

EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS,
THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY
Vol. 13 no. 6 July–August 2003 \$7.50 (inc. GST)



Medicare: more a tightrope than a safety net
Paul Hill: from Guildford to Bogotá
An ethical framework for governance?
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Meg Simons' Meeting of the Waters and Philip Ayres' Owen Dixon
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Patrons Eureka Street gratefully acknowledges the support of C. and A. Carter; the trustees of the estate of Miss M. Condon; W.P. & M.W. Gurry

Eureka Street magazine, ISSN 1036-1758, Australia Post Print Post approved pp349181/00314, is published ten times a year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd, 300 Victoria Street, Richmond VIC 3121 PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121 Tel: 03 9427 7311 Fax: 03 9428 4450 email: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au <http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/> Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by Andrew Hamilton sj, 300 Victoria Street, Richmond
Printed by Doran Printing
 46 Industrial Drive, Braeside VIC 3195.
 © Jesuit Publications 2003
 Unsolicited manuscripts will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Requests for permission to reprint material from the magazine should be addressed in writing to the editor.

This month
 Cover artwork Massacre at Mistake Creek by Charlene Carrington used with permission, and thanks to Alison Forbes and Maxine Taylor.
 Cover design by Ben Hider.
 Photographs p20 used with permission, pp22-23 Peter Davis, p25 used with permission, p50 John Sindy.
 Illustrations p 8, 12, 34-35, 38-39, 45-46 by David Ramm.

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United we stand

THE RECENT CONTROVERSY about the ABC has been studied as an exercise in politics, as a lesson in handling criticism and as an exercise in free speech. It may also be part of a larger cultural shift in the way governments see themselves in relation to the people they govern.

The shift is to a strong individualism. It sees people as individuals who create their identity by the choices they make. In this outlook, the exercise of will comes first and reasons follow afterwards. Individuals choose the moral philosophies and views of the world that suit them. There is no overarching moral universe within which people give shape to their lives.

Governments that accept this view focus on the economic choices that their citizens make. They see people as consumers, customers or clients, and see it as their own business to enlarge the individual's freedom of choice. For governments, too, the exercise of will is paramount. Good governments 'have ticker' and make the 'hard decisions'; they then choose reasons for their decisions. The subordinate role of argument and reason is being made increasingly clear in the current scrutiny of the decision to make war on Iraq.

Any political philosophy that focuses on individuals needs to take account of social institutions and community groups. Governments see voluntary groups, such as unions, humanitarian organisations and churches, as formed to represent the interests of their individual members. By their nature such groups operate competitively, endeavouring to expand their members' interests at the expense of others. Any claim they may make to speak of the common good or in the name of a shared humanity is therefore pretentious and suspect.

For this reason, too, no group can properly claim to stand *between* the government and individuals. Corporate bodies can either be arms of government executing its will, or they can be associations representing the interests of their individual members. So governments resent publicly-funded institutions that claim a higher authority—for example, courts that resist the executive will, or a governor-general who represents the claims of a humanity which judges both governments and individuals. The government also resents the appeal made by community groups to a higher moral order—it will remind church leaders who criticise government policy that they do not represent the views of those in the pews.

This is the significance of the controversy about the ABC. The ABC is funded by the government and so, in the government's view, should ultimately commend the decisions of government. Instead, it claims the privileges of a free association of individuals, and promotes their interests at government expense. And it masks those interests by appealing to principles of free enquiry, the need for an informed citizenry, and the national interest. Such principles assume a moral order that would constrain the exercise of the government's will.

At stake here is neither simply the attitude of particular government ministers to the ABC, nor even the future of the organisation, but a view of government and ultimately a view of humanity. If the concepts of the common good, of a common humanity, of the collective conscience, of a community and moral universe within which choice is properly exercised, are vacuous, then the independence of institutions like courts and the ABC is tenuous under governments of any colour. But if these notions are to be defended, we may need to reflect critically on the unqualified authority given in our culture to individual choice.

—Andrew Hamilton sj

THE HOWARD government wants a different Medicare: one where people who can, pay more to visit a doctor. The government is grappling with a complex economic issue, but should not dismiss the social benefits that Medicare delivers to the very sick and less well off. The degree to which the lower paid and the disadvantaged are protected will determine the success of the government's plans.

In a bold step to restore bulk billing for pensioners and concession card holders, the government has shifted the escalating cost of general practitioner services from the public purse to private households. With seemingly little regard for public opinion, this embrace of a user-pays system heralds a major change in the culture of health services.

To encourage GPs to bulk-bill pensioners and concession card holders in more remote locations, the government will pay a maximum \$6 per patient incentive to GPs. No incentive is paid to GPs who bulk bill patients without concession cards. This crude means test furthers the notion that only some people deserve the full value of Medicare cover. Moreover, charging all non-concession patients full fees will then become accepted practice. Bulk billing will largely disappear and become a slim prospect for a few.

In effect this new form of Medicare accepts that bulk-billing rates will fall from the present 70 per cent level to around 50 per cent of all GP consultations. It presumes that those entitled to the full benefit of Medicare are only the most needy.

Holding a concession card is no proof of impoverishment. Self-funded retirees can earn up to \$80,000 a year and hold a health care card. Yet 'working poor' families on only \$34,000 annually receive no benefits and will likely pay more to see the doctor. As research consistently indicates, the lower paid are also the most dependent on health services. This demonstrates the necessity of maintaining broad access to health care. Determining eligibility for full health cover based on income or working status is too simplistic given the diverse factors that give rise to bad health and chronic disability.

Of course the government is the last to admit that its 'Fairer Medicare' proposals will open the door to increased medical fees. But the major assumption underpinning the proposals is that bulk billing for concession

Cut price care

card holders, at least, must be preserved. What happens for the rest of the community has been less clearly identified.

By releasing its Medicare changes before the Budget, the government tested public reaction to the prospect of higher GP fees. There was widespread community concern and in many instances confusion. How could the proposals be called fair when 'working poor' families were left uncompensated to cope with extra medical costs? If the government were instigating a system of user-pays for lower income people, where would these people find the extra money to meet the bills?

Hence the tax cuts on budget night. Most observers have questioned the meagre size of the cuts and their capacity to offset the increased costs of GP consultations. However, the tax cuts demonstrate the government's preference for giving taxpayers choice over how they spend their income, rather than having the government spend on their behalf.

This may be reasonable in other public domains, but health care is far more complex. Keeping essential health services accessible and affordable is crucial. The more the health care system moves towards a user-pays basis, the more likely those less well off become marginalised through either the centralisation of services or the capacity to pay.

A RECENT STUDY of the impact of increased charges for pharmaceuticals on lower-paid people is revealing. 'Working poor' families, who comprise 25 per cent of those not holding concession cards, already pay up to seven per cent of their after-tax income on medicines and other pharmaceuticals. This figure is expected to rise to nine per cent by 2005. Since the remainder of the population pays four per cent or less of its after-tax income on pharmaceuticals, the inequity is stark. A further study found that up to 20 per cent of people delayed purchasing medicines because of the cost. Access to health care is increasingly determined by affordability rather than necessity.

It is widely recognised that a properly functioning public insurance scheme like Medicare helps constrain health costs and in turn keeps doctors' fees affordable. When commercial incentives are introduced that favour differential charging practices, the potential for escalation in health costs is greater. All the downsides of access and affordability follow shortly thereafter.

Some economic forecasters have welcomed what they see as the long-term vision of the government's proposals. They criticise current Medicare arrangements

as being 'middle-class welfare' and too expensive to maintain. Yet respected research demonstrates that Medicare in its present structure favours the poor. Lower-paid people receive by far the greater proportion of benefits from the system. Those less well off are not only protected, they are advantaged, because those who can afford to do so are compelled to contribute.

Once Medicare becomes only a safety net for some, the middle classes will lose interest and political support will shift. Without widespread support, public safety nets become fragile and those who rely on them are at risk of further marginalisation.

This was not the purpose of Medicare. Medicare was intended to address need, not means. Medicare requires that individuals meet their obligations to the system and, in turn, to the community. It recognises that health care is integral to human dignity and must be safeguarded. Only a robust, universal public health insurance scheme can guarantee these lofty goals.

Ensuring that the Medicare patient rebate keeps pace with the real costs of care will mean long-term stability for a universal public system. Medicare can be far more than a subsidy for medical bills. It acknowledges that paying for health care is a major challenge for household budgets. This is particularly important given that two thirds of Australians bring home less than the \$43,000 understood as average yearly earnings. Medicare is a crucial component of the social wage.

Rather than instituting meagre tax cuts, making a tax investment would enable lower-paid people to remain covered for medical expenses. An increase in the Medicare levy of only one per cent would raise in excess of \$2 billion annually. Since it requires less than \$1 billion a year for doctors to bulk-bill almost all patients, the social benefits are well worth the money.

Surveys have consistently revealed that Australians will pay more tax if it is directed towards essentials like health care. Published reports demonstrate that voter intentions are swinging back towards spending on social services in lieu of tax cuts. It seems, however, that politicians are too timid to make the shift.

Medicare is too important to become a safety net for only a few. The lower paid are too vulnerable to have their interests traded off in a dubious compensation package of token tax cuts. Only a well-targeted strategy of tax investment will properly protect the poor and marginalised. ■

Francis Sullivan is the Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Health Australia.



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Rebuilding Iraq I

The day-to-day operation of any state, including the newly liberated Iraq, depends on public servants, not politicians. After an entire generation of despotic dictatorship, Iraq must lack both an independent bureaucracy and the potential to establish such a bureaucracy in the short-to-medium term.

The separation of powers is a cornerstone of functional democracy, while political manipulation of the public sector is a cornerstone of repression. Saddam has had 25 years in which to stack all tiers of the Iraqi public service with cronies sympathetic to his philosophy and style of government. A hallmark of this era will be blatant nepotism in the public sector.

Many influential positions in the police force and Justice Department will have been occupied by Saddam's sympathisers

for decades. How will representative government survive in an environment where police officers and the judiciary know nothing of independence from the administration? Education, health, transport and communication will have been overseen by a cadre of Saddam's 'good-old-boys' who have been rewarded for years of faithful service to the regime. Prime local government positions will have been reserved for the chosen few. These bureaucrats are the only alternative to interim supervision by qualified coalition administrators.

Had the dictatorship of Iraq been relatively short, a body of professional, experienced public servants may have survived to resume administration of the country and help establish a stable democracy. However, after almost 30 years of totalitarian rule, there will be no such foundation of appropriately qualified people on which to build a free nation.

The rapid departure of coalition forces and administrators may salve injured Iraqi pride, but an Iraq administered by the old, pro-Saddam bureaucracy will be an Iraq ready and waiting for the next dictator.

I sympathise with those who desire the immediate restoration of Iraqi sovereignty; however I believe that some who demand the immediate removal of the interim coalition administration simply wish to reintroduce an old order in a new guise before Iraq has a chance to build a functional, independent public service which will be able to serve a democratically elected government.

Greg Hawthorne
Stanthorpe, QLD

Rebuilding Iraq II

After illegal invasion, now comes imperialist-like occupation of Iraq with US bases. We still do not know the number of Iraqi casualties in the latest conflict. One wonders if the war was about one tyrant fighting another for his possessions.

There is nothing to admire in the imperialist behaviour of the US under George W. Bush. It would have been better to spend war budget increases on addressing problems of homelessness and poverty and improving public health services in the US. Unfortunately, conservative politics regards such government expenditure on the needy and essential services as a hindrance to 'growth' (for those who already have too much).

Nor has the US got to the heart of the Middle East problem, which is the cause of so much hatred towards the US. The US still refuses to adopt an even-handed approach in seeking a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Meanwhile, Australia's little prime minister, so good at playing race and nationalism cards in ensuring his political survival, rides high on the electoral gains of licking Bush's boots and sending young Australians to war without so much as a debate in parliament. Like Bush and Blair, John Howard is another politician who kept clear of gunpowder while taking action to cause the deaths of others. As for the US, it needs an FDR.

John Dobinson
North Balwyn, VIC



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New tricks

LABOR'S LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS have been a dream for the Liberal Party, not least by obscuring the fact that the real victor in leadership games over recent months has been the prime minister, John Howard. He had bought himself several years of peace from leadership speculation by ruminating about making a decision to retire when he was 64; then, at a time of his own choosing and before that birthday, he announced that after deep reflection, he had decided to hang on indefinitely. Not for his own sake, of course, but for the country and the party. Peter Costello may be generally agreed to be the heir apparent, but Howard, who owes him no favours and is well aware that Costello is itching to dismantle many of his monuments, can wait.

So nicely has Howard played it that the general reaction within the Liberal Party was one of relief. Howard has pretty much cemented an image of substance, solidity and experience and, even if he is far from the visionary, the idealist or the man who can appeal to the emotions, he is part of the furniture. He has had more than his share of luck, but good politicians make their luck. He's taken some big gambles, and they appear to have succeeded. The way Labor is going at the moment, a Coalition victory might seem certain at the next election, but John Howard and the Liberals never take anything for granted. Howard, on the evidence, is a more certain winner than Costello, particularly as far as the focus groups and the opinion polls are concerned: the electorate has never quite warmed to the Treasurer.

This Cincinnatus has no farm—not in fact, nor in his heart. John Howard has very few personal friends, and almost no interests outside politics. He reads a little more, and a little more widely, than most politicians, but gets little satisfaction or intellectual pleasure from it—his skills and his instincts are visceral, not drawn from books. He could play some international diplomatic role, but is so used to playing the leader that he would find it difficult to take a brief. He is probably too old and too proud to prostitute himself, as Hawke has, to commerce. In politics, he and his ideas will be dead the moment he leaves the stage, and there will be no queue of people calling to have him ruminate at gatherings. He is doomed to spend his retirement isolated and frustrated or, like Malcolm Fraser, as a Banquo. Small wonder he wants to stay on.

But the end of the Howard era could well be the end of the Coalition era as well. The government has had its time; indeed, it had pretty well run out of ideas and time before the last election, when a combination of events (September 11), opportunism (*Tampa*) and extraordinary indolence and moral cowardice by Labor gave it another go. While international

events have continued to favour Howard, the government slips whenever it comes to domestic policy and it may well be beyond Howard's power to engineer circumstances to his election timetable. Labor, however incompetently led, could win the next election; it would have to be extraordinarily badly led, or unlucky, to lose the one after.

A new leader could change all that for the Liberals. Costello had already been rehearsing a number of changes, symbolic as well as real, to show that there was now a completely new mind-set in charge. He had wanted to reposition the party on immigration, refugee policy and Aboriginal affairs—the source of much of the moral contempt in which the party is currently held by the elites. That now has to wait—and Costello fears that the wait may either be so long that he cannot get up a head of steam, or will last until Howard loses an election, dooming the Coalition to three or more terms in opposition.

WHAT DOES THIS mean for Labor? An unspoken part of many of the early machinations against Simon Crean was the assumption that, at the next election, the Labor leader would be facing Costello, not Howard. Beazley's anxiety to move was partly predicated on the assumption that Howard would go. Yet the idea that Beazley had a better chance against Costello than Crean, based on the notion that he is more popular among electors, was always fanciful. Beazley is a yesterday's man, not the wave of the future. Affable perhaps, but no longer, after *Tampa*, with a shred of moral authority or idealism to inspire a new generation of Laborites. A man who caused more than half the paid-up membership of the party to desert Labor for the Greens at the last election. A man who, in six years of opposition, could never articulate just what Labor stood for, and whose idea of policy was a collection of slogans confected in a focus group. A man, moreover, that Costello had played off a break for years.

Even a party desperate for a lift, a break, or a leader who commanded attention would be mad to go backwards to Beazley. If Crean is not good enough—and Beazley's brigade makes a fairly convincing case that he is not—the party would be better seeking a younger man or woman able to inspire some passion among the followers. Or at least someone who is (as Crean is, to be fair) stolidly doing the homework, devising policies and running a race that the Coalition—and John Howard in particular—would ultimately be forced to enter. ■

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



Coffee and coincidence

Restaurant strips are shrines to the Goddess of Coincidence. A Jesuit was recently part of a group choosing arbitrarily among the hundreds of nearby cafés for their cup of coffee. The waitress, who turned out to be from Indonesia, asked him if he knew John Dijkstra. To which he could only reply, 'I did not know him, but when I was visiting Indonesia recently, I attended his funeral.' It was a significant funeral. John Dijkstra was a Dutch Jesuit who spent his working life in Indonesia. He had a gift for encouragement, and through his friendships he influenced Catholic work for social justice throughout south-east Asia, helping to broaden its focus beyond its earlier narrowly anti-communist preoccupation. This expanded vision could be dangerous in Suharto's Indonesia, where opposition to communism allowed corruption and structural injustice to be concealed. The waitress had met Dijkstra through her work with street kids, through a group that Dijkstra had begun and animated.



Encore

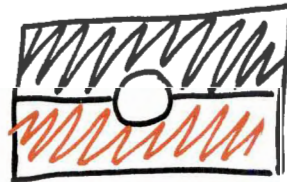
How much applause should we give the Immigration Minister's decision to give residence to almost all the East Timorese who have so far applied to him? For the East Timorese nothing less than a standing ovation will do. For the government, only polite clapping.

The process discourages an enthusiastic response. A vulnerable group has suffered great and needless anxiety—forced to apply for refugee status, inevitably refused first by immigration officers and then by the Refugee Review Tribunal, then having to appeal to the minister's discretion.

The process has also been financially and spiritually costly for Australians.

A better way was always available. Groups with unique needs and claims can be given a visa available only to them. When the East Timorese arrived in Australia they were refugees beyond any doubt; they failed to be accepted as refugees only because of Australian fears of the Indonesian government reaction. Furthermore, they were traumatised by their experiences in East Timor, have since developed close links with Australia, and it is clear that the new East Timorese nation can only with difficulty afford to settle them if they are repatriated. To make them apply for refugee status on the grounds that they would fear persecution on returning to East Timor now is a cruel charade.

So the audience will applaud the denouement but not the plot. But the play continues, and the audience must demand an encore. The risk with relying on unreviewable ministerial discretion is that hidden quotas which have nothing to do with individual cases can be imposed. In the case of the East Timorese this would be unjust.



For the people?

As the ALP tears itself apart, the Coalition is busy taking the axe to ATSIC. On 1 July, ATSIC will be split in two. ATSIC will retain its representative and policy-making functions, but its assets and the majority of its 1200 staff will be transferred to the new body, ATSI, which will be responsible for determining individual funding applications.

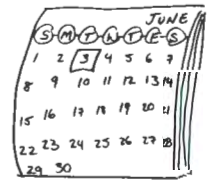
The decision follows a period of intense scrutiny and criticism by the Coalition of ATSIC's elected board, particularly of its Chair, Geoff Clark, and his deputy, Sugar Ray Robinson. According to Minister Ruddock, the split is an interim measure designed to promote good governance and accountability by removing the potential for conflicts of interest. But many commentators argue that ATSIC is already overburdened by accountability mechanisms, and question the timing of the deci-

sion, which was taken one month before the report of a comprehensive review of ATSIC was due.

Concerns have also been expressed about the process and politics of a Minister for Indigenous Affairs unilaterally stripping ATSIC, an elected body, of its functions. As the Chair of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Professor Mick Dodson, pointed out recently:

Regardless of how you feel about the performance of the board, we went through a democratic process of selection. Our people were asked to make choices, and we made our choices. Whether they be right or wrong, we made them. And what have we got? A highly undemocratic, unilateral, outrageous decision [by the minister] about our future that deeply affects us, and that we've had absolutely no say in. Nobody in a democratic country ought to be treated like this.

A decision that seems unlikely to repair relations between Indigenous leaders and the federal government ...



Mabo day

Something that might, though, is a new national holiday. Marking the eleventh anniversary of the High Court's decision in the Mabo case, the family of the late Edward 'Koiki' Mabo launched a petition (available at www.atsic.gov.au) calling on the Senate to declare 3 June a national holiday in recognition of the decision.

As Eddie Mabo Junior pointed out, there is currently no national holiday that acknowledges Indigenous people and recognises their contribution, achievements and survival in Australia. A public holiday to commemorate the Mabo decision, he said, 'would be a celebration all Australians can share in with pride—a celebration of truth that unites Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and a celebration of justice that overturned the legal myth of terra nullius.' Bonita Mabo, Koiki's widow, has suggested that the holiday replace the Queen's birthday holiday in June.



Dr Seuss' books

CALIFORNIA DREAMING

SAN DIEGO is distilled California—palm trees and storeyed Spanish mission architecture. It's so leisured it doesn't even feel the need to compete. To get home each night we drive slowly along the sunset length of Del Mar beach where even in the spring chill there are always a few surfers riding the Pacific roll.

San Diego is also a military depot. As you make the first right turn out of the American Eagle plane, a sign tells it straight: 'The Free, The Proud, THE MARINES.' This is the town from which President George W. Bush launched his triumphant trip from shore to deck of the troop-laden aircraft carrier moored in San Diego Bay. 'Boy, did that cost some,' say our bemused American hosts. Many of the yachts in San Diego Bay fly a yellow ribbon from their masts. In a good wind they flutter like acid sunbeams.

On the campus of the University of California at San Diego (UCSD), one of the long chain of state-funded and, to Australian eyes, wealthy West Coast universities, the handbill signs are what you might expect. 'Civil Rights in America: USA PATRIOT ACT. Guest speaker: Salam al-Marayati, Muslim Public Affairs Council.' 'ONE WORLD ONE FUTURE WITHOUT WAR. Keynote speaker, Chalmers Johnson, on US Foreign Policy.' But another tattered yellow handbill asks, rather desperately, 'Can you afford an attorney?' And in the eucalyptus grove (there are gums everywhere—very disorienting for an Australian) between the student centre and the faculty buildings, there are two miniature American flags tied on to a gum sapling above a sign, 'Fallen American Heroes', with a forlorn typed list of names like tear-off labels.

San Diego has one of the world's most famous zoos—every creature imaginable and a few you hadn't thought of. When UCSD went looking for a mascot some decades back they almost settled on the koala. California is bear country but the

The god of plenty

THE PRINCIPLE OF SCARCITY—the fear that there is not enough to go round (enough love, enough food, enough land, enough of God, enough 'salvation') is a strong motivator for possessiveness and for jealousy.

Piscine Patel (Pi), the character in Yann Martel's novel, *Life of Pi*, tells the story of Lord Krishna when he was a cowherd:

Every night he invites the milkmaids to dance with him in the forest ... The night is dark, the fire in their midst roars and crackles, the beat of the music gets ever faster—the girls dance and dance with their sweet lord, who has made himself so abundant as to be in the arms of each and every girl. But the moment the girls become possessive, the moment each one imagines that Krishna is her partner alone, he vanishes. So it is that we should not be jealous with God.

Being jealous with God is not just a tendency that manifests in or between religions. In her recent work on Christian spirituality in times of terror, *God in the Balance*, Carter Heyward describes humanity's hoarding of the capacity for relationship with the divine, our keeping it from the rest of the created order. She sees it as a widespread form of terrorism against the environment: 'We deplete the earth's soil. We desecrate the earth's land. We rip down the earth's trees, strip her mountains, pollute her waters, foul her air, torture her body—and we dare to call other people "terrorists".'

Pi is the son of an Indian zookeeper, Hindu by birth but simultaneously (and unacceptably) Muslim and Christian by pilgrimage. He finds himself stranded in a lifeboat in the Pacific Ocean with a Bengal tiger, a wounded zebra, an orangutan and a hyena. Over the months they spend adrift, he and the tiger—the only survivors—establish an unlikely camaraderie. Early on in the series of 'life and death' decisions he faces, Pi snares an ill-fated flying fish. After agonising over the idea, and then the act, of killing the fish for bait, he reflects:

I wept heartily over this poor little deceased soul. It was the first sentient being I had ever killed ... I was sixteen years old, a harmless boy, bookish and religious, and now I had blood on my hands ... I never forget to include this fish in my prayers.

Although Pi would kill again, he never assumed that this fish, or the tiger, or any other animal—whether in his father's enclosures or his watery horizons—had less right to live, less entitlement to be itself under God, than he. Pi never dressed up his 'me or you' choices in theological garb, nor reduced their moral perplexity. Yann Martel imagines for us a world in which boy and Bengal tiger can—if not quite feed together as Isaiah's wolf and lamb—at least share a precious lifeboat on a sea of uncertainty. But only by not clinging too tightly.

Whenever we use our doctrines, our scriptures, our resources, our power or our privilege to insist that God's embrace is for us alone, we heighten anxiety that there is not enough of God to go round. We stir up fear in others, and the abundance of God vanishes. ■

Richard Treloar is Chaplain of Trinity College at the University of Melbourne, and teaches at the United Faculty of Theology.

koala is still seriously weird here. It's so small. It's so cute. It doesn't eat people. In the zoo it just sits on a low branch right opposite the entrance turnstiles and munches—leaves. Can't you see it denatured into duffle bags, furry slippers and bear mouse pads? Fortunately, the campus had a sun god festival one year—Mexico is just a trolley ride from downtown San Diego—and the fiery Aztec deity caught on instead of our modest marsupial. So now there is a 14-foot fibreglass bird-god, with gold leaf crest and white wings, installed on top of a 15-foot vine-covered arch on a manicured lawn plumb in the centre of the university. The sculpture, by Niki de Saint Phalle, is part of UCSD's serious art collection, but there is more than a touch of Disney in Sunbird's half-toucan, half-roadrunner visage. The students dress him to fit the prevailing mood. He's been Sony Walkbird (complete with earplugs) and Rambird. In the climate of the moment, the huge AK47 hanging from his white wings looks more prescient than satirical.

The library at UCSD is a huge concrete diamond on stilts. 'We get to hire it out to movie companies as the mother ship', our companion informs us. He's from New York, and rather wry about California. We have to find out for ourselves that the library was funded in part by the proceeds of Dr Scuss books. America is full of ironies. This is a state-funded university, resourced beyond the dreams of any Australian institution, and here too the private funds flow. Money begets money.

Our New York friend doesn't read the West Coast papers, he tells us. What need? You can get the national edition of *The New York Times* every day. We read everything—when in San Diego, etc.—including *USA Today*, and the copy of the *Alamo Christian Ministries World Newsletter* that is tucked under our windscreen. Pastor Tony Alamo expends even more words on his revelations of the universal Roman conspiracy than *The New York Times* does on its four-broadsheet-page confession of the sins of Jayson Blair, the young African-American journalist who let down journalism's and the *Times'* side by faking copy.

Pastor Tony labours his point a little:

Every leader of every country in the world is under Rome's control. This includes the President of the United States of America. This has been the case for centuries ... All

major evangelical TV networks are Catholic Jesuit priests under the guise of Christianity, wolves in sheep's clothing.

(This claim is footnoted.) Every car on campus gets a copy.

The New York Times doesn't have to resort to free distribution. And if it labours its point about Jayson Blair, I'm not about to mind. Journalism's integrity in a time of rant and misinformation seems worth defending. It takes two and a half hours to read through all the weekend papers and every second of it is fascinating. And it's not just the Jayson Blair story, or *The New York Times*. The *Los Angeles Times* writes the most incisive, critical commentary I've read on Afghanistan and its implications for US policy in Iraq.

