

EUREKA STREET

Vol. 4 No. 7 September 1994

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Collectors' items

Michael McGirr on the sale of Australia's post offices

Tim Winton tells **H.A. Willis** about ghosts, God and *The Riders*

Graham Little conjures up the spirit of childhood

John Button tackles the spirit of Aussie Rules

Janine Haines takes to the road with Jill Ker Conway



*In Australia, early spring has a look found nowhere else:
afternoon scene in Taradale, Victoria*

Photo: Bill Thomas

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Rwandan causes

WORLDWIDE EXPERIENCE WITH MILLIONS OF REFUGEES on the move from Rwanda and other places should be teaching us something—that the international community needs to practise what it preaches: that we are part of one human family. This is not going to be easy in the case of Rwanda, and it will not be easy if Burundi blows apart in the next month, because of the brutal nature of the massacres there both in the past and recently.

Few people who depend on the commercial media for information would realise that the genocide of Tutsis nearly succeeded. On the best estimates in Nairobi (the nearest city with good communications and Africa watchers), only 200,000 adult Tutsis are left out of 700,000 who were alive when the massacres started on 6 April. Yet some Africans would say the Tutsis deserved it. Though a minority, they dominated commerce and government for decades, sometimes treating the Hutus like serfs. The present troubles are just the latest in a long series dating back to when the Belgians quit their colony.

But let's look at the brutality more closely. I base my thoughts on time spent in Bukavu, Zaire, where more than 600,000 Rwandan refugees have fled since April. In those camps, you can sense a predominating fear. You can almost smell it. People avoid your eyes; young men respond to the camera with hostility; families hide from strangers under their blue UN plastic.

Of the thousands of refugees I saw, I reckon perhaps 20,000 to 30,000 were young men, walking the streets in groups of 10 or 20. Clearly, they were the militias (the *inyaraha* Jack Waterford described in the August edition of *Eureka Street*). They have good reason to fear the camera, for they certainly do not want to be identified as mass killers, especially since the Rwandan Patriotic Front government keeps announcing in the capital, Kigali, that there are 40,000 war criminals in camps in Zaire.

How were these youths drawn together into a paramilitary force, and how could they kill with such vigour and zeal? A number of Christian pastors and priests in the camps in Bukavu believe that witchcraft was used—some elemental recourse to Rwanda's ancient animism. This added a touch to the old Hutu hatred of Tutsis. Then the moderates in the army and the government were eliminated. Then add an airlift of new machetes from Sheffield, England. By 6 April, when the president's plane went down, everything was ready. It seems that the massacres were about to happen anyway. Maybe the plane crash was merely the trigger.

The brutality of death squads and hit lists that shocked the world shocked Rwandans just as much, especially the Christians. For the boast had been that Rwanda was the most Christian nation in Africa, with a large national Catholic Church, an Anglican Church of 1.2 million members, other Protestant and Pentecostal churches, and even a Seventh Day Adventist Church. How is it possible, with such a tradition and with a great deal of intermarriage, and even allowing for

the old hatreds between tribes, for such a genocide to be undertaken, and with such savagery?

There are several explanations to be heard in Bukavu, spoken of quietly in tents and prayed over in church services:

- Too many people 'turned their heads' at the start of the massacres. They speak of it with shame. Some among the leadership of the both the Catholic and the Anglican churches are accused of this, of trusting the former government too much.
- The church did not give enough support to moderate people in the army and the government.
- Tribalism was perpetuated in the way clergy were chosen, trained and promoted. Ten of the country's 11 Anglican bishops were Hutus. In the Catholic Church, I understand that most priests were Tutsi but bishops were Hutu.
- The fruits of the East African Revival Movement, which started in Rwanda and spread through all the Protestant churches, overflowing to Uganda, Kenya

and Tanzania in the 1970s and '80s, started with personal confession and forgiveness, but did not extend to community or tribal reconciliation.

- Not everything is a matter of shame. Many church leaders were killed because they preached an end to tribalism. Some priests were killed because they hid Tutsis from the militias, others because they were 'Tutsi lovers'. The Anglican Church lost 17 priests, the Catholics many more.

Suffering, shame, loss. The church suffers with the whole nation. How can the church rebuild? How can the nation? Instead of pointing the finger, or giving up because it's all too complex, Australian Christians might give a thought to this question: how deep is our own Christianity anyway? Spare a thought for the churches of Rwanda. As with the churches of Germany from 1936-45, all their choices are hard. ■

Alan Nichols is an Anglican priest and writer, who works for World Vision Australia.

COMMENT: 2

JOHN ERNST

Failing to pass Go

THE LABOR LEFT'S OPPOSITION to the sale of the nation's airports and shipping line, and the botched public flotation of the Victorian betting and gaming giant TABCORP, have re-ignited debate about the purpose and value of privatisation as an instrument of public policy. Even more remarkable than some aspects of the debate itself—such as the sudden emergence from political hibernation of the Victorian Labor opposition—is the fact that it has been so mightily long in coming.

Privatisation and that other catchphrase, corporatisation, continue to dominate the public policy agenda in this country, despite the weight of evidence from countries such as Britain and New Zealand that the rhetoric of privatisation has rarely been matched by reality.

Judged in its own terms, privatisation has more often than not failed to deliver. Typically, privatising governments have failed to maximise the return to taxpayers from the sale of public assets, as the example of TABCORP amply illustrates. In many instances, competition has been elusive and public monopolies have simply been replaced by private ones. The promises of new consumer rights and consumer sovereignty have been made to look absurdly improbable under privatised industry regimes of rising prices, lack of choice and deteriorating service standards. Even claims about the efficiency of private ownership are dubious, for many of the more significant efficiency and productivity gains have been made in the period prior to privatisation, when the indus-

tries concerned were still under public ownership.

There are more fundamental reasons than these for questioning the efficacy of privatisation programs, however, particularly as they move into the post-Hilmer world of microeconomic reform and restructuring in public utilities. The sale of enterprises and assets clearly involves a transfer of property rights from the public to select groups in society, usually domestic and international capital. But along with the transfer of property rights, the act of privatisation relieves the public of part of its sovereignty. Public ownership provides a framework of control and accountability over strategic decision-making in key areas of infrastructure and essential services; under privatisation this is relinquished. Privatisation casts important policy questions, like the economic, social and environmental consequences of infrastructure development, adrift from the democratic process, as the British public found to their considerable dismay in the recent controversy over electricity generation and the future of the British coal mining industry.

Fundamental citizenship rights are also impaired under privatisation. Truth—or at least the right to know—becomes the first casualty. Privatisation invariably means the removal of freedom of information and Ombudsman protections. And the capacity to obtain information about the activities of monopoly service providers is smothered by the veil of commercial secrecy. Essential services become valued only as commodities. The implicit right of all citizens, of a country with the prevailing standard of

living of Australia, to adequate levels of basic services (such as energy and water) is made uncertain by commercial imperatives and government ambivalence towards so-called community service obligations.

If, in a civilised society, the ultimate test of public policy is the

way that it affects the weakest and most vulnerable members of society, then the international experience of privatisation, thus far, indicates that it has been a gross policy failure. Even supporters of privatisation policy would find it difficult to deny that the impact of the privatisation of essential

services on the poor of Britain, New Zealand and elsewhere, might be summed up in two words—vicious and unfair. ■

John Ernst lectures in the Department of Urban and Social Policy at the Victoria University of Technology.

COMMENT: 3

MORAG FRASER

A tide in PNG affairs

WITH THE PNG FLAG planted at the mountainous Panguna minesite and his troops penetrating even the nearby village of Guava, home of the Bougainville revolutionary president, Francis Ona, Prime Minister Wingti is proclaiming the beginning of the end of the six-year war. And that end is to be imposed as a military victory, not the negotiated settlement advocated by Senator Looseley and his delegation (see *Eureka Street*, May 1994, p. 38).

Wingti's triumph comes opportunely. The other four Islands provinces (East and West New Britain, New Ireland and Manus) are planning a breakaway Federated Republic of Melanesia (FRM) if Prime Minister Wingti persists with his centralising program. That program entails abolishing second-tier governments, which have worked on the whole satisfactorily for the Islands, if not on the mainland.

In the present circumstances, the Islands' premiers are now expected to look at the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) with a little more respect. Then there is the Finance Minister, Masket Iangalio, who is saying that PNG is on the verge of bankruptcy. The prospect of restarting the Panguna mine (in 1988 it was providing 17 per cent of revenue and 36 per cent of export income) should help the investment climate. Or so it is hoped.

But the reality is rather different. Even allowing that the seven square kilometres of Panguna are under control—and, at the time of writing, this is not clear—the PNGDF is staring at the great hole that is the second largest open pit in the world.

There might be symbolism in the 'victory' to shake the morale of some rebels and their sympathisers.

But the hard-core rebels know how brittle PNGDF logistics are and how unreliable is rudimentary air cover. The PNGDF cannot prevent classic guerrilla harassment in areas where their numbers are depleted—or even where they are not. Even if the BRA were to be completely eliminated (past experience suggests that the PNGDF will not be taking prisoners if they find the leaders) the Bougainville people cannot be subjugated. PNG is not Indonesia: the state does not have that power.

There is reason to fear that Prime Minister Wingti may now shift even further away from practicable peace negotiations. He has not pursued the initiatives facilitated by the Solomon Islands government at official level in Honiara recently, and has been dismissive of those of his Foreign Minister, Sir Julius Chan. The wise course would be a judicious balancing act: Wingti could use his triumph to reassert Port Moresby's determination to overcome secessionism. But he should also summon a pan-Bougainville conference to ease the processes of internal reconciliation within the province and of reintegration within PNG.

But Wingti knows that the outcome of any pan-Bougainville conference will be a call for the restoration of provincial government; more probably for an increase in autonomy over the pre-war level. With the PNGDF's symbolic victory, he may dismiss the latter but not the former.

Wingti does not acknowledge that the Bougainville Accord of

August 1976, which brought an end to the first Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) is binding. He seems unaware that Port Moresby agreed to grant and resource provincial government as a condition of unity. He likes to convey the impression that this devolution of power was at the root of the Bougainville revolt. This is not the case. Provincial government provided the North Solomons province (NSP—a more accurate term than Bougainville) with stability and effective incorporation within PNG until grievances arose over minesites. By the time the new Namaliu government proposed a generous settlement in 1989, the security forces had alienated most North Solomonese, enabling the BRA leaders to hijack the secessionist sentiment always present in the province. Namaliu, an Islander himself with some empathy with North Solomonese, withdrew the security forces in March 1990 to avoid further bloodshed.

The result was the UDI of May 1990, proclaiming the Republic of 'Meckamui' (a Nasioi word from Central Bougainville meaning 'sacred land'). The BRA in its turn alienated North Solomonese living away from the Central area, so that in September, leaders on Buka Island invited the PNGDF to return. Subsequently, with villager support, the PNGDF has returned to most areas but its presence has not meant control. Neither does flying the national flag at Panguna. Wingti's belief that the mine can be reopened quickly is a pipe dream. No multinational company will expose personnel to guerrilla harassment. And nothing

is more likely to forge a new unity of North Solomonese than a refusal to restore provincial government.

The problem of Bougainville is now compounded by the threat of further secessionism in the Islands. There are reports of plans for a separatist security force. And to compound grievances, there is the fact that provincial government is being abolished by a Highlands-dominated government with a reputation for corruption. If a buoyant Prime Min-

ister Wingti tries to crack down on the FRM rather than withdraw his centralisation program, he risks fracturing the state more than the Bougainville crisis has.

Questions will inevitably arise about Australia's role. Should Australia help to check Wingti's progress? It will not want to be seen as dictating to its former colony. But the disintegration of PNG is clearly not in Australia's interest, or in that of PNG's component parts.

COMMENT: 4

RAY CASSIN

When theology goes public

WHEN POPE JOHN PAUL's apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* was released to the Catholic world in May, two questions were prompted by its declaration that the church cannot consider admitting women to ordained ministry. What kind of authority is possessed by this teaching, which although presented as definitive stops short of using the language normally used for what the church proclaims *ex cathedra*? And what would the consequences be for those who publicly expressed dissent from the teaching?

The former question may still be a matter of theological debate, but in Australia at least, the answer to the latter now seems clear. On Thursday, 18 August, the Archbishop of Melbourne, Sir Frank Little, asked Fr Philip Kennedy OP, a lecturer at the Yarra Theological Union (YTU), to give him an assurance that he would not publicly express disagreement with the Pope's teaching as set down in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*.

Several times, in media interviews, Fr Kennedy had pointed out that the Pope's letter, setting out ecclesiastical teaching with a high level of authority, assumed that Jesus had deliberately bequeathed to his followers a hierarchical male priesthood, thereby establishing a church. In the light of historical and biblical studies, however, especially the historical-critical movement of the past 200 years, the Pope's position was unverifiable. Therefore, Fr Kennedy had concluded, it was inappropriate for church authorities to expect blind obedience to the teach-

ing contained in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. Fr Kennedy felt unable to give the archbishop the undertaking he had asked for, and accordingly resigned from his post as a teacher of undergraduate theology students.

The issues raised by this confrontation between one theologian and his local bishop go beyond the issue of women's ordination itself. They concern the relationship between the church and the wider society, especially with regard to the airing of theological controversy in the media, and the kind of authority that the church can exercise over those who teach in institutions whose licence to grant degrees is conferred by the state.

These are not simply juridical questions; the answer that one gives to them will be an expression of how one understands what it is to be part of the church. Some of Fr Kennedy's colleagues, for example, may take the view that theological debate should be confined within the walls of the academy. *Eureka Street*, however, agrees with Fr Kennedy that not only is there nothing wrong with taking theology into the marketplace but that sometimes one is bound to do so. Simply, it is proper to do theology wherever it is proper to preach the gospel. And in a world that is virtually constituted by the constant barrage of conflicting media voices and messages, the question is not whether to use the media, but how to use it best. That lesson, at least, does not seem to have been lost on the Pope.

The constraints that may be

Australia has considerable leverage through its aid programs, defence support and investments. The secessionists can be told that Australia will support Port Moresby strenuously in the event of unjustified rebellion.

But one thing is certain: there will be no kudos for Australia if it sits on the sidelines and imagines that it won't have to pick up the pieces.

—Morag Fraser

placed on theologians in state-affiliated institutions raise similar considerations. The churches in Australia now have an historic opportunity to establish links with the universities from which they were excluded by the secularist ideologues of a century ago. Theology and religious studies are beginning to be accepted as tertiary disciplines, and students at institutions such as YTU, where Fr Kennedy taught, can pursue joint degrees with secular universities. But if Catholic theologians cannot pursue the truth wherever it leads them, one wonders whether theology will ever fully shed its Cinderella status in the academy.

Which takes us back to Fr Kennedy's objections to *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. Anyone who has read that document knows that it is stronger on assertion than on argument; indeed, there is comparatively little theological argument of any kind, other than a simple reassertion of the notion that for 'the Twelve' chosen by Jesus, one can read 'bishops', and that this all-male hierarchy was bequeathed to the church in perpetuity. In an age when a theologically literate laity is a fact of church life, however, it is not clear that documents formulated in this way will receive that general acceptance by the faithful which, throughout the history of the church, has been a note of authentic teaching. When discussing church authority, the question is not only 'Who's speaking?', but 'Who's listening?'

—Ray Cassin

One out of five

From Fr Brendan Byrne SJ, member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission. In his 'Comment' article (August 1994), Philip Kennedy OP lists 'four noteworthy documents' issued from Rome recently by the central authority of the Catholic Church, and notes that reaction to all four has been mixed.

A fifth document might have been added to the list: the statement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (23 April 1993). In contrast to the other four, this document has generally been widely welcomed for its openness to new paths of interpretation based on contemporary hermeneutic and literary theory. Among other things, it gives a positive, if measured endorsement to liberationist and feminist reading, welcomes the contribution of women exegetes and asserts the privileged role of the poor in interpretation.

I mention this not to blow the trumpet of the Biblical Commission but simply to offer some alleviation of the view that everything emanating recently from Rome is destined to cast gloom over those hoping for more openness in the church.

Brendan Byrne SJ
Parkville, VIC

Michael's message

From Brian Lang

Michael Jude McGrath was killed on the road with his friend Fred Quinn.

On Monday, 18 July 1994, Michael was farewelled by his wife Marlene and their family and friends in a Mass of Christian burial at St Timothy's Church, Forest Hill, VIC, celebrated by his brother John McGrath, parish priest of Corowa.

On Sunday, we remembered Michael's life with thanksgiving in a memorial liturgy using the music and symbols of Michael's love of life: a tapestry, some red wine, the Bible, golf sticks, walking boots, a wedding album, photos of their children, and words spoken by family and friends about what Michael had meant to them.

It is a parable of what is happening in the church: Forest Hill has no parish priest at the moment because he

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is taking a break for renewal. Marlene McGrath is a pastoral assistant in the parish, and previously she and Michael had worked full-time in the youth apostolate.

Many who attended the double memorial were people who shared Michael and Marlene's love of the church and its apostolate to youth. Some of them are sisters and priests still in full-time ministry. Some of them had been ordained, like Michael, but have since married and so are excluded from the official ministry of word and sacrament.

Now Marlene continues the pastoral work loved by her husband. How shall I picture her? Like Judith of old, she is called to save her people at great cost to herself. She must do that without the power of sacramental ordination, but with the support of her family. Family life is also a channel of grace—a grace denied to many ordained men, while those 'ordained' men who have accepted the grace of marriage are denied the privilege of ministering in the church. A paradox.

Brian Lang
Shepparton, VIC

As I was saying

From Raimond Gaita

Reply to Peter Singer and Rae Langton (*Eureka Street*, August 1994).

I began *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* with this quotation from Chaim Kaplan's *Warsaw Diaries*:

A rabbi in Lodz was forced to spit on a Torah scroll that was in the Holy Ark. In fear of his life he complied and desecrated that which is holy to him

and his people. After a short time he had no more saliva, his mouth was dry. To the Nazi's question, why did he stop spitting, the rabbi replied that his mouth was dry. Then the son of the 'superior race' began to spit into the rabbi's mouth and the rabbi continued to spit on the Torah.

I quoted it then, and I quote it now, to discourage a very particular kind of thoughtlessness which is so natural to philosophers that many of them fail even to suspect that it is an occupational hazard. Rae Langton falls into it when she says that it may be mere 'prejudice' to say that what the Nazi did is evil if one is not prepared to say why; that 'it is not a good idea ... to say that such things are forever out of bounds, at least as far as your thoughts are concerned': that 'it is not good enough' to say, without further argument, that such things are evil when half of the population doubt it. True, Langton does not have such examples in mind, and I do not say that the differences between them and the ones she has in mind are merely of degree. But it is not mere carelessness that prompts her to speak in that unguarded and general way. She gives voice to a familiar and edifying philosophical rhetoric about reason. It holds many philosophers in its thrall, but (thankfully) most shake free of it in the face of stories like Kaplan's. None of which is to deny that our understanding of such evil may be deepened, or that it is the task of moral philosophy to do it, and to do it for an audience wider than that of professional philosophers. However, philosophy does not tell us *why* such deeds are evil in any sense that assumes that philosophy should, or could, make us more rationally secure in the judgment that they are. Or, so I argue. Langton may still think that is not good enough, but she should acknowledge that that would not be a judgment about the nature of philosophy that is neutral with respect to our differences about the nature of good and evil, of the *kind* of seriousness which is fundamental to their acknowledgement, and of the thinking that is true to that acknowledgement.

It takes little imagination to think of situations in which someone would rightly be terrified and ashamed because certain arguments inclined them to think that what the Nazi did to the rabbi was no evil. There are enough people who, even now, say that the Jews deserved what the Nazis did to

them, and many do it in full knowledge of such examples. In a fine article in *The Tablet* (23 July 1994), Donald Nicholl says that it is part of the 'intellectual's professional deformation' automatically to scorn the thought expressed by Gerard Manley Hopkins when he said 'cleave to that which is good and not even give evil a hearing'. Nicholl discusses, with hair-raising plausibility, the role that 'deformation' played in the rise of Nazism and in the acceptance of its evils by so many Germans. Philosophers may say (while tying themselves to the mast) that no respectable argument could compel anyone to approve the evil done to the rabbi. Even if that were true, it is for the most part irrelevant, if only because that claim will always be so controversial—so unestablished—that no one could take comfort from it if they feared that argument was validly driving them to approve it.

