensland border town of Goondiwindi—the centre of a prosperous cotton-growing district. The Aboriginal settlement of Toomelah was across the border in New South Wales.

TOOMELAH WAS TO BECOME a national focus for the problems of Aboriginal fringe settlements. It was to be the settlement that moved the then head of the Human Rights Commission, Mr Justice Marcus Einfeld, to tears. But that was later. When I first visited Toomelah, driving over roads that were little more than interconnected potholes, it was a different story. The houses had broken windows and graffiti all over the walls. The toilets made you retch as you approached. For most of the day, the taps in the houses trickled muddy brown fluid. I approached the people with a smile on my face, notebook hidden, hands in pockets, trying to appear friendly and non-intrusive. They sat on beds and old couches on the verandahs of the houses, and did not meet my eye. Even my manner of speech, which I was keeping determinedly casual, marked me out. I spoke what I later learned was called 'style', the language of the white world—connected, articulate, presumptuous. I got reluctant, uncomfortable answers. There were long silences during which everyone looked at the ground.

A young man came and sat beside me, and said: 'You're scared, aren't you?' I agreed that I was. 'That's right. I've been scared like this in white pubs.'

Driving back to Brisbane, I heard on the radio that the then Leader of the Opposition, John Howard, was opposed to the idea of a treaty with the Aborigines because it would imply that Australia was two separate nations, when in fact we were one. I was so upset that I had to pull over by the side of the road.

A year later, the Human Rights Commission report on Toomelah was released. Now media-wise, the community put on a show for the journalists. Local residents had formed a panel. Each spoke on a particular problem—water, prejudice in the Goondiwindi white schools and so on. They spoke 'style'. The effort to communicate with white Australia had clearly been immense. The strain, the good will, the desperate desire to be understood, showed in the slowly spoken words, the hands wrung together, the practice sessions obviously held beforehand to get it right. None of this, of course, could come across in the 30-second grabs or the tight news stories. To talk about it would have seemed patronising. The true and human nature of the chasm could only be grasped by being there.

After the media conferences, the community served lunch to the journalists and the frisky Mr Justice Einfeld. It was cold chicken and salad. Plates were stacked at one end of a table and we were to help ourselves. The bottoms of the apparently clean plates were filthy, covered in black, sticky goo. We ate sparingly. Mr Justice Einfeld, looming greyly around the room, kept swapping hands, and without interrupting the flow of conversation, surreptitiously wiped his fingers on the walls.

RETURNING TO MY FRIEND with the shameful secret of the Aboriginal brother-in-law: we debated the police who blacked themselves up and hung nooses around their necks. 'I don't agree with what they did,' the woman's husband said, 'but it was a bad-taste party. Think of all the Barlow and Chambers jokes there were at the time. No one made a fuss about that.' These people—intelligent, articulate, by no means rednecks, did not regard themselves as racists. To prove that they were not, they had, like so many rural whites, an ap-

One of the settlements that reduced Justice Einfeld to tears. Photo courtesy of The Age.

proving story to tell of a black family who had lived in town like whites, and had been accepted and well-liked.

'Everyone's the same under the skin' is indeed a dangerous lie. I agree that if you took white and black and treated them the same, you would end up with similar results. But in Australia that has never been done and we are a long way from doing it. Meanwhile, the 'same under the skin' theory gives those white Australians who live near Aborigines no tools with which to tolerate, let alone grapple with, the enormous and shocking differences between the way Aborigines and other Australians live.

By the time Justice Einfeld cried at Toomelah, I was cynical. I knew that there were far worse places. In fact, Toomelah was relatively 'good' from a white perspective. I had been up to Cape York, and visited the settlements of Kowanyama, Edward River and Aurukun, which for much of the year are accessible only by air.

The people there have been deprived of two cultures, their own and that of the invaders. When I met them, the first shock was that these people did not speak my language. Nor did they speak their own traditional language, but a kind of pidgin. Nominally self-governing, they were largely dependent on white advisers and employees, and on the Cape those who work with blacks are not necessarily altruistic. Some were former employees of beer companies and exercised their influence to persuade the communities to vote against banning alcohol. The TAFE college in Aurukun, a depressing, concrete building, once held classes in traditional crafts but had been turned into a beer canteen. In Kowanyama, the beer canteen was palatial: the most impressive building north of Cooktown. I was told that building it had put the community so far in hock that people were virtually obliged to get drunk every night to pay off the debt. There were obviously malnourished children in the streets. The houses were built of corrugated iron. They were covered with graffiti, but strangely not a swear word was to be seen.

Among these people there was no obvious political activism, nor the political awareness that one finds among blacks in the cities. The anger and despair was turned inwards. I ran into a white anthropologist who told me angrily that the place was a zoo—the blacks were fed and given alcohol by the government, and sometimes whites like us came to look at them.

By the time Justice Einfeld cried at Toomelah, I was cynical. I knew that there were far worse places. In fact, Toomelah was relatively 'good' from a white perspective.

ANOTHER SETTLEMENT, Yarrabah, is geographically close to the booming tourist town of Cairns, but on an isthmus cut off by mountain ranges. It was originally chosen by missionaries to protect the blacks from being kidnapped as forced labor. The missionaries divided the sexes and brought the children up in dormitories. Now these people, with no model to turn to, are trying to bring up their own families. From the Yarrabah front beach, you can see the towers of the Hilton Hotel in Cairns. Here at least, there are some employment opportunities, and the people have vestiges of their own languages as well as understandable English. Yarrabah is only half an hour's drive from Cairns, but it might as well be a million miles away. It is in the Third World.

I spent a night in the beer canteen, the only white and one of very few women. I was frightened, and not sure whether smiling or frowning was safer. One man, eyes rolling in his head, grabbed at my breasts. The harassment might have happened in any pub, with any drunk, but here I hardly dared to push him away. Then a young man came and sat beside me, and said: 'You're scared, aren't you?' I agreed that I was. 'That's right. I've been scared like this in white pubs.' The man had been to university. He had come back to Yarrabah because the campus was unbearably lonely. The effort of bridging the cultural divide was too great.

Back in my country town, my friend with the black brother-in-law said: 'I think that they should be offered

a choice. Either live their own way, and not get the dole or anything else, or live in white society like whites, and get all the benefits we get.'

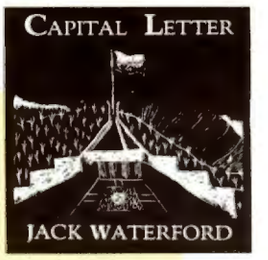
By 'their own way' she meant a 'tribal' way of life. But she was not in favour of granting the blacks the land necessary for this. In any case, in Aurukun and other ghettos the traditional way of life is now almost as remote a possibility as is acceptance by whites. We have wrecked the lot. The culture of these settlements is as much imposed by prejudice and poverty as it is 'traditional'. Yet even in places like Kowanyama there are families who would like to move out of the settlements and on to their own land. There is no great political motive here, merely a desire to escape the destructiveness. This small ray of hope requires land, and there are residents who have summoned the determination to fight the state government on issues like land rights, with some success.

SOME ABORIGINAL ACTIVISTS speak as though black Australians have one set of problems. This is for understandable political reasons, although a moment's thought makes it obvious that the problems of an urban black are very different from those of a black on Cape York, for example, and will require different solutions.

It is seems to me that for good, practical, common sense reasons, land rights and a treaty would be a good start. How can we even begin to spend money wisely and apply our limited goodwill to effect without an acknowledgement of our history, and a real attempt to allow Aborigines self-determination? Because the problem is one of cultures rather than merely skin color, the solutions are complex and progress will be slow. Lots of money has been thrown away, and some goodwill. Not much has improved. I don't know the answers, but what I have seen has shaken me, and made me angry and ashamed. The condition of Aborigines in this country is just cause for self-doubt and self-loathing among other Australians. I am not talking about guilt for what our grandparents did. I am talking about now. ■

• See 'This land is their land', p32.

Margaret Simons writes regularly for *Eureka Street*.



Trouble starts at the top

GOVERNMENT, THE ROYAL COMMISSION into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody declared towards the end of its 1.5 million-word report, should do more to help Aborigines get jobs. Spot on, replied the Commonwealth on p1134 of its own 500,000-word adventure in tedium. Here is what the government will do:

'As part of the reconciliation process, the Commonwealth will seek an ongoing national commitment from governments at all levels to cooperate and coordinate with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission as appropriate to address progressively, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage and aspirations in relation to, among other things, land, education, employment, infrastructure, and economic development ...

'To enhance the implementation process, the Commonwealth proposes to refocus the policy to ensure a greater economic development emphasis and will take steps to ensure that the National Aboriginal Employment Development Policy Task Force becomes more actively involved in achieving progress in the public and the community sector and to build on achievements in the community sector. The task force will be chaired by an ATSIC commissioner and include representation from the private sector as well as the community and public sectors ...'

It is obviously all under control. Just a few more meetings, taskforces, interdepartmental committees, reports, consultations and discussions, a few more finely-honed strategies and reviews, and the job's done.

This sort of sludge deserves close attention, and not just by Sir Ernest Gowers. People who know what they are doing do not feel a need to murder the language, especially when there's an extra $150 million—donated by politicians who also do not have a clue about what to do but who desperately want to be seen to be doing something—waiting to be handed out, and the promise of another $300 million just down the track.

Not that the royal commission's report would have provided any guidance. If one has an idea, or even 339 of them, one doesn't need 15 volumes to flesh it out. The commission expanded from an inquiry into deaths into a study of Aboriginal living conditions but, though it is unremittingly critical of what has happened in the past, the policies it promotes are the policies that have put most of the chains on Aborigines.

There is an obvious role for government in Aboriginal affairs, in marshalling the financial and other resources that are needed to help Aborigines liberate themselves from their desperate disadvantage. It is time, however, to acknowledge that in most other respects the problem *is* government, and that the problem is often greater when government is benevolent in its intentions. This is so whether the face of government is black or white: the ATSICs of the world are just as much a part of the enchaining process as the old white bureaucracies they mimic.

Aborigines are one of the few groups that government programs insist on treating collectively. Take any identifiable Aboriginal group and one will find more petty socialist institutions than one can poke a stick at: a community council, a co-op store, a housing co-op owning the titles of all dwellings, a medical service and maybe a legal service. Virtually all real property is vested in a local lands trust. Any employment-generation schemes, apart from all of the above, must be incorporated. In some areas the community provides other services—transport, child care and sometimes education. And nearly all funding is organised through notionally Aboriginal organisations such as ATSIC.

In theory, these legal entities design services and programs that meet Aboriginal needs. There are elaborate provisions for regular meetings and for ensuring local accountability, and an Aboriginal could spend all of his or her days attending meetings—reviewing the way the garbage is collected, discussing the relevance of an education curriculum; reading the balance sheets of the shop, the health service or the child-care centre; helping to devise strategies for the legal service; or discussing funding for the employment project.

Aborigines are swamped with self-management and forced continually to turn their minds to things that other Australians take for granted. The only time I worry about the garbage is when it is not collected—I do not spend a minute of the day worrying about how it is organised. I live in a society in which most people are well and I only have to worry about remembering the family doctor's telephone number; I do not have to continually worry about organising the health service.

In most Aboriginal communities there is little private enterprise. There are no shops owned by Aboriginal individuals or families. If there is a need for a transport service, the community might get a bus that even a Harvard Business School graduate could not make profitable—but no one will lend an Aboriginal the funds to buy a taxi that might make him or her a living. And one of the problems of run-down housing, apart from funds, is that ownership is not personal. When there is a sense of personal ownership, people treat property better. Is there anything special about Aborigines that creates this problem? Not a bit of it—just look at the common areas of any high-rise.

We should stop treating Aborigines *en masse*, and focus instead on individuals and families. We should sell houses to individuals and wind up many co-operatives, selling their assets to those willing to take chances and giving training and favourable loans where necessary. Aborigines should retain political control of services traditionally provided by government, but there should be a clearer separation of political control and service delivery, and governments ought to be able to insist that these services be run professionally. ■

Jack Waterford is deputy editor of *The Canberra Times*

PAUL D. MCNELIS

Taxing questions

How seriously can we take the goods and services tax?

JOHN HEWSON'S PROPOSAL FOR A GOODS AND SERVICES TAX has brought into sharp focus the benefits and costs of shifting the tax base from income to consumption. Any change in tax policy, especially a change that alters the base and not just the rates of tax, is a profoundly political question because it is about which groups pay more or less for public spending. The question is more than just one of technical analysis: it about how a society allocates the costs that each generation must bear, for the common good and for future generations.

This can be made clearer by trying to imagine a setting in which a change in the tax base makes no difference at all. Suppose that the switch in the tax base from income to spending has no effect on total tax revenue. We are told simply that our income taxes will fall by 10 per cent, but that prices will also rise by 10 per cent because of the introduction of a 10 per cent goods and services tax. None of us should feel richer or poorer, for although we have 10 per cent more income the purchasing power of this income is unchanged. Hence none of us has any reason to alter saving and spending habits.

This neutral effect of changing the tax base, however, holds only under an extreme assumption: that everyone in the population is the same age. For example, if there are two groups of people in the population, the 'young' who work, earn income and save for retirement, and the 'old' who spend their own savings in retirement, then the switch in the tax base has strong distributional effects. If Hewson succeeds in changing the tax base before 1994, then the 'old' of 1994, who paid high income taxes before 1994, will have a bigger tax burden as 'old' in 1994, since they will be spending more of their income than the 'young' in 1994, who will be working and saving, and thus having their tax burden reduced. Of course, in later years the 'young' of 1994 will become 'old', and will then assume a greater tax burden. An inescapable fact of the switch in the tax base from income to consumption is that the 'old' *at the time of introduction* face a double tax burden; in the past as young income earners and in the present as old spenders. Thus, support for the Hewson proposal by older voters would have to stand out as an act of high political altruism.

Of course, taxpayers differ not just in age but also in wealth. Suppose that there are three groups, the 'rich', the middle class and the 'poor'. Here the case for one form of taxation over another is less clear cut. Although one can argue that a progressive income-tax system is more equitable than a consumption tax, since the 'rich' would pay more in this system, the accounting measure of income is only one way to measure the true spending power of the rich. It should be no surprise to Australian taxpayers that various definitions of income introduce different inequities into the tax system—there are strong advantages for the 'rich' to spread out capital gains or bonuses over longer intervals. It is obvious why taxpayer revolts against the progressive tax system have strong support among the middle class, for its members rightly feel that they bear the biggest tax burden. With consumption taxes, longstanding loopholes vanish. Executive perquisites and other forms of 'income in kind' that escape income tax, such as company cars, business luncheons and conferences at vacation resorts, are taxed like any other form of spending. Burdens on 'the poor' from the consumption tax can be eased by exempting items such as basic foodstuffs, primary medical care and basic educational expenses.

FURTHER, THE AVOWED AIM of the switch in the tax base is to promote savings. During the past decade the aggregate household savings rate in Australia fell by more than 30 per cent, from nine per cent of household income to about six per cent. Japan, by comparison, has a savings

rate between 12 and 13 per cent. And, although the growing integration of world financial markets makes more foreign investment possible, the fact remains that there is a high correlation between domestic savings and national investment. Countries that save less have less investment and lower prospects for sustained economic growth. There is no question that Australia, like the United States, will have to reverse this decline in its national savings if economic growth, and thus an enhanced standard of living for future generations, is a priority.

It is hard to say how much of a difference a consumption tax would make, for much depends on the beliefs and practices of a national culture. Are Australians willing to trade off present comforts for the sake of future generations?

Will a consumption tax reverse this decline in the national savings rate? The argument goes that households will have an incentive to work harder and longer, and thus earn more, since income taxes will be reduced, while the new taxes will cause less spending and thus promote greater savings and investment.

But it is hard to say how much of a difference a consumption tax would make, for much depends on the beliefs and practices of a national culture. Do Australians have a low 'social discount' rate—are they willing to trade off present comforts for the sake of future generations? Do people not yet born, not able to vote or save or invest, have a right to a standard of living at least as good, if not significantly better, than people living, working, spending and saving in the present? The Hewson proposal, by itself, cannot make much difference unless that new tax base reflects a consensus for a fundamental change in the social discount rate and renewed respect for the rights of future generations.

