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A poisoned cup

WHEN ARCHBISHOP PETER HOLLINGWORTH was appointed governor-general, we wished him well, but also asked whether it was proper for a bishop to accept this position. But for all our reservations, we could not have anticipated the tragedy in which he would so soon be cast.

To personal tragedy, the decent response is pity and awe. But the Governor-General's predicament also has public aspects.

When government ministers make appointments to public positions, they try to balance the public interest with the interests of their party. When the party agenda is seen to dominate the public interest, as has been the case with appointments made by the present government, the offices themselves are tarnished. The conduct even of the governor-general is measured by its impact on party politics. It is not surprising that in discussion of any future republic, public opinion is so insistent that the president should not be chosen by politicians.

In such a climate, no more can be expected of the governor-general than that he will perform his ceremonial functions correctly. The possibility, briefly opened by the bearing of Sir William Deane, that the governor-general might reflect the nation to itself, is lost. That is not Peter Hollingworth's fault. He was unfortunate in the times in which he agreed to serve. Anyone who reflected to the nation our responsibility in devising the brutal Pacific solution to the plight of asylum seekers, and in taking part in the war against Iraq, would need quite extraordinary moral courage.

When Archbishop Hollingworth accepted his position, he was confident that his status as Archbishop of Brisbane would not be in conflict with his new role as head of state. He was mistaken, but for reasons that no-one anticipated. It is a time when heads of churches have faced intense scrutiny—accused of culpable disregard for the victims of sexual abuse in their concern to protect the

interests, officials and reputation of their churches. In Hollingworth's case, an enquiry initiated by the Brisbane church found that he had not acted with due care. Public anger about this issue is rightly intense, and makes it difficult for a governor-general accused of neglect of duty to perform even the ceremonial functions of the role. It has proved impossible for the bishop to leave behind his past when becoming governor-general.

Archbishop Hollingworth's predicament will surely mean that it will be a long time before a bishop is again appointed as governor-general. This exclusion of bishops from public office is to be welcomed. Because he is called to be a teacher within the church, a bishop should not accept the office of governor-general. He has an inalienable responsibility to reflect publicly on the implications of the Gospel in Australian society.

Archbishop Hollingworth's advocacy when with the Brotherhood of St Laurence encouraged the hope that, as governor-general, he might find ways of reflecting on moral issues. Even in quiet times, this hope was never likely to be fulfilled. In the last two years, when Australian treatment of refugees and the prosecution of war against Iraq have called for fearless moral judgment by churches, the tensions between the responsibilities of episcopal calling and those of the head of state have become intolerable. They were evident when Australian troops departed to fight in Iraq. The archbishop, present out of concern for members of his church, would have had to take a moral position on the war. The Governor-General's participation gave legitimacy to the operation.

That is the tragedy of Archbishop Hollingworth's tenure in office. He was offered a poisoned cup which it would have been better to let pass. But it is hard not to feel sympathy with him in the pain that its drinking has brought him and those close to him.

—Andrew Hamilton s.j.

The other side of mateship

THROUGHOUT HIS TIME as prime minister, John Howard has frequently appealed to notions of core Australian values—loyalty, a fair go and mateship—in his efforts to speak to the ordinary Australian. In pursuit of this cause, he has enlisted the help of Don Bradman and played soldiers with George W. and Tony Blair.

Howard has sanctified the condition of the ordinary Australian. But such action usually diminishes the nature of the subject. Ordinary Australians are proud of their country, believe themselves to be fair-minded, generous (donating to the St V de P, the Sallies, and all bushfire appeals) and willing to put themselves out for their mates.

In most instances these notions about Australians are true. We like things to be straightforward: from our religion to our relationships (with one another and with other nations) and our politics. We don't like hidden agendas and we are unforgiving when we feel our trust in public figures is betrayed. We are keen to repay the generosity of others—Australian men and women demanded that the government finally get involved in East Timor and end the violence in 1999. Australians still hold dear the assistance the East Timorese offered to our soldiers in WWII.

Yet with the help of the Howard government, ordinary Australians have let their fears get the better of them, betraying what was prized in the first place. The ordinary Australian man and woman has had his or her fears of 'funny looking people arriving in funny little boats' legitimised. No allowances are made, even for the East Timorese who have lived among us for over ten years, and contributed much to their local communities and the nation.

Australians still cannot come to terms with 'the other'. Most Australian politicians know this. (Fraser and Calwell knew it and deliberately led us in the opposite direction.) Mr Howard has exploited it. He has managed to divide Australians over immigration, reconciliation and the conflict in Iraq. As a nation we now know much more about how we differ from

one another than about all we have in common. The ordinary Australian has been encouraged to be nice to Ahmed across the street, but to keep him under surveillance.

Even when Australians do accept others into their communities—such as the Afghan people living and working in Young, NSW—they are never encouraged to see such examples as indications of what might be possible with increased migration. Vibrant, multicultural communities are regarded as the exception to the rule. Australians are certainly not encouraged to translate positive experience of the other in their midst to their understanding of 'the other' in the world. The Iraqi family next door is quite different from Iraqis living in Iraq.

Australians punish difference. We detain those who arrive by boat without the necessary papers and employ those who arrive by air and overstay their visas, mostly because the latter look and sound like us.

Our hearts go out to those killed and injured in the Bali bombings of 2002. Quite rightly we see these people as victims of an aggression they neither provoked nor deserved. Yet we are supposed to believe that the suffering and loss of the ordinary Iraqi in 2003 is a price they must pay for their freedom. The cost is one we insisted they bear.

We need more from our leaders. Australians expect our public officials, elected and appointed, not only to act in the best interests of the office and our nation, but to advance our community. The politics of division have been played for too long and we deserve better. It is not enough for the Coalition simply to maintain the status quo, the ALP to wait for a sea change, nor the Greens, Democrats and independents to campaign on the fringes.

Generosity, a commitment to a fair go and to one's mates are qualities that have served us well when married with strong and honourable leadership. We have never needed such leadership more than now.

—Marcelle Mogg

Acts of terror

In his otherwise engaging review of Ghassan Hage's book, *Against Paranoid Nationalism* (*Eureka Street*, April 2003), Robert Phiddian suggests that Hage never mistakes explanation of Palestinian suicide bombings for justification. We have obviously read a different book.

In fact, Hage devotes over 20 pages of text including endnotes to justifying Palestinian terrorism. For example, he cites at length (pp128–129) a Canadian author who argues that there is no moral problem in the Palestinians' deliberate killing of civilians. He also jokes about the possibility that he as a Lebanese Christian could be involved in Islamic suicide bombing (p121). Funny indeed.

What Hage (and perhaps Phiddian) doesn't seem to understand is that progressives have always distinguished between progressive and reactionary responses to structural oppression. Progressive responses use disciplined political strategies to target the real source of the oppression—whether capitalism in general, or particular national or global sources of corporate or military power. In contrast, reactionary responses involve scapegoating other groups who are often equally oppressed, and fail to address the underlying causes of the oppression. What this means in practice is that we don't tolerate working-class males who have been oppressed by class exploitation in the workplace diverting their anger and violence towards their female partners in the home. We don't condone those who have been abused by a violent communal culture expressing their frustrations by physically or sexually abusing their children. We don't support those who have lost their jobs due to a multinational takeover of a local company turning to Hansonist solutions based on the oppression of Asian immigrants or Aborigines. And we don't support members of socially deprived communities attempting to blame and exclude illicit drug users and street sex workers.

The analogy should be obvious. A progressive response to Israeli oppression would target through disciplined collective political action the major Israeli political and military structures—those groups in the Israeli government, settlement movement and army who seek to maintain the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip—responsible for Palestinian oppression.

Instead, the suicide bombings indiscriminately target Israeli civilians within the Green Line, irrespective of their political attitudes towards the Palestinians, their socio-economic positions, and their ethnic/religious backgrounds. They provide a rationale for further Israeli incursions into Palestinian territory, strengthen Israeli identification with the nationalist right on the basis of a perceived fight for survival, blur the distinction between the territories occupied in 1967 and Israel itself, and weaken those Israelis who seek a two-state solution.

They are a counter-productive and reactionary response that only serves to reinforce the continuing structural oppression of Palestinians, and they deserve absolute condemnation.

Philip Mendes
Kew, VIC

What's in a name

At the recent Melbourne Press Club lunch, world-renowned lawyer Geoffrey Robertson gave a brilliant address on the role of journalists in protecting human rights and of human rights in protecting journalists. When introducing the event, Neil Mitchell acknowledged a number of dignitaries present among the audience of academics, lawyers and journalists. In his final acknowledgment before introducing Robertson, Mitchell said, 'And welcome to Vijay—I'm sorry Vijay but your full name is far too difficult to pronounce.'

Mr Vijayan Venugopal is a lawyer and a partner in a Kuala Lumpur-based law firm. He was in Melbourne for the same reason as Geoffrey Robertson, as a delegate to the Commonwealth Law Conference. Mitchell's refusal to pronounce the name is more than simply lazy journalism. It is a sad but all too prevalent example of the negation of identity—a concept central to the very issue on which Robertson was talking. Affirming and claiming identity is surely a key pillar

on which human rights are established. Mitchell's dismissal of Mr Venugopal's name seems to belong in another era when so many people in the West had difficulty in acknowledging people from 'other' places (my own grandfather changed his name when moving to England from Europe for fear of anti-Semitism). Such sloppiness on Mitchell's part diminishes the profession of journalism which, as Robertson outlined in his address, is uniquely placed to uphold and defend human rights whenever they are threatened.

Peter Davis
Ferntree Gully, VIC

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Hollingworth's reckoning

PETER HOLLINGWORTH provides an uncomfortable lesson in how not to deal with sexual abuse and paedophilia within religious establishments. Far more so than most Catholics would like—it's too close to home. He is being judged by different, and higher, standards now in place than when he was wrestling with the problem. In political terms, however, that has not been his major vice. Plenty of others have mucked things up. But political forgiveness involves acknowledgment as much as repentance, and Hollingworth seems to have lacked the humility and the knack for either.

Hollingworth has put his own interests ahead of that of his office—in much the same way as, a decade ago, he was putting the institutional interests of his archdiocese ahead of his duties as a pastor. But there was more to it than that. The trained social worker and able advocate for the poor proved quickly, as archbishop, that he did not listen, either to his own counsellors or to his flock. Many of his instincts and judgments of people were awry.

He seemed to have a knack for alienating many of his brother bishops, many of his better clergy, and not a few of the great and good in the archdiocese. This is a factor in his enduring his torments with very little support from his own. He also seems to have been certain he was right—while going against the advice of those there to help him. He left in place, albeit on very strict conditions, a minister who had confessed his paedophilic behaviour. Even now, it appears, he thought he was making a courageous decision, when it would have been easy to dispense with the minister to placate a lynch mob. This moral certainty meant he was taking in only information that suited his preconceptions, and missing that which did not. Either that or, as the commission of inquiry hinted, he was simply lying about his recollections, or reconstructing them.

Hollingworth now claims he got a dud deal, and no natural justice, from the special inquiry. But at the time, the complaints were largely in the opposite direction. He was legally represented, and by aggressive counsel, and he made many statements to the inquiry. He had the opportunity to comment on statements made by others that were adverse to his memory or to his judgment. He was able to comment on tentative findings. By contrast, the victims of abuse complained that they had little in the way of protections, including against defamation writs.

The very way Hollingworth anticipated, then handled, the findings illustrates his lack of feel. He completely flubbed the business of acknowledging the harm done by people under

his control, and of apologising to victims and helping them. Hollingworth apologised for this in advance, as well as after the findings were handed down. Yet his strategy at the inquiry involved defending conduct he had apologised for—and now, it seems, he does not even accept the findings that were made. It might seem unfair (it certainly does to him) that he is the scapegoat in a national catharsis for poor management of institutional abuse. But scarcely anyone has so well played the role in a way that might make the community consider the issues and judge them—and him.

This process was largely completed before it emerged that he had been accused of sexual abuse himself. But even his handling of that was inept, especially since the allegations seemed very unlikely. Bad news is never well hidden. He put the timetable of its emerging in the hands of others, with the inevitable consequence that it happened at just the wrong time. George Pell had a better idea, and now has an enhanced reputation and authority, without even having to exhaust his copious reserves of humility.

NOW HOLLINGWORTH HAS the active animosity of the man who appointed him, who has expended more than enough political capital on his account, who needs an association with the covering-up or third-hand protection of paedophilia like a hole in the head, and who is resentful that Hollingworth's mismanagement of his situation took all the glory away from his triumphal procession. Hollingworth is lucky that Howard has a stubborn streak and a determination not to yield to what he would call the chattering classes, but now he is at the prime minister's mercy.

The irony is that Hollingworth is a good and decent man, one who has rendered his community and his church some service, but who got in out of his depth. The charitable will say that this was when he became archbishop, not Governor-General.

It is doubtful whether there will be a Royal Commission into the sexual abuse of children. It might not be a bad thing, if only to clear the air. Those who pretend that it was once a big problem, but is now under control, will end up looking sillier than Peter Hollingworth. Indeed, given the preponderance and breadth of Catholic institutions over the years, the reckoning still coming for the Catholic Church in Australia may make the Hollingworth *auto-da-fé* seem a picnic.

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



A Fairer Medicare?

The spin was good: calling the package 'A Fairer Medicare', words like affordability, access and availability and the focus on the \$917 million. According to Howard (it) 'reinforces the fundamental principle of Medicare'. One has to wonder which principle is meant by the man who once complained, 'Medicare has been an unmitigated disaster' and promised to 'pull it right apart'.

The package has some positives. Funding for nurses' positions in GP clinics will provide more options for nurses frustrated with the public hospital system and allow clinics to run more efficiently. Incentives for doctors to set up practices in outer suburban, rural and remote areas and more places in medical schools and GP training can only be good.

But the bulk billing incentives pushed as 'a fairer system' are little more than smoke and mirrors. They will only apply to health-care-card holders (income less than \$30,000) and as Democrats Senator Lyn Allison put it, 'there (is) no longer any incentive for doctors to contain costs'. The opposite is true when you consider that private insurers will now be able to fund gap payments. When Howard was pushed on this point, he declared that free-market forces arising from increasing doctors' numbers would keep costs down.

Medical services are not 'just another product'. They never can be. Need for consumption will never relate squarely to income and the result of substandard treatment can be disastrous. What of the single mother with four kids who all get sick in one week? She may earn more than \$30,000 and therefore not have a health care card. She may have to weigh up whether to pay power bills or take her kids to the doctor.

Howard has grown wise since the

'80s. He no longer threatens to dismantle Medicare. This time he says he will allow 'market forces' to decide as Health is hustled out onto the famous 'level playing field'. My money is on the insurance companies, not Medicare. Labor, the Democrats and many Independents say they will block the package in the Senate. Let's hope they do.



A fine-toothed romance

Public transport is more than a way to get around. It can be a window on life and love. The number 96 tram along Nicholson Street was the perfect setting for a young couple to express their affection. Undeterred by the presence of other passengers, and taking full advantage of the bright lights of the tram, she gently held his head in her hands, talking closely to him in words of reassurance that, in fact, there were no longer any head lice.

Ring 'dem bells

Catholics in a tiny New South Wales town are eagerly awaiting a new Angelus bell from Papua New Guinea and a new bell tower for the Mount Tabor Catholic Retreat Centre. But while local councillors are set to approve both, the bell will be fixed so that it can't ring and will probably never be heard.

'It's all rather odd,' said Father John Gould from the retreat. 'The Angelus is part of a wonderful tradition and we initially wanted to ring it three times a day, a total of 54 rings. However, we now live in a secularised society and the neighbours objected about

the possible noise. It's a real shame but it would seem people just don't want to hear church bells any more.'

'Then the council agreed at an earlier meeting that we could have one single ding a day at noon. I mean that's just ridiculous. It has no meaning. You either ring the Angelus or you don't and we don't want to fall out with the neighbours so we won't ... We hear an ice-cream van bell here every day. I felt like asking the councillors if they would let us ring the Angelus if I started selling ice-cream.'

Small mercies



In the latest round of the debate about board-stacking at the ABC, the federal government has played its trump card: Dr Ron Brunton has replaced Michael Kroger as a director from 1 May. Formerly a senior fellow at the right-wing think tank, the Institute of Public Affairs, and a fortnightly columnist for the *Courier-Mail*, Brunton describes his views as 'eclectic'. Lindsay Tanner prefers to describe him as a 'hard-line right-wing cultural warrior'.

Apart from renewing concerns about political appointments (it has been reported that Brunton is a former member of the Liberal party, and was a researcher for the Victorian division in the early 1980s) the appointment has been criticised on the basis that Brunton has no real experience in broadcasting, and has little to offer the ABC.

Communications Minister Richard Alston disagrees. In a press release announcing the appointment, Alston pointed to Brunton's experience as an anthropologist and a commentator on native title, and his 'media and communications experience'. He said that Brunton's most recent position as director of Encompass Research was also relevant, as the company researched issues (such as native title and immigration) that 'are extensively covered by the ABC'. Lindsay Tanner's response: 'On this logic a criminal would qualify to be on the ABC Board.'

But as Graeme Thomson from the ABC staff union pointed out, it could have been worse. 'The only thing going for the bloke,' he said, 'is that he's not Peter Reith.'

the month's traffic



No, minister

THE IMPORT OF THE NELSON REPORT

STUDENT LIFE is not the stream of continuous parties, interrupted by the occasional lecture and assignment, that I was led to believe. Instead it's hard work studying full-time and working part-time, trying to lead a balanced life, and to make space for those I care for. Student life is still life, full of stress and concern. However, I'm lucky. Under the current HECS arrangements, I've been given an opportunity to make the most of my gifts and go further than my family could have otherwise afforded. This may not be the case for future tertiary students.

The Nelson Review was born out of the Crossroads paper launched by the federal Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson, in June last year, addressing the critical issue of higher education funding. The Nelson Review will seek to deregulate university fees as one solution to the funding crisis, allowing universities to set their own fee levels. This means that the cost of highly demanded courses in prestigious universities will increase. Thus, a gap between the HECS loan and the actual fee for the course will open up—a catastrophe for current school students.

If I had been born a couple of years later, I'm not sure whether my family or I would have been able to cover the extra cost. A future student in my financial situation will be forced to take out a commercial loan. I'm already looking at a more than \$20,000 debt by the time I finish. With the added loan, a student will have all of the disadvantages of a mortgage without any of the benefits. Alternatively, the extra costs may force them to work harder in a menial job, with a corresponding fall in their studies and well-being. Education should be liberating, but future HECS students will be trapped. If they step out of line once—fail a subject or decide to move to another course, both regular occurrences—they face the prospect of full fees and all of the associated stress.

I despair that people like me are pawns in a wider political game. The Howard government is seeking to cover the costs of its recent follies, and students are easy targets—stereotyped as loafing around on government money. However, it is sadly ironic that the Nelson reforms will likely affect the children of Howard's battlers the most. That is, the children of families that are not quite poor enough to qualify for welfare, and therefore the extra scholarships that the government is also promising, but not wealthy enough to find the additional money. The base of Howard's current popularity, the lower middle class, is most undermined by these reforms. Hardly a rich reward for electoral loyalty.

Although it is not definite that the Nelson Review will be enacted, it is due to be debated in federal parliament in 2004, to be put into effect in 2005. It faces a hostile Senate, but the strength of this opposition is proportional to the pressure put on opposition parties. Hence the current need for building community awareness and action.

Education, inquiry and analysis are the lifeblood of a dynamic society. Higher education does need more funding, but denying opportunities to those who have the talent and the focus, compared to those who have the funding, sets a dangerous precedent. This is a case of retreating from a meritocracy into an aristocratic era. Money will determine life paths, and the lives of current school students will be haunted by what could have been. I'm angry and fearful that the Nelson Review will do nothing more than frustrate the potential of the Australian community.

—Godfrey Moase

Bless you

THE RISE OF SARS

AT THE SIGN of peace during Holy Thursday Mass, I bowed to my brother Jesuits—handshakes and hugs were forbidden, as was touching or kissing the cross during Good Friday services, as is taking communion from the cup, as is receiving the host on the tongue, as is going to confession in confessional. All of these changes were ordered by the Bishop of Toronto to help prevent the spread of

SARS. Catholics were told that their public health duty is their religious duty—even if it meant missing the Easter services.

As of Easter Wednesday, there were 324 confirmed cases of SARS in Canada, 261 of those in Toronto, and 15 deaths—all in Toronto.

Since the first death from SARS in Canada on 5 March, some 10,000 people in and around Toronto have gone into voluntary quarantine in their homes for ten days, during which time they were monitored twice a day to see if they developed symptoms of SARS.

The symptoms could be of anything—dry cough, muscle aches and pain, shortness of breath, fatigue, headaches (most of us have some of those almost every day)—until the fever of over 38°C develops. While the first victims of SARS were elderly, it is now seen to attack people of all ages. No-one is exactly sure how SARS spreads other than by direct close contact with an affected person. Close contact means being within one metre for more than five minutes with a person who is infectious and not wearing a mask. Health officials advise people to wash their hands thoroughly and often, especially after being out of their homes.

The UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand have told their citizens not to travel to Canada. Malaysia and Libya have forbidden entry to Canadians. The US Center for Disease Control has issued a travel advisory telling people that they could be in danger if they travel to Toronto, and telling them to avoid hospitals if they do travel there.

The economic and social impact of these measures has been immense. Large international conventions have been cancelled. Tourism is down. Yet health officials have told people not to be afraid and to go about their regular business. If they feel ill they are told to stay at home and phone for advice. At first there was no compensation for missing work and a number of people lost their jobs while in quarantine. Now the federal government has allowed compensation for work missed in quarantine. If someone coughs on the subway, there is a subtle shift of people away from the cougher. Many are afraid to go out. But most people accept that SARS is here to stay. There is no panic, but certainly everyone feels the need to be extra careful.

Hospitals allow visitors only if the



Style police

STYLE IS ALWAYS more than skin deep. So as Pope John Paul's Encyclicals, the letters addressed to the whole church, have become more distinctive, the change is more than ornamental. The way in which they are read also changes.

The style of Encyclicals was once objective, careful, measured and authoritative. They were to be taken away, studied and used as a measure. The present Pope's letters retain these qualities, but within a tissue of personal reflection and meditation. So his recently issued *On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church* looks back on 25 years as Bishop of Rome and 50 years of priesthood. It is an old man's letter, drawing on the wisdom and experiences of a lifetime of commitment.

The large themes of the document are drawn from the patrimony of the Catholic Church. Church and Eucharist naturally go together. Catholics commonly describe their participation in the Eucharist as going to church. Theologians explore the image of the Body of Christ, which refers both to Eucharist and to Church. The Encyclical describes the connections between the death of Christ, the Eucharist and the church, emphasising the importance of the public texture of church, ministry and liturgical practices. These themes are presented attractively, with a keen eye for their relationship to the torn and fragmented body of the world.

The letter, however, also has a polemical edge, directed against perceived tendencies to minimise the distinctive dignity of the priest, to offer and receive the Eucharist indiscriminately, and to adapt the received liturgy at will. To these trends, which walk easily across boundaries, the Pope's response is to insist on control and sharp edges.

We cannot but read these aspects of the Encyclical in the light of Pope John Paul's personal experience and spirituality. He was brought up in the Catholic society of Poland, was formed as a priest by the war, and as a bishop he engaged a hostile government in a struggle where disunity and indiscipline were fatal. The core of his own priestly spirituality is his identification with Christ in his presidency at the Eucharist. His experience helps shape a rich and distinctive perspective.

It is a perspective that calls for strongly drawn and patrolled boundaries. It sits a little uneasily with the life of the Church after the Second Vatican Council, in which boundaries have been crossed, and the continuities emphasised between church and world, between the Catholic Church and other churches, between lay and clerical, between men and women.

At one point the two perspectives clash notably, when the Pope claims that the Reformation churches do not have the full and genuine reality of the Eucharist because they lack a valid ministry. In Catholic theology it is unexceptionable to claim that other churches lack the full reality of church and sacraments. But to claim that their ministers and sacraments are not genuine, and that therefore God sees them as fraudulent or totally defective, will seem incredible to anyone familiar with the inner life of these churches.

The point is that people are now increasingly familiar with the life of other churches. The familiarity has been a gift, and from its perspective, the control of boundaries commended by the Encyclical will see a holding operation and not a final word. ■

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patient is a child or is on the verge of death. All elective surgery, clinics and treatments are postponed. Health care workers in and out of hospitals are double-gowned, gloved and masked, and wear eye shields. They are working tirelessly and are in the greatest danger of contracting the disease.

Churches were packed for Good Friday, the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday. But there was more worry about SARS following three announcements: the 14th death in Toronto from SARS, the closing of part of Toronto's largest hospital due to an infected staff member, and the discovery over the three days of 12 new cases (mostly hospital workers).

And so it went during the Easter season in the city once known as Toronto the good, now known as Toronto the shunned.

—John J. Pungente SJ

Good citizens

STRONG COMMUNITIES ARE STILL GOOD FOR BUSINESS

CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP means understanding and managing a company's influence on its stakeholders and on society. The concept has received widespread support from business, government, community groups and the popular press. Most recently, Dr John Hewson, former Liberal Party leader and now Dean of the Macquarie Graduate School of Management, has been championing the cause. In a recent column for the *Australian Financial Review* (21 March 2003) he wrote: 'The community has become tired of irresponsible behaviour in areas like corporate governance, including payments to executives; of companies that exploit our environment to their own particular benefit; of companies that are reckless as to the social impact of their activities; and of companies that exploit workers.' The media has been replete with similar articles extolling the benefits to companies and the broader community of practices such as corporate community involvement, corporate philanthropy and corporate sustainability. To those of us active in what can be loosely called the 'corporate citizenship movement', the attention has been welcome.

Critics of corporate citizenship—like P.P. McGuinness ('No cause for businesses to give away shareholders' money', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 April 03) and Janet Albrechtsen ('Corporate credibility takes a dive in ratings', *The Australian*, 16 April

2003)—have seized on incidents like the collapse of HIH Insurance to discredit the notion that companies have stakeholders other than their shareholders. They point to HIH's donations to charities, to their community sponsorships, and suggest that their social responsibility did not save them—or as Albrechtsen concluded, 'Directors are paid to save the company, not the world'. Sentiments against corporate philanthropy are growing. The former High Court judge, Gerard Brennan, recently said, 'Virtue consists in the giving of what is one's own, not in the giving of assets that belong to another' (i.e., shareholders). But these views should not be used as evidence in the case against corporate citizenship.

It is true that companies like HIH gave significant sums of money to charitable causes. It is true that such companies were mismanaged and that standards of corporate governance were not adhered to. It is also true that ethical judgment or reasoning was lax if not absent. Justice Owen's royal commission into the HIH collapse correctly highlighted flaws in the accountability and transparency of that company's philanthropic activities. However, damning corporate citizenship because failed companies like HIH made charitable donations, and may have had codes of conduct and corporate governance on paper but not in practice, is not only simplistic and naive—it is incorrect.

A key problem with the arguments of those critical of corporate citizenship is that they take their cues from outdated management theories on the role of the firm in society. The 'Friedmanesque' mantra that the 'business of business is business' has come a long way since the 1970s. It may still rule at business schools like Chicago, but not at Harvard, Stanford, Boston, Warwick or Sydney. Directors may not be paid to save the world, but they will only save the company if they can ensure it is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable.

What, then, are some of the main errors being made by these corporate citizenship critics? First, they incorrectly equate corporate philanthropy with corporate citizenship. The former is only a small tip of the corporate citizenship pyramid. Firms' social responsibilities are at least fourfold and include their economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic activities and behaviour.

Second, the notion of corporate philanthropy has changed significantly in the last

decade, and as M.E. Porter and M. Kramer recently pointed out (*Harvard Business Review*, December 2002), strategic corporate philanthropy can improve a firm's competitive advantage as well as benefiting the recipient community. Strategic philanthropy is about companies giving not only money, but their time and expertise, to community organisations through long-term partnerships.

Third, the critics mistakenly argue that improving corporate governance is unrelated to good corporate citizenship. In fact, good corporate governance is the foundation of good citizenship. Imagine if we argued at an individual level that civic behaviour has nothing to do with being a good citizen.

In brief, good corporate citizenship is about integrating social, ethical, environmental, economic and philanthropic values into the core decision-making



processes of a business. It is only by doing this that businesses can become truly sustainable. This may still not prevent corporate collapses, but it will make businesses more aware of how intricately linked they are to their stakeholders. Engaging stakeholders in genuine ways can lead to improvements in financial and societal goals. 'Stakeholder engagement' is not just a trendy term. It is about factoring into corporate planning, from the beginning, the pensioners who lost their superannuation, the workers who lost their jobs, and the community organisations that received donations. Only in this way will those people not be seen as the unfortunate losers of corporate mismanagement.

Until recently, corporate citizenship has been getting good press for good reasons. It is not a fad, despite the attempts of critics to portray it as such. Many firms have recognised that the environment in which they do business has irrevocably changed.

Their economic, social and environmental impacts on society have grown significantly and as a consequence so have their responsibilities. Practices like corporate philanthropy are a small but significant part of good corporate citizenship.

—Gianni Zappalà

Fine fillies

SYDNEY'S AUTUMN
RACING CARNIVAL

T

HE RICHEST race day in Australia is held at Randwick in the autumn, not Flemington in the spring. Prize money of \$8 million is underwritten by the San Miguel brewery whose boss, Edward Cojuangco, had the satisfaction last year of seeing his colt Don Eduardo win the AJC Australian Derby. Having done nothing since, the Don is off to stud duties. The Derby is one of three Group One races on the day's card, along with Australia's greatest 'mile' handicap, the Doncaster, and a million-dollar sprint, The Galaxy.

The Randwick carnival follows that at Roschill. The latter culminates in the world's richest race for two-year-olds, the Golden Slipper. The other highlight of that day is the 2400m Group One BMW. Australia's best racehorse, Northerly, came into it after defeats in his first two runs in Sydney, but there looked nothing to match him. Not long after the start, the John Hawkes-trained Freemason went to the front. Northerly took him on, again and again. Astonishingly the two went head to head for the last 1600m of the race. Although at the post he lunged one last time, Northerly just lost. The dour Freemason, unplaced veteran of the last three Melbourne Cups, ran a course record to win. The Slipper was an anticlimax.

Fillies still dominated the Slipper market, as did two trainers: Hawkes with seven of the 16 runners, Gai Waterhouse with five. Numbers did not count. The consistent Polar Success, owned by nine battlers who'd each paid less than \$7000 for a share of her, got the money. The first six home were fillies. Trainer Graeme Rogerson's speech took as long as two Melbourne Cups.

If fillies were superior to colts and no two-year-old seemed top class, what of the classic generation? Here the news was

SARS and stripes

WITH HORRIFYING SYMMETRY, just as the war on Iraq sidelined the United Nations and weakened its power, nature demonstrated why we need such world bodies. The coronavirus that causes Sudden Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) has shown how interconnected the world is, and how vulnerable even superpowers can be in the face of a contagious disease.

China has found that keeping quiet costs more in the long run than owning up. Because of the cover-up, at the end of last year the world lost an opportunity to nip SARS in the bud. And China is now losing more tourists and investment than it ever would have at that time.

The best hope for controlling the disease seems to lie in the development of a vaccine. The immune systems of people who have recovered have been responsive in producing antibodies, and there are several vaccines against similar viruses in livestock. But the coronaviruses are particularly adept at mutating, and development of the most simple vaccine would take at least two or three years' work. A more sophisticated vaccine could take up to ten years. All the major vaccine manufacturers have started research already, but will they end up with a product that is affordable for developing nations? And if the poor can't afford it, will the rich be prepared to subsidise them? After all, as long as SARS is around anywhere, the rich will be at risk. The longer it remains in the human population, the more time the virus has to mutate into something even nastier.

The careful—and in many cases very brave—quarantining pursued in places like Hanoi, Singapore and Toronto seem to have worked and, as *Eureka Street* went to press, the disease appeared to be contracting back whence it came. But many experts think SARS may well end up as endemic in China.

In global terms, we have been relatively lucky with SARS. It is not an airborne infection, and demands fairly close contact to spread. But it is a warning. Another bird virus capable of infecting humans has been spreading in Holland. Just before Easter, Dutch authorities were quietly killing millions of chickens, causing an egg shortage in Europe. The big one would be a new virulent strain of influenza, of the type that killed more than 20 million people worldwide in 1918.

The only way we can beat these diseases is to work co-operatively. Many are arguing that the World Health Organisation should be given greater powers to monitor emerging diseases—the right to send inspectors into countries, and to help regulate their response. The US may well oppose any increase in the powers of international bodies, but when it comes to health, can countries afford to go it alone?

Certain elements in American society think so. In a bid to stem the global epidemic of obesity, a recent WHO report recommended limiting our intake of calories in the form of sugar to less than ten per cent. The powerful US Sugar Association was incensed, and is threatening to lobby Congress to suspend the US contribution to the WHO of more than \$US400 million.

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also mixed. Helenus had been the best three-year-old in the spring in Melbourne, finishing with a hairsbreadth win in the Victoria Derby. In Sydney his form was scratchy, but he managed a scrambling win in the Rosehill Guineas. The Canterbury Guineas—run at night—had gone to the good filly Fine Society, but that was the last shot fired in her campaign. When the classics are won by different horses each time, the verdict is not good. On Derby Day at Randwick it rained, and it kept raining throughout the carnival. The unmajestically-named Clangalang got through the wet ground, kept to the rails and won clearly. But will this name resonate in seasons to come?

Next was the Doncaster. Favourite was Hawkes's best horse Lonhro, coming off some easy wins against weaker opposition. It struggled into fourth place. The winner was Waterhouse's Grand Armee. It won with contemptuous ease, enjoying the soft conditions more than all those behind. This win gave Waterhouse six out of the last ten runnings of the Doncaster. One more will equal the record of her father, T.J. Smith.

Nor was Waterhouse finished. By the time the carnival was over, she had trained five Group One winners in a row. Snowland won The Galaxy. On a heavy track Hasna, third in the Slipper, took the Sires' Produce Stakes (usually a race that better indicates quality to come). Arlington Road battled to an unlikely victory in the All Aged Stakes. In the Oaks, the regally-bred Sunday Joy (by the fabled Japanese-based and now deceased sire Sunday Silence out of Joie Denise), which had cost one million dollars, beat the even more expensive yearling purchase (Waterhouse again), Shower of Roses. This was Sydney after all. Money is meant to count for more here than elsewhere in Australia. And yet for all the quality on show, racing's heart is still in Melbourne, where in the spring, the fortunes of those horses that battled each other at Rosehill and Randwick will be showcased again.

—Peter Pierce

This month's contributors: Godfrey Moase is an Arts/Law student at Melbourne University; John J. Pungente SJ is Director of the Jesuit Communication Project in Toronto; Dr Gianni Zappalà is the Director and principal researcher of Orfeus Research (www.orfeusresearch.com.au); Peter Pierce's most recent book was *Australia's Vietnam War* (Texas A & M University Press, 2002).

by the way



Reeling in the years

W

HEN I WAS a pie-faced lad of some eight or nine summers, to paraphrase the ageless Bertie Wooster, I became deeply addicted to the pursuit of *Cherax destructor*, a diligent, single-minded little crustacean better known as the yabby. I would spend long afternoons at a lake in Landcox Park pitting my wits against some of the more cunning and veteran *destructors*. They were cunning and long-lived because generations of depredation by small boys and girls had taught their ancestors all they needed to know about the snares and tricks that accompanied any innocent-looking lump of meat slow-motioning across the lake floor. Race memory did the rest.

The lake, as I had remembered it, was huge, with a thickly wooded island just off the shore. When I went back there a year ago, I found the lake was more like a pond and the island a clump of trees clinging to a pimple of mud. But that's the past for you: not just another country but, in remembrance, invariably a *bigger* country. When revisited, the remembered past shrinks to unheroic proportions and brings down with it what seemed to be amazing feats. (I was sure, for example, that I had never seen such huge, raking dropkicks as were executed by a kid named Ray McManus at Sacred Heart School, St Kilda, but when I returned there a while back I found that the playground was not much bigger than a suburban backyard. No wonder the ball kept flying over the fence into a neighbouring house, spectacularly exacerbating sectarian tensions in the region.)

Anyway, in the matter of *Cherax destructor*, our preferred method of attack inclined to the individualist rather than the team approach. Each of us would be armed with a length of black thread on the end of which we would tie a chunk of meat. This morsel was tossed into the deep, perhaps three or four yards, and then the angler waited, with a quality of patience not normally associated with small boys, until a tightening of the thread, and a dragging sensation accompanying its reeling in, would signal the presence of a yabby at the other end.

This of course was only the beginning. The yabby then had to be inched towards shore so gently as to allay its vague suspicion that something aberrant was happening. As a frog will boil alive because it doesn't register incremental changes in temperature, so the yabby will continue to dine while being hand-over-handed into the shallows where, within reach of a crude net, it could be scooped up. A revolving restaurant would be lost on your average yabby because it wouldn't notice the building's infinitesimal circling.

Unlike the hooked fish, though, the yabby was not captive. It could let go at any time, and many did. But large numbers

of them clung on to be netted—and this is because they are greedy. Your yabby is a voracious little mollusc, and once it latches onto a tender shred or veiny gristle, it will be separated from it only by surgical operation, or the hand of fate.

On one memorable long afternoon at Landcox Park, my mate Tod and I caught 372 yabbies. We took them home in three buckets, which we left on the back lawn of my house, while we sought raspberry cordial, peanut butter and other ministrations available to the muscle-weary, mentally exhausted yabby pirate. During our absence an unseen hand, never identified then or since, but almost certainly that of my young sister, upended the buckets.

Y

ABBIES HAVE AN uncaring sense of where the nearest water is and, if by chance or misfortune they are abandoned on dry land, will instantly set off in phalanxes and squads towards creek or pond, stream, dam or river. Eccentric to the last, however, or perhaps in paranoid fear of a treacherous attack from the rear, they head for safety by travelling backwards. With large claws raised and snapping and beady black eyes pinpointing the dangerous terrain, they back away in good order. Never was rank retreat made to look so brave, so strategic, so utterly inevitable.

When our 372 yabbies were granted their unexpected liberty on the lawn, they immediately scented the Elster Canal that ran past our back fence and began retreating steadfastly towards it. My mother, who had been hanging out clothes on the Hills Hoist and who had noticed nothing untoward, only became aware of this development when, as it appeared to her, the entire lawn upped and moved, snapping and stalking, spidering and clawing—a carpet of brown-bodied, bug-eyed crustaceans going backwards to glory.

That episode, curiously enough, ended my yabbying career at its apogee. I lost track of them until very recently, when the backsiding little battler re-entered my life as the essential ingredient in a variety of succulent entrées and piquant pasta sauces, not to mention the *sine qua non* of a delectable pâté. A sad fate, in a way, for the truculent *destructor* who, however, is too ancient, too offbeat, not to have the last word. I will be surprised if the Armageddon we are painstakingly preparing for ourselves does not feature battalions of yabbies backtracking into the middle distance, claws waving and clicking, convinced that aggressively peaceful retreat is the height of strategy.

Go *Cherax*! Go little *destructor*!

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Africa's

Anthony Ham explores the little-publicised conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo

NOT ALL WARS of the 21st century are played out live on our television screens.

In April 2003, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) issued a report on the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It concluded that there had been 4.7 million war-related deaths over the past four-and-a-half years.

The IRC's director of operations in eastern Congo, David Johnson, described the findings as a calamity, 'one which the world has consistently found reasons to overlook. Congo's war is the tragedy of modern times'. The war in the Congo has claimed more lives than any conflict since World War II.

Leading British newspapers carried the story on page nine. Other media, preoccupied with the war in Iraq, didn't mention it at all.

When the Belgians set out to plunder central Africa in the 1880s, they called their possession the Congo Free State. As many as ten million Congolese died as a direct result of Belgian rule. Upon independence in 1960, Congo was left without a functioning administration and with scarcely an indigenous school graduate. Patrice Lumumba, the fledgling state's democratically elected leader, was deposed and killed—by local thugs armed and directed by the CIA and Belgian agents.

The CIA's appointed leader, Mobutu Sese Seko, renamed the country Zaire and ran it as his own private fiefdom. His funding came primarily from the United States for whom Mobutu was a

favoured client, as he dutifully resisted all overtures to move under the Soviet sphere of influence. Successive US governments turned a blind eye to his outrageous kleptocracy. Mobutu expressed his gratitude in the form of mining concessions—the Congo is rich in diamonds, gold, timber and coltan (a metal necessary for the production of mobile phones, satellites and Sony Play Stations).

In May 1997 a rebel army, backed by Uganda and Rwanda and led by Laurent Kabil, seized Kinshasa. Mobutu fled into exile and died shortly afterwards, but apart from taking power, the new government's only achievement of note was to rename this plundered country the Democratic Republic of Congo. Like the names bequeathed to the country before it, this title was a parody of an aspiration that bore little resemblance to the reality.

Kabila's former backers soon turned against him and Rwanda was the main protagonist. In 1994 in Rwanda, 800,000 Tutsis and Hutu moderates were massacred in 100 days. Western governments knew what was happening and did nothing. The Rwandan army justified their presence in the Congo after 1998 on the need

to establish a buffer zone against the infamous Interahamwe Hutu militia, which had been responsible for the genocide. Uganda claimed a similar need to protect itself from cross-border rebels. Namibia, Angola, Chad and Zimbabwe sent troops in support of the government.

The conflict became known as Africa's



forgotten wars

World War. The international response was to send a largely unarmed UN force of just over 5500, but promising peace agreements have faded for want of the resources to police them, and a further 3700 peacekeepers expected in the coming months may not be enough.

Most of the foreign armies have now left. In the last week of April, Uganda finally began to withdraw from its domain around Bunia in the far north-east of the country. Rwanda continues to occupy the eastern region of Bukavu. Both Uganda and Rwanda, whose budgets are dominated by Western aid money, stand accused of egregious, widespread and ongoing violations of human rights, whether by their own armies or by their rebel proxies.

