EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY
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Gargoyles

War

Germany

Sport

Spain

Dogs

Italy

Peace

Sri Lanka

Sahara

Love

Youth

Cambodia

Art

Afghanistan

France

Poetry

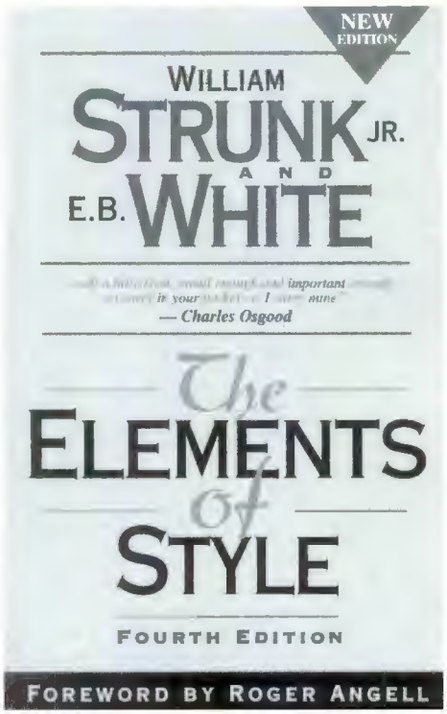
Nicaragua

Hate

England

Age

EUREKA STREET book offer



The Elements of Style

By William Strunk Jr & E.B. White

Last month a boxer pup called Becky ate a large chunk of that pocket classic of lucid instruction, Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*. The dog belonged to our columnist, Brian Matthews (see page 33). Next issue we expect Becky to write her first column for *Eureka Street*.

While waiting for that, why don't you write in for a copy of this most elegant, efficient and amiable of language handbooks? Strunk and White reads like the ideal style guide for the speeches you wish an American president would make. And even with appendices it is still smaller than a *Football Record*. You could insinuate it into board meetings, book clubs, classrooms or courtrooms without marring the line of your jeans. Or you could read it in bed, to give your brain delight and your wrists a rest from those large-format paperbacks destined to have an afterlife as doorstoppers.

Thanks to Readings Books and Music, *Eureka Street* has 10 copies of *The Elements of Style*, fourth edition, to give away. Just put your name and address on the back of an envelope and send to: Eureka Street July–August 2002 Book Offer, PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121. *See page 8 for winners of the May 2002 Book Offer.*

Readings

EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY
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This month:
Cover: *The Captured Gun*, 1986 painting by George Gittoes. Oil on canvas. Cover design by Siobhan Jackson.
Photograph p4 by Jon Greenaway.
Graphics pp6, 21–22, 34, 37, 38, 46, 50 by Siobhan Jackson.
Cartoons pp11, 14, 16, 19 by Dean Moore.
Photographs and artwork pp28–31 by George Gittoes.

Prospects

THE GOVERNMENT TANK, pictured below, rusting against a cruciform sky, is now sinking into what was once its field of violent operation, the Elephant Pass causeway in Sri Lanka. The tank was put out of action when troops of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) overran the Sri Lankan army base in April 2000.

Now, after a ceasefire and the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding, and with peace negotiations in prospect, there is some chance that it will be left to rot into irrelevance in the tropical air. For the first time in decades, Sri Lankans—Sinhalese and Tamils—can now regularly do the things we take for granted: go home, trade, grow their own food, travel in their own land, educate their children.

Jon Greenaway's story this month (page 23) details the moves toward peace in Sri Lanka, and some of the consequences—psychological and physical trauma, family fragmentation, degradation of the land—of the long war. The countryside is still seeded with mines and unexploded ordinance. But the checkpoints that have for so long impeded movement are down, infrastructure is being rebuilt, development aid is coming in and the mood in the country is buoyant. The tank now looks like the ill-conceived aberration it is—an engine of war in paradise.

Other tanks (like the one rumbling through Nablus on the West Bank, pictured on page 34 of *Eureka Street* last month) will not be destroyed or decommissioned in the near future. But in a world of conflict, Sri Lanka's move is a sign of peaceful possibility.

So too are some of the analyses of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict that you can read in the United States' serious press. The *New York Review of Books* has, during the past weeks, carried much sane and incisive commentary—a world away from the inflammatory rhetoric of US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. When thinking people write cogently and fairly—and publicly—about an issue so close to their own hearts and interests it must, eventually, filter into policy. Or so one has to hope.

Other signs: a world away from Nablus and Colombo, on the island of Bougainville, abandoned tanks are now rapidly being incorporated into the jungle. Orchids flourish in their turrets and vines twine through their treads, binding them to the earth that will, in time, absorb them. On Bougainville, peace came when the people, the women particularly, acknowledged that they could no longer waste the lives of their children in war. What price victory if it destroys the hopes of the generation who inherit it?

This month's cover story focuses on the artist, George Gittoes, who has made war his business—but not in the usual way. No mercenary outfit is likely to employ him. Gittoes goes to where the troubles are and records the lives of the people who endure and survive—or don't survive. His work is testimony: in drawings, diaries, paintings and on film. Not for Gittoes the quick in and out and some footage for the evening news. He spends his time. One overwhelming impression his work generates is of grotesque, tragic absurdity. Why do we go on doing these things? In Baidoa, African soldiers patrol in night-vision goggles that so disorient them, so distort their perspective, that they risk shooting the small children who crowd around them brandishing toy guns—their own children (see page 31). But there is energy there too—in Gittoes' work and in the resilience he is able to document.

With war hovering, you might take time out to read about a language that understands as much about love as conflict. Peter Steele SJ writes this month about love and the poetry of Peter Porter ('Swerving to Happiness', page 34). Porter, who will be in Australia later in the year, recently won the Queen's medal for poetry—a badge of honour of a refreshingly different kind. ■

—Morag Fraser

One step forward, another step back

RECENT NEWS ABOUT asylum seekers has been at one remove from the way in which they experience their lives in Australia. From stories of self-harm, gassings and batonings and the storming of fences, we have now moved on to stories of applications for refugee status, courts, enquiries and government initiatives.

Here are some of the more important items.

The enquiries have been into detention. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission has been holding hearings into the detention of children. Those who have made submissions have asked whether, given the manifest psychological harm suffered by children in detention, the regime can be said to be in the best interests of the child. Some submissions have also asked whether it is right for the minister responsible for the detention regime also to be the legal guardian of the children, and therefore responsible for deciding what is in their best interests. Few were reassured by Minister Philip Ruddock's most recent defence of child detention on the grounds that, if the children were released, they might be kidnapped and held hostage by other asylum seekers.

Two separate delegations from the UN Commission on Human Rights have visited Australia to report on aspects of Australia's detention regime.

Louis Joinet, chairman of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, named four areas of concern: the detention of children and other vulnerable people; the relationship between indeterminate detention and the widespread depression suffered by asylum seekers; the issues raised by the administration of detention centres by private companies; and the practice of holding in prisons asylum seekers and prisoners who have completed their sentences but who await resolution of their visa status.

It is as ritual a practice for government to criticise judges for not implementing its will when important cases are about to be heard as it is for cuckoos to sing before spring. The latest criticism preceded a case being heard by five judges of the Federal Court. At issue is the interpretation of recent government laws that sought to prevent judicial appeal against most immigration decisions. Judges have offered diverging interpretations of the scope of the law. Some of these interpretations suggest that the new laws may not efficaciously exclude appeals based on natural justice. These issues are so important that they are likely to be tested finally in the High Court.

BUT BEHIND COURTS and enquiries are human faces and human predicaments. Particularly poignant is the case of the East Timorese who fled East Timor up to eight years ago. At that time Australia would not have their cases heard because Indonesia would have been offended if the East Timorese had been found to be refugees. They have since settled and raised their families here, but are now forced to apply for refugee status, with the prospect that they will be returned to East Timor. The government has rejected a proposal that they should be offered special humanitarian visas.

The stronger the criticism and the more authoritative the body making it, the more intransigent the response. The government will not be moved in any sense of the word.

State governments have also become involved in asylum seekers' issues. The South Australian government was drawn into the treatment of children at Woomera, while the Victorian government has appealed to the federal government to allow the East Timorese asylum seekers to stay on humanitarian grounds. It has also contributed funds to organisations offering legal and other services to the group.

But the general field of play remains the same: the stronger the criticism and the more authoritative the body making it, the more intransigent the response. The government will not be moved in any sense of the word. In its intransigence, it knows that it enjoys the support of the majority of Australians. Those of us who argue that the present policy is humanly destructive and deeply corrupting of public life still need to persuade other Australians of the truth of our convictions. ■

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

SNAPshot

Historical loss

Okay, we know all about football passion and one-eyed supporters and all that. And we also know that China has just made its first appearance in a World Cup finals tournament. But it did stretch the imagination when one of the commentators at China's valiant loss to Brazil in the first round described China as 'one of the young nations in this tournament'. Try telling that to the folk who built the great wall.

Opportunity knocks

In June Melbourne was treated to the revelation that one of the gargoyles on St Patrick's Cathedral was indeed a representation of ex-premier Jeffrey Kennett. Master stonemason Tom Carson described his work as a whim, but a whim in a grand tradition.

Now, last time *Eureka Street* looked, there were some blank bosses inside Sydney's Saint Mary's Cathedral just waiting for the appropriate image to be carved on to their receptive stone. It would seem a pity to let a grand tradition lapse, and there is, surely, no shortage of apposite subjects.

Anniversary talk

A teenager quizzed recently had never heard of the Vietnam War, nor of the Dismissal. But then, she had never heard of Paul McCartney, either. We should not be surprised that few have heard of the Second Vatican Council, which is 40 years old this year.

To celebrate the event and reflect on the Council, the lay movement, Catalyst for Renewal, has organised a conference in Sydney. Joseph Komonchak, an incisive North American historian who has edited the recent history of the Council, will speak. He will be joined by John Wilkins, the editor of *The Tablet*, which has been the journal of record of the twists and turns of the post-Vatican II church.

They will team again in Melbourne, where Catalyst for Renewal will offer a public lecture on Vatican II given by Joseph Komonchak, a Conversation Dinner with John Wilkins and an all-day seminar. Details: *Sydney*—Conference: 12–14 July 2002, contact Patricia on (02) 9247 4651. *Melbourne*—Public lecture: 18 July, 8pm, Knox Lecture Theatre, Diocesan Centre, East Melbourne. Dinner: 19 July, 6.30pm for 7.30pm, Xavier College, Kew. Seminar: 20 July, Australian Catholic University, 155 Victoria Pde, Fitzroy. Bookings: Maria George, (03) 9579 4255.

Remembering Shirley

It is appropriate that the Melbourne Catalyst for Renewal lecture on Vatican II should be named after Shirley Macdonald. Shirley was a Presentation Sister deeply involved in initiatives in religious education and social justice after the Council.

Her work on religious texts brought her into the controversies of the 1960s. She never took a step backward, and never bore grudges. On one occasion, she spoke of a talk for parents on religious education, which she was giving with a fellow sister. The venue was usually hostile and, weary of conflict, they decided to speak on joy in religious education. Hardly controversial, she thought. The first question was, 'Sister, is it true that you took part in the demonstration against the Springboks at the weekend?' And after that, it was open season on the Sisters. Shirley laughed about it, as she would at the idea of having a public lecture dedicated to her.

Shirley lived simply, and never drove a car. Before she died, in 1992, she helped set up a property at Balnarring where groups which could not otherwise enjoy holidays could go. Ventures like this were what she would have liked Vatican II to be remembered for.

Riding high

It's been the month for gongs. So let us announce here, loudly, that writer and broadcaster, Peter Mares (a regular contributor to *Eureka Street*), has just won the Gleebooks prize for literary and cultural criticism at the 2002 NSW Premier's Literary Awards. Peter's book, *Borderline*, is a powerful analysis of Australia's refugee policy and practice. *Borderline* picked up a swag of awards in 2001, including the prize for the work that best advanced public debate, at the Queensland Premier's Literary Awards. It was also short-listed for a number of awards in 2002. But don't just admire the medals. Read the book. Peter is currently preparing a revised and updated edition for UNSW Press.

Oldie but goodie

Down here where the wind drives in from the southern ocean with all the charity of an ice pick, we have to find our seasonal consolation in good books and bad jokes. Herewith, one such (and if you've heard it before, relay it to someone who has not). Sign on the window of an enterprising coastal camping and disposals store: NOW IS THE DISCOUNT OF OUR WINTER TENTS.

Capital Letter

Jack Waterford

Coming to light

Labor Senator John Faulkner has been doing a fabulously good job on the children-overboard affair. Day after day he has dragged from bureaucrat after bureaucrat tales of lying, evasion, politicians' abuse of their power and public service connivance at it. He has uncovered the mechanics of the way John Howard found an issue, grossly oversimplified it, and rode it home to an election triumph. Some of the goriest details, of course, are not coming out, because the government has forbidden the giving of evidence by ministerial staff and former ministers. But in some ways that makes the inquest easier, and makes more legitimate the drawing of some inferences about what people knew, and what they did, or did not do, about it.

Along the way, the Senate committee has found even more to chew on. It all began with a grossly overloaded fishing boat—called here the SIEV 10 (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel 10)—which left Indonesia on 19 October last year. The boat later foundered and some hundreds of people drowned. Tony Kevin, a former Australian Ambassador to Cambodia, began asking questions. What had Australia known of the movements of the boat, which had set out at a time of unprecedented surveillance of Indonesian ports? He looked at the sea areas in which SIEV 10 was moving, and at the policy of aggressively repelling such boats. How come this one slipped through the net? What had we known, and what did we do?

The answer to these questions, it emerged, was plenty and nothing. Intelligence sources had reported the gathering of the passengers, the boat's imminent departure, its actual departure and the dangerous overloading of the ship. The reports were widely circulated among all of the agencies involved in the unprecedented program of hunting 'boat people' away. At the time of the sinking, an Australian warship was about 150 nautical miles away from the boat. Had it arrived within four hours, as it could feasibly have done, it might have saved the people from drowning. But, it seems, all of this intelligence was being dismissed as unconfirmed, and the Australian navy patrolled on, blithely unaware of the tragedy.

Or was there a more sinister explanation? Tony Kevin raised the possibility of the unthinkable—that some of those involved stood back and allowed the vessel to sink, hoping that this would send a more alarming message to 'boat people' than shootings across bows, armed boardings, towings to Indonesia and 'Pacific solution' kidnappings. Had the possibility been raised by anyone other than Kevin, it would probably have been dismissed out of hand as conspiracy theory. But Kevin is not regarded as a nut. And the more that preliminary questions were asked, and prevarications, clarifications and other evidence emerged, the more some senators, not least John Faulkner, came to realise that either the grossest incompetence or the most callous indifference to human life was involved.

The truth may be unpleasant, but it can set one free. John Howard is still probably right in calculating on overall public support for his aggressive 'border protection' plans, even including his most recent absurd excision initiatives. Nor is he holding back on the 'Pacific solution', whereby the heads of some of our most mendicant neighbouring countries have allowed their constitutional systems to be hijacked in return for aid.

Most voters are unlikely to be very much interested in the tedious detail of facts being extracted in a Senate committee room in Canberra. But impressions do travel. The careers of almost everyone involved in the 'boat people' affairs have already been affected by revised perceptions of their character and acumen. And by now a few of the initial enthusiasts for the Howard policy—including some shock jocks—are sounding uneasy.

But what a pity that Faulkner's determination to get to the bottom of the affair does not embrace a searching examination of Labor's own ineptitude, incompetence and, ultimately, shameful silence. It's not just a matter of knowing the facts—they are largely out there (though some, particularly about the nature of the advice Labor itself was receiving from the political geniuses to whom it listens, have yet to come out). It's also a matter of facing the facts and learning from them.

Failure to admit the facts almost inevitably commits Labor to repeating the disaster, this time without the excuse of an imminent election. And that failure affects not just Labor's immigration or refugee policies. The same mind-set—and the fear of being trapped by Howard's wedge politics—has Labor paralysed lest they be seen to be beholden to clamorous lobby groups and soft on terrorism.

When Howard began manipulating affairs to make border security the big election issue, Labor thought it was being clever in simply ducking the questions—it did not want an election on immigration. The tactic, said the clever men, was to make the issue go away by agreeing with everything Howard said and concentrating on the issues with which Labor believed it could win. Well, there is no election imminent now. But the Labor smarties still think that facing the facts is a recipe for disaster. They are wrong, of course. They are playing Howard's game, and it will cost them dearly. ■

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

A dialogue

This month's 'Summa' continues the exchange between **Andrew Hamilton** and **Ray Cassin**, that began with the May 'Summa'. It preceded the recent public controversy begun by the *60 Minutes* program in which Archbishop George Pell was interviewed.

Dear Ray,

Thank you for your careful reading and courteous reply (Letters, June 2002) to the part of my May 2002 'Summa' that touched on clerical sexual abuse. You were troubled that, in counselling against 'simple exclusions and rejections', I appeared to argue implicitly for a lenient treatment of clerics who had abused children.

I appreciate this opportunity to clarify my position and to carry our conversation further. I wished to reflect primarily on the way in which we should imagine sexual abuse and those who perpetrate it, and not on what we should do in response. I was not arguing for leniency for priests and religious who had abused children—for a Catholic priest to do that would be totally inappropriate. Indeed, I agree wholeheartedly with your insistence that anyone who has once abused a child should be excluded from pastoral ministry.

Ways of imagining, however, have both a history and practical consequences. After discovering some years ago that people for whom I care deeply had been abused as youths in Catholic churches and schools, I came to appreciate the incalculable and continuing devastation caused by abuse. From a naive belief that the evil of abuse lies almost entirely in the single actions of the perpetrator—actions which could be repented of, forgiven, and effectively forgotten—I have come to imagine it through the eyes of its victims in more realistic and catastrophic ways.

This change of view may have consequences for practice. Certainly those who focus on sinful actions to the neglect of their continuing destructive consequences, may be inclined to be more indulgent to those who abuse but who appear repentant. They will forget the devastation of human lives that flows out from the abuse.

I would also like to expand on my characterisation of the sexual abuse of children as essentially an abuse of power. For this forms the context of my unease with 'simple rejections and exclusions'. The evil of child abuse is rooted in the privileged and powerful position that an adult has over children, and a priest may have over laity. It should therefore be placed not only with other forms of sexual misconduct but with other abuses of power. Indeed, of those guilty of sexual abuse whom I have known, many have misused their power in other pastoral relationships, particularly in their dealings with women. And many have seemed driven by a strong ideology of clerical power and lay subservience.

This idolisation of power in the church tallies with a cultural mood that calls for ever harsher punishment of crime and for diminished personal rights, and for the loss of scrutiny of abuses of power. In such a climate, to insist on the cancerous evil of the sexual abuse risks being misunderstood as supporting a response that is no more than punitive, which is itself an abuse of power. For that reason I insisted on our solidarity in sin, claiming on the one hand that we simply lack imagination if we say that there is any evil of which we personally would be incapable. I insisted, on the other hand, that no evil that we might do would ever destroy our dignity or cancel our destiny. A purely punitive approach denies the solidarity between those who punish and those who are punished.

In this context I argued further against any 'simple exclusion or rejection'. I envisaged first an attitude that does not recognise the solidarity between those who punish and those who are punished, and second, responses that involve a further abuse of power. Some Catholics, for example, have urged that in response to the scandal of child abuse, homosexuals be excluded from ministry. Others have proposed excluding those who do not subscribe to all church positions on sexual morality. I find it hard not to regard such proposals as opportunistic and evasive, and as leading naturally to yet further abuses of power. They are also destructive because they will lead to the denial of sexual orientation. You don't need the clinical experience of Freud to realise that this denial contributes to

May 2002 Book Offer Winners

O. Abrahams, Southbank, VIC; R.S. Boylen, Glandore, SA; T. Dopheide, Eltham, VIC; V. Hill, Drysdale, VIC; H. Knorr, St Andrews, VIC; M. McCann, East Fremantle, WA; J. McGirr, Wagga, NSW; J. Smith, Kensington, VIC; K. Thomas, Bundoora, VIC; P. Wilkins, Campbell, ACT

dysfunctional and potentially abusive relationships.

Not all forms of rejection and exclusion, however, are necessarily punitive. Some are absolutely necessary. In a church in which children have been abused and the abuse allowed to continue, the abuse itself, the minimising of its harm, and its concealment must be unequivocally rejected. That rejection will be ambiguous unless those who have abused children are excluded from ministry, and accusations of abuse are adjudged justly and transparently. The proper care for children demands at least that.

It also seems proper to reject all sexual relationships between priest and lay person, because they are an abuse of power. For they are asymmetrical, and begin with the shared assumption that the priest's personal and professional commitments exclude such sexual relationships. And it also seems proper to reject any arbitrary and unreviewable exercise of power in the church.

But to reject abuse of power is not to reject people. Nor does every abuse of power dictate exclusion from ministry. The hard questions have to do with deciding when and how to exclude. For abuse of power has so many forms and grades. Though all sexual relationships formed by priests are abusive, there are significant differences between one's abuse of children, of adolescents, of young adults, of pastorally dependent adults and of other adults.

What forms of exclusion are appropriate in these different circumstances? And how in a religious community that is based on the Gospel, does one hear the Parable of the Good Samaritan at prayer in the morning, and exclude a brother or sister in the afternoon? I find these troubling and puzzling questions. But, as I said at the beginning of my letter, Ray, it is certainly not proper for them to be decided by priests alone. Might our conversation pursue these questions? *Andrew Hamilton*

Ray Cassin replies:

Andrew Hamilton asks how, in a religious community, one can hear the parable of the Good Samaritan during morning prayer and then exclude a brother or sister in the afternoon. This is not only a problem associated with clerical sexual abusers. The same dilemma arose after the genocide in Rwanda, where the Hutus accused of butchering Tutsis included priests and nuns. Some of these priests and nuns later found sanctuary in the monasteries and convents of their religious orders in Europe.

The church institutions involved did not refuse to hand the Hutus over to secular authorities when arrest warrants were eventually served on them, but they refused all co-operation short of that. They justified this as an expression of solidarity with their brothers and sisters in religion, and sometimes as an expression of their concern that due process be carried out. To the rest of the world, however, the monasteries were harbouring people accused of appalling crimes. Would Good Samaritans do that? Hamilton is right, of course, in saying that the sexual abuse of children is primarily an abuse of power. That abuse is compounded when perpetrators appear to be protected by those who wield power in the church, which is why my unease at Hamilton's original comments is not lessened by his invocation of notions like 'solidarity'. George Pell has said that he accompanied Gerald Ridsdale, who is now serving a prison term for the sexual abuse of children, to court as an act of solidarity with a brother priest. But Pell says that at the time he did not understand the extent of Ridsdale's crimes, and that he now regrets his act of solidarity because it sent the wrong message. It certainly did.

Of course the problem of clerical sexual abuse cannot be understood if the abuse is regarded as a series of discrete acts, abstracted from the context in which they take place; in other words, if responding to the problem does not cause us to make honest assessments of clerical culture and its psychosexual underpinnings, and of the clerical power structures that have created the opportunities for abusers. But from recognising that this is so, it does not follow that it is acceptable for bishops and major superiors to continue to deal with the problem in the way that they have done, that is, as a kind of damage-control exercise. In the present crisis the church still appears to be intent chiefly on deflecting criticism, and I do not think church leaders can blame anyone else for the fact that their actions are perceived in this way.

Ray Cassin

University blues

Frank Jackson (*Eureka Street*, June 2002) is right: there must be 'A Better Way' in university funding. Indeed, the situation with higher-degree research is even more insidious than he describes. The current push on minimum finishing times and maximum publications is already proving to be meretricious.

The emphasis in research grant applications on the Track Record of the researcher makes it increasingly important for PhD students to have a patron. A career-minded student would be foolish not to be beguiled into 'working on the professor's project'. Immediately, the risk increases that the student will be engaged more in refutation (testing the professor's data) than in conjecture (speculating about different possibilities for both theory and data). To meet the funding-for-publication part of the Department of Education, Science and Training formula, a career-minded student will be invited—some departments insist—to share the authorship line with the professor.

Minimum times and maximum publications are also a formula for discrimination. In applied fields, such as public health or social welfare, a good proportion of students during the '90s were doing research degrees 'after a period in the workforce'. Their theses *may* never have been read by 'anyone except the student, the examiners and the supervisor' (although that is an overstatement by Jackson). Their period of disciplined study *did* make many of them more sympathetic and more imaginative about the people whom they serve and how those services might be improved. Probably they would be horrified by a recent example where the professor in charge of research wrote formally, concerning one student of this kind who had taken carefully organised maternity leave: 'Research Committee was most interested in X's likelihood of completion' within the minimum time '—likely to be harder than it once was given the absence of a scholarship for 6 months and child care costs'. Said the thoughtful, mature-age student, 'what do they suggest that I do about it?'

Some universities now pay senior academics a bonus up to 30 per cent above salary to act as heads of department, implementing university policy. Their salaries at appointment were set, of course, on the basis that providing academic leadership and stimulating research were duties that went with the job. The aforementioned professor-in-charge said, 'I realise that this process has become excessively bureaucratic, however departments that do not demonstrate that they are compliant with these requirements and are graduating students in a timely manner, may find it difficult to obtain RTS-funded spots in the future.' That phrase about willing executioners came to mind.

Neville Hicks
Unley, SA

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

Redeeming

Having reread Andrew Hamilton's original piece, 'Culture and Abuse' (*Eureka Street*, May 2002) several times, I do not see the grounds for Ray Cassin's reading into that article Hamilton's supposed diffidence about 'zero tolerance' with regard to child abuse (*Eureka Street* Letters, June 2002). Not for the first time, I actually think Hamilton's reflective piece is powerful, apposite and helpful.

I too am disgusted and repelled by the 'abuse of power and trust' and 'suffocation of any hunger for the transcendent' entailed in child abuse, whether clerical or not. But I am also distressed by the occasion for anti-Catholic bigotry and the readiness of many to jettison the abusers as human beings. This is a response which, while it may be understandable and cathartic for those traumatised by abuse, could lose the opportunity for us to look again at the reality of sin and the power of God in our lives. Perhaps that is what Andrew Hamilton was alluding to when he talks of the 'simple exclusions and rejections that our culture dictates'?

