EUREKA STREET

Vol. 5 No. 10 December 1995 $5.00

Year of war and peace

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Bosnia's present **Mike Ticher**

Year of the writers

Helen Garner on writers alone

Jim Davidson on writers together

Goenawan Mohamad on censorship and Indonesia

Andrew Riemer on warring writers in Germany

Plus **Raimond Gaita** on rethinking euthanasia

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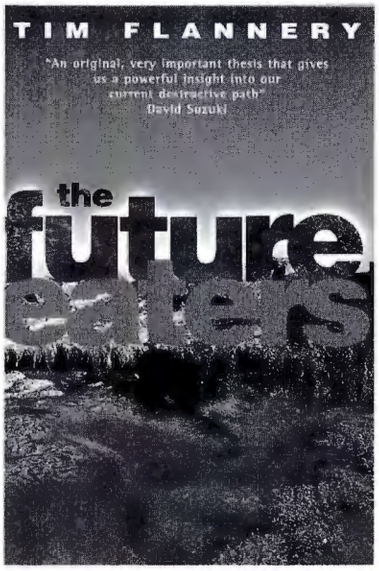

The Future Eaters

by Tim Flannery

Tim Flannery has spent years looking for fossils and ancient bones and thinking about the way our region has developed over millions of years. The result is an ecological history of the Australasian lands and people which is informative, entertaining and has significant implications for our future development.

The Australasian people are mostly newcomers. They and their land must form a bond as great and lasting as that between the English and their Church. Otherwise we will always remain poor confused strangers in our own lands.

—Tim Flannery

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EUREKA STREET

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

Volume 5 Number 10
December 1995

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Eureka Street wishes all its readers the peace and blessings of the Christmas season.

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Jesuit Publications
PO Box 553
Richmond VIC 3121
Tel (03) 9427 7311
Fax (03) 9428 4450

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A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

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Michael Kelly SJ

Editor
Morag Fraser

Consulting editor
Michael McGirr SJ

Assistant editor
Jon Greenaway

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COMMENT

JOHN S. LEVI

Tomorrow's Israel

NOTHING IS SIMPLE IN JEWISH HISTORY and life in Israel is never dull. As the radio beeps the passage of the hour every car, bus and taxi driver tunes in to the news. As dusk falls at the end of every Sabbath and Festival, people listen grimly to the news because, by common consent, neither radio nor television delivers information concerning death and disaster during time that is dedicated to the sacred.

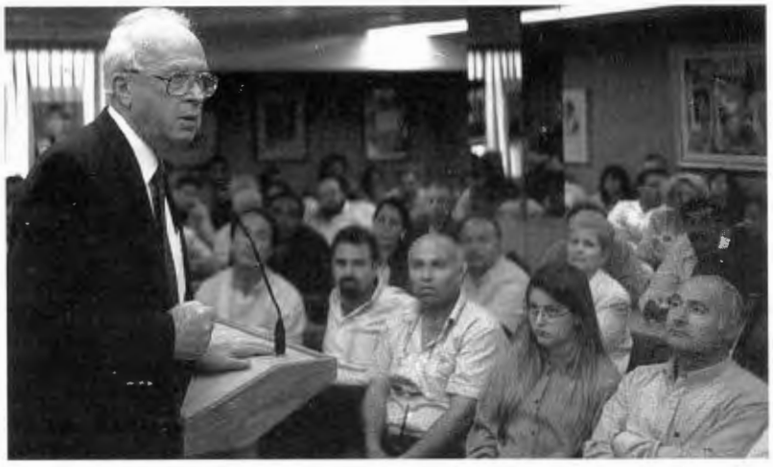
At the State funeral Noa movingly spoke about her Grandfather who would watch over her from 'on high' accompanied by angels. It was a spontaneous expression of emotion far removed from normative Judaism. For weeks following the assassination, crowds of mourners have continued to place flowers and candles in the renamed Tel Aviv square. Jews don't light candles to entreat God's mercy. Candles are lit to celebrate the onset of a festival. A memorial light is kindled in the home following a funeral as a symbol of the life that has gone. A feature writer for the *Jerusalem Post* astutely observed 'Where traditional Jewish learning isn't cultivated, and no liberal alternative takes root, weeds spring up.' It appeared as though the murderer's bullets had produced a pseudo-religious phenomenon to fill a deep spiritual vacuum.

Yitzak Rabin always appeared to be profoundly uneasy when, at funerals and religious ceremonies, politeness bade him to cover his head. He was a typical, secular Israeli although, in his latter years, he began to invoke key phrases and sentences from the Prayer Book and Bible when he spoke about peace. Whether those words came from his pen or from the heritage and wisdom of his speech-writer is a moot point.

The trauma of the assassination has highlighted a continuing spiritual crisis that has afflicted the world Jewish community since the Holocaust. We lost one third of our community. The Nazis and their auxiliaries murdered them because they were Jews or because a grandparent was Jewish. The fact has two sides. From the Jewish perspective the murderous onslaught was inescapable and contained biblical dimensions. Hitler and Pharaoh were interchangeable. After all Pharaoh had ordered the murder of every Jewish male. In the 20th century only Shifrah and Puah, the merciful midwives, were missing. So it didn't matter what kind of a Jew you were. The gas chambers exterminated the wicked with the saintly whilst the infants were often burnt and buried alive. And the other side yields a very uncomfortable fact. Most of the murderers were Christians. It follows from this that neither Christianity nor Judaism matters. Good and bad behaviour doesn't matter. Religion doesn't help. In fact you take a cross and you twist it and you get a swastika. You sew Stars of David on to the coats of children so you can tell if they are Jewish or not. Without those yellow stars you can't tell whether the child should be murdered. This is Elie Wiesel's 'Kingdom of the Night'. This is a world without

God, and Jews, the martyred people, have never been able to see the merit in martyrdom.

In this world stripped of meaning those Jews who survived wondered what sense could be made of their identity. Millions were still persecuted in that graveyard called Europe. The liberal, pragmatic assumptions of North America paled before the aftermath of Hitler and the ongoing reality of Soviet anti-Semitism and Islamic hostility. The drama of the struggle to give birth to an independent Jewish State became the secular religion of world Jewry. Slogans like 'Never Again' really resonate. Operation Entebbe and the rediscovery and return of Ethiopian Jewry became immensely important spiritual events. The redemptive message of liberation from slavery brought hundreds of thousands of captives back into the land whilst the achievements of the Israeli Defence Force bore echoes of Joshua entering the Promised Land. The really difficult questions had to wait until the peace process began. Did Israel really want to become the new Beirut of the Middle East? Would the land of Milk and Honey and Jaffa Oranges turn into Liechtenstein, Singapore or Hong Kong? Decades of precious funds poured into research and development suddenly began to pay off. And the five or six hundred thousand recent arrivals from the former Soviet Union brought scientific and musical baggage of incalculable dimensions.



THE HOLOCAUST CREATED A RELIGIOUS polarisation in the ranks of an already divided world Jewry. The largest Jewish community of the world is still to be found in America, although its demographic pre-eminence is now being challenged by Israel. American Jewry is overwhelmingly non-orthodox and identifies with the non-fundamentalist Reform or Conservative Movements.

Israel has an Orthodox established 'Church' with two Chief Rabbis and an array of Chassidic sages who preside over their own band of followers. The stricter you are the more 'Torah True' or authentic you are. You may use technology for medicine, maths and communications but not for archaeology, art, history, theology, philosophy or biblical research. Look where such skills lead the so-called civilised nations of Europe in the mid-20th century!

American Jewry also gave birth to a neo-Messianic cult built around the personality of Rabbi Menachem Schneerson 'the Lubavitcher Rebbe' whose followers now occupy almost all the Orthodox pulpits of Australia.

For at least 25 years after the Second World War, the physical struggle to establish the little state of Israel and the spiritual struggle to be able to confront the memories of the Holocust and to glean some sense out of the onslaught silenced the Jewish People. In 1967 the stunning victory of the Six Day War led by Israeli Chief of Staff, Yitzak Rabin, required a Jewish ideological somersault. Could the hand of the God of history be seen in victory and not in extermination? Emil Fackenheim, a leading Holocaust theologian wrote of the 'return of the Jewish People to history' and told Jews not to abandon their heritage, for by doing so they would give a posthumous victory to Hitler. Twenty years had to pass before the Israeli people began to understand that a war that imposed an occupation, no matter how benevolent, was no victory. Somehow or other peace had to be made with the enemy despite the fact that the enemy hated and loathed their very presence in the Promised Land and still continually call for 'a holy war'.

There is no guarantee that the complicated peace treaty being worked out between the Palestinians and the Israelis will work. If it does the Middle East will be transformed. Historians are already recalling the Golden Age in Spain when the synergy created by Jews and Moslems together built a remarkable civilisation. If it does not work I have no doubt we will see a repeat of the 'ethnic cleansing' witnessed in the Balkans. I would like to be an optimist and look forward to a new Israel whose commitment to peace will not be seen as a weakness by its opponents. This will call for a new chapter in the history of the Jewish People.

As immigration from the former Soviet Union continues, the Jewish population of Israel will grow to be a majority of the Jews living in the world. The last time this happened was probably in the Second Century before the Common Era (B.C.E.). Those Jews will speak Hebrew and the Jews of the Diaspora will need to send their children to Israel to learn Hebrew as a living language. The Jewish secular culture of Israel will place great strains on the religious identity of the Jews of the Diaspora. Perhaps secularism will give way to a renewal of spiritual identity. The last time that happened was when the Babylonian exiles brought new religious insights to those who remained in Zion in the Fifth and Sixth centuries B.C.E.

Yitzak Rabin speaking on the peace accord in May, 1994. Photograph by Emmanuel Santos

There is something magical about the return of the Jews to their land. The gathering of Kings and Princes, Prime Ministers and Presidents at the funeral of Yitzak Rabin was not only a tribute to a soldier turned peacemaker. It was also the most notable international gathering in Jerusalem since King David made it a capital city 3000 years ago. For those of us who, despite everything, find meaning in history, it was not only an awe-inspiring moment of sadness: it was a moment of spiritual hope.

Following the funeral of Yitzak Rabin the mother of a young Israeli soldier killed last year by a member of Hamas wrote:

> The member of Hamas who killed Arik was also a deeply religious man; this came to light in his trial last year. He sincerely believed that his actions, in killing and kidnapping my son, were sanctioned by God.
> How sad and tragic that, on both sides, a deep and sincere belief in the Divine should lock us so intrinsically into a conflict the result of which can only be the shedding of more and more blood. How greatly we need to examine the actions of all our sons, the Cains and Abels who surround us.

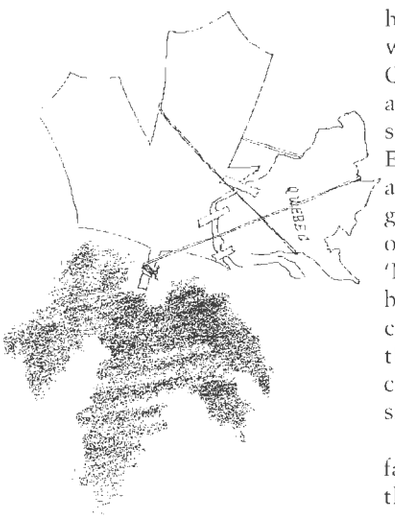
John S. Levi is Senior Rabbi at the Temple Beth Israel in Melbourne.

COMMENT: 2

MICHAEL ROSE

The divisions of Canada

FOR THOSE OF US WHO lived in Québec during the 1980 independence campaign, which also ended in defeat for the separatist side, the inconclusive result of October's referendum is perhaps the worst of all possible scenarios. And for those of us who worked as journalists in Québec in the 1980 campaign, and then covered all the subsequent years of exhausting, divisive and failed attempts at Canadian constitutional reform, the result is confirmation that the Québec question may simply be beyond resolution, at least in the usual political sense.



Those who know Québec and its tortured politics must now conclude what many of us suspected all along as we tracked the politicians and political scientists and sociologists as they tried to solve the riddle: the answer lies on the plane of symbol and psychology. Until the people of Québec and Canada accept this, the situation can never get better. It may indeed get far worse.

The paper-thin win by the federalists will leave a lot of Québecers angry and looking for scapegoats. The English-speaking and ethnic-immigrant communities of Montreal, whose 'No' votes may have been the only obstacle to a victory for the separatists, could prove an irresistible target.

There were, in fact, no winners in the referendum result, just as it turned out there were no winners in the 1980 vote, although our expectations for change and reconciliation were much higher 15 years ago. Pierre Trudeau, Canadian Prime Minister at the time, clearly sensed this.

'I am unable to rejoice without qualifications', Trudeau said after the 1980 result. 'We have all lost a little in this referendum. If you take account of the broken friendships, the strained family relationships, the hurt pride, there is no-one among us who has not suffered some wound which we must now try to heal.'

TRUDEAU, AND THOSE FEDERALIST politicians who worked with him and after him, did try to extend a hand to the losers and try to heal the wounds, just as the current Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien, has now offered to do. Trudeau and his allies moved first to give Canada full control of the constitutional reform process, but left Québec by the wayside in the complex procedure of transferring the constitution to Canada from Britain in 1982.

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney later decided to stir the constitutional cauldron when he took office, with equally disastrous results. The tortuous negotiations which yielded the so-called Meech Lake agreement, a deal which would have formally recognised Québec's status as a distinct society within the Canadian federation, died in 1990 when the required support of the provincial legislatures was not forthcoming. Two years after that came another heart-breaker: a refined version of the Meech Lake deal, this time called the Charlottetown Accord, was rejected in a national referendum of all Canadian voters.

So, with political rationality and methodical negotiations at a stalemate, and another independence referendum inconclusive, we are once again in the realm of the symbolic and the psychological, where the roots of Canada-Québec division have lain all along. There can no longer be a rational basis for the desire for a vibrant and confident French-speaking society like Québec to secede from Canada. Québec has near-complete control over all of the powers which it could possibly need to safeguard the future of the French language inside its borders and allow its citizens to live as they wish. The

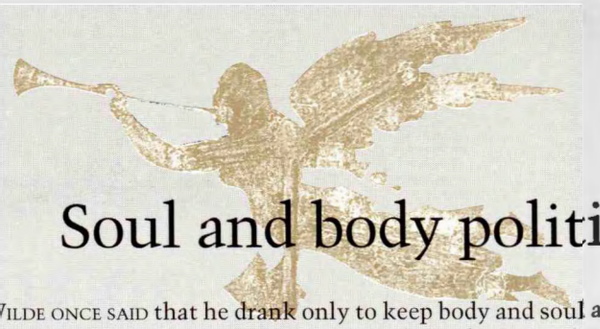
respected Montreal newspaper columnist, Lysiane Gagnon, remarked during the latest referendum campaign: 'How can people want to separate from Canada while remaining Canadian? That is clearly illogical, but in constitutional matters, it is not unusual for Québec to be illogical.'

Indeed, it is not only possible for a province or a country to be illogical, but even to be insecure, or anxious, or neurotic. It is telling that after the separatist Parti Québecois traumatised the rest of Canada when it first won power in 1976, the PQ cabinet minister assigned to introduce sweeping new cultural and language measures to make Québecers feel 'masters in their own house' was a former psychiatrist, Dr Camille Laurin. For French Québec, he became a hero figure of the most archetypal kind; for the English community in Québec, he was the Prince of Darkness.

SO MUCH OF WHAT HAS HAPPENED in Québec, ever since the British conquered the French colony in North America in 1759, functions at the level of symbolism and emotion. Prime Minister Chrétien has once again promised constitutional reforms to make Québec 'feel a part of Canada'. But that route has been tried many times before, without success. For English Canadians, apparently, there is still something threatening about allowing a part of their country to be different, confident, dynamic. For Québecers, apparently, there is still something unsatisfying in simply going about the business of building a unique French culture in North America, if not as an independent nation then as an important unit in a federal state. Canadians and Québecers, it seems, have always yearned for that little something more, that symbolic *je ne sais quoi*, which never seems to come.

Until the required psychological and emotional maturity does come, there can be for Canada no catharsis, no further growth, no escape from this sorry state of affairs. ■

Michael Rose is a Canadian journalist and broadcaster who now lives and works in Sydney.



Soul and body politic

OSCAR WILDE ONCE SAID that he drank only to keep body and soul apart. I wonder: have politician Jeff Kennett and commentator Gerard Henderson perhaps been hitting the bottle lately? Certainly both seemed determined to keep body and soul apart in their account of the subtle and shifting relationship between religion and politics. Both get it wrong.

Mr Kennett suggested recently that the churches would do better to attend to their real business, which in his view means the cure of souls in the strictest and most 'spiritual' sense of the term. The flip side of this is that the churches should get out of the Government's way, leaving politics to the politicians to govern as they like without the bother of uncooperative and incompetent churches. In the response to the Premier, the churches left little doubt that they saw things differently.

Some time later, Gerard Henderson sought sagely but unsuccessfully to arbitrate the brawl between God and Caesar in one of his pieces in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age*. He was slower than Mr Kennett to make up his mind. In fact he seemed to shift ground as the words rolled on. He began by urging that the churches stick to their proper themes. By the end of the piece, however, he was admitting that it was hard to draw the line between religion and politics. But on balance the earlier Kennettesque claim prevailed. In the end, both politician and commentator find themselves caught in a world of false antagonisms.

Gerard Henderson proffers as the kind of theme proper to theologians of my persuasion the very Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation; and he claims that we have turned to themes like privatisation only because transubstantiation is harder to sell. But he fails to understand just how political a doctrine transubstantiation can be and that there may be a subterranean link between transubstantiation and privatisation.

However arcane and 'spiritual' it may seem, the doctrine of transubstantiation is all about God's radical involvement in the world of matter, the everyday world in all its aspects. Once Catholics say that the risen Jesus is truly present in the bread and wine of the Eucharist (as the doctrine states), they are saying that the God of Easter is immersed in all aspects of the everyday world, in the mess of things, even the mess of politics. But the doctrine of transubstantiation is not only about God's involvement in the mess of things: it's also about God's *transformation* of the mess. In that sense, it is by implication about God's transubstantiation not just of bread and wine, but of politics as well. It speaks of the divine determination to turn politics from an arena of deceit and power-mongering where money is God, to an arena of truth and service where the human being is what really matters and where God is therefore truly God.

This is what Gerard Henderson fails to see. And this is why he can claim that Pope Pius XII 'took the transubstantiation option' and did nothing about Nazism during World War II. A claim such as this misunderstands both papal strategy at the time and Catholic doctrine at any time. If it were true that Pius XII did nothing about Hitler—and that is far from clear—this would be the exact opposite of 'the transubstantiation option'. It goes without saying that politicians and churches have different areas of competence and responsibility. But it is no less true that the two are complementary rather than hermetically sealed one from the other as Jeff Kennett and Gerard Henderson seem to think. *There is both a soul of politics and a politics of the soul.*

Politicians and commentators have a right to criticise the churches, just as the churches have a right and duty to criticise the commentators and politicians. But all are obliged to ensure that criticism is well informed and is made in support of the common good rather than for the sake of some cheap expediency or ideological axe-grinding.

The political culture in this country is changing faster than we think. Conventional party ideologies have grown weary and many of the old antagonisms are being redefined. For all that they may seem *au courant*, both Jeff Kennett and Gerard Henderson are way out of date on the score of how religion and politics might relate in the shifting scene. What we need in Australia now is a reworking of the relationship between religion and politics, a new imagining of both the soul of politics and the politics of the soul. What Jeff Kennett and Gerard Henderson offer instead is a rehash of worn-out orthodoxies and the false antagonisms they spawn. My word of advice to both would be, 'Less bottle, more Bible'. That's if they want to keep body and soul together. ■

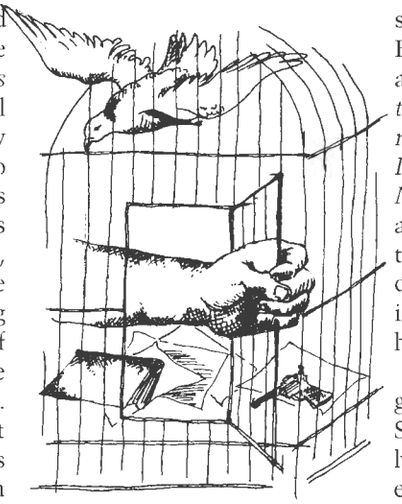
Mark Coleridge is Master of Catholic Theological College in Victoria.

MICHAEL MCGIRR

Holding on to freedom

ONCE SALMAN RUSHDIE WENT INTO HIDING, he suddenly became ubiquitous. He was everywhere, if not in person, then at least in news, pictures, discussion and jokes. In September he was on radio talking about *The Moor's Last Sigh*, his first adult fiction since *The Satanic Verses*. He told the ABC's Terry Lane that six years ago he could not possibly have imagined himself being preoccupied with such an abstract idea as freedom. But painful experience had changed his tune.

He spoke about a certain Pakistani film which the British censorship board had wanted to have banned. The film included a character called Salman Rushdie who happened to have written a book called *The Satanic Verses* but whose real interests were international drug running, terrorism and making merry mayhem. The Rushdie in the film was so evil, apparently, that he tortured good guys by getting his henchmen to read them parts of *The Satanic Verses*. True to his beliefs, the real Rushdie petitioned for the release of the film and said he would not be suing anybody. He suspected that the threat of legal action was far more important to the censoring body than the content of the film. At all events, he wholesomely declared that the most offensive aspect of the film was the fact that Salman Rushdie appeared in a sequence of vile-coloured safari suits.



Not so eirenic is Yusuf Islam, formerly known as Cat Stevens, who was also on ABC radio in the springtime. He was promoting his new recording of Moslem melodies. He spoke about his conversion to Islam and said that when he saw The Rolling Stones still belting out the same old stuff he felt they were encaged. They had lost their freedom. The interviewer had the impertinence to ask about his endorsement of the fatwa against Rushdie and Yusuf Islam said complacently that 'actions have consequences.' Was death an excessive consequence? Yusuf Islam drew breath and said that there used to be a song called 'I'm gonna get me a gun'. He said he wanted to get himself a gun to deal with the likes of the interviewer.

This December is not a bad month to consider the many shades of freedom that colour the conversation of Salman Rushdie, Yusuf Islam and, for that matter, our entire conflicted planet. After four years of intermittent meetings, December 8, 1965 was the last day of the final session of Vatican II. The sessions had covered 281 days and had involved 2860 bishops and cardinals. The total cost of Vatican II was just over seven million American dollars, about the cost of running a fair-sized Catholic hospital for a year and no more than a spit in the bucket of the space exploration programs which crop up occasionally in the Council documents as an example of the latest gee-wizardry with which the theological mind might be called upon to contend. The average age of the participants was 60, 253 of them died between the opening and the closing dates and the vast majority of them paid their own fares to get there. Looking back on their achievement after thirty years is a little like watching the film *Apollo 13*. The recent past seems so remote.

The day before the party broke up however, (December 7, 1965) saw the promulgation of two documents which have done more to enliven Catholicism since then than an entire cast of martyrs. Both the single conciliar document addressed to the whole world, the *Declaration on Religious Freedom (Dignitatis Humanae)* and the Council's final act, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* have an ability rare in such documents of being at the same time both accommodating and demanding. They develop an understanding of freedom sophisticated enough to goad both Salman Rushdie and Yusuf Islam.

If Yusuf Islam wants to conceive of one group of middle-aged ranters, The Rolling Stones, as 'encaged' whilst being prepared himself to rant against interviewers and endorse violence against heretics, he might do worse than to ponder the line in *Gaudium et Spes* which has been most forced to work overtime in the post-conciliar church: 'Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a person. There you are alone with God whose voice echoes in your depths.' Nobody's religious views make them a target. *Dignitatis Humanae* declares: 'The right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person, as this dignity is known through the revealed Word of God and by reason itself.'

Nevertheless, both documents take to task the endless open-endedness of a Salman Rushdie. *Gaudium et Spes* and *Dignitatis Humanae* both champion the kind of freedom which can only be fully expressed by freely accepting constraints, by giving itself away. They inhibit the kind of consumer spirituality which looks on all religious traditions as supermarket items ranged before bored or impulsive buyers. The documents breathe the deep freedom of belonging. It is this kind of freedom which we celebrate every year, at Christmas, in the incarnation. God, who had long been known to be ubiquitous, came out of hiding. God's freest act, the one which makes us free, is to accept all the limitations of being one of us.

Michael McGirr SJ is Eureka Street's consulting editor.

W.J. UREN

The line on women

IT WAS, I MUST CONFESS, WITH NO LITTLE DISMAY and more than a little regret that I read in the Melbourne *Age* on November 21 that the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had, on 18 November, issued a communiqué signed by its Prefect, Cardinal Ratzinger, on the (non) ordination of women.

The Congregation was responding officially to a doubt raised:

> Whether the doctrine according to which the Church does not have the authority to confer priestly ordination on women, as proposed in the Apostolic Letter, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, must be believed in a definitive way so as to be considered as belonging to the deposit of faith?

The Congregation replied in the affirmative. More than that, it maintained the teaching was infallible:

> The doctrine demands definitive assent because, founded in the written Word of God and constantly preserved and applied in Church Tradition from the very beginning, it has been proposed infallibly by the ordinary and universal magisterium.

The original doubt was not an idle one, nor was the question necessarily a Dorothy Dixer. Learned theological commentators, at the time of its original publication in June, 1994, had wondered what status was to be attributed to the Pope's Apostolic Letter, especially with reference to its penultimate paragraph. To be sure, the Pope was saying that the teaching was definitive, that it was not open to debate, that it did not have merely disciplinary force. But was it infallible? The form of words in the penultimate paragraph, while reminiscent of that employed in infallible teaching, was judged by some to be significantly variant. Cardinal Ratzinger himself in an extended commentary on the Letter in the *Osservatore Romano* on June 29, 1994, had discussed the binding nature of the document:

> Is this therefore an act of dogmatizing? Here one must answer that the Pope is not proposing any new dogmatic formula, but is confirming a certainty which has been constantly lived and held firm in the Church. In the technical language one should say: here we have an act of the ordinary Magisterium of the Supreme Pontiff, an act which is not a solemn definition *ex cathedra*, even though in terms of content a doctrine is presented which is to be considered definitive.

In this latest communiqué the Sacred Congregation has taken upon itself to resolve this question. No doubt this will present a further theological conundrum to the learned commentators. Has the Sacred Congregation, particularly in what is merely a standard response to a doubt or query, the competence to discern or decree infallibility, especially when it is not clearly and unequivocally remarked in the original document? We have become accustomed to believe, in disputed matters at least, that this power was reserved to the Holy Father and to Ecumenical Councils. If this is no longer the case, the Sacred Congregation has certainly 'upped the ante' and the infallibility language is in danger of being debased. One hesitates to think what the present constituency of the Congregation will make in retrospect of the much disputed (and now often conveniently forgotten) 1950 Encyclical, *Humani Generis*. Monogenism—the thesis which the Encyclical supports that we have but one common pair of ancestors, Adam and Eve—has a pedigree at least as unsullied and consistent in Scripture and Tradition as the exclusive ordination of men.

What will be the likely effect of this latest pronouncement from the Vatican? Let me respond by recounting two incidents, and drawing two conclusions, the first somewhat pessimistic, the second, I hope, more optimistic.

A couple of years ago in Indonesia a group of Jesuit Provincials from the Asian region were discussing dialogue with Islam. An eminent Jesuit theologian who had spent most of his priestly ministry in Islamic countries opined that there was very little hope, even through the extended dialogue of experts, of reaching any common ground with Islam. Nonetheless, he maintained, it was important that the dialogue be resolutely continued, for this reason at least: to support and encourage moderate Islamicists against the encroaching tide of the Islamic fundamentalists.

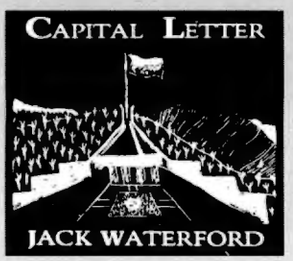
I suspect this latest communiqué from the Vatican will only drive the many moderate women who would hope to seek a forum within the Church to discuss this and allied questions, into the arms of their more radical sisters outside the institutional Church—a sad outcome indeed. This is doubly disappointing, because in recent dispatches the Pope has shown himself to be increasingly aware of 'the women question' in the Church. Perhaps next to nothing had emerged in practice but at least he has adverted to the alienation women experience in many aspects of Church life.

MY SECOND INCIDENT RELATES to a 1993 discussion of the Encyclical, *Veritatis Splendour*, on ABC television, in which I participated with Bishop George Pell. Bishop Pell had spoken of the authoritative nature of the Encyclical and of the Church 'drawing a line in the sand'—presumably defining boundaries for Church membership. This elicited the most illuminating and encouraging comment in the whole discussion. It came from a member of the audience seated right at the back of the auditorium.

I now know him to be the recently appointed Chair of the Australian Human Rights Commission. 'You can draw your line wherever you like, Bishop George—it won't really make much difference. Just as long as you remember—it's not your Church, it's our Church.'

The Vatican Congregation has been drawing lines more deeply in the sand again. It's important to keep remembering that it's still our Church—both men *and* women.