America: it's an extraordinary place. Its own worst enemy and its own best friend.

—Morag Fraser

Peace under fire

IT WAS NOT THE MOST auspicious start to a peace conference. As more than 100 delegates from 25 countries arrived in central Jakarta, they were greeted with the news that the Indonesian military had declared open season in the province of Aceh on separatists and their supporters—some two million people, if attendance at a rally in the regional capital a few years ago was any guide.

Yet the events unfolding as the conference took place—287 schools torched by mystery arsonists as troops stood by; a 12-year-old boy shot dead as Indonesian soldiers fired on 'terrorists' among the civilians—confirmed for the activists the importance of their mission.

As the conference's final statement, the Jakarta Consensus, read:

We oppose war in all forms whether open, declared, interstate war, war against social movements, economic war against the poor peoples of the world or war against political activists and opponents of the dominant order.

Thrown together in a matter of weeks, bringing activists from every continent, the conference was perhaps the first international opportunity to take stock of the

war in Iraq and of the peace movement's attempts to prevent it.

It was agreed that the movement had made huge gains, bringing millions on to the streets in co-ordinated protests all over the world. Helen Salmon, from the Stop the War Coalition in Britain, told delegates that Prime Minister Tony Blair had asked public servants to prepare for the possibility of his government falling.

But the delegates also acknowledged the danger of further US-led wars. 'We're back in a period of inter-imperialist rivalry,' said Filipino academic Walden Bello from the Bangkok-based institute, Focus on the Global South. 'We should respect US power but not overestimate it.'

The impact of what is variously known as anti-capitalism or anti-globalisation on anti-war activists is clear. As Rafaella Bollini, of the Italian Movements of the European Social Forum, put it, 'I feel for the first time part of the global movement. A global plan of domination found global resistance. A global civil society has been born. Our main task is not to lose those newcomers to the movement.'

Salim Vally, of the Anti-War Coalition in South Africa, emphasised the way global capital was fighting war on two fronts—one military, the other that of economic policies. 'We need to link the fight against war with the daily struggle against neo-liberalism and privatisation,' he said. Indonesian union leader Dita Sari took up a similar theme, arguing that the movement had to be taken into national politics. 'Another world needs to be made to exist for the poor in activists' own countries,' she said.

This was indeed a microcosm of a global movement with a global mind-set. The building blocks that made up the Jakarta Consensus were easily assembled without controversy, even though most delegates had never met before.

But there were also ideological fault lines, acknowledged and explored with civility and in a spirit of diversity, but there all the same. It was one thing to agree that the occupation of Iraq by the US and its war allies, including Australia, should end and that the Iraqis should be free to construct their own democratic society. It was another to decide whether the United Nations could be part of the problem or the solution in this process.

Etta Rosales, a progressive MP from the Philippines, said, 'The future of the UN is

at stake. It should not be an organisation where decisions are taken for 189 countries by five or one.' Medea Benjamin, from the anti-corporate Global Exchange in the US, argued that the UN was more open to pressure than the US. If it took control of Iraq, that would be a defeat for the US agenda.

But other delegates argued that the UN was made up of states with their own agendas and by necessity was dominated by the imperialist powers. Any global alternative to the US had to come from below—like the anti-war movement itself and the World Social Forum.

Mericio Juvinal Dos Reis, from the East Timor Institute for Reconstruction Monitoring and Analysis, gave delegates an insight into how the UN operated on the ground.

'The UN opened the road for overseas financial institutions. The IMF and the World Bank came to East Timor thanks to the UN. There has been no consultation with the East Timorese. Sometimes the UN sees the East Timorese as a stupid people who they have to educate. That makes the East Timorese an object of the reconstruction—not an actor.'

In the spirit of consensus, such objections were noted. Delegates committed, however, to rally around common causes: a global day of action against war and globalisation as the World Trade Organization meets in Cancun, Mexico, in September; opposition to the spread of US military bases; a global 'referendum' in 2004 on the legitimacy of President Bush.

And as the decisions were duly noted, the war in Aceh grew bloodier. —David Glanz

The good life

BY AMBERLEY BIRD

ON THE FIRST SATURDAY of August last year, I awoke in my Madrid apartment, convinced that something was wrong. I could hear the birds. I had become accustomed to waking to the sound of traffic: of Madrileños discussing loudly whether to go home or instead to look for the next bar. Living in Europe's most vibrant city does have its downside—it can be difficult to sleep. Just down the road, a billboard advertised apartments for sale, not with an announcement of the number of bedrooms or the views but with the



Mind and matter

CHEMICALS CAN HAVE a direct impact on health and behaviour. Alcohol, nicotine and other recreational drugs affect people physically. And the power of chemistry to change behaviour and personality is apparent to anyone who has contact with the modern treatment of many mental health conditions.

The reverse—that behavioural changes can alter body chemistry—has never been as clear. Archimedes' interest was sparked by recent studies linking behaviour with physical changes in the human body. For example, smokers deprived of their cigarettes were tested on their perception of time. After only 24 hours without nicotine, time passed more slowly for them. The researchers attributed this to hormonal changes.

Likewise, a large study in Norway has provided concrete evidence that anxiety makes people more susceptible to cancer. The link may be changes in the immune system. Earlier research has shown that depression can have a massive impact on the immune system, and *New Scientist* recently reported that the bliss radiated by experienced Buddhist monks was reflected in the physical activity of the left prefrontal lobes of the brain—the seat of positive emotions.

The connection between psychological and physical well-being has long been a part of many holistic Asian health systems—in India, China, Korea and Japan, for example. The attitude of Western doctors is typically that of a biological mechanic—fix the physical and the psychological will take care of itself. In fact, the Western medical establishment has historically regarded traditional Asian medicine with healthy scepticism and some outright hostility, though these attitudes are changing. The general public has been less reticent—as the recent recall of products manufactured by Pan Pharmaceuticals Ltd shows, complementary medicines account for a substantial proportion of discretionary health spending.

In Australia, the link between mental and physical health is acknowledged in specialist fields like psychological medicine. But that awareness does not always translate into the daily routine of teaching hospitals. Archimedes became aware of this recently when an elderly relative was recovering in hospital after a fall. Physically, she mended well—but an important part of her therapy was getting her to move and do things for herself. That involved talking to her, stimulating her and encouraging her on a long-term basis.

Not only was there no time for the overworked nursing staff to do this, but many of them were unequipped and unprepared to undertake such work. It was only taken care of when she was moved to a specialist rehabilitation hospital. This could have been serious. Any elderly patient unwilling or unable to move in a large metropolitan teaching hospital naturally increases his or her risk of infections and diseases that could be life-threatening.

This is still a controversial area. Further work is important—a firm statistical link has not yet been demonstrated between a 'will to live' and increased chances of survival. But perhaps even more important is to take the findings of psychological medicine a little more seriously, and factor them into the day-to-day operation of our hospitals. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

words, 'There are 83 bars within walking distance of this apartment. Do you think that's enough?'

The Spanish understand the value of the more important things in life—a gentle hedonism, good food, passionate music and outdoor living. Summer is a moveable feast of happy crowds sitting in outdoor terraces and 18th-century plazas trying to decide whether to go and see the permanent exhibitions of Picasso, Goya or Van Gogh, or simply to stay and talk. Traffic jams are not unheard of at 2am on a Tuesday. Parking inspectors go on holidays (an event helpfully announced by the government each year), schoolchildren begin their three-month-long summer holidays and 'tinto de verano' (the wine of summer) is freely available.

So on this morning there was something profoundly unsettling about the silence in Madrid. And then I remembered that it was August, a month when many companies close their doors and send their employees on holidays. Despite living in the geographical centre of the Iberian peninsula, the people of Madrid have a greater love for the beach than perhaps any other people in the world, and in August they evacuate the city in droves. On long weekends and at any time of good weather, Madrileños drive for three to five hours to lie by the beach, eat seafood and relax with family and friends. If a holiday falls on a Thursday, most Madrileños make a *punte* (bridge) to the Saturday and rush from town. If the holiday falls on a Wednesday, they make an *aqueducto*.

When the weekend (or August) is over, everyone returns, grudgingly, accepting the fact that they will sit in traffic jams nearly 50 kilometres long and for up to ten hours, never doubting for a second that it's worth it.

This summer, I wondered if I would be able to enjoy my time here as much as I had the last. Three months after arriving in Spain, my legal status had become precarious. Due to marry in Madrid in December, I had visions of the wedding taking place without me, or at the very least, spending my days furtively avoiding police vehicles.

Two days before falling illegal, I visited the police station with my partner and her two uncles (both policemen), armed with sheafs of documents attesting to my solvency and good character. At the *comisaria*, they introduced me to the relevant officer, who assured us that her

advice had the weight of senior people in the Ministry of the Interior, whom she had phoned before our arrival.

'I'm not exactly sure why you're here,' she began. 'It's probably because you are normal and worry about such things. The fact is, we don't.' She then proceeded to tell us a few things we could do, but advised that they involved a lot of unnecessary paperwork and had little purpose. 'Where are you from? Australia? No problem. We almost never deport anyone and as long as you don't murder anyone, we'll leave you alone.' I pointed out to her that for an Australian, such a generous and liberal policy on foreigners and immigration was quite a shock, and that I had left Australia in the months after the shameful days of the *Tampa* debacle. 'We're not like that here,' was her polite response.

Then, it being almost halfway between breakfast and lunch, my partner's uncles gathered a posse of their police friends and we adjourned to a neighbouring bar where they proceeded to buy us *tapas* and drinks. 'So what do you like about Spain?' they asked.

—Anthony Ham

Sidney Nolan

DESERT AND DROUGHT

WE ARE IN a plane, banking slightly to give a view of a ridge and ranges of mountains. We are seeing landscape from the air, perhaps the first time anybody anywhere has painted this way, and certainly a new view of how to see the heart of Australia. Miles of reds, browns, ochres, in complicated patterns, often of triangular bands, stretching endlessly away to a bright blue line of horizon. We are pitched at all that bare earth, and have to force ourselves to look upwards into the subtly different blues of the sky. Sometimes we have landed at some isolated spot for a more conventional view, maybe of the delicate wriggling branches and delightful pods of 'the boab'. But it's the flying pictures that take our breath away.

May 2003 Book Offer Winners

G. Bryant-Badham, Weston Creek, ACT; Emerson Publications & Research, Camberwell, VIC; M. Ferla, Kew, VIC; D. Ingley, Leongatha, VIC; H. Kain, Prospect, QLD; M. Long, West Chermiside, QLD; Lourdes Hill College Library, Hawthorne, QLD; M. O'Connor, Hawthorn, VIC; J. Slifirski, Canterbury, VIC; J. Sutherland, Mosman, NSW.



In the Burke and Wills paintings, the camels look like slow-moving hillocks, and the outsize birds are often paused and poised in flight over the hapless explorers. In the religious paintings, like 'St John in the desert', surreal angels, with wings for arms, fly in from the early Italian Renaissance to bank and pitch themselves over the outback; the Lord himself spins and rolls above 'St Francis receiving the stigmata'. Maybe it's a fancy to go back to the 'plane over the desert' works and become an angel, exhilarated by the flight over the landscape of this new world. Whatever it is, the outback is not godless.

The carcasses have no specific background, but float in a misty space of greys, browns and reds. Through varying states of decay, they are transformed: 'Carcass of a ram' has the thing hitched aloft, upside down, its limbs dangling, with the wickerwork tracery of its ribcage greeny-white, and the splay of its horns springing from the downward thrust of its skull. The black eyeholes look at us looking at it.

Nolan's achievement, firmly re-established by this wonderful exhibition, is to give us immensely delicate images of the outback. He reveals the otherness of the place by taking us up there—the red heart seen from aloft.

Sidney Nolan, *Desert and drought*, Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, 6 June–17 August.

—Andrew Bullen sj

This month's contributors: **Morag Fraser** is an adjunct professor at La Trobe University, and former editor of *Eureka Street*; **David Glanz** attended the conference for the Victorian Peace Network, and the full text of the Jakarta Consensus is at www.focusweb.org; **Anthony Ham** is *Eureka Street's* roving correspondent; **Andrew Bullen sj** is former rector of Jesuit Theological College.

Casualties of conflict

Conflicts of interest pose a serious threat to democracy

THE GREATEST THREAT to our security is not SARS or terrorism, but distrust of government. This goes far deeper than our disdain for leadership squabbles. We never have liked politicians. Australian police have been repeatedly exposed as corruptible. Governments in three states—New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia—have had to set up anti-corruption bodies to protect the integrity of public decision-making from erosion by officials' private interests. Governments increasingly form partnerships and develop relationships with business and the non-profit sector to achieve their public policy goals. The likelihood of conflicts of interest has never been greater.

At the same time, slippery values and an incapacity to identify, eliminate or manage conflicts of interest are obvious. This may be the outright, 'children overboard' variety, or the rambling incoherence of Rodney Adler when asked to tell the Royal Commission how he distinguished between his own and his company's interests. When a major management consultancy firm is offering consulting and auditing services to the same client, and can't foresee and prevent an inherent conflict of interest, the public should be concerned. The failures of government and the private sector—whether that be the financial-planning industry, AMP, HIH, Enron or the tobacco industry and its advisers—wound not only the wallet, but our willingness to work together.

Having a conflict of interest is not, in itself, wrong. It is the potential for wrongdoing and corruption that must be avoided. We are not very good at this in Australia, but we need to be. There is much opportunity for discretionary and casual misuse of power in our relative isolation, interlocking loops of power elites, the increasing mobility of employment between the public and private sectors, the rising numbers of joint projects and temporary

public offices, and the relatively small number of individuals making and influencing public decisions. In Australia, the narrow range of relationships is perhaps the most fertile ground for conflicts of interest. In a small town there is nothing like six degrees of separation between business, government and social cliques.

It takes distance to recognise conflicts of interest and their potential risk. Dealing with them demands clarity and transparency. It's a problem not only in the small-town cultures of most of Australia, but also in complex cities and in more densely populated regions such as Europe because economic unions will only cohere if their members trust each other.

That is one of the reasons the OECD set up a project for managing conflict of interest in the public service. Its recently released draft guidelines—discussed in a Sydney workshop with anti-corruption and public sector commissioners from Australia and New Zealand in June and led by one of the authors, Janos Bartek—adopted a generic definition of conflict of interest:

A 'conflict of interest' involves a conflict between the public duty and private interests of a public official, in which the public official has private-capacity interests which could improperly influence the performance of their official duties and responsibilities.

Note the use of the word 'could'. Finding that you have a conflict of interest is not a revelation of wrongdoing. Bartek describes it in terms of chess: when you find that your king is in check, the situation must be resolved, and if it is not, the consequence will be the end of the game.

A conflict of interest is only a potential one if the public officer is never in a position to make a decision that each interest could affect. But if the elements of the definition are met, there is an actual

conflict of interest. This is true even if the public official with conflicting public and private interests—in, say, the benefit of awarding a contract to a friend or future political mentor that may be at odds with achieving the best price for the public purse—was not actually influenced by these personal preferences.

IF HE OR SHE were influenced, the 'conflict of interest' has already become misconduct, abuse of office or at worst, corruption. But if it is identified and acknowledged, and adequate steps are taken to make sure both that misconduct does not result, and that it is made apparent that such steps have been taken, then the conflict of interest has been managed properly. The true aims of public service have been met: the protection of the common good and of public service ethics, and the preservation of public trust in government.

It would be helpful if we had Australian standards for recognising and managing conflicts of interest. New South Wales' ICAC and Queensland's CMC are working to produce a tool for this in Australia. It is timely.

Most of Australia's 'corruption' scandals have developed from cosy arrangements among powerful men to whom ethical edges have become smooth under the gentle buffing on the conference tables and in the boardrooms of power. That seems to be the way that even men standing on the high moral ground in religious institutions fell into error. They failed to recognise the conflict of interest between their duty to protect the rights and interests of sexually-abused children, their duty to their fellows and colleagues, and their duty to limit the financial and legal liability of religious institutions. ■

Moira Rayner is a barrister and writer.



Samuel Beckett's Wrinkles

It starts with an untidy map
held within skin,
deep and heavy on the head

And becomes an avenue of *this*, a river of *that*
a crossroad, meeting between eyebrow
curved and bent beyond recognition;

A roundabout
at cheek and chin,
drawing the mouth into recess.

Eyes become unexplored terrain
while hair, always neater than the face
reaches for sky.

Libby Hart

Our Birth is but a Sleep and a Forgetting

The man who believed
that televised weather forecasts
make it all happen:

the woman who did all her foreign travel
under a lemon tree
in her backyard, with an atlas:

the young man, faintly adventurous
who entered a maze and never came out,
leaving half a handkerchief behind:

the cabin attendant, or trolley-dolly,
afflicted by her entirely terrible
fear of heights:

the country butcher
whose father falling blind drunk
had been gobbled up by pigs:

the teenage girl whose main belief was
that, if she fell asleep, her legs
and arms could easily drop off:

the little boy who felt at night
the surrounding darkness
was all made of water:

and the chubby rose-pink baby
who had remembered it all
but now forgot.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe



Bowled over

SOME TIME IN NOVEMBER 1962, I decided to upgrade my living arrangements from squalid to moderately conventional. I was a teacher at a Melbourne suburban high school so it wasn't easy to find time to look at likely premises. I spent fruitless evenings and weekends in St Kilda and environs touring an array of overpriced attics, damp, gothic basements and backyard sleepouts redolent of lust-tortured tom-cats.

Not long after the visiting Poms under 'Lord' Ted Dexter amassed seven for 633 at the MCG against an Australian XI, but some days before Australia beat them by 70 runs in the First Test at the Gabba, I saw an advertisement for a flat in Balaclava. It sounded ideal, but required prompt, weekday action. I had the first part of the morning free of formal teaching so I decided to take a look.

I was greeted at the front door of the flat by the agent, whom I instantly recognised. It was Jack Iverson. Taking up cricket at the age of 31 in 1946, Iverson had graduated from Brighton Thirds to Test Cricket in four years. He was that archetypal figure—the 'mystery spinner', as intriguing and romantic as the unknown lad from the bush who turns up unannounced for a practice game and belts the cream of the bowling all over the park. In the 1950–51 series against England, Iverson took 21 wickets at 15.24 runs per wicket, including six for 27 in the Sydney Test. Then he disappeared—back into the no doubt somewhat anticlimactic territory of Real Estate.

He was a big bloke, his bulk accentuated by a tweedy-looking sports jacket from the sleeves of which protruded those famous hands. I remember glancing at them: they were as huge as legend suggested. He was pleasant and welcoming. While we chatted—a conversation in which, for my part, I tried to avoid wide-eyed, 'knowing' references to his cricket career (which as a matter of fact I knew intimately) with the same pathological intensity Basil Fawlty brought to not mentioning the war—two more people arrived, a flinty-looking couple in their forties. Iverson then took us on a tour of the flat. It was perfect, but being new to respectable tenancy, I didn't know what was supposed to happen next. It was obvious the forty-ish couple were equally pleased. Was I supposed to make a bid?

With an amiable smile and a flicker of amusement behind his eyes, Iverson simply said that he would see us at the city office in Collins Street. With a great show of nonchalance the three of us farewelled him and headed for our cars. Theirs was shiny and new. Mine was an FX Holden that ran on equal parts of oil and petrol and sounded like a tractor when it was not

espousing long periods of Trappist-like silence. It seemed a strange way to manage the negotiations, but as far as I could see the flat would go to whoever arrived at the office first.

Having a lot of luck in the running along narrow, congested High Street, I barrelled into St Kilda Junction, threaded its chaotic criss-cross of traffic and settled into a roaring, blue-smoky negotiation with St Kilda Road. This route in the reverse direction was one I knew well, because most Friday nights I played snooker and drank beer at the University Club, 100 Collins Street, before heading for home in the early hours. So it was not as if I felt apprehensive about swift passage through city traffic, and Collins Street was familiar ground. I steered straight for the office, planning to work outwards from there for a parking spot, but as I approached, a car pulled out right in front of the door. I was upstairs to the first floor before you could say 'Howzat!', greeting Jack Iverson across a reception counter (how did *he* get there so fast?).

'I hope you didn't break the speed limit,' he said with a quizzical, irresistible version of that amused look. I reassured him, produced all the necessary credentials, wrote a cheque and we shook on it. My hand disappeared in his.

ON THE STAIRS GOING down I met the couple coming up. She gave me a rancorous glance, and I had the impression that the husband was going to cop some flak for being such an unadventurous driver.

Thinking about all this much later, I concluded that part of the explanation for the rather extraordinary *modus operandi* was that Iverson might have been bored witless by the job and was introducing some spice into it. As well, though, I think he took a bit of a shine to me. Being fair haired and fair skinned, I looked about 16 (I was 25), and was almost embarrassingly transparent and guileless and quite obviously ignorant of the whole rich world of real estate and its protocols. Whereas the competition—the husband and wife team—were stony-faced (patently not cricket lovers) and probably a little presumptuous about their chances against such callow opposition.

That's what I like to think, anyway. But maybe I have continued to be haunted by his wan, ghostly smile, by the memory of shaking that 19.4 overs, eight maidens, six for 27 hand, and by the knowledge that, some years after our brief encounter, Iverson walked out to the garage of his suburban home and shot himself. ■

Brian Matthews is a writer and academic.

In the name of the sons

Justice has become a life's work for
the Guildford Four's Paul Hill

PAUL HILL SERVED fifteen years for a crime he didn't commit. Fourteen years after being freed from jail, he finds himself fighting for justice again. Back then it was Hill versus the British justice system. Hill was one of four people—three Irish, one English—who were convicted over the IRA's bombing of two pubs in Guildford and Woolwich, England in 1974, an attack in which seven people died. The four, who became known as the Guildford Four, were convicted solely on their confessions which they later retracted at trial, saying they were beaten out of them by police. The confessions were extracted despite the fact that 'British intelligence services knew we had nothing to do with this because they had informers in Northern Ireland in the '70s and '80s giving them information on a regular basis,' Hill says. It was considered one of Britain's most serious miscarriages of justice. The four were finally released after dogged investigators discovered documentation at Guildford police station 'that proved that evidence against us had been fabricated and doctored and manufactured,' he says. 'The judge stated that on releasing us.'

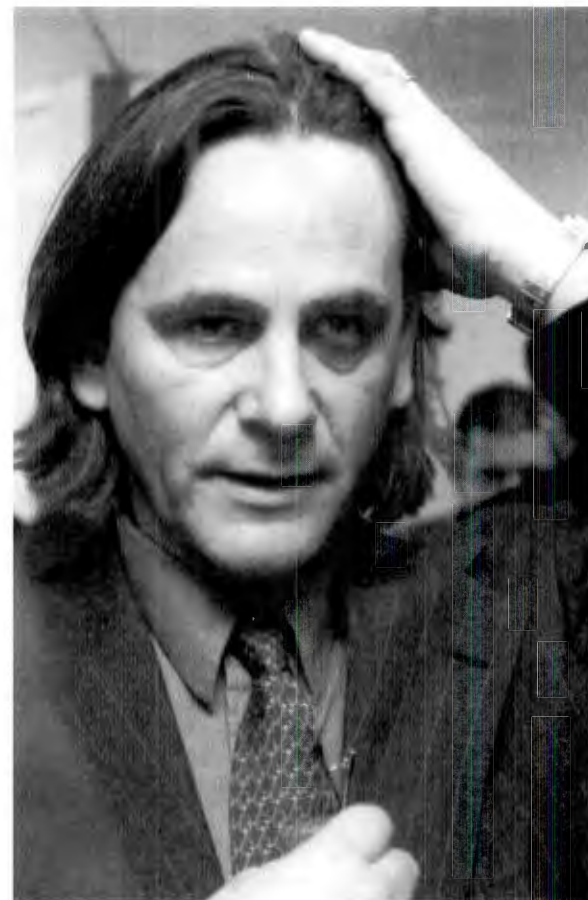
Hill has now built a new life. He lives in America, married Courtney Kennedy—daughter of assassinated US Attorney Bobby Kennedy—and has a six-year-old son. But Hill has chosen to immerse himself in what Irish campaigners consider to be another case of injustice. He has twice flown to Colombia to observe an intriguing trial that has drawn much attention.

In a sensational move two years ago, Colombian authorities arrested three Irish men alleged to be members of the IRA—

Niall Connolly, Jim Monaghan and Martin McCauley—and charged them with teaching FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) Marxist rebels to build bombs, in exchange for heavy weapons. Speaking from Dublin before embarking on his recent tour of Australia, to campaign for international monitoring of the trial, Hill says he first become concerned about the case after reading newspaper reports. When Cathriona Ruane from the Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas asked him to take a watchdog role, Hill was receptive. He knows that the Guildford Four were only saved from languishing in jail for their full terms because of the persistence of 'investigative journalists who were incredibly good, documentaries on television, and people who firmly believed in us at that stage.'

It is only the second political case Hill has been prepared to become involved in since his release. The other was the Birmingham Six: the case of six Irish workers in England, also charged with fatal pub bombings in 1974, who were finally exonerated in 1991. 'The rest of the cases I have been involved in have been straightforward criminal cases that go completely unheard of.'

His concern about the Colombian Three case was triggered by the clear absence of a presumption of innocence in statements made by the military and the Colombian president. 'In the initial stages of their arrest they stated quite unequivocally that they were guilty. You can't possibly receive a fair trial if the presumption of innocence has been removed. This is one of the fundamental basic rights to protect people.'



Irish activist Paul Hill at the trial of fellow nationals in Bogotá, Colombia, December 2002.
Photo: AFP/AAP/Gerardo Gomez.

He has now been to Colombia twice—last December and in April this year—as an independent member of a delegation of observers to the trial, which is being conducted in stages. He will pass on his report, and those of the other observers, to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, both groups he has worked with previously. Hill's concerns about a fair trial include the absence of a jury and the use of informers—which, he says, 'has been ridiculed by the European Court of Human Rights, by international jurists, both in England and Northern Ireland. And there was a case in Australia ten years ago that I campaigned for of a man who had apparently attempted to kill the Indian prime minister: the case of Tim Anderson.'

Anderson, a member of the Ananda Marga sect, was convicted and jailed over the Hilton bombing in 1978, in which three people died in the failed assassination attempt against the visiting Indian prime minister. Hill explains that the sole evidence against Anderson came from an informant. The informant, a fellow

prisoner of Anderson's, alleged that Anderson had admitted to planting the bomb. Anderson was, in fact, in Melbourne at the time of the bombing. There was an extensive campaign on Anderson's behalf, which included Hill visiting Australia for Amnesty International. Anderson's case went to appeal and he was released in 1991. 'The case was dealt with quite efficiently by the Australian authorities.'

