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# EUREKA STREET

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# New season

**I**N BRISBANE, people are heading into spring by reading Peter Carey's novel, *True History of the Kelly Gang*, as part of a city-wide exercise. It's an idea adopted from Chicago. And no, Chicago wasn't put on a crash course in Ned-rhetoric—the book Chicago chose was Harper Lee's American perennial *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Lee's lawyer-hero Atticus Finch—upright, determined, dignified (and forever Gregory Peck)—is a very different agent of justice from our iron-icon Irish rebel. And Chicago will have its own windswept way of reading collectively, as, no doubt, will sunny Brisbane.

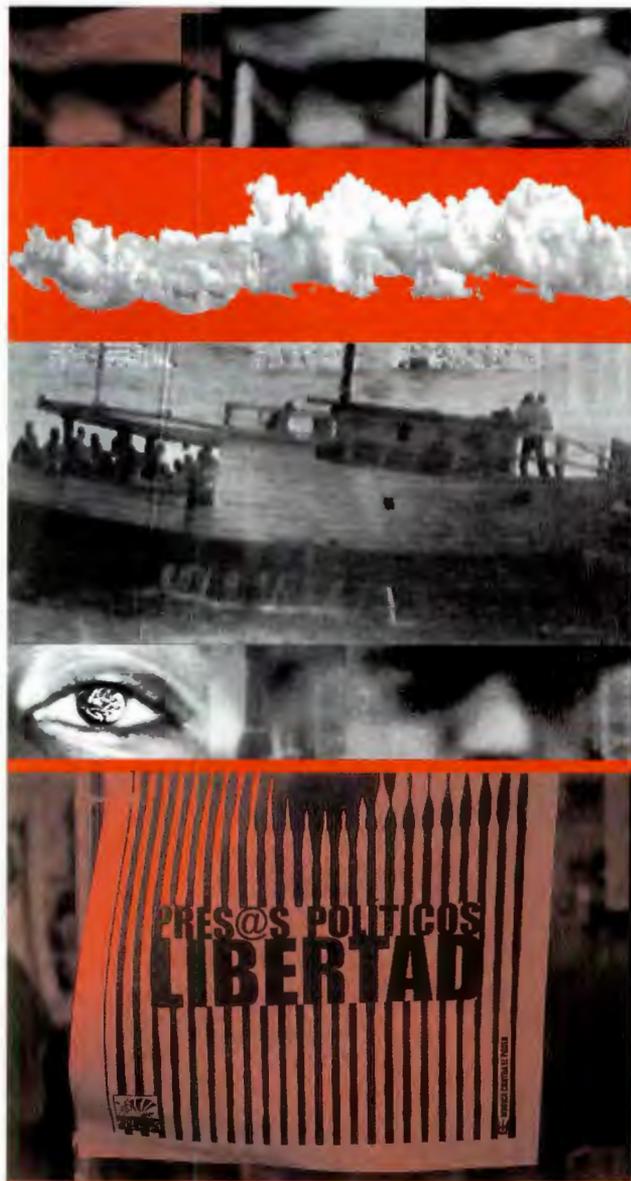
But what a marvellous thing to do, to have a whole city reading, thinking and talking together. One journalist was sceptical. Wasn't it a bit anti-democratic, he asked, to make a whole city read the *same* book? Well, not if there weren't any electrodes being applied, responded Carey. Invitation and compulsion are different. But yes, he was very pleased it was his book and in future years it will be another book, another author. Profit is nice but not the point. The point is that a city might well celebrate by putting its head in a book and not, for a moment, have to fear machines that fall out of the sky.

As September 11 approaches, I've been reading old interviews with Primo Levi, looking, I suppose, for guidance from a man who was once in the worst place imaginable and yet was able to translate that experience into something scrutable, into words that don't fuse human experience into an unassimilable mass.

It was not, finally, in his writing or conversations about Auschwitz that I found a cast of mind that helped. Instead, it was in his stringent, honest, critical concern for Israel, and for justice—for Palestinian and Israeli alike—that the consolation lay (if consolation is the word for an encounter with wisdom wrung out of appalling experience).

Levi was an Italian Jew to whom Israel mattered profoundly, even though he lived his life determinedly in Turin. His gift (and ours from him) was a yen to get to the truth and to tell it. Fate didn't allow him the luxury of an equivocating tongue. He is no longer alive to make judgment on what passes for international or domestic politics these days, but his books are there. I don't suggest that a whole city read them, but *you* might.

—Morag Fraser



## Jubilation

At the 2002 Australasian Catholic Press Association and Australasian Religious Press Association conferences, *Eureka Street* won an award for best social justice coverage (Frank Brennan SJ and Mark Raper SJ, 'A Better Way', the Jesuit Lenten Seminar, photographs by Grant Somers, April 2002). It also won best magazine reporting (Peter Mares, 'A Pacific Solution', November 2001), best editorial (Andrew Hamilton, 'Taking the High Road', June 2001), best magazine cover (December 2001, photograph by Mathias Heng, design by Siobhan Jackson) and was highly commended for Meg Gurry's series on illness and recovery, 'The Heart of the Matter', April 2001 and 'Recovery', March 2002. We should add that Meg Gurry's articles have also received extensive media coverage, republication and radio analysis, and have been a focus for discussion at the Australian Catholic Health conference in 2002 and in health circles generally. Congratulations to all.

# Morality in a spin

**I**N JULY, AUSTRALIAN public values found expression in two stories. The first was Mr Downer's advocacy of Australian participation in any US operation against Iraq. The second was the return to Woomera of two Afghan boys who had escaped to Melbourne. They were put on the plane from Melbourne even as their distraught father was coming there to visit them.

The most apposite comment on these events was written 2500 years ago by the Greek historian, Thucydides. When offering the people of Melos the choice between alliance and destruction, the Athenian ambassadors remarked:

When these issues are discussed by practical people, the standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel, and on the fact that the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.

What the two traumatised boys returned to Woomera have to accept is clear: further incarceration, distress, depression and worse. What the children, women and men of Iraq have to accept is also clear. A people who already suffer politically from a brutal regime, and whose health and sustenance are already affected by trade sanctions, have to accept bombing, invasion, and all the physical and social ills that are the lot of those against whom war is waged.

These things the Afghan boys and the Iraqi people must accept because they do not have 'the equality of power to compel'. So, from Australia as ally of the powerful and as powerful in its own right, they can expect a lesser standard of justice. Practical people in Australia, as in Athens, do not object.

But for Thucydides, the Melos incident was not only an example of political realism. It also marked a stage in the corruption of Athenian public life. The people of Melos, who strangely preferred freedom to security and so were slaughtered, lived by the ideals that had once inspired Athens. The practical people who had come to power in Athens had lost the compass that could protect them from subsequent miscalculation and practical disaster. Later theorists would identify the corruption of public life with disregard of the moral dimension of policy.

Judged morally, Australia's participation in a war against Iraq and its treatment of asylum seekers are alike indefensible. If the military action against Afghanistan was morally ambiguous, the grounds

that may have supported it are lacking in the case of Iraq. The sole defence offered is the removal of a tyrant. There is no evidence that he supported the terrorists involved on September 11. Nor does his possession of biological and chemical weapons establish grounds for war. It is difficult to see how a war against him could be described as legitimately authorised or as conducted with a right intention. Finally, the sufferings that will come to the Iraqi and other peoples as a result of the war seem totally disproportionate to the gain expected in removing Saddam Hussein. The imprisonment of children who seek asylum is also morally obnoxious, because detention is so injurious to human dignity, especially to that of vulnerable children. Moreover, even if the policy of deterrence were itself not immoral, its goal—the integrity of Australia's borders—would be achieved without detaining children.

But moral considerations are irrelevant to practical people who know that 'the standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel, and on the fact that the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept'. They see moral considerations as no more than a matter of spin to be imparted after decisions are taken.

In Australia, as in imperial Athens, there are also those who believe that a morally reasonable public policy is a condition for building a humane and prosperous society. If called on to participate in the incarceration of asylum seekers or in war against Iraq, they will consider whether they can be complicit in forcing the weak to 'accept what they have to accept'. ■

*If the military action against Afghanistan was morally ambiguous, the grounds that may have supported it are lacking in the case of Iraq.*

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

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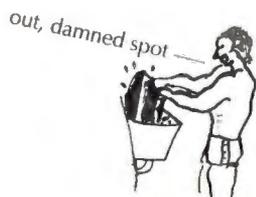
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## Soak it to him

Nathan Buckley, the captain of Collingwood, recently became the first player in the AFL to be had up on the charge of wiping blood on an opponent's jumper. This must be the equivalent in Aussie Rules of handling the ball in cricket. Buckley was contrite and apologised. But he needs a better scriptwriter. He said he hoped the whole thing would come out in the wash.



## The litter of law

Raffles are a ceremonious business. So, as the Act requires, we nominated 11.00am as the time for the Jesuit Publications raffle to be drawn. But subverting the solemnity, we also ordered a celebratory cake. Providentially, because this was the year the raffle police came to the draw.

Albert looked like the accountant of the Untouchables, Jack like one of their operatives. They found us gathered like the witches from *Macbeth* around the ticket vat, ensuring that all entries were separated and enjoyed the equal and indiscriminatory chance of winning that the Act demands. Albert and Jack were plied with cake. The Staff plied them too with crafty questions designed to elicit just what the Act provides, and with stories of great Catholic raffles that the Act was instituted to stamp out. Undistracted, Albert and Jack asked their own deadly questions, establishing exactly who was responsible for the raffle, how we could prove that the winning tickets were paid for, as the Act stipulated, and so on. The Staff tried to propitiate these Gods of Chance with the casuistry card, asking Albert and Jack for advice about the hypothetical book of five tickets for which ten dollars were due, but only eight had been paid. Given that each ticket was made out

to a separate person, but only four had been paid for, how would Albert and Jack rule on which ticket was to be omitted from the raffle?

Jack and Albert were not confused by such Jesuitry. They watched the Staff separate the tickets, put them into a large laundry basket (deemed in accordance with the spirit of the Act), shake them vigorously, pour them into another laundry basket and back again. Down to the floor went Manager and Publisher to ensure that no tickets had escaped. Down to the floor went Albert and Jack to countercheck and, no doubt, to look for trapdoors and other infernal devices in the laundry basket. Then into the laundry basket went the Publisher's head, shoulders and fingers which scabbled for a ticket, hoping that it came within the meaning of the Act, and would not announce to Jack and Albert that its owner (unnamed) was the same as the one named on ticket no. 34,567. Eyes screwed shut to suggest total impartiality, the Publisher handed the ticket to the IT Manager, who solemnly read out the name and address, passed it on to the Manager for verification, and on to the Editor (*Madonna*) to be written down. Editor (*Eureka Street*) and Editor (*Australian Catholics*) had presciently taken themselves out of town for the day. These procedures were repeated till all winning tickets were drawn and Jack and Albert expressed themselves satisfied within the meaning of the Act. The Staff settled down to what Albert and Jack and the Act had left of the cake. Thus ended the Raffle, and thus did the Regulators of Chance rule it fair.

## Fine tuning

Contrary to popular opinion, 'raffle' is not derived from Raffles, Hornung's gentleman thief. But that the two concepts do exercise a mutual attraction is recognised by those experienced in church raffles. One country parish priest, also rumoured to have fixed a horse race or two to augment parish funds, once invited the doctor's wife to lend her grand piano for the parish fete. She acceded, and was delighted to see it in



the place of honour. She was less happy to find that it was being offered as first prize in the raffle. Perturbed, she told the parish priest she had loaned the piano, not given it to the church. Nothing to worry about, she was assured. First prize in the raffle would, of course, be hers.

## Seven a side

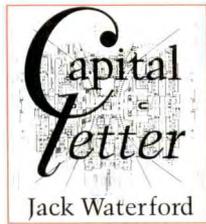


John Howard's dreams of a High Court in his own image came tumbling down on 8 August 2002. First the court (including all three of his appointees) blew the procedures of the Refugee Review Tribunal out of the water, bringing into question more than 7000 decisions that would have been removed from all judicial scrutiny if they'd been made post-*Tampa*.

Then two of his own appointees (including Chief Justice Gleeson) joined with members of the Wik majority to rule that Wik had survived the Howard surgery. Chief Justice Gleeson and Justice Hayne joined with Justices Gaudron and Gummow to rule that native title could still exist on pastoral leases in Western Australia. As ever, Justice Kirby wrote on his own, reaching the same conclusion. The only capital 'C' conservative who delivered according to Tim Fischer's mantra was Justice Callinan who was joined in vigorous dissent by Justice McHugh, who had been part of the original Mabo majority. McHugh lamented that 'the deck is stacked against the native-title holders' and 'the chief beneficiaries of the system are the legal representatives of the parties'.

Much of the National Party's post-Wik concern had centred on the plight of farmers in the NSW Western Lands Division. In 1998, it was a tinder box back of Bourke and no legal assurances that native title had been extinguished would satisfy the farmers, whose fears had been fed by their representatives and politicians.

In the third decision of the day, all seven justices of the High Court showed these fears to have been baseless. It did not require capital 'C' conservatives to deliver that result. Next day, the *Daily Telegraph* didn't even mention it.



# Labor in vain

**B**OB HAWKE and Neville Wran say that Labor needs an attractive, inclusive and participatory organisation with something to believe in. It needs to get rid of factionalism and branch-stacking, and involve ordinary members more in devising policies.

A tick for all of the above, as aspirations at least, but you have to ask whether the Hawke–Wran report on the future of the party delivers any of it, even on paper. No doubt the factions and the real power brokers will continue making ritual squeals to give the impression that they are being dragged kicking and screaming away from the levers. No doubt Simon Crean will emerge, slightly bloodied from the disputation, clutching endorsement of the proposals as proof that he is a real leader who can take on the heavies and win. No doubt the new party chieftains (looking amazingly like the old ones) will spend a fortune marketing the party as transformed for the new millennium. Essentially, however, it looks like a public-relations confection. An appearance of broadening the party cannot mask the fact that the centres of power will not change much.

The big debate is not really about whether unions have 60 or 50 per cent of the delegates at a party conference, or even about whether unions have delegates at all. This is a labour party, not just a party of social democrats, and even if a modern party of its nature must form new alliances with women, with professionals, and with some key minorities to gain power, its roots in the industrial labour movement are still, or should still be, critical to its success. What the debate is really about is how power and decision-making is shared, and whether attempts to broaden and deepen the appeal of the party are intended to let new people, even unionists, sup at the table.

Alas, rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, an implemented Hawke–Wran report will not much influence the power balances. Even the proposed 50–50 rule is a bit of a fraud, because it is fundamental to the proposal that unions will have a new power of nomination of 50 per cent of delegates to the enlarged party conferences. And will these delegates be a representative sample of the best and the brightest men and women from a particular union, involving a wide range of views about the best policies for the modern day? Not on your life. Generally, they will be the henchmen and cronies of the faction in charge of the particular union. As the report suggests, 'the selection process for delegations should ... remain the prerogative of affiliated trade unions'.

And don't expect more than ritual complaint from left-wing unions, because their own practices of manipulating union numbers are at least as corrupt as those of the right wing. Indeed, as Messrs Hawke and Wran themselves comment, in

another context, labels such as 'left' and 'right' are by now quite out of date. The factions are not organised around a battle of ideas but around personalities and the spoils of power.

Labor, like the Liberal Party, is still essentially state-based, even if its federal council now has final control. The federal model is important when one remembers both that Labor is in power in every state and territory jurisdiction, and that it is at that level that the highest proportion of perks are available and distributed. It may be by having upper houses in which membership is virtually by appointment. It may be in the hundreds of boards, agencies and statutory positions to which the spouses, mistresses, children and cronies of the power brokers can be appointed. It may be in the scores of jobs in ministerial offices, many of which will be occupied by apprentice apparatchiks occupied full-time on factional affairs. Or in the consultancies that will be dished out to the mates, or in the favour processes at local and state government level for developers and urgers. So much more to enjoy, and, at the state level, so much easier to enjoy it without the scrutiny and the protests that occur when it happens at the Commonwealth Government level.

Little wonder, then, that many of the factional chieftains do not quite share the sense of keen disappointment that Labor, at the national level, is a failure, that people who need to be inspired are deterred or discouraged from joining, or that critics complain about the party's incapacity to articulate ideals and new ideas. There's the risk, after all, that idealists might not like what they see when the party *is* exercising power—might even upset the apple cart.

**N**EVILLE WRAN and Bob Hawke, however steeped in the party, never really had to roll up their sleeves in party affairs. Neither had to do much personal knife-wielding. Neither spent more than a term in opposition, and both left office (Hawke kicking and screaming, of course) while the party was still in power. In their time, both were tremendously popular, but neither left much in the way of monuments to their rule. Winners, yes; achievers and visionaries, no.

From the Hawke–Wran report, then, it is hard to see Simon Crean, or his mentors, emerging in the style of Whitlam as he took on his party in the 1970s, the Whitlam who actually argued about policies that mattered, who changed people's minds on fundamental issues, or who inspired a generation of younger people. That all came a cropper too, of course, but sometimes it seems that crashing in such a cause is almost as noble as crashing through. ■

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

## Incorporating faith

To save all of us in the Catholic Church from our present shame and to restore our faith in ourselves as pilgrim people of God, our cardinals and bishops must accept ultimate, collective accountability for what has happened, confess openly their failure of stewardship and consider resigning their offices.

To many, this suggestion will seem absurd. But it should not. It will seem absurd only because the Catholic Church is commonly perceived, even by Catholics, to be an international religious corporation run by a board of directors, and boards of directors in general do not behave like that.

But the church is not a corporation, or at any rate, it was not intended to be one. It was intended surely to be unique: a community whose leaders would see themselves as servants, not masters; or as shepherds who would not think it absurd—only painful—to sacrifice themselves for their flocks.

The board of directors of a mere religious corporation, on the other hand, would put itself first. It would close ranks; it would refuse to come clean; it would be tight-lipped about its own accountability but apologise loudly and repeatedly for the sins of others; and it might even come to believe that in protecting itself it was protecting its flock.

What our cardinals and bishops do now will show whether the church is what it was intended to be or an international religious corporation run by a board of directors.

**John F. Haughey**  
Carlton, VIC

## For consultation

*The following was sent as an open letter to the bishops of New Zealand. As the issue is of such moment, we republish it here.*

Thank you for your recent letter on sexual abuse in the church in New Zealand. Sexual abuse hurts the whole People of God; most of all it damages victims and their families.

We are very conscious of priests and religious feeling alienated, by the actions of abusers, from those they minister to. When priests are moved to parishes where abuse has occurred they may not be informed of



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this and feel unsupported by their bishop. They face the deep anger and hurt of communities who have been abused.

It is no use focusing on the past and introducing draconian punishments for abusers without at the same time trying to ensure this will not happen again. Other professions have very clear written standards of accountability and behaviour. They also undergo regular professional supervision and auditing of their work. We think this is essential for all pastoral workers. We understand this is a radical proposal, as the work of clerics has always been left to their consciences. Unfortunately the present outcome shows this is not enough to safeguard the innocent.

Two underlying factors contribute to abusive behaviour. On the one hand there is an unreal expectation that because the institutional church represents God in the world, it must appear perfect. To acknowledge publicly the sinfulness of clergy and religious is therefore impossible. Not wishing to scandalise the faithful was the excuse of those who hid abuse. On the other hand there is unchecked, oppressive power at all levels of the church that reflects its internal hierarchical and clerical structure. This leads to a profound deafness, a failure to listen and be accountable.

In the Vatican, abuse of power is visible in two important areas. First, its Congregations refuse to listen to the pastoral concerns of bishops. Local bishops at the synods of Africa, Oceania and Asia tried with passion to address urgent pastoral concerns about marriage, women in the church, married priests and more. The problem of sexual abuse of women by priests was raised at all these synods. None of their final documents deals with these issues. All were written in Rome and anything contentious was edited out. Second, the current method of appointment of bishops by the Vatican, with minimal local consultation, sometimes causes con-

flict and distress in the local church. This occurs when the appointed bishop is at odds with the local church and attempts to impose his vision of church.

In the church in New Zealand, we note with sadness that similar behaviour occurs. Local bishops sometimes move priests without consulting the parishes to which they will go, or the ones they will leave. This exactly reflects the Roman model above. It is sinful to appoint a priest to a parish where he then dismantles a well-functioning church community and imposes his limited vision of church. This damages the community and the priest. It does not reflect the image of church as the People of God. Another ongoing issue for women in the church is the deliberate use of exclusive male language in liturgy and the failure of bishops to address this practice.

The church is in a process of radical change. This demands a painful letting go of past certainties, safety and power. That is the real challenge of the Second Vatican Council. This age calls for a stepping out in faith, a walking on water, with full knowledge of our weakness and fallibility.

A dysfunctional church wounds us all. We pray for a true People of God, a church where the truth can be spoken in love and be heard. We pray that you might have the faith and hope to help it come to birth.

**Dr Anna Holmes**  
New Zealand

### Congratulations to our winners!

#### Raffle

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# Vatican II: from pause to forward

The great issues still to be resolved are sex and power, argues **Bishop Geoffrey Robinson**.

**W**HEN BISHOPS COME together, they are at ease with discussion of pastoral issues, but much less comfortable with discussion of profound theological issues. This is true whether we are speaking of a meeting of the Australian bishops in conference or of the Synod of Bishops in Rome, and I believe it was true also of the Second Vatican Council.

The Council opened up perspectives, raised questions, indicated directions and made many beautiful and inspiring pastoral statements, but it frequently did not give the clear theological foundation on which to plan confidently for the church of the future. All too often the Council's treatment of a topic involved a tension between very different theological positions. This was certainly true of the Council's treatment of collegiality, conscience and marriage, among others. This is one of the major reasons why we must speak of Vatican II as unfinished business.

It is important to understand that these tensions were present in the Council itself and in the documents it produced. Opposing groups within the church can quote different statements to support their own positions. It is not surprising, therefore, that these tensions are still with us.

Despite this, I am an optimist about the final outcome of the Council. In large part my optimism comes from the least likely source imaginable, the crisis concerning sexual abuse of minors that has engulfed the church.

It is my hope that, somewhere around the year 2100, an historian will be able to look back and say that serious change took place in the Catholic Church over the 100 years between 1960 and 2060.



At first it was the Second Vatican Council that caused changes in most aspects of the church's life and had a quite profound effect on the way Catholic people lived their lives. Eventually, however, the changes of the Council seemed to come to a stop and go no further. It was then, in the 21st century, the historian will say, that the issue of sexual abuse forced further change. Serious change in an organisation as large and ancient as the Catholic Church requires an immense energy and it was the issue of sexual abuse alone that had that level of energy, for it was this issue that finally caused vast numbers of Catholic people around the world to rise up and say, 'This is not good enough. There must be change.'

And so, our future historian might report, a further series of profound changes came over the church in the first half of the 21st century. They were mainly in

the two areas of sex and power. They did not come without fierce opposition, but the energy for change arising from sexual abuse was so great that eventually they did come.

Human development came to be put beside spiritual development and the two began to walk hand in hand. What was spiritually healthy and what was psychologically healthy began to shed light on each other. Sexuality was distinguished from sex, spirit and matter were reunited and joy in all of God's creation began to spread. The gifts of women came to be better appreciated. Power came to be seen as service, as Jesus had intended, and collaboration and empowerment became daily more common.

It is extremely unlikely that our historian will be able to report that everything became as perfect as this, but I hope that she will be able to report serious progress.