The reports of massacres emerge with a frightening, relentless regularity. In February, UN observers—for that is what the world's interest in Africa has been reduced to—reported a massacre of 467 people in eastern Congo. On 21 March, 22 people were killed in one village alone, hacked to death by machetes and spears. In the first week of April, 966 villagers were massacred outside Bunia.

Despite the ongoing violence, there is no clamour for international intervention, no urgent calls for the UN Security Council to be convened. Congo long ago disappeared off the world radar. Stories of massacres, dense jungles and cannibalism may play to a Western fascination with Africa's impenetrable heart, but they inspire little else.

Congo has held no strategic value for any Western country since the Cold War. Congo's neighbour, Sudan, has a similar tale to tell—two million dead in a decades-long conflict. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the West sees Africa as too complicated, and best left to its own



devices. In an era of satellite technology and precision-guided weapons, a conflict involving up to nine national armies, 12 rebel groups formed along tribal lines and myriad local militia is too confusing to contemplate, and millions of deaths are beyond comprehension.

In the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, plans for military conflict have been highly developed, the blueprints for subsequent nation-building and local empowerment less so. Western powers are expert in destroying threats to their security, real or imagined. The same governments are less proficient at picking up the pieces afterwards.

It is a history the Congolese people know well: Western occupation under a flimsy pretext of liberation and solidarity; the installation of a compliant government; ongoing and culpable neglect.

We save our worst neglect for Africa. The hysteria of the SARS virus may be sweeping Asia and further afield, but Africa's Ebola virus is far more contagious and kills far more people, as does malaria and a host of illnesses that rarely threaten Western lives.

Is the failure to act driven by racism? The widely-held perception within Africa is that it is. How else, they ask, to explain the world's indifference to the deaths of 6.7 million people in African wars? The evidence is overwhelming: in an echo of the colonial past, African lives matter less than those of people with fairer skin—a form of criminal neglect that masquerades as a failure to understand.

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Helping the hit squads

Will Howard's anti-terrorism bill lead to extrajudicial killings by our powerful allies?

PEOPLE LIVING IN a democratic society should have an unassailable right to refuse to answer questions that could lead to others becoming victims of extrajudicial murder. This is the core problem with the *ASIO Legislation Amendment (Terrorism) Bill (2002)*, which the Attorney-General, Daryl Williams, has reintroduced into the Budget session of the federal parliament.

After some government members supported amendments recommended by a Senate committee, Williams has changed some of the more obnoxious provisions of the original bill. But he has refused to yield on provisions that allow people to be held for questioning by ASIO for seven days and denied access even to a lawyer for the first 48 hours. Yet Williams concedes that people detained and forced to answer questions may 'not themselves (be) suspected of terrorist activity, but may

have information that may be relevant to ASIO's investigation into politically motivated violence.'

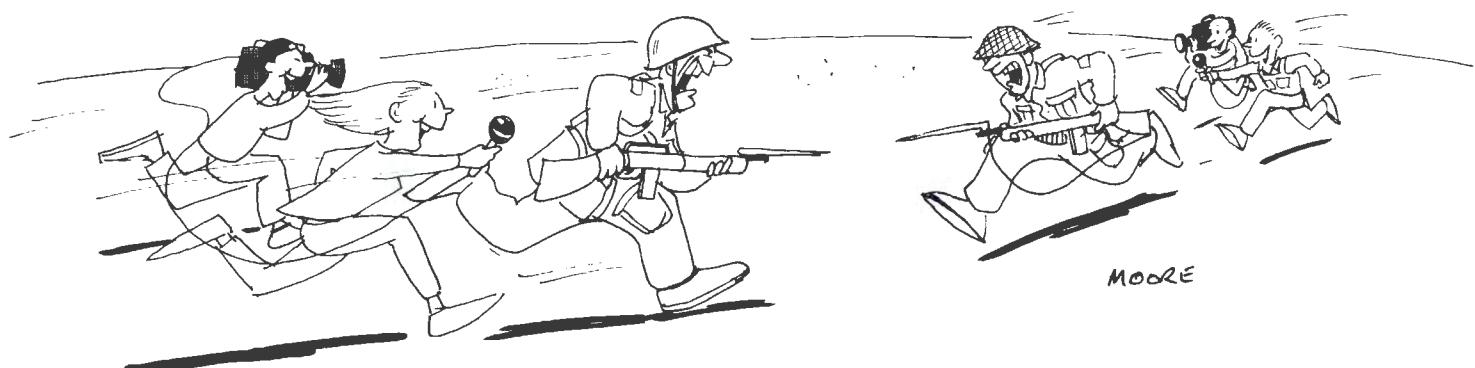
To its credit, the Labor Opposition in Canberra is attempting to limit the bill to creating a 'questioning regime' in which detention is confined to an initial four hours. Judicial permission would then be needed for extensions of no more than two further blocks of eight hours.

This approach is in marked contrast to the extraordinary contempt for basic democratic principles displayed by the NSW Carr Labor government's *Terrorism (Police Powers) Act (2002)*. The Act explicitly says that police behaviour 'may not be challenged, reviewed, quashed or called into question on any grounds whatsoever before any court, tribunal, body or person in any legal proceedings'.

Federal Labor's much more moderate

stance on the ASIO bill is based on the premise that limited questioning regimes are already in place for bodies such as the Australian Securities and Investment Commission and various state anti-corruption bodies. The crucial difference, however, is that people who answer questions in the latter cases have no reason to suspect their information will be used to assassinate anyone. For those who provide information to ASIO, this is far from being a paranoid suspicion.

No-one suggests that ASIO, or any other Australian intelligence or military body, is going to assassinate anyone. But White House officials have acknowledged that President Bush has authorised an extensive campaign to assassinate suspected terrorists. Bush's last State of the Union Address even referred indirectly to successes achieved by this program. The UK's civil and military



intelligence services have a long history of assassination. There are no grounds to expect that a zealot like the current Labour PM, Tony Blair, would have called a halt.

ASIO is deeply enmeshed in arrangements for exchanging information with its US and UK counterparts, the CIA and MI5. In these circumstances, anyone forced to answer questions from ASIO would be entitled to assume their answers would be passed on to the CIA and MI5. If this information pointed to the whereabouts of alleged terrorists, these suspects could be executed without the benefit of a trial.

While ASIO will sometimes generate legitimate questions about people of direct interest to itself, often it will be asked to gather information on behalf of its overseas counterparts. A typical example could involve the CIA discovering that someone who lives in Australia might know the whereabouts of an alleged terrorist living in an unknown location in Europe. ASIO would then be asked to use its new powers to get an address.

ASIO itself may not even know how the information it passes back will be used. But the person who is interrogated in Australia could make a reasonable guess that answers could lead to an innocent person being assassinated.

The danger of this occurring is entirely plausible. Intelligence information is often wrong. Identities can be confused, intercepts misconstrued, and informants give false information about rivals. In one notorious intelligence mistake in Afghanistan, a

CIA 'Wanted, Dead or Alive' poster carried a photo purportedly of the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar. When the terrified person represented on the poster eventually came forward, he pointed out that the photo showed someone with two eyes when Omar is well known to have only one.

Such mistakes are one reason police are not allowed to go around assassinating people suspected of committing a crime. There is no excuse for making an exception in the case of people who commit murder for political rather than other motives.

Even if ASIO detainees have grounds for suspicions about a second cousin in Spain, for example, they would be entitled to object to saying anything that would facilitate extrajudicial murder. Providing answers that lead to a suspect being arrested and given a fair trial is a completely different matter from providing a tip-off for an assassination squad.

Courts can make mistakes—as demonstrated by the trial of the Birmingham Six. But requiring guilt and punishment to be determined in a court of law certainly beats the system implicitly endorsed by the ASIO amendments in which people can be condemned to death without the safeguards of a trial.

Obviously, most people would be happy to provide information about possible terrorist activities if they were convinced that no miscarriage of justice would ensue. Indeed, existing laws already oblige people to let the police know if they are aware of a plan to commit a violent crime, regardless of whether it constitutes an act of terrorism.

Allowing ASIO to force people to answer questions may well be justified where it is clear that the sole purpose of the interrogation is to obtain information for purposes that are compatible with Australian law and values. This would include gathering information that helped prevent future terrorist atrocities or, less ideally, helped catch the perpetrators after the event. But the amendments should protect all Australians from being forced to answer questions that could lead to people being assassinated by ASIO's overseas counterparts.

Even in the most benign circumstances, however, there are still problems with the way the amendments take a large step towards turning ASIO into a secret police force. In the past, many members of ASIO were proud of the fact that they lacked the coercive powers exercised by secret police forces in authoritarian countries. Unfortunately, changes to the law in 1986 made it a criminal offence to name members of ASIO. But the blow to accountability inherent in such secrecy was limited by the fact that ASIO still could not detain and interrogate people.

This will all change unless the new ASIO bill is amended to ensure that no pertinent information can be passed on to overseas organisations that assassinate people. The law should never condone politically motivated murder, whether it is committed by terrorists or by shadowy government organisations. ■

Brian Toohey is a Sydney-based journalist.

Retail therapy

The winner in the **Jesuit Publications Raffle** will revel in the chance of some serious retail therapy. But you need to send your tickets in to have a chance. **All tickets are due in by Monday 23 June. The raffle will be drawn on Monday 14 July 2003, and results published in the Australian, Saturday 19 July 2003.**

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Rights write-off

Australia's reluctance about rights is in contrast to the attitudes of other countries in the Commonwealth

THOSE WHO attended the 13th Commonwealth Law Conference in Melbourne recently were confronted by what Professor Hilary Charlesworth calls Australia's 'reluctance about rights'. The conference was due to be held in Harare, but was rescheduled to avoid the turmoil in Zimbabwe. While rather less serious, the Melbourne organisers had their own troubles: the outbreak of SARS and the fear of repercussions from the war on terror, which was unfolding as the delegates gathered for opening drinks. In response, security was tight and venues subject to change at short notice.

It was big business at the Melbourne Convention Centre. Registration fees exceeded one thousand dollars, and a sit-down lunch was provided every day. Groups of Scots lugging golfclubs could be spotted escaping in cabs. And everywhere you looked, it seemed, there was a Chief Justice talking to an attorney-general or to one of the conference's star silks, Geoffrey Robertson and Cherie Booth.

I assumed Cherie Booth would leave politics outside the glass doors, and address the conference from the perspective of her solid reputation as an anti-discrimination QC at the London Bar. I was wrong. Booth publicly embraced the first-lady role from the start, thanking John Howard for his kind remarks about her husband's leadership in Operation Iraqi Freedom, and passing on Tony's best wishes. (At the last minute, Howard asked to open the conference despite not having been invited to do so.) Booth's speech on human rights and the shared values of the Commonwealth was somewhat coloured by this opening. But in the best legal tradition, everyone looked stonily to the front as if a speech on the protection of human rights by the first lady of the defenders-of-democracy

coalition—against a backdrop of an illegal invasion, unsanctioned by the UN—were quite unproblematic.

True to style, Australia's Justice Michael Kirby popped up on every second panel, asking the difficult questions and cutting through the reserve that marks most high-level legal gatherings. He was the one to challenge Cherie Booth's time-honoured rendition of why there are so few female judges in Britain—there are so few good ones to choose from as the pool is so small. He also challenged the representative of GlaxoSmithKline, who denied that patents held by his company impede Africans' access to treatment for HIV-AIDS.

Mohamed Husain of the Law Society of South Africa gave the figures: 35 million people live with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa. They make up 70 per cent of the global HIV-infected population. Nearly five million South Africans are infected with HIV, and the rate of infection for blacks is three times that for whites. But South African President Thabo Mbeki continues to challenge the link between HIV and AIDS, insisting that poverty is the underlying cause of reduced life expectancy. At the same time, his government's stated policy is that it works on the 'premise' that HIV causes AIDS. As Husain pointed out, this conflict has very real ramifications. The South African Finance Minister recently said that it was a waste of limited resources to focus on the provision of anti-retrovirals (ARVs) to HIV-positive people. Rather, he said, those resources should be directed to reducing poverty and building schools.

Such an approach has angered those non-government organisations who believe that, without widespread access to ARVs, the rates of transmission will continue to soar. One of the most prominent

of those NGOs is the Treatment Action Collective (TAC), which brought a legal challenge to the government's policies in 2001. The South African government was distributing the drug Nevirapine to HIV-positive mothers in certain parts of South Africa. The drug substantially cuts the rate of transmission of HIV from mothers to their newborn children, is easily administered, and was supplied free of charge to the government by the company that owned the patent. The TAC argued that by limiting the program to women in certain regions, the government was in breach of the constitution.

One of the most progressive in the world, the South African constitution states that everyone has a right to health care, and imposes obligations on government to ensure that those rights are realised. The Constitutional Court agreed with the TAC that the South African government's failure to distribute the drug to all new mothers who were HIV-positive was in breach of those obligations. It ordered the government to make the drug available to all hospitals and clinics in South Africa.

Former ANC activist Albie Sachs is one of the judges on that court, and at the Melbourne conference he spoke eloquently about that decision, and about the earlier landmark decision to require the state to provide emergency housing to homeless people. While acknowledging the economic and social pressures on the government, Sachs made a passionate case for the Constitutional Court to play a role in ensuring that all South Africans are accorded a minimum level of dignity under the constitution.

IN THE PECKING ORDER of the Commonwealth, Australia prides itself not only on its superior civil and economic status, but also on its commitment to human

rights. In the 1980s and 1990s, Australia's High Court under Sir Anthony Mason was held up as a model of the progressive development and application of law, despite the limited framework of the Australian Constitution. But at this gathering, the Constitutional Court of South Africa, the Supreme Courts of Canada and India, and the High Court of New Zealand were the big names for keynote speakers extolling the common virtues of the Commonwealth. Even Britain has been galvanised by its recent *Human Rights Act*, which has made the European Charter on Human Rights part of British law. Australia's High Court, with the exception perhaps of Justice Kirby, barely rated a mention in these sessions.

When the High Court did come up—in panel discussions on human rights in smaller, darker seminar rooms—the bitter tone of the Australian speakers was in marked contrast to the optimism of speakers like Justice Sachs and the Attorney-General of India, Soli Sorabjee. As Sachs and Sorabjee spoke of the growing movement to protect social, economic and cultural rights, Frank Brennan sj and Noel Pearson presented, yet again, their respective—and damning—critiques of Australia's treatment of asylum seekers, and of the racism underlying the High Court's restrictive approach to native title post-*Mabo*.

Australian lawyers have long been aware of the gulf between the rhetoric and the reality of successive Australian governments' approaches to human rights. The Australian Constitution is an impoverished one, and both Liberal and Labor governments have consistently ignored their obligations under the international human rights conventions to which Australia is a party. But what struck me at this conference was how unaccustomed Australians have become to the kind of unapologetic and high-profile support for human rights offered by Justice Sachs and the Indian Attorney-General. Under the Howard government, human rights advocacy has become a fringe activity, practised by underfunded NGOs, meddling priests and interfering lawyers. And those who undertake it are often subject to genuine hostility by the state.

Take the *Tampa* case. After its success in the Full Court of the Federal Court, the federal government argued that the

Cut-price rights

It would be hard to get a less passionate advocate for human rights than Daryl Williams. After reducing funding to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission by 40 per cent in his first year as Attorney-General, Williams is now attempting further substantive cuts. These include reducing the number of full time commissioners from five to three, stripping back HREOC's powers, and most controversially, requiring permission from the Attorney-General to intervene in any court proceedings.

Williams denies that the changes are designed to muzzle HREOC, arguing that the government veto on intervention will merely ensure that the Commission is acting 'in the public interest'. But the existing system already ensures that. Currently the judge in each case determines whether there are public interest reasons for HREOC's intervention. The federal government now wants to take this role for itself. The conflict is obvious: the body determining the public interest will be the defendant in most of the cases.

Not that the ALP's approach is much better. When asked on Radio National recently to give an example of an important case in which the Commission has intervened, Nick Bolkus umm-ed and ah-ed and said he'd have to look at his list. The obvious example was *Tampa*, but clearly ALP policy is to avoid any reference to that case. With friends like that, who needs enemies?

lawyers for the asylum seekers, who acted for free, should pay the government's costs out of their own pockets because the litigation was 'an interference with an exercise of executive power'. The Court rejected this, stating that the case was brought in the public interest to ensure that the government was acting in accordance with the Constitution. It ordered that the parties bear their own costs. But the approach of the federal government in that case shows how little store we can now place even in the rhetoric of human rights protection in Australia, let alone on any substantive safeguards.

For all its pomp, ceremony, and at times overblown rhetoric of common values, the conference offered Australians a timely reminder of what the language of human rights can and should be about. As Justice Sachs put it, upholding human rights is about rescuing the dignity of human beings. It is a shame John Howard couldn't stay to hear that. ■

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Relative merits

DAVID WILLIAMSON has been around for so long that it is easy to forget how refreshing his early plays were. However much they are of their time, plays like *The Removalists*, *Don's Party* and *The Club* can hold the stage as more than a boulevardier's substitute for television.

But in the last 15 years or so, that has not often been the case. Nor has it helped when the popular playwright has decided to take on intellectual issues. The best that can be said about *Dead White Males* (the literary theory debate) or *Heretic* (Williamson's take on the Margaret Mead/Derek Freeman debacle) is that they evoked sympathy for positions one rejected—not by dint of compassion but because of the ineptitude and middle-brow obviousness of the representation.

Birthrights is one of Williamson's more watchable plays of late. Tom Gutteridge's production doesn't have that breath of life-and-death naturalism that Robyn Nevin gave *After the Ball*, but the play itself is, in the minimal sense, probably more of a winner.

It's the story of a woman who has a baby, impregnated with the sperm of her sister's husband, when her sister cannot conceive. For the next 20 years she tries to crack it herself, to no avail, despite IVF and all its works. She is a lawyer and her husband is a painter and cartoonist. The strain of the conception game affects their marriage.

Meanwhile, her rather more conventional sister and her self-made millionaire husband have the daughter who—wouldn't you know—is very attracted to her auntie. This cleaving to the natural mother is a source of resentment to the nurturing Mum and Dad. On the sidelines, there's the career woman mother of the two sisters; a boisterous lawyer of liberal bent who in the second half of the play finds herself dying and regretting the crimes of her misspent childhood.

If it sounds like an open invitation to everything most lachrymose and clichéd about Williamson—well, it almost is, but with greater flashes of reality. David Williamson is not a Helen Garner or a Hannie Rayson: he can't get inside how a woman feels, but he certainly does create what Barry Humphries used to call a nice evening's entertainment. In fact, *Birthrights* may be one of the better things Williamson has written since *Travelling North*. It does the trick and it's liable, I would reckon, to please the crowds.

It's helped a good deal by Tom Gutteridge's unfussy production, which has no hint of campery and which presents this very Melburnian story—I didn't believe in the Sydney transposition—with an

attention to accuracy of gesture and intonation and an emotional authenticity.

Kevin Harrington ('Kevin' from *Sea Change*) is probably too much of a walking Williamson cliché. He looks more like a used car salesman than a self-made millionaire, though he remains likeable.

I also flinched a little at Asher Keddie as the brat daughter, Kelly. She's not meant to be a dear but it might have been helpful if the audience didn't want to drown her. It's not a bad performance, but Keddie is probably a bit too mature in manner for the inconsiderateness of the young girl.

ELSEWHERE THERE'S BARELY a false note, as far as the actors go. Peter Houghton is randy, then blighted, then behaves in precisely the right way for the left-wing cartoonist. And Deidre Rubenstein, if she seems a bit over-ripe at first as the lawyer-mother, is impressively real on her deathbed.

Doris Younane as the elder sister does everything she can with the less rewarding of the two main roles. She's absolutely right in the opening scene—very early '80s—as she confesses to her sterility. The gradual move to conservatism (and out again) is done with considerable feeling. In a frumpish, dark performance this actor manages to be moving.

Then there's Maria Theodorakis in the star role as Claudia. She looks like a woman in her early twenties at the outset and a woman of 42 at the play's end. Theodorakis runs the gamut between anger and sassiness, and the grief of a woman whose body will not obey her deepest desires. It's a fine performance, full of observation and intelligence and with a tough, stormy reality that never permits this ordinary play to become a caricature of itself.

Birthrights is as familiar as a family lunch and with much of the same sense of *sturm und drang* and teacups. It is not remotely progressive drama, nor does it carry the hoary old art of naturalism a step further, but it is skilled playwriting. It fiddles at the edge between stereotype and real feeling, and is performed in a straightforward, quietly adept production. This is the kind of theatre (as so often with Williamson) where the dramatist has a horror of being over the heads of his audience. The wonder is that in this case—and it's a bit of an unexpected pleasure—he gets them between the eyes as often as he does. ■

Peter Craven is the editor of *Quarterly Essay* and *Best Australian Essays*.

Growth industry

MANUEL HATZIKOSTIS is not a man to let opportunity pass him by. Manuel is a builder. And a gardener. He came to Australia at the age of 18 from the island of Samos, Greece, in 1955. In Samos he was a furniture maker. When he first settled in Australia, he worked in a slaughterhouse before resuming his trade as a builder. He built a number of schools in the country and worked on the construction of the MCG prior to the Melbourne Olympics.