The attempt to get a fair trial for the Colombian Three is fraught with difficulty. Hill stresses that he has spoken several times with the judge conducting the trial and is convinced he is 'an incredibly fair individual'. 'The problem is how can he arrive at a decision which is contrary to what is being said by the president of his country?' Hill contends that the Americans and the Colombians will stand to benefit if the Colombian Three are convicted. 'In the so-called wave of international terrorism now, these will be the first three Europeans who have been convicted anywhere in the world of international terrorism.'

Among the disturbing contradictions that have emerged in the trial so far is that one of the three charged says he was in Cuba at the time he was supposed to be in Colombia. The secretary of the Irish Embassy supports this alibi, testifying that the suspect was indeed in Cuba at the time he was alleged to be in Colombia training FARC guerrillas. Hill describes video evidence of another of the accused attending a conference in Belfast at the time a second informer alleges he was in Bogotá. Hill says that every reporter he has spoken to at the trial, many from around the world, has admitted that the trial is a farce.

Hill believes that the presence of international media and well-paid lawyers is confronting the Colombians with a new understanding of justice. Hill says that the system is used to dealing primarily with poor people from the *barrios*, with little education or understanding of their rights, who are defended by lawyers who themselves are often under threat of death. 'So when we go and observe this, it is contrary to everything they've been getting away with for decades in some countries in Latin America.' He says if the three Irish are convicted, human rights observers will appeal to the United Nations Human Rights Commission. 'We will take it anywhere we can possibly go,

even the International Court of Human Rights at The Hague.'

The trial is not expected to finish until the end of the year. One more witness will be called in June, followed by summaries by the prosecution and the defence and an independent prosecutor. The judge then adjourns to consider his verdict. 'What is also disturbing is that there is no jury in this court, which is something we find abhorrent,' Hill says. He describes the experience of being wrongfully convicted and feeling that no-one is listening as 'incredibly frustrating. And the only people who really are listening are your family, and where can they go? I had 15 years of this, so no-one can tell me these things don't happen. To me it is not abstract—it is very tangible.'

Hill can reel off a list of Irish and British people wrongfully jailed in Britain in the '70s and '80s over IRA-related offences, who have since had their convictions overturned—the Birmingham Six, the Winchester Three, Judith Ward, the Maguire Family. Their convictions were finally overturned because the British justice system 'realised that they had to eventually 'fess up, as it were. I spoke to my barrister, Lord Gifford, who was a very eminent QC, and he says at any one time in the British prison system, which I think numbers 56,000 now, at least three per cent of those people will be innocent, not by being fitted up by the police, but by the system malfunctioning.'

When Hill was first released he would get eight to ten letters a month from the families of prisoners, beseeching him to take up their cases. He didn't get involved unless they were serving extremely lengthy sentences 'because it is hard to maintain and establish innocence over a protracted period of time. Eventually people say "I did it" because you have to say "I did it" in order to be released. That's one of the criteria of parole.'

Belfast-born Hill even faced the threat of a return to jail when old attempted-murder charges were brought against him in Belfast in 1994, but they were dismissed. He says it was logical that the case would collapse because the evidence for both the charges emanated from Guildford police station. He came close to succumbing to bitterness over his treatment at the hands of the British justice system, especially because he knew that 'the people behind the charges were very senior police

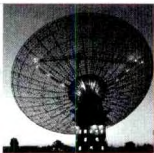
officers who knew without a shadow of a doubt that we were completely innocent because they had intelligence that suggested that at the time.'

The Kennedy clan—including his mother-in-law Ethel, brother-in-law Joe and wife Courtney—flew into Belfast during his 1994 trial to lend support. '[The Kennedys] have always been supportive in cases of injustice in many corners of the world,' Hill says. It was through such involvement that Hill was introduced to the Kennedys. He met Ethel first at a hearing in Congress on human rights. She introduced him to her daughter Courtney, a former lawyer. Hill says he didn't find the transition from 15 years in jail to life with the Kennedys, and appearing at Congressional hearings, at all daunting. 'I am not being blasé in saying that, but these are ordinary human beings like us all. They just happen to have a privileged background. I've never really been in awe of anything like that.'

Since moving to America, he has also been involved with Amnesty International's Survivors' Committee: providing counselling and psychological help for a group of people from Latin America, Indonesia and Palestine who have been victims of torture. Of the other members of the Guildford Four, he still sees Paddy Armstrong, now married with a child, on visits to Dublin, while Carole Richardson lives in England and Gerry Conlon 'is unfortunately not doing well. He has psychological problems and stuff like that.'

Hill says he realises 'it is not a very hip time to be engaged in human rights, specifically for Australians, after the atrocity in Bali and after September 11. But what we must not do when these things happen is erode the fundamental basic human rights that apply to us all.' Such rights ought to extend to suspected terrorists currently being held outside the US, beyond the protection of those rights applicable to prisoners in America, he says. It includes other alleged al Qaeda prisoners held at Camp X-Ray at Guantanamo Bay, such as Australian David Hicks and several British citizens. 'As far as I am concerned, there are no boundaries with human rights. There is no colour with human rights. There is no difference with creed.' ■

Andra Jackson is a journalist with *The Age* and appears with permission.



African solutions

Anthony Ham says that despite good intentions, the West continues to misunderstand Africa

INTERNATIONAL OPINION outside Africa is united against the brutal regime of Zimbabwe's president Robert Mugabe. Since Mugabe lost a referendum on constitutional change in 2000—a referendum that, if successful, would have granted him sweeping new powers and permitted him a further two terms in office—Zimbabwe has been one of the worst places on earth to live. It has been witness to forced land seizures and vigilante and systematic government persecution of all opposition. One of Africa's most promising economies has been reduced to near-destitution.

Zimbabwe has become something of a cause célèbre in the (Western) international community. Sanctions have been imposed and Great Britain, the European Union and Australia have been at the forefront of a very public campaign to demand Mugabe's removal. Nothing less than regime change—the defining medium of international political reform for the new century—is deemed acceptable by Mugabe's opponents.

In the weeks surrounding the conflict in Iraq—a conflict that has left Iraqis grateful to be rid of Saddam Hussein and equally insistent that foreign forces should leave its soil—Zimbabwe slipped from world headlines. Into the vacuum stepped a troika of presidents: Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Bakili Muluzi of Malawi, who visited Zimbabwe. The only solution capable of procuring enduring change, they argued, must be one coming from within Zimbabwe itself.

The talks were officially unsuccessful. However, since the visit President Mugabe has spoken publicly for the first time of the need for a debate as to his successor.

The Zimbabwean president agreed, again for the first time, to hold direct talks with Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The stumbling block was Mugabe's condition that the MDC first recognise his legitimacy as president and withdraw all pending legal cases challenging the deeply flawed elections of 2002. The MDC refused and the three leaders left Zimbabwe without an agreement.

Africa's record on regime change has indeed been deplorable—a series of coups d'état, civil wars and sham elections. African leaders have been steadfast in their policy of refusing to intervene in the internal affairs of neighbours, at least where intervention is merited on humanitarian grounds. The now defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was all about the politics of solidarity—not with the people of the continent but instead among largely illegitimate leaders protected by policies of non-intervention.

But the West has been equally culpable in fostering poor governance in Africa. Years of genocidal and otherwise destructive colonialism gave way to a cold-war favouring of despots, mineral exploitation yielding little benefit for Africans and an enduring neglect in times of war.

And so it is that Africans—a people with an almost universal sense of African solidarity—bristle defensively whenever the West lectures Africans on what's best for Africa. Writing in *The Guardian* on 6 May, Liz MacGregor acknowledged that:

Tsvangirai's strength—his ability to mobilise Western support—significantly weakens his position on his own continent. It has enabled Mugabe to paint the international

campaign against him as a bid by Britain to protect the white farmers whose land he seized ... He has branded the MDC as a foreign body manipulated by Britain, and the MDC has played into his hands by cultivating white constituencies abroad while publicly criticising African leaders.

In a similar vein Dr Eddy Maloka, head of the Africa Institute in Pretoria, expressed concern that 'the MDC should have read that Britain and Australia's concern about Zimbabwe was perceived as being concern for British expatriates. They have mismanaged the situation and alienated themselves from the continent.'

Across Africa, it is widely accepted that Mugabe is a brutal leader. But such matters are considered secondary to the fact that prior to the policy of land reform, the white citizens of Zimbabwe (just one per cent of the population) owned two thirds of the country's arable land. Mugabe's thumbing his nose at Great Britain—the original architect of unequal land distribution in its former colonies—won him grudging but widespread support across the African continent. At the same time, the MDC's refusal to consider the offer brokered by the three African presidents (John Howard was quietly omitted from the travelling party, despite being the third member of the Commonwealth's committee on Zimbabwe), and Tsvangirai's decision to appeal instead to Rhodesia's former colonial master, lost the MDC many African friends. If nothing else, many Africans believe that the MDC must allow this ageing hero of the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean liberation struggle to step down with dignity.

There was much about the proposed

agreement that was distasteful to Western ears, particularly its failure to punish the man responsible for terrorising and impoverishing a nation. But there remains in Africa a desire to punish the West for its many sins. By supporting Mugabe, many Africans are stating that they will no longer accept moral lecturing from outside Africa. And by continuing its policy of megaphone diplomacy and very public hostility towards Mugabe, the West is playing into his hands. An African solution may be more complicated and even unpalatable to many in the West, but it may just be the only one capable of resolving Zimbabwe's crisis.

Compelling evidence for this principle can be found on the other side of the African continent. If you recently received an email asking you to sign a petition in support of Amina Lawal, you were not alone. At last count, in excess of five million people had received and forwarded the petition. Amina Lawal is a young woman from Katsina State in northern Nigeria who was found guilty of adultery by a sharia court on 22 March 2002 and sentenced to death by stoning. The full text of the message read:

AMINA LAWAL SET TO BE STONED ON 3RD JUNE 2003

The Nigerian Supreme Court has upheld the death sentence for Amina Lawal, condemned for the crime of adultery on August 19th 2002, to be buried up to her neck and stoned to death. Her death was postponed so that she could continue to nurse her baby. Execution is now set for June 3rd. If you haven't been following this case, you might like to know that Amina's baby is regarded as the 'evidence' of her adultery. Amina's case is being handled by the Spanish branch of Amnesty International, which is attempting to put together enough signatures to make the Nigerian government rescind the death sentence. A similar campaign saved another Nigerian woman, Safiya, condemned in similar circumstances. By March 4th the petition had amassed over 2,600,000 signatures. It will only take you a few seconds to sign Amnesty's online petition. Please sign the petition now, then copy this message into a new email and send it to everyone in your address book.

The problem is that although the originating website bore the official Amnesty International logo, the email

is dangerously inaccurate and does not come from Amnesty International. It is simply not true that Amina Lawal was to be executed on 3 June. In 2002, her sentence was suspended until January 2004 until her baby—born out of wedlock—had been weaned. On 3 June, Amina's appeal against her sentence was to be heard.

Worse than the inaccuracy is the danger that it could cause to Amina herself. Baobab—a local women's human rights NGO in northern Nigeria and the organisation representing Amina, along with eight other women—issued a counter-appeal. It read, in part: 'Many of these campaigns are inaccurate and ineffective and may even be damaging to her case and those of others in similar situations'. Ayesha Imam, a Baobab representative, went further:

If there is an immediate physical danger to Ms Lawal and others, it's from vigilante and political overreaction to international attempts at pressure ... This has happened already in the case of an unmarried teenager convicted of extramarital sex and sentenced to flogging a few years ago. Her punishment was illegally brought forward, deliberately to defy international pressure. The state governor boasted of his resistance to 'these letters from infidels', even sniggering over how many letters he had received.

Baobab should know. It has represented many such women and is yet to lose a case.

Amnesty International, whose official petition last year gathered some 1.3 million signatures, has indeed been at the forefront of such campaigns. However, Amnesty is working alongside Baobab and agrees that the campaigns must be carefully timed. A recent Amnesty statement said simply, 'Because of the political situation there, we believe that we're more likely to be successful if there is less media coverage.'

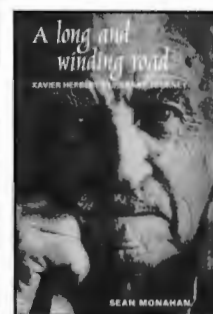
If Amina's appeal fails, the tactics necessary to support her may change. In the meantime, many Africans are asking that the Western world not rush blindly in to make up for past neglect. There is a different way of doing things in Africa. Regardless of what the rest of the world thinks, these African solutions to African problems may just work. ■

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

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Deeper water

The Meeting of the Waters: the Hindmarsh Island Affair, Margaret Simons.
Hodder, 2003. ISBN 0 7336 1348 9, RRP \$39.95

IN THE EARLY 1980s, very few Australians would have heard of Hindmarsh Island and the phrase 'secret women's business'. Both are now part of our history and numerous books have been written about what came to be known as the Hindmarsh Island Affair. The latest is *The Meeting of the Waters* by Margaret Simons.

Hindmarsh Island is a small island in Lake Alexandrina near the mouth of the Murray. By 1989, Tom and Wendy Chapman (she was a former Lord Mayor of Adelaide and had associations with the Liberal Party) had advanced plans to expand the small marina they had developed on the island. These plans included building a bridge to the island, which was at that time only accessible by ferry. The Chapmans negotiated with the Premier of South Australia, John Bannon, and because the discussions were positive

the Chapmans pursued the other steps they believed were necessary. These included an environmental impact study and consultation with representatives of the local Aboriginal people, the Ngarrindjeri. As history records, these moves were far from adequate and by the time the affair had run its course the Chapmans were broke and bitter and the Ngarrindjeri people deeply divided.

Even in the early stages, while the entrepreneurial couple saw dollar signs, others looked at their plans in very different terms. Conservationists, who had originally given qualified approval, were concerned for the fragile wetlands. The Aboriginal Heritage Branch wanted more serious work done on the mythology of the area and possible sites of importance. They recommended a report by an anthropologist, which was commissioned and carried out. Years later, the Federal Court found that it was uncertain whether the anthropologist was aware of the proposed building of the bridge.

Local residents and other concerned people soon banded together in loosely organised protest and called themselves Friends of Hindmarsh Island. When this name was registered by pro-bridge supporters, the name was changed to Friends of Goolwa and Kumerangk. Kumerangk is the Ngarrindjeri name for Hindmarsh Island and is said to mean place of pregnancy, while Goolwa was claimed to be the meeting of the waters, but these meanings were questioned and some believed they were part of the fabricated stories.

LA TE IN 1993, when another anthropologist was studying the island, the first Ngarrindjeri joined the protesters. Around the same time Dr Doreen Kartinyeri, who would become a key figure in the dispute,

heard about the proposed bridge. In April she made the first recorded mention of secret women's business. Meanwhile, in February 1994, Justice Jacobs advised the state government it was legally obliged to build the bridge. From then on the situation escalated.

After a significant meeting of the Ngarrindjeri people, a letter was sent to Robert Tickner, the federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in the Labor government. It expressed concerns about the bridge and Tickner responded by placing a ban on its construction. However, one woman who had attended the original meeting was disturbed by what took place. She became one of the 'dissident women' who denied the existence of secret women's business. This group would be championed in turn by the influential Liberal politician Ian McLachlan.

There were other signs of trouble. Anthropologists giving advice on the situation were splitting into factions. So were the Ngarrindjeri people, and Simons records this. But she continually calls the women who supported the secret-women's-business position 'the Ngarrindjeri women', while calling the others 'the dissident women' as though they did not have equal claim to be Ngarrindjeri people. It is a common error.

During 1994, Tickner commissioned a report on the claim of the proponent Ngarrindjeri women, as he was legally obliged to. A senior female lawyer and female anthropologist were appointed. The appendix to the resultant report was placed in an envelope and marked 'confidential—to be read by women only'. In an extraordinary twist in early 1995, a box of papers including the envelope was delivered to Ian McLachlan's office in error. After parliamentary games of one-upmanship, it was revealed that a man



had read the contents of the envelope and Ian McLachlan resigned.

Then in August 1995, the Royal Commission found that the secret women's business was fabricated. Over the next five years there were debates in parliament and a number of court cases. In 1999 there was a settlement between the Chapmans, Westpac and the SA Government, and work on the bridge began. It was opened in 2000, the same year Justice Von Doussa of the Federal Court sat to consider action bought by the Chapmans. Its findings criticised the Royal Commission—but although Justice Von Doussa found against the Chapmans in entirety, he also found that 'any future attempt by forensic process to establish the existence or non-existence of the knowledge [of secret women's business] as part of genuine Aboriginal tradition will be fraught with difficulty'. So after years of wrangling, the major outcome besides the actual bridge is a very high cost: in personal pain to all the individuals involved, and in hard cash to the taxpayer.

WHEN I BEGAN reading *The Meeting of the Waters* I was hoping that, at last, here would be an objective study of this very controversial issue. However, I rapidly discovered where Simons stands. Parts of her book are as polemical as the opinions of the people involved. *The Meeting of the Waters* is an unashamed apologia, for the proponent women and their claims that if the bridge was built it would have serious consequences for Ngarrindjeri women, because the island was special to them for reasons they could not reveal. However there is also some good objective writing and the book represents four years of comprehensive research. It must also be taken into account that it's almost impossible to be dispassionate about this subject.

The Hindmarsh Island Affair is not just a dispute about whether some Aboriginal women fabricated a story to stop the building of a bridge. There is some validity in the author's claim that it's at the heart of how we perceive ourselves as a nation—and of what that perception means for the day-to-day experiences of Australians, black and white, and from many other cultures and races. The book forces us to look deeply at our political and racial attitudes.

Should this book have been written? The bitter wrangle has already been

the subject of a number of books, from both sides of the Great Divide. There's been a Royal Commission, High Court challenges, Federal Court judgments and legal actions, inquiries, reports and appeals. For nearly 15 years the media has contributed screaming headlines and front page splashes as well as serious studies. Do we need more? Undoubtedly yes. *The Meeting of the Waters* has a role to play in being able to look at such an important topic with the privilege of hindsight.

The book describes the progress of the affair in great detail. It asks pertinent questions about why some evidence was overlooked or not acted on and, it claims, sheds new light on the saga. It is well annotated and includes a helpful time-line and list of characters. The writing is refreshing. It ranges from unashamedly romantic, through chatty journalese, to taut factual language. Simons' wry throwaway lines not only entertain, they usually enlighten. However, there is a noticeable variation in the way Simons handles her material. Her language becomes more or less pejorative depending on whether she is dealing with the proponent or dissident women.

Her research is basically thorough but with occasional mistakes. She calls Adelaide a city-state, and the majority of South Australians who dwell in rural areas or provincial towns and cities would agree. But she wrongly states 'only the iron triangle of industrial towns, the Barossa and the Riverland have significant populations'. She has consigned to oblivion the entire South East and Mount Gambier, which has the biggest population outside Adelaide! Tasmanian readers will sympathise. On a more serious note, it's always a concern to find these simple errors because it suggests there may be more serious ones.

For those interested in Aboriginal culture and politics, *The Meeting of the Waters* is worth reading for its comprehensive coverage. But despite Simons' conclusions, the critical reader will realise that there are still far more questions than there are answers. ■

Pam O'Connor lives in the South East of South Australia and writes regional and community history. She has assisted a Ngarrindjeri woman to write her life story and is currently working with the SE Nungas Community Organisation.



Their Stories, Our History, Peter Gebhardt.
Helicon Press, 2003. ISBN 0 9586 7855 3,
RRP \$39.95

THE WORLD EVOKED by Peter Gebhardt's poems is one of elemental forces—rain, rock and sea. A land of red earth peppered with the bleached bones of a black-skinned people. The bones introduce a human dimension to the terrain. We experience the landscape as infused with mortality and history, dreams and memory.

The use of poetry to convey to white Australians the full impact of colonisation upon the land's original inhabitants is extremely potent. These poems are an attempt to use the language of the invaders to challenge the received knowledge of that group. Firstly, by speaking bluntly about the death and marginalisation that accompanied European settlement. And more radically, by using a new art form to transport the black experience to the wider Australian community—as music and painting have done.

Peter Gebhardt's language allows an emotional response to the enormous dry continent that we call home, and confronts us with the ugly truth of its recent past. The combined effect is to alter our understanding of both.

Like the poet-advocates, the 'speech fighters' of the Torres Strait Islands, Peter Gebhardt is using language as a catalyst for change. Drawing on his experience as a student, teacher and judge, he offers his response as a poet to the ongoing reconciliation debate. This is not a comfortable read. But it is a stimulating and challenging one.

—Steve Gome

Through the generosity of the author, all proceeds from the sale of this book will be used to assist Indigenous scholars at Trinity College. Available through Development Office, Trinity College, Royal Pde, Parkville VIC 3052, \$39.95, plus \$5 pwh. Tel 03 9348 7116, www.trinity.unimelb.edu.au.

Beyond the frame

Manipulating images: from the real to the ideal

LAST YEAR I led a group of photographers on a tour of Turkey. One member of the group was particularly keen on landscapes. Just outside Istanbul he focused his camera on a magnificent sunset. Then he noticed the wires, telegraph poles and industrial chimneys in the foreground. 'I hate that kind of ugliness,' he protested. But he assured his fellow travellers that he wouldn't let the ugliness spoil his picture. 'When I get home I'll put the picture through Photoshop and get rid of those wires,' he announced.

Manipulation of photographs is nothing new. It has, in fact, been around since the beginnings

of photography itself. In 1840, French inventor and photographer Hippolyte Bayard produced a photograph of himself as a corpse, suggesting that he'd drowned himself in his bathtub. He then distributed the image as a protest against the fact that the academy of the day had generously funded his competitor, Mr Daguerre, while he, Bayard, had received nothing.

Photographs have long been employed to manipulate, distort, interpret, validate, define and mirror some sort of truth.

The photo is often a rendering of what actually exists into an ideal of what we would like to exist. A photo can transform presence into absence (the traveller who wants to remove what he sees as ugly) as well as absence into presence. In Mexico I photographed a

photographer who makes her living snapping

Mexican families against a life-size and very real looking cardboard cut-out of the Pope. 'I bring his Holiness into the lives of ordinary people,' she told me.

While photography supports the cult of celebrity, it is the lives of ordinary people who are most often the subject of the photographer's gaze. And ordinary people are often captured in extraordinary circumstances. The people depicted might be hungry, homeless or traumatised by grief. They may even be wounded or dead. Our response to such images is largely determined by the context in which we see them. We may be shocked into silence or moved to some sort of action. We may be outraged by a perceived intrusion, or disturbed by the aesthetic that accompanies suffering. We may even see so much that we become numb.

In her latest book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag considers our response to images of suffering. This is a sequel to her seminal book *On Photography*, first published in 1977 and in print ever since. In her current offering, Sontag revisits the territory she explored 30 years earlier when she pondered the extent to which the authority of an image is diminished by the saturation of images. Like her earlier work, *Regarding the Pain of Others* makes reference to many



Left: Tsam Choe and village children, Tibet, 2001

I was interviewing Tsam Choe for a feature on rural Tibet. She has lived in the same village all her 71 years. After 20 minutes of talking with her I asked (via my interpreter) if I could take her picture. At that point she froze. She looked at my translator and said, 'If he photographs me alone then people in his country will think that I live alone.' When some of the village children came into the frame, Tsam Choe relaxed and allowed me to take the picture. Photography as collaboration can ease the pain of misrepresentation.

Above right: Feeding Centre, Ethiopia, 1995

I took this picture as a response to the clichéd image of famine—the single child with distended belly. Famine, of course, is not just about failed crops. It's also about the politics of distribution. I wanted to show that the pain belongs not just to an isolated individual, but to a community. And I wanted to show something of the anger that accompanies pain—at least in the early stages before it becomes mind-numbing. I have no idea how many people in this image are still alive.



photos, but it does not contain a single one. The cover, however, has a powerful etching from *The Disasters of War* by Goya. Sontag argues that Goya marked a significant point of departure in the representation of war and suffering: 'With Goya, a new standard for responsiveness to suffering enters art ... the account of war's cruelties is fashioned as an assault on the sensibility of the viewer.'

Photography wasn't far behind Goya, but it took some time before war photographers depicted the battle scene as something other than heroic or even romantic. Roger Fenton was the first known war photographer. He was sent to the Crimea in 1855 by the British government at the behest of Prince Albert. Even though the technology of the day demanded 30-second exposures, Fenton could have turned his lens on the many hundreds of corpses that littered the battlefields and produced a poignant image derivative of Goya's *Disasters of War*. But Fenton's brief was to counteract the reports of the dreadful conditions suffered by the British troops. Death and destruction did not enter his frame. Fenton and his horse-drawn darkroom were nothing more than a PR machine.

However, Sontag points out that there is one picture of Fenton's that doesn't require

images of dead soldiers to depict the horror of war: *The Valley of the Shadow of Death*, now part of the Library of Congress collection. The photograph reveals a desolate landscape littered with cannonballs. It's the place near Balaklava where 600 British soldiers were ambushed, the same event that inspired Tennyson's poem 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'. But the power of this image really comes from what we discover beyond the frame—the title and the context. Much of Sontag's ruminating can be summed up as 'context is everything'.

Towards the end of her book, Sontag quotes from Baudelaire's journal. Writing in the early 1860s (before photographs were reproduced in newspapers), Baudelaire said, 'It is impossible to glance through any newspaper, no matter what the day, the month or the year, without finding on every line the most frightful traces of human perversity.'

Not much has changed. In the days after I read Sontag's book, our daily papers carried graphic images of ordinary people traumatised by an earthquake in Algiers, bomb blasts in Morocco and Israel, a plane crash in Turkey, more killings in Iraq, massacres in Aceh, an attempted aircraft hijack in Melbourne and starvation

in Ethiopia. How does it affect us to be confronted so often by so much suffering?

As a photographer who has sometimes turned his lens on trauma, I have felt the anxiety of misrepresentation—that publication will somehow undermine the intent of my framing. Perhaps the image will be unfairly cropped. Maybe the caption I wrote won't be used. And what if the image of that emaciated and homeless child dying of malaria appears next to an advertisement for an apartment with a million-dollar view? Does this matter? As Sontag points out, there is no way the creator of the image can guarantee reverential conditions in which to look at such images and be fully responsive to them. Images develop a narrative of their own once they leave the clutches of their creator. Perhaps the best we can hope for is a sophisticated level of visual literacy where the consumers of images engage with the context of what lies both inside and outside the frame. And perhaps, too, those of us who produce images can strive to resist the lure of cliché and, where appropriate, collaborate with the subject. ■

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

Finding common ground

Community Development projects can make a difference

THE FEDERAL LABOR Party is taking its first tentative steps away from the more extreme elements of the Howard government's economic fundamentalism. One of the influences has been the electoral successes of state Labor governments. The lessons are not that complicated. Australians still want to live in a country where the water is drinkable; community services, health care and public transport are accessible and reliable; and schools and universities are sufficiently affordable to provide ground for optimism about the future of their children and grandchildren. Australians want to live in reasonably friendly, reasonably safe, reasonably supportive communities. This last expectation may also help explain the resurgence of interest by state and local governments in a diverse array of initiatives under the broad banner of building, strengthening and engaging local communities.