W.J. Uren SJ is the Australian Jesuit Provincial.



Trading on disunity

THE BIG SURPRISE ABOUT THE ACCORD, Labor's industrial relations laws, and the reorientation of the trade union movement, is how long things went on before they began to fall apart. Quite a few people in both the political and industrial wings of Labor have had their eye off the ball for a long time.

The Accord has worked well in making Bill Kelty a de facto Cabinet minister and in giving the organisational wing of the trade union movement a major say in industry and employment policy. The trade union leadership has played a major role in dampening the expectations of trade unionists, breaking down old craft-based demarcation disputes and creating a productivity focused work-culture. Usually, it could hardly have been more 'understanding' of the government's economic problems or 'responsible' in helping to address them.

But that is a part of the problem. Ordinary trade unionists are familiar with a deal-making culture. Not all can be reassured, in the long run, that the dealings have been to their benefit. Thirteen years of major concessions from trade unionists have seen real average wages actually fall by 1.4 per cent. There has been discontent at shopfloor level for some time; in the past few years some unions, particularly transport and building industry unions have been openly rebellious about the deals made.

A push towards super-unions suited the government down to the ground—it meant fewer actors to deal with and necessitated fewer side deals and promises. It suited many employers, because it tended to wipe out demarcation disputes.

This helped create a situation where such unions became used to the Government's underwriting of expenses, with grants towards training, occcupational health and safety, workplace reform, and, increasingly, an income stream from managing industry superannuation. Some workers in super-unions have found their interests compromised when those interests have been in conflict not with the government or the bosses but with other sections of the trade union movement.

Too many people, in short, taking things for granted for too long.

One reason why the CRA case was allowed to go so far without any reaction was that union officials' never thought that employers would provide more than the award. The bogey was of New Zealand or Kennett-style reform in which the wicked boss would call up some inarticulate and disadvantaged worker and offer him or her the right to keep the job provided they accepted a pay cut and much reduced working conditions.

That, still, is the spectre with which Paul Keating is trying to panic people into withholding a vote from Howard. But the essence of the CRA-style deal at a Weipa was not reduced but increased salaries, not reduced conditions, but more flexible ones, with the most novel part of the employer's demand being an attitude of commitment to the company and no divided loyalties.

One reason why it took the central offices of the trade unions so long to wake up to the fact that most of the employees were signing for deals (promising them, in most cases, at least $20,000 more a year) was that those who were signing up were hardly complaining.

Nor was it clear to them that once the defections had broken the back of the opperative unions, the companies would cut their wages and conditions and bring in the stockwhips. With some such deals it is not even necessary to insist that those who sign up join the union.

Where there is a contract providing superior wages and conditions to those specified in the award, the award, and, progressively the union itself, simply become irrelevant. Why would one want to pay one per cent or more of one's salary to maintain the existence of a document which does not in fact have anything to say about how one works? The threat of the personal contract, in short, can be far more to the union than to the worker.

In fact, CRA's critics have very good grounds for arguing that ideology—and particularly a desire to get the unions right off the site—was playing as important a role as economics in the company's thinking. There are other companies—such as, say BHP and ICI, that have achieved better, and cheaper, productivity gains by sitting down with unions and teams of workers to frame flexible enterprise arrangements which suit everyone. But even in arguing that the CRA-style contract was not providing equal pay for equal work compared with those insisting on working to old awards, the unions were in the uncomfortable position of arguing that the now suddenly unsatisfactory packages were the ones they had themselves negotiated.

And the Government, in suddenly discovering that there was a problem—after a 100,000 volt shock from the ACTU—was in the uncomfortable position of having to admit that what had been done by CRA fell well within the spirit and letter of legislation it had put into place only a few years ago.

There are still puzzles aplenty about what happened next. The union movement's way of letting the Government know it had a problem was not the usual cosy telephone call but an escalating strike. It cost the economy $200 million and may have seriously compromised Labor's argument that a Liberal Government would produce industrial confrontation amid chaos.

EVEN BEFORE THAT, the ACTU had determined to hire Bob Hawke to present its case to the Industrial Relations Commission—a move that ACTU Secretary Bill Kelty 'forgot' to tell his closest political friend and ally, Paul Keating, beforehand. That he would do so underlined what a crisis the case was presenting. Industrial Labor was sending political Labor a very powerful message about not ignoring it. Keating got the message all right, though whether he will be so indulgent in doing favours for Kelty the next time around remains to be seen.

The immediate beneficiary is John Howard, now able to emphasise how far Labor's present legislation goes in his direction, how little he himself would change it, but how he will help the humble artisan escape from the clutches of the union if there is a demonstrably better deal offering.

Well, it has at least as much credibility as the Keating policies. ■

Jack Waterford is the editor of the *Canberra Times*

Trick or treaty?

From Peter Graves

In 'Evans on Evatt' (*Eureka Street*, October 1995), our current Foreign Minister gave us a fascinating exposé of Australia's international influence in 1945 and his hopes for the UN in 1995. His concerns for the positive and substantial effects of implementing UN charters would be even more admirable if Australia didn't seek to renege on them.

It is now five years since Senator Evans went to the 1990 World Summit for Children and pledged that Australia would put children first for resources, at home and abroad. Australia subsequently signed UNICEF's Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Moira Rayner ('Home Truths' p.16) reminded us does involve the Commonwealth in a legal obligation to prevent child abuse in Australia.

Senator Evans is now part of the Government which seeks to ensure that international treaties 'by which Australia is bound do not form a part of Australian law unless Australian legislation provides otherwise'. The *Administrative Decisions (Effect of International Instruments) Bill* of 1995 seeks to reverse 50 years of Australia's deserved acceptance of the UN's conventions, because of concern over the special circumstances of the Teoh immigration decision.

This decision does not merit the wholesale rejection of the UN principles which Senator Evans has quite rightly observed are the foundations 'for the standards of human rights and fundamental freedoms accepted by the UN Member States'. He also observed that Dr Evatt 'sought effective ways of implementing (UN standards)'. Senator Evans and the Attorney-General Michael Lavarch should honour 50 years of Australian commitment to the UN by changing the above Bill and fully implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Peter Graves
Campbell, ACT

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.

Tolerable limits

From Christopher Dowd OP, Dean of Mannix College

Thanks are owed Dr Denis Minns for pointing out in his eulogy on tolerance (*Eureka Street*, October 1995) that human beings are often inconsistent, especially in the presence of self-interest.

However, inconsistency finds a home in Dr Minns' own article, the opening sentence of which refers to 'Lefebvrists, and other enemies of the Church in the modern world...'

Enemies of the Church in the modern world? Are they like enemies of the people? The belligerence of Dr Minns' language would cause a Constantinian bishop's eyes to light up, fan the inquisitorial fires of the Counter-Reformation and the warm the cockles of the heart of Pius X himself.

This style of language discloses the illiberalism that is normally masked by liberal Catholic discourse and shows how intolerance still has comfortable digs inside the Church.

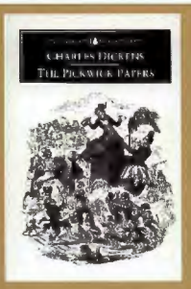
Without holding any brief for the Lefebvrist movement, one can recognize the fact that the sad adherents of that schismatic tendency find themselves where they are today in large part due to the hostility which was shown them in a time of liturgical change on account of their devotion to ancient rites which Rome, ever zealous for conformity, had been persuaded to try to suppress. In more recent times the people responsible for this mean-spirited policy or, more likely, their successors have realized the error of their ways and have taken steps to rectify it, albeit grudgingly.

If we cannot manage to be comfortable with diversity of practice in a matter indifferent, such as the external forms of public worship, then there is little hope for that real tolerance, and its attendant arts of persuasion, that Dr Minns so admires.

Christopher Dowd OP
Clayton, VIC

***Dennis Minns OP**, Master of Mannix College, replies:*

'Help, help, a Herrible Hoffalump! Hoff, Hoff, a Hellible Horralump! Holl, Holl, a Hoffable Hellerump!'



This month, courtesy of Penguin Books, the writer of each letter we publish will receive, as *Eureka Street's* Christmas present, a copy of *The Pickwick Papers* by Charles Dickens. Penguin Classics, RRP $10.95

But of course it wasn't a heffalump that Piglet spied at the bottom of the Very Deep Pit, it was just Pooh with his head in the honey jar. Dr Dowd, seems similarly and unaccountably to have mistaken me, whom he ought to know at least as well as Piglet knew Pooh, for a monster of belligerence and intolerance, a fire-fanning inquisitor of a stamp likely to warm the illiberal cockles of the heart of Pius X, no less. And all because I described Lefebvrists and their fellow-travellers as 'enemies of the Church in the modern world'! May I say that I used these words simply because I supposed that this was how these people saw themselves, and will, of course, withdraw them if this is not the case.

It is not their 'devotion to ancient rites', or a fondness for Latin, lace, and funny hats that marks out Lefebvrists as enemies of the Church in the modern world. In themselves these are just eccentricities, but here they accompany an agenda which seeks to undo the fundamental work of the Second Vatican Council and to take the Church back to an age when, it is imagined, things were better: when the Pope wasn't the only absolute monarch, when Catholicism and European culture seemed synonymous, when women were kept in place, when the Church had real power to force its will on people, and so on.

Of course one sympathises with the Lefebvrists—they are like children who have been told by a spoilsport that Santa Claus isn't real. For so long the Church encouraged the view that it was possible to live one's life as though the 18th century hadn't happened. Now it doesn't anymore, and the Lefebvrists are understandably cross. That is all I meant to say.

When Piglet discovered his mistake he took to his bed with a headache. I hope Dr Dowd appreciates that this will not be necessary.

Dennis Minns OP
Clayton, VIC

Writing wrong

In the second paragraph of John W. Doyle's letter, published October 1995, p9, the word 'typological' should have been typographical.

Fair share

From Peter Hunt

It's good to see both Jim Griffin and Race Matthews (*Eureka Street*, September 1995) agreeing that consideration of 'distributism' is needed and appropriate at the present time.

The basic principle of 'distributism' is that property ought to be widely distributed because ownership of property is a natural right. Either State monopoly (as in State Socialism) or big Capitalist monopoly (all right, oligopoly ... let's not quibble) is abnormal, though common. The essence of the alternative to these oppressive regimes, and what Chesterton so greatly admired and fought for, is economic democracy. People, families owning the means of production, and therefore having power, a degree of real independence, is 'distributism'. Yet, simple in principle though this central truth is, so many talk against it as going backwards, as 'medieval', as impractical. But if the principle is right, and the best community is one in which independence combined with communal co-operation brings a diffusion of power, then what remains is the question and task: 'How can this come about?' No matter what the difficulties, we need to work towards it.

We've had enough of 'economic rationalism', speculative investments in land and shares, of profit divorced from production, of centralised and excessive taxation, of small businesses destroyed by corporations, and could do much more to foster opening of vast areas of fertile land to crops, and the growth of co-operatives.

All over the world, with its inequalities , its gross disparities between affluent societies and those without

A Christmas Tale in London.

What did he mean by it,
that Armenian, with his thick
black overcoat, his fine
pointed beard, and whistling cheerfulness,
trotting along on Christmas day
in Kensington, greeting me
and in not more than five minutes
telling me how ancient was
the heritage of Christians
in Armenia, and how he spent
those years in Yemen and the memories
of a romance broken long ago?
In the icy air he radiated warmth,
acceptance, aglow with tidings of
a joy eclipsing sadder touches
in his brief, confiding tale.
What did he mean by it?

Peter Hunt

necessities for millions, land-hunger is great. The message for today is 'Unlock the land'. In Australia we could (and eventually will in one way or another) admit many more immigrants if we open up former pastoral land to small-farm or co-operative crop pro-

duction. (See, for example, Peter Hunt, 'Colin Clark, Small Farming, the Guild System and Chesterton', *The Chesterton Review*, Spring-Summer, 1978).

In 1994, a Chesterton Conference was held in Zagreb, Croatia, and 'distributism' was central to its deliberations and discussions. In Poland, too, his vision is alive.

The Catholic Worker in Australia (during the 30s, 40s and 50s), was not only handing on the Chesterton and Catholic traditions of social reform, but before its time. Never has distributism seemed so feasible as now.

Finally, Race Matthews rightly insists on the distributist elements in Guild Socialism. R.H. Tawney and G.D.H. Cole enriched the thinking of all socially responsible critics of modern capitalism and drew on history in a way which Chestertonians share. I look forward to further discussion of this theme.

Dr Peter Hunt
Winmalee, NSW

Helping hand

From Therese Vassarotti

Recently I received a very distraught phone call from my 15-year-old daughter who had found herself stranded at the train station of a country town in New South Wales. She was on her way home to Canberra only to find that her bus connection had been cancelled. There was no easy way for her to make the homeward journey, nor did she have sufficient funds with her. At a distance of 300 kilometres it was the stuff of every mother's nightmare. I knew of no one in this town whom I could call to 'rescue' my daughter and ensure her safety while I made the three hour car trip to pick her up.

However, the hand of providence was guiding our movements in that I decided to ring the Catholic presbytery of this town to seek assistance. The two women who received my call, the parish secretary and one of the nuns from the parish team, immediately allayed my fears. Within 15 minutes, Sister Ellen made the trip to the train station and collected my daughter and took care of her until I arrived later in the afternoon. I knew neither of these women and had never spoken to them until my phone call yesterday. However, I felt secure and confident that I could rely on them as I could on anyone in my own parish.

There is some intangible bond and unspoken allegiance between people in my generation of Australian Church. This bond is not dependent on a personal knowledge of the other, nor is it restricted by distance. I was drawing on the power of a shared past and pilgrimage which have provided me with an understanding of belonging. This is one facet of Church which makes up for some of the disappointments and disillusion of formal Church.

Therese Vassarotti
Hackett, ACT

Colonial hangover

From Bill Tomasetti

The three articles on Papua New Guinea commencing on p15 of *Eureka Street*, September 1995 are timely; and I wish to comment very briefly on the first and more fully on the third. The first piece, Rowan Callick's, makes an informative contrast with the third, that of Professor Emeritus James Griffin.

The first is marked by perceptive description and analysis, and one completes a reading of it with the feeling that the material rewarded that reading. The third recalls the school of anti-colonialism which effloresced in the late 1960s at Waigani (in Port Moresby), the echoes of which still make jaded reappearances from time to time.

In the third, of several points that warrant mention, one that suggests a serious misunderstanding of district administration has been selected.

In 1962 I accompanied the UN Visiting Mission around the Eastern Highlands District. At Kainantu the Mission met with an assembly of village officials and other notables invited to meet the Mission. In discussions they made clear to the Mission that they opposed (indeed, resented) the UN pressure on Australia to hasten the transfer of sovereignty to PNG. They asserted that they were not yet ready for that transfer, and would say so when they were. There was a comparable assembly at Kundiawa with an address to the Mission asserting Chimbu views similar to those of the Kainantu, except that the Chimbu specified what they saw as prerequisites for independence: which included the establishment and operation in the Chimbu of both a mint and an armaments factory—serious matters. I have no doubt that these opinions corresponded (in general) to those held by very many Highlanders in 1962.

In 1968 the then Australian Minister for Territories,Barnes, made a public statement concerning the forthcoming national elections, in which he was critical of political parties. With reference thereto and to the Western Highlands, in his article Prof.Em. Griffin writes: ' But—can you believe it now?—... his *kiaps* [sic] (officers) actively discouraged them and warned that early independence could threaten Australian aid and that it would mean Highlanders would end up as 'grasscutters' for the more advanced coastals'.

I find it implausible that *kiap* would waste their fully extended resources to put around ideas which they would have known Highlanders had crystallised and refined during (at least) the last six years. It may be recalled that it had always been the prescribed functions and daily task of the *kiap* to influence the conduct of public affairs—of course subject to the appropriate legislation and relevant policies. (Examples of these functions are the reduction of inter-society violence and the establishment of local government councils.) Thus it is surprising that the continuing exercise of that function in an event as important as a national election excites com-

ment. But one should also recall that it has long been a common mistake to see Highlanders (indeed all Papua New Guineans) as the *passive* absorbers of exotic ideas.

The 1968 general elections in electorates in the Western Highlands is explored in *The Politics of Dependence*: Epstein A.L., et.al., (eds), 1971, pp218-274 and *Free elections in a guided democracy*, by Colebatch H.K & Peta, Reay Marie, & Strathern A.J., A.N.U. Press, Canberra. It examines and describes the complex relationships between the various influences and interests at work in the lead-up to the election. It notes the public dominance of the District Commissioner (in this instance markedly so) and the work of his staff of *kiap* in the field in the conduct of the election. It mentions that, some months before the election, the District Commissioner 'called a meeting in Mt Hagen of the MHAs and the council presidents and vice-presidents, with Keith Levy as chairman, to discuss the nature and function of political parties....and wariness about self-government led people to reject the notion of parties without debate' (pp224/5).

The material in that chapter lends itself to a variety of interpretations, but Prof.Em. Griffin's comment, with its note of shocked surprise (above) , seems to me to ignore much of the relevant material. Would it seem relevant here to suggest that simplistic doctrinaire views do not help towards an understanding of complex situations?

But why quarrel about a display of antique scholarly anti-colonialism? Chapter XII, Article 76 (b) and (c), of the UN charter, requires a trustee power 'to promote the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the inhabitants of the Trust Territory and their progressive development towards self-government or independence.' And also to encourage respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all. When the Australian Government entered into the Trusteeship Agreement with the United Nations for PNG, it agreed to do so.

Thus, did not the Australian Government, as the sovereign authority for PNG from 1946 to 1974, have an anti-colonial policy? Have not the anti-colonial feathers been wrongly worn for far too long by the late starters of the Waigani efflorescence?

Bill Tomasetti
Wentworth Falls, NSW

All in good fun

From John Grey, managing editor, The Catholic Leader

Paul Chadwick ('Cracking the Code' *Eureka Street*, November 1995) appears to share a common misunderstanding—that journalism (good and bad) does not exist outside politics, or even outside Canberra.

He is dismissive of what he calls 'entertainment' and separates journalists from entertainers as one would sheep from goats.

Even in my most penitential moments, if my profession did not require me to read newspapers (and religious journals) I would not pick one up unless I was going to enjoy the experience.

If you want to educate, inform or otherwise intellectually stimulate a reader, first catch your reader. If your target market wants only serious verbiage, print it unadorned. If you want a wider market, you must step up to (not stoop to) 'entertainment'.

John Grey
Clayfield, QLD

Inside story

The proprietors monopolise media coverage, but what about the workers in the fourth estate? ***Mark Skulley*** *reports.*

JOHN MORTIMER'S LATEST VOLUME OF MEMOIRS has been praised as an exercise in great wit and good manners in which his emotional life of 20 years is hidden beneath layers of discussions of Rex Harrison, Laurence Olivier and the Sex Pistols' use of the word 'bollocks'. It's rare for journalists to be accused of having great wit or good manners, but we often smother our emotions with anecdote and argument. There are, however, frequent formularised exceptions such as mock outrage and mawkishness.

All journalists are familiar with the emotions which prompted a scribe of yesteryear to carve some T.S. Eliot into the press gallery bench overlooking Western Australia's Legislative Council: 'I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.'

As Margaret Simons wrote in the first issue of *Eureka Street* (March, 1991), journalists are in many ways like police: 'An air of anti-intellectualism pervades both police stations and newsrooms. Thinking is not encouraged and, in any case, there is hardly time for it.'

On the other hand, much of the gathering of raw material comes down to a reflexive way of dealing with people which is gleaned from experience and instinct rather than text books. For example, the novelist and biographer Blanche D'Alpuget said in a recent television profile that she had found that prominent men tended to talk about themselves when she talked about another prominent man.

Tom Wolfe wrote in his introduction to *The New Journalism* anthology that reporting could be tedious, messy, physically dirty, boring, dangerous even. 'But worst of all, from the genteel point of view, is the continual posture of humiliation.'

The reporter started out by 'presuming upon someone's privacy, asking questions he has no right to expect an answer to—and no sooner has he lowered himself that far than already he has become a supplicant with the cup out ... adapting his personality to the situation, being ingratiating, obliging, charming, whatever seems to be called for ... '

Wolfe was writing about in-depth feature reporting, but the handmaiden principle is still generally true (even if it only lasts as long as it takes to gather the story). Tales of complaisant journalists sit uneasily with documented cases of arrogance and bullying, such as the hounding of the family of the Australian backpacker, David Wilson, after he was taken captive in Cambodia, but such behaviour is really only an extension of Wolfe's argument in the sorry direction of 'whatever-it-takes'.

As a reporter myself, I ruminate over non-fiction books such as Helen Garner's *The First Stone*, of which Dr Jenna Mead has said that her real-life character was split into 'six or seven different characters' in the book—a legally required distortion about which Garner has expressed some post-publication regret.

Then there's John Berendt's absorbing story about murder in Savannah, Georgia, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. Berendt was quoted in a recent interview saying that he has shuffled the sequence of events of his narrative. Berendt is working in mixed-media territory, and he's been honest enough to admit his shuffling. I have more pedestrian worries, like how do you record such extended southern Gothic conversations? Do you risk spooking somebody by pulling out a tape recorder? Do you have perfect shorthand or are the conversations re-creations?

Admittedly, the classic form for 'news' stories in newspapers, the inverted pyramid, is unable to replicate what exactly happened as it happened (what is sometimes known in the trade as 'the true facts'). Life doesn't fit any consistent format, let alone one in which the most important or 'sexiest' facts are in the first paragraph and thereafter in descending order of importance down through the story. Inverted pyra-

mids are often hammered into round holes or squares. They can look even stranger when stretched on the rack of a royal commission.

This almost-but-maybe-not-quite rendering of events while racing the clock can be exhilarating and enervating at the same time. The taxi drivers who say brightly: 'Journalism must be an interesting job', are both right and wrong: there are long fallow periods. All journalists are familiar with the emotions which prompted a scribe of yesteryear to carve some T.S. Eliot into the press gallery bench overlooking Western Australia's Legislative Council: 'I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.'

RISK BRINGS EXHILARATION. The only journalists who never make mistakes are those who never write anything, or at least very little, and the need to acknowlege mistakes can go against the piss-and-vinegar attitude one needs to hang in there. But as Margaret Simons wrote in *Eureka Street*, journalists should not hesitate to be as critical of themselves as they were of others. Her insistence was lost on some of the reporters from the now defunct Melbourne *Truth*, who privately complained that research on the newspaper for a *60 Minutes* report had 'invaded their privacy'.

In a profession marked by daily or even hourly demarcations, it doesn't take long to get a personal history which is widely known among one's peers. Even cadet journalists are regularly in the crowd scenes of public life dramas. But there's often a yawning chasm between the dream and the reality. As Tom Wolfe wrote about wanting to get into journalism in the first place: 'Chicago, 1928, that was the general idea ... Drunken reporters out on the ledge of the *News* peeing into the Chicago River at dawn ... Nights down at the detective bureau—it was always nighttime in my daydreams of the newspaper life ... '. The daydream changed over time to include investigative reporters who looked like Robert Redford, but it was always still nighttime.

Compare all of that with a black and white photograph circa 1965 of the old *Age* newsroom in Collins Street, Melbourne. A bunch of blokes in thin-lapelled suits are hunched over typewriters perched on tiny desks with ashtrays on them. These guys were smoking inside the building!

Strangely, an as-yet-unnamed law seems to mean that every advance in newspaper technology brings deadlines forward rather than back. This lunacy is compounded by the industry's increasing tendency to devalue, or simply not employ, experienced sub-editors (let alone the extinct proof-reader). Who else will insist that desks be called desks, not work stations!

There also seems to be less boozing amongst journalists in general nowadays. It's all professionalism. Tertiary and work qualifications have long been the go for would-be cadets. Younger (male) journalists seem to have switched in the late 1980s from quoting Hunter S. Thompson to quoting P.J. O'Rourke, although quoting writers seems to be going the way of public joke telling.

Australia has only this year seen the first appointment of a woman, Deborah Light, as editor of a national paper, *The Australian Financial Review*. (Michelle Grattan was briefly the editor of the *Canberra Times*.) There is still no career path for younger journalists of either sex.

Another change is the dominance of TV news. One topic that has not been covered on the ABC's *Frontline* is the simmering tension between TV and print. Newspaper journalists pride themselves on 'setting the agenda', and grind their teeth while attending media events custom-made for TV consumption. Both branches prefer to overlook radio where possible, which is a considerable feat given the reach of radio in Australia.

James Fenton's reportage on the end of the Marcos regime touched on the twitchy nature of mixed-media competition:

> There's a special kind of vigilance in the foyer of a press hotel. The star TV correspondents move through, as if waiting to be recognised, spotted. When they come back sweating and covered with the dust of the road, they have a particular look that says: 'See, I have come back sweating, covered with the dust of the road'. When they leave in a hurry on a hot news tip, they have a look that says: 'What? Me leave in a hurry on a hot news tip? No, I'm just sloping off to dinner'. Everyone is alert to any sudden activity—the arrival of a quotable politician, the sudden disappearance of a rival crew, the hearty greetings of the old hands. When the foyer is full, it is like a stock exchange for news. When it is empty, you think: Where are they all? What's going on?

The only journalists who never make mistakes are those who never write anything, or at least very little, and the need to acknowlege mistakes can go against the piss-and-vinegar attitude one needs to hang in there.

Franklin D. Roosevelt conducting a presidential press conference. Photograph from The Newspaper: An International History *by Anthony Smith.*

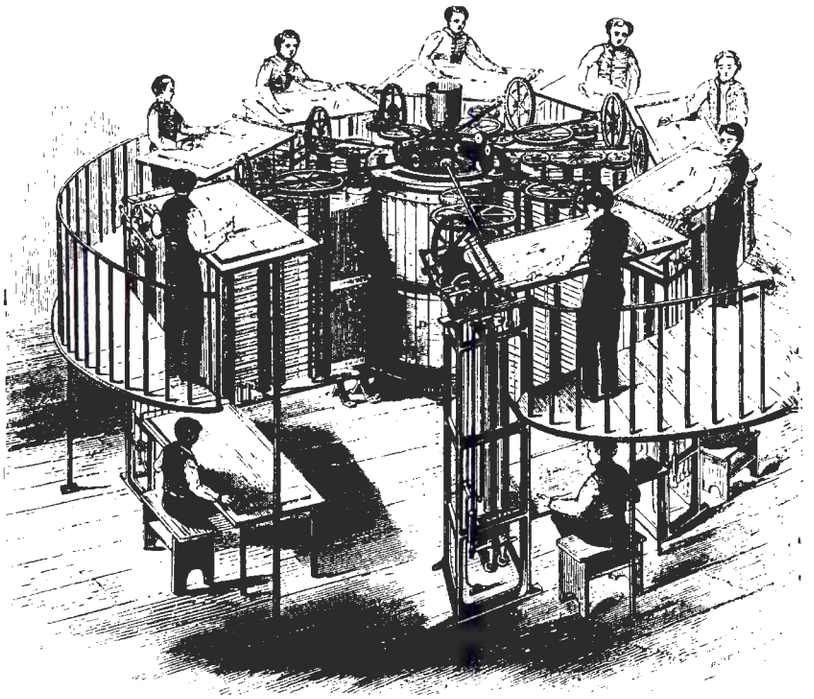


Illustration of a press used for printing The Times *in the early 19th century, from* The Newspaper: An International History *by Anthony Smith.*

I once attended a (very) early morning press conference at Melbourne's Tullamarine for the arrival of an Australian hostage released during the early days of the Gulf War. The TV crews had set up and one cameraman decided to save time by doing a 'two shot' of his reporter nodding gravely and taking notes *before* the arrival of the interviewee. I was sitting next to the camerman's reporter and was asked if I would mind 'making like' I was taking notes. I blearily tried to explain that it would be better if we stuck to our own approximations of reality, but the cameraman took umbrage at the lack of fraternal co-operation.

For a (decreasingly) knockabout group, journalists are surprisingly conscious of personal status when they begin to climb the professional ladder. This is not that surprising because journalism is like boxing—to paraphrase the great American journalist A.J. Leibling—in that everybody gets done over sometime. These falls can come from within and without, professional jealousy and elbows-out competition being found at all levels of journalism, along with generosity and friendship.

Contrary to popular opinion, Canberra and the problems it poses for reporters trying to do their job properly are not unique to Australia. Hugh Lunn's *Vietnam: A Reporter's War* told of Saigon-based journalists being present when US President Lyndon Johnson flew in to Cam Ranh Bay. The local reporters were hindered when trying to file stories and 'put on a bus that didn't go anywhere.' Lunn later discovered that the White House press corps were being given time to land in Bangkok and file their stories before the local reporters. 'It was an example of what all presidents, prime ministers and premiers know: that if they are nice to the people who report on them day after day and let them get, exclusively, the biggest, most interesting stories, then they will get a better press.'

Adam Gopnik wrote in *The New Yorker* last December that one of the overlooked turning points in American journalism came in 1864, after General Meade, the hero of Gettysburg, publically humiliated a journalist he disliked. The Yankee hacks retaliated by blacking out Meade's activities, with the consequence that today everybody knows that Robert E. Lee was the noble general defeated at Gettysburg. Who remembers Meade?