In bringing about these changes, I am not calling for a revolution or battles in the street in front of cathedrals. The issue of abuse is complex and sensitive, and it does not allow of instant and sweeping solutions. The whole church must work together. But the immense energy for change that the issue of sexual abuse has generated must not be lost. It must grow stronger, and it must be harnessed and used effectively.

**I**CANNOT SPEAK of the whole issue of abuse here, but let me give a few examples. I would like to see a massive request from the Catholic people of the whole world to the pope, asking him to put in motion a serious study of any and all factors within the church that might foster a climate of

abuse or contribute to the covering up of abuse. I would like to see an insistence that obligatory celibacy, attitudes to sex and sexuality and all the ways in which power is understood and exercised within the church at every level be part of this study. I would, however, want a truly serious and scientific study, far deeper than anything I have so far seen in newspapers or heard around a table.

As a second example, I would like to see a massive request/demand that the collegiality the Vatican Council spoke of be used to the full in responding to this crisis. If collegiality is not fully used in an issue so important, so down-to-earth and so crucial to the effectiveness of the church, then the Vatican Council is truly unfinished business. This surely means the Vatican listening to the needs of each country and not imposing solutions.

As a third example, I would like to see the 32 diocesan bishops and 150 leaders of religious institutes in Australia give up some of their independence for the sake of all of us acting as one on this issue. However, I realise that in the Catholic Church people treasure any independence they do have and are slow to surrender it. I also know that in the 19th century bishops rode roughshod over the rights of religious, especially women religious, so some religious can today be resistant to any suggestion that comes from a bishop. As I said, the issues can be complex and sensitive.

My thesis is simple. The Second Vatican Council was the greatest event in the church in my lifetime. It has inspired my life over the last 40 years. But because its theology was frequently far from clear, it is unfinished business, and two of the areas that demand further work are sex and power. For these two issues the crisis of sexual abuse alone gives the enormous energy that is needed for further change to occur. We should respond to the crisis of abuse for its own sake and the sake of the victims, but we should also seek to use its energy creatively, sensitively and intelligently in order to take further the unfinished business of the Council. ■

**Geoffrey Robinson** is Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney. This text was his panel speech on the opening night of the Catalyst for Renewal Forum, 'Vatican II: Unfinished Business', held at St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, Sydney, in July 2002.



## Play on hold

**I**N A SPLENDIDLY TOUGH-MINDED account of university Catholic life in the 1950s and '60s, Patrick O'Farrell (*Australasian Catholic Record*, April 2002) remarks how the tradition of intellectual interest in the faith dissipated in the 1960s after the Vatican Council. Not for the first time, I wondered why the 1960s so often appear as a Bermuda Triangle in which Catholic and other ships set fair in sail go down or are spun off into another dimension of reality.

O'Farrell records the loss of something precious and distinctive, which may be of more than Catholic interest. I believe that what was lost was playfulness: the '60s brought conditions under which it could not flourish. Playfulness implies that there is time and space to play seriously with ideas. Time and space in turn are provided by a solid and large tradition in which authorities are set securely. But their pretensions can be subverted and freedom found by exploring other parts of a tradition that turns out to be expansive. Living in such a solid community, fed by scholars like Rahner and Von Balthasar, people found room to play seriously with ideas because they counted.

The conditions that support playfulness are vulnerable to cultural change, as the end of *Manna*, the journal that Patrick O'Farrell edited, testifies. The civility required for leisurely argument had already been eroded by the bitterness of the Split. The 1960s were corrosive of all solids, especially the solidity of authority, while at the Council the previously subversive interpretations of the Catholic tradition were taken into the mainstream. The theme of much subsequent debate was about who had power over the tradition. In such conversation, where tradition is handed over to exploitation and not to exploration, playfulness dies.

The loss of intellectual playfulness in contemporary teaching institutions affects more than theology. Few groups dedicated to conversation about ideas flourish, and much discussion that takes place is about which group possesses historical, theological or economic truth rather than about what is true. This should not be surprising. It reflects a general suspicion of authorities and the fragility of communities.

All of this might make us ask if there is any room now for theological playfulness, and what forms it might take. Certainly, many young adults are interested in theology, and many are engaged in formal theological studies. But they are not usually drawn by the desire to explore and to find room in a solid tradition, but by the desire to find a tradition that offers meaning and an affective home. They also often seek a way to subvert the brutal and vacuous ways in which they see power exercised in public affairs.

If a theology that is fed by such hungers is to be playful, it requires the kind of community that could once be taken for granted. That might suggest that small magazines now play a different role. Whereas *Manna* offered a forum in which an existing community could express itself, its successors may need to help create a community within which young Christians can encourage each other to reflect playfully on the large matters of faith and meaning. ■

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



# THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC

## No man's island

PARSLEY WARS

ON 11 JULY, 12 Moroccan gendarmes bearing two Moroccan flags and two tents occupied the island the Moroccans call Leila, or Toura.

Spain reacted furiously, dispatching a flotilla of five warships to Perejil (Spanish for 'parsley', and the Spanish name for the same island).

On 17 July, 28 soldiers of the elite Spanish Special Forces, backed by helicopter gunships, ejected the six remaining Moroccans without a shot being fired.

On 22 July, the enlarged Spanish occupation force of 75 soldiers abandoned their newly constructed defences in accordance with a deal brokered by US secretary of state Colin Powell whereby neither side may henceforth occupy the island or raise any flag of sovereignty on its shores.

Rarely has such farce prevailed in international diplomacy, or exposed so much hypocrisy.

For six days, the goats of Perejil/Leila (the island's only inhabitants) had become temporary citizens of the European Union. For the duration of the conflict, conservative newspapers and politicians in Spain spoke of a 'reconquista' of Africa by Spain, shamelessly voicing fears of yet another Islamic invasion. The last such 'invasion' took place in 711 AD. A resident of the Spanish enclave of Ceuta (one of two small parcels of land under Spanish sovereignty on the African mainland) gave vent to the fears of escalation: 'If they let the *moros* [Moors] get away with this, there'll be no stopping them.'

At the same time, 14 Islamist deputies in the Moroccan parliament urged Moroccans to re-enact the 'Green March' of 1975 (during which 350,000 people marched into the Western Sahara in a national reassertion of Moroccan sovereignty). There is also every reason to believe that the occupation of

Leila/Perejil was a wedding present to King Mohammed VI.

Spain's tabloid newspapers expressed dark fears of 'intercontinental conflict' and of wars between Islam and the West at their closest geographical meeting place. Morocco called Spain's occupation of Leila a 'declaration of war'. For a time, Spanish flags flew provocatively over Perejil (they could be seen from the Moroccan mainland) in a triumphalist assertion of what one Spanish politician called 'Spain's first military victory for decades'. Hinting perhaps at the embarrassment potential of the whole tawdry affair, the Spanish defence minister allowed that 'Spain had been attacked in a sensitive point of its geography'. Sensitive? Parsley is the only thing that grows on the island. Never has Jorge Luis Borges' description of war 'as two bald men fighting over a comb' seemed so apt.

The legal status of Leila/Perejil is ambiguous. It lies just 180 metres off the coast of Morocco, five kilometres from Ceuta and around 11 kilometres from the Spanish mainland. According to the Moroccans, the 1860 Spanish-Moroccan peace treaty that dealt with Ceuta did not mention Leila, and in 1878, the Moroccan army prevented the Spanish from building a lighthouse on the island. At the end of the 19th century, Moroccan forces rebuffed three Spanish attempts to occupy the outpost. In 1949, Spain declared Ceuta (but not Leila) to be sovereign Spanish land. The Moroccans argue that Leila was effectively

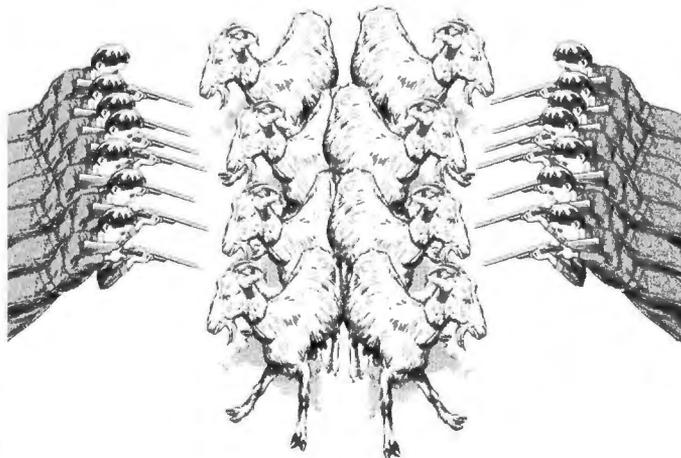
handed over in 1956 when the Spanish colonial protectorate ended. The vigilant Moroccans also successfully flushed out a Spanish attempt to incorporate Leila into the Ceuta municipal chart in 1987.

According to the Spanish, Perejil and Ceuta were conquered by Portugal in 1415 and subsequently handed over to Spain in 1581. Spanish troops occupied Perejil in 1746 and Spain built a lighthouse there in 1878 and a permanent military post in 1912. The troops remained on the island until 1960, a full four years after the ending of the Spanish protectorate of Morocco.

From the time of Moroccan independence in 1956 until 10 July 2002, no-one really bothered with Perejil/Leila. It existed in a strange no man's land, a rare patch of stateless territory, owned by no-one and not worth fighting over. But the recent change in the island's suspended neutrality speaks of larger issues facing the region. It's an intriguing instruction in international diplomacy and national aspirations as they relate to the principle of self-determination.

Spain has recently been involved in negotiations with the UK over the status of Gibraltar (surrounded as it is by Spanish territory). Spain claims Gibraltar in large part to preserve the concept of geographical unity—and to remove the anomaly of British sovereignty on the Iberian Peninsula. Then there is the issue of its strategic position overlooking the Strait of Gibraltar. A pact of shared sovereignty is currently on the table, much to the disgust of Gibraltarians, who in a 1967 referendum voted 12,000 votes to 44 in favour of remaining under British sovereignty.

Spain opposes the use of a referendum to determine Gibraltar's future, fearing that the aspirations of Basque, Catalan and Galician separatists would be emboldened by such a concession to self-determination. Writing in *The Guardian* on 19 July, Martin Woollacott explained why US diplomats newly arrived in Madrid are advised not to seek an explanation from the Spanish Foreign



Ministry of the difference between Gibraltar and Spain's African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla: 'You will not get out of his [the official's] office for hours, and your brain will not recover for days.'

Not surprisingly, the Moroccan government interpreted Spain's vigorous pursuit of Gibraltar as an opportunity to follow the Spanish arguments to their logical end. That Morocco's invasion of Leila was a clumsy effort to bring other issues to the fore was highlighted on 30 July when King Mohammed VI used the third anniversary of his ascension to power to call for 'an end to the Spanish occupation' of Ceuta and Melilla. The king described the enclaves as centres that bleed the national economy and which serve as platforms for clandestine emigration.

A spokesman for the Ceuta government, Emilio Carreira, said the king 'should ask for Disneyland' instead, while the Spanish foreign minister, Ana Palacio, claimed that Ceuta and Melilla, which are surrounded by Moroccan soil, are as Spanish as Sevilla or Cadiz.

Morocco's claims to the two enclaves, and to a number of other disputed islands in Moroccan waters (even, according to some sources, the Canary Islands), have negligible chance of success. Whatever the historical rights and wrongs, the populations of Ceuta and Melilla are overwhelmingly Spanish, patriotic to the core, and the militarily superior Spanish state would defend their right to be Spanish to the death.

Morocco's precipitous actions on Leila were fuelled by a lingering and understandable resentment over the brutal history of Spanish colonialism in Morocco. Thumbing the national nose at a former colonial oppressor was, if nothing more, a hugely popular and symbolic act of defiance.

But Morocco's position, like Spain's, has its own double standards.

In 1975, Morocco, Mauritania and Spain formally agreed to divide the former Spanish colony of Western Sahara between the two African states, with Morocco getting the mineral-rich northern two-thirds. The Polisario Front then launched a guerrilla war to oust both Morocco and Mauritania from the area. In 1978, Mauritania renounced all claims to the Western Sahara, after which Morocco occupied the remainder of Western Saharan territory. A bitter civil war ensued when the indigenous Western Saharans, led by the Polisario Front, opposed the notion that their future



## Good connections

**T**WO DISPARATE PIECES OF INFORMATION implanted themselves in the arcane Archimedean mind during the past fortnight. But once there, they came together powerfully.

The first was a series of comments from the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee on the standard of secondary-school science education in the UK. The words 'boring', 'tedious', 'dull' and 'pointless' cropped up a lot. The second was a report from the US that doctors have detected the first strain of the bacterium *Staphylococcus aureus* (golden staph) that is highly resistant to the antibiotic vancomycin (the 'last resort' antibiotic). Golden staph is now potentially unaffected by all antibiotics commonly used in hospitals.

It's hard to think of life without antibiotics, yet they have only been around since World War II. Before then, bacterial infection was a life-and-death matter. We are close to returning to those times, having now squandered the advantage antibiotics gave us over our bacterial foes.

The basic mechanism of resistance is simple, and an obvious consequence of natural selection. When you set out to poison such variable beasts as bacteria, there are always going to be some individuals that are less susceptible and that will survive. These hardy souls will pass their genes on to the next generation. And if what made them resistant is genetically based, you have just started to create a problem.

Given this, it is clear that resistance is inevitable. The speed of its advent, however, can be controlled by careful management. The more often antibiotics are used, the quicker they become obsolete. Every unnecessary prescription for antibiotics—about half of them, some experts estimate—isn't just a waste of time and money for doctor and patient. As soon as a population of bacteria becomes resistant, the battle against infection becomes just that much harder. And it's now becoming evident that resistance can be passed on between bacterial species.

But there are further complications. About two-thirds of antibiotic use in Australia is in agriculture—and most of that is not for veterinary purposes but as 'growth promoters' in feed for livestock. Some of these antibiotics will eventually be ingested by humans and the bacteria living in their digestive systems. Despite this widespread use, there is very little evidence that antibiotics promote growth or reduce animals' food intake.

But when countries seek to limit the level of antibiotics in food production, as happened in Scandinavia, they are often slapped with legal action from drug companies, and World Trade Organisation orders from other countries still using antibiotics and claiming restriction of trade.

So where is the link with the House of Commons committee? It has suggested that science courses should be the avenue for discussing contemporary issues such as the benefits and risks of antibiotics. The committee believes that this would not only make science more interesting, but would stimulate students to think about complex issues and to weigh competing claims. How else can we hope to make wise decisions in our technology-rich world? ■

**Tim Thwaites** is a freelance science writer.

could be decided by foreign powers with no consultation with the people concerned.

Hopes for the principle of self-determination were raised a decade ago when the UN announced a referendum as its preferred solution to the problem. Spain continues (disingenuously) to support the idea of a referendum—at least in the Western Sahara—despite the fact that the driving presumption of its colonial history in the region is that the local people cannot be trusted to govern themselves.

In April this year, the UN's special envoy, former US secretary of state James Baker, rewarded Moroccan stonewalling over electoral rolls and the question of who should be allowed to vote in the referendum by announcing a new UN plan. Under the plan, favoured by the US, France and the UK, Western Sahara would be granted autonomy but it would remain under Moroccan sovereignty. The Polisario Front's UN representative, Ahmed Bujari, greeted the news with a stark assessment: the proposal was 'delivering Western Saharan citizens and territory to a colonial power'.

Morocco's justifiable anger against its former colonial masters must therefore ring hollow among the people of the Western Sahara, who continue to live under the

oppressive military rule of what they consider to be a foreign power.

After the weeks of heightened tensions, the disputed island remained Percijil to the Spanish, Leila to the Moroccans and the parsley was left in peace.

Meanwhile, one journalist tracked down the owner of the island's livestock, an old woman named Rajma Lachili who lives in a nearby Moroccan hamlet. Asked who she thought owned the island, she laughed and reduced the issue to its barest absurdity: 'My goats.'

—Anthony Ham

## In the beginnings

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

IT IS AN ODD PLACE to wait for a baby to be born—a sheep stud in the middle of lambing time. My oldest friend—that is, the friend I have had since I was a small child—is a week overdue with her first child. She's in the city. We are all waiting, wherever we are. Beth, like all expectant mothers, is inundated with calls. 'Is it here yet? When is it coming? How are you feeling? We must catch up before it's born—how about lunch or dinner or drinks—juice for you of course!' She just wants to nest,

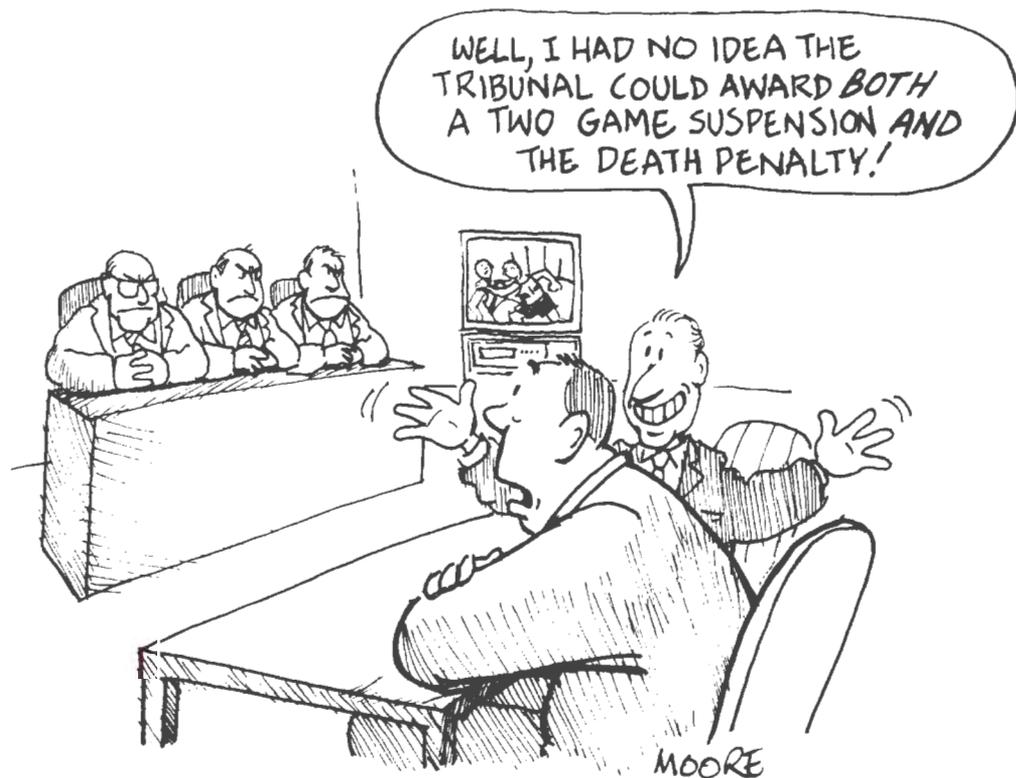
but the rest of the world is desperate to see her before the start of the rest of her life, and the inconceivable changes that this much-anticipated baby will bring.

Beth has always had an overdeveloped sense of guilt: she still pretends she doesn't screen her calls, despite having done so for years. Whenever I ring I talk to the answering machine, and within seconds she is there. She tells me that she was hanging out the washing or at the other end of the house. I tell her that screening calls is a healthy management tool. Now we laugh every time she picks up the phone. As usual, she is quick to ask me how I am—'how are you?'—but these days I have taken to mumbling something vague and then saying 'but I want to know about you'. There is so much about this stage of her life that I want to know, and that she wants to tell. So we spend the rest of the conversation talking about her and her baby and her partner and her dogs and her life in this strange period of calm before the storm.

I am fascinated by pregnancy, and by the way my friends cope with it. The past year or two seem to have been filled with pregnant friends, and now their babies. I have always liked babies and known vaguely how to look after them—at least enough to keep them fed, dry and warm—but it is something else entirely to be meeting the children of my friends, people my age, whom I hope to know in 20 years, and whose children will be forevermore a part of my relationship with them.

I now understand why my mother's friends ask after me, and seem delighted to see me. Their interest always seemed slightly odd, almost invasive. Now I understand that they feel some strange sense of ownership of me. They remember me when I was just born, and even before, when I was the as yet unknown source of sickness and anticipation. They have watched me grow and change. For the first time, I understand that those stories they tell about my first birthday or my tendency to bite their children are not just about me—they are about them too. Those stories form part of their past, and their own struggles to maintain their friendships and establish a relationship with this new little person in their midst.

Now I am one of those friends, trying desperately to know all these new babies. For the first few months I know them predominantly by the amount of trauma



they cause their parents. One screamed after feeds, and in the car, and whenever she was put to bed, and in between times, until finally a nurse realised that her mum did not have enough milk and that she was hungry. Within days of being put on to formula she was calm and happy and her passion for screaming had turned into an incredible curiosity for life. Last time I saw her she was toddling around a park kicking a soccer ball, with a strawberry in one hand and a piece of bread in the other. She will be an amazing person. But no matter what else she does, I will never forget those early months when her two mums were driven almost to despair.

Then there are the two little half-brothers who are growing up together down the road from each other. My friend was the donor father for one, and is the devoted dad of the other. They are only two months apart, and they are as different as can be. One is like a baby in a Kleenex ad—chubby, complacent and charming—while the other is lean and fast and curious. He has a perpetual frown of concentration on his face, so when he smiles his whole face changes and you find yourself smiling idiotically at him even though he has long moved on to other things. Their parents share a garden and the clothes of the older one are passed on to the younger. Now their tiny singlets and jumpsuits are being passed on again to this unborn child for whom we all wait.

So I am here, on this farm where I spent many holidays as a child, waiting for Beth's baby to come, when I will dash back to Melbourne to meet him or her. It is the middle of the lambing season, and I am surrounded by fertility and birth. They even practice artificial insemination here—just like my friends! The only difference is that it is legal to artificially inseminate a sheep. And the midwives definitely run the show here.

The other night my aunt and I were cooking dinner when my uncle appeared at the window in his muddy boots carrying a torch. He called out to my aunt that she was needed in the paddock. We drove down on the bike and there was the ewe, a tiny pink nose poking out below her tail. I thought that was a good sign until I discovered that, unlike humans, sheep are born feet first. My aunt grabbed the ewe's leg and pulled her on to her side. I held her watch for her while she plunged her hand into the ewe, who moaned softly as my aunt's forearm disappeared. Thin bloody

liquid poured out around my aunt's arm and on to her jeans. She kept up a steady stream of commentary as she fished around trying to turn the lamb.

I couldn't help thinking of Beth, whose baby had until recently been standing up, ready to emerge feet first. Beth had been told that they no longer attempted to turn breech babies as it was too risky, and that no doctor would attempt a normal delivery of a footling breech, as they call them. She had no choice but to book in a caesar. On the day they came to Melbourne for the caesar they discovered that the baby had turned around. We have been waiting ever since.

It seemed to take a long time for the lamb to get into the right position, with the ewe moaning and kicking occasionally and my aunt swearing and pressing her head against the sheep's flank. Finally she grabbed the front feet, and pulled. There was a crack. 'Shit,' she said, 'I think I've broken its leg.' With another pull the lamb came out like a body surfer riding a wave—front legs stretched out first, then the head and body, and the back legs out straight behind. My aunt cleared its mouth and eyes and then picked it up by the back legs and slapped it hard in the chest as it dangled there head down, slick and yellow and unmoving. 'Come on lamby,' she said, slapping it again, and finally it jerked and shook its head and took its first breath. Lying it down next to its mother's head, she reached inside her again to feel for a second lamb. This one was back to front. She pulled it out by the back legs with one smooth pull. But no matter how much she slapped it, it was dead.