He eventually set up his own company, Kostas Constructions, and now builds and renovates houses with his two sons, making money and moving on.

But Manuel takes more than a speculative interest in his properties. Once a property is acquired, Manuel checks the plans to see what dirt can be his for the duration of the project. He then gets to work on 'the garden'. In between his tasks on the site and at the end of the working day Manuel plants, tends, grows and reaps.

The garden beds are neatly laid out, the tomatoes have stakes and the snails are kept at bay. Sometimes it's corn, other times onions or maybe lettuce. Manuel grows vegies in every spare space he can find, choosing the vegetable that is most suited to the particular space available. The quiet attention to planting, watering and weeding offers a contrast to the noise of hammer and drill.

Understandably, Manuel is a bit crook on the short-term building projects his sons pick up, as there's not enough time to get the most out of the garden. Too much good land going to waste.

Manuel is a generous man. On longer projects he has a nice little harvest. Site visitors often leave with a cabbage or bunch of carrots to take home. By the time the building and renovating is finished everyone is a little richer.

Puts *Backyard Blitz* to shame.

—Words and photos Bill Thomas



So much to do

Kenya faces its brutal past and the huge tasks of the future

TWENTY MALE PRISONERS lie side-by-side, tightly packed together on the cold cement floor at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, 20 kilometres from the Kenyan capital, Nairobi. Individual body shapes, like their backgrounds, are varied, yet each evening they meld into one indistinguishable human mass.

'Time to turn,' yells the warden at the collection of bodies which, following orders, roll from left to right in dishevelled unison.

'Space in some Kenyan prisons is at such a premium that if one prisoner turns while sleeping, all must turn,' explains

Kenyan human rights activist Kang'ethe Mungai. He is a man who speaks from experience.

In 1986, as a member of a movement agitating for democratic multi-party rule, Mungai was arrested and charged with sedition and membership of an illegal organisation. This was the heyday of the regime of Daniel arap Moi. Sentenced to twelve-and-a-half years in prison after a one-hour trial without legal representation, Mungai initially spent two weeks in the now dismantled Nyayo House in Nairobi, notorious for its use of torture.

His early release, after serving only half

the sentence, followed two key events. In December 1991, Kenya moved from a one-party state to multi-party democracy. Since this shift towards democracy did not bring about the release of those who had fought for it, the mothers of political prisoners began a campaign for their sons' release.

A tent was pitched on Freedom Corner—an edge of Uhuru Park in Nairobi—and the mothers of 52 political prisoners, including Mungai's mother, began their peaceful protest with a public fast. Tear-gassed and physically beaten, they remained steadfast from February until June 1992. Their protest gained support around the country, and internationally. Moi eventually capitulated.

Upon his release, Mungai worked with a local non-government organisation Release Political Prisoners before co-founding People Against Torture, in 1997. Invited to Australia recently by The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, he spoke of his organisation's work, raising awareness about the use of torture in Kenya.

The challenges which continue to beset the Kenyan criminal justice system—prisoners subjected to dehumanising conditions and a remand system which can leave the accused waiting years in detention—are, according to Mungai, symptoms of wider-ranging social, political, judicial and economic stagnation in Kenya. Under the 24-year rule of the Moi regime, government became 'a mere tool for the accumulation of personal power'.

In the recent Kenyan elections, an overwhelming majority elected Mwai Kibaki to power, thereby ending Moi's rule. As a result, Mungai is hopeful about Kenya's future. 'Now that the huge burden which was on our shoulders has

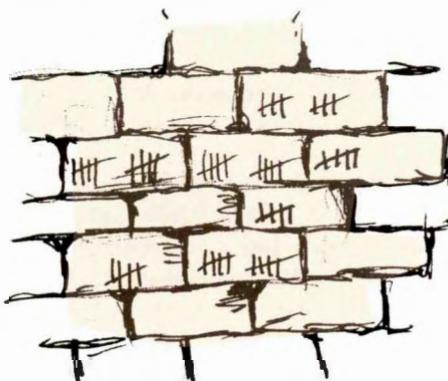


been removed, we can stretch our limbs, and do all those things we dreamed of.'

Mungai, like many Kenyans, believes President Kibaki is the man to lead Kenya towards those dreams. Having served in the Moi government (KANU) until the introduction of the multi-party system in 1991, Kibaki's longevity may well be attributed in part to his so-called 'fence-sitting' during his time with KANU. Yet he was never personally tainted by corruption or human rights violations.

'Kibaki has been at the forefront of declaring that corruption will no longer be a way of life in Kenya. His greatest attribute however is his humility, and his human heart.' After more than two decades of Moi, that may be just what the people need.

Although there is the danger of Kenyans placing too many hopes and aspirations on the new president, or of a split in the diverse coalition of political parties which makes up the Kibaki government, Mungai remains positive. Impending constitutional change and the fact that so many



new government ministers and MPs have been highly active in civil society are, he believes, encouraging signs.

The international community is also hopeful that Kibaki will be the man to reform the country: cracking down on corruption, rebuilding basic services such as health and education, and developing and implementing a new constitution. The release of World Bank emergency funds for health and education is one indication that the international community is satisfied with the new Kenyan government, and their anti-corruption measures.

Mungai believes that reforming the criminal justice system is critical because the law failed to protect the people as it should have during the Moi regime.

'If nothing else changes under the new government, but we are able to have the rule of law, then it will have been worth all the suffering and death.'

'The new draft constitution is committed to the rule of law, and the Kibaki government has pledged its ratification within six months, so I feel there is sufficient ground for optimism. What we need is the determination to make a difference.'

Following his Australian visit, Mungai returned to Kenya to lead a campaign demanding the government open the doors of Nyayo House—the alleged torture chambers. However one imagines a building that houses torture cells, it is doubtful that a city office block, thousands of workers filing through its doors each day, would be an image which springs to mind. Yet that is exactly what Nyayo House was. The semblance of normality from the outside of the building belied the horrors which occurred in its specially constructed, underground levels.

The Minister for Justice eventually bowed to pressure to open the building to the public. Referring to an official public visit to the torture chambers, organised by Release Political Prisoners, to mark the 12th anniversary of the 1991 violent dispersal of the mothers of political prisoners at Freedom Corner, Mungai writes:

Tears flowed freely as the elderly women groped in the dark corridors leading to the cells. They imagined their sons in these dark underground cubicles. It was a painful experience. So too listening to personal accounts.

On Sunday March 24, Release Political Prisoners and People Against Torture organised a cleansing ceremony to take place at Nyayo House. Among the 500 who attended were survivors and their families, and representatives of human rights and religious groups. The aim of this service was twofold: to rehabilitate the image of democratic crusaders who had been tortured at the chambers and demonised by the former regime, as well as raising awareness of the country's past, and the need to come to terms with that past through a healing process.

Now Kenyans can feel free to visit the museum without feeling haunted by the spirits of those who died in the chamber, and whose numbers will probably not be known

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until a Truth and Justice Commission is established. The crowd that gathered toured the cells after the ceremony. This symbolic act marked a new beginning for Kenya.

Immediately after the first delegation's visit to Nyayo House, the government—through the Minister for Justice—formally apologised to the survivors, before declaring that the cells would be opened to the public and turned into a 'national monument of shame'. Testimonies of Nyayo House survivors began appearing in the Kenyan newspapers—lawyers, journalists and student activists among them.

Less than two weeks after that initial Nyayo House visit, the government pledged to tackle human rights abuses in prison, and has declared that it will establish a tribunal to investigate the conduct of the Chief Justice. Judicial change has begun, yet there is much with which to grapple.

The debate continues as to why the Chief Justice was singled out, rather than embarking upon a more sweeping investigation such as the establishment of a Truth and Justice Commission.

Kang'ethe Mungai says that what is needed in this time of transition is the determination of civil society, not just the government, to make a difference. And if the aftermath of the Nyayo House 'opening' is any indication, it will take great courage and determination for Kenya to face its past. It will also require dealing as much with the human dimension—that is, the violation of dignity—as constitutional and judicial reform. ■

Michele M. Gierck is a writer, educator and public speaker. **Kang'ethe Mungai** is a human rights activist in Kenya.

Hey you tell

This story is but hours old
Four little girls
Two pairs of sisters
On a tarpaulin
Under some shade
As three elder generations
Tend the fire
Cast an eye over the lines in the billabong
And talk
The little girls play

Playing.
Then ...
A gentle shove
Shrieking ...
Some kicking into sand
Some into bone
Teasing
White teeth sinking
Deliberately
Into dark flesh



'Hey you mob
I seen 'em big wild piggy-wiggy
He come and eatum you
Over dere
You betta watch out!'

The gnash of wrestling bodies
Untangle into laps of safety nearby
Teeth reappear in smiles
The scene stiller than a picture

As bidden, I toast this moment
With a camera
Absorbing its ripeness
Through heart
Through lungs
Through lens

A sigh? A breath?
Well before the camera
Returns to its case
The tumbling cousin-sisters
Renew their grappling embrace

We enmesh ourselves to that moment
To one another
Each time this story is told
This story which is but hours old

IHAVE JUST GOT back from an afternoon of fishing with the Bayulu mob. We couldn't fish in the river because four kids drowned in the floods earlier this year, and the proper mourning can't begin until all the bodies are found. So we climbed on the back of the community truck and drove out to the billabong instead. The water level in the billabong was high, too high for fishing, said the old ladies. They were right. We didn't catch any fish. So we had a barbecue with some steak and sausages from the community supermarket instead. But the old ladies, still in mourning for a close relative and forbidden to eat red meat, were forced to sit outside the campsite and nibble on damper.

I write this poem for myself. What happens between the lines is the most important—the scent of spinifex, the roaring blue of the sky, time seeping away. And for me the sense of having completed a circle. Not simply by returning to this country and her people. But through being claimed, reclaimed by their stories. Our stories. It strikes me now that I was encouraged to take a photo for my family in Melbourne and to tell the story of this particular incident several times when we returned to Bayulu—different ways of recording a significant event.

When I was a boy, I lived in Fitzroy Crossing with my family. I went to primary school there with one brother while the youngest started kindergarten. Dad worked as a doctor at the hospital and Mum helped with a basic nutrition program. We became very close to the people up there—in particular the people from the Bayulu community who lived on Go Go station and their relations in the town in Kurnangi camp. They would often take us fishing and hunting—we provided transport, they provided all the know-how. That was more than 20 years ago. And this is the first time I've been back.

Summer thunderstorms remind me of the time Up North. Days of stinking dry heat—even in Melbourne—take me back to that place. The sweet potato from the 24-hour Coles tastes like a wild yam from Christmas Creek. It has always been with me, it has never gone away. And there is something else, a sensation, difficult to describe.

This sensation of belonging is brought into consciousness when I see Ningali Lawford present her life story at the Malthouse theatre. She paints her story with ochre on her chest, she sings her story in Walmatjarri and parodies life in the township of Fitzroy Crossing in brisk Kriol, the aboriginalised English which is the shared language of the region. I am hearing the language of the schoolyard again! I hear my friends laughing and I hear myself. Released by the sound of a language I had forgotten I had spoken. I knew then that I had to go back.

For the first few days in Fitzroy Crossing



'em bout that story again

Steve Gome returns to the people and language of Fitzroy Crossing

I am very hesitant with speaking language. I do not want to speak in a patronising or inappropriate manner—like a maiden aunt trying to speak skateboard jargon. The other people staying at Darlgunyah Backpackers (which was the post office when my family lived here) are a pair of German teachers and a Japanese woman. Slowly I reacquaint myself with the lackadaisical life, the saturated colour and the persistent heat of the Kimberley.

Fitzroy Crossing township comprises several scattered clumps of buildings. As I wander through Mangkaja Arts Centre, the supermarket, the hospital and the school, I am aware not only of the colour of my skin but that I am a stranger and alone. Even though I feel completely relaxed and have no time constraints on my meanderings, I notice that I walk more quickly than any of the Aboriginal people who are going about their business.

The school has changed significantly. Not only is there a grassy oval (the frantic sprinklers affording the kids much joy) where sports, especially football, can

be played, but Fitzroy Crossing now has its own high school! The mission behind the school has been closed—all the kids from the outlying communities such as Bayulu, Noonkanbah and Brooking Station now have their own little schools. Children's shrieks and laughter fill the playground as a lone emu struts through the sandpit.

Having absorbed the colours, the scents, the sounds of Fitzroy for three days, my head awash with memories and speculation, it is time to make contact with the people. A place is something one can come back to. I have done that and I have a lot to think about as a result. But 20 years later, as an adult not a child, what can I expect will be left when I come back to the people?

Annie Kogolo is the only person whose whereabouts I know for certain. A few years older than me, she has been working for a number of years now at Wangki (news) Radio 6 FX. In terms of the kinship relationships that the members of the Kurnangi and Bayulu mobs shared

with my family, Annie is my niece. The last time I saw her was six years ago in Melbourne, when she accompanied some Fitzroy artists, mostly elders, whose work featured in a major exhibition of Kimberley art in the National Gallery of Victoria.

Everyone at the radio station presumes this *kartiya* fella has come to fix one of the computers. A slow smile of recognition washes over Annie's face. 'You didn't tell anyone you was coming? ... How is your mum and dad?' I am smiling too, relieved—and aware of being the only male presence in this small group, a situation unlikely to be tolerated for too long outside the workplace. 'You can wait till lunchtime? That's good. We can go to Mangkaja Arts Centre and see the old ladies.'

On my way to Wangki Radio, not an hour previously, I had trudged through the supermarket and poked my head into Mangkaja. Some kids were kicking a footy around in the car-parking area, while the adults and toddlers sat in the shade of trees or the corrugated iron verandah of the shopping centre. Mangkaja, a self-styled



Arts Resource Agency, has two medium-sized rooms—one almost completely choked by the desks and paperwork of the office, the other bare except for a few chairs, some space on the floor where the artists can paint and boxes of paints, brushes and paper stacked against the far wall. I bought a few postcards of paintings by my honorary sister, Annie's mother Amy, to send back with news to my family. There is a sense of having interrupted the old men and women in the painting room. My greeting is met with muted waves and calm indifference.

And now, with Annie as my guide, the scene is transformed. She points out two of the old ladies, two Mollys, sitting outside Mangkaja on the concrete. Not having expected to see anyone I recognised, I had unthinkingly walked past them earlier. Taking my place in the circle on the ground, embarrassment is replaced by waves of recognition. There's Nipper, and Alec too. Alec/Larnyi—some people even in *kartiya* circles are known by their tribal or English names interchangeably. Most just by their English ones. Larnyi, silver-haired and slightly hunched, has lost almost all his sight. Annie is speaking Walmatjarri to the group, introducing me. Larnyi begins tapping his heart slowly and making a noise, which fuses chuckling and sobbing. Annie explains that he is happy to know I have returned, but he is sad because he is reminded of all the old people from those days who have passed away. And then the

exchange of stories begins.

'Dere was three boys, right? And you was always pushin' the little one into the water.'

'Your dad, he bin drivin' ebrywhere. An we was fishin' and huntin' out Noonkambah way, eh?'

'We went to the store at Noonkambah and we gave them some crocodiles for two bags of flour—proper big ones—so we could make some damper. They was surprised.'

Gradually, my self-consciousness with speaking Kriol is receding. Now it is a tool for communication, a common ground somewhere between English and the tribal languages. I am not sending up their voices, the intonation is my own. But the vocabulary at my disposal and the rhythms and inflections of this language are ones I have learnt through growing up here.

'I bin livin' Fitzroy looongTime ... i bin goin' School dere ... looongTime ... dat mission store he bin open ... he bin Closed now ... we was buyin' Cold drink from dat store ... dat store and dat Mission finished now ... Today i bin go dere i bin Looken-round ... dey gottem high School now ...! true God! and some grass for dat Football ground ... I even seen'em Big one Emu at dat school ... he was Slow one ... not cheeky Fella.'

Much muttering accompanies my mention of the emu. Overlapping and repeated phrases, the old men and women eager to share what they know. Annie

is filling in the gaps in the narrative, translating Walmatjarri, polishing the details with soft asides delivered in my ear. What is emerging is the story of Old Man Thirkall. It is one to which details will be added over the following days as other people I meet are made aware of it having been told to me. And it goes something like this ...

Old Man Thirkall kept an emu chick as a pet at his home in Kurnangi. When it grew to maturity, it left the camp and headed out into the desert to find a mate. And every year, at least once, sometimes twice, it would return to Kurnangi with its new chicks to visit the Old Man. The chicks would approach the camp with caution—the rumbling of the highway and the sun gleaming from the corrugated iron were new and strange. But they followed the father emu through the camp till they found Old Man Thirkall. The Old Man gave them some tucker and water to drink from the same old tin.

That Old Man is finished now, poor-fella. But his wife still lives in their house in Kurnangi camp. And the emu still comes to visit, still looking for Old Man Thirkall. And the chicks follow the father emu across the highway. Sometimes they eat some chips at the roadhouse. The emu wanders all over town—in the gardens near the hospital, across the footy ground, past the radio station. He even wanders around the school, looking at the children, avoiding the sprinklers. But he can't find that Old Man. And soon he goes back to the desert.

Everyone is excited to hear that Old Man Thirkall's emu is back in town. It is his emu, the emu that I have seen. And over the next few days, when I visit the Bayulu community (now with its own community supermarket, health centre and truck!) and go fishing with the two Mollys and their families, people chat to me about the emu. They have already heard—firstly, that it is back and secondly, that I have seen it. Each aspect of the story encases a kernel of meaning particular to the person who is telling it. For some, the essence of the story is that Old Man Thirkall's wife is still at Kurnangi and that I should go and visit. Others enjoy sharing details of the emu's behaviour, fascinated by the bond that links the emu with the Old Man. For everyone it is a chance to demonstrate their own involvement in the story as ongoing





witnesses. And of course to remember fondly that Old Man, whose name, like the names of all the deceased in tribal communities, may never be uttered again.

The story of Old Man Thirkall and the emu teaches me a lot about storytelling and language. I appreciate how much more than the bare facts is communicated each time the story is told. By telling this story to one another, individuals open up a line of direct personal connection. At the same time, the history of the community is preserved—and developed. This story mingles with other tales of family, local news and tribal law. This story, like every other story, ties the tellers to one another and to this place. Because the Old Man knew me as a child 20 years ago, and because upon my return I encountered his emu, I am part of this story. And I am being claimed through its being told.

When we came back from fishing that afternoon and Amy (Annie's Mum, my older sister) kept insisting I repeat the story of how the girls were only quiet when threatened with the wild pigs, I obliged. I appreciated being able to talk about something recent, not in the distant past. But I kept thinking that perhaps it was boring to people who had heard it already—like a stale joke. Only when I returned to Melbourne did I understand

Amy was offering me the chance to forge new ties, lasting ties. Because I am sure that when I return to Fitzroy, in one year, in five years, in ten, the story of this afternoon will be recalled. It will join the little girls to me even if they would not otherwise remember. And it will join me to the old ladies on that afternoon and in my childhood 20 years before.

Back in Melbourne, far from the spinifex and pindan, I look over my poem. Something doesn't quite ring true. The poem shares a perspective that saw me walk through Mangkaja oblivious to what was actually there. I have imposed an atmosphere upon the events that wasn't present when they occurred. Telling the story without using the language of the place is too jarring. And yet it is no lie.

What follows is a translation of the opening poem. It now exists in a form that can be shared by the Bayulu mob as well as the *kartiya* mobs down south. It is in the language of the country. And the language in which the event occurred. Experiencing the story of Old Man Thirkall and his emu made this version possible. ■

Steve Gome is a freelance actor and writer. He is currently directing Brecht's *Mr Puntila and his man Matti* to be performed at Trades Hall in Melbourne in July.

This story he new one
Four little girls
On the ground
Under some shade
Everybody been makin' fire
The old ladies was fishing in the billabong
And little Lyall Lovett was sleeping

The little girls playing
They was kicking sand
They was kicking themselves
Laughing and running
A little bit biting

'Hey you mob
I seen 'em big wild piggy-wiggy
He come and eatum you
Over dere
You betta watch out!'

The little girls bin hiding
Hiding behind their aunties
Hiding behind their granny
They was sitting in their auntie's lap
Looking for the piggy-wiggy
They was smiling

They was quiet like a photo
No talking

The four little girls was smiling
At my camera
They was very quiet
I make a photo for my mob in Melbourne
I was breathing and looking at everything
So I can remember

After that photo finished
Put away that one camera
The little girls was
fighting and laughing
Straightaway
Straightaway they start again

We tell this little story
'Bout when we was fishin'
We staying together

Maybe this little story get big one
Maybe four little girls bin growed up
They bin aunties and grannies too—long time
They tell'em bout this story again.

Looking for JC

The story behind the picture

WHY DON'T YOU come and march with us?' said the woman from the media alliance as she navigated her way through the sea of banners towards one claiming 'Media Workers for Peace'. I soon lost her in the crowd. She was expecting me to follow her, but the truth was, I didn't want to follow anyone. I wanted to be a free-roaming agent with camera—gazing out, looking in and peering beyond. Or, as Nadine Gordimer puts it, 'being a part of yet apart from the main event'. I also wanted to find Jim. 'A special welcome to Jim Cairns,' a rally organiser boomed through a megaphone. Her voice was relayed the length of Swanston Street.