Sociologists and political theorists have often noted the fact that academic philosophers have little inkling of the discrepancy—sometimes of comic proportions—between their professed willingness to doubt almost anything, and the fact that, taken generally, they tend to doubt very little of any consequence. If this were merely a sociological or psychological observation about philosophers it would have limited interest. However, the reasons why it is for the most part true, go deep into the discipline. The empty protestations that a real philosopher will never fear to follow the argument wherever it goes, rest on a view of the nature of reason and of what is genuinely cognitive that discourages reflection on that broader range of critical concepts I spoke of in my interview. In the public realm, the effect of that discouragement is to prepare the way for philosophies that suit the times—as does consequentialism; or which, more generally, work with moral and critical vocabularies that are then enough to enable those philosophies to adapt relatively easily to demands of public policy in a divided community. In philosophy itself, its effect is to disguise from philosophers the extent to which the discipline is vulner-

able to fashion, and the degree to which philosophers are closed to views beyond the fashion. Its effect, in other words, is to mock philosophy's claims to be radically self-reflective and to be radically reflective in its applications. All that is controversial, but I would assert the following as fact. Philosophers pride themselves on being experts in thinking, not merely because they are 'used to thinking about complicated things' (Langton), but because they think about thinking. However, there is in the mainstream of the subject no serious investigation of the concepts whose importance I tried to underline in my interview, and which constitute the bulk of our critical vocabulary. Philosophy students go



through their courses without an inkling that there is anything seriously to think about here. If that astonishes non-philosophers, then so it should.

I believe that this goes some way to explaining why Peter Singer and Rae Langton misunderstand almost every major point I made. I am prepared to take my share of the blame, but it is hard to know how much that should be when it is clear that they made no serious effort to understand. The reason may be inferred from their tone, which as a friend aptly put it, is like the one taken by politicians who have been in office for three terms and who then succumb to the suspicion that they are born to rule.

Raimond Gaita
St Kilda, VIC

On the other hand

From David Ardagh

In one usage of the slippery term 'metaethics' viz. deciding what ethics is about, Rai Gaita's call for allowing literature and literary criticism to illuminate ethics looks like a meta-ethical suggestion. His declining to disclose any firm stand on the precise implications of 'sanctity of life' for killing a specific human being look like a decision not to be drawn on the normative implications of his normative base; that is, the meta/normative ethics distinction he says he wants discarded seems to be one he needs to express some of his own ideas.

Applied ethics, and with it the meta/normative/applied ethics distinction do not appear to me to be inherently suspect. Surely two meta-ethical eudaimonists, e.g. Aquinas and Mill can share a metaethical view of happiness as being the *summum bonum* and differ over normative prescriptions, due to different theologies and/or anthropologies perhaps; or differ over applications due to different factual beliefs about the role of circumstances in general, or the facts of a particular circumstance.

Nor can 'applied ethics' be dissociated from the role of the university teacher. Universities are ideally delivery rooms for philosophical midwives to induce the product of intellectual unions, but also arenas for educational, social and ecclesiastical politics, and not easy places to capture in a single metaphor.

Gaita seems to hanker for a return to an earlier model of the ethicist as following a vocation rather than a profession. However there never was a golden age when university teachers pursued truth only as a vocation, not as professionals. Abelard was cautioned for his reckless applications of logic to ethics and theology by the church authorities who paid his stipend. Later, Siger of Brabant was sacked by the same authorities, who also condemned some of the books of Siger's less popular university colleague, Thomas of Aquino, for being excessively rationalist and importing natural sciences, metaphysics and logic into ethics and theology. Yet in 1870 Aquinas was quite abruptly designated by Vatican I as the official guide for theological teaching, and only went out of fashion in the late 1960s.

Gaita's real target is a subspecies of applied ethicist—a pseudo-neutral agnostic 'proceduralist', using a thin theory of human nature or none at all and prepared to consistently crank out the logical entailments of any general principle one may wish to consider. Perhaps there are still such people, driven by a liberal pluralism gone mad. In the period 1940-1960—the heyday of positivism and emotivism—there were many philosophers who trumpeted the complete autonomy of ethics and/or abjured any sort of 'foundation' for ethics in theology, metaphysics or even philosophical anthropology, and perhaps some are in practice today. But this description will not fit many, and certainly not Peter Singer, since he is prepared to offer and argue for an account of these matters, albeit his views are quite different from those of most Christians on all three counts.

It would seem preferable to admit such cultural, intellectual, and spiritual divisions openly and try to defend a philosophical anthropology that is at least friendly to Christian notions of the sacred both in the university and the town hall meeting rather than retreating too quickly into our safe communitarian havens. We have to share hospital and medical resources with others, and 'get along' with them, so we should be trying to convince them that our ontology, theology, and anthropology really is sounder where

so in our understanding of the systematic relations between theoretical/indicative/assertoric reasoning of the standard type, and practical/imperative reasoning allow one to hold out hope for there being some scope for the primacy of the true/false dichotomy and for practical logic in rational/ethical decision making. I refer here to the works of von Wright, Kenny, Geach, Searle, and Dreyfus, and the role of 'defeasibility' in practical logic. Acknowledging the use of such logic to provide necessary conditions of sound ethical reasoning need not preclude the notion that ethics is ultimately about the preciousness (if not sanctity) of the individual as individual and that literature, not logic alone, will illuminate it better, as Dostoevski, G.M. Hopkins, Steinbeck and Gaita say. But remember it is also philosophers like Scotus, Kierkegaard, Pierce and Buber who fertilise this sort of reflection, and Kierkegaard and Buber at least were social meddlers (Buber a devout Zionist).

I said earlier that it would be well if we could convince our fellow citizens of the correctness of our views on God's providence, life's sanctity, and the gifts that Christianity proclaims. This task will undoubtedly require more than 'applied ethics', but since no moral philosophy, including Gaita's own, could possibly deliver here, it can hardly be to the discredit of applied ethics as a whole that it does not suppose it can. Yet moral philosophy and applied ethics/logic can, it seems to me, be very useful in removing obstacles to our faith understanding.

David Ardagh
Wagga Wagga, NSW

Roadhouse blues

From Gerard McCabe, of *Alternatives to Freeways Now*

I write to inform your readers that at 5am on Sunday, 7 August 1994, VicRoads workers cut down about 70 trees in the middle of Alexandra Parade, Fitzroy (an inner suburb of Melbourne). These comprised a mixture of eucalypts which had been planted in the 1977-78 anti-freeway campaign and some elms planted in the late 1800's. The operation was carried out with police protection and was efficiently clinical, with stumps being extracted and the wood mulched, leaving little evidence of the destruction.

This is the first stage of a road-widening. It is planned to narrow the grassed and treed plantation down the middle of the parade to provide a six-lane roadway. This will effectively extend the Eastern Freeway further into inner Melbourne, creating the need for further road-widening to release the traffic bottleneck.

In February 1994 the Victorian Minister for Roads and Ports, Bill Baxter, released a document called *Linking Melbourne*, which contained the proposed transport solution 'over the next 15 years'. The solution? ... 'to link and upgrade strategic roads to provide a continuous principal road network.' This position is supported by both the State Government and Opposition, Federal Transport Minister Laurie Brereton, and ACTU secretary Bill Kelty.

There are a number of inner-city freeways/ bypasses/ tollways/ major roads in various stages of gestation. These include the Western Bypass (north-south link) and the Domain Tunnel (west-to-east link) and the extension of the Eastern Freeway with Alexandra Parade at one end. It is a terrible irony that Alexandra Parade was originally to have been a grand boulevard leading into Melbourne, and the Eastern Freeway was to have been a heavy rail line.

Even the pro-road lobby would agree that Melburnians stand at a critical junction. We can follow the direction set out in *Linking Melbourne* or follow some overseas examples and take the public transport alternative. (A recent inquiry into the Eastern Freeway, chaired by Professor Bill Russell, recommended heavy or light rail alternatives to the freeway extension).

Community groups are opposing the road-building disease. Recently a Fitzroy group CAFE (Coalition Against Freeway Extension) painted the trees with white crosses to symbolise the threat to our city if they are put to the axe in order to widen the road.

At the risk of sounding sectarian, one of the plantations on Alexandra parade is named after Frank Little, Archbishop of Melbourne. It would seem it behoves us all, but obviously Catholics in particular, to have more respect for the land of which we are but custodians.

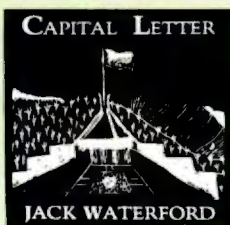
Gerard McCabe
North Melbourne

• *Alternatives to Freeways Now* meets every second Thursday at the North Melbourne Uniting Church.



such differences seem to lead us into different bioethical applications, and be grateful that this does not happen all the time. Aquinas' method of 'object, end and circumstances' is applied ethics of the best sort—casuistry.

As Toulmin & Jonsen remark in the *Abuse of Casuistry*, disagreement at this level does not happen nearly as often in practice as one might think. Further, developments since 1970 or



Downer on his uppers

IN TIME ALEXANDER DOWNER will no doubt recover from his disastrous week in Central Australia, and he will probably be wiser for it. But his experience there, which ended his media honeymoon and stripped him of about a third of his popularity rating, raises interesting questions about where he can lead his party.

Downer himself gave credence to suggestions that he is a skimmer rather than a detail man—a man of style rather than substance, someone not well-grounded on policy issues. Yet even on style, one of the surprises was that a person with a genuine instinct (and breeding) for politics could not recover quickly. Any politician gets the occasional king-hit; it is the ability to bounce up and carry on that wins respect. But this was not even a king-hit. To mix the metaphor, it was an own goal. Paul Keating is a good king-hitter, with no instinct for mercy, and now he knows a major point of weakness in Downer.

The disaster was not simply a question of Downer's being ill-briefed. It was the *impressions* he conveyed that were wrong, not the fine print of Liberal policy. In fact, the fine print signified a liberalisation of the party's Aboriginal affairs policy. But by the time he was finished, he had not only imperilled that liberalisation but turned the issue into one he will probably never dare to tackle again. For Aborigines, that is probably a disaster.

Originally, his tour was to have been a low-key visit to several poor Aboriginal communities, so he could see at first hand some of the ordinary health, housing, educational and employment problems that remote Aborigines face. He had been talked into it by Brendan Nelson, federal president of the Australian Medical Association, who has been pushing hard for a bipartisan push on improving health care. But two days before the visit Downer raised the temperature enormously, by promising WA Liberals that if necessary he would repeal the federal Mabo legislation. This won him a lot of cheers in Perth but caused dismay elsewhere. In fact, the fine print was a defeat for the WA Liberals. Party policy had hitherto been to repeal the Native Titles Act, but Downer's 'if necessary' qualification left open the possibility of amendment and accepted the idea of federal legislation.

When Downer said he was going to the Territory, he spoke to the former deputy leader, Michael Wooldridge, who told him that the NT government usually set senior Liberal visitors up to criticise Aboriginal land-rights legislation, especially with regard to the mining veto and NT control over the Act. But whatever they said, Wooldridge advised him, he should not succumb. Party policy supported the mining veto, and the so-called patriation of the Act would only occur in the context of NT statehood, i.e. perhaps never and certainly not in the short term.

That was what Downer had in mind when he made his big stumble and denied any intention of changing land-rights legislation, or of handing control back to the territory. The first statement, later humiliatingly retracted,

was closest to being right. Though party policy is more evasive than that: like so many Liberal policies, it appears to say one thing but actually says another. Just the sort of duplicity shown in Perth, in fact.

Downer's first mistake was not to look at the text itself, but another problem made recovery more difficult: the relevant policy was not filed under 'A' for Aboriginal affairs but under 'N' for Northern Territory. So he issued his first clarification—the 'I had something else on my mind' statement—while still unbriefed on what the policy actually was. To my polite inquiry on just that, he suggested that I read it myself. Like his advisers, at first instance I and other reporters looked under 'A' for Aboriginal, too. Hence his second and third clarifications.

These fumbblings destroyed any warm cuddly impact from Downer's trip. He has announced a review of Aboriginal affairs policies, but even if these end up sounding very concerned, one can expect that they will get little emphasis, and that they will contain all of the appeasement of state interests that has so bedevilled Liberal policy in the past.

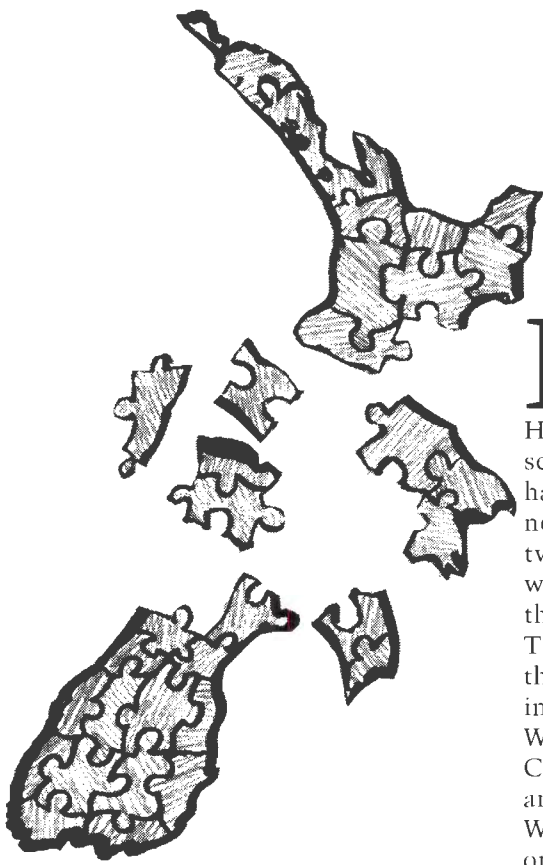
In the meantime, Downer is preparing to launch his vision statement. It will be fluff: the Liberal Party is to be 'pro-family, pro-jobs, pro-community and pro-Australia', aiming at 'growth without dramatic shocks and practical, common-sense improvements without complicated radical upheaval'. The focus will shift to education, health care and community safety. It will actually promise much the same as the party does now, while claiming to emphasise better management and individualism.

The Liberal Party no longer wants to frighten the horses. So there won't be much about republics or monarchies, constitutions or Aborigines, and some of it will be apparently sniping at Labor from the left: Why can't people have operations when they need them? Why can't students get into universities? Why don't we have a decent road network? It will be an avuncular image of government as benevolent provider rather than stern doctor handing out the nasty but necessary medicine. The strategy could work, but Labor and the electorate are probably too clever to let Downer get away without specific policy prescriptions and some real details of what he would do.

Only six months ago, Bronwyn Bishop was attracting attention because of her knack for expressing the gut instincts and prejudices of many Australians. She lacked substance and was a mistress of doublespeak, too, but she had a real flair for coining slogans. But Downer's slogans will not be her type of slogans, and he will face much sharper questioning. He will not emerge well unless he does more homework, concentrates on plain speaking rather than on ambiguous fine print, and confronts some of his party's own contradictions—especially its state-based structure. ■

Jack Waterford is deputy editor of *The Canberra Times*

Land of the long litigation



DELIVERING JUDGMENT on the Hawke memoirs, David Lange observed, 'Australian prime ministers have to win—Australians love a winner.' Race relations and rugby are two fields of human endeavour in which New Zealanders have prided themselves as winners in the trans-Tasman stakes. In the same week that Lange assessed Hawke 'burnishing his image with barbed wire', the Wallabies retrieved the Bledisloe Cup and Eddie Durie, Maori judge and respected Chairperson of the Waitangi Tribunal, told a conference on Maori economic development that Australia was now about 10 years ahead of New Zealand. In 1984, he 'would have said it was about 30 years behind'. The Mabo decision

and Commonwealth initiatives like ATSIC, the Native Title Act, the Indigenous Land Fund Corporation, and the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation are being noticed in *Aotearoa*.

According to the 1991 census, 511,000 of New Zealand's 3.4 million people identify themselves as being of Maori ancestry. By 2025, the majority of New Zealanders will be able to claim some Maori ancestry. The Maori Congress, one of the main national Maori organisations, assists *iwi* (tribes) to achieve their own goals, and negotiates with government on matters of national importance. Professor Mason Durie, deputy convenor of the Congress, estimates that 'at least 50 per cent of Maori have no active link with their *iwi* at all.'

In 1988 the Waitangi Tribunal considered Article 2 of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, in which the Crown provides Maori with guaranteed 'full exclusive and undisturbed possession of their fisheries which they may collectively or individually possess'. The tribunal upheld Maori claims that this guarantee extended to fisheries off a tribe's coast on the continental shelf out to the 12-mile limit. In 1992, when considering the claim of the Ngai Tahu in respect of the South Island, the tribunal took into account the international exclusive economic zone which extends 200 miles beyond the mainland and any islands claimed by a nation state. The tribunal conceded that Maori tradi-

tionally never fished beyond 25 miles from the coast but recognised the tribe's exclusive development right out to the 200-mile limit.

In the wake of rapid privatisation, Maori have been busy in the courts and before the tribunal, claiming that Crown sales of public assets are contrary to the principles of the treaty. Since 1975, government has had to deal with public assets in light of the Crown's obligations under the treaty. When the Government introduced fishing quotas for sale by tender, Maori claimed they were entitled to half the quota in a spirit of partnership between them and the Crown. By a variety of legislation and commercial deals, Maori now control over 40 per cent of the annual quota.

The deals have come at a price. The major commercial deal between Maori negotiators and government was the purchase of the Sealords fishing empire in 1992. The Government insisted that the one-off purchase be part of a full and final settlement of treaty grievances relating to fisheries. Maori opponents of the deal have been adamant that the negotiators could speak only for their own *iwi* and not all Maoridom. They claim any full and final deal would itself be a breach of the principles of the treaty, which requires continuing recognition and respect for Maori treaty rights. Judge Eddie Durie concedes that full and final settlements are attractive to government, but the bane of Maori leaders. Matiu Rata, who chaired the negotiating team for Sealords, says the \$48 million-a-year income should be used 'like a bank, to bank-roll the development of fisheries'.

SINCE THE DEAL, another Maori negotiator, Sir Tipene O'Regan, has chaired the Treaty of Waitangi Fisheries Commission. The son of a prominent *pakeha* surgeon who campaigned against apartheid and the Springbok rugby tours, he is the driving force behind the legal and political strategies of his mother's people, who lost most of their land on the South Island. Fish is their main resource.

O'Regan says: 'My dream has been to move our people out of grievance mode and into the development mode. But they will never come out of grievance mode until there's a settlement.' Two years down the track, he defends the Sealords deal: 'There was only one option. If we hadn't taken it there would have never been the capacity for a settlement—no possibility. It was a huge step, and I don't know whether it was the right step for Ngai Tahu. It's left us terribly exposed to others' greed.'

Maori on the South Island are not even 10 per cent of the Maori population. Fish is the only major resource up for allocation at the moment. Forests are

The courts are going to be busy resolving disputes among Maori about how to carve up the catch. Retired Governor-General and Anglican Archbishop Paul Reeves describes it as the 'Balkanisation of Maoridom'.

next. Some Maori in the north take strong exception to the idea that the quota proceeds would be allocated according to coastline, which would give the southern tribe \$56 million of the \$103 million. Sir Graham Latimer, Chairman of the Maori Council, and Shane Jones, one of the most respected young Maori leaders in the country, are campaigning hard for allocation according to population. They are particularly conscious of the history of civil disturbance at Bastion Point which preceded the 1984 extension of the tribunal's power to report on past grievances, back to 1840. 'It is better to spread the money to give everybody an opportunity in life rather than just concentrate on one or two groups,' says Latimer. If distributed according to population, the south would receive only \$9 million.

O'Regan sees a 'battle front emerging as some northern tribes seek to acquire South Island treaty resources'. His Maori opponents point to maps that include fishing resources up to 600 miles south of the South Island's southern-most tip, down in the sub-Antarctic. They claim those resources should be shared by all Maori, especially the dispossessed, disadvantaged and alienated of the Auckland suburbs, the despair of whose lives is captured on screen at the moment by Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors*. This film, on everyone's lips, is a distressing portrayal of alcoholism, domestic violence, street gangs and youth suicide among urban Maori. O'Regan says, 'We've heard the pan-Maori trumpets for some little time now and see that as a real threat to our region and our treaty rights.'