IT IS NO SECRET THAT GOVERNMENTS have incentives to manipulate economic policy for short-term electoral gain, with little regard for long-term consequences. Witness the 'muddling through' in the United States, by both the White House and the Congress, as each party tries to blame the other for the continuing deficit. Political leaders, like many householders, have a high social discount rate, since policy planning horizons do not seem to extend further than the next election.

Governments have powerful incentives to renege on prior commitments. For example, a government could announce a low-inflation policy, and thus induce many citizens to hold government bonds in order to finance its spending. Then, after the bonds are bought, the same government can wipe away its debit with a burst of high inflation. This is a remedy that Argentina tried in the late 1970s, with an ensuing loss of credibility and continuing inflation.

In a similar vein, governments have incentives to manipulate income-tax rates for short-term gains. A new government could announce a low income tax, and thus induce its citizens to work more and invest more. Once the work contracts are drawn and the investments are made, the government can raise taxes, gaining more revenue than it would have by announcing the high taxes in the first place.

With a consumption tax in place, it is harder for a government to cheat. If a government announces one set of consumption taxes and then reneges and raises the rates, there is no guarantee that the government will get the additional revenue. People could quickly react by simply spending less. With an income-tax rise, on the other hand, people are locked into past work and investment decisions, so in the short term there is little they can do except pay the higher taxes.

Changing the tax base to spending thus imposes a greater discipline on the government to get its fiscal act together, since there is much lower scope for cheating on past announcements. Honest, credible government behaviour, in which policymakers tell it like it is to the voters and follow through on their commitments, cannot help but improve prospects for greater saving, investment and economic growth.

A change in the tax base should also be considered in an international perspective. Australia is a Pacific-rim country. This year the average growth rates of the newly industrialised countries of Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Thailand will be more than seven per cent, with savings rates at least twice as high as that of Australia.

What is interesting about the Asian success stories is that equality actually helped economic growth. Too often we think of a trade-off between greater equity and higher growth rates. In Asia, greater social equality gave a greater sense of fairness and social cohesion when there were many burdens to share, and later a greater sense of social participation in the success story when there were rewards to distribute. There was much less social conflict and much less distraction from economic challenge than in Latin America, where there is a high degree of inequality in income and wealth distribution.

Support for the Hewson proposal by older voters would have to stand out as an act of high political altruism.

There is also much greater investment in education in Asia. For example, almost a quarter of doctoral

students in electrical or electronic engineering in US universities come from Taiwan, a country with more than 70 universities and 140 technical institutes.

So, is a consumption tax worthwhile for Australia? If it is associated with credible government change, promoting more public as well as private saving, with support based on a sense of fairness in bearing the burdens of the inevitable government cutbacks, but with broad educational opportunities, then such a change could reverse the decline in national saving, ensuring a better future for the coming generations of Australians.

Without a doubt, Australia's transition from a pattern of low savings and low growth to higher savings and growth will not be swift. A tax on spending is no quick fix. Chile and New Zealand are two countries that, like Australia, had long been isolated from international competition in trade and that had relied heavily on agricultural and mineral exports to volatile commodity markets. Both have adopted reforms aimed at greater openness and integration with the world economy. Although price stability came fairly quickly, both countries have experienced painful and protracted recessions. Only Chile is showing signs of sustained growth, but this upturn came more than 10 years after the reform process began.

CATHOLIC BISHOPS AROUND THE WORLD have issued many pronouncements on economic issues. In coming to terms with the problems facing Australia today, the church does not have to go into detailed analysis—it could effectively advocate some old-fashioned virtues. One would be honest talk by politicians. Another would be thrift; too often, advertising pushes people into a spending pattern that is both spiritually crippling and harmful to the common good. Another is a strong appeal for high-quality education, in both church and government schools. Education is something that the church has done well in many countries for many decades, and Catholic education has been a powerful instrument for income redistribution in favour of poorer groups in society. Raising the quality of education has to be a strong force for economic growth.

Honesty, personal thrift, the promotion of education: these are simple, direct messages that the church can get across. And of course, the fact that some messages are simple and direct does not mean that they are unimportant. It is the simple truths that politicians most easily forget or try to avoid. Hewson's tax proposal could be part of this Australian conversion process—*if* a Hewson government practises the same thrift it wants to promote, speaks honestly about economic problems, shares burdens fairly, and gives all Australians a chance to study. ■

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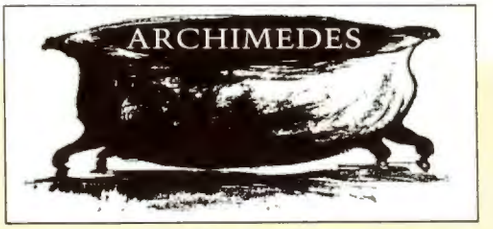


Mind over method

THE HUMANITIES CROWD have always been a problem for science. 'Never any good at maths at school' themselves, they suspect scientists of being not quite human. It is a bit of a worry, when they hold the purse strings.

It could be worse. It *was* worse, when modern science was trying to get off the ground. An expert on Galileo's sources, William Wallace OP, has retrieved a fascinating passage written in the 1590s, which shows the mess that results when you try to do science by the methods of the humanities. The question under discussion is: can there be a change in the heavens?

'The first opinion is that of Philoponus ... since the heavens are a finite body, if they were eternal they would have infinite power ...

The second opinion is that of Aristotle, who was the first, as Averroes notes, to teach in this book that the heavens are ungenerated and therefore incorruptible. ... Finally, the intelligences achieve their perfection in moving the heavens, and so the heavens must be incorruptible ... Second proof: because the heavens were made especially for man; therefore they ought not to be incorruptible, for otherwise they would be more noble than man ...

Why do the heavens not corrupt and undergo change even now? I reply: by the permission of the divine will; since there is no agent powerful enough to corrupt them ... I say, second: it is more probable that the heavens are incorruptible by nature. Proof of this, first: because it is more conformable to natural reason, as is apparent from the arguments of Aristotle ...

A third argument is drawn from the consensus of peoples ... Fourth, from the etymology of the word ... '

We can be absolutely certain that this was exactly the bog from which modern science had to extricate itself because the author of this rubbish was the young Galileo himself. Galileo later wrote, after he had discovered how science is really done:

'If what we are discussing were a point of law or the humanities, in which neither true nor false exists, one might trust in the subtlety of mind and the readiness of tongue and in the greater experience of the writers, and expect him who excelled in those things to make his reasoning more plausible, and one might judge it to be the best. But in natural sciences whose conclusions are true and necessary and have nothing to do with human will, one must take care not to place oneself in the defence of error; for here a thousand Demosthenes and a thousand Aristotles would be left in the lurch by every mediocre wit who happened to hit upon the truth for himself.' ■

Our guest Archimedes columnist, **James Franklin**, is lecturer in mathematics at the University of NSW.

WILLIAM DANIEL

Life, death and choice

SUICIDE SHOULD NOT BE countenanced by the law, because it is a negation of the basic values on which our society and culture rest. It is the most direct repudiation of the value of life, and of human community. It says to the rest of the world, 'I mean nothing to you and you mean nothing to me.' It is the supreme gesture of despair. Voluntary euthanasia is assisted suicide.

Professor Peter Singer and Dr Helga Kuhse of Monash University's Centre for Bioethics are again in the news with the results of a survey of nurses. Of the 1942 surveyed, replies were received from 943 (49 per cent). Three-quarters of these respondents said that it would be 'a good thing' if the same situation prevailed in Australia as in the Netherlands, where the courts have laid down conditions under which doctors who practise active euthanasia will not be prosecuted.

Two points might be made about this piece of news. First, while it is not possible to know exactly the opinion of the 51 per cent who did not reply to the questionnaire, it is not rash to presume that people who want a change in the present state of affairs are more likely to participate in such a survey than those who are more content with the *status quo*. And so a headline like 'Euthanasia: 75 per cent support among nurses' strays beyond the evidence.

Secondly, the fact that one is a nurse does not by itself guarantee that one knows a lot about palliative care. As a group from the Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute, Melbourne, wrote to *The Age*, 'We suggest that a survey of palliative-care nurses, i.e. those who are trained to relieve the suffering of the dying, would give a very different result from that given in Dr Kuhse and Professor Singer's survey.'

The driving force of the euthanasia movement is the argument that the ban on euthanasia is an unwarranted restriction on personal liberty, and one that is based on religious grounds. To quote Peter Singer: 'It is strange that societies like ours, which value freedom and generally do not force people to live in conformity with religious doctrines, have been slow to repeal laws restricting our freedom in the way we end our lives.'

The libertarian argument in favour of euthanasia treats the decision to commit suicide as though it were simply one of life's many choices. It is, however, a unique choice, the significance of which does not depend exclusively on religious grounds.

Kant argues, for example, that a right to suicide would mean that one has title to withdraw from all obligations: 'That man should have moral freedom to withdraw from all obligation, i.e. freely to act as if he needed no moral title for his action, is a contradiction.' In his view, therefore, moral autonomy is exercised within a framework of duty, of morality. Suicide represents a breaking out from this framework in such a way that the moral autonomy ceases to be moral. Such a choice is unique, shared by no other moral choice in our life history of moral choices.

The appeal to self-determination or autonomy is an empty one, both morally and socially. Morally it proves nothing about the right that is claimed; socially it leaves untouched the whole question whether the law should allow the liberty that is claimed, for there are many liberties that we have to surrender in the interests of the common good.

To institutionalise euthanasia would be to enshrine suicide and a new form of killing in the heart of our culture. We have very painfully got rid of the judicial killing of criminals. We are asked now to adopt the killing of the sick and aged and depressed. The institution of euthanasia would be one more blow to the sense of trustfulness upon which our relationships are based from childhood. In particular it would change our relationship of trust towards the health care professions. It would subtly put pressure on the very ones whom it is supposed to benefit, the sick and the aged.

Euthanasia would, of course, be voluntary. But when it became established, it would be no time before it would become the expected thing for the sick and the old to have the consideration to get themselves off the scene in decent time. What this would do to our relationships of compassion and trust beggars the imagination.

Proponents of euthanasia often have difficulty in distinguishing active killing from the reasonable abandonment of life-prolonging treatments.

In the Christian tradition, life is regarded as a precious value, but not one that is to be preserved at all costs. There is a reasonable limit to what we are obliged to undergo in the way of burdensome treatment for the saving of life and health. There is a limit to the sacrifices we should demand of others.

The person who decides that he or she has done enough in the struggle for life, and that the time has come to abandon active treatment and simply be cared for through the process of dying, is not rejecting life. This decision simply acknowledges that there are more important things in life than just living, and that it is possible to make an idol of sheer physical survival.

The strongest argument for euthanasia is the appeal it makes to compassion. We are told that this is the only deliverance for those suffering from terminal pain or extreme disability.

There is an answer to the sufferings of such people, and the best answer to the demand for euthanasia is to let people see this answer in action. Modern palliative care brings to the terminally ill (especially those in the last stages of cancer) a wonderful skill in pain control, and in enabling the sick to lead as normal a life as is possible in the circumstances of their sickness.

We need a kind of Neighbourhood Watch, on the lookout not for burglars but for the sick and lonely, who need help but may not be aware of the helps available in the community. An interdenominational parish care group could be a better argument against euthanasia, in the minds of ordinary people, than a tome of philosophical argument. ■

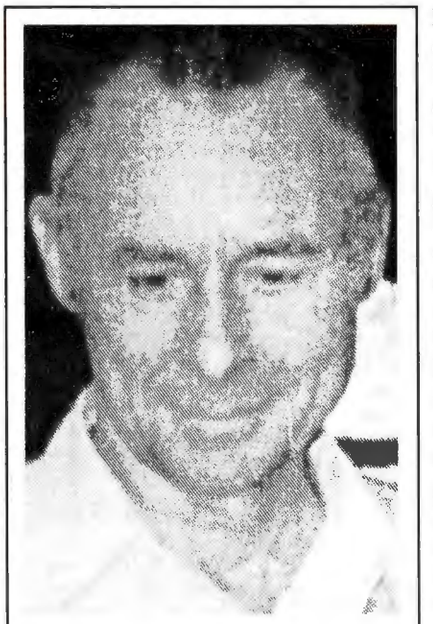
William Daniel SJ lectures in moral theology at the United Faculty of Theology, Parkville, Victoria.

WHOEVER HANDS OUT those unfashionable martyrs' crowns these days might spare a coronet, or at least a laurel, for Jim Franks SVD. After 30 years as a missionary in Papua New Guinea, he died on 30 March 1992, because rudimentary postoperative care—for minor surgery in this case—was not available in Port Moresby. In a country where the departure of expatriates is not frequently lamented, Prime Minister Namaliu was undoubtedly sincere when he said his country could ill afford to lose Fr Franks because, he implied, of his contributions to the media, democracy, and ecumenism.

Originally from Pittsburgh, USA, Jim Franks was less than 30 when he arrived in Madang. His athleticism and spartan habits, his alternately brusque and shy manner recommended him for service in the bush. Twelve years there made him a master of Tok Pisin (Pidgin, or neo-Melanesian to some). In 1977 he was lured to a temporary editorship of *Wantok* (loosely, 'compatriot'), heroically launched by Frank Mihailic SVD, to standardise Tok Pisin as well as to bring news to the common man and woman. *Wantok*, and later the English language *Times of Papua New Guinea*, both weeklies today, became the flagships of Word Publishing, which the major denominations, particularly the Catholic Church, underwrote. In between times Jim helped to set up the communications studies department, again with Mihailic, at the Divine Word Institute in Madang, where some of Papua New Guinea's best journalists were trained.

From 1986 Jim was general manager and the dominant influence at Word, but it was as a contributor to the *Times*, the best news-breaking paper in the South Pacific, that I knew him. His hard-working staff was almost entirely indigenous and his approach to localisation inspiring. He was neither patronising nor sentimental. So called 'Melanesian time' (like the Spanish *mañana*) had no place in the exacting trade of journalism. On production nights the staff was there until the paper came out. Jim loathed cant and humbug, and his straight talking did not please everyone. But the proof of it lay in the standards of a paper old colonials had hoped could never be written by Papua New Guineans.

In Papua New Guinea women are not generally socialised to speak their minds, but Jim was particularly successful in nurturing female journalists such as Anna Solomon, the publisher at Word, and Konio Seneka. Konio tells of being summoned before the formidable Deputy Prime Minister and former commanding officer of the Defence Force, Brigadier-General Ted Diro, for an accurate report she had written on the St Valentine's Day massacre on Bougainville. Who told her that a pastor and five of his congregation had been slaughtered, Diro demanded. What was the name of the sole survivor? Konio must tell him so that he could bring the culprits to justice! Before she met Diro, Jim Franks told her—this is her report—'Well Konio, this is a trying time for you. You either give in and reveal your sources, or be a professional and stand your ground.' Jim was himself threatened by Diro: he was a foreigner and his continued presence in the country depended on the stories in the two newspapers, which other defensive politicians have claimed are not owned by nationals but by the Vatican. Konio says that the incident determined that she 'would continue in investigative journalism without fear or favour.' Her tribute to Jim in the *Times* (2 April 1992) is heartfelt.



Jim Franks SVD 1933-1992

JIM HAD A ROBUST SENSE OF HUMOUR and there was nothing prissy about him. The *Times* reports colloquial speech as required and does not baulk at unpleasant issues. It runs thoughtful articles by clerics, but no propaganda or threat expertly masked by 'Christian concern'. To a bishop who wanted prayers and piety Jim said, 'I'm running a newspaper, bishop'. And he did finally get the *Times* to break even financially.