The goals and strategies of 'community building', or 'community development' as it was more commonly known 30 years ago, are far from new and continue to raise questions. There is an understandable suspicion that 'community building' is just a smokescreen, obscuring underlying structural inequalities and conflicts. No government looks forward to making hard decisions about the redistribution of, and public investment in, health, education and community services. And inviting a few local community leaders to comment on such decisions does not constitute community engagement.

There are many ongoing experiments in community engagement that appear to be making a difference where it counts, although all are still in their early days. In Victoria, the Wendouree West Neighbourhood Renewal program, the Aboriginal Justice Agreement implementation strategy and the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority are three such examples. These may serve to illustrate

some of the benefits and limitations of community development projects.

Wendouree West Neighbourhood Renewal: 'Everybody here will want to be here.'

Wendouree West was established as a public housing estate on the western edge of Ballarat in 1950 and now has a population of 2500. This is certainly not a slum: its layout and appearance are textbook Housing Commission-styled suburbia in a semi-rural setting. However poverty, unemployment and crime have been rubbing shoulders with the problems of limited access to health and education services, and to mainstream Ballarat life, since the late 1960s.

For this reason, Wendouree West has been one of the priority sites for the Victorian government's Neighbourhood Renewal program designed to use community-building strategies to narrow the gap between the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Victoria and the rest of the state.

Faye Macintosh has been resident in Wendouree West since the 1960s, and has been involved in numerous community initiatives and neighbourhood groups over many years. As a member of the Wendouree West Residents Group she sees a genuine difference between older methods of community consultation and the present Neighbourhood Renewal project: 'We weren't told, we were listened to—we were asked what we thought, what we felt.'

Her colleague in the Residents Group, John Boers, is also eager to promote the value of community involvement, while stressing the difficulty that he and others had in mastering the conferral process. 'When I joined I thought, "Why aren't they just doing this? What's all this yabber, yabber, yabber for two hours every week?" But I only can get something off the ground now because they did that groundwork and did it properly, correctly and legally and everything else that most

of us hate. Lucky for us they had enough gumption to keep going and get it right, so we can get things going!'

One of the first lessons of the Wendouree West initiative is that practical, visible improvements are the key to creating faith in the process within the community. John says that when he joined the Residents Group, 'a lot of people said to me, "You're an idiot because nothing is going to happen". People are actually starting to change that [view] because they're actually starting to see things happen.'

A community-run survey of residents provided an important mechanism for building trust and identifying local concerns. The results of the survey also demonstrated the extent of people's loneliness and isolation. Kevin Waugh, one of the community survey organisers, notes his surprise and alarm at the stories of loneliness and loss that came up in the survey process, and at the widespread desire for contact and conversation. For many local residents, participation in the survey was less important than simply being listened to.

Other organisations have had to become comfortable with the new community consultation model. Uniting Care, under the guidance of Cliff Barclay, bought into the Wendouree West experiment last year when the group purchased four 'dead' shops in a central location in the area. Community consultation on the shopping strip challenged Uniting Care's initial assumptions about the best use for the shops. 'They said to us that they didn't want a food bank,' says Barclay, equivocally, 'even though we think from our experience that would go down quite well there. But they wanted a mini-mart. So we came up with a plan that combined those two things. We can sell some stuff, also we can have free stuff for people to take.' Other proposals are a white goods repair facility, providing a convenient local enterprise and training; a coffee

shop, which also offers training and a social hub; a factory seconds outlet, and a centre where service providers such as Centrelink can put their representatives on a regular basis.

Waugh speaks with enthusiasm about the local benefits of a project he initially greeted with scepticism. 'Now, when people walk down the street they're not looking at the ground, they actually look up and talk to you, look you in the eye. They want to actually talk to each other.' In a few years, he says, Wendouree West 'will be a great place to live. It will be a community that actually believes in itself, an inclusive community, everybody here will want to be here.'

The Aboriginal Justice Agreement: 'We've got a practical way of fixing it.'

The Aboriginal Justice Agreement was established by the Victorian Labor government in 2001 as a mechanism for working with Victorian Aboriginal communities to take forward the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The organisations involved include the state government,

ATSIC, Victorian Aboriginal advocacy groups, the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee, and Victorian Koori Communities. The key to success, according to Andrew Jackomos, Manager of the Indigenous Issue Unit in the Department of Justice, is that Indigenous communities are winning real participation and ownership, rather than being assigned a merely consultative role.

This commitment to engaging Aboriginal communities in new approaches to justice issues has attracted enthusiastic support from workers in a range of Aboriginal communities. But it's clear that no single initiative could be expected to address quickly the entrenched problems in the relationship between Victoria's Koori population, the judiciary and the police. Larry Kanoa, Chair of the Grampians' Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee (RAJAC), notes that on a scale of one (rhetoric) to ten (reality), the AJA initiative is 'at about three ... and anyone who reckons they're further advanced than that are fooling themselves. It's just a process that needs to have its life, and needs to have a long life, not be one of these fly-by-night ideas'.

As a result of Indigenous community input into the AJA process, a whole range of practical initiatives is being explored. These initiatives include cross-cultural awareness programs for police and the judiciary; community support and family visiting programs for Aboriginal prisoners; peer support and mentoring for Aboriginal young people; the introduction of temporary, non-custodial 'holding cells'; the development of a 'Koori Court' exploring more culturally appropriate and responsive forms of legal administration and a system of 'night patrols' run by Aboriginal volunteers.

Justin Mohamed, of the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-op and Chair of the Hume RAJAC, sees the night patrols, recently introduced in Shepparton, as a good example of the way in which creative and constructive strategies can emerge from genuinely listening to the Indigenous communities most affected.

'There was a fairly large issue with the [wider] community with the young people down the mall at night-time and they were seen to be creating havoc and making people feel endangered. We know our young people aren't angels but it wasn't just them, it was a whole lot of other kids



Residents of Wendouree West with their vision for a community hub

from other nationalities and so forth but the Aboriginal kids got the brunt of the blame for it. So the community decided, "We've got a practical way of fixing it".'

Volunteer drivers patrol the streets of Shepparton on Friday and Saturday nights returning local kids to their homes. Police co-operate in the program by alerting the patrol to the whereabouts of teenagers who 'need to be picked up'. Patrol staff say that the young people they deal with respond positively to their presence and to the service. In the first six months of the program, arrests of young Kooris declined by almost 40 per cent.

Both Kanoa and Mohamed have seen situations where the traditional bureaucratic point of view has sought to re-establish itself—telling the Koori community what to do, or attempting to solve problems without consultation. Nevertheless, both see the AJA process as a healthy start.

Mohamed explains that historically, Shepparton would only attract 'the lower level of bureaucrats' who have little decision-making authority. Under the AJA the Indigenous community, local government, police and other stakeholders have been impressed with the importance the state government has placed on the initiative. Now Mohamed finds himself with 'the Department of Justice and the senior people there, sitting around a table listening to a community Chairperson like myself, listening to what the real needs are. It's a little bit unusual for the community. In the past two years it's been a fairly steep learning curve and things have happened which we probably never thought we were able to achieve leading up to the AJA before it started. I'm positive. I reckon it's a step in the right direction for the way communities communicate and how government departments hear what the community is doing.'

Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority: 'The community is the vital player.'

Catchment Management Authorities—such as the Glenelg Hopkins CMA in western Victoria—have grown out of the more traditionally bureaucratic Catchment and Land Protection boards as an uniquely Australian approach to engaging local citizens and communities in the sustainable management of local water resources and catchments.

According to Colin Dunkley, CEO of the Glenelg Hopkins CMA, the shift towards community engagement has been significant. Colin was involved in writing the first regional catchment strategy for the area. He says the difficulty was that the strategy came first, and the community was only invited to participate in implementing the plan; in other words, to do the work.

'It's almost the opposite now, the community is the vital player and we're asking the community to look at the threats, identify and value the assets available. Let's try and get [the] community, in a co-ordinated way, to help us solve the problems.'

Dunkley says that community members can now work to effect change in resource management in the region. There is growing interest in addressing long-term environmental challenges through organisations such as the South West Sustainability Network. However, the most effective starting points for getting involved often come from success in addressing immediate concerns affecting the daily life of communities, and in promotional and community-based group activities that highlight the issues, as much as directly working to solve problems.

'We've got an issue of carp in Rocklands Reservoir. There was a meeting here this morning with a whole range of people: the angling community, local tourist operators, others that have concern about carp in the river. We organised the meeting and we brought the NRE (Department of Natural Resources and Environment) specialists into the office and spoke to them. So that facilitation process is one of our important roles. The outcome was that the community will have a day where they will actually have a 'fish-off' and try and simply reduce the numbers [of carp]. They understand they're not going to get rid of the carp in Rocklands Reservoir, but it will promote awareness, it will get rid of a few fish, and it will be the community doing something that they'll see as positive.'

According to Dunkley, community engagement in natural resources and sustainability means tapping into an existing spirit of innovation and a pool of ideas and marrying this with local leadership. 'People talk about innovation—there's no shortage of innovation, there's always ideas. It's grasping them and pursuing them and taking them through to action which

is the difficulty and so that's where leaders can be really valuable in small towns.'

Community engagement: First steps on a long journey?

Cautious optimism, a willingness to keep learning and the importance of turning rhetoric into reality are the common thread in these stories.

In all three cases, enthusiastic support for a more respectful engagement with citizens in the decisions affecting their lives is tempered by a healthy scepticism. People are properly suspicious of token involvement. They are also aware that small transfers of power and responsibility to the community may be withdrawn with the next shift of the political and bureaucratic wind.

In each instance it is clear that people will only start to take the rhetoric of community building and community engagement seriously when they see evidence that it delivers real and lasting improvements to their lives. Community building and community engagement can be valuable processes and are paths worth pursuing. But such efforts are no substitute for long-term investment in the core public infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, health centres, housing, transport, parks and meeting places. Such institutions provide real foundations for resilient and healthy communities.

Twenty years ago Martin Mowbray and Lois Bryson wrote a famous and influential article called 'Community: The Spray-on Solution'. It was in response to the sometimes overblown claims for community development as a public policy cure-all. Then, as now, 'community' was easily criticised as a buzzword that meant any number of things—all of them positive. Similar caution is necessary in judging the next generation of such experiments. But in a world—and a country—short on alternative directions, it's important to learn from any examples of governments taking even the most tentative of steps away from free-market fundamentalism. ■

Professor John Wiseman is a Professorial Fellow in Community and Public Policy at Victoria University. **Dr David Nichols** is a researcher at Victoria University and research fellow at Deakin University's Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific.

The question mark

Experiencing death in the midst of life

'SEE THIS SWELLING HERE, the left half of the globe is being pushed up against that side of the skull by the bleeding.' The surgeon was twirling his pencil around a sketch of Dom's brain. Dominic was an uncle. 'We would go in here, and put in a drain to get the blood out. This is pretty standard, it's what we normally do.'

Behind us, in casualty, parked in a station surrounded by machines, Dom was writhing, twitching, unconscious. He had always been so welcoming and amiable. It was a wrenching sight. He had fallen in his bathroom that morning and deteriorated during the day.

'Sure,' said the brother who had come on behalf of Dom's Order. I was not so sure, but rationalised: 'The brother probably had the legal right to decide. Dom probably wouldn't survive the surgery, so what had we to lose? He would go that night, with it or without it.'

Playing for time to think, I asked, 'Can you decide by yourself, or do you need to check with someone?'

'No,' he said. 'I can sign.'

Casualty was worse than usual: they were renovating, it was half its normal size, noisy and messy. The people, though, were poor, ugly and squabbling—that was usual.

They got ready to wheel him to the theatre. It was time to go. The brother stood a foot from the bed and did not touch him. He peered at him. There was no evident emotion. Dom had been in this all-male religious Order for 60 years, as if in a family, and still the bonds had not softened into touch.

Angry—about a lot of things—I made sure I kissed Dom on his prickly sweaty forehead in front of the brother.

I was rung the next morning. Dom had made it to intensive care. He had a dedicated nurse, the cheerful Delia, who managed all his machines. She was

trying to get pregnant. In her loud, nasally Australian voice she negotiated over the phone with her husband and doctor about whether this was a good day or not to make love.

Despite her fly-swatting voice, Dom writhed, unconscious for 36 hours. The longer he was unconscious, the more I regretted the decision to do the operation. The chance was that if he did regain consciousness he would have brain damage from all the internal bleeding his fall had caused.

The surgery had left him with a giant question mark traced out in steel staples, which began up above his eyebrows on the crown of his head, curved towards the back and then swung down under his left ear to his neck.

HE WAS 80 NOW and had joined the Servants of Christ over 60 years ago. He was the seventh boy in a row born to a poor northern suburbs family of devout Catholics. I often saw him in black-and-white Depression-era photos with all his brothers, trussed in ill-fitting suits and ties, just as they were trussed in their poverty, family and Catholicism. They all looked shrewd, competitive, energetic, independent and a bit feral. Their era seemed to have little connection with ours but it was only a decade or two before I was born. I know now how little decades mean. They were taught Latin. It was a way of yoking them to an international and ancient autocracy, incongruous with the lanes, creeks and cricket paddocks they haunted. Their parents were stoical, resilient, not given to indulgence or affirmation. What peasants can afford such luxuries?

During his decades of teaching Dom ran a small business on the side. He made rosary beads and gave them out with medals to the boys. Corny and eccentric it might have seemed, but because it was

Dom they would take them and love him. Everyone loved his impish charm and good humour, especially the mothers in the tuckshops of the various schools in which he taught. He had survived into the late '90s, still coaching boys who were struggling.

May was Mary's month and each year Dom would have the boys build an altar to the Virgin. The centrepiece would be a large statue of the woman, dressed in blue, white streams of lace flowing from her hands, and flowers, blue and white, and lemon wax candles. There were, in the pictures I saw, curlicued paper banners pinned to the blue curtain at the back. They read: *Mother of God, Queen of Heaven, Comforter of the Afflicted and Mystical Rose*. It was the high watermark of both the cults of Mary and of Communism. Mary was standing on a snake that represented the latter. Dom joined organisations dedicated to Mary and the use of her powers. She seemed to be the devotion of his life.

I don't know if there is any truth in the rumour but it had been said that before Dom left for the seminary he was keen on a young woman from the parish, also called Mary. She was my mother. When we got to the hospital bed where she was already yellowing, Dom was there, saying his rosary. Now I was at his bedside.

Eventually he did regain consciousness. During the two or three days that followed, Dom did not ask for his beads and neither prayer, nor Mary, nor God seemed to cross his mind. Nurses came to his bed regularly to test his neurological function. 'Can you squeeze my finger, Dom?' they would ask. Each time, his whole body jerked and a beatific smile spread across his face, giving and receiving. He was thoroughly charming and unashamed in his delight. The other time he blossomed was when a nephew brought

in his five-year-old child. Children melted for Dom. They recognised with joy that he was one of them.

I stood for many hours stroking his arm. I remembered that only two weeks before his fall, I had visited him in the hospice. He was sitting on his bed when I arrived. He suggested that we go and see his sweet peas. As he stood, his pants fell down. I stooped to pull them up for him. I was embarrassed and touched at the intimacy of the moment. He could do no more than shuffle out to the garden. His breathing was faint and thin. I got a chair for him to sit, while I weeded and watered. Over my shoulder he told me that he loved women. I was astonished and turned to look at him. His arms were raised and there was an energy in him. 'How wonderful they are. It was wrong that as young men we were kept apart from them.' It was the only radical or daring thing I had ever heard him say. He had always seemed content with the company line. By then, it was too big a topic for me to follow and he was too fragile.

Reflecting on this moment, as I stood beside his bed, I felt angry again. How cruel it was to take him into an order and ask

him to vow against intimacy and his sexuality before his puberty was even over.

I saw him as a 20-year-old putting out the lights of a dormitory of hundreds of boys, thousands of miles from home. I saw the grimace on his face as he strapped the big rugby players to keep order in classes of 60. I saw him handing me a letter sent to him from one of the other brothers that had helped him cope with his depression. I saw him stand on a hill during a family picnic and spread his arms out towards the countryside. 'I am the Lord of all I survey,' he declaimed. Later he said the doctor had got the dosage wrong. He was embarrassed about being so high. He had told me, too, of the time during his training when he'd been made to eat off the floor for three days because he had broken a plate.

DOM SOON SLID back into a coma. There was a phase when his eyes manically scanned the ceiling as if in desperate search for an answer to the question that had been sliced and stapled into his skull.

Opposite him in the six-bed room, a man was tied to the wall—his bed on the floor, so he couldn't harm himself.

He too was writhing incessantly. It was unnerving. I had to hassle the weary nurses to get Dom a room by himself to die in.

At one stage he opened his eyes, smiled and said, 'Trust you.' Was it affirming or ironic? I don't know.

I watched and sat for hours, synchronising my breathing with his as a joint prayer. It was as if he was the father I had needed, and I a son he should have had.

I got too sleepy. The nurses gave me a pillow. I was lying on the floor when I heard the breathing stop. I checked my watch; they would want to know. It was 3am.

In the darkened room, before I went for the nurses, I rubbed his arm, fervently, confident he could still sense it. Who knows when the soul leaves and where it goes? Thank you Dom, I said, thank you, on behalf of all those who loved you, that big clan, everyone.

I kissed the already tight but still sweaty forehead. I let my lips linger, trying to make up for what I thought life had done. I could have left them there a long time. ■

Terry Monagle is a writer, farmer and public speaker.

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

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

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

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

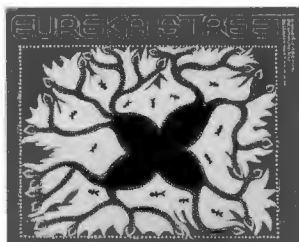
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EUREKA STREET

readership survey



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 Paul Hill: from Gullford to Bogota
 An ethical framework for governance?
 As easy as ABC Summer in Madrid
 Belief and unbelief: an uneasy relationship
 Meg Simons' Meeting of the Waters and
 Philip Ayres' Owen Dixon Community
 development: once more with feeling

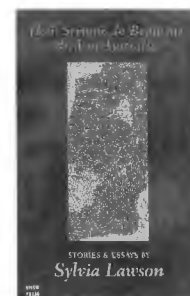
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UNSW
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About the magazine ...

1. How did you first come across *Eureka Street*?

- Introduced by a friend or colleague
- Answered an advertisement
- Replied to a direct mail invitation
- Saw it at a bookshop
- Saw it on the newsstand
- Mentioned on radio and/or in print

2. What attracted you to *Eureka Street*?

- The reputation it has for independent analysis and fine writing
- The fact that the magazine has its roots in the Catholic heritage
- Coverage of local and international politics and current affairs
- The reviews of books, film, theatre and other arts
- The religious commentary and discussion
- Other

3. How long have you been subscribing to *Eureka Street*?

- Less than 2 years
- 2-3 years
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- 6-7 years
- 8-9 years
- 10+ years

4. How many people will read this copy of the magazine (including yourself)?

-
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6. On average, how long do you spend reading each copy of *Eureka Street*?

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7. Do you keep past issues of *Eureka Street*?

- Yes
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- One week
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- Two months
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9. Have you used or acted upon something you've seen in *Eureka Street*?

- No
- Yes
 - Phoned for more information
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 - Other (Please specify)

10. How much do you enjoy or dislike the following features and aspects of *Eureka Street*?

	Very much	A little	Not much	Not at all
Snapshot	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Public affairs features	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Church issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Theatre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Book reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Film reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CD reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overall Design	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Additional comments:

.....

11. What is your preferred length of article?

- Column
- One page
- Full feature
- Like mix of all

12. *Eureka Street* has its roots in the Catholic tradition but seeks to bring together a range of opinion on the important issues in Australia. Please consider the balance of 'Catholic' and secular content in the magazine. Is there

- Too much Catholic content
- The right balance
- Too little Catholic content
- Don't know

Additional comments:

.....

13. How would you prefer to receive *Eureka Street* in future?

- Printed version
- On-line

Information about you ...

- a. What sex are you?**
- Male
 Female
- b. What age are you?**
- Under 18
 18-25
 26-40
 41-55
 56-70
 71+
- c. The highest education level you have attained is...**
- Completed primary level
 Completed secondary education
 TAFE graduate or student
 Tertiary student
 Completed tertiary degree
 Postgraduate studies
- d. Your religious affiliation is...**
- Catholic
 Anglican
 Uniting Church
 Other Christian (Please specify)
- Jewish
 Muslim
 Hindu
 Non-Religious
 None
 Other (Please specify)
- e. Are you a member of any political, academic, religious or other associations?**
- No
 Yes (Please specify)
- f. Do you work...**
- Full-time
 Part-time
 Casual
 I am not currently in paid employment
 I am retired
- g. Your occupation is best described as...**
- Student
 Teacher
 Religious
 Professional Managerial
 Clerical
 Trade
 Home duties
 Self-employed
 Unemployed
 Other (Please specify)
- h. Your total household income is...**
- \$10,000-\$19,999
 \$20,000 - \$29,999
 \$30,000 - \$39,999
 \$40,000 - \$49,999
 \$50,000 - \$59,999
 \$60,000 - \$69,999
 \$70,000 - \$79,999
 \$80,000 - \$89,999
 \$90,000 - \$99,999
 \$100,000+
- i. Do you have a personal computer?**
- No
 Yes
- j. Do you have access to the internet?**
- No
 Yes
 At work
 At home
 Other (Please specify)
- k. Have you travelled to the following in the last twelve months, and how often?**
- Overseas times a year
 Interstate times a year
- And why? (tick all that apply)**
- Business
 Holiday
 Visit family/friends
 Other (Please specify)
- l. Have you done any of the following in the past month? (tick all that apply)**
- Bought a ...**
- Book
 CD
 DVD
 Rented a video
 Done a short course
- Been to the ...**
- Theatre
 Cinema
 Opera
 Ballet
 Movies
 Undertaken other study

14. What would you like to see more of in *Eureka Street*?

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15. What would you like to see less of in *Eureka Street*?

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16. Please provide any other additional comments you would like to make about the magazine

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17. What other magazines and newspapers do you read regularly?

(Please specify)
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18. Do you subscribe to any other publications?

No
 Yes (Please specify)
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An Australian slave trade

The trafficking of women highlights the consequences of the government's policy on illegal immigration

IMMIGRATION MINISTER Philip Ruddock recently announced that the federal government is committed to combating the crime of trafficking for sexual slavery, where women are brought to Australia against their will and used as sex slaves. The minister's comments were long on rhetoric and short on practical details and commitment. It seems the minister is more concerned with damage control, following public horror at revelations that there are trafficked women in Australia.

Trafficking for sexual slavery is a serious crime against humanity. The government's commitment to addressing this human rights disaster is a good first step, but until concrete measures are introduced to protect and assist the victims of trafficking and to prosecute those responsible, there is little cause for excitement at the minister's announcement.

In April this year, the New South Wales Deputy State Coroner, Carl Milovanovich, handed down his findings in relation to the inquest into the death of a trafficked woman in Villawood Immigration Detention Centre. The Coroner's case showed that despite Ms Puongtong Simaplee revealing to a Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) Compliance Officer that she was the victim of sexual slavery, she was incarcerated in the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre, where she died three days later as a result of heroin withdrawal and medical mismanagement. The Coroner found that aspects of the medical treatment of Ms Simaplee were inadequate, inappropriate and below the standard expected.

Both DIMIA and Australasian Correctional Management (ACM)—who operate Australia's detention centres—failed Ms Simaplee. There are obvious and simple measures that should have been taken to assist and protect her. Until the government and its private detention centre operators take such measures to assist trafficked women, any claims to be addressing the issue are hollow.

Appropriate treatment of the victims of trafficking includes putting them in touch with agencies that have expertise about the needs of trafficked women and providing them with lawyers who can advise them of their rights. In addition, both DIMIA and ACM staff should be trained specifically to identify

trafficking issues and to respond appropriately when someone reveals they have been trafficked. Trafficked women suffer from complex psychological and health issues that require careful and informed treatment.

Bridging visas need to be available to victims of trafficking so that these victims are not kept in detention centres, where experiences of powerlessness and abuse can only be exacerbated. The policy and conditions of mandatory detention contributed to Ms Simaplee's death and threaten the lives of many other trafficked women. It needs to be easier for those who allege they have been trafficked to obtain criminal justice visas and witness protection, so that they can safely remain in Australia at least for the time it takes the federal police to investigate their stories.

Brothels should be scrutinised by state and federal police so that the crime rings behind people-trafficking are eradicated and illegal brothels are shut down. The Commonwealth legislation that makes trafficking a crime should be strengthened in order to prosecute traffickers. Organisations that have worked to establish access to imprisoned sex workers need better funding, so they can assist more women to escape.

It will be interesting to see exactly how the government plans to address trafficking for sexual slavery. After considering the evidence about Ms Simaplee's death, Coroner Carl Milovanovich recommended that DIMIA and ACM should consider working with other organisations to provide appropriate medical, community and translator services to women who have been identified as possible victims of trafficking. The UN Trafficking Protocol (to which Australia is a signatory) requires the government to take measures to protect victims of trafficking. The tragic death of Ms Simaplee demonstrates what can happen when such obligations are neglected.

Minister Ruddock frequently refers to his commitment to the human rights principles embedded in the philosophy of Amnesty International. Here is an opportunity to display this commitment. ■

Georgina Costello is a Melbourne-based lawyer and a fellow at OzProspect, a non-partisan public policy thinktank.

In the skin of a tiger

A Naga poet keeps her culture alive even without a recognised homeland



EASTERINE IRALU had her first encounter with the spirit world of the Naga people at a young age. One evening in north-east India, after she and her cousins had finished playing, she noticed a little boy still hiding under the table. Before she had time to let him know the game was over, the boy was gone.

'He had this mischievous look on his face and he looked as though he wanted me to keep his secret,' she says. 'And then a few more minutes later—I don't know if he disappeared or not—but it struck me that he was not any one of the children I knew.'

It may have been a lucky escape for Iralu. Many Naga stories, passed around the village and between generations, tell of people lured away by the sweet calls of forest spirits. Some return, unable to speak of their experience. Others never come back, but they are not considered dead. They have left their human form behind.

'It's not just magical realism, it is there,' Iralu says. 'As recently as 1998, the lady who used to come and clean our office went missing for a week. She'd been spirited away. The whole village came out to look for her, after a week they found her somewhere in the forest and brought her back.'

'She was home for two days and then she went missing again. And then they got her back for good. She was quite disturbed by the whole thing so she couldn't clearly say what had happened, she just said some

people called her.'

Iralu says she has a foot in both worlds. Her sense of the other-worldliness still present in Naga culture sits comfortably with the Christianity brought by the missionaries who followed the first British punitive raids into the Naga Hills in the 1830s.