For O'Regan, the fishing quota is about tribal property rights, not fairness among all Maoridom. He says, 'You can't take a treaty right and allocate it in a way that's contrary to the treaty or in breach of it. If the treaty right is going to be used by some to expropriate the assets of others, that clearly has to be contrary to the treaty.' O'Regan despairs of welfare payments on the basis of race. He claims property rights under the treaty and equates a pan-Maori distribution as racist and as theft.

The courts are going to be busy resolving disputes among Maori about how to carve up the catch. Retired Governor-General and Anglican Archbishop Paul Reeves describes it as the 'Balkanisation of Maoridom'. Reeves despairs that intra-Maori disputes about the catch will profit only the lawyers, doing nothing to assist those young Maori seeking their own identity and a better future. He did not come to a sense of his own Maori roots until he accepted a Maori scholarship to study at Oxford. He decided he could not take the scholarship without accepting the responsibility of discovering what it might mean to be Maori. For him, 'Identity is both given and claimed. There is a subtle interplay between the individual and the group.'

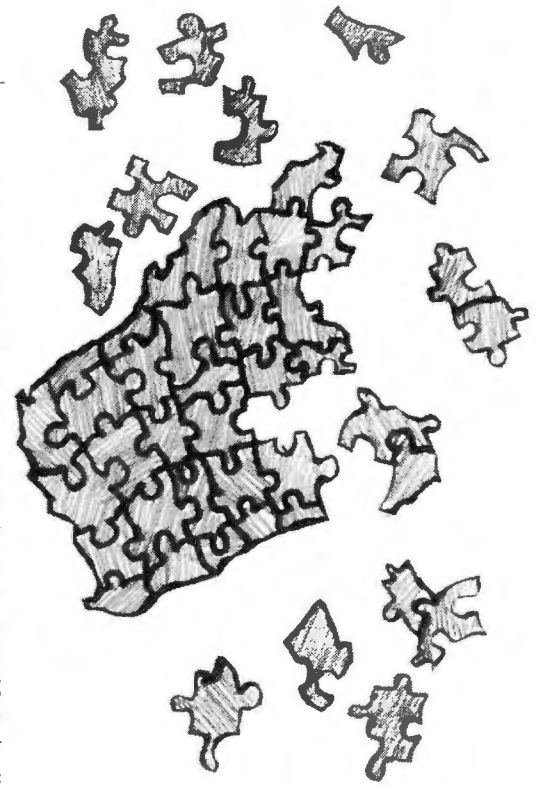
In the wake of Mabo, Australians looking across the Tasman appreciate there is no such thing as a full

and final settlement of an indigenous people's historical grievances. There are only durable solutions that deliver present certainty while keeping open the prospect of future negotiation in good faith. Negotiators can speak only for their own group, but government will always be keen to lock in a sufficient spectrum of the indigenous leadership to legitimise the deal. If historical grievances are reduced only to issues of property rights, social equity issues will still need to be addressed. The community's commitment to righting past wrongs may decline once it is appreciated that settlements are not reaching those most in need. It is only some fudging of property rights, equity and welfare that will reconcile past wrongs and present needs, providing better outcomes for all in future.

The New Zealand Government is already hinting that it will create a fiscal envelope limited to \$1 billion from which it will take all property settlements from treaty determinations, concluding by 2001. Australia, without a treaty and with half the number of indigenous people, is now committed to a land fund twice the size of the New Zealand envelope. Special programs for indigenous people are bound to favour the emerging middle class and the few propertied individuals or tribes. When some indigenous leaders become people of considerable means, inevitably the community at large will question its commitment to programs on the basis of race.

More so than decisions by government, tribunals and courts, Maori decisions about the allocation of fish hundreds of miles off-shore will shape onshore relations of tribe and race. 'To chuck it in a great pot and stir it up in a soup,' says O'Regan, 'is really to revert solely to some big generic grouping based on race.' The choice of soup for all, or fish for the few will require new ways of thinking about justice, fairness and rights. As ever, there will be winners and losers regardless of race, on both sides of the Tasman. ■

Frank Brennan SJ is visiting fellow in the Law Program of the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University.



In the wake of Mabo, Australians looking across the Tasman appreciate there is no such thing as a full and final settlement of an indigenous people's historical grievances ... If historical grievances are reduced only to issues of property rights, social equity issues will still need to be addressed.

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That Australian institution, the local post office, has changed. In most cases the bricks and mortar are still there, but Australia Post isn't always there. What was once a public service is now a government business enterprise, and its local representatives are often licensed entrepreneurs.

THE POST OFFICE THAT WAL ROWLING SERVED for 43 years no longer exists. At 14, he began as a telegraph messenger in the Sydney suburb of Marrickville. It was wartime, and part of his work involved fetching a clergyman to accompany him when he delivered one of the mauve-coloured telegrams that announced a death in action. 'They were pretty regular', he recalls, 'about three or four a day.'

Often a clergyman was unavailable and young Rowling was asked to read the telegram to the next of kin. It was a harrowing experience, compensated to some extent by the Sunday in 1942 when he worked all day to deliver 200 telegrams telling relatives that the 9th division were safe in port and ready to disembark the following morning.

As the '40s wore on, Wal found himself at the 'facing-up table' in the Sydney GPO, standing through the night, often for four or five hours at a stretch, turning letters right way up before they were postmarked. It was dirty work under a tough regime. He used to sit near the Martin Place cenotaph for his midnight meal, or 'crib'. Later, he took a nine-months training course to learn Morse Code and worked through the era before STD phone calls, when newspapers depended on the 'press telegram' by which stories were sent across the country for a penny a word. Nowadays, Wal demonstrates Morse Code at the Telecom Museum in Ashfield. Every year in October, 180 former Morse operators gather at the Wentworthville Bowling Club for a reunion. They are trying to keep a dying art alive: the minutes are read and business conducted in Morse Code. Rowling, 67, finds that he is almost the youngest present. Telegrams, Morse Code, the facing-up table and even the argot which included words like 'crib' are all a thing of the past.

Had he joined the post office 10 or 20 years later, Wal Rowling's career would have followed a completely different path. Like a number of Australia Post employees who joined the organisation as teenagers in the '50s and '60s, he might well have found that he now owns his own post office.

Another person who has spent 43 years in the industry is Ken Lawry. Lawry started at 15, on the

Psst! Wanna buy a post office? The impressive neogothic pile in the Melbourne suburb of Flemington is still in public hands. Many like it are not.

Photo: Bill Thomas

night telephone exchange one Christmas Eve. Since then his career has included 25 years as postmaster in Tongala, a town of 1200 people 25 kilometres from Echuca in northern Victoria. Australia Post announced that the Tongala Post Office was to become a Licensed Post Office (LPO), the name given to a post office which is something between a shop with a franchise to sell Australia Post (and other) products, and an agency for Australia Post services. An LPO, unlike your traditional post office, is a private business.

Lawry was faced with either retiring or applying for the licence himself, and staying in the job as a private operator. He chose the latter course. In his case it meant taking a Voluntary Early Retirement package (VER) and using the money to buy the 70-year-old post office and residence in Tongala. The licence to run the business came free with the building. According to Milton Neilson, the national company secretary of the Post Office Agents Association Limited, Lawry is free to sell that licence when he chooses. It could be sold to any local shopkeeper who, if given the nod by Australia Post, would run the postal business alongside their pharmacy or bottle shop. If the profitability of the business goes down and the licensee wants to get out but can't find a buyer, Australia Post has no further commitment to keep running it. This is an unlikely scenario in Tongala. Lawry is precisely the kind of postal manager that Australia Post wants to step outside the practice of a lifetime and take their own licence. He knows everyone in town. He works 12-14 hours a day, and, by his own account, is doing pretty well.

Any regular user of Australia Post over the past six years will have noticed big changes. Post Offices look zippier and the range of products have diversified enormously. Since 1989, Australia Post has been a 'government business enterprise', meaning, as the name suggests, that it is being run as a business rather than a government instrumentality. Rowland Hill, Australia Post's national corporate communications manager, explains that this means the organisation has been expected to show a return on the assets it has built up over generations as well as to pay government taxes and charges. Last year, it paid \$300 million in tax. The commercial pressure on Australia Post has been increased by last November's Industry Commission report, which decided to diminish the postal monopoly: before that a competitor had to charge ten times Australia Post's rate on any letter under 500 grams.

WHEN LEGISLATION IS ENACTED later in the year, the monopoly will apply only to letters under 250 grams, for which four times Australia Post's rate will have to be charged. Australia Post has been pleading that, if change is to be introduced, it should be gradual. This first step will take about 16 per cent of total business out from behind the monopoly. A review scheduled to begin in 1996 could well remove the

monopoly altogether. As we've seen with Optus and Telecom, the way would then be open for a competitor to provide a rival standard letter service, especially on the lucrative eastern seaboard. Ken Lawry, for one, is more than a little troubled by the prospect of a competitor, perhaps based in a neighbouring town, moving in on his business.

Nevertheless, our ability to get an ordinary letter for a basic rate to somebody in the Western Desert or the Antarctic Territory is protected by law. Even so, the rural and regional task force of the Federal Labor Caucus has written a discussion paper asking for Australia Post's community service obligations to be clarified. Is the organisation obliged to deliver large bundles of school books to correspondence students in the outback?

Caught between its two obligations of providing a service and making a profit, Australia Post has developed a number of strategies to keep the cash register humming. One is in the area of print post. Don Siemon was formerly the business manager of the magazine *Australian Society*. He notes that the old category of 'registered publications' was designed partly to assist unprofitable 'worthy publications' which carried less than 25 per cent advertising. But the new category of 'print post', which replaces registered publications, touts for the bulk-mail business of such publications as advertising catalogues, especially those with the kind of reply-paid coupon that generates further business.

Rowland Hill believes that the organisation also has an unexploited network for acting as an agent for other principals, especially with EFTPOS enabling customers to do a myriad of transactions from the same point. The Post Office has represented the Commonwealth Bank for almost 80 years but is now talking with other banks. Its future identity will be more like a 'one-stop bill shop'.

More immediately, Australia Post is moving towards a complete separation of its retail and delivery sectors. The post office is no longer a reassuring stone presence at the hub of every city, suburb and town, nor even a place which handles very much mail. With the advent of 'retail post', the local post office is just another business in the street. Mail is sorted and delivered through unprepossessing concrete bunkers called mail centres. Although 16 million items of mail pass daily through these centres nationwide, 800,000 customers cross the threshold of retail post outlets. These retail outlets are increasingly in private hands.

The posties' room behind the Clifton Hill Post office in suburban Melbourne stands empty. The only mail which the new licensees, Bob and Mary Taylor, are required to sort is that for private boxes. They are hoping to be able to sub-lease the room where pos-

The post office is no longer a reassuring stone presence at the hub of every city, suburb and town, nor even a place which handles very much mail. With the advent of 'retail post', the local post office is just another business in the street.



Post offices on the move: the unimpressively modernist Camberwell, VIC Post Office, wearing its relocation sign.

men used to gear up for the day's rounds. Bob worked in dozens of post offices over a period of 25 years until he became the controlling postal manager in the Brunswick area. A reorganisation meant that he was finally promoted into a position for which there was actually no job. He worked, in what he considered an overpaid capacity, for 18 months. 'I could see the writing on the wall', he says. He decided to take a VER and tender for the licence at Clifton Hill, part of the tender indicating that he was willing to negotiate to buy the building. The office is now open longer hours than before. Are they doing better financially? 'Oh yeah, certainly,' he says.

Milton Neilson provides a clear picture of the extent that retail post operations are being sold: by October this year, the familiar post office agent will be a thing of the past. These are the 2700 postal outlets nationwide that were often run in conjunction with newsagencies and grocery shops. The agents used to be paid a fee for service. They have been given the option of taking a licence and running the business for themselves. Others have been paid a cessation fee. Bob Ross, the licensee of the West Wallsend Post Office near Newcastle, believes this cessation fee has been used to pacify agents who were often the ones in local areas organising petitions against closures and change.

Neilson says that about 600 official post offices have been designated to convert to LPOs, although Australia Post maintains they have no 'hit list' and that potential LPOs are identified on a case-by-case basis.

So far, fewer than 250 have made the change; the slowdown, according to Neilson, resulting from pressure applied by the Communication Workers Union. Those post offices taken over by existing staff have not been subject to a licence fee. The licensee simply had to buy the buildings, gaining both a business and a property in one hit.

Where the tender has come from outside the particular post office concerned, the licence has been sold. Neilson says that it was very difficult to estimate the value of these licences. He knows of cases where people paid \$250,000 for a licence and could never hope to recoup their investment. He knows of a busy suburban post office for which the only tender was \$5. It was sold after further negotiation.

Milton Neilson was formerly an agent and is now the licensee in Melbourne's Deepdene. As an agent, Australia Post estimated that he was entitled to 31.5 hours of assistance per week. He says that one of the victories of the Post Office Agents Association was that a licensee can decide his or her own staffing needs. 'I never really needed an assistant,' he says. 'The money that used to go in that direction now stays in my own pocket'. As licensees work longer hours, other people are looking for work. The agreement struck between Australia Post and the union allows for the loss of up to 1500 jobs during the five-year phase-in period for retail post. One factor that prompted Bob Ross to take an early retirement package and use it to buy the licence at West Wallsend, in NSW, was shrinking job prospects within Australia Post, for which he was working as a senior project officer in Sydney. The position gave him the chance to make a list of the post offices he would most like to own. He got his second pick.

There's no doubt that licensees have done well out of the current push towards profitability. On the one hand, the agents' association is proud that the deal it took three years to negotiate with Australia Post provides its members with a level of protection which the Federal Government has so far struggled unsuccessfully to implement in the case of other people investing in a franchise.

ON THE OTHER HAND, JOHN LYNCH, an Australia Post area manager, says that the first licence he put out to tender was resold within 12 months for treble its value. 'A lot of them can see the licence being doubled or trebled in very quick time,' he says, noting ruefully that the office in Pyramid Hill, where he started at 14, has recently been sold. 'They want more private boxes to rent. They want to carry philatelic lines because the margin on them is 30 per cent as opposed to the normal 12 per cent. They're business people.' Lynch has no doubt that the LPO provides quality service and that the tender system is 'watertight'. But he also recalls that the post office, as a matter of course, used to have room for a different kind of worker. At one stage, he was able to employ kids from a 'backward home'. 'I remember the first day I paid one of those guys', he says. 'The look on his face was just magic. I went to his Christmas party and he showed me round to all his friends.' Is a licensee likely to carry that kind of worker? 'It's most unlikely.'

Australia Post says that the winner in all these changes is the customer. Retail post gives you the opportunity to buy Christmas cards and presents at the same place you buy the stamps to send them. 'I don't use the post office much anymore,' says Wal Rowling. 'I get annoyed when I go in and it looks more like a newsagent or a card shop. It's not a post office anymore.'

Michael McGirr SJ is the consulting editor of *Eureka Street*.



Can you keep a secret ...



DURING 1994 THERE HAVE BEEN two public inquiries into events surrounding the sale of the Fairfax group of companies to the Canadian media magnate, Conrad Black, in 1991. The first report of the Senate's print media committee, *Percentage Players*, recommended an overhaul of foreign-investment policy to make its operations more open. And a \$1.5 billion claim for damages has been lodged in the Federal Court by the unsuccessful bidders for Fairfax against the Fairfax group and its former receivers and their advisers. Those being sued have made a \$400 million counter-claim.

The unsuccessful bidders were the INP group, led by the Irish businessman Tony O'Reilly, and Australian Independent Newspapers (AIN). Bob Ellicott QC, a former solicitor-general, attorney-general and Federal Court judge, heads the INP legal team.

During the Senate inquiry, the Government resisted requests for it to hand over documents on its decisions in 1991 and 1993 regarding the Fairfax group. Hitherto, the Government has conducted its Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB) operations in a way which has seen the more sensitive FIRB procedures and expertise operate under almost total secrecy.

But on 18 July Justice Sheppard ruled in the Federal Court that the INP lawyers and certain nominated legal counsel should have confidential access to the FIRB material. So, when the case is heard later this year, it is possible that counsel for INP and AIN will apply to have the documents in question tendered as public evidence. If this happens, it may lead to FIRB officials being cross-examined on their expertise.

In more than 20 years of FIRB operations, there have been few releases of confidential material. The first major reported breach of FIRB security occurred early in 1993, when a crucial document on the 1991 Fairfax decision was leaked to the AIN group. This document was attached to the AIN submission to the Senate print media committee and authenticated

by its recipient, the then Treasurer, John Kerin, when he appeared before the committee. *Percentage Players* contains a number of remarks about inaccurate and misleading material in the document, especially in relation to AIN's qualities to run Fairfax.

Those involved in foreign-investment transactions in Australia will follow events in the Federal Court closely. Many documents provided in confidence to the FIRB contain sensitive commercial data that, if released, could give recipients a competitive advantage. If the court does take a liberal view about the release of information, it is possible that future overseas investors would be less ready to provide information on their proposals, and more inclined to invest in countries that have open and rigorous procedures. On the other hand, it could be argued that businesses which fear disclosure do so precisely because they have information which should be made public.

Another point of view is that greater openness and accountability in decision-making would improve the quality of the FIRB's information-gathering and analysis. And foreign investors and their representatives will be interested in what the documents reveal about the way the FIRB works, and about how recommendations to the Treasurer on foreign-investment proposals are prepared. Such intelligence could help in the preparation of future applications—an outcome of greater long-term significance than the any of the other implications of ending Treasury secrecy.

The potential sensitivity of certain FIRB material is evident from INP's 1991 submission, a copy of which has been given to the Senate committee. Had this information been in the public domain at the time of the 1991 decision, it could have had a significant influence on stock-market decisions. Three years after the decision to sell Fairfax to the Conrad Black-led Tourang group, however, the INP material has only limited practical and commercial value—hence, to a large extent, the willingness of INP to

publish it. But INP's openness does raise questions about how secretive the FIRB should be.

Even apart from the court case, however, the Government is likely to make some changes to FIRB procedures. On 15 July *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the Government planned to release reasons for rejecting or accepting major foreign-investment proposals. Although the changes are consistent with the general thrust of majority (non-government) and minority (government) recommendations in *Percentage Players*, the Government has not yet formally responded to that report. Under Senate procedures the Government endeavours to respond within three months of the tabling of a committee report, and it is likely that the Senate will keenly debate the Government response.

The majority report calls on the Government to establish a Foreign Investment Commission, which would operate at arm's length from the Treasury and report to Parliament annually. For certain kinds of proposals, the commission would be the gatekeeper. However, decisions in key economic areas would be made by the Treasurer after advice from the commission. The majority report also recommends that FIRB applications should be released to the public after 12 months, unless the affected party is able to demonstrate that the public interest requires that the material be confidential.

The 'ayes had it' in the Senate print media committee in requesting the release of FIRB documents, but the Government refused. All eyes are now on the Federal Court in Sydney to see whether, as with Mabo and the political broadcasting legislation, the judiciary must do the legislature's work when it comes to dealing with secrecy in the executive. ■

Richard Gilbert is Secretary of the Senate Select Committee on Certain Aspects of Foreign Ownership Decisions in Relation to the Print Media.



'Freedom's just another word ...'

It is important that we understand how profoundly we all feel the needs that religion, down the ages, has satisfied ... firstly, the need to be given an articulation of our half-glimpsed knowledge of exaltation, of awe, of wonder: life is an awesome experience, and religion helps us understand why life so often makes us feel small, by telling us what we are smaller than; and, contrariwise, because we also have a sense of being special, of being chosen, religion helps us by telling us what we have been chosen by, and what for. Secondly, we need answers to the unanswerable: how did we get here? How did 'here' get here in the first place? Is this, this brief life, all there is? How can it be? What would be the point of that? And, thirdly, we need codes to live by, 'rules for every damn thing' ... The soul needs all these explanations, not simply rational explanations of the heart.

—Salman Rushdie, Herbert Read Memorial Lecture, written in hiding, 1991.

ON MONDAY, 1 AUGUST 1994, Peter Cameron announced his resignation from the Presbyterian Church of Australia. Last year Cameron, an ordained minister of the church, was convicted of heresy for preaching that there is no scriptural barrier to women's ordination. He remains a minister in the Church of Scotland—the parent church of Australian Presbyterianism, and a parent that is evidently more tolerant than its child.