I know that I am capable of any sin apart from child abuse. But does that exception give me the right to distance myself from other sinners who may have committed the ultimate outrage? The 'lack of freedom to live virtuously' described by Augustine could be a reference to me. I support an attitude of 'zero tolerance' of child abuse anywhere, and I think many of our bishops have handled this issue insensitively (e.g. the Catholic community owes *nothing* monetarily to convicted clerical paedophiles after their release from prison), but there is a responsibility for the Catholic (and wider Christian) community to understand that this issue is ultimately a spiritual issue, a life and death issue, an issue of eternal consequences. Adopting an attitude of vilification and pillorying of abusers (many of whom have committed suicide) is not the answer. Christianity, surely, ultimately, must be about the possibility of God to heal and redeem?

Warren Featherstone
Preston, VIC

THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC

Country matters

A WORKING SOLUTION

MOHAMMAD Husseini is one of around 70 Afghan refugees working at the Burrangong Meatworks in Young, an hour-and-a-half's drive north-west of Canberra. He's a serious, quietly spoken young man with a good command of English, and he's been working at the abattoir for nearly a year. 'I like the way people live here,' he says, 'so peaceful, friendly people, where you can access justice. Anything's possible here, so I'd like to be here.' But like all the Afghans at Burrangong, Mohammad is on a three-year temporary protection visa, which means his future in Australia is uncertain, to say the least.

Tony Hewson, human-resources manager at Burrangong, says the men were a godsend for the company, which has had long-term problems attracting workers. He wants Philip Ruddock and his department to let them stay when their visas begin to expire next March. Predictably, the minister says there'll be no exceptions to the rules: if they want to be considered for permanent settlement, Mohammad and his countrymen will have to go back to Afghanistan and apply under the skilled migration program. There's a suggestion that they might get preferential treatment, but they'll still have to make the trip—at their own, or the company's, expense.

It sounds like another bleak episode in Australia's official program of hostility towards asylum seekers and refugees. But the stand-off brought with it some good news as well. In April the Sydney *Sunday Telegraph* reported that the people of Young had rallied around the men in the face of the government's intransigence. In a 'fascinating reversal of stereotypes', the paper reported, 'the people of Young are battling the federal government to stop the boat people leaving.' The mayor had written to the immigration minister supporting the abattoir's bid to have the men stay on. Local teachers were providing free English lessons. 'Meeting these people face to face makes you realise they're just people like you and me,' Andrew Graziani, an employee at the abattoir, told the *Telegraph*.

By the time I visited Young late last month, the good news had begun to unravel. According to a report in early May in the Sydney *Sun Herald*, Mrs Gay Maxwell, a long-term resident of the town, didn't want to be tarred with the tolerant, multicultural brush, so she'd begun collecting signatures on a petition opposing the presence of the men. 'The media has been reporting that we all welcomed them with open arms,' she was quoted as saying, 'but we've never had a chance to put the other side of the story.' But when I asked Mrs Maxwell for an interview she didn't want to discuss the issue and doubted that any of her supporters would want to speak to me either. She did say that the men were 'illegals'—they aren't—and that they had taken jobs away from locals—which the local employment agency, Mission Employment, denies.

Although support for the men was strong among the people I met in Young, there are reports that at least some of them have been threatened and abused in the streets of Young. A group of the men, it seems, want to leave the town.

Their distress would have intensified in early June when a leaflet began circulating in Young calling on the locals to act to 'save' the town from 'the blight':

> What's in store for Young very soon? Rape-gangs, shootings of police officers, drugs, muggings, house-breakings, murders and unemployment? It starts with contract labour at Burrangong Meat Processors. Some call it multiculturalism. Ordinary people know it's the takeover of our towns, our country!

It's a fair bet that, coming from the Australia First Party, these views reflect only a small body of opinion in Young. When I called the mobile phone number on the leaflet I was greeted by a man in Sydney who didn't want to give me his name. He said that the leaflet was written by a group of people in Young whom he couldn't name, and that he couldn't comment on its contents either. He told me he'd ask the president of Australia First, Diane Teasdale, to phone me to discuss the leaflet. Ms Teasdale lives in Shepparton, Victoria, even further from Young than the unnamed man in Sydney. She hasn't phoned back yet.

Since then, *The Sydney Morning Herald* has revealed that the man on the mobile phone is Jim Saleam, a former leader of the far-right organisation, National Action. According to the paper, 'Dr Saleam was jailed for 3½ years in 1991 for possessing a firearm and organising a shotgun attack on the home of the African National Congress's Sydney representative.'

Tony Hewson thinks the leaflet is so ludicrously extreme that it will actually increase support for the men in the town. But the

Afghans in Young—and the other 8000 temporary protection visa-holders around Australia—deserve a much stronger show of political support. They are, after all, refugees—and are accepted as such under Australian law. The local federal MP, Alby Schultz, is hostile towards anyone who's arrived by boat. Premier Bob Carr is a vocal supporter of a tough stand against refugees and asylum seekers. And the federal ALP is still floundering around, unable to summon the courage to reject the failed pragmatism of the Beazley years. Despite the warm welcome they've had from many people in Young, Mohammad and his friends have good reason to feel uncertain about their future in Australia. **—Peter Browne**

In memoriam

JOHN DORMER

ENIGMATIC IS THE word that best describes John Kenelm Dormer, who has died in London at the age of 87. He was a creative presence in university Catholic circles in Melbourne and Sydney half a century ago, although few participants could say quite what he did or where he fitted in. He seemed to spend his days and nights in student coffee shops, encouraging younger people to discuss what it meant to be Catholic. The poet Vincent Buckley caught something of Dormer's enigma in his description of his first sighting of the man who was to become a close associate:

> I noticed him sitting in a meeting, with his extraordinarily swarthy and battered face, looking like the popular image of a gypsy, and (with the eyes that had only two expressions, merry and sad) curiously beautiful, or at least moving.

These were the glory days of university Newman societies, when members were exploring new ways of being Catholic. Ten years before the event, they were already experimenting with Vatican II outcomes in the lay apostolate, spirituality, liturgy, ecumenism and openness to the culture of the world. The architect of their style of church was a Belgian, Joseph Cardijn, whose Jocist (Young Christian Worker) movement showed the way forward. Dormer had made contact with the Jocist movement at source; to meet him was to encounter a witness to authentic tradition.

Not that he big-noted himself. His presence drew forth from younger colleagues their own deepest hopes and expectations, without any imposition of readymade answers. Nor was his Catholicism noticeably radical. Its Benedictine foundations had been dug deep at Downside School, the seminary of Australia's early English bishops; and he was proudly conscious of the recusant history of his father's family, who had suffered for the faith under the Tudors.

From his mother's family he derived great wealth, his grandfather being a founder of Toohey's brewery in Sydney. The money was tied up in a discretionary trust, whose principal trustee refused to release it to him. So this middle-aged man survived on what remained of his demobilisation payout—he had been a captain in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry during World War II—and pocket money from the trust. When at last the obstructive trustee died, Dormer cashed in the estate and went to Europe, to pursue his vocation as an artist.

In his memoirs, *Cutting Green Hay*, Vincent Buckley lists some of the properties the Toohey's heir now acquired: a house in the Cotswolds, a flat in London, a regular booking at a hotel in Geneva, and a farm in Connemara. The London apartment sat above a fashionable restaurant, Mirabel, which John used as his in-house caterer. Nothing pleased him more than to entertain Australian arrivals in London. He would tour them round the family castles and estates, taking special pride in that sacred site of English Catholicism, Stonor, which had never left the family or the faith. Once, building on a chance acquaintance, he took some Australian students to afternoon tea at an art curator's flat inside Windsor Castle. Clearly, the curator was not sure how this had happened, or who John Dormer actually was; and she was speechless when he casually asked to see the Queen's Holbeins.

By repute, artists are unworldly creatures, and Dormer had come into his money too late to have learned how to manage it. Incredibly, he let the fortune slip through his fingers. From Italy he appealed to a friend in Sydney for help. Then came the most heart-warming part of this story. Sending a circular letter to old Newman Society members, the Sydney friend raised $5000 in a fortnight. More than that—many of the donors thanked him for giving them the opportunity to do something kind for a man who had done so much for them in their youth.

So John Dormer got back to London, to live out his days on welfare. He was still active in church circles and the art world; and he still talked of realising youthful dreams of finding community. He had the great good fortune to meet and marry Kathleen Michael, a musician from Queensland. Together they shared his tiny charity

New York: some things never change. For those who need glasses, the billboard reads: 'Keep using my name in vain, I'll make rush hour longer. —God'. *Photograph: Trevor Hay*

flat in Earl's Court. When he became too frail to walk, his faithful wife would wheel him each day through the streets—everyone seemed to know John and smile at him—to a café where, as in years past, he was surrounded by strenuous conversations. Kathleen was with him at home, holding him in her arms, when he died peacefully on 30 May, the day the English church celebrated the feast of Corpus Christi.

—Edmund Campion

Mixed marriage

PRESERVING THE PAPER'S EDITORIAL IDENTITY

SEASONED INTER-CITY commuters know that *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* can usually substitute for each other without causing the peripatetic reader more than mild distress. The Fairfax broadsheets are similar, with relative differences; if they were human, they might be siblings. Sydney, who is slightly senior, is more urbane: more handsome, more worldly, more self-assured. Melbourne is more evidently a creature of contrasts: serious, but with a radical vein of humour; established, but often 'alternative'; spiritual, but in a secular sense.

Nevertheless, the titles have so much in common it is easy to forget that their relationship is through marriage, and that only a generation ago they belonged to different families. For more than a century, *The Age* was owned or controlled by David Syme and his descendants, and when they agreed to tie the knot with the Fairfaxes, it was, for the Symes at any rate, a union of last resort. Warwick Fairfax had first presented his suit in 1946. He proposed to inject £400,000 into the undercapitalised *Age*, but in return, he sought control of the business, something the Symes were not prepared to yield. Sir Warwick renewed his attentions in the 1950s, again unsuccessfully.

Around this time, young Rupert Murdoch began purchasing shares in David Syme & Co Ltd. Syme family archives show that, in 1959, he wrote to them announcing he had a proposition to put; evidently, he received no encouragement. But the industry knew that when David Syme's last surviving son, Oswald, died, a large tranche of family shares would find their way on to the market. In 1966, Syme management agreed to a deal with Fairfax, in order to forestall a hostile takeover by the Murdoch or Packer organisations after Oswald's

Gould's gold

IF EVER THERE WERE an antithesis of the caricature of the eccentric and aloof scientist, it was Stephen Jay Gould—palaeontologist, best-selling popular author, and baseball fanatic—who died in May of lung cancer at the age of 60.

Gould was an urbane polymath. He was multilingual, studied classical music, sang in Gilbert and Sullivan groups, and dodged bullets and drug-runners while collecting land snails in the Bahamas.

He was a public intellectual of the best kind. Once a month for 27 years, he sat down on a Sunday afternoon and wrote a beautifully crafted essay for *Natural History* magazine—more than 300 of them on the trot. (Not even the World Series could stop him, he once boasted.) The best of them fill nine volumes of the more than 20 books he wrote, and established him as one of the great science writers. In keeping with the man, these essays blend life and science, baseball and history. In one famous piece, he used his knowledge of statistics to argue that outstanding batting averages were a thing of the past in baseball—not because modern players were any worse than the players of history, but because they were better.

Most of his writings, however, were to do with fossils and evolution. He is often credited with re-establishing the importance of palaeontology in the study of evolution. In graduate school, he and fellow student Dr Niles Eldridge developed an overview of the course of evolution known as 'punctuated equilibrium'. They proposed that, far from being a smooth process of steady change, evolution occurred in sudden jumps that punctuated long periods of stability. A well-known example is the idea that dinosaurs and many associated species rapidly disappeared after the earth was hit by a large meteor.

The theory provoked such dissension among evolutionists—dissension as yet unresolved—that creationists tried to suggest the debate demonstrated that Darwin was wrong and evolution was on shaky ground. Gould, however, was an implacable foe of creationists, and took them to the Supreme Court to argue that evolution was an essential part of the science taught in American schools.

In 1982, he was diagnosed with a rare kind of mesothelioma. His response was typical. He read everything he could about the condition, and found that the median length of survival was just eight months. He then calmly sat down and analysed the statistics backing that contention, and decided there was a better than even chance he would live a lot longer. As it was, he lived 20 years longer, and eventually wrote an essay about his experience, which should be standard reading for all those who are told their time is limited. (When one of Archimedes' colleagues contracted the same kind of cancer, Gould heard about it through a mutual friend. He then wrote a positive, encouraging and practical email to a man he hardly knew.)

Public intellectuals of Gould's type are becoming an endangered species. Let us hope that his legacy inspires others, so that his kind will not become extinct. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

passing. According to Ranald Macdonald, then managing director of David Syme & Co Ltd, the family's preferred option was to remain independent—but with the shares at take-over prices that option was unaffordable.

Having held out so long, the Symes managed to wangle significant concessions from Fairfax, including an arrangement that as long as they owned at least ten per cent of David Syme & Co Ltd, they would have equal representation on its board. Gradually, however, the newspapers' managements became enmeshed. In 1972, Fairfax acquired majority ownership of David Syme & Co Ltd; in 1983, the major Syme shareholders, including Macdonald, sold out; by late 1997, David Syme & Co Ltd's board had been disbanded and its separate management structure flattened. Thereafter, *The Age*'s editor-in-chief and publisher (a single executive) reported directly to Sydney. During these years the sharing of editorial resources gradually increased, notably in costly foreign coverage.

Recently, there has been a fresh outbreak of symbiotic sentiment, with rumours that the newspapers' separate Canberra bureaux would merge, or at least begin to share copy. In early June, management told staff separate bureaux would be maintained, but that the papers would in future share each other's political exclusives. The move came hard on the heels of the consolidation of the newspapers' classified advertising businesses under the leadership of one Sydney-based executive.

From the stock market's perspective, such measures appear desirable. Last November, Deutsche Bank issued an analysis that criticised Fairfax's high fixed costs, including staffing, and said that with further cuts it should be possible to deliver another $110 million in gross annual earnings. Whether they will enhance the newspapers' editorial performances is a different question: in the Canberra bureaux, there are mixed opinions.

Undoubtedly, the new copy-sharing arrangement is part of the gradual attrition of the newspapers' separate identities, a process that may well continue. With the Howard government intent on mitigating the cross-media ownership rules, Fairfax's chief executive, Fred Hilmer, has signalled that he is interested in joining Fairfax with a television network to create a larger, national media empire. It seems his vision for Fairfax is not for a newspaper publisher primarily serving two state markets but for a large, integrated, multimedia conglomerate. If this comes to pass it will have enormous consequences for *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and their traditional editorial identities.

Put simply, a newspaper's editorial identity is its brand or 'image'. If a paper is to thrive in a competitive market, every issue must be a recognisable variant of the title. Readers do not want yesterday's paper all over again, but they want to know what they are buying. Just as novelty and currency are crucial ingredients in the editorial mix, so too are the paper's history and editorial traditions. As W.S. Holden wrote, 'the image formed by a newspaper's past is a powerful influence upon its present fortunes'.

I began to think about the historical aspects of editorial identity when I embarked on research into the qualities that had made *The Age* a special Australian newspaper. It is safe to assume that during the two decades the Syme family held out against Fairfax, they were contemplating not their commonalities but their differences. Both *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* were forged in the Victorian era of the serious broadsheet, but as Gavin Souter's history showed, the *Herald*, founded in 1831, was conservative almost from the outset, opposing universal suffrage. *The Age*, a product of the gold rushes, was a 'liberal' or 'radical' journal. By 1860, it came under the control of David Syme, and through it he waged war on entrenched interests such as the Victorian Legislative Council and the *Argus* newspaper. *The Argus* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* were natural allies, and for several years shared a cable service that went head to head with a rival group led by David Syme.

Even when *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* began to share some services, fundamental differences in their politics remained. *The Age*, instinctively more moderate, was pro-Liberal but nevertheless often supported Labor, even advocating the return of the Scullin government during the Depression. It claimed for itself the mantle of political 'independence and detachment'.

In reality, its independence waxed and waned, and has rarely been so unambiguously expressed as myth suggests. David Syme, for all his shameless self-promotion as the champion of ordinary Victorian workers, made deals with politicians. In the 1950s, the paper had a commercial relationship with a serving Victorian Cabinet minister. In the 1974 federal election campaign, conservative elements on the Syme board

forced editor Graham Perkin to neuter an editorial supporting the return of Labor.

Yet the idea of a venerable tradition of political independence dating back to Syme has remained a key to the paper's editorial identity. In the mid-1990s, *The Age* consciously invoked it to take a stand against Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett. At the last federal poll, when *The Age*'s election-day editorial opposed the Howard government's return because of its policy on asylum seekers, many readers would have recognised its old impulse to go its own way.

Some other aspects of *The Age*'s editorial identity are of a finer grain, and less visible to the naked eye. A distinction needs to be drawn between its liberalism in politics and its often conservative feeling on social issues. A former *Age* editor, Creighton Burns, thought the paper was 'more alive politically than it was socially', when he joined it in 1964. As late as 1981, columnist Phillip Adams noted that the paper had a 'curious sort of embarrassment about sexuality'.

When I worked on the paper's foreign desk during the early 1990s, *The Age* did not deign to notice the Duchess of York's toe-sucking escapade, or other low-level Royal peccadilloes that featured in the tabloids. Even *The Sydney Morning Herald* had more interest in the Royals' romantic misadventures. It was only when the marital war between Princess Diana and the Prince of Wales threatened a fully-fledged constitutional crisis that *The Age* cranked its coverage into top gear.

To me, *The Age* had a strange, dual flavour, a combination of campaigning and coyness. During my research, I realised this quality probably came down from David Syme, a Chartist who had been brought up by a stern Calvinist father. Under Syme, and later under his son Geoffrey, lurid political insult mingled with Protestant primness in the newspaper's pages.

If owners and managers keep wearing away the distinguishing aspects of a newspaper, it will not only begin to resemble other papers: eventually, it will cease to resemble itself. Happily, this rule of editorial identity also works in reverse. The people at Fairfax might care to study *The Australian*, the paper which Rupert Murdoch founded in 1964 in a sustained burst of newspaper idealism. Although it is part of News Ltd, *The Australian* does not generally share the copy and photographs it generates with other papers in the group. This was the case even during the long years before it turned a profit. Consequently, it has avoided the homogeneity that sometimes infects other News Ltd titles, and created its own highly identifiable, enduring brand.

—Sybil Nolan

Hons and rebels

OLD ROCKERS AND THE QUEEN

Am I the only one to have squirmed in my seat while watching all those rock and pop stars performing at Her Majesty's golden jubilee? Witness Ozzy Osbourne, bat-decapitator and scourge of decent families everywhere, happily strutting his stuff before a hereditary constitutional monarch, who apparently wore earplugs because she hates anything with a backbeat. (Or a black beat? Why were there so few black musicians invited to the party?)

I grew up with rock music during the 1960s when it occasionally had something meaningful to say. This was not the rock 'n' roll of the late 1950s, with themes of teenage love and hot cars. The closest that 1950s rock came to being rebellious was in songs like 'Summertime Blues' by Eddie Cochran. Juvenile disenchantment with parents and arguments over pocket money were hardly challenging to the social order. I appreciate that the lyrical content of early rock music was not its primary purpose. The 'threat' it posed lay elsewhere—in its African–American origins, in its pounding beat and implicit sexual enthusiasm. But in the 1960s, groups like the Beatles and the Animals possessed all of the above—and also had something to say.

For a young rebel like myself, there was an affinity that extended beyond the music and into a shared mission to change the world. This, lest we forget, was the world of inter-continental nuclear threat and the Cold War. Closer to home, it was the Vietnam War, compulsory military service by lottery, and a series of state and federal governments that liked to censor things. It was also a time in which a generation—the baby boomers—enjoyed a level of personal opportunity in employment and education not known by their parents' generation.

Pop music spoke for large numbers of young people and many thousands became

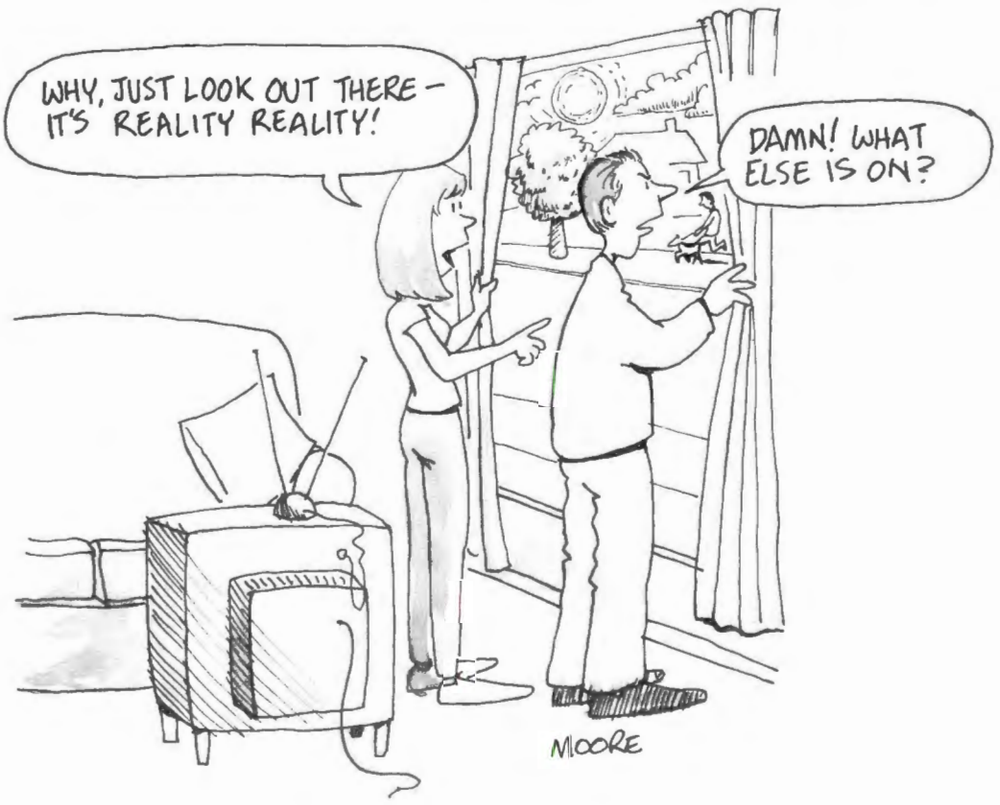
politically active. My particular musical hero was Eric Burdon, of the Animals. Growing up in Brunswick, Melbourne, I took inspiration from songs like 'We Gotta Get Outta This Place'. Back then, Brunswick was a tough industrial suburb of low-income workers. Burdon's lyrical delivery resonated with my own experience, as it did with his own as a Geordie from Newcastle-upon-Tyne and, later, with that of American soldiers serving in Vietnam.

Burdon was not among the 'pop legends' who performed at the Queen's party. But Paul McCartney—Sir Paul McCartney—was. Perhaps Sir Paul's development epitomises what happened to the rebelliousness in 1960s pop music. Wrongly disparaged as the 'bubble gum' element in the Beatles, McCartney was actually the band's most creative innovator. Not as overtly political as John Lennon, Paul was nonetheless politically aware and willing to use his music in the service of a political cause. It was Paul, for example, who penned 'Give Ireland Back to the Irish' in 1972. Three decades later, Ireland is yet to be returned to the Irish and Paul—Sir Paul—is special guest at the Palatial Party.

There is plenty of evidence of 1960s pop musicians adopting US folk singer Woody Guthrie's motto, etched on his guitar during the 1930s: 'This guitar kills fascists'. In other words, music does not exist in a vacuum. Musicians are part of the real world, even if their part of it may seem bizarre and occasionally unreal to everyone else. There comes a time when a pop musician's gotta do what a pop musician's gotta do. Barry McGuire's 'Eve of Destruction' is a case in point. In 1965, its 'ban the bomb' message reached millions and sold millions—well, two million worldwide, to be precise.

Few stand out in the history of rock rebellion as starkly as the late John Lennon. He created two protest anthems—'Give Peace a Chance' and 'Power to the People'—at moments when they were sorely needed. And it was John who, in 1969, returned his MBE in protest against British policy in Biafra and the war in Vietnam. In fairness, it should also be said that he returned it because he was unhappy that his record 'Cold Turkey' had slipped in the charts. But that was John being John.

Would John Lennon ever have become 'Sir John'? Would the offer have been made? I believe the powers-that-be are always happy to co-opt their strongest opponents. And very few are not co-optable. Would Lennon, like Paul, have managed the metamorphosis from pacifist to royalist?



So, what is the source of my discomfort? Perhaps it has more to do with me than with them. How could I have been so naive as to believe that rock's rebelliousness was not just part of the packaging and promotion? Look at the evidence of manipulated reputation in the case of Jimi Hendrix. Now Jimi was no political radical. In fact, as a one-time member of America's 101st Airborne Paratroopers, he supported his government's intervention in Vietnam. As Eric Burdon has remarked, Hendrix merely substituted his military weaponry for a Stratocaster. Chas Chandler, who discovered and managed Hendrix, tells a revealing tale in John McDermott and Eddie Kramer's book, *Hendrix* (Warner Books, 1992). During Jimi's 1969 American tour, Chandler forged and released a press statement purporting to come from the ultra-conservative 'Daughters of the American Revolution'. The statement condemned Jimi's 'exposure' to young American girls. The press release worked: the media seized on the Daughters' supposed hostility to Hendrix. The phoney controversy created much publicity for the tour and fixed Hendrix's reputation as some kind of radical.

But maybe I'm being too harsh on the old rockers and poppers. We all change. The fruits of capitalism have been more forthcoming and on a grander scale for successful pop musicians than for most of us. All it took for some of my old fellow rebels to 'sell out' was the election of a Labor government and offers of secure and comfortable positions in the public service. At least pop music legends commanded a high price.

—Barry York

Writers' meet

LAUNCHES ON THE HARBOUR

More than any other event at this year's Sydney Writers' Festival, the media turned up for the launch of Bob Carr's *Thoughtlines*, a collection of essays and articles written by the premier over the years. It was a festive occasion. A number of Labor luminaries came to the venue directly from the funeral of Sir John Gorton. Perhaps this was why they were in such rare form. Not only had they just buried one liberal prime minister but they had looked on while another was publicly chastised.