According to Gopnik, an access culture developed after the Civil War in which a journalist's advancement depended on his intimacy with power. He argues that this has changed in the past 20 years to an aggression culture in which success can also depend on a willingess to stage 'visible, ritualised displays of aggression' and which avoids any relation to serious political ideas because of the need to at least appear objective.

In between, says Gopnik, Richard Nixon replaced the access system with a system of prepackaging:

> That system—of spin control and prepackaged information—became an all-purpose model for dealing with the press, used by everybody from a politician running for President to a celebrity running from (or to) *Vanity Fair*.
>
> Conventional wisdom has it that the press became more aggressive in order to mean that the more authoritarian the figure in power, the more aggressive the press's reaction. Just the opposite seems to be the case: the more authoritarian the figure, the more complaisant the press. Anyone with his own narrative of aggression to relate has to be treated respectfully ...

Australia, lagging behind most American trends, has a mixture of access and aggression journalism. I agree when Gopnik argues that the 'morality of being a reporter is really the same as the morality of being a person.' As my old cadet counsellor, a laconic Scot named Jim Dunbar, used to say: if you have a think about it, you *know* when it's fair.

But I disagree when Gopnik argues that it doesn't make sense to talk about professional ethics in journalism—as something apart from simple ethics—*because* journalism is not a profession (my emphasis).

Gopnik reckoned that editors demand a 'particular kind of belligerence' because it sells, and reports of conflict and mayhem often have staying power. The first entries in *The Faber Book of Reportage* include the plague in Athens 430 BC, the Death of Socrates, Caesar invades Britain, Rome burns and Vesuvius erupts.

John Carey writes in the book's introduction that reportage provides modern man with a reassuring sense of events going on beyond the immediate horizon, a release from trivial routines and an habitual daily illusion of communication with a reality greater than himself: 'When we view reportage as the natural successor to religion, it helps us to understand why it should be so profoundly taken up with death ... Reportage, taking religion's place, endlessly feeds its reader with the deaths of other people, and

therefore places him in the position of a survivor ...'

That sounds impressive, but may also be serious twaddle. Reportage constitutes only a fraction of the daily media bombardment. More people appear to be Out There with fictional TV shows rather than via reportage.

The Faber Book of Reportage includes three eyewitness reports on the sinking of the Titanic, although a 1980 article in *Punch* magazine concerning Miss Eva Hart, who was a seven-year-old passenger when the ship went down, is more memorable.

Miss Hart, a musician, insisted that the Titanic's orchestra was *not* playing *Abide With Me*, but possibly a song called *Autumn* which had a similar beginning. She recalled her father standing on the deck and her mother reaching out from the lifeboat for her hat, a 'large decorated thing ... It's hard to believe but almost every woman took her hat.'

Nowadays, Miss Hart would perhaps be grilled for Repressed Memory Syndrome. ■

Mark Skulley is a reporter with the *Australian Financial Review.*

Eureka! ... almost

THE MEDIA HAVE BEEN GIVING the 'B' word a fair old workout again. You know, that all-purpose description of any useful advance in science and medicine, 'the breakthrough'.

The recent announcement of the discovery in Australia of a genetically defective strain of the HIV virus was billed as a 'world breakthrough'. And, given long years of work and a certain amount of good fortune the strain could become the basis of a vaccine against AIDS.

But while the researchers, to their credit, have been trying to stress how much effort such a successful outcome would involve, reporters are not so circumspect. They have been falling over themselves to ask AIDS support groups for comment on how wonderful the future will be.

To give the HIV research its due, it certainly seems significant. It really might be a turning point in the fight against AIDS, but how can you tell?

And that's part of the problem the media has in reporting science. Reporters with little background generally present snapshots of the continuous process which incrementally adds to the patchwork of knowledge. For the most part, because they don't understand the process, journalists report results without context. And in a misguided attempt to make those results more interesting, out pops the word 'breakthrough' on cue.

The impact of this 'breakthrough' syndrome is much wider than the debasing of a word or the dilemma of the boy-who-cried-wolf. Using the word 'breakthrough' actually reinforces the old stereotype of scientists as boffins, odd people who sit and cogitate all day, occasionally jumping up to cry 'Eureka!' That image is not good for funding. People who function like Archimedes surely do not need or deserve expensive equipment, facilities and human resources.

But perhaps of even greater concern is that it gives none of the flavour of studies which raise more questions than they solve, which show the world to be an increasingly complex place. And for every study which gives a clear answer, how many more are inconclusive?

Almost a year ago, Dr Jeff Friedman and colleagues from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute in New York announced that they had found a gene which, when disabled, made mice grow extremely fat. They called their gene Ob, the obesity gene. It was responsible for a hormone, leptin. When injected, leptin caused mice to shed fat. And there was a similar substance found in humans. The media were quick to forge the connection between the Ob gene and a 'breakthrough' that would revolutionise the diet industry, a fat pill.

But there is much more to the Ob gene story. No-one has yet been able to show any impact of leptin outside of rats and mice. Leptin is already known to be present in fat humans. Obese people not only manufacture leptin, they seem to make it in proportion to their weight—so they actually have more of it than their slimmer friends.Their problems do not seem to lie with a defective gene, but with the fact that its product is not triggering slimming. Already the system is starting to look too complex to be rectified by swallowing a simple fat pill.

Meanwhile a group of Australian researchers, led by Dr Frank Ng at Monash University, has found another compound which causes mice to lose fat in fat tissue. This compound is a small section of the human growth hormone (hGH) molecule. It is not surprising that hGH should be involved in regulating fat: hGH is the chemical messenger that regulates growth and development. And growth and development need energy, which the body stores as either fat or sugar. Dr Ng has also found that another part of the hGH molecule regulates insulin, the enzyme which controls the breakdown of sugar. This finding provides a biochemical link between obesity and diabetes, a link known at a practical level for years.

From the 'breakthrough' Ob gene and the prospect of a fat pill, we've suddenly leapt into a complicated world of growth, development, diabetes, and energy metabolism—not so straightforward, but far more interesting. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

MUZZLED FOR THE PUBLIC SAFETY.

MOIRA RAYNER

Muzzling the watchdogs

GOVERNMENTS OFTEN establish statutory watchdogs—'independent' officers, who are not strictly speaking public servants—to allay public fears about the proper use of their discretionary power. These bodies appear to be watchdogs, at arm's length from the government, protecting the public interest in individual claims of right.

Sooner or later however their relationship with government sours. Criticism is always inconvenient and sometimes politically painful. Powerful interests move in to criticise or even seek to muzzle them. DPPs have been the target: in Victoria, where Bernard Bongiorno finally left his position after a scandal over the Attorney-General's secret plans to legislate away his autonomy, and in NSW, where DPP Nicholas Cowdrey QC was forbidden to give evidence about his concerns over proposed mandatory sentencing laws to a Parliamentary committee. In South Australia the welfare bureaucracy seems bent on—and is likely to succeed in—abolishing the function performed since 1984 by the Children's Interests Bureau. Its director, Sally Castell-McGregor, is internationally known for her effective advocacy of the rights of children. At the time of writing she had been cursorily invited to 'consider her career options' because, it was claimed, she had not welcomed the integration of what had been her independent office into a department with other policy priorities.

In other words, when governments establish guardians of the public interest to protect the rights of individuals that may be overlooked or overridden, they quickly become uncomfortable and seek to deprive them of the capacity to perform that task.

One of the ways we show respect for people is to take their interests seriously. By definition individual claims or complaints challenge other perceptions of 'the public interest' or the common good. One of the most obvious recent examples in Victoria was the way in which the concerns about the education of Aboriginal students were dismissed when a particularly effective school, Northland Secondary College, was closed. The students complained that this deprived them of their access to public secondary education because of their race, and a series of courts found this to be the case. Nonetheless the Victorian Education Minister argued that their individual rights claims were inconsistent with, and therefore unreasonable to uphold vis-à-vis the public interest in a streamlined and economically efficient education system which could not 'afford' to continue that service. Through no fewer than nine legal proceedings over two years the courts upheld that challenge, which was made through the then Victorian Equal Opportunity Act, one of many statutes which reflects the public interest in a private rights claim. Before it was finally forced to reopen the school, in 1995, the Victorian government then legislated to prevent any further claims under State anti-discrimination laws, by amendments to the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act, and a Constitutional amendment which removed the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court so to do, entirely.

What does this say about the value society places on individual rights to be equal before the law?

Citizens acquire their ideas, standards and values, their criteria for making judgments about their own best interests, through participation in a community. Recognition that they have such interests means holding them to be, intrinsically, worthy of protection even when governments do not find this convenient.

In 1968 the Common Law courts first asserted the citizens' right to challenge government decisions when the House of Lords decided that a request to produce government documents in legal proceedings could no longer be automatically and successfully resisted on the ground of 'the public interest'; instead, the court must test the merits of the claim to determine whether or not the public interest in keeping such a document confidential should properly outweigh that other public interest, that justice be done and be seen to be done. Since then governments in the Common Law tradition, as Australia is, have sought to allow, in a more systematic but increasingly limited way, citizen access to government information: rights under FOI legislation, to written reasons for administrative decisions, or access to statutory tribunals such as the Administrative Appeals Tribumal..

There has been growing reluctance to continue along this path. The Victorian Attorney-General, for instance, appears to be of the view that Parliamentary elections are suf-

Who are they?

Directors of Public Prosecutions protect the public interest and confidence in the proper administration of criminal justice. Community services for the most vulnerable people are overseen by officers such as (in NSW) a **Community Services Commissioner**, in South Australia the **Children's Interests Bureau**, or (in Victoria) a **Public Advocate** (for people with intellectual disabilities). Concerns about medical and hospital treatment may be addressed by **Health Services commissioners** or **complaints bureaux** in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and now, federally, for complaints against private health insurers. Governments set up complaints mechanisms for facilities such as superannuation or insurance, telecommunications; or for facilities which were once the business of government but are now the business of industry (such as the **Victorian Electricity Ombudsman**) and 'independent' regulators of commercial interests which have consequences for the fabric of society—casinos, major international events such as the Olympic Games or the Australian Grand Prix.

ficient mechanisms for individuals to register their protests. Addressing a seminar on the Victorian Constitution in October 1995, Mrs Wade asserted that while 'legitimate' criticism of government action had a value—'keeping us on our toes'—this did not require access to a remedy for loss of civil rights and liberties.

Mrs Wade dismissed widespread concern about the growing Victorian practice of preventing citizens from seeking redress for lost rights and damaged interests by legislation which included Constitutional amendment to deprive the Supreme Court of jurisdiction. The most controversial legislation in the last 18 months seeks to protect commercial contracts for government-supported projects—such as the casino, the Australian Grand Prix and the new City Link tollway—from public disclosure. It makes it possible for citizens to commit offences by objecting to their implementation and—in each case—amends the Constitution to remove the Supreme Court's jurisdiction in significant respects. Removal of access to a State Supreme Court also in effect deprives the citizen of the right of access to the Commonwealth's High Court. The *Ikea* case is presently challenging such provisions on the ground that they are inherently unconstitutional.

Formal political structures themselves—parliament, the executive, the courts—protect the public interest in a representative democracy, but these are not in themselves the source of the public interest. The public interest in individual interests exists *because* of the fundamental principles of a representative democracy, which require individuals to be protected against encroachment upon their rights by the politically powerful.

When governments seek to allay public concern about their administrative acts by appointing 'watchdogs'—they have enthusiastically embraced quasi-'ombudsmen' or commissioners particularly—it is instructive to observe how they have treated those which already exist. It is arguable that any office or office-holder which is resourced at the discretion of the executive and may be abolished or its officers dismissed without redress is not, technically, independent at all. What value do they have if, when they do what their job requires, the government undermines their legitimacy?

For example, on 10 November *The Age* reported that the Victorian Health Minister had severely attacked her health services commissioner simply because she had presented a paper at a case mix conference in Adelaide which referred to Victorian complaints of shorter stays and earlier discharge, shifting human and financial cost to the community. Mrs Tehan had apparently objected to this 'behaviour' in the strongest terms, asserting that the commissioner should not make any public comment unless she had first reported to Parliament or to the minister. It might well be argued that there is no point in establishing such offices if their duty to speak about their work is denied.

THE PEOPLE DO HAVE OPINIONS about 'legitimacy' which goes beyond the forms of law. Twenty years on we still care about the conduct of the Governor-General not so much because of the technical legality—or illegality—of his acts, but because he acted furtively—and, apparently, to protect his own position. Victorians are concerned about the laws which establish commercial enterprises which considerably affect public interests, because their government has fallen into the habit of protecting them by concealing information, granting immunities to private corporations, and limiting or denying citizens' rights and freedoms: because they raise fundamental questions about competing assessments of the public interest, individual rights vis-à-vis the State, and the *proper* uses of power. They raise questions about the principles of the rule of law, which are infrequently discussed, but underlie our sense of the legitimacy of government.

These are the principles which do not permit a public servant to exercise arbitrary discretions; which say that everyone is equal before the law and subject to the same laws, administered by ordinary judicial institutions, to which everyone has the right of equal access and to be treated properly in them. The unwritten rule of law gives individuals essential rights vis-à-vis the State: freedom of expression and movement, equal protection from threats, violence or exploitation, and procedural guarantees such as due process and natural justice.

When it is denied or misunderstood the rule of law becomes tenuous, even in a community which considers itself to be free. When its principles are overridden as a matter of course, or advocates are threatened or silenced, the institutions of democracy are deeply undermined.

Australians have a civic duty to understand and preserve the fundamental principles of the rule of law—constraints on discretionary power; equality before the law; and an independent and accessible judiciary—and to object to their removal. They protect the public interest in a society where individual and minority rights not only matter: they are the reason for the State's existence. ■

Moira Rayner is a lawyer and freelance journalist.

RAIMOND GAITA

Reflections on the euthanasia debate

WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE SO DETERMINED to change the law in Victoria, now that euthanasia is, de facto, permissible? I think an important part of the answer is this: many people are persuaded by Peter Singer's vision of a new, ethically mature, society to replace the old one sustained (they believe) by religious superstitions and an infantile moral absolutism. They believe the old order is dying on its feet. Some of them find this inspiring, even some who find aspects of Singer's vision abhorrent.

That would go some way to explaining why many of the campaigners for more liberal laws appear not to take their opposition seriously. *The Age* provides an example. It called for a 'rational debate' on euthanasia. It also said that 'compassion demands' a change in the law and that the present state of affairs is hypocritical. That doesn't look like a position from which one can concede much to the opposition. It makes the call for rational debate look less like an invitation to a discussion than a summons to have one's hard-heartedness and hypocrisy exposed. This incapacity amongst many campaigners for euthanasia to take seriously the other side of the argument goes back a long way.

It shows itself in their incredulous response to the question, why do not those who ask a doctor to kill them or to help them die, consider killing themselves instead? Of course, sometimes they cannnot do it, and when they can the consequences are sometimes terrible. Such facts are cited often enough, but never against any position that needs seriously to be reminded of them. It is a remarkable fact that supporters of euthanasia have been under no real pressure to explain why many of those who ask others to kill them could not kill themselves.

Why should there be such pressure? The answer is obvious to anyone who believes the considerations for and against euthanasia yield ample material for dilemmas. The person who is willing to assist in your suicide or to kill you today, may tomorrow be persuaded by the other side of the argument and suffer grievous remorse. That possibility flows from the acknowledgment that there is a morally serious case against euthanasia, one that could persuade someone of sense and goodwill, whether or not they are religious. In most cases no one could know how real that possibility of change is for the person who has agreed to assist someone to die or who has killed someone. Given how serious the remorse would be if it were a lucid response to the reasons that should inform it, it is reasonable to ask, what kind of person would ask someone to risk it rather than suffer a failed suicide attempt?

If the person appreciated the nature of the risk, the answer would often have to be harsh. However I think that they do not appreciate it. I suspect the main reason why they have not been moved by the fear that the doctor who kills them might later suffer grievous remorse, is that they cannot see how someone who is not religious could find in euthanasia grounds for such remorse. They take religion to be a form of superstition and believe that the road from superstition to enlightenment is usually, at least in the life of an individual, one way. They therefore assume that a non-religious doctor who favours euthanasia can be relied on not to lapse into unreason.

HOW DOES ONE EXPLAIN THIS FAILURE of moral imagination? By pointing, I think, to forms of dissociation—of some of our beliefs from others and of some of our beliefs from experience. The former is caused by a failure to distinguish what we believe from what we believe we believe (as Bernard Williams puts it in *Shame and Necessity*). The latter is caused by our failure adequately to conceptualise what is at issue in the distinction between knowledge of the head and knowledge of the heart. That failure expresses itself in a distinction between reason and emotion that distorts our understanding of one of the most important facts about the ethical—that we often learn by being moved by what others say and do. The two forms of dissociation feed one another.

The dissociation in our beliefs often shows itself in our inconsistencies. We sometimes take as obvious something that contradicts other things we believe, and sometimes we do it for reasons that are more

interesting than the fact that we are always vulnerable to inconsistency. In this case it arises from obscurities in the concepts of morality and religion, and the concepts of the psychological and the spiritual, which are connected with them in close and complex ways. We sometimes fail to understand the nature of our moral beliefs—not only about what we should or should not do, but about what we take morality to be, and therefore, what we take to be of moral concern.

Many people believe that only religion could justify (by providing premises for valid arguments) the claim that euthanasia is always morally wrong because suicide is always morally wrong. They also take the following beliefs about suicide to be obviously compelling for anyone who is not religious. First, that there can be no moral objection to suicide unless the person who commits suicide harms others or exhibits a vice in committing it, a vice, for example, such as cowardice. Secondly, that there can be no justification for interfering with suicides unless they are acting against their best interests or harming others.

Many of the same people are often closer to religious ideas about suicide than sits easily with their (sincerely) professed beliefs about religion and suicide. The religious objection to suicide, put generally, is that people can wrong themselves analogously to the ways they wrong others. In particular—this objection goes—when they kill themselves, they wrong themselves analogously to the way murderers wrong their victims.

Religion has often read that analogy closely, describing suicide as self-murder. One can believe that reading to be a mistake while agreeing that one can act morally against oneself, that most suicides do so, and that that fact partially informs our sense of the nature and seriousness of murder. Those beliefs are inconsistent with the belief that there can be nothing wrong with suicide if it harms no one and if it expresses no vice. I suspect that many people hold those inconsistent beliefs.

Certainly many people take seriously the idea that some forms of acting against oneself, some forms of reckless disregard for one's life or health, and some forms of suicide, may be objectionable in ways conveyed by the thought that to do these things is to hold one's life cheap. Some will go further and speak of those deeds as forms of ingratitude. They may speak of life as a gift while rejecting the need to answer the question—who gave it? Or, if they will not speak this way on their own behalf, they may understand and be moved, in ways that are in tension with their official attitudes, by the fact that others do.

I have conjectured that many of the people who believe such things also believe that there can be no ethical objection to suicide when it harms no one and does not manifest a vice. If that is true, and if the reasons for it are deeper than our ordinary disposition to inconsistency, then the task to determine what we most deeply believe is likely to be more difficult than either side of this argument appears inclined to acknowledge.

One of the doctors who challenged the Victorian law said that he assisted the suicide of a young man dying of AIDS who had become severely incontinent and could not bear the indignity of it. You don't have to be religious to be uneasy by what that says about when a life might reasonably be thought to be no longer worth living. People have lived through such humiliations to find and to express a sense of value that transcends them. We sometime express that sense of value by speaking of a deeper sense of dignity, or of an inalienable dignity. However, I suspect that the concept of dignity cannot really sustain such disengagement from appearances. Dignity is inherently alienable by indignities. Its vulnerability to shame makes it unsuited to express the ethical content of the idea that all human life is sacred. Those who rely on the concepts of inalienable dignity and of quality of life, often look desperate when they try to express what human life may mean in the face of severe and degrading affliction.

People do maintain dignity in the face of terrible indignities and humiliations. However, I think that the cases in which this is possible—the cases in which dignity is the right concept to capture the demeanour that remains possible for them—are fewer than is needed by those who are morally troubled by euthanasia in many circumstances. I am sure that those who are opposed to euthanasia in all circumstances are whistling in the dark when they talk of inalienable dignity. Simone Weil, whose writings on suffering and affliction, and on our tendencies to seek consoling illusions are amongst the most insightful I know, wrote of 'those who have been struck the kind of blow which leaves the victim writhing on the ground like a half crushed worm'. It is possible even for such people, nourished by a saintly love and seeing things in the light of that love, to speak of their life as a gift. We know it is possible because it has happened. If it had not happened, we would have no reason to think it even intelligible, let alone possible. But they do not find it possible to speak that way because they have tapped within themselves a deeper source of dignity, or because they have found some quality of life up their sleeve. The possibility of such a response to affliction has always seemed mysterious to those who have wondered at it and felt obliged to testify to it. They persistently invoke concepts like Goodness (of the kind that invites a capital 'G'), love, purity and grace. These are concepts that stand in a different relation to the will (and, as I shall presently suggest, to the range of natural human goods) than does the concept of dignity and those, such as courage and nobility, that go with it.

It is unfortunate that the concepts of dignity and 'quality of life' should dominate discussion of euthanasia. Both are of the kind Simone Weil called

It is desirable and inevitable that we should think again about the relation of religion to morality and of both to law. If the work of reason is really to be done, as so many are urging that it should be, then its first task must be to rescue the phenomena from over-simplification.

intrinsically mediocre, that is, they are intrinsically inadequate to the spiritual realities we sometimes try to express with them. The latter is worse than the former. Talk of quality of life seldom conveys the considerations that impinge on a person's sense of the meaning in his or her life. It is a banal expression in most of its uses, especially when it hardens into phrases like 'the argument from the quality of life' or 'considerations of quality of life'. Their repeated use tends to make us tone deaf to the language we need in this discussion. That exemplifies the second kind of dissociation. We become tone deaf but do not notice it. Favoured theories about the relation of the cognitive and the affective reduce our chances of seeing what a handicap this is.

That is one reason why we should all be wary of talk of 'quality of life'. But there is a reason particular to those who oppose euthanasia. Talk of quality of life tilts the argument against them. It tends to be tied to the ongoing fulfilment of wishes and desires, the pursuit of projects and such like. It is therefore well suited to support the apparent truism that life may cease to be a good to its possessor. It supports the natural thought that life is a space of opportunities in which the characteristic human goods are won and lost, and that a humanly good life is one in which the good outweighs the bad. It is obvious that according to this conception there may come a time in someone's life when their sufferings are so great and their disabilities so extensive, that life ceases to be a good for them, and dignity impossible. The conceptual and spiritual reach of talk of quality of life ends just where the transforming power of an unconditional gratitude for the gift of life begins. I cannot argue this in convincing detail here, nor even hope to show that there is something intelligible here for argument to defend. I have tried to do so at length in *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*. Here, I can merely try to map some of the conceptual landscape.

Could such considerations, suitably elaborated, sustain the belief that euthanasia and suicide are always impermissible? I think they could not, but it does not matter to the ethical significance of the idea that all human life is sacred. It is again unfortunate that the argument over that idea has been hijacked by the claim that its ethical content is captured in the principle that it is always morally wrong intentionally to kill an innocent person. Even if the claim that all human life is sacred entails that principle, its ethical content is not revealed in its exceptionless character. Its content has always been connected with a particular sense of the preciousness of each individual. That preciousness is interdependent with the modalities that express the fact that we are a unique kind of limit to our own will and to the will of others. Elaboration of that interdependence reveals to us the particular kind of seriousness that ethical considerations have for us. Kant tried to capture it in the authority and seriousness he attributed to the categorical imperative.

The nature of that authority and seriousness is best shown in lucid remorse. Remorse reveals how extraordinary it is that other human beings could matter to us as much as and in the way that they do. Dostoyevski explored this with passionate insight. It is cause for astonishment that we should routinely find it understandable (if badly mistaken) that people should sometimes kill themselves in their grief over the realisation of what it means to have murdered someone—even when the person they murdered mattered not a fig to them or to anyone one else, and would have been mourned by no one if he had died of natural causes. Elaboration of what it means to wrong someone will generally disclose the relevance to that meaning of the victim's desires and interests, projects and so on. But reflection on remorse reveals two things. Firstly, how extraordinary—how unnatural—that it matters so much to us when we illegitimately interfere with someone's interests or override their autonomy. Secondly, that its mattering that much and in that way to us informs and is informed by, our a sense of the way human beings are precious.

Remorse is the horrified—and often bewildered—realisation of the meaning of the wrong one has done and what one has become by doing it. When one tries to elaborate what it means, many of our theories about the nature of morality seem inadequate. 'My God what have I done. I have violated the social contract, or my freely chosen principles, or botched my chances of flourishing!' And so on. These elaborations of a remorseful sense of what one has done are parodies of moral seriousness because they diminish the importance of one's victim, or because they are inadequate to a wrong-doer's remorseful sense of what it means to have made this person their victim. That is the deepest lesson that remorse offers to moral reflection. It reveals to us—in a way that argument over principles of conduct does not—what it means to wrong someone and the way that connects with the idea that human beings are precious, an idea we sometimes express by saying that they are unique and irreplaceable. But remorse does not reveal that wrong-doing means what it does *because* human beings are irreplaceable (or precious). Rather—and this is critical—it discloses the way in which our sense of what it is to wrong someone is interdependent with that sense of individuality and its value to us. Morality—or rather, this conception of it—is imbedded in a preceding sense of human preciousness which sustains it, but which it then transforms. The idea that hu-

man beings are sacred is such a transformation—the most sublime in the history of moral thought.

Many of the examples with which we probe the concept of the sanctity of life are of extremes. In the argument over euthanasia they are often of extreme suffering. In other cases they are of people who may not be suffering, but who lack to some radical degree the normal capacities of human beings. In still other cases, they are of people who have done such evil and whose characters are so wicked, that it is natural to think that they deserve to be treated like vermin. Such examples may incline people to think that the idea that human life is sacred is properly expressed in exceptionless moral principles, for in their exceptionless character those principles take us to the extremes. But the conception of the preciousness of each individual that may be revealed in reflection on such extremes, is not of that of an individual whose preciousness exists only at extremes. The absoluteness of that conception of absolute value which finds expression in the idea that all human beings are sacred, is not captured in the thought—*even here* one cannot do such and such. It is found in the meaning of the wrong we do even when it is quite ordinary and uncontroversial.

If the insistence on exceptionless principles is not to appear merely lunatic—an instance of what Jack Smart called 'rule worship'—then it will have to make clear its relation to a sense of the meaning of wrongdoing that is interdependent with the sense that each human being is unconditionally precious. Casuistry over hard cases which are intended to test exceptionless principles has distracted attention from this need.

I think that in order adequately to deal with the difficulties thrown up in the argument over euthanasia, we need to explore more deeply than we have whether morality is usefully distinguished from the ethical, how it relates to the religious, whether we need a concept of the spiritual distinguished from the religious and from the moral, and how in relation to all this, we should place the psychological. I don't mean that we need to think about these things in the abstract. We should think about them under the pressure of the examples which reveal the need to do it. Schopenhauer said that if there are moral arguments against suicide, they go deeper than those to be found in ordinary morality. I have already indicated why the seriousness of suicide cannot be fully captured in the vice it may exhibit, or the harm it does to someone else. It cannot be fully captured in the thought that it is always immoral or wicked or evil, nor, of course, in the thought that it is terribly sad that anyone should be driven to taking their life. The difficulty of determining what kind of terribleness attaches to suicide when it is not moral or psychological terribleness is not a trivial matter of classification, or a merely verbal matter. It is a difficulty generated by weaknesses in the concepts of the moral and the psychological. I believe that the same is true of the terribleness of some acts of euthanasia and assisted suicide.

Attention to the differences between the moral and the ethical, the religious and the spiritual, will show, I think, how implausible it is that an exceptionless prohibition against suicide and euthanasia could rationally be authoritative for someone who is not religious. It is implausible that the moral content of the idea that all human life is sacred will yield an understanding of what it means to commit suicide or euthanasia that will support the claim that these are always morally impermissible. The terribleness that from a religious point of view always attends suicide and euthanasia, will not be revealed in the moral content of the idea that life is sacred, insofar as that content is binding on an enlightened secular conscience. It needs to be expressed in specifically religious concepts—the concept of sin, for example.

It is therefore desirable and inevitable that we should think again about the relation of religion to morality and of both to law. If the work of reason is really to be done, as so many are urging that it should be, then its first task must be to rescue the phenomena from over-simplification. That will not be a morally neutral achievement, because what one takes the phenomena to be is to some, inexpungeable, degree determined by one's ethical sensibility. It is a mistake to think, as Singer does, that an account of morality or the ethical can recommend itself over its competitors on the grounds that it gives the most economical account of all the relevant phenomena. One's sense of what is relevant, and then, of whether it is adequately characterised, is not neutral as between those competing accounts.

SOMEONE MAY OBJECT THAT WHATEVER MERIT there may be in what I have said, it is irrelevant to the argument over euthanasia, because I have been talking about morality and religion whereas the argument has been about their relation to law. The argument (this objection continues) has been about whether respect for the autonomy of adults together with certain principles of the liberal state require that in certain circumstances the law should permit voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide.