I was back in Melbourne when I got the call. I drove to the hospital with that fluttering excitement that I had had before meeting all the other babies. As with pregnancy, and labour, and parenthood, the fact that other people have done it before doesn't make birth any easier, or any less exciting. I was itching to see Beth and her new daughter. A new person to know and a whole new relationship to establish. This child of my childhood friend is someone I will know for the rest of my life. She will know me as a friend of her parents, a regular visitor, a bearer of gifts and an asker of inappropriately personal questions. If I am lucky she will know me as an old lady. I am desperate for her to love me as I know I will love her. Such weighty demands on someone who has only just been born. For now

though, I am happy just to hold her and take her in. There will be time for all that later.

—Kristie Dunn

## Meeting women

TEA AND EMPATHY

THE COMMISSION for Australian Catholic Women has pressed more flesh than any party of electioneering politicians, and, since it was first set up in February 2001, its team has drunk more tea than the English gentry.

But it hasn't produced any outcome remarkable enough for a newspaper to run on its news pages, let alone across a banner headline.



When I put this observation to Therese Vassarotti, Executive Officer of the Commission, she protested that the Commission's task was to create connections between Australia's Catholic bishops and lay women, not necessarily to generate publicity.

Bernice Moore, a leader of Women and the Australian Church (WATAC), a group committed to the spiritual development of Catholic women, would be the first to condemn the Commission's achievements if she felt they deserved it. But she's impressed.

'Credit where credit's due. The Commission has very quickly managed to engage female representatives from nearly every diocese in Australia and they have the potential to create real links between women at the grassroots and the bishops,' she said. 'In Church terms that's spectacular.'

However, it is a bishop's commission, so it's not women who will set the agenda but the bishops themselves. So the Commission must constantly raise women's issues and hope the bishops won't lose interest. This is a tough call at a time when women's concerns are easily displaced. Child abuse by clergy, for example, has recently gripped the churchgoing public's imagination much more than any specific issues of recognition

of or injustice towards women—even though the two are in many ways related.

But the fact that Australia even *has* the Commission (the end result of a 1996 decision by the Australian bishops to research the church's relationship with women) is remarkable. Whether they quite knew what they were getting into or not, the bishops did commission a report into the participation of women in the Australian Catholic Church. And when *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*—all 560 pages of it—was released in 1999, it was widely acknowledged as the largest, most comprehensive report into women and the church published anywhere in the world.

Not surprisingly, it pointed to a lot of hurt.

Many respondents were older traditionalists who were nonetheless sick of being given subservient jobs—ironing altar cloths, arranging flowers. Another cluster were women with active careers who felt marginalised within the church; others were young women who see the church as increasingly irrelevant to their lives.

The editors were careful to avoid any appearance of heterodoxy, and declared, up front, their intention to be 'loyal to the

Pope' and loyal to the spirit of the Pope's letter, *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, and its declaration that the church does not have the authority to ordain women. But even when research from an inherently conservative base (answers to questionnaires collected from women who were attending church) was included, it showed that 68 per cent of the women wanted more discussion on ordination for women.

This came at a time when the Catholic Church in every other liberal Western democracy was silencing those agitating for an inclusive female voice. The Australian Catholic Church's decision to seek it publicly made it look like a dancer lurching to the left of the stage when all the other ballerinas were moving to the right.

Sr Myra Poole, English author of *Prayer, Protest and Power*, and a well-known English advocate of ordination for women, finds this aspect of the Commission and its development 'extraordinary'. She is well placed to comment on the mood of the church in relation to women. She was an organiser of the Dublin Women's Ordination Worldwide Conference held in June 2001, and both she and Sr Joan Chittister, an American Benedictine, had 'formal obedience' imposed on them by Rome for their role in organising the conference.

As the Commission meets women throughout Australia, the most noticeable feature of its gatherings is that most participants are over 60. WATAC's Bernice Moore says this reflects today's reality.

'Surveys show that, 18 months after leaving school, 92 per cent of young Australians educated in Catholic schools no longer attend Mass.

'Except for the ultra-conservatives, many younger women have walked from the church as an institution, though they often have well-formed Christian values,' she said.

It's a problem the Commission's Chair, Geraldine Hawkes, acknowledges. 'I've been asked on many occasions, "Why aren't young women at church?" But really, it's the wrong question. The more appropriate question is, "How can we journey with them?" Unfortunately, in the past, the church has really sidestepped the lived experience of many of these women.'

The Commission has a way to go. In the long term it will either provide a credible women's voice to which the bishops listen, or it will be ignored and collapse. At this stage, the jury is still out. —Margaret Rice

## The quiet one

REPRISING GEORGE

THE PINK VINYL COAT was a bone of contention, if a coat can be a bone. Between my younger sisters and me it was far more accurate to talk about coats of contention, socks, blouses, skirts and school hats of contention, for when there are five sisters in a household that is not a beneficiary of major white-collar crime, then there will inevitably be clothes of contention.

Kathleen and I were going to the Beatles concert at Festival Hall that chilly night and the loser would have to wear something warm and sensible. It was pre-Carnaby 1964: *Rolling Stone* was three years away, Menzies was still prime minister and though JFK was dead, he had two brothers who were going to sort out organised crime and abolish racism. We had saved for months in one of those cuboid tin Commonwealth Bank money boxes that looked like a little bank building. It was worth it. It was Melbourne in June, almost exactly a year since we had arrived in Australia, and now England was coming back to us. The Old Dart had metamorphosed into fabness in the short time we had been away. We could never go home because home was already gone, had faded even as we left. But the Beatles, bringers and harbingers of the newness, still looked like your friends' older brothers.

We all had our favourite Beatle. Cool, rebellious people chose John. Romantics chose Paul. Ringo was chosen by the fans of rock-steady drumming or by girls who thought he was cute. George was chosen by guitar freaks and girls who thought he looked Byronic and intense. That is until he opened his mouth and said something flat and uncompromising in that Scouse accent, with its slurred Ts and Ds, its guttural As. His singing was curiously unilting, matter-of-fact; no Paul-sweetness, no John-fire, no Ringo-avuncular-for-the-kiddies. Yet we saw and heard him that night in Festival Hall amid screaming that would have shattered windows if there'd been any, singing bang in tune, imperturbable.

George was the quiet Beatle, the underrated youngest one. His talent was often swamped by Lennon and McCartney. As they tussled for control, he doggedly went on playing. All this is documented

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in *Harrison*, a large hardback of almost coffee-table size (by the editors of *Rolling Stone*, Simon & Schuster, 2002). It is pretty much an anthology of new essays, photographs and reprinted *Rolling Stone* articles along with some purpose-written tributes from colleagues such as Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Paul Simon, Elton John et al.



There are some outstanding essays such as Ben Fong-Torres' clear-eyed reminiscences of George's troubled 1974 tour of the US. The book includes articles about his guitars (that 12-string Rickenbacker that brushes up your spine at the beginning of 'A Hard Day's Night!'); analysis of his few but often excellent contributions to the Beatles ('Something', 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps', 'Within You Without You'); a complete discography; and, because we are now benighted nostalgics, an overview of Beatles collectibles. If you had a Beatles lunch box or portable record player that you allowed the children to destroy in the '70s and '80s, weep now because US collectors are offering thousands in hard currency for such ephemera.

Yet the book has another kind of poignancy for those who not only loved George but *Rolling Stone* too. In June this year its publisher and founder, Jann Wenner, hired the British editor of *FHM*, Ed Needham, as managing editor. Needham, a 37-year-old, is going to chase the 15-to-29 demographic and has talked of catering to shorter attention spans. From 1967 *Rolling Stone* has been a heavy in popular culture, unafraid of making connections with politics and history, making history of its own. Now presumably it will become *Ralph* with CD promotions. Sad.

*Harrison*, however, is still old-*Stone*; whether or not we agree with what's writ-

ten we are still in an intelligent space. Mikal Gilmore's 'The Mystery Inside George' is an example. Discussing the 1970s, he writes:

The two movements that most changed pop music during this time—punk and disco, both of which Harrison hated—

spoke for changing social realities and class conditions that the Beatles seemed unaware of, even though they had grown up in a time and place of similar deprivations and uncertainties.

This recirculates the received old saw about those two highly artificial musical styles, puffing them as some sort of grassroots reaction against rock. In reality they were packaged and intensely marketed creations of record company executives who were threatened by the artistic freedoms enjoyed by the musical revolutionaries of the '60s. But still, *Harrison* as a whole is a reminder of high-quality rock reportage and analysis. It is not hagiography, and rakes no muck. I'm going to give it to my sister in memory of the pink vinyl coat.

—Juliette Hughes

## Xanana's justice

WHICH WAY EAST TIMOR?

**I**T WAS AN extraordinary moment: witnessing Indonesian president Megawati Sukarnoputri step on to the stage at East Timor's independence celebrations earlier this year.

In the hot, humid night, with thousands of others, I had crowded into the Tasi Tolu site to watch the festivities through a

haze of dust. The atmosphere was electric. With the eyes of the world upon him, José Ramos Horta, MC of the event, escorted Megawati on to the stage, hand-in-hand with the newly elected East Timorese president, Xanana Gusmao. An overwhelming cheer from the audience broke the tension.

I felt relief that the international community was witnessing such a spirit of generosity from the East Timorese people, and some amazement that people had been able to respond in this way. If I had been in their shoes I might have screamed abuse at the Indonesian president.

But it is perhaps too easy to read a desire for 'reconciliation' into the response of the crowd.

The next day I met my neighbour, Tiu 'uncle' Joao, at the Taibessi market, and asked what he thought of it all. Like many of his neighbours, Joao lived for years near the notorious Indonesian 744 Battalion and was routinely terrorised by them. Now that Taibessi is transformed into a fruit-and-vegetable market, and full of life, it is hard to believe it was once a place of terror; hard to believe no taxi driver would pass by it at night, and no schoolchildren would go near it. There were stories of young boys disappearing, of women raped. Now, the charred ruins of the barracks have been torn down and the restored market sits in the shade of the old Banyan trees planted long ago by the Portuguese army.

Tiu Joao spoke of Megawati's visit: 'We are happy because the Indonesian president came to learn about the real situation in East Timor. It was good that she came to see with her own eyes the truth of what happened in 1999.'

'So it does not mean people are ready to reconcile with Indonesia?' I ask.

'What does reconciliation mean until there is justice?'

By justice, Tiu Joao clearly means the court trial of those responsible for serious human rights crimes. And crimes committed not only in 1999, but also throughout the entire Indonesian occupation.

I have heard views similar to Tiu Joao's expressed frequently over the last two years. At a national forum organised recently by Yayasan Hak, a prominent East Timorese human rights non-government organisation, survivors and families of victims of the violence gathered in Dili to ask questions of the Serious Crimes Investigations Unit (SCIU). SCIU is the unit mandated by UNTAET (United Nations Transitional

Administration in East Timor) to investigate crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide.

Amid all the fervour of 'nation building' the forum was a reminder of the rawness and anger that still surrounds the experiences of September 1999. More than 100 people crowded into the Canossian Sisters' Hall to have their say. For most of those from the districts, this was their first opportunity to talk with the SCIU.

One by one, people rose to speak. A mother from Emera talked of the anguish of not yet recovering the bones of her son. A young man with a faded machete scar told of watching bodies being dismembered and piled into the back of a car. An older man and community leader from Aileu was concerned about militia leaders returning to his village and walking around freely: 'If the police are not going to arrest them then shouldn't we arrest them ourselves to protect them from retaliation from the community?'

The question, 'Why is justice taking so long?' was repeated again and again.

The SCIU has no easy answers. The familiar refrain is that people should be patient and have faith in the justice process. But for how long? And how honest is it to continue raising expectations and claim that all is going smoothly when the main constraints are not practical or legal but political?

In the prosecution of serious crimes, UNTAET's track record is not very good. The SCIU's progress has been painfully slow and it has been plagued with problems, including poor management plus a lack of resources and institutional support. The Special Crimes Panels of the Dili District Court, set up specifically to hear cases of serious crimes, have convicted very few suspects. In no case has an Indonesian officer been present for a trial. The political constraints on extraditing suspects from Indonesia, particularly members of the military (TNI), mean that this goal may never be achieved. And after only two years of operating, the SCIU will be winding up its investigative work in 2003.

Even less forgivable has been the failure of the SCIU to develop a community education and outreach program. Earlier this year the SCIU decided to locate its investigators out in the districts rather than in Dili—to facilitate better access to information and contact with the community. In my own work as a human-rights educator

I encountered many angry and cynical people who told me they didn't see the point of co-operating with investigators and giving their statements when no-one had come back to tell them anything about the status of their cases.

The few community information sessions that have been conducted in Dili have been more in the vein of public relations exercises, emphasising the UN's commitment to the justice process rather than making any real attempt to listen and engage with people's experiences. Perpetuating the myth that the process is running smoothly does not do justice to people's real experiences. Nor does it ease their anger and frustration. In the end, a more palatable response would be one that engaged with survivors as equals and acknowledged that in the area of justice there are no easy solutions.

With East Timor's independence, a new twist has been introduced into the process. While the SCIU continues its work, the big decisions on justice and the prosecution of serious crimes have now passed from the UN to the independent East Timorese government. There are many tough decisions to be faced and the jury is still out on which way things will go. President Xanana Gusmao has begun speaking out strongly in favour of a policy of reconciliation and for an amnesty for those who committed serious crimes. He has emphasised the need to forget the past and move on. On occasion he has also ridiculed human-rights groups for dwelling in the past.

Back in Taibessi, the 744 Barracks have been reclaimed. Taxis now line the street in front of the market. By day, vegetable-sellers arrive on crowded morning buses from the districts; stalls sell Indonesian noodles and cheap Indonesian rice and beauty products; schoolchildren play and tethered goats graze on the grass. But the memories of Tiu Joao and other Taibessi residents will not fade so quickly. And as anyone will tell you, 'Rai Nains' (spirits) live in those big old Banyan trees. If you walk too close to them at night, their limbs reach out to drag you inside. Those Rai Nains will not so easily be exorcised. —Lia Kent

*This month's contributors:* **Anthony Ham** is a *Eureka Street* correspondent; **Kristie Dunn** is a freelance writer; **Margaret Rice** is a freelance journalist; **Juliette Hughes** is a freelance writer; **Lia Kent** worked with the United Nations in East Timor.



# Talking writers

Meeting *Eureka Street's* fellowship writers, John Harding and Tracey Rigney.

**I**T ALL BEGAN IN A ROOM at the University of Melbourne. Not in one of the hallowed old halls near the law quad but in a squarish building down one of the streets that leads into town. There was an Aboriginal flag on the front, its colours a political flash in the decorous old Victorian street (this was just before Parkville was transformed into an education 'precinct').

We were talking about being white, about whiteness, about being black and being invisible. The woman speaking was Lillian Holt, Director of the University's Centre for Indigenous Education. She'd just finished a trip through southern Victoria with lawyer Liz Curran, who at the time was executive officer of the Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace. They were two women with responsibilities. Political duties, leadership obligations. Heavy stuff.

Yet it wasn't like that. On that day these were just two women, one black, one white, one Irish-Australian, one Aboriginal, telling me about an experience they'd had together. They'd been driving around Victoria as friends, as companions. The pair of them. But in many places they were not treated as a pair. In pubs, cafés and motels Liz was acknowledged, served, looked after. Often as not, Lillian was neither acknowledged nor served. Sometimes she was rebuffed (we were not talking decades ago: this was late 1990s). Sometimes, when Liz would insist on Lillian's being served, the pair of them would be rebuffed together, as though colour were contagious—black rubbing off on to white, making it ineligible for whatever privilege whiteness customarily attracts.

Here, in this white university room, wearing her authority as of right, Lillian Holt was a woman to be reckoned with. But she is always that, anywhere. Hard to imagine how anyone could think it appropriate, think they were somehow entitled

to disregard her. Lillian commands space and attention.

But my look of disbelief was a concentrated rejection of Aboriginal history since white settlement, and both women were quick to tell me so. Or remind me. Sometimes you need to be reminded because it's possible to carry two sets of beliefs simultaneously. One is about the *now* that seems also to be the norm (Lillian talking in this room, surrounded by institutional and personal artefacts, the paintings, the filing cabinets, and us listening). The other derives from what you think you know, from what you have read or heard (in my case, Aboriginal writing, Henry Reynolds' histories, the stories Lillian and Liz were telling me). But we are so welded to our contexts that it takes a sharp kick up the imagination to get mind and memory operating on both sets of belief. Lillian delivers a fine sharp kick.

**S**O IT WAS TO Lillian that I went when *Eureka Street* was looking to set up a fellowship for two Aboriginal writers. And it was Lillian who introduced us to Tracey Rigney and John Harding. There they are, opposite, in my office this time, surrounded by the artefacts of yet another world, but both of them talking about how they write *their* world. And how our various worlds interweave, conflict, reflect and refract.

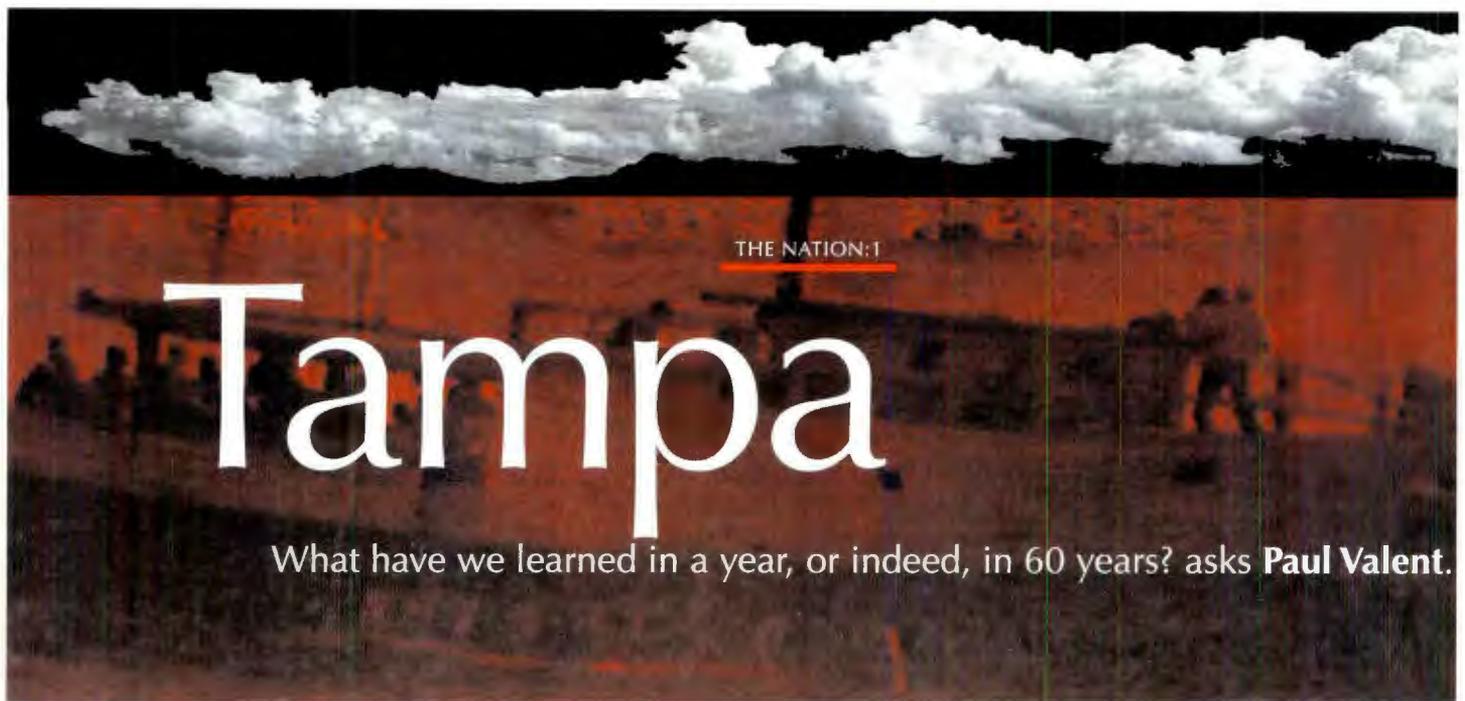
John is a seasoned playwright. He is also a man with cultural responsibilities and a far-flung family. He comes from Darnley Island in the Torres Strait, a descendant of the Ku-Ku tribe and the Mer people. When the Mabo tenth-anniversary celebrations were held in Melbourne he had to be here as master of ceremonies. And earlier in the year he was also in Melbourne to rehearse and oversee a production of his play, *Enuff*, for a season of

Indigenous drama, called 'Blak Inside', at the Playbox. His writing is confrontational and broad. He has been long enough around arts and public-service bureaus to know how complex racial and political conflicts are and how much personality, as well as politics, contributes to the mix. Politics and human folly bring out the satirist, so when John visits, what we do most is laugh. Sometimes the laugh is desperate. Mostly it is the survivor's release into hilarity—something to be shared.

Tracey is a very different kind of writer. Quieter, less overtly political, she has been an actor, student and playwright (her *Belonging* was also part of the 'Blak Inside' season). A Wotjobaluk and Ngarindjeri woman, Tracey grew up in western Victoria, and it is to there that she has now returned. In talking about home and country and the wellsprings of her writing, Tracey goes back, time and again, to her grandfather. She has done the city-creative-arts, education-acting-drama stint, so now, she says, it's time to go back, put back, trace the sources, look more closely at her family and what they have made, and made of her. She wants, eventually, to teach, but in the meantime she wants to learn language and culture and her grandfather, all over again.

Our first few months with John Harding and Tracey Rigney have made it clear that 'Aboriginal writer' is a catch-all term, useful perhaps for solidarity, identity politics maybe, or for bureaucratic identification on grant forms. But it is of no use at all when one works with them as writers, or simply as people who, like Lillian Holt, command our attention. Over the next few months, as John and Tracey write and we meet, some of that spark of connection will show up in the pages of *Eureka Street*. ■

Morag Fraser is editor of *Eureka Street*.



**I**T WAS A CLEAR NIGHT with dark feelings. I was a four-year-old boy, sitting on my father's shoulders. My father's shoulders were my anchor to the world. My mother was too distant, somewhere in the dark, part of the rustles in the field around me. I heard accelerated whispers. Barking dogs in the distance caused fear in the group. I knew because I felt its wave envelop me. I was a good boy, as I numbed my desire to scream and cry. That became a habit.

Sixty years later I found epithets for that experience. My parents and I were queue jumpers, liars, criminals colluding with people smugglers, seeking a change in lifestyle. To us, we were refugees from Slovakia, where first my nanny, and then all my father's family were forcefully deported to concentration camps. My father's business had already been taken over, and we had been evicted from our flat. We had to flee before we were taken over too. We were lucky to have money to pay a smuggler. Those who did not had to remain behind.

We made it across the border, but one day my parents were apprehended. First, they were put in jail, and then they were handed over to the Slovak border police. Trains took them to a series of detention centres. They were loaded on to the final train, a cattle car headed for Auschwitz. Minutes before the train pulled out, they escaped after the guards were bribed. Eventually my parents and I were reunited. The wounds of that separation took many years to heal.

We lived illegally as local Hungarians on false papers till the end of the war. Even as a four-year-old, I had to lie well for us all to survive.