Could Jim Cairns really be here? Thirty-two years earlier, I photographed him as he addressed 100,000 people lying down in symbolic protest in front of Flinders Street Station. It was near the end of the Vietnam War and Cairns was the intellectual driving force, as well as the avuncular face, of the Australian anti-war movement. In the years since, I have sighted him, as have many other Melburnians, selling his books at local markets and happily engaging whoever had the time in a conversation about the nature of society and change. And now, on Valentine's Day 2003, on the eve of the war in Iraq, in a crowd of more than 150,000 people, the octogenarian protestor was somewhere out there. I wanted his picture.

I made my way up Swanston Street from Southbank, past the discordant architecture of Federation Square and past the huge peace banner strung like an apron from the Melbourne Town Hall. I overtook

the Christians for Peace carrying white cardboard doves on sticks, and the school kids in uniform brandishing 'War is not good for Children' and 'Give Peace a Chance' placards. Their melodic, almost mesmerising chant of 'No War' was barely discernible above the more determined and aggressive 'No Blood for Oil' from somewhere deeper in the crowd.

I like such kaleidoscopes of humanity.

Everyone, it seemed, claimed membership of something—gender, occupation, political party, a country town, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity or some combination thereof. Not far from the 'Palestinians Against War' were the 'Jews for Peace'. I knew some of them and they beckoned. 'Join us,' one of them yelled. 'You're one of us.' I declined. 'I'm looking for JC,' I mumbled to myself. They moved on, and their space was occupied by 'Muslims for Peace' and then the 'Ex-Servicemen & Women Against War', followed by the teachers, the council workers and even 'Puppeteers for Peace'.

Belonging seems to be important to protesters, particularly when democracy is threatened. I did not wish to belong to any one group, but I felt proud to belong to this city that was the first to take the anti-war message to the streets in a worldwide chain of protests; a city that has a rich tradition of protest—thanks, in part, to the man I was seeking.

From their city balconies, residents of postcode 3000 watched their backyard become a massive theatre—a swathe of slogans snaking its way along the tram tracks from the State Library to Federation Square. The consumers in McDonalds masticated their burgers and fries as they regarded the crowd with silent bemusement. Police officers whispered into their epaulettes as they stood on the sidelines, while news helicopters hovered like mosquitoes in the late summer sky. I continued my search for Jim.





FINLAND

I finally arrived at the library steps and secured a position on the speakers truck. And there he was, in his wheelchair, making his way slowly down Swanston Street. His placard, 'Make Love not War', was a distinct echo of earlier times and a perfect message for Valentine's Day. I took my pictures and watched him merge into the accommodating crowd. Surrounded by helpers, he seemed alert and proud, but a little weary as though the shadow of world events weighed heavily on his fragile frame. 'Who is Jim Cairns?' one of the rally organisers asked me. History, it seems, needs to be re-learnt every 15 or 20 years.

In the months since I took those pictures, the contemporary history of Iraq has acquired a new and sad chapter, while the records of its ancient history have been obliterated in the chaos of occupation. The peace movement continues its steady march and its cry against war. Both still and moving pictures offer circumstantial evidence. But it's the stories behind the pictures that reveal the texture of what's really happening. ■

Peter Davis is a Melbourne writer and photographer, and a lecturer at Deakin University.

April 2003 Book Offer Winners

C. & N. Griffith, Dee Why West, NSW; R.C. & G.M. Hallows, Scullin, ACT; H.J. Herbert, Chatswood, NSW; M. Kubik, Australian National University, ACT; P. Leane, Birkdale, QLD; V. Luke, South Hobart, TAS; P.J. MacCarthy, Mount Claremont, WA; J.J. & B. Magee, Yokine, WA; H.M. McCabe, Newtown, NSW; C. Murphy, Box Hill, VIC; R. O'Halloran, Geelong West, VIC; F.L. Parkinson, Trevallyn, TAS; T. Potts, Terrigal, NSW; P.A. Stewart, East Victoria Park, WA; V. Walker, Newtown, NSW.

I could stay here all day inside my house
Or go to Finland.

'There is a hotel in the north'
A friend told me, 'that's made of ice'.
'You're never cold at night'
'Because they heap thick reindeer skins all over you.'

I warm to the idea
But part of me likes it right here
Where I have always lived, not looking out too far.
And so the years go by

And my life changes, once just every year or so,
Now almost month by month—
Like when you're on that new fast train

That glides up north
And Finland becomes Lapland between lunch and tea.

There are new vowels to hear,
Long lists of things that you must do without

And that is why I want to go

And why I will not go:
I know those lean old towns where no-one walks

And I can do without
Those streets made endless by the sun or lack of sun.

I have those lists at home:

And I can do without.

—Kevin Hart

The weigh up

What is the Bible's basic role?

OFTEN ENOUGH THE Bible will contradict itself or offer variant views. On its own evidence, therefore, it is more a hallowed invitation to reflection than discourse from God imparting knowledge. This comes as no surprise to those intensively involved with it, but needs some thought from the rest of us. If that's the way it is, why treasure it?

The base for this discussion is well known, whether we speak of it as the options offered in the Bible, the multiplicity of vantage points available, the complementarity of views expressed, or the contradictions presented. What concerns me is the conclusion drawn from these observations. Is the basic role of the biblical text to provide something (for example, information), impose something (for example, ideas), witness to something (for example, direct revelation), or invite to something (for example, thought)? Experience of the text leads me to the last—to invitation.

A saying that I have not heard contested or queried sharpens the issue. It is not an axiom, it is a matter of observation:

We do not believe something because we can quote it from the Bible; we quote something from the Bible because we believe it.

This prompts two questions: first, by what process and for what reasons do we come to believe something of relevance to our faith, if it is not on the authority of the Bible? And second, why then do we quote from the Bible in support of what we believe? What need is operative in us?

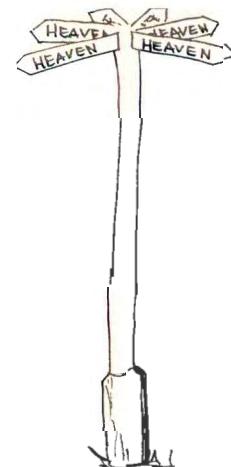
Here I find the metaphor of signposts useful. Signposts may be vital to travellers on a journey. A signpost pointing in a

single direction is helpful, if the direction is the right one. Several signposts, pointing in different directions to the same destination, invite reflection. Many readers will find that the Bible often offers conflicting signposts—that is, competing claims about faith and YHWH (Yahweh)—from extensive texts about creation, flood, deliverance at the sea, sojourn in the desert, conquest of the land, emergence of monarchy, and even divine providence, to matters that can be compassed in a verse or two. The biblical text tends not to adjudicate, but to amalgamate.

The decision about what is predominantly the nature of biblical text and how it functions is one that needs to be remade out of the experience of the text by each generation of its readers. Any other way risks dogmatism or superstition. Each generation must study its Bible. These considerations should not deflect attention from the complementary roles of the biblical text: to arouse feeling, fire imagination, and to fuel faith. My task here is to explore the biblical text and reflect on its signposts.

Creation

The Bible offers us manifold allusions to creation, whether lengthy descriptions or shorter references. Psalm 104 moves magnificently from the earth on its foundations and the deep as its cover, to the ocean with ships sailing on it and Leviathan sporting in it. Proverbs 8 has a marvellous image of creation, with wisdom's primacy over everything else, 'the first of God's acts of long ago' (v. 22) through to 'rejoicing in the world and delight in the human race' (v. 31). Job 38, opening God's discourse out of the whirlwind, has a



wonderful series of questions about the laying of the foundation of the earth, the shutting in of the sea with doors, the origins of morning and the dwelling of light, the storerooms of the snow and the channels for the rain. Genesis 2 has the forming of a man and God's search for human completeness, achieved in the forming of a woman. Genesis 1 has the creation of our visible world, majestically segmented into days, finding its completeness in the hallowing of the seventh day, the creator God's observance of Israel's Sabbath.

Alongside these, in the sophistication of Isaiah, Job and Psalms, we have allusions to creation by combat and the dismembering of the primeval sea monsters—Rahab

cut in pieces in Isa 51:9; with the dragon (Tannin), Rahab, the Sea, and the serpent (Nahash) all featuring in various parts of Job (e.g. 7:12, 9:13-14, 26:12-14); with Leviathan being crushed in Ps 74:14 and Rahab crushed in Ps 89:10. When, in its times of distress, Israel needed a God with grunt, the awesome power of the conqueror in creation was available.

In all of these, God creates. Nothing else is common. We have witness to faith in God as creator. As to the 'how' of creation, we are invited to reflection.

Flood

We know well that there are at least two traditions of the Flood. They are interwoven because both end with God's solemn commitment never to destroy sinful humankind again (Gen 8:21-22; 9:1-17). Arranged any other way, one would subvert the other.

In one set of traditions, the flood is portrayed in 40-day blocks, comes from a great rainstorm, and with the preservation of seven pairs of clean animals as well as one pair of each of the unclean has surplus enough for a great sacrifice. In another set of traditions, the flood is portrayed in 150-day blocks, comes from the bursting forth of the fountains of the great deep and the opening of the windows of the heavens, and with the preservation of only one pair of all animals fortunately does not end in a sacrifice.

We may be comforted by faith in a God who will not destroy or reject us because of innate human evil. If we wish to know more detail, we are invited to reflection.

Sea

The deliverance at the Sea, whether Red Sea or Reed Sea, is one of the great images in Israel's experience of salvation worked by God (cf. Deut 11:1-7; Josh 2:10, 4:23, 24:6; Pss 106:7-12, 22; 136:13-15).

The classic image is clear: at the gesture of Moses' hand, the waters were parted to left and right, Israel marched across, followed by the Egyptians who were then swamped. But also, in the same text, there is a tradition of deliverance but no crossing. The pillar of cloud moves from in front of Israel to take up station between Israel and the Egyptians all night (14:19-20); God's wind drives the sea back all night (14:21); at the end of the night, near dawn, from the pillar of cloud God causes panic among the Egyptians

so that they retreat across the dry seabed and are swamped by the returning waters (14:24, 25b, 27), assuming that God's 'all-night' wind stopped with the dawn. Since at the start of it all, the Israelites were told to turn back and camp by the sea (14:2), they had already gone past it. Crossing the sea was not the problem; escaping the Egyptian pursuit was.

Israel believed it had been delivered. As to how, at best reflection is invited. Elsewhere I have, with my co-author, put it like this:

The maintenance of duality within this carefully combined text can only be understood as witness to the conviction in ancient Israel that Israel's history did not declare God to Israel without interpretation. Rather Israel's theologians and people of faith read and interpreted their experience of history and declared God from it. The unity achieved in the text attests a faith that the passage from Egypt to the wilderness, from slavery to freedom, a passage symbolic of Israel's emergence from the womb of history, was a moment of such significance to Israel it needed to be focused in the uniqueness of a single story, in which Israel expressed their confession of deliverance by the God who was the source and center of their being. (*Sources of the Pentateuch*, A.F. Campbell & M.A. O'Brien, Fortress, Minneapolis, 1993, p256)

Israel's authors were professing and celebrating faith; they were not reporting details of fact, not informing the people of the present of precisely what had occurred in the past. Deliverance is reported; as to the processes, reflection is invited.



Wilderness

In the pentateuchal texts of Israel's sojourning in the wilderness, it—the wilderness—is the classic location for Israel's rejection of their God. If we forget for a moment Israel's longing for the fleshpots of Egypt, and for their fill of bread (Exod 16:3), along with the fish, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic (Num 11:5), we

can hear God's angry complaint to Moses, 'How long will this people despise me? And how long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? I will strike them with pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they' (Num 14:11-12), followed by God's characterisation of the people who 'have tested me these ten times and have not obeyed my voice' (Num 14:22).

For Jeremiah and Hosea, the wilderness is a time and place for honeymoon fidelity. For Jeremiah: 'I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown' (2:2). For Hosea: 'I will now allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her ... There she shall respond as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt' (NRSV, 2:14-15).

Infidelity and fidelity are marvellously mingled. If we seek for understanding, we are invited to reflect.

Occupation

Israel's occupation of its land is as complex an issue as any other in the biblical tradition. For our purposes, we can set aside recent scholarly reconstructions involving infiltration, peasant revolt and social upheaval; what we need is in the biblical portrayal. Three traditions dominate the picture—two are enough for us here. In one, Israel wages a military campaign, with God's help. Kings and their soldiers are handed over to the Israelites (cf. Josh 6:2, 8:1-2, 10:1, 16-27, 24:11). In the other, the work is entirely God's, with Israel's role little more than that of being there—i.e. the stories of the Jordan crossing, the capture of Jericho, and the failed attack on Ai.

The capture of Jericho is a good example. To march around a besieged city once a day for six days and finally seven times on the seventh day may be brilliant psychological warfare, unnerving the defenders. But a shout, no matter how fierce, does not cause the walls to collapse. Only God can do that.

If we want to look back to Israel's occupation of the land and reflect on its meaning for Israel's life in the land, we cannot go beyond speculation as to what took place. There is an invitation to thought; there is no imposition.

Monarchy

At least three traditions are preserved about the origins of monarchy in Israel. One reflects Israel's need for defence against its external enemies. Another reflects Israel's need for internal justice. A third regards the request for a king as apostasy, the rejection of God. (See *Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History*, A.F. Campbell and M.A. O'Brien, Fortress, Minneapolis, 2000, pp217–19, 230–49.)

Should we want to think about it, we are not told what to think.

Providence

In much of the wisdom literature, providence and God's relationship to goodness and wickedness is clear. Psalm 1 puts it well: 'Happy are those ... [whose] delight is in the law of the LORD. ... In all that they do, they prosper. The wicked are not so ... the way of the wicked will perish.'

Job's verdict is equally clear: What rubbish! 'Have you not asked those who travel the roads, and do you not accept their testimony, that the wicked are spared in the day of calamity, and are rescued in the day of wrath?' (Job 21:29–30).

In all of this, it seems to me clear that the biblical text does not impose thought on us from outside. It invites us to think. I have nothing against thinking, but I need something more to account for my particular passion for the Older Testament.

Three areas at least catch something of what fires that passion and excites my critical interest in the Bible. They can be named the incarnational, the foundational, and the interpretational.

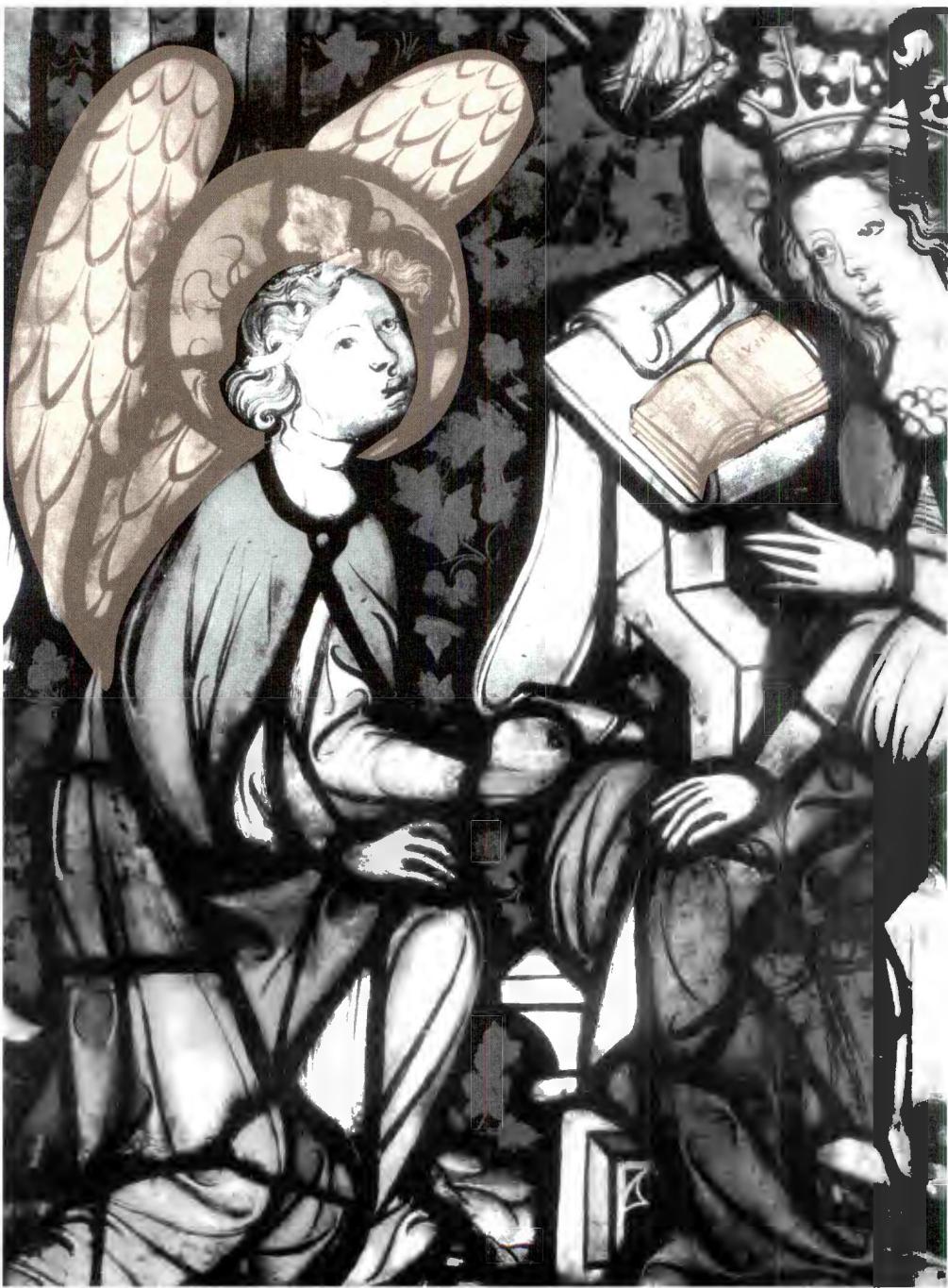
The incarnational is important to me (it may well be different for others). For me, it is not restricted to God's becoming one of us, but expanded to reflect our experience of God as unobtrusive and intangible, almost concealed from us in the ordinariness of life. It speaks of God who is not distant from us, but deeply involved with us. The imagery is intense: 'as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you' (Isa 62:5); 'as the loincloth clings to one's loins, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, says the LORD' (Jer 13:11). At first sight, God as unobtrusive and intangible, the ordinariness of God, may not seem evidently applicable to the Bible. Many

long to escape the ambiguity and uncertainty of so much human living and the Bible often seems to offer a way into the certainty and clarity of the divine. Closer acquaintance with it calls us back to explore, be reconciled with, perhaps rejoice in the incarnational (involvement-in-the-human) uncertainty and ambiguity we find in the Bible as well as in ourselves—an invitation to compassion.

The foundational is for me at the base of identity in faith. It arises where we quest for what is of ultimate concern to us in our lives. We need to know about

the wellsprings in our past that are vital to our present. We yearn for foundations that rest in bedrock. We may need to examine the nature and the quality of the foundations on which major aspects of our faith-identity are built—just as people buying a house run checks on foundations and structural soundness, plumbing, roofing, and wiring, and so on, or financial institutions contemplating takeovers run due diligence checks. In such a situation, adherents of biblical faith need to explore the Bible.

The interpretational relates to that



risky activity of exploring our present beings, of self-discovery, when we need to make meaning for ourselves of our living, when we need to interpret our lives to ourselves. For many, the exploration of the Bible—probing in the foundations of faith and even discovering there roots and something of the incarnational—is an indispensable aid in interpreting life.

To simplify, the attraction exciting much critical engagement with the Bible can be spelled out in terms of three activities: being at home with God, being at home with one's faith, and being at home with oneself.

Incarnational

The God I experience in my faith is a God who does not bypass the human but engages with it, a God experienced as unobtrusive and intangible, almost concealed from us in the ordinariness of life. I would be suspicious if the God of the Bible were much different.

What I look for in biblical texts is not in conflict with what I learn from recent science. I do not look for modern science in biblical texts; I do not usually look for insights into the meaning of life from recent science. When I look into biblical texts, I find faith and doubt there. I find prayer and politics there. The faith is occasionally expressed in terms I would today describe as grossly unscientific. What I find in the wide range of biblical texts is a struggle to find meaning in human existence. That struggle is not denied; it is not always successful. It is there. Recent science does not for me deny the struggle for meaning; it does not resolve it either. The struggle is there. Biblical text that neither denies nor always resolves the struggle for meaning is for me text that is deeply steeped in the mystery of human experience. It is incarnational, and I am at home with that.

Foundational

Once upon a time, it was said that a career in the church was the bolthole for the fool of the family. I would be disappointed and uncomfortable to find too many of the family fools among the pillars of the Bible.

I would not want the core documents of my faith to be substantially the work of those who might be characterised as credulous, gullible, and unsophisticated. Fortunately, the evidence suggests quite the opposite.

Interpretational

There can be joy in encountering text that challenges one's understanding of life and of self. Jeremiah puts it well: 'They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water / and dug out cisterns for themselves, / cisterns that can hold no water.' (Jer 2:13)

We need the challenge of living water; it is all too easy to lapse into making cisterns for oneself that can hold no water.