In explaining his resignation, Cameron said that he had failed in his mission to reform the Australian church 'from the inside'. He had decided to stop preaching because many of his congregation were coming only to see a kind of sideshow, and some, it seems, came primarily to gather evidence for the prosecution. I wonder what God thought of their prayers.

The day before, Anthony Freeman, a Church of England priest, gave his last sermon, too. He had been sacked by his bishop for writing 'there is nothing "out there"—or if there is, we can have no knowledge of it'. This was interpreted as an avowal of atheism. Freeman wept as he preached, and likened himself to the prophet Jeremiah, who was 'banned from the House of the Lord because he had struck at the heart of the power structure that enabled God's spokesmen (and traditionally they were always men) to control

the hearts and minds of God's people'. His congregation wept, too.

That same week, Taslima Nasreen, a feminist writer, surrendered to a civil court in Bangladesh to face charges of offending Muslim religious susceptibilities. She had been in hiding for weeks, under threat of both civil prosecution and a *fat-wah*, because she had said that Islamic law—and, her would-be assassins claim, the Qu'ran itself—should be 'thoroughly revised'. Religious mobs are demanding not just her death, but the introduction of blasphemy laws. Ironically, the civil law under which she has been charged was originally intended to protect religious freedom.

The link between these outcasts—the Australian, the Englishman and the Bangladeshi woman—is the legal standing of, and the relationship between, religious and civil authority, and the impact of religion on liberty of conscience and freedom of speech.

In Western countries we tend to assume that there will be some kind of separation between church and state, but this separation has rarely been fully effective. Most religious repression, persecution and prosecution has been carried out by state and religious authorities in partnership. The Australian colonies inherited British blasphemy laws and the canon law of the Church of England at the time of British settlement,

and some of those laws are still on the books, though they are now little used.

Many other laws that institutionalised religious intolerance were gradually abolished, however, and our founding fathers took religious freedom so seriously that clause 116 of the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution (one of that document's few 'human rights' guarantees) prohibits the Commonwealth from establishing any religion, from imposing any religious observance or prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, or from setting a religious test as a qualification for public office.

The mainland States and Territories have also prohibited religious discrimination, but their statutes, as well as the Commonwealth's *Sex Discrimination Act* (1984), exempt ordination absolutely, and other practices of religious bodies and schools under their direction, if they are 'necessary to avoid offending the susceptibilities of adherents of that religion'.

TOO MUCH UNKINDNESS AND hypocrisy has been perpetrated under that exemption, probably unlawfully, for the 'necessity' of many offensive practices—sexism is surely no less a blasphemy against the human spirit than racism—has not been made out.

Once, the idea of the separation of 'Church and State' was to protect



Reality bytes

A RCHIMEDES SHOULD NOT LISTEN to radio talk shows. It makes him seethe. It's not just that most of the program hosts are scientifically ignorant, but that they seem to take pride in their ignorance.

The other day a well-known radio commentator was chatting to a social scientist who was contrasting our success in developing work-saving machines with our failure to stem the rate of unemployment. He also noted the curious fact that those still in work are toiling much harder than they were a decade ago. The host, a proud technophobe, immediately began to blame technology for all these ills. There was no suggestion that an inability to take advantage of technology might have something to do with the problem.

Dr Ilana Snyder, of Monash University's faculty of education, has been studying the use of computers in the classroom for more than five years. She has shown that word processors can help students learn to communicate because they reinforce and automate the way that most people compose written texts. Snyder says that, around the world, research on the process of writing demonstrates that it is not linear: most people do not plan a text, then write it, revise it, and print it, in that order. Normally, people perform these operations over and over again, in no specific order.

The computer helps this approach. Writers can play with text, and, if they do not like the result, quickly change it back to what they had before. Computers eliminate the need to recopy work. But, according to Snyder, this is not happening in many classrooms because teachers have not been given a chance to understand computers: 'Word processors are often seen by teachers merely as fancy typewriters used to produce good-looking printed products, and to check spelling and punctuation.'

You do not need to trace the wiring of a computer to have a general understanding of what it does and how it does it—and that general understanding is what separates people who can use a computer from those who merely push buttons as specified.

We assume that it will take time to learn to play a musical instrument, and that the player will have some understanding of how the sound is produced. We even expect people to think about how they will interpret a particular piece of music. Why should the computer and its software be any different?

Archimedes is not suggesting that all technology is useful, or even well-designed. But finding the time to come to terms with technology may well be the difference between having a job or being unemployed. As Ilana Snyder says: 'We run the risk of dividing our society into the information-rich and the information-poor, the technologically advanced and the others.'

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

the individual's freedom of conscience and observance from the oppressive practices of secular rulers. In the three cases in point, however, secular laws and institutions have been used to give legal recognition to religious hierarchy and to enforce its authority.

Peter Cameron is a 'heretic' because the (incorporated) Australian Presbyterians agreed that his scriptural interpretation was wrong (as theirs had been when they had agreed to allow women to be ordained nearly 20 years before.)

How ironic that the Westminster Confession of Faith (1643), from which Presbyterianism grew, asserts that '*our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority (of the Holy Scripture) is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness, by and with the Word, in our hearts ...*' and that '*God alone is Lord of the conscience; and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men ... so that to believe such doctrines or to obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience ...*'

The kirk seems to have acquired many more infallible scholars in the 22 years since Lloyd Geering, a New Zealand Presbyterian theologian who had argued that it makes no difference to the fundamental truth of Christianity whether or not Jesus' bones are whitening in a sepulchre somewhere, was charged with and acquitted of heresy.

I am no theologian, but my relationship with God is my own and nobody else's, and I approach it in my own way, often through struggle and despair. Nobody has the right to dictate how Jacob is to wrestle with the Angel. In the Protestant tradition in which I was raised, faith is a private matter.

Anthropologists commonly record that wherever people live together in a community they express some kind of conviction that there are inner, and higher, forms of experience which, when shared, link members of that community into a social relationship with a shared purpose. There is always, then, a body of religious teachers, to guide and describe those experiences and

to lead their ritualistic or symbolic observance. And they set up chains of authority and influence which, naturally, affect the community.

They are often also in business, delivering religious, social and community services for a fee, or through the benefit of public subsidies. They provide employment, goods and services, investment and savings, and trade. In a secular state, no one has to become their shareholder or customer—but it follows that they ought to be subject to secular laws. If church organisations continue to seek exemptions from discrimination and other laws in the name of 'religious freedom', they ought not to use their privileged position to deny freedom of conscience to others.

The Presbyterian Church in which I grew up (and from which I formally resigned in 1973) valued independent scholarship and intellectual debate. I am deeply uncomfortable at the resurgence of fundamentalism, narrowness, spying and bullying in the church that bears its name in Australia today, and in other churches of the Protestant tradition.

Transcendence, the religious experience of being 'more than oneself, of being in some way joined to the whole of life', as Rushdie put it, is by its very nature short-lived: once grasped, it is gone. Perhaps the sad truth is that when a spiritual inspiration becomes a religious organisation, it dies.

I should like to say something to the three outcasts:

Taslina, you might be, as some say, a novelist of no great literary merit; but there are a lot of us—not only feminists—who support your right to express your beliefs, your doubts and your questions without fear of prosecution or slaughter.

To John Freeman, the 'atheist' priest: there is no shame in your losing a job because your employer rejected the challenge you represent. Neither you nor the 'heretical' Peter Cameron has lost a church: you have gained your freedom of conscience and our, or at least my, fellow-feeling and respect. ■

Moira Rayner is a lawyer and freelance journalist.

According to Winton

*Tim Winton describes his new novel, *The Riders*, as 'a journey into the underworld'.*

H. A. Willis talks to him about the book, its 'bit of a job' hero, Scully, and the sources that have shaped Winton's fiction.

When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs as you do, you can relax a little and use more normal means of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures.

—Flannery O'Connor

TIM WINTON: I WAS BROUGHT UP in a house full of Bibles. My parents were converts to the Church of Christ, and like many converts their flame burned bright. My father went to work with a tiny New Testament in his pocket. I still have it. I guess the heat of their conversion has carried beyond them. I like the idea of my old man going to work with that little book tucked into his copper's uniform.

The Scriptures were really influential in my upbringing. Our tradition was very non-conformist, very civilian, if I can put it that way. Anti-intellectual, anti-representative, anti-professional. There was no ornamentation, no real sense of form

*'To my mind a saint is someone who, by grace and listening and hard work, is actually apprehending and seeing something that is there. Scully [the main character in *The Riders*] just thinks he can break down the doors and get to what it is. Scully is not waiting around for anybody! Perhaps that's his Australian male nature.'*

Photo of Tim Winton by H. A. Willis

or liturgy, no notion of sacrament, aside from baptism, which was very definitely full-immersion baptism. A pretty austere tradition. Protestants still protesting, still reacting to the idea of embroidery. An effort to get back to the Source, and the only pure source of revelation was in the Scriptures.

My favourite Gospels are Luke and John: Luke because he was a practical idealist, in the sense that he was a doctor and concerned with justice; and John because he was a mystic. There's always the two halves of my upbringing and character, as though there's two parts always trying to balance each other up. I grew up with this indoor/outdoor business. My childhood was one of outdoor activity, the life of doing things, usually very physical, confronting kinds of things on, in or under water. But also a lot of reading and introspection as well. Half the day out, half of it inside, usually determined by the weather, or more to the point, the wind.

The Church community I was raised in was very pragmatic, a very hands-on religion. I felt very much a part of something in that Church, as a kid. I felt loved. But later I realised that something was missing. The plainness and austerity weren't simply a discipline, but a blindness to mystery, a fear of Bigness and Beauty. My tradition was in the grip of the spiritual/physical divide. In the end my own instincts won out. If the spiritual world and the physical world were so divorced, how come I was feeling Grace in the natural world? When I swam underwater and sensed the hugeness and benevolence of the Creator, the Holiness of the world of creatures and things, was I simply deluded? What about the shivers of recognition I got from Art? From other people's liturgies, from the smells of food and children?

H.A. WILLIS: *PEOPLE LOOK for the influence of religion on your writing, but the 'tangential' influence of the Bible as a literary text in itself is just as strong. I'm thinking of what comes out of America's old South—that writing that picks up the cadence of American speech and, at*

the same time, seems to follow that of the King James Bible. You like that sort of writing and have talked about its influence elsewhere. The most recent example is Cormac McCarthy.

Yes. You know, Faulkner, really, before any. Faulkner alternates between his high Gothic style and his high King Jamesian style. But certainly the best of the modern exponents of that cadence is definitely Cormac McCarthy; and especially so in, say, *Suttree*, or in the latest ones, *All the Pretty Horses* and *The Crossing*. It just sounds like ... Old Testament!

The voice of the Prophet.

Oh, it's a wonderful sound. And it rings bells for me, you know; bells and whistles go off everywhere. It's not even to do with the meaning of what he is writing, it's just the sound of it, the cadence of it. And I find that both alarming and attractive.

The influences you usually cite tend to be English language writers, particularly Americans, starting with Mark Twain. What about someone like Robert Louis Stevenson?

I think Stevenson was being punished—and is still being punished—for being popular. I love Stevenson. Later in life I could see the purity and sparkle of his prose, but when I was a child Stevenson got me interested in reading as much as anybody did. I went back to him as a student because I read somewhere that Jorge Luis Borges revered him as his favourite writer. And then I knew somebody who went to Buenos Aires and read Stevenson, in a ritual way, to Borges when his sight was totally gone and he was bed-ridden. That fascinated me—going along to somebody who would be seen to be perhaps one of the most sophisticated and obtuse and difficult and post-modern writers and reading Robert Louis Stevenson to him.

What about the traditional European masters: Flaubert, de Maupassant, Zola, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Camus?

I've read most of those people and admired some of them, but, no, there's no big ringing of the bells

there. Endo, from Japan, is one of my favourites. I like Tolstoy and I like Dostoevsky ... I think they're probably still the great novelists, but there's not always that personal connection there. I suppose my tradition really ends up being modern American.

W *HAT ABOUT AUSTRALIAN WRITERS? Tell me the story you told me a long time ago about the day in Subiaco Markets when a man offered you his place at a table*
Oh, that's right.

Are you sure of who it was?

Oh, I'm certain of who it was. I was very young. I'd just written my first novel and it hadn't come out. I was with some friends at a food hall one day—you know, dragged out to have a rank mutton curry. Looking for a table: no tables. And there was this old bloke with a younger bloke, who looked like his grandson He had on an old shirt, he had a big, wiry moustache, the hair anyway, he got up and he offered me his table. It took me a couple of seconds to realise who it was, as he walked away, and it was Xavier Herbert.

I wanted to say a hundred things. I wanted to chase after him but I was just too embarrassed. I was too dumbstruck and too shy. Because *Capricornia* was a bit of a turning point for me, in my work.

I think Herbert really is a hugely under-appreciated writer. With that sense of literary fun and the sound of the people's language and, on the other side, the high-flown style, plus that mystical edge.

I've always treasured that meeting as my little moment. It was terrific because it was unarranged. I still get pleasure thinking about it. I actually saw someone living their life. If I'd had to introduce myself or gone up and done the sycophantic young writer thing, then he would have been forced into his public persona and I would have lost the moment.

★ ★ ★

I want to ask you about how you accept the supernatural and the natural as being as one. It follows

I was with some friends at a food hall one day—you know, dragged out to have a rank mutton curry. Looking for a table: no tables. And there was this old bloke with a younger bloke, who looked like his grandson He had on an old shirt, he had a big, wiry moustache, the hair anyway, he got up and he offered me his table. It took me a couple of seconds to realise who it was, as he walked away, and it was Xavier Herbert.

through all your work and is expressed by Les Murray in the epigraph to *That Eye, The Sky*: '...this interleaved continuing plane'.

I was always frustrated with realism, for some of the reasons that a lot of people were frustrated with realism. The realistic novels that I read didn't include all of the reality that I knew. So if this was realism, what about all the parts of life that I had been perceiving that weren't included?

ANYTHING THAT WAS SENSED to be outside of the concrete was only ever used in Gothic ghost stories. If you look back at all the art up until the middle of last century—nobody seemed to have a big division on what was real and what was supernatural, or what was real and what was super-real. I see what people might call the 'magical realist' or surreal elements of my work as realist. The world described as ... the world as a given that I see. I think that's the world we live in and so I don't use those sorts of things—talking pigs or angels—as devices. I'm of the Raymond Carver school: No tricks.

All the same, those elements stand out and have significance. The ghosts in The Riders, the ghost horseman, close the book.

And they open it, too, in a sense. They're symbolic. It's hard to know ... Scully, the main character in *The Riders*, doesn't actually perceive, he hasn't really got a handle on these mythical or ghostly medieval horsemen. He hasn't decided what they are, in a sense. He hasn't had time to think about it.

They don't particularly frighten him, do they?

No. And they're not invisible or all that ghostly. He goes down among them and they smell of shit and they smell of sweat. He touches the horses' flanks and he sees the dried blood and he sees the sweat and the mud on the men—half of them are young boys. So, he knows that they're there. But he hasn't been able to make up his mind about them ... because he's cold and the circumstances force him away from dealing with it properly

and the next day he's off on his nightmare, which is what the book's about, it's a journey into the underworld.

It's a real journey into the underworld. This novel is one of the darkest things you've written. Scully is tested more than most of your characters.

Yes, he's a bit of a Job in that way. But, unlike Ort (the main character of *That Eye, The Sky*), his implacable faith is probably misplaced.

Ort is tested when he's presented with a hideous situation (his father's in a coma), but he can perceive some substantial hope without destroying himself. There is some sense in which his father is still alive, he's still there—he's gone for all intents and purposes, perhaps, in a mental sense, but Ort believes and Ort's surrounded by nature and Ort apprehends grace through nature, through the big eye that he sees the sky is.

Scully has a kind of rigid, blind faith that is just an inability to believe or to let things go. It's a form of self torture. It's almost like a senseless passion. He sees clues, he sees chances, he sees hope where there is no hope and he deludes himself.

Ort is my primitive contemplative, my primitive mystic. He proceeds, seeing hope where it's offered to him and seeing grace where it's, to him, unavoidably seen, and Ort's pretty sensitive, Ort's able to be quiet and to listen.

Scully, in the state that he's in, doesn't do very much listening at all. He's all action. Scully sees himself as a bloke of action and he's going to do this and he's going to do that. He tends to go before he's fully made his mind up. He never allows himself to absorb any information completely, he interrupts his own thoughts with action and he tends to see things where they aren't. He constructs his own false grace, I suppose you could say.

He is just too keen to get on, he's a doer, he's too passionate about forward movement and the story is a sort of headlong forward movement—it's on rails. Sometimes he is mad. He's the difference between the fanatic and the saint.

To my mind a saint is someone

who, by grace and listening and hard work, is actually apprehending and seeing something that is there. Scully just thinks he can break down the doors and get to what it is. Scully is not waiting around for anybody! Perhaps that's his Australian male nature. And everywhere he goes he's turned away, every clue is a clue he's made for himself and he gets to the end of it and realises that he's made it for himself—or has he?—and he's just unable to stay still long enough to apprehend properly.

So, in some degree, the nightmare is of his own making.

Yes. We don't know what's happened to make his wife abandon him and the child but we do know that the process he goes through in those few weeks after being abandoned is probably tougher than it needed to have been. I mean, he almost destroys his own child, his own life, everything—he almost takes the whole ship down with him. It's all or nothing.

What the kid, Billie, his daughter, can see that he can't see is when it's time to walk away, when it's time to see the silence (of the wife) for what it is. Scully's up against silence in the same way that Ort's up against silence. Ort's up against his father's coma and this big sky that seems things to him, that he apprehends as benevolent but which never speaks to him in words. They are both ways of coming up against mystery.

And I'm thinking of *In the Winter Dark*, which, again, is about people coming up against mystery. Perhaps the mystery is of their own making, perhaps what's out there is not an animal, perhaps it's just a sum of all their fears and nightmares and guilt—but they go out looking for it with dire consequences, too. They go bollicking out there and get themselves all sorts of strife—the

blokes do, at the expense of the women.

SCULLY'S TRYING TO BASH down the doors of meaning, trying to assail the silence and it's just disaster. He's only saved by the wisdom of the kid, who draws him away. He goes back to the riders and he realises, in an intuitive sense, that he's like these people, he's like somebody trapped

in time. He's trapped in his own idea of who he is and what his life is and who he belongs with and to. He's not budging from that and it's destroying him. He's going to be like these medieval horsemen who are stuck in time, who turn up at the front of this castle keep looking for something that never appears.

Flannery O'Connor's *Mystery and Manners* is one of my favourite non-fiction works. It's like a hymn book or a prayer book to me. She says, 'What the fiction writer will discover, if he discovers anything at all, is that he cannot move or mould reality in the interests of abstract truth. The writer learns, perhaps more quickly than the reader, to be humble in the face of what is.'

And that's what Scully's having to deal with, what *is* is the fact that he's been deserted without explanation, without the likelihood of any explanation being forthcoming. Sooner or later, he's just going to have to cope with that. And he won't. Not until the end of the book he won't.

The *Riders* is one of the dark books. *That Eye, The Sky and Cloudstreet* are the books where I'm trying to work on ideas of what could be. They are a bit more sunny, a bit more sentimental, visions rather than nightmares. *The Riders* is a nightmare in the same way that *In the Winter Dark* was a nightmare.

There's a character a bit like Scully, with the same determination, in your story, Wilderness, which was in Scission, wasn't it, published back in 1985.

Wilderness is as close as I ever got to copying or being derivative of O'Connor and it's my O'Connor story. I used to work on this stuff: 'The problem of the novelist who wishes to write about a man's encounter with this God is how he shall make the experience—which is both natural and supernatural—understandable, and credible, to his reader.' That's Flannery O'Connor again.

But in depicting or using the supernatural, there's always that problem of where you step over that line of what's believable.

Of making it believable? Yes, and

where you step over the line of not being humble in the face of what is. Where you can try to bend reality to suit yourself, which is where propaganda and the tatty, sentimental, inspirational novel of the heart comes out—mediocrity. And also those devotional books. I think they are very present in a patsy Christian tradition of writing and they're hugely present in a lot of feminist and Marxist writing where the writer doesn't own up to what the world is like, to what reality is like. They shift it to suit themselves. You can smell a rat quickly, you can smell a phony there.