Gough Whitlam arrived a little late and the crowds parted to allow him to come forward and take a seat. He was now

Australia's oldest living former prime minister and he knew it. When Mr Carr thanked his personal staff for being the best any leader had drawn together, Gough corrected him. 'State leader,' he said. It was a family affair. Even Mr Carr's former high-school English teacher was present. It was only when the launcher, Barry Jones, spent ten minutes probing Mr Carr's understanding of Proust that the crowd started to fray at the hem.

With federal Labor now so long out of government and so far from returning to it, it is hardly surprising that the party finds itself in a reflective mood. Political parties tend to do their private thinking in public and a writers' festival is as good a place as any. Neal Blewett, a former Labor health minister, has pointed out that 'the Hawke and Keating governments were the most literate this country has seen'. Apart from both Hawke and Keating themselves, the list of politicians-turned-authors is remarkable. It includes John Button, Bill Hayden, Tom Uren, Peter Walsh, Susan Ryan, Robert Tickner, Graham Richardson and Blewett himself. It would be interesting if occasionally an author moved into politics, but so far the traffic is all in one direction.

This is a little surprising given the passionate political views of many authors. At this festival, Bryce Courtenay spoke about literacy. 'Freedom of speech is implicit in the ability to read,' he said. Both Richard Flanagan and Raimond Gaita suggested that what is commonly referred to as Australia's 'security' is really a sign of a deeply rooted insecurity. Gaita wondered why in the name of sovereignty was it necessary to deny health and other forms of care to those who happen to be from somewhere else. He said that the defensive policies of wealthy nations are equivalent to living behind barbed wire.

On the same panel, Flanagan told the story of his 85-year-old father who had been in the Hellfire Pass. Mr Flanagan Snr had been inspired to speak at a public rally because 'he didn't know what army Bruce Ruxton had been part of'. Mr Flanagan remembered an Aboriginal colleague called Pinky who fought gallantly for a country which, at that time, denied him citizenship. He also remembered a homosexual soldier who was widely accepted 'because he was a good bloke'.

Don Watson's insider's account on the prime ministership of Paul Keating, *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart*, provided an occasion for him to reflect on political culture. He spoke, for example, about the organisational chaos which seemed to govern the prime minister's office during Keating's tenure. And about Keating's strategies for evading minders and lobbyists when he wanted to get home late in the day. He said that there were times when getting Keating to focus on something was 'like trying to drag a dead horse across a paddock'.

But Watson's most incisive comments were directed against the dead language to which political ideas are reduced. As Keating's speech-writer, he trawled through memoranda and drafts which were couched in such meaningless clichés that they were 'like an exchange of dead animals'. Many formulaic expressions were 'like an old door sausage just put there to keep the drafts out'. When a new word or expression was introduced, it would be done to death. One such word was 'enhance'. Suddenly, said Watson, government policy was about enhancing everything. 'You'd get up and say "I'll enhance my face this morning".' A word such as 'committed' could be used to mean the opposite of what it seemed to. 'Why do you need to say you are committed to doing something when you can simply say that you are doing it?' The word could be a stalling tactic.

There were also plenty of signs at the festival that the world is bigger than Australia. Visiting Palestinian, Tariq Ali, and East Timorese writer, Abe Soares, were welcome for that. We needed them. At the opening of the festival, the Lord Mayor of Sydney, Frank Sartor, spoke of having just returned from Dili where he was present at the inauguration of a new nation. Sydney had donated some buses to East Timor. Sartor was sitting in a café in Dili when one such bus went past. Its destination indicator still said 'Pyrmont'.

—Michael McGirr

Dramatic moves

SHOWS ON THE ROAD

Two theatre productions currently touring Australia reveal many of the characteristics of present-day itinerant theatre.

The David Atkins-produced tap-dancing musical comedy *Hot Shoe Shuffle*—currently in Melbourne as part of a 31-town national tour—emanates from the bold-as-brass commercial theatre sector. Margery and Michael Forde's darkish comedy-drama *Milo's Wake* is playing 28 different centres in four states and the ACT on a 27-week tour, in a production created by Brisbane's La Boite Theatre Company.

The *Milo's Wake* tour began in Adelaide in mid-April and has played in Melbourne, Canberra and then several regional NSW centres. In early July it goes to the Belvoir St Theatre in Sydney. Then Launceston and also one-night stands in five other Tasmanian towns in August before returning to regional Victoria and suburban Melbourne. The tour concludes in Wagga Wagga (25 September–5 October) and Penrith (8–12 October).

Above: Milo's Wake.
Ross Smith, Garry Nunn and Michael Forde.

Working almost entirely in the opposite direction, *Hot Shoe* began its third Australian tour in Launceston and Hobart (in early May) before tapping into the Athenaeum Theatre in Melbourne for a month. It will travel as far as Darwin before settling back into Sydney's Theatre Royal for an open-ended season starting 31 October.

These are massive travelling ventures. Current Australian touring practice is dependent on performing arts centres and other venue managers (and some theatre companies) combining to present a wide variety of theatrical work—or going it alone to present other companies' shows off their own entrepreneurial bats.

It's interesting to see La Boite getting such wide exposure. One of the Nugent report's recommendations was that more work should tour out of Queensland, and Wendy Blacklock's touring company Performing Lines has taken advantage of the opportunity to pick up *Milo's Wake*, with funding from Playing Australia.

This is a play with a very good premise. Old building-supplies manufacturer Milo O'Connor has decided to retire, hand the

business over to his son Ned and hit the road with long-suffering wife Maura in a mobile home—all of this unbeknown to the family. Meanwhile, he has decided to stage his own wake in an Irish-theme pub, mainly for the chance to hear a few kind words about himself from his family before he dies. But plaudits look an unlikely prospect, given Milo's cavalier treatment of all around him throughout his life and through most of the play.

This production is set as if we're in the Wren Bar of the pub, with part of the audience sitting and drinking Guinness at tables, and the action punctuated with songs from a very good two-man Irish band. This, plus the light-hearted bantering tone, provides for some rollicking good fun, especially in the first half. After the interval, the mood darkens as skeletons emerge from the family closet—in particular the bones of what happened to Ned's dead brother Aidan. The songs become more ironic and the writers make telling use of some dark and frightening Irish myths and legends to parallel the O'Connor family's relationships.

It's an enjoyable performance and Michael Forde is outstanding as the old rogue Milo. But it feels a bit too much like a one-man-show to me. None of the other three characters (especially Ned's girlfriend Brooke) is developed beyond the level of sounding board to Milo's tirades of complaint and self-pity. And fun though it is for the audience at the tables, I suspect the play would be better served by a more intimate actor–audience relationship.

Hot Shoe Shuffle is another experience entirely. Written by Larry Buttrose and Kathryn Riding (using a concept by David Atkins and Max Lambert), the show is about the seven Tap brothers and their struggle to make a dollar in the cutthroat vaudeville business. The idea is that they can get access to their dead father's very generous will only if they can reproduce his famously difficult 'Hot Shoe Shuffle' tap-dance variety act in public. And only if they do so with a girl who can't dance for nuts and who is supposed to be their long-lost sister April.

The boys enthusiastically begin rehearsing but life is made difficult—as much by the dictatorial old director Max King who's appointed to supervise the act as it is by April's lack of skill. But once it's clear that April is *not* their sister, the boys vie for her affections—except the eldest brother Spring, who begins to resent the whole thing and decides to call it all off. There are of course a string of classically neat reversals in the second act and the show duly goes on.

It's paper-thin and very silly stuff. But the songs (by the likes of Hoagy Carmichael, George Gershwin, Duke Ellington and even Peter Allen), the simple, colourful cartoon sets (by Eamonn Darcy) and, above all, the outstanding tap-dancing from a highly skilled and energetic cast make this unashamedly old-fashioned show a good, nostalgic night out. The finale, with a series of solos (especially Jesse Rasmussen's 'Puttin' on the Ritz'), duos and group acts of escalating difficulty, is dazzling.

—Geoffrey Milne

Media blanks

WHO CARES?

On 22 May, Malcolm Fraser and other speakers—including refugee advocate Paris Aristotle, writer Arnold Zable, ACTU President Sharon Burrows and me—addressed a capacity audience in the Melbourne Town Hall (2500 people, and a queue that stretched around the block). It was a powerful and moving occasion of support for refugees and asylum seekers. Yet not one TV camera was seen. The following day not one newspaper, radio talkback or news program, either commercial or ABC, made any reference to the event. It was blanked.

It seems that non-violent, thoughtful and well-managed human-rights events like this are of no interest to news media. It is said, on what authority I know not, that Australian journalists or their employers, or maybe both (with the honourable exception of a cohort in *The Australian*), think that refugees and asylum seekers have been 'done'; the news mileage now lies not in the human tragedies but in the sabre-rattling between the great engines of power, Minister Ruddock and the Federal Court.

But the journalism fraternity's lack of interest is particularly odd when it extends to the plight of one of their own.

Cheikh Kone is a young journalist from Côte d'Ivoire. He took the escape road after he had been arrested, beaten and tortured by authorities—an article of his had offended them. He stowed away in a cargo ship that made it to Fremantle. There he was apprehended, given no advice, interviewed, found wanting as a refugee and confined at Port Hedland.

The facts of his plight appear in a letter to the prime minister sent by the Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN, an association representing writers in 94 countries, a few weeks ago:

> According to our information, Cheikh Kone, journalist with the Côte d'Ivoire newspaper 'Le Patriot', was detained by immigration officials in Australia in December 2000. He fled Côte d'Ivoire in fear for his safety after reporting fraudulent activity during the October 2000 elections. Amnesty International reports that during 2000 considerable numbers of opposition activists and supporters were tortured and killed by the military in Côte d'Ivoire. In spite of well-documented evidence to support his claim for refugee status as defined by Article 1 of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, to which Australia is a signatory, Cheikh Kone's initial application for asylum was rejected. It would appear that there were serious flaws in the due process of his case, in particular the lack of legal representation and provision of an interpreter during his first interview at port by Department of Immigration officials, which was to form the foundation of his case. He is presently pursuing an application to the High Court, which is his final avenue of appeal. International PEN believes that Cheikh Kone's life would be in danger if he was repatriated ... Inter-

national PEN Writers in Prison Committee considers journalist Cheikh Kone to be in grave danger of persecution in Côte d'Ivoire solely for the peaceful exercise of his profession ...

The Australian journalists' professional association, the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA), apparently did not share PEN's sense of urgency. Cheikh Kone contacted the federal office of the MEAA more than four months ago. To little avail. He needed immediate help finding an English-speaking advocate, getting legal advice the moment he contacted them and later, support for his appeal to the High Court. The WA branch of the MEAA has expressed interest in helping Kone, but they were not contacted in time to be of use.

Most parties seem to accept, at least, that this literate black young man does come from Côte d'Ivoire. But is he a journalist? That is the question being asked.

How could he prove that? Kone has apparently been a fugitive since late 2000, when he made a run for it after his reports on government electoral irregularities caused 'offence'. At his first interview in Australia he didn't use the right words. He didn't persuade the Refugee Review Tribunal. He had no way of 'proving' anything, though he did fax contact details of several referees to the MEAA, of whom only one seems to have been directly contacted. Though PEN (UK) was satisfied after two telephone checks with the editor of Kone's paper (who confirmed he had indeed written for the paper), another international organisation, Journalists Sans Frontières, apparently spoke to someone else, the 'editorial manager', who said he didn't know Kone.

Côte d'Ivoire is not a safe place for investigative journalists, editors or, indeed, anyone much. It has been largely lawless for a very long time. In 1995, Amnesty International declared several journalists prisoners of conscience after they were convicted of insulting the head of state. In June 1995, one journalist was summoned to the offices of the Côte d'Ivoire security services, stripped to the waist, then beaten by four members of the security forces in the minister's presence.

It is therefore possible, one would think, that an editorial manager well aware of such risks would deny any knowledge of a troublesome journalist who had fled the country two years before.

Amnesty also reported that, before the 1995 presidential election, the Côte d'Ivoire authorities increased their harassment of members of FESCI (a student organisation that campaigns for improved living and studying conditions) so much that its leaders went underground. Matters were no better in 2000, when Amnesty reported that another military promise to respect the freedom of the press had not been matched by effective action to prevent the military from behaving like a law unto themselves, from raiding newspaper offices and ill-treating 'offending' journalists. According to Amnesty, staff of at least five publications were subjected to intimidation and physical brutality.

The Amnesty reports are compelling. In the light of them it beggars belief that we might risk sending a political refugee back to a country he fled after being subjected to violence just because our laws say it's 'legal' to do so. If there is any purpose to human-rights agreements, it is to set down fundamental, universal ethical principles. Be just. Be compassionate. Do not turn away the desperate from your door.

And why is it that the media didn't see the immediate need to support a young, black, French-speaking political journalist, their brother? Is it because he, at least, believes in the universal moral code? Or because they don't value those who take risks to write what should be said?

'Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?'
'To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.'
'The dog did nothing in the night-time.'
'That was the curious incident,' remarked Sherlock Holmes.

—Conan Doyle, *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*

—Moira Rayner

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What's right for Europe?

From Madrid **Anthony Ham** reports on the shifting politics and racial preferences of a Europe that is, mostly, out to maximise its own advantage.

EXCLUSION WAS ALWAYS at the heart of the European Union (EU) ideal. Indeed, the concept of the EU as a federation of diverse peoples is to some extent mistaken. The people of Europe, for all their differences and distinct cultural histories, do not really see themselves as so unlike each other, but more as a mosaic of different shades of the same sophisticated and overarching Western culture. In this broader sense, European unity has been conceived as a union of self-declared elites. The English may at times be disdainful of the French and resentful of the Germans. The nations of northern Europe may privately laugh about the hot-blooded temperaments of their Mediterranean neighbours. Deep down, though, there is a recognition that they are all Europeans.

Cordoning off Europe into a political and economic bloc, distinct from the rest of the world, necessarily has an exclusionary edge, and 'Fortress Europe' has taken on a disturbing new currency in recent months. The rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen in France, and his ability to attract six million voters, confirmed—spectacularly—the place of a renascent right as a mainstream political force. The crude populism of Le Pen, whose political platform is founded on nothing so much as the expulsion of dark-skinned immigrants, contrasts with the subtler policies of the late Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands. But even Fortuyn felt no restraint about calling Islam a 'backward religion'. Fortuyn's rise, assassination and posthumous near-canonisation has provided confirmation, if any were needed, that Europe has lurched to the right.

IN THE SPANISH CAPITAL, Madrid, xenophobia is hard to find. In this grand city of some six million people I have encountered the healthiest of European inclusivism. I asked Doña, who is of mixed Spanish and English parentage, about the recent upsurge in arrivals of undocumented migrants from across the Strait of Gibraltar. He assured me that 'on the lips of every Spaniard is the phrase "as long as they're not hurting anyone, let them be".'

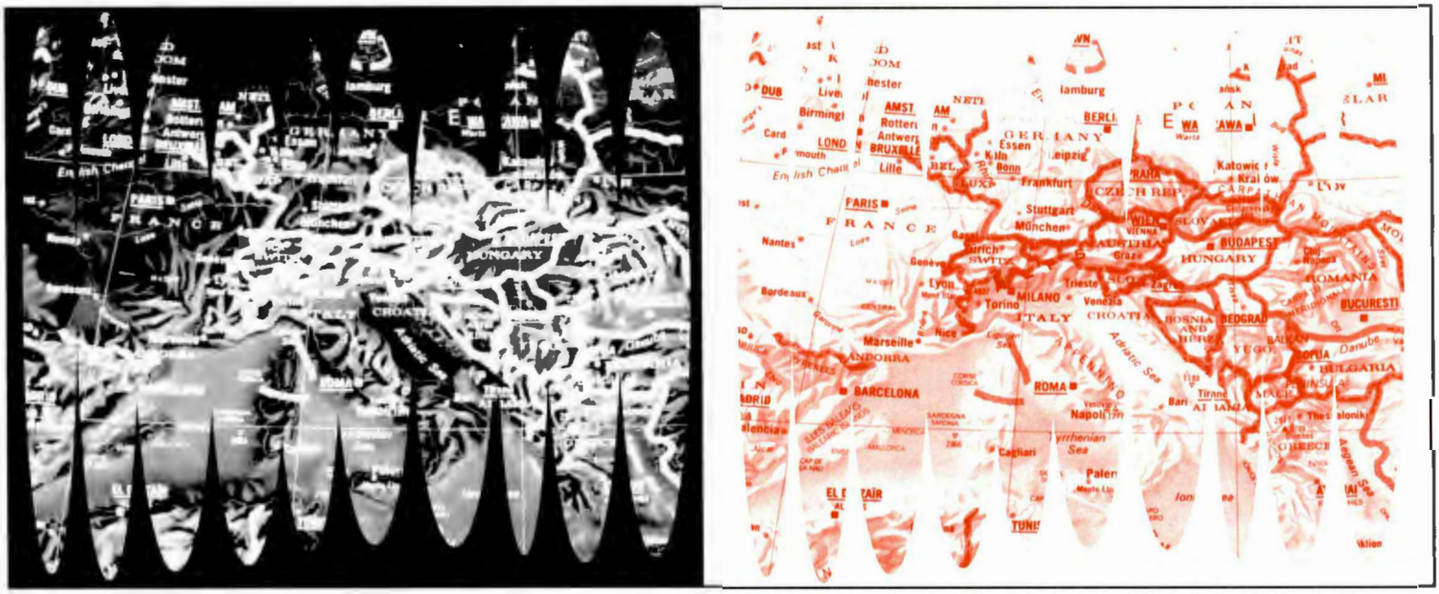
In this intoxicating place, his words sound like a motto for the Spanish way of life. This is most evident in Lavapiés, a gritty Madrid suburb and the last of the capital's true *barrios* (old quarters), home to low-income families and impoverished immigrants. In Madrid, Lavapiés is known as a great place for an evening out. Here I sense none of the angst and hostility that dominates the bleak dormitory suburbs of Paris or the estates of northern English towns like Bradford and Oldham.

It is not difficult to see the reasons for such evident tolerance. Spain has undergone an astonishing transformation. The Spanish lived under the Franco dictatorship until the mid-1970s. Now, Spain seems to be ruled by Ángel Ganivet's famous statement: 'Every Spaniard's ideal is to carry a statutory letter with a single provision, brief but imperious: "This Spaniard is entitled to do whatever he feels like doing."'

A recent and deeply felt memory of repression is strong in the Spanish heart, and it is expressed most vibrantly in a love of freedom. Just one generation ago, Doña and Marina's parents lived in a world where persecution by the forces of General Franco was widespread and where, in some parts of the country, women were not allowed out of the house unless accompanied by a man. Spain's history is also one of conflict, then accommodation, with Muslim armies—to such an extent that even flamenco and many famous Spanish dishes are of hybrid origin. Madrid itself started life as an Islamic garrison town. The Spanish also understand what it is like to be patronised as the poor cousins of a cultured Europe. Their recent history has bred a greater understanding among Spaniards of the perils that many refugees flee. It has also helped to make Spain one of the few countries in Europe where a charismatic far-right leader is not in the ascendant.

Spain is not, however, immune from the anti-immigrant sentiment that is sweeping Europe. Prime Minister José María Aznar currently holds the rotating EU presidency. He has been at the forefront of efforts to co-ordinate a tougher, Europe-wide immigration policy, a policy which will dominate the EU summit in Seville in June. Spain is also under growing pressure from human-rights organisations over conditions in its detention camps for illegal immigrants, on the Canary Islands and Spain's outposts of Ceuta and Mellila on the African mainland.

In a recent survey, 70 per cent of Spanish respondents said that there were too many immigrants in Spain, and 60 per cent agreed that increased immigration meant increased crime. Spain's deputy prime minister and interior minister, Mariano Rajoy, recently denounced the merging of immigration and criminality in the popular mind. But, almost in the same breath, he pandered to popular sentiment, stating that 'excessive immigration provokes crime'.



Racist statements and assertions of a link between immigration and crime are no longer the preserve of an extremist fringe.

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi recently launched a drive against what he described as the 'army of evil'. Large-scale round-ups of illegal immigrants were the centrepiece of his tough-on-crime stance. In France, the resurgent President Jacques Chirac has set up special police squads that have a largely unfettered power to enter predominantly North African neighbourhoods to restore law and order. In Germany, Ronald Schill of the Law and Order Offensive Party has openly advocated deporting 'black African drug dealers and the knife-stabbing Turks'. Edmund Stoiber of the Christian Social Union, standing on a joint platform of anti-immigrant and law-and-order policies, looks likely to be the next German chancellor. From Denmark (Pia Kjærsgaard's Danish People's Party) to Austria (Jörg Haider's Freedom Party), the extreme right is on the rise and in many cases is part of a government coalition.

It has become almost fashionable to assert the connection between crime and foreigners as an incontrovertible fact—a perception elevated to the level of a fundamental truth. The real facts seem irrelevant. The same report that heralded Berlusconi's crackdown on immigrant crime quoted police figures showing that in the past year, even with an increase in immigration, crime levels have actually fallen. But who takes any notice? What counts with the Italian government is that 25 per cent of Italians *feel* less safe than they did a year ago.

In Spain, a recent Civil Guard report found that of 18,991 arrests made in January, 5830 were of foreigners, over half of whom were legally resident in Spain and/or from other EU countries; illegal immigrants accounted for just ten per cent of the arrests for crime-related matters. Yet the government was more interested in the fact that 60 per cent of Spaniards *believe* immigration increases crime.

In Britain, four days after the British National Party won nearly 30 per cent of the vote in council elections, the minister for Europe, Peter Hain, announced that Muslims in Britain were 'very isolationist in their own behaviour and their own customs', and that they should do more to integrate into British society. Never mind that the Chartered Institute of Housing produced widespread and damning evidence that many British real-estate agents were actively persuading Asian home-buyers to buy up in the 'ghettos' of their own kind (to the point of refusing to sell them homes in certain areas). They also encouraged white

home-owners not to sell to 'Asians' lest property values fell as a result.

The alienation that has drawn so many to the policies of Le Pen, Fortuyn and others cannot be dissipated unless the unease at the heart of that alienation is addressed. Many supporters crave the certainty of the solutions on offer. They are seduced by the notion that security, even security founded on a fallacy, is the most fundamental of human rights and that all other rights must be subservient. As the EU girds itself for a new program of expansion to the east, the people become more anxious about security at home, and more suspicious that this enlargement of Europe is a project devised by technocrats who are aloof from the European people.

Javier Pradera, a columnist for the Spanish newspaper *El País*, suggests that there is a causal connection between the exclusion that immigrants experience and the crimes they commit. He argues cogently that immigrants are expected to demonstrate responsibility towards their host country, while the countries themselves are absolved of any reciprocal responsibility. Urging the Spanish prime minister to look closely at his country, he sardonically predicted that Aznar 'will surely discover not only the waters of the Mediterranean, but also the fact that, compared to hungry drifters, the customers of five-fork restaurants are much less likely to steal chickens'.

The dramatic shift of the political centre to the right is accompanied by the left's loss of power across

Europe. Of Europe's politicians, only one, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, has refused to countenance the rhetoric of extreme racism. In a recent interview, he talked of his fear that politics in Europe was becoming re-nationalised and that there was a disturbing rise in intolerance towards minorities: 'If you make verbal concessions towards the extreme right, you make them strong. And so we will have to take action against them, not appease them.'

But Schroeder's is a lone voice. In just about every state of the EU, leaders and politicians have been scrambling to appear tough on the twin evils of illegal immigration and crime—in that order. There is little to differentiate left and right on economic policy, so each side feels compelled to outdo the other on these other issues. British Prime Minister Tony Blair has been the typically messianic leader of this movement. Just days after Fortuyn's death, Blair announced that his solution to rising crime was to institute a tougher approach to refugee transit countries and to tighten border controls around Europe. In a statement that may speak as much of the centrist parties' political paranoia and the perceptions of insecurity among Europe's people as it does of any causal link between immigration and crime, he warned that 'we have seen what happens when we do not deal with this problem'.

In short, the solutions offered by Europe's leaders and opinion-makers to the 'problem' are precisely those offered by the populist leaders of the extreme right. They criminalise being foreign and blame immigrants rather than right-wing demagogues. They 'save' the country from the rise of the extreme right by swerving the government towards the extreme right.

To make this shift, people must ignore Europe's more incomprehensible economic logic. For example, paying subsidies to European farmers not to produce food is an issue of national sovereignty; keeping asylum seekers on meagre government handouts is interpreted as supporting freeloaders who are a threat to national security. The shift to the right also requires some collective amnesia among European states. Almost all of them have, in their not-too-distant pasts, carried out brutal and pillaging colonial projects which came close to destroying the countries from which many of these immigrants now flee. It requires Europeans to ignore the deeply disquieting parallels between the racism targeted at Muslims in contemporary Europe and the racist demagoguery against Jews in the 1930s. And who ever cares to note that the diverse group of illegal immigrants who are seen as responsible for all the ills of Europe account for just one-thousandth of the population?

Recent events leave us facing the disturbing possibility that a unified Europe defines itself by whom it excludes. The people of Europe are suddenly 'free' to declare that inclusion has its limits and that it's time for Europe to become more exclusive, more 'European'.

This is the voice of new Europe: Trish Green of Throckmorton, protesting against British government plans to build an asylum seekers' centre near her village. 'I know people will accuse us of playing the race card but I don't really have a problem with genuine asylum seekers. However, I do not think a rural area like this is the ideal place. I think asylum seekers will have an awful time here. People are narrow-minded in the country. They will not be accepted.'

After reading these words, I headed back to Lavapiés and spoke with Marina López García, mentioning what I had read. She said simply: 'But Madrid is a city of immigrants. We are all from somewhere else.' ■

Anthony Ham is *Eureka Street*'s European correspondent.

Sights set on peace

After decades of civil war, the Tamil Tigers and the Sinhalese majority are finally coming to the negotiating table. **Jon Greenaway** returns to Sri Lanka to report on the prospects for conciliation.