The demand for autonomy can be a superficial thing. It sometimes amounts to little more than the irritated demand that other people mind their own business. Of course it can go deeper. Tamas Pataki, writing in the July/August issue of *Quadrant* said:

> There are . . . people who, with their support for the existing laws and other forms of advocacy, seek, through the instrument of the law, to intrude into that relationship [between mortals and their deaths] and to regulate how and when, and so with how much suffering, with what degree of self-respect, by what means and at what time, the dying should be allowed to die. I am simplifying, but it comes down to that, and I can scarcely think of anything more indecent, reprehensible or presumptuous.

Many people take seriously the idea that some forms of acting against oneself, some forms of reckless disregard for one's life or health, and some forms of suicide, may be objectionable in ways conveyed by the thought that to do these things is to hold one's life cheap.

Remorse is the horrified —and often bewildered — realisation of the meaning of the wrong one has done and what one has become by doing it. When one tries to elaborate what it means, many of our theories about the nature of morality seem inadequate.

Pataki referred to Freud's response to a related matter. Anyone who knows Freud's work will be able to hear more fully the tone of Pataki's indignation. Rhetoric aside, it commands respect. Yet, in my judgment, it is Simone Weil who gives the deepest account of the considerations that cluster around the concept of autonomy. In 'Human Personality' and elsewhere she writes passionately of the obligation to respect each person's 'power of refusal'. She grounds that obligation—its strictness and the seriousness of its violation—in her account of what it means for a person to be sacred.

Her account and Pataki's very different one (as it is implicit in what he says) achieve their authority from their conceptions of the preciousness of each human being. Those conceptions are interdependent with their accounts of autonomy. When those accounts are elaborated they show the different things it can mean to fail to respect autonomy. Respect for their autonomy is an essential part of how we express the way people matter to us, but it is only part of it. What we take autonomy to be and the weight we give it, will vary according to the ethical perspective from which we view it.

Just as talk of autonomy will not decide between seriously competing ethical conceptions in which it is imbedded, so it will not decide disputes about the relation of morality to law. Someone could rationally defend the existing law on euthanasia, and even stricter enforcement of it, by arguing that the law expresses and supports that ethical conception of the individual within which autonomy is most seriously respected. They might warn that in the name of autonomy we are undermining the practices which condition our deepest sense of why it must be respected. But they could not clear-sightedly believe themselves to be appealing to a morally neutral conception of autonomy. The qualification 'deepest', as I have used it to expound such a view—what it would come to when elaborated—is reliant on the ethical perspective it recommends, rather than an independent reason for adopting that perspective.

There are many conceptions of human dignity and of the way we are precious to one another. Supporters of euthanasia are right to say that liberalisation of the law will not of itself drive us to barbarism. Societies which did not have anything like the idea of the sanctity of life as it has been part of the religious tradition of the West, have had serious conceptions of the preciousness of persons even when they permitted infanticide and euthanasia. One need only to read Homer and the Greek Tragedies to know that. But it is also true that one need only read them to know that the ancient Greeks would have found absurd the suggestion that no human being, no matter who they are or what they have done, may be killed in the spirit of ridding the world of vermin. Some of the argument must be over whether that matters.

There is no neutral point which could yield decisive arguments about law and morality that would settle what divides parties to this dispute. That being said, it should at least be acknowledged by all concerned, that despite the distinguished place in legal philosophy of the view that law and morality are radically separate concerns, in our practice they have always been interwoven. Murderers could not express to themselves the ethical sense of the evil they had done to their victims by elaborating the wrong they had done to society. The murdered dead will not haunt their murderers only in the legal *persona* of a member of the community. 'My God what I have done. I have killed someone with whom I had (at least implicitly) a civil contract not to do this sort of thing!' The sense of the evil of murder, as it is revealed in a lucid remorse, informs our sense of its criminality. I know of no compelling argument why it shouldn't; which of course does not imply that the criminality of murder is just the evil of it.

The law against euthanasia does not exist only to prevent abuses that might follow its abolition. It exists also, I think, to expresses the recognition that, as things stand, our sense of the evil of murder depends on a conception of the preciousness of the individual that is threatened by the idea that voluntary euthanasia is the sort of moral issue that the law should leave to conscience.

Is this consistent with liberalism? It is probably not consistent with classical liberal theory as we have it in John Stuart Mill, or perhaps even as it has been developed after him. It relies on a sense of the expressive function of law, and on an idea of ethical value as *sui generis*, which is probably inconsistent with any concept of harm that is true to the spirit of classical liberalism. It has long been recognised that the moral/conceptual difficulties in determining what will count as harm creates problems for the liberal doctrine that the law should act against individuals only when their actions harm others. Of course people who oppose euthanasia believe that it harms those who are killed in that way (and the person who kills them), but the harm is of the kind they believe suicides inflict on themselves by holding their life cheap. It is doubtful whether liberalism can acknowledge that kind of harm without distorting exactly what made it an attractive doctrine. That is probably why opponents of euthanasia have (for the most part) not argued the case for the recognition of that kind of harm in order to preserve their liberal credentials.

Be that as it may: as with the legal philosophy that radically separates law and morality, so too with that theory of liberty. It has never been fully part of an existing free society. One can think of that gap as a reason for trying to take our society closer to the liberal ideal, or one can take it as a reason for rejecting that ideal, or much of it, because it cannot adequately express our aspiration to liberty. I think the second is the better option. Liberalism is in trouble

on many fronts. The challenge is to free our aspiration to liberty from its distortion by liberalism.

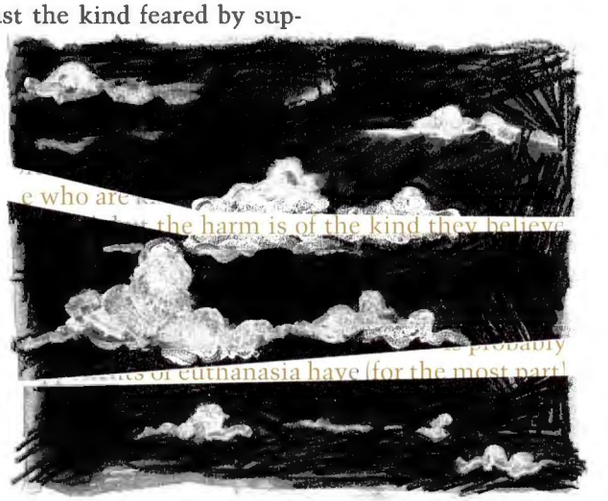
Finally, liberty is not the central political issue in the euthanasia debate. Pataki's protest expresses a strong sense of when the state has no right to intrude, but no elaboration of the good of liberty will be adequate to the outrage he expresses when he says that he can scarcely think of anything that is more 'indecent, reprehensible or presumptuous'.

Does the kind of weight I have given to the moral connection between objections to suicide and to euthanasia, make me vulnerable to the objection that the law is inconsistent in permitting suicide but prohibiting voluntary euthanasia? I think not. The prosecution of a poor wretch who has attempted suicide is an obscenity that discredits the law, just as the refusal to bury in hallowed ground someone who has succeeded is an obscenity that discredits religion. Neither of those judgments entails that the law should make all means of suicide readily available to competent adults, and neither entails that those who assist others to kill themselves, or who kill them after they have requested it, are merely the morally neutral means to the efficient realisation of someone's fully competent desire to die.

A LAW THAT EXPRESSES THE CONCEPTION of human life that I have been trying to reclaim for serious consideration, will discourage people from asking doctors (and others) to kill them and from doctors (and others) from agreeing to such requests. But the enforcement of such a law will also recognise that there are times when it would be indecent for law to intervene, for the same reasons that it is indecent to prosecute attempted suicides. They will be times when affliction and indignity are so protracted or severe, or both, that the law should not presume to sit in judgment on those who ask to die and those who assist them to die, or even who kill them. They are some of the cases that prompt people to say that 'compassion demands' that euthanasia sometimes be lawful. But there are other cases when, in despair over the meaning of their lives and in the name of a dignified death, people seize on the possibility of euthanasia to take control of their dying, and seek to die well before their illness makes any such thought about the 'demands' of compassion plausible. I do not say a law which permits euthanasia or assisted suicide in this latter kind of case is incompatible with any sense of the preciousness of life, or that ours would be an evil society if the law permitted it. But we have reason to believe that such a law would not be consistent with the sense of the preciousness of the individual which presently informs our sense of the evil of murder, or with our sense that even the most radical evil-doers are owed our unconditional respect. The law would be justified in prosecuting such cases.

The present state of affairs in Victoria more fully respects the divisions in our society than would any proposed change. Some who wish the law to be changed have argued that the present state of affairs brings the law into disrepute and that that must be reckoned to be a bad outcome by all parties in this dispute. But it is not always the case that a law which is not enforced and which is challenged to prosecute those who break it, falls into disrepute when it refuses to prosecute. It depends on perceptions of why it has not been enforced. I think that Victorians know that the present state of affairs is a serious response to serious situation—that it is not, as *The Age* says, hypocritical, nor even muddled. However it is true that the law cannot retain its authority if it is persistently broken and mocked and yet does not prosecute those who break it. I fear that the zeal of those who are excited by the prospect of shaping a new moral order will allow them no rest until they have forced the law to change.

Their enthusiasm for discrediting 'the doctrine of the sanctity of life', should make one wary of the claim that no one need fear that 'human life would be devalued' (*The Age*) if the law were to permit euthanasia. Those who are inspired by Singer's vision must at least hope that the widespread sympathy for a more liberal law is an expression of the radical change in attitudes they applaud. They must also hope that a more liberal law will consolidate that change, and encourage more of just the kind feared by supporters of the present law. Of course, those who press for such change do not believe that it would express an objectionable devaluing of human life. Moreover, they believe that those who are now dismayed by its prospect may come to welcome it, and to agree that it is not at the bottom of a well-known slope, but at the end of a path clearly lit by reason.



That path, insofar as we can infer its route from the professed beliefs of those who urge us to travel it, will lead to non-voluntary euthanasia, to (at least) argument about the desirability of involuntary euthanasia, and to the killing of infant children for reasons which no one could seriously describe as the expression of compassion. Those who fear this believe that our reasons for travelling this route are not transparent to reason and are not the expression of it. They will find no comfort in the reassurances offered them. ■

Raimond Gaita is Professor of Philosophy at the Institute of Advanced Research, Australian Catholic University.

Stand up and be counted

Or, in the case of many writers, go away to your room, sit down, write and be counted. On the public platform, in their invented lives, in print or on television, 1995 has been the year of the writer and the year of controversy.

This month Helen Garner, and Goenawan Mohamad talk about trials and tricks that go with the territory; Andrew Riemer discusses the way Germany is reacting to the controversial Marcel Reich-Ranicki, and Jim Davidson sizes up the Melbourne Writers' Festival.

HELEN GARNER

A world apart

In a talk given at the recent Melbourne Writers' Festival , Helen Garner pondered what sort of responsibilities writers have to their subjects.

FICTION WRITERS ARE OFTEN ASKED, challengingly, if they can morally justify 'hurting the feelings' of 'real people' that they supposedly write about. Perhaps I can come at this question from a different angle, by asking what sort of person becomes a writer.

One evening, back in the '70s, some people were dancing in the kitchen of a big communal house in Melbourne where I lived. I was standing in the doorway with a woman friend, cheerfully watching. One of the dancers, I noticed, was clicking her tongue in time to the music as she bopped around among the chairs. I remarked to my friend, 'Look how X clicks her tongue while she dances'. I meant nothing by it—it was just a neutral observation, as one might point out a bird on a twig or an unusual cloud—but my friend leapt away from me as if I had pinched her. She stared at me with distaste and said, 'Oooh. That's creepy. *You're* creepy. You're too detached.'

This happened nearly 20 years ago, but I have never forgotten the jolt of it. It was my first outside confirmation that something I had often sensed in myself—detachment—was a bit weird: that if people found out about it, they wouldn't like it.

Virginia Woolf is only one writer who has remarked on this aspect of her character. She noticed her own detachment at a very early age, and wrote about the moment, years later as an adult, in her diary. She recalls that just after her mother had died, the whole household was summoned to stand around the bed. The child Virginia noticed that one of the maids seemed to be faking grief: her tears did not look genuine. What appals Woolf about the memory, though, is that even while she herself, half stunned with pain and loss, was standing there beside the dead body of her mother, the noticing part of herself was still working—persistent, disobedient, involuntary. She sensed this split in herself as something alarming, and felt relieved when she came across Guy de Maupassant commenting on the same thing in himself and other writers.

The South African writer Nadine Gordimer tackles the topic in the introduction to her *Selected Stories* (1975):

> Powers of observation heightened beyond the normal imply extraordinary disinvolvement; or rather the double process, excessive preoccupation and identification with the lives of others, and at the same time a monstrous detachment. For identification brings the superficial loyalties (that is, to the self) of concealment and privacy, while detachment brings the harsher fidelities (to the truth about the self) of revealment and exposure. The tension between standing apart and being fully involved: that is what makes a writer.

If social life runs most smoothly when people don't notice things, then it follows that a writer is someone you don't particularly like having around. The unpleasantness of having a writer in the room—in your *life*—reminds me of those scary posters that some fundamentalist Christians have hanging on their living room or kitchen walls: *Christ, the unseen listener to every conversation.*

If social life runs most smoothly when people don't notice things, then it follows that a writer is someone you don't particularly like having around. The unpleasantness of having a writer in the room—in your life—reminds me of those scary posters that some fundamentalist Christians have hanging on their living room or kitchen walls: Christ, the unseen listener to every conversation.

It's suggested that people don't like seeing themselves represented in fiction because it 'hurts their feelings'. I propose that their reasons for objecting are more complex and interesting than that.

If someone else gives an account of a situation you were involved in, the feeling of wrongness you get is—on one level anyway—aesthetic. It's about the *shape* of the story. To you, its shape is all wrong. The story opens at the wrong point, omitting certain details which you feel are essential, or including matter that you see as irrelevant. The rhythm of the story is all wrong: the stresses fall in the wrong places, the pace is too slow or too rushed.

The dialogue is all wrong—you *didn't* say that, or you said something much cleverer and more to the point—and besides, the *order* of quotes and events is also wrong. The balance of the story is out of whack. The style is mediocre. The meaning is distorted—and

Photograph of Helen Garner, p28, by Ponch Hawkes.

worst of all (this is where aesthetics and psychology overlap)—*you* are not the main character. You are a secondary character. You are a bit part. You are only an extra, a walk-on, in someone else's drama. It won't help if I tell you, as well, that the writer almost certainly stopped thinking of her character as *you* a long, long time ago.

I know this is no comfort, no excuse. I'm trying to empathise here, not to justify. I'm trying to describe a process.

Then there is the question of motive. I used to think that if I examined my motivation as ruthlessly as I could, I would be able to do better than just write stories which were 'settlings of accounts' with people. I thought I'd be ethically in the clear as long as I wrote 'in good faith'—that is, if I laid *myself* on the line as well, applied to myself the same degree of analysis and revelation as I did to the other person concerned. I still happen to think this attitude is legitimate as far as it goes—but it's based on an assumption of consciousness in the writer which I am obliged by experience to admit is over-optimistic to the point of being grandiose.

I realise, especially since I published *Cosmo Cosmolino*, that when you get down into the real muck of life—marriage and sex and God and death and old old friendships—you are working blind. You think you're seeing what you're doing, but in fact you're not.

You get so engaged with the technical problems of making a story that the connection between its characters and what exists outside the book becomes less and less visible to you, and of less and less interest. Pretty soon you forget which bits are 'true' and which bits are made up. It can be years before you see with real clarity (if you ever do) what urges you were gripped by when you were writing that book. Often, what you thought you had a handle on turns out to have a handle on *you*. It's very sobering to be made aware what a small slice of the pie-chart of your psyche is actually conscious, when you're writing.

Once, about ten years ago, I heard the late, great Raymond Carver address a class at Sydney's University of Technology. I asked him whether there was a line he wouldn't cross, in writing about people he knew and things that had 'really' happened. There was a long pause. He said 'I think my job as a writer is to tell the truth as I see it.' Another long pause; then he added, 'It's a jungle out there'. At the time, though everyone laughed, his reply was not very helpful to me. Years later, however, he published a story called *Intimacy*. When I read it, I thought that now perhaps he had answered my question.

In this story, the narrator pays an unexpected call on his ex-wife, when passing through the town she now lives in with her new husband. She rages at him for having left her, but more bitterly for having written about her and their life together—'for all the world to see and pity'. The narrator says nothing. She rants on and on, pouring out rage that has been bottled up for years. The narrator doesn't try to explain or excuse himself. He just stands there and bears her reproaches in silence. And then suddenly he gets down on his knees and takes hold of the hem of her skirt.

This strange gesture, with its biblical echoes, its grand mysterious power, changes the tone of their encounter. It swings it right around. Her harangue loses its impetus. She falters. She speaks to him differently, with a sort of ironic patience, with rough humour. It becomes a story about forgiveness, about acceptance of the past and the readiness to let it go and move on.

Some years ago I published a story that an old friend of mine was very angry about, and wounded by. *I* thought the story was full of love, a complicated, angry, frightened sort of love, but love nonetheless. But he rejected my protests with bitterness. I realised that there was no point in trying to defend myself or trying to force my interpretation of the story on him. So I left it, and went away.

I had to accept that I had lost a friend. I still thought, defensive to the last, that my interpretation of the story was right and his was wrong. Several years passed, and I began to be able to see other aspects of the story—that is, its unconscious content started to become clear to me, the things about the me who wrote it that I had been unaware of at the time. I was appalled and sad. And I missed him.

So I wrote to him and said I was sorry. I asked him to forgive me. He wrote back and said that forgiveness had nothing to do with it. He said that forgiveness was not appropriate, it was not required. He said that to talk in terms of forgiveness would just concrete over a relationship which was still alive. He said he had realised that my story was only another phase in a very long, deep and complicated friendship.

That sort of generosity may be rare. Stories of lasting resentment and enmity may be more common—though not in my experience. But the question of writers who write about 'real people' seems to me to be part of what *is*. I don't see it as one those problems that something 'ought to be *done* about'.

There are writers in the world, watchers, people who notice things and have the urge to tell the stories. A writer who's any good won't just steal a bit of your life for no good reason, or out of sheer malice, or to make a buck. A writer who's any good might find something richer than you knew was there—or take a literal experience and base an invention on it that will surprise and even enlighten you.

A writer who's any good might save a bit of your life from oblivion. What a writer 'takes' from you might otherwise have been lost. In the long run, maybe that's what writers are *for*. Writers aren't necessarily nice people. Writers can be mean and lonely. But you need us. We exist. Live with it.

Helen Garner's most recent book is *The First Stone*.

GOENAWAN MOHAMAD

Dangerous language

I COME FROM A COUNTRY WHERE CENSORSHIP has become almost a ritual. And like many kinds of ritual, it can be brutal and at the same time empty—so empty that it is sometimes only partially observed. One well-known story is that of the 70-year-old writer whose name is Pramoedya Ananta Toer. He is the Indonesian author most famous in the world today, with his books translated into many languages—probably on account of his extraordinary fate.

For 30 years the Indonesian government has forbidden his works to be read, even after he was imprisoned for 13 years. Yet this does not mean that the State has succeeded in mobilizing all its powers to ensure that Pramoedya remains unread. I had occasion to meet with a senior government official who realised that this kind of censorship was not productive. He was an assistant prosecutor. At the time the government had not yet banned Pramoedya's books published shortly after his release from the prison camp; but voices were heard urging that such action be quickly taken, because Pramoedya's novels were considered to contain communist propaganda. In this meeting, I was for some reason asked to give an opinion. I put it to the assistant prosecutor that the banning should not be carried out. He agreed, but for a more practical reason. 'I'm tired of making books into best-sellers,' he said.

In the end, Pramoedya's books were banned anyway. Yet, people could still obtain them and nothing has happened, destructive or otherwise, in Indonesia. The country, including the government controlling it, goes on just as before.

To view censorship as a kind of ritual, however, does not mean that it is of no consequence. Especially when censorship grips you not only from the office of watchful military officers or zealous bureaucrats, but also from somewhere else, from something not far away from your first sentence.

From an early age I knew what it meant to be afraid of words. But probably 'to be afraid of words' is not the right formulation: what disturbs people, actually, is their own inability to control the impact of words. When I was little I heard people with their nets, lines and hooks say that they would not utter the word 'fish' as long as they were at sea. People going to the forest to cut teak would not use the word 'tiger'—but would refer to the animal by another name—in order not to invoke the anger of the king of the jungle.

Words, in the awareness of those older people, do not simply exit from the mouth aimed towards some concept that they symbolise. Words push through their own physicality, as if becoming part of a dim world where danger spreads like a germ. 'Your mouth is a tiger that can devour you,' says a Malay proverb.

Bringing the old Malay proverb into this discussion, one may think that the idea of freedom of expression is not something based on a valid universal assumption. I am not very sure, although it fits nicely with the way people talk about values today to express a genuine need to exult differences. There is a powerful trend to recognise a variety of diverse centres of cultural expressions whose understanding requires a large dose of empathy. I welcome such a trend. But I notice that the predominant tenor in the idea of 'multiculturalism' is to use the word 'culture' as the synonym of 'community' and a euphemism for 'race'. In other words, an impermeable human unit, complete with its unshifting centre and clear-cut margins.

What follows from this temptation of difference can be something that runs counter to the urgency to

Photograph of Goenawan Mohamad courtesy Dewi Anggraeni

celebrate empathy. At the end of the day, what you have may not be tolerance, but an *apartheid* of values. I say this as a cautionary note, especially when you deal with the question of freedom of expression, which entails more than just a public space to differ. To me, and I beg you to forgive my bias, the issue of freedom of expression is not about certain collective precepts and principles, or formulation of common values, but like other issues related to human rights, in the beginning it is about violence and suffering. The issue starts from a certain sensibility. To quote Emmanuel Levinas, the French philosopher, it is a sensibility that takes place 'on the surface of the skin, at the end of the nerve'. In other words, it is a sensibility when one looks at the face of the victim.

ALLOW ME TO TELL YOU ONE STORY I love to use as a case in point in which the issue of freedom is tightly tangled not with a certain reading of Western canons, but with real murder and real fear. In June 1994, *Tempo*, the magazine I worked for as an editor, was banned by the government together with two other publications. Thirty days later, I went to a remote village on the island of Madura, in the east of Java, more than 1000 km from *Tempo*'s office. I was among people invited to take part in a public 'prayer of concern', organised by a 100-year-old religious school in the village. About 2000 people attended, including about 50 *ulemmas* [Islamic preachers]. I used to think that such an expression of sympathy—in this case for *Tempo*, an urban-based publication—would only take place on campuses or among yuppies. So I asked the host why, of all people, he did it. The answer was forthright: two months before the banning, four peasants from the neighboring village were shot dead by the military, when they staged a protest against the construction of a dam on their land. *Tempo* and others sent reporters to cover the incident, and when the story was published, it attracted nation-wide attention, and the central government was forced to act to appease the anger of the Maduranese. By having independent press coverage to publicize their plight, the Maduranese had found some kind of protection. Their fear was that with a press that could no longer work freely, more murders could take place unnoticed, more abuses unchecked. Anyone who says that when freedom dies, it dies alone, is absolutely right.

People are driven by anxiety, and seek wholeness in a final form of purity. A work of literature, arriving with an innate drive to dissent from any kind of finality, can easily be seen to frustrate the search and damage the sanctity of the utopia.

The Maduranese episode has persuaded me to believe that there has always been a social history of horror, or at least anxiety, in the background of freedom and the absence of it.

In the beginning, in a time when man had a limited technology of survival, and when social relations were created by traumas of repression and shared poverty, words were treated almost like *keris*, the traditional dagger: at times an emblem of ceremony but, nonetheless, forever containing the possibility of harm. Because words can so easily incite aggression and conflict, they, like the *keris*, are more often than not left silent inside their sheath.

Later, when words entered the era of printing, the anxiety about what they would bring about, and the lack of freedom resulting from that anxiety, became even greater.

In many ancient literary works, which were written in manuscript form and read aloud before a limited and intimate audience, writers could discuss God and sex without too much inhibition. In the *Serat Centini*, for instance, an 18th century Javanese poetic text in several volumes, erotic passages describe what is generally found in male sexual fantasy: the endless desire for a woman's body, and even a homosexual episode between a local big shot and a male dancer.

The world of a manuscript text was a world more or less shaped by proximity to an unfragmented community of listeners. In that familiar space, we are able to speak to an audience with whom we immediately share values and metaphors. But then capital and print technology arrived, and there were no more works like the *Centini*. Writers—who since that time, moreover, could no longer be concealed by anonymity—became more cautious in expressing what they experienced in dreams and their daily life. Especially concerning God and sex. They no longer had direct aquaintance with the readership for whom they composed literature. They lost a lifeworld close to them, and entered a world easily shocked, suspicious, uncomprehending or angry at what they had to say.

Perhaps that is really the paradox of words in an age when printing and book publishing are expanding rapidly. Power, while seeming to fuse with words through the process of their multiplication and distribution, eventually causes words themselves to become unfree.

Through all these changes, as I have suggested elsewhere, the writer has become a monument builder. People have dreams and nightmares about him. This creates a delusion of grandeur and the origin of censorship.

During the 1940s, when modern Indonesian literature was mainly circulated among a small circle of literati, there came to the fore an amazing poet, Chairil Anwar. He not only wrote lyrical and moving poems, he wrote of things that had never been written of before. His creative period was that of Indonesia's

new independence, when hopes, like fireworks, were displayed to celebrate the dream of a free country. Chairil Anwar's poetry was fresh and insolent. *'Aku suka pada mereka yang berani hidup,'* 'I prefer those who dare to live,' he said, and *'Aka suka pada mereka yang masuk menemu malam'*, 'I prefer those who enter and confront the night.' For Chairil, it seems, it was of no concern that the night held danger, sin, blasphemy, demons or syphilis. For him there was no fear, no administrative sanction, no religious doctrine, no censor, or any other limiting factor.

One of his poems, with a tone of ridicule, speaks of heaven using imagery popular in Indonesian Muslim circles:

Bersungai susu
dan bertabur bidadari beribu
(Complete with a river of milk
and stocked with thousands of nymphs)

The poet asks whether among those nymphs there are any as arousing as the young girls on earth. In other words, his attitude celebrates this life more than the next, in a rejection of religious convictions. In another poem, *Di Mesjid*, he even portrays an encounter with God as a kind of conflict:

Ini ruang
Gelanggang kami berperang
(This space is
the arena in which we battle each other)

Chairil Anwar died young, before the 1940s ended. In the history of Indonesian literature, his was the first and the last insolence. 20 years later, the editor of a literary journal was convicted and given a suspended sentence following a loud protest concerning a short story. The editor, H.B. Jassin, published in the magazine *Sastra* an allegory about the degenerate morals of the times, in which God was pictured wearing golden eyeglasses, sending the prophet Muhammad, disguised as a bird, to witness the present destruction on earth. A number of religious leaders were angered by this story, and a group of youths broke up *Sastra*'s office. They considered that story, *Langit Makin Mendung* (The Sky is Getting Darker), offensive to God.

THIS OCCURRED IN 1968. Nearly 20 years later, Ayatollah Khomeini offered a $3 million reward to whoever managed to kill Salman Rushdie. The times had changed. Or, the times once again confirmed the feeling of fear and vigilance, in a new form, towards those who produce words, as though the potential for violating sacred norms were inherent within them. Today, no writer in Indonesia would dare to provoke such a feeling of fear and vigilance. He or she may even have internalised the need to be censored.

In short, many things may have happened after Chairil Anwar fought with God in the mosque. Many things, but let me just describe two.

First of all, the change occurred after one large segment of society—people who half a century ago would never read works of literature—increasingly had the chance to express itself, complete with all its dreams and prejudices. At the same time this segment of society also increasingly had the chance to confront a new and different world. Tension, confusion, feelings of inferiority and superiority emerging from collision with 'the other' have become very acute, while the interaction taking place in that encounter, or collision, has shaken, even brought down, a host of certainties.

People are driven by anxiety, and seek wholeness in a final form of purity. A work of literature, arriving with an innate drive to dissent from any kind of finality, can easily be seen to frustrate the search and damage the sanctity of the utopia.

The second explanation is the 'media-isation' of words. The community of listeners surrounding the storyteller in former times has been fragmented for the 20th century writer. Poetry, the short story and the novel have gradually become part of a process linked to information dissemination. They are being 'translated' into a language that is increasingly dominant, the language of the mass media. Those who nowadays read Chairil Anwar's poems *Sorga* or *Di Mesjid*, or Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, generally tend to 'read' them as an event highlighted by none other than its newsiness, and yet the 'new' is perceived as a regular, typical and homogenous item. This repetition of the new reduces pathos into a flat surface of impressions. In other words, a novel, a play, or a poem, no longer transforms what Walter Benjamin refers to as *Erlebnis* into an experience with a different quality: something having continuity with remembrance of the past and dreams of the future, something that opens a person to the sensation of a unique encounter, something that cannot be expressed in any other way, something that is extraordinary.