Fiction is all about copying what is and seeing what might be and also what's available. It's about being forced to cope with reality. That's why fiction is more potent and more strange and mysterious than pamphlet writing. My specific interest has always been in trying to find a



language that includes, incorporates, discusses religion without it having to rely slavishly on the Western Christian metaphors.

I'm interested in theology coming out of place and out of a certain time—out of a place, out of a region, out of a culture. I think that the new Reformation is the liberation theology of the New World, which I think is the biggest thing that's happened since the Reformation. This is where people's praxis, the things that people are doing, are informing their theology, where it comes out of a time. As a writer I'm fascinated by things being located in time and place, and saying, 'This is our experience'.

Being born into a culture that's irreligious, being brought up within a ghetto that is religious, and a ghetto within the greater ghetto of Christendom, I've got this double thing of having religion and having faith and having almost nothing in common with the surrounding culture. And then I have to represent that and not be self-conscious about including it as part of the world that people in my books see—so I've got to find a new language that's authentic and which doesn't relax into clerical stereotypes.

THE REASON GRAHAM GREENE can get to things quicker than I can is because he can have clerical characters, he can have the structure of the Church, he can have the buildings of the Church itself—people are in uniform. There were a whole lot of givens there that he can work with that just weren't there for me and won't be there for people with my background. We've got to do a whole different set of manoeuvres and go through a whole separate process of thought in order to make ourselves understood.

O'Connor found that, being a Catholic in the Protestant South. That was the advantage, that was the itch for her—to be weirder than the weird. To the people who were sacrificing goats on the bonnets of their Chevies in Main Street she was weirder than them. Same deal with snake handlers.

Anyway, what I was struggling with—and you can see it in *An Open Swimmer* and in *Shallows*, I start getting a better handle on it in *Scission*, stories like *Lantern Stalk*—was getting back to a notion of a distinctive, primitive if you like, Christian religion coming out of a specific place; an Australian flavour. It's Christian folk religion. I'm trying to pare it back to get some notion of Australian primal, primitive religion, which is what Ort gets.

Australian spirituality.

Yes. I was trying to do it so that not every metaphor is received. There aren't any new metaphors really, but there are new places and there are new circumstances and there are new cultures. And I think you can't avoid

I think Robert Louis Stevenson was being punished—and is still being punished—for being popular. I love Stevenson. ... when I was a child Stevenson got me interested in reading as much as anybody did. I went back to him as a student because I read somewhere that Jorge Luis Borges revered him as his favourite writer.

*Centre (and p24):
The Rider,
by Marino Marini,
1955.*

I see what people might call the 'magical realist' or surreal elements of my work as realist. ... the world as a given that I see. I think that's the world we live in and so I don't use those sorts of things—talking pigs or angels—as devices. I'm of the Raymond Carver school: No tricks.

the difference in people's outlook. That's what I was struggling for, to try to find a new language for the numinous or a new colour on the Christian shape, a new thread in the story.

There's traces of what I take to be that in such things as Cloudstreet and also in In the Winter Dark—of this sense of the immensity of this country, this continent.

And as I've said lots of times before, here we are, perhaps the most irreligious culture on earth, living in perhaps the most religious and spiritual and mystical of continents, with at least 40,000 years of continuous human habitation. And our culture is showing the attention deficit to the wisdom of the people who have been here all this time. It's not just a matter of know-how, it's a matter of understanding, of apprehension.

How real can evil get in one person? Where does a person slip into being not just wrong, not just making a bit of a mistake, but wilfully doing something that's evil?

There are a lot of people who will be the agents of evil in a mistaken way. Anybody who makes a statistical error, on occasion, in a public bureaucracy, are able to perpetrate evil without even knowing what they've done. I think there is an inherent structural ... *stink* that hangs over some institutions and bureaucracies. There's a sense that the thing is more than the sum of its parts, the structure of it. And that explains a lot of people's involvement in a lot of things in this century. The fact that you are able to be removed from consequences is, perhaps, the modern condition.

BUT THE POINT AT WHICH you become evil ... my feeling would be at the point when you realise that you are wrong and you proceed regardless, and you even proceed enjoying that and being proud of that—that's evil. It interests me how evasive modern people are about evil. They are very unwilling to say that something is wrong in the first place be-

cause wrong is just according to what your values are. You have to search among people to find something that they're unequivocally opposed to. We've got to that stage where everything is so relative.

So where does the idea of sin go? Are there sins? What about the sin of pride?

Yes, I'm pretty old-fashioned about that. I still hold to the idea of original sin.

I just can't see it as avoidable. If the culture is bending over so far backwards to ascribe reasons for behav-



our of the most bestial kind—and all those reasons end up being sociological, developmental reasons—they end up as tenets of faith. It's almost an act of faith that people will find some sociological reason that explains the horror of what people are capable of doing.

But nobody, including the people themselves, ever believes the explanation. I don't think our society has come to the point where we really do believe it when we pick up the newspaper and look at the paedophilia trials and the guy says, 'Well, I was interfered with as a child.'

Does that make any difference to how any of us feel about it? Do we ever believe him? I think that people believe, OK, this begets this begets this, but nobody ever really *feels* that this has anything to do with, or ever excuses, the nature of the crime.

Let's go a little further into what you mean by 'original sin' ...

I think that's the flaw in our nature. I think it's demonstrable, it's witnessable every day. You are hard pressed to find somebody who doesn't have those kinds of signs of the flaw in them. And I don't mean that in the sense of 'people are worthless' because their natural tendency is just as much to avail themselves of the dark as it is of the light.

The story of Adam and Eve is the mythical construct of that. Although it's problematic, it makes sense to me. Emotionally, I can see that. I can see that, given the nature of people and the free will that they have and use, it's a sign of our nature that we will often, or at least some of the time, choose what we know is either destructive or has consequences of destruction or difficulty for other people or for ourselves. Of course, we also make positive choices—more often than not, hopefully. How many Gardens of Eden do we need to go through to see our nature? It doesn't have to be apples.

How much do stories like that perpetuate that culture?

I don't know. If somebody told me that the patriarchal nature of that story was hugely influential on our culture, I'd believe them. If they had finally got the proof that it wasn't, I just as easily believe them. I don't know. Frankly, I don't think that at this stage in our culture that most people even know the story anyway.

There's one other aspect of our traditional religious culture that does have a tremendous influence, and has had for millennia, and that's that God's a man. That's the big one.

Yes. I can see that in that case the naming and the giving of gender to God can be, ultimately, destructive.

For me, it's no problem! Because I don't perceive of God as somebody with a penis or not a penis. Or a male nature, if there is such a thing; Or a female nature, if there is such a thing. Or a racial nature, if there is such a thing. And I know women who don't have any problem either. But I also know women who do have a problem with that and, if it is a big enough problem, then I think that warrants thinking about.

The problem there is language. Any notion, any name, any word, any picture we have of God will have to be a metaphor. Theology is a metaphorical exploration. I don't think it's possible to apprehend God without metaphors. I think theology has come out of times and places, and the metaphors usually evolve organically and are what pictures people are able to make of God and come to consensus about. When those metaphors cease to become useful, cease to become liberating, then they have to be rethought. I don't there's any problem with that. And I don't think that precludes the notion for a search for characteristics or nature.

Let's talk about rebirth and healing. I'm thinking of Cloudstreet and the birth of the baby and the way that healed the house. I suggest that sometimes healing doesn't come - ever. Sometimes the damage is done, the thing is broken and it stays that way. If anything, it's just going to get worse. How do you fit that into your scheme of things?

The unrelieved suffering question?

The unrelieved suffering question and this idea that there is absolutely no hope. The spine or the mind stays broken. It's not going to get better and any hope is completely unrealistic.

I don't have an answer to that. Well, I don't have a neat answer. I don't know why ... I believe miracles occur. I think I've seen them happen. But I don't know why they occur for some people but not other people. And I don't know why they ...

It's not willing them to happen.

No. Oh, no. It's not faith. Miracles don't come from faith. The evangelical Pentecostalist with the cash registers will always tell you that you are not healed because your faith isn't strong enough, which is a form of torture to somebody to say that. There's no way ...

That gets close to evil.

Yes, I think that's right on the money for evil. There is no equivalence between faith and reward. There is no equivalence between faith and movement. And, sometimes, there

isn't much of a relationship between faith and belief. Some of the people who want hardest to believe are not able to believe and some of the people who don't try very hard are able to believe—and not even in a superficial way, they have a belief, a strong, comforting, nurturing, nutritional belief [laughs]—in the sense of something that feeds them—nurturing wasn't quite strong enough.

Miracles are incidental. The fact of the Resurrection isn't as powerful as the symbolic meaning of the Resurrection.

YOU CAN SEE IT in the Scriptures, you can see it in Jesus's behaviour, his frustration at people missing the point, not getting it about the miracles, asking them not even to tell anybody that they were happening, fleeing from them, on occasion—this is not the point, you know, you're getting the smoke and the noise but not the music. It's what I'm saying, it's what I'm offering, it's what I'm being that's the deal. The rest of it is just incidental. It's a sort of a regular refrain in the New Testament where Jesus says to them, 'Go away, don't tell anybody and believe.'

You never get the follow-up case histories of all these people who are healed in the Scriptures—and my bare-faced bet is that hardly any of them ever go on to be believers, because a healing isn't enough. And I know people like that, who, in religious circumstances, have been in some small way or big way healed and they don't go on and believe—it isn't enough to them.

Healing the body may not be enough to heal the mind.

No

Is that what you meant when you said that you've witnessed miracles?

No, I think I've seen ...

Or have you seen miracles?

Well, I don't think I'd even answer properly ... I've seen ... Yes, I've known people who have been healed, but they've never wanted to be public about it. And they wouldn't speak about it. And I couldn't ... without being evasive, I'd rather not talk

about it because it's not something I can argue for either one way or the other. You know, what am I going to do? Drag them up and use them as case studies? I'm a reasonably sceptical person ... I've even been to things like healing services and ceremonies and whatever else and I don't feel good when I go to things like that, you know, I'm not into that.

It's out on the looser edge of things there, isn't it?

Yeah, and also, I'm always worried about people's motives. I mean, it's bad enough at the best of times, but ... It's all pretty loose goose out there.

What do you think was your hardest piece of writing? What really cost you the most sweat?

Shallows, I think. Two and a half years. To some extent it shows the labour, which is sad. I felt like I was killing myself over *Shallows* and I think the reason was that I was too young to write it, too young to attempt it. I knew at the time, and people were telling me all the time, in ten years you'll probably make a real go of this book, you'll know more. But being the young gung-ho Protestant boy living on hormones I just went at it. I was 20 and still at university when I started *Shallows*. I had to slave over it and it was discouraged by the academic who was supervising me as a project for it. It was rejected by the publishers after I'd submitted it. I had to fight to get it published. It was only due to the intervention of other people that it was published.

It won the Miles Franklin Award.

Yes, but I always have good luck in bad years.

So you do believe in luck.

Australian letters has a lean year and I get in under the gate, as somebody very sensitively told me. ■

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Tim Winton's most recent novel, *The Riders*, was published in September by Macmillan Australia.

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Imperilled are the peacemakers

The Middle East 'peace process' is not off track yet, but it is hardly a triumphal progress either.

ance they feel? My concern here is with the Arab and Islamic opponents, for the Israeli opponents have a very different agenda and deserve separate treatment.

Perhaps the best starting point for such a reflection is the Palestine Liberation Organisation itself. The PLO has been around for a long time now, and has been associated in many people's minds with acts of terrorism, for it was through terrorism that the issue of Palestine was put on the international agenda. In the minds of others, the PLO is associated with liberation, for the dividing

the democratically elected President of South Africa.

Now compare the ANC to the PLO, for it too has 'come in from the cold'. Yasser Arafat has been received by the US President as well as by Nelson Mandela, but unlike the triumphant Mandela, Arafat seems to have received little more than the mayorship of Gaza, with only the vaguest promises of more to come in the future.

It is easy to see why some Palestinians feel bitter at this turn of events. They argue that the present round of peace agreements, like the Camp David agreement between Israel and Egypt in the late '70s, are born of Arab weakness. Further, they argue that these new agreements are the result of US financial and diplomatic pressure on unrepresentative Arab governments. King Hussein of Jordan, for example, has received significant financial aid, including a cancellation of debts, in return for his appearance on the White House lawn, just as Egyptian President Anwar Sadat did after signing the Camp David agreements. The US continues to provide financial aid to Egypt today.

Israel, on the other hand, has entered this latest round of agreements from a position of considerable strength, and has been able to negotiate with characteristic hard-headedness. And, after the Gulf War, it has been in the interest of the US to show some movement on the Middle East peace front. This perhaps explains why the latest agreements have been greeted with such rapture by the largely US-dominated international media.

For the average Palestinian, however, the Gaza-Jericho Agreement has brought no real betterment of his or her lot. Israeli settlements



Looking for a home of her own: Arab woman at the Damascus Gate, East Jerusalem.

Photo: Emmanuel Santos.

WESTERN MEDIA HAVE generally reported peace 'breakthroughs' in the Middle East—ceremonies on the White House lawn, Yasser Arafat's return to Gaza, the agreement between Israel and Jordan—with a note of triumph. That sense of triumph, however, may well be premature and is certainly not shared by all inhabitants of the region.

The peace process has opponents on both sides, of course—hardline Israelis and hardline Palestinians and other Arabs. We know something about these opponents and have seen the destruction they can wreak, in Hebron and in Buenos Aires, in Lebanon and in London. But do we really understand the deep sense of griev-

line between a 'terrorist' and a 'freedom fighter' is always a narrow one.

In this respect the PLO is similar to another terrorist organisation of days gone by, the African National Congress. In fact the leaders of the two organisations, Yasser Arafat and Nelson Mandela, share a certain empathy as well, and Arafat was invited to Mandela's inauguration as President of South Africa. Like the PLO, in its terrorist past the ANC was seen as a Soviet proxy, and was outlawed and its leaders imprisoned. And, like the PLO, it was at the same time a liberation organisation struggling for the rights of an oppressed people. Today, however, the ANC's fortunes have changed dramatically. It is an internationally respected ruling party, and its leader has become

*Peace with the
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goal of Israel and the
US. In the past, the
Palestinians were
the obstacle to this
kind of peace
between Israel and
its neighbours, but
now that obstacle
has been removed.*

remain in the occupied territories, and the settlers are subject to leniently applied Israeli law. And the economic disarray and heavyhandedness of the Israeli army that have characterised the occupation in general have not changed. Most of the 'advances' have been very cosmetic indeed.

One important difference in the politics of the occupied territories, however, is that a growing number of Palestinians now see their own leadership as complicit in their continuing oppression. Arafat, these critics argue, has become a kind of Israeli puppet, reliant on Israeli security to protect him from the assassin's bullet, and acting in Gaza to maintain 'control' for the greater good of Israel.

ARAFAT REMAINS a political leader, with responsibilities to his Palestinian constituency, yet every time he speaks on issues such as the status of Jerusalem, or the Palestinians still in prison, he is further humiliated by the Israelis. In Capetown, at the time of Nelson Mandela's inauguration, Arafat spoke of a *jihād*, or holy war, to liberate Jerusalem, which all Palestinians see as their capital. The Israelis were incensed, and a humiliated Arafat was forced to recant.

The agreements between Israel's Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, and King Hussein of Jordan also rankle with the Palestinians, for Hussein has been given a kind of trusteeship over the Muslim holy places in Jerusalem—a trusteeship Arafat feels should rightfully be his. This explains his recent insistence that Jerusalem be put on the agenda now, and not in three years' time as originally planned, but it is unlikely that the Israelis will agree to this request.

Many Palestinians believe that they have been fobbed off with little, in order to remove them as an ob-

stacle to Israel making separate peace agreements with Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. For it is peace with these frontline states, rather than with the stateless Palestinian people, that has always been the goal of Israel and the US. In the past, the Palestinians were the obstacle to this kind of peace between Israel and its neighbours, but now that obstacle has been removed.

In fact, some Palestinians see the present series of agreements as the ultimate sell-out: it amounts to giving the Israelis and the Americans everything they ever wanted, while giving nothing substantial to the Palestinians. How might the agreements be opposed by someone who understood them in this way? As there are few other forums to express opposition in the Middle East, resort to terrorism again becomes a possibility. So, although we might be witnessing the beginnings of a kind of *Pax Americana* in the Middle East, this may be accompanied by more, rather than fewer, acts of terror. Can such acts derail the peace process? Not in the short term, certainly. Neither the Buenos Aires bombing nor the Hebron massacre have significantly upset the process. But in the longer term, if terror is directed at the Arab governments that signed the agreements, it could cause those governments to fall, and possibly be replaced by hardline fundamentalists. This is already happening in

Algeria, although for different reasons, since Algeria has not signed a treaty with Israel.

A revival of terrorism is the great fear of the Israelis, too. For although Camp David survived the assassination of President Sadat, there is no guarantee that an agreement with Syria would survive the fall of Assad, or that peace with Jordan would survive the death of Hussein, who has cancer anyway. And who could say whether peace with the PLO would survive the demise of Yasser Arafat? So we may be looking at the prospect of more instability in the Middle East, with more acts of terrorism—and more reprisals—in the years to come. In many Arab countries a change of regime is long overdue, and today's events may well be the catalyst that brings about such changes.

It is time to sound a note of realism, rather than of triumph, in analysing the politics of the Middle East. The triumph, such as it was, ended with Operation Desert Storm. ■

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*Ultra-orthodox Jews at the Western Wall, Jerusalem, pray with the chief rabbi during Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, May 1994.
Photo: Emmanuel Santos*



Using childhood



THIS IS THE VERSION OF JACK AND JILL I thought was the true one:

*Jack and Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water;
Jack fell down
And broke his crown,
And Jill came tumbling after.*

*Then up Jack got
And home did trot
As fast as he could caper;
And went to bed
To mend his head
With vinegar and brown paper.*

Then I read that Jocelynn Scutt, the feminist lawyer, was brought up on a different Jack and Jill: 'I must have been three or four, in a discussion with my older sister about the sexist content of Jack and Jill, and how, in the second verse, Jill gets into trouble for everything and has to wrap Jack's crown in vinegar and brown paper, whereas I'm sure they both had to tumble down the hill and she would have been distressed and hurt. But, no, she has to have the stiff upper lip and minister to Jack.'

In *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, there is no Scutt version and the preferred second verse is:

*Up Jack got, and home did trot,
As fast as he could caper,
To old Dame Dob, who patched his nob
With vinegar and brown paper.*

The nearest I was able to come to the offending version was a verse in which the real business is between mother and daughter. This would hardly satisfy Jill's supporters, but at least it brings Jill to centre stage.

*Then Jill came in,
And she did grin,
To see Jack's paper plaster;
Her mother whipt her,
Across her knee,
For laughing at Jack's disaster*

Drawings by
Peter Fraser

That seemed to be it. But just recently a student showed me a page in the 1965 edition of *Dean's Gift Book of Nursery Rhymes*, illustrated by Janet and Grahame Johnstone. The text gives my version of Jack and Jill—but the illustrations have Scutt's. Down in the right-hand corner, a little girl, blonde and curly and with round cheeks, is dabbing at the scalp of a boy who looks just as boys are supposed to, simultaneously heroic and helpless.

As it happens, I am not much interested in who has the right Jack and Jill. What interests me is that an ideological point is made with a piece of childhood, that a childhood experience is used to justify a public career and, presumably, the private life that sustains it. I have come to think of 'childhood' as a thing we carry about in our grown-up heads, a thing we are constantly polishing and editing, or even rewriting: a narrative that *places* us. In this sense, childhood is selective and open to revision, a construct shaped by who we are and what we are about in the here and now. It belongs as much to the present as to the past, and as we play the game of *pro vita sua* it is the joker in every hand.

Richard Coe writes in *When the Grass Was Taller* that the problems in writing 'the Childhood' are first 'the accuracy of memory' and second 'the constantly changing relationship between the self who writes and the self who is remembered'. Goethe, Chateaubriand and Wordsworth 'all spent the better part of half a century struggling with successive versions of their earlier selves'. There was a time, of course, when childhood did not exist: children had no mind till their first syllogism and no heart till their first kiss. In the 18th century's discovery of childhood the pivotal figure was Rousseau, because he remembered his nurse beating him on the bum when he was 11. Childhood became both another world, in which children have ideas and feelings that make them more than seedling adults, and a distinctive presence in the adult world. Then Freud made childhood a major preoccupation of the century that is now coming to a close.