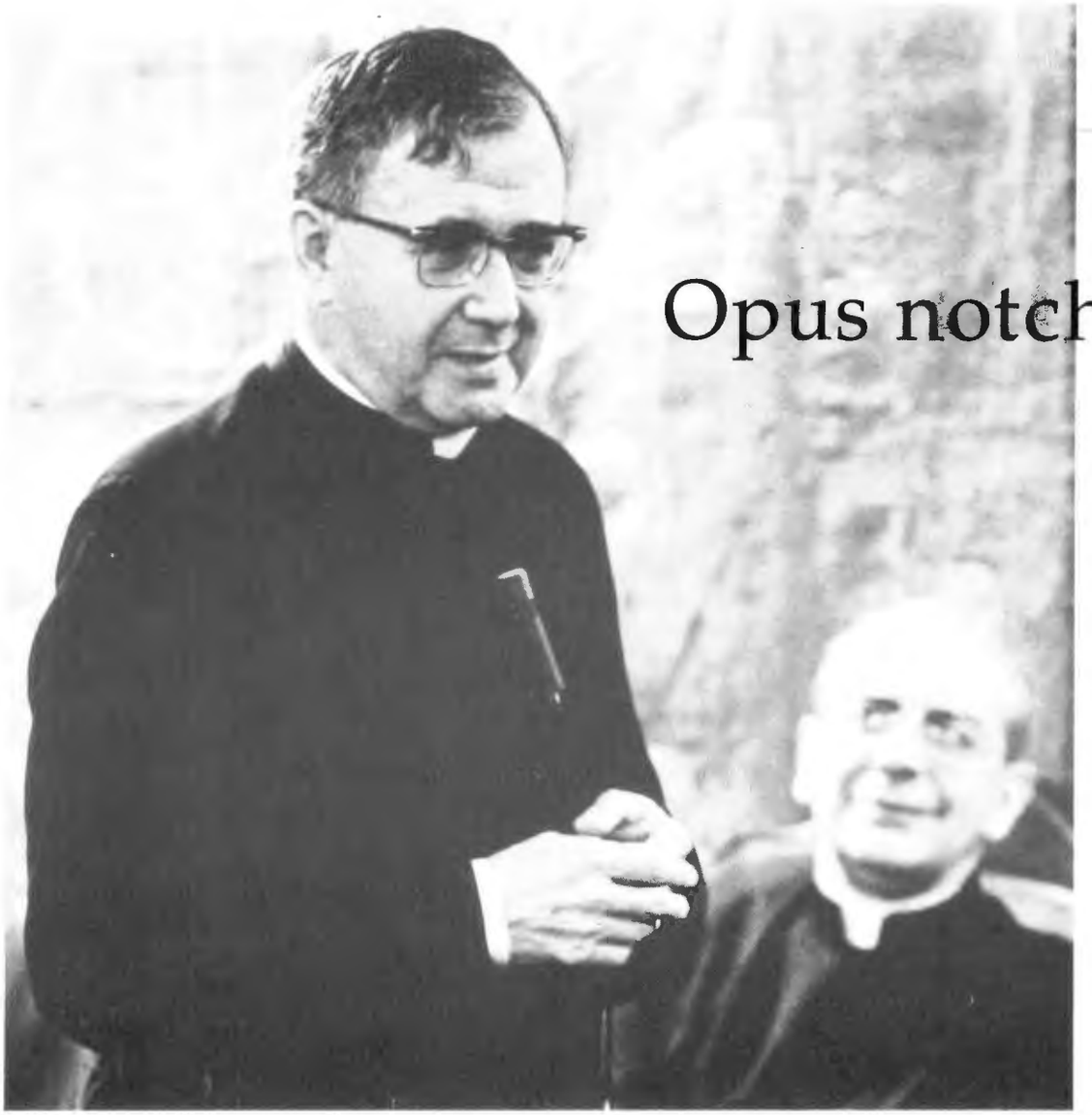
I once saw Jim say Mass in Port Moresby cathedral. Even his crew cut was somewhat transformed by the vestments. Elsewhere he was rarely seen in anything other than shorts and short-sleeved shirt and thongs. There was no brusqueness in his manner here, no sense of a routine, no demonstrative prelacy. He was fastidious, reverent, devoid of unction. The sermon in Tok Pisin was eloquent, practical. I realised that newspapers were far from the most important things in Jim's life.

I am told that in his panegyric Fr Mihailic said he had made an inventory of Jim's worldly goods: there were only five pairs of shorts and 10 short-sleeved shirts. Minimalist in the tropics, that—one pair of trousers for every working day and a change of shirt in the evening. Apparently Jim left his thongs at the hospital.

—**James Griffin**, emeritus professor of history, University of Papua New Guinea.

DAMIEN SIMONIS

Opus notches one up



The founder of Opus Dei, Josemaría Escrivá (left), is expected to be beatified this month. But critics of Opus, including some of the institute's former members, say the move is ill-judged.

FR VLADIMIR FELZMANN joined Opus Dei ('The Work of God') at the age of 20 because he 'had fallen in love with God'. Twenty-two years later, in 1982, he decided after much agonising to leave what some have come to know as the 'cloak-and-crucifix' religious institute. Its founder, the Spaniard Monsignor Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, is due to be beatified—one step short of canonisation—on May 17, and Felzmann feels compelled to make public the reasons he believes beatification should not take place.

For him the storm broke with an article by *Newsweek's* religion writer, Kenneth Woodward, in January. In it, he was quoted as saying, among other things, that he had heard Escrivá claim the Nazis could not have exterminated as many as six million Jews. Ten years after leaving Opus Dei, he still believes that much in it is positive, but that Escrivá's beatification would discredit the process of canonisation. Opus has poured scorn over its former colleague, saying his personal acquaintance with 'the father' was slight. Felzmann's reply? 'Look, when I was in Rome it was a well-known joke that I was "the father's favourite". Now, I never said that he was anti-semitic, but pro-Hitler.' It is almost understandable that Escrivá, like many Spanish Catholics of his generation, could have held such a view. For them, Hitler and his Condor Legion, together with Mussolini and Franco, were their saviours in the 1936-39 civil war.

Escrivá founded Opus Dei in Spain in 1928 as a mainly lay organisation. Its 'theology of the laity' aimed at encouraging people to achieve 'holiness' in work and was, according to Opus spokesmen, a revolutionary development. Escrivá's detractors say that he took the idea from St Thomas Aquinas' theology of the 'mixed' (i.e. both active and contemplative) life, hence it is anything but original. Of the 76,000 members Opus now claims to have around the world, only about 1000 are clerics. The rest, according to the institute's British spokesman, Ives Mascarenhas, are 'just ordinary people'.

THE MOVEMENT HAS UNDERGONE several transformations, the latest when it became a 'personal prelature' in November 1982, effectively making it responsible directly to the Pope. Mascarenhas denies claims that in this way Opus groups had escaped diocesan control—

the assumption being that bishops not well disposed to Opus might have been able to curb its activities. 'Members of Opus, like any other Catholics, are responsible to the diocesan bishop,' he says, 'but for internal matters of Opus they are responsible to Opus.'

Mascarenhas, a structural engineer, was born in Nairobi in 1946 and has been a member of Opus since he was 17. He dismisses critiques of the movement, such as Michael Walsh's *The Secret World of Opus Dei*, published in 1989, as 'rubbish'. Opus has tried to counter negative publicity with copious documentary evidence of its wide support, including a 236-page volume called *Testimonies of the Catholic Hierarchy in the International Press 1975-1990*, which contains press clippings in six languages.

Opus is the only religious institute to have become a personal prelature, and it has attracted criticism for its alleged secrecy, wealth and influence-peddling. More sinister testimony about its activities has come from former members like Felzmann. The Czech-born Felzmann, 52, now works with youth in London. To understand Opus, he says, one must see that 'for them, the world is a warfare. They say that when I was in Opus I used to say wonderful things about Escrivá—of course I did, I was trying to be a good member ... [But] I sensed the destructiveness Opus Dei was ultimately causing. You can be a boy scout and live a fantasy when you're young. But if you're still a boy scout when you're 35 or 40 there's something wrong.'

Self-flagellation with a 'discipline' (a small whip, similar to a cat-o'-nine-tails), and wearing a 'cilice' (a spiked belt, often strapped round the thigh) are part of Opus Dei's medicine for the soul. Felzmann admits to indulging in such practices with zeal, but now believes that they were psychologically damaging. 'The idea was that you could sublimate your sexuality, but it doesn't bloody work.'

Escrivá's best-known work is a collection of 999 aphorisms called *El Camino* (The Way), in which he underlines the necessity for obedience to one's director. Felzmann, at the age of 22, was a director for 24 'numeraries' (a high rank) at Opus Dei's Netherhall House student residence in London. He said that Opus members gradually felt obliged to confess all their thoughts to their directors and to seek guidance on everything. At 22, and not yet even a priest, Felzmann was arguably too young for the job; but the idea, he said, was that he was a vehicle for God's 'advice' and therefore could not get it wrong.

In his book Michael Walsh cites the case of Maria del Carmen Tapia, another ex-member of Opus who, Felzmann says, was once virtually imprisoned in Rome, her passport withdrawn and all contact with outsiders cut off. This largely because she wanted out. By the time of her 'release', her hair had turned white.

Mascarenhas denies the claims. 'How on earth can you just hold someone like that?' Felzmann maintains that a desire to leave was equated with a loss of faith and that great pressure was exerted on members to stay—'you are a traitor, deserting the front'—something Mascarenhas also rejects. 'I can walk out now—I have a career, I am in no way bound to stay here.'

Opus' string of properties, like those set up in Britain as student residences, are often cited as evidence of its wealth. Not a bit of it, says Mascarenhas—the properties are not owned by Opus but by charitable trusts with Opus members on the board. They are financed by donations from Opus members and go to the Charities Commission if they run into financial difficulties. Such disclaimers do not impress those who, like Michael Walsh, suspect that Opus is a source of funds for papal projects and has been tied up with dubious banking operations.

Opus says, and Felzmann agrees, that in the arch-conservative Spain of the 1920s and '30s Escrivá's assertion that lay people could attain the highest sanctity in many ways pre-empted Vatican II. But *El Camino* seems to qualify this: 'When a layman sets himself up as an expert on morals he often goes astray: laymen can only be disciples.' (aphorism 61.) Mascarenhas, single and a numerary, is at pains to point out that many Opus members are married. But here is Escrivá: 'Marriage is for the soldiers and not the general staff in Christ's army... (*El Camino*, aphorism 28)'

Felzmann says that, far from being pleased that at Vatican II the church had caught up with his own 'enlightened' thought, Escrivá in fact hurried off to Greece to look into joining the Orthodox. Opus has long refuted this, and Mascarenhas clarifies Escrivá's attitude to Vatican II in this way: 'The teachings of the council are beautiful, there is no question. What Mgr Escrivá was concerned with was abuses of those teachings.'

It has been claimed that other religious orders, jealous of Opus Dei's special status, are stirring the pot—and that Opus, in turn, wants to hasten the beatification to fend off the attacks. In Britain, two outspoken critics of Opus—Michael Walsh, and Peter Hebblethwaite, who writes for the US *National Catholic Reporter*, are former Jesuits; and the Jesuits were certainly hostile to Opus in pre-civil war Spain. Mascarenhas does not explicitly accuse other orders of malice, but hints that one should ask just what line anti-Opus writers are pushing. Felzmann, however, rubbishes any 'conspiracy' claim: 'I more or less got this rolling, and I have nothing to do with the Jesuits.' In fact, Felzmann says, Opus now 'is similar to the pre-Vatican II Jesuits—conservative, wheeler-

'I sensed the destructiveness Opus Dei was ultimately causing. You can be a boy scout and live a fantasy when you're young. But if you're still a boy scout when you're 35 or 40 there's something wrong.'

—Vladimir Felzmann

dealing, appealing to the aristocracy and an intellectual elite.'

Felzmann regards the problem with the beatification of Escrivá as mainly one of timing. Escrivá's conservatism, his ideas on 'feminine psychology' (Felzmann said women numeraries had to sleep on boards to mortify their sexuality, and could not cuddle babies, lest this awaken any maternal instincts), and sympathy for Hitler ('In 1941, still not knowing about the concentration camps, Opus Dei members volunteered to fight on the Eastern Front') makes beatification now 'imprudent'. Let the question wait a few generations, Felzmann says, when the spiritual side of Escrivá's life can be held up as an example.

Self-flagellation with a 'discipline' is part of Opus Dei's medicine for the soul. Felzmann admits to indulging in the practice with zeal, but now believes it was psychologically damaging. 'The idea was that you could sublimate your sexuality, but it doesn't bloody work.'

It seems unlikely, however, that the beatification can be delayed, for argument over Escrivá's suitability is now probably juridically irrelevant. Under new rules for the canonisation process, laid down by the Pope in February 1983, the procedure has been considerably decentralised and it is possible for someone to be canonised only 10 years after his or her death.

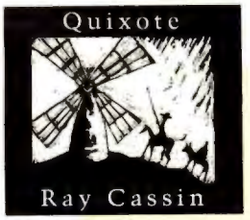
The bishop of the relevant diocese considers each proposal for canonisation and, if he is satisfied that there is a case, presents the evidence to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome. The order or group sponsoring the proposal is then asked to appoint a postulator, whose task is to develop the cause according to the congregation's rules. The written evidence—there were 6000 pages of it for Escrivá—must be condensed into a *positio* and submitted for scrutiny by 'historians and theological consultors'. When they are satisfied, it is presented to the cardinals and bishops of the congregation. Fr Gregory Winterton, a Birmingham priest on the secretariat of the postulator for the cause of Cardinal Newman, says that the congregation usually accepts the judgment of the historians and consultors, and decrees the subject to be of 'heroic virtue'. Escrivá's 'heroic virtue' was declared on 9 April, 1990, at which point the question of his suitability as a role model in the church was presumably resolved.

Beatification, the next stage, requires a miracle that can be attributed to the subject's intercession, and formal canonisation, the last stage, requires another miracle. Refusing to buy into the debate about Escrivá, Winterton says: 'Opus Dei have a miracle in the bag (it was recognised last July), so they're home.'

ASKED IF THE NEW RULES make for unseemly haste in the process of making saints, Winterton notes that 'one of the questions the congregation has to put to itself in any cause was: "Is the moment judicious?" We know what Opus Dei's detractors would say but, again, the congregation answered this question in April 1990.' In general, Winterton approves of the accelerated procedure: 'It was so tedious before. In England, for instance, you had to draw up the case and do all the work, which was then scrapped and done all over again in Rome—in Latin.'

There is no set time between the phases on the road to canonisation. Cardinal Newman's 'heroic virtue' was declared in January last year and there is no date in sight for his beatification. According to Hebblethwaite, it has been held up because the congregation insists on reviewing his writings again, just in case there is any 'error'. Says Winterton: 'We are just waiting for a miracle.' ■

Damien Simonis is *Eureka Street's* European correspondent.



The long goodbye

'If we are to give credit to the history of Don Quixote which has lately been given to the world,' said the Duchess, 'we gather from it that your worship never saw the lady Dulcinea, and that this same lady does not exist on earth but is a fantastic mistress, whom your worship engendered and bore in your mind.' 'There is much to say on that score,' replied Don Quixote.'God knows whether Dulcinea exists on earth or no, or whether she is fantastic or not fantastic. These are not matters whose verification can be carried out to the full. I neither engendered nor bore my lady, though I contemplate her in ideal form ...'

—**The Adventures of Don Quixote**, by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra.

BRIGHT NEW DAY. Day of trepidation. I am to have lunch with Dulcinea. To renew the acquaintance, that is. Dulcinea and I have already met, indeed we have known each other for some time. But our last meeting was not a pleasant one and we have allowed considerable time to pass before speaking to each other again. In fact, if Dulcinea had not greeted me when I passed her in the street recently we would probably not be meeting today, or ever again. Like my distinguished ancestor, I am at my most quixotically foolish in my devotion to Dulcinea. And, like the great Don, my pride is the greater part of this foolishness.

Foolishly, I am resolved not to let this foolishness show, and thereby am bound to show it. I decide to arrive at the restaurant late enough to indicate that, so far as I am concerned, not a great deal hangs on the fate of this meeting. A paltry stratagem and of course it fails. Dulcinea arrives a fraction of a second later and it is a case of the biter bit. Trying to regain an air of feigned indifference, I wait a whole two minutes before remarking on the fact that since last we met Dulcinea has become a blonde. She explains that it is the result of an essay she has written about a popular blonde American singer. I consider asking why the techniques of method acting should apply to the writing of essays, but remain silent lest flippancy be taken for hostility.