On the night of 23 July 2001, 14 members of the LTTE Black Tiger suicide unit penetrated the perimeter fence of Colombo's Bandaranaike International Airport. Bandaranaike, a single-strip runway with an old terminal mildewing in the tropical heat, serves as Sri Lanka's only air link to the rest of the world.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) suicide squad approached disguised as picnickers. Witnesses later recounted seeing a group of young men enter an adjoining sports ground at dusk. They carried large polythene bags, snacked on biscuits and soft drink, and sang pop songs in Sinhalese. Later, in the dark, they slowly picked their way through fields of coconut trees, avoiding detection by patrols and sentries. They waited until after midnight, when the last planes belonging to airlines other than Air Lanka had taken off.

If the Tigers were to admit responsibility for what followed (LTTE cadres currently preparing for peace talks with the Sri Lankan government often forget to deny responsibility and recount with relish this most successful raid in their 19-year insurrection) they would cite this precaution—letting the foreign planes go—as proof that theirs has been a calculated war of self-determination. They would call it a war waged against legitimate targets, not a boiling over of the kind of fanatical nihilism that would shake the United States, and the world, six weeks later.

After cutting their way through the chain fencing that separated the parked military aircraft from the runway, the squad split into two groups. They crawled on their bellies through mud towards the Sri Lankan Air Force hangars at the southern end of the airfield.

A mile-and-a-half away the queue of traffic arriving for the first flights of the day was lengthening. At the checkpoint where IDs are scrutinised and the undercarriages of cars are inspected for explosives, the first stage of a three-hour crawl through security procedures for passengers departing Colombo was beginning.

By 3.50am the first Black Tiger group was positioned in front of the squadron of helicopters. The second was near the jet fighters that were being deployed in the escalating war in the north.

The two teams attacked in unison, raining automatic-weapon fire, anti-tank shells, rocket-propelled grenades and explosives on the aircraft and on the startled soldiers who rushed from their barracks to engage them. In the ensuing 45-minute battle, three Sri Lankan defence personnel were killed and eight Tamil guerrillas died on the tarmac. Two attack helicopters and six fighters (bought at great expense from China, the Ukraine and Israel) were destroyed.

Anxious passengers who had flown in on Air Lanka flights from Muscat and Jakarta heard the fighting and asked what was happening. Most likely an air-force personnel drill, they were told.

When the walls began to shake as the shooting and explosions came closer, staff and passengers fled the building in panic. The surviving rebels crossed the runway, engaging defence forces all the way, and occupied the vacated terminal. Three modern Airbus planes belonging to the national airline were blown apart, two by grenades fired at them from the roof of the terminal. The other would later be written off after being sprayed with 200 rounds of small-arms fire.

At 9.30am, six hours after the attack began, three more airmen were dead and all of the Tigers had perished. Three of them took their own lives by detonating explosives strapped to their torsos. The country woke to the undeniable truth that the war could not be won.

THE SWEEPING views from the windows of the office occupied by the head of the Sri Lankan army takes in much of Old Colombo, an area known as 'Fort'—a nod to the past when Europe's colonial powers fought for control of the island. From his desk Lieutenant General Lionel Balagalle, a neat man who sits with a straight back and restless feet, can see a number of locations hit by Tamil Tiger bombings and suicide attacks since the war began in 1983.

It is three months since the new government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe and the LTTE signed a ceasefire agreement. Balagalle talks of the relief felt by the rank and file at the break in fighting.

'They have their doubts about the situation, which is natural given the past experience, but they are quite happy and they hope that it will last,' he says.

Balagalle is described by observers as a moderate in the faction-riddled defence forces. His term as army chief was extended by Prime Minister Wickramasinghe, who ignored calls by hawks to replace him with General Janaka Perera (currently Sri Lankan High Commissioner to Australia). It was General Perera who swept the Tigers from the Jaffna Peninsula at the northern tip of the island in 1995. Pressure groups are still seeking redress for violent reprisals committed by the military against the people who stayed behind after the LTTE withdrawal. Balagalle's response: 'If you look at it from the soldiers' point of view, during the fighting, every other day we had bodies in bags going back to Colombo.'

Above: Government soldiers supervise returning fishing families at the Wanni checkpoint on the edge of the Jaffna Peninsula.

Page 23: View through house in Vadaramachy East, damaged during heavy fighting in March 2000.

The benefits of an end to open hostility have been quickly realised across the island since the parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on 22 February under the watch of the Norwegian government. Checkpoints have come down, travel between government and LTTE-held territory is now possible. Trade has resumed between the north and south, and almost daily there are announcements of deals being done on development aid and infrastructure projects. Sri Lanka's national mood, which for so long alternated between fear and vengeance, is turning optimistic. Maybe, just maybe, the country is heading towards a conciliation that will mark the beginning of the end of half a century of misunderstanding and bitterness between the Sinhalese community and the indigenous Tamil minority.

'AT ONE POINT I was worried that things were going too fast,' says Sunil Bastian, from one of Colombo's thinktanks, the International Centre for Ethnic Studies. 'But this time we have a firmer ceasefire agreement. There's a better mechanism for monitoring, with a third party involved, so my hunch is that once negotiations have started it will be much more difficult for the parties to get out of them.'

Three years ago an LTTE suicide bomber killed the founder of Bastian's thinktank, Tamil parliamentarian and constitutional lawyer Dr Neelan Thiruchelvam, as he drove to the office through the morning traffic. Thiruchelvam had been in the vanguard of efforts sponsored by the previous administration to bring in a new constitution that would address Tamil aspirations for self-rule and bypass negotiation with the Tigers. (The LTTE have never claimed responsibility for this act either. Its representatives still allude to his slaughter as one of the many 'lamentable' losses of life during the conflict. Post-mortems at this stage of moving forward are, they say, 'counter-productive'.)

It is understandable, then, that Sunil Bastian quickly tempers his optimism by drawing attention to the failure of five previous attempts at negotiation. The sticking points then were devolution and the renunciation of armed struggle—points yet to be discussed in the current peace process.

If the substance of an agreement is to be shaped at mooted talks in Thailand (at the time of writing there had been no agreed date but the government was pushing for the end of June), both the LTTE

and the Sri Lankan government will need to shake off a history of 70,000 dead and more than a million people displaced. Each party has its particular challenges to overcome. Will the current Sri Lankan leadership be prepared to risk a backlash from the Sinhalese electorate by ceding one third of the island and half its coastline to the LTTE? Will either side be able to trust the intentions of the other when sticking points are reached? And, most crucially, will the LTTE be able to function in the opaque world of political negotiation in which outcomes are so much less concrete than they are on the battlefield?

All this is to be played out under the still-distant, yet watchful, eye of a US administration anxious to protect its expanding security interests in the region.

THE WANNI, an area in the northern hinterland of the island often referred to as the 'jungle headquarters' of the LTTE, is in truth more flat land and open space than dense bush. But as a description of a place that is remote to the point of inaccessibility, the term is apt.

After crossing at the checkpoint on the A9 road between government and LTTE territory north of Vavuniya, we pass through a landscape devoid of any sign of human activity. Its silence contrasts sharply with the bustle among the Sri Lankan armed forces on the other side. The occasional telegraph pole, stripped of its wires and lying at a drunken angle by the side of the road, is a reminder of our isolation. The remains of houses, snapped in half by shells and pock-marked by bullets, are evidence that farmers once lived here and tilled the fields that are now full of landmines. The road itself—the object of a determined campaign by government forces to open the land route to the isolated Jaffna Peninsula over the last decade—is at best an undulating strip of crumbling bitumen. At worst it's a corrugated dirt path that threatens to remove the undercarriage of any car travelling faster than walking pace.

Halfway to the town of Kilinochchi, which functions as the headquarters for the Tigers, the driver of our coughing Toyota van (owned by the Sri Lankan Red Cross) stops to pray at a Hindu shrine. He is joined by the driver of a truck loaded with soft-drink bottles and by groups of other travellers on their way to and from Jaffna. To one side is a billboard showing a painted likeness of a young Velupillai Prabhakaran, the talismanic leader of the Tigers, smiling out at worshippers and passers-by.

In every building used by the LTTE there is a photograph of the rebel leader, older and in uniform, standing under palmyra trees with a pistol on his belt and a vial of cyanide on a necklace outside his shirt. All LTTE cadres have cyanide to swallow if captured by Sri Lankan forces. In this blank landscape, pounded flat by years of fighting and controlled by indoctrinated people who are forbidden to drink or smoke, who are not allowed to marry before they have served five years and are over 30 years of age, Prabhakaran looms as large as if this were a religious cult in Mississippi.

In April, Prabhakaran gave his first press conference in a dozen years. It drew 350 local and foreign journalists along the A9 from the south. Judging from his startled expression throughout, Prabhakaran was taken aback by the attention and the vigorous questioning. Nonetheless, he used the opportunity to pledge his support for the Oslo-backed peace process.

In a disciplined and hierarchical organisation like the LTTE, Prabhakaran has been the paramount authority. He has masterminded the Tigers' progression from a band of a few guerrillas to an army capable of fighting a front-line war.

'Our 20-year conflict has been because of one fanatic,' says a director of the Sri Lankan Board of Investment. The Board

Far left: Bomb crater—result of an attack by the Sri Lankan Air Force on Vadaramachy East, March 2000.

Left: LTTE cadre with his cyanide capsule. The man was wounded during LTTE advances towards Jaffna during 1999–2000. His job is to film battles for propaganda and fundraising purposes.

Above: Van on Mannar causeway, where the former checkpoint no longer operates. Tamils are taking advantage of their new freedom of movement.

Photographs by Jon Greenaway.

is currently trying desperately to attract investment to help restart an economy crippled by the last administration's war budget. Spending on defence accounted for a third of GDP and contracted the economy last year. 'One fascist fanatic has held 18 million people to ransom.'

However, those who have met Prabhakaran since this round of negotiations started say that the Tiger leader has changed.

R. Sambandan is the elder statesman of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), the main Tamil parliamentary party from which Prabhakaran's youth wing split to form the LTTE in 1979. The TULF is currently in an alliance with four other Tamil parties that support direct negotiations with the LTTE (and, by extension, the Tigers' stated aim to be the sole representative of the Tamil people). All of the parties in the alliance have had members attacked or assassinated by the LTTE when Tamil parties were seeking a political solution that excluded the Tigers.

'I met Prabhakaran in the Wanni on the 12th of April and I have met him several times before that in Chennai and Madras in the mid-'80s. I met him for the first time in 1979 when he came to see me in my own constituency to offer me protection. He brought news that some Sinhalese radicals were wanting to bump me off.'

Sambandan tells me this in the dining room of the parliament buildings, hidden on the outskirts of Colombo. Earlier in the day he had met with the prime minister to urge that the momentum of the peace process be maintained by continuing to lift restrictions on the north and east. 'I found Prabhakaran very different this time to how I found him in the mid-'80s. He's mellower, he's more thoughtful, very mature. He's becoming a different person. He talked to me about his family, his children. You know, you can't keep fighting, you can't just keep on attacking camps, killing soldiers and capturing weapons—it's an unending process. He has come to realise that Eelam is not going to be a military achievement.'

IF THAT CHANGE in Prabhakaran means that others will assume more responsibility in the LTTE leadership, then one of the men likely to step up will be the leader of the LTTE's political wing, S.P. Thamilchelvam. Wounded in battle in the 1980s (he now walks with a cane) Thamilchelvam has become one of the Tigers' leading ideologues and the man responsible for drafting policy for meetings with government negotiators. Indications are that the LTTE are now prepared to negotiate a federal arrangement that will be a substitute for the creation of a separate state.

Thamilchelvam himself gave one of the strongest hints yet of a willingness to compromise: 'When the negotiations start and proposals and counter-proposals are put on the table and when we, or rather the Tamil people, find their aspirations met within the proposals put forward by the government, then we will be able to spell out whether we would be satisfied with a federal system or any other system of governance.'

But Thamilchelvam also had some strong words for the government—a sign that LTTE militancy has not evaporated.

'In Jaffna and other heartland areas there are still checkpoints and schoolchildren subjected to body checks every day. The presence of the checkpoints in densely populated areas is a thing that has been spelt out in the MOU that is being contravened. The people are also being prevented from returning to farming and fishing.'

'The onus lies with the government,' Thamilchelvam concludes. His words are a warning that face-to-face talks are conditional upon full implementation of the ceasefire agreement. (The most important condition for the LTTE, de-proscription, was tipped to come by the end of June.)

Yet though the LTTE are shaping to become less of a paramilitary group and more a political–bureaucratic organisation, Prabhakaran still has a key role to play keeping the Tigers from splintering.

'There are rumours of groups within the LTTE stating their dissatisfaction at having given 18,000 lives for the demand for an interim administration,' says Jehan Perera, Director of the National Peace Council. Perera is a long-time campaigner for an end to the conflict on terms that would satisfy the desire for self-rule.

'Prabhakaran is a supreme leader and as long as he is alive the LTTE will remain intact as an organisation. Even if there are dissidents, they will not be able to take any sizeable chunk of the organisation with them,' he concludes.

If negotiations proceed, it is difficult to imagine the LTTE administering a Tamil homeland in the north and east with the kind of openness the civilians in government-held territory have come to expect.

ON MANNAR ISLAND, a sand bar jutting out from the north-west coast of Sri Lanka, I visit one of a handful of LTTE offices opened in government-held areas as a prelude to full de-proscription of the Tigers.

Sitting in an austere room—bare walls and plain furniture—the head of political operations for the region declares his wish to combat pornography and the use of narcotics. The government, he implies, has allowed both to spread among the youth. Surprisingly, given the history of the LTTE's harsh treatment of Sri Lanka's other, Muslim, minority, the man bears a Muslim name, Amir Thap. But he refuses to talk about his past. When I ask three other cadres in the Wanni to nominate a social issue that needs attention they produce the same response, word for word. With the LTTE's history of silencing even Tamil dissent with violence, it seems unlikely they will make allowance for political groups with competing views, let alone for internal debate—despite Thamilchelvam's protests to the contrary.

'That is going to be the challenge for them,' the National Peace Council's Perera says. 'They organised demonstrations in support of themselves in Jaffna in April but have not staged any since. It is possible they are confident now they have the support of the majority of Tamil people and so maybe they can come at greater openness.'

Since the cessation of fighting, the people of the north and east, what the LTTE call Eelam, have enjoyed a rare period in the sun. The Jaffna Peninsula, cut off from the south for the last decade, is now open. Families long kept apart by restricted movement have been bussing around the

country to reunite. Goods have flowed to the north and, though prices are still up to 20 per cent higher than in the south because of transport costs and LTTE taxation, Jaffna is regaining some of its lost status as a trading town. The threat of the war that has brought pain to all communities in Sri Lanka is lessening day by day.

But the impact of two decades of conflict can still be seen in the psychiatric wards of Tellepalai District Hospital to the east of Jaffna town. Dr S. Sivayokan, one of only two trained psychiatrists in Jaffna, estimates that nearly 30 per cent of the peninsula's current population of 500,000 have at least minor symptoms of stress due to trauma.

'Anxiety, depression, insomnia—these sorts of effects. But so many do not see it as abnormal because everyone else is experiencing it as well,' Dr Sivayokan tells me as he prepares to chair a meeting of outreach workers and counsellors.

'There have been the deaths and disappearances, separation—some have been displaced nine or ten times in the last 20 years—and the impact of this has been greater because coping strategies are limited by poverty and often the lack of family.

'The ceasefire has helped but it will need to be sustained because it takes a long time to get rid of traumatised memory.'

The firmest indication that Sri Lanka is finally on its way to peace will come when the refugees move back to their homes. Some of the 800,000 people internally displaced have started to make the trip back to their villages. They are still wary—afraid that the pause in fighting may not last—and only a handful of the 65,000 refugees in camps in southern India have approached the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to be returned. The refugee agency is reluctant to recommend a return to their homes until there is a durable solution in place and efforts begin in earnest on infrastructure repair and removal of mines. More than two-thirds of arable land in the war zone is still seeded with anti-personnel mines.

Left: Selamdi, a retired fisherman, two days after returning to his village. He was lucky—one of the walls of his one-room house was still standing.

Above: The Mariadas family, returning home from a camp in the Wanni with their seven children. Their first act on arriving home was to right an overturned table and set on it a photograph of the son who died fighting for the Tigers in July 2000.

K. Soosaithas runs a shop in a thatched hut, in a refugee camp on land next to a church on Mannar. He sells plastic combs, fruit, cigarettes and not much else. Though their village is only four miles away, Mr Soosaithas will not move his wife and nine children until transport services resume and there is some sign of help to rebuild their home.

'Nothing is for sure. There is no permanent peace in sight, so for now we feel safer here.'

In the Wanni, people have begun trickling back to their villages. Two days after Selamdi, a 67-year-old retired fisherman, moved his wife and daughter's family from Mullaitivu back to his home in a village on the eastern coast of the Jaffna Peninsula, he concedes that they took a risk. But the accommodation was terrible where they were. There was no work and the mosquitoes were very bad, he tells me as we sip hot tea in the shade of his meagre hut riddled with rifle shot—the 'symbols of war' as he calls them in his limited, clear English.

'We know that if there is no peace agreement we will have war again, but if we lose our lives it is in our own place.'

The refrain of Sri Lanka's war, as in Kashmir and the Middle East, is that damning phrase 'intractable conflict'. The Sinhalese majority would never comprehend the Tamil wish for identity and cultural preservation through self-rule, and the LTTE would never renounce arms. Now, 19 years after Prabhakaran's first guerrilla raid in the north and Colombo's fatal Tamil riots, Sri Lanka is tantalisingly close to a solution. The final, irreversible steps will be the hardest for both sides to take. ■

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MICHELE M. GIERCK

The man who reads th

HIS EYES ARE piercing, his voice full of passion. There's intensity but also a tinge of weariness as he tells of his latest investigative travels in Afghanistan. 'Afghanistan is totally destroyed,' laments artist George Gittoes.

He describes a huge camp for internally displaced people inside Afghanistan: sub-zero temperatures, dysentery and pneumonia (life-threatening conditions in this part of the world), little if any access to aid. 'It's a living hell.' It makes him certain of one thing: it would be a mistake to repatriate asylum seekers from Australia to Afghanistan under current conditions.

Gittoes travelled in Afghanistan with Médecins Sans Frontières, visiting much of the country. He was filming, photographing and drawing. Descriptive notes border the charcoal figures he brings to life on the page; the people he draws often watch their own image emerge. Back in Australia, in his studio home bordering bushlands and bay in New South Wales, there is shelter and solace from the world in which he immerses himself. There is also space—for reflection, painting and speaking out.

Within weeks of his return to Australia in March, Gittoes had spoken on ABC *Radio National* and local radio countrywide, featured in *Tales from a Suitcase* and *Dateline* (both on SBS) and had his travel diary published in major print media. 'The art world still doesn't see journalism as having any place in art,' Gittoes says. Nonetheless, he is proud of the journalism in his own work.

George Gittoes has for the last two decades been in a remarkable number of hot spots around the globe. It is an unusual path for an artist, and made even more exceptional by the fact that Gittoes is ardently opposed to war. 'All war is my war and I've made it my war. My war is a war on war, and that's what my whole life's work is about. It's a cry for humanity. I've made myself an advocate for all these people who are caught up in these conflicts.' It seems like a heavy load.

Gittoes' work is not for escapists. His images from the front line are realistic, confronting and compelling. Yet, somehow, he also manages to capture extraordinary moments—glimpses of hope and determination in the inhumane darkness that is otherwise overwhelming. His depiction of Mirow and Awliya demonstrates this capacity. The scene is Somalia. The artist's notes beside the drawing read:

> Mirow is the grandmother of three little girls Awliya (6), Madaye (3) and Mariana (8). All are weak but Awliya is nearest death. Mirow brought the children to the aid centre after their mother had died. She had to carry them, as none were strong enough to walk. So Mirow would carry Awliya and Madaye (one on her back and one in her arms) for a kilometre—leave them and go back for Mariana, and so on for two weeks—which it took her to reach the aid station. She must have foraged for food as there was none left in the village they left ...

'I went through a phase in my art where I was interested in light,' says Gittoes, 'physical light as a metaphor for

Left: Mirow, the grandmother, with Awliya and Madaye. *Right:* Mirow carrying Awliya.

e signs

George Gittoes' work draws him to the extremes of human experience: he is artist, advocate and journalist, habitually in the thick of things.

spiritual light. I always loved the work of Monet and van Gogh, who translated the light of the landscape into colour ... What I look for now is light in the human spirit. You usually find it in the places of greatest darkness.'

Gittoes' 2001 exhibitions, 'Lives in the Balance' (South Africa), 'Across the Lines' (Yemen) and 'The Persistence of Hope' (Melbourne) used a variety of media. His photographs record a specific moment. The drawings capture what the camera cannot. The paintings are often the essence of the whole experience distilled into a single image. For his multimedia practice, Gittoes uses the model of Vincent van Gogh's letters to his brother Theo, particularly as they referred to Roulin, the postman in Arles. Gittoes: 'You read what van Gogh has to write about the postman, with so much love. Then put that next to the painting and the drawing [of the postman]; it means so much more than just seeing the painting and the drawing.' Gittoes believes that text is integral to his own art. He also imagines what it would be like if the postman could speak to us. It is the breadth of the story that Gittoes seeks, and he's prepared to experiment to achieve that. In the future he hopes to film interviews with the people he is drawing, so that their stories can sit beside his own work.

'Premier war artist' and 'a leading figurative artist' are common descriptions of Gittoes. In 1995 he won the Blake Prize for Religious Art for *The Preacher*, an extraordinary painting from Rwanda.

> *23 April 1995, Kibeho Camp, Rwanda*:
> Two days ago there were thousands of people standing and pleading for help. Now everything is flattened—bodies crumpled amidst rubbish—their few discarded possessions ...
>
> This afternoon as if walking though an invisible door, I came into a group who were calm. Though bursts of machine gun fire surrounded them—continually getting closer with terrifying inevitability—they remained a solid congregation—bound together not by walls, but by prayer.
>
> A solitary preacher read to them from a ragged bible—he was a tall man in a yellowish coat sitting high on a sack of grain. He spoke in French with a thick dialect—his voice hoarse and broken—but I could recognise the sermon on the mount. 'Heureux les cœurs purs: ils verront Dieu' ... blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God ...

Gittoes never did find out whether the preacher died. Afterwards, he looked everywhere for the yellow coat and continued the search several years later, unsuccessfully. 'I'd like to think he survived,' he reflects, but it is more a wish than a probability.

The ongoing connection the artist maintains with people he meets also extends to the problems they face over issues like, for example, the clearing of landmines. And Gittoes establishes personal relationships. Some, like the one with a young Cambodian woman called Lot, have been sustained over years.

When Gittoes first came across her in 1993, Lot was begging near Angkor Wat

Left: Lot, her drawing, and friend George Gittoes. *Right:* Gittoes' Blake Prize-winner, *The Preacher*. *Top:* Gittoes' 1991 etching, *Hounds*, from the Empire State Suite.

temple. Born with birth defects from defoliants (an often-forgotten consequence of the Vietnam War) she was also unfortunate enough as a child to have crawled on to an anti-personnel landmine. Gittoes' friendship with the beggar without legs and just one digit on one hand began publicly, on the streets. He noticed her pretty face and her intelligence.

Lot had been bought by an old man: for him, she was an ideal beggar, and she was bound to him for life. (Gittoes nicknamed the man Pol Pot.) When Gittoes first drew her, Lot looked at the work and then motioned him to draw her with hands and feet. That image became the artist's gift to her, one she delighted in. When, six years after their initial encounter, Gittoes returned once again, Lot was still begging in front of the temple, but she spoke to him in perfect English. How could that be?

Lot had determined she would gain her own freedom. When her owner resisted, she went on a hunger strike. 'You won't own anything,' she warned him. It took her near death to make her owner relent. Having won her freedom, Lot used it to negotiate the right to retain her two prime, strategically located, begging sites. These days Lot pays for her own tuition at a private school and begs in the afternoon. 'She makes a packet,' Gittoes laughs, so proud of her. Her ambition is to go on to university to study and become a human-rights lawyer so that she can work towards the banning of child slavery.

There are others: individuals like Missey from Rwanda, Mohad Jabary in Hebron or Ghuncha in Pakistan. But they are never just drawings in his books. These are people Gittoes visits as often as he can. He delights in their personal achievements, the odds having been so stacked against them. He revels in their stories.

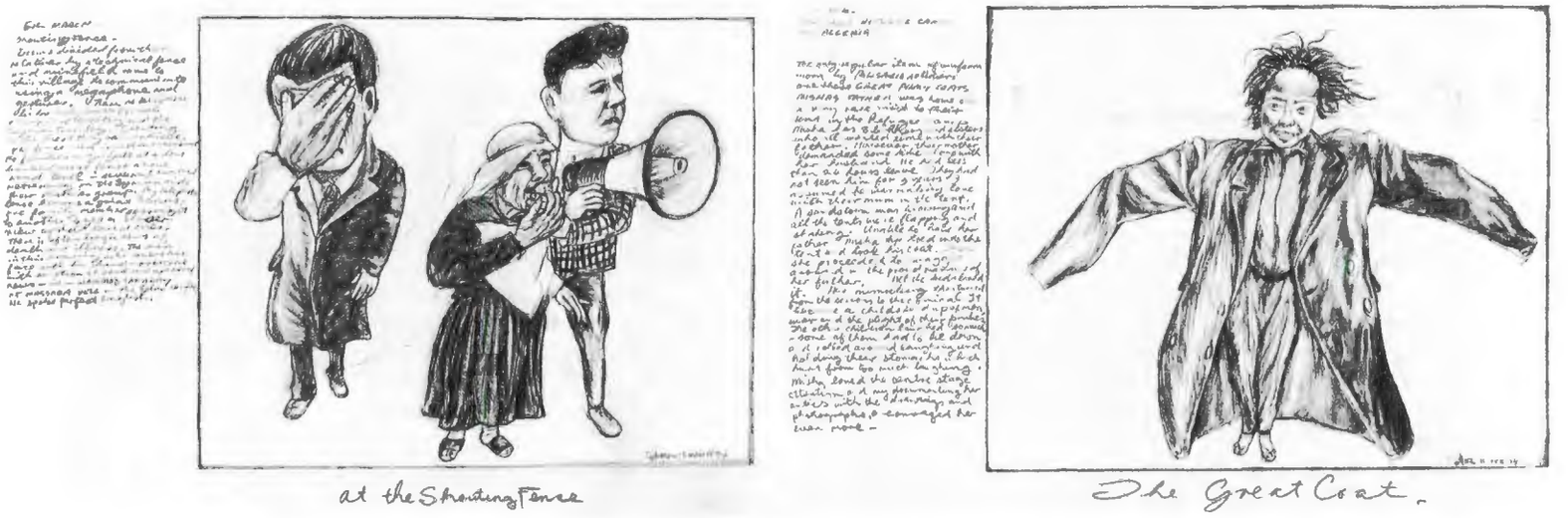
The relationship between the artist and the people he collaborates with (never once in the interview does he refer to them as 'subjects') is integral to his life and work. 'All the people who I draw and work with get to see the results of what I'm doing, and then they get involved and they want to go on telling their story.'