A poet, writer and translator of traditional verse from her Angami tribe, Iralu also teaches in the English department at Nagaland University. She is in Sydney to attend a conference on reconciliation and healing before heading south on a three-week tour of Australia. It is all good material for the diary she is keeping of her travels. Her meetings with the locals and impressions of the land prompt some on-the-spot lyricism. 'Nothing pantheistic,' she jokes.

There are three million Nagas, and as many as 50 tribes, living in Burma and India. The state of Nagaland in north-east India is home to many, including Iralu and her family, while others are spread through neighbouring states. On the eve of the British departure from India in 1947, the Nagas made their own unilateral declaration of independence.

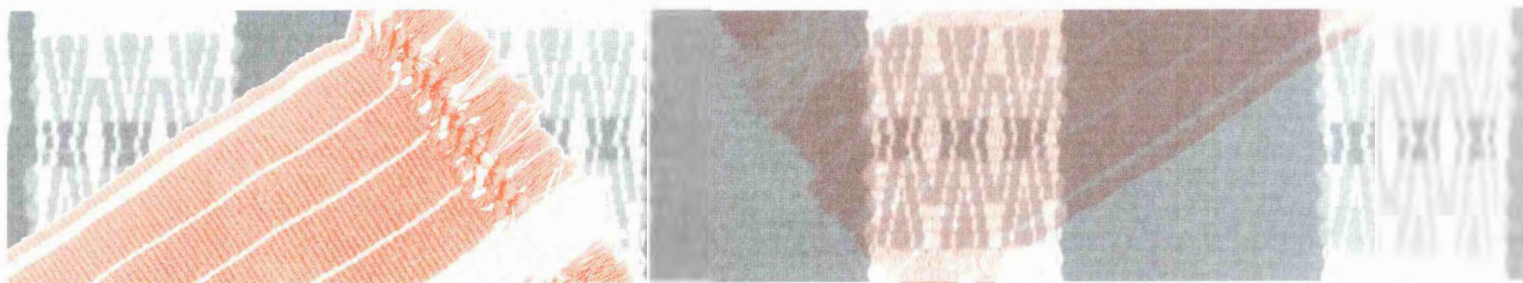
It was ignored, despite an earlier assurance from Gandhi that there would be no forced union. Many, perhaps most, Nagas remain unreconciled to their inclusion in India. They dream of Nagalim—a homeland for the Nagas, centred on Nagaland and incorporating the Naga-inhabited areas of neighbouring states in both India

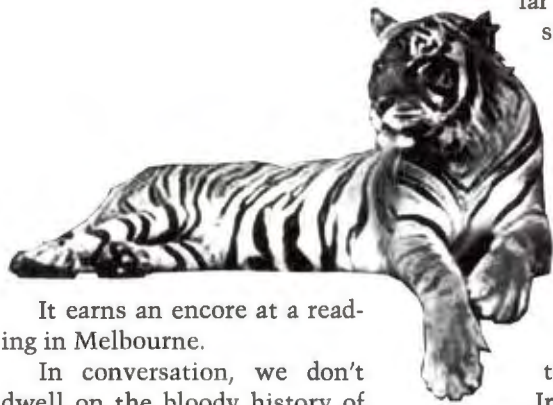
and Burma. The idea was met with increasing Indian force in the 1950s. It has resulted in a heavy presence of Indian jawans (soldiers) throughout Nagaland ever since. A ceasefire between the central government and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), brokered in 1997, still holds.

In an historic move, Naga independence leaders met with Indian ministers in Delhi in January this year. It was the first time in three decades that NSCN leaders had set foot on Indian soil without fear of arrest. But after three months of hope, the talks have hit a snag. The NSCN are determined that discussion of Nagalim and sovereignty remain on the agenda and be canvassed sooner rather than later. Delhi has responded by introducing the prospect of 'disarming and disbanding' the underground armed movement before the talks proceed. It raises the spectre of the ceasefire collapsing and a return to civil war.

Iralu's poem, 'After reading *Wounded Knee*', reflects on how a history of resistance to British, then Indian, colonialism has been overtaken by internecine war between the independence factions.

Betrayed, we have learnt to betray
my brothers are riding out
to seek my brothers' lives
and I stand here alone
waiting, in the shadows
afraid, of life, not death.
Bury my heart too
at Wounded Knee.





It earns an encore at a reading in Melbourne.

In conversation, we don't dwell on the bloody history of Naga nationalism. Instead, Iralu begins telling stories and talks about her struggle to 'decolonise the Naga mind'. She takes the phrase from one of her favourite African writers, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, whose work she has introduced to her literature students at Nagaland University. African texts, as well Australian Aboriginal authors, are not the only surprises for her students.

'Just as you would make time to read a favourite book, I push them to make time to go and sit by the fireplace and listen to the stories and write for me in the form of an assignment,' she says. 'It's to emphasise that the stories have value, both value in themselves as well as cultural value.'

'Then they realise without me saying a lot that stories are going to die if they don't do something and it inspires them to do research on the old stories. It's a way of making the stories live again.'

Iralu herself has spent many hours sitting listening to the tales of her grandmother, a midwife who travelled extensively among the Naga villages. Some of them are the inspiration for stories in her recent book, *The Windhover Collection*, its title a reference to the work of 19th-century Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins.

In 'Spirit Feast' a midwife takes a short-cut late at night, going to the next

village to help with a delivery. On the way she is offered refreshment at an unfamiliar village, where the people are taller, stronger and more beautiful than ordinary folk. The next day she is told no such village exists and she can no longer find the path so clearly marked the previous night. The hospitable spirits of this tale are matched elsewhere in Iralu's collection by menacing unseen presences that stalk unwary villagers in the forest.

Such narratives read as cautionary tales. Others convey moral lessons, says Iralu. And in two hair-raising stories she deals with lycanthropy. While European folk tales of lycanthropy typically focus on the transformation of humans into werewolves, these stories recount the special relationship the Naga have with tigers. Even today, says Iralu, people twin their spirit to the spirit of a particular tiger in the forest.

'We have weretigers. It is a furtive sort of thing. They won't come out in the open but people know who are the weretigers.'

Nagas living in Melbourne add their own stories of lycanthropy: villagers who sicken and die when their tiger is killed in the hunt; a villager who is followed through the forest by a prowling presence, then is told on arrival of being protected by a relative's familiar. Iralu says tales of lycanthropy vary among the Naga tribes. They are explained by an origin story that puts man, spirit and tiger as brothers, children of the same mother. The tiger breaks taboo by eating human flesh and leaves the family home.

She sees herself as a reinvented storyteller, turning to the printed word to preserve tribal stories. In meetings with Indigenous Australians Iralu is impressed by the ways they have used technology 'to keep culture alive'.

Naga stories and the identity they carry have suffered under a colonial education system that has devalued indigenous

culture. And as the young leave the villages and fields for the towns and schools, they are also losing touch with the stories Iralu goes out of her way to collect.

'Culture gives you a way to survive,' she says. Unemployment, drug abuse and an increasing suicide rate are the alarming features of the new world for many Nagas. 'Why cannot we have a foot in both worlds?' she says. It's possible to have access to education and technology, and to indigenous knowledge, 'because that gives you life'.

Apologising for being rude, Iralu expresses some disappointment with much of the Australian landscape she has seen: 'too pretty, too organised. I did not come to Australia to see England.' But crossing the South Australian border en route to meet an Aboriginal group at Coorong, as the gum trees become silhouettes in the fading light, she experiences the primeval landscape she had yearned to see. 'This must be how it was in the beginning,' she writes in her travelogue. 'Australia mothering the planet, birthing mountains and seas, rocks and trees and animals and the greatness of spirit that would be needed to make the Ngarrindjerri people.'

An Australian visitor to Nagaland might be disappointed if their expectations tend to the exotic. The vistas of town life are the same the world over.

'But it is more than that and I can only say it comes alive in the stories because we have the landscape still and I'm grateful for that,' says Iralu.

Easterine Iralu, as storyteller and tour guide, could lead us to a village where two stones used to scream 'in the not too distant past', or show us other taboo stones that will change the weather if touched.

'I can still take people to a particular river which has a female guardian spirit, and they will experience the other-worldliness of it because she is still there.' ■

Nick Lenaghan is a Melbourne journalist.





Hamlet in hard times

HAMLET IS THE premier play of English-language theatre, not because it's Shakespeare's greatest tragedy but because any classical actor worth his salt has the chance to shine in it. The title role is so open to interpretation that the actor can, if not quite play himself, at least exhibit his natural gifts without violating the characterisation.

So it was that Olivier's first stage Hamlet was described by James Agate as the finest performance he had ever seen. Gielgud's recordings suggest a Hamlet of lingering, meditative intensity and a wonderful glinting gift for high comedy. Scofield was pensive and uncertain, starting into an abyss. Richard Burton made the verse a weapon of his will and the comedy was like swordplay.

Derek Jacobi was the last big-time British actor to tour this country in the part, a couple of decades ago. But local Hamlets have cut their swathes: Robert Menzies, and more recently Richard Roxburgh, who had Cate Blanchett as his Ophelia and Geoffrey Rush as his Horatio.

Hamlet is not like *Lear*, in which only an actor or two every generation comes within cooee of the role. A new Hamlet need not worry about the looming memory of a Scofield or a Paul Robeson, a James Earl Jones or a Sean Connery. He can simply become one more bewildering element, in a play about the riddle of selfhood.

A histrionic prince who treats the world as his mirror and his rehearsal space, Hamlet has to imagine himself before he can find himself as an actor. The mask of the comedian and the mask of the magnetic actor, the prince of self-possession, derive their power from the fact that Hamlet is steeped in a desolation he cannot understand.

In his new production for the Bell Shakespeare Company, John Bell gives the role to Leon Ford—a young actor who plays the Prince as very young, looking like a homeboy, a nerd or some very con-

temporary incarnation of alienated youth.

You can't object to the trappings of the conception. But Ford plays Hamlet as a kind of goblin boy, all cartoon hair and creepy, ethereal voice. In a slightly alarming way, the language is neither an approximation to standard English—the sort of high Australian Mel Gibson used—nor ordinary middle Australian. Instead, he uses a weird impacted voice that owes something to Bell's own sub-Olivier mannerisms—the terrier-like barking and nipping round Shakespeare's words—but nothing to his technique or mastery of the verse.

The upshot is a thwarted performance. It's not naturalistic but it doesn't have a mastery of traditional style either. Ford takes the idea of Shakespeare (or the precedent of Bell) as the pretext for playing Hamlet as an oddball, contemporary gargoyle. Parts of it are done well. Ford can hurl out Hamlet's quips and give them a flattened, cagey nerviness that translates their savagery into a contemporary vocal idiom. But the overall effect is of a funny little cartoon, at once artless and self-conscious.

Christopher Stollery, in his day a distinctive Hamlet for Bell, plays Claudius with a nasal Australian drawl that cuts against the verse. He looks like a nightclub owner, but very self-possessed, and the performance has a natural authority of its own.

On the other hand, Linda Cropper has the right kind of Shakespearean manner as the Queen, but fails to make much of the part. There is not enough presence, in this somewhat thankless role, to get Cropper over the hurdle of the Queen's vapid early statements, and she doesn't make enough of the closet scene to compensate. Nor does Bell's direction do much to help her.

Robert Alexander as Polonius makes rather more of this prime ham role. The natural fall of the lines is preserved and he belts out the jokes more or less effectively.

It is a sound traditional characterisation, but without much to hone or highlight it.

Ophelia, in Anna Torv's interpretation, falls between two stools. She intones drama schoolishly—which can be a relief in a Bell production, where everything can sound like Brecht in alliance with the more desperate side of Kings Cross. But although she is a 'traditional' Ophelia, it's not the tradition of speaking the verse 'on the note'—and finding the character through that. This is a porcelain cliché imperfectly executed.

I'm not sure if one should be bemused or relieved that a man of Bille Brown's talents is to be found as the Ghost, the First Player and the Gravedigger. He is less of a delight than he might be because his Marlovian Ghost, in a blanket of stage smoke, has something Gilbert and Sullivan-like about it. His Player is artfully painted but has all its skill underlined by the craftsman, and his Gravedigger is a matter of what the Gravedigger can do for Bille Brown rather than what Bille Brown can do for the Gravedigger.

THIS PRODUCTION HAS been overpraised in ways that suggest a lot of people no longer 'get' Shakespeare or have forgotten the kinds of directorial and acting skills that are required. John Bell should concentrate on equipping his younger actors with a mastery of Shakespeare's language. He might also pull back his old hands so they are not simply hoist on the petard of their own technique.

The production does have a certain clarity of outline. It gets from A to B without fuss. The young audience in whose company I saw it greeted it with intelligent enthusiasm—laughing at the jokes, rather than inappropriately—in a way that put most first-night establishment audiences to shame. ■

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

Tales from the bench

Owen Dixon, Philip Ayres. Miegunyah, 2003. ISBN 0 522 85045 6, RRP \$65.00

AUSTRALIA'S FINEST JUDGE was Sir Owen Dixon, who spent 35 years on the High Court, 12 of those years as Chief Justice. For almost seven years he was away from the bench assisting the government with the war effort, first at home—when his vituperative brother-judge Starke said he 'did nothing and just went to lunches and dinners'—and then as Special Minister to Washington. In 1950 he was UN Mediator in Kashmir.

Dixon died 31 years ago, and the legal community has awaited his official biography with great anticipation. For years, James Merralls QC from the Melbourne Bar was expected to provide the text. But in the end the family committed Dixon's papers to a non-lawyer, Philip Ayres—an English literature academic from Melbourne and the biographer of Malcolm Fraser. Ayres has burrowed beyond Dixon's public record, but in very selected places. His main additional sources are Dixon's diaries and five of Dixon's surviving and most adoring associates, who shared their memories and assisted with the redrafting of the more legal chapters. Judges' associates are usually bright young graduates who spend a year or two with a judge before their own successful careers at the Bar and on the bench. Ayres does not list Merralls as one of the associates who participated in the biography, but he is given special mention for his 'extensive and profound' knowledge of Dixon. The result is a very Melbourne book under the imprint of Miegunyah Press from Melbourne University Press. Miegunyah, for those not in the know, was the residence of Sir Russell Grimwade, Dixon's predecessor as Chairman of the Felton Bequest Committee.

Not only has there never been a finer judge, there has never been one better connected with the government of the day. Prime Minister Menzies had been Dixon's pupil at the Bar. When in 1964 Dixon decided to retire as Chief Justice, he tried to convince Menzies to take on



the job because, as Ayres puts it, 'it was impossible to leave things to the others'. Dixon had a poor opinion of most of his fellow lawyers, and especially of his predecessor John Latham and successor Garfield Barwick. He regarded Latham as a usurper and was very curt with Menzies at the swearing-in. He never liked Barwick, who had often appeared before him as an advocate. When Barwick's appointment as Chief Justice was announced, Dixon's judicial colleague Douglas Menzies, the prime minister's cousin, called to see him at home. Dixon told him that the appointment was 'on the same plane' as that of McTiernan, whom Dixon regarded as lazy and unqualified. Dixon confided in his closest judicial friend, Justice Kitto, that Barwick's way would be to decide cases 'rather than to decide them rightly'.

To the layman, Dixon is best known for his espousal of a 'strict and complete

legalism'. Ayres attempts to place Dixon in the centre of our national story, proclaiming him to be 'the finest and most entire mind Australia has produced'. Ayres applies to Dixon the words of Horace: 'entire in himself, well-turned and polished, rounded off'. Many of the quotes from the ex-associates add a touch of hagiography to the work. In contrast, the quotes from the diary often raise more questions than they answer.

The *Communist Party Dissolution Case* was a case of profound political significance. Dixon led the court in striking down the legislation by six votes to one. Chief Justice Latham, who had been Attorney-General, was alone in dissent. Barwick had led a bevy of barristers in the Commonwealth's unsuccessful defence. The case ran for 23 days and the court delivered judgment ten weeks later. The report in the *Commonwealth Law Reports* runs to 285 pages. Dixon commenced his own judgment with the observation:

The primary ground upon which (the Act's) validity is attacked is simply that its chief provisions do not relate to matters falling within any legislative power expressly or impliedly given by the Constitution to the Commonwealth Parliament but relate to matters contained within the residue of legislative power belonging to the States.

He found the legislation unsupported by the Commonwealth's defence power because by 1950, when the legislation was enacted, 'the country was not of course upon a war footing' and 'the matter must be considered substantially upon the same basis as if a state of peace ostensibly existed'. He thought it quite 'unnecessary to discuss the principles of communism' and 'even less necessary to examine notorious international events'. He knew Menzies would be very upset by the result. They didn't bump into each other for another nine months. Ayres quotes from the diary:

(Menzies) mentioned Commo case & said he was shocked on reading my judgment to find what I said. I answered it was presented only dialectically and Barwick had no general knowledge. We needed international facts. I added that Latham had avoided having a conference. He said he could understand him because he preferred to dissent like Isaacs.

Was his Honour seriously suggesting to the prime minister that the outcome of the constitutional litigation could have been different had there been different counsel or a judicial conference? Eight years later, Dixon would write to Lord Morton:

I cannot help feeling that in litigation the order of importance is first the formal order, second the reasons, third the adequacy of the basal material and the use of it made by the reasons. The place which the arguments of counsel take should be auxiliary. The place given to them is in fact too great. In the past I have read arguments before the Privy Council presented by Australian counsel which they would not have dared to raise before us.

Diplomat Alan Watt, who was Dixon's First Secretary in Washington during the war, observed that Dixon's 'intelligence and his wide experience have led him to expect little from human nature and always to anticipate the worst'. Dixon once told one of his associates, 'When I hear stories ... about people who are reformed characters, the only thing it ever reminds me of is the story of the cannibal chief who lost his teeth and became a vegetarian'.

Like all of us, Dixon was a product of his age. Some of his fixed attitudes prompt dissent from the assessment as 'the finest and most entire mind Australia has produced'. Like many Australians then and now, he had a strong aversion to organised religion, verging on prejudice and intolerance. When arbitrating the Kashmir crisis he wrote home, 'Like many troubles in the world, religion is at the bottom of the one I am to look after'. He described the Islam of the Pakistanis as 'a religion which seems to give a good deal of exercise in bobbing up and down and it certainly is not more absurd than the Roman Catholic religion'. Of the Indians in the Kashmir dispute he wrote, 'The great majority are Hindus and what they believe in is more archaic'.

Despite or because of his extensive international experience, Dixon remained a strong advocate of the White Australia policy. When questioned about India by an American judge in 1942, he confided, 'we were afraid of the East including India because whether by conquest or peaceful penetration they would overrun us'. By the early 1960s, Dixon was very troubled on his regular visits to London, alarmed by the number of Jamaicans and other West Indians on the streets. He predicted



race riots and told his associate, 'They can have communism and get rid of it after fifty years, but they cannot get rid of that'. When Special Minister to Washington during the war, he went down into the heart of old Confederacy country and addressed the Executive Club in Memphis:

We regard our country as a southern stronghold of the white race—a thing for which it is well fitted; and our population is European. The aboriginal native has retreated before the advance of civilisation, contact with which he apparently cannot survive. The analogy in this country is the Red Indian, but the Australian Aboriginal is of a much lower state of development.

He belongs to the Stone Age and no success has attended efforts to incorporate him in civilised society.

No wonder the critics of the *Mabo* decision hanker after Dixon's strict and complete legalism. But even they fail to appreciate that his strict and complete legalism was to be applied to the constitutional interpretation of the federal compact. He was the past master at developing the common law and that would have been more relevant to the *Mabo* exercise. When he thought the House of Lords was erroneously developing the common law on murder and manslaughter, he took the unprecedented step of declaring:

Hitherto I have thought that we ought to follow decisions of the House of Lords, at the expense of our own opinions and cases decided here, but having carefully studied *Smith's Case* I think that we cannot adhere to that view or policy. There are propositions laid down in the judgment which I believe to be misconceived and wrong. They are fundamental and they are propositions which I could never bring myself to accept.

When the High Court considered *Mabo*, there had been no decision of the High Court that squarely raised the issue of native title with native title claimants being a party to the proceedings. By 1992 a judge in the Dixon mould could readily have been a member of the majority ruling that the common law recognised native title. In earlier times, it might have been uninformed prejudice rather than purity of legal method that would have held back a Dixonian judge from recognising native title in the common law of Australia.

ONE OF DIXON'S associates confided to Ayres that 'Dixon would often write a judgment straight through without authorities'. Once when the associate pointed to the deficiency, Dixon retorted, 'You think we had better decorate it, then?' He proceeded to add references to various precedents. He once quipped at a dinner party when a woman enthused about the capacity to dispense justice:

I do not have anything to do with justice. I sit on a court of appeal, where none of the facts are known. One third of the facts are excluded by normal frailty and memory;

one third by the negligence of the profession; and the remaining third by the archaic laws of evidence.

Because Ayres is not a lawyer, and because he's anxious to establish Dixon's brilliance behind the scenes, he reveals blemishes in Dixon's judicial behaviour. On one occasion Dixon wrote in his diary, 'spent all day doing Rich's Sun Newspapers Ltd and Associated Newspapers Ltd ... Finished Rich's judgment at 2.15am'. He then proceeded to sit on the three judge bench for the appeal. Ayres notes that Justice Rich's judgment 'had been substantially written up for him by Dixon, a comic ingredient which must have delighted Dixon beyond words'. The impropriety of it does take your breath away.

Dixon had very strong views about the need for utmost propriety by others. He wanted the Melbourne Club to change its rules and drop its automatic offer of membership to governors-general once William McKell was appointed. Dixon told Latham (the president of the club):

I could not come into a club and meet McKell: that it was not a political matter as he alleged but a moral question: that charges of corruption had been made in the evening *Herald* as well as other journals and that it was not right to countenance such a man or expose people to the risk of meeting him.

At the club, all sorts of business could be done and gossip exchanged. On one occasion at the club, Chief Justice Dixon fell into conversation with the personal physician of his fellow-justice Williams. Dixon asked about Williams' health and the doctor obliged—'seemingly breaching patient confidentiality,' says Ayres. The reader is left with the impression that much discussion in the clubs and with senior government ministers would have been seemingly improper if it had been conducted by mere mortals in public places, restricted by the usual canons of judicial propriety.

It's extraordinary that these things happened. But it's also extraordinary that they can be faithfully reported by a biographer who seems committed to hagiography. By 1952, Dixon was making a habit of offering advice to state governors confronting constitutional crises. Ayres gives this assessment:

Dixon believed that English service officers who had become State governors might speak to him if they were troubled by a constitutional crisis, given that they were ignorant of constitutional law and conventions and that there was no one apart from their premiers to whom they could turn. He told some of them this—it was simply an offer to help them in times of trouble. He would not have dreamt of advising a governor who had a legal background. A scrupulous academic lawyer concerned



to downplay the Crown's reserve powers might consider Dixon's offer or such advice a breach of propriety, but for Dixon, a commanding judicial figure with an undeniable sense of propriety, the circumstances outweighed any niceties if such existed.

Even at the Commonwealth level, there were times when Chief Justice Dixon thought he had a responsibility to throw the proprieties and conventions to the wind. He would regularly discuss the proceedings of the Petrov Royal Commission with the chief commissioner and with ASIO's Brigadier Charles Spry. Ayres tells us that 'it was a matter of national importance on which he believed he had

a civic duty to remain informed'. Early in the planning of the politically charged commission, the government hit a legal glitch. There was doubt whether the Royal Commissions Act would permit a commission of three members. Justice Fullagar ruled in the government's favour. Dixon was unpersuaded by Fullagar's judgment. Before any appeal, the Chief Justice came to the Prime Minister's rescue, 'telling Menzies to pass a new Act and announce it immediately while Fullagar's judgment was in his favour, "which he immediately did" '. We are not told if the conversation took place at the club, in chambers or at Parliament House.

In his last months, Dixon exchanged some taped messages with Menzies who was recuperating from a stroke. In one of the last messages, Dixon said:

I sit here quite content but, of course, the loss of Alice (his wife) was a sad blow. We had arranged between us that I should die first, but we didn't keep to the arrangement, and—However, I sit still, and having been told that all is bad with me, and with bad luck, I am not looking forward to anything, because I never had any luck, as you know.

Well, it was delightful to hear you, and all I can say is that you take a great deal more interest in the outside world than I did, but you saw more of it than I did—And so keep going, and keep your pecker up—And our friendship means a great deal to me.

He concluded: 'Well, goodbye and good luck.'

Many lawyers will justifiably remain convinced that Dixon was our finest judge. But I will now have an added caution, seeking to detect the social and political preconceptions behind the tight judicial logic. In his position of isolated privilege, Dixon had the intellect to command any conversation whether from the bench or at the club. I hope that the doctrine and practice of the separation of powers has developed, and that judges are now more cognisant of the social realities that generate the conflicts requiring judicial resolution. While Dixon's judicial method remains supreme in his published judgments, the disclosures of his diaries and of his associates highlight the fallibility of one long isolated by power, social position and intellect. ■

Frank Brennan SJ is Associate Director of Uniya, the Jesuit Social Justice Centre.

The wild cliff's brink

June Saunders was a little-known Queensland poet with a wealth of potential

EVERY SECOND-HAND book tells two stories. The first is the story of the text. The second is the story that the book tells.

A few months ago, I bought a box of pre-war poetry books from a second-hand dealer who couldn't sell them on the internet. 'Detective books do better,' he said, 'and mysteries.'

One of the books was *Poems Old and New*, published in 1945 by the Brisbane Catholic poet, Paul Grano. Inside the front cover was a carbon copy typewritten manuscript poem called *Gilded Day*, by Margaret Compton Saunders. It was a pleasant enough work of its type, about feeling sad on a sunny day. At the bottom of the poem were the words 'June Saunders, Ipswich'.

Inside the back cover of the book was another manuscript poem, this time in pencil. It was by Paul Grano himself and was entitled *To a Young Poet Drowned—in memoriam June Saunders*. Two weeks later, I chanced upon a book of verse by another minor poet, *The Singing Tree* published in 1941 by Paula Fitzgerald. The first poem in the book was a sonnet called *Grief—to June Saunders*.

At that point I really had no choice but to try to discover her story. Fortunately, enough information exists about June Saunders in the John Oxley Library, the Queensland State Library, the University of Queensland Fryer Library and a number of private archives to piece together a picture of her life. She was a schoolteacher, poet, broadcaster, children's writer, actor and a member of both Brisbane's Catholic intelligentsia and its left-wing fringe. She was 22 when she died—washed off the rocks at Stradbroke Island, on New Year's Day, 1939.

What we know of her life shows us a world that for talented young women was at once more limited and more open than it is now. What we don't know of her story leaves a lot of tantalising questions unanswered.

June Saunders was born Margaret Compton Saunders at Ipswich, Queensland on 3 June 1916. I don't know why she was called June, but I suspect it was for the corny reason that she was born in June and her mother was named May. She was raised a Catholic (though in a letter she notes 'Dad, by the way, is not a Catholic'), but was educated in the secular environment of Ipswich Girls State School and Ipswich Girls Grammar School. She shone at Ipswich Girls Grammar, editing her form's

watched you down /
urged "So, walk me /
I answered, "we shall /
n's here. "'

section of the school magazine, publishing many poems and winning a number of academic awards. But she left school at 15 and became a trainee teacher. By the age of 17, she was in charge of a class of 30 Grade 3 children at her old primary school.