We leave the restaurant. All the tables were taken, and since feigned indifference is the order of the day neither of us has bothered to make a booking. Dulcinea suggests that we adjourn to a nearby hostelry and drink instead of eat. Relieved, I agree. Dulcinea is a vegetarian and I am a carnivore, and eating together has usually seemed to dramatise all our other disagreements. Besides, the strain of feigning indifference has killed my appetite anyway.

So we drink. This is a qualified success, since we both do it rather well. The success is qualified because the landlord embarrasses the hell out of me by insisting that all the drinks are on the house. He is a friend of mine and perhaps thinks I want to impress this beautiful woman. Well of course I do, but I doubt whether being deferred to like a B-movie *mafioso* will create the right impression. Dulcinea and I exchange questions of the 'So what have you been doing lately?' variety. We ask after each other's families, and about each other's writing. We make lame jokes about what we have not been writing. Now feigning indifference like a professional, I refrain from asking about Dulcinea's present paramour. She also tactfully skirts round the subject, but at one point is compelled to mention him as an anecdotal detail. Then it is quickly on to another anecdote. A good recovery on Dulcinea's part, and I keep on feigning.

We manage to survive the encounter without reviving the scarifying arguments of old. When we part there is mutual unstated agreement that the cold war is over, although *rapprochement* is another question. I find a coffee shop and munch my way through a carnivore's sandwich; my appetite has returned now that I no longer have to feign indifference. I try to tell myself that despite earlier trepidation I have coped rather well, and that I am accepting what cannot be changed in a civilised and reasonable manner. I conclude that I never find myself persuasive on the subject of Dulcinea.

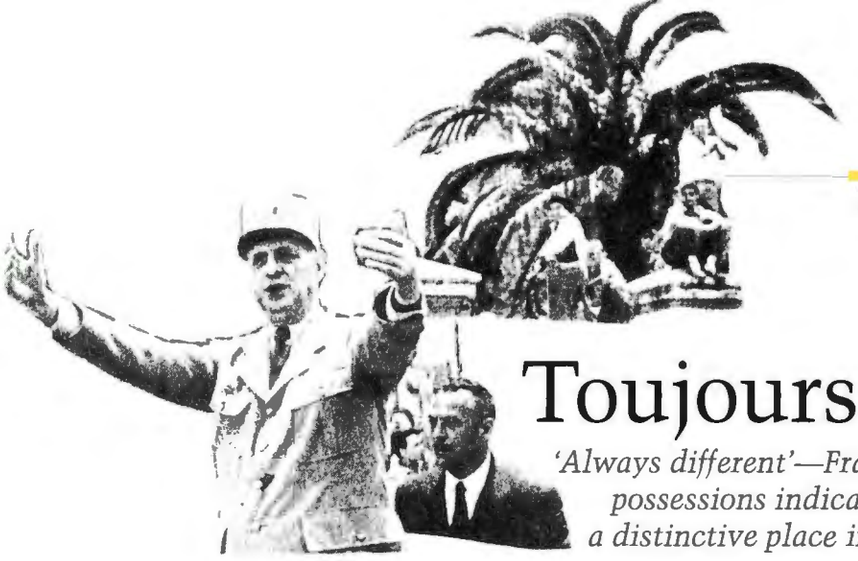
The rest of the day's events collapse into one another, and are viewed through the distorting lens of my relationship with Dulcinea. I mumble my way through meetings, gleefully consign unread documents to wastepaper bins, and am more truculent than usual while rehearsing truculent songs with the Trades Hall Council Choir. The things I have joked about not writing remain unwritten. This personal turmoil has a deep cosmic resonance, and while I am walking home the heavens open up. I arrive soaked to the skin, grateful that in Melbourne one really can count on the weather to provide a perfect ending to one's day.

Wrong again. Not about the appropriateness of the weather to my mood, it's just that this is not the end of my day. When I try to open my front door, the key will not turn in the lock. A pile of wood shavings in front of the door explains the difficulty. The maintenance man has called during the day and has snibbed the deadlock on leaving—the deadlock to which neither I nor my landlord have ever owned a key.

Quixote barred from his own castle. Sympathetically, the heavens continue their deluge. To finish the day dry, and with a modicum of dignity, there is only one course. Selecting a loose rock from the garden, I pitch it through a window. The whole block is suddenly illuminated as the neighbours are woken by the noise, and a score of Neighbourhood Watchers are mystified by the sight of a man breaking into his own flat.

In the morning I awake and survey the shattered glass. Bright new day. ■

Ray Cassin is production editor of *Eureka Street*.



BRETT EVANS

Toujours la différence

'Always different'—France's resolve to keep its overseas possessions indicates that the French desire for a distinctive place in the world has not weakened.

IT IS OFTEN POINTED out that France's overseas territories and departments are an anachronism in a postcolonial world. In fact, the globe is littered with the detritus of the colonial era, with some forty dependent territories still constitutionally linked to advanced industrial nations. France, it should be remembered, is not alone in maintaining its 'confetti of empire'—Britain, Spain, Holland, Portugal, Denmark, the United States, New Zealand and Australia each possess territories that fall under this description.

The main difference between France and the world's other latter-day colonialists, however, is in the way the French regard their 'colonies', colloquially known as the DOM-TOMs. For the French, they are as much a part of France as Paris is. The *départements d'outre-mer* (DOMs)—Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane and Réunion—have the same political and legal status as metropolitan *départements*, and are located in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean. The *territoires d'outre-mer* (TOMs), on the other hand, have greater autonomy and are all in the Pacific: French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, and New Caledonia.

The DOM-TOMs are the subject of two new books, Aldrich and Connell's *France's Overseas Frontier* and Henningham's *France in the South Pacific*. Read together they give a thorough, learned and ultimately pessimistic analysis of France's overseas territories, and, by extension, its place in the Pacific. France is here to stay, no matter what happens in Europe or in the region.

The French acquired their colonies in the traditional manner: with superior firepower. And just as traditionally, they were eventually asked to leave, most bloodily in Algeria and Indochina. France's last act of decolonisation came in 1980, when it grudgingly allowed independence to the New Hebrides, now Vanuatu, after attempting to foster a seccessionist movement on the island of Espiritu Santo.

France has remained tied to its remaining DOM-TOMs by creating shallowly based economies that would fail without metropolitan support, compliant elites who enjoy their flights to Paris to sit in the National Assembly, policies of cultural assimilation, and settler programs.

France's Overseas Frontier: Départments et Territoires d'outre-mer, Robert Aldrich and John Connell, CU P, 1992. ISBN 0 521 39061 3 RRP $49.95

France and the South Pacific: a contemporary history, Stephen Henningham, Allen and Unwin, 1992. ISBN 0 04 442327 6 RRP $29.95

Most importantly France has fashioned unique administrative and constitutional arrangements that give the populations of these small nations rights and privileges that amount to metropolitan citizenship. The indigenous peoples of the DOM-TOMs have been forced to give up an independent democratic regime for an imposed democratic regime.

Even in New Caledonia, where violence once threatened to engulf the nation, a rough compromise still manages to hold the peace. It is not a fair exchange, but even the most ardent *indépendantiste* must acknowledge that it is getting harder every year to break free of *la Hexagone*. The French themselves sometimes fail to understand exactly what they have created. When De Gaulle first visited Martinique in 1964, he exclaimed in surprise: *'Mon Dieu, comme vous êtes francais'* ('My God, how French you are!').

To many Australian observers, France's commitment to its overseas territories and nuclear forces would seem to be thoroughly irrational. Why hang on to 'colonies' that act as a net drain on government finances, or to a nuclear-missile force in the post-Cold War era? But since when has nationalism been rational?

MODERN FRENCH NATIONALISM grew out of World War II. Comparatively few French were ever members of *la Résistance*; many more collaborated, either openly or in collusive silence, with the Nazis. Couple such humiliations with a declining overseas empire and you have two vital ingredients necessary to concoct a national mythology of *la grande France*. In foreign policy, France draws on this sense of national mission to construct its own version of 'manifest destiny'; it formed the *raison d'être* for its commitment to an independent nuclear force and to its overseas territories.

Until recently, all French political parties were unambiguously Gaullist on foreign policy. Even the French Communist Party accepted the need for an independent nuclear force. Indeed, the sinking of the Rainbow-Warrior was greeted in France by a united front. France was right to protect its national interests by whatever means it deemed necessary.

As it enters the 1990s, however,

there is a vital question confronting the Fifth Republic: how can France maintain its unique status as the international system's only *puissance mondiale moyenne,* or middle-sized world power? The integration of Europe, the Mitterand Government's unpopularity, the rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front, and the growth in popularity of the French green movement have combined to place enormous pressures on France's unique consensus on foreign policy.

France seems to be going through a period of uncharacteristic soul-searching about its place in the world. As *Time* magazine has argued: 'The French fear that the country is failing to find a new role in the post-Cold War world and is being overshadowed within Europe by the rise of a unified and vibrant Germany. Should they assert themselves vigorously and strive to lead the new Europe, or retreat into a kind of Gallic stockade and preoccupy themselves with domestic concerns?'

At present, a confusing array of clues regarding such questions have been thrown up by both French culture and politics. For example, Marguerite Duras' novel *L'Amant,* a love story set in colonial Vietnam and winner of the 1984 Prix Goncourt, has recently been brought to the screen by a French director, but using foreign actors who perform in English. Yet the film's producers have not been guillotined for this flagrant insult to French pride by either the press or the mob. It seems there are more pressing issues occupying French minds than the protection of French literature from the imperatives of international cinema marketing.

Indeed, the construction of 'Euro Disney' in France has barely raised a ripple of dissent in a culture with a haughty contempt for things American. In fact, many French see the locating of this amusement park on the outskirts of Paris as a symbol of Gallic leadership in Europe. Legitimacy from cartoon characters? *American* cartoon characters? *Mon Dieu,* not only are the barbarians inside the gate, they are up the boulevard as well. De Gaulle must be spinning in his crypt.

Do these examples from French culture presage a new, less nationalistic France or a less confident France? This confusion over national aims and France's place in the world is also reflected in the results of the regional elections held in March, which painted a picture of deeply felt voter disillusionment with mainstream politics. There were many issues: unemployment, African immigration, political scandal, and the unpopularity of the Prime Minister, Edith Cresson, who was subsequently sacked by President Mitterand.

All of France's political parties became minority parties in this electoral contest: the Communists were completely marginalised; the ruling *Parti Socialiste* received only 18 per cent of the vote, its lowest in two decades; the moderate right, represented by the *Union pour la Democratie Française,* dropped four percentage points to 33 per cent; two new 'green' parties, *Les Verts* and the *Génération Ecologie,* scraped together 14 per cent of the vote between them; and the dreaded *Front Nationale* also received 14 per cent, actually beating the Socialists into second place in some electorates. And all this with a respectable voter turnout of 68 per cent.

Such ferment in France should be of interest to Australians concerned about the stability of the Pacific region. How will President Mitterand respond to these political results and cultural undercurrents as he approaches next year's elections for the National Assembly, particularly with regard to New Caledonia, French Polynesia, and Wallis and Futuna? Probably with the guile we would expect from Europe's most senior statesman.

In April, Pierre Beregevoy, Cresson's replacement as Prime Minister, announced that France would halt its nuclear-weapon testing program in the Pacific for one year. It was a breathtaking policy switch for a nation that only a month before had arrested the crew of the Rainbow Warrior II for trespassing in French territorial waters while protesting against nuclear testing on Mururoa.

It was a move clearly designed by Mitterand to court the green vote. Only by forging a coalition with these parties will he have any chance of avoiding a repeat of the 'cohabitation' of the 1980s, when he was forced to preside over the conservative government of Jacques Chirac.

At the same time, of course, Mitterand wants France to play a central role in Europe. Beregevoy's statement reiterated France's commitment to the *force de frappe* as 'the keystone of our defence policy'. In January 1992 Mitterand proposed that France's nuclear forces be put at the disposal of the European Community's defence. Moreover, French politicians have been tireless in selling the benefits of the DOM-TOMs to their fellow Europeans.

The space centre in French Guiana, for example, offers a future united Europe an ideal launching site for both crewed space flights and satellites. Besides being officially affiliated with the European Community, the DOM-TOMs also offer Europe global reach and influence, a vast maritime territory, and possibilities for scientific and cultural co-operation. In the opinion of Bernard Pons, one-time Minister for the DOM-TOMs, they could represent *Europe tropicale.*

Mitterand is obviously having five francs each way in the run-up to next year's elections. So as always with things French: *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.* ■

Brett Evans is a Sydney writer and a research officer for the Evatt Foundation.

ANDREW BULLEN

I find it curious and not a little amusing that, having been urged for many years to put aside my foreignness, I am now sometimes censured for having neglected my 'ethnicity'.

—ANDREW RIEMER

Two-way visions

Jewels and Ashes, Arnold Zable, Scribe, Newham 1991.
ISBN 0 908011 20 2 RRP $17.95
Inside Outside: Life Between Two Worlds, Andrew Riemer, Collins Angus & Robertson, Pymble 1992.
ISBN 0 207 17398 2 RRP $14.95

FOR MANY AUSTRALIANS, to go to Europe is still to go back, even to go home.

Although Arnold Zable had not been to Poland before, the journey recounted in *Jewels and Ashes* is a homecoming. His parents left Bialystok, in eastern Poland, for refuge in Australia in the 1930s, and the Holocaust annihilated most of his people and their places of living and worship. But Zable seeks out whatever traces he can find: a few survivors, a restored synagogue, the dreadful forest clearings. From these scraps, and the family reminiscences that he gleaned from his parents, he raises up in this wonderful book the vibrant prewar Jewish culture and people who still occupy his imaginative heartland.

Riemer's father in 1942, 'defending the country that, as it turned out, did not want to defend him'.

For Andrew Reimer, on the other hand, the journey back to his childhood home in Budapest made him realise that Hungary is certainly not his home. As he tells us in *Inside Outside*, his focus is on Australia and on himself as an Australian, and this journey was important to him because it 'helped to clarify the puzzles of personal and national identity that had governed and shaped much of my thinking about Australian culture, literature and society during the previous 20 years.' (p x).

Riemer's observations about Australian culture and society are nerved by an autobiographical charge. Sardonically, he lets us know that his parents prepared for their migration to Australia by taking him to see *The Wizard of Oz*. As they sailed past Watsons Bay, 'What we found at the end of the rainbow was the most commonplace of images. Australia will always be represented for me by that first glimpse—a row of streetlights strung along a low hill, seen in the early dawn of a February morning. This image has haunted my imagination for almost half a century. It has become for me the essence of Australia.' (p18).

The Australia his parents dreamt would be like a Hollywood South Sea island turned out to be like postwar Epping—narrow, ignorant, indifferent or clumsily hostile. Riemer tells how his own growing up in this Australia in the late 40s and 50s was a growing away from the stultifying Hungarian subculture that survived the migration to Australia and at times was successful enough to flourish bizarrely in the espresso bars of Sydney's eastern suburbs, or on the southern ski slopes. As a welcome alternative to this ersatz society, the policy of assimilation offered him a society to grow into.

HE WAS LUCKY, too, because his talent opened Sydney's academic life to him and later brought him to the place 'true' Australians and British subjects like himself used to regard as 'home'—London. But there he also discovered 'a tentative and provision-

al Australianness within myself' (p190), thanks in part to Patrick White's *Riders in the Chariot*, with 'its bleak vision of the awfulness of Australian suburbia' (p 188). If he became a scholarly ex-pat, he would have had to undergo a second bout of assimilation, so in 1962 he returned to Australia on the *Canberra*, which happened to catch fire en route.