No wonder, we have seen examples of how literature is muzzled in the history of this century—a century which has created great difficulty in providing literature with space and time to play, to be heedless of consequences, to be free.

Yet somehow, stories and poetry have become too much a part of our lives. In its finest manifestations, literature once again shows us how words can do unexpected things, can explore uncharted territory, leaving only footprints that mock every kind of fettering. And thus it proves how empty is the ritual of censorship, and how difficult for anyone to submit to it forever. ■

Goenawan Mohamad was editor of the Indonesian magazine *Tempo* until it was banned in 1994. This article was originally delivered as the inaugural lecture to the World PEN Congress in Perth, 29 October 1995. He would like to thank Mary Zurbuchen for translating the first version of the speech from Indonesian, and Tessa Piper for checking the English in the present version.

ANDREW RIEMER

Stirring Germany

MARCEL REICH-RANICKI, AN EXCITABLE and garrulous septuagenarian in a crumpled suit, is undoubtedly the most influential literary figure in Germany today. In the last days of August, Reich-Ranicki became the focus of national interest through his public outbursts over Günter Grass's latest novel, *A Wide Field*, five years in the writing, an 800-page account of 20th century Germany.

He took exception to Grass's latest work on what he claimed were solid literary grounds. Grass, he insisted, is not a true novelist, being incapable of sustaining coherent narrative structures. *A Wide Field* is marred by its parasitic reliance on the life and works of the late 19th century novelist Theodor Fontane. Nevertheless, despite the literary tenor of Reich-Ranicki's misgivings, politics inevitably coloured his view of Grass's fall from grace simply because most aspects of German cultural life are governed by political preoccupations.

During the week leading up to the publication of *A Wide Field*, when Reich-Ranicki's name and photograph appeared daily in the press and on television, the 75-year-old critic emerged as the champion of traditional German literary culture. Grass, he claimed, had infringed the German writer's sacred duty to disclose the political and moral experience of the age, preferring instead to flirt with postmodernism in the games he played with Theodor Fontane. To prove his case, Reich-Ranicki invoked the pantheon of German writers of the last two hundred years. Here was, therefore, what seemed like a nasty case of cultural nationalism: the best-known German writer of the day had been caught bedding down with Gallic flippancy. When one of the panellists on a popular literary television program suggested that Grass may have been doing no more than relaxing, having fun, writing his *Der Rosenkavalier* in a way, Reich-Ranicki exploded in a shower of saliva and indignation: a German writer should not trifle with the history of our time. A carefully posed photograph of him tearing apart a copy of *A Wide Field* on the cover-page of *Der Spiegel* provided a telling emblem of that indignation; it also stirred disturbing memories of the book-burnings of the past.

For all that, public opinion seemed largely to support his uncompromising stand. Nor was there much resistance to the other ground for Reich-Ranicki's censure of the new novel: that Grass had no business to insist that the unification of Germany after the collapse of the GDR ran the grave risk of consolidating right-wing sentiment and nostalgia in the former West Germany. In such circumstances, an outsider could be forgiven for deciding that Reich-Ranicki's uncompromising stand represents a tendency by the recently unified Germany to slip into bigoted nationalism. A few details of his life are sufficient, however, to demonstrate how far from the truth such an assumption would be.

He was born in Poland in 1920. His father was Polish by birth, his mother a woman from Berlin. The family's everyday language was German, the *lingua franca* of educated people in pre-war Central Europe. For that reason his mother never learnt Polish fluently, never felt at home in provincial Poland where she spent many years of her life. She yearned for Berlin; after her husband went bankrupt in 1929 she found some consolation when she realised that the family would have to move to Berlin—at least she could live in her beloved home-town once more.

Nevertheless, they did not think of themselves as German. In their own eyes, as much as in the eyes of their German or Polish neighbours, they were simply Jews. That, as the young Reich-Ranicki found, was a source of many of the difficulties in the Berlin of the early 1930s. Even at the time when the family moved there, many Germans were already insisting that Jews should not be allowed to pollute the soil of the fatherland. In 1938 the Reich-Ranickis were expelled, forced to return to Poland; they ended up in the Warsaw ghetto. But during the years he spent growing up in Berlin, Reich-Ranicki came to be absorbed by German culture, and to find his intellectual and imaginative life defined by German philosophy, literature and music—even the operas of the passionate anti-Semite, Richard Wagner. So when at the age of 18 he left Berlin, with nothing but a spare handkerchief and a book in his luggage, he took with him an immersion in German civilisation that was

to prompt him more than half a century later to emerge as the champion of German literary culture when he mounted his attack on Günter Grass's failure to live up to its noble traditions.

The fortunes of Reich-Ranicki's family, most of whom perished in Treblinka, represent the common experience of the millions of people for whom German culture and the German language provided stability and fulfilsment in an often treacherous world. Many, though by no means all, were assimilated secular Jews who thought of themselves—as my family did—as belonging to the German-speaking world, even though they were citizens of Poland, Hungary or Czechoslovakia. For all that, though, German literature and music gave their lives a sense of coherence and conferred on them membership of a cultural community that transcended the barriers of language, nationality and race.

FOR MOST OF THE FEW WHO SURVIVED Nazism and the systematic extermination of European Jewry, the horror of those years led them to abandon that sense of cultural allegiance, breeding in them instead a contempt of all things German. Others—and Reich-Raniki is perhaps the most notable representative—attempted to retain an awareness of the difference between the broad achievements of German civilisation and the aberrations of a decade and more of tyranny and barbarism. Very few chose to live in Germany, but those who did, like Reich-Ranicki himself, found that Germans (at least in the west) were also making strenuous attempts to deny the discredited assertion that German culture is the sole property of the German people and a reflection of their unique racial characteristics.

The constitution of the postwar Federal Republic reflects in political and administrative terms the determination to detach German culture (in the broadest sense of the word) from concepts of nationalism, therefore making it possible for German civilisation to embark on the road to recovering its former international respect. Half a century after the defeat of the disastrously nationalistic Germany, the consequences of that decision are to be seen in almost every aspect of German life in a curious though significant form. For contemporary German citizens—even those who lived until recently in the totalitarian east—regional identity seems more important than nationality. People speak of themselves as Franconians or Bavarians, as Rhinelanders, Saxons or Thuringians. The

Photograph, above, of Marcel Reich-Ranicki courtesy Andrew Riemer

administrative structure of the Federal Republic, a relatively loose confederation of largely autonomous states, mirror that sense of regional identity. One notable consequence of Germany's determination to distance itself from the doctrines of Nazism, especially the Nazi insistence on 'one people, one nation and one leader', has been the revival of regional dialects among the educated classes, many of whom move easily between their local *patois* and the High German of cultural life.

It is significant therefore that it is left to an outsider like Marcel Reich-Ranicki—who is not and does not claim to be German, and resembles, moreover, the caricature Jew of Nazi propaganda—to articulate a sense of national cultural heritage and to act as the spokesman for German literature in a world where people are dismayed by the concept of nationalism. It may be that with the privileged licence of one who had been reviled and persecuted by the fury of German nationalism, he is able to cater for a fundamental need that few if any Germans are willing to acknowledge. The respect he has earned among his readers and television audiences may indeed be a result of his expressing that suppressed, perhaps even illicit sense of a national identity which has been so strenuously discouraged in the half-century since the end of the Second World War. As an outsider, a Jew who could gain no comfort from the resurgence of violent nationalism, Reich-Ranicki may be able to speak the unspeakable and remind the citizens of modern Germany that they possess a rich and complex national culture, not merely an aggregation of related though distinct regional cultures.

Everyone—a small number of skinheads and neo-Nazis apart—seems anxious to avoid giving the least impression of racist or anti-Semitic attitudes. That Reich-Ranicki's family was Jewish is never mentioned, except by himself.

Almost every literary and cultural figure I met during a month-long visit in August seemed far more circumspect: none of the writers, publishers and literary journalists I was introduced to showed much willingness to speak about German cultural or—if it comes to that—political identity. Instead, I encountered pride in the distinctive cultures of the different regions of the federation, a pride which clearly embraced much more than an interest in quaint folk customs and festivals. Only through their dedication to regionalism could German citizens live in harmony with each other, several of these people assured me.

In one respect though, that regional awareness, ubiquitous in contemporary Germany, has become a source of tensions and resentments, which were reflected in Reich-Ranicki's attack on Grass's attitude to the unification of 1990. For centuries, conflict among the German states and principalities was played out across the great division between the Protestant north and Catholic south. After 1945 the axis shifted 180 degrees: nowadays tensions are much more obvious between the prosperous west and the eastern regions which are slowly recovering from decades of appalling neglect and mismanagement.

Few in the former East Germany will speak out, at least in public, against the unification of the two parts of the country. Where most aspects of life are concerned, it has to be admitted, there would be little reason for them to do so. There are signs everywhere in the former East Germany—in East Berlin, in Leipzig and Dresden, as much as in small towns and villages—of large-scale reconstruction and restoration. Economic life is recovering even though pockets of massive unemployment remain. Yet given the frenzy of public works—from the rebuilding of Dresden's splendid baroque monuments destroyed by the infamous air-raid of 1945 to the relaying of Leipzig's crumbling sewers—there can be little doubt that everything possible is being done to improve the quality of life and to provide employment for the people of the former GDR. In spite of that, there are some in the eastern parts of the country who do not regard being yoked to the prosperous, materialistic west as an unmixed blessing.

THESE ARE NOT ONLY SEVERAL FORMER communists who are experiencing some political success, principally in Brandenburg, the region just beyond Berlin centred in the city of Potsdam. Their number indicates even some of those who had suffered hardship and persecution in the years before the Berlin Wall came down. Their resentment is understandable. The east has, in a sense, been colonised by the more developed western parts of the nation. West German law, West German financial and commercial institutions have replaced the inefficient and repressive social and political structures of the GDR. That does not preclude, however, a suspicion that those unfortunate enough to have lived in the east are being patronised by their more confident compatriots from Stuttgart and Düsseldorf.

The reaction is at times wistful, as with one of the publishers in Aufbau, East Germany's most

independent-minded and highly regarded publishing house, who now has to obey the orders of an entrepreneurial owner and work with a financial wizard brought in from the west to make the firm commercially viable. With others, as with a member of the East German branch of PEN International I met, the reaction is more pronounced, on the edge of anger and dismay.

The constitution of PEN International requires that the two German branches of the organisation be merged now that Germany is a single political entity. Opposition to the merger is very strong among members of the western branch. Many of them fled from East Germany; now they refuse to belong to an organisation which includes writers they look upon as collaborators, even perhaps as traitors.

Such problems, together with the sense that some valuable aspects of social and cultural life in the former GDR are in jeopardy after unification, are usually mentioned in public only obliquely. The predicament of several intellectuals in the eastern part of the country serves nevertheless to give some justification to Günter Grass's argument in *A Wide Field*, as well as in some of his earlier writings, that unification involved risks and perils which could have been avoided by a looser confederation of the two sovereign states. Such a view is, however, close to heresy in the present political and cultural climate. For that reason, therefore, Reich-Ranicki's attack on Grass provoked little reaction or censure from a public remarkably tolerant of an old lion's pugnacity.

The tolerance is an oblique indication of the extent to which most Germans are determined to ensure that the nationalistic fury which destroyed their nation 50 years ago will never arise again. Jews are treated with great respect in political and intellectual life—despite what people may mutter behind closed doors. And yet, ungenerous though the suggestion might seem, there is something disturbing in the highly public awareness of the burden of the guilt the Germans still claim to bear and acknowledge without apparent misgiving or embarrassment.

Everyone—a small number of skinheads and neo-Nazis apart—seems anxious to avoid giving the least impression of racist or anti-Semitic attitudes. That Reich-Ranicki's family was Jewish is never mentioned, except by himself. Indeed, an article dealing with his career in an earlier issue of *Der Spiegel* was widely condemned because it seemed to imply, in a very roundabout manner, that his behaviour revealed certain typical Jewish characteristics. Contemporary Germans are determined to stamp out the least suggestion of the anti-Semitic prejudice which was always an adjunct of German nationalism.

Such resolve is touching and impressive: whatever else might be said, it is undeniably better for Germans to be hypersensitive than complacent about their past. Yet, as I met intellectual after intellectual—in a folksy Munich *Beirstubr*, in the sprucely modernised coffee shop of East Berlin's Hilton, at the Leipzig office of the regional broadcasting authority of Saxony—one assertion kept recurring with the insistence of a Wagnerian *leitmotiv*. Germans must be eternally vigilant, these people insisted, because of the intrinsic flaw of the German character: its tendency to hatred, barbarity and destruction. That, as one quizzical and ironic writer who continues to live and write in the eastern part of Berlin said, is the German destiny. Was all this, I began asking myself, merely an inversion of the old supremacist arrogance, the conviction that the German people were marked out for a unique destiny.

...Reich-Ranicki's insistence that the humanism of Goethe, Schiller and Thomas Mann represents the German spirit as much as Hitler did, or that the Wagner who created matchless works of art is not to be confused with Wagner the bigoted anti-Semite, is as necessary now as it was 50 years ago...

FOR THAT REASON, REICH-RANICKI'S insistence that the humanism of Goethe, Schiller and Thomas Mann represents the German spirit as much as Hitler did, or that the Wagner who created matchless works of arts is not to be confused with Wagner the bigoted anti-Semite, is as necessary now as it was 50 years ago when a disgraced Germany lay in ruins, destroyed by its Wagnerian fantasies of a national destiny. The time has surely come for Germans to acknowledge that there are positive and invaluable elements in the cultural achievements of Germans—not merely of Saxons, Barvarians or Rhinelanders. That way they may at last be able to come to terms with their past and to forgive themselves—not to forget by any means, but to admit that German culture embraces the magnificent as well as the infernal, that (like any other nation) Germany is made up of the base and the noble, the humane and the brutal.

That Marcel Reich-Raniki, the Jew from Polish backblocks, should be the one to remind Germans of their cultural achievements at a time when so many are consumed by self-lacerating guilt may be the only way to recover a pride in the excellence of German culture which once used to be shared by anyone—

Jew or Gentile, German or Pole—who had access to the German language. Yet as I watched him ranting away on television about Grass's failings and dereliction, I could not entirely banish the thought that here, perhaps, was another alarming figure of authority capable of bewitching and enthralling his adoring studio-audience which seemed to hang on every one of his words. And that, in turn, made me wonder whether there was, after all, something in the German character that marked it out for a dubious destiny, making it vulnerable to those that arouse passions and sound stirring calls-to-arms even if only in the name of literature.

Surely, I remember thinking during the days around the publication of *A Wide Field*, when there seemed to be no other topic of conversation or interest, when passions ran high and no-one had a good word to say for Grass, it is only a novel, one of hundreds published in Germany each year.

Andrew Riemer travelled to Germany as a guest of the Federal German government.

WRITERS: 4

JIM DAVIDSON

Reading the write act

IT COULD BE DESCRIBED as a party with brains: four days of talk, drinking, catching up with old friends and making new ones, and all against the backdrop of two discussion sessions and perhaps a book launch going on at the same time. Everybody has to make an individual choice as to how they negotiate the Melbourne Writers' Festival, but in the formal program you will encounter more stimulating ideas popping up at random, and more stylish wit, than you are likely to run across elsewhere in months.

Even Jeff Kennett, in the days when he used to attend the Premier's Awards dinner rather than the Hard Rock Cafe, rightly remarked on the 'energy' of the occasion. This year's dinner, the most high-profile element of Writers' Week, was no exception. There was Richard Flanagan, receiving the new fiction award, who began brightly by pointing out that Demidenko backwards reads 'Ok, Ned, I'm Ed'. In a considered, scene-stealing statement Flanagan then averred that while the matter of evil might be acceptable material for fiction, it certainly wasn't when based on historical and personal falsehood. A hard act to follow, unless you're Barry Dickins. That writer spoke of the subject of his award-winning playscript, Ronald Ryan, as 'a bungler, not a burglar', someone who was 'a charismatic ... (Dickins looked serious) ... dickhead'.

But the outstanding performance of the evening was that of Robert Dessaix, the guest speaker. Suddenly, after a variety of witticisms and pointed remarks, he spoke of spells, ensorcellment and charms, almost seriously. For Dessaix was calling for less economic rationalism, less managerialism, and a greater sense of where we have been placed. We must listen to the land, and learn from its indigenous people; note, how even such a city as Bologna, with its violent past and its vicious class oppression, has nevertheless managed to come through as a wondrous kind of 'stone garden'. Its architecture is an outgrowth of

strong roots, of a shared civilisation. Melbourne, on the other hand, now has little sense of being a city we share and love in common; public culture here and elsewhere is 'on its knees'. We need, more than ever before, our repositories of cultural memory, which is what university English departments ought to be. But, said Dessaix, the era of postmodernity finds the contemplation of death difficult. It is that capacity to 'look mortality in the eye'—to accept the challenge and to leap beyond it—which gives Bologna's architecture its authority and its seeming unity.

In expressing a need for 're-enchantment', Dessaix turned out to be giving a keynote address. There is a spiritual hunger out there, and quite early in the piece the Festival session 'All That Is Sacred' was sold out—despite the trendy counter-attraction of a session on grunge. (Perhaps the polarity of the two attractions parted the Sunday morning audience as if they were the Red Sea.) Elsewhere there was a striking seriousness about the proceedings. Instead of PoMo playfulness—although visiting English writer Peter Ackroyd did his best to turn everything on its head—there was a concern with truth, and how history and biography measured up; and with responsibilities, and how journalists and fictioneers discharged them. But just in case you're thinking it was all Melbraic earnestness, there was also that grunge session, with others on lesbian writing and writerly decadence, to bring in a touch of the Sydnitic.

There were also, of course, the hour-long spotlights on various writers. Those on Frank Moorhouse and David Malouf interested me particularly because some years ago I conducted lengthy interviews with each of them. And yes, there was Frank, still choosing his words carefully, still fully engaged with the question, determined to think through its implications as if he would carry them forever more; only older now, and having lived in a foreign-language culture, his utterances sounded more hard-edged, more authoritative than perhaps even he meant them to be.

And then David Malouf, always polished and urbane, his answers adroit and square-on, except that often he would unexpectedly continue and modulate a response into seemingly new and unexpected areas of feeling. This, of course, is entirely characteristic of a writer who had a sense of 'foreboding' about being categorised after *Johnno*. And so he moved away from it as far as he could: in more ways than one the succeeding novel was *An Imaginary Life*. Indeed this was, Malouf now believes, 'a valedictory book', and he has been exploring the ample terrain between his first two fictions ever since.

Malouf emerged as a novelist in 1975, Moorhouse's first book appeared in 1969. What about the upcoming generation—and their unbecoming concerns? One of the burdens of *nostalgie de la boue* (since few people can negotiate the French these days) is that a new word has to be thought up for it every ten years. Not so long ago it was sleaze. Now it's grunge—a word the Americans invented just after we

Cartoons by Peter Fraser

were using *scunge* for the same sort of disagreeable grime and muck ... a twist to a souvenir of a torrid R & R in Kings Cross, perhaps?

Anyway, none of the writers assembled wanted much to do with it. As the chair, Sophie Cunningham, pointed out, grunge seems to mean 'I don't like what these people are writing about'.

Grunge is a label arising more from the subject matter than the kind of writing. True, nihilism and drugs and unconventional sex may have been written about before—and sometimes less flatly—but a rising generation all these occupy a larger space in the landscape than was the case even twenty years ago. Fiona McGregor may look awesome in her leather pants and cropped blue hair, but she is a serious writer capable of painterly descriptions in her short stories—and often a quite sympathetic portrayal of family relations. But, as she says, she is interested in catching the truth inherent in a moment of feeling, whether it is that of a mother gazing upon a departing child, or some man cruising a public toilet.

In this session there were also spirited contributions from Linda Jaivin and Andrew McGahan—very much a roaring boy. And there was a riveting manifesto issued by Christos Tsiolkas, who explained that he was as much concerned with Australia as the racist site of successive waves of migration, as he was with writing as a gay man. Ethics and commitment, he declared, is what he was about; which is why he loathed a government which cheerfully consigned people to the scrapheap. He thought of Victoria's Premier, Jeffrey Kennett, going out of his way to woo the Greeks in Athens, with his opportunistic support of their position on Macedonia—while here Greek migrants like Tsiolkas's ageing parents, uneducated, unemployed, wonder whatever is going to happen to them. 'Jeff Kennett, you are an arsehole, you are death! And *that*,' Tsiolkas concluded as he stormed back to his seat, 'is grunge!'

At some considerable remove were two sessions concerned with history-writing. The one I attended considered how the past may be used to address the present. Henry Reynolds explained that when he went to Townsville in the 1960s, he was shocked by the nature of race relations there, and was motivated to ascertain how this state of affairs had come about. 'What I was after was reform', he said, 'the righting of historical wrongs'. In similar fashion Greg Dening spoke of giving a voice to the dead of the ill-named Pacific, and how it was necessary to pass into the world of myth, dance, symbols and artefacts in order to do so. Concerned to 'disturb moral lethargy', Dening pointed out that the legacy of the Enlightenment is too limited to deal with the condition of postmodernity (quite different, he reminded us, from PoMo games), and that a broader approach has become essential. Even so, the two men in this session were, alas, a pair of ponderosos, inclined to play God and see the dead as but putty in their hands. Joy Damousi pointed out that the past is not a separate terrain, but also something which informs the mindset of the historian; there is, she argued, simply not enough discussion of the relationship between self and historical text. Rather, the emphasis is still too much on complete accuracy and closure; distillation often means control.

Journalists too were concerned about the nature of the record. Present at the Festival was John Berendt, whose book *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* has been a runaway bestseller. This affectionate portrait of Savannah was centred on a murder; Berendt explained how he had deliberately moved it, for reasons of effective narration, to a point after his arrival in the town. But, he explained, while he used fictional techniques in his account, it sought to be truthful; some of the characters appeared under their

real names. Since everybody knew he was writing a book, Berendt continued, there could be little sense of personal betrayal, even if a writer turns things to his or her purpose in ways the subject had not dreamed of. Helen Garner's problems were quite different. [See pp23-24 for Garner's talk]. The two young women in the Ormond College case which was the subject of *The First Stone* were determined to be inaccessible. 'The more frustrated I became', said Garner, 'the more determined I was to go ahead with it'. But this does mean that there is 'a hole in the book'.

A matching session, in which Garner participated again, considered the question of whether writers have any obligation to the people they write about. It is not that simple, said Carmel Bird; there is always the possibility that you are activating a memory when you think you are inventing something. Never trust a writer, seemed to be the purport of Kate Grenville's remarks; but if she did cannibalise people, then she would be careful to give them a limp and a Hungarian accent. The real responsibility is to the reader; a point Helen Garner endorsed.

THE DEMIDENKO AFFAIR FINALLY RECEIVED the spotlight at the end of the Festival. 'A good hoax', said Michael Heyward, 'is a snapshot of the zeitgeist of the age.' Robert Manne agreed: in presenting herself as ethnic and working class, Helen Darvall scored a bullseye on three cherished 'middle-class susceptibilities'. Manne then addressed the question of anti-Semitism, arguing that it could be found not only in the structure of *The Hand that Signed the Paper*, nor just in its dialogue and presentation of the characters, but in the way Darvall had raised it in interviews, on one occasion going so far as to say that Jews would be taught some 'hard lessons'. That the book should have won three prizes was most unsettling for any Jewish person; inevitably one no longer felt completely at ease in a country which was home. But, Manne conceded, in one sense all this pointed to a lack of serious anti-Semitism in Australia; otherwise the issue would have been instantly politicised.

A less temperate response from one of the audience underlined the great strength of the Festival: it is anything but a writers' closed shop. Indeed, attendance figures for 1995 rose by 22 per cent, so it is just as well that the space available is being extended next year. Perhaps the organisation could be a bit smoother, with writers better briefed and left a little less to their own devices. But a visiting Pom can always be relied upon to even the score. One visitor combined abrasiveness, hypersensitivity and condescension so artfully that it brought back tender memories of the kind of English departments that are with us no more.

Jim Davidson is Associate Professor in Humanities at Victoria University of Technology. He edited *Meanjin* from 1974 to 1982.

Peter Steele

The Best of a Bad Job

The Oxford Book of Exile, John Simpson (ed.), Oxford University Press, 1995. ISBN 0 19 214221 6 RRP $45.00

At odd moments, I am visited by one of the more astringent Hasidic sayings: 'Rabbi Hanokh said: "The real exile of Israel in Egypt was that they had learned to endure it."' This, I find, is kept fresh by public events, as well as by private ones.

It seems that the human versatility in folly is matched only by our ingenuity in denial, and that when even this fails, there is always the option of bluster. We use our mirrors for pragmatic, rather than for contemplative, purposes, and we do not find this strange. Habituated to the black vaudeville that makes up the bulk of news reports, we respond with frissons of ruefulness, or with brief canters towards some friable moral table-land. An un-named god of cynicism has invisible shrines in countless spots, constantly ready, it seems, to foster our emotional callousing or our embitterment. So it goes: life goes on: we learn to endure it: welcome to exile.

Still, the Hasidic master was no unique exclaimer. Romeo—whose very name betokens pilgrimage and so an element of the insatiable—Romeo, told that he is banished from the city and so from Juliet, says 'And sayest thou yet that exile is not death?' Those nine words might be the epigraph for a library of books which quarter the globe and span the centuries, books engendered by a smouldering or a flaming sense that, so far as may be, exile is not merely to be endured, not merely to be borne. This campaign of refusal, sometimes of revulsion, may adopt many different measures when it is literal transportation that is at stake. There are the pinings and wheedlings of Ovid at the Black Sea, the aquiline resentments which show from time to time in Dante's *Commedia*, and the brooding reappropriations both of Russia and of the West which animate Joseph Brodsky's poetry.

Those three are poets. I single them out, not from some guild-loyalty, but because poetry (the bent, the hunger, the proficiency, the yield) is the best instance I know of a formed way of the human race's addressing our interleaved exiles. For of course 'exile' is a pluriform notion—branching, tentacular, throbbing—and part of the ache of exile is precisely in its ungoverned reverberations. Someone—emperor, flunkey, malicious family member, envious colleague, 'them'—consigns you to discontented lodgement at another spot on Earth's surface, and thereupon, for the first time, it becomes clear to you that just where you are can be eloquent about who you are, even about what you are. When, earlier in this century, the expression 'Displaced Persons' was coined, only those with long cultural memories could have anticipated, spontaneously, how terrible a designation that was. For many people, to have nowhere to be, strongly, is to have no-one to be, strongly. The exiled man or woman can feel like a candle whose flame has been pinched out, and whose wick has then been extracted.

It is not always so with the figures represented in *The Oxford Book of Exile*. The logical outcome of what I have been touching on is that this title should mean, equivalently, 'The Oxford Book of Distress'. But, by a familiar paradox, retrieval becomes the order of the day, and in one way or another those who, page after page, are hustled out of their preferred milieux, here achieve or at least are awarded some consolation in the midst of direness. After the misshaping, the ripping up of the map of oneself, words are webbed together to provide some alternative pattern. Consistently, I find this touching, but I do not find it surprising, since I think that this is how all art has come about—the deepest thirst draws up the deepest song, and the blacker the ash, the brighter the phoenix.

But this *is* a paradox, and mysterious, not some obvious outcome. Art's handling of exile's horror is something which, at least occasionally, ought bring us to a stand. Kafka, one of the greatest of modern exponents of the trope of exile, wrote that 'A book should serve as an axe for the frozen sea within us', and the great exilic works go on chipping and chopping at iced-up sensibilities, iced-in hearts. There is not much to be said for the quasi-barbarous contemporary dismissal of the classic writings of the western world, but at least that *ressentiment* may

provoke a new gaze at those works. Seen afresh, they show themselves, century after century, as haunted by exile. There are moments of exhilaration, even of ecstatic joy, in *The Odyssey:* but before and after Odysseus comes home, he is host to an insatiable heart. In *The Aeneid,* its hero is plumed and fletched with a destiny, but for all the magisterial elegance of Virgil's writing, there is no such thing as a serene page in the whole poem. As for either the Hebrew Bible or the Christian redaction of its revelation, who could seriously dispute that the spindle around which they both turn is the experience of exile?