At about the time she started teaching, one of her poems, *Christmas Mass*, was published in the poetry column of Brisbane's *Catholic Leader*. It attracted the attention of another minor poet, Martin Haley. Haley was 11 years older than Saunders, but he was a Catholic and a schoolteacher, so they had a lot in common. He wrote to her and thus began a six-year correspondence. Haley's side of the correspondence seems to have been lost. But Saunders' side tells a wonderful story of the life of a schoolmistress in the 1930s: the rigours of school inspections, enormous class sizes (46 children in the class was a good year, 60 a bad year), and the excitement of training the school swimming team.

During all of this time, her poetry continued to develop. *Gilded Day* was published in the now defunct *Australian Women's Mirror* early in 1934. Saunders was of course delighted by this. Writing to Haley, she says, 'I have always been striving to reach a certain goal—the *Mirror*'. But she knew that the *Mirror* was not high literature—it was, after all, the first Australian magazine to serialise Lee Falk's *The Phantom*. She wrote: 'the *Mirror* is simply "the beginning of things". It is a stepping stone to higher realms.'

Unfortunately, with the exception of *The Bulletin's* Red Page, there were no 'higher realms' for a young female Queensland poet of the 1930s, as there were no accessible literary magazines. So, like any young poet, she got herself published wherever she could. In 1936, another of her poems (appropriately called *Phantom*) appeared in the *Women's Mirror*. She was also published in the Brisbane *Courier*, the *Toowoomba Chronicle*, two specialist Catholic publications—the *Risen Sun* and the *Southwellian*—and, for a number of years after she left school, in the Ipswich Girls Grammar magazine. One of her poems won first prize at the 1936 Queensland Eisteddfod.

IN 1939, her poems were collected and published in a memorial volume called *June*, edited by Martin Haley. It's a mixed collection, containing a good deal of juvenilia, some light verse, some unfinished pieces and a number of more substantial works.

Throughout almost all of the poems, though, there is a kind of shadowy unhappiness—perhaps a kind of adolescent wish to be other than she was. In *Child Ghost*, written when she was 17 or 18, she sees:

The ghost of the child with grave grey
eyes and dark, wind-tangled hair
Who wanders down to the wild cliff's

brink and lingers a while to stare
At the slender shred of a lost white moon
in the hot, blue summer sky,
And the flash of a floating, spray-wet
plume as the gulls go drifting by ...

As Saunders matured, she began to show a real originality of theme. Her only anthology piece, *Doomed*—published in the 1946 Angus and Robertson collection *Poets of Australia*—is about a woman body surfer. Other female poets of about that time—Elizabeth Riddell (*Life Saver*) and Judith Wright (*The Surfer*) have written about men surfing—and Kenneth Slessor (in *She Shoots to Conquer*) wrote a light piece about a woman surfer, but *Doomed* is the only poem of its time that I know by a woman about a woman surfing.

Her most ambitious poem, *Tinsel*, written in 1938, shows her ambivalence about 'getting up a party for the Varsity Ball' (a topic of which she writes more fondly in her letters):

To me the brilliant lights,
The heated air, the glasses, and the frocks
Are glittering so brightly that it seems
Incredible the little girl I hide
Within should not have warned me long
ago
That all this easy brilliance we display
Is tinsel ...
So here I sit among
The tinsel of the circus ring, and talk
In this clear, brittle voice, for I exchange
Tinsel for tinsel ...

It is a unique female take on the parochial Brisbane version of the *Bright Young Things*.

The book shows that her work was certainly promising, probably nearly as polished (and not nearly as affected) as, say, Kenneth Slessor's work when he was about that age. Ultimately, though, she did not have the experience, nor the external influences, to deliver fully on her promise. Her education was limited, as was her reading. Her favourite poets were Rupert Brooke, Edna St Vincent Millay, Francis Thompson and (towards the end of her life) Lord Alfred Douglas. There is no reference anywhere in her correspondence to any major postwar poet or even, as one might expect, to Gerard Manley Hopkins.

I can't help thinking that a good (or even a bad) university education, or the

influence of a single major artistic figure, could have fixed all of this for her. Instead, Saunders became a member of a group called The Catholic Poetry Society. Its name may have sounded grand, but Martin Haley, the secretary, kept the minutes and accounts in a single battered coverless exercise book. Its members included Grano, Haley and other forgotten Queensland poets of the period. They seem to have met every month or so, and commented quite vigorously on each other's work. But the absence of any liberating influence—at one meeting one member nominated C.J. Dennis as his favourite poet—meant that their criticisms must have perpetuated each other's limitations.

DESPITE THE narrowness of her upbringing, education and society, Saunders had opportunities that would probably not be open to her now. In 1936, she was asked to write and present a children's session at the then Ipswich-based radio station 4IP. She successfully ran the session, broadcasting live to air once or twice a week, until April 1938.

At about the time she started broadcasting, she became active in amateur theatre, beginning with the Ipswich Girls Grammar Old Girls Association Theatre Company and moving on to the Ipswich Repertory Company. In 1938, she joined the Brisbane-based left-wing theatre company, the Unity Theatre Group. Her last role was as a female lead in a staple play of 1930s radical theatre groups, *Waiting for Leftie*, which is about 'big shot money men', who make 'suckers of the workers'. It ends with the 'workers of the world' striking to 'make a new world'. Did she believe in the cause? Perhaps she did. Perhaps she just wanted to be on the stage.

Saunders' letters to Haley are coy. In the early letters, she calls him 'Mr Haley'. Her father was obviously suspicious of young men who wrote letters to teenage girls about poetry, and banned him from giving her books as presents. After a year or so, she begins to call him 'Dear Martin' in her letters. Finally, after about 18 months correspondence, she contrives to meet him, away from her parents, at the cafeteria at Finney's department store in Brisbane. The next letter is again addressed 'Dear Mr Haley', and from then on she seems to introduce a new boy in

every letter. She writes of 'perfect dancing partners' and boys who find her 'most interesting' but there is no evidence that she was particularly attached to anyone.

After spending Christmas with her family in 1938, she travelled across to the then remote location of Point Lookout at Stradbroke Island to join other members of the Unity Theatre Company on a camping holiday. At about 1.30am, on New Year's Day 1939, after a New Year's Eve party, she and four other members of the group walked along the cliff in front of Point Lookout, intending to climb down to find out what was causing a 'phosphorescent glow' on the sea.

One of the party, Miss Edith Tighe of Lutwyche, said her shoes were slippery and did not follow them down the cliff. No-one knows what really happened. The body of Miss Veronica Connolly was found washed up against the rocks the next morning. The bodies of Saunders and her two remaining companions, Blair Benjamin and Harold Bradbury, were never found.

So her work was cut short. The story made the front page of all the local papers, but bushfires in New South Wales and Don Tallon's wicketkeeping soon took over the main news pages. Her death brought an outpouring of memorial odes from the Catholic Poetry Society, from Trevor Hillard of the Unity Theatre Group, and individual efforts from Paul Grano, Paula Fitzgerald and of course Martin Haley. Six or seven years later, a memorial story appeared in the student paper *Barjai*, and her poems received a brief mention in an unpublished masters thesis from the 1980s. Apart from that, she now seems almost completely forgotten.

There my research ended, but with many unanswered questions: about her relationship with Haley, whether she was drunk when she fell, what became of Miss Tighe—who, but for her slippery shoes, would have drowned too—and why June did all the things she did. In the end, however, I didn't really want to know too much.

All this knowledge, and all these unknowns, because of two manuscript poems pasted into a book I bought for a dollar. Second-hand bookshops may be bad for your hay fever, but they are good for your soul. ■

Mark Carkeet is a Brisbane solicitor.

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Barriers to grace

W

E PLANT ROCKS in our street now. It's a longish street and quite elegant in its own understated Canberra way. Not too many of John Hewson's 'renters' apparently, for most people seem to take a reasonable amount of care with their yards, front and back. It's a quiet street, most of the kids seems to have grown up and moved on, and we live and work, for the most part without too much knowledge of what the others in the street are up to. But we look at the gardens and enjoy them and thank those who work to make our part of the place relaxing and so pleasant.

One man in particular, long retired, on a corner block, has the most beautiful lawn—bowling-green perfection. He seems modestly proud of it, in that understated Canberra way. Early summer mornings will see him, dressing-gowned usually, with a mug of tea, just looking. At the beauty of the lawn or the sun on the hills, who can tell? A cheery wave and shy greeting is all we ever get from him. Winter mornings you can hear him at his piano, early again, starting his day gently and graciously.

For us, though, the early morning walks around this street are no longer merely an opportunity to review and preview our own lives and to salute those of our kind who are out and about. They have become, sadly, an audit of the damage. Some person (why do I automatically think male and young?) has the habit of driving onto our lawns and gardens, spinning the wheels a bit for maximum damage and revelling, no doubt, in the deep tracks left.

Why does this distress me so? It is the sheer bloody-mindedness of it, I suppose, the unfairness. If you or I derive some pleasure in an orderly and mannered garden, in neat and careful work, why should someone want so needlessly to spoil it? Where's the fun? Is the lawn-hating hoot reacting to being yanked out of bed too early on Saturday mornings past to mow the family plot? Or is he, in his own mind, a rebel against the modest aspirations of the 'petty bourgeoisie'?

This has been going on month after month, for at least a year now, so it is not a whim or some drunken error of judgment. It is crafted and planned and, indeed, there is considerable driving skill in some of the areas this idiot reaches. I doubt that I could drive in and out of my own front lawn, in the dark at some speed, as our neighbour has done.

And he must be a neighbour to torment us so constantly. The police cannot help in a matter like this. What, sit all night in a patrol car hoping that this will be one of the nights of his random strikes? So we plant rocks on the edges of our front lawns—not allowed, of course, fences in Canberra.

And when I saw those images of Glenn McGrath sorting out the West Indian batsmen in that final, sad Test, why did my mind immediately turn to the terror of the turf in suburban Canberra? West Indian batsmen have always been remarkable to me for the effortless grace of their game. A loon yelling in rage, unable to take the wicket, is the antithesis of such grace. The anger, the gracelessness, the violence reminds us that this boorishness is such an offensive part of the way we live in Australia.

The lawns will survive and prosper, I hope. The mornings will remain a time for gentle neighbourliness. And the rocks will remind us too that we have to work a bit to preserve the gentle pleasures in this too violent, silly world. ■

Michael McKernan is a broadcaster and author, most recently of *This War Never Ends: The Pain of Separation and Return*, University of Queensland Press, 2001.

Forgotten victims

On the Natural History of Destruction, W.G. Sebald. Hamish Hamilton, 2003.

ISBN 0 241 14126 5, RRP \$39.95

The Villa, the Lake, the Meeting: Wannsee and the Final Solution, Mark Roseman. Penguin, 2003.

ISBN 0 141 00395 2, RRP \$22.95

ONE DARK NIGHT during the Second World War, an English police officer waved down a speeding car. 'The way you're travelling, sir, you'll kill someone,' he scolded the driver. 'Young man', came the reply, 'I kill thousands of people every night!' The driver was Sir Arthur Harris, the leader of RAF Bomber Command. It was, of course, no idle boast. During the war, Bomber Command dropped about 1 million tons of bombs on enemy territory, attacked over 130 towns and cities, killed more than 600,000 civilians, destroyed 3.5 million homes and left about 7.5 million Germans homeless. The way that this astonishing experience has been dealt with in German thinking and literature is at the heart of W.G. Sebald's last book to be published in English.

Sebald was born in Germany in 1944. He taught German literature in English universities from 1966 and was Professor of European Literature at the University of East Anglia when he was tragically killed in a motor accident in 2001. Despite speaking English well he wrote exclusively in German. His acclaimed novels, especially *The Rings of Saturn* and *Austerlitz*, are well known to Anglophone readers.

On the Natural History of Destruction is his first book of non-fiction to be published in English. It first appeared in Germany in 1999 and provoked considerable debate. The German edition consisted of two lectures and an afterword entitled 'Air War and Literature' and an essay on the writer Alfred Andersch. For the English edition two further essays were added, on Jean Améry and Peter Weiss.

It is, as Sebald says in the opening lines of his first lecture on the air war, 'hard to form an even partly adequate idea of the

extent of the devastation suffered by the cities of Germany in the last years of the Second World War, still harder to think about the horrors involved in that devastation'. For Sebald, one of the cultural mysteries of the 20th century is the fact that, despite Germany suffering destruction on an unprecedented scale, the experience 'seems to have left scarcely a trace of pain behind in the collective consciousness'. He observes that the experience of being bombed flat 'has been largely obliterated from the retrospective understanding of those affected, and it never played any appreciable part in the discussion of the internal constitution of our country'.

On Sebald's analysis it is not just Basil Fawcety who lived by the rubric 'Don't mention the war'—so did the postwar Germans. One explanation for this, he believed, was that after the war the West Germans refused to look backwards. As their country had been burned and smashed during the years 1942–45, so had the prehistory of the Federal Republic of Germany been obliterated with it. Out of the ashes and rubble the West Germans were determined to build a brave new world, acknowledging the Third Reich as little as possible. Indeed, as Sebald saw it, the destruction of German cities lifted 'the heavy burden of history' from the survivors who set about building the 'economic miracle'.

Nonetheless, he said, the rebuilding of Germany was powered by 'a stream of psychic energy' which had not dried up and which had its source in 'the well-kept secret of the corpses built into the foundations of our state'. This secret, he believed, bound all Germans together in the postwar years, and continued to do

so, 'more closely than any positive goal such as the realisation of democracy ever could'.

Sebald was fascinated by the question of why the literally awful experience of the German people under the bombs had made so little impression on German literature since the war. As far as he was concerned in 1997, when his lectures were delivered in Zurich, the great German epic of the war years remained to be written: 'the unparalleled national humiliation felt by millions in the last years of the war had never really found verbal expression, and those directly affected by the experience neither shared it with each other nor passed it on to the next generation.'

He explained this in terms of German writers who had experienced the war, producing works marked by a false consciousness 'designed to consolidate the extremely precarious position of writers in a society that was morally almost entirely discredited ... [The] redefinition of their idea of themselves was a more urgent business than depiction of the real conditions surrounding them.' His essay on Alfred Andersch provides one such example.

On the Natural History of Destruction invites us to contemplate the enormity and horror of what was done to the Germans, whether justifiably or not, by focusing on the concrete details of a major air raid: the firestorm created in Hamburg in July 1943. That experience was, for many survivors, literally unspeakable and maddening. Half-deranged women carried the shrivelled, mummified bodies of their children in suitcases onto trains. The Hamburgers of 1943 were undoubtedly shocked and awed by the bombing campaign.

Why has no German written the great novel of that time? Sebald did not provide a hard answer. Perhaps, as he suggested, many Germans felt that their travails were just retribution. Anthony Beevor's *Berlin: The Downfall 1945* tells the story of a tramload of Berliners being berated for their defeatist talk by a soldier who warned ominously that Germany could not afford to be defeated by the Red Army. Because of what the Germans had done in Russia, the soldier admonished them, there would be no mercy shown if they were beaten. The task of depicting the German experience without implying a moral equivalence with the Holocaust, and with the murder of millions of other victims in German-occupied Europe, no doubt defeated the cream of German literature. Günther Grass's new novel *Crabwalk*—about the torpedoing of a German hospital ship crammed with 10,000 refugees in the Baltic in 1945—may be a partial answer to Sebald's dilemma.

Sebald's companion essays on Améry and Weiss also confront themes of torture, cruelty, insensibility and remorse arising out of the Second World War. Améry worked in the Belgian Resistance, was tortured by the Gestapo and survived Auschwitz. After the war he wrote extensively on exile, resistance, torture and genocide. His was, Sebald believed, an authentic voice in a sea of comfortable denunciation of the Third Reich by European writers in the '60s. Peter Weiss, an artist and writer, also received Sebald's accolade for finding 'the requisite gravity of language for the subject [of genocide]'. Sebald sees Weiss's great work, *Ästhetik des Widerstands* (Aesthetics of Resistance), 'not only as the expression of an ephemeral wish for redemption, but as an expression of the will to be on the side of the victims at the end of time'.

The essays and lectures hang together extraordinarily well. In no sense does Sebald drop his moral guard and there is a sense of relentlessness in his determination to support a literature of authentic memory and remorse. It only serves to

emphasise the gravity of the loss of this fine writer and thinker.

On 20 January 1942, at a large villa set in a shaded garden in the well-to-do Berlin suburb of Wannsee, a tall, blonde secret police officer called a meeting of 14 senior public servants and police officers to order. Sipping cognac as they discussed the agenda, they successfully formulated their plans in a little under two hours. They dispersed to put into operation the Final Solution to the Jewish Question in Europe. The chairman was Reinhard Heydrich, the SS ruler of the 'Protectorate' of Bohemia and Moravia, also known as 'The Butcher of Prague'. His assistant was Adolf Eichmann.

AMERICAN HISTORIAN Christopher Browning has noted that in early 1942, about 80 per cent of the eventual victims of the Holocaust were still alive. By early 1943 the proportions were exactly the opposite. The year 1942 was one of the worst that humanity has yet lived through. Mark Roseman's pithy and erudite study sets out to scrutinise the evidence and to determine why the meeting was called, what exactly was decided there and by whom. It is a brilliant little piece of historical detective work, a synoptic history of the decision to wipe out the European Jews.

The minutes, or 'protocol' as it was called in German, of the Wannsee Conference were copied 30 times. At the end of the Second World War, when the Allies sought to piece together the history of the decision to kill the Jews, one copy, Number 16, was found in captured German documents. For the Nuremberg prosecutors it crystallised the moment at which the decision was taken. Historical research, much of which is encapsulated in this book, suggests that the Protocol may not be exactly what it seems. Roseman calls it 'a deeply mysterious document'.

The reason it is so deeply mysterious is that Hitler did not attend the meeting, and the group that did attend was not senior enough to take such a momentous decision. No written order signed by Hitler directing that the Jews of Europe be eliminated has ever been found. The evidence against Hitler in that regard is indirect. Historians argue that the timing is wrong. The mass murder of Russian Jews had begun almost as soon as the Germans crossed the borders in the summer

of 1941. Gassings of Jews had begun in Poland in December 1941, and a second extermination camp was in the course of being built. So why was the Wannsee meeting called?

The second big question asked by Roseman is 'how on earth did they get to that point?' In his view, the weight of historical evidence shows that 'in a curious feedback process ... the deed of murder beget the idea of genocide as much as the other way around'. The Germans had started to murder Jews *en masse* in Russia and Poland in 1941. Roseman believes that this led Hitler to make the decision to cleanse first the Reich, then all Europe, of Jews—sometime in the last quarter of 1941, but most likely after the USA entered the war in December.

The men sitting around the conference table that cold day were not merely public servants. They were all educated men, relatively youthful high-flyers in the bureaucracy and the SS-Police and, significantly, virtually all were true believers—none more so than Heydrich himself. He and Heinrich Himmler, the chief of the SS, regarded themselves as the vanguard of a new *judenfrei* (Jew-free) Germany. They apparently anticipated that much of the rest of the German bureaucracy would resist moving to the Final Solution, if for no other reason than that it would concede turf to the SS in relation to 'the Jewish Question'.

Roseman's analysis is that Heydrich's purpose in calling the Wannsee Conference was to impose his (and Himmler's and, discreetly, Hitler's) will upon the civil service. Eichmann reported during his trial in Israel that Heydrich was so pleased with the compliance of the public servants that he drank cognac and smoked a cigar afterwards to celebrate.

Roseman's little book is a valuable addition to the copious literature of the Third Reich. Some will argue with his conclusions but the analysis is fair, cogent and compelling and this makes it very good history writing indeed. While it lacks the originality of Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men* and Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*, for readers seeking an introduction to the subject of how the Germans became the perpetrators of genocide there are few better than this. ■

Hugh Dillon is a Sydney magistrate.

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In memoriam

Remembering the life and talents of Richard Victor Hall, 1937–2003

SYDNEY'S ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL was packed, the mourners an engaging mix of the devout, the uncertain, the religiously tepid and the atheistic. Background, vocation and style were also diverse. There were the politicians, left, centre, right, and of course Gough and family; there were the authors, the priests, the critics, the journalists (left, centre, right) and the academics; there were those who looked as if they lived in suits and ties and those who couldn't wait to change out of them. What drew all together in tribute and a shared sense of loss was the remarkable man whose body lay in the coffin and whose portrait by David Naseby stood at the altar threshold, as compelling in representation as its subject had been in life.

Richard Victor Hall is dead at the age of 65 and a life profoundly shaped by its formation in Catholic tradition has run its course. He was one of my oldest friends. We had met as cadet journalists on the Sydney afternoon newspapers described by John Douglas Pringle as the two worst newspapers in the world. It was probably true when he made his comments in the 1950s, though that was before Rupert Murdoch really hit his straps. We were part-time Arts students at Sydney University and helped found the Evening Students Association where we saw ourselves exerting Catholic influence against a vaguely sinister, and possibly imaginary, Masonic force. We became a factor of some sort (positive, I hope) in the Newman Society and worked with the inspiring Catholic chaplain Roger Pryke whose intellectual curiosity, enthusiasm, openness and lack of pomposity made Catholicism seem exciting, fresh and full of potential.

We edited the university magazine *Hermes* in 1959 and included a short story by Robert Hughes and (I think) the first published poems of Les Murray. We visited Ed Campion and Brian Johns during their spell in the Springwood seminary and talked theology, culture and current events. Our



Catholic contemporaries, as students, included the philosopher Genevieve Lloyd (who became Australia's first woman professor of philosophy), Bob Vermeesch (later a legal academic), John Woodward (later a judge) and scores of others who became influential in Australian life.

They were heady times to be a fledgling 'Catholic intellectual' committed to the life of the soul, the life of the mind and service to the community. Largely because of Hall's adventurous spirit, we linked up with the key figures in the 'intellectual apostolate' (as it was somewhat portentously known) located in the University of Melbourne. In later years, Hall was always thought of as a quintessentially Sydney phenomenon, but he was born in Melbourne and raised there for a time, and always moved easily between the two cultures. The intellectual apostolate was associated in Melbourne with such people as the academic and poet Vincent Buckley, the philosophers Bill Ginnane and Peter Wertheim, and many others later to be prominent in public life.

This movement of ideas, much influenced in different ways by Suhard, Congar, Cardijn, Dorothy Day and Courtney Murray, took somewhat different shapes in Sydney and Melbourne and had a great influence on generations of Catholic students and subsequent effects beyond the universities. In hindsight, it now seems to have been a trifle self-important, a little claustrophobic, often distinctly sexist, but nonetheless genuinely radical in its reformist instincts with regard to the church and the relation of faith to the secular world. Indeed, as a pre-Vatican II movement, many of its ideas and insights were more radical and intellectually courageous than those later propounded at the Council.

Although Dick Hall was a key figure in all this, he quickly moved beyond the ivory tower. He dropped out of his Arts degree after a few years because, I suspect, he found the disciplines and routines of university life too confining. He also

wanted to change the world more directly than most academics. He continued in journalism, but found his true vocation as an ideas man in public life, especially in and around the Australian Labor Party, and later as an author. In some respects, the Whitlam years and their aftermath saw Dick at his peak. The passion for justice that was such a feature of his Catholic formation had been accentuated by his experiences growing up in the care of a single mother who had been deserted by Dick's father when he was very young. At a time when single mothers had little social support, Phyllis Hall suffered much to raise her son and send him to the Jesuit school St Aloysius. Her struggles left her with many fears and neuroses and she could never settle in one place. So Dick grew up with the regular expectation that he would return home after school or work to find he no longer lived there. As a young adult, he solved the problem by buying a house for both of them.

Hall was secretary to Gough Whitlam during the years that Whitlam fought to make the Labor Party a feasible candidate for government. Then, with Labor in power, he worked in Aboriginal Affairs and in Secondary Industry. He was a founding member of the Australia Council's Literature Board and was instrumental in setting up their fellowship and grants scheme. He was a guiding light in the establishment of the Public Lending Right that rewards authors for the use of their works in public libraries. During those years he also wrote pungent pieces for *The Catholic Worker*. He became an authority on security services and their foibles and wrote several books related to them. He wrote an excellent critique of the neo-conservative objections to black armband history, *Black Armband Days*.

IT WAS OFTEN my melancholy duty, as co-editor of *The Catholic Worker*, to decipher the copy Dick sent us. His typing, in those pre-computer days, was marked by an aristocratic disdain for accuracy and his handwriting (often used for correcting the typing errors) was virtually incomprehensible. After his death, I excavated a ten-page letter he had handwritten me when I was in Oxford in the mid-'60s; it's like trying to decode the Rosetta Stone.

He was a prodigious reader and talker whose literary-political-cultural lunches were legendary events from which it took days to recover. He was a kind man, but intolerant of folly. His conversation was stimulating, but a little baffling because it always began in the middle. He assumed you had read the latest remarkable novel, had already heard the inside political story that would be next week's sensation, knew the arcane history of Mossad and its major personalities, were familiar with some medieval Papal scandal, so he hurried on from there with

something you mightn't yet know about one or all of these topics.

Like so many of those who were passionate about the revival of an enlightened Catholicism in the '50s and '60s, Dick gave up on the institutional Church when its movement towards regeneration became glacier-like. Even so, he kept a close eye on its doings and latterly was an occasional contributor to *Eureka Street*. In some ways, his hopes and fears shifted to the Labor Party and it was fitting that Whitlam's speech-writer, Graham Freudenberg, gave the principal eulogy at the requiem Mass and his friend Wayne Swan read the epistle. But as *Eureka Street's* contributing editor, Ed Campion (who conducted the service with Jesuit Michael Kelly) told the congregation, Dick's passion for truth had distinctively Catholic sources.

Though chronically broke, he would regularly ring me and my wife, Margaret, for an updating chat ('How's the intellectual life, comrade?'), and we spoke on the phone during his sickness. He had been ill with liver failure for some time and his outlook was not favourable. I was overseas when he went into serious decline and in Tasmania when he died.

I had planned to visit him in Sydney the next week to say goodbye, but this memoir will have to stand as a poor substitute for that farewell.

I was sharply reminded of him again the other day when I received a small payment from the Public Lending Right authorities. I have other reminders of him. When I left Sydney for Melbourne in 1961 he presented me with a handsome silver-plated beer mug, of some antiquity, that curiously enough contained the insignia of the NSW Parliament, the bar of which he had often graced with his presence. It was good of them to donate it.

Dick got things done, he sparkled, he connected, he brought values and a critical, sceptical mind to everything he did. He was proud of his three daughters and devoted to their educational enlightenment. He crammed so much into a life that was far too short by today's standards, and in the end, despite the Writer-in-Residence facilities provided by Sydney University, he hadn't quite finished his monumental biography of Gough Whitlam that was to set the record straight. The final part will be completed with a number of essays from those who knew both Dick and Whitlam.