What was it that moved Gittoes from his early 'light as spiritual light' artistic phase to a more humanist, political aesthetic?

All he'd ever wanted to do was paint. He won his first Book Week Illustration Award at five years of age. In 1968, as a young artist, he went to the US. Inspired by the civil rights movement, his work was figurative, political. Returning to Australia, he found abstract art dominant and no-one interested in his figurative work. 'You reach a point you get so broke you can't survive doing it. So I had a period away from it. I thought for a while this was the right way to go, but essentially you are what you are, and my whole interest is in human beings, and humanity, and it's about passion. So after a few years I just had to swing back.'

During this time Gittoes and his partner, Gabrielle Dalton, had begun tutoring Aboriginal children who came from far western NSW to Kirinari Hostel in Sylvania for their secondary education. Through a combination of documentary-making and interest in Aboriginal issues, Gittoes swung back into political art. At the time, Indigenous rights were not high on the political agenda. *Tracks of The Rainbow*, filmed in 1979, took a group of these Aboriginal children back into places of special significance in the Northern Territory. It was followed by *Warriors and Lawmen*, a Gittoes and Dalton co-production that highlighted the conflict between white and Aboriginal law. Its making, in 1983–84, endeared the makers neither to the Northern Territory government nor to the police.

But the documentary proved the turning point in Gittoes' career. 'Everything came together in *Warriors and Lawmen*; for the first time I combined film with journalism and storytelling and painting.' There was a moment during the filming when Gittoes turned to Dalton excitedly: 'I've found it, I've found the perfect formula for the rest of my life's work. This is what I'm here for. This is it—working across the mediums in this way.' But there was more still to discover.



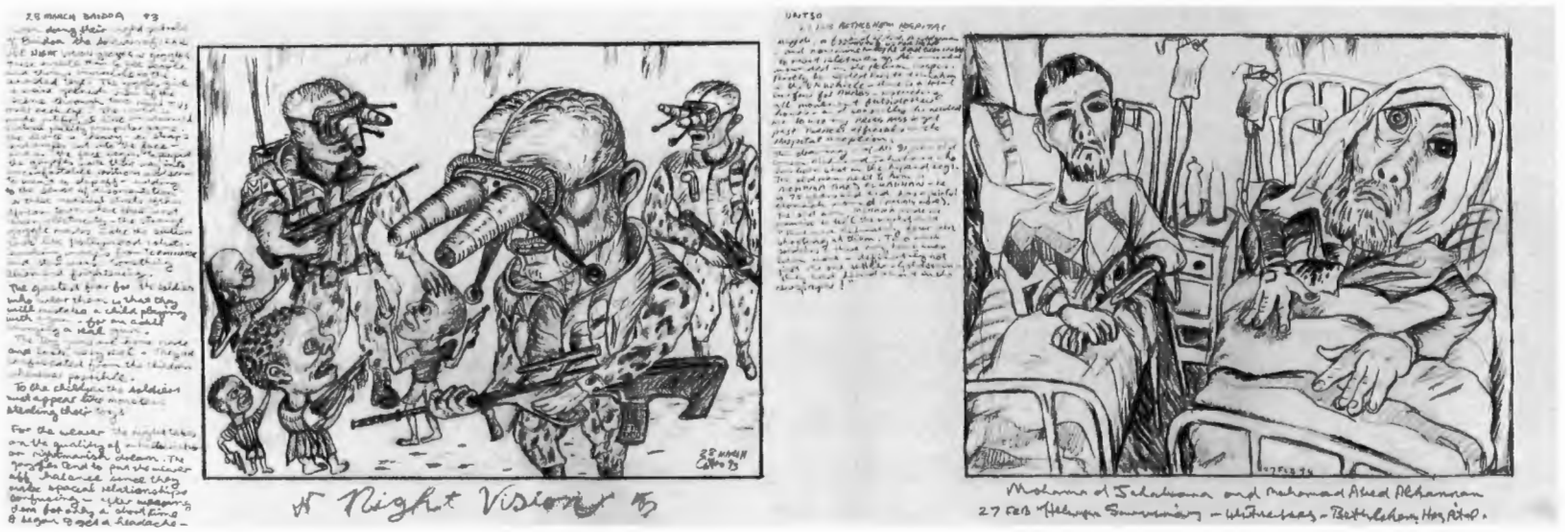
Gittoes' workbooks are in the great tradition of art and text—the words extending the images, the images fixing the moment in imagination and memory. These four pages from *Drawing on Peace: Observations of United Nations Peacekeeping* are Gittoes at his best—wry as well as profoundly involved in the lives he records. At left, families arbitrarily divided by a fence in the Golan Heights shout to one another through megaphones. At right, the child in the army greatcoat is Misha, from Polisario in the Western Sahara. The coat is her father's. She took it when he returned home from war, and swaggered in it as he did—child satire.

In 1986, film-making beckoned him overseas for *Bullets of the Poets*, a documentary about five Nicaraguan women—revolutionaries (Sandinistas) and poets. They found poetry to be a powerful weapon in times of struggle and social change. During the filming, Gittoes met poet Ernesto Cardinal, who had invented a literary movement called 'externalism'. Cardinal solved a problem Gittoes had with both the art world and the intellectual world. Externalism rejected both modernism and postmodernism. Life was to be an immersion, out in the field, not locked away in a solitary room. Cardinal's assurance was that through participation, bodies scattered. He realised he must fight the Contras, and reported immediately to the Sandinista Army. When the army informed him they could not waste a gun on anyone so decrepit, he replied, 'What if I get my own gun?'

A crack American Special Forces unit with the latest M16 sub-machine guns was stationed nearby. So determined was the old man, he sneaked in and stole one. He returned to the village and, with rudimentary technology, turned the flash sub-machine gun into something that could take local ammunition.

Gittoes explains how the man's story affected him. 'I drew *The Captured Gun*.

His recent visit to Afghanistan was to be followed by a visit to Berlin to complete some work for the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, and to attend a subsequent meeting in Amsterdam. But Afghanistan drained Gittoes in the same way Rwanda had seven years before. Once in Europe he became aware that he had lost what he refers to as his 'protective force field'. There was only one thing to do: the Amsterdam leg was cancelled. Gittoes headed home to wife Gabrielle, his two children and the community at Bundeena in NSW. Without that secure base, Gittoes is sure he would have fallen apart long ago.



In 'Night Vision', African soldiers in Baidoa wear night-vision goggles which help them see in the dark but which also disorient them. Children's toys can be mistaken for real guns—with obvious consequences. The last drawing, right, is of two men, Mohammed Jahabara and 75-year-old Mohama Abed Alkannan, in a Bethlehem hospital. Both were wounded at the Hebron Mosque. Both had family to be contacted. Gittoes became both artist and go-between.

'things would happen'—life itself would provide the metaphors. There was no equivalent movement in painting, but Gittoes knew immediately that he was an 'externalist'. 'I realised what I was—like an ugly duckling realising you're a swan.'

Out in the field in Nicaragua with a group of Sandinista soldiers, Gittoes found himself accompanied by 'a little old hunchbacked, crippled man'—his assigned minder. He was intrigued by the fact that this fellow carried a US weapon when the rest of the patrol carried Russian versions. 'How did you get an American rifle?' he inquired.

This was the story. The old man had returned home one day to find everyone in the village dead, their dismembered For me this became the metaphor for the whole conflict, because at that time you had one of the smallest countries in Latin America taking on the military might of America. That's what this crippled little man and his resourcefulness, to me, epitomised.' The artist, as Cardinal had taught, had not had to invent a metaphor. He had already found the metaphor that said everything about the conflict. 'That has become my yardstick for work ever since.' (See cover for Gittoes' *The Captured Gun*.)

Gittoes arrived in Nicaragua unsure of what he was doing. In making *Bullets of the Poets*, the synthesis he had first experienced in *Warriors and Lawmen* returned. It was a defining period in his work. Sixteen years later, he's still following that path.

He adds, 'I've always felt directed. My whole life is reading the signs. There is no map, no pattern, no model, and you can't model yourself on other artists. I do believe there is something better than a map—a system of little signs and symbols that you learn to read ... I work on this invisible map and I really think it's there for all of us, and that's what keeps us alive.'

But it's been a long haul. Gittoes' path has had its ups and downs. His sense of vocation and his independence as an artist come at a cost, but he has clearly found the language and audience—national and international—for his art. His exhibition, 'The Persistence of Hope', will tour nationally in 2003. ■

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Global rules

While Senegal was celebrating and France was drowning its sorrows, photographer *Peter Davis* was in Mexico (they'd just tied with Italy). In the *Zocalo*, Mexico City's grand central plaza, he spotted these soccer (and other assorted) balls on sale. The balls were, of course, made in China.

Refining Rebecca

OUR DOG, A BOXER PUP named Becky (short for Beckett—well, all right, Rebecca), recently discovered a copy of *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr and E.B. White and chewed up large chunks of it.

When you live with an editor, you are accustomed to seeing Strunk and White lying around upstairs and downstairs and certainly in my lady's chamber—or 'office' as she prefers to call it, for some reason. Multiple copies of Strunk and White manifest themselves throughout the editorial household the way versions of the Bible might proliferate in a vicarage, or copies of the old *Miller's Guide* might be lovingly archived in the town house, the country estate and the beach retreat of a bookie.

In our house, Strunk and White stares out from more than one bookcase, stands on a kitchen bench, prim and dégagé, between *The Cook's Companion* and *Cooking with Verjuice* and, despite its pocket size, is daunting in its sheer puritanical presence and ubiquity. (There is no comma after *Verjuice* because *in a series of three or more terms with a single conjunction, use a comma after each term except the last*—Strunk and White, p2.)

Looked at from one point of view, the mastication of Strunk and White was not a particularly serious event. There remain, after all, numerous alternative copies. Yet I worried about it. Might not Becky, in savaging our *Elements of Style*, have inadvertently—or rather, in savaging our *Elements of Style*, might not Becky (*the subject of a sentence and the principal verb should not, as a rule, be separated by a phrase or clause that can be transferred to the beginning*—p29) have inadvertently struck another blow at the language? If Strunk and White is a repository of good usage, and it assuredly is, who knows but what Becky's attack might not have deprived the language of just a little more of its authority and reach. (In prose *the line between the atrocious and the felicitous is sometimes alarmingly fine*—p77.)

Think about it. Something or someone is waging war on the language. Have you actually met or heard of the person who changed 'impact' to a verb? Of course you haven't. Any more than you know who is responsible for the abandonment of 'uninterested' and the conscription of 'disinterested' to do both jobs. (*Disinterested means 'impartial'. Do not confuse it with uninterested, which means 'not interested in'*—p44.) Or, who ruled magisterially (*be sparing in the use of adverbs*—p75) that the adjectival use of 'appropriate' should be extended to have a moral dimension? (see any speech by Philip Ruddock in which the word 'detainee' also appears); or that 'mitigate against' should replace the correct 'militate against'? Or that 'hopefully'—but don't start me on 'hopefully' (*not merely wrong, it is silly*—p48).

Obviously the decline of the language is due to (*Due to is loosely used for through, because of or owing to ... in correct use synonymous with attributable to*—p45) the gradual destruction (as in cases of canine irresponsibility), neglect or immobilisation of the great repositories of language usage, such as, *inter alia* (*Anglo-Saxon is a livelier tongue than Latin, so use Anglo-Saxon words*—p76) such as, among others, *The Elements of Style*.

THE LANGUAGE, you see, is not deteriorating because of sloppy usage; sloppy usage is creeping in because the important arbiters of language, the textual authorities, are being silenced, overlooked.

And I don't think dogs are mainly to blame, frankly. I mean, admittedly Becky is culpable, and any jury would send her to the pound for gross literary turpitude—the more so if a coroner had examined those critical parts of Strunk and White that she particularly rendered unreadable: 'Words and Expressions Commonly Misused', which no doubt she totalled with *one foul blow*; and 'Form the possessive singular of nouns by adding 's' (test all the cappuccino's, CD's and Pizza's that you see round town against that one).

Becky's crime could certainly be revealed as deliberate, more than negligence or 'doggy derring-do', as the man said, and would conceivably qualify under rigorous cross-examination as malfeasance or tort. But that's another matter.

To fight the pernicious conspiracy that has embargoed, quarantined, segregated, marooned, sequestered and estranged the great repositories of language usage, we must get them back into circulation, and they must be made mandatory reading. If we're quick enough about this, we could have Strunk and White included in the anti-terrorist legislation presently under discussion, so that anyone over the age of eight found not to have Strunk and White in his or her possession and further found to fail an on-the-spot, short-answer test on its basics, would be declared a terrorist under the act. A language terrorist.

In the last analysis (*a bankrupt expression*—p49), it is not in terms of (*a piece of padding usually best omitted*—p50) undisciplined dogs that we should see the crisis in English, at least for the foreseeable future (*a cliché, and a fuzzy one*—p59), but as a case of literary terrorism and therefore to be appropriately (!) included in the strategies of the war on terror. This should be the thrust (*a showy noun, suggestive of power, hinting of sex*—p61) of our campaign to revive the language. The prosecution rests (*empty, derivative gesture*). ■

Brian Matthews is a writer and academic.

PETER STEELE

Swerving to happiness

A letter to the world: love and Peter Porter

ONE WAY TO FIND the grain of Peter Porter's poetry is to proceed allusively, since few things are more characteristic of his imagination than its tendency to touch off associations, as a single match may light one candle—and sometimes one powder-train—after another. So in coming at the matter of love in Porter's poetry, I shall begin with a fragment not from his own poetry or from his uncommonly spirited prose, but from the Polish/American poet Czeslaw Milosz. In a recently published piece, 'Falling in Love', Milosz writes:

> *Tomber amoureux.* To fall in love. Does it occur suddenly or gradually? If gradually, when is the moment 'already'? I would fall in love with a monkey made of rags. With a plywood squirrel. With a botanical atlas. With an oriole. With a ferret. With a marten in a picture. With the forest one sees to the right when riding in a cart to Jaszuny. With a poem by a little-known poet. With human beings whose names still move me. And always the object of love was enveloped in erotic fantasy or was submitted, as in Stendhal, to a 'cristallisation,' [*sic*] so it is frightful to think of that object as it was, naked among the naked things, and of the fairy tales about it one invents. Yes, I was often in love with something or someone. Yet falling in love is not the same as being able to love. That is something different.

Porter's poetry is of quite a different temper from that of Milosz, but I find these lines remarkably suggestive when one is considering Porter's ways of addressing love. And 'ways' they are, not only because of the decades during which the poems were written, but because part of Porter's agenda is to bring to the fore love's element, small or great, of enigma. It is an aim which makes for probative writing—for testings of the water, soundings of the rock. Reflect a little on some of the elements in Milosz's fragment.

Of falling in love, he asks, 'Does it occur suddenly or gradually?' Porter writes of love, passingly or at length, in at least a third of his poems, and commonly he is talking about the intersection of love and time—of seized or fugitive moments, of snapped and revisited incidents. He is classical in his attention to love as that which may be stronger than death but which is always attended and menaced by mortality; and in the matter of love, as in the matter of art, he is engrossed recurrently by the relationship between distantiation and imminence, a relationship often expressed by dreams, which bid for our total attention, and yet are by definition fugitive. Elias Canetti envisages in a notebook entry a 'labyrinth made of all the paths one has taken', and Porter's framings of love have something of that about them. They have the dark vividness of labyrinth, and a fixed attention to things done or yet to be done.

When Milosz says that he would 'fall in love with a monkey made of rags. With a plywood squirrel. With a botanical atlas. With an oriole' and so on, I am reminded of the fact that Porter is a master of what might be called domestic or intimate bricolage. That is, he writes partly with a hospitality towards the

countless items which surround love's occasions, and partly from a sense that these may do more than attend certain moments, and may in fact be love's talismans, its lares and penates. I offer in evidence the poem 'Little Buddha', whose epigraph is 'Ich bin der Liebe treuer Stern', which is rendered, later in the poem, as 'I / Am love's ever-faithful star.'

To see its porcelain smile
  Is a surprise in that room
With the electronic junk,
  The albums, the morning gloom,
The empty Pils neatly piled
By the futon, the light sunk
  To a hangover of dreams
  And yet, whatever it seems,
Whether indifferent to
  Fate or expectation or
Luck, its surveillance tells you
  Love can't walk out through the door.

Unbelievers, still stung by
  The need to construct a trust,
Like to set some piece of kitsch
  In place, a Madonna, bust
Of Shakespeare, Sports Day trophy,
Anything numinous which
  Shines in the Humanist dark,
  For they are set to embark
On an unknowable sea
  And the call-sign from afar
In darkness and light is 'I
  Am love's ever-faithful star.'

You sing this and try to prove
  It by rational choosing,
By doing without the bounty
  Of high romantic losing,
Keeping instead to a love
Durable as accounting,
  Traditional as the rhyme's
  Approximated sublime,
And you let the Buddha fix
  On you its unchanging look
Outfacing digital clicks
  And the brandishing of books.

But the warp remains in the soul,
  The obscenity of faith,
The creed that runs in the blood,
  The seventy years of safe
Excess succeeding control,
A dream of desert and flood,
  Of God at the index points
  Whose gift of loving anoints
The numinous animal
  With lyrical avatars,
The lure of impersonal
  Truth, a silence of the stars.

'Little Buddha' is one of many poems by Porter which cock the wariest of eyebrows at the human proneness to go a religious way: but it is quite as reserved about the endorsement of banality as an authentic human way. If 'love' is to some degree a floating signifier in the poetry, it is not one fit to float in shallow waters. Porter is impatient of, even incredulous about, the merely ornamental. He can in season have as vehement a sense as, say, Giacometti's, that commonplace entities are copious with significance—though what that significance may be it is part of the business of the poems to feel for. Their feeling for it, in turn, requires excisions and exactions. Porter's poems task the reader, since the experience which they both enact, and are, is itself tasking. Hence the imaginative span which tautens through, for instance, the second stanza of 'Little Buddha'—'Unbelievers, still stung', etc.

The last three lines of that stanza—'And the call-sign from afar / In darkness and light is "I / Am love's ever-faithful star." '—may remind us of two things. The first is that, as Virgil was to Dante, Auden is to Porter; and the second is that Dante himself can be more than a *bête noire* to Porter (which he occasionally is) and can be a kind of provocative counter-example to many of Porter's essayings of love's definition. Auden wrote often of love as though it knew him thoroughly while he badly wanted to know it: Dante, in the *Vita Nuova* as well as in the *Commedia*, wrote of love both as summoning and as chastening—as that which enjoins and confutes, and above all surprises. Porter's mentality, sensibility and idiom all differ from Dante's in abundant ways; but the poets do share a conviction that insofar as there are *stelle* or *sterne* to be invoked when love is in question, these are burning things indeed. To be 'the numinous animal' may be all very well, but it is also, proportionately, to be the taxed animal, if love is the numen.

PORTER, WRITING OF love not as an abstraction or in isolation but as something given, lived or quested for, writes of it with mixed feelings. Mixed feelings are indeed his *métier*. His poems blend them, attempt to transform them, and display them. This is so, too, when, after the fashion of Milosz, he falls in love with 'a poem by a little-known poet'. There are, when we think about it, ways and ways of being 'little-known'. Porter, for all his wide and deep versing in the range of the poets of the past and the present, is interested, I think, not in the esoteric but in the imperfectly divulged. The 20th-century theoretical interest in that which is 'made strange' in language is something powerful in Porter, not only in the fashioning of his own poems—many of their titles, alone, bear witness to this—but in his attention to the poetry of others. That many a magus is spurious does not mean that many a magic is not genuine in poetry; and it is this starry but elusive magic which commands homage

in much of Porter's writing about other poets, as about music and the visual arts. Sometimes love itself is cited by name: but even without this, one would see allegiance as part of the agenda, and indebtedness as part of the theme. Such poems, themselves writing through mixed feelings, foster a more perfect divulging of what has been going on in the arts addressed. Porter, who is unflinching in his characterising of 'a lift ascending to the floors / of non-existence [where] They wait there for us, / our friends and lovers recognizable / as we shall be by their perfect missingness', is still abundantly haunted by ghostly poetic mentors—as for instance in his poem, 'Happiness':

> The world's a window on to death
> With killers closing in to kill,
> But love of life's a shameless zest
> Persisting still.
>
> The sun eclipsed by passing cloud,
> The icicle upon the sill,
> With feeling in their gift were proud
> Of standing still.
>
> To have survived another night
> Is all the pelting bloodstream's skill
> And purpose through the octave's height
> Sounds surely still.
>
> Our language lacks George Herbert's nerve,
> His more can only make ours less,
> And yet we cross his lines and swerve
> To happiness.

Porter has written illuminatingly, elsewhere, of Herbert's art. This time, we have a version of 'imitation' in its literary sense, namely a piece of writing which, itself deeply indebted to a preceding work, still contrives to make its own distinctive and divergent way. On this occasion, happily, the more Porter does this, the more he emulates Herbert, a poet for whom complexity and simplicity were matched as a matter of course, and one in whom replication and transformation both bid for priority in his many hundreds of allusions to prior texts. The 'love of life' to which Porter refers in his poem is, one sees on a little reflection, also a love of the life of Herbert's poems, for all their otherness in doctrinal stance, in 'nerve', and as Porter would agree, in calibre. Without Herbert's distinctive example, there would have been no such poem as Porter's 'Happiness'; but without Porter's poem, some of Herbert's own stringencies would be less apparent.

Considering Herbert, and Porter, and Milosz on the 'little-known poet', I am reminded that the traditional preoccupations with 'the art of love' and the 'art of poetry' can be fused, and have been, many times. I have in mind not so much the poetry of seduction, distinguished though some of its exemplars may be, as the art of poetry as *itself* an art of love. Whether this is so, and if so, whether this is good news or bad, is a question rehearsed, at least implicitly, in countless exercises, in prose and in verse, in our own time. On one account, all poetry is doomed, or possibly summoned, to be an art of linguistic narcissism. This view can have its consolations: as Auden put it, '"After all," sighed Narcissus the hunchback, "on *me* it looks good."' Porter, who is among more important things a virtuoso of the linguistic, has little to learn about the proneness of words to fold back upon themselves. But like anyone for whom language is felt as both intimate and instrumental, and for whom the world of things and persons alternately beckons and turns its back, he can scarcely let the matter rest there. After all, for some poets at least, the primary question remains, first to last, 'what is going on?', to be followed closely by, 'and does this call for praise, or for blame, or for both?' When, as for Porter, things 'go on' seamlessly in word and in world—where passion for utterance and passion for understanding are virtually indistinguishable—the matters of love in or of the world, and of love in or of language, are things which have to be renegotiated in each poem.

Canetti, again, has a notebook entry which goes, 'To dismantle noise', which I take to be a good policy; and another which goes, 'Elegant, well-curried words', which I take to provoke second thoughts. Much of Porter's writing about poetry, about drama, and about music, could have been done under the rubric, 'In praise of those who dismantle noise'. But he has a constitutional aversion to mere gleam or gloss in the fruits of the mind, and a deep suspicion of that currying of language which looks for all the world like a currying of favour with literary, cultural or political Maecenases. Hence the writing of poems which become, if anything, all the warier as they make their way into the initial wave-chop, or the high seas, of love. Here, for instance, is 'Verb Sap':

> Nothing they say of this
> Infinite mystery
> Love could disparage
> More than its usual
> Course through extremity
> Safe into marriage
>
> High expectation of
> Personal happiness,
> Magic achievement—
> One takes on dozens of
> Lovers, another stays
> High on bereavement—
>
> Each plays the cold self game,
> Seeing in love's face a
> Secret opponent
> Where the advantage is,

Mirrored attraction or
Pious atonement.

Poetry knows its role,
Lending its rhythms to
All that's enduring,
Servitude, blandishment,
Irrationality,
Even procuring.

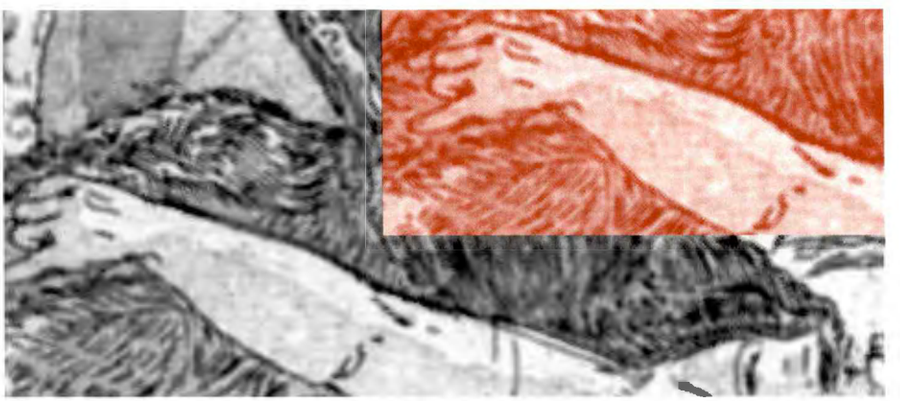
This is a poem which displays Porter's instinct for thought as a testing at once of the prevailing and of the countervailing. One consequence of such an attitude is that his writing is incorrigibly dramatic. It is not only a question of such ironising contrasts as those italicised in rhyme—'disparage/marriage', 'achievement/bereavement', 'opponent/atonement' and so on—the gambit taught by Rochester, Swift and Pope. There is also, in the poem, a rake of mind across mystery, institution, emotion, psychic contrivance, expediency, summoning, and piety as accommodation. And it is in such a milieu that poetry is invited on-stage, to be a kind of servitor of the largely charmless, though the still enchanting—'Servitude, blandishment, / Irrationality, / Even procuring.'