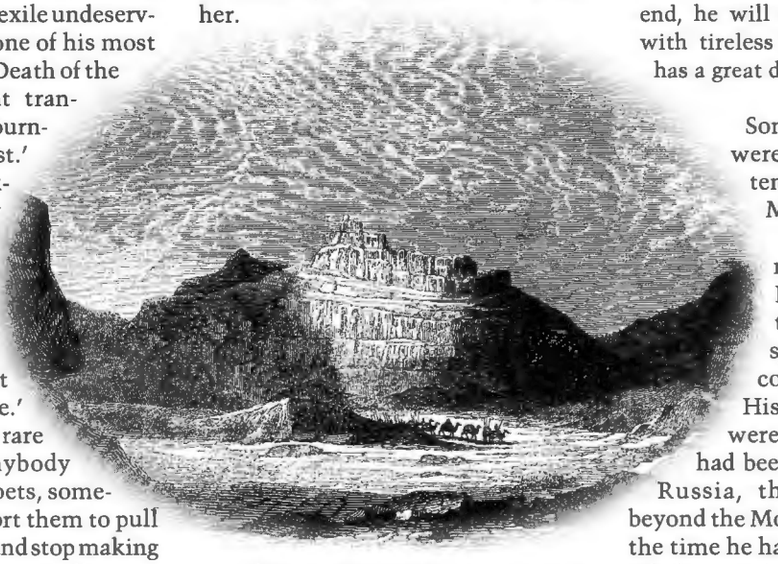
The poets will not let up on this hag-riding. Dante, writing from a distance to the citizenry which has expelled him, signs himself, 'Dante Alighieri, Florentine, exile undeservedly.' A.D. Hope, in one of his most famous poems, 'The Death of the Bird', speaks of that transient's 'exiled love mourning within the breast.' Richard Wilbur, thinking of a small boy looking through a window at a snowman, imagines the melting being's giving such a 'godforsaken stare/ As outcast Adam gave to Paradise.'

Of course, on the rare occasions when anybody takes any notice of poets, somebody is likely to exhort them to pull themselves together and stop making such a fuss—which naturally confirms their agitation. But they are unlikely to co-operate, since poetry habitually murmurs that there are more fissures around in life than is pretended in the general cultural glibness. That said, there are a couple of questions to be asked of *The Oxford Book of Exile.* The first is as to how far it advances beyond being that half-awake thing, a bedside book: and the second, whether or not it can prick us in the present.

Well, it's not so much a bedside as a deskside book, full of stimuli, provocations towards reflection. It harbours many ways of writing about its distressing subject, and it can deal either with a single outflung cry or with a revolving of the intractable. About 200 AD, the captured Lady Wen-Chi, carried off to Inner Mongolia and forced to marry a local chieftain, writes, 'No—there is no answer to my cries from the vast barbarian sky;/ And yet the moon that shines there is our Chinese moon; it must surely recognize me?' In the nineteenth century, as Robert Hughes reports:

> Withers was writing to his brothers from Van Diemen's Land: *I have sent 2 letters to My Wife an Cant get heny Answer from her Wich Causeth Me a great deal of unhapyness for i think she have quite forgotten me an i think she is got Marred to some other Man, if she is pray send me word.*

Eleven years later, he heard from her.



Through Simpson's pages, there parade many well-known figures, some nobly and some ignobly exiled. Pascal thought that the figure we all cut is that of dislodged royalty—a view which has plenty of biblical warrant, among other things: but then, there are royals and royals, as one realises anew from reports here on Napoleon, Mary Queen of Scots, Bonnie Prince Charlie, Edward the Eighth, the Shah of Persia, the Ayatollah Khomeini. The last, enchanter of many but surely nobody's sweetheart, asked by an accompanying French correspondent on the plane bringing him into Iranian air space, 'What are your emotions after so many years of exile?' replies 'Hichi'—'nothing'. It is a Beckettian moment, except that Beckett was sedulous in keeping his hands off other people's lives.

'Exile being the human condition, no government subsidy can provide the chariot that will carry us home.' So ends a reading, a couple of years old, from Germaine Greer. Right or wrong, she is offering a deeply traditional view. *The Oxford Book of Exile* is, though, interested besides in more mundane matters—witness a spy's report on an earlier figure well away from his home base:

> In private life he is an extremely disorderly, cynical human being, and a bad host. He leads a real gypsy existence. Washing, grooming and changing his linen are things he does rarely, and he is often drunk. Though he is often idle for days on end, he will work day and night with tireless endurance when he has a great deal of work to do....

Some will wish that he were oftener drunk and oftener idle, for he was Karl Marx.

In 1987, in the month he accepted the Nobel Prize for Literature, Joseph Brodsky spoke in Vienna at a conference on 'Exiles'. His credentials to do so were impeccable. First, he had been an internal exile in Russia, then he was ejected beyond the Motherland: and most of the time he had in any case been an inhabitant of an imaginative terrain which is inaccessible to the bustling rest of us.

He was, as he remains, one of those whose jersey bears a big yellow 'E'. But he says, in 'The Condition We Call Exile', 'Whether he likes it or not, *Gastarbeiters* and refugees of any stripe effectively pluck the carnation out of an exiled writer's lapel. Displacement and misplacement are this century's commonplace.'

Australia has no *Gastarbeiters,* officially at least, but our endearing island has uncounted inhabitants who might say, in a variety of tongues, that they feel themselves to be in exile.

To that, responses vary. As you

read this, somebody, somewhere in Australia, is reciting a prayer which looks to a post-temporal condition, 'after this our exile', where things may or may not be better, but will certainly be other. At the opposite pole, there are exhortations against taking the notion of 'home' as anything other than a manipulative fantasy, and bracing calls towards resolute discontentment. I know where I stand on this one, but either position will do as provocation for attention to the extracts in *The Oxford Book of Exile.*

IT MAY BE THAT WE HAVE HERE—as we did in Oxford Books of *Garden Verse*, or of *Villains*,—involuntary illustrations of the fact that you can drop a plumb-line anywhere you like out of the void, and strike the heart of the human. After all, if you were determined to be at once mythic, experiential, literary and contemporaneous, you could put together *The Oxford Book of Gardens, Villains, and Exile*, which would address at once some notable features of Western myth and history, and the agenda for the next Federal election.

But in ten years' time only politicians and their chroniclers will remember anything whatever about that election, and I would hope that some other words will endure.

William H. Gass, thinking about exile's various modes, talks about 'poetry', by which he means not verse, but language in its erotic power, its authority, and its distinctiveness. He assumes that for most of us, most of the time, it is in exile—a ruined king, a stateless magician.

His concluding words seem to me apposite not only to the haemophiliac state of much of our culture, but, by contrast, to many of the extracts in the present volume:

> But of course poetry, if it returns, will never make us pay. No. It will not put us to death or in prison or send us, as it was sent, so sadly away. It will simply put us to shame. ■

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

BRUCE WILLIAMS

Secco Eco or Time isn't what it used to be

The Island of the Day Before, Umberto Eco, Secker & Warburg, London, 1995. ISBN 0 436 20270 0 RRP $34.95

TRY THIS FOR SIZE. You reach the middle of the detective story, the scene in which the great detective, pipe in hand, sums up developments so far, while the stolid village policeman takes notes. 'How much do we really know about that crowded few minutes just before Celia entered the library?' etc. At this point, you, the Reader, put the book down and consult your own pencilled timetable of events alongside your meticulous sketch of the library, shrubbery and purlieus. 'Of course' you murmur. Besides detective stories, you delight in cryptic crosswords, in palindromes and acrostics. When it comes to more serious fiction, you cut your teeth on Borges, you know which sentences in Donald Barthelme are the jokes and you are close to identifying the algorithm from which all 500 pages of *Life: A User's Manual* were generated. You delight in learning, the more miscellaneous and recondite the better. You are drawn to the pre-scientific ages of the world, in which authority is vested in chains of texts which slowly wind, with many a labyrinthine coil, from antiquity to the present.

Does this description fit? If so, you are the Model Reader of Umberto Eco's novels.

As a theorist, Eco, together with E.D. Hirsch and others, has contributed the concept of a reader implied by the text, the one at whom the text seems to aim. In these accounts, to read adequately means, for the space of the book, to assemble appropriate bits and pieces of the everyday self into that Model Reader who will pick up the clues, spot the references and thus take whatever pleasures and rewards the book might have been designed to give. How difficult this is will depend on whether you have the right bits and pieces in your kitbag, which may explain why readers sometimes get the feeling that they are beside themselves.

The Island of the Day Before resembles Eco's previous novels, *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum*: its ingredients are a small quantity of action, a larger amount of plot, and a vast amount of information.

Unscrambled, the main narrative would run something like this. It is

the 17th century, the Thirty Years War is underway. Roberto la Griva, a young Italian nobleman, goes with his father to defend the besieged city of Casale. Here, out in the world for the first time, he is exposed to the haphazard destructiveness of power; he is lectured on the art of statecraft; he meets Padre Emmanuele, who has invented an Aristotelian machine for constructing metaphors, based on 'the ability to perceive objects under ten Categories'. Roberto (thus far) is that familiar character, the impressionable innocent, through whose eyes the reader sees vanity fair.

We are, however, supposed to be interested in Roberto quite as much as in what he sees, and to that extent the novel is a *Bildungsroman*, tracing the growth of a mind and sensibility through the formative years. From Casale, Roberto goes to Paris, where he frequents a salon of *précieuses* and learns to play their intricate erotic and intellectual wordgames. He falls in passionately rhetorical love with the inevitable Lady, but is too inexperienced to take advantage of the opportunities she provides, so she remains a Distant Beloved.

It should already be obvious that the reader of this book will not be swept along by a torrent of events. Things do happen, but on the whole, people, including the author, hold forth, they fill in the background, they contextualise, they discourse, instruct and explicate. The book is full of 17th century ideas about natural science, medicine, theology, navigation, rhetoric . . . This is nothing like as dull as it may sound. Eco's fictive expositions share in the playful spiritedness of his non-fiction; given these premises and these rules of inference, he seems to say, look what fun you can have. See how reasonable it was for them to have thought this way.

But to resume: Roberto falls foul of Cardinal Mazarin and is sent off on a voyage. His mission is to spy on another Englishman, one Byrd, who is trying to solve the problem, strategically crucial in the age of nascent imperialism, of getting an accurate fix on longtitude. His ship is wrecked, and he finds himself cast up, by a quirk, on another ship, anchored just offshore. The ship is deserted, although fully provided with food and water, with a garden, an aviary and a roomful of clocks; Roberto cannot swim.

There, in fact, the novel begins; the preceding events we learn as we go along. Nor is this time-management, replete with parallels and cross-references, the only narrative complication. The tale purports to be reconstructed from Roberto's own writings—thus the narrator keeps reminding us of his own work of interpretation and the problematics of fiction. There is also a double, a wicked figure called Ferrante who may or not be Roberto's illegitimate brother. Ferrante—follow this closely, reader—may or may not be a character in a romance narrative of Roberto's own devising. He is everything Roberto is not: confident, vicious, a man of action, not tossed about on the currents of ideas or mooning over Distant Beloveds but driven on by an over-mastering hatred of his brother.

'Ferrante stands for your fears and your shame' explains the cynic Saint-Savin. 'Often men, rather than admit they are the authors of their fate, see this fate as a romance narrated by a fanciful and scoundrel author.'

NOW THERE'S AN ESSAY TOPIC for you, that's where the seminar might begin. And that's where my difficulties become acute. Let me acknowledge that in one way I am far from ideal for this book. I read detective stories for the locales, the characters, the argot and the jokes, tranquilly indifferent to the question of who actually did what to whom. That's why I like Simenon, who clearly didn't care either, and dislike Agatha Christie, for whom the guessing game is the main point.

Not easy, then to become a Model Reader of Eco. Yet I delight in Barthelme, in Borges, in Calvino, and I stayed with Georges Perec's *Life: A User's Manual* through every one of those 500 pages. The question then arises: what is the difference between those, compelling, examples of postmodern fiction and this latest book of Eco's, which I take to be a turkey?

The short answer is that the fiction itself is badly managed. Roberto, says Eco, 'had been educated to discover new lands only through the telescope of the word'. So much might justly be said of an author who constructs his characters out of other characters: Shakespeare's Mercutio stands behind the materialist Saint-Savin; Ferrante is Iago crossed with the Secret Sharer of Conrad's tale, and a right stagy mixture that makes. More damaging still, Roberto himself only flickers into life every fifty pages or so, then winks out again. Throughout the book, the person who dominates the proceedings is the author, learned, ingenious, generously sharing the wealth of his reading with us and constantly setting small and large tests for our readerly percipience.

Generously—and garrulously. The lectures and lecturettes and expositions all proceed at a similar, even, unruffled pace; the narrative, too, moves steadily along, or better, sways back and forth like the anchored ship itself. It is not possible to find a passage both representative and brief enough to quote. As a result, it is hard to think of a single moment of intensity, of surprise, of gathered force or particular eloquence. Calvino, whose fiction is comparably self-conscious and highly-wrought, provides such moments in abundance.

As the book progresses, Eco seems less and less interested in reconciling action with discourse. The early adventures on the ship, and the siege of Casale, are comparatively rich. In Paris, the proportion of talk increases—and there are some small but revealing chinks in verisimilitude, as when Roberto is alleged to take several months of frequenting the same talkative salon as his beloved before finding out her name—this in a period when names and introductions were essential to social life. In the later chapters, the action slows to a trickle, while accumulated masses of learning begin to loom. The sense of an ending, in this novel, will be achieved only by that reader who is willing to piece together all the various motifs—Aristotelian word machines, attraction at a distance, parallel universes, landscapes and bodies—into some satisfying or intriguing whole.

One whole chapter is devoted to

a history of the device of the Dove which is to this novel what the Rose was to *The Name of the Rose*. To Roberto (we are told) it becomes 'a compendium of every passion of his loving soul':

'It was not clear to him (nor can it be to us) whether the bird had become the Island, or Lilia, or both, or the yesterday to which all three were relegated, for Roberto's exile was in an endless today, whose future lay only in arriving, some tomorrow, at the day before.'

Model Readers quiver at this. And read on, gladly, through: 'some notes for a future monograph that could be called *Columba Patefacta*, and the project does not seem to me completely otiose, considering that others have devoted whole chapters to the Meaning of the Whale.'

Indeed: but the book that contains the Whale also contains Ahab.

In the end, I was reminded of Michael Frayn's splendidly funny novel, The *Trick of It*, in which a scholar marries the novelist on whose work he specialises, and, after quite failing to convince her that he knows better than she what book to write next, resorts to becoming a novelist himself. Hence the title: he gets it, he thinks, this thing that marks her off from him, 'the trick of it'.

The Island of the Day Before is a book of an increasingly common kind whose point is its interpretation, as though fiction existed for the seminar. But, to adapt Heidegger, the primary characteristic of fiction is to be *there*. This one is not there; it fakes an interest in telling stories in order to promote an interest in storytelling.

Postscript: apart from mums and Distant Beloveds and a marginal trace or two there are no women in this novel. It is possible to argue that an author who sports with the deeper meanings of the universe ought to put some proper ones in. ■

Bruce Williams is head of the school of Arts & Media at La Trobe University.

BOOKS: 2

MIKE TICHER

Disorder in the house

Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the failure of the west, David Rieff, Random House, Sydney, 1995. ISBN 0099478315 RRP $17.95 **The Death of Yugoslavia**, Laura Silber and Allan Little, Penguin, Melbourne, 1995. ISBN 0140249044 RRP $16.95

WHEN YUGOSLAVIA BEGAN TO disintegrate in 1991, the idea of Europe seemed irresistible. With the European single market coming into force the following year, common defence and foreign policy mechanisms seemed the logical next step. The euphoria of communism's demise in the east had not yet resolved into the hard grind of economic reconstruction. 'The age of Europe has dawned,' Luxembourg's foreign minister Jacques Poos proclaimed, as the EC confidently waded into the Yugoslav fray.

By the time a Serb mortar killed 37 people in Sarajevo in August 1995, it had been obvious for years what a bitterly false dawn that was. A woman who brought flowers to the site was quoted in the London *Independent*: 'None of them were my relatives,' she said, 'but they were all my fellow citizens, regardless of their names or religions. I am sick of the world. I am sick of Europe.'

In retrospect, the signs that the common European home was a house built on sand were already there when communism collapsed. The most fervent wish of the former eastern bloc countries was to 'return to Europe', yet it was not so clear that the Europe they idealised even existed. In his book *We The People* (1990), Timothy Carton Ash wrote: 'Travelling to and fro between the two halves of the divided continent, I have sometimes thought that the real divide is between those (in the West) who have Europe and those (in the East) who believe in it.'

What were the characteristics of that Europe they believed in? The perception of shared cultural bonds, albeit partially interrupted for 40 years, was certainly there. But that guaranteed nothing. After all, hadn't the Jews trusted that their immersion in German (and European) culture would entitle them to be treated as Germans and Europeans? There was affluence too, but that was an aspiration, not a right. More important, surely, was that European institution instinctively cited by the anonymous Sarajevo woman: citizenship which guaranteed equality before the law (regardless of name or religion), in contrast to the Nazi and communist tyrannies endured in the past 60 years. Furthermore, the supra-national institutions under construction in the EC clearly implied the indivisibility of those rights across Europe. Scots and Greeks and Danes could claim them alike. With communism dead, logic demanded that they be extended also to Poles, Czechs and Hungarians—and Yugoslavs.

Among those who believed in the rhetoric of pan-European solidarity, as David Rieff makes clear in *Slaughterhouse*, were the educated middle-class of Sarajevo, and many other citizens of the former Yugoslavia. They understood 'Europe' not only as a repository of consumer goods and liberal democracy,

but also as what Rieff calls 'a moral category'. They could not believe that actually existing Europe—above all Britain and France—could stand on the sidelines and watch the destruction of historic European cities and the genocide of a people who believed themselves to be Europeans.

Rieff, as an American Jew, is ideally placed to dissect the betrayal of that idea of Europe as both an insider and an outsider. True, his admirable book is sub-titled 'the failure of the West', not 'the failure of Europe'. He cannot exclude his own government from complicity in the Bosnian slaughter—for Bill Clinton to utter the words 'never again' at the opening of New York's Holocaust Museum in 1993, when the butchery of Bosnia's Muslims had already been under way for a year was, he writes, 'to take vacuity over the border into obscenity'.

Yet Rieff writes best about the complex relationship of the constituent parts of Yugoslavia to Europe. He carefully isolates the importance of being European to Croatian identity (in contrast to the so-called Byzantine' Serbs)—a yearning which should have provided the Europeans with a powerful lever to curb the fanatical drive by the Tudjman government towards an ethnically homogenous state.

Instead of using that lever to insist that 'European' values be applied, however, the EC countries chose to 'read Yugoslavia out of Europe' as Rieff puts it. It was redefined as 'the Balkans', complete with supposedly ancient, bloodthirsty and immutable ethnic hatreds. Another quarrel in a faraway place between people of whom we knew nothing. Mass murder, the expulsion of whole populations, the destruction of hundreds of mosques and hundreds of thousands of houses—this is not how Europeans behave, therefore Yugoslavia could not be in Europe.

The bewilderment of the Bosnians that Europe did not come to save them stemmed from the belief that their plight was a 'category error', that their status as Europeans would give them a protection not enjoyed by victims of similar atrocities in Africa or Asia. It is the bitter disillusion in discovering their error that will help shape the mentality of a future Bosnian state and the identity of its citizens, just as the Holocaust transformed millions of liberal Jews into hardline Zionists. This means, above all the relentless reduction of identity to the specific sub-group targeted for genocide. As one of Rieff's friends in Sarajevo put it: 'First, I was a Yugoslav. Then I was a Bosnian. Now I'm becoming a Muslim.'

Rieff is unashamedly, but not sentimentally, pro-Bosnian. He is scrupulously fair to both governments and individuals, which powerfully reinforces his indictment of those who have connived at the slaughter.

In particular, he makes a clear distinction between the bravery and commitment of the UNHCR and the nauseatingly craven response of successive leaders of UNPROFOR. He explains convincingly how the United Nations quickly came to believe that 'peace' in Bosnia meant acceding to a carve-up of the country along ethnic lines. It was a view which led them to play down the massacres and expulsions which that entailed, and to see the Bosnian government as the main obstacle to that 'peace', while toadying up to and apologising for the Serbs, including those indicted as war criminals in The Hague.

Slaughterhouse is not without its faults. Rieff plunges into the story with little or no historical introduction, the book progresses without a discernible structure, and the urgency of his argument sometimes drives him into tortuous syntax. But these do nothing to obscure the damning clarity of his case. This is only enhanced by his thoughtful examination of his own professional ethics as a journalist:

'I arrived in Bosnia having always resisted appeals to become indignant about one cause or another. Indignation, I believed, was inimical to understanding ... since in the end it was informed by a sentimental and reductive reading of events. I don't know what I think now.'

Certainly he is far from ashamed that the media became, consciously or unconsciously, 'the only dependable allies the Bosnians had':

'What the press understood and the United Nations did not, was that to be fair and impartial was not the same thing ... It always seemed to me poignant that this group of professional skeptics [the media] ...turned out to believe more in 'Western values' than their governments did.'

THIS IS NOT A VIEW SHARED by Laura Silber and Allan Little, whose book is the companion to the BBC series recently screened on the ABC. It is hard to believe that it is not Rieff himself they have in mind when they rather sniffily insist that theirs is not a *cri de coeur*, a call to arms of

the 'Save Bosnia Now' type (though we believe that Bosnia could and should have been saved). It is not a polemic against the failure of the West to protect the weak from the strong. And it is not a book about journalism or journalists.

Rather, it attempts to document dispassionately, in chronological order and copious detail, the unfolding drama of the break-up of Yugoslavia. There are plenty of forgotten episodes here, and some surprising angles. The haste and manner in which Slovenia declared its independence, for example, knowing the unenviable choices it would leave the republics with far less homogenous populations, seems much shabbier than it did at the time. *The Death of Yugoslavia* is, at least, a magnificent reference book.

Yet for all this valuable and painstakingly recorded information, the authors' achievement is strictly limited, since they fail to draw the conclusions which follow from their own mass of evidence. In the introduction they write that Yugoslavia's failure to take its place in 'the hopeful community of European nations ... turned out to be Europe's loss as well as Yugoslavia's, and a mortal blow to many of the core moral certainties of our age.' This is surely subject matter which cries out not merely for documentation, but also for analysis—passion, even. Yet, like the UN carefully counting the incoming shells, the authors tend to interpret their 'mandate' as journalists in the narrowest possible sense, to the exclusion of making moral judgements about what they are observing.

What conclusions there are tend to be inexplicably crass throwaway remarks. The dismal litany of failed international initiatives leads them to state feebly at one point that 'in reality, there was little Washington could do'. This immediately before they explain how the Americans painstakingly rebuilt the Muslim-Croat alliance, which drastically changed the course of the war in 1994. This strange, semi-detached pseudo-objectivity, in stark contrast to Rieff's angry, but self-critical engagement, makes *The Death of Yugoslavia* a much less impressive book than it might otherwise have been.

The military map of Bosnia has changed substantially since both these books were completed. But the turning tide of the war has, if anything, only hastened its essential outcome, the same outcome to which Carrington, Vance-Owen and the rest shamefully gave their imprimatur—the destruction of a multi-ethnic Bosnia, and with it the Europe that flickered so briefly into the imagination between 1989 and 1991. That ideal lies buried with the thousands of nameless corpses in Srebrenica, Prijedor and a hundred other European towns. ■

Mike Ticher is a freelance writer.

CHRIS MCGILLION

Fighting time

Home Before Dark, Ruth Park and Rafe Champion, Viking, Sydney 1995. ISBN 0 670 85739 4 RRP $35.00

ON MY WALL AT HOME is a framed black-and-white photograph of Ernest Hemingway leaning over the ropes of a boxing ring. His hands are gloved, his chest bare, and there is a sly grin across his face. Before he blew his brains out in Cuba, Hemingway had what I regard as a wholesome attitude to life. One may have found the details distasteful—his screwing the girlfriend of the notorious gangster Legs Diamond on the stairs of a New York speakeasy; his fascination with the blood and gore of bullfighting; his love of boxing—but these were the surface expressions of a deeply adventurous spirit. Hemingway confronted life head-on: he relished its challenges and searched out its risks. He was not a man to trade passion for the *petit bourgeois* securities urged upon so many of us today.

I thought of Hemingway again last month when I was coaxed out of 'retirement' for a welterweight exhibition bout on the undercard of the Australian Universities Boxing Championship. I also thought of Les Darcy. Amateur boxing is a long way from the slug-fest that professional boxing has become but is not all that far removed from the 'manly art of self-defence' that Darcy and others practised earlier this century. Once you climb through the ropes the sensations are identical: the apprehension in the loins as you face an opponent; the taste of blood in your mouthguard; the thud of a hard right against the side of your head if you're silly enough to drop your guard when in retreat.

I copped a hiding. But I didn't regret it. For one more glorious night I was a member of the boxing fraternity again. It's an exclusive club and membership of it also gave me some understanding of Darcy's story from the inside.

Boxers can be colourful personalities but they are rarely complex ones. Les Darcy was no exception. Like others before and after him, Les was lured to boxing because it offered a way out of the pre-ordained limitations of working-class life. Before the First World War, boxing was a mass entertainment sport. A top-draw fighter could make more money for one night's work in the ring than he could hope to make in three year's manual work.

Money and opportunity versus routine and drudgery. For Les there was really no choice. His father's reckless drinking was rapidly consigning his mother and her ten children to a life of near destitution and so Les took it upon himself to be the family breadwinner. As the purses from his fights grew, so did his ambitions. Les's dream was to see his mother set up in a comfortable house of her own—and this dream became a demand after the tumbledown shack the family occupied near Maitland was all but destroyed by severe flooding in 1913. Then, as now of course, home ownership was an expensive proposition. Les had to fight and keep on fighting to earn enough to finish the new house. This explains his dedication to boxing, his reluctance to cut short a promising ring career to enlist in the Army, and his fatal decision to leave for the US and pursue the kind of high-paying contests he was being denied at home.

THIS SIMPLE PLOT has become the stuff of rich folklore ever since. *Home Before Dark* is an attempt to sift the fact from the fiction. Fiction: Les Darcy would have become the greatest boxer of all time. Fact: He was almost certainly the best middleweight, and perhaps the best light-heavyweight of his day but beyond that the discussion is meaningless. Fiction: Darcy was poisoned by 'the Yanks' because he was so good and threatened US boxing interests. Fact: Darcy died from septicaemia probably contracted after Harold Harwood knocked out two of his teeth in 1916—long before Darcy even set foot in the US. Fiction: Darcy was a coward and a traitor, a man who would feather his own nest while his mates died for God, King and Country in the First World War. Fact: Australians were divided over participating in Europe's war; Darcy's choice to defer enlistment was not extraordinary and his decision to stow away to America was made after attempts to leave openly had been closed, unjustifiably, to him.

In unearthing the real Les Darcy, Ruth Park and Rafe Champion have produced an authoritative and highly entertaining book. But have they explained the Darcy mystique? On the jacket cover of *Home Before Dark* is an elaboration of the title: 'The story of Les Darcy, a great Australian hero'. Recently I asked Rafe Champion, who was talking about the book to a small gathering at the Sydney University Sports Union, what he understood by the term 'great Australian Hero'. Rafe's first response was to point to Darcy's celebrity status but I wouldn't buy that. Celebrities are not heroes and our age is the poorer for paying too much attention to the former and too little to the latter. Then he mentioned Darcy's amiable

The photograph, above, of Les Darcy in evening dress hung over the desk of family friend and mentor, Father Joe Coady.

A PR shot of Les Darcy shoeing horses in the East Maitland forge, with fellow boxer and friend Frank Loughrey.

disposition and the fact that he endured considerable physical suffering in silence. But that would qualify for hero-status a good many people we meet every day of the week.

Someone in the group submitted that Darcy was the master of his profession. Maybe, but in a sense so is Mike Tyson and you don't hear anyone calling him a hero. Someone else (the question was obviously generating some interest) suggested that heroes are social constructions and therefore we should be looking for sociological explanations of, not mythological qualifications for, heroism.

It was at this point that Rafe, who'd been leafing dreamily through his book, stopped at the third last paragraph. This was written by D'Arcy Niland, whose extensive research before his death into the Les Darcy story inspired—and largely directed—*Home Before Dark*. It is, indeed, the most evocative paragraph in the book. Referring to the June 26, 1917 funeral of Darcy (the largest, proportionally, in Australia's history) Niland wrote:

> I don't think all those hundreds and thousands of people, millions really, were mourning for Les alone. Somewhere in the air was a vast silent lament for all the dead and ruined boys, the generation that had gone away laughing and singing and just vanished into thin air. In some mysterious way he was one of them, not a soldier but a battler, someone who did his best, came a cropper and didn't whinge about it. There's something profound, perverse if you like, in the Australian psyche that feels most love for the good loser. That's why Gallipoli means more to us than any victory.

We remember Les Darcy less for what he was than for what he came to symbolise about these troubled years of the First World War. That is where his 'heroic' status—in a narrow sociological sense—lies. What Les Darcy was is something quite different from the stuff of mythology. Darcy was masculine without being boisterous or brutal. He was a successful sportsman while also being accomplished at the blacksmith's forge and violin. He was someone who stood for what he believed in, whether that was confidence in his abilities or loyalty to his family.