He had such a capacity for living that it would be unfair if he hadn't another life. His legion of friends have said goodbye but many of us hope and pray that it is merely a profound *au revoir*. ■

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In adversity, strength

The people of Colombia's Cacarica River Basin face an uncertain future

ALETTE LATORRE SPEAKS passionately yet calmly as she recounts the events that led 3700 Afro-Colombian farmers into exile.

Alette, a member of the Religious of the Sacred Heart, sips coffee in an outer-suburban Melbourne home and ponders the atrocities she has witnessed in Colombia. She wants Australians to know about the crimes of government-backed paramilitaries in Colombia, who are pursuing a campaign of intimidation, torture and murder aimed at stripping a resource-rich patch of jungle of its inhabitants—the descendants of the original African slaves.

She will soon return to Colombia and considers it a privilege to live and work in the Cacarica River Basin where farming families are refugees on their own land.

The Cacarica River Basin, which lies in the Chocó district—the lush north-west corner of Colombia bordering Panama—is an area rich in timber and agricultural resources. Numerous multinational companies are keen to exploit the area.

The peaceful rural lives of the farming families in the Cacarica River Basin began to change in December 1996 when the paramilitaries arrived. It was then that the economic blockade, threats and murders began. The paramilitary units burned farms, stole livestock, looted homes and destroyed community projects including the women's store.

But none of this would prepare the people for the shock of 'Operation Genesis' when military personnel from the 17th Brigade joined the paramilitaries in a combined air, water and land assault. On 24 February 1997, locals were given orders to leave within three days, which in some districts translated to only a few hours' notice. The paramilitaries claimed they would not be responsible for what

would happen if families failed to comply with the order. Indiscriminate bombing by Black Hawk helicopters allayed any doubts that the Colombian armed forces were behind the operation.

On 27 February 1997, Alette says paramilitaries beheaded a member of the community, Marino López Mena, and played football with his head, later hacking his body to pieces. People were horrified and started to evacuate the area in makeshift rafts made from tree branches. Some rowed with their hands and a few managed to flee in small speedboats. When aircraft and helicopters were heard overhead, the children fled from home to home in fear. Desperate mothers searched for their children in the rainforest and workmen dropped what they were doing and fled. Many managed to escape through the jungle to safety but 80 were killed or considered 'missing'. Some hid in the Atrato River delta district or crossed the border into Panama, but the rest followed the orders of the paramilitaries and crossed the Gulf of Urabá to reach the town of Turbo on the other side.

In Turbo, members of the national police and local authorities met an initial group of 550 refugees and led them to an old sports stadium. After two weeks, 1200 people had arrived to set up home in the stadium, with no running water or basic hygiene services. Others stayed in shelters around Turbo or were taken in by volunteer hosts. Many lived in this state of forced displacement for four years. They suffered hunger and intimidation. The murders and disappearances continued.

Alette was called to be a witness to this human chaos and to try to prevent further atrocities. She was living in Australia at the time, after being deported from Rwanda where she was working with refugees. The head of the Colombian

Catholic Church's Intercongregational Justice and Peace Commission, Father-Javier Giraldo SJ, asked if she would be willing to help out during this desperate time of exile. 'I was simply going to help during the period of displacement in the stadium, but when the people started to resettle (on their original land), I asked to be able to accompany them.'

Ironically, the time in exile produced a positive effect that the paramilitaries had not anticipated. Rather than succumb to fear and intimidation, the people organised committees, each designed to respond to specific needs, from the care for victims' families and orphaned children, to food storage, health, and housing. The people then compiled a list of demands and on 20 April 1998, presented it to Colombian President Ernesto Samper Pizano. Of the 3700 displaced people, 2500 wished to return to their lands, even though the area was in a state of war. The rest agreed to be resettled in other rural areas or cities.

The 2500 returnees demanded from the government the construction of two new settlements in their traditional territory, communal title to 103,024 hectares of land (as authorised by Colombia's Act 70 of 1993, which recognises the rights of Afro-Colombians), unarmed government protection and several community development projects. Their final demand, which among others has not yet been granted, is an investigation to bring to justice those responsible for their forced exile, the murders and disappearances.

The Colombian government has since acknowledged that there were violations in the Cacarica River Basin of international treaties and protocols protecting civilians in times of war. But Alette says the people refuse to accept government claims that this was merely a skirmish

between illegal paramilitaries and left-wing guerrillas who are active in the area, believing instead that it was a premeditated attack designed to force them off their land. Alette says that the government's failure to acknowledge what actually happened and make moral reparation is the biggest stumbling block for people trying to rebuild their lives.

In December 1999, the Colombian government signed an agreement that only partially met people's demands. In the following two years, thanks to persistent lobbying, the community managed to resettle more than 1300 people in the settlements of Esperanza en Dios and Nueva Vida, where they are experimenting with forms of self-determination.

Apart from the continued presence of paramilitaries and further reports of torture, intimidation and murder, a new economic persecution has begun. In June 2001 military and paramilitary personnel arrived to hijack the traditional farming of bananas, rice, maize, yams, yucca and sugar cane. They forced farmers to grow cocaine-producing coca plants and oil-producing African Palms. Military-backed corporations designate the farmers as 'partners' to avoid paying them fringe benefits or enter into costly labour contracts, but the farmers are not made partners in the lucrative processing of palm oil and soap products. The production of African Palm requires the clearing of vast tracts of forest and the use of chemicals that end up in the watercourses. The palms take five years before they start producing, in the meantime forcing the farmers into debt. They are left with a crop that produces no food and an income at the mercy of the corporations.

Alette alleges that a private timber firm, Maderas de Darién, has been illegally clearing forest in the newly-titled territory with the support of the government environment ministry. The cleared areas have become sterile wastelands that allow easy access for the military and paramilitaries who safeguard lucrative economic interests.

While the government granted 103,024 hectares in the signed agreement, continued death threats have forced the people to live in areas of just 12 hectares each. The people of Nueva Vida and Esperanza en Dios now plan to fence and designate their communities as 'humanitarian areas', a more visible reminder of their rights and



arms-free policy than the present billboards.

Alette says the people can no longer venture out to work their crops for weeks at a time for fear of the paramilitaries. 'We are refugees within our own land because we [will have] to put up a fence to keep them out.'

The construction of the fence remains a controversial proposal. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees opposes the idea because of its overtones of a concentration camp. But Alette says the people have tried to explain: 'People put fences around their houses because they don't want burglars to get in—and this is just what we are planning to do. But we have faced a lot of opposition and we haven't had much economic assistance. It is very expensive.'

The fence is not yet a physical reality, but several teams from private and international humanitarian aid organisations have taken it upon themselves to regularly patrol the proposed fenceline. Consequently the paramilitaries have changed their tactics. In June 2001 a second massacre was averted, due to what Alette believes was the heightened international, national and religious presence. On that occasion 800 armed paramilitaries invaded the territory and detained a group of people for three days. As they marched the detainees towards the two townships they became aware of the presence of international and church representatives,

as well as the government official stationed in the district.

'They no longer come firing machine-guns at everyone like they did in 1997, but they come to see which of the most outspoken leaders they can seize. We are sure that they came with intentions to do something. We believe that this presence prevented them from killing the group, or some of them at least.'

Alette lives with a missionary team of four young lay professionals. Missionary team projects, which also operate in other parts of the country, are an initiative of the Colombian Catholic Church's Inter-congregational Justice and Peace Commission, set up by 25 superiors of religious congregations in 1988. While they have a broader anti-terrorism role in other parts of Colombia, their aim in the Cacarica River Basin is to work against terrorism and repression from government-backed paramilitaries and to defend the rights of the poor and marginalised.

Alette says the community is now seeking answers so that the truth can be aired. While they wait for the government to start its promised infrastructure projects, the people also wait for justice.

Alette explains that a climate of impunity reigns. 'From the highest functionaries to the lowest, they do as they please—kill who they want to, steal, or do what they want.'

'And nobody is guilty of anything. So [the people] want it made very clear who is responsible for what has happened to them.'

Alette doesn't pretend that everything in the Cacarica River Basin community was perfect before the attack in 1997, but she sees a quality here that the persecutors haven't. 'My prayer involves contemplating the people and the environment—when I accompany the women sowing the crops, caring for their children, cutting firewood or spending time with the families.'

Alette says that the bloody attempts to drive these people into exile has unexpectedly made their communities stronger. And living in solidarity with them means more to her than playing the role of spiritual mentor—it's a matter of life or death as she returns to bear witness to their struggle for life and freedom. 'For me it has been a privilege.'

Kent Rosenthal is studying theology.

Legal fiction friction

Lee's Law: How Singapore Crushes Dissent, Chris Lydgate. Scribe Publications, 2003.
ISBN 090 801 189X, RRP \$33

DOES THE TITLE of this book say it all? Here is a study of Singapore's veteran opposition leader, Joshua Benjamin Jeyaretnam—JBJ or Ben—the man with the broad mischievous smile, the mutton-chop whiskers, the educated voice, the distinctive mien. Yet the book is called *Lee's Law: How Singapore Crushes Dissent*. Lee Kuan Yew, now for 12 years senior minister after 41 years as prime minister, has long been Jeyaretnam's and many others' nemesis. If unable to tame them quickly, he toys with them as a cat torments mice when tossing up whether to despatch the poor creatures or not. That Lee has not killed Ben Jeyaretnam's spirit is, I suspect, a matter of irritation but ultimate indifference to the former; it's an amazing tribute to the latter.

Why should anyone's life story be subsumed, for whatever reasons, under the name and modus operandi of a formidable and detestable enemy?

With these rhetorical gauntlets thrown down, it must be stated with pleasure that *Lee's Law* is a carefully drawn and affectionate portrait of a fine man. Chris Lydgate, an American freelance journalist, followed his wife to Singapore in 1997. There he first encountered the solitary figure of Ben Jeyaretnam on the street, selling books of speeches and memoirs.

A Jaffna Tamil and male scion of a devout Christian family, Jeyaretnam grew up to prize education and to espouse faith-based values and social obligations. Attracted from an early age to law, he went on to become a barrister and solicitor, district court judge, parliamentarian and party leader. He adored his late wife Margaret, an Englishwoman, herself a lawyer, and is a fond father and grandfather. (His younger son, Philip, is well respected for his own legal skills and socially sensitive fiction.)

Jeyaretnam has also been bankrupted, imprisoned and treated shamelessly by a compliant judiciary playing out exquisite symbolic parodies of due process at Lee's behest. One thinks, for example, of key public moments when he would appear before a fellow Tamil or the only Anglican on the Supreme Court for some further humiliation. Repeatedly tried for defamation of Lee and other People's Action Party leaders, his show trials meant that he was himself systematically defamed.

(On a personal note, it saddened me that from the early 1980s many of his pastors and co-religionists abandoned him or decried him as a sinful and nominal believer.)

Lydgate's book catalogues Jeyaretnam's triumphs, the quiet decent ones in the service of a poor or wronged client and the noisy surprising ones such as his entry to parliament via the Anson by-election of 1981. Inevitably the reader must also contemplate the many injustices done to him from which he rarely escaped unscathed. The one, famous vindication came with his 1988 appeal to the Privy Council, which elicited a 22-page verdict damning in its indictment of various Singapore judges:

The appellant and his co-accused ... have suffered a grievous injustice. They have been fined, imprisoned and publicly disgraced for offences for which they are not guilty. The appellant, in addition, has been deprived of his seat in Parliament and disqualified for a year from practising his profession.

Unfortunately, their Lordships' call for redress fell on deaf ears.

The figure that this book portrays has a palpable authenticity—virtues, warts and all. He is no straightforward hero or martyr. But like other Singaporean political figures who started out as—or eventually felt obliged to become—opponents

of Lee's ruthless and idiosyncratic social engineering, JBJ has an integrity that cannot be denied. His belief in the rule of law is unshakeable, an astonishing thing given the treatment he has received from its Singapore version.

Jeyaretnam may not be in the same league as some of Lee's earlier adversaries, men like Lim Chin Siong or Chia Thye Poh. Perhaps he has been too much an individualist, too often hoist on his own petard, to be a team player or policy strategist. Nor has he been as foully and falsely besmirched as his younger colleague, Dr Chee Soon Juan.

But his story, told with thoroughness in Lydgate's book, is eloquent testimony to his Jesus-inspired conviction: 'That no force outside can destroy a person. That the human spirit is indomitable.' Against all the odds, this dissident has refused to be crushed by Lee Kuan Yew's designer future—brilliant, pervasive, neat, racist, astringent, robotic, grandiose, fearful, sterile, banal, and ultimately unsustainable. Lee only gets away with blue murder because his island republic is so small that it can dance in and out of reckoning and because he builds domestically and internationally on others' interests and benefits sufficiently to gain privilege for his own agenda. And up against a seasoned gamesman, only a fiercely independent person would pursue valour above discretion.

For Jeyaretnam's and Singapore's sake, I trust you will take heart that the book's title overstates the case. But why not read it, and make up your own mind? ■

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Of bullocks and bulldust

Discovering the joys of *Such Is Life*

JOSEPH FURPHY'S classic novel, *Such Is Life*, was published in Sydney on 1 August 1903. My love affair with it began nearly 50 years later. Strangely, this happened in Beijing in the early days of Mao Zedong's China.

One of a dozen idealistic young hopefuls selected to study communist theory in China for three years under Chinese and Soviet lecturers, my smartest move in preparation was to buy great works of fiction of which I had read virtually nothing. *Such Is Life* accompanied multiple volumes of Tolstoy, Balzac and Dickens. These made my suitcase heavy but became a significant part of our spare-time reading during the icy winter nights and the annual long hot seaside vacations each summer.

One evening early in 1952, many months after our arrival, Eric Aarons handed me my own 1945 edition of *Such Is Life*—which I hadn't read. He had it open at page 342. 'Read these next few pages,' he urged. It was Jack the Shellback's yarn about the man-o-war hawk, the hungriest thing on earth. I became hooked for life.

Most of our group read the book. The man-o-war hawk, tawny-haired tigresses with slumberous dark eyes, the doings of Pup and other snippets of *Such Is Life* rivalled Dickens' Pecksniff and Mrs Gamp, Mr Micawber and Uriah Heep in our everyday talk throughout three long years in China.

Such Is Life has never

achieved a wide readership. It's been ignored or put aside. Nevertheless, it has remained in print for a century, and fine judges rate it as one of Australia's greatest novels. Stephen Murray-Smith wrote: 'I revere Lawson and Richardson but *Such Is Life* is a book I should like to be buried or burnt with me ...' A.D. Hope regarded Furphy's work highly: 'For all his limitations Furphy is about the best prose writer the country has produced.'

In Marion Halligan's *Storykeepers*, Rodney Hall argues that the wholesale neglect of *Such Is Life* is 'the greatest oddity in Australian literary history'. He refers to it as a 'gloriously inconsequential, learned and earthy masterpiece' with an absolute Australianness and a 'compassionately mocking tone that never lets up'.

Others, like Manning Clark, complain that no-one has been able to establish clearly what *Such Is Life* is about. These worries remind me of stories concerning such disparate

writers as Virginia Woolf and Frank Dalby Davison. *To The Lighthouse* is interpreted by many academics and students, yet in a letter to a friend Virginia Woolf wrote: 'I meant nothing by *The Lighthouse*.' She believed readers would place their own construction on it and 'make it the deposit for their own emotions'.

Likewise, when short-story writer John Morrison quizzed Frank Dalby Davison about his novel *Man-Shy*—asking whether there was truth in the suggestion that the little red cow represented mankind's struggle for freedom—Davison, with a dry smile, replied: 'It's just the story of a bloody cow, John.'

So being a simple soul, my search for Joseph Furphy has never dwelt overlong on unravelling the obscurities that sometimes spice his yarns of the bush, his forays into social life via biblical and Shakespearean ramblings, his fanciful philosophising and his assertions of democratic and nationalistic ideals. Rather, I became curious to know something of the scenes in which the novel is placed, to find the site that provided the prototype for the Runnymede Station of *Such Is Life*, to see the spot on the Lachlan where Warrigal Alf was 'down'.

Furphy (1843–1912) set his novel in 1883—a long time ago, as some



The old Conoble homestead, August 1992.
Photo: John Senty.

wider, oddly assorted events of that year may demonstrate. Henry Lawson, then a teenager, left the NSW countryside to live in Sydney. Bella Guerin graduated from the University of Melbourne, the first woman graduate in Australia. Karl Marx died in London. The volcano Krakatoa between Java and Sumatra erupted, killing some 30,000 people. Parnell's popular Irish National League campaigned for Home Rule. Ethel Florence Richardson, aged 13, became a boarder at Melbourne's Presbyterian Ladies College.

How long ago it was became apparent when my 1992 quest began. The three surviving letters to his father, written by Furphy in 1882–3 during his bullock-driving years in the Riverina, mention five huge sheep stations to and from which he had carted goods. These were Coan Downs, north of Hillston; Conoble, Boondarra and Mossgiel, north of Booligal; and Paddington, south-west of Cobar.

These properties still exist and are marked on road maps. Phone calls to Shire Councils, police stations, post offices and local historians yielded names and addresses of current owners and other sources. The responses were invariably co-operative, even though Furphy and his book were not known and station records and documents going back to the 1880s seemed to have disappeared without trace.

Exultation came with a long and informative letter from Tony Mackinlay who then owned Conoble Station. His father had 'drawn' Conoble in a ballot in 1947 when large holdings in the Western Division of NSW were cut up for closer settlement. The 25,000 acres obtained by the Mackinlays was about one tenth of the original property.

Tony Mackinlay's parents lived on the station from 1947 until 1979. A lecturer in biochemistry at the University of NSW, Tony ran Conoble under a share-farming arrangement with a neighbour, visiting the place periodically. He had read *Such Is Life* and puzzled as to whether Furphy had based the Runnymede of the book upon Conoble—an assumption argued strongly by Julian Croft in *The Life and Opinions of Tom Collins* (1991). He encouraged me and my wife Dawn to visit him at Conoble in August 1992.

The trip up through Echuca, Deniliquin and Hay was both exhilarating and depressing. The worst drought for 20 years had gripped the Western Riverina.

Between Echuca and Hay the road was lined with litter and dead kangaroos. After Hay the litter decreased a little, with dead sheep replacing the kangaroos.

Northwards, across One Tree Plain, we gazed in awe at the widest horizons and biggest skies we'd ever seen. On that flat and treeless earth the world was three-quarters sky, turning cars, humans and animals into insignificant specks. Jill Ker Conway represented this country with exactness and panache in *The Road from Coorain*:

Because of the flatness, contrasts are in a strange scale. A scarlet sunset will highlight grey-yellow tussocks of grass as though they were trees. Thunderclouds will mount thousands of feet above one stunted tree in the foreground. A horseback rider on the horizon will seem to rise up and emerge from the clouds.

Such is the country that provided the scenes for most of *Such is Life*—through which the fictional Tom Collins rides, dreams, yarns, pontificates, pompously airing opinions and advising, helping or hindering friends and acquaintances.

And so on past Mossgiel to Ivanhoe and out to Conoble, on a dirt road beside streaming mobs of giant red kangaroos. They were bounding at high speed through sparsely timbered paddocks, looking much grander and faster than the greys we are used to.

THE 'NEW' Conoble homestead was built in the 1950s, several hundred metres from what remains of the old one. We walked to the old site in the chilly breeze common to plains country in winter. Mirages danced in the distance but the stench from the kangaroo die-off was real enough. High above the derelict, sagged and rotting structure was an eagle's nest on top of a dead tree. The hulk of a 1923 Dodge and other vehicles and implements rusted and rotted.

Standing there in desolate drought, it was hard to imagine that in Furphy's day this was the centre of a community of nearly 300 people. Apart from the homestead no trace remained of the living quarters for single and married men, stables, blacksmiths' forges, sheds, cookhouses and graded dining rooms for management, jackaroos, stockmen, labourers and travellers.

That afternoon, Tony Mackinlay drove us across the red-and-black soil plains of

Conoble. When he told us we were near the middle of Lake Conoble I felt like the bloke in Lawson's story: taken to see the Paroo River he asked where the river was, only to be told he was standing in it.

This Conoble district was the setting for large parts of *Such Is Life*. From the nearby Gladstone Station shearing shed, Tony pointed out the dark timberline some ten to 12 kilometres to the north. Somewhere not far away was the scene described on page two of the novel:

Overhead, the sun blazing wastefully and thanklessly through a rarefied atmosphere; underfoot, the hot, black clay, thirsting for spring rain, and bare except for inedible roley-poleys, coarse tussocks, and the woody stubble of closely-eaten salt-bush; between sky and earth, a solitary wayfarer, wisely lapt in philosophic topor. Ten yards behind the grey saddle-horse follows a black packhorse, lightly loaded; and three yards behind the packhorse ambles listlessly a tall, slate-coloured kangaroo dog, furnished with the usual poison muzzle—a light wire basket, worn after the manner of a nose-bag.

Mile after mile we go at a good walk, till the dark boundary of the scrub country disappears northward in the glassy haze, and in front, southward, the level black soil plains of Riverina Proper mark a straight skyline, broken here and there by a monumental clump of pine-ridge.

In October 1882, Furphy informed his father he had to cart five tons of timber to Boondarra and then go on to Conoble to get a load of wool, about seven tons, to take back to Hay.

My reading had linked Boondarra with Harry West of Hillstone—its manager for over 20 years into the 1950s. Harry West had died but his wife, Mary, was very much alive. At 24, she had married him in 1938. What a shock it must have been for a young woman from high-rainfall Gippsland to find herself amidst the heat, drought and dust storms of the western Riverina plains—the nearest neighbours miles away, no other women close by and the telephone operating quite irregularly. She mothered five children there.

Mary West was tall, handsome, intelligent and witty. Droll humour spiced her stories on Boondarra, people and incidents. She recalled the terrible heat waves of 1939. A drop from 117 degrees Fahrenheit to 107 the next day seemed

like a cool change, when the Coolgardie safe proved useless and birds dropped dead out of the sky.

She described the amazing changes to the land after big rains, when the countryside rioted in glorious growth and hosts of wildflowers. She bemoaned the loss of trees, especially quandongs and native pines. Boondarra adjoined Coorain so she knew the Kers well, and read *The Road from Coorain* as she had *Such Is Life* long before.

Our visit to Boondarra found no-one living there and the homestead demolished. Only an old shearing shed, sheep yards and piles of debris remained. We saw the famous ground tank (then dry) that kept the homestead in water for so long during the 19th century. We found, too, what could have been a swimming place in the old days. Its size, attributes and distance from the homestead site bear considerable resemblance to the swimming hole at Runnymede in chapter VI of *Such Is Life*—where Collins had his midnight swim and, while returning, found Priestly, the bullock driver, and Pawson, a travelling saddler, at their midnight

pilfering of Runnymede's prime horse- and cattle-feed.

All this, however, reinforced the conclusion reached by John Barnes in his biography of Furphy, *The Order of Things* (1990), that Furphy wrote '... of a region that is geographically exact, though specific locations cannot be pin-pointed ...' Furphy, it seems, borrowed features from various western Riverina stations and places to give a realistic but fictional account.

A lot of the original version of *Such Is Life* was set along the Murray in northern Victoria between Echuca and Barmah. Great hunks were cut and later reshaped into *Rigby's Romance* and *The Buln-buln and the Brolga*. However, the third chapter of *Such Is Life* has Collins lose his clothes in the Murray while crossing it on a log. He is then swamped by Pup, the gormless kangaroo dog. This long chapter of sustained humour is set near Barmah.

Collins, after plunging into the water and being carried downstream and scrambling ashore naked, cannot tell whether he is in NSW or Victoria. This had always seemed far-fetched to me. But some years back, while lunching on a scenic bend of the Victoria side at Barmah, I saw a houseboat go upstream and moor. Then, later, I called to Dawn, 'It's moved across to the NSW side.' In fact, we found it to be still on our side of the river. The curliness of the river makes such mistakes easy.

The Echuca-Barmah region was well known to Furphy. While bullock-driving in the Riverina, he passed this way several times on the long ride to visit his parents. The terrible 1883 drought killed most of Furphy's working bullocks and ruined his carting business. He appealed to his brother, John, who owned a flourishing foundry in Shepparton. The family moved to Shepparton to a foundry-owned cottage, in Welsford Street, and he worked at the foundry for over 20 years. The Furphy foundry is famous in Shepparton and throughout Australia; my feet often rest on a Furphy fender in front of an open fire.

In the tiny sanctum that he built behind the house in Welsford Street, Furphy wrote *Such Is Life* by lantern light after work and at weekends. Offices and shops now occupy this place. A plaque on a Wilga tree, which Furphy planted himself, stands on the edge of the footpath as monument to the man and his book.

People and traffic rush by.

In Shepparton today the name Furphy is associated with the foundry much, much more than with the writer. Only a few copies of *Such Is Life* are sold annually, while the library caters for a tiny readership interest.

The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature (1985) says:

... for all the cleverness and appropriateness of his literary allusions to Shakespeare, the Bible, Sterne and other authors, there remains a certain self-consciousness about his literary style; the effect, when the ponderousness and pomposity natural to the character of Tom Collins are added, is to make *Such Is Life* difficult to read, if increasingly enjoyable to reread.

The words 'increasingly enjoyable to reread' are appropriate probably to much of the world's best literature. The Furphy masterpiece is no exception. ■

John Senty lives and writes in north-west Victoria.

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CATALYST for RENEWAL

"Not servants but friends": women and authority in Australian Catholic life (Jn 15:15).

Catalyst for Renewal will host its annual dinner on Friday 29 August 2003 at Xavier College and all are welcome. Welcome at 6.30 pm followed by dinner.

Speakers on the theme are Mary Williams (WATAC) and Louise Crowe (formerly from Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture), with conversation chaired by Peter Price (a consultant in adult faith and leadership formation and education).

Tickets are \$40 per person including dinner and drinks. Please make cheque payable to Catalyst for Renewal, c/- 5/693 Nepean Hwy, Carrum VIC 3197 and include a stamped self-addressed envelope for return of tickets. Enquiries 03 9776 2705. Numbers are strictly limited so please book early.

Problems with belief

Respecting the beliefs of another is possible,
but respecting unbelief can pose problems

'DO YOU BELIEVE in God?' Recently in Bangladesh, a friend asked me and I answered with the truth. 'No. I do not.'

'For a very long time?'

And I told her that indeed it had been for a very long time, since I'd been quite small.

Two years ago, my granddaughters, at the time aged 11 and 5, had asked the same question. When I told them *no* they had their own follow-up question: 'Have you been baptised?'

I said I had. There was an exchange of glances. The older one said: 'I thought baptism was supposed to help you believe in God.'

I had the feeling then, and again the other day, that they knew the answer to the main question before they asked it—they were confirming something.

My granddaughters might have been simply curious. But when the question is asked in Bangladesh it has deep significance. As I discovered when I visited my friend, atheism can be a troubling fact for Bangladeshi Muslims to accept.