After the war, we applied to immigrate to Australia. It took many months for one of the few permits to Australia to arrive. The Iron Curtain slid down immediately behind us. We arrived by boat in 1949.

My family relished the safety and friendliness of our new country. My father, who had abhorred the totalitarian lies of Europe, found freedom of speech life-giving. He admired the Australian passion for democracy shown in the referendum that defied the government and defeated the outlawing of the Communist Party.

Almost five decades later, I had the privilege to be an Australian delegate at the first international conference of the millennium. It was the International Forum on the Holocaust, held in Stockholm in January 2000. Forty-four heads of state attended. The Australian prime minister did not attend. The aim of the conference was to ensure that lessons from the Holocaust would translate into the new millennium.

Led by Germany, the heads of state of many nations acknowledged their countries' roles in the destruction of the Jews. They each said sorry. The Slovak and Hungarian heads of state seemed to speak to me personally as they detailed and regretted what we had suffered.

The delegates confirmed some earlier outcomes of lessons from the Holocaust. They included the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Refugees, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to them, my family had a right to seek refuge in Hungary! I had a right to exist, be free and have an education.

At the conference, Dr Michael Naumann, German minister of state for cultural affairs, detailed common precursors to genocide. He warned that nations had to reverse them while there was still time.

The first step is that a government identifies a specific group of people as scapegoats for its own shortcomings, and current political and economic anxieties. It uses the media to misinform,

dehumanise, vilify and demonise the identified group. It fans anxieties and mobilises nationalist, racist and religious prejudice. By rallying the population behind it against the scapegoated group, the government maintains power.

All members of the scapegoated group are lumped into one faceless or caricatured entity. They are placed outside usual laws, and special laws may be promulgated for them. The group is constrained economically, and sometimes geographically. If incarcerated, people are identified by numbers, not names. They are humiliated and equated with animals. They may be kept as long-term scapegoats, or ultimately be expelled or killed.

I returned from the conference to my democratic, multicultural country, grateful for how totally it had absorbed the lessons of the Holocaust. Through my profession I continued to heal victims of atrocities from other countries.

But recently I felt reverberations of the old fear. I heard those epithets, which described my family's quest for escape from persecution, being hurled at a new wave of refugees. I did a check. Of course, this was nothing like the Holocaust. But in its treatment of refugees in detention centres and on the high seas, Australia was far along the process described by Naumann. It was condemned internationally for breaking human-rights conventions relating to refugees and children. What was happening to my country and its values? This time I was not going to be a victim, or a bystander.

In the vanguard of a movement among disaffected Australians were two organisations of which I was a representative. The Australasian Society for Traumatic Stress Studies published in newspapers, and made representations to Philip Ruddock's Immigration Detention Advisory Group (which later recommended scrapping the Woomera detention centre), pointing out that traumatising the traumatised, especially children, was wrong and cruel. The Child Survivors of the Holocaust Group wrote similar letters, and started to visit children in detention. Both groups took part in the Children in Detention Story submission to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention, which scientifically documented the sorry plight of imprisoned children.

**O**N 29 AUGUST IT WILL be a year since the inauspicious phone tapping and subsequent storming by crack SAS troops of the unarmed Norwegian ship the *Tampa*. On that day Australia declared to the world that it was prepared to turn accepted international convention on its head. The *Tampa's* 'crime' was rescuing asylum seekers from a sunken ship, and preparing to deliver them to the nearest port, as required by international law. In its undeclared 'deter and deny' war against refugees, the government heavy-handedly prevented this. Eventually it diverted the ship to

Nauru, initiating an unprecedented policy of paying countries dependent on Australia to look after its refugees.

In war many taboos are broken. The time of uncertainty following September 11 led to the war on terrorism. Faced with an election it was going to lose, the government brought the war on terrorism closer to home. Painting the refugees as an invading horde and scapegoating them as quasi-terrorist, the government used the process described by Naumann to rally the electorate behind it.

It is hard to credit that this process should be so cynically applied. It is far less psychologically wrenching to trust the government's good faith.

However, if we take off our blinkers, and include the Holocaust paradigm in our wide-angled view, we see disturbing details of the Naumann process.

*Recently I felt reverberations of the old fear. I heard those epithets, which described my family's quest for escape from persecution, being hurled at a new wave of refugees ... What was happening to my country and its values? This time I was not going to be a victim, or a bystander.*

Refugees, in the main from Afghanistan and Iraq, arriving by boat, were chosen as the scapegoats. Disinformation, euphemisms and vilifications about them have a familiar ring, which, if he heard them, would make my father turn in his grave. Refugees and asylum seekers were called illegal immigrants; escapees of persecution were queue jumpers (as if there were a queue); paying to be smuggled branded refugees as criminals, and lifestyle seekers; turning away leaking boats with their human cargo was called border protection. Fears of these few thousand refugees were fanned by equating them with 20 million refugees who wanted to pour into this country, and with al Qaeda terrorists.

To maintain this demonisation, the government sought to control information and its interpretation. Media suffered limitations of access unheard of in peacetime. Those working in detention camps could not speak because of confidentiality clauses. Speaking out could also harm detainees' cases.

Dehumanisation and lack of compassion were carefully tailored. No government pictures were allowed to give a human face to refugees. Pictures of the faces of deeply distressed children like Shayan last year, and the Bakhtiyari boys who escaped Woomera last month, were called stunts. Parents were blamed for the distress of their children, and the media were blamed for being duped by the stunts. Refugees

belonged as faceless numbers in distant camps.

Then there was the famous, 'We do not want that sort of people here,' intoned by the righteous, but we now know dissimulating, John Howard, just before the election. Information about refugees throwing their children overboard was false. What was true was that Mr Howard and Mr Ruddock threw children into detention camps.

Howard and Ruddock have shown scant compassion. For instance, the mother whose three children drowned at sea was denied entry to Australia to join her husband. If her husband were to visit her in Indonesia, said Ruddock, he risked being denied return here.

Questions of compassion are always answered with blame, and upping the ante. When questioned about the inhuman conditions children live in at Woomera, Mr Ruddock suggested that these children are potential terrorists and laws should enable them to be strip-searched. There was no compassion for the escaped Bakhtiyari boys last month. Rather, the father was threatened with deportation.

Similarly, Mr Ruddock shows no obvious compassion at the prospect of detainees being driven to riots and suicide. He disparages both actions as equally manipulative. This is an unsympathetic pre-psychiatric and pre-modern-prison-era interpretation of intolerable circumstances where suicide is the last resort.

What is the meaning of this uncompromising attitude? It brings back questions of why all Jews were dehumanised, why as a child I was as much a target for annihilation as my parents. The answer is that dehumanisation must include the whole group, and just as one does not differentiate between young and old germs, one does not differentiate between children and adults.

Similarly, to the extent that detention camps are designed as signals to deter others from attempting to come to Australia, it is logical to make all suffer, including children. It is like saying, 'If you want a better life for your child, don't come to Australia.'

People often avoid the realisation that their governments are abusing human rights. In Australia we saw many rally behind the government's actions and policies, readily accepting the spin that such policies and actions were necessary for national security and survival.

I want to emphasise again that detention camps are not like concentration camps, and the treatment of refugees is a far cry from the treatment of Jews in the Holocaust, even if it shares some precedents with it. However, lesser persecutory processes also carry costs.

The costs to refugees are obvious. The cost to Australians of unnecessarily depriving them of resources that could have been better spent on health and welfare, is also relatively clear. It is the less obvious costs to Australians that carry, for me, special pain.

The major hidden cost is the acceleration of our move away from being a compassionate society. The dehumanisation of others has a boomerang effect. The initial brunt is borne by naval personnel, and guards and staff in detention camps, who see the faces of refugees, know the truth, but are not allowed to speak it. The cost to these Australians is dehumanisation, demoralisation, burn-out and stress.

The wider community is also victimised. It suffers a corrosion of democratic values through disinformation and censorship; questionable, ad hoc laws; and the blaming of the legal system when it does not do the government's will. The morality and humanity of us all is attacked when we become bystanders in the abuse of human rights, the denigration of those who expose the truth, and the implicit ridicule of kindness.

Internationally, we cannot hold up our heads as a moral country any more. Our treatment of refugees compounds our treatment of Aborigines.

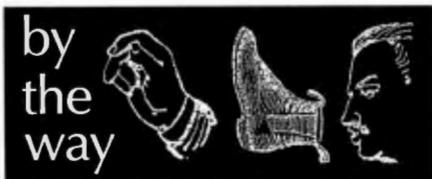
**W**HAT NOW? Unfettered by compassion, history, guilt, shame or sorrow, Mr Howard and Mr Ruddock lecture Europeans on how to treat refugees. However, they may do better to learn from Europe. In spite of having much larger numbers of refugees, no European country has adopted Australia's harsh policies. These countries still respect the international laws on refugees, and they remember the reasons for their promulgation. They are frightened by the return of xenophobia and fascism.

Yet, we are still a lucky country. The claim that 20 million refugees are waiting to flood us is false. A few thousand have made the attempt. We can afford to honour international laws. We can afford to process refugees humanely, and not confuse victims with perpetrators.

Even on their own terms, John Howard and Philip Ruddock have won their phoney war. Deterrence worked. Still, politically, it may not serve them well to maintain their harshness till the next election. Pragmatism, legality and humanity may combine to release the incarcerated refugees at last.

Mr Ruddock can put his Amnesty International hat back on, and Mr Howard may temper toughness with mercy. Rather than being remembered for assailing the *Tampa*, and 'We do not want that sort of people here', he could be remembered for resilience. Resilience could join his other humane responses, as in his push for gun control after the Port Arthur massacre and his efforts for East Timorese independence. And we may all redeem our pride in being Australian. ■

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# The fruits of passion

**S**EEN FROM THE MERCILESS retrospective of a cold Monday morning and a desk gloomy with overdue deadlines and unpaid bills, the weekend just past should have looked terrific. But in all honesty, I can't say that it was up to much. A curious combination of events produced this melancholy result. Among these were the usual Saturday assurances from a variety of journalists that Mr Howard is feeling even more confident, and that he is now a statesman because he has declared war on someone. Well, almost. You could say he's declared \*ar. He awaits only the confirming 'w'—or in the language of international diplomacy, the *dubbya*.

All of this was exacerbated by inadvertent encounters on radio with, in the argot of the footy coaches, your Kernots, your Downers, your Ruddocks. The latter has managed to inflict upon the English language a blow more grievous than anything it has encountered in its triumphant march from Chaucer to the 21st century. (Or, as Ruddock would say: 'In relation to the language we have delivered a situation of grievousness in terms of meaning evacuation which is appropriate in relation to appropriate measures of appropriateness.')

But these were random events. My weekend-ruining mistake was to assume that a journal called *Passionfruit* (discovered on the web) might be at least peripherally concerned with passionfruit. I urgently needed advice on this voluptuous vine because a morose Saturday morning circuit of the garden had revealed that the passionfruit espaliered all over the pergola outside our kitchen window seemed in the grip of severe pestilence. Not to put too fine a point on the matter, it looked, well, dead.

Admittedly, it's winter down here. Things close in a bit. Grey, heavy days tend to be 'of a holy, cold and still conversation' as the man said. And in this case 'holy' is the *mot juste*, if that's the expression I want, because the passionfruit vine in question had about it not a look of healthy hibernation, but a rather recusant mien, a pinched, dissenting sort of shrinking from the great dogmas and rhythms of the natural world.

And in any case, quite apart from philosophical indications, this vine's leaves were papery, its branches dry and brittle, and the two or three isolated stragglers from last season's crop hung like little wizened heads, crinkled bonsai visages of Mother Teresa or W.H. Auden.

This was a tragic loss because your average passionfruit is, true to its name, a sexy item—plumply rounded, shining exotically purple in the hot sun and, when sucked, yielding a Niagara of black pips on sweet, yellow rapids of juice. And the passion flower is one of the more beautiful and delicately intricate to be found in the average back garden. So, when *Passiflora* shows every sign of turning up its tendrils, tossing in the trellis and shuffling off, there is cause for alarm.

The sensuous passionfruit and I go back a long way. I never laid eyes on one as a child, but I knew about them thanks to a diminutive primary school prodigy who revealed to me passionfruit's sinister secret: that the pips, if ingested in sufficient numbers, would cause appendicitis. Extrapolated to that other lush paroxysm of pips, the watermelon, this erroneous assessment cut me off for years from two of life's great fruity pleasures.

It took a bout of appendicitis and peritonitis and accompanying emergency surgery to release me from passionfruit abstinence and relieve me of all future need to take precautions. At last, I graduated to guiltless and flagrant consumption of passionfruit. But no sooner, it seemed, had I done so than they began to wither on the vine. Which is why I fell a ready victim to *Passionfruit*—which duplicitously turned out not to be, as I'd assumed, a compendium for the eager though amateur vine cultivator but 'a forum' for 'women [to] share journey tales and discuss global issues' and 'to encourage one another to push beyond societal barriers'.

**T**HE TROUBLE WAS, I lingered fatally over various back issues of the horticulturally useless *Passionfruit*, and so came upon my epochal discovery. Idly noting an essay called 'Radish Night' and an author named Wendy Orange and a review of a book by Banana Yoshimoto and an essay on brussels sprouts, I realised with growing excitement that I had come across an as yet untheorised and relatively unplumbed source of *fruit and vegetable literature*. Never mind that these excellent women were conducting world-shaping dialogues—fine! But fruit and vegetable nomenclature was their golden subtext, the *fruit* of their *passion*. I could see it all: my ground-breaking essay on post-colonial fruit and vegetable symbolism.

Sunday—grey, overcast, with news from interstate of a tragic football result—brought the return of reality. I looked again at the passionfruit vine: it was terminal. Likewise my dream of storming the literary critical bastions with a sensational debut critique of fruit and vegetable literature. Insubstantial—and probably already written somewhere.

Why couldn't passionfruit have a proper name anyway? When you analysed it, that absence of a name was what had led to my misapprehension. Why not a name like Bergamot, Granny Smith, Jonathan? If passionfruit were called, say, Kernots, would I have bothered to read something called *Kernot*? Would I have been sidetracked into reading confessional women? Would I have known the connection between a Kernot and passion?

Do I wake or sleep? ■

**Brian Matthews** is a writer and academic.



The pope has visited. Soon world leaders will assemble in Mexico for the APEC summit. They'll discuss globalisation and free trade. Meanwhile, in the great city square, those words assume other levels of meaning, as writer and photographer **Peter Davis** discovered.

**A**T PRECISELY 10am every day except Sunday, two events take place in the Zocalo. The massive bells from the 15th-century Metropolitan Cathedral announce the hour. And the doors of the Monte De Piedad, the national pawn-brokers, swing open to desperate sellers and almost-as-desperate buyers. In the late afternoon, in another corner of the square, Aztec dancers pound their drums with such vigour that the church bells are almost silenced. Elsewhere in the square, rap dancers, political demonstrators, tradesmen, shoeshiners and entrepreneurs congregate and push their causes.

Welcome to the third-largest city square in the world (after Beijing and Moscow). The Spanish word *zocalo* means a stone base—a reference to an independence monument that was begun but then abandoned in the mid-19th century.

The size of about 20 MCGs, the Zocalo is where freedom of speech and movement meet the bastions of might and power. The square is bordered by seriously grand buildings and by ancient sacred sites. The Metropolitan Catholic Cathedral, one of the largest in South America, took 350 years to complete. It sits on what was once an Aztec sacrificial site.

Adjacent to the cathedral is an archaeological site—the grand temple. Excavated in 1976, this is where the ancients saw an eagle with a snake in its mouth perched atop a cactus. For the Aztecs this was the centre of the universe. The image is now the emblem at the centre of the Mexican flag. Today's centre of power, the presidential palace, dominates the eastern side of the square. Behind the palace colonnades is a square within a square (where Cortes once staged bullfights). Inside the palace,

on the second floor, are the vast murals of Diego Rivera. To view these depictions of Mexican history, skimpily clad tourists with cameras meander past heavily clad soldiers with machine-guns.

The Zocalo achieves exactly what a city square should—it is a magnet for all the colour and contradictions of the nation. It mirrors a complexity beyond its own simple form. Inside the square, one is not simply in the centre, one *feels* centred. It is from here that all things radiate.

The best view is from the seventh-floor balcony of the colonial Majestic hotel. From here the Zocalo is not unlike a Rivera mural—a pastiche of interconnected activity. The more you look, the more you see. A focal point is the giant Mexican flag atop a 40-metre pole. At 6pm every day (except days on which demonstrators are camped in the square), the flag



# Mexico CITY

is ceremoniously lowered by the presidential guards.

Throughout my four days of exploration the square is taken over by protesting schoolteachers. Thousands of them assemble to pitch their tents in the centre. Opposed to privatisation of education and calling for more government funding, they use music, dance, art shows and interminable speeches to sell their message.

Look closely and there are protests within protests. Tucked away in one area is a small but vocal gathering appealing for the release of Erika Zamoron, a university teacher and political agitator who has been in prison for four years and has just begun a hunger strike. And in another area, a gaggle of out-of-uniform police officers use a megaphone and some passionate slogans to demand an increase in their allowance for uniforms.

These sellers of messages come and go. Up to one million demonstrators can assemble in the Zocalo and then evaporate into this city of 20 million. But it is the sellers of goods and services that make the square home.

Che Guevara T-shirts have been in vogue ever since the resurgence of a

movement for freedom and democracy ten years ago. Aztec artefacts are also popular. And along the pavements, on the perimeter of the square, thousands of hawkers oil the wheels of the underground economy. They sell everything from designer clothes and power tools to CDs and videos. Much of it is stolen from any one of the 4000 trucks that are hijacked each year on the Mexican highways (a considerable drop from the 12,500 trucks that disappeared in 1995). Authorities claim the satellite tracking systems and armed guards on board the trucks have helped reduce the hijacks. Even so, every day tonnes of tacky and stolen booty find their way to the centre of town.

The police stage regular raids. The hawkers invariably know the police are coming and with lightening dexterity wrap up their goods and vanish into the shops. Sometimes the law wins and police trailer trucks loaded with the loot as well as the hawkers wend their way though the traffic snarling into the depths of the metropolis.

Labour is also sold on the square. Along the western wall of the cathedral, away from the tourists, is a long line of Mexican workers. Since the 1994 currency

rescue, when galloping inflation was stopped, foreign investment rekindled and free trade agreements forged, Mexico has been gripped by a globalisation frenzy. These workers represent the flipside. They sit on stools or pieces of cardboard with their tools of trade on the ground in front of them. Each worker displays a homemade sign promoting his skills. Plumber, electrician, plasterer, stonemason or carpenter. If they get lucky, someone will engage them for a few hours, or maybe even a few days.

'There are 250 workers who have permits to work this corner of town,' says Augustin, a 57-year-old stonemason who has sat in the Zocalo six days a week, ten hours a day since 1976. 'I live in the south of the city and it takes me two hours on the metro to get here. If I get work I can earn 100 pesos [A\$25] a day, sometimes more. I'm paying for my sons to go to college. They don't want to do my kind of work, it's too hard for them.' Asked what he thinks about the freeing up of markets, Augustin says all he knows is that there is a lot more wealth in Mexico. 'But none of these people benefit,' he said, pointing along the queue.

For Augustin and his comrades, the Zocalo is a holding bay until they are snapped up for work elsewhere. But for others, the Zocalo *is* their place of work.

Through the dancers and the shamans who work the square, the Mexican Indian culture struggles to survive beyond the museums. Every couple of hours the Aztec drums begin. The dancers mark out a small circle inside the square. This becomes their sacred space. In the centre sits an elder (sometimes male, other times female) with a smoking vessel. The others dance around the sacred centre in what looks like a fusion of an Irish jig and ancient Aztec rites. After maybe 30 minutes of sometimes frenzied choreography and drumming, the beat slows and the dancers become coin collectors with caps in hand.



Next to the traditional dancers are the rap dancers doing backward triple somersaults and spinning on their heads and buttocks on the stone floor—all to the strains of an over-amplified ghetto blaster.

Only metres from where the rappers are rapping, two medicine men—Carlos, a vet, and Gavriel, a silversmith—perform an Aztec purification and energising ritual. And so I stand with my arms outstretched, hands together and palms open upwards—as if to receive from the gods. With ceremony and chanting, Gavriel waves smoking herbs over my body. Five minutes later it's Carlos' turn. He offers me a liquid to rub into my palms and on my forehead. Had this taken place during the height of Aztec power, it would almost certainly have been a prelude to my being sacrificed. Now the only sacrifice I have to make is a donation according to how I value the experience. I ask Carlos if he does this just for the tourists. 'Of course not,' he replies. 'I believe in this, but I also believe in Western medicine. I see no problem with believing in more than one culture.'

Carlos is a modern-day player in this grand theatre of multiculturalism. 'Sometimes I even eat over there,' he says, pointing to McDonald's on the western side of the square.

McDonald's occupies part of one of the old colonial buildings. The McDonald's sign is surprisingly understated. I wanted to see Mexicans at the consumer end of globalisation. Inside are young, upwardly mobile Mexicans looking as homogenised as the food they devour. But it is the



internal walls that draw my gaze. They carry striking black-and-white photographs of another Mexico—a Mexico that existed in the period before McDonald's. Some of these pictures I had seen elsewhere, in other cafés, in books, postcards and in the lobbies of the boutique hotels.

The next morning I venture outside the square in search of Enrique Segarra—the octogenarian photographer who took those images on the McDonald's walls. I find him at the Jardin de San Jacinto, a craft market nestled in an exclusive area of cobbled tree-lined streets and grand haciendas.

Segarra sits in a collapsible chair next to his orange Ford Mustang. He gazes into the middle distance as he chews on a Cuban cigar. Opposite him, against a wall, are his images. 'Look at this one,' he says with pride. He shows me his picture of Diego Rivera. 'I took that in 1942 and I remember like it was yesterday.'

We talk at length about photography and politics. 'We're choking ourselves out of existence,' he says as I photograph him holding an image of himself. He gives me a splendid book of his images. They do indeed reveal another Mexico. His book is titled *Alavera Del Camino* (at the side of the road). The title is a reference to his sponsors, Goodyear. But the title is also poignantly prophetic.

That afternoon, two Mexico City teams play each other in the national soccer finals. The team called Americana wins, for the first time in 12 years. Within minutes the Zocalo explodes into a frenzy of singing, conga dancing and shaving cream.

Had the soccer match occurred in earlier times, some of the winning players would have happily walked to their decapitation to please their god. Today



there are no such sacrifices. But there are new gods. Soccer is one. The free market is another. I leave the conga to walk back to my hotel. The next morning I flag one of Mexico City's 150,000 green-and-white Volkswagen Beetle taxis. Carlos the driver has a small TV on his dashboard. He is absorbed in the soccer replay. I ask him to drive me once around the square before heading to the airport. 'Do you want to buy something? I know a good place,' says Carlos in tourist English. 'I just want one last look,' I tell him. He ignores me and drives to a narrow street behind the cathedral where shop after shop overflows with *Articulos Religiosos*. 'The pope will be coming soon to Mexico,' he tells me. 'You must visit the basilica.' In the midst of all the rosaries, the crucifixes and the virgins is an Aztec medicine shop. 'You buy good energy here,' says Carlos. I purchase some incense, more to please him than myself. When I reach the airport I examine the packet closely. The label reads 'Made in China'. ■

**Peter Davis** is a freelance writer and photographer.

# Workable, decent, affordable

Could Australia develop a refugee policy that is all of the above? Yes, argues **Frank Brennan**, and it might even become exemplary.