Les Darcy, in short, was a man. Hemingway's example reminds us that there are no necessary virtues in this. But there was a rarity in Darcy's day and there is an even greater one in ours. ■

Chris McGillion edits the opinion page for *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

BOOKS: 4

James Griffin

Time bilong money

The Min of the Papua New Guinea Star Mountains, Gerrit Schuurkamp, Publication sponsored by Ok Tedi Mining, Tabubil, Western Province, Papua New Guinea, 1995. ISBN 9980 85 099 X RRP $70.00

CERTAINLY A COUPLE OF YEARS ago one could, perhaps one still can, come across Des Fitzer bustling on government business in Port Moresby—a bureaucratic amanuensis. I mention Des because he led the first patrol into the last parishes to be contacted on the southern (Papuan) slopes of the Star Mountains in the centre of geographical New Guinea. It was 1963 and it took 124 days in the precipitous granite and limestone mountains which rise to over 4000 metres (13,675 feet) and are leached by rainfalls ranging for four to eleven metres (160 to 430 inches), where one can wallow out of quagmires on to 35-degree gradients, where the escarpments shake and their debris is swept away in pluvial landslides. 1963, that's how recent and arduous it was meeting the most remote of the Wopkaimin, a subgroup in the Min culture area, 'Min' being a suffix meaning just 'people'. Officially it was the last first contact and Mt Fubilan (6837 ft) rose there with an unsuspected fifty metre cap of gold.

'A geographic hell', said Fitzer, and he had 'no hesitation in stating that there was no possibility of establishing a patrol post on the Papuan side of the Star Mountains'. However, in 1966 another patrol saw watercourse rocks peacocked in blue and green. Not so unusual that, except that the geologist knew this was a region of tectonic plate collisions and that there was a fair chance

of substantial mineral lodes.

In the early 1960s, with new extraction techniques, it became profitable to mine low-grade ore bodies—and create enormities of sludge. In 1964 Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia (CRA) realised that Bougainville's huge porphyry copper and gold deposits could be slurried into saleable concentrates although grades were only 0.48 per cent of copper and 0.55 gms of gold per tonne. Quite different from the 1930s when the ubiquitous alluvial prospector, 'Sharkeye' Park, had pontificated: 'There's a lot of gold in Bougainville, but too much bloody Bougainville mixed up with it'. The grades at Ok Tedi were much higher.

THE CENTRAL BOUGAINVILLIANS reacted very differently to the news that their sacred land was to be mined. They had fertile soil and an equable climate and they enjoyed palliative if limited welfare services from the Christian (predominantly Catholic) missions so that there was no desire for frontier mining camp development. Moreover, there was profound distrust and exasperation at having had several generations of contact through mostly unrewarding plantation labour followed by the devastation of war—which did not even graze the northern Min. And since 1930 Bougainvilleans had had experience of sporadic (profitless for them) gouging of their ground by uninvited, overbearing and less perceptive 'sharkeyes', a few of whom were staked by that wide-ranging entrepreneur, Archbishop (Sir) James Duhig of Brisbane.

Not so the Min. The outskirts of their region had probably been contacted as early as 1922 and the great patrols of Champion/Karius (1927) and Taylor/Black (1938) had passed through. On the New Guinea side Michael Leahy (see Connolly/Anderson's film *First Contact*) had crash-landed to establish a glider strip at Telefomin in 1944 but, in spite of a post being established there in 1948 and at Kiunga (Papua) in 1950 near the confluence of the Ok Tedi and the Fly, there was little development. Where Fitzer went, life was far from idyllic. Life expectancy for a male was 28-32 years; for a female less than 25. Tribal fighting may have accounted for a third of deaths without respect to age or sex. Stunting, as the result of poor nutrition, had the average weight for adult males (in 1978) at 56 kilos and height at 158 cms; for women 50 and 147. Those sceptics who think cannibalism based on protein lust was a whiteman's fantasy can still find a few well-mannered participants in the Stars. Chronic anaemia, filariasis, shigellosis, typhoid, even sub-alpine malaria took a heavy toll. A Min traditionally knew virtually nothing of life beyond a radius of 40 kilometres: even then the earth did not seem under-populated and they fought over land. Taboos and sorcery promoted social cohesion but also an ethos of cramping fear.

Kennecott was the first large miner to challenge the tyranny of altitude and terrain as well as distance at Ok Tedi. It seems to have been enlightened in its self-interest from 1968, when it took out its lease, until its withdrawal in 1975. That was in part due to its fear of the strident economic nationalism which emerged prior to independence and the drastic renegotiation of the Bougainville Copper Agreement in 1974. An odour also enveloped Kennecott with the deposition and murder of Allende in Chile. But it did not know of the gold cap or anticipated the surge in gold prices, pegged at $35 an ounce before 1973, to roughly $850 in 1979.

BHP was the beneficiary. With German involvement and a 20 per cent PNG government equity, Ok Tedi Mining Ltd was set up. Today BHP has 60 per cent and the management contract. It took eight years and US$1400 million between 1976 and 1984 to develop the mine. By 1994, with the closure of the Bougainville mine in 1989, Ok Tedi's export sales of 536 million Kina represented 20 per cent of PNG's total. The government received K37 million in direct revenue; K58.9 million was spent in goods and services, 68 per cent from PNG supplies; K13 million is spent on education and training; K300 million has gone on infrastructure including Tabubil town of 10,000 people. Little wonder then that Port Moresby would like to see Messrs Slater and Gordon who, with their alluring contingency fees, could incite downstream villagers to bring OTML to a halt, defenestrated through their window of opportunity. So would the Min. But the alleged destruction by mining waste of village communities along the Ok Tedi and the Fly, which has always carried millions of tonnes of sediment irrespective of OTML's contribution, is not within the scope of this book.

A cynic or, better still, an overearnest environmentalist, will probably say that this almost monumental coffee table ethnograph is no more than an attempt to justify the ways of a godlike multinational to Min. Sponsored by OTML it consists of some 800 full-colour photographs taken with a 'fill-in' electronic flash and an interleaved standard succinct text which fits the book's modest subtitle. The superb photographs range from numinous silhouettes of the sublime (in Edmund Burke's

Smiles are still in order despite long hours and rules for work.

Caption and photo opportunity from the book.

sense) Hindenburg range at dawn to the intimacies of moss, lichen and the local cuisine; from the scarlet efflorescence of the 'flame of the forest' vine to the *bilas* (personal displays) of villagers with their paradise feather headdresses and virtuosic penis gourds; from the weaponry of hunting to the mechanics of vertiginous hanging bridges and house making. There are ossuaries as mindful of mortality as a medieval monastic necropolis but nothing of current mortuary rites. The 'family album' portraits are all posed; all the children are well laundered; there are no candle-grease noses. For a little verismo infants are not invariably cheerful but pacification seems to have left no one disgruntled.

However, there is no need to be cynical at the sight of a Min operating a 190-tonne dump truck or a computer in a control room. Or even about the final exhortation in large font italics on an embroidered page: 'The Min must continue to take pride in their unique culture and heritage, it is a source of community strength and personal identity! Only you can pass along these cultural values or else they will be lost.'

This sounds like wormwood but Dr Schuurkamp is really expressing here respect for a 'time before' culture and discreetly backing off from specifying what 'heritage' can be distilled from it and how it will stand up to the dynamics of western commodification. Attrition and what further opportunities are available when OTMI closes around 2010 will determine that. Meanwhile it is essential that the Min are not totally alienated from the consensual practices of the past by the tyranny of technology.

In this regard Christian religions which allow syncretic adjustments are surely to be preferred as agents of change. Schnuurkamp rightly deplores those western *Rebaibalists* ('revivalist', but with plenty of baibal) who have kindled the burning of spirit houses. Only recently former Prime Minister, Rabbie Namaliu, complained that the Constitution guaranteeing freedom of religion made it impossible to do anything about them.

Dr Schuurkamp, primarily a health worker rather than an anthropologist, has given the Min an admirably reflective memorial of their transition from the past. Obviously anything as neolithically veracious as the Gardner/Heider *Gardens of War* 1969 (filmed as *Dead Birds*) photographed in 1961 in the Baliem Valley (Irian Jaya) was impossible. There are a few slips in the text: 'New Guinea' (meaning present day PNG) had not been claimed in 1876 when D'Albertis flew his Italian flag up the Fly but Dutch New Guinea had (p. xi), while 'loose' for 'lose' (p276) and 'appetiate' (sic p 150) perhaps show his Dutch origin. ■

James Griffin is Emeritus Professor of History, University of PNG.

BOOKS: 5

PAUL COLLINS

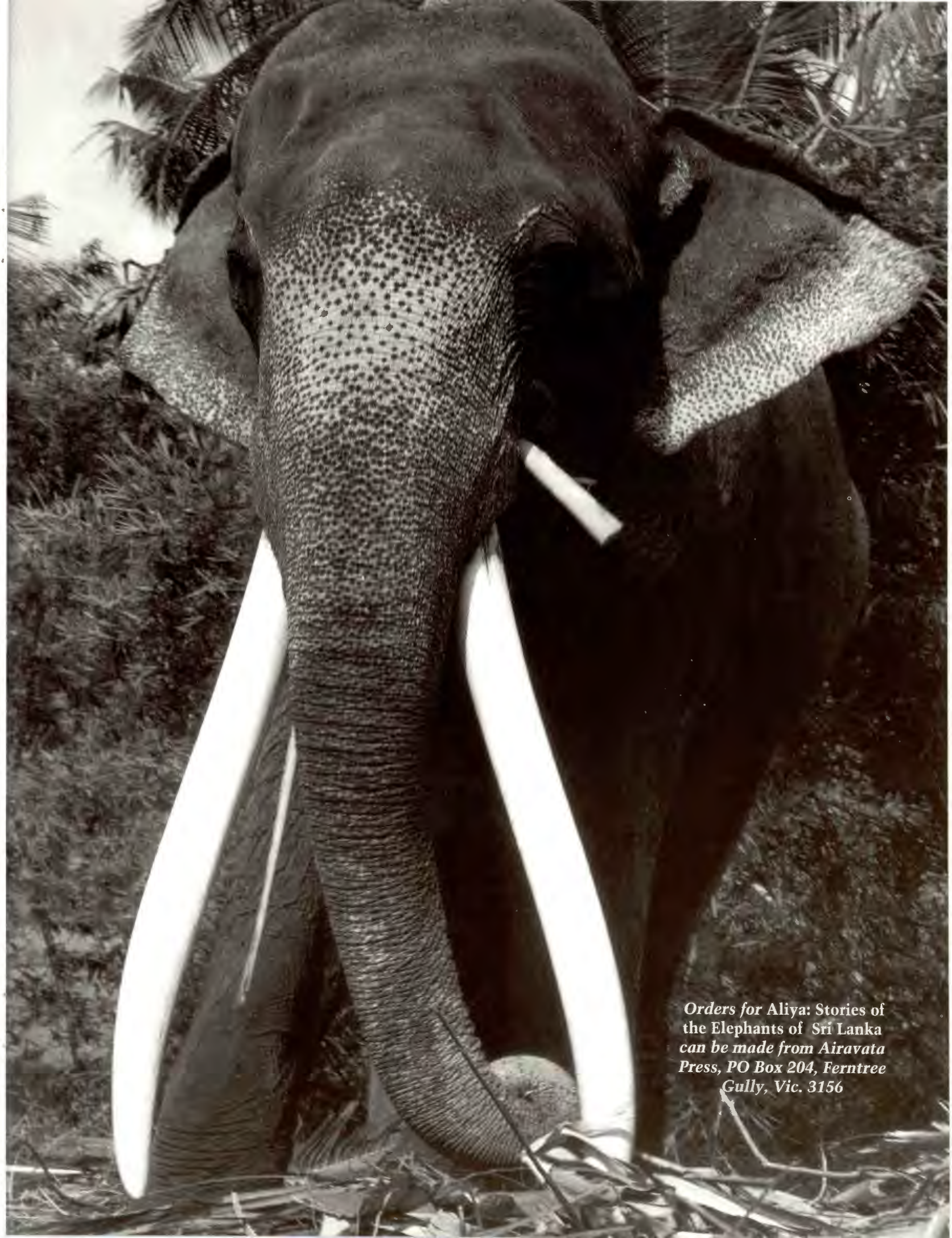
Trunk call

THESE DAYS CONTACT WITH wild animals is rare. Recently, on South Australia's Kangaroo Island, I had chance to visit one of the few major colonies of Australian sea lions at Seal Bay Conservation Park. The total population has now recovered from the depredations of 19th century hunting to a total of about 12,000. Six hundred of these are at Seal Bay.

Now sea lions have small brains and in the mating season (which tends to come around about every 18 months) they have only two things on their mind: territory and copulation. The group of us on the beach, including children, went quiet for the whole time we were there. People spoke in whispers. The sea lions completely ignored us; they were too busy defending territory and warding off younger males.

Our silence resulted from a sense of awe, a sense of being in the presence of creatures that were totally other than us. This is the terrible risk we run as we progressively destroy more and more of the natural world. There is increasingly so little left that it is not somehow controlled or been manipulated by us. With one hundred thousand visitors to their beach at Seal Bay each year, one wonders what will happen to the sea lions, despite the best efforts of the National Parks Service.

Aliya: Stories of the Elephants of Sri Lanka, Teresa Cannon and Peter Davis, Airavata Press, Melbourne 1995. ISBN 0 646 21408 X RRP $49.95 (Christmas special price)



Orders for* Aliya: Stories of the Elephants of Sri Lanka *can be made from Airavata Press, PO Box 204, Ferntree Gully, Vic. 3156

Clearly Australian writers Teresa Cannon and Peter Davis, share an even greater sense of awe in the presence of the *Elephas maximus maximus*—the Sri Lankan subspecies of the Asian elephant, the largest of all land-living mammals. But like the sealers who drove the sea lions to the edge of extinction, in the mid-nineteenth century in Sri Lanka 6000 elephants were destroyed by European hunters because they were considered to be 'vermin'. Now there are an estimated 2000 to 3000 wild elephants living in the country and about 500 domestic ones.

Sri Lanka is smaller than Tasmania with a population of 17 million. Cannon and Davis comment that is 'a credit to conservationists and those involved in wildlife management' that there are still animals alive in the wild. It is yet to be seen what damage the war on the island has done to the animals.

Cannon and Davis try to place these extraordinary animals in an historical, cultural and religious context and they describe in detail the role the elephants have played in Sri Lankan tradition. However, I found the historical and cultural material less interesting than the physical and zoological description of the animals and their intimate and intricate social structure.

...Sri Lankan Buddhism has given a mythic and sacred status to elephants. 'Having been born of celestial and divine realms, the elephant has woven its way into mythology and become a profound symbol of strength, protection and fortune...'

What this part of the book does is reinforce the on-going ethical and moral reappraisal of the status of animals and of our relationship to them. Charles Birch in *Regaining Compassion* (1993) and Peter Singer in *Animal Liberation* (1991) are two Australian ethicists prominent in the discussion.

Cannon and Davis make it clear that Sri Lankan Buddhism has given a mythic and sacred status to elephants. 'Having been born of celestial and divine realms, the elephant has woven its way into mythology and become a profound symbol of strength, protection and fortune ... It is a sacred creature providing life and sustenance and therefore deserving of deep gratitude, honour and reverence.' The elephant is closely connected with the birth of the Buddha and, in fact, he was thought to be an elephant in a previous incarnation.

In the role it assigns to animals, Christianity could learn a lot from Buddhism. Traditional Christian moral theology tends to see respect for animals in a neighbourly but strictly subservient sense. Bernard Häring, in *The Law of Christ* , described the Christian view as 'animals and all irrational creatures are objects of our wonder... We cherish all of God's creatures for their Creator's sake, but strictly speaking, nothing irrational can be the object of the Christian virtue of neighbourly love.'

Underlying this is the assumption that animals are irrational. This shows the influence of Rene Descartes that animals are merely natural machines totally subservient to the force of instinct. According to Descartes they lack any form of consciousness, freedom or the ability to make decisions. They are simply led by their instinctual needs. In the light of modern biology this view is totally out of date. Simply by focusing on the elephants and describing their complex social interaction, Cannon and Davis' book implicitly debunks this Cartesian view and also shows how dated Christian ethics have become in the area.

The book describes the complex interrelationships that exist in elephant herds. 'Elephants in the herd are intimately connected to each other in a rhythmic continuum of audio and tactile communication. It is through this collective cadence that the spirit of the elephants finds expression and the consciousness is formed.' The herd is not just an ad hoc group. 'It is a complex and defined support structure of genetically related members, offering security, companionship and, above all, survival.'

Elephant society is matriarchal. The herd is guided by the largest and oldest female. They care for each other and for the calves with sensitivity. They have poor sight, 'vision beyond 25 meters is blurred' but they have a highly developed sense of touch, hearing and smell. They clearly have a range of communal sounds and much of their communication may occur through infrasound. They also seem to be high on the scale of intelligence.

All of this indicates that elephants are so far from 'irrational' as the Christian tradition suggests. As this book shows they are, in fact, extraordinary animals. *Aliya, Stories of the Elephants of Sri Lanka* is a tribute to them. There are beautiful illustrations and it introduces the Sri Lankan people who care for the elephants, both domestic and wild. The authors clearly love the country, but they are not unaware of its shortcomings, not the least of which is the war that is at present raging.

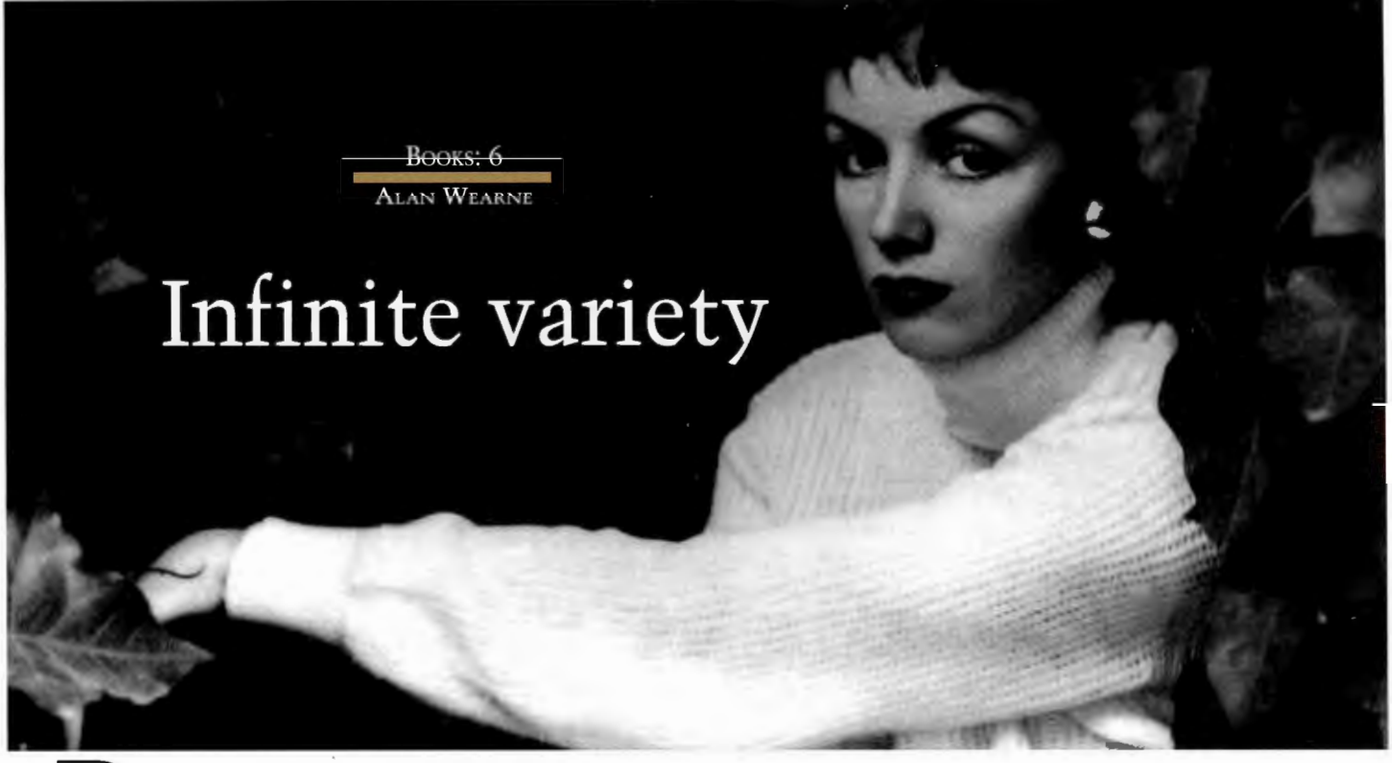
That is why the book ends with a note of warning. 'Since we made our first visit [to Sri Lanka], there have been more elephant deaths than births. No one knows the exact numbers. But the elephants are clearly losing. And inevitably, so too is the ecosystem.'

So the Sri Lankan elephant faces the same threat as the Australian sea lion and the rest of the natural world: human beings. It would be a tragedy if this beautiful book were the Sri Lankan elephants' swan song! ■

Paul Collins is the author of the *God's Earth, Religion as if matter really mattered.*

Alan Wearne

Infinite variety



Poetry can be a defiantly tribal thing, so whenever I see an all-purpose women's anthology from the US or Britain my first impulse is to see what Australians are represented. Starting with colleagues (Gig Ryan, say, or Jennifer Maiden) I then move onto other contemporaries I admire (Rhyll McMaster for example); my eyes peeled for older figures I will always read and re-read (like Gwen Harwood or Judith Wright). I am also vigilant for those writers I hardly barrack for but whom, I know, possess a decent track record (Faye Zwicky or the late Jennifer Rankin). Invariably I find few (Judith Wright is the one constant) and this annoys me.

Certainly with the first three of my above categories my desire to see Aussies included is not out of tokenism or jingoism; nor is it, at times, purely out of plain old-fashioned friendship; rather it is a wish to see certain fine challenging poems in a position where they can be read by as many people as possible.

A volume like *The Oxford Book of Australian Women's Verse* might help redress this imbalance on behalf of the female members of our poetry tribe (the Hampton-Llewellyn Penguin effort of a decade back has also assisted). Maybe if more international verse powerbrokers see this book more of our poets will achieve a reasonable recognition. Not that the anthology has been assembled purely for flag-flying.

The Oxford Book of Australian Women's Verse, Susan Lever (ed.), Oxford University Press, Melbourne 1995. ISBN 0 19 553505 7 RRP $24.95

I found the book quirky and at times annoying; if not predictable then at least reliable; if conservative (though hardly James McAuley conservative) yet with a sure ability to surprise. Pieces I am glad I encountered for the first times included 'Bachelor' by Anne Elder, the five poems by Susan Hampton and the five by Margaret Scott, 'The Mountain Road: Crete, 1941' by Nan McDonald, and 'A Problem of Language' by Dorothy Auchterlonie.

There are song lyrics but no concrete poetry, sound poetry, 'language' poetry and, although the editor might dispute it, little to no performance poetry. It may be that concrete, sound and language verse doesn't come within the editorial parameters but there should have been a disclaimer to this effect in the introduction. (More on aspects of this later.)

It is in the earlier verse where one of the book's strengths emerges: this is in the variety of vigorous poetry (still living, not mere museum pieces) from colonial and federation times. Is there more such women's verse to be assembled? Doubtless. Is there an editor to do the assembling and a publisher to present them? We hope so.

I confess a soft spot for the ballady and Kiplingesque from those days (as marked an influence, let's face it, as any in literature) particularly those that turn Rudyard on his head: humanist, angry and leftist (not that Kipling couldn't be humanist and angry). I'm pleased that Susan Lever discovered Marie E. J. Pitt's 'Australia's Tommy Atkins', for example; it has great vigour. Here though is an item I'd definitely omit: 'My Country'. This war horse, this chestnut, has the quaint Mary Grant Bruce-ish air of a colonial cousin in jodhpurs telling the distant relatives back 'home' at the ancestral hall, sweetly as she can, a thing or two. Sure, it has served its purpose well for the bulk of this century. Now it should be put to sleep. True, it made the Hampton-Llewellyn nine years back, but they also included Dorothea MacKellar's 'Arms and the Woman' as Lever should have. A remarkable piece, it is a brief verse essay on how a woman should defend herself when attacked; it gives the poet quite a new dimension.

Should songs lyrics have been included? The reviewer equivocates. Certainly if a man were presumptuous enough to concoct as unlikely a volume as an 'Oxford Book of Australian Men's Verse' I doubt if he'd include 'The Road to Gundagai', 'The Pub With No Beer', and 'Friday on my Mind'.

I cannot pass comment on Robyn Archer's 'The Menstruation Blues'. I can only guess that the reaction to it

The confronting face of The Oxford Book of Australian Women's Verse *is the former Patricia ('Bambi') Shmith, now the Countess of Harewood, as photographed by Athol Shmith in 1947.*

amongst women would range from veneration to disgust. Glen Tomasetti's rousing equal-pay polemic 'Don't Be Too Polite, Girls!' I can appreciate and will promote. For apart from the rhetoric of conscription and the Vietnam War, never did the Menzies Era establishment trot out more fatuous, patronising platitudes and lies than the arguments opposing equal pay for equal work. Are Tomasetti's words then, like something out of a time capsule, the lyrical equivalent to 'Blue Hills'? Not at all. The song grows more apt by the day.

Perhaps a real shame is that the ultimate Australian women's song lyrics, 'Girls In Our Town' (though much in the way that Messrs Cukor and Sirk made women's films), couldn't be included, since it was written by a man.

Given that women are at the cutting edge of reproduction, sexuality, and the domestic grind (or assume they are), then a volume of women's verse is sure to have much that is polemical, socially engaged: the hand-to-hand combat of it all. Which is where, I suppose, the song lyrics can be slotted in. Are men, perhaps, more likely to be found behind the artillery of satire? Could be, though never let it be said that women's satire doesn't have the grip and snap desired of the form. Vicki Raymond, absurdly neglected in Australia, is certainly in the running to be the nation's Stevie Smith (with a dash of Dorothy Parker).

Did I find much that was humorous in the book? Not heaps, though the fault may be mine. I remember how the cartoonist Judy Horacek bewailed the fact that men didn't see the joke in one of her pieces. Exactly, I later thought, we didn't see the joke because we didn't think it funny!

Though space, if not taste, excludes plenty from any anthology, here are some of the more established contemporary names that I feel are hardly done by with their exclusion: Louise Crisp, Thalia, Amanda Stewart, Alexandra Seddon, Chris Mansell, Kate Jennings, Anna Couani, Stephanie Bennett, Christine Churches and Joyce Lee. Knowing what it like to be omitted from anthologies do I beat some kind of vicarious drum on behalf of the excluded? I trust not. I admit I have never warmed to the works of Mansell or Couani but feel I know their worth enough to be riled by their absence. Certainly the inclusion of Lily Brett annoyed me considerably. That the subject matter of her verse (The Holocaust and its aftermath) is worthy of art goes without saying. The trouble is that perhaps a poet has to be a Paul Celan for that art to happen.

I would not expect Lever to have included Ramona Barry, Cassie Lewis or Emma Lew, however, since at the moment they have only begun to taxi along the career runway. I do predict, though, that all three will take their readerships on long flights to places and states of mind exotic and enjoyable.

It would be great to have an Australian woman poet whose international standing in verse paralleled that of Stead in fiction, Melba and Sutherland in opera or Greer in all-purpose stirring. Certainly we have produced women poets who have exceeded the talent, if not the influence, of the Americans Plath and Sexton, two of this century's most overrated versifiers. Of equal certainty, no Australian poet, female or male, has ever had the careers, produced the achievements, or held the sheer moral authority of the Russians Akhmatova and Tseteyeva. But then no Australian poet has had to endure what fate, history and ideological malevolence had in store for Akhmatova and Tseteyeva (and Mandlestam, Pasternak, Garcia Lorca, Hernandez, Machado, Neruda etc.).

Put alongside Akhamatova (for starters) the complaints of Mark O'Connor and Les Murray, those bardic blowhards who recently haven't been able to get their way at the Australian Council. Every member of the Australia Council Reform Association should read a biography of Akhmatova just to help them attain a modicum of perspective and a smattering of humility. Have any of our women poets gone in for such grandstanding? None spring to mind.

Sound poetry and performance poetry, though three dimensional on the stage and the airwaves, invariably shrinks to one dimension the moment it encounters an actual page, print often showing up the essentially conservative nature of the beast. For this reason, though much could have been made of it in the introduction, many of the omissions can only be bewailed by crocodile tears. The editor promotes Ania Walcicz and Joanne Burns as 'performance' though both are worthy of more substantial adjectives.

Gig Ryan, Dorothy Porter and J. S. Harry are described as experimental, and although all three write challenging poetry, in not-quite-

research ethics

remember Billy
Billy the norman
we used to split
a hogshead from time to time
at the river

he always had
a slate by him

they say
he's in Paris
a doctor at the Sorbonne
he defended the proposition
English is a dying language
and won

the bastard we'll not see him
back in Southampton

Lee Cataldi

traditional forms, 'experiment' is hardly their category. Lever, I submit, has really not much idea what experiment in verse in the nineties, could possibly be. You want a woman poet worthy of the term experiment? Try the American Marjorie Wellish: no Australian has pushed the craft in the directions that she has, her fractured assemblings making John Ashbery appear the epitome of lucidity.