The problem of memory is a real one. But the other problem interests me more—the need for the self of childhood and the self of adulthood to work out some story on which they can both agree. How do we use our childhoods to construct an identity with which we can live, and how do we use it to construct a political ideology, where we act for others? I want to explore the idea that childhood, as Oscar Wilde said of youth and the young, is wasted on children, that it is experienced only by the adult the child becomes, understood only in retrospect and then only in an endless series of revisions.

People who observe childhood by observing children directly would not care for these questions, and it is true that not properly listening to children is one of the oldest crimes against humanity. But looking to children themselves does not guarantee their being heard. Those British children in the series *7-Up* are in competition for their childhoods with people determined to tell them who they are every seven years. In newer versions of the series, particularly the one made in the ruins of the Berlin Wall, adult politicking all but drowns out the children's thoughts. Indeed, whether we are children or adults, we are all under pressure to frame our childhoods according to public meaning. In the decade of child abuse, there are memory consultants to bring our pasts up to date, and critics to tell

Blanche D'Alpuget she'd got *her* childhood wrong when she didn't moralise in the expected manner.

AGROWN-UP DAUGHTER SPENDING A WISTFUL AFTERNOON with her mother over the photo albums—this must be about as far as you can get from an ideological use of childhood, or even from *using* childhood at all. It is about finding a truth, not developing a line. 'There were 30 years of photos and memories spread in a jumble over the table. My mother and I dipped into them at random, resting our elbows on the faces and places of decades past, looking for the people we were then and for the elusive, youthful signposts of what we would become.' At one point the mother was speaking about one of the pictures, about getting it enlarged and so on, but the daughter 'wasn't listening any more. I was gazing at a casual portrait of myself seated in a chair, eyes, even at seven years of age, serious and questioning, considering the world. I studied that face, trying to trace the woman I had become in the child that I was. Would the child be pleased with the adult? I hoped so.'

Childhood is here a shrine burdened with innocence, an oracle not for ideology but for the wisdom of babes and sucklings. Trying to contact that child, the daughter picked up the picture of her seven-year-old self: 'Carefully I passed it on to my mother, "Look at that." My voice was soft, I waited, wondering what insights she would add to the child that had become me. But each of us studies the past for different signposts. "My God!", exclaimed my mother, "Did I really think that wallpaper was sophisticated?". And together we



Childhood can become a theme park for nostalgic grown-ups, a costume drama in which the villains are only pretending—or so monstrous as to be completely alien—and the children are happy little Vegemites with their minds on nothing but the new bicycle, the video game and the trip to Disneyland at Christmas.

laughed.' The shrine was just a dandelion after all and the child is mute. The story, which promised to be simple and elevating, becomes complicated and depressing, a *Mommy Dearest* story dressed in whimsy with its terrible theme a rejecting mother lodged at the core of her daughter's adult self. The younger woman's dalliance with the photo album has only confirmed her belief that 'the child that had become me' is lost to her because she cannot compete with the next bright thing that catches her mother's eye.

I ONCE MET A MAN who said he'd slammed the door on his childhood at 18, vowing never to give it another thought, and he hasn't. But out of sight is not always out of mind and a man's childhood may lie in wait till he's down, as in the pathos of dying soldiers calling for their mother in a foreign land. Sometimes we prefer to work on other people's childhood instead of our own. Typically, the hard-boiled detective hero has had his childhood stolen from him and his mission is to give other children their childhood back. Ross Macdonald's Lew Archer roams the real and suburban deserts of California looking for lost boys and girls he can restore to their grieving families. Some people treat their childhood as a mystery containing clues to the meaning and direction of their life. D.M. Thomas, author of *The White Hotel*, remarked of his psychoanalysis: 'I had this constant sense of expectation that there would come this moment of great revelation when I would discover that my mother had seduced me at three years old or something—which would cure all my ills.' Perhaps most of us are hoping for a 'Rosebud' of our own among the junk in our attic.

The recovery of a childhood promises continuity, but it can bring surprises. Adults sometimes fear it the way children fear discovering they're adopted. News items still recall the Hollywood melodramas of the '40s which featured mistaken identities, newborns mislabelled in hospital, and shock revelations at the reading of the will: aunts who turn out to be mothers not allowed to keep their child, or orphans recognised at last, like Cinderella. Bill Clinton even found a brother in the White House. Unexpected news from childhood can lead to a new beginning but most of us probably want the reassurance that we had a good upbringing, that we are the proud possessors of a normal childhood that no friend might be embarrassed by and no enemy will be able to use against us.

Certainly for many people who are middle class and vote right-of-centre, the best childhood is a conventional childhood and, anyway, it's a private matter. Here is 'Lou' with his list of what *didn't* happen in his childhood:

I was born at a very young age (laughter), had a normal middle-class upbringing, childhood. Very stable home, parents never fought or anything like that. The basic theme of our home life was harmony ... It's just a very normal, very normal sort of home life, whatever you call normal, no moments of great conflict. A level sort of existence. Everything was within certain parameters, there were no extreme highs or extreme lows.

'A level sort of existence' even on the first day at school: 'I remember kids howling leaving their mothers, being really distraught. I just stood there and watched what was going on. Wasn't traumatic at all.' Lou boasts 'a typical middle-class upbringing', a social category saving him from the anxieties of any psychology tailored to his inner life. Another tactic is to put childhood on hold, like the man embarking on his first gay love affair who puts his interviewer off with 'Look, I'm enjoying where I'm at now. I had a nice childhood, but I'm not anxious to go and re-live it.'

Then there are those who return to their childhood precisely because it was traumatic. These are artists and patients, Ingmar Bergman in *Fanny and Alexander* a distinguished example of the first, Freud himself a paradoxical example of the second. Other people turn to music and painting and dance for signs that there is more to them than what they've become, that they had a childhood that contained a self that a career and a family haven't quite extinguished.

Childhood can be used for self-excuse or self-reproof. It may be confessed to the way sins are told to the priest, though the confessions be as secular and shameless as Rousseau's. At the other extreme, St Augustine's childhood is a memory bank of wickedness drawn on in spiritual crisis. Childhood can also be used for revenge.

MY CHILDHOOD CAN BE A CLUB TO BEAT YOURS WITH, as when a Labor Minister for Education rebuked protesting students for not being a patch on his revolutionary youth, and we all lecture our children for being more affluent at 16 than we were at 30. But a rewritten childhood can patch things up, can show sympathy or pay tribute. It can be used simply to record an existence, to say I was there, there I am, that's what I was like. Intellectuals enjoy charting the growth of their ideas, what they were reading when, seeing how much wiser they've become or being reminded how precocious they were. Of course, they risk discovering how they've slowed down or that they've been going round in circles. There is an almost clinical approach that goes down well at dinner parties in which we become specimens to our-

selves, surprisingly pleased to be introvert or extrovert, Taurus, Virgo or Gemini. Presumably this is because we are not alone and, being generic, not to blame.

It may be different for women. Though feminist biographies may still be catching up, at this moment in history women readers are licensed to read what another woman writes as if it were autobiography. Whatever the subject matter, women readers read women writers as if every woman's book is really a note from the underground childhood they all shared but weren't free to speak about before. Gender *samizdat*. Something like this may occur wherever there are newly liberated groups discovering the writers among them—East Germans, for example, and Chinese students exiled in the West.

What happens to childhoods when history itself is disrupted? What stories are Russian parents telling their children as they queue for their Big Macs? At the Sigmund Freud Institute in Frankfurt, a man reported that in Holland every elderly citizen, encouraged by tales of a nation's Resistance, has a childhood they want to talk about, while in Germany, it is not only the Third Reich they won't talk about but the child they are ashamed they were then.

Folk singers and novelists, as well as historians in what is called oral history, recover childhood in forgotten games and rhymes, in curses, in maps of lost landscapes and torn-down buildings and abandoned streets, in family sayings and remedies, in lists of things stuck on the fridge, in mother's recipes, in the lopsided blind and the dunny door that would never shut properly—as well as in all the names of the people who formed the crowd in our childhood epic.

BUT THE *conservation of childhood*, charming as its results often are, has its dangers. It diminishes childhood by leaving out its rough psychology, treating its emotional wildernesses and forests, its sexuality, violence, fear, hatred and guilt, as if they were not much more than cute, like bonsai plants. Childhood can become a theme park for nostalgic grown-ups, a costume drama in which the villains are only pretending—or so monstrous as to be completely alien—and the children are happy little Vegemites with their minds on nothing but the new bicycle, the video game and the trip to Disneyworld at Christmas.

The past can be a game families use to make contact in the present. Funny stories are standard here, elaborated, exaggerated and doubly familiar—like the one about the uncle who was shaving the corpse that farted, and the apprentice who ran away on his first day wailing he'd never be back! The childhoods of parents reassure the young that their world extends behind them and ahead of them, that they are surrounded by a host of guardian angels disguised as jolly and unreliable uncles and stern but heart-of-gold aunts, barely remembered mad cousins, a neighbour whose 'yoo-hoo' would send half the family out the front door on sudden errands. Pondering the idea that their parents had to meet and fall in love for their own lives to begin, children experience a frisson at almost not-being as they drink in the tale of two families converging over time and space, of strange coincidences and near-things that saved their mum and their dad from marrying somebody else and having different children. In the film *Back To The Future*, a boy travels through time to make sure his parents get together in time so that he gets born as precisely himself.

There's another side to this for children whose parents separate. Conrad Black describes the small voice of his five-year old son on the transatlantic phone: 'But don't you love mummy just a little bit?' The shared biographies of blended families, the story of how we all came to be together this way must be hard to begin but vital to attempt.

THE FIRST AUDIENCE FOR OUR CHILDHOOD IS OURSELVES. Politicians and other famous people have an interest in building a version of childhood into their image, but it works better if they believe it themselves. Lyndon Johnson convinced himself his granddaddy fought and died at the Alamo, though it suited him politically as well. Ronald Reagan constructed for himself a childhood that was more American than Huckleberry Finn's by editing out his horn-rimmed glasses and pipe, and his hound's-tooth jacket, and his mother's demand that he play her husband in the psychodramas of marriage she wrote for the local church. Margaret Thatcher claimed a strict upbringing and used it to attack the welfare state and as a model for an entrepreneurial Britain. She left out her competition with her mother and her sister, the *politics* of her growing up, while Benazir Bhutto, in a political battle with her mother and brother, insists with presidential vigour that her father chose *her* as his successor. Bob Hawke graced his ambition to be Prime Minister of Australia with a biblical prophecy vouch-



It may be different for women. Though feminist biographies may still be catching up, at this moment in history women readers are licensed to read what another woman writes as if it were autobiography.

safed to his mother and with stories of how all who observed his boyhood and youth were filled with amazement. Hawke made his calling his own with a 'near-death' experience after crashing his motorcycle at 18. Something like this seems *de rigueur* for male reformist leaders with any pretence to charisma and it can be very useful if, like President Clinton, their story includes rescuing their mother from a violent (step)father.

There ought to be as many childhoods as there are people on the planet, but sadly that isn't the case. On reflection, my remark about childhood being wasted on children is not so funny since for centuries children all over the world have been robbed of their childhoods in mines and paddy fields, in the chimneys of grand houses, in boarding schools, and refugee camps and wherever they are hurt or neglected. We thought the worst of that was over, at least in the richer societies, with progressive education, child-care and families small enough to afford their children 'quality time.' It is not, and high on any agenda of social justice today must be the harm done to children.

And yet, this is surely a time when charity really must begin at home. Adults will only cherish *children* when they can cherish *childhood*, when they are not afraid of their own childhood or a complete stranger to it. We cannot expect adults without childhoods to know the first thing about responding to the mind and heart of a child.

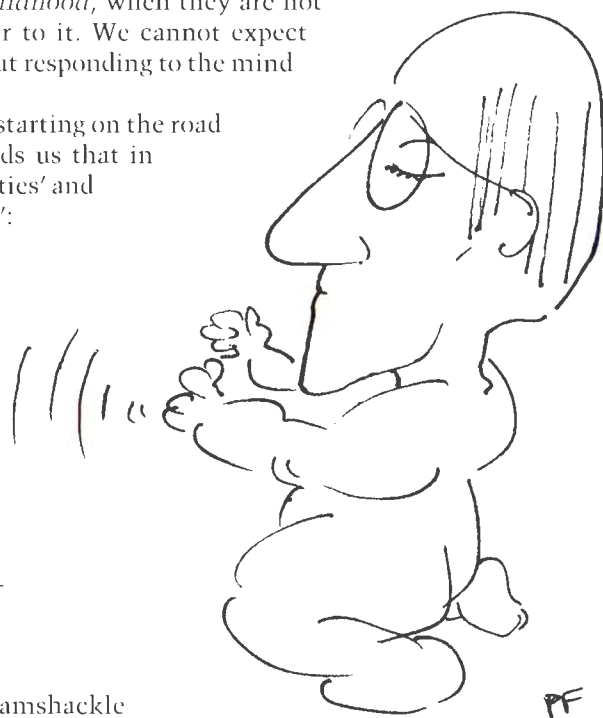
When we begin thinking about childhood we are starting on the road towards understanding children. Richard Coe reminds us that in the self-portrait-as-child we are after our 'unique qualities' and it should portray us in all our worldly 'insignificance':

And this sense of the significance of the apparently insignificant self, who has accomplished nothing, invented nothing, created nothing, can be appreciated only in a comparatively democratic social and cultural climate... The cultures which have produced the greatest flowering of Childhood literature are those which, in one way or another, are or have been inspired with an ideal of democracy and of equality: France and England, North America and Australia, the emergent Third World, and—perhaps paradoxically—Russia.

A GOOD SOCIETY REQUIRES citizens who have some ramshackle semblance of a self. And selves need childhoods rich enough to sustain them. The other civilising work of adulthood, besides seeing to the children, has to be protecting the childhood in us that is ours to transact a self with.

I come back to Jack and Jill. A surprising number of people leave out their brothers and sisters when they talk about their childhood. It is as if the childhood we all want is a story of mum, dad and me, a story in which we are our own hero. But Jack's full story would include Jill's story, and Jill's would include Jack's. A childhood should be the history of sibling relations as well, a history in which the equivalents of The People and The Middle Class get the attention Kings and Queens, Prime Ministers and Presidents do, who stand for parents. Some such 'de-centring' is needed to guard against childhoods that are nothing more than bedtime stories that help us drift off to sleep while the light is on and a soothing voice can still be heard.

That said, we should not expect Jack or Jill to include everybody and everything. We share our stories, and it does not matter that Jack's story of the incident on the hill never completely matches Jill's. What's important is that Jill's version gets to press too, and that they each ponder the complex and sometimes baffling role of the other as they construct their story about growing up Jack or growing up Jill. ■



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It's not just who you know

THE PHONE RINGS. Submarine cables slither across my field of vision and twist through a sheet of water surrounded by mountains. Lake Geneva. I don't live here. I don't even want to be here. I hate Switzerland. Got to get my head out of *Three Colours Red*. Why am I dreaming about the silliest part of an otherwise good movie? Why do I know I'm dreaming even though I'm still asleep? And if I know I'm dreaming why can't I pick what I want to dream about? Don't answer any of those questions. If you do I'll probably have to wake up to think about them. And I'll be angry. It's Sunday morning. Or maybe it's still Saturday night. One of those. Go away and let me sleep.

Now I *am* awake. The phone really is ringing. I emerge a little further from the blankets. It's cold. All right: snow, ice, mountains, submarine cables, the opening takes of *Three Colours Red*. That means the phone's ringing and it's too cold to get out of bed. I hate obvious explanations. Well, not always. But I said I'd be angry.

A mound at the nether end of the bed quivers slightly and begins to move towards the edge of the blankets, like some sort of burrowing animal. Celia's tousled head appears, bearing an upraised eyebrow that I take to mean 'Are you going to answer the phone?' I decide to make my reply less specific, while sounding heroically concerned: 'Don't worry, darling, I'll make the phone stop ringing.'

But I do answer the phone instead of unhooking it. I don't know why. If this were a film such as *Three Colours Red*, one might make a great deal out of this. One might speculate on the ways in which simple decisions reflect connections between people that are opaque to the individuals themselves. To which someone else might respond: 'This isn't a film. And you're in the habit of answering phones. That's it. Enough of the mystical crap, thank you.'

'Hello'. On the other end of the phone is the Biblical Scholar. Oh good, no mysticism here, I'm sure. But let's try a little low-order prediction of future events instead. The next thing she'll say is 'Sorry, did I wake you up?'

'Oh sorry, did I wake you up?' And then, without waiting for a reply, without even allowing me to feel smug about my successful prediction: 'Why are you still in bed at twenty past ten on a Sunday morning? It's disgraceful.'

'No it's not. Sabbatarianism is a view with no support in the New Testament and only equivocal support in church tradition. Except among your gloomy Calvinist tribe, of course.'

'I happen to be a Protestant. I am *not* gloomy or a Calvinist. And you're probably just being rude about Calvin because you've been having those stupid nightmares about drowning in Lake Geneva again. Anyway it's Celia I wanted to talk to. About *your* gloomy tribe.'

'What have we done now?'

'They've sacked him.'

'Sacked whom?' The Biblical Scholar names the Theologian, Celia's supervisor.

Suddenly I am alert as well as awake. 'Who are "they", and what precisely have they done?'

'The archbishop threatened to withdraw his mandate to teach in a Catholic institution, or something like that. Because of what he's been saying about women's ordination. So he resigned from the faculty in case other people there get bound by disciplinary action aimed at him. But he's still allowed to do his own writing and supervise postgraduates. I thought Celia would want to know.'

'Yes, thanks. I'll ask her to call you.'

When Celia hears the news, she takes it better than I am managing to do. But then she is not someone troubled by irrational fears, such as anxiety about drowning in Lake Geneva. So we spend a couple of hours drinking coffee while I get depressed and she merely gets angry. The conversation doubles back on itself a couple of times, but the thread runs something like this.

ME: 'Well, at last they've come clean about how they intend to treat dissent. And the most likely result is that those reasonable people who haven't already walked out of the church probably will do so. The only ones left will be a bunch of rightwing fanatics boasting about the desert they've made.'

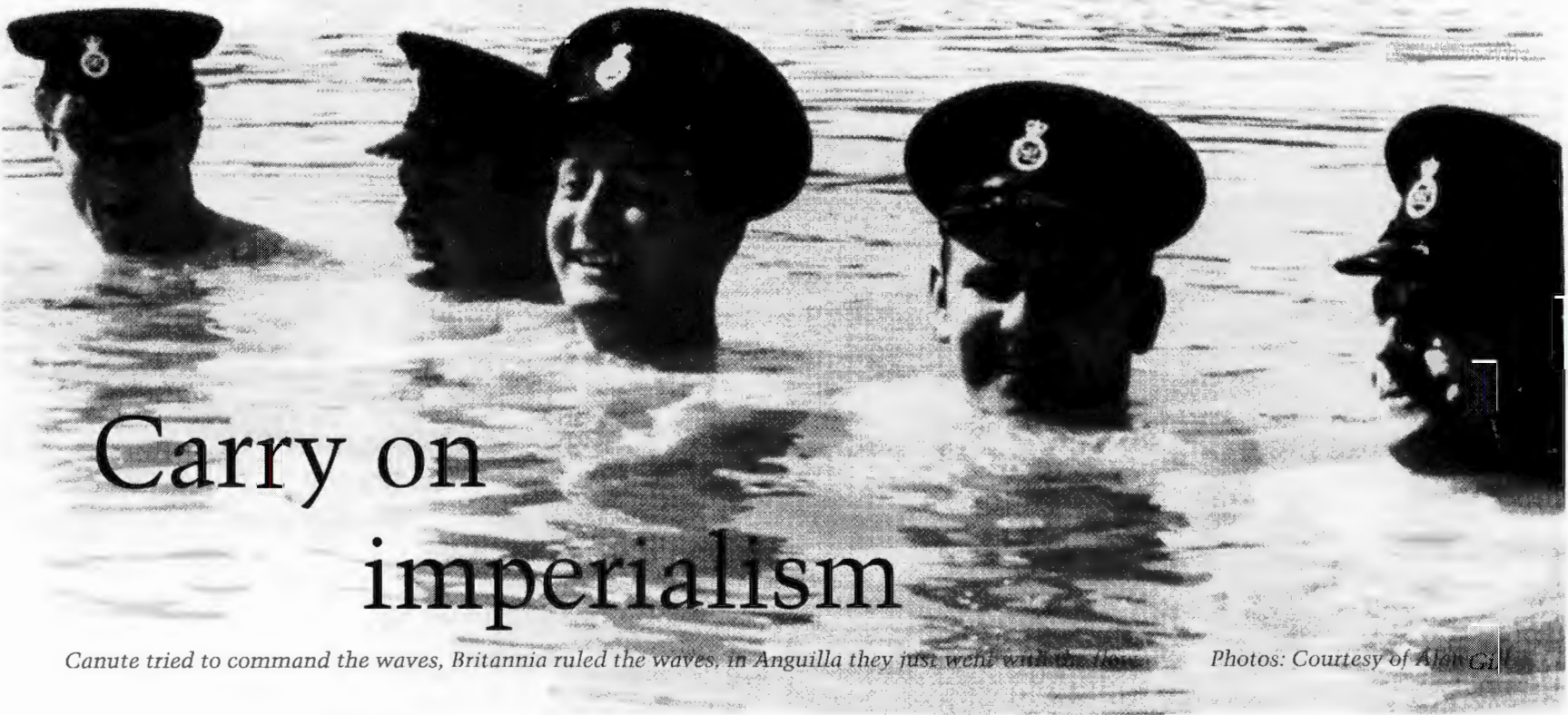
SHE: 'That will only happen if people like you *are* dumb enough to give up on the church. Right now, a better thing to do would be to go and see the Theologian. There are times when people need to know that others support what they're doing.'