**M**ANY GOVERNMENTS are trying to strike the balance between sovereignty and the protection of refugees. In Australia, we have not found the balance.

This has been evident in our politically charged public debates, in the 'Pacific solution', in the limiting of judicial review, excision of islands and the mandatory and unreviewable detention of asylum seekers. These policies have been pursued at great and unnecessary human and economic cost.

It is time, then, to create a refugee policy that is workable, decent, affordable and efficient.

At enormous expense, we are maintaining reception and processing centres at Curtin, Port Hedland, Woomera and now Baxter on the Australian mainland. Curtin will soon close. All fair-minded people, including the government's own Immigration Detention Advisory Group, think that Woomera should have closed long ago. There are now only 180 detainees in that hellhole, which is dehumanising for detainees and workers alike—our 21st-century Port Arthur.

For government, Woomera's deterrent value is enormous. There is no other policy reason for keeping it open, certainly no sensible financial rationale. It is far removed from state services such as children's services and police. It is too isolated a place to enable public servants and tribunals to process claims for refugee status comfortably and efficiently. The Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs sees an ongoing use for Woomera because it ensures that 'we have a network of centres in order to best manage the diversity of the detainee caseload. Retaining the Woomera IRPC [Immigration Reception and Processing Centre] also makes possible the operation of the alternative housing project for women and children in the Woomera township.'

Woomera's main purpose now is to emit a double signal—to would-be asylum

seekers and to fear-filled voters. Dispersing the 180 Woomera detainees to other places would deprive government of a crucial transmitter.

The government justifies detention in part because it helps with the processing of claims. Detention in an accessible place and in a more work-friendly environment might help with processing. The current detention regime, however, contributes to and helps disguise the uneven performance of our decision-makers, especially when it relates to Iraqis and Afghans.

During this last financial year (1 July 2001–30 June 2002), the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) set aside 62 per cent of all Afghan decisions appealed and 87 per cent

*Imagine that every country signed the Refugee Convention and then adopted the Australian policy ... all refugees in the world would be condemned to remain subject to persecution or to proceed straight to open-ended, judicially unreviewable detention.*

of all Iraqi decisions appealed. This means that Afghan asylum seekers got it right 62 per cent of the time when they claimed that the departmental decision-makers got it wrong. And the public servants got it wrong in 87 per cent of the cases that the Iraqi applicants claim to have been mistakenly assessed. Meanwhile, the RRT set aside only 7.9 per cent of decisions appealed by members of other ethnic groups. Even more disturbing than these comparisons is the following statistic: in the last financial year, the RRT finalised 855 detention cases of which 377 were set aside. This represents a 44 per cent set-aside rate in detention cases.

The government and the parliament have been anxious to get the decision-making process away from court supervision. We could approve the cost-effectiveness of removing the courts from supervision of these decisions if we could be more convinced of the professionalism

and independence of the primary decision-makers and of the security of tenure and competence of the RRT members.

Also of concern are the visa entitlements granted to asylum seekers once they are found to be refugees. These people should have the same rights as all other refugees, regardless of whether they arrived by plane or boat, with or without a visa. In particular, they should have the same rights of international travel and of family reunion. By denying these rights to some, we encourage women and children to risk hazardous voyages and we demean those refugees living in our community who want to get on with their lives and not remain disconnected from their

families. Family reunion is not a 'Convention plus' outcome as the minister likes to describe it; it is a basic human right.

In recognition of the far-reaching damage of policies based primarily on deterrence, the European Union is now trying to formulate common standards and a unified approach to the processing of asylum applications. In Europe, they do not have the luxury of going it alone, because deterrence methods merely shift the burden from one country to another—very unneighbourly behaviour. Indeed, governments of First World countries everywhere are under double pressure—from asylum seekers and from electors—as they strive to find the balance between the protection of borders and the protection of asylum seekers.

Compared with the European asylum-seeker challenge, Australia's problem is a very small nut to crack. Why then use a sledgehammer approach that would inflict untold damage if applied in other places?

Our current policy suggests two explanations. Either we want to be so indecent that no other country will dare to imitate us and so asylum seekers will want to try anywhere but here. Or we want to lead other countries to a new low in indecency. That way we lose our short-term comparative border-protection advantage but get to be seen as world leaders in greater stringency towards asylum seekers, triggering another round of competitive tightening.

**I**F DEMOCRACY IS about honouring the will of the people and protecting the rights and dignity of all, it is essential that our political leaders respond responsibly to people's fears instead of feeding those fears. They must allay fear with policies faithful to the values of the people and to the integrity of their social institutions. Because of the electoral fervour and the talkback-radio lather about the asylum-seeker issue, we have not taken sufficient stock of the damage and cost being inflicted. Our policy presumes that we can isolate Australia from the population flows that affect the rest of the world.

*Woomera's main purpose now is to emit a double signal—to would-be asylum seekers and to fear-filled voters. Dispersing the 180 Woomera detainees to other places would deprive government of a crucial transmitter.*

We think we can stop or control the flow by sending a harsh message. Instead, we should manage the flow by keeping step with other First World countries and by maintaining a principled commitment to human rights.

The immorality and inequity resulting from our present 'slam the back door' policy is highlighted by a simple thought experiment. Imagine that every country signed the Refugee Convention and then adopted the Australian policy. No refugee would be able to flee from his or her country of persecution without first joining the (mythical) queue in that country in order to apply for a protection visa. If people dared to flee persecution, they would immediately be held in detention (probably for a year or so) awaiting determination of their claims. In other words, all refugees in the world would be condemned to remain subject to persecution or to proceed straight to open-ended,

judicially unreviewable detention. The purpose of the Refugee Convention would be completely thwarted.

While we await the European reviews of law and policy next year, we should urge our politicians to make these immediate corrections to our own law and policy:

- Those claiming to be asylum seekers inside our territorial waters should be escorted for processing to Christmas Island by navy personnel who place the highest importance on the safety of life at sea and who always respond to those in distress.
- Initial detention at Christmas Island should be only for purposes of identity, health and security checks. There should be resident child protection officers at Christmas Island. No child should be treated as a security risk.
- Those who have passed these checks and have not been screened out as bogus claimants should be moved to the Baxter reception and processing centre, which should be for reception and processing rather than for deterrence and punishment. Better still, people could be moved to one of the urban centres, such as Villawood, with provision for day release. Alternative

detention arrangements outside Baxter should be set up in Port Augusta and/or in the available and vacant Whyalla housing stock, to which many in the local community are anxious to welcome newcomers. Alternative detention should be available to any person for whom a primary decision is still pending after four months, or an RRT decision after two months of lodgement.

- For unaccompanied minors there should be an independent guardian who can exercise authority without the conflict of interest and artifices that surround the present guardianship arrangements. We must avoid farcical situations such as the guardian offering his ward a financial incentive to return to a war zone because the guardian has a vested interest in having the child leave the territory.

- The influences on primary decision-makers that lead them into regular error in the assessment of Iraqi and Afghan claims

should be investigated and removed.

- RRT members should be given sufficient security of tenure (if need be after an initial probation period during which their decisions would be automatically reviewed by senior members) to ensure the integrity of their decision-making and render it immune from improper ministerial and departmental influences.

- Successful applicants should be given a visa entitling them to family reunion and international travel as specifically provided in Article 28 of the Refugee Convention (of which Australia is unquestionably in breach). A temporary protection visa should be made permanent if our protection obligations are still invoked three years later.

- We should maintain a commitment to at least 12,000 off-shore refugee and humanitarian places each year in our migration program regardless of the number of successful on-shore applications for refugee status. There is no reason to think that our on-shore caseload will increase exponentially given the improved regional arrangements and the tighter controls within Australian territory.

- We should abolish the 'Pacific solution'.

- We should abolish the concept of a distinct Australian migration zone given that our processing and appeal system can be sufficiently streamlined to process all comers. The Australian Federal Police have already warned that the excision of further islands from our migration zone may 'deflect illegal immigrants to regional centres with better infrastructure'.

If detention is to remain a cornerstone of Australian border protection and front-door immigration entry, there is a need for alternative arrangements to render the present policy more humane and effective. There is also a need to strike a balance between border control and the fair and efficient management of refugee flows. Given the modesty of the problem confronting Australia, we would do well to ensure compliance with the standards set by other countries that receive significantly more asylum seekers across porous borders. ■

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This is an edited version of a speech delivered to a University of Sydney Forum on 7 August. The full text can be found on the *Eureka Street* website, [www.eurekastreet.com.au](http://www.eurekastreet.com.au).

# A poem for David

I tried to think of some way  
to let my face become his  
'Could I whisper in your ear  
a dream I've had? You're the only one  
I've told this to.'

He tilts his head laughing  
as if, 'I know the trick you're hatching,  
but go ahead.'

I am an image he stitches with gold thread  
on a tapestry, the least figure,  
a playful addition.

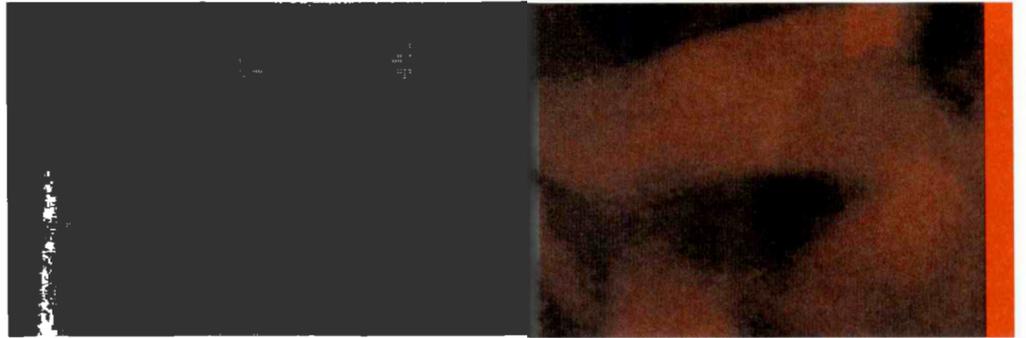
but nothing he works on is dull.  
I am part of the beauty.

—Rumi

**T**HIS IS ABOUT ONE man: my friend David, and about the very brief time that I knew him. It is about how his face did not resemble the face in the Sufi mystic's poem—and yet paradoxically Rumi's poem is all about David and David's face.

The poem is a good way to start talking about David, about faces and bodies. In my mind, I connect the poem with Marc Chagall's figures; all his brides and bridegrooms, musicians and crazies painted with their faces turned upwards towards the light. This in turn reminds me of the Latin phrase—*in luminas oras*—'into the shores of light'. The experience of knowing David and sharing in his life was like entering, for a very short time, into light.

I met David when I was working with homeless men in the inner city. His face was scary-looking. His eyebrows ran together over a nose that was flattened, and his cheekbones were very wide. He always had a black eye, stitches and blood, always blood. As he sat at the kitchen table he would pick scabs. If you said, 'David, you've got blood all over your face,' he would wipe the blood off with



the back of his sleeve—unselfconscious. David was frightening because he heard voices. He was a drunk and a crazy. He talked about being able to feel his father's spiritual presence, and he had a tic that flung his head all about and over to one side, twisting his face upwards. 'That's my Uncle Robert tormenting me.' Usually, though, you could not see David's face. He hung his head down so low that—even though he was a tall man—you could see only his ginger-coloured hair spiralling, all matted and dusty, towards the crown. It was as if he were carrying a huge weight, his head a ball so heavy that it had to be carried on his chest.

The way he walked reinforced the idea of weight, of burden. Years of alcoholism gave his gait a seafaring roll. Most of the time his balance was so bad that he would edge himself along the walls of the terrace houses, with his back to the street. A simple 'walk' to the corner pub was an arduous journey. He was also dirty and smelt bad. He never washed and often was so drunk that he would piss himself. So the wet trousers with the yellow stains, the vomit, and the blood-smeared wind-cheater, were other burdens that David had to carry. The ugliness, the bloodiness, the smell—he could have been the hunchback of Notre Dame. Except that in the end, Quasimodo is filled with bitterness. David wasn't bitter and he wasn't spiteful. And when he lifted his head, well—that was something else altogether.

When you said, 'Hello David,' you had to address the top of his head and the horizon of broad, dark-coated shoulders his head sunk below. There would be a long pause before his response. For the first few weeks I was afraid that, in the pause he would spit, or swear, or swing his fist at me. Everything about his presence spoke of violence. But eventually, he would lift up his leaden head and look at me. It was more a stare, then the surprise of recognition, and this great, loud and warm 'hello' back.

This is how the Rumi poem illuminates my friendship with David. The poem speaks of the mystery of our separateness—our bodies' boundaries. The face holds much of the tension of this mystery: the contrast between its openness (this is where our tears come from) and yet also its closed, unreadable quality. In the face are our isolation and our deep need to overcome this isolation.

The poem is about love and how it creates the need, not just to know the other person, but to be that other person. It tells of a meeting. I imagine an empty room, and the writer edging up close to the other. There are only two people in the room. For the poet it is a privilege. It is a secret, a private audience. It is a rare occurrence, perhaps even a one-off meeting, and the poet—in love and eager to make the most of the chance—tries to trick his way into unity with this person. It is the meeting with the beloved.

Encounters with David were similar to this. Even in a crowded room or on the street, when David raised his head it felt like a private meeting. This was partly because of his isolation. Other drunks were noisy. They tried to scam money off passers-by. They sat together on the footpath drinking their plonk, and rolling their endless cigarettes with fingers stained yellow from the tobacco. But David was just there, silently making his way along the street. He seemed larger

work of the early Christian mystics who talked, wrote and meditated upon the body and the body of Christ. Maybe it is at this point that the idea of imperfection comes in, because the body of Christ on the cross was not a perfect thing. It was an image of intense physical pain and suffering. It spoke of human limitations; as Christ suffered on the cross the audience watched for some sign that he really was the son of God. Instead the man hung there until he died of suffocation. It was

of the soul: the sheer abundance, fertility and creative possibility of a human life. As if the soul and the world mirror each other—outdoing each other after the rains in how green they can become. In the Old Testament too, the landscape and the stories of the prophets are intertwined. The body is connected to the earth and in tune with, akin to, the sowing of seeds and the harvesting of the wheat. Cyclical, it incorporates not only those celebratory events of birth and renewal but also their oppo-



than life and more alone than anyone else—solitary, suspended, other-worldly. He was far removed from all the havoc of the inner-city suburb where he lived.

In the way he walked—one leg on the footpath following one hand along the wall—and in the way he looked with his old moleskins and his blue windcheater, there was something monumental about David. His extreme dereliction, his literal in-the-gutter state, gave him stature. He made his way, so slowly, so laboriously. It was a feat of courage.

It was as if his deep isolation created a physical space, into which you were immediately drawn. Yet this sense of a private audience had also to do with his startling gentleness which, when combined with his ugliness, used to shock me into a state of quiet—a place of silence and concentration where only the communication between this man and me mattered.

**I** BEGIN TO THINK about how the body and the spirit may be related, just how corporeal the spirit life can be. But then I get stuck, because typically when these things are connected with each other it is between the soulful and the beautiful: gold, curly-haired seraphims and archangels; Mary Magdalene in her deep red robes; a chubby baby Jesus. So what place has physical imperfection?

Perhaps the first place to look is in the

in the pain and blood of the body that the holy was situated.

The mystic Julian of Norwich knew this well when she wrote that she wanted to suffer *physically* Christ's suffering, and the visions she had of Christ were graphic illustrations of his physical state on the cross:

I saw that he was thirsty in a twofold sense, physical and spiritual ... the physical thirst, which I assumed to be caused by the drying up of the moisture. For that blessed flesh and frame were drained of all blood and moisture ... because of the pull of the nails and the weight of that blessed body it was a long time suffering for I could see the great hard, hurtful nails in those dear and tender hands and feet.

This description of Christ shows Julian's commitment to a spirituality grounded in the physical: her visions were not lofty, flighty imaginings but were hard-hitting and often violent. In her writing there is little separation between the soul and the body. The soul inhabits and suffers with the body and vice versa. It also luxuriates in the body, as Meister Eckhart writes: 'the soul loves the body'.

In the writings of these early mystics, a further connection is made between the human body-soul and the world's body-soul. Hildegard of Bingen sums this up when she talks of *viriditas*, the 'greening'

sites, death and decay. The body's ripeness marking the time for the harvest; the bruised wheat fields after the storm.

The bruised wheat fields. Once I went around to get David from where he was lying, half-propped against the wall in the back lane behind the housing commission flats, with a huge and bloody cut lip. Every part of him was bruised. His eyes were black-and-blue from a night in the police cells. His body had been cut down. The sheer weight of living had cut it down. It lay useless, a too-ripe and yet whole fruit that had just fallen in the grass of some orchard, and in the end would rot. That was David's body, as he lay there waiting for someone to come and pick him up out of the gutter. The sheer brutality of being alive seemed lovely that day. Or at least comprehensible, part of the cycle, part of the plan. It was the harvest and I knew that it was near the end.

**O**NE TIME I WAS looking out the door and saw David making his way towards the house in the pouring rain. I wished that I had not seen him, or that it was my imagination and that the drunk walking along the street was not really David, that it was some other drunk I did not know, a David lookalike.

I rushed out with a broken old umbrella. He was wall-walking as usual so I stood behind him. What struck me

was the strangeness of the whole act. The strangeness of protecting David from the rain—from cleansing water—and then this man who (in social terms) was unclean. I was protecting him from the rain, which would have cleansed him. It would also have made him freezing cold and perhaps given him a dose of pneumonia.

A few days after this I had a dream about David. He was coming towards me in a passageway filled with the most brilliant light. As he came closer I saw his face. Instead of all the usual scars, dirt and weeping sores his face was clean, healed and glowing and his head was surrounded by light.

The dream was a gift. It made me think deeply about my own reactions to David and made me realise that however much I felt I had accepted David as he was, I wanted him to be not like this. I wanted him okay. I wanted him healed. My feeling that David's suffering held some meaning, that his broken body was part of a whole, was only true if there was something beneath the suffering. There is nothing redeeming about suffering in and of itself: it is sheer and brutal. The dream showed me the numinous quality of David as he was, the shining being beneath all the bruises:

the more luminous anything is,  
the more it subtracts what's around it  
peeling away the burnt skin of the world  
making the unseen, seen

—Charles Wright

The dream showed the direct connection between the material and the

spiritual—the dividing line so fine, so (burnt)-skin-deep that sometimes it is peeled away and the unseen is seen. fleetingly, I saw David's life held: all in a bundle of dark Fitzroy streets and a paradise now. There was no separation between the two places.

One morning, a few weeks after this, David announced to me that he was giving up the drink. We were sitting at the kitchen table over cups of tea—well, David was trying to drink his. His hands shook so badly all the time that it was hard for him to pick up the cup. I looked across at him when he made this huge announcement and realised that I was on the point of tears. Among all the grimy coffee cups, stains of tomato sauce, and the dank grubbiness of the light globe and the beige walls, I felt my heart was going to break from the shock of sudden hope. I had not realised that hope was such a hard thing to practice.

The next few days we just spent time talking. He would roll on to his bed and lie there. As I sat on the end of the bed he would talk about Oscar Wilde's letters from prison, George Orwell, and Bach's cello concertos. At one time, a long time ago, he had been a concert pianist, a jazz musician, a performance poet. He had married a poet and they'd done the pub circuit, singing her poems.

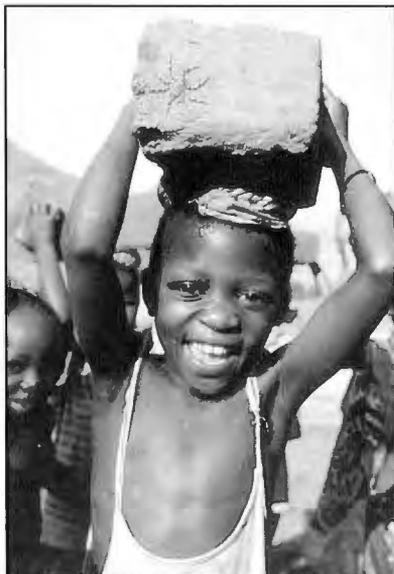
He got me to get his Bible from the shelf and open it at the Psalm of David—Psalm 56—because he wanted me to read it aloud. 'That's me, that's my namesake,' he said. He had underlined the whole psalm with thick lead pencil—struck by

its literalness, its aliveness. Especially the last verse: 'for thou hast delivered / my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver / my feet from falling, that I may walk / before God in the light of the living?' But when I read 'thou tellest my wanderings: put / thou my tears into thy bottle: are they / not in thy book?' I thought of the Rumi poem: 'I am part of the beauty.' Everything is accounted for. Even everything that had happened to David. I really hoped for this.

Two days later, David was sitting at the kitchen table after the evening meal. Once again he had a cup of sweet tea in his hands and was struggling to get it to his mouth. He had started drinking again that morning, very heavily, and was not only being tormented by 'Uncle Robert', the tic and voices that flung his head around, but was also agonised with guilt about picking the grog up again. 'I'm bloody hopeless, I'm a bloody hopeless loser!' he shouted into the air and to anyone who approached him. He had already fallen over several times that day, and there was blood on the steps leading into the kitchen, blood in the lane behind the house. A trail of blood marked his passage back into the dark. As he got the tea to his lips, he fell off the chair, hitting his head hard on the lino floor. We rushed him to hospital. He died two days later.

David's release back out into the light, and his meeting, finally, with the beloved. David was King David was David. We are all part of the beauty. ■

Kirsty Sangster is a freelance writer.



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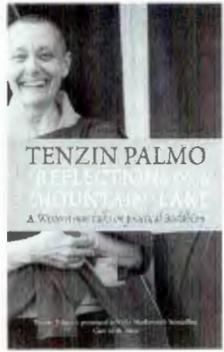
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# THE SHORTLIST



**Reflections on a Mountain Lake: A Western Nun Talks on Practical Buddhism**, Tenzin Palmo. Allen & Unwin, 2002. ISBN 1 86508 810 2, RRP \$29.95

This book is a bottler. I expected a poor brew from the extemporaneous talks of a Western Buddhist nun. But Tenzin Palmo, an Englishwoman who began a three-year cave retreat in India and finished it 24 years later, imposes herself as a teacher of great spiritual insight.

The art of spiritual guidance is to help people move out from the defences that they build against the spirit. Since the most secure of defences are the doctrines and practices of the spiritual tradition itself, a good guide needs to be able to recognise how the angel of self-preservation disguises itself as an angel of light.

The spiritual traditions with which I am most familiar are the Desert and Ignatian traditions. I was fascinated to see Palmo make in another key and with great subtlety the same kind of outflanking moves with which I was familiar. In her own tradition, the techniques that enable contemplation are a source of strength but also bulwarks against the spirit. She is bold against their defensive use: one man who had found that long practice of meditation had not led to inner transformation was sent off to Mother Teresa's nuns to care for the sick.

*Reflections on a Mountain Lake* is irreducibly Buddhist in its spirituality, surprisingly different from Christian spiritualities in making its goal the discovery of the divinity within and not the relationship with a personal God. But Palmo insists uncompromisingly that compassionate attitudes and practice lie at the heart of spiritual growth, and so makes deep connections with any genuine spiritual tradition.