This book is hilarious as well as heartfelt. Often ironic—is this Australian, Hungarian, or both?—sardonic, acerbic, outraged, spellbound, Riemer's volatile feelings quickly generate questions about national and personal identity that elude easy, or any, answers. He signals early in the book that 'you cannot change the intimate, deeply-ingrained, essentially mysterious core of the personality which seems implanted very early in life' (pp4,5). It appears that the choices and chances of being a migrant, especially a child's dependence on his parents' choices and chances, have made Riemer's lifelong search to find a settled home for that mysterious core all the more poignant and hilarious than it is for settled folk.

His personal history has made him wary of the assimilated and multicultural definitions of Australian identity. This was because his own experiment with assimilation failed to quieten the memories of difference or to dissolve his inherited patterns of feeling; besides, he was too intelligent and too morally engaged to ignore his own complex responses to Australian society. He is rueful about the new Australian shibboleth: 'The days of assimilation, at least as far as official policy is concerned, are long gone. Multiculturalism is the doctrine of the time. I find it curious and not a little amusing that, having been urged for many years to put aside my foreignness, I am now sometimes censured for having neglected my "ethnicity".' (p13). The false and shallow dream of a uniform Australia has given way to a rhetoric and policy that may be more subtle and sensitive, but that may also presume, in Riemer's case if he fell for it, the myth of a golden-age Hungary.

The reality of Budapest is starker. The pivotal passage in this book, to my mind, is Riemer's complex recounting of his return to the block of flats that was his home in the mid '40s: 'I knew the name of the street but had forgotten or was confused about the number. As I walked down that drab thoroughfare lined by blackened, crumbling buildings on each side, stucco peeling from their pompous neo-baroque facades to reveal layers of crudely made bricks, nothing spoke to me of familiarity, nothing gave me the sense that I had been there before, or that this was somehow part of my life. I could have been strolling through a giant postmodernist stage set. Gradually and disturbingly, though, I became aware of a trickle of recognition. The past was returning' (p61).

Riemer's mother 'as the grande dame, c.1940. When the Russians looted the flat in 1945, they put pins through the eyes in the photograph.'

BUT THE HOPED-FOR 'moment of recovery and recognition ... was destroyed as I began to look at the building itself', because his memory of a 'shipshape construction smelling of newly laid cement' was confronted by the 'mean, decaying pile' it had now become. Fascinatingly, 'the sense of disappointment and anticlimax this encounter had produced' was 'a feeling not unlike the flatness that overcame my parents and me, all those years before, when the *Marine Phoenix* sailed past the row of streetlights near South Head' (p62).

Many of the effects and much of the structure of this book are poetic, but any lyricism is counterpointed by tough-minded, even tart, observation and argument: 'Perhaps this world, the memory of which had been preserved for me by a lovingly nurtured mythology, had always been as grimy, decrepit, ill-organised and foul-smelling as that building, that street, indeed as all of Budapest'. He is left questioning a dream that at best only took part of the reality and then gilded it: 'Had those of us who had retained a glowing memory of this world been perpetuating a lie for so many years? I could not find then, as I cannot find now, an answer to these riddles. Perhaps no one can' (p63).

Riemer's honest bewilderment does not lessen the implication that multiculturalism fosters a falsely selective dream of a culture and society. Nor does it lessen his repugnance at the moral ugliness the dream can hide or even foster: 'Magyar nationalism was visible everywhere, mixed with a totally incompatible and entirely irrelevant nostalgia for a Habsburg past. Antisemitic slogans, in a world where, surely, there were few Jews left, were daubed on walls and embankments' (pp 213, 214). By the end of his book Riemer is glad to be back in Sydney: 'This was home; this was where I belonged' (p 215). Unassimilated, ex-Hungarian, he is happy to be an Australian.

If Riemer's book uncovers uncomfortable ironies about national identity and intriguing ironies about its relationship with personal identity, then Zable's makes for compulsive reading another way. The difference between the two can be seen in Riemer's discussion of how the immediate postwar migrants could welcome assimilation precisely because it offered 'oblivion, the annihilation of the personality' (p15). Disturbing as this observation may be, and worthy of the reader's most careful consideration, the word 'annihilation' reaches its fullest horror in Zable's re-enactment

Identity depends on what story you are compelled to tell, and the voice with which you are compelled to tell it.

of how the Nazis wreaked the Holocaust upon the vibrant Jewish communities of eastern Poland.

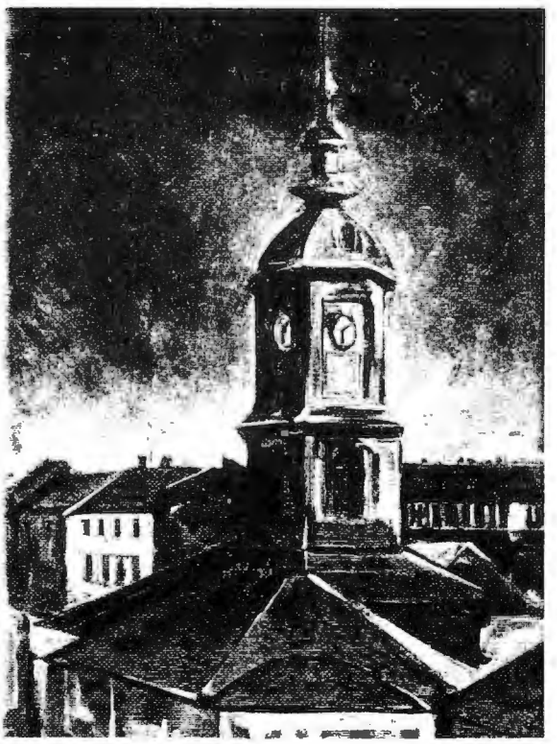
ZABLE'S SUCCESS in resurrecting a culture by telling the story of its annihilation maybe an ironic achievement, but his tone throughout is lyrical, plangent, haunted. In a way very different from Riemer's, this is a sophisticated, cultured book. Zable measures out the horror of his story through an account of his own journey back to Bialystok in 1986. The narrative works in tandem with his account of the Jewish culture of the past and its eventual destruction. There is no confusion and the emotional demands on the reader, however considerable, are orchestrated through the short episodes in which he tells now one strand, now the other.

Both strands join in the figures of his parents. Although they have lived in Melbourne since the mid '30s, their every move and dream has been of the Jewish world they left: 'Mother and father fight to keep their ghosts at bay in radically different ways. They are opposites, and have been for as long as I can remember.

'For mother, especially in the years of her aging, it is the silence that predominates, broken occasionally by a quiet humming, a snatch of ancient melody which evaporates back into silence. At times it resonates with defiance; at others it suggests an irredeemable loss. Sometimes it is softer, a surrender, a letting-go' (p164). His father's strategy of daily survival depends on busyness and verbal refrains, and Zable uses the most frequent of these: 'Do not dwell upon the past' (pp158-159) to stress the enormous emotional risk he takes by undertaking the opposite.

THIS BOOK RECOUNTS a deliberate effort to seek out the past, to find the sites of ancient homes, streets and synagogues, to meet whoever is left and prise from them their memories. Here is one such episode that says it all: 'Father remembers Prager's garden as a vacant block, with gnarled fruit trees, weeds and ivies—formerly the walled grounds of a wealthy merchant. Nearby stood the Neivelt house of prayer. Father had attended cheder with the son of the cantor, and they often played together in the neighbourhood.

'Soon after the ghetto was erected, Prager's garden became the site of a market. Residents gathered to barter: an overcoat for bread, a bar of soap for butter. Children would steal over the ghetto fences to smuggle in whatever they could to augment their parents' meagre stocks. When the Nazis happened to be in the area the dealers would scatter, leaving behind their paltry goods, their sole means of survival.



Bialystok *Dora Zable*

'At two in the afternoon of February 5, more than 100 hostages were herded from the courtyard at Kupietzka 29, marched to Prager's garden, lined up against the wall of the Neivelt prayer-house and shot ... Among those murdered in Prager's garden were my grandparents Bishke and Sheine.' (p146)

As far as the ambit of this book is concerned, Australia is little more than the place where some survivors have maintained their Jewish identity; it could just as well have been Buenos Aires or Toronto. In contrast to Riemer's experience of the Hungarian expatriate community, the warmth of Jewish family tradition was enlivening for Zable, and so his book is an act of devotion to its origins. The great age of his parents and their silences compel him to record before it is too late.

RIEMER, TOO, is partly compelled to speak because the death of his parents imperils the memories of family stories and the vanished world of prewar Hungary with total loss. Their attempts to enter Australian society overwhelmed them and even pushed their relationship to breakdown. Riemer himself, however, was able to make the complex transactions with Australian society that his book recounts, and I suggest that most migrants who have survived their own entry have stories that will be illuminated by reading his.

His subtitle is 'Life between Two Worlds', and 'between' is where many new chums, like myself, are, and quite happily too. Riemer's book forces such Australians to consider the terms of their content—and discontent. Many of us know what he means when he concludes: 'Sydney, with its sprawling suburbs, its harsh, all-revealing light, seemed a blessed place.' (p 214).

If the issue of identity remains unsettled after a reading of these richly detailed, compelling books, and if many readers are spared the impress of the history of *Mitteleuropa* on our lives, nevertheless these two Australian writers show that, at the very least, identity depends on what story you are compelled to tell, and the voice with which you are compelled to tell it.

Andrew Bullen SJ, born in Wales, is a poet and teacher. He now works in administration.

PETER PIERCE

An institution of dreams

Sir John Monash said it should be 'a Mecca for all Australians'. Historian Michael McKernan sees Australia's War Memorial differently.

TOWARDS THE END OF *Here is Their Spirit*, a book about a building and the men who dreamed of it, designed it and became its administrators, Michael McKernan concludes that 'the Memorial had been unlucky'. Not many adult Australians would be uncertain of which memorial he means, however familiar they are with the cenotaphs, arboreal avenues of honour and school honour boards listing the 'fallen' of two world wars in their towns and cities.

No longer the prime tourist attraction of the national capital—that position is occupied by the new Parliament House, which stares at it across an artificial lake—the Australian War Memorial is still the most readily recognised and, in private, best-loved place in Canberra. In what respects, then, has it been unlucky?

In his welcome and comprehensive history of the memorial, McKernan summarises the kinds of ill-fortune to befall it, whether this was 'an architectural design contest that went sadly astray, or poor timing that gave approval for building just as the Great Depression began, or a monument to the first world war that had opened when the nation was again at war, or the failure of the Board and management to understand the imperatives that would keep a great museum vital, or the introduction of renewal by those who did not fully understand or sympathise with what was being attempted ... ' This is the depressing facade of the historical traverse that McKernan attempts. 'Neglect', 'Crisis', 'Conflict' are indicative chapter headings, and the reader is often inclined to feel that the building is lucky to be there at all.

Here is Their Spirit. A History of the Australian War Memorial 1917-1990. Michael McKernan, University of Queensland Press in association with the Australian War Memorial. ISBN 0 7022 2413 8 RRP $39.95 (cased and jacketed)

MCKERNAN, WHO IS the memorial's deputy director, was commissioned to write its history from May 1917, when the Australian War Records Section was established on the lines of a similar Canadian body. Its head was Lieutenant John Treloar. McKernan argues that 'In some respects the creation of this unit marks the beginnings of the Australian War Memorial'. Treloar would eventually become its director, but the immediate consequence of his appointment to War Records was 'the great AIF scavenger hunt'. Delighted amateur collectors would—while the war continued, and often at personal risk—begin the assembling of the many tonnes of material that became the foundation of the memorial's exhibits. Treloar also made systematic the collection of war diaries.

The dream of a war memorial was initially Charles Bean's. Even as he laboured for more than two decades after the armistice to complete the history of Australia in the Great War, Bean was devoted to ensuring the completion and proper use of a national war memorial. Although an agnostic, he insisted that military waste and memorabilia should be described as 'relics', and by such a name sanctified. McKernan suggests that Bean was influenced by his theosophist brother to accept an obligation to the dead. Cer-

Anzac Day in Martin Place, Sydney, 1989
Photo: Andrew Stark.

tainly Bean's sense of how national character had found its truest expression in war was also compelling. The 'real Australia' which he'd discovered a decade earlier in north-western New South Wales had entered history and its feats warranted remembrance.

Waterloo played its part in Bean's commitment to the memorial. During the 1890s he and his brother had stayed with their family at a hotel near the battlefield. One of its rooms was filled with souvenirs, or 'relics' of Wellington's victory. That childhood memory would inspire Bean's vision of the grander tableaux of Australia at war that the memorial might house. Meanwhile the war had another year to run. The opening of the memorial in Canberra would wait until Armistice Day, 1941.

HALF OF MCKERNAN'S BOOK is concerned with explaining this delay. As usual, chapters have tell-tale headings: 'Waiting', 'Marking Time'. An able historian of what is misleadingly called the 'homefront', McKernan analyses how newspaper hostility directed at the memorial from some quarters—*The Age* complained of 'collection mania'—abetted the conventional ambivalence of those who did not serve towards those who had come back from war. Economic constraints meant that no acceptable design for the building was costed below the ceiling figure of £250,000. Then the Depression brought all work to a halt. When Lord Gowrie at last declared the building open, it was 'an institution of the dreams of old men, not the hopes of young'.

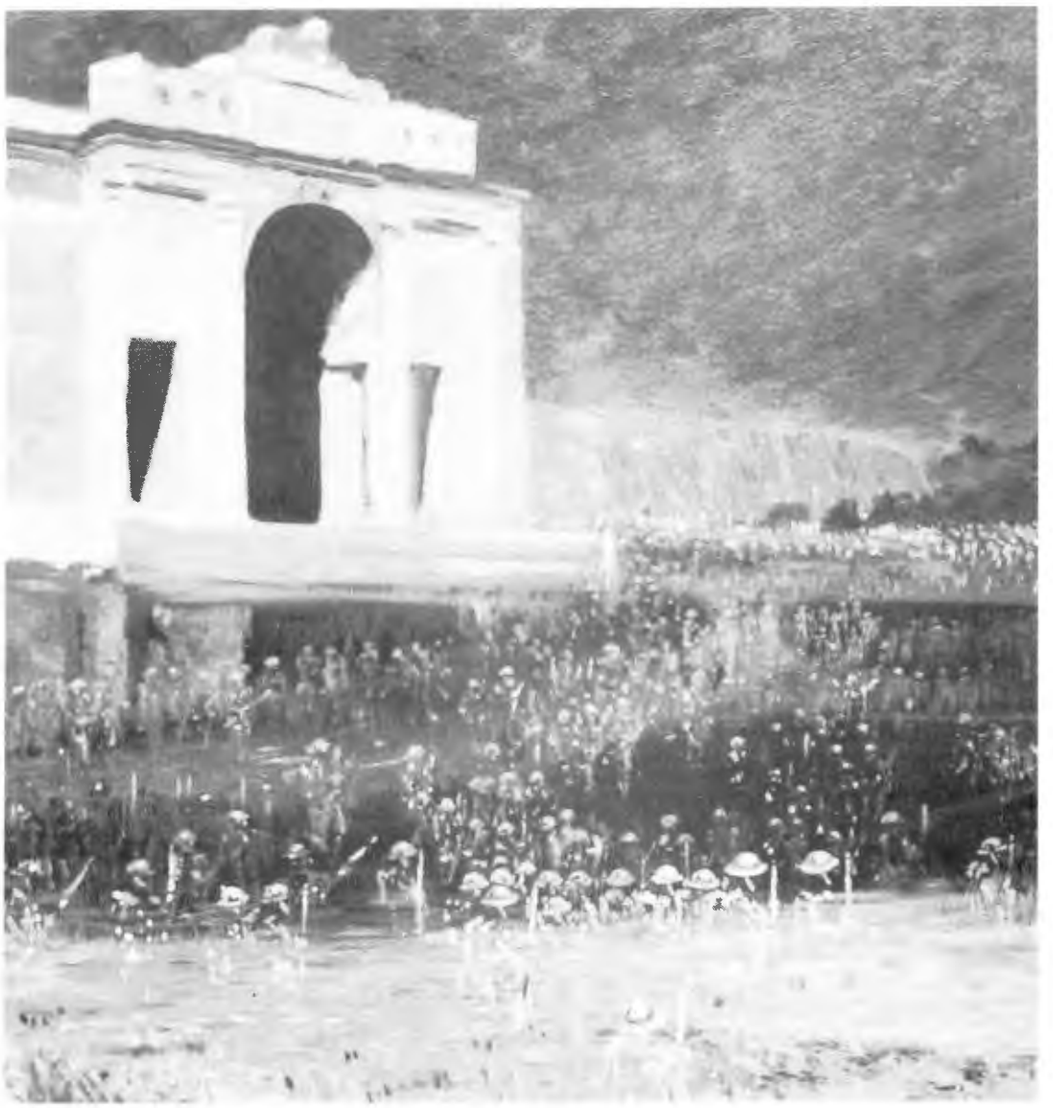
Before the memorial found a permanent, multipurpose home in Canberra—as shrine, museum, tourist resort, and latterly a centre for research into the history of war—its Great War booty was stored in temporary quarters in Melbourne and Sydney. In 1921 the first memorial show opened at the Melbourne Aquarium. The admission charge entitled visitors to free viewing of the seals and fish. Subsequently the memorial moved to the Exhibition Buildings, then from April 1925 to Sydney. While it was still lodged in his home town, General Sir John Monash opined that the memorial 'should form a Mecca for Australians'. The comparison had been used some years before, by Rudyard Kipling of Flemington racecourse, where the Melbourne Cup is run.