My friend's parents were preparing to leave Bangladesh to go to Mecca for the Haj. It was also the time when Muslim families all over Bangladesh were preparing for the major religious festival of Eid Ul Azha. In the Chittagong district, where I was living, families try to return to their ancestral village for the annual slaughter of beasts that commemorates the story of Ibrahim and Ishmael (which, as a Catholic child, I had learnt at school as the story of Abraham and Isaac).

Belief in God is fundamental to those activities, as well as being an essential element in daily life. Discussions about religion were frequent. Both my friend's brother and her husband initiated such conversations with me on the night of my arrival. Part of their motivation would have been Bangalee courtesy—making sure that the guest is accompanied. When

a Bangladeshi family 'guestifies' you, they are bound by their duty towards visitors to feed you and to engage in conversation—and in this household the topic of conversation most often raised was the one of religion and belief.

I found the situation difficult. In what appeared to be an attempt to make me feel at ease, both young men had prefaced their remarks with comments about the Muslim reverence for Issa (Jesus) as a prophet of God, and their respect for Miriam (Mary) his mother. I sensed that they were searching for common ground on which to conduct the discussion, because they believed I was a Christian. And even though they thought that Christians were mistaken in their beliefs, they wanted to convince me of the efficacy of their own beliefs without outrightly condemning mine.

Feeling embarrassed at my failure to meet my obligation as a guest, and wishing to spare both of us any further problems, I told my friend's husband, 'I am not a Christian, I am Buddhist.'

BUT MY statement did nothing to relieve the tension. What I said confronted him with an unimaginable situation—I did not believe in God. In his belief system there is no doubt about the existence of God—and you either believe or you do not, there is no alternative.

The story of Abraham and Isaac had been one of the stories that had caused me so much difficulty as a child. It made no sense to me at all that the same God would require the father to kill his only child. Because of temperament more than anything, I began the slow process of becoming a non-believer. In that process I left the realm of what is known as Abrahamic Faith, and lately I've been discovering that even in modern times, in an urban setting, there is a tribal sense to all those three religious faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) which profess the

Abrahamic tradition. Leave that faith and, in a way, you betray the tribe.

Some of this I tried later to explain to my Bangladeshi friend. That conversation was a gentler one than the ones I'd had with the men of the household. My friend talked to me of how important God was in her life and of the great peace and happiness she experienced when she thought about God. Then, and on subsequent occasions when talking to other people, I was moved by the ways in which people talked about God as real and meaningful in daily life. These people, most of them university-educated and members of the professional middle class, approach life from a rational stance; at the same time they live in a belief about God which they openly express in conversation.

Bangladesh is a nominally secular state, but is gradually becoming Islamised. Atheism, whether practised by Buddhists or Communists, is now unacceptable to a large proportion of the population. Not so long ago people lived harmoniously with difference, and in the smaller communities, i.e. villages and *mofussil* (small towns), differences in religious belief and practice were acknowledged and at the same time were often subsumed into traditional local practices that were secular in character.

Moderate Muslims, particularly urban dwellers, maintain that the problems of religious intolerance are recent and a feature of urban life where people were not known to each other.

There *is* intolerance, however, and recent years have seen widespread incidents of communal violence, both in urban and in rural areas. Initially, the violence was aimed at Hindu, Buddhist and Christian communities—suggesting that perhaps the intolerance is of difference rather than of non-believers.

Since early 2002, there have been some incidents in Chittagong that involved verbal threats being made against moderate Muslims. For example, female

students were 'sent' home from university by young male members of the student political group 'Shibir'—sent home to change their clothes to something more respectable.

In another incident a group of school children practising for an annual spring display were threatened by a group of Shibir activists because they were using drums and the girls were dancing.

Shibir's motivation appears to be to intimidate others into accepting a more fundamental practice of Islam—one that places restrictions on the use of music and dance, and that limits the participation of women in public life. Shibir's members have been known to punish people who do not comply. One way is to cut the tendons of the feet and wrists of those who resist.

These incidents reflect what Bangladeshis call the 'muscle power' being exercised by supporters of Jama'at Islam, one of the senior partners in the four-party government elected in 2001, and a party which endorses more fundamental religious belief.

The question of belief has special significance for members of the Muslim community. During my time in Bangladesh, I had a number of conversations with people, mainly men, who were grappling with issues of interpretation of the Koran, and who were not sure if they believed in God or not. One young man told me that on the whole he felt he did not believe. 'But,' he said, 'I do not know if I can call myself agnostic or atheist, because when my daughter is ill, I hope that God will make her well.'

Others spoke earnestly of the importance of Islamic practice, and especially the significance of Eid Ul Azha for the maintenance of good family relations. In a modern world, however, the significance of such rituals may be more social than religious.

The men I spoke to were nonetheless cautious about expressing doubt. One man told me more than once that if he spoke out in his community, in particular about his doubts about some aspects of the Koran, he would be killed. I really had no way of assessing whether that was a legitimate fear, but I did not doubt his concern.

As the public face of the family, men tend to be the ones who are faced with the problem of being non-believers. One Bangladeshi woman—Taslima Nasrin, author of *Shame*—who did speak out, raising serious concerns about the effects of fundamental belief on the women of Bangladesh, has been forced to live in exile for most of the last ten years.

In Bangladesh, religion and politics are intertwined in ways we in the West are not used to dealing with. Public discussions of religious schooling and festivals, for example, take place on a daily basis in newspapers, and discussions about religion are impossible to avoid in everyday life.

Believing in God, then, is important. And not believing in God is a problem. ■

Lyn Riddett lives in Canberra.

New from Cambridge Australia

Elders

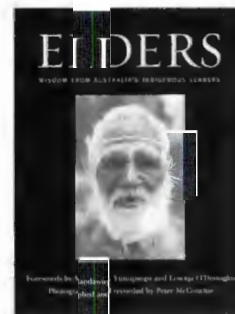
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Forewords by Lowitja O'Donoghue & Mandawuy Yunupingu

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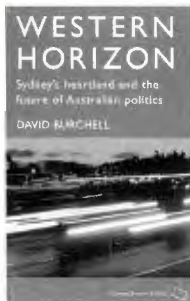
www.cambridge.edu.au

Western Horizon: Sydney's heartland and the future of Australian politics, David Burchell. Scribe, 2003. ISBN 0 908011 93 8, RRP \$16.95

David Burchell examines the political phenomenon of western Sydney. Burchell goes beyond the everyday perceptions and uncovers many paradoxes. He recognises that while western Sydney bears the mark of poverty and poor infrastructure, it is also increasingly a place of prosperity—particularly for those who have benefited from the rise in housing prices and those seeking the advantages of living in open-space suburbs and 'dream' homes.

Since *Tampa* and September 11, western Sydney has gained a reputation for racism. In *Western Horizon*, Burchell concludes that while the area continues to attract high numbers of migrants, a culture of racism and intolerance persists.

Exploring the shift from traditional Labor voting behaviour towards a Liberal mind-set, Burchell offers readers an engaging view of the political culture of western Sydney. —**Miriam Bugden**



Reading this book, I felt much more enlightened about the survival of those on the railway. It's an amazing story. Sadly, it is a story Peek shares with too many comrades. Peek is cheerful and matter of fact about an experience that could have been soul-destroying, but wasn't: something I can never understand. —**Chris O'Connor**

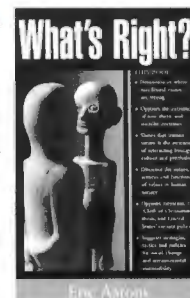
What's Right?, Eric Aarons. Rosenberg Publishing, 2003. ISBN 1 877058 10 6, RRP \$24.95

Reflecting upon the events of September 11, 2001, Eric Aarons is particularly affected by the destructive use of modern technology intended for the benefit of ordinary lives. Aarons contends that the modern world delivers more misery than it is supposed to, and its achievements are often overshadowed by its failures.

'What's right?' is an apt question for today. Since September 11, neo-liberal hawks on the political right have pursued an increasingly aggressive policy agenda, supposedly in the name of the morally right. Aarons analyses today's pre-eminent neo-liberalism, in theory and practice: from the perversion of high-minded and moralistic classical liberalism to today's market-fundamentalism.

Aarons embarks on a refreshing discussion of human nature, and its biological and anthropological history. Nonetheless, he wastes no time in relating this discussion back to the central dilemma: what is neo-liberalism, and what are its ethical values?

With candour and a tempered idealism, Aarons expresses dismay at the present situation, sketches possibilities for the future and warns against the blunders of the past. —**Tom Rigby**



Body and Soul: A Spirituality of Imaginative Creativity, Fintan Creaven. St. Paul's, 2003. ISBN 1 876295 59 7, RRP \$21.95

One of the great discoveries of late has been the wealth of Celtic spirituality. The prayers, poems and practices of early Irish Christians have been widely published and appreciated.

Fintan Creaven, a British Jesuit, reflects on the connection between his Celtic and his Ignatian heritage. It is a journey of discovery, as it would be for many Jesuits of his generation. The emphasis in Celtic spirituality on wonder at the beauty and rhythms of creation, and to recover the same spirit in Ignatius and his companions. Qualities often obscured in the desire to make an orderly and teachable spirituality.

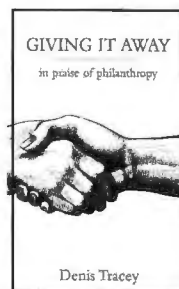
The book is notable for its enthusiasm and its quotations from Celtic literature. I would have loved only to see the writer go in for more recent spirituality through Patrick Kavanagh, George McKay Brown and John McGahran. —**Andrew Hamilton**

One Fourteenth of an Elephant: A memoir of life and death on the Burma-Thailand Railway, Ian Denys Peek. Macmillan, 2003. ISBN 0 7329 1168 0, RRP \$35.00

Reading this book inspires you to sit down with a bottle of whisky and two glasses—one for yourself and one for Peek as he tells you his story. The book is not a narrative but a conversation.

It's about being a prisoner of war on the Thai-Burma railway during World War II. The author is emotional and forthright. His attitude to his Japanese and Korean captors is hard to swallow, but his anger is understandable. Peek's intense dislike of his captors is not racially based—others to feel his wrath include God, the Irish Unionists, his own officers, and a few of the rank and file prisoners.

Many people know a bit about the Thai-Burma railway, and the experiences of these men has inspired a latter-day tourist industry.



Giving it Away: In praise of philanthropy, Denis Tracey. Scribe, 2003. ISBN 0 908011 90 3, RRP \$27.50

One distinctive quality of the early Christians' God was philanthropy. Unlike the neutral or hostile gods of others, their God loved human beings. But in the human world, philanthropy was a virtue for the god-like. Philanthropists who gave to their cities came in many colours, but it was taken for granted that they were rich.

What was in question was their love. The vanity displayed by the rich in their giving was commonplace, as were the complaints by philanthropists about the small-mindedness of their critics.

Denis Tracey goes beyond these stereotypes in his description of the willingness of Australians to give of their resources. He finds a fitful but growing tradition, with evidence of the meanness of those come to wealth, but also of a commitment to give and of creativity in finding better ways to enable good things to be done. Tracey's interviews take the reader beyond stereotypes and display the full range of passion and perplexity among donors and recipients.

A recurrent theme is the desire of contemporary donors to give effectively and to create new opportunities. Those who appeal for money now need to make detailed submissions and offer evaluation of their projects. It will also help if the donations they seek are seed funding. The philanthropic God is no longer an absent gardener. —**A.H.**

flash in the pan



Moving images

Naqoyqatsi (below), dir. Godfrey Reggio. The opening sequence is impressive: a long, slow travel across the facade of a ravaged, inky, multi-storeyed building. Its arcades and aspects are desolate, eloquent. Something has happened here. But what? The effect is like that of the disquieting photography of Australian Bill Henson. Enticing. Disorienting. You want to know more.

Okay so far. And there is Philip Glass' score, haunting and coherent (not overbearing as it was in *The Hours*). And Yo-Yo Ma's transcendent cello. Plus all the visual tricks that dedicated, multi-talented techs can deliver. A dutiful reviewer can't close her eyes, lie back, listen to the music and forget the digital transformation of some 3.5 terabytes of information (no such obligation attaches to anyone else). And if you are a fan of MTV, fractal imagery and portentous abstraction, then by all means stay bug-eyed and receptive for the whole 90 minutes. And you can be admiring too, because this is very worthy stuff. Godfrey Reggio's take on 21st-century existence is passionate, his commitment to justice patient. In this third of his trilogy with Hopi language titles ('Naqoyqatsi' means something like 'each other-kill-many-life') he

constructs a relentless, wordless critique of technology, of human competitiveness escalating into brutish violence. And yes, he is aware of the irony of using 'cutting edge' technology to warn of technology's catastrophic takeover. And he was for 14 years a member of a contemplative religious order so his values are all in the right place.

But it's such a prescriptive onslaught. In the welter of manipulated imagery there is so little room to think. No space, for all the film's inventory of natural wonders. Remember the scene in Carol Reed's *The Third Man*, where the camera moves from the glint of a shoe slowly up the human body to Harry Lime's (Orson Welles') infinitely complex face? There is more menace and wonder in that one sequence of film than in all the artful construction of Reggio's opus. Maybe because Reed better understood that the ideal play between director and audience, visual image and viewer, is dynamic, not passive.

—Morag Fraser

Open heart surgery

Open Hearts (right), dir. Susanne Bier. The Dogme manifesto was thrust upon the world in 1995 by Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg. Like the declarations of the *Nouvelle Vague*, or the Oberhausen Manifesto, it asserted itself as the cure for the corrupt state of contemporary filmmaking—a new New Wave. Based on a 'vow of chastity' eschewing such fripperies as lighting, sets, external music, props and costume and so on, it aimed (or so it

said) to focus on the 'reality' of the inner lives of the characters, rather than exploding cars and special effects.

In practice, the 'truth' of many Dogme films consists of absurdly melodramatic performances generated in response to the most artificial and contrived of narrative set-ups. In the case of Susanne Bier's new film, *Open Hearts*, the set-up turns on the shattering of Joachim and Cecilie's soon-to-be-wedded bliss by a car accident that leaves Joachim quadriplegic. He pushes her away out of self-pity; she turns to Niels, a doctor at the hospital where Joachim is treated, who just happens to be the husband of Marie, the woman who ran him down. Joachim yells a lot and is rude; Cecilie cries a lot; Niels looks troubled and supportive; Marie alternates between sweetness, denial and distress (the most complex performance of the film).

Like most Dogme films, it is shot on digital video and looks pretty ugly. The obligatory hand-held camerawork and jump cutting doesn't feel so much like 'documentary realism' as it does 'video clip'—a feeling reinforced by the use of music as a substitute for emotion in the film itself. If there was some genuine exploration of the network of guilt binding the quartet of characters together, it might be an interesting film. But instead we get your basic wife-vs-lover story, with a quadriplegic sub-plot thrown in. There are some Dogme films that work on their own terms (*Italian for Beginners*, for example), but I suspect that this is despite, not because of, the manifesto or its vow. *Open Hearts* doesn't have much more to offer than its 'Dogme-ness', and given that I suspect that the manifesto is von Trier's idea of a joke on both the viewer and other film-makers, that's not much of a recommendation.

—Allan James Thomas

Shooting with blanks

The Matrix Reloaded, dir. the Wachowski brothers. The first *Matrix* was brilliant. It was one of the true originals, with a dark, bold story of dystopic conspiracy: full of archetypes, epiphanic moments and a twist on special effects that made them more than whizzbang. All those slo-mo and full-rotation camera angles created the flavour of something new, particular and vividly creative. Tribute was paid to its genius throughout the





film and TV industry when those swooping faux 3D frozen moments were emulated, quoted, plagiarised and satirised. A new brand was born, a frame of reference was planted in the minds of everyone everywhere.

I suspect that the Wachowskis got too rich and successful, were courted by bigger money and thought 'let's do more of the same but bigger', forgetting that more is so often less, and often—as with George Lucas' horrible prequel travesties cluttering the only two good Star Wars movies—becomes virtually nothing.

So what is so wrong with this sequel? Well, the edge is gone. There is no more real conflict, unless you count the glaring moral void when Neo (Keanu Reeves, that wonderful actor so curiously empty here) is given the choice of saving his girlfriend Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) or saving a quarter of a million human beings. He doesn't even hesitate, let alone break a sweat: he saves Trinity and the rest of the human race can just die. But of course, you see, the script makes Nietzsche's *Übermensch* look like Mother Teresa. We are reminded that Neo is 'the one' and various messianic images are perpetrated, as when he returns to Zion, the refuge of the remnant of human beings, and is besieged by devotees. They are treated in the film pretty much as ordinary fans are by Hollywood—insignificant pests who want a

piece of the superstar. No religious experience here, only empty reference without comprehension. And the mysterious, glorious Zion, spoken of in hushed tones in the first film, is simply a subterranean shanty town that likes to party hearty, a cave rave.

And the crowning failure is the car chase—14 minutes of complete lack of tension, so replete with computer effects that you almost expect to see a line at the end promising that no actual vehicles were harmed during the making of this movie. But there are so many failures to choose from: the ludicrous love scenes, complete with naked backs liberally decorated with black computer buttons; the predictable wire-assisted fight scenes lifted straight from the Hong Kong martial arts film genre; the black leather clothes, which looked so good in the first film and now look so try-hard. I could cite more, but really, I'd start to get as bored as I was sitting at Hoyts last week watching the damn thing.

—Juliette Hughes

Seamless lies

La vérité si je mens! 2 (Would I lie to you, again?), dir. Thomas Gilou. This sequel to a 1996 film of the same name is an exquisite piece of French froth and bubble. Although handicapped by English subtitles,

which distract from some hilarious dialogue, the vitality of the visual humour still carries the day.

A group of young garment manufacturers are struggling to compete with the multinationals in the Parisienne rag trade. Sell garments they might, but payment is slow. In desperation they approach a giant clothing chain, Euro Discount, with a trendy outfit featuring a catchy logo. The interest shown by the general manager of Euro Discount, Vierhouten (Daniel Prévost), is flattering and at first very promising. Then, however, the marketing giant begins to apply the screws, placing condition after impossible condition on the contract. The last straw is the rejection of their product for the contrived reason that the fitting is too small.

Predictably, they find their garments, bearing their logo, being sold everywhere in Euro Discount stores carrying a 'Made in China' label. They attempt to mount a court challenge, but this is unsuccessful.

Acknowledging that they have been duped, our heroes break up their business and go their separate ways, until Eddie (Richard Anconina) has an inspired idea for a sting that will cut the villainous Vierhouten down to size.

The execution of the sting itself occupies relatively little screen time. The action moves between Paris, St Tropez and Tunisia. Much of the film's running time is devoted to the matrimonial problems and love interests of the five men. It is an ensemble effort, with the acting honours going to José Garcia who plays Serge, the delivery boy, who unwisely has an affair with the daughter of a wealthy family, pretending he has money to burn. It's a frenetic performance. His role in the sting is absolutely manic.

Although there are no big names in the cast, there are some marvellous cameo performances. The movie audience has the opportunity to enjoy the company of this group of friends. Importantly, the cast members react to each other with infectious vitality.

And the final sting? It's child's play, so to speak.

—Gordon Lewis



Temporary inanity

A GREY MELBOURNE day of dust-wind and mud-rain, all the windows sanded with topsoil blowing over the city from the west. A slight cold leaves me disinclined for anything but sloth and gluttony. The fireplace is sharp and clear and the television is a glittering jewel. Comfort food, footstools, cushions and cups of tea. I cocoon all day and well into the night, watching TV, chatting on the phone or fiddling aimlessly with the laptop. I am the luckiest being in history, warm and fed and sheltered and entertained and surrounded by family.

What are you writing? asks my son after dinner. He is acknowledged lord of the remote control and is feeling indulgent towards me because he has just managed to show me how to do text messages on my mobile. I have felt too lazy to bicker with him about program choices, and so my brain is replete with *Big Brother*, so popular that I wonder until I take account of what else is hugely popular and successful right now. (Let me think. Hmm. Rainforest destruction going fine, no stopping that one—pass me those disposable mahogany chopsticks; poaching rare and endangered species, yes, invest the super in that one and make a real killing. It's obviously time to distract myself from distraction.)

The lord of the remote is summarily deposed. He sighs when I insist on watching two ABC previews, *Wild West* (Thursdays at 8.30pm) and *Walking with Cavemen* (Thursdays at 8pm). I smile wickedly as he goes off with his cousin to play guitars and talk young-bloke talk. All really fine pleasures feel a little guilty, a bit stolen. What a Catholic I am, to be sure.

And so I watched *Wild West* with Dawn French as grumpy lesbian Mary, stealing pleasures as well. She was chocking out (only wimps veg out) in front of a nice big TV herself, watching whatever while I watched her. Her pleasures were stolen from the satisfyingly hateable and objectified rich absentee holiday-house owner, who was adding to the drama by racing to her hideaway. Would the squalor left by Mary's orgy be discovered, or would she get out in time to make the political point she was supposed to be making? It said something sharp about the strains on small communities like St Gweep, the Cornish backdrop to the story. Moneyed weekend house owners contribute nothing to the place, even doing their grocery shopping in the city before coming down to suck up the ambience of the seaside Cornish quaintery. The rich woman and Mary both envied what the other had: suburban guerrilla warfare ensued.

You could see the origins of such rivalries in *Walking with Cavemen*, Robert Winston's latest foray into biology, archaeology and anthropology. He imagines scenarios around the fragments of our fossil ancestors—starting with Lucy, the famous Rift Valley discovery of the Leakeys. We are shown a turf war that results in her death, not by design, but by depressingly familiar chance, along the lines of what clever Mr Rumsfeld might describe as collateral damage.

Winston wanders through the scenarios as himself, a pretend time-traveller kibitzing on the urgent life-business of our foreparents. We trace our evolution in four episodes until we reach the Africa of 150,000 years ago. In a moving final moment, Winston, coming upon an absolutely adorable baby, picks her up lovingly and says that if he were to take her home and bring her up as his daughter, she'd be no different from his other children. The real mother returns to the child just after Winston has laid her tenderly down where he found her. She looks around questioningly but calmly. Eve.

THERE WAS A BOOK, *The Seven Daughters of Eve*, published a couple of years ago, claiming that anyone of European descent can trace their lineage to seven individual women through mitochondrial DNA. You can even send them a sum of money to investigate your DNA (they send you a kit, presumably, with scrapers, slides, little bottles and placky bags).

Meanwhile my descendant is bored. His ancestor has controlled the cocooning for too long. I swiftly horse-trade the remote for a cup of tea made in my favourite mug (the one that says *I am woman, I am invincible, I am tired*) and, too lazy to shift, watch as he and his cousin flick restlessly through multifarious cable channels. He settles on the Metallica special on MTV, and I am content. Our German shepherd, sprawling even more abandonedly than I, begins a low croon in the root note of their modal frenzy. I was going to watch an SBS documentary on shaky fish futures telling how we stupid children of Lucy ravage the oceans and how if we don't stop it right now there won't be any at all within a decade—but right now just knowing it and deciding not to buy ocean fish any more is enough. Metallica's music crashes round us, blasting care away: violent, beautiful, fierce, fertile. Look, says my son, it's giving me goosebumps. Me too. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

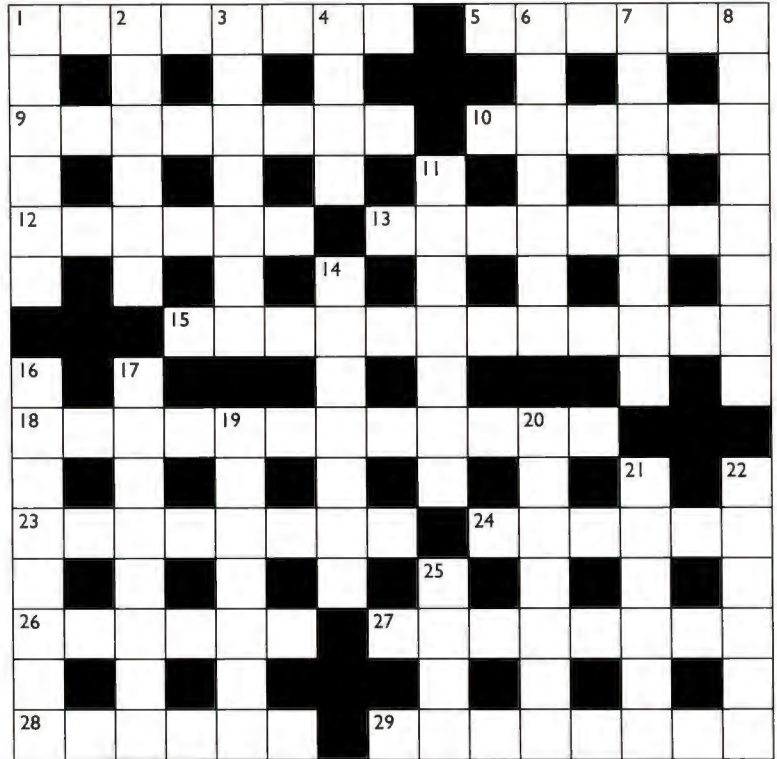


Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 115, July–August 2003

ACROSS

1. Useful headgear to wear in a sort of race ... if you are one of the better runners. (8)
5. What the verse did with something worse! (6)
9. The writer published his English catalogue after early November. (8)
10. Nourishing drink, or part thereof, was once in a shell beside the wooden peg. (6)
12. Incarcerate some flocking sheep. (4,2)
13. Totally abandoned, with everybody unaccompanied. (3,5)
15. Someone just starting a career, perhaps, has this challenging goal. (3,2,7)
18. She can make people lose their senses. (12)
23. Star-type embroidered into the ornamental fabric. (8)
24. Place where a woolly sort of goat went left instead of right. (6)
26. As arranged, went easy on the marmalade, for example. (6)
27. Ineffectually attempt to fully tie the knot, perhaps. (8)
28. Acting inquisitively, found something bad in the drink. (6)
29. Irritating bloke was born a shade paler. (8)



DOWN

1. The composer, we hear, might grasp this. (6)
2. The apprentice is apparently without shortcomings. (6)
3. Twice sick about the beginning of winter, she shows her resentment. (3,4)
4. Referral sometimes includes this as well. (4)
6. Bath the boar the other way round? Nonsense! (7)
7. The available work-force in the population lacks the feminine touch. (8)
8. North Sea bank uses the Spanish lines of poor quality. (8)
11. Former performances, or past legislation? (3,4)
14. Hikers thumbing lifts lose their heads and show their irritation—by scratching? (7)
16. Quiet craftsman is a devotee of the cause. (8)
17. Smash pieces against the fortifications. (8)
19. We object to the surrounding discoloration and seek support. (7)
20. Dispatching the second conclusion. (7)
21. Thus recline the most painfully sensitive ones! (6)
22. Tom the timber worker in Missouri. (6)
25. Sparring match pre-arranged between two, reportedly. (4)

Solution to Crossword no. 114, June 2003



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