—Andrew Hamilton SJ

**The Making of South African Legal Culture 1902–1936: Fear, Favour and Prejudice**, Martin Chanock. Cambridge University Press, 2001. ISBN 0 52179 156 1, RRP \$199

This is an important and timely book. Martin Chanock, in writing an historical account of South African legal culture, has built a strong, scholarly and cohesive picture of the way in which 'law' may bear no resemblance to 'justice'. In South Africa, formal law and its language were twisted by the state into mechanisms of racism and violence.

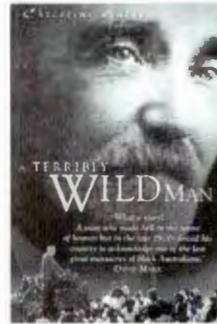
Chanock argues that such a process occurred in part because of an extreme dissociation between formal law and the real-life political and social culture of South Africa: law became a 'theology' which only the chosen few had the right to interpret. As these chosen few, the judiciary became caught in an imaginative world of their own making. In this fantasy world, European culture and Roman-Dutch law represented true civilisation, whereas South Africa was a heart of darkness. A strict adherence to legal formalism (the 'letter of the law') ensured the judiciary was isolated from the daily injustices committed on those whom Desmond Tutu calls the 'little people' of South Africa. This history of South African legal culture serves as a potent reminder of just how easily the 'rule of law' can be used to legitimise state violence. Chanock

The Making of  
South African  
Legal Culture  
1902–1936

Fear, Favour and  
Prejudice

indicates that there are lessons here for the global community: we should take care that international law is not similarly abused. As Chanock quotes Gandhi: 'A thing acquired by violence can be retained by violence alone.'

—Kirsty Sangster



**A Terribly Wild Man**, Christine Halse. Allen & Unwin, 2002. ISBN 1 86508 753 X, RRP \$35

Ernest Gribble was trouble. After his Evangelist father decided Ernest should take over his work with Aborigines, he grew into his calling and fought with Anglican bishops, the church missionary societies, his fellow workers in the missions of northern Queensland and the Kimberley, local settlers, police, magistrates and Catholic missionaries. He also struggled against climate and soil.

His methods were also controversial. He tried to force Aborigines, especially children, to come to the mission, and ran the missions like 19th-century boarding schools, with an emphasis on strict sexual morality and on discipline built around beatings and segregation of the sexes. He showed no respect for Aboriginal cultural norms.

On the other side of Gribble's attempts to force children on to the mission are the stories told by the stolen generation. His motive, however, was not solely theoretical: he wanted to protect the Aborigines from the pervasive exploitation and sexual abuse by the settlers. For his work he was feared by Aborigines and hated by settlers.

But finally he is known for his denunciation of a massacre near Wyndham. His clamour occasioned international interest and a Royal Commission, but no convictions. He finished his life as a chaplain on Palm Island, enjoying the esteem of the people whose cause he defended.

Halse's modestly told life of Gribble illustrates the sad paradox of the fate of Aboriginal Australians. They suffered from the European settlers who exploited them. But they suffered equally from those who tried to redress that exploitation. Each group knew what was best for the people; neither group consulted them. Consultation was inconceivable, because it would have revealed that they wanted respect for their lives and their relationship to the land. And that kind of respect was not in anyone else's interests.

—A.H.

**Australia's Religious Communities: A Multimedia Exploration (CD-ROM)**, ed. Philip J. Hughes. Christian Research Association, 2000. [www.cra.org.au](http://www.cra.org.au)

It's a rare reference that can satisfy the browser by being authoritative about the world she knows but also intelligent and stimulating about worlds that are unfamiliar, or known only through filters of stereotype. It is also a great boon to encounter a work that earns the lavish praise printed on its cover.

Every university, school and religious institution should own a copy of this extraordinary reference library contained on a CD-ROM. *Australia's Religious Communities* is a work of scholarship, history, anthropology, theology and great good sense—and profoundly Australian in its open, egalitarian exploration. More about it in the months to come.

—Morag Fraser



# Moving people

*The Price of Indifference: Refugees and Humanitarian Action in the New Century*, Arthur C. Helton.

Oxford University Press, 2002. ISBN 0 19925 031 6, RRP \$69.95

I APPROACHED THIS book with high expectations because I already knew something of Arthur Helton's work. In the late 1980s he convinced the United States Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) to conduct a successful pilot project for the parole release of 'excludable aliens'—non-citizens arriving without valid travel documents—who would otherwise have been held in immigration detention until their status was determined. The pilot project resulted in the establishment of a permanent release authority, partly because the INS realised that it was in its own interest to reduce the number of people held in detention.

For many years Helton directed the Refugee Project of the USA Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. He then founded the Forced Migration Projects at the Open Society Institute in New York and is now Senior Fellow for Refugee Studies and Preventive Action at the Council on Foreign Relations. I hoped that a book based on his knowledge and overseas experience might help us to unpick the political knot on the issue of asylum seekers and refugees here in Australia, where the fate of vulnerable people has become hopelessly entangled in the ugly politics of 'border control'. I was looking for instruction on how to weave a strand of compassion into majority opinion and then convert it into the fabric of policy. On this level I was destined to be disappointed.

Helton offers no pat solutions to the dilemmas of the developed world. He has no magic policy formula that would satisfy the popular desire for strict border controls yet still uphold both the spirit and the form of the principles of protection enshrined in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. There is no simple way to filter refugees from the vast numbers of migrants seeking to move for other reasons—reasons that are often compelling but that do not amount to persecution for one of the five reasons defined in



the Convention (race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, political opinion). The business of assessing who is, and who is not, entitled to protection under international law will always be complex, expensive and at times messy. Even if we were to cushion our decision-making machinery to make it as humane as possible, some people would probably still get crushed in the bureaucratic process. Equally, no matter how harsh we make our processes, if asylum is the only window to the West, then people will try to clamber through it.

Helton's achievement is to encourage us to take a less myopic approach. There is no easy way to calm the fears of voters in developed societies—societies with falling birth rates and ageing demographics—as they see migration pressures steadily building beyond their frontiers. But *The Price of Indifference* reminds us that the global refugee crisis is not really to be found at the border posts of the well-defended and corpulent West. Unauthorised migration to the richer countries of the world is merely one manifestation of multiple crises elsewhere, in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Refugees represent a global problem requiring a co-ordinated international response.

'Why do refugees matter?' Helton asks in the introduction. In answer he quotes the 'pragmatic compassion' of Richard C. Holbrooke, formerly the US Permanent Representative to the United Nations:

'Refugees matter because they are there.' Taking action to assist displaced people is expensive and difficult, but ignoring their plight can be much more costly in the long term. As Helton points out, protracted exile produces radicalisation and political instability. Events in Israel and the Palestinian territories should be reason enough to heed his argument on this point. Refugees 'provide important insights into the modern dilemmas of statecraft' because they 'reflect failures in governance and international relations'. Helton suggests that if we cannot meet the refugee challenge, then this must 'raise basic doubts about the ability of people to live together'.

Helton identifies a fundamental shift in the international politics of refugee issues since the breakup of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War:

During the Cold War, refugees were often adjuncts to ideological confrontation. Repatriation from the West was tantamount to endorsing the totalitarian system that had emerged in the Soviet Union, and the option of refugee return became unthinkable. Rather both sides encouraged defectors. Those who sought asylum from one side or the other became trophies in the ideological contest of the day.

This approach was not confined to defectors crossing the Iron Curtain from Eastern to Western Europe, but extended to Cuba and Vietnam, and to 'proxy contests' in countries such as Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, El Salvador, Ethiopia and Nicaragua.

Ironically, the strict controls on human movement imposed by Communist states helped to make such an approach possible. With the exception of Vietnam, the people who managed to evade the exit controls in their own countries were generally too few to be a matter of concern when arriving in the West. With the end of the Cold War, however, refugees lost their 'ideological value' and became seen as 'potential migration threats'. The response was a 'new

strategy of containment ... championing migration control and not ideology' with the aim of confining refugees to their home states or to neighbouring countries of first asylum. At the same time, the 1990s emerged as 'a decade of extraordinary human displacement': the 1.7 million Iraqi Kurds fleeing Saddam Hussein's army at the end of the first Gulf War; the upheavals in the former Yugoslavia; the conflicts accompanying the breakup of the Soviet Union; the genocide in Rwanda; clan wars in Somalia; and the forced exodus from East to West Timor—not to mention the chronic conflicts dating from the 1980s or earlier in such places as Angola, Burma, Mozambique and of course Afghanistan.

**H**AVING SURVEYED this troubling global landscape, Helton examines a number of recent examples of mass human movement in detail, and evaluates the international response in each case. He looks in turn at the former Yugoslavia, Cambodia, Haiti and East Timor. What emerges is 'a vicious cycle of unpreparedness':

The lack of capacity at the international level has meant that responses have been driven by crises. As a consequence, political leaders have lurched from crisis to crisis. The outcomes have generally been disappointing, leading, in turn, to a failure to invest in building any further capacity to respond to crises.

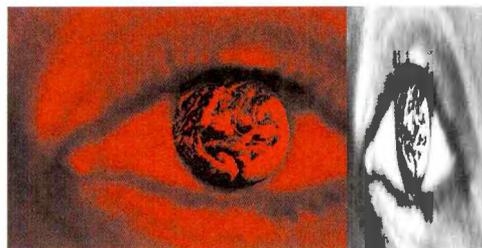
Helton's studies make enlightening, if at times depressing, reading. The case of Haiti, in particular, casts interesting light on recent developments in Australia. In 1981 the US government introduced 'detention and high seas interception programmes ... to forestall the arrival of Haitian boat people'. A decade later, when it was clear that these measures had failed to prevent thousands more Haitians heading to the US in 'rickety little boats', President George Bush (senior) asked various Caribbean and Central American nations to hold Haitian asylum seekers in closed camps on Washington's behalf. Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Honduras and Belize agreed in principle. The UNHCR expressed grave concerns about this innovation in asylum policy, warning that such measures should not be allowed 'to provide a distorted mechanism for offshore processing and detention, or one which consigns refugees to permanent lack of access to

international protection with the blessing of the international community'.

In the end President Bush's 'Caribbean solution' faltered because of domestic opposition in the countries that were to host the boat people. Instead, as Haitians fled the military repression that followed the coup of September 1991, more than 12,000 asylum seekers were detained and processed at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay—which Philip Ruddock would no doubt call 'an offshore place'. When this in turn failed to deter fresh departures, President Bush ordered the Coastguard forcibly to return all Haitians intercepted at sea without any inquiry into whether or not they might be persecuted on their return. The UNHCR again protested, pointing out that the US was breaching the fundamental principle of *non-refoulement*, the basic rule that signatories to the Convention shall not return a person to a place of possible persecution.

In 1994 President Bill Clinton scrapped the Bush policy of immediate return to Haiti with no investigation of a person's claims to asylum. A renewed outflow of boat people quickly overwhelmed offshore processing arrangements that had been set up on a US naval vessel anchored off Jamaica, and the Haitians were transferred once more to Guantanamo Bay. The US again looked to small regional states for help, and received expressions of interest from Suriname, Belize, Panama and a number of Caribbean island nations.

Helton is sharply critical of the US approach to Haiti, but he does not condemn the 'Caribbean solution' wholesale. Rather, he sees in it the seeds of future policy. He



suggests that if 'regional facilities' had been available to accommodate the renewed outflow of boat people from Haiti in 1994, then 'the United States probably would not have proceeded so aggressively to deploy military forces to restore democracy' in the country. Regional schemes to 'manage a refugee or migration emergency humanely' would allow for 'responses short of a military deployment' and help to liberate policy from 'the excessively reactive posture that

precludes cooperation in the throes of crisis'.

Helton's words should not be interpreted as a blessing on such contorted policy exercises as Australia's 'Pacific solution'. Rather, they suggest that our own problems with boat people would have been better addressed through regional arrangements that protected the dignity, rights and welfare of asylum seekers intercepted en route to Australia, and that offered a durable solution (that is, resettlement) to those identified as refugees by the UNHCR.

The case of Haiti exemplifies the increasingly close relationship between human displacement and military and foreign policy. Refugee flows can influence policy, as developed nations seek ways to contain the movement of uprooted peoples who might otherwise cross their borders. The fact that such policies are driven by self-interest does not deter Helton from seeking to harness them to good effect. He argues that we are likely to see increasing examples of forcible humanitarian intervention, as in the case of Kosovo, with or without a mandate from the UN. In 1999, for example, the EU Summit in Helsinki set the aim of developing a peacekeeping force of 60,000 troops that could be deployed within 60 days and maintained in the field for up to one year. Helton says this capacity 'is well on its way to realisation'. He describes the current era as one 'characterised by new efforts undertaken by outside governments and international organisations to protect and assist people before they have to flee across a national border'.

The implications of this trend are far-reaching. Refugee advocates have cried themselves hoarse calling for greater action to address the problem of human displacement at its source. Military strikes under the rubric of 'humanitarian intervention' are not necessarily what they had in mind. Helton says that humanitarian agencies and military forces must learn to work together more co-operatively despite the 'inherent tension' between them. The benefits of such co-operation would be that military forces incorporate humanitarian concerns into their planning, and that humanitarian agencies are better prepared for the consequences of military action.

There must also be much greater effort to co-ordinate the delivery of humanitarian assistance around the world, rather than the present 'crazy quilt of bilateral and multilateral initiatives and entities'. Reform efforts must seek to breach the gap

between immediate humanitarian relief and long-term development.

Helton provides a detailed analysis of the current inadequacies of the international architecture for humanitarian action, particularly in the US and the UN. At times the bureaucratic detail is a little hard to follow, but his key point is clear enough. He stresses the urgent need for reform and puts forward some specific proposals. First, he calls for the establishment of an Agency for Humanitarian Action within the US government. The aim is twofold: to streamline decision-making by having 'just one entity and person' in charge, and to raise the volume of 'the humanitarian voice' in government decision-making.

Second, he proposes the creation of SHARE—'an intergovernmental mechanism for strategic humanitarian action and research'. SHARE would be 'an expert entity and an intellectual resource' outside the UN structure and would become 'the international locus for the manufacture and refinement of the tools necessary for new forms of humanitarian action'. One such tool that Helton suggests is a 'rule of law service package', which would include an interim criminal code developed by the UN, and a ready roster of lawyers, judges and police who could be brought in on the coat-tails of a peacekeeping operation. SHARE would also 'develop proactive strategies to avert or mitigate emergencies in possible "hot spots"' and fashion 'realistic policy options' for decision-makers. It would 'prepare protocols and checklists' for humanitarian deployments and digest and analyse the outcome of humanitarian missions, in order to overcome the 'customary weakness' in international peacekeeping: 'the seeming inability to plan or to learn lessons'.

Whether or not Helton's specific proposals are implemented in the ways he suggests, this thoughtful and detailed book alerts us to the urgency of assembling 'a new toolbox' to address the problem of refugees and forced migration through international policies of prevention and co-operation. The alternative is continued human misery and political instability, which will leave none of us untouched. ■

**Peter Mares** is a broadcaster with the ABC and a visiting fellow with the Institute for Social Research at Swinburne University. UNSW Press is about to publish a revised edition of his book *Borderline: Australia's Treatment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers*.

# Give and take

*Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971–2001*, Seamus Heaney. Faber, 2002.

ISBN 0 57121 080 5, RRP \$45

IT IS THE rule rather than the exception for Seamus Heaney to be greeted by complete strangers when he is walking around in Dublin, which can make for some comical moments. One day in June last year when he and I were crossing a road, a lorry-driver paused long enough to say, 'You're Seamus Heaney, aren't you?' Heaney said yes, at which the driver proclaimed, 'I don't know anything about poetry', and drove off triumphantly.

*Finders Keepers* could not be said to be a book for that driver, but it is certainly a good thing for anyone wanting to learn more about poetry. From Heaney's point of view, if you are not prepared to learn, you do indeed know nothing about poetry, since he sees it as an art which, at its most characteristic, both expands horizons and deals in surprise. His preface claims of the essays here that they are 'testimonies to the fact that poets themselves are finders and keepers, that their vocation is to look after art and life by being discoverers and custodians of the unlooked for', a claim given its warrant by almost every page in the book.

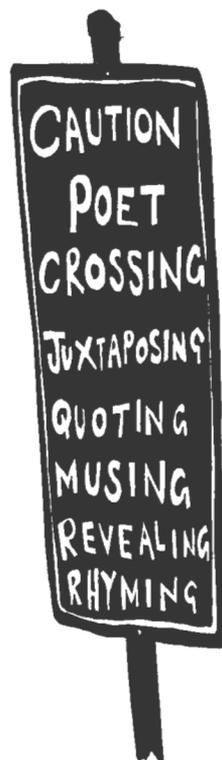
Heaney is a great one for distilling the possibilities of individual words, in his poetry and perhaps even more in his prose, and he would no doubt be aware of chances being taken when 'testimonies' are being invoked; too many of these, after all, have been provided by the hot-eyed and the oddly hearted for the word always to be welcome. Still, here too abuse does not invalidate use, and in practice Heaney's testimonies are things not simply occasioned by the poetry he attends to, but somehow required by it. He never writes as

if he is just in the same room as a poem: the thing speaks to him, and he has to speak back. These essays are in effect the overhearing of that speech.

At one point in the book, Heaney remarks that for much of his life he has been a teacher, and this simple fact is suggestive. The only teachers worth a damn are those who are constantly being taught, and Heaney comes to any poem or body of poetry as someone glad, and needing, to be taught. As a matter of fact, this can be seen all over the place in his own poetry, where teachers and mentors of various stripes—animal, mineral and vegetable—are constantly making an appearance, to school him in understanding, in feeling, in relating, and even in being. This demeanour, this habit, of aspiring to be what Swift called, drily, a 'docile animal', flows on from the practice of poetry to the custom of attending to poetry.

And since this attitude is nowadays even rarer than the occupation of writing about poetry, Heaney is off to an admirable start.

A major theme of both his poetry and his prose has been 'the double capacity that we possess as human beings—the capacity to be attracted at one and the same time to the security of what is intimately known and the challenges and entrancements of what is beyond us.' Seeing this as the 'double capacity that poetry springs from and addresses', he concludes that 'a good poem allows you to have your feet on the ground and your head in the air simultaneously'. The model has its relevance to political realities, and from time to time Heaney has attempted to bring it home in the tortuous polity of Northern Ireland, that terrain which was the original nourisher and vexer



of his imagination. But there is little of that in the present collection. This time poetry itself calls for all the attention available.

Most of the pieces in *Finders Keepers* have appeared in earlier volumes, but the new juxtapositions and implied sequences give them a flavour of freshness. Not that the work is likely to stale in any event, since with little ostentation Heaney seems constantly to be looking for original attention. He says of Elizabeth Bishop's 'At the Fishhouses':

Typically, detail by detail, by the layering of one observation upon another, by readings taken at different levels and from different angles, a world is brought into being. There is a feeling of ordered scrutiny, of a securely positioned observer ... And the voice that tells us about it all is self-possessed but not self-centred, full of discreet and intelligent instruction, of the desire to witness exactly.

It might be describing his own agenda and, frequently, his own accomplishment.

It was, I think, Peter De Vries who said, 'I love being a writer: it's the paperwork I can't stand.' Heaney does the paperwork, all right, writing the prose with the same poise and care that he brings to the poetry. Of Edwin Muir's 'One Foot in Eden', he says:

Muir's music is a combination of primal song chant and the differentiated, alienated precisions of the modern world. There is a haulage job being done by the metre; the rhymes are like a system of pulleys over which the argument drags forward a positive meaning.

The mentioning of music, of metre and of rhymes, is both necessary and characteristic: as Auden said of poetry, it is 'a way of happening, a mouth', and not to address its way, its mouthing, is in effect to treat poetry as if it were a thematic exercise—about as helpful as discussing Mozart only in terms of his libretti. If Heaney can

rejoice, as when writing of Hugh MacDiarmid, that 'suddenly the thing chanced upon comes forth as the thing predestined: the unforeseen appears as the inevitable', he knows that nothing good is mere afflatus, that the spirit is incorrigibly a shaper.

There is plenty of gravity in these writings, if little solemnity, but even the gravity is companionable. Personally without aloofness, Heaney writes in the same vein. Most of the pieces here were originally lectures or broadcasts, and the feeling for audience, for comradeship, is usually strong. This may show itself in vivid formulations which are less like putting on exhibitions than buying the reader a drink—as when he says of what Dante meant to Osip Mandelstam that he was 'a guide who wears no official badge, enforces no party line, does not write paraphrases of Aquinas or commentaries on the classical authors. His Dante is a voluble Shakespearean figure, a woodcutter singing at his work in the dark wood of the larynx.' And then there is the relish for the fraternity or sorority of poets whether or not they are currently about their craft—as when, of MacDiarmid again, he says, 'No wonder Norman MacCaig suggested that the anniversary of his death should be marked each year by the observance of two minutes of pandemonium'; or, of Joseph Brodsky, 'Once, for example, when he was in Dublin and complaining about one of our rare heatwaves, I suggested jokingly that he should take off for Iceland and he replied in a flash, with typical elevation and roguery, "But I could not tolerate the absence of meaning."' The Irish friend was a savourer of the Russian's own, often sardonic, jokes, and none the less for the fact that, as Anthony Hecht said in a poem in memory of Brodsky, the laughter was sometimes coming through clenched teeth. Heaney's writing accommodates, as though by instinct, dark and bright elements in meaning's manifold, and it always assumes that the testimony he holds dear has little in common with

proclamation's trumpetry. It favours kinship, of which it is a form.

*Finders Keepers* sports on its jacket the claim of a reviewer of the earlier *The Redress of Poetry*, 'The force of his book is as much spiritual as critical', which it would not be excessive to claim for the present book. There are, as Heaney well knows, many gatekeepers of the word nowadays who would be alarmed at being associated with the critical, let alone the spiritual, but very properly he gives their like no more than a raking glance or two. Heaney loves brio in others, and has plenty to display in himself, and he knows that brio too is one of the spirit's gifts. But this invigilator of bogs and death-pits, of individual and societal derangement, is not one to take lightly how tasked the spirit may be in the face of life-as-she-goes. It is natural for him to say, when referring to the Czech poet Miroslav Holub:

Holub sees the function of drama, and so by extension the function of poetry and of the arts in general, as being analogous to that of the immunity system within the human body. Which is to say that the creative spirit remains positively recalcitrant in face of the negative evidence, reminding the indicative mood of history that it has been written in by force and written in over the good optative mood of human potential.

History may of course, like that lorry-driver, bustle off heedlessly about what some deem to be its business, but from time to time poets have a way of swinging themselves aboard, in with the lumber and the tar-barrels. That political loser, Dante, nourishes many who know nothing of the victors, and so does Mandelstam, and Brodsky. 'Finders keepers' need not, after all, dictate possessiveness: it may instead imply that careful attention to resources which makes donation possible. ■

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

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# All in the family

*Passionate Uncertainty: Inside the American Jesuits*, Peter McDonough and Eugene C. Bianchi.  
University of California Press, 2002. ISBN 0 52023 055 8

**W**HEN OUTSIDERS offer the inside story of families, some of the insiders usually get their noses out of joint. But often you suspect that the outsiders aren't as far off the money as the family claims. So when Peter McDonough and Eugene Bianchi, two lay sociologists, offer to take you inside the American Jesuits on the basis of their interviews with many present and former members of the order, this Jesuit reviewer might bristle at their claim, but it is nonetheless to be taken seriously.