So we do call on the Theologian, and find that he is neither depressed nor particularly angry. He is merely unburdened. And though, being human, he probably does appreciate encouragement, I think it is actually his faith which strengthens ours.

Later, back at home, there is another phone call. It is from Sancho, who announces that he is now a father. He has a son, and mother and child are doing fine. This event may have no apparent link with the world of archbishops and theologians, and I am sure it has no link at all with Calvinism, Jansenism or sundry other forms of theological gloom. But somehow knowing about the Son of Sancho casts the day in a different, and better light.

That night, as I drift into sleep, all the day's conversations start to run into one, and I think again about *Three Colours Red* and its theme that human beings are connected in ways they can scarcely fathom. And, just before wakefulness finally disappears, Celia touches me on the shoulder and whispers: 'You're not going to dream about Lake Geneva again, are you?' ■

Ray Cassin is production editor of *Eureka Street*.



Carry on imperialism

Canute tried to command the waves, Britannia ruled the waves, in Anguilla they just went with the flow. Photos: Courtesy of Alan Gill

AS WARS GO, the invasion of Anguilla doesn't rate very highly. Like the Suez (1956) and Falklands (1982) campaigns, it involved sea and airborne landings. Yet no one was killed in this madcap war against rebels who sought to *remain* a British colony. Many people were embarrassed, however, in an affair that might have been scripted by Gilbert and Sullivan.

Anguilla, with a population of 7000 is a dot on the map (50 sq. km.) of the Leeward Islands in the Caribbean. The region is still known colloquially as the British West Indies, though officially the 'British' in the title has been dropped.

The conflict arose in the mid-1960s, when Anguilla's 'self-appointed' leader, Ronald Webster, objected to British proposals that

the island lose its colonial status and become part of a proposed Federation of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla. Most former British possessions had already been given their 'freedom', and Harold Wilson's Labour government wanted to rid itself of the last vestiges of colonialism. Webster replied that he didn't want independence, thank you very much, and would be quite happy for Anguilla to remain under the British Crown.

Apart from being pro-British, Webster and many islanders were also anti-St Kitts, which, one suspects, was the main reason for their protest. St Kitts, a much larger island, was quite happy to lose its colonial status, and well aware of the benefits that would accrue from being the dominant partner in the new alliance. The British government, ignoring Anguillan objections, forced acceptance of federation.

The Anguillans showed their displeasure by throwing six St Kitts policemen off the island, and, 18 months later, by evicting Tony Lee, a British diplomat. Webster, who had heard about Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), rubbed salt into the wound by issuing a UDI

statement of his own. Independence from *what* was never quite clear. He authorised the flying of a rebel flag—the Union Jack—from the police station.

Intervention was urged by some British MPs, and a minority of (mainly European) residents in Anguilla. Their spokesman, Canon Guy Carleton, was a Anglican cleric 'of the old school', who had been decorated during wartime service as a chaplain to British forces in East Africa. In addition to his pastoral duties, Carleton was joint owner and editor of the island's only newspaper, *The Beacon*. Furious at the slight to British prestige, he wrote an editorial declaring: 'The only solution is for Britain to invade.'

CARLETON'S FRIENDS said that he had Foreign Office connections. In a cable to Harold Wilson he repeated his invasion demand, justifying the call by claiming that Anguilla had been taken over by 'Mafia-style' American gamblers, expelled from previous havens in Cuba and the Bahamas. Webster dismissed the Mafia claims as preposterous, and said that as a Seventh Day Adventist



Full weight of the law: Asst. Commissioner Way.

lay preacher he regarded gambling as a sin. His cause was not helped by the presence on Anguilla of an American Baptist minister, the Rev. Freeman Goodge, who supported UDI and was a friend of the 'gamblers'. Goodge later stirred the pot by telling the unsophisticated islanders that British paratroopers were called 'Red Devils'.

The invasion duly went ahead under the codename 'Operation Sheepskin'. The name proved unfortunate. British Opposition MPs called Harold Wilson 'a sheep in sheep's clothing', and American newspapers found amusement in the designation SNOWI ('Senior Naval Officer, West Indies'), used for the Task Force Commander, Commodore Martin N. Lucey, and in the name of his flagship, *HMS Fearless*.

The assault vessels comprised the frigates *HMS Minerva* (2860 tonnes) and *HMS Rothesay* (2600 tonnes). On board were several helicopters and 40 Royal Marines, who had been made to cover their insignia with black tape. While the ships were at sea, 315 Red Devils—men of the 2nd Battalion, 16th Brigade, of the Parachute Regiment—were flown from RAF Brize Norton to the deep water port at Antigua, in the West Indies, to rendezvous with the invasion fleet.

Antigua had been chosen as the staging post partly because of its harbour, but also because its Premier, Vere Bird, supported the British endeavour. Secrecy was broken when Antiguan spotted British troops and their equipment rumbling through the capital in trucks, and guessed at their intentions.

'D' Day was 19 March, 1969. Webster knew about it, having been tipped off by the Antiguan, and also by the London *Daily Express*, which had a mole at Brize Norton and alerted the world to what was about to take place. Would the invasion be opposed? Antiguan told the troops that everyone on Anguilla carried a gun and would not be afraid to use it. In London the *Daily Mail*, miffed at having been scooped by the *Express*, suggested that force would be met by force and, in an astonishing display of hype, reported: 'The firepower of the rebels—who may have been joined by American gangsters and

Black Panthers, the trigger-happy wing of the Black Power movement—is unknown.'

The landing, a classic pre-dawn operation, was unopposed. The Red Devils' parachutes were not needed—they landed by rubber boats. A few children ran along the sand, getting 'in the way' of the invaders. Webster strolled to the beach to meet his 'guests'. A party of marines distributed invasion leaflets stating: 'Our purpose is to end intimidation'.

A marine later recalled an old lady coming out of her house, waving an umbrella at him, and demanding: 'Does the Queen know about this?'. The only shot fired in anger was by a Red Devil who responded to what he thought was machinegun fire. It turned out to be a youth starting his motor bike.

Within hours of the invasion calm

Andrew Way. Some newspapers misspelt his name as 'Weigh'—an unkind error since Way weighed 22 stone. He had been transferred from the mounted branch because it was considered best that he no longer sit on a horse. The police contingent, whose members had received less than 48 hours' notice of their part in the invasion, had arrived at Aldershot the night before departure to be given kit bags and military clothing suitable for the tropics. Unfortunately, they didn't have anything in Commissioner Way's size, so he had to go along in blue serge.

THE INVADERS SOON FOUND that their duties were not particularly irksome. Anguilla's beaches, not at all like the stony ones back home, proved attractive. Not to worry that



was 'restored' (assuming that it ever left) and SNOWI cabled the Admiralty: 'Operation Sheepskin a success'. Later the same day a new force arrived—47 London policemen, whose precise duties were unclear. Their presence was Harold Wilson's idea. He is said to have told a friend: 'Everyone loves London Bobbies; they give sweets to children'.

This unusual force was under the control of Assistant Commissioner

some of them had forgotten to pack their bathing costumes: Bobbies, marines and Red Devils stacked their rifles on the beach, stripped off and went swimming in the nude, resulting in entertaining photographs that made front pages in much of the English-speaking world.

When they were not on the beach, Commissioner Way and his men attempted to find the 40-or-so 'Mafia types' and others, on a list said to

When flat feet don't matter: Bobbies on the beach at Anguilla.

have been supplied by Canon Carleton. Heading it was Freeman Goodge, who was subsequently expelled, with several others, from Anguilla. Tony Lee duly came back with the paratroopers, but did not stay long, being replaced in rapid succession by two other junior diplomats. Webster, whose status as 'prisoner' or Chief Minister was unclear, made a trip to New York where he was received (albeit as a private citizen) at the United Nations.

Britain, by now well aware that the rest of the world regarded the whole affair as high farce, took steps to get out of a tight corner. It sent no less a personage than Lord Caradon, Britain's ambassador to the United Nations and a junior Foreign Office minister, to hold peace talks on the island. On arrival Caradon promised 'talk, talk and more talk until we get this thing sorted out.'

THERE WAS, INDEED, plenty of talk, resulting in a proposed formula for agreement which, basically, seems to have been that Ronald Webster would be Chief Minister but Her Majesty's representative would be boss. Meanwhile, the invading troops turned to PR work, building a radio station and other amenities for the Anguillans. The first broadcast was by Ronald Webster, who said, with his biblical training to the fore: 'Friends and fellow Anguillans ... I am with you and will remain with you ... Have confidence in me. I have nothing to hide from you, so do not sell your leader's birthright for a dish of porridge (*sic*). Remember what Judas did to Christ. Beware of false prophets and wolves in sheeps' clothing.'

On 14 September 1969, all British forces, other than a late party of Royal Engineers (who stayed a further two years), were pulled out, together with the London Bobbies. Thus ended an occupation that had lasted 179 days. On the day of their departure an area of the airport was cordoned off, and a large sign erected reading 'waving base'. It had been that sort of invasion.

About a year after the invasion the British government came up with a proposal that allowed Anguilla to

revert to colonial status. To avoid loss of face, some form of the old St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla Federation remained, though its role was left deliberately vague. Today, 25 years after the invasion, Anguilla is one of Britain's 14 remaining Crown Colonies (the preferred term is now 'dependent territories').

It would be nice to report that all is now well on Anguilla, but this would be incorrect. There is an argument about who should run the island. Anguilla now has its own parliament, the House of Assembly, with a membership of 12. Real power, however, rests with the Governor 'acting on the advice of' an executive council of six. The six include the Chief Minister, the post formerly held by Webster.

There is debate about what 'advice of' really means. Your reporter located Ronald Webster, who still lives on Anguilla. The man who was a victor in the clash of 25 years ago is now seriously discontent. 'I am not pleased at all. The freedom that we had 25 years ago is no longer there. The Governor now has too much power and we are trying to reverse that.'

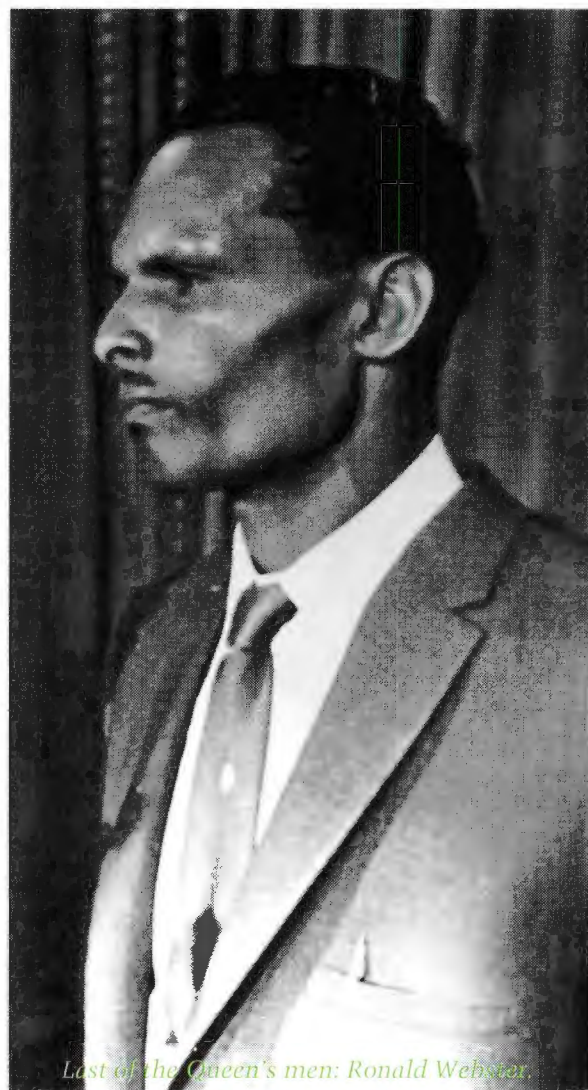
Webster also complained that Britain had acted unfairly towards Anguillans by failing to train local people for suitable administrative jobs. 'They [the British] have been using us'.

The Queen and Prince Philip recently visited Anguilla, and during the visit the Queen knighted the present Chief Minister, Emile Gumbs. Webster was not invited to meet her. The man who once championed the cause of colonialism is now depicted by many as a closet republican. He has formed a new political party, An-

guillans for Good Government, and, at 69, is planning a political comeback.

He remains a religious man, and believes he was treated unfairly by the Seventh Day Adventist Church, which says religion and politics do not mix. 'They told me I couldn't be involved in the Anguilla revolution and be at the same time an Adventist. They said I must make a choice, so I resigned. I had a duty to perform to my people, and I chose that.'

Religion has also affected his relations with the Governor, Alan

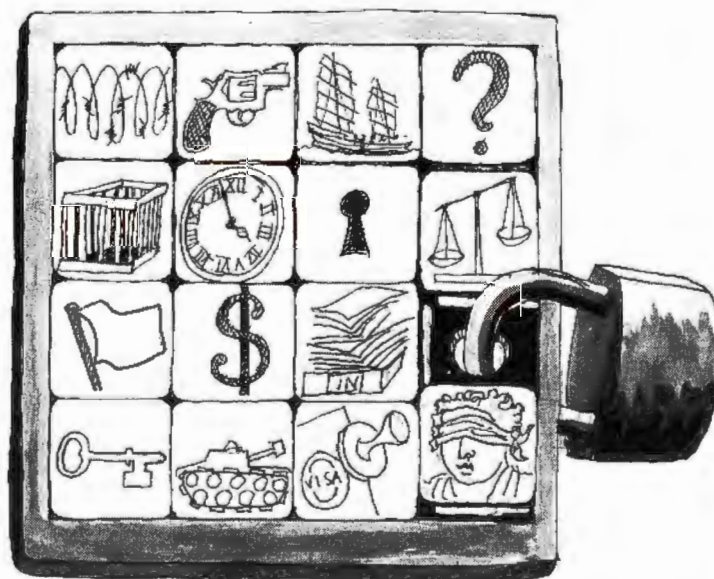


Last of the Queen's men: Ronald Webster.

Shave. Says Webster solemnly: 'He is a man who does not believe in God.' ■

Alan Gill is a former ABC broadcaster and religious affairs reporter for *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

The Urge to Control



IN MARCH 1994 the Joint Standing Committee on Migration published its report: *Asylum, Border Control and Detention*. The vast majority of the submissions to the Enquiry recommended that asylum seekers should no longer be detained while their cases were being heard. While the Committee hoped that recent changes to procedures would ensure more prompt decisions about refugee status, it recommended in effect that they should continue to be detained.

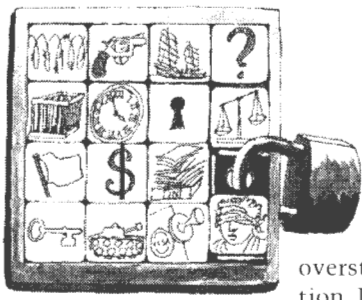
The Report merits examination. It illustrates clearly what happens when politicians or civil servants become preoccupied with control. This concern has dominated immigration policy and regulations in recent years, but it has also characterised other areas of government like taxation, police and prisons. The interest in control is natural at a time when advanced technologies have made more sophisticated systems of control available. But in the report this preoccupation has led to inhumane and impracticable conclusions, and it may well be that single-minded interest in control makes more generally for bad and inefficient policy.

The Report

The general scope of the Committee was to consider how people who arrive in Australia without a valid entry permit should be treated. This group includes both those who arrive without valid visas, and those with visas who apply for refugee status on arrival. In particular the Committee had to decide whether detention in custody is the best policy, and whether a bridging visa, which under new legislation will free from detention those who have overstayed their visa, should also be available to those who arrived without visa. Finally, it had to decide whether alternatives to detention, (such as the bonding system), would be applicable and enforceable in Australia.

The Argument

The central claim made by the Committee is that detention is a necessary component of Australian immigration policy. The keystone of Australian immigration policy is the requirement that all entrants should have valid visas which they have applied for and received off-shore. This requirement is controlled by systems



Were the humane goals of Australia's immigration policy sufficient to justify any means of control ... no objection could be raised against shooting unauthorised arrivals.

of passport control, surveillance of those who have overstayed their visas, and detention. Detention ensures that no one will enter the Australian community until they have been given valid documents, and confines those who will be deported.

For these reasons the Committee was persuaded by the submission of the Immigration Department that detention is necessary. It claimed further that detention is legally justifiable and that it has support within the community.

On these assumptions, it is not the practice of detention, but the length of time for which some people have been detained, that forms the problem to be addressed. The Committee therefore sought to shorten the length of detention. Accordingly it took comfort from recently more efficient processes of determining refugee status; it went outside its terms of reference to recommend that opportunities for litigation be curtailed, and it recommended that the Minister be given discretion to release people from detention in cases of special need.

Thus the argument and the recommendations of the Report rest on its initial assertion that the detention of all unauthorised arrivals is a necessary and appropriate element in ensuring the integrity of Australian immigration policy. It is preoccupied with the need to control.

Control

Control has an important and legitimate role in government. It has to do with ensuring the conditions which allow a clearly articulated policy to be administered efficiently. Without control, policy is ineffectual.

In this sense, control is blind. Its eyes are given by the policy which it implements. It has to do with the will to sustain a reasoned policy. Hence, we cannot discuss whether particular forms of control are appropriate or reasonable without also examining the policy to which they give effect.

But even the best of policies do not automatically justify all the forms of control devised to implement it. Were the humane goals of

Australia's immigration policy sufficient to justify any means of control, for example, no objection could be raised against shooting unauthorised arrivals. But although this might be an economical, efficient, and effective means of control, we would instinctively reject it. For we recognise that this particular means of control is inconsistent with the humanity of the policy which we have adopted.

IT FOLLOWS THAT MEASURES of control are reasonable only when they are broadly coherent with the values which animate policy. The Report on Detention ignores this crucial point. It moves quickly from asserting that Australian immigration policy is humane and needs to be controlled, to ask what forms of control are the most coherent and effective. Thus it assumes that the humane goals of policy guarantee that any efficient methods of control will also be reasonable and appropriate. Control is no longer seen as a means to preserve the values of immigration policy, but is seen as an end in itself. This ideology of control manifests itself in several ways which I shall now outline.

The Report and control.

An ideology of control manifests itself first in a narrowing of vision. When we are preoccupied with control and fail to reflect on the broader moral context within which it is exercised, we come to find increasingly obnoxious even the small areas which remain uncontrolled.

In the report this narrow preoccupation with effective control can be seen at several points. It is seen for example in the Committee's review of the Migration Reform Act, itself dominated by the desire for fool-proof control of immigration and refugee policy. The Report points out small anomalies, which might be barriers to effective control. It invariably corrects them by tightening the force of the legislation.