Nearly three million people paid to visit the memorial's holdings in Sydney and Melbourne. Entrepreneurship by Treloar and Bean also swelled its funds. Thousands of public servants agreed to have their pay garnisheed to buy copies of the *Official History*. The AIF tin hat was sold in large numbers—not as a military souvenir, but as an item practically convertible into pot stands and coal buckets. The best earner of all was the reproduction of Will Longstaff's painting *Menin Gate at Midnight*, another piece of homage to the quasi-spirituality that the believers in the war memorial readily enlisted in their cause.

OF THE 60,000 Australians who died in the Great War, only General Bridges, the commander killed at Anzac, was brought home for burial. Relatives of the rest, says McKernan, 'were consoled by few of the rituals surrounding death'. The memorial would solemnly commemorate them. In this facet of the enterprise Australians were fortunate 'to know the name of everyone of those who had died on its fields of battle'. A list of those names was a principal but long delayed object of the memorial.

McKernan carefully traces the difficulties associated with effecting this intention of Bean's: what of merchant seamen? what of the three men hanged after the war whose crimes the experience of battle might have induced? He also deals capably with the poor material conditions of workers and exhibits at the Memorial, and with a problem that loyalty to the institution perversely engendered: 'Memorial staff turned resolutely inward, establishing a work culture which esteemed a practical, down-to-earth approach'.

Seconded from the University of New South Wales in 1981, McKernan was out of kilter with the old 'work culture' of the memorial. In the final parts of *Here is Their Spirit*—which those acquainted with the bitter administrative controversy of the mid-1980s are likely to have turned to first—he deals with the implementation of changes at the memorial, in particular those designed to secure its



'The best earner of all': Menin Gate at midnight *Will Longstaff, 1927.*

authority as an intellectual as well as a commemorative place. After the retirement of Noel Flanagan, McKernan applied for the director's position, but the job went to Air Vice Marshal Jim Flemming. In January 1987, Flemming became 'the first Commonwealth statutory office-holder to be dismissed'. McKernan justly argues that although Flemming had the mandate and the desire to continue Flanagan's reforms, he allowed himself—once inquiries into his administration had begun—to be portrayed as 'a war hero determined to preserve the past', confronted by 'radicals intent on change'.

THESE EVENTS SOURED the recent history of the memorial, notwithstanding that McKernan insists on the happy future in store. At times it seems as if he were a reluctantly commissioned historian. That he has partly informed his narrative with hopes and disappointments of his own might account in some part for the book's distempered tone. Serviceably written, although not without cliché, *Here is Their Spirit* is virtually free of humour. Its funny stories, such as the theft of the *Emden* bell in the 1920s, of rare medals in the 1970s, have decidedly unpleasant endings. Having to work in such an imperfect building has not given McKernan much tangible affection for it. Some of the most telling of the many illustrations in the book are of abandoned designs for the memorial. A building's story, *Here is Their Spirit* is also a boys' story. Its principal characters are the reticent Bean and Treloar, whose legal wives remained discreetly offstage while these two husbands consummated their unions with the legend of Anzac and organised the savings to build a home in which to guard it. ■

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BOOKS

MARGARET SIMONS

ON THE THIRD OF APRIL 1991, only months after gaining power, Queensland Premier Wayne Goss and some of his senior ministers toured the remote Aboriginal settlement of Aurukun on Cape York. Marcia Langton, then a senior Aboriginal bureaucrat advising the government, was later to write of her disgust at their behaviour. 'Most of the government delegation behaved like rich American Peace Corps kids on their first stint in the Third World. They flinched and grinned, discomforted by culture and the shock of how the other half lives, and, like the Americans in Vietnam, did not understand what they were looking at ... the gulf of understanding between us and the Premier was too wide.'

Langton's thoughts are quoted in *Land Rights Queensland Style* by Frank Brennan, a lawyer and Jesuit priest. Any unacclimatised Australian of European descent who has visited an Aboriginal settlement will cringe at her words, recognising themselves in the crassness of Goss and his ministers.

Brennan's account of the battle for land rights is in many ways depressing, but the enduring message is of courage and hope. From the poorest, most culturally deprived settlements in the country have come activists and politicians who took on the Bjelke Petersen government, and often won.

Sir Joh Bjelke Petersen was vehemently anti-land rights. He broadcast bizarre conspiracy theories that the movement was an attempt to set up a separate nation that would cooperate with Australia's enemies. Yet by the time his government was voted out, it had all but granted Aborigines inalienable freehold title to three million hectares in Queensland, putting them in many ways in a better position that Aborigines in Victoria.

These victories were won in spite of both subtle and brutal tactics by the government and its employees—not least among them the notorious former head of the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement, Pat Killoran—to disenfranchise Aboriginal communities, manipulate meetings

This land is their land

Land Rights Queensland Style: the Struggle for Aboriginal Self-Management. Frank Brennan SJ, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1992
ISBN 0 7022 2407 3 RRP $29.95

and gag 'young Turks', and divide rural Aborigines in depressed areas from their more vocal and politically experienced urban compatriots.

Brennan writes first and foremost as a lawyer, and his clear, precise account is primarily aimed at providing guidance on the state of the law. He is eminently qualified to do this, being not only a respected advocate, but also a legal adviser to the Aboriginal Coordinating Council in Queensland, and a consultant on Aboriginal affairs to the Australian Catholic bishops. Few whites have been more closely involved in the land-rights debate. But Brennan does not explain the law in isolation. His book is a dryly written but at the same time complex and moving political story full of characters, heroism, villainy, expediency and that most mundane of democratic imperatives, compromise.

When lawyers describe each other's work as 'journalism' it is usually meant as an insult. But Brennan's book is journalism in the best sense of the word; the prose is dispassionate without being disinterested, the research meticulous. Ministers and heads of department are condemned without invective, but rather by a remorseless contrasting of their rhetoric with their actions.

AURUKUN, BAMAGA, Weipa, Kowanyama. These places are for all intents and purposes in the Third World. Anyone who has visited one of these settlements, where the history of land-rights activism has been played out, can only wonder at the success of these people, who effected change in spite of extreme remoteness, and being starved of resources, media attention and parliamentary access; and at a time when the Commonwealth was long on rhetoric but, at almost every crucial juncture, let the Aborigines of Queensland down. It is to these people that Brennan has dedicated his book. His respect and affection for them are obvious.

The book is depressing, not least in its analysis of how the Goss government betrayed its commitment to Aboriginal people in the interests of political expediency. Anyone who wondered why Aboriginal demonstrators responded to the passing of land-rights legislation by knocking down the gates of Parliament House will cease to do so after reading this account.

Not only was the legislation weak—mere icing on the cake of what had already been achieved—but the consultation process had been worse than a farce. Pastoralists and mining companies were briefed on the legislation so that they would be 'on side', while Aborigines were funded to prepare submissions to impossible deadlines, without any information on what the government was proposing, and when in fact the form of the legislation had already been decided. Then the legislation was rushed through Parliament in a manner at least as bad as anything the National Party had done.

All this happened because the Goss government feared land rights would be unpopular, and therefore intended to rush it through before any electoral backlash. Labor members who in the past had marched in demonstrations in support of land rights, such as the Minister, Anne Warner, and Matt Foley, were pushed aside or outvoted. One can only speculate on their feelings.

BRENNAN COMMENTS: 'The mode of consultation and introduction of this legislation marked the Goss government's formal abandonment, or at least selective use from now on, of the Fitzgerald processes of public consultation, discussion and accountability.' Goss, of course, had been helped to power by the revelations and recommendations of that inquiry.

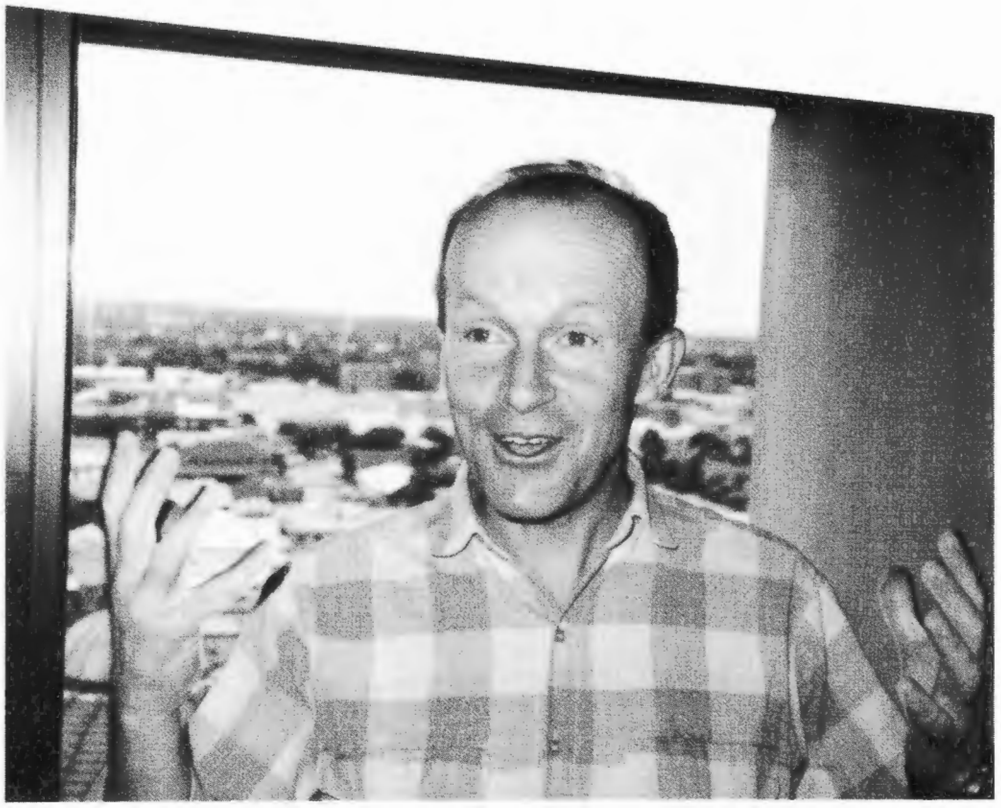
Brennan also depresses by reminding readers that the dispossession of Aboriginal people is very recent history indeed. It was only in 1959 that 354,828 hectares of land belonging to the people of the Weipa South reserve were reduced to a mere 162 hectares, to provide Comalco with special bauxite mining leases. By 1976 the reserve had been reduced to 119 hectares. Some of this land has since been given back to the crown, but none of it has been regazetted as Aboriginal land.

And in 1963 the people living at Mapoon, to the north of Weipa, were moved to the tip of Cape York, to a new site inland, and people from Lockhart River were moved to Umagico, also on the tip of Cape York. The distances involved make the moves analogous to sending Melbourne people to the Mallee or Sydney people to New England. Brennan tells the land-rights story in a manner that is clear and urgent, yet at the same time balanced and precise. Anyone who wants a better understanding of the arguments and processes of the land-rights debate, or who wants to see some hope in the seemingly intractable problems of Aboriginal Australia, should read this book. ■

Anyone who has visited one of these settlements, where the history of land-rights activism has been played out, can only wonder at the success of these people, who effected change in spite of extreme remoteness, and being starved of resources.

Margaret Simons is a regular contributor to *Eureka Street*.

INTERVIEW



Prophet of the urban marketplace

English novelist Jim Crace is an ardent townsman. 'City air makes free', he told ***Michael McGirr*** *during a recent visit to Australia.*

Michael McGirr: *You have said that living in Birmingham was the factor that triggered* The Gift Of Stones, *which is set in a prehistoric village. Is Birmingham lurking in the background of Arcadia as well?*

Jim Crace: *Arcadia* is a book about cities and to some extent it fed off my own city, Birmingham. One of the things that triggered the book was seeing the way that new shapes were being imposed by people with money and power, shapes which didn't suit the sentimentality and nostalgia of the people in the streets. We have an old market area in Birmingham called the Bull Ring, and there were plans afoot to turn that into a high-rise expensive shopping centre where you wouldn't be able to buy cheap vegetables and cheap meat. So one of the things in Ar*cadia* can certainly be found in Birmingham.

But I've been noticing as I've been going around that people have been saying to me, 'This is about Detroit, isn't it?' or 'This is about Milton Keynes.' Somebody said 'This is about Sydney because we recognise Paddy's Market, which has been closed down.' And somebody wrote a review of *Arcadia* and made a comparison with the new Melbourne Central shopping centre. So I wasn't trying to write a book about the real Birmingham, or any other real place, so the citizens of that place could pick it up and say 'Yeah, that's what it's like'. That's the realist method and that's not my method of writing fiction. What I try to do is invent a place which serves as an abstraction for everyone's experience of similar places in their lives.

Why have you grown so fond of Birmingham?

I originally came from North London but moved to Birmingham as a freelance journalist because the woman who later became my wife was living there. Since then I've become a real Birmingham chauvinist. I know that it's got its faults and that it's a comic city, in most people's view, because it's ugly. But it's a city that's going through change. It's not a city that's complacent. There are lots of beautiful cities in Britain and you might think how wonderful [it is] to have a thatched cottage in the suburbs of Cambridge or to have a nice Georgian house in York or Bath. But they're dead in the water, cities like that. Birmingham, precisely because of all its faults and vices, is immensely attractive to me. That's the theme of Ar*cadia*.

There's a paradox: on the one hand, our certainty that all of the worst things of the 20th century are best illustrated by city life; yet on the other hand, people still hang on to cities. You can think of racism and people's indifference to poverty and people's abuse of power and you can think of pollution and noise. They are best exemplified in cities. [But people] still flee from the countryside into cities. And the reason for that is that city air makes free. That's a phrase I use in the book. You're unfettered. You're out on the street. No one knows you. Privacy and possibility, those two things. So I'm loathe to make the move down to some little writerly cottage in Cornwall.

In Arcadia, *though, the privacy people experience is a very sore privacy. The characters are all lonely, or are they?*

All of the characters in the book are flawed. That doesn't make them bad or unworthy. Just because my wife and children are flawed and blemished it doesn't mean I stop loving them; I still find them interesting. Yet there's a kind of conspiracy in English fiction to equate worthiness or being worth attention with being attractive and perfect. It's the Hollywood syndrome. In my book I want to show people blemished, and challenge people's reactions to them. There is a point in the book at which Rook, who is a very blemished character, is offered an orange in the market and he picks the bruised one. That was a key

Continued p36

MICHAEL MCGIRR

Arcadia, Jim Crace, Jonathan Cape, London, 1992. ISBN 0 224 02692 5 RRP (hardback) $29.95

I REMEMBER BEING TAKEN, as a kid, into Sydney's wild west to experience Roselands. Another time we went to the deep south in search of Miranda Fair and once we made a day of it at Carlingford Court. There was no question that the time was well spent. After all, these were shopping centres and they were new. Squeezing into a hot car park, we might have been pulling up in the forecourt of heaven itself.