WHICH BRINGS ME to what might be Australia's most original contribution to poetry, something no-one else in the world has ever done (and you can't get more original than that!): Thalia's concrete poems based on Pittman's shorthand. Now there may be decent aesthetic reasons for not including concrete verse, and Thalia's works are decidedly non-mainstream and obscurely distributed. But this should not have prevented the editor from locating and, at least, mentioning them in her introduction. She had, after all, the resources of the Australian Defence Force Academy and Oxford University Press at her disposal.

A few years back I received, as a present, the Oxford publication *Poetry by Canadian women*, a fine book to expand the horizons of an Australian man. 'Now here's a poem that should intrigue ... ' I might say, showing a colleague, a student, a friend. 'That it is by a Canadian woman is doubtless fine, it also just happens to be a good poem, independent of any label. Whether Metaphysical or Augustan, Romantic or Modern, academic or performance and yes, Canadian, Australian or Women's, the best verse will always have the ability to shed any labels.'

Buy this book and send it abroad to someone who might appreciate something so different. Those who have made the Lever listing deserve their place. In the way I return to the Canadians Margaret Avison, Jay McPherson, Gwendolyn McKeown and Bronwyn Wallace, so I'd like to think that someone overseas will return to Rosemary Dobson, Dorothy Hewett, Pamela Brown and Alison Croggan. ■

Alan Wearne is a poet and author of the verse novel *The Nightmarkets*.

Dinner at the Internet Cafe

OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS a number of internet cafes have opened up across the nation. 'Welcome to the Net Cafe' one flyer announces, 'where cappucino meets cyberspace.' Coffee and connectivity. 'Get your feet wet on the internet' exhorts another pamphlet.

Internet cafes give a human and social context to terms like 'electronic frontier' and 'cyberspace'. At the same time, internet cafes function as initiators. What can you learn between short blacks? Well, one of the things you can learn is that the internet consists of two basic formats: the International Relay Channel and the World Wide Web.

The cyber cappucino set can cruise the International Relay Channel (IRC) chatting (that is, typing messages). This is done by joining 'sites' which are normally determined by topic. There is no limit to the number of sites individuals can join at any one sitting; consequently, it is possible to have many conversations at once on the IRC. Because of the cross-pollination between sites, a conversation on the internet tends to be disjointed, non-linear, and multi-layered.

The second format, the World Wide Web (WWW– where people 'surf' the internet) contains a mass of information which continues to swell. Anyone can put anything on the internet. In consequence much material is arcane, quirky, and off-beat. The WWW is the domain of the weird as much as it is a repository of information—a virtually unlimited encyclopedia of the human condition. This year there has been a 300 per cent rise in the number of visitors to the 'Web'. RMIT puts the global figure at 9,000,000 per week. Little wonder internet cafes, the social spaces for the electronic age, are also spreading across the world—the way tea and coffee houses once did.

Is the cyber-milieu and its associated spaces, like these cafes, a form of recreation or re-creation? Much of the material on the internet perpetuates a mythology, which is cyber-centric and shrouded in the internet's mystique. As its use as a forum for all fields increases, the internet will inevitably change our world view. This is happening now, as the internet emerges, normalised, in internet cafes. Internet cafes represent a step forward in the electronic revolution. The amateur and the cyberphobe can relax in an environment where technicalities are the responsibility of trained staff. At a 'net cafe, the internet experience becomes user-friendly. What was once esoteric becomes a social activity. The internet has come out of the closet...

So, heed *Netiquette's* (the on-line code of conduct) admonition: 'When thou enter a city, abide by the custom' (taken from the Talmud). The same applies at an internet cafe: when entering, fetch a coffee, sit down and log-in. In a generation, none of this will seem strange at all. ■

Dan Disney is a freelance cyberphile.
The Australian Jesuits have set up Web pages on Christian and Social Justice issues. The address is:
http://www.vicnet.net.au/~cardoner/index.html

GEOFFREY MILNE

Festival fever

OCTOBER IS A BUSY TIME for arts festivals in Australia. This year I managed to catch a fair sampling of two of them. First came the National Festival of Australian Theatre in Canberra (the capital's fifth in all and Robyn Archer's third); then the tenth Melbourne International Festival of the Arts (and Leo Schofield's second as Artistic Director).

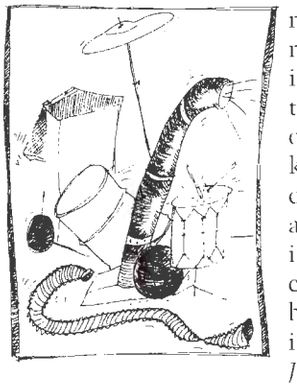
In Robyn Archer's mind, 'theatre' can mean anything from orthodox drama and dance to cabaret. 'Australian' means two things in the context of the National Festival: all work is Australian-created and it comes from companies from all over Australia, although this year the strongest presences were from Adelaide and Canberra.

Dance was strongly represented by the Meryl Tankard Australian Dance Theatre from Adelaide (their *Furioso* was one of the hits of the Festival) and the national Bangarra Dance Theatre, with *Ochres*. I hadn't seen this company before and I am glad I now have. *Ochres* is in four sections, each taking its mood from one of the ochre colours: yellow, black, red and white. It opens with the giant figure of the ochre spirit (Djakapurra Munyarryun) daubing himself with yellow ochre in a centre spotlight, tentatively and gently at first, but by the end of the sequence yellow ochre is flying everywhere in a display of energy and enthusiasm which pervades the rest of the evening.

If Bangarra's work is a combination of western and indigenous dance traditions, another show with an interesting fusion of ideas was *When I am Old I shall Wear Purple*. This was devised and performed by members of Canberra Youth Theatre and the Canberra Older Women's Network, directed by up-and-coming NSW director Leisa Shelton. The nine older women's mostly solo reminiscences about their pasts (especially their work, marriages and sex) were neatly intercut with the eight younger women's speculations about their futures. Still in women's community theatre mode, but in stark contrast, Somebody's Daughter Theatre, from Melbourne, gave an emotionally charged performance of their *Call my Name*, a harrowing play about the horrific experiences of prison inmates and 'graduates'. Somebody's Daughter's members are all ex-inmates (and ex-users) and the story they tell is true but it is not merely a documentary: the piece is so well-structured (especially with its series of witty and ironic songs) and so well-directed (by Maud Clark) that it achieves a poignancy in the end that transcends its 'amateur' origins.

Still further contrast—Archer's church is a *very* broad one!—was provided by three boys from Sydney, called Pablo Percusso. This trio make percussive music and irreverent fun out of everything from orthodox drum-kits to basketballs, with Otto bins, mobile phones, each other and industrial waste along the way. Their late-night cabaret gig was as joyous an evening of 'theatre' as I've had in a while. On the other hand, the closest thing to an orthodox play in the Festival (Daniel Keene's *Because You Are Mine*, from Adelaide's Red Shed Company) left me stone cold. Ostensibly about the victims of war in the Balkans (and, to an extent, its survivors) this overwritten realist drama had a curiously disengaged feel about it; it felt like documentary TV, especially in the dauntingly wide spaces of the ANU Arts Centre.

The two real highlights were both very theatrical and non-naturalistic performance pieces. The first was an adaptation of the 'Romeo and Juliet' story, entitled *Verona*, which came from Adelaide's Magpie Theatre. Directed by Neill Gladwin and superbly designed by Shaun Gurton, *Verona* uses an unlikely but potent blend of mime, Buster Keaton-style silent comedy, miles of dirty linen swung back and forth between the two warring households on washing-lines that double as tightropes, plus new circus acrobatics, to render the classic love story in 80 minutes with an extraordinarily gifted cast of only seven. Not a word is spoken, but all the tragic detail of the original is left intact and a lot of slapstick humour is added. The whole affair is complemented by the Canberra Youth Orchestra playing Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* ballet score. This is, quite simply, a world-class festival piece.



The other highlight, called *Mum's the Word*—a puppetry/visual theatre piece about the relinquishment and adoption of unwanted children—was a world première from Canberra's Company Skylark and, as a brand new work, it is not yet in quite the same class as *Verona*, which has the benefit of a reworking since its Come Out Festival opening in May. But this work (directed by Peter Wilson and designed by Richard Jeziorny, with a text developed by Mary Hutchinson) already has the makings of a genuine stayer, given its capacity to get under the skin through its moving portrayal of human experience *in extremis* and its very confident theatrical technique.

Robyn Archer finishes up her Canberra engagement this year after a most impressive three

years at the helm. She now goes to Adelaide to direct the next brace of Adelaide Festivals; Rob Brookman takes over the next couple of National Festivals in Canberra, having directed the theatre-rich Adelaide Festival of 1992. I can't imagine a better trade.

The Melbourne International Festival is a horse of a different colour and it has been running long enough for us to discern some recurrent trends. Its headline acts are almost invariably international and most of them come to Australia solely for MIFA. The locally-produced content has mostly consisted of rushed première productions of new works or of extant plays from abroad, which suffer by comparison with tried and tested festival pieces from high-profile foreign companies. Too rarely has this Festival brought in good extant productions by other Australian companies or even overseas companies who have succeeded in other Australian festivals like Perth, Adelaide and Sydney.

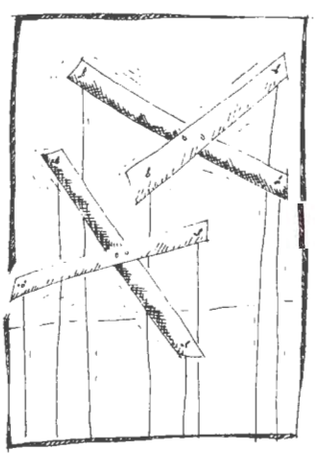
The very canny Leo Schofield has cleverly addressed these problems, with the result that the tenth Melbourne Festival has given us its most effectively balanced drama component to date, although Richard Wherrett definitely had the right idea.

The classy *Tiger Country* (the latest in the Sarah Cathcart/Andrea Lemon trilogy of monodramas on Australian women's experience) is a typical case in point. Not only did its dramaturgical vision and production hold up well against last year's international monodramas (for example, Anna Deavere Smith's *Fires in the Mirror*), but Cathcart's outstanding performance skills eclipsed them. *Tiger Country* was given the chance to iron out such kinks as it might have had before it came to MIFA in a première season for Fremantle's Deck Chair Theatre a month earlier. Likewise, another of the Australian productions in MIFA10—IHOS Opera's *To Traverse Water*, by Konstantine Koukias—was chosen after its Hobart and Sydney seasons had shown real promise. Even if this large-scale performance piece about the experience of migration ended up being rather illustrative of the obvious, in terms of its textual material, it was nevertheless a well-calculated risk and its staging in a cargo shed at Victoria Dock, and the best of its image-making, were truly remarkable.

The major international drama attractions this year were impressive. Cheek by Jowl's *Duchess of Malfi* (part of a world première season) was a clean-limbed production of this gothic horror story, given in an unhurried pace that enabled Webster's surprisingly modern-sounding language to achieve full weight. Cheek by Jowl remind me of the Royal Shakespeare Company of the late 1960s, with their actor-centred and highly detailed approach; even the potentially clichéd setting in 1930s' Italy served the text intelligently. It was my Festival highlight.

Practically everybody else's highlight was the other English company, Theatre de Complicité, with their version of John Berger's story, *The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol*. This re-enactment of the story of a French peasant family and its dwarfish daughter began with a bang. Its performers play multiple roles (human, animal, vegetable and mineral) with great energy and vivid dramatic imagination, although some of us remember this kind of performance-style well enough from the days of the famous Mill Community Theatre and elsewhere for us not to be completely blown away by it. In the second half, the rich theatricality falls away a bit and the story ends sentimentally, but it's still a fine festival piece.

Finally, a valuable Japanese/Australian cultural exchange gave us a Playbox production in English of a post-war Japanese play, *The Head of Mary*, with a Japanese puppet theatre production of John Romeril's 1974 classic, *The Floating World*, in Japanese. This was a very brave and worthwhile project, even though it only half worked. In trying to make the play do too much, and by trying to universalise a particular Japanese experience, Aubrey Mellor ended up delivering too little with the Japanese play. But there was some exciting theatricality in the Romeril play, particularly because here were Japanese actors denouncing Japanese war-crimes through an Australian text, but also because here was the bigoted ocker victim of those atrocities, Les Harding, being held up to a biting satirical mirror at the same time. Even though *The Head of Mary* was the acknowledged 'turkey' of the Festival, I valued the experience and (unlike one rather vindictive element in the Melbourne press) would want to see more in the way of this kind of cultural exchange in future—with Playbox, too, if it had another good idea.



If I had any other criticism of what was a really good couple of weeks of Festival drama, I still think MIFA could turn over a few more stones in the wider Australian theatre, especially in collaboration with the adjacent National Festival in Canberra. Magpie's *Verona*, for example, would have sat very well indeed alongside *Lucie Cabrol* and *The Duchess of Malf*. ■

Geoffrey Milne teaches theatre and drama in the School of Arts and Media at La Trobe University.

Diabolical intent

Seven, dir. David Fincher (General release). The bizarre and distorted mind of the 'serial killer' seems to fascinate current movie-makers. Since *Silence of the Lambs* there have been a number of cheap imtiations. But director David Fincher, who has clearly learnt a lot since he made the messy *Alien 3*, restores class to the genre with *Seven*, one of the year's best movies.

Here the serial murderer is utterly psychotic. In an un-named city, where the sun never seems to shine, the bodies of the victims are found daily, killed in sordid fashion. A pattern matching the biblical seven deadly sins quickly emerges and it seems the killer considers that his victims deserve to die.

His police pursuers are a world weary, disenchanted veteran about to retire (Morgan Freeman) and an impetuous hothead (Brad Pitt). As each victim is discovered it becomes apparent the clues are not to be found in the forensic laboratory, but at the public library, for this is an erudite murderer, steeped in Spenser, Chaucer, Milton, St Thomas Aquinas and the Bible.

At times dimly lit and frequently in sepia tones, the film maintains a brooding and menacing atmosphere. Violence and cruelty are seldom shown, only its consequences and then only fleetingly. The product of the most disturbing murder is sensibly left to the imagination.

Highlights are the restrained performance of Freeman and the most exciting foot chase I've seen in years. Pitt's one-dimensional performance is the film's only weakness; nonetheless this movie oozes class.

—Gordon Lewis

Heel Porky

Babe, dir. Chris Noonan (Hoyts). This is not the first time the farmyard has been used as a metaphor for society. The most notable examples being George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and, to a lesser degree, E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*.

The film is set on a small farm, in a fairy tale valley, with a 'ginger bread' farmhouse—the home of Farmer and Mrs Hoggett (James Cromwell and Magda Szubanski). Each animal on the farm has a clearly defined role and each is resigned to their fate.

Into this well-ordered world comes Babe, an orphaned, innocent, young pig who wants to avoid becoming Christmas dinner, by becoming a sheepdog, er... sheep-pig.

As in the recent American blockbuster *Forest Gump*, it is Babe's naïveté that allows him to question the existing social order. This reveals the extent to which the social order is based on a set of largely unchallenged assumptions about what is appropriate behaviour.

The animation and, in particular, the voice characterisation of the animal characters, is superb. *Babe* is a wonderfully funny modern fairy-tale that will appeal to both adults and children. I haven't laughed till I cried in a film for a long time.

—Tim Stoney

Girls 'n' the hood

Mi Vida Loca dir. Allison Anders (independent cinemas). Anders' follow-up to her *Gas Food Lodging* is a solid venture into cinéma verité. It shows the world of Mexican-American gangs from a woman's perspective via the snapshot portrait and it's a view of the dislocation and violence of gang life which differs markedly from the norm'. In place of stylised murders and excessive gore we see grieving and emotional turmoil.

Set in the Los Angeles suburb of Echo Park, it follows the lives of female gang members and their men. The life-long friendship between Sad Girl (Angel Aviles) and Mousie (Seidy Lopez) is jeopardised by their involvement with the same fellow, before he is shot and killed. As they try to come to terms with his legacy, the similar stories of other gang members are unravelled; the gridlock of living in a male-dominated environment is a shared experience. Giggles (Marlo Marron) is a few years older and wiser, courtesy of a stint in jail for covering for her man's crimes, and urges the girls to take control—with inconclusive results.

The appearance of actual gang members in the cast lends the film an authenticity its story sometimes lacks. A trap with this style of film-making is to be too creative with the interpretation and portrayal of real life, and *Mi Vida Loca* does appear to play a little fast with the truth for the sake of getting a point across. However, you do get the impression the director is aware of this and redresses the imbalance with sobering force at the end.

—Jon Greenaway

Light up

Smoke, dir. Wayne Wang (Independent cinemas). *Smoke* is a story about stories and the people who tell them.

Augie Wren (Harvey Keitel) manages a small corner tobacco store in Brooklyn. He has an intriguing habit—everyday for 14 years he takes a photo from the same place outside his shop, at the same time of day.

He meets people, listens to their stories and tells a few in return. His

Eureka Street
Film Competition

Judy Davis was nominated for an Academy Award in 1984 for *A Passage to India*. For the *Eureka Street* movie prize, the $30 question is: how many Australian actors have won academy awards and who are they?

The winner of the October competition is Chris Ridings from Salisbury East SA who reckoned Marlon Brando was thinking: 'Send help ... being attacked by man-eating curtains ... send help now!'

customers include Paul (William Hurt), a novelist struggling to write after his wife's death; Rashid (Harold Perrineau), who mysteriously carries $5000 around with him in a paper bag; Cyrus (Forrest Whitakker), Rashid's father who is running from a past rapidly catching up with him; and Ruby (Stockard Channing), an ex-girlfriend who appears in his shop one day and announces they have a crack-addicted teenage daughter.

Adapted from a short story by Paul Auster, *Smoke* is a film about life, with its relationships, connections, fractures, absurdities and ironies. It's funny, beautifully written and understated.

Wang's direction draws strong performances from the cast. He creates spaces with little action but infused with powerful imagery and symbolism. Unlike many American films, it's in these quiet moments the film speaks most.

Winner of the Special Jury Prize and International Critics Prize at this year's Berlin Film Festival, *Smoke* is an unusually good film that will linger with you for a long time.

—Brad Halse

Fighting Franco

Land and Freedom, dir. Ken Loach (independent cinemas). Renowned British director Ken Loach undertakes his most ambitious project to date in *Land and Freedom*, a study of the Spanish Civil War.

The war, fought between 1936-39, is often described as the last just war. Loach portrays it as a complex ideological contest between facism, communism, nationalism, socialism, anarchy and democracy. He also sees it as a forgotten war, perhaps overshadowed by the tremendous upheavals of WWII which followed.

The story unfolds through the eyes of David (Ian Hart), a young unemployed Liverpudlian caught up in the revolutionary zeal of the 1930s. He journeys to Spain to join the peasant militia fighting Franco's fascists. But he sees the initially clear contest between communism and fascism quickly become blurred by the internal battles for control of the revolution.

Loach connects the film to the comtemporary by framing it as a journey of discovery by David's granddaughter, as she leafs through his personal affects after his death.

He takes a considerable gamble in trying to do justice to complex issues without oversimplifying them. At one point a round-table debate amongst a group of peasants about private ownership or communal farming of the village land lasts for over 20 minutes, without either losing the audience or sacrificing the integrity of the debate. This is cinéma verité at its best!

—Tim Stoney

Insanity prevails

The Madness of King George, dir. Nicholas Hytner (Village). 'There is a model everything these days—model farms, model villages, model manufactories. We should be a model family', King George III (Nigel Hawthorne) admonishes his disaffected and dissolute son George, Prince of Wales (Rupert Everett), at the conclusion of this wickedly clever film.

The ironies are obvious for observers of the foibles of George's late 20th century descendants. But the film never spells them out. Except, as the final credits roll, we are told that 'George III probably suffered from porphyria ... a disease that afflicts the central nervous system. It is recurrent, unpredictable—and hereditary.'

The king's illness has a physical cause, but it mirrors the state of his mind. George is obsessed with trivial details, because the Big Picture is unpalatable to him: Parliament rules, he doesn't; and the empire (in North America) has been lost. His subjects mutter about reform, even a republic, and his heir conspires with them because he is entering middle age without much prospect of becoming king anytime soon. Oh, and the great love of the prince's life is Catholic, so she can never become Queen.

The Madness of King George is a superior period piece, with contemporary parallels piled on thick throughout if you want them. All this is paraded past us with barbed understatement and delivered in superb performances, especially by Hawthorne and by Helen Mirren, as Queen Charlotte.

—Ray Cassin

Love hurts

Angel Baby, dir. Michael Rymer (independent cinemas). The opening titles run over a scene of three fairly chaotic characters in a bowling alley. That one sequence has some of the offbeat clownishness that has become a staple of the success of much recent Australian cinema; it also has aspects of the kind of benign amusement which has been a long standing

defensive reaction to some kinds of mental illness.

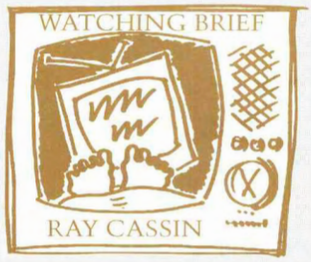
But *Angel Baby* soon carves out territory of its own. For Melbourne viewers especially, many of the locations are instantly recognisable. The genius of the film is to turn the familiar aspects of an Australian city inside out and use them to explore an experience which is uncomfortably dark.

Harry (John Lynch) and Kate (Jacqueline McKenzie) both suffer schizophrenia. They do something as simple as fall in love and as culpable as conceive a child. They not only insist on keeping the baby but decide to go off their medication during the pregnancy for the sake of the baby's health.

The film explores the ramifications of this decision for Harry's brother, Morris (Colin Friels), Morris's wife Louise (Deborra-Lee Furness) and for Harry's work prospects. More than anything, it confronts the question of how free we are to follow our own advice.

McKenzie's performance is involving. *Angel Baby* is a humane work, yet is no less threatening because of that.

—Michael McGirr SJ



Cicero's ghost lives in Kensington Palace

READERS WHO ARE OLD ENOUGH TO REMEMBER the first Moon landing will doubtless also recall what they were doing at the time, and how they heard the news. Or perhaps saw it, because the astronauts caught it all on camera for us. My memories of 13 June 1969 are vivid, partly because of the landing itself, partly because I still marvel that no one was crushed to death as hundreds of small boys clustered round the half-dozen or so television sets then possessed by Marist College, Perth, and partly because of Brother Liguori.

Liguori was a Latin teacher, a humanist (it was not a pejorative term then) and the resolute fighter of a rearguard action against the encroachment of scientific and utilitarian studies. As the entire school, teachers and students alike, scrambled for a place near a TV screen to witness the fulfilment of an age-old human dream, Ligouri maintained a silent protest in the quadrangle. 'I refuse to be overcome by the mass hysteria that is sweeping the world,' he announced, and then spent the rest of the afternoon pacing up and down, reading the *Odes* of Horace.

I never knew what Liguori thought of the monarchy, but I suspect that, although his political views were in other respects conservative, as an admirer of Cicero he would have had a sneaking sympathy for republican institutions. So, if he is still with us, I think he would have had mixed feelings about the Great Interview—the one in which Diana Windsor, *née* Spencer, enlisted a worldwide television audience of 200 million in her battle against her husband and his mother.

If Liguori does have the republican views I imagine him to have, he would have rejoiced at the prospect of the monarchy falling apart under the weight of its own iniquities. But he would have been horrified to realise that television had finally won. In 1969, it was merely an instrument, the means by which people around the world witnessed the event that was making the news. In 1995, a television event itself *was* the news.

Liguori had always insisted that nothing but confusion and deceit could come from the medium. Even its name was a sham, preposterously combining a Greek prefix (*tele*) and a Latin verb (*videre*). Such linguistic poltroonery, he would solemnly tell a class comprised mainly of aspiring engineers, was only to be expected in a world ruled by engineers and other illiterates.

After the humanist rage had run its course, however, Liguori might start to think differently about the interview. A true disciple of Cicero knows a rhetorician when he sees and hears one, and what a rhetorician she was. Liguori and other Ciceronians would not have been impressed by any of the talking heads, English and Australian, whom the ABC assembled to interpret the interview for us. Certainly not by the Australians, monarchist and republican, who decided that the wronged wife had put up a dignified performance and thereby either strengthened the monarchy or helped to bury it, depending on your preconceptions.

But neither would Liguori have been impressed by the Englishman who pointed out 'what none of the people in Australia (naïve fools that they are) appear to have noticed', namely that Diana had had voice coaching for the interview, and had obviously prepared her answers. The whole thing might have looked spontaneous to you chaps out in the colonies but it damned well wasn't, you know, so don't let that wronged wife act fool you. It *was* an act, and that's the point.

Well, of course it was an act, Liguori might reply, and of course no television interview of that kind can be spontaneous, on either the subject's part or the producers. (The fact that the BBC got the whole thing recorded and edited for transmission in two hours just proves how slick they are.) But that's why one admires the rhetorical skill. Diana may have been *playing* the wronged wife, but that doesn't mean she wasn't one.

By now Liguori would be in full flight, breathless with admiration for the woman (republican views aside) and, grudgingly, for the medium. What Cicero could do to only a few hundred people, she—with a little help from the BBC editors—could do to millions. So, of course, there is no way that a learned rhetorician like Ligouri, having been surprised to find himself on home turf with television after all, would have been convinced by that other English fool on the ABC's panel who opined that the monarchy would have no problems with this admittedly consummate performance by the wronged wife.

'After all,' Lord Something-Something declared, 'if the monarcy could survive Henry VIII and George IV, it could survive anything.' Yes, my lord, but the rhetorical arena was different for those monarchs. In Henry's time it didn't extend much beyond the king's court, so there was no real limit to the king's will. Except the church, of course, and Ligouri was always careful to remind us what Henry had done about that. George IV was constrained by the will of the oligarchs in Parliament, but George's Parliament was not yet a democratic institution. Neither monarch had to worry about being popular, or about manipulating television images, which these days amounts to much the same thing.

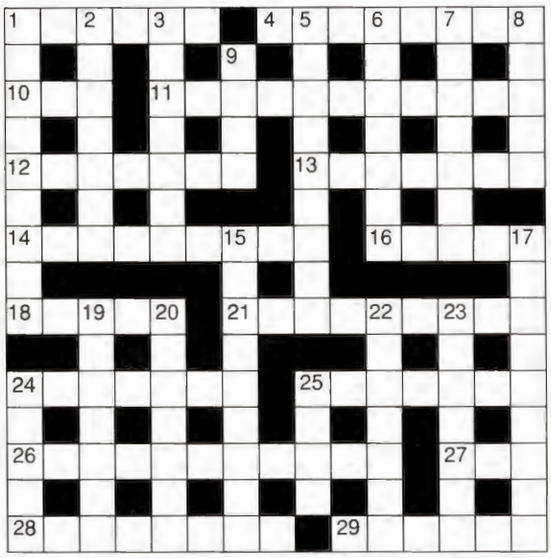
So Liguori, finding these Ciceronian echoes all through the Great Interview, might have been pleased to find himself reconciled to late 20th century information technology after all. At least for 24 hours. Then, if he was still watching, he would have noticed another wave of mass hysteria sweeping the world, in response to a song sung by one dead man and three live ones—and a lot of manipulation of television images in order to make some rich ageing Liverpudlians even richer.

Sham and confusion again, brother, sham and confusion.

Ray Cassin is a freelance writer.

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 39, December 1995

Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM



ACROSS

1 Representative has record in tax. (6)
4 Being close to Janet, cad unfairly took advantage of her. (8)
10 Norm, being on an equal footing, may strike back. (3)
11 In former prison accommodation, gently decapitated the item thus performing superbly. (11)
12 Muscle-building substance somehow does it right. (7)
13 Confused Vatican duet, without a net, make for the bridge. (7)
14 High command is hard to obey? (4,5)
16 There must be a cause for this—the First Lady going to the Northern Territory! (5)
18 The conditions an old hand knows! (5)
21 Crazy gear used at his party with Alice at 'The Oaks'. (3,6)
24 Mixed crop is a blessing, maybe, but is not exactly poetic! (7)
25 Even a tiny map could direct you to 'The Drums'. (7)
26 Am I in former race? Arranging it will be the test. (11)
27 The main drink? (3)
28 The unusual duet, says she, sings on weekdays. (8)
29 What'll I do to identify the blossom? Listen! (6)

DOWN

1 He mixes 12-across in Post Office and puts it in the bank. (9)
2 In Jaipur, cello concertos may interest the composer. (7)
3 Music in which quavers dominate the movement? (7)
5 Released the lever. Died, sad to say, as a result. (9)
6 Declare date of birth when asked about 10-across. (7)
7 See, up the shaky tree, dux of the school with his arm thrust out. (7)
8 Endeavour to reach street for the meeting place. (5)
9 Some maniac identified the substance as sour. (4)
15 Political system in which you will see car come back in the heartless dynasty. (9)
17 Finish work in order to meet train as arranged. (9)
19 Will process rob tape of its resolution? (7)
20 The Fremantle doctor? (3,4)
22 I cry in distress: O am I man enough to use the gas? (7)
23 Cooked tart's in passage—waiting at the airport. (7)
24 Simple attire contains material arrangement. (5)
25 Cut a neat figure? (4)

Solution to Crossword no. 38, November 1995

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

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