For me, that 'fountain of living water' involves awareness of what is named 'spirit' and acceptance of 'commitment to faith in God'. The idea of God is not, I hope, the product of need, the preserver of privilege, the opiate-numbing injustice and oppression. Commitment to faith in God is at bottom a giving of weight and worth to the whisper of spirit at the deep core of human life. Yearning for the spirit has been an issue across all human history: whether to seek it, spurn it, or ignore it. Often, the options are fundamental and basic, involving the meaning or absurdity of life lived at depth. For some, Christian faith may be chosen because it gives most meaning (for example, acceptance of God's reality). Again, of the absurdities on offer, Christian faith may be the least absurd (for example, acceptance of God's love). For such faith, the reality of God, incarnation, Eucharist, and resurrection are too vital to be lost in the turmoil of church politics or institutional change. (I speak of 'Christian faith' because it is the faith I know and live. I dare not speak of the 'meaning or absurdity' of other faiths that I do not know from within.)

Spirit can impact on us in many ways. It may be extraordinary, erupting into our lives powerfully, overwhelming us. We may have to be careful; it can be risky. It may be very ordinary, quietly and unobtrusively present. We may have to be attentive; it can be elusive. A biblical example of the extraordinary might be Elijah's great wind, or earthquake, or fire (1 Kgs 19:11-12a); since the LORD was not in these—but could have been—another example nearby is Elijah's long-distance run in front of Ahab, halfway across Israel (1 Kgs 18:46). In our lives, it could be a passionate love affair, at its best, or the cataclysmic encounter with nature or great art. The prime biblical example of the ordinary is surely Elijah's 'sound of sheer silence' (1 Kgs 19:12b). In our lives, there is the stillness of intimacy, the quiet

of contemplation, the wonder of fidelity—and so much more.

The awareness of spirit is often coupled with an awareness of ourselves and our world as insufficient—to the best of our understanding. The discoveries and theories of science are fascinating and illuminating. They open avenues to new universes of the mind. They do not diminish our sense that we and our universe are insufficient. So we seek a cause that is sufficient; the sense of spirit validates our search. The outcome of the search is not factual and certain knowledge; it is chosen belief—commitment to a point of view, while recognising that it might not be right. C.S. Lewis's biographer refers to the whole European philosophical tradition since Plato attempting to account for 'our sense that we do not belong to this world, that we are pilgrims and strangers here, homesick for another place where one day we shall be truly ourselves'.

We might never use such language—for we do indeed belong in this world as well as beyond it—but is that 'sense' romantic rot or does it touch on ultimate truth? Awareness of spirit leans toward the latter. At the core of it all is a mystery that says Yes—the mystery we name God.

Afterword: At this point, the two initial questions can be answered:

i. Why do we believe something, if not on the authority of the Bible? We believe it because it has its proper place within the interpretation of ourselves, our lives, and our world that we have shaped—from our experience of ourselves and the various levels of community within which we have been shaped—based on an insight into ourselves and our world to which we are committed and which gives meaning to our lives.

ii. Why do we quote from the Bible in support of what we believe, if it is not the authority for our belief? Because of foundations. We quote from the Bible because it is important to us that our faith-identity and our present belief are in substantial conformity with some aspect of the experience we find articulated within the Bible, in substantial conformity with some aspect of our foundations. ■

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Capital investment

For nearly three decades, microcredit has been proving its worth as part of the solution to world poverty

IN 1976, Professor Muhammad Yunus, a microcredit pioneer, met Sophia Khatoon in the tiny village of Jobra in Bangladesh. At 22, she looked twice her age. She had been abandoned by her husband and was living with her two children in abject poverty, making exquisite bamboo furniture—seven days a week. With no working capital, Sophia was at the mercy of a trader who sold her the raw material on credit. He also bought the final product at a price he dictated, a price that barely covered her costs. Yunus was undertaking social research with his economics students in her village. He calculated that Sophia was repaying her loans at ten per cent a day—over 3000 per cent annually.

In fact, the vast majority of the world's poor are caught in this trap. They are exploited either by their 'employer' or the moneylending elite. They cannot borrow from mainstream banks because they have no formal credit history and cannot provide the collateral required.

With a loan from Yunus of 50 taka (a few dollars), it took Sophia only a few months to establish her own little business, increase her income seven fold, and repay the loan. Thirteen years later, in 1989, she had a rainproof house, her two children were in school and she had diverse income streams, both constant and seasonal—bamboo weaving, livestock, vegetable gardening. She had even leased some land. Her income of \$550 a year was twice the national average in

Rajamma lives in India. She used to do housework in 'upper-caste' homes so she could feed her daughters the leftover scraps of food. At one point, she became so desperate that she borrowed money from a rich landowner. Unable to repay him, she was forced to send her daughters to work in his home as virtual slaves. But Rajamma then joined the local self-help group Bridge Foundation—an India-based microcredit organisation—and took out a loan equivalent to \$196 to purchase a milk cow. Within 10 months, she repaid the loan and gained the release of her daughters from their bonds. With her savings she bought half an acre of land and has taken another loan to irrigate it for groundnut cultivation. Rajamma's eldest daughter is learning tailoring, while the younger girls are in school. Rajamma says that the program has helped her regain her dignity and self-worth

Bangladesh. She had amassed just under \$100 in cash savings, and another \$200 in non-cash savings. Her husband, who had abandoned her and the children, had sent her messages indicating that he was thinking of coming back.

From this modest beginning in 1976, Professor Yunus started the Grameen ('village') Bank which now employs over 12,000 staff, works in more than 40,000 villages of Bangladesh, and extends 4 million microcredit loans a year. With loan repayments exceeding 98 per cent, it outperforms all other banks in Bangladesh and most banks around the world. The Grameen Bank model of microcredit has now been replicated in over 60 countries.

Microcredit financing means small, collateral-free loans for self-employment, which are extended to the very poor. The Grameen Bank developed its own model, but there are many others. Common to all microcredit programs is the fact that money is a loan and not a grant, and it is repaid with interest (usually just above the local commercial rate). Repayments are usually small and regular (sometimes weekly) and often include a tiny obligatory savings component. Most programs lend primarily to women, as experience has shown that women have been more reliable repaying their loans. More importantly, women are more likely to plough the income generated back into benefits for the whole family.

John Hatch started FINCA (the Foundation for International Community Assistance)—a microcredit institution with 200,000 borrowers across South America, Africa and the former Soviet Union. He describes its benefits:

Increased income earned by a low-income mother translates into a chain of positive improvements for her family. This chain starts with her capacity to purchase more food. A better diet and improved nutrition stimulate better family health. Improved health results in greater resistance to disease, higher energy, greater capacity for work and learning, and this enhances productivity. As family nutrition and health are stabilized, incremental investments in the education of children are almost certain to follow. Close behind education expenditures come investments in home improvements. Finally, these outcomes are paralleled by a near-total transformation of the borrower's self-respect.

Microcredit's worldwide expansion over the last 30 years, and its impact on the lives of those like Sophia Katoon, has been remarkable. Not all of the more than 2000 microcredit institutions operating today have had the spectacular growth and

international acclaim of the Grameen Bank. However, microcredit practitioners around the world agree that giving a destitute woman a very small loan for use in a self-employment venture brings an amazing return on your investment. The success of microcredit has also turned around many misconceptions about the poor. The characteristically high repayment rates on loans are proof that even the very poorest people are creditworthy. The poor do not lack ideas, skills or an enterprising spirit; they are capable of working their way out of poverty through their own efforts if provided with the right opportunities. As we see from Rajamma's story (see previous page).

In 1997 a Microcredit summit attended by 2900 delegates from 137 countries, including Australia, launched a nine-year campaign: to reach 100 million of the world's poorest families, especially the women of those families, with credit for self-employment and other financial and business services by 2005. Achieving this goal will go a long way towards eliminating extreme poverty in the world, because reaching 100 million of the world's poorest families means approximately 500 million, or almost half, of the world's poorest people.

Many world leaders, such as the President of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, and the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, regard microcredit as a critical tool in the fight against poverty. As one method of delivering foreign aid, it can be highly successful and cost-effective. Donor countries like Australia are gradually building microcredit into their programs.

In recent years, the federal government has increased Australia's foreign aid for microcredit programs to around \$13 million a year. There has also been more effort to fund the expansion of quality programs. For example, in Vietnam poor women are increasing their income by using small loans to grow and sell vegetables, raise pigs and start or expand other income-generating activities, through the CEP (Capital Aid Fund for the Employment of the Poor), a locally initiated and run program. However, Australia's annual \$13 million for microcredit is just under one per cent of our total aid program of \$1.8 billion. There is no guarantee that funding will be maintained at that level, let alone increased. This seems to indicate a hesitancy by the government to fully appreciate the contribution microcredit can make to ensuring our aid dollars help those most in need.

In November 2002, I went to the Microcredit Summit + 5 Conference in New York. We looked at the progress made since 1997. By the end of 2001, 2186 institutions were delivering microcredit—up from 618 in 1997. Over the same period, almost 55 million microcredit borrowers were being reached—up from 13.5 million in 1997. Nearly 27 million of the total microcredit clients were among the poorest in the world—up from 7.5 million in 1997. The growth in microcredit remains on track to reach 100 million

Before joining FINCA El Salvador, Doris Vilma Lara de Flores sold bread for someone else and earned commission on the number of loaves she sold. She did not make enough money to support her five children and her husband who had an unsteady job as a bricklayer's assistant.

She joined a village bank and used her first loan of \$US57 to buy more bread to increase her profits. One year later, the man who sold her the bread could not keep up with her sales and offered to sell her the oven with a chance to pay for it in instalments. She says, 'If I had not been in the village bank, I would not have had the courage for such an undertaking. With the bank I am learning to have confidence in myself, to realize that I can do it! And I convinced my husband that we should work together on this project.'

Doris and her husband have hired three women to sell bread and bought a bread oven. With their earnings, they bought a pick-up truck to distribute the bread, brought electricity into their house, and made other improvements. They now eat better. They have \$US540 in savings and plan to save more. Doris is 41 and never attended school; nevertheless, she is the treasurer of her village bank and has learned how to read and write. She explains, 'Now I can handle the large equations, and I feel happy when the [staff member] reviews the records, and they are all accurate. My fellow group members believe in me.'

of the world's poorest families by the International Year of Microcredit in 2005.

The conference demonstrated that it was possible for microcredit to reach the poorest people—in the bottom half of those living below their country's poverty line—in ways appropriate to their needs, and to bring about positive changes in their lives. Many development interventions have struggled to achieve such advances. Contrary to conventional wisdom, many microcredit institutions are both reaching very poor clients and becoming financially independent of donor funds.

In an international climate of globalisation and free trade, the 'trickle down effect' of economic growth is not guaranteed to help the poor. In contrast, microcredit has created a 'trickle or bubble up' approach to economic growth, as coined by David Bornstein in his book on the Grameen Bank, *The Price of a Dream* (1997). He describes how, in the long run, wealthier people in the economy can eventually benefit from the increased spending power of these microentrepreneurs.

Microcredit is not the panacea to end global poverty, but its critical role is sorely underestimated by the governments of developed and developing countries—some of whom may still be unaware of its existence, let alone its impact.

Maree Nutt is the president of RESULTS Australia, part of an international network of volunteers who advocate for the public and political will to end hunger and the worst aspects of poverty. For more information see www.microcreditsummit.org and www.results.org

Re-construction

In the post-feminist era, women on work sites remain a rarity

BIG, BURLY, BEEFY—when it comes to the common view of construction workers, from Bob the Builder to the Builders Labourers' Federation, most people would sum it up with yet another B-word: blokey. This, of course, is hardly surprising. Building sites are full of men and, looking at apprenticeship patterns, this is the way it will be for a long time to come. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 100 per cent of all apprentices in plumbing and the electrical and electronic areas in 1999 were male. In construction, the figure was 99.7 per cent—meaning just 85 out of 28,300 young people entering the industry were female. Statistics that included apprentices over 24 were only fractionally better: 41 female plumbers, 225 electricians, 311 construction workers. Kids won't be watching Betty the Builder for quite a while yet. So what is it like to be the odd woman out? Why would any woman even take the plunge, and how do they survive?

Federation Square by the Yarra River in central Melbourne has become best known for its fractal architecture, controversy over glass shard towers and for running well behind schedule. But for Angela Casella, the only female blue-collar worker there, it is the point of entry into a new trade. Casella started as an apprentice stonemason after eight years as an accounts payable clerk. The reception was friendly, if a little paternalistic. 'The guys would ask me why I wanted to be a stonemason, but would say good on me for trying. They were concerned about me lifting heavy things. For the first six weeks they wouldn't let me carry a full wheelbarrow—which was probably a good thing! I'm building up my strength slowly, although I haven't got muscly arms yet.'

Survival for a new apprentice isn't just a matter of getting used to hard yakka, it's also about coping with the workplace culture. It helps that Casella, at 30,

is older. Asked by one worker why she wasn't at home looking after the kids, she responded, 'It's easier to work eight hours than 24.' Another offered a 'real kiss' for her birthday. 'I shouted out to the whole site that he'd offered me a tonguey—he shut up for the rest of the day.' The biggest challenge came when co-workers started going to a strip joint for lunch. 'They started asking me if I was one of the blokes, so I went once. It was a dive. Since then they've never gone back. I don't know if they were testing me or whether they got fed up with me saying that it was terrible to see some 16-year-old strip buck-naked in ten minutes while men drop coins in a beer jug.'

Vanessa Garbett, an electrician for ten years, has had to deal with different pressures. She has two children, one 12 and one who has just started primary school this year. 'If I didn't have a partner who shares I wouldn't be able to do it. I'm often out of the house before 6 am and there's no way you can get kids out of bed at 5 am. But my partner is a teacher and can do it for me.' Isolation has been a problem; she's been the only woman on just about every site. 'At first it used to freak me out, but now I don't take any notice really. I remember when I walked on to the Docklands Stadium in Melbourne. I was the only tradeswoman on the job and there were already 400 or more blokes and everybody stared at me. But it was only one day and you get over it. Most of the blokes I've worked with have been terrific.'

Ravi Ariyawansa, national project manager with Construction Training Australia, says that perhaps two per cent of tradespeople are female, although there is a larger minority among clerical, supervisory, managerial and engineering staff, bringing levels for the industry as a whole to around 14–16 per cent. Voula Karantzas is part of that modest white-

collar increase. She took a civil engineering degree at Melbourne University and now works for consultancy firm Connell Wagner. Her responsibilities have included the steel work on the CityLink tunnels under the Yarra. When she began her university course in 1990, school friends thought it was abnormal and arts students tended to write her and fellow female engineering students off as butch. 'Even now I have to explain to people what I do. But within the industry they're getting used to female engineers.'

Greater access to university and shifting expectations of, and among, young women help explain the growth in the white-collar sector. But it is participation in the much larger blue-collar sector that remains the touchstone of progress. It has been a hard road. The Burgmann sisters, Meredith and Verity, in their book *Green Bans, Red Union*, about the NSW Builders Labourers' Federation, record the attempt in the early 1970s to open the industry up to women. There was some success, partly because of the impact of the women's movement, and partly because the NSW BLF was probably the most politically progressive union branch in the country. In 1971, the state branch had nine female members; by 1974, 80. That year the union appointed three women as temporary organisers, including one who had been elected to the branch executive the year before. But such modest progress petered out when the branch was deregistered and its leadership broken.

On the face of it, it should be easier to make progress today. A further 30 years experience of women in the paid workforce has broken down many of the crassest of sexist assumptions about a woman's place being in the home. Mechanisation has made individual strength less of a factor. Construction sites, especially the big, unionised ones, are cleaner and safer. Wages are higher,

and certainly higher than for most female-dominated routine jobs. Progressive attitudes may not be universal in male union circles, but they are not the rarity they once were. The Electrical Trades Union in Victoria supported a bridging course for women interested in taking up an electrical apprenticeship, which was run in conjunction with Victoria University. Garbett was involved in organising it—Casella was one of the attendees. Both women say that the support of their unions (Casella is in the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union) has been important.

Yet participation rates stubbornly refuse to budge. One reason is continuing hostility to women in the industry, especially from managers who are, after all, the gatekeepers. Casella, having done the bridging course, applied for a range of apprenticeships. 'I had a few interviews and got knocked back quite blatantly for being female.' Garbett, too, has found managers more of an obstacle than male co-workers. As Casella puts it: 'People think construction workers are all blokey and sexist and I can understand why, but it's a learning experience for them as much as for me. They say things out of nervousness. But even the men who are progressive have said that stonemasonry is very heavy work—I suspect that if I was a 15-year-old boy they would say, "you'll be right, you'll build up your muscles".'

Ariyawansa, from Construction Training Australia, identifies a bigger problem—that young women, far from being kept out of construction, are not even looking to enter. The industry, with a reputation for being back-breaking and dangerous, is simply not as attractive to young women as hospitality or information technology—jobs in which 'they don't have to get their fingers dirty'. It is crucial to get the message out that construction and allied trades can be safe and well-paid. Role models are important, too.

Garbett became an electrician almost by accident. 'After I had my first child, I went back to school [Warrnambool TAFE]

college] and chose the course with the best job prospects: electronics. I did well and enjoyed it and was wondering what to do next when the head of department phoned and said an electrician's apprenticeship was available. There was no grand plan.' Once in the job, Garbett faced the problem that's widely reported by women in the industry—isolation. 'I nearly quit on a few occasions. I felt unsure of myself, I suppose. And because I was an apprentice on my own I had no other benchmarks.'

Casella, too, had to overcome social barriers. 'I've always wanted to do a trade but I never thought it was available as an option. I was the first girl to do manual arts—woodwork and metalwork—at my school but there was this attitude that if you were intelligent enough you did maths and science, and I used to be in the top five per cent for Queensland in the Westpac maths competition. I thought maths was boring and wanted to do manual arts because it was useful. My careers

teacher told me I should do teaching, because it was a good job for a woman because of the school holidays.'

There are two organisations that encourage women in construction and create networks of support. One, Women in Male Dominated Occupations and Industries, is essentially blue-collar. Ellen Kleimaker, women's and equity officer with the Victorian Trades Hall Council, says that WIMDOI was founded about six years ago and holds national conferences as

well as local events. 'It's had a very positive impact on the women who have participated, but what's hard is getting women involved.'

Voula Karantzas is a former Victorian president of the National Association of Women in Construction. NAWIC, with between 500 and 600 members nationally, is open to women in every facet of the industry, including building inspectors, lawyers and students. With the benefit of corporate membership and sponsorship, it has the resources to run a scholarship scheme and to put videos on women in non-traditional roles out to schools.

Karantzas' workplace, too, is very supportive. 'We've an affirmative action policy and we have lunches and invite speakers to discuss issues like work balance.'

Karantzas has another advantage—she also enjoys the benefits of a critical mass of female colleagues. It's that lack of critical mass which Kleimaker believes is the fundamental stumbling block for women in the trades area. 'Women who start off in construction and get their apprenticeships often go out [into business] on their own. It tells me that things are not bearable in the industry.' She campaigned last year for funds for a breakthrough project—to get 30 to 40 female apprentices employed on the one site, the Queen Victoria Hospital redevelopment in central Melbourne. The site has a number of advantages. It's symbolic, because it was once the women's hospital and still houses a women's centre. It's strategic, because it's an entire city block and will provide continuous work for some three years. And it's political—Grocon has signalled its willingness, along with the relevant unions, to back the project.

Yet such are the barriers to women's entry to the industry that Kleimaker believes even this happy conjuncture is not enough. 'Women don't respond to ads. A failure in previous projects is that no-one would go to TAFEs and schools and talk to women, to tell them not only about the good conditions and money, but that they wouldn't be on their own.' This time round, Kleimaker hoped for a project officer and a publicity budget. That kind of ambition comes with a bill attached—\$110,000 for the first year and \$60,000 a year for the life of the project. That meant state funding, but the Victorian government showed no interest.

With work on the site under way, the window of opportunity has effectively closed. Yet even small steps forward are welcome, so low is the threshold of expectation. Angela Casella says that four blue-collar women are today working on the Queen Victoria site. Her employer is bidding for work there—and her membership of the workforce is seen as positive in the process, she says. Faltering steps in the right direction, or tokenism? For your answer, watch toy store shelves in years to come to see if Betty the Builder makes her debut. ■

David Glanz is a freelance journalist.



Flickering images

American film is trying to come to terms with a post-September 11 reality

AT THE VERY end of Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York*, there is a time-delayed montage of the city, moving quickly from a decrepit urban slum and graveyard into the modern megalopolis that is Manhattan today. In the last shot, right before the credits roll, two buildings stand out in the crowded skyline: the Twin Towers. They stand out not because they are taller than the other buildings, but because their presence in the film is a somewhat audacious move after a year and a half of the towers being erased from New York and its movies. In *Gangs* the towers are not a testament to architectural innovation, or modern Tower-of-Babel hubris. Instead they are symbolic representations of the pain, fear and terror present in a city that the film argues was built on those very things. Fear and terror are as iconic as the city itself.