Australia has some mighty shopping centres. We have built one on a train to service far-flung whistlestops. There is one at the foot of the chairlift in Thredbo. Old towns such as Berrima in NSW have had shopping centres transplanted into their aging buildings to keep them alive. Sydney's Rocks is the same and so is the Queen Victoria Building. Melbourne's Lygon Street has had a proper shopping centre tacked on behind its quaint facade. Then there are all those big shopping centres, as anonymous as defence installations, that squat on fields of cars. The list goes on.

But Jim Crace has ideas for more. Arcadia is the name of the ultimate shopping centre, which a recluse called Victor, on his 80th birthday, conceives of building above an ancient marketplace 27 storeys below his office. He consults 12 architects, who propose buildings with pipes and entrails that cling to thin glass walls, buildings inspired by tombstones, bookends and freight containers, by washing-powder packets, dice and the Hanging Gardens, by paddleboats and by birds in flight. But Victor chooses a design that will push over the squalor of the city, creating a climate-controlled countryside inside glass walls. Arcadia will be the apotheosis of art in the pay of trade: a triumph of 'markitecture'.

Arcadia would be ridiculous if it weren't so familiar. The Soap Market for which these architects prescribe 'the chemotherapy of the bulldozer' is 600 years old. It has raised and fed countless children, generated gossip by the cartload and concealed scandal. Victor himself arrived in the market as a fatherless baby, the prop with which his mother learnt to beg with great subtlety. After her death in a boarding-house fire Victor sold eggs in the market, settling into a loveless life of material ambition. As an old man, Victor wants his Arcadia to house a statue of a woman 'soapie' with her child; although, in trying to leave his mother's mark on the city, he intends to sweep aside the present-day soapies who are her real kinsfolk. But of course, Victor won't get his way quite so easily.

Arcadia is much more than a tale of confrontation between rich and poor, between residents and developers. It is narrated by the Burgher, a shadowy figure who pops his head above the surface of the prose from time to time to let us know that he's pulling the strings. The Burgher used to write a gossip column about life in 'our city' but, having been cast aside as too old, he has taken up writing Victor's life story. No one knows more clearly than the Burgher that a city, although it appears to offer endless possibilities, really offers so few.

Crace uses a similiar device in *The Gift of Stones*, a book about the moral ambiguities of trade in a Stone Age community, in which the narrator is the daughter of the village storyteller. In *Arcadia* the Burgher, like the book's other characters, lives alone but not in isolation; he shares the human deficiencies of those he judges. The narrators of *The Gift of Stones* and *Arcadia* are morally ambivalent, but the storyteller makes the rules. Readers have to trust the Burgher—it's the price of being able to think of a place as 'our city'. When he shows us the freedom of beggars and pickpockets and says, 'Now do you see the charm of cities?', who are we to beg to differ?

Crace's writing is as sharp as limes. This distinguishes Arcadia *from the imaginary world of Ben Okri's* The Famished Road. *But Okri's prose drones on and on like a dull headache for 500 pages. I'm surprised that anyone got to the end, let alone gave it the Booker Prize.*

For Arcadia Crace has conjured up a city and garnished it with a prose as sensual and fascinating as that of Patrick Suskind's *Perfume*: 'The smell, an airborne punch of cabbage stalks, figs, olives, beet ... had belched and yawned along these streets and down these Squints for six hundred years. The housing bricks and paving stones, they said, could boil down into soup; the place was steeped in root, and leaf and fruit.' Crace's writing, to use one of his own images, is as sharp as limes. This distinguishes *Arcadia* from the imaginary world of Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. Like Crace, Okri is aware of the brittle half-freedoms that a modern economy offers even its favourite sons and daughters. But Okri's prose drones on and on like a dull headache for 500 pages. I'm surprised that anyone got to the end, let alone gave it the Booker Prize.

Arcadia is aptly named. You might think of a land of arcades with rivers of consumer goods flowing down the middle of each one. You might also think of the mythological Arcadia, which in art is often represented as a paradise threatened by the collateral image of a skull. Writing of Arcadia in one of his last columns, the Burgher says that 'Gravestones make good foundations. So do bones.' It doesn't hurt to remember that Melbourne's Victoria Market is built above a cemetery. In a broader sense, the same might be true of all our magnificent trading places. ■

From p34

statement for me. We are all blemished but that is what provides us with our juice and our sweetness.

Yet the main character, the one who builds Arcadia, *seems without redeeming features.*

Victor's attractive side is his resilience. We have to quantify the damage that his childhood did to him. He is someone who has been stabbed by the city through no fault of his own. He came to the city because his father died in the countryside about 1900. He didn't want to come. He is dislocated. Imagine the alternative life for him if he could have stayed with his father, making leathergoods. He wouldn't then be the Victor of the novel who went through life without loving anybody and without receiving love. So we don't have a man who's intrinsically bad, we have a man who is damaged by his experience.

It's no use pretending, in that Hollywood way, that people who are damaged by their experience are somehow always going to come triumphantly out of it. When you meet people who can't love, who are damaging and cold-spirited, you have to ask what created that in them. Now, if you're a Catholic and believe in original sin you might believe that that is the explanation, that people are born bad and have to gain their redemption. My view is the opposite one. I believe that people are born good and that any sour aspects of their nature are something that life imposes on them. So, as far as Victor is concerned he is an unattractive character unable to give and receive love. But you are not being required to like him, but to understand him and provide some compassion for his predicament.

That may be so but he still does tremendous harm to others. He wants to put up a glass and concrete temple to his mother in place of the livelihoods of hundreds of people.

That's true, but if you think that buildings can destroy a people you are wrong. They can change the lives of people but they can't destroy them because, even though the power structures put up the bricks, in the end the commonality of the citizens will make its imprint on that new thing. Whenever an Arcadia is built, it isn't long before someone has graffiti up, or someone else is selling umbrellas out of a suitcase.

The trouble with city planners is that they don't understand that the one thing cities are good at is *streets*. They want to put people in lifts and underground and on escalators and in carapaces of glass. They don't realise that what cities are good at is rainy streets with traffic and crowds. It doesn't matter what you plan for, if you're going to build something that is going to be used by people to get the old cash tills operating then people are going to make it work in their own terms.

The conventional books that are published in England are satirical, whereas traditional stories like Beowulf *are moralistic. They are trying to come up with ways forward for communities.*

—Jim Crace

In the book you speak of 'the sorcery of cities'. That phrase has both dark and bright connotations. Yet do you underestimate the sinister side of what is going on? It seems at the end that everyone can get exactly what they want out of the city. Is there any such thing as evil in your vision of how a city works?

That's a very interesting question. I answer it as a reader of the book rather than the writer of a book because the morality of a book is something which expresses itself to you as a reader rather than me setting out to communicate a morality through the book. Is there evil? I'm trying to think. There's cynicism and there's abuses. But I don't think there's any evil. There's indifference. There are disloyalties so that you feel disappointed in characters rather than feeling [you are] in the presence of people who will only find a place in hell and nowhere else. If you think of it in terms of heaven and hell, I see all my characters standing at heaven's gate pleading mitigating circumstances and the mitigating circumstances making some headway with the man who controls the gate. Falls from grace aren't evil. I think you can fall from grace right into the territory of evil but still not be evil.

Evil is a strong word. Three or four times in Arcadia *you use the image of tram tracks taking someone somewhere they have no choice but to go. You say this is not chance, this is fate. Characters such as Joseph are drawn magnetically to the city. This is where I sense the essence of evil—where somebody doesn't get to choose.*

All cities represent the triumph of anti-nature to the extent to which everything in cities is regular and uniform and controlled by timetables. The tram tracks capture something of that. But the city to me doesn't represent evil. Joseph and the city are the moth and the flame. You've only got to look at *The Pilgrim's Progress*, if you want a religious text as a comparison. Bunyan's character goes through all kinds of temptations and sour experiences in order to become that improved person. I don't feel the city is an evil place.

You have said that you are a moralistic writer. Is this your moral vision that you're describing, the vision of us all at heaven's gate pleading our circumstances?

Yes, it is. I should explain to you that I'm not a religious person. I used to call myself an agnostic, but I think I've realised that what I am now is an

atheist because my moral interests are earth-rooted. I think it might be overstating it, but I did say to somebody recently that if you could prove to me that God existed I'm in a position now where I wouldn't be interested. What I think is that people are born good. They can affect the way in which society develops but, equally, life itself is strewn with boulders and can damage people. Now, if I were a religious person I would have a moral creed provided for me which probably wouldn't be much different from my own self-found creed. But if you haven't got a creed then you have to make personally based judgements. You haven't got a grid to refer things to.

I'm not sure, when I call myself moralistic, how that differs from being judgmental. If you don't have a moral creed imposed from the outside then what happens is that either you have no moral position at all, and go wherever it suits you, or you have to impose one on yourself. I think imposing morality on yourself turns you, in a funny way, into a much stiffer and more disapproving person than if you have one imposed from outside. When I say I'm moralistic, I also feel quite puritanical in my lifestyle. I feel quite judgmental in the way that I deal with people. So being moralistic doesn't necessarily have an approving ring to me. I'm just recognising what I am.

But I'm also trying to make a literary point. The natural tone of voice of the English together is social satire and irony. When you look at the conventional books that are published in England their voice is satirical, whereas traditional stories like *Beowulf* are moralistic. They are trying to come up with ways forward for communities, not analyses of the catharsis of individuals. I think that's what my books try to do.

I guess that, as a socialist and an active member of the Labour Party, commitment to the community is what I fall back on in making moral choices. I actually believe that a leaflet is of much more importance than a novel, but I don't have those particular writing skills.

Arcadia *ends on an optimistic note. I found myself wondering if this was my experience of city life.*
The kind of inventive fiction I write isn't confined to being true to experience. The human spirit benefits from crutches to help it get around. The politics of despair and the fiction of despair say things will only get worse. It is true that if you want to find illustrations of things getting worse you can find them.

But fiction has a choice. It can say the imaginative aspects of humankind are capable of making things better. A novel is an imaginative act and one of the choices it has is, despite the evidence, to indicate that things can get better. It says, 'the good news is ...' ■

Michael McGirr SJ is a Jesuit scholastic. He is a regular contributor to *Eureka Street*.

Holy Thursday

Between olive trees
the passover moon lays down
a small white altar.

after the feet
what comes
after the supper
what comes
after the puzzled love

Full moon. The garden.
Bring to this outcast altar
the last broken bread.

Aileen Kelly

When Time = T_n

The texts reveal:-
Christ breaking through time at the Resurrection:
living now both with the Father and with us.

This caesura produces the possibilities.

The dreams reveal:-
The father as a child with his own children:
relating now in the eternity of the moment.

Larry Osborne

MORAG FRASER

Rubens on the Molonglo

Self-Portrait,
Peter Paul Rubens, 1622.
Australian National Gallery.

Rubens and the Italian Renaissance,
Australian National Gallery, Canberra,
28 March-8 June.
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,
20 June-30August.

SIR PETER PAUL RUBENS, painter, diplomat, friend of princes, was an intrepid traveller. Nonetheless, it still comes as something of a shock to see so European an image as Ruben's *Seneca*, dying in his bath, fluttering on a gigantic banner against the brown waters of Lake Burley Griffin. There have been rumblings among the art professionals about the appropriateness of such an exhibition at this point in the development of the Australian National Gallery. Priorities, costs, the displacement of other projects all rate a mention. But the rumblings are lost on the enthusiastic crowds. Art gallery goers will always be opportunists.

And in this instance, why not? *Esso Presents Rubens and the Italian Renaissance* (yes, that *is* the title, even on the catalogue) is a gem of an exhibition, full of surprises, well researched and curated, a sensuous delight and and useful as well, to scholars and the public alike. And although the publicity suggests a blockbuster event, the exhibition itself is mercifully modest and coherent. It doesn't leak away from you in surfeit.

Past the toll gates everything is crimson hush—'lights subdued to preserve the drawings'—except for the not quite subliminal hum from the black audio guide boxes everyone has slung from their shoulders. It is worth hiring one of these and doing the ANG square dance—'Three steps left, then turn'—for the pure comedy of it. The suave commentary is simplistic at best and occasionally rises to heights of banality that will take your breath away. 'Rubens was in fact quite a shy man' it confides in front of *Leda and the Swan*, and we learn that cardinals sometimes had paintings of an erotic nature in their anterooms. The anonymous polymath even dictates toilet and playlunch stops. Don't miss him. But do ask why Australians have to put up with such patronising dross instead of the helpful commentaries provided, for example, by the National Gallery Art in Washington DC.

The exhibition consists of 17 paintings by Rubens (some in fact from Australian collections but the rest borrowed, which is no small

achievement these days); five Rubens drawings, and a sizable sampling of works from the Italian late Renaissance and Mannerist periods, with a lean towards Mannerism and beyond. (The advertising, stressing the Renaissance, is misleading puffery.) But the period categories are porous, as the exhibition ably demonstrates. There was a slippage between styles, and a whirl of ideas abroad in the Italian city states Rubens set out to visit in 1600, at the age of 23. Already prodigiously skilled, and an indefatigable copier, Rubens was a perfect register and absorber of change. That he was also much more can be demonstrated by a quick glance at one of the drawings in the exhibition: *The Naked Man Dropping From a Wall* (see p3). The drawing is after Raphael, but the musculature has Ruben's unmistakeable signature.

So it is the great virtue of this exhibition that it deftly maps the complex passage from the Renaissance to the Baroque. But at the same time it allows for ample focus on some great paintings by Rubens, which may serve to change or open the minds of people whose reluctant acquaintance with him has been through the sensual overburden of cycles like *The Life of Marie de' Medici*.

The exhibition also has some enjoyably dreadful paintings like Cesari's bathetic *St Barbara*, not quite receiving her white robe from an angel. The 19th century painted over her naked breast but the more aesthetically stringent 20th century has restored it to full immodesty. Then there is Correggio's *Martyrdom of the Four Saints*, which, in its frozen ambivalence, would set you wondering for weeks about ecstacy, martyrdom and the aestheticisation of violence. There is more: some iconographically puzzling Salviatis and Jacopo Zucchi's indescribably coy *Cupid and Psyche*.

But they are the sport of the exhibition. The weight is in the Rubens, in the unexpected bonus of Veronese's *Agony in the Garden* with its tranparent blues, and in Titian's *Venus, Mars and Cupid* which, in its lines and erotic gravity, reminds us of the happy debt Rubens owed to the painter he copied throughout his life. Caravaggio's extraordinary and chilling *Judith and Holofernes* is one of the exhibition's great coups, but there is also the dramatic and moving *Portait of a Knight of Malta*. Its creased and dominating white Maltese cross divides the composition, but a subtlety around the eyes puts one more in mind of Rembrandt than of the usual highly finished, psychologically ambiguous performances we expect from Caravaggio.

And the Rubens: the exhibition is designed to allow one to see the evolution of technique. By the time you come to *Deianira and Fury* (c.1635, five years before Ruben's death) and the two sketches for *The Triumphal Entry of Henry IV Into Paris* (one in possession of the ANG, courtesy James Fairfax and the Belgian community) the hand is as infallible as it is in Van Gogh's late paintings. Every stroke counts, in bravura performance. The *Deianira* also provokes some of the best backchat in the exhibition. People talk to the painting. 'My God', exclaimed the woman behind me, quite shattering the awe of hum and hush, 'your legs are even worse than mine. And you're supposed to be a great beauty!'

About the other paintings there is a more restained response. But in front of something as sensuous and gravely eloquent as the Mazoh *Leda*, ribaldry isn't an option. If you only have time time for a brief visit, spend most of it looking at this painting, .with its dawning reds, extraordinary texture and incongruous composure.

You could chase any number of the hares set running by this exhibition. It reminds us, for example, that painting was once a manufacturing industry. These artists kept apprentices in employment. There *was* an apprenticeship. Copying was an art form. It also highlights some of the byproducts of the Counter-Reformation. The Jesuits, for example, became art patrons on a grand scale. Having educated Rubens, they became one of his patrons. You can also see, in some of the paintings, evidence of a shift of sensibility, with saccharin piety supplanting a more vigorous religious strain. Also manifest in the collection is the intimacy of the enterprise of art—the borrowings, the inspirations, the necessary incestuousness.