I doubt whether I am alone in hearing behind these words an echo of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, with all its modalities of attention to love thrown in, including that of Leporello. I mention this because that opera is, at least, about beguilement: and as operas must if they are to be at all, it enacts the beguilement which it also deprecates. Porter's poem is called, with cryptic eloquence, 'Verb Sap'—'a word will do for the wise one'—and it is launched with an allusion to 'this / Infinite mystery / Love'. These are moves to hint at a relationship between insight and enigma in what is to follow. Auden, in one of his half-dozen most famous poems, adjured the poet of his choice to 'sing of human unsuccess / In a rapture of distress'; that knottedness at the heart of aspiring song is also the key point of Porter's attention. It is as if love and poetry give each other warrant in his writing, both of them committed to Canetti's turn towards a 'labyrinth made of all the paths one has taken', and each supposing that the outcome may be an encounter not with the Minotaur, but with a Cretan light.

Such a supposition has its critical case at the pitch to which Milosz refers—those fallings in love 'With human beings whose names still move me.' Once upon a time, Porter's poems were anthologised with a special eye to his 'Phar Lap in the Melbourne Museum', which concludes by saying that 'It is Australian innocence to love / The naturally excessive and be proud / Of a big-boned chestnut gelding who ran fast.' There is more at issue here than the concessions, and perhaps the condescension, of an inspector of insularity who was a long way from home. But this and others of Porter's poems were to be moved aside by a magisterial work, his 'An Exequy', which is modelled after Bishop King's 17th-century poem of almost the same name, a poem which also addressed the death, and invoked the presence, of a lost young wife. 'An Exequy' is well known and has had admirable attention elsewhere. But let me make a point or two.

Rudolf Arnheim, in his *Parables of Sun Light*, writes that:

> The tranquillity of domestic animals keeps us from remembering how breathless a vigilance is required for the ordinary pursuit of life in the wild. Watch a goldfinch hastily pecking his seeds while his head darts in all directions to make sure that interferences from anywhere can be responded to with lightning speed. How much fortification of the environment it took to protect us from a way of life in which constant mortal danger is a pervasive condition!

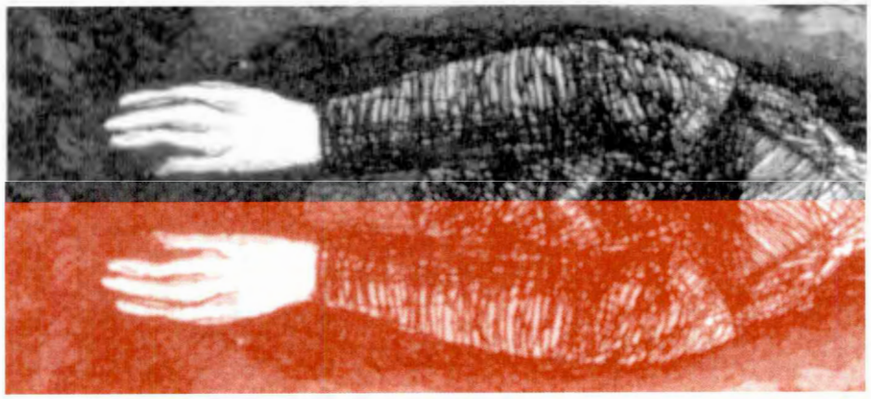


That 'constant mortal danger is a pervasive condition' is an imaginative axiom of Porter's poetry. Arnheim's 'in the wild' can be transposed, at a millisecond's interval, into the human stockade. (I think here too of the attitude reported of an Inuit tribesman who, asked about the beliefs of his people, replied, 'We do not believe: we fear.') The emblems or tokens of this exposedness are many—above all, perhaps that of exile, upon which Bruce Bennett's book on Porter (*Spirit in Exile: Peter Porter and His Poetry*, OUP 1991) is eloquent, and which is surely normative for an understanding of much of his work. It is certainly true that 'An Exequy' is animated by a sense of past, and present, and future 'constant mortal danger'—animated too by unillusioned resoluteness in the midst of such a state of affairs. This in part is how it looks, and sounds:

The rooms and days we wandered through
Shrink in my mind to one—there you
Lie quite absorbed by peace—the calm
Which life could not provide is balm

In death. Unseen by me, you look
Past bed and stairs and half-read book
Eternally upon your home,
The end of pain, the left alone.
I have no friend, or intercessor,
No psychopomp or true confessor
But only you who know my heart
In every cramped and devious part—
Then take my hand and lead me out,
The sky is overcast by doubt,
The time has come, I listen for
Your words of comfort at the door,
O guide me through the shoals of fear—
'Fürchte dich nicht, ich bin bei dir.'

'The shoals of fear'. We hear of these, or their equivalents, at other points in Porter's poetry. At the end of 'Essay on Dreams' he writes, 'And dreams have



never heard of history / or style, but like our childhood games / they knock us into love with present fear.' In 'Death's Door', Porter meditates on the fact that we 'with no evidence say love is real / Though fear like Fafner keep the iron gate'. If it is true that all dramatic characters are conditioned by the plays in which they occur, it is also true that all estimations take their colour or flavour in part from the poems in which they occur—they are not ubiquitously deployable tokens. Still, that love and fear are often twinned in this poetry is surely not an incidental matter. After all, what other two emotions or dispositions make more peremptory claims on our attention?

My own sense, though, is that it is the tally of the dangers that may menace us, rather than of the fears to which those dangers may give rise, which most exercises the poetry. Porter's writing is commonly that of someone who is standing to arms: the 'vigilance' to which Arnheim refers is one of its animating principles; and, in it, love attends those who, with good reason, are vigilant. It is a commonplace of criticism of Porter's poetry that there is no apt way of reading it which relaxes alertness; the evidence cited for such a proposition would include its elasticity of wit, its copiousness of cultural allusion, its precision of reference coupled with vivacity of interpretation. To these, though, I would add the fact that the poetry, even when its *esprit* is marked, is pitched as a *warding*. And if we are not attentive to that as this poetry's way, it is unlikely that we will know what the poetry is.

One thing which makes the conclusion of 'An Exequy' remarkable is its holding, to the very end, a tension between love and warding. Well enough for Bishop King, granted his resurrectional expectations, to say at the end of his poem, '*Dear* (forgive / The crime) I am content to live / Divided, with but half a heart, / Till we shall meet and never part'; but as Porter wrote in his '"Talking Shop" Tanka', after a citation of John Donne's naming his dead wife's blessedness, 'I can't go on, / I share death not faith with Donne.' Porter's 'An Exequy' faces to the last his own exposedness—a heart cramped and devious, a sky overcast by doubt, the fears shoaling—and it appeals, in the words of a scripture in which he does not believe, to a love in which he cannot bear not to believe. To write like this is indeed to find aesthetic closure; but it is also to shake the house of art.

To mention the house of art is to be reminded of another remarkable poem of Porter's, his 'John Ford Answers T.S. Eliot.' Eliot said of that 17th-century playwright that he had a 'distinct personal rhythm in blank verse which could be no one's but his alone', but Eliot had plenty of reservations about Ford's work, as indeed others have had. Porter's Ford redivivus has striking things to say of his art—and of the loves with which it is concerned. Here is the poem.

You knew I was a lawyer, why be surprised
by my distinctive style? Overall, my plays
aren't centred, but what I know of men
tells me centres will form only when
storms erupt to make them. My poetry
is what a lawyer might describe as small
instances growing great occasionally
(that is on sporadic and ingenious
occasions): for this I listened to the manner
men and women, tiring of the means they use
to hide their thoughts or to mislead
their interlocutors, may suddenly,
as philosophers will do, rush into compact
forms of language not malleable
as dialogue—their passions striking them
without advertisement or strategy,
they loop around them such forensic toils
as make pleached gardens out of parkland.
The paradox is poetry, a sort of
versified cascade not requiring metaphor
but like a fountain in a blindfold villa
unmistakably an image of the heart.

Why, three hundred years ahead of me,
you should commend me for belief in love
eludes me. What is there else to write of?
You with the urgings of an impotence
appropriate to your short-breathed age will put
your own adopted crinkle-crankle doubt
into the sort of poetry which won't
assimilate mankind—instead pathetic
Nature and the ramblings of a rhetor God
are called to make your language beautiful.
You are a Psalmist doing without the smell
of burning flesh. Good and evil mixed, you say,
is not the way to justify a knack
with cadencing, and further, I make occasion
fill the cast-list. And here you're wrong
since you resort so often to that arid
concept 'character'. Brutish husbands, vengeful lovers
are simply steeds the words can ride—if every
speaker were the same at each intrusion
on a sentence, then personae might make character—
instead, I write the only poetry
the broken heart has known—not sympathy
for this or that distracted humanoid
but palaces and obelisks and tombs
of diction, and I set before you shapes
with names and callings, sub-contract them to
a place of some malignity and then
I watch. As they come into focus, syntax
stirs and seeks its opportunity:
for this the human race was made, to build
its only lasting Babel, rusticate
the puffed-up feelings and the blemishes
of tragic pity. I have the instrument
to deal with ruined love—to outlast thought
by being before thought what it would say.

At the beginning of his poem 'The Truest Poetry is the Most Feigning', Auden enjoins, 'By all means sing of love but, if you do, / Please make a rare old proper hullabaloo'; Porter's Ford may not be making a rare old proper hullabaloo, but he certainly favours the ellipses and enfolding conceits commended in that poem. The John Ford who speaks here is, in lawyerly fashion, making out his own best case, and his voice is no more to be identified simply with that of Mr Porter of Brisbane and London than are the various other ventriloquial utterings which can be heard in the *Collected Poems*. At the same time, his brief touches on some of the most important elements of Porter's practice. One of these is a deepset policy of writing of love as something which is radically implicated in language: speechless love is none of his business. There is, it is true, some clone of Caliban to be heard in Porter's writing, that Caliban who, speaking to Prospero, says bitterly that, 'You taught me language, and my profit on it / Is, I know how to curse': Porter knows that language is as prone to taint as anything else. He also knows that, for all its potential vehemence and its frequent majesty, language itself, in all its works, is perpetually liable to appear strange. Wittgenstein said that if a lion could speak, we could not understand it; for Porter, there is something leonine about language itself. Nonetheless, it is a major way, perhaps the major way, by which we can be ourselves at all, and as such it has an intimate and perdurable relationship with the love, or the loves, by which we can also be ourselves at all. Hence, as I take it, the centrality of a poem like 'John Ford Answers T.S. Eliot.'

Porter's Ford says, 'what I know of men / tells me centres will form only when / storms erupt to make them.' In another of his poems, 'Bellini and Heine Come to Dinner', Porter has Bellini say, 'The calm before the storm, the calm which follows it, / anyone, Countess, can show us that. It is the calm / within the storm which I compose.' To compose 'the calm within the storm' is, recurrently, Porter's aim—the calm of language, even while it is mediating agitation, disarray and inconclusion. Some poets, and among them some of the best, write as though following a formula from Canetti, who speaks of 'Pause after pause, and in between, quadrangles of words like fortresses.' Porter's way is usually more supple, and more subtle, than that. Of some of his own work, and especially when he is speaking of love, it might be said that 'The paradox is poetry, a sort of / versified cascade not requiring metaphor / but like a fountain in a blindfold villa / unmistakably an image of the heart.'

Ford was nothing if not provocative, and his voice in Porter's poem remains so. 'I write the only poetry / the broken heart has known—not sympathy / for this or that distracted humanoid / but palaces and obelisks and tombs / of diction' he says, and 'for this the human race was made, to build / its only lasting Babel'. In saying this he is the inheritor, and the modifier, of a long tradition of the poets who model fulfilled or unfulfilled love as something lodged in language, that lodgement itself being a consolation, but also being a reminder that consolation is called for. Porter has a longstanding fascination with the most famous of all broken towers, the one which is called 'Babel'. Around this he deploys, in various poems, sentiments ranging from mockery to celebration, the tower embodying meanwhile a haunting blend of endeavour and hubris, of spectacle and futility. Babels are both profoundly unsatisfactory and permanently unforgettable, and as such they are well placed to stand for language, and for the loves which sometimes recognise themselves in language.

Of some of these last, Porter can speak in comic vein, as when for instance, he says in 'Throw the Book at Them':

Proust could get ten thousand lines from
one night at a party and Robert Browning
knew he was in love only when he found he'd

said so on the page. How Elizabeth
loved his profile when it hovered over her
in trochees ...

At the same time, the jests are shadowed things—as he writes a few lines later in the same poem, 'Today in Rouen there is an Avenue / Gustave Flaubert, but nothing spoils the stillness / at his desk'—and activity upon the tower is often perturbed. Few contemporary poets have been more deft than Porter in representing language in its degenerate mode of ostentatious babble, so it is natural that Porter's speaking love, or speaking of love, should so frequently take the way of second thoughts, of second sayings. His John Ford says, in one of those remarkable endings to poems which, in Porter, both encompass all that has been said and leave another wing of thought jutting out into the future, 'I have the instrument / to deal with ruined love—to outlast thought / by being before thought what it would say'; but Porter for one knows that Babel is both the first and the most famous of ruins, and so that there are, literally, no last words.

Any attention to Ford or to his contemporaries—uniquely, Shakespeare—must remind us of the constancy with which love and death have been paired in description, celebration, and lamentation. Anyone who needs reminding that for Porter to write of mortality is the normal thing must have been looking at the spaces between the lines rather than at the lines themselves; but love is death's congener in his poetry, as it so frequently is in the music and the opera of which he has written for a long time. One early poem, 'A Hoplite's Helmet', begins:

Inside this helmet
A brain known to great brains

Moved to kill,
The object was in the orders.

The helmetless lover
And boozer fathered as many

New skulls as any,
But he put the helmet back on ...

Another, 'To Start a Controversy', offers an eager archaeological scholar who dilates on the remains of an ancient couple preserved, by volcanic deposits, in the posture of lovemaking, and concludes:

... Gentlemen, are we
Not also in the actual presence
Of DEATH; now we may unveil their whole
World. Death was what made them what they were.
From knowledge of death they made up love,
Whose shape we see, acting against oblivion.

In 'All the Difference in the World', there is a contrast between 'wounds made by words / and the enduring silence of those / who can talk of love / only in the cadences of memory'—cadences which, here, have only the most ironic of consolations about them. In 'Death's Door', having said that 'Our minds which live on time ... /Once having tasted love hunger for more', Porter reflects that '(The hour you knock at will be called your fate!) / Love's what you want to do and think you feel, / Love's voice is music but its touch is steel / And death not Venus may be your blind date.' In 'Doll's House'—itself a small masterpiece—he offers the fact that:

Love, orderer of dolls and towns,
Has Lilliputianized the scale of pain,
So the wide adult eye looks down,
Bereaved again

Of esperance, the childhood flush,
And has no passage into afternoons
But through diminished doors and hush
Of darkened rooms.

The vein is inexhaustible, not only in that love's partnership with death is re-enacted in every generation, but in that what is to be made of this goes on re-presenting itself as enigma in every poem. Porter is about as far from a mystagogue as it is possible to

be—indeed he can sound like a sweet-tempered Thomas Hobbes, or a Voltaire suddenly visited by geniality—but he has a singular readiness to attest the astounding—the astoundingly bad and the astoundingly good, both, and their turbulent fusion in experience. He is, in a special sense of the word, a barbarous poet. I mean the term in the sense implied in Hopkins' line, 'barbarous in beauty, the stooks arise'; Hopkins, ever the intellectually sophisticated and the experientially exposed, was speaking of being in its vivid nakedness, its undeniable impingement. Everything he wrote, good and bad, came out of that; and although he liked masquerade as much as any of us—his technique itself being a version of masquerade—it is this undeniable imminence of the real that propels his writing. Peter Porter shares that barbarous disposition. Where Hopkins has shocks of wheat, Porter has the shock of loving mortals.

This is fine in some circumstances, as when, in the late poem, 'Jam on the Piano Keys', Porter writes, 'Love and the dead are sufficient subject matter'—a view which Yeats also held, or said he did. But another looming question may still present itself—something implied at the end of the little piece from Milosz with which I began, when he says, 'Yet falling in love is not the same thing as being able to love. That is something different.' What is at issue here is not only an individual's psychic bent, nor only our traffickings with one another, but whether or not the whole amatory shebang is a charade. Emily Dickinson, who might be called the *éminence blanche* behind some of Porter's imagination, said in one of her poems, 'This is my letter to the World / That never wrote to Me', a move which tests the world not only for responsiveness but for its very identity. Peter Porter's poetry, I would say, tests the world for identity, and never more than when he is writing of love.

Canetti asks, 'What if it were all just an overture and no one knew to what?'—'overture' is good, surely—and floats the proposition, 'In the play of language, death disappears.' Porter's reservations about both of these notions would be profound, but he would understand instinctively why they were being framed. He is, after all, a constant favourer of the 'what if' disposings of the intellect and the imagination, and he is himself a necessarily crumpled magician of language, for whom death keeps on betraying its presence, however spectacular the linguistic panache may be. Given a lead in much by Auden, he might also be led by a climactic claim in Auden's 'In Praise of Limestone', where the 'older colder voice, the oceanic whisper', says that 'There is no love; / There are only the various envies, all of them sad.'

There are many ways of addressing the 'older colder voice', not so much to rebut it as to hold it at fence—'In Praise of Limestone', is, after all, among other things a love poem. In 'The Storm', Porter asks, 'Why write poems? / Why, for that matter, march on Moscow / or ask your daughter if she loves you?'; in 'Essay on Clouds', he writes, 'Night awaits the upper wind. / I decide I should not like to live / in a universe kept up by love / yet unequipped to tell a joke / or contemplate the sources of its fear.' And there is indeed a jesterly path, as when, in 'Essay on Patriotism', Porter writes, 'Compared to my true patriotism / the imperialism of my legs and bowels, / the suzerainty of my eyes, / grave hemispheric rulings / of the wide Porterian peace, / my love of country is a pallid passion.'

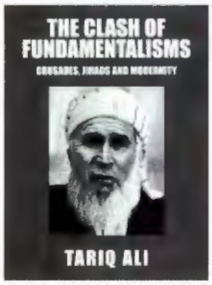
In an uncollected poem, 'A Lido for Lunaticks', Porter continues to essay descriptions of love, which are framed sometimes after the guesses of earlier enquirers, and sometimes under the press of experience. The poem's title is warning enough to keep us wary as to conclusions, but the probings are not perfunctory. 'Love is the gloriously / Mechanical operation of the spirit', 'Love can behave ... like the Carthaginian / Army'; 'Love's proper face / Will not be authorised but will concede / In waters calcinous and camphorous / That a solipsism of dreams is what the heart / Expects in its projected Heimatland.' 'Love is the inward journey of the soul': it is a traditional claim, but the formula is pressed, immediately in the poem, like some coin of the past which is bitten to test for its soundness.

'A Lido for Lunaticks' has for epigraph a quotation from Emily Dickinson, 'And Life is over there'. Porter's last words in his poem are, 'If, as we trust, / Life is over there, then is this love, / This inconclusiveness which orbits us, / A spacious Swiftian teleology / Of backs being turned and elsewheres to be at?' I think of the last words in Keats' last letter—'I always made an awkward bow'. Truly significant questions make an awkward bow: they have the ungainliness of the uncertain, as does Porter's question here—which is how we may know that they are genuine. And I should like to conclude this essay, which is also a kind of *laudatio*, a formal salute to distinction, by quoting once more from Rudolf Arnheim, as he muses on the ways in which words may discharge meaning:

> When the meaning of a word is not known, its sound and its ingredients of particular connotation may conjure up a distinct referent. *Antimacassar* is to me a mastodontic battlewagon, and the dictionary's assurance that the word designates a delicate backrest cover is not strong enough to dispel the barbarous vision.

Peter Porter knows that love can indeed be a 'mastodontic battlewagon', and that it can be 'a delicate backrest cover'. His poems are 'not strong enough to dispel the barbarous vision', and that is part of their unique authority. ■

Peter Steele sj has a personal chair at the University of Melbourne.



The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity, Tariq Ali. Verso, 2002. ISBN 1 85984 679 3, RRP $49.95

Tariq Ali was first known as a radical student leader, and his subsequent work has maintained the cheekiness and radical commitment of his earlier life. The dust jacket of this argument—that September 11 arose out of successive reactions to the imposition of imperial power—carries photographs of a didactic Osama bin Laden and of a presidential George Bush in which the faces are transposed.

Ali's preface adopts the same confidently and cheerfully tendentious tone:

> I want to write of the setting, of the history that preceded these events, of a world that is treated virtually as a forbidden subject in an increasingly parochial culture that celebrates the virtues of ignorance, promotes a cult of stupidity and extols the present as a process without an alternative, implying that we all live in a consumerist paradise.

The distinctive gifts Tariq Ali brings to the book, however, make it worth reading. He was brought up in Pakistan and is able to represent a non-Western perspective from within. He knows and recognises the importance of the long slopes of history and not simply of the markers. He has engaged many of the main actors in free conversation.

Above all, he sets the conflict between the US and terrorists into the broader historical perspective. This is lacking in many commentators on the war against terrorism, who, like an Alcibiades without charm, demand passionate allegiance devoid of understanding.

—Andrew Hamilton SJ

Lighting the Way: Reconciliation Stories, Dianne Johnson (ed.). The Federation Press, 2002. ISBN 1 86287 427 1, RRP $29.95

Lighting the Way brings Australia into sharp, three-dimensional focus with its examples of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working together to promote reconciliation. Their collective efforts might involve collaborative artworks, community projects or political activism. The Sea of Hands, for instance, is an encouraging symbol wherever it goes. Not just about politics or social change, this collection of stories has a radiant sense of power, hope and gentle determination.

The stories give an Aboriginal perspective on our shared history. It's distressing for white Australians to confront past and present injustices and personal ignorance. But it's also a relief. *Lighting the Way* is interested in healing individuals, reuniting families and re-sanctifying the land. It imagines a transformed Australia in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous people talk more and know more about each other, sharing power. In the abstract, this might seem depressingly impossible. But *Lighting the Way* looks at real situations where people have made it work.

It's written in a roundabout style. This is confusing, and sometimes makes the information less accessible. But *Lighting the Way* does succeed in demonstrating the human potential to love radically. If this book is any indication, the reconciliation movement is one of the best things ever to happen to Australia.

—Susannah Buckley

Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky, Peter R. Mitchell & John Schoeffel (eds). Scribe Publications, 2002. ISBN 0 90801 172 5, RRP $35

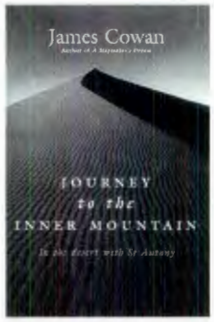
Some intellectuals are great haters. Think of Evelyn Waugh. Others, like John Pilger and Noam Chomsky, are great hateds. When they are on tour or publish, the local commentators turn on them with the adjectival savagery usually reserved for Crows players in the Collingwood members' stand.

If, like me, you wonder why Chomsky is a fox for hunting, this collection of Chomsky's speeches will be illuminating. He is sardonic and reasonable, with a gift for looking behind what the camera is showing you and revealing how the cameras came to be there and who has written the script. Because his subject is frequently the manipulation of news, and he includes commentators among the cheerfully duped, he will never be popular.

But, whether right or wrong, Chomsky is always interesting and a touch infuriating. He has a 19th-century faith in scientific reasoning, no time for metaphysics or theology, an unshakeable suspicion of conventional wisdom, a passion for disagreement, and a great ability to trust facts. A good but not a nice mind. He offers a bracing antidote to denial, not simply for the complacent, but also for reformers who need to believe that change will come quickly to justify their commitment to social movement.

I find attractive Chomsky's basic intuition that those with power and wealth will understandably try to shape society in their own interests, and to clothe these interests in the language of the common good. I find his trust in science and facts less conducive to a humane world. But when it comes to the hunt, my sympathy is with the fox and not the men with bugles.

—A.H.



Journey to the Inner Mountain: In the Desert with St Antony, James Cowan. Hodder & Stoughton, 2002. ISBN 0 34078 658 2, RRP $29.95

Australian on journey-into-self goes into Egyptian desert, detours to meet locally famous solitary who turns out also to be Australian and introduces him to the spirit of the Desert Fathers. Australian writer returns from the desert to write a book about it. Satiated reader pauses doubtfully, recognising in this recipe the possibility of something meaty or of a *moi soufflé*.

Cowan offers something more solid than soufflé. When he links his exploration of Antony, Evagrius and Isaac of Nineveh to his own journey, he does not reclothe them as 20th-century travellers, but leaves them in their strangeness. They are not homogenised as commodities for the bargain-hunting soul.

And because Cowan is perceptive about the process of writing and has given himself time to read his chosen texts closely, he is often illuminating.

As a reader who comes to the stories of the desert with modern questions, he refers more to psychology and sociology than literary composition or theology in interpreting them. He sees the desert as a break with the classical world. I would see greater continuity precisely because of the often unspoken theological tradition of the communities that generated the texts. But if you wish to sample the desert, Cowan's confection will leave you with a taste for more.

—A.H.

BRETT EVANS

The man who knew too much

Recollections of a Bleeding Heart: A Portrait of Paul Keating PM, Don Watson. Random House, 2002. ISBN 0 091 83517 8, RRP $45

PAUL KEATING saw it as his duty occasionally to toss 'a bloody big rock into the pond' of Australian politics. In early November 1992, when Labor was facing the prospect of political oblivion at the hands of John Hewson and his Fightback policy, the then prime minister decided to dump a whole cliff-side of boulders into the toddler's pool that is Question Time.

'I say to the Opposition that, in the unlikely event of its becoming a government, the Labor Party would not obstruct the passage of the GST legislation in the Senate.' A rippling wave of shock spread across the House of Representatives, slapped into its walls, then rolled back again.

The Opposition thought all its Christmases had come at once; 'Bye bye, Paul,' they chanted. After all, had not their hated enemy just endorsed the Coalition's key policy? Surely the gig was up? Meanwhile, on the government benches—none of whom had been forewarned—there was stunned silence. But slowly it dawned on everyone what Keating was up to: he had just made it crystal clear that there was only one way to avoid a consumption tax—you had to vote Labor back into office because the Senate wouldn't protect you from it.