The predicament that Bianchi and McDonough describe is similar to that of Jesuits in other parts of the Western world. Founded in the 16th century, suppressed by the pope in the 18th and refounded in the 19th century, the Jesuits have had an important and esteemed role in the intellectual and educational life of the church. But in the last 40 years, the number of Jesuits has declined by over a third, and their average age has increased sharply. Like members of other Catholic religious congregations, they are both participants and pawns in the contemporary interplay of change and reaction within the church, whose outcome it is difficult to predict.

In *Passionate Uncertainty*, the authors make central to their analysis of the US Jesuits the conflict between the forces for change released by Vatican II and the forces for restoration which insist on the interlocking symbols of hierarchy, celibacy and rigorous sexual morality. The tensions between these two movements in the church make a corporate sense of priestly identity difficult to articulate. The loss of confident identity has been accompanied by a decline in the number of priests and religious.

The writers argue that an overarching sense of Jesuit identity has been weakened, so that many Jesuits commonly identify



with conservative, socially radical or gay subcultures which, though often at odds with one other, are alike in their conscious opposition to an established North American culture.

This account of tensions, of numerical decline and of looser ties of identity makes the authors ask how the Jesuits hold together at all. They answer that Jesuits commonly contain the tension between liberalising trends and an intransigent central authority by dividing their lives into separate compartments. In their personal lives and their ministries, they have been able to adapt. In their relations with the directions given by the Roman church authorities, most have tended to go to ground. They have eclectically incorporated therapeutic emphases into their spirituality. In their ministries they have adapted to smaller numbers by emphasising professional qualifications and standards, by encouraging lay responsibility, and by taking new initiatives for social justice. Although the differences between the Roman construction of the church and that of many Jesuits remain intractable, they are not generally explosive, because members of the order can find adequate space for their lives and work. The title *Passionate Uncertainty* catches this mixture of engagement and loss of a sense of agreed corporate identity.

The balance achieved, however, is unstable and leads the observer to ask what factors will put it under pressure and mili-

tate against continuity. Bianchi and McDonough emphasise the importance of diminishment. The decline in the number of Jesuits affects the sense of common identity by increasing tensions between subgroups, and also by restricting the possibility of Jesuit leadership of ministries. As lay leadership is encouraged and becomes more widespread, Jesuits cannot but ask more insistently what is distinctive in priestly ministry. The continuing conflict in the church about priesthood makes this question both inescapable and irresolvable.

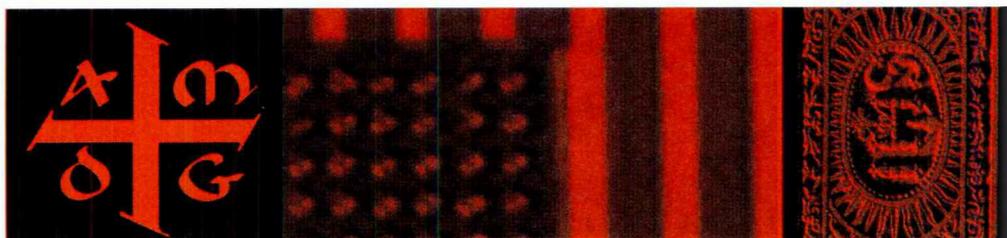
Jesuits will find the conclusions of the book bracing. Given that populist authoritarianism is the flavour of the world after September 11, and that in the church it is likely to survive the present pope, it is difficult to see how the US Jesuits can recover a strong corporate sense of identity. And without this, they are unlikely to attract many new recruits.

There is much to praise in the book. It has the virtues of an outsider's account: its detachment allows the authors to illuminate many of the predicaments that Jesuits face in common with other religious congregations and lay groups. I find it less persuasive, however, in its claim to get 'inside the American Jesuits'. It brings Jesuits outside for inspection, guts, stuffs and boxes them in ways that are interesting but also conceal their original habitat and way of life.

**P**ASSIONATE UNCERTAINTY demonstrates the great changes in Jesuit fortunes over the last 40 years. It is perceptive in drawing attention to the significance of falling numbers for Jesuit ministries and relationships between Jesuits, and to the strains imposed on Jesuit identity and ministry by the current tensions within the church. It also describes persuasively the unintended

consequences for Jesuit identity and morale of drawing on the talents and spiritual leadership of lay people in ministry. These developments require a strong sense of corporate identity and the capacity to develop sustaining relationships both within and without the order.

The authors' decision to interview both present and former Jesuits also makes for interesting reading. The often indiscreet quotations from these interviews give an anecdotal and racy edge to the argument. Finally, the book canvasses a variety of



hypotheses in accounting for the different aspects of the Jesuit predicament. It reflects wide reading, and frequently offers the ruminative reader details to chew on.

The areas in which the book is strong have to do with contexts and organisational structures, where one would not expect an external observer's view to differ from that of a Jesuit. When the writers move to the more intimate aspects of Jesuit identity—namely their personal spirituality, relationship with the church and ways of resolving conflicting expectations—I find more questionable their claim to present the inside story. The reasons for this touch both the genre of *Passionate Uncertainty* and the way in which the authors have handled their material.

Because the argument of the book is drawn from reflection on excerpts from interviews, its success depends on the quality of the material presented in the interviews. This material certainly provides verisimilitude and makes for stimulating reading, but it also provokes questions about the extent to which the contributors reveal or conceal themselves and what moves them deeply. The sayings of a group in which articulacy is prized are not to be taken at face value.

Judged by the ordinary patterns of Jesuit conversation, some of the quotations in *Passionate Uncertainty* seem considered, while many others, including the most arresting, seem to be offered off the top of the head—the kind of remark you would throw off at a party but prefer not to

be held to, let alone measured by. I looked for indications of how representative individual comments were, and whether they were offered in writing or conversation. This analysis was not provided, and in its absence the reader must take on trust how far what is recorded is representative and reflects deeper attitudes and convictions.

The second reason for doubting that this work amounts to the inside story of the US Jesuits is the way in which the authors handle their quotations. They use quotations to develop their argument that there

has been significant change between earlier forms of Jesuit self-identification and its current forms. But the argument often runs ahead of the evidence offered for it.

When they deal with Ignatian spirituality, for example, they record the responses to questions that invite their correspondents to reflect on how their spirituality has changed. They conclude that Jesuits have moved from 'visions of a tyrannical deity to the embrace of a compassionate saviour', and associate this with a change from authoritarian to individualistic constructions of the church. When you ask people about how they have changed spiritually, they normally emphasise discontinuities. But even so, the quotations offered suggest that the significant change is not between periods within the Jesuit life, but between childhood ideas and the experience of God gained through identification with the Jesus Christ who is known through the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Furthermore, the argument is not carried by the quotations, but by the imagery of the authors' narrative. They conclude, for example, that 'the symbolic vibrations typically turn from hellfire and the God of reproach toward imagery with a powerful resonance of *miser cordia* and maternal *piet à*'. The quoted basis for this claim speaks only of the recovery of devotion to Mary in highly traditional ways. The evidence for any *turn* is lacking. The authors then argue in a highly rhetorical passage that reference to the Holy Spirit is also anti-authoritarian: 'Characterizations of

the third person of the Trinity as a free spirit flitting about the battlements of the church add up to criticisms of authoritarian remoteness and caprice.' The quotations that actually mention the Holy Spirit seem singularly empty of any such flighty reference. Perhaps the colourful comment rightly characterises the tenor of material they have collected, but their quotations fail to substantiate their case.

This aspect of Ignatian spirituality is fairly peripheral to the book, but it does not inspire confidence that the authors have entered their subjects from inside. In other more controversial areas the thinness of the evidence is more troubling. For example, they assert that 'sometimes Jesuits work through their crises of affectivity without violating the vow of chastity. Sometimes, after a lapse or two, they recommit themselves to celibacy ... In other instances, the hint of clandestine sex is strong.' The threefold division of Jesuits suggest that there is a significant number of Jesuits in each group, including the third. This is not substantiated by any statistical analysis of the interviews. And in the two or three quotations offered, admittedly embodying quite flaky attitudes, the hints certainly need to be filled out by the judgment of the observer.

What ultimately limits the claim of *Passionate Uncertainty* to be an inside account is its lack of sustained attention to the Ignatian tradition which comprises the complex of images, practices, language and ideals in which Jesuits live. This is summed up in the Jesuit phrase, 'our way of proceeding'. The phrase can be filled out adequately only through reference to Christian faith and to the language of the tradition: to themes like discernment of the Holy Spirit, an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, and thinking with the church. The currency of the book's analysis is organisational structure, upper and middle management, needs, desires and rationalisations. The categories are valid, but by themselves they offer a thin account of how Jesuits work because they lay aside the content of belief.

By focusing on the experience of individual Jesuits the book certainly corrects a common Jesuit misapprehension that knowledge of the tradition enables you to predict how individuals will act. But it ignores the ways in which the tradition shapes ways of dealing with tensions. These cut across the ways in which the

book boxes Jesuit attitudes. Bianchi and McDonough distinguish, for example, between three contemporary approaches to the tension between Rome and the Society: those who ignore the tensions and find personal satisfaction and meaning in the daily grind; those who cling to obedience to Rome; and those who are torn between the Society of Jesus and the institutional church. Now, these tensions are real but they are not new. Indeed, they are inherent in the Ignatian tradition in which solidarity with the church and availability to the pope for demanding missions have formed the context for discerning what God asks of the Jesuit. Different Jesuits have always differed in the priorities which they give to personal discernment and to papal direction, but these differences are held in tension within a shared tradition. Although the tension is greater at times, like Ignatius' age or our own, when there is widespread call for the reform of the papacy, it is of itself not new. Nor does it threaten Jesuit identity.

**T**HE CENTRAL theoretical argument of *Passionate Uncertainty* also seems misplaced when set within the shared imagination, convictions and practices that structure life in the order. Bianchi and McDonough argue that in the church the structures of celibate priesthood, strict sexual morality and authoritarian constitution are inseparably united in the current teaching and discipline of the church, but that Jesuits who share the culture of the US in which they work, and who are inspired by the more democratic ideals of Vatican II, will inevitably question authoritarian rule and unchanging sexual morality. As a result they will come to question their rationale for priestly ministry.

The issues raised by this argument are interesting, but I do not believe that these interlocking relations between celibacy, strict sexual morality and hierarchical authority were ever central to Jesuit identity. Nor do they catch accurately the predicament of contemporary Jesuits. Certainly celibacy, strict sexual morality and strong hierarchical authority undergirded a theology and spirituality of priesthood. But in the Jesuit tradition, priesthood was set in a different matrix. Jesuits were commonly attracted first to the Society, and only consequentially to priesthood. Their fellow Jesuits, moreover, include unordained brothers.

Within the Jesuit tradition, too, the vow of chastity functions differently from the commitment to celibacy made by diocesan priests. It has to do with a shared commitment to availability for the mission of the Society. In crude terms, the vow expresses the inner and total gift of self for mission that links Jesuits to other religious, and not the unmarried state that links them to other priests.

Hierarchical authority, too, has a distinctive resonance in the Jesuit tradition. As the historian John O'Malley has suggested, the Jesuits have less historically in common with the localised priests and monks of the early church than with the evangelists—people who crossed boundaries, and who travelled light. The demands of this way of life are reflected in the emphasis on discernment and pragmatism. While these qualities may have been obscured in the practices of the Society after the Suppression, they were preserved in stories and rhetoric which told of conflict with church authorities resolved amicably. That bishops and popes were favourable was regarded as a grace and not as a right. Correspondingly, the belief that Christ acts through those who bear authority within the church was always recognised as an act of faith. It never implied that virtue or wisdom necessarily inspires the decisions made and directions taken within the church.



This whole tradition is riddled with tensions which threaten to blow it apart. The interviews recorded in *Passionate Uncertainty* show the force of contemporary cultural movements and also indicate the factors that Jesuits will need to take into account—including changes in community size, affective expectations in religious life, shifts in attitudes to morality and right governance—factors that constitute the environment in which Jesuits live. If the directions given at Vatican II were followed within the church, and if the many democratic and cultural changes suggested by the authors were adopted, the change would doubtless affect the context within which Jesuits live. But it would not

eradicate the tensions established within the tradition. These, and the resources provided by the tradition for living with tension, lie at the heart of Jesuit identity.

Finally, for all its merits, *Passionate Uncertainty* strengthened my doubts about the genre of sociology by interview. I have long confined my co-operation with surveys to helping out my nieces with their assignments in undergraduate sociology, and nothing in this book encourages me to revise my curmudgeonly practice.

I find unappealing the way in which the authors take possession of the offerings made to them and to the academy, and sit self-consciously and epigrammatically in judgment on them. They assure us that 'the guarantee of confidentiality, combined with the Ignatian habit of periodic self-scrutiny, generates frank conversation'. A few lines further on, we read, "'These guys sound more Jewish than I am!'" a colleague cracked after reading through some of the Woody Allenesque transcripts. Doubtless by the standards of the discipline, there is no breach of confidentiality here, but if I had contributed to the transcripts, I would have been angered by a lack of due respect.

The authors recognise the offence that their work may give, anticipating that:

the eye-level observations of Jesuits and former Jesuits may sound too lacking in propriety, too squalid even, and our commen-

tary may reflect too closely the gaze that Graham Greene traced, in noting the artist's ruthlessness, to a 'sliver of ice in the heart'.

Fair enough, but in this genre there is no risk of being seriously done over by the 'sliver of ice in the heart'; the risk is of being patronised by the pat of talc on the toupee. It is said that, in the US, people are more ready to reveal themselves than in Australia, but at the end of the day I do wonder why anyone would want to appear, even faceless, before such Oprahs on stilts. ■

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

# A soldier's tragedy

*Pompey Elliott*, Ross McMullin. Scribe, 2002. ISBN 0 90801 170 9, RRP \$45

**I**N ONE OF THOSE casual Australian gestures of fond disrespect, the nickname 'Pompey' passed to Harold Edward Elliott from another Elliott, a Carlton footballer. The nickname stuck to one of Australia's most famous soldiers, a man 'vigorous and capable, volatile and controversial', in the estimation of his biographer, Ross McMullin. *Pompey Elliott* tells at great length the story of an Australian who 'deserves to be better remembered'. This is any biographer's basic claim. How and how far is it justified?

While McMullin is scrupulous in delineating the character of the troubled individual who became a general and a senator, this is a tale that works against singular remembrance. So much of Elliott's life seems to typify an exemplary pattern of struggle, achievement and the cost of both for an Australian born in the 19th century. Leave the famous name aside for a while. This was the child of parents who migrated from England in the 1850s. The family suffered a desolating series of personal losses (of the magnitude that Joseph Furphy—no stranger to them—turned to comic account in *Such is Life*). One child died after being severely scalded. Another son was 'a criminal and a certified lunatic'. Elliott's sister Nell committed suicide by putting her head on the railway track near the family farm at Charlton in Victoria.

Harold Elliott's own mental instability may be traced genetically, but McMullin does not make this emphasis. The child, born in a two-room hut of timber, iron and bark in 1878, would complain later of the 'terrible hardship' of his 'awkward bush shyness'. He did not have long to



Main picture: Elliott at a captured German divisional headquarters, Harbonnières, 9 August 1918. Inset: Portrait photo taken at a professional studio, London.

worry about poverty. His seemingly feckless father headed to Western Australia to prospect for gold. For a long time he was as unsuccessful as most of his fellow chancers and then—at a mine called Londonderry—he struck it rich. This is a fairy-tale twist that propelled the family into the gentry of Ballarat, as owners of their farms, an imposing house and a pub. Harold was soon on his way to study law at Melbourne University, where he lived at Ormond College. He seems never to have thought of himself as fortune's favourite, but was diligently committed to study, sport and civilian military service.

The study was suspended when he went to the Boer War as a corporal. Elliott's tactical acumen was early and often exhibited, and he came home with rank and a Distinguished Conduct Medal. Married to Kate in 1909 (and more or less happily to the end) he was a militia colonel whose rigidity and punctiliousness were already causing aggravation to those above and below him in the hierarchy of the peace-

time army. But he was well enough regarded. When the Great War began, Elliott was given command of the 7th Battalion of the 2nd Division of the First AIF. He was 'by far the youngest of the sixteen original AIF battalion commanders'. Shortly he was abroad again, to another war.

Once again, his first responses were typical rather than singular. He wrote to Kate from Cairo, as one among many thousands of military travellers, 'Can you imagine women sunk so low as to allow dogs and it is said donkeys to connect with them for exhibition?' Well, she could now. Was Elliott being naive, or

disingenuous? And what did Kate think? Later she would reprove him for reports of his bad language before the troops. Perhaps she reckoned that the bestial entertainments of Egypt were more to do with rumour than her husband's recreation. He was, anyway, off to Gallipoli. From there he wrote to her that 'we are like men under the sentence of death'; 'May I never see another war.' Elliott's solicitude for the sufferings and loss of his men was the heartfelt, central note of all his accounts of battle.

For himself he led, literally, from the front, gaining a reputation for 'remarkable, selfless bravery'. He inspired his men. Before he was evacuated with pleurisy, four soldiers from the battalion had won VCs at Lone Pine. Elliott—for his part—was at war on two fronts. Although he would soon take command, on the Western Front, 'of more than a mile of the British line in the biggest war there had ever been', he was at odds with some of his commanding officers. General Birdwood was first

among these, and Elliott would come to feel that his talents were slighted when he was overlooked or superseded for promotion. His account of the British bungling of the battle of Polygon Wood did not help. At that time his brother was killed in action and his crooked legal partner had sunk the firm into debt. McMullin: 'he had in quick succession directed a difficult battle, buried his brother, discovered he was probably ruined'. In that frame of mind he wrote the damning report of Polygon Wood. Its suppression was 'so rigorous as to be almost unique in the history of the AIF'. There would be no more advancement for Pompey Elliott in this war.

McMullin's focus widens to provide a fine account of staff work in war, of the rivalries between officers, of preparations for battle. His command of such details is one of the most telling parts of the book. Of Elliott's powers as a tactician and soldier we are left in little doubt. By 1918, Elliott—not alone—wrote 'I cannot stand the strain much longer'. Yet he recovered to get into trouble again, threatening to hang British deserters—and to lead one of the great Australian victories of the war, the recapture of Villers-Bretonneux on Anzac Day. Once more he was passed over for promotion. This time someone told him why. General Brudenell White wrote: 'yr ability? It is well known; but—you mar it by not keeping your judgment under complete control.' Elliott's retort: 'if you want to get on in the army, go on leave to Paris, learn dancing, take lessons in deportment, learn to bow and scrape'. It is the classic, but pointless, reproach of the fighting soldier to political generals.

In the last stages of the war Elliott was shot in the buttocks, fell into the Somme and also faced down a mutiny of troops who were resisting the disbandment of their brigade. But homecoming worried him more: 'I would rather go on facing the Germans here for twenty years than face those people Roberts [his partner] has cheated of their money.' Back home, Elliott displaced some of his own anxieties at returning to a strange world on to the plight of the mass of ex-servicemen, whose wants never ceased to exercise him. He resumed legal practice and became a National Party senator. Belated honours (promotion to major-general) alternated with the sort of indecorous episodes that had marked his military career—such as a fist fight with his Melbourne neighbours. All the while

he kept a strict and interfering watch on Bean's *Official History* of the war and his part in it. Bean, by the way, said of Elliott that he was 'as straight as a ruled line'.

McMullin writes steadily and sympathetically of Elliott's civilian life, which his triumphs as a soldier made a more difficult matter of adjustment. 'Pompey was really struggling.' So is the prose. This book could have gained significantly from a cliché cull. Pompey offers 'pearls of wisdom'; his men seek 'horizontal refreshment'; 'time seemed to stand still' (admittedly on the row into Anzac Cove); 'By mid-1918 the AIF was in top form.' Pompey also—given his temperament—ends up shooting himself in the foot and wearing egg on his face. But was the egg on his face (cliché or no) unexpected? The red and round-faced big man on the cover has not lost all of the insecure, battling bush child as he faces the world. McMullin says tellingly of Elliott's last years that he was 'tormented

by delusions relating to his integrity'.

Finally, after one failed attempt to shoot himself, Elliott committed suicide with his razor while in hospital. The details of his death were first fudged. When they were made more explicit, outrage was the reaction of many with whom he had served and who honoured him still. McMullin is asking no less than Elliott's due in wanting him to be better remembered, and he has done the state—and his subject—valuable service in this biography. But Australians have never been long interested in their military heroes—not in Monash, or Jacka, or Elliott. Non-combatants—Simpson, Dunlop—have curiously commanded more attention and regard in a country which still supposes that by battle it entered into history, long ago, in Turkey. ■

Peter Pierce's most recent book was *Australia's Vietnam War* (Texas A&M University Press, 2002).

BOOKS:4

MICHAEL MCGIRR

# Buckley's chance

*The Life and Adventures of William Buckley*, edited and introduced by Tim Flannery. Text Publishing, 2002. ISBN 1 87700 820 6, RRP \$23

**A**USTRALIANS love stories about bolters. From the jolly swagman to Christopher Skase, the story of the one who got away has a long-standing appeal. Harry Houdini, the 'self-liberator', had a huge following in Australia. When he came here in 1910, 20,000 people gathered to watch him dive off Melbourne's Queen's Bridge. Ronald Biggs is another favourite. It could be a long list.

Like many cultures, however, ours has a tendency to tell stories about who we aren't, not who we are. The larrikin myth is the product of a deeply compliant society which is a little embarrassed about how keen it has always been to please its



William Buckley, 1852  
by Ludwig Becker

masters. Stories about bolters serve a similar purpose. They provide substitutes in story for what most of us lack in fact. Increasingly, the whole of a life's work and creativity in this country is focused on the acquisition of a small piece of real estate. And keeping other bolters away from it.

One of the first items of Australian slang was the term 'bushranger'. It was in common use by the turn of

the 19th century and was used, among other things, to describe convicts who'd managed to escape into the bush. There were plenty of tall tales and true about such people. One of the best-known was William Buckley. Buckley has gained a



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toehold in our culture as the source of the expression 'Buckley's chance', although you can still get a decent argument about whether Buckley was responsible or whether it was Melbourne's former retailing aristocrat, the department store 'Buckley and Nunn'.

Buckley, a bricklayer-turned-career-soldier, was transported for 14 years on what appears to have been a charge of relatively minor theft. He was part of the group that was sent to establish the first settlement in Victoria, that at Sorrento, in 1803. That settlement didn't last very long, but long enough for Buckley and several others to bolt into the bush. By the time Lieutenant-Colonel David Collins gave up on Sorrento and took the other few hundred convicts back to the relative comfort of Sydney, he assumed that Buckley and his companions were all dead.

In fact, Buckley had tried to set off overland for Sydney, a distance of some 600 miles. The journey was impossible, so he settled down and lived for the next 32 years with Aboriginal people around the Barwon River and Bellarine Peninsula. During that time, he became comfortable in Aboriginal languages and lost his ability to speak English. He married at least one Aborigine. He learnt a lot.

In 1835, when Batman was laying the foundation stones of Melbourne, Buckley stepped out of the bush and announced himself by pointing to the tattoo on his arm. This took considerable courage—more than it would have taken to remain where he was. Buckley was six foot five. He was obviously European. He could well have ended up back in chains. In fact, he became valuable as an interpreter in early Melbourne, so much so that a pardon was arranged. Buckley's ability to reintegrate into colonial society is as remarkable as his ability to have become part of Aboriginal communities. He was a contortionist of sorts. He shared that with Houdini.