Gangs was released into theatres on 22 December 2002, the same day that Spike Lee's *25th Hour* (above right) hit the cinemas. These films, together with Jim Simpson's *The Guys*, signal a move away from the bowdlerisation of film that came after September 11, when film-makers were unsure of how to create filmic representations of a tragedy from which the country was still reeling. In response, they omitted mention of it altogether. And in its place, like jingoistic Norman Rockwells, they coddled the surge of patriotism September 11 generated—the newfound fondness for men in uniform and military action, and the overwhelming respect for the flag and its ideals.

Movies about terrorism made before September 11 (such as *Collateral Damage*, with Arnold Schwarzenegger as the firefighter who hunts the terrorist killer of his wife and child, and *Big Trouble*, a mad caper featuring a bomb being smuggled onto a plane), were shelved until such



time as the population seemed less sensitive. Movies that cast a cynical eye on America's military or foreign interests (*The Quiet American*, suggesting that nefarious actions come swathed in the altruism of American foreign policy, or *Buffalo Soldiers*, about drug-running US soldiers in Germany) were held back, for fear of appearing unpatriotic. At the same time, box office hits like *Black Hawk Down* and *We Were Soldiers*—featuring brave US soldiers willing to immolate themselves for their country and their military brothers—seemed an appropriate filmic expression of the feel-good bellicosity emanating from the States. All this at a time when Americans felt overwhelmingly proud of the red, white and blue, and vengeful of anyone who would seek to destroy it.

While it was clear that Americans' appetite for violence did not abate after September 11, feature film-makers were still reluctant to address the horrific and

violent events of that day in the epic manner they deserve. Crudely put, September 11 is a film-maker's dream: the ultimate apocalypse, fraught with symbolism, tragedy, bravery and melodrama. Yet to present it as such would be to exploit it, and it remains too early to do so. (It took three years after the ship sank for the first *Titanic* movie to be made, paving the way for the scores made since.) Until now, September 11 has been the province of news photographers and documentary makers—such as Jules and Gedeon Naudet, whose film *9/11* was an accident, filmed inside the towers as they were making a documentary about NY firefighters. (Even *9/11*, generally regarded as the September 11 documentary, shied away from the more horrific footage of bodies on fire and falling from the upper floors of the building.)

On the other hand, feature film-makers have treated September 11 tangentially, as a pool from which ideas could be drawn

but not dived into. Films about September 11 have so far only extracted the positive messages from that day: trust in America and its heroes.

John Simpson's *The Guys* is the first feature film to be made whose subject is solely September 11. It is, however, such a controlled and confined film that the enormity of the actual event is diminished from the tragedy of mass horror into a relatively minor drama. Originally *The Guys* was a two-character play performed at the fledgling Flea Theatre in New York—an 80-seat venue started by Simpson himself. *The Guys* is the story of a writer (Sigourney Weaver as Joan), who is approached by Nick, a Fire Captain (Anthony La Paglia), to help him write eulogies for dead firefighters. Nick must give eight eulogies in the coming days for men lost in the towers, and possibly 350 more in the next few months. 'You've got to understand,' he tells Joan. 'Over a bad year we lost maybe ... six. This was in one day. One hour.'

The tragedy has struck Nick dumb. The horror of what occurred transcends Nick's capacity for language. September 11 has emasculated him, rendering him impotent in the face of such destruction. Nick's courage, and that of his comrades, became a trap that lured them into a site from which most could not be saved. Initially, he describes the first of the eulogy subjects as 'A schmo. If Bill walked into a room, nobody would even notice', but with Joan's careful prodding, Nick is able to find his voice and define the humanity he seeks to honour. As his inarticulateness dissolves, Joan helps Nick discover the language that transforms

ordinary 'guys' into heroes while retaining the human detail that makes them real.

The Guys is largely devoid of action. Most of the shots are medium close-ups that offer little spatial context of the world the film inhabits. Set in Joan's apartment, we are never given a real sense of the rest of Nick and Joan's world. There are exterior shots of New York, but none of teeming hoards walking the streets of Manhattan, nor sweeping vistas of the newly decapitated skyline, nor gloomy shots of the desolation of Ground Zero. September 11 is referenced through benign signifiers—rainy security camera footage of papers floating through the air, and the tacky homespun memorials to firemen that inundated the city. The film is almost entirely conversation and monologue, but even in the conversation there is no mention of terrorism and no call for revenge.

Simpson limits the ripple effects of the tragedy and removes it from a larger context. September 11 is not about the thousands who died and the terrorists who killed them, but about two people whose lives are profoundly affected by death. Consequently, September 11 is portrayed as a kind of natural disaster serving to bind the many disparate peoples of New York and offering heroes, rather than a catalyst for military action.

In Spike Lee's *25th Hour*, the events of September 11 are used in a similarly limited fashion. In this film, the devastated city mirrors a life on the edge of desolation. Although the film is not about September 11, Ground Zero haunts the narrative.

25th Hour is in many ways the quintessential New York film featuring

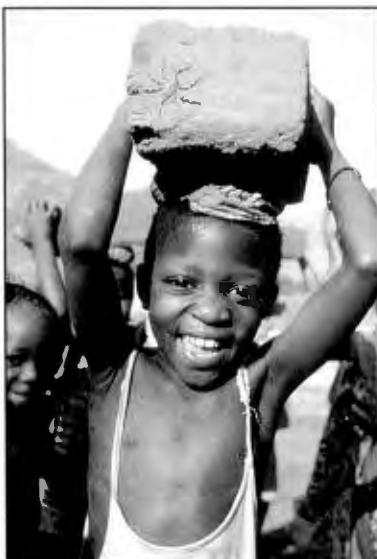
an assortment of the city's characters: the white smart-arsed drug dealer, the upper East Side trust fund loser, the obnoxious preppie stock trader, and dangerous Russian mobsters. Based on the book of the same title by David Benioff, the screenplay was tweaked to address post-September-11 New York. The film is about Monty Brogan's (Edward Norton) last day in the city before he starts a seven-year prison term for drug dealing.

The movie opens with shots of the twin shafts of light used to memorialise the Twin Towers. Most of the crucial action takes place against the backdrop of Ground Zero, or some other memorial of the tragedy. Throughout the day, Monty and his friends contemplate Monty's future and mull over the remnants of his crumbled past, wondering who betrayed him to the cops and where it all went wrong.

Lee creates a sense of confusion by constantly changing the axis of action in the crucial scenes. Characters shift from left to right on the screen and back again, and in these moves, all stability is lost. There is a sense that just as Monty's life is hurtling irreversibly into despair, the city too has come to a time when it cannot turn back. All choices lead to zero. There is no mawkish sentimentality in this film. New York is an insecure place that is trying to chart a course in an unknown future.

Like all critical moments in history, the ultimate meaning and import of September 11 lies in the future. Simpson and Lee have begun to ask the questions that might lead us there. ■

Gaby Wenig is a freelance writer living in Los Angeles.



He could be in school if his community wasn't impoverished

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After the war

Our Woman in Kabul, Irris Makler. Bantam, 2003. ISBN 1 86325 386 6, RRP \$26.95

'THEY SAY JOURNALISM is the first draft of history. I was there before the ink dried.'

So writes Irris Makler, and with warrant. The journalist, familiar to Australians for her ABC reports from Russia, flew into Northern Afghanistan soon after September 11, and was there for the fall of Kabul and the routing of the Taliban. When she left, nearly three months later, she took with her a birdcage found in the rubble of an al Qaeda compound through which Osama bin Laden, in his ghostly way, had passed, just hours ahead of a US missile strike. 'You don't think of a terrorist with a birdcage', she writes.

Afghanistan might have cured Makler of any capacity for surprise. She saw enough paradox in her time there to make anything seem likely—incomprehensible brutality and civility you could call chivalric, often coming from the same men. The people she met were mostly men. Under Taliban dominance women were invisible, kept in their homes. When they had no homes they were still invisible, like the woman beggar Makler saw at the roadside, swathed in a muddy, ice-blue burka, begging from passing cars, her bare feet the only evidence of her humanity.

Makler is very much the journalist, writing out of the heightened camaraderie that war correspondents experience. Afghanistan in late 2001 was an exciting, fraught and adrenalin-charged world. Makler saw the dead bodies of a number of her colleagues brought back from the Taliban trenches. She acknowledges the volatile mix: '... danger is an aphrodisiac ... When your colleagues are dying around you, it

makes life—and love—more precious.'

The book could have become a self-serving account of one woman's war. But it doesn't. Makler is no political or historical analyst but she has a sharp eye and a deft way of summing up a situation. She also has a feel for the country she is in, a well-read, unflaunted knowledge of its history and its rigours. As her notes on sources reveal, she found time to read and think in between journeys in disintegrating helicopters and cars held together with wire. Quoting a UN special rapporteur who investigated Taliban killings she writes this: 'Many bodies were also tossed down deep wells, then hand grenades were thrown in, and the wells were bulldozed over. In a desert land, who would poison a well?'

Who indeed. Makler does not assign blame. The situation in Afghanistan is too complex to be sorted into a tale of goodies and baddies. Instead Makler has to be content to ponder—as must we—the eloquent contradictions she encounters, and records, every day. Driving through the once beautiful city of Kabul, celebrated by poets, Makler contrasts the devastation around her with the liveliness of her young translator:

Sabi is a nineteen-year-old from the Panjshir Valley and we drive through the ruins of Kabul listening to his favourite tape. He is a great fan of *Titanic*. 'Did you like it? It is my favourite. The story is too sad.' He plays his pirated cassette of the score, with its glitches and sudden stops, over and over again. It provides a surreal soundtrack to the devastation. I want to

tell Sabi that what is 'too sad' is outside the window, but for him, this is just Kabul.

'Just Kabul' had just received its latest pounding, this time from US forces, about whom Makler is somewhat wry. Washington did not much like the coverage many war correspondents gave of the 'war against terror' in Afghanistan. Journalists were on the ground and had some actual, not just theoretical, notion of the intractable nature of the country. They also had some sense of the lack of fit between President George W. Bush's stated intentions and the reality of the situation. Makler quotes Bush's now famous remark made on CNN on September 16: 'When I take action, I'm not going to fire a two million dollar missile at a ten dollar empty tent and hit a camel in the butt. It's going to be decisive.'

But in Afghanistan, nothing is ever decisive. Osama bin Laden was not taken. Some camels were undoubtedly hit. So were many civilians. US firepower aided the 'victory' of the Northern Alliance, but so did the defection of so many of the Taliban forces. Makler admits to being amazed at the fluidity of alliances in Afghanistan. She is reduced to reading it through the symbolism of appearances:

A hat-seller in the bazaar in Taloqan says he almost sold out of *pakuls* earlier this week, in the days before the city fell. The Taliban once threatened to shoot anyone wearing the *pakul*, the symbol of Massoud. But now it's the Taliban's own soldiers who are queuing up at the hat stall to buy them.



Makler is shown the abandoned, ominous evidence of al Qaeda's presence: instruction manuals, diagrams of hot-air balloons intended as dispersal machines for chemical weapons, anti-Israeli and anti-American propaganda leaflets, an inflatable model of an American plane. There is discussion of the involvement of Pakistani nuclear scientists.

No-one in Makler's group underestimates the seriousness or the international ramifications of what they uncover. But Makler's focus stays, properly, on the country she is reporting from. The UN representative, Lakhdar Brahimi, describes Afghanistan as a 'failed state which looks like an infected wound'. Makler is less sweeping, but clear-eyed nonetheless. Surveying the devastation of Kabul, she concludes: 'The destruction occurred in layers, caused not by the American bombardment which just ended, nor by the decade-long war with the Soviets, but mostly by the bitter civil war of the 1990s. Afghans did this to themselves.'

Makler also quotes the conclusions of the NBC cameraman with whom she travels, Tom Streithorst, a New Yorker who reads Herodotus between shots. Of Afghans, Streithorst says: 'They are like heroes in the *Iliad*. Brave, hospitable, resourceful, hardy, loyal, unselfish, they never complain, they are never ironic. They play chess like champions. They are oddly gentle, these killers, cupping their hands around a moth, helping it escape.'

It's an heroic picture. But Makler is a Western woman in Afghanistan and therefore able to turn disadvantage into advantage. She gains occasional access to the unseen half of the population—to the women. And from them she hears the other half of the story. In a society where women are kept in domestic prisons, men go to war. 'Sex and death', she writes. 'When you can't get one, it seems you focus on the other.' She meets some very brave women, doctors who go on working in impossible conditions, political activists, like Farahnaz Nazir, who risk death to give women a voice. But the voice is muzzled in Afghanistan, even now. As Makler leaves, Farahnaz Nazir is seeking asylum in Canada. Canada, not Australia, note. Makler has to advise her that in the climate of the moment, Australia would probably not receive a woman of her kind. ■

Morag Fraser is the former editor of *Eureka Street*.

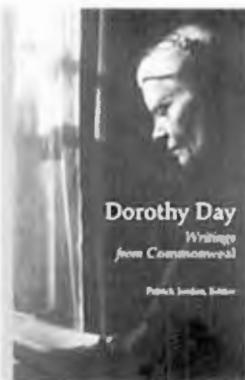
YES

It happens, once or twice. Oh yes,
It happens
On days that go astray, warm days
When light is rich and hours are long.
It happens

When time
Is inside-out a little, when you see
Those flakes of cloud
Float up, as if released from the snowy lawn,
And those red cedar leaves are still:

Oh yes, it happens,
Although they cannot say exactly so
Although we cannot tell them how
Although—it happens,
Just once or twice, but yes, oh yes.

—Kevin Hart



Dorothy Day: Writings from Commonweal,
Patrick Jordan [ed]. Liturgical Press, 2002.
ISBN 0 8146 2875 3, RRP \$44.95

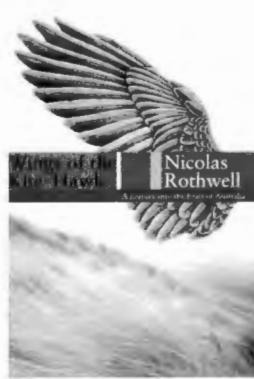
One hopes that Dorothy Day will never be made a saint. Certainly, she had virtue and spirit enough for canonisation. The survival of the Catholic Worker movement, which she began with Peter Maurin, is a sufficient miracle. But hers was always a voice from the edge, calling her church back to the margins where the Gospel was to be found. It would be a pity to domesticate her.

This collection of her occasional pieces written for Commonweal presents the cadences of a lifetime. She prefers stories and descriptions of life lived concretely. Her earliest pieces, written when she was a convert, are surprising for their easy ownership of the contemporary Catholic culture. Throughout her life she retains the punctilious respect for the ministers and institutions of the Catholic church characteristic of the first half of last century.

She writes best when engaged with her critics. Her accounts of prison, and of interaction with those who criticised the pacifism of her movement, are both powerful and moving. About civil religion, she writes tersely and intransigently. Speaking of the Korean war, she says, 'We shall of course be called defeatists and appeasers. Nevertheless I would say that our way of life, as we are living it, is not worth saving. Let us lay down our way of life, our life itself, rather than go on with this senseless slaughter.'

Dorothy Day is too catholic a treasure to be enshrined as a merely Catholic saint.

—Andrew Hamilton SJ



Wings of the Kite-hawk: A journey into the heart of Australia, Nicolas Rothwell. Picador, 2003. ISBN 0 330 36402 2, RRP \$30

The first half of this book, in particular, reads like a slightly SNAG-y version of a 'boys' own adventure'. Journalist Nicolas Rothwell follows in the footsteps of Leichhardt, Sturt, Strehlow and Giles into the heart of the Outback, searching for an understanding of what drove them on their quests of discovery. As you might expect, he meets many characters (including an assortment of central Europeans who tell of their own journeys, and of how they found their place in unlikely surrounds), who ask some Big Questions: 'Isn't that what everyone who's drawn into the Outback wants? To lose themselves—to escape—into the arms of time?'

Rothwell writes fluently, and aspects of his quest are intriguing. But for the most part, the story meanders, like Bill Bryson without the edge. It is weighed down by symbolism, like the kite-hawks that follow Leichhardt on his failed adventure, and mark Rothwell's own moment of epiphany. Rothwell raises some interesting questions—such as whether there is a language other than conquest and discovery to describe white people's relationships to the Outback—but fails to provide answers. No doubt this is the point. But after a while, it all just gets a bit trying.

—Kristie Dunn



War has changed our life, not our spirit: experiences of forcibly displaced women, Danielle Vella [ed]. Jesuit Refugee Services, 2001. ISBN 88 88 126 01 5, international@jesref.org

On the scale of human loss and suffering, refugee women rate at the very top. Struggling to live amid ongoing insecurity and poverty, there are few, if any, opportunities to tell their stories.

This collection of stories by refugee women redresses the imbalance. It also gives some meaning to the overwhelming

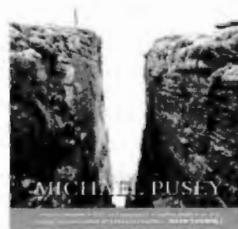
statistics of their displacement. Estimates suggest that women and children make up 80 per cent of the world's refugees. Women describe their experiences in countries such as Burundi, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Bosnia, Colombia and Burma. Drawn from the fieldwork of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), it challenges the distorted images that so often depict refugee women as passive and pitiful victims.

The stories are first-hand accounts of the evils of war: the deliberate targeting of women through rape and gender violence, the burning of villages and crops to destroy their livelihood, and the use of landmines. While each woman's experience is different, the destructive forces of greed, power and aggression appear again and again. The idea of security—so often confused with the protection of power, wealth and privilege in the West—is reduced to living today and finding food today. Often alone, women must assume new roles as provider and primary carer for what remains of their family.

The direct, matter-of-fact way the women recount their harrowing experiences—of rape, abduction, starvation and the deaths of husbands and children—speaks not only of their sorrow and grief but of their resilience in the face of such horror. As the title suggests, there is hope in their struggle to survive and rebuild their lives.

—Louise Crowe

The Experience of Middle Australia



The Experience of Middle Australia: The Dark Side of Economic Reform, Michael Pusey. Cambridge University Press, 2003. ISBN 0 521 65844 6, RRP \$36.95

I remember studying high-school economics when Keating was defeated and the Howard Coalition came to power. The buzz phrases of the course were 'supply-side' and 'structural reform'. In Canberra the economic policies of the Hawke/Keating era continued, with libertarian free market economics, privatisation, and labour market flexibility. It was assumed that a new prosperity awaited.

Michael Pusey has questioned all these assumptions, based on the Middle Australia Project, which sought to discover the attitudes of urban middle-class Australians to economic reform. A middle-of-the-road social democrat, Pusey's book on economic reform is not about economics, but about attitudes and emotions. The middle class is being hollowed out as inequality in society increases. Stress and time pressure erode family life and genuine leisure in a world of mobile phones, flexible working hours, job insecurity and resentment towards any groups getting special benefits.

The book divides the participants in the study into four groups: survivors, globalised North Shore people, battlers/hansonites and improvers. It looks at employment, community, economic perceptions and politics. The way these issues translate into votes is an intriguing part of the work.

Pusey generally agrees with George Soros that the deregulated market is a 'killer shark [devouring] values, morals, communities, families, family businesses, nation-states and the undeveloped world'. His book serves to express the emotions of a class of Australians who have been the real battlers in recent years. And it reminds students of economics that there are two sides to every coin.

—David Ferris



Growth Fetish,
Clive Hamilton.
Allen & Unwin,
2003. ISBN 1 74117
078 1, RRP \$24.95

Sometimes in life we overlook the simplest of truths, concealed in a fog of obviousness; the keys are on the table or the number is in the diary. In this instance, Clive Hamilton puts the question: if having more money does not generally make us any happier, then why are governments on both sides of politics bent on achieving sustained economic growth, even to the point where our environment and personal security are under threat?

Hamilton invites his reader to step outside the system, exposing its glaring inconsistencies and irrationalities. In one account that sickened me, Hamilton assesses what the economic costs would be for the United States to adopt the Kyoto Protocol. Three months' worth of growth over 15 years is the price of a world future that, because of its obsession with growth, the United States is unwilling to pay.

Hamilton writes with a clarity and pace that are not usually found in books dealing with economics. Perhaps his greatest asset is that he draws out the simple philosophical assumptions underlying what is a more complicated economic debate, allowing him to access a wide audience. *Growth Fetish* contains the seeds for a coherent response to rationalist economics.

—Godfrey Moase



Play, Slava and Leonard Grigoryan. ABC Classics, 2003. 472 824-2 RRP \$29.95

Guitarists are strange, obsessed creatures, serving the most versatile of all the instruments (saving only perhaps the human voice). In general it is better to be a natural, someone who has no choice but to pursue the temperamental mistress. Kazakhstan-born Slava Grigoryan has found fame in Australia, and here plays with his brother Leonard on an album that has many pleasant surprises once you pass through Astor Piazzolla's frigid po-mo academic tangos in the first 18 minutes. They negotiate these precisely and cleverly—indeed, as well as anyone could.

The lack of heart/loin throb is not the Grigoryans' problem: Piazzolla has turned the dance of passion into discourse, and it remains to be seen whether it can survive in other composers. But the other music is engaging—dreamy or hard by turns, scorching through Radames Gnattali's tributes and sweeping happily through their father Edouard's two pieces, which are at times folk-inspired (always a good move for guitar music) and at other times rather Debussy-inspired (also a good move for guitar music). There is a sweet little snippet from Andrew York, 'Daydreams'. No-one reinvents wheels here, but music is played, and played with, lovingly.