The catalogue, although a little po-faced about some of the more hilarious exhibits, is meticulous, lavish in both colour and quality of reproduction. and excellent value at about $26.00.

So it's all quite enough, really, to make one grateful to Esso (who declare themselves 'excited' to be presenting the Italian Renaissance) and almost forgiving of the crassness that branded the Esso logo into the loins of Caravaggio's Judith in the poster reproductions. A small mercy: at least they didn't suggest that you put a Titian in your tank. ■

Morag Fraser is editor of *Eureka Street*.

Leda and the Swan, *Peter Paul Rubens, Mazoh collection, New York.*

FLASH IN THE PAN

Turtle Beach, dir. Stephen Wallace (Hoyts). This is a bad film brandishing a good conscience. It exploits our sympathies for refugees and boat people in order to spin a corny, sentimental yarn that is dismally written and poorly acted. I have no time for censorship, but by the end of *Turtle Beach* I was wondering whether we might not all have been better off if the Malaysian government had managed to get it banned.

The film is loosely based on Blanche D'Alpuget's 11-year-old novel about an Australian woman working as a journalist in Malaysia. The novel is no great shakes but it isn't a bad read. Its transformation into celluloid is a case of turning brass into mud.

The opening scene of a riot in Kuala Lumpur, in which Malays slaughter Chinese and Indians, is the best thing in the film; it is grim, frightening and has the ring of truth about it. Thereafter, the film is all downhill. This partly because it is carrying the deadweight of Greta Scacchi's performance as the journalist. Scacchi spends much of the film round-eyed and amazed—if not a stunned mullet then a stunned turtle—though she takes some time off for sexual dalliance with a superior Indian black marketeer, who is the focus for some standard gibberish about the inscrutable East. The plot has almost as many holes as the script has clichés.

Is it politically mischievous? There is no evidence for its central claim—absent from the book—that Malay villagers slaughtered boat people, and all the Malays portrayed are corrupt or bloodthirsty. Nor does *Turtle Beach* contain any coherent political insights that might atone for its artistic defects, though readers will be pleased to know that it ends with strong plug for motherhood.

—Tony Coady

Hook, dir. Stephen Spielberg (Hoyts and Greater Union). *Hook* tries terribly hard to be one of those films that appeal to adults and children alike. There is lots of colourful action in Never Never Land for the kids, and for the adults there are in-jokes about other Robin Williams films, and a four-sided love tangle (a square instead of a triangle?) that joins the adult Peter Pan (Robin Williams), Tinkerbell (Julia Roberts), an aged Wendy (Maggie Smith), and Peter's wife, Moira.

It's a little tiresome at times—especially during the seemingly endless antics of the streetwise, post-Ewok, Lost Boys in Never Never Land—but the idea could have been a good one. Peter has left Never Never Land and married Wendy's granddaughter, Moira. He has forgotten his past and remembers nothing before he was 12, when he was adopted by an American family. In fact he has switched sides; he's become a pirate, a corporate raider. But when he returns to visit Granny Wendy, his children are kidnapped by Captain Hook (Dustin Hoffman), and Tinkerbell appears to remind him of his past and to help rescue the children.

So unfolds a morality tale of the nineties, a sort of anti-*Wall Street*. Greed is bad, being tempted by Julia Roberts is a kind of bittersweet pleasure—so long as there is no serious danger of succumbing—and spending more time with the kids (your boys, actually) is the central moral value. I suppose there are worse ways of spending more time with the kids than taking them to *Hook*, but it's not the kind of film that you sneak off to by yourself, contentedly nibbling a choc-top among hordes of children.

—David Braddon-Mitchell

Bugsy, dir. Barry Levinson (Hoyts). Warren Beatty has long suffered from inept casting. His chief dramatic skill is playing Warren Beatty, yet cinema audiences keep being asked to believe that he can portray other people, such as the earnest Communist journalist John Reed, or even comic-strip characters like Dick Tracy. But by taking the role of Benjamin 'Bugsy' Siegel, the 1940s gangster whose chief legacy is the gamblers' haven of Las Vegas, Beatty has shown some cunning. The real Siegel was rather like the usual Beatty persona—a handsome, philandering, egotistical bore—so this time the old familiar Warren isappropriate.

Yet *Bugsy* has little else to commend it, and how this film could have attracted 10 Academy Award nominations is deeply mysterious. James Toback's script rests on the implausible premise that a handsome, philandering egotistical bore can be presented as a romantic visionary just because he decides to build a casino in the desert. The film's other focus, an attempt to render intelligible the relationship between Siegel and his gold-digging girlfriend, Virginia Hill (Annette Bening), is even more preposterous. Hill steals $2 million from Siegel and deposits it in her Swiss bank account; when he finds out, his anger cools improbably quickly, and after she offers it back to get him out of debt he almost swoons in gratitude.

True lurv, presumably, is meant to explain why Siegel and Hill stop behaving like the ruthless, selfish, venal people we know them to be and start forgiving each other. Yet *Bugsy* never explains how these ruthless, selfish, venal people have learned

Eureka Street Film Competition

Tell us what you think Lauren Bacall and Harry Truman are saying to each other in the scene pictured above, and we'll award two tickets, to the film of your choice, for the answer we like best. The winner of the March film competition was Genevieve Mac Shane, of Cremorne, NSW, who thought that Alfred Hitchcock chose not to sit in his own chair because he was completely beside himself.

anything about love. So when Siegel's partner, Meyer Lansky (Ben Kingsley), recovers the money from Hill after making sure that Siegel receives the Mob's traditional punishment for failure, one just feels relieved that this tedious couple got what they deserved. Evil has its glamour, but *Bugsy* does little to add to the allure. Stay home and watch *Goodfellas* on video instead.

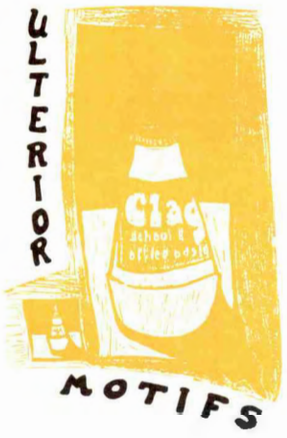
—Ray Cassin

Delicatessen, dir. Jeunet & Caro (independent cinemas). *Delicatessen* proves, if proof were needed, that not everyone has the same sense of humour. It's a bit like the *Divine Comedy* played for laughs.

Stan Louison (Dominique Pinon) is a circus clown who replies to an advertisement for a small-jobs man in a smallgoods shop, and comes to live in the rickety building above the shop. The other inmates range from a shortsighted but exceedingly fair cellist called Julie (Marie-Laure Dougnac), who lives on the top floor, to a dark gentleman who occupies a flooded cellar amid countless frogs and a growing heap of snail shells. There are also brothers who make useless gadgets and a woman whose marvellous powers of invention are spent in pursuit of the perfect suicide, an ambition she never achieves even imperfectly, whatever that might imply. The whole mob is united by a network of pipes and drains that carry sounds, keys and water from one flat to another. They are also united by fear of the shop proprietor who, late at night, restocks his business with the flesh of hapless lodgers. But never fear, members of an underground movement, the Trogolodists, are moving in from the city's sewers. And if they don't make it, Stan and Julie are going to flush out the whole rotting joint.

That's only the half of it. Some gags work better than others. There's a bit of business about a boomerang-shaped knife that appealed to a few of those in the cinema with me, there is a wonderful dance routine on a squeaky bed that appealed to me, and there is more intriguing junk than at the Brotherhood Bazaar. For one terrible moment I did contemplate this film as a satire on the way we live. Better just to go along and laugh where you can.

—Michael McGirr SJ



REMEMBER THE Index of Forbidden Books, that list of proscribed reading matter which was the Vatican's peculiar way of promoting Voltaire, Emile Zola, James Joyce and other literary luminaries? The Index, we rejoice to say, is no longer with us—it was abolished by Pope Paul VI on December 7 1965, thus becoming an early and deserving victim of the Second Vatican Council.

If there are prizes for documents that achieve dead-letter status, the Index might have been considered a strong contender, since even when it existed it was probably the piece of church legislation that Catholics ignored most. But there are those determined to keep its memory alive. We allude not to the Humanist Society, the Rationalist Society, the Orange lodges and other traditional sparring partners of the Men from the Curia. No, we speak of one Professor Leo A. Brodeur, who identifies himself as a spokesman for the Maria Valtorta Research Centre.

Maria *Who?*, we hear mystified millions mutter. Valtorta was the author of *The Poem of the Man-God*, a turgid multi-volume work describing her visions, which has become popular among the signs-and-wonders brigade. We are not aware of any other similarity between Valtorta and Voltaire but, like *Candide*, *The Poem of the Man-God* was listed on the Index of Forbidden Books.

In a leaflet posted to Catholic publishers and booksellers, Professor Brodeur notes that in the same *motu proprio* in which Paul VI abolished the Index he also abrogated canons 1399 and 2318 of the 1918 Code of Canon Law. Canon 1399 stated that books about new apparitions, revelations, visions, prophecies, miracles or devotions were forbidden unless they carried an imprimatur, and canon 2318 excommunicated people who published such books without an imprimatur.

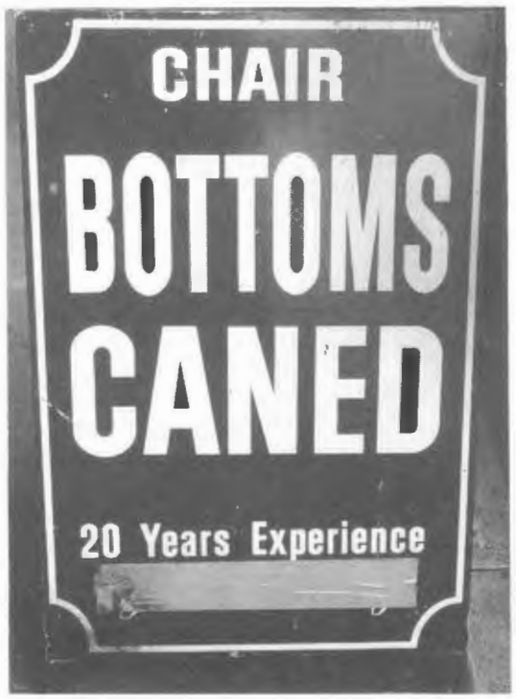
Perhaps the sort of people who enjoy the tortuous paths down which Valtorta takes her readers are also the sort of people who feel in need of an Index to guide their choice of books. Whatever the reason, Professor Brodeur seeks to reassure them thus: 'Let the scrupulous understand that they have nothing to fear from an illicit condemnation which, to boot, was officially revoked.'

No doubt, professor, no doubt. But after perusing *The Poem of the Man-God* we have only one fear—that other readers of the bizarre Ms Valtorta might decide there was some merit in the Index after all.

★★★

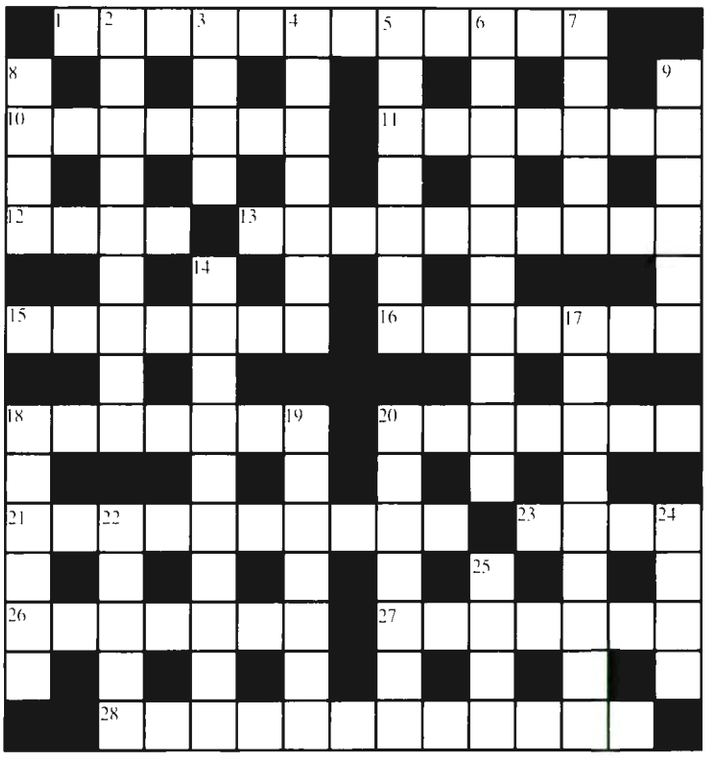
The *Eureka Street* Terribly Boringly Obvious Award goes to the Melbourne *Herald-Sun*, for this front-page gem on the demise of a WA mining magnate: 'Mr Hancock died at 10.12am (Perth time) in a makeshift hospital in the guest house of his $30 million mansion. His death ended months of speculation about his health.'

Photo: Bill Thomas



Enterprising advertising in Melbourne's private-school belt—a sandwich board seen in Glenferrie Road, Hawthorn, Vic.

Eureka Street **cryptic crossword no. 2, May 1992.**
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM



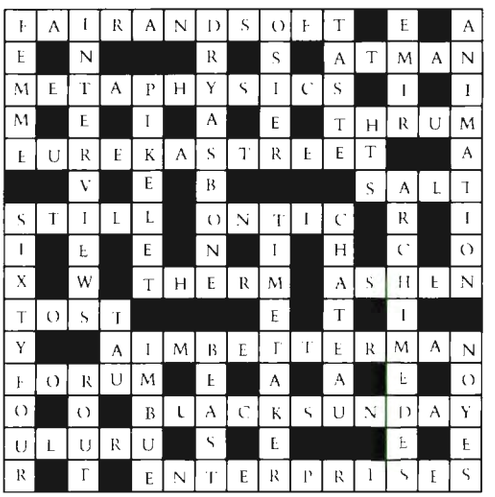
ACROSS

1. For all the world, Sergei had enough room in this. (5,7)
10. Haughtily became more distant and receded. (7)
11. Constrain Rosalind to listen for Celia inside. (7)
12. Bearing astern is indicated by the old signal flag. (4)
13. In dispersal, serenade around the pet house without question. (10)
15. Running amok, tears up the chemist. (7)
16. Has a horror of French exams. (7)
18. To soften the blow, lean on the edge of the billiard table. (7)
20. Calls off work in the civil service—it's clean but chaotic. (7)
21. Washing your clothes with only a shilling is non-U and causes gossip mongering. (10)
23. Miscellaneous ends and sods go with this. (4)
26. There's a ban on me going back to the local but in the end I go. (7)
27. It's hard to be given a mandate that is unclear and pointless. (7)
28. Colourful is the praise for one meaning to share again. (12)

DOWN

2. Whatever happened in the past, if CIS is destroyed they will oppose any call to arms. (9)
3. Confused girl at an American college is looking for a set of rules to follow. (4)
4. The drink is for the motorcycle passenger. (7)
5. Turned aside to make a statement to Edward. (7)
6. In contaminating others, the student is turning off the direct course. (10)
7. UNESCO architect sounds apprehensive and irritable. (5)
8. Pull up a guard without hesitation. (4)
9. Maybe the singer is boss. (6)
14. Appearing perplexed, the venerable Bede was more angry than confused. (10)
17. 'Bright star, would I were ... as thou art.' (Keats) (9)
18. Swore at the annoying thing, to speak colloquially! (6)
19. Restricts the bird, in its upward course, from including an alternative to the right. (7)
20. A man on a horse? Not half! Or rather, half and half! It's all Greek to me. (7)
22. Cut the curve on the road and you'll be able to see the colour of the traffic light. (5)
24. Perhaps the eats are filling! (4)
25. An essayist to strike a bishop? Ba! (4)

Solution to crossword no.1, April 1992



EUREKA STREET bookshop

	Mark quantity
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