It's hardly surprising that Buckley became a curiosity and that the legends surrounding him took on a life of their own. Hamilton Hume, the leader of the first group to make the trek overland between Sydney and Port Phillip in 1824, wrote a letter years after the event, in 1867, claiming that Buckley had run after them as they were leaving. A.G. Robinson, another early explorer, wrote in 1840 that Hume had told him that when he, Hume, had reached the vicinity of the Barwon River, the local

natives had wanted him to come and meet a white man who was living with them. Hume thought this must have been Buckley. But both these stories date from after Buckley's rejoining European society. As the years went by, Hume was careful not to let the lustre dull on his own myth.

The taciturn and shy Buckley tried to avoid publicity. He had a hand in two accounts of his adventures. One of these was dictated to Rev. George Langhorne, a missionary, soon after Buckley came in out of the bush. It is quite brief. It went missing and was not published until 1911. The other was ghost-written by John Morgan in 1852 and published in an open attempt to raise money for both Buckley and Morgan, who was a struggling newspaper man.

Tim Flannery has republished both Morgan and Langhorne's versions of events and added an introduction. Flannery is good at this. He has a deft ability to dust off old diaries and memoirs and present them in a way that invites a reader into the first-hand experience of the authors without putting them through an academic security search. His succinct and insightful introductions are an important part of his approach. Flannery has previously given new life to the diaries of Watkin Tench (1788), Matthew Flinders (*Terra Australis*) and a selection of other explorers (*The Explorers*).

Flannery has obviously befriended Buckley. He raises questions about the reliability of these accounts but suggests that Buckley's testimony is by no means to be discounted. This is significant, given that Buckley is the one and only European witness to have spent so long among Aborigines who had yet to have encountered the full force of colonisation. Buckley's accounts of cannibalism and infanticide are pretty blunt (though by no means universally accepted). Buckley speaks little about himself. But he gives a lot away when he describes what he sees as the superstitions of the Aborigines. He may have been cut adrift from the world that nurtured him, but you get the impression that he survived because he brought so much of that world with him. He had a watertight theology tucked safely inside his head. In that, at least, he is more like Robinson Crusoe than a Wild White Man. ■

**Michael McGirr** is the fiction editor of *Meanjin*.

# Taking flight

*White Butterflies*, Colin McPhedran. Pandanus Books, 2002.  
ISBN 1 74076 017 4, RRP \$29.95

**C**OLIN MCPHEDRAN describes himself as a 'refugee'. At a time when this word is so prominent in our current political debate, McPhedran's autobiography comes bearing some interesting baggage.

The book begins in Burma in 1941, shortly before the Japanese invasion. McPhedran is 12, the son of an expatriate Scotsman working for Shell. His mother is Burmese, a talented pianist and teacher. It is a very different Burma from the one we know today, a country still under British colonial rule and bracing for the Japanese advance. For young Colin the war seems a distant and unreal concept. The early part of the book is more interesting for its portrayal of British colonial rule and its impact on a family of mixed origin than for the threat of war.

So, despite the book's setting, this is not a war story. Indeed, in many ways the war is peripheral to the events McPhedran relates. With his father absent overseas, and the Japanese closing in, Colin's mother decides that they should head for India. Along with thousands of other non-combatants, the family begins the terrible three-and-a-half-month journey through the Patkoi ranges. It is a journey that claims the lives of thousands of people, including Colin's mother, his sister and elder brother. Young Colin himself arrives in India a mere skeleton, suffering from malaria and a festering shrapnel wound. The book highlights the cost of any war, most notably for those not directly involved in the fighting. McPhedran's story is one of collateral damage on a massive scale.

The journey is central to the book and is obviously still etched in McPhedran's mind. It is a journey of courage and determination and terrible beauty. One example: the source for the title of the book. Coming upon the corpse of a fellow refugee,



McPhedran notes how the body appeared covered in a white sheet:

Then we saw a cloud of white butterflies rise up with a whirring, humming sound, exposing the bloated, shiny corpse of an Indian refugee ... The butterflies must have been drawing on the juices secreted in the skin. When we had moved away, I looked back in amazement to see the cloud of white settling back on the corpse, a fitting veil for the deceased.

Such moments punctuate the journey to India like epiphanies. The butterflies are a fitting symbol for life's fragility—something that is made abundantly clear during the passage through the mountains. At times, though, McPhedran's writing tends toward cliché and a stock portrayal of the wonders of the human spirit. This is most evident in throwaway lines such as: 'I was soon to learn that people somehow muster extra strength when the odds seem hopelessly stacked against them', or, 'My mother was visibly saddened', which in context don't seem adequately to match the emotional intent. Perhaps this has something to do with the limits of lan-

guage, or our ability to shape it, particularly in retrospect.

This highlights another problem with McPhedran's book, one that is shared by many autobiographies: the difficulty of recalling and successfully transcribing dialogue, in this case conversations from half a century ago. In *White Butterflies*, the dialogue is at times stiff, stilted and distracting, as though the characters in question are talking dolls. This is most noticeable with McPhedran's mother, whose statements appear mechanical and contrived. For example: 'The things of nature we cannot control, the wild animals we can with patience and our fellow humans are never as bad as historians make them out to be.' McPhedran's love for his mother, a central theme of the book, almost turns her into a caricature.

The book is successful despite its stylistic problems. The narrative is at its strongest during the journey to India but the second half of the book is also interesting as we watch Colin search for his identity and a place to call home. The tension between McPhedran and his father, the roots of which stem from his father's apparent abandonment of the family during the war, is also compelling.

Colin's sense of dislocation is finally put to rest by the book's end when he reaches Australia and records a feeling that the 'place had a good Karma' (once again forcing a consideration of the term 'refugee' and its current implications).

*White Butterflies* is a story about those on the edge of war, a book about 'refugees', a tale of survival. McPhedran arrived in Australia by boat and it might be interesting to discover how those in our detention centres might respond to his tale. ■

**Cameron Lowe** is a postgraduate student at Deakin University.

# FLASH IN THE PAN



## Arctic epic

*Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*, dir. Zacharias Kunuk. This much-awarded film is an astonishing achievement for a first-time director. Using Inuit myth, it covers the territory of all great epic and saga. The story centres on Atanarjuat of the film's title, the 'fast runner', but the concerns stretch to far more than individual struggle. Society must be healthy if people are to be happy; vengeance must stop somewhere; evil must be dealt with, but not in such a way as to make the good people evil too. Atanarjuat and his older brother Amaqjuaq are marginalised because of power struggles in their father's generation. Their talents and hunting skills cause Oki, the group-leader's son, to become violently jealous. Then Atanarjuat wins the beautiful Atuat from Oki in a brutal traditional head-punching contest. After a series of intrigues and betrayals, Oki and his cronies murder Amaqjuaq as he sleeps in a tent with his younger brother. Atanarjuat escapes naked across the melting snow and ice fields, finding help in extremis.

The cinematography is beyond beauty: vast Arctic skies and snowfields. The sound includes chants, growls, howls and the crisp crunch of underfoot snow. The acting is utterly convincing, with Peter-Henry Arnatsiaq and Lucy Tulugarjuk

particularly compelling as Oki and his spoilt, conniving sister Puja. And you wonder how Natar Ungalaaq as Atanarjuat (above) managed his naked run on that snow, falling into ice-pools as he went. As film, as epic, as redemption-wisdom, it all works wonderfully. And despite going for nearly three hours, it was none too long. If this page gave stars, I'd be giving it six out of five.

—Juliette Hughes

## Casualised casualties

*The Navigators*, dir. Ken Loach. Loach, in his unobtrusive, startling way, follows a chrome-yellow-clad gang of rail-track workers (the navvies of another age) as they negotiate the Third-Way world of modern British industry. We meet them first as a sparky unionised team, inheritors of a working-class culture and a few health and safety standards. They become casualised units of a privatised railway infrastructure before our eyes. And we are forced to watch, like accomplices, as more than their Yorkshire wit and camaraderie wears away.

It's a subtle, devastating film. These are not working-class heroes, battling to a brass-band accompaniment. They are ordinary men with conflicting demands and loyalties. They have kids, estranged wives, rent to find. They go ice skating (the film's

best scene—Cartier-Bresson in waltz time). They live in cramped houses where making love to your wife is awkward because your mate is dosed down on the couch and the walls quiver. They console one another with communal rituals (bulk chip orders) and they betray one another out of desperation and fear.

Some of the ensemble cast are professional comedians, hence the machine-gun pace. The script, by one-time British Rail worker, Rob Dawber (now dead of mesothelioma contracted on the job), is a class insider's piece of work—hilarious and tragic.

—Morag Fraser

## Here be dragging

*Dragonfly*, dir. Tom Shadyac. My problem with *Dragonfly* is not the acting, the direction or the production values. Rather, it is why this thin script was chosen for a 105-minute movie in the first place.

The story begins in a flurry of action. In Venezuela, a bus carrying Emily Darrow (Susanna Thompson), a dedicated humanitarian doctor, is swept over a cliff by a landslide. Although her body isn't found with the other victims, she is presumed dead and her grieving doctor husband, Joe (Kevin Costner) is devastated. After Emily's death the cynical Joe begins to notice some odd happenings around the house. Lights fail, the family parrot goes berserk, and Emily's clothes resist a clearance from a wardrobe. Odd things also happen at the hospital. The deceased doctor specialised in paediatric oncology and several young patients claim to have messages from Emily for Joe. A mysterious symbol begins appearing in the drawings of the patients and the message Joe receives is that Emily wants him to do something.

If these are messages from the other side from the deceased Emily, one can only admire her industry. She is sending more messages to Joe than you get from your local Member in the week before an election.

So far so good, but we've just reached the 75-minute mark in the movie. Just how many unexplained incidents and expressions of disbelief can one film accommodate without plot advancement?

Eventually the penny drops and gloomy Joe realises that, yes, six months of solid poltergeist action and generally unexplained phenomena must mean something.

During the last 30 minutes of the movie, the story recovers from its dormant state and accelerates into action, with the final five minutes providing a mawkish but moving endorsement of faith.

Costner is OK as Joe, although he does 'grumpy' better than 'grieving', and he really was unfortunate to have missed out on the silent movie era. Kathy Bates adds spark in the nothing role of a good neighbour, while Linda Hunt, as a nun, looks like ET.

In short, this is a 45-minute movie suffering from bloat. —Gordon Lewis

## Not altogether

*Tilsammans* (*Together*), dir. Lukas Moodysson. Set in Stockholm at the start of the '70s, Lukas Moodysson's *Tilsammans* presents itself as a gentle comedy of manners. It begins with battered middle-class housewife Elisabeth leaving her abusive husband to stay with her brother Goran in his leftist communal household. Elisabeth and her two children's first introduction to the household is a heated practical demonstration of the politics of not wearing underwear at the breakfast table, and so begin the clash-of-culture laughs. Much of the humour of the film is derived from the absurd coalition of leftist idealism that makes up the house—a communist, a pair of vegetarian eco-hippies, a cynical medical student named Lasse, his newly lesbian wife and their child Tet (named after the Tet offensive) and Klas, who has an appalling Prince Valiant hairstyle and the hots for Lasse. Of course, despite their collective commitment to forging a new way of life outside the confines of bourgeois materialism, none of them can agree on anything, let alone achieve any kind of real political or social change. No surprise, then, that many of the jokes are built around endless infighting over the finer points of dialectical materialism, open relationships, feminism, vegetarianism and bad '70s concept albums.

The film has many charms; it captures the feel of the period nicely, and is filled with likeable performances, especially from the children (who, taking their cues from their parents, cheer when they hear from the radio that General Franco is dead, and then take turns playing 'torturer and victim'). In many ways Goran is the emblematic figure of the film—he seems

to have no real political commitment of his own whatsoever, apart from an aversion to conflict and a desire for everyone to get along. Like Goran, the film ultimately has no real interest in the politics of the people it deals with, except as a source of humour. Despite initially presenting Elisabeth's husband as a drunken boor, and the collective's middle-class neighbours as uptight self-righteous hypocrites, the film's politics really lie firmly in the centre. It achieves its 'happy' ending by reuniting the wife-beater and his newly 'politicised' wife (she doesn't shave her armpits any more), under the auspices of the collective. But, importantly, its most radical members have gone—to become a drunken child-molester, or to join the Baader-Meinhof Group, or to live in a more strictly vegetarian commune where there are no TVs. As long as no-one felt too strongly about anything, the film seems to be saying, we'd all get along just fine. For many, this ending will seem charmingly humane and inclusive; I can't help but see it as a cynical cop-out. —Allan James Thomas

## With respect

*Ali G Indahouse*, dir. Mark Mylod. Unlike *American Pie*, Ali G isn't just a teenage-boy phenomenon. The Queen Mother used to like Ali G and she was 100. And so does my mother, a young lass of 80. And so do I ... There is some weird thing in the ether that crones share with young chaps, and being a bit radical is part of it—look at any protest march and you'll see an overrepresentation of old women and very young blokes. So you just might be able to take your mum to see *Ali G Indahouse* if she's that sort of mum.

A creation of Cambridge graduate Sacha Baron Cohen, Ali G is Alistair Graham, a Jewish boy from Staines, London. He is a wannabe-black, adopting the style and speech of the dangerous-cool Afro-Caribbean culture of London that in turn parodies the gangsta culture of LA. So he wallows in hip-hop stereotypes, from the baggy Hilfiger clothes complete with tight beanie and yellow fly-eye sunglasses to the uncomfortable territory of hip-hop's ingrained sexism and illiteracy. He offends many people. Yet Ali's faux-ignorant interviews can show up the dodginess of smooth-tongued spinners. Australians took to all this with ease—Norman Gunston did

it all 20 years ago, more gently, but just as hilariously.

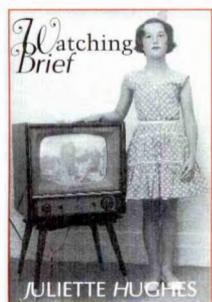
The film has been a huge box-office success here. Cohen has made a plot of some political sophistication: Ali, a long-term dole-bludger, comes under the notice of a sneaky cabinet minister (a suitably villainous Charles Dance) when a by-election looms in Staines. Dance needs a loser in order to destabilise the PM and seize power. But Ali, of course, wins. The television debate where he trounces the rival candidate is belly-laugh stuff. Ali accuses his opponent of fellating a horse (as you do when arguing in Staines). The candidate responds by creating a totally self-incriminating defence—the casual shot has gone home and the splendid stereotype of the Conservative perv is perpetuated. There is a lot of swearing and extremely rude jokes, many of them very funny. Look, don't go if you don't like crude British humour: I can't say fairer than that. But you'll be missing a low, incorrect and completely indefensible good time. —Juliette Hughes

## Netsky prospekts

*Birthday Girl*, dir. Jez Butterworth. John (Ben Chaplin) is seemingly unremarkable in every way—an uninspired bank clerk who wears his short-sleeved shirts with a tie and lives in a miserable housing estate outside London. In an attempt to add a little colour to the grey, he orders himself an internet bride through a site aptly named 'From Russia with Love'. Needless to say, it all goes a tot haywire and his Russian bride turns out to be a little more complex than the internet video streams indicated—and on it goes.

*Birthday Girl* is not a great film by any standard, but it does have a rough charm that is reminiscent of that great anti-Thatcherite-kitchen-sink-urban-riot-upturned-burning-car period in British cinema. Oliver Stapelton's cinematography is sensational, which is not a surprise given his CV—*My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Sammie and Rosie Get Laid*, *Prick Up Your Ears* (a roll-call of '80s classics). But while *Birthday Girl* looks fantastic and is supported with great performances (including Vincent Cassel and Mathieu Kassovitz—two crazy Frenchmen playing two insane Russians), it lacks oomph. But it's delightfully brief—and never short of a laugh.

—Siobhan Jackson



# Devils and bargains

An English builder is hiring casuals. When an Irishman turns up, the builder asks, 'Have you ever done any building before?'

'To be sure, to be sure, I have indeed,' says the Irishman.

'Well then, what's the difference between a girder and a joist?'

'O, that's easy,' says the Irishman. 'Goethe wrote Faust and Joyce wrote Ulysses.'

**W**HO CONTROLS YOUR REMOTE? If it's your teenager then you will have to battle to see *Faust*, *Les Misérables* or Bert Newton's *Good Morning Australia*. The last (every morning at 9am on Ten) is a gem of Australian culture: it ought to be recorded and put in a time capsule for historians of a couple of hundred years' hence. If there are any left. And before you send the cultural consistency police over to my bunker for including Bert within a thousand keystrokes of the *Mis* and *Faust*, pause a moment. Admittedly, if the three programs had been included in one of the 'pick the odd one out' questions in Eddie McGuire's national IQ test in August, even the Kiwis would have got that one because *GMA* had three words in the title and the others, er, didn't. (By the way, I was suitably outraged when, along with Red Symons and Derryn Hinch, I was ruled incorrect when I selected 'alarm' as being closest to 'perturb'. 'Agitated' was the correct answer, we were informed. Too bad that grammar doesn't seem to form part of the equation. All right, all right! I'm putting it all behind me.)

Anyway, at first view you might just think that *GMA* didn't have much in common with the other two. But think about it: 'Good morning, Australia.' The wide-brown-landness of it. How are we today? What are we thinking, desiring? What is happening now? What peddlars want to show their wares, promising youth (anti-wrinkle creams); beauty (bronz-ing blushers, state-of-the-art depilatories); health (special delousing treatment for the kids and Horny Goat Weed to put flare in hubby's nostrils); help for chronic pain (magnetised shoe inserts); assistance with housework (Big Kev ranting and foaming over his soaps and mini-vacuum cleaner); even participation in saving the planet by buying Danoz's steam cleaner, which, one gathers, will clean everything except an immigration minister's hands.

Bert presides over this caravanserai with warmth and calm. He is order among chaos, MC of the mini-morality plays that are the advertaintments. He interviews celebrities, isn't afraid to be a bit political (Michael Long was given a good run about the fight against racism). This is, after all, not the *Footy*

*Show*. Bert is talking to housewives and shut-ins and he serves them well.

He has recently struck a new bargain with Ten. There was talk that his contract mightn't be renewed, that Nine was sniffing round. But no: he ringmasters his circus of performers for us on Ten five days a week, meeting people where they live.

**I**N Goethe's and Hugo's times, where people lived was not so different. If *GMA* doesn't give us depth, it sure gives scope. When my family first arrived in Australia, and bought a TV, it was *In Melbourne Tonight* more than anything else that showed us how different, how very different, was this culture from the one we'd left. It was 1963, and Bert was playing straight man to Graham Kennedy. He's been on telly longer than many people have been alive, so if Bert Newton hasn't been called a national treasure, he should be called something very like it.

SBS showed *Les Misérables* during July and August, and it was wonderful. Just as any Dickens or Shakespeare is still eloquent about what it is to inhabit a fragile human body in a systemically evil and chaotic world, so too is Hugo's masterwork. And while Gerard Depardieu is a completely satisfying Valjean, it was John Malkovich's Javert that chilled me to the heart, not so much in his relentlessness and lack of compassion for others, but in the wilfulness, the icy despair of his suicide.

There is a sort of anomie that older men can get and Javert epitomises it: it doesn't have the heroic feel of Milton's Satan, who would rule in hell rather than serve in heaven. No, it's more grey than that, and the more terrifying for its lack of bluster. Faust, on the other hand, sees anomie coming and fights against it, but fights without anything meaningful left inside him to fight for. The huge task of putting on both parts of the complete play was undertaken by Peter Stein, with Bruno Ganz as Faust. SBS will be screening Part I at 11pm on Sundays from 18 August, so it will have begun by the time you read this, but do still give it a try. Tape it and watch it at a more humane time. Part II will be shown on Saturday afternoons at 12.30pm from 7 September to 5 October. The preview tapes are being fought over in my family as I write: they are full of greatness, the kind of greatness you get from *Lear* and *Hamlet*. Wrest the remote from the kids and experience it. ■

**Juliette Hughes** is a freelance writer.



# Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 106, September 2002

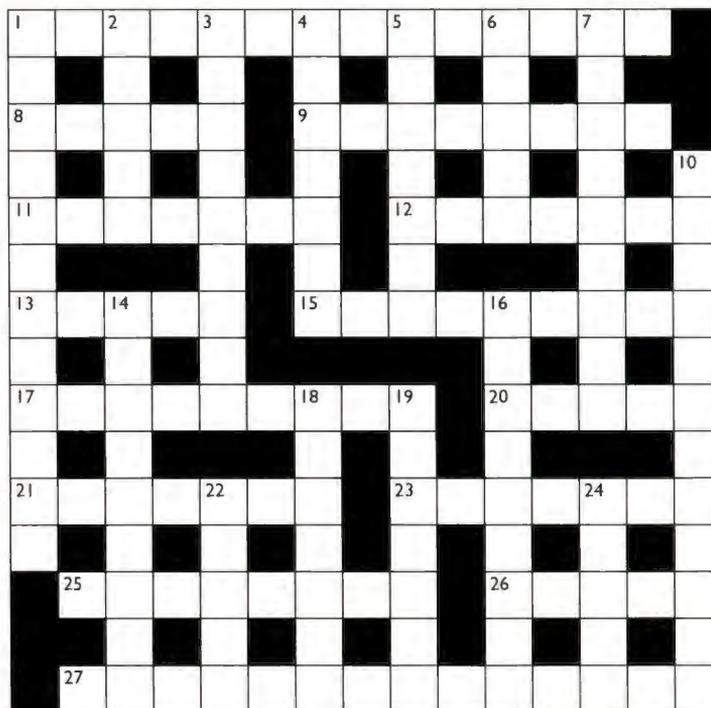
Devised by  
Joan Nowotny IBVM

## ACROSS

1. Bound to be mopping up, for instance, at this time of the year. Vernal purification? (6,8)
8. U-shaped bend in river where cattle stoop to drink, perhaps. (2-3)
9. 1-across may cause this frenzy for fodder. Achoo! (3,5)
11. Convenience store where one can perhaps mark bill—detailed for payment. (4,3)
12. Rice mixed with writing fluid spilt on this arena. (7)
13. Small change, perhaps, or notes in store, we hear. (5)
15. Make melody on the long, unbroken waves! What vocalist does to gain applause? (5,4)
17. Competitor on 12-across who performs difficult trick with surprising ease. (3-6)
20. Become hardened when assailed. (5)
21. Furious pace—see the one who got away! (7)
23. Yours landed softly, but mine, unfortunately, fell on the hard road surface. (7)
25. Could be sirloin fillet—competitively priced. (8)
26. Disagree with doctor about feverish fit of shivering. That's about right. (5)
27. Takes retaliatory action when the adder makes a sudden rush to attack? (14)

## DOWN

1. Gambling contraptions perhaps; cash lost in 'em! (4,8)
2. Dance round Bob—the first to man the barricades? (5)
3. First report of important events? Or the program between the TV ads, according to the cynic? (9)
4. Roman brigades unfortunately shot orc to the point of extinction. (7)
5. Blissful fields where the water is somewhat saline? Yes, at first. (7)
6. Some connection, i.e., certain relation included. (5)
7. Penury sounds like a quality that dough has when it is being worked on. (9)
10. Bare essentials needed to open many doors (8,4)
14. Possibly send croc east—a rising direction? (9)
16. Poor Sara butts in to the underground foundations! (9)
18. Foolishly create first lemon-flavoured molasses. (7)
19. Concerned about the ear, Robert for the first half acted like an automaton. (7)
22. Latin-American peasant, we hear, received enthusiastic praise. (5)
24. Mother with giant—and giant's partner. They're usually inseparable. (5)



## Solution to Crossword no. 105, July–August 2002



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