By the end of the day Keating's tactic was being applauded in the media as a master stroke. The coming election would be a referendum on Hewson's tax policy, and Keating's risky manoeuvre had branded the Coalition with a death sentence just three letters long.

From the relative safety of his parliament house office, Keating's speech-writer, Don Watson, was watching the pandemonium on closed-circuit television and marvelling once again at his boss' 'crazy like a fox' political style. The mercurial, grumpy Keating was often a difficult man to work for, but the highwire moments like this somehow made it all worthwhile. As Watson says: 'Paul Keating is a kind, charming and very intelligent man who would risk his own life to save yours or to get an unwanted crease out of his trousers.'

The mercurial, grumpy Keating was often a difficult man to work for, but the highwire moments … somehow made it all worthwhile. As Watson says: 'Paul Keating is a kind, charming and very intelligent man who would risk his own life to save yours or to get an unwanted crease out of his trousers.'

Watson joined the prime minister's staff in early 1992, just a few weeks after Keating had knocked off Bob Hawke for the Labor leadership, and stayed until the bitter end in 1996. From the beginning he kept a diary with the intention of writing a book. Watson is a historian by trade, a gifted writer, and for four years he was also a political insider. This rare combination of attributes has enabled him to capture the texture of the Keating Labor government in a way that few other writers could ever hope to match. Though probably too long for its own good, *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart* is destined to become a classic of Australian politics.

When first approached about the job, Watson was far from being a confirmed admirer of the Labor leader. His wife's publishing business had been sent to the wall by 'the recession we had to have' and like many other Australians he was understandably wary of Keating's public persona: the aggressive and vituperative politician of TV legend. On first meeting, however, he was surprised to discover a man who seemed tired, withdrawn, even melancholy. 'It would remain the dominant impression. It's why I liked him and knew at once that I wanted the job.' (It's a strange, yet revealing, reason to take on the sort of job that is capable of killing even the hardiest workaholic. But, then, as Keating recently joked, Watson seems to possess the inclinations of a fruit bat—'he always heads back to the darkness to feed'.)

In rapid succession the prime minister's new speech-writer acquired a Henry Bucks suit, a Diners Club card and a room at

Canberra's Telopea Park Motel. 'In the space of a week I drifted a thousand miles from ordinary life.' He drifted all the way to the new parliament house and he found the atmosphere surreal. 'Inside it wants for nothing except reality', Watson writes. 'It smells of nothing, tastes of nothing, and is the colour of nothing. Having no past or provenance it evokes nothing, unless it is the end of history.' When you work there 'it can cross your mind that you are dreaming or extinct'.

And if this wasn't enough to cope with, like Alice, he also disappeared down a rabbit hole. Watson found that the long, bending corridor that bisected the prime minister's suite of offices made it resemble nothing less than a large rabbit burrow, and 'if you live in a burrow long enough you become a bit like other things that live in burrows; it narrows your vision but it may also heighten your instincts'. He also found a game in play that might have been invented by Lewis Carroll: the Pointy Heads versus the Bleeding Hearts.

The Pointy Heads were, of course, the economists. The Bleeding Hearts were just about everyone else. It is important not to caricature this division. Everyone in the prime minister's office believed in the free market, explains Watson, it's just that the Pointy Heads were inclined to believe in it to the exclusion of everything else, including, at times, common sense. The Bleeding Hearts wanted a broader definition of what constituted the 'main game'; they wanted to include symbolic issues, like history, the arts, the Republic. Watson joined the Bleeding Hearts and sat down to help his prime minister.

He wrote hundreds of speeches, thought up jokes for Question Time, drafted press releases, worked until 3am, hallucinated through lack of sleep, handled his kids' homework via fax, rewrote the verbless sludge that emanated from the bureaucracy, and worried about his boss' psychological state. There is a lot in this book, but always at its centre lies the desire to explicate one of Australia's great mysteries: what the hell makes Paul John Keating tick?

A diagram of John Howard's brain would probably show a small area marked 'Cricket', a slightly larger one marked 'Family (Mine and the Queen's)' and the rest, say 90 per cent, would be labelled 'Staying in Power'. As Watson describes it, the Keating brain is a very different beast. Like a chameleon on steroids it exists in a state of continuous mutation. One moment it would be 100 per cent 'Mahler', a second later, 100 per cent 'APEC', then 100 per cent 'Packer Vendetta', then 100 per cent 'Annita'. And sometimes, according to Watson, it could turn very black indeed. He once said of John Howard: 'I'm going to drive an axe into his chest and lever his ribs apart.' And this from a man who, Watson assures us, abhors violence ('*Braveheart* was too violent for him').

In the end, Watson comes to a startling conclusion: 'by the time of his prime ministership Paul Keating was in some fundamental ways unsuited to political life'. He tells us that the same man who stood in front of the word 'Leadership', spelt out in letters ten feet high, when he launched Labor's 1996 election campaign, disavowed the concept many times while prime minister. He tells us 'it was very faint, but something in Paul Keating's defence of Lawrence echoed Evatt and the Petrov Royal Commission'. Did the man have a political death wish?

'Keating', Watson argues, 'was an unusual prime minister in no stranger way than this: he seemed not to understand that he could make himself more popular and trusted if he played sometimes to the hollow centre of the job—to the ceremonial, sentimental, cliched dimension of it'. Such a view almost amounts to a denial of politics itself—Hawke, and certainly Howard, could never be accused of it.

What was the cause of this lack? Watson writes discreetly about the state of Keating's marriage, but it is clear that the thing he valued above all else—far above political power, for example—was foundering and causing him great anguish. Was it also the way he came into the job, crawling over the political corpse of Bob Hawke? Or maybe, as Watson likes to think, Keating just had a 'fanatic heart', like that other Irish–Australian outlaw, Ned Kelly, prone to self-destructive rages, intemperate speech, and a loathing for the Establishment.

Whatever the reason, it meant that Keating was never capable of forging a consistent, respectful relationship with the electorate. By the end of his time as PM, Watson says the government needed 'a Redfern speech for all the other Australians', but by then it was too late, no-one was listening to the government's story any more.

Over time Keating became a sort of hero to Watson, yet, with the historian's understanding of such things, the loyal speechwriter also knew that real heroes have real flaws. When he wasn't being beguiled by Keating's charm, he was being frustrated by his wilfulness and lack of discipline. But he was always ready to forgive him.

So why did the two men click? What they had in common was a love and skill for language, and a shared project. Watson writes:

> Politics and history are alike and inseparable in that the craft of both is storytelling. Masters of both juggle past and present to create coherent narratives, the historian to make the past knowable, the politician to do this with the present.

When it was all over, Watson moved out of the rabbit burrow and drifted back into ordinary life. He eventually stopped sending ideas to Beazley's office and got on with his own writing. Keating cleaned out his desk after 37 years in Canberra, gave his prized, and pristine, Mercedes Benz to Jimmy Warner, his long-time driver, and moved back to Sydney. The finality of his divorce lay ahead. The popularity and long-term electoral success of his nemesis, John Howard, lay ahead. And despite Watson's superb first stab at the story, history's judgment still lies ahead.

EVIDENTLY, Paul Keating hates book launches, but he turned up to the one for *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart* at the Sydney Town Hall and even made a brief speech. He told the crowd, 'the only reward to a public life is public progress—there is no other award ... I don't care about the books. I don't care about the accolades. Truly. What I care about is whether it all mattered.'

So did it matter? How much of the Keating story do Australians still believe in? How much of it did they ever believe in?

In January 1996, just before his government was put to the sword by the electorate, Keating gave a major speech in Singapore. It was an eloquent restatement of the story that he had developed as prime minister with the aid of people like Don Watson. He told his audience of Asian businessmen that Australia had left its traditional racism and xenophobia behind, but had maintained its traditional egalitarian and democratic values. He extolled the virtues of Australia's economic renovation and painted an optimistic picture of Australia's developing role in Asia. If such sentiments look hopelessly out of date that's because, as Keating always said, when the government changes, so does the country. ■

Brett Evans is an ABC journalist and author of *Life of the Party: A Portrait of Modern Labor* (UNSW Press).

BRIAN TOOHEY

Capital chaps

Rich Kids, Paul Barry. Bantam, 2002. ISBN 1 86325 338 6, RRP $45

FOR CAPITALISM TO work as advertised, companies sometimes have to go to the wall. Risks have to be taken; money has to be lost. Capitalism works even more efficiently, however, if capital is not squandered because investors have the wool pulled over their eyes.

In Australia, three main institutions are supposed to ensure that investors are well informed: the financial sector itself, the regulatory authorities and the media. As Paul Barry demonstrates, all three underperformed during the events leading up to the collapse of One.Tel, the company at the centre of his latest book, *Rich Kids*.

Barry is a boon for those who feel they should know something about business, especially as the expansion of compulsory superannuation means their retirement incomes will increasingly depend upon what happens in the share market. With Barry as their guide, they should come away wiser—but hardly reassured.

A former BBC journalist who moved to Australia in 1987, Barry writes with pace and verve. He has the knack of keeping his story simple, despite amassing hundreds of hours of interviews and stacks of financial and legal documents. The result is that *Rich Kids* is entertaining, convincing and, ultimately, disturbing.

The book begins with the story of how one rich kid, Jodee Rich, started a computer company called Imagineering in 1981. It grew at such a breakneck speed that administrative systems, to the extent they existed at all, were soon overwhelmed. But the share market—encouraged by the backing of one of the nation's most respected fund managers, BT—loved it. Less than a decade later, computing was still a growth industry, but Imagineering was falling apart. Rich was given the boot, but not before taking $8 million out of the company.

Nevertheless, he still had his admirers. Shortly after Imagineering announced a large loss in 1990, the then *Sydney Daily Mirror*—now part of the *Daily Telegraph*—wrote an adulatory piece about the 'successful' young millionaire who rode his bike to work. As Barry notes, the *Daily Telegraph* ran a similarly effusive piece 11 years later, even though it was obvious that Rich's next venture, One.Tel, was disintegrating in much the same fashion as Imagineering.

Left to right: Jodee Rich, Brad Keeling, Rodney Adler and John Greaves.

Even as late as May 2001, when the ship was well and truly sinking, The Australian *quoted from a report by Goldman Sachs entitled 'Great Start. One.Tel is here to stay'. The incident showed the difficulties facing the media, especially in cases where parent companies had invested in One.Tel.*

Following the Imagineering disaster, Rich took an extended skiing holiday overseas before returning to Australia to buy a private jet to indulge his passion for flying. But the entrepreneurial urge never died. In 1994, he entered the booming phone market by starting One.Tel with Imagineering's former marketing manager, Brad Keeling, as his joint managing director. True to form, the pair drove the new company at a frenzied pace and ended with the usual crash. Although some journalists and financial analysts expressed doubts based on Imagineering's history, most were happy to treat Rich and Keeling as freshly minted business geniuses. Astonishingly, BT saddled up for another ride. About the only difference this time around was that it lost far more money.

The young millionaire who liked to portray himself as riding a bike to work was soon to add three power boats, a helicopter, a Whitsunday hideaway and two Sydney mansions to the private jet—to an overall tune of $40 million. When the Australian Securities and Investments Commission belatedly started breathing down his neck after the plug was pulled on One.Tel, Rich transferred a large part of his share in these assets to his wife Maxine, under the Family Law Act. Keeling did OK, too. Like Rich, he was paid a bonus of $6.9 million in 2000, bringing his weekly pay packet to well over $140,000.

Apart from fooling BT again, Rich really worked his charm on three other unlikely victims. Two were also rich kids, James Packer and Lachlan Murdoch. The third was a supposedly smart company, Optus. The Hawke and Keating governments had protected Optus in an effort to establish it as a serious rival to Telstra, but it has proved a disappointment. Not least of the reasons is the astonishing deal it offered to One.Tel.

Before deciding to pay crazy prices for its own slice of the microwave spectrum, One.Tel used Optus as the carrier for its mobile-phone customers. Every time One.Tel signed up a new customer, Optus paid it a $120 cash bonus. Barry gives vivid accounts of how One.Tel dealers couldn't believe their luck. They were soon standing on street corners, and even beaches, giving $10 to anyone who would sign a contract. Half never bothered to make a phone call. Even calling an eventual halt to the folly cost Optus over $15 million in compensation.

For its part, One.Tel found that many of those who did use its phones never paid their bills. Many others never got a bill in

the first place, such was the administrative shambles within One.Tel. The losses were only exacerbated when One.Tel offered free calls between its own mobile customers and sold fixed-line services below cost.

The business model was clearly a recipe for disaster, as was the chaotic nature of One.Tel's financial controls. Yet two of Australia's rising young executives, James Packer and Lachlan Murdoch, succumbed to the lure of Rich's 'vision'. James is the son of Australia's richest—and toughest—businessman, Kerry Packer. Lachlan's father is the former Australian citizen, Rupert Murdoch, renowned for his skill in building a global media empire.

In these circumstances, small-time shareholders could be excused for being favourably impressed when the Packer and Murdoch organisations invested heavily in One.Tel. James and Lachlan receive a well-justified drubbing from Barry. By the time they cut Rich and Keeling loose, they had lost almost $1 billion of their own and their shareholders' money. Other shareholders, including some prestigious investment banks, lost close to another $1 billion.

Even as late as May 2001, when the ship was well and truly sinking, *The Australian* quoted from a report by Goldman Sachs entitled 'Great Start. One.Tel is here to stay'. The incident showed the difficulties facing the media, especially in cases where parent companies had invested in One.Tel. Such an up-beat banker's report is legitimate news, but was not balanced often enough by more sceptical opinions.

Barry's analysis prompts the question of why business journalists did not subject One.Tel to tougher examination earlier in the piece. One answer is that the share market puts constant pressure on media companies to cut costs in an effort to boost the share price. Yet a well-informed market often depends on the media having enough resources to blow the whistle on dodgy companies. Constant cuts to journalistic resources may please the market by helping the share price. But it does so at the perverse cost of choking off the flow of accurate information to investors.

Barry has produced a sorry tale, sparklingly told. Sadly, there is every chance he will have no shortage of material for a repeat performance in a couple of years. ■

Brian Toohey is a Sydney-based journalist.

BOOKS:3

PETER C. GAUGHWIN

Graceful possibilities

Ageing Well: Surprising Guideposts to a Happier Life from the Landmark Harvard Study of Adult Development, George Vaillant. Scribe Publications, 2002. ISBN 0 908 01164 4, RRP $30

Ageing is an issue in search of a policy. There has been some tinkering at the edges—the compulsory superannuation guarantee, promises to increase nursing-home beds and initiatives for aged care, for example—but governments over the years have neglected to provide a coherent policy that demonstrates an understanding of ageing as a fact of life rather than as an inconvenience to be tolerated. This is clear from recent media coverage and the launching of an independent inquiry into the state of aged care in Australia. There are now about 2.4 million people over 65 and that figure could swell to 4.2 million by 2022. In the next ten years the number of people over the age of 85 is likely to increase from 260,000 to 389,000.

As with these statistics, discussion of ageing tends to focus on those who have reached 65 and over. What appears not to be appreciated is that ageing in fact commences when we are born and ceases when we die. We age every day: tomorrow we will be chronologically older than we are today. Common sense, wisdom, discernment and understanding are attributes we associate with age, though chronological age is not a guarantee that they have been attained. Think of King Lear and his daughter: Cordelia demonstrates more of these attributes than her father ever does.

The development of a capacity to love is at the heart of ageing well.

Preparation for ageing might more correctly be described as preparation for different periods of our lives. Such a mind shift may help ameliorate negative attitudes that surround the discussion of ageing.

George Vaillant's book, *Ageing Well*, is a study of the various positive and negative facets of ageing, from our earliest days and throughout life. Vaillant is a psychiatrist at the Harvard Medical School and his book is based on what is arguably the longest study of ageing in the world, the Harvard Study of Adult Development.

The study focused on three cohorts: the Harvard Sample, the Inner City Cohort and the Terman Women Sample. It began with the Terman Women Sample in 1922 (before Vaillant was born), and was part of a study of gifted children. In 1937 (when Vaillant was three), the Harvard study began, and was deliberately confined to Harvard students who were considered to be healthy in mind and body. The subjects were all men. In 1939 Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck began a prospective study of 500 youths sent to reform school and 500 matched schoolboys who had not been in any legal trouble. This group became known as the Inner City Cohort and again the subjects were all male.

It was Vaillant who brought all three cohorts together to form what is now known as the Harvard Study of Adult Development. Vaillant is now the director of the study.

What is different about this study compared with other studies of human development (for example, the work of Erik Erikson, to whom Vaillant pays tribute, and Daniel Levinson's *The Seasons of a Man's Life*) is that Vaillant's study is prospective. The others have tended to be longitudinal follow-back studies, which must depend on memory, whereas prospective studies record events as they happen. This is similar to what Michael Apted has done with his famous *7 Up* series, though Apted's cohort is much smaller.

Memory can be affected over time and shaded by defence mechanisms, examples of which are recounted in the book.

Sheer cost explains why there are not many prospective studies. Other difficulties include maintaining contact with the subjects of the study, and the fact that, over time, the subjects can become unrepresentative, for reasons such as death or loss of interest.

The Harvard study, then, would appear to be unique. It has managed to integrate three cohorts of now elderly men and women who have been studied continuously for six to eight decades. Further, it is a study of the well, not the sick, although a number of the subjects became unwell with the passing of the years or through abuse of their bodies. A lot of psychiatric studies examine sick people, that is, those presenting to psychiatric hospitals or clinics, and draw conclusions from them. Such studies, however, often do not take into account those who have experienced misfortune and who have survived it in a positive fashion; *Ageing Well* has examples of many such people.

WHAT IS AGEING? Is it decay (after age 20 we lose millions of brain cells a year), or seasonal change (the head of healthy black hair becomes a sparse grey thatch), or continued development up to the moment of death (like an oak tree)? As Vaillant points out, ageing is all of these. It is also true, though, that septuagenarians, because of their social and emotional maturation, can do some things better than 25-year-olds can.

Social maturation is, according to Vaillant, the sequential mastery of life tasks. People familiar with the work of Erik Erikson will recall his eight stages of development—a series of positive steps and their pathological opposites. For example, in infancy a child could develop a sense of trust (in those giving care) or its pathological opposite, a sense of mistrust (because the carers are not trustworthy). In Erikson's schema, to grow as a healthy person one needed to master each of the eight stages. Failure to master a particular stage, though, did not automatically mean that one could not then master the next stage, though it became harder the more stages one did not master.

For adult development, Vaillant revised Erikson's model and changed 'stage' to 'task', which he says is more scientifically correct. In Vaillant's model there are six sequential tasks:

- Identity: the adolescent separates from his parents
- Intimacy: the person becomes 'reciprocally, and not narcissistically, involved with a partner'
- Career consolidation: the person finds 'a career that is both valuable to society and as valuable to herself as she once found play'
- Generativity: the person 'manifests care for the next generation'
- Keeper of the meaning: the penultimate task—the person passes on 'the traditions of the past to the next generation', which leads to a widening of the social circle
- Integrity: the person achieves 'some sense of peace and unity with respect both to one's own life and to the whole world'.

Emotional maturation is the development of increasingly adaptive coping mechanisms. Another term for coping mechanisms is 'defences', and most of us have probably, at some time or other, had the charge 'you're being defensive' levelled at us, usually in a moment of argument or crisis. But a mature defensiveness is necessary to enable healthy development, or successful ageing. As Vaillant puts it, 'successful ageing means giving to others joyously whenever one is able, receiving from others gratefully whenever one needs it, and being greedy enough to develop one's own self in between' (p61). That last clause probably encapsulates the difference between healthy adaptation and unhealthy maladaptation.

At Appendix B, Vaillant illustrates the difference between immature defences and mature defences. Immature defences, such as projection and passive aggression, are about an unreal focus in life, whereas mature defences, such as altruism and humour, enable life to be lived realistically and not

The Man and the Map

The dead flags
Of a city square clattered
Their stone curse,

Moss climbed, paper
Cups swirled, yet on this
Thursday the sharp hour,

The mad whip
Across a spiteful bare
Dawn disturbed him

Not at all. Stood there
Studying the grim
Map of a great town spread

Arm to arm, now buckling
Now flapped badly
At middle crease, flimsy

As the sky ... Glad
To have spotted him, strangely
A consolation against

The encroached week
And the Cathedral bells,
I was transfixed

By a man who wrestles
A map, who carries a shaggy
Coat, shabbily the hairs

Of his ankle glint, a shade
His chin and the eyes
Fish-mouths. Wednesday's faded

Print wearily tumbles
Across his boot, unstrung
And still. He turns

Away into the cluttered sun
But the sky shakes
Its head. He shakes first one

Then another face,
But nods into his map
Shivering with half a heart

Under a larrikin breeze. I scan
The ghosts
Aboard my singleminded tram

As it abandons him. The last
Frame is a man
Statued alone with a chart

Dying on his hands,
Nodding to the compass-points
For confirm, a bent

Smile staining his face—
Then, like a prophet
On a swirling precipice,

He lifts his arms aloft
To liberate the map ...
It gathered stock, it almost

Hovered back to the earth
It mocked, before
The final gust grabbed

The limp sail of its cloth,
Levitated it
Like a triumphant glowing

Rug into the minarets.
He examined this, then sagged
As it disappeared

Behind a stone facade,
And crumpled to a knee; immersed
In a howl I still can see.

Alex Skovron

in a defeatist manner that sees oneself always as a victim. Mature defences enable people to adapt to life; immature defences are likely to create maladjustment and with it concomitant and chronic pain. Defences are more thoroughly analysed in an earlier book by Vaillant, *Adaptation to Life* (Little Brown, 1977), which also contains stories of some of the people in this book.

Vaillant lists as significant a number of the findings of the Harvard study:

- It is not the bad things that happen to us that doom us; it is the good people who happen to us at any age that facilitate enjoyable old age.
- Healing relationships are facilitated by a capacity for gratitude, for forgiveness, and for taking people inside. (By this metaphor I mean becoming eternally enriched by loving a particular person.)
- A good marriage at age 50 predicted positive ageing at 80. But surprisingly, low cholesterol levels at age 50 did not.
- Alcohol abuse—unrelated to unhappy childhood—consistently predicted unsuccessful ageing, in part because alcoholism damaged future social supports.
- Learning to play and create after retirement and learning to gain younger friends as we lose older ones add more to life's enjoyment than retirement income.
- Objective good physical health was less important to successful ageing than subjective good health. By this I mean that it is all right to be ill as long as you do not feel sick. (p13)

Thus, it is who we are and what we do with ourselves that predicts how we will age. To age well, we must also be prepared not merely to tolerate difference, but rather accept difference for what it is. In accepting difference we will learn much that in the long run will enable the development of new perspectives on life.

In other words, as Vaillant puts it, 'a test of successful living, then, becomes learning to live with neither too much desire and adventure nor too much caution and self-care' (p61).

THROUGHOUT THIS book there are many stories of people who were comfortable in themselves, but with whom others felt uncomfortable. They did not conform to stereotypes that someone or some group had defined as the norm; they were different. One such person is Professor Mark Aurelius Stone. (Some of the names in this book are a delight.) At an early stage of the

study researchers deemed Stone's response to the Rorschach test—as 'just ink blots'—to be temerity. One psychiatrist called him a 'robot'. Another considered that Stone had not lived because he had not suffered. Another described him as a 'rather constricted sort of person'. But one visitor to the staff conference discussing Stone had the courage to ask, 'Why is it we all seem to dislike these successful people?' Another then added, 'He sees things pretty much as they really are.' As Vaillant goes on to comment, 'like it or not, the Rorschach designs are just ink blots' (pp150–2).

Vaillant reports that, at age 75, Mark Aurelius Stone remarked, 'I seem to take things as they come more than most people.' In his 70s, Stone had cared for his wife who was crippled with multiple sclerosis, continued to supervise graduate students, paid his laboratory expenses out of his own pocket and expressed his interest in the environment by trying to improve the beauty of his suburban neighbourhood. Vaillant comments: 'taking things as they come was how for seventy-five years he had so successfully survived' (pp154–5).

Mature people of whatever age can adapt to the circumstances in which they find themselves. There are no doubt periods of mourning when things are not quite what one hoped for, but the challenge is to move on without excessive regret, which can become paralysing.

Susan Wellcome is an example of someone whose early life was problematic. Vaillant met her when she was 76, and she 'appeared a perfectly ordinary gray-haired, somewhat overweight old lady' (p64). She was a person who 'could welcome the outside world in and yet remain attentive to her own needs' (p65).

Susan's history revealed that her mother was difficult and selfish, a woman who disliked children and who tried to prevent her daughter taking any initiative; her mother told Susan that she wished Susan had never been born. Susan's early life was shrouded in a deceit forced on her by her mother; her mastery of Erikson's stages of basic trust, autonomy and initiative was blighted.

Susan defended herself against her mother and life by using one of the immature defences, passive aggression. In defending herself Susan was simultaneously defeating herself. She continued this behaviour throughout school. However, in her 20s, three important things happened that served to turn her self-defeating behaviour into mature coping strategies. She found a mentor with whom she could identify; she learnt that her anger towards her mother was healthy; she entered into a loving marriage that was to last over 40 years.

Susan Wellcome, then, is an example of someone for whom adverse early life experiences do not necessarily mean a blighted life forever after. Sir Michael Rutter, the noted child psychiatrist, has written that 'the notion that adverse experiences lead to lasting damage to personality "structure" has very little empirical support'.

Rutter's comment notwithstanding, there continues to be strong debate, particularly among psychiatrists, lawyers and judges, about whether people with negative early life experiences can change a negative pattern of behaving to one that is more positive. Susan Wellcome would appear to answer the question in the affirmative.

Life experience, however, seems to suggest that there are no firm answers to this question; at best there are possibilities. Therefore, for example, people who have dealings with those whose past behaviour has been negative need to ensure that they do not become responsible for some greater tragedy—ruining a life that has begun to get back on track, for example.