—Juliette Hughes



Aled, ABC Classics, 2003. 064 479-2 RRP \$29.95

Aled Jones came to the late Queen Mother's notice in the early '80s when he was a little Welsh choirboy. Under such patronage, he became known at times as the world's greatest soprano—a tough call for anyone. Now he is a man in his thirties, presenting religious music on British TV, and is the possessor of a very light baritone voice, so light that you can hear the timbre of the child still. It is an instrument of pearly sweetness, certainly not made for opera, and on the basis of the recording here, would be swamped by an oratorio ensemble of any size at all.

The amplification provides Jones with a forum for his gentler kind of voice—one that can soothe and bless and that you can certainly listen to with pleasure, once you decide you are not going to demand that he break windows. The songs range through the more accessible religious and classical repertoire: a soft Schubert's 'Ave Maria', a mellifluous 'Panis Angelicus', and some really lovely modern stuff: 'Vespera' by Robert Prizeman, and John Rutter's 'Pie Jesu'. The last track, Adam's 'O Holy Night', tracks his treble performance with his present self. The comparison is interesting, because you hear that Jones' voice was always going to be warm and gentle but never strident.

—Juliette Hughes



Up all night, The Waifs. Jarrah Records, MGM distributed, 2002. RRP \$29.95

The Waifs are the sort of group you imagine inhabiting the corner stage of your local on a Sunday afternoon, playing to enthusiastic but seated punters. They're on an independent label but are now popular enough that you won't actually hear them at your local unless that happens to be a pretty big venue.

Their latest offering and fourth full length album delivers the smoky, country, folksy indulgences that their fans expect. For aficionados of 'folk rock' (for want of a better term) The Waifs don't disappoint. Most songs are instantly accessible yet sophisticated enough to bear repeated CD rotations.

The Perth trio oscillate between muted country rock and quieter musings. The vocals, sometimes harmonised, are right in the front of the mix. I guess there is no other place for them. The occasional quiet blues harp solo and steel string guitar weave in and out of the tracks, adding a warm, laid-back depth to the songs. The drums are brushed, the bass and guitars strummed.

Listening to the lyrics will offer the greatest reward—it probably doesn't hurt to have the liner notes on hand. The Waifs' subjects include love, life on the road, small town gossip and inner city gardening. It all rhymes. This is not a CD to turn up too loud—save it for one of those introspective weekend afternoons when you can't be bothered going to the pub.

—Ben Wells



Playing with time

Russian Ark, dir. Aleksandr Sokurov. Russian director Aleksandr Sokurov's new film, *Russian Ark*, opens with its disembodied narrator's intimations of some unnamed disaster. He may be dead, but at the very least he has been blown out of time, and finds himself in an unfamiliar place and era, unseen by all but a fellow 'displaced person'—a French 19th-Century nobleman loosely based on the Marquis de Custine, who smells of formaldehyde and may also be dead himself. Unlike the narrator (who exists for us only through the presence of the camera, and is in fact Sokurov himself), the Marquis is present both on screen and, at least sometimes, to the people around him. As they wander, they gradually realise they are in the halls of the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg (the former Winter Palace of the Tsars). Although the location stays the same, the time changes constantly, from the reign of Peter the Great to the siege of Leningrad, to contemporary Russia, to a grand ball in 1913, and many times between.

For Sokurov, this simultaneity of different eras within the film is the very condition of the Russian people, in the sense that none of the historical phases of development that Europe has gone through have ever really been ended or completed in Russia, so that all of them coexist at the same time: '...despite the fact that we [Russians] live in the 21st century, we are also living in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.'

This temporal, historical, even cultural tension between Russia and Europe is one of the themes of the film. It is played out most obviously in the exchanges between the narrator and the Marquis—who asks the narrator, 'Why do you find it necessary to embrace European culture? For what reason? Why borrow also Europe's mistakes?' The Hermitage is filled with European art, real and copied, yet the Tsars who built the



collection were themselves Russophiles. The funding of the film was made possible by a coalition of Russian and European bodies. Its location also evokes the French revolution—the storming of the Winter Palace during the 1917 revolution is a bit like a Soviet version of the storming of the Bastille. Sokurov describes himself not as a European but as a Eurasian, in a sense both inside and outside of Europe.

Astonishingly, the film was shot in a single take of over 90 minutes. It was not edited, and was shot on high-definition digital video. Despite or because of this, the film succeeds as an attempt at a purely cinematic art. Art is explicitly what Sokurov sees himself as making. It doesn't hurt to know something of Russian history, but it's not essential. His intent and approach are serious, but Sokurov's film is surprisingly playful, even funny. Fluid, subtle and restrained, it pushes the viewer towards a perception of the cinema's only real topic—the pressure of time itself, the layering and co-presence of 'sheets' of time, peaks and troughs of past, present (and possibly future) in a single image, on screen before us.

—Allan James Thomas

Searching for clues

Spider, dir. David Cronenberg. At first glance it's hard to recognise *Spider* as a David Cronenberg film: no special effects, no mutant bugs, no blurring of the line

between man and machine. Instead, we're presented with a muted, stripped back aesthetic and a minimalist narrative. (Cronenberg has said that Beckett was one of his reference points.) The 'Spider' of the title is Ralph Fiennes (above), recently released from a psychiatric institution. He shambles, mumbles and writes obsessively in impenetrable hieroglyphics as he wanders the scenes of his childhood, like a detective searching for the clues that will account for the 'crime' of the film—that is to say, himself.

In fact, there is an absolute continuity between this film and Cronenberg's other work beneath *Spider*'s more conventionally realistic surface. As with his previous films, this is a study of psycho-sexual anxiety expressed in strictly visceral terms. A film like *Videodrome* presents this anxiety on and through the body itself—the man/VCR plays or is played by video tapes inserted into a gaping vaginal slot in his belly.

Spider, however, emphasises the visceral surfaces of the world itself, in the dingy and drab of '50s London. The dirt and damp and sweating walls that dominate the frame are like an ingrained filth on the surface of the film itself, whose flatness and muted brown tones make each image reminiscent of nothing so much as patterns on damp-stained mouldy wallpaper. This disembodiment of the bodily seems to be a reflection of *Spider*'s own psychic state, which is so desiccated and pared down that there

seems to be more of him in his notebooks than in his own body. For much of the film he is more a spectral presence than a body, a spectator to a film of his own life. This is another of Cronenberg's favourite themes: not the *confusion* of the real and the imaginary, but their *indiscernability* and the inevitable redirection of each by the other.

Unfortunately, in the case of *Spider* none of this adds up to much. The stripped back aesthetic, the drabness, the self-imposed limits and constraints of the film push nothing else to the forefront—they are all the film has to offer. The Freudian 'mystery' that Fiennes is driven to unravel is so hackneyed (and obvious) that I assumed right to the last minute that there must be something else about to happen—some redirection or transformation that would reveal the 'real' film. Unfortunately, there was nothing else, leaving me feeling that I'd just watched a 98 minute film that never quite got around to starting.

—Allan James Thomas

Thrilled

Night of the Hunter (1955, black and white), dir. Charles Laughton. When this restored print came to the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, it was given a week's season, and that was just enough time for a sizeable group of my friends and family to organise their lives sufficiently

to go together. On the face of it, a basic thriller: will the children keep ahead of the psychopath who stalks them for the money their father stole? Robert Mitchum is quite possibly the scariest villain you'll see in a long time: Hannibal Lecter is just an effete poseur next to the evil Preacher. Laughton's direction is brilliant: every frame of the film bristles with purpose and significance. And the scene on the river is, I think, the most beautiful piece of cinema I've ever seen. All this with a backdrop of the 1930s Depression and a subversive look at respectable America. If it comes to an arthouse near you, see it. Or at least get the DVD.

—Juliette Hughes

Deep diving

Whale Rider, dir. Niki Caro. New Zealand is becoming very cool, and I think it goes way back, long before *Heavenly Creatures* hit the latte circuit. *The Piano* grabbed the scorched almond accolade and *Lord of the Rings* caught the popcorn vote. For my money, ever since *Split Enz* and *Footrot Flats*, there's been definite Kiwi coolness. And now with *Whale Rider*, Caro has produced something quite lovely, and particularly New-Zealandish in flavour.

The film has gathered the audience prizes in numerous festivals overseas, and its solid acting and direction and gorgeous cinematography deserve them. Keisha

Castle-Hughes (below left) has become the latest sensation, her face plastered everywhere since *Whale Rider* came out, and it's not hard to see why—what with her lovely, strong-featured young face and a certain vibrance. She has that quality, the one that great stars have—think Monroe, Callas, Sinatra—of drawing your eyes to her. She plays the child Pai, who is a surviving twin: her brother was stillborn, and the firstborn male line of chiefs is broken. Her grandfather Koro, the patriarch, is played brilliantly by Rawiri Paratene.

The camera lingers on the sea, the whales, Paratene's face, Castle-Hughes' face. They're presented by Caro in a way that is never self-consciously arty nor National-Geographic-y. Pai must convince her grandfather that she is the chosen one, or things will go badly for everyone.

The story is one that schools will flock to: a real excursion special. Family values, Indigenous traditions, gender issues, all done with tenderness and strength. Yet it escapes the worthy boring trap as well as the Disney *Free Willy* one. The plot comes from the novel of the same name by Witi Ihimaera, and is concerned with the tension between Maori traditions and the impact of Western culture. It does this with skill, humour, and towards the end has a scene of transcendent beauty and power. One of the best films of the year, without any doubt.

—Juliette Hughes



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Out of the ordinary

J

UST BEFORE MIDNIGHT the dark figures arrived at the door. They did not bother to knock; they could enter at will, since their invitation, once extended, was perpetual until revoked. They knew what to expect, and went immediately to seat themselves in the dark reverential hush. There was some quiet, furious whispering as two contended for the same vantage point, but superior power was invoked sternly and they settled in with small snarls and vicious glances. The glow in the corner grew to a glare, the usual music began to play, and they were triggered into the familiar, addictive trance, feasting ravenously on the communal offering. But then the lights blazed on, and chaos began.

'Expletive! Turn off the expletiving lights, man.'

'Why'd you expletive do that, man?'

'My expletiving fag dropped in my expletiving shoe, mate.'

'OK, OK. Hey, settle, dudes, Willow and Kennedy are kissing!'

Instant silence. Darkness reigned again.

A normal Tuesday evening in many Australian lounge rooms. Young men gather to watch *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, now in its seventh and last season. And yes, they address each other in a mixture of American and Australian slang. Their fathers at 16 to 20 would have called each other 'mate', but today's lads have added 'guy' and 'dude' to their vernacular. (Expletives are eternal, however.) The scene is repeated the following night with *Angel*, the spinoff series. Often they are joined by fellow devotees, of greater age and opposite gender, who came to the series late, out of reckless curiosity, and stayed, pitiful addicts. Once bitten, the thirst for the Buffyverse does not slake easily. The addict can be spotted easily, pale and distract on Wednesday and Thursday mornings, because the temptation to run old *BtVS* and *Angel* videos after the new episode can be just too much.

The programs screen late (10.40 pm) and on Channel Seven, which is a pity, but there doesn't seem to be an easy solution. The themes in both can be very challenging, although it is never as louche as *The Secret Life of Us* or *Sex and the City* or as horrifying as *Foreign Correspondent* or *World News Tonight*.

The peak 9.30, normal-working-adult pre-bedtime viewing slot on Tuesday goes to *Rove* (Ten), *Stingers* (Nine), *Cold Feet* (Seven), *Foreign Correspondent* (ABC) and *World News Tonight* (SBS).

What does *BtVS* offer someone like me: over-educated, over-50, and over-indulgent? Like Tolkien's books, or Terry Pratchett's, the audience is ostensibly male and adolescent-to-twenties.

Yet the networks' and publishers' own research continually pulls up evidence that a taste for mystery and imagination is not confined to this group. We fiftyish women are an unpredictable lot. A spokesperson for Ten claimed in mid May that there is a large minority of that demographic who are glued to *Big Brother*. I see them as the lost ones, the pathetic sheep who went astray. The rest of us are interested in what makes the universe tick: *BB* has deflected the lost ones away with a mere flick of etymology, since it acts as an engorged tick, draining life and creativity away from millions.

WHAT IS SO GOOD, rare and strange, then, about *BtVS*? The credit has to go to the writer, Joss Whedon. He is that rare thing, a TV *auteur*. The series began as a spinoff from his 1992 film of the same name. It enjoyed only moderate success, but the idea was original and full of possibility: that a simple, normal young girl could be the deliverer of humankind from evil. Well, perhaps not entirely original ...

One of the best things about *BtVS* is its attachment to the normality of its characters, even when they are doing extraordinary things. Like *Fawlty Towers*, *BtVS* is quitting at the top of its game. Not for Whedon the shark-jump. (*To jump the shark*: a phrase in common parlance among TV commentators, referring to the point at which a series runs completely out of ideas. Derived from the deplorable moment in *Happy Days* when the Fonz jumped a shark with his motorbike.) From the credits to the final production logo, when a comic paper cartoon monster lurches across the screen, saying the immortal words 'Grr, Aargh', *BtVS* is a work of fantastic invention, intelligence, exploration and humour. It has spawned innumerable internet sites and earned itself an entire section on Massimo Introvigne's huge and weighty CESNUR website. There are numerous theses written, and countless fans, from the merely obsessed to the crazed. As the series comes to an end, there will be wakes, parties and, in America, conventions. There will be DVDs to buy, and I think they will be worth keeping, because they will be an important record of a particular time and mind-set, as well as terrific pieces of art. If you haven't started watching the series, get the videos out and give them a try, remembering that the whole underpinning of the series is that ordinariness can be the very thing that defeats pride and vaingloriousness.

And if you don't agree, well—bite me.

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.



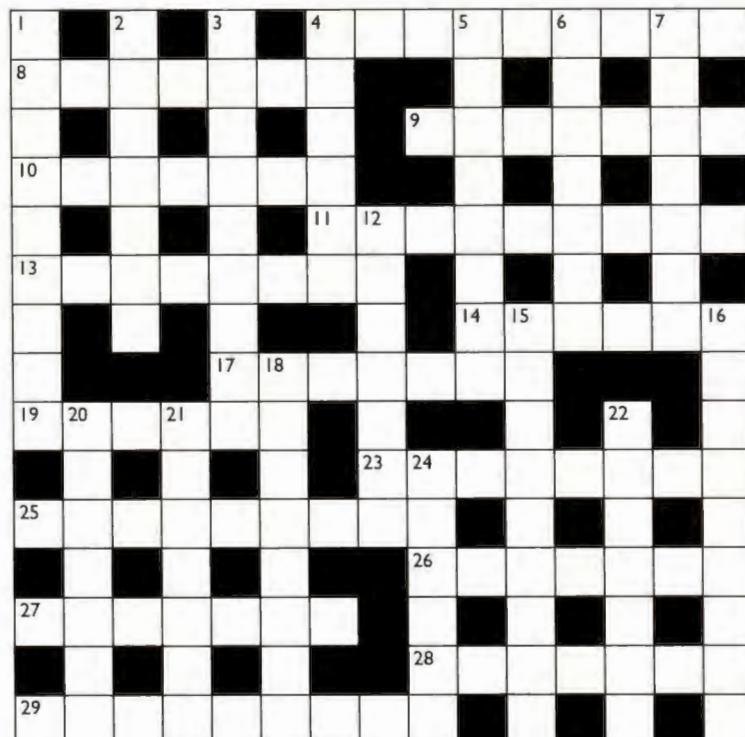
Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 114, June 2003

ACROSS

4. There may be copes in tent—to be used to celebrate the feast day. (9)
8. Football club at the beach, celebrating their patron saint? (2,5)
9. Copper creature or head in the museum? (7)
10. Intertwines fabric in three directions. (7)
11. Substitute—to put it inoffensively! (9)
13. Deeply affected by deception found in part of Seneca ... (8)
14. ... where he writes about one who keeps watch. (6)
17. Could be Sam with lute displaying his charms, perhaps. (7)
19. About as good as one could expect from this word. (6)
23. When pious bombast is used by one with ambition? (8)
25. Sit astern, perhaps, unyielding. (9)
26. Could be Ryan—one who is exasperating. (7)
27. Pull out of shape for a time. (7)
28. Returns for a first-class beer, wearing such finery. (7)
29. Seemingly without foundation or physically impossible? (9)

DOWN

1. Upward movement to enable the celebration of 4-across. (9)
2. Shelley's 'blithe Spirit' would never attempt to play jokes. (7)
3. Superior to the brown variety is this source of fuel. (5,4)
4. Not at her best when getting into parking spot. (6)
5. Exclamation of disgust in examination to find the most durable. (8)
6. The Mao clan probably included a miner. (7)
7. Godfather, possibly, as patron. (7)
12. Relation an example of a dirty word? (7)
15. Psychic ability, with a charge on seniority, produces undercover work. (9)
16. Positive response ready about beginning of time—before the present period. (9)
18. At the end of the day, it's calm, somehow—quite otherworldly! (8)
20. Choose artist to play the role of Greek heroine. (7)
21. Part of camera I'd erstwhile used to take photos of the attackers. (7)
22. Al on his cycle possibly looking for cup-like structure in the coral, for example. (7)
24. Gazes rudely, it's said, at flight—going up or down! (6)



Solution to Crossword no. 113, May 2003



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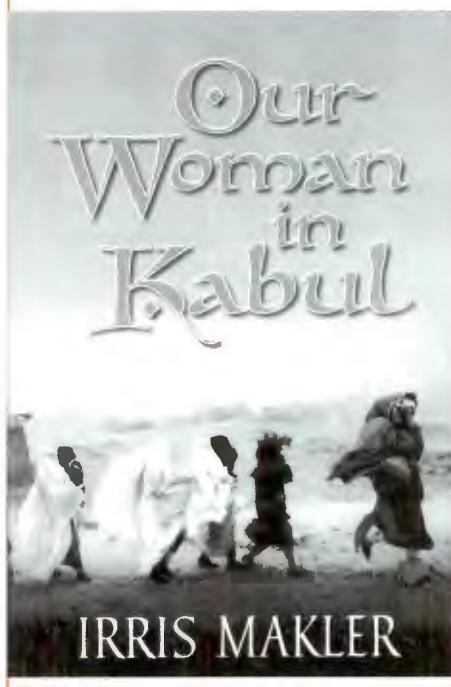
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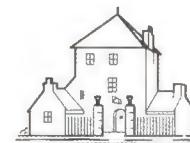
EUREKA STREET book offer



Our Woman in Kabul by Irris Makler

In 2001, our woman in Kabul was former ABC journalist Irris Makler, reporting on the war in Afghanistan and the subsequent transition from Taliban rule. Unlike her male colleagues, Makler was able to talk with Afghani women, who reveal something of their ongoing struggle. Her account of this culture in turmoil is told with dark humour and an eye for the absurd.

Thanks to Bantam, *Eureka Street* has ten copies of *Our Woman in Kabul* to give away. Just put your name and address on the back of an envelope and send to: Eureka Street June 2003 Book Offer, PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121. See page 29 for winners of the April Book Offer.



RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA

EUREKA STREET and Uniya, the Jesuit Social Justice Centre present

JESUIT SEMINAR SERIES 2003 MUSLIMS & CHRISTIANS...WHERE DO WE ALL STAND?

'There will be no peace between nations,' says theologian Hans Kung, 'unless there is peace between religions. And there will be no peace between religions without dialogue.'

The time for serious dialogue between Australian Muslims and Christians is now, and this year's Jesuit Seminar Series will offer an opportunity for such dialogue/conversation about the things that matter to us culturally, theologically and politically.

THE SPEAKERS

Abdullah Saeed, Associate Professor and Head of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Melbourne, who has recently published *Islam in Australia*.

Fr Dan Madigan SJ, Lecturer in Islamic Studies in the Department for the Study of Religions at the Gregorian University in Rome

Fr Frank Brennan SJ AO, Associate Director of Uniya, lawyer and prominent advocate for human rights –most recently for refugees in Australia and in East Timor.



LOCATIONS

BRISBANE Tuesday 15 July 7.30 pm City Hall King George Square, Adelaide St, City

SYDNEY Wednesday 16 July 6.30 pm* The Great Hall, St Aloysius College, Jeffrey St, Milsons Point

CANBERRA Thursday 17 July 7.30 pm The Chapel, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture 15 Blackall St, Barton (cnr Kings Ave)

MELBOURNE Monday 28 July 7.30 pm Xavier College, Barkers Rd, Kew

ADELAIDE Tuesday 29 July 7.30 pm St Ignatius' Church, 137 William St, Norwood

WESTERN SYDNEY Wednesday 30 July 7.30 pm Good Shepherd Parish Hall, 130 Hyatts Rd, Plumpton

PERTH Friday 1 August 7.30 pm Gibney Hall, Trinity College, Trinity Avenue, East Perth

All welcome. Enquiries Kirsty Grant (03) 9427 7311 or kirsty@jespub.jesuit.org.au