Vaillant points out what has been present in the clinical literature for years: genes and environment both have an influence on who we are and what we become. In that sense, understanding the difference in people becomes crucial. Once Susan Wellcome moved out of what can only be described as a pathological environment into a world that encouraged and loved her, she learned to encourage and love and thus became able to pass on the fruits of that learning.

One reviewer described this book as a 'must-read' for anyone in their 50s or 60s. That may be true, but it is also quite limiting. In my opinion this book is a must-read for people of many ages, especially those in their 20s who are wondering what they can make of their lives. Vaillant comments: 'Lives change, and so the course of life is filled with discontinuities.' (p287)

THERE IS AN emphasis in this book on the way new opportunities can present themselves and be grasped positively. This is part of ageing well. Of course luck plays a role. And sometimes opportunities cannot be grasped for a variety of reasons, not the least of which can be others who work to prevent such a thing happening. For example, sometimes people who are perfect for particular employment miss out, because of preconceived notions about them. Employers can fail to see beyond the surface or the stereotype, can fail to recognise that a person has grown or changed. So this is also an important book for employers, managers and policy-makers: those people whose decisions often affect the lives of many others.

The strengths of *Ageing Well* are multiple. It is well written and free of the jargon that often limits works written on psychological topics. Where the use of technical terms becomes necessary, Vaillant carefully explains what they mean in ordinary language.

This book could have ended up as a dry, albeit important, study of the ageing process, something of interest only to those who study gerontology. Fortunately, it did not. This is a wise book, a book about acceptance, resilience and hope. ■

Peter C. Gaughwin is an Adelaide reviewer and lawyer.

PHILIP HARVEY

States of equilibrium

Darker and Lighter, Geoff Page. Five Islands Press, 2001. ISBN 0 864 18723 8, RRP $16.45
Luminous Bodies, James Charlton. Montpelier Press 2001. ISBN 1 876 59708 9, RRP $19.95

It's curious how many of Geoff Page's poems take up a page. Author faces namesake in some moment of courageous personal understanding. Understandings multiply, result of a mastery of the art of self-perception. He confesses 'I like to spend an afternoon // reflecting on the mortals.' At one level there is a poetry of unspoken moment—putting down the dog, unpacking belongings after a separation—a poetry of losses, small ruptures that define the difference: 'the way a net / means double faults— // the way one loses / games to love.' ('Poetry and Tennis')

Then slowly we are drawn into a wider world that is also one of privacy, personal indwelling, that inexpressible inner privacy that is existence. 'Sermon' starts by asking if art can ever express what an individual experiences, and after concluding that it cannot, takes the idea a step further:

> The memories
> we leave the living
> are likewise fictions more or less.
>
> The messages
> all run one way.
> No one knows your true address.

Something of a corrective for those who would hallow the page. A steady building of telling phrases into a poetry of experience is one of Page's best skills. Easy everyday rhythms are his forte, where we would least expect to find deeper meanings. Rhyme happens from time to time like some unmentioned accident. Occasionally he even breaks through into genuine small triumphs; in 'Starting Over' for example, where a couple in their 50s 'setting out from rented space, / their differences in history' can exclaim 'This time, yes, they'll get it right'. The move from the objective to the subjective comes effortlessly.

Page is a canny portraitist of Australian suburban mores, a place where you find girls who have 'vaguely got religion', widows in their 80s who are 'teetotal or "a touch, thank you"', a grandson 'on the internet /

Who climbs his family tree // The other with his new Nintendo / Entirely self-engendered'. Behavioural patterns beget new ways of seeing, pleasurable with instant recognition. This has its dark side too, as for example in 'The Big Black Cat':

> Bigotry's a big black cat
> balanced on your knees
> purring as you stroke its back
> and sharing the TV.
>
> Everybody has a cat;
> there's no one who's not felt
> the purr of satisfaction when
> some talkback smooths the pelt.

No-one? Page uses the sweeping statement to confront our own innocence or denial. Once out of the private world, though, Page can be a little unsteady. His poetry of social protest meets with varying success, owing to the same easy speaking tone. The ironies lose their steeliness in protracted declamation, as in 'A Short Statement of Policy'.

A passion for the short three-line verse is just one example of Page's immense debt to William Carlos Williams. Epigrammatic, plain-dealing and powered by everyday Imagism, Page has the insuperable advantage of explicit meaning. Take this six-line poem called 'The Analogues':

> Those speedboats on the Boobera
> as if along an ancient spine
> wincing under water
> or Harley Davidsons in church
> throaty on the sacred tiles
> and heading for the altar.

This is a poetry of direct engagement where the voice has a weathered common sense and the tricks are not showy. Another Australian character is the 'dark-night-of-the-soul agnostic', someone Page would seem to know from personal experience:

> He builds no temple out of bricks
> and does not like to preach.
> He thinks conviction more impressive
> slightly out of reach.

In privacy Page can celebrate the sanctity of the individual, while his poems on Religion (Big R) are sceptical of all fixed positions, including the sceptic's. The human scale is his measure, while in his hard questions about right living, Page is the determined Protestant.

An emergent Catholic sensibility informs the poetry of James Charlton; the diction is stable and the tendency is adjectival. Like Page, he has a trained Imagist propensity. 'The petrel's beak points / to nothing except the fish,' he writes in 'Tasman Peninsula', while the end of the sentence warns of something more going on, 'which in turn / symbolises nothing but itself, // a lesson I resisted, / much as that raptor ...' The changes are contemplative, internalising. At its best, such an enterprising poetry leads into a state of affirmation and self-transformation.

Charlton will not avoid the suffering of creation, and in naming suffering walks the fine line poetry always must between bathos and despair. His report of a rabbit shoot keeps to the facts:

> One pulse ceases;
> another quickens.
> One set of teeth jerks open;
> another clenches.
>
> ('This Rabbit')

The problem of talking about suffering while employing a richly sensuous, indeed pleasurable, language is, however, one that Charlton does not altogether come to terms with, and in this he is not alone.

Acceptance is achievement. The mood lightens when Charlton reaches states of physical equilibrium. He is most at home with bodiliness, his own body or that of his lover, 'suspended happily / between hope and hopelessness.' In the poem 'On the Rim' he talks of how 'our bodies, these portable monasteries, / sit on the rim of silence.' And in the natural world he can speak of insects as 'joint heirs of such molecular inheritance / that where our skin stops, // our bodies do not stop'. This last is a greeting that is also a peace offering to the web of nature, that elsewhere stings or bites.

With these concerns at the centre of his thought, the urge to mystical union becomes almost a common occurrence, though the value is never lessened. 'Mystical' would have to be one of the more unfashionable words of our times, and 'mysticism' has been replaced silently by the popular catch-all, 'spirituality'. How else, though, to explain the following, from 'A Lagavulin Night': 'I'm in a country you've already // entered; in a house / you've already seen.' Or this, the poet gazing at a boulder very like those gazed upon a few years ago by another Tasmanian, James McAuley:

I looked until I saw,
or thought I saw,
an infinitesimal
rise and fall:

igneous passion in motion,
stabilised for an aeon
and now stilled,
or perhaps not.
I felt part of a backdrop
of presence,
as if all things participated
in a gossamered influence,
a cloud of utterance.
('Breathing Boulder')

There is political and love poetry in this first collection, but definitions like these are the special guides Charlton leaves us. In such a space, in such a breath, we have squarely left the page and found in human language a means to the ineffable, to a new oneness with the world. ■

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Heaven Refuses

for Chris Wallace-Crabbe

There goes that hat again,
doffed by the seventh wind
into the blue postmodern
but this time past retrieve,
a dispassionate balloon resisting anchor
for the vaster—see
practically the cherub's cheek puff mad
as the cap filigrees
into the high northern so-long
longing for ozone.

She pats her ruffled Medusa
with a vanity that dawns
as it glimpses both Ecclesiastes
and Eccles: her brows unite
like knitting, chins collapse
progressively, as the eye
(squinting with opprobrium)
loops upward, dragging
the prissy visage kicking
into the dialectic.

But heaven refuses to antithesize,
and the last she'll
snatch of the absurd expatriated ostrich
as it levitates evenly
beyond even theosophy's heptalogs
is light—the speck
winks its lazy, spiky valedictory
once, and is absent,
its plume snuffed in a puff of decency
beneath the sandy yonder.

Alex Skovron

Alex Skovron's next book, The Man and the Map, *will be published by Five Islands Press in 2003.*

FLASH IN THE PAN

Crossing the bar

Last Orders, dir. Fred Schepisi. There are faint echoes of Chaucer in this delightful film. It follows a group of friends on a pilgrimage to fulfil the last wishes of one of their boozy company that his ashes be scattered from Margate pier. They even visit Canterbury on their way, but the tales they tell (mostly to us, not each other) are the bitter-sweet flashbacks of memory, not episodes of instructive fiction. These flashbacks explore the pains and complex triumphs that lie beneath the phlegmatic surface of the lives of these ordinary men and their women.

Australian Fred Schepisi has gathered an extraordinary cast of British stars to bring to life his adaptation of Graham Swift's prize-winning novel. Michael Caine plays butcher Jack Dodds whose post-mortem instructions are the last orders of the title. The film opens with Jack's friends Ray (Bob Hoskins), Vic (Tom Courtenay) and Lenny (David Hemmings) meeting with his son Vince (Ray Winstone) in their local pub for a priming ale before their uncomfortable journey begins. An uneasy presence is the urn containing Jack's ashes and an uneasy absence is his wife Amy (Helen Mirren) who cannot bring herself to make the trip. Instead she is visiting their severely retarded daughter June (Laura Morelli) in the institution to which she has been confined for 50 years without a single visit from her father. June has never shown a flicker of recognition of her mother. Vince's connection with his father is real but ambiguous.

As the past unravels in layers of flashback, we learn of the betrayals, compromises and delicacies that have formed these lives. Caine's nudge-wink Jack beautifully complements Hoskins' restrained portrait of the reticent, overshadowed Ray who is nonetheless a semi-professional gambler. David Hemmings is fine as the ex-boxer Lenny full of menacing grievance, while Tom Courtenay's undertaker Vic presents a dignified, wry fulcrum for the group. Ray Winstone's Vince shows the virtues of understated acting and, as the young Jack, J.J. Feild gives a flamboyant, insinuating portrayal of irresponsible charm.

One might cavil at a few plot tricks, and at the end there is the now-common British fantasy of Australia as a distant paradise, but this is a film not to miss. Don't wait around for closing time. **—Tony Coady**

The real thing

Italian for Beginners, dir. Lone Scherfig. 'Lights, camera, action'—I'm quite sure they don't say that on *any* film set, but if you're making a Dogme film even the temptation is removed. Rule no.4 of the 'Vows of Chastity' in the official Dogme Manifesto allows no special lighting of any kind. But that's not your only restriction—no added music, no tripods, no black-and-white, no murders, no costume drama, no personal assistants to your pet iguana. Despite these restrictions, and quite possibly because of them, *Italian for Beginners*, officially certified Dogme film no. 12, is in all respects a joy.

Set in an uninspiring suburban corner of Copenhagen, *Italian for Beginners* explores the minute tragedies and comedies of everyday loneliness. When the local priest pushes his organist over the church balcony, the priest is retired and a young replacement, Andreas (Anders W. Berthelsen), is brought in to preach in his place.

Despite having no congregation to speak of, Andreas finds himself in the midst of a community quietly in need. Jørgen (Peter Gantzler) is impotent and shy and in love with Giulia (Sara Indrio Jensen); Giulia doesn't speak Danish so can't tell Jørgen she loves him; Halvfinn (Lars Kaalund) is violently grumpy and in need of a hair cut; Karen (Ann Eleonora Jørgensen) cuts hair, if her horribly sick mother isn't in the salon; and Olympia (Anette Støvelbæk) sells cakes on the rare occasions she doesn't drop them first. Their lives aren't quite hell in a hand basket but they are definitely in need of a little repair. Their one shared joy is a weekly Italian class for beginners.

The performances are glorious—every one. Inspired improvised dialogue works seamlessly with the hilarious and beautifully shaped script. Although Dogme doesn't allow directors credit, Scherfig deserves a great deal. She has dug a story out of the grot that accumulates in the corners of your kitchen and under the seats on the bus. As a result, *Italian for Beginners* is always unexpected and hysterically honest.

—Siobhan Jackson

Arachnid kid

Spider-Man, dir. Sam Raimi. Spider-Man comics have always been different, more noirishly funny than the others. His postures are not the posey-heroic beefcake of Superman and Batman—he squats splay-legged on the side of buildings, not trying to be attractive, and the web that shoots out from his wrist is rather icky. His muscles are for agility rather than display, so his looks are more Robin than Batman. But unlike the ambiguous duo, Spidey is definitely no gay icon. He's straighter than Superman and Lois put together.

The movie does a good, workmanlike job. Tobey Maguire as Spider-Man/Peter Parker has large eyes and Raimi's direction has him using them a lot, cultivating a sense of alert stillness that builds intensity without seeming to try. The story is well known: orphaned, bullied swot yearns after beautiful, ill-treated girl-next-door, is bitten by genetically modified spider on science excursion, develops super powers and must make moral choices. Peter Parker has adolescent conflicts with his loving aunt and uncle, but his teenage arrogance and bad temper are shown to have incalculably terrible consequences. So then the underlying theme is power and the matching responsibility it carries: a moment of self-ishness can/will destroy others.

There is of course a baddie, and Willem Dafoe is wonderful as the Green Goblin—much more scary in his own skin than in costume. The lines, the bones of his real face are so stylised you could just look at him all through the film. As you do, in fact, whenever he is on-screen. He acts everyone off the set, but that is no criticism of the others. Kirsten Dunst is subtle and, like Maguire, curiously still as her character, Mary Jane, the love interest.

At times the scenes have a feeling of tableau; Raimi is true not just to the idea of Spider-Man but to the whole comic feel, without sending it up, which is a difficult thing to pull off. On the whole, he manages it and has given us something worthwhile and very watchable. I just hope this means that kids will go out and buy the comics now, and that Marvel will reissue the old ones without trying to update them.

—Juliette Hughes

Missing out

I Am Sam, dir. Jessie Nelson. Sam is intellectually disabled, Annie is socially disabled, Margaret is disabled by regulations and Rita is disabled by a hunger for perfection. You may have noticed a pattern emerging. *I am Sam* has a good point to make, it just makes it too many times and with not nearly enough nuance. The point is this: bringing up a child is confusing, challenging, frightening, even disabling at times, but if you show abundant and unconditional love your child will probably come up trumps. A handsome sentiment and basically true, but what thunderous complexities it fails to acknowledge.

Despite having the intellectual capacity of a child, Sam (Sean Penn, right) has cared for his daughter Lucy (Dakota Fanning, far right) for nearly seven years as a single parent. When her intellectual capacity starts to challenge his own, child welfare authorities step in, believing the unconventional situation is detrimental to Lucy's development. Lucy is put into care, but Sam vows to get her back.

I am Sam is about judgment and love and how painfully blind we can be when it comes to judging others. If you want a good weep and sniffle, this film is right on the money, but it just doesn't quite pull off the very difficult (granted) task it sets itself. Sadly, Sam's intellectual disability becomes a dull metaphor for the mistakes and confusions of any parent and in so doing fails to acknowledge the individual realities of bringing up kids, disabled or not.

—Siobhan Jackson

Heist on own petard

The Hard Word, dir. Scott Roberts. All heist movies have the same plot: a team of guys must pull off an audacious crime against the odds, preferably with the use of gadgets, charm and humour. But to be a great example of the genre, this simple narrative must run with clockwork precision towards a killer ending. Unfortunately, *The Hard Word* is not a great heist movie; it is, in fact, a cowpat of a film: one that comes out steaming, but falls in a heap.

And somehow writer–director Scott Roberts has managed to create this disappointing mess with one of the best casts ever assembled for an Australian production. How do you make a film in which Guy Pearce isn't charismatic, Kim Gyngell isn't funny, and Rachel Griffiths isn't sexy? It must take a lot of planning.

The three Twentyman brothers are bank robbers. Dale (Pearce) is the brains of the operation. Mal (Damien Richardson) is the nice one. And Shane (Joel Edgerton) is the psycho—although, like his siblings, he too has a heart of gold. The boys are released from prison by some criminally inclined Sydney cops to pull a job. It quickly becomes apparent, however, that their corrupt lawyer, Frank Malone (Robert Taylor) is rather too friendly with Dale's missus, Carol (Griffiths), and the big job he's planning is designed to end in betrayal.

So far, so good. From similar clichéd beginnings many a good caper flick has been constructed. But soon enough the bad dialogue starts to grate and you find yourself getting embarrassed for the actors. Before you know it, your mind—set adrift by story illogicalities—has wandered, and you are playing Spot the Location ('Oh, look, there's the Anzac Bridge'). By the time the credits roll you have worked out your weekly shopping list.

It's important to support the Australian film industry—it's always in dire straits, after all—but don't waste your $13.50 on *The Hard Word*. Make an investment in the future and donate it to VCA or AFTRS instead.

—Brett Evans

Ghosts made flesh

The Devil's Backbone, dir. Guillermo del Toro. Although Mexican director, Guillermo del Toro (*Cronos*) describes his supernatural melodrama as an allegory of the Spanish Civil War, I suggest you forget the symbolism and treat the war only as background, as you settle down to watch this beautifully photographed, atmospheric ghost story with gothic influences.

Set in Spain in the late 1930s in the final months of the civil war, the action occurs in a rundown and isolated rural orphanage which is being used to house children who are the flotsam of the conflict, as well as the resident orphans. The overcrowded orphanage is struggling to survive because of a shortage of food and money.

A young boy, Carlos (Fernando Tielve, an inspired choice for this pivotal role), is left at the orphanage after his father has been killed. As the new ingredient in the existing tension among the boys and the meagre staff of five, he is immediately bullied to hand over his comics and his other childish treasures.

He is allocated bed 12 in the cavernous, echoing dormitory, the bed formerly occupied by a missing boy named Santi. Santi disappeared on the night a huge bomb was dropped in the quadrangle of the orphanage. It failed to explode and was left standing upright with its nose buried in the ground, a monument to the futility of war.

Like the other boys, Carlos hears a nocturnal ghostly voice of 'the one who sighs', but it seems that only he catches glimpses of a spectral figure in the physical and emotional claustrophobic gloom of the orphanage.

He becomes aware too of the staff tensions: the hatred of the brutal young caretaker, the weary hopelessness of the headmistress, and the frustrated love of Casares, the aged professor.

As the mystery unravels, the brutality within the orphanage matches the worst that is occurring outside its walls. The ghost predicts deaths to come. Living passions override the all-pervading fear of the dead, and earthly matters are horror enough. As Professor Casares observes, 'You shouldn't fear the dead, you should fear the living.'

—Gordon Lewis

Monsters are us

HOW MANY MONSTERS lived under your bed when you were seven? Perhaps the monster is your sister, who lurks among the dust bunnies one evening as you, perhaps humming a sleepy little tune, walk to your bed. Then she grabs your ankle.

You recover, eventually, with enough sympathy and hot cocoa. Many years later, that very scene is reprised in *The Sixth Sense*, and you shriek just a bit louder than the rest of the audience. Friends start to back out of cinema dates with you unless the movie is PG, tops. 'I'll come with you to *Crush*, but forget the *Carrie* rerun,' says one, heartlessly.

She cannot understand that, shrieking aside, I enjoy the frisson of terror, even the chill of horror, in my entertainment. Perhaps it's because horror's themes are big, really big, taking in the meaning of things, the nature of existence, the reasons for living, power, good, evil, love, death, soul-struggle, moral dilemma. And if we can also get these things in an episode of *Blue Heelers* then horror offers us something else as well. Good horror makes you think, under the pressure of fear. Shakespeare knows how to leave both the mundane world and the shadow world in our minds. His witches in the Scottish play were saying things attributed to 'real' witches at the time, and the play's bad-luck history ever since has spawned a culture of fear for actors—you don't muck around with old *Mac*. And while Hamlet's father's ghost may well be explained away in whatever theory happens to appeal more than the words that Shakespeare left us, a well-performed first scene of Hamlet has you shivering.

The best things on TV at the moment are dealing with all that big stuff. Channel Nine has been showing *Six Feet Under* (around 10.30pm Mondays) and it should have an army of admirers. They have programmed it after *Sex and the City*, obviously gambling that it might keep those parts of that audience that don't then switch over to Seven for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. All three are, along with *Spin City* and *West Wing*, the very best of American television drama.

Six Feet Under is about a small-town, family-run undertaker's business. The father dies in a car accident and Nate Fisher, the estranged eldest son, finds that he has been left half the business to share with his repressed gay brother David. There is a lot of interesting detail about embalming and tarting up dead people, some of which might bother the fragile-stomached. There is some terrific acting—Rachel Griffiths is compelling and attractive as Brenda, Nate's lover. The series is complex and intelligent, but will shock some people. Its language is as obscene as the timeslot allows—there is literally nothing they won't say. Don't be put off by this. It feels authentic, unlike the swearing in *Sex and the City*, which sometimes has a self-conscious 'aren't-I-daring' air. Both *Sex* and *Six Feet Under* are well worth a look, the former because it is a true essential: Carrie, Miranda, Samantha and Charlotte mean something to women everywhere. In a world where women are often the poorest of the poor, they are relatively without money worries. They dress extravagantly in a world that also contains burkas. They choose whether and how to have sex in a world that also includes clitoridectomy and honour killings. The people in *Six Feet Under* make similar choices but they exist in a world that is less fairy-tale than *Sex in the City*.

STRANGELY ENOUGH, the world of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is not far removed from either *Six Feet Under* or *Sex in the City*. It is a fairy tale but it delves as deep as any philosopher would want. Websites on it proliferate, discussing the themes that arise in the series—everything from its treatment of Christianity, or Kant's ethics, to Plato's cave. The 'All Things Philosophical on Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel' website is fun and can be found at http://www.atpobtvs.com/index.html. Buffy lives in an American Our Town called Sunnydale, which happens to be built right over a portal into Hell.

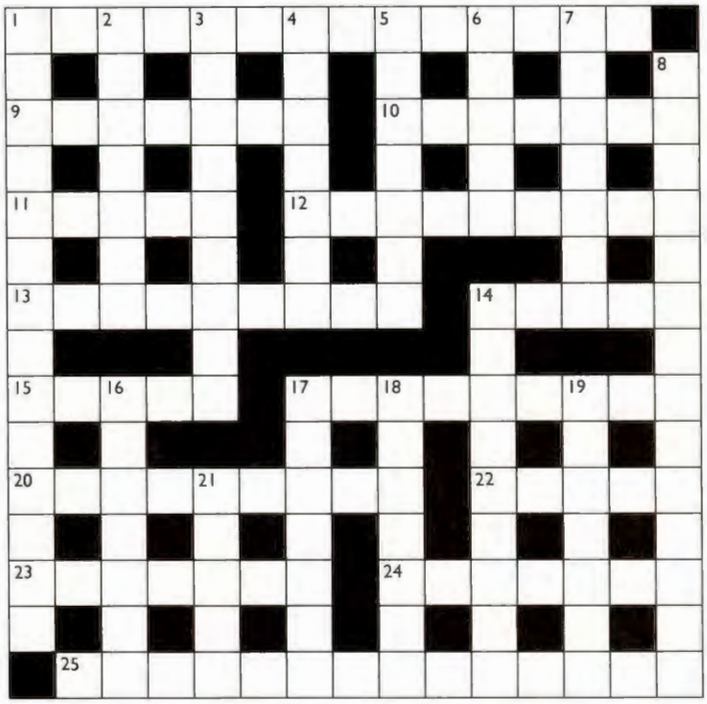
Joss Whedon, the series' creator, makes the cast read Shakespeare before shooting each episode. Allusions abound, sometimes even direct quotes. Spike the vampire, in an early episode, when he is still pure evil, promises his lover that he will kill Buffy, adding 'I'll chop her into messes.' No other direct reference to *Othello* is made in that episode. It is just one of the many little surprises. If you are female you will adore Spike, the cute almost-reformed vampire who loves Buffy. But I have to tell you that in this you will come up against opposition from young males in the family, who will all barrack for Angel (Buffy's first vampire lover; it's a long story—don't ask) and deplore Spike as a scurvy knave.

'I suppose you and Mum think he's a lovable rogue, a bit of a scapegrace,' said my nephew bitterly. 'Oh yes,' we chorused. 'He's a real scamp, isn't he? Love those cheekbones!' Nephew went off to his computer muttering about pearls, swine and the tragedy of menopausal brain-softening in close relatives. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 105, July–August 2002

Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM



ACROSS

1. Changing weather patterns for one whose enthusiasm may wax and wane. (4,3,3,4)
9. It's strange to lisp on 'u', a letter in ancient Athens. (7)
10. Hear about a horse to back? O no, it goes up in smoke! (7)
11. Baggy clothes? Change the top, but they still look dishevelled! (5)
12. Accept an (old) coconut, perhaps, as partial payment. (2,7)
13. Turned up for the photo? It's on the nose—sort of! (9)
14. Like 9-across, but it's the 'thank you' letter. (5)
15. Some sound I'd cancelled. (5)
17. Partial to those with narrow-minded concern for the interests of their group? (9)
20. Impractical idea, a fantasy rising from use of 10-across, perhaps. (4,5)
22. Line of poetry becomes crisply brief when the beginning is changed. (5)
23. It sounded as if it teemed, but the day was supreme. (7)
24. Like the curate's egg, good where no splits somehow appear left out. (2,5)
25. Someone to turn to for information and supplies—like Capability Brown? (8,6)

DOWN

1. Four off the bat; referee, however, needed for 8-down. (8,6)
2. On location, heard that recognition occurred when noticed. (2,5)
3. Christmas berry on tree where stars are seen. (9)
4. A number of tutors develop muscles. (7)
5. Shell for crazy person? (3,4)
6. Kind of measure for youngster in charge. (5)
7. So-called bait etc. confused the university instructor when giving the talk. (7)
8. It's that time of year when the weather supports the game. (8,6)
14. Sister set out for France with great sadness. (9)
16. Dispossess one who snaked off—or vipered off, if you like! (7)
17. English poet who may be extravagant with money? (7)
18. Search in eastern area in order to amalgamate. (7)
19. Common sense about confused clergyman produced a reaction that was somewhat apprehensive. (7)
21. Strange dog in the outback. (5)

Solution to Crossword no. 104, June 2002

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

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