The unreflective way in which the Report considers the numbers of asylum seekers and of those who have disappeared into the community also indicates a narrow preoccupation with control. For if control is

set firmly within the context of a humane policy, it is axiomatic that punitive measures should be taken only if they are absolutely necessary. Numbers are significant because they reveal whether the situation is serious enough to warrant infringing on human dignity by imprisoning innocent people. But for the Committee, the fact that only a little more than a couple of thousand asylum seekers have arrived over four years and that the numbers who have disappeared into the community are also very small, is irrelevant. Any asylum seekers who arrive without visa threaten the conceptual neatness of the system of control.

The narrow preoccupation of the Committee with control is also shown strongly in its treatment of litigation by asylum seekers. The committee claimed that this was a major cause of the length of detention and of the cost borne by the Australian community. It therefore attended to ways of restricting access to the courts by asylum seekers.

In this perspective litigation is seen as a barrier to effective control, which is constituted by universal detention, quick decision about status, and quick deportation of those denied refugee status. Within a humane perspective we would first ask why there has been so much litigation. We might naturally suppose, while we awaited further evidence, that the number of lawyers willing to act *pro bono* might indicate something amiss in the way in which people were treated.

The Committee took no evidence on this point. It asserted without evidence that much litigation had been motivated by a desire to stay in Australia at any price. The heart of the argument is that the efficiency of control procedures is threatened by the length of detention. The length of detention, in turn, is largely due to ready access to judicial review. Therefore in the interests of efficient control, access to this review should itself be tightly controlled.

Secondly, when we are driven by the ideology of control, we will treat as less relevant the humanity of those who are controlled. They become the objects of national polity and not

subjects. Their human dignity becomes identified with the sum of their legal entitlements.

This instrumental attitude to human beings is a striking feature of the Report. It emerges most clearly in the Committee's treatment of the evidence that human beings are harmed by detention. The Report deals with this evidence only tangentially. In the first place, it weakens its force by asserting that there was public disquiet only about the length of detention and not about detention as a measure of control. Moreover, it is only in the chapter dealing with detention centres that the Committee records the evidence given about the harm done by detention. Thus it would appear that the evils of detention are caused only by the deficiencies of particular places of imprisonment. We are to presume that if only these are set right, detention will be harmless.

The impression that the human effects of detention are irrelevant to the committee's deliberations is confirmed by the crucial step of its argument for detention. The validity of the argument turns on the distinction between asylum seekers and other unauthorised arrivals. Critics of detention would argue that the differences between these groups mean that asylum seekers should not be detained. But the Committee does not examine the peculiar human experience and needs which underlie the distinction. Instead, it bases its argument for detaining asylum seekers solely on the need for effective control.

THIS DIMINISHED SENSE of human dignity can also be detected in the way in which the Report treats the law about asylum seekers. To justify its contention that detention is not illegal, it quotes at length a judgment that detention is not punitive when it is intended for administrative ends. While the argument of the Report is unexceptionable in legal terms, in the absence of any further discussion of the effects of detention, we are left to assume that reasonable asylum seekers would not experience detention as punitive, and that administrative ends would justify any form of detention. Human

dignity here is reduced to minimal legal entitlements.

In a revealing argument, the Committee supports detention by arguing that if they were released into the community, asylum seekers would have neither adequate means of support nor access to medical care. The Committee has moved now to take responsibility for asylum seekers. Because it has no responsibility to them, it does not enquire whether they would prefer freedom to security, still less whether the current denial of medical benefits and basic support to asylum seekers within the community is reasonable.

The Report therefore shows a pervasive lack of curiosity about the human dignity and experience of asylum seekers. This does not imply that the Committee members are callous, but only that they view asylum-seekers primarily as the objects of efficient control. Their humanity is simply irrelevant to the Enquiry.

Thirdly, when we are preoccupied with control, all questions become reduced to issues of power. As obstacles to a completely controlled world become more intolerable we demand that those responsible for maintaining control have unfettered power to remove all obstacles. This preoccupation with power can be seen in the two major recommendations of the report. The first is to limit access to the courts. This would diminish public scrutiny of the processes of control and judgment of them by standards of legality accepted within the community.

The other major recommendation is that a decision made to release asylum seekers after six months in detention should be at the minister's sole discretion. He is accountable to no-one should he decline to exercise his discretion, but in any decision to release an asylum seeker he is accountable to Parliament. In this recommendation, the power to maintain detention as an instrument of control is unfettered. Only the power to release from it is itself subject to control.

When control is seen as a goal of policy and not as a means to implement it, the logic of control ultimately turns against the values

which it was designed to protect. In totalitarian societies such conflicts are resolved by extending steadily the instruments of control. As a result they soon erode the human freedom, social responsibility and equality before the law which they were instituted to ensure.

In democratic societies the introduction of inhumane measures of control generally creates public disquiet. The measures necessary to make control completely effective, moreover, meet institutional obstacles. For the humane values on which regimes of control infringe are often written into constitutions or into judicial practice.

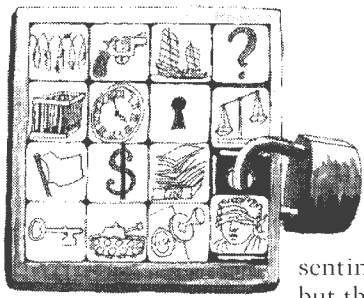
This unresolved dilemma makes the recommendations of the Committee unworkable. For the logic of the Report stipulates that the controllers should have unlimited power over the instruments of control, and particularly the power to detain indefinitely. To this end judicial review is to be limited and the minister is to have unreviewable discretion to deny release from detention.

In Australia, however, it is impossible totally to limit judicial review. Under the Australian constitution administrative decisions, including those which affect aliens on Australian soil, are reviewable. The Federal Court was established to take the burden of hearing such cases from the High Court. If access to the Federal Court is limited, therefore, the High Court will become the court of first appeal. This would have notable inconveniences.

The solution to this dilemma is obvious: to develop policy so that it embodies in a more precise way the humane values which are held to guide it, and then to align the processes of control more closely with these humane values. The alternative is continuing warfare between executive and judiciary from which no one will gain.

The recommendation to allow the minister unreviewable discretion to hold asylum-seekers in detention is also politically onerous. For the responsibility for the detention of each asylum seeker rests solely with the minister. As a result, because asylum seekers will be able to win release only if they persuade

It follows that measures of control are reasonable only when they are broadly coherent with the values which animate policy. The Report on Detention ignores this crucial point.



the minister of the merits of their cases, those representing them will have no option but through publicity and advocacy to put the minister under as much pressure as possible. Thus the relationships between the Government and the bodies which represent refugees will necessarily be adversarial in structure. This will damage the quality of advice available to the Minister and Department about immigration policy to the detriment both of asylum seekers and Australia's international reputation.

A Better Way

Having argued that the Committee was led by its pursuit of efficient control to make recommendations that are impracticable and politically damaging, I would like now to ask how it could better have gone about its task.

The first step would have been to attend carefully to the assumptions which underlay the argument of the majority of the submissions. This would have made it clear that public concern about the treatment of the Cambodians was not simply with the length of their detention but also with detention in itself.

While most submissions were prepared to allow asylum seekers to be detained for a few weeks to allow identification and prepare for their release into the Australian community, they claimed unequivocally that the detention of asylum seekers is not an acceptable instrument of immigration control. They recognised that this culture of control was responsible for the Cambodians' sufferings and the lack of due respect shown their human dignity. They were perturbed that the Government seemed to regard it as a lesser evil to detain a few people for four years than to release them into the community.

SECONDLY, THE COMMITTEE would have done well to ask more penetratingly why the Cambodian boatpeople have brought so many cases to court. The Report deals with the fact of litigation, but is content with superficial explanations for it.

These court cases do indeed provoke questions. We may ask what is

to be learned when so many firms and individual lawyers are willing to forego revenue in a time of recession, when a government more than once rushes through legislation to avoid an unfavorable decision in court, when in one case a court finds a minister wrong in declaring himself unable to consider cases on humanitarian grounds, and another judge severely criticises the conduct of a Prime Minister, a Minister of Immigration, a senior officer in the Department of Immigration and a Delegate of the department.

The conclusion which the asylum seekers and many of their supporters drew is that they had suffered unjustly at the hands of the Government, and that the courts alone offered them remedies. That conclusion is not infallible, but it is supported by evidence that the Committee would have done well to have considered carefully.

Secondly, the Committee would have done well to have been more critical of the Department's submission which argues that the case for detention is not grounded primarily in deterrence. The purpose is rather to safeguard the integrity of Australian immigration policy by proper controls. Control includes two elements: not allowing unauthorised entrants to enter the Australian community, and ensuring that they are available for questioning and for eventual removal.

The divorce consummated here between detention and deterrence is verbal only. For all controls are instituted precisely to deter, whether they be passport controls at airports, fences and turnstiles at football grounds, or detention. If there were no need to deter people from doing the wrong thing, there would be no controls. Some controls, however, are merely preventative, like passport controls for emigrants or turnstiles at which barrackers pay before entry. If you haven't passport or money you are merely turned away. Other controls are punitive—as for example it would be to imprison drunks during a football game. Their treatment deters others.

So, like passport controls, detention acts as a deterrent against seeking entry into Australia without val-

id entry permit. But unlike passport controls, it is manifestly a punitive deterrent. People imprisoned inevitably experience it as punitive. It cannot adequately be described as purely administrative in intention.

Given that detention beyond the short time necessary to establish identity and prepare for temporary entry into the Australian community is punitive, the central question finessed by the committee arises inescapably: is this form of control by punitive deterrence justifiable and reasonable?

TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION, the Committee would inevitably have been led to a deeper reflection on the claims which different groups of unauthorised arrivals make on Australia's humane immigration policy. Only then should it have gone on to ask what should be Australian policy towards them, and what forms of control would be reasonable and appropriate. Instead, the Committee began by accepting uncritically as given a system of control.

A proper treatment

Among the people who seek entry into Australia without valid documents, asylum seekers make a unique *prima facie* claim on Australia. For Australia has made a commitment to offer protection to those found to be refugees, and that claim should affect the treatment of all applicants for refugee status. The claim which asylum seekers make should be reflected both in government policy and in systems of control which give force to that policy.

First, the place of refugees within Australian immigration policy must be assessed thoroughly and distinguished from that of other immigrants. In the case of immigrants and tourists, the policy of admitting to the community only those with valid documentation is generally reasonable. It is also reasonable that those who try to enter Australia surreptitiously without compelling reason and those who overstay their visas should be liable to removal.

The measures of control used to implement this policy, however, should reflect the humane goals which inspire it. This needs to be

Once they have come to Australia asylum seekers should receive decisions about refugee status as quickly as is compatible with justice, so that they can get on with their lives either in Australia or in their own countries.

said, for the ideology of control has affected many aspects of migration policy. Some recent practice, indeed, seems quite inhumane. It is customary, for example, to draw up profiles of groups who regularly overstay their visas, and to use them secretly to deny visas to applicants in these categories. That said, however, it does not seem unreasonable or inhumane to detain unauthorised immigrants for a very short time immediately prior to deporting them.

The policy towards asylum seekers, on the other hand, must respect their precarious situation, which has made it unreasonable for them to apply beforehand for entrance to Australia. While it is reasonable to hold them briefly for health checks, to certify their identity, to allow initial interviews, and to ensure the proper conditions under which they live within the community, it is unreasonable to detain them routinely. It would be unreasonable, for example, to penalise them because they have not applied off-shore for refugee status or because they have not gone through the ordinary processes of immigration. The persecution which refugees fear in their own countries would prevent them from doing this.

Once they have come to Australia, asylum seekers should receive decisions about refugee status as quickly as is compatible with justice, so that they can get on with their lives either in Australia or in their own countries. The Committee was right to insist on this point. Furthermore, the process of refugee determination should be transparent and independent. The introduction of the Refugee Review Tribunal has certainly contributed to an impression of transparency and independence.

I would disagree with the Committee, however, in evaluating the place of judicial review. Where court cases are multiplied by the impecunious, we should assume that they feel aggrieved.

In such circumstances it becomes the more important that judicial review allow governmental malpractice to be revealed and corrected. Although the point which Barney Cooney made in his dissenting note was narrowly applied to the power of

the courts to release asylum seekers, it is more generally relevant to judicial review:

If in fact the judiciary is untrustworthy then this country is in a crisis which must be addressed immediately in a dramatic way. If it is not so, then its powers should not be limited on the basis that it is. In my view, the judiciary is trustworthy and should have jurisdiction to release people held in detention under the Migration Act.

One of the most difficult questions raised by the Committee concerned the material support which asylum seekers could expect to be given within the community. The Report assumed, however, that the current regime by which asylum seekers have been excluded from access to benefits or to medical care was reasonable.

If the government considers it reasonable to spend so much to support a regime of detention, it would appear even more reasonable and humane to offer community groups assistance to support asylum seekers. This area, however, needs more attention than was given it in the Report, which seemed unduly sceptical about the readiness and capacity of groups in the community to provide support.

DETENTION IS A PARTICULARLY UNREASONABLE form of control, because refugees are more damaged by it than are other groups of people. Those who have fled persecution are already more vulnerable, more suspicious of punitive measures of control, and so much more likely to be diminished by the dependence and deprivation of liberty entailed in detention. Hence a regime of detention is unjustifiable.

Those who support detention sometimes respond to this argument by saying that not all asylum seekers will be found to be refugees. It is therefore proper to detain asylum seekers until they are found to be refugees and so released, or deported as unauthorised entrants.

The objection is weak. It commits Australia to imprison refugees whom it has bound itself to protect,

and fails to show that why it is necessary to detain all asylum seekers. Apart from the unreasonable desire to have automatic and all-embracing systems of control, no such argument has been produced.

Those who support detention also argue that without this form of control many people would apply for asylum and then disappear into the community. In such circumstances the distinction advocated between asylum seekers and other immigrants would collapse in the face of public indignation.

The present measures of control, excluding detention, appear adequate to prevent this from happening. If asylum seekers were required to report regularly and could expect to receive decisions quickly, the figures given within the Report suggest that about three quarters would comply fully.

INDEED, THEIR HOPE of receiving a favourable decision depends on their doing so. There will, however, be asylum seekers whose background or behaviour suggests that their release would be gravely disadvantageous for the community.

It would be reasonable, then, to establish an independent board to whom the Department could appeal against release into the community. The onus would be on the Department to establish its case for limited detention.

These controls will not be foolproof, any more than controls over traffic or taxation will produce perfect compliance. But they should be adequate to meet the demands of the situation.

The alternative is a utopian ideal of perfect control, with the consequences we have seen. ■

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His dossier on the Cambodian refugees has appeared in *Eureka Street* in February and March 1993 and in April and September 1994.

When we are driven by the ideology of control, we will treat as less relevant the humanity of those who are controlled. They become the objects of national polity and not subjects. Their human dignity becomes identified with the sum of their legal entitlements.



BOOKS

JOHN BUTTON

Remembering the magic

Southern Sky, Western Oval, Martin Flanagan, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne 1994, ISBN 0869 143 31X RRP \$14.95 **Polly Farmer: A Biography,** Steve Hawke, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle 1994, ISBN 1863 680 926 RRP \$19.95

ON THE DAY Footscray beat Geelong at the Western Oval in round 17 of this year's competition, I stood in the crowd next to some Footscray supporters; three young men in their 20s. They were looking forward to watching Ablett, and to seeing Doug Hawkins achieve a record number of games for their club. One made a comment about the Western Oval's old-fashioned scoreboard. There should be, he said, an electronic scoreboard. His mate replied 'An electronic scoreboard in the Western suburbs? You'd have to be joking!'

Footscray supporters have a sense of difference. It is understandable. Their club is the only one in the Western suburbs. It's a battlers' club, with strong and proud traditions that probably reflect what other clubs were like when suburbs like Richmond, Fitzroy and Collingwood were predominantly working class.

In 1993 Martin Flanagan spent a year studying the Footscray club and has now produced a fascinating book *Southern Sky, Western Oval*, which could have been subtitled 'The Anatomy of a Football Club', Flanagan loves football. He is a searcher for the essence, the soul, of the game. I'm glad he chose Footscray as the club to write about. It's a club which, as much as any, nurtures the history and soul of football. It hasn't been taken over by tycoons. It's resisted the attempts of the AFL to turn foot-

Graham 'Polly' Farmer.

Photo: Courtesy of The Age

ball into an élitist business. It respects its loyal followers, and they in turn respect it.

Flanagan's book refers to Footscray's most important games in 1993, but is structured around the main personalities of the club. The coach, Terry Wheeler, the president, the captain and vice-captain, some key players, and Footscray's legendary heroes Charlie Sutton and Ted Whitten, are the *dramatis personae* through which the fears, the excitement, the passions and the strategies of running a football club are played out. They are ably supported by a cast of less well-known actors, a band of loyal followers who, over the years, have watched the stars come and go. Flanagan gets inside his characters, helping the reader to understand what it's like to lose a close game, to suffer an injury, to be dropped from the team, and sometimes to win with style and courage.

It is, however, more than a book about the Footscray club. It's a book in which Flanagan diverges into the history of the game, the players and performances of other clubs, the magic moments, the competing philosophies surrounding football's future, and the interactions that make football 'part of the fabric of people's lives'. He does it well. He loves 'the individual drama of the game'.

Steve Hawke has written a different sort of book; a biography of Polly Farmer, one of the acknowledged all-time 'greats'. Farmer played his football in an era when most of the clubs were more like the Footscray of today: less wealthy, and more dependent on loyalty and dedication than on money. 'From a football point of view,' Farmer is quoted as saying, 'I was born 20 years too early.' The game, he argued, was 'entering an era of all-out professionalism' in which players of his talent and success could expect to finish their careers as wealthy men.

Farmer was, however, a 'professional' in a different sense of the word. From an early age he dedicated himself to studying the game and improving his skills and techniques. It was a practice that remained with him through 23 seasons of football in Perth and at Geelong, leading to Ted Whitten's judgment that he be-

came 'the player who caused more concern to more players and coaches than any player I have ever known'.

The concern emanated not only from Farmer's own great physical skills, but from his capacity to bring other players into the game and to turn the progress of a match with his own touch of inspiration and leadership. His unique ruck play, palming the ball with deadly accuracy to a waiting rover, and his skilled use of handball, changed the style and nature of football. He was one of the last great exponents of the drop kick. He set new and different standards of excellence and technique, and became a football legend.

Steve Hawke's book is well researched and well written, in a classical biographical manner. Beginning with a description of young Graham Farmer's early life in a hostel for orphan children, it follows his career into football and upwards to his period of dominance as a player, and his years as a coach.

Martin Flanagan quotes Brent Crosswell as saying that footballers and Aborigines had something in common: 'people who knew nothing about them thought they were stupid'. Farmer is an Aboriginal and was a footballer. He is not stupid. Indeed, more than almost any other player he is remembered for his 'intellectual' contribution to football, and the creative way in which he enhanced the skills content of the game. His Aboriginality attracted its share of taunts, but not to the extent that provoked Nicky Winmar at a Collingwood game in 1993. Farmer seems to have managed the problem easily, within the framework of his overriding commitment to football.

IN 1994, HOWEVER, he is an enthusiastic protagonist of the Polly Farmer Foundation, established to provide young Aborigines with the opportunities to develop their skills in sport and academic life. It is a pity that this biography doesn't examine the extent to which Farmer's career influenced the commitment and ambition of a generation of top Aboriginal footballers who have come after him. One is left to guess that his influence has been significant,

and the consequences profound in terms of Aboriginal dignity and self-esteem.

When I left the Western Oval on the day of the Geelong-Footscray match I was disappointed about the result. But I did think that if your team had to lose, it's probably less upsetting to lose to Footscray than any other team. Somehow there's less hype at Footscray. They like winning, but they understand losing, and they don't rub your nose in it, like supporters of some wealthier and more fashionable clubs. Perhaps Footscray players are a bit like the professionals in the way players in Polly Farmer's era had to be: playing from commitment to the game and loyalty to a cause.

Martin Flanagan writes about the character of teams and the nature of clubs. Steve Hawke's book is about the magic and integrity that an individual can bring to the saga of football. There is a danger that some clubs are under threat from the huge costs associated with 'all-out professionalism' and football as a TV extravaganza.

Both books are salutary reminders of the things that are best about Australian football, enabling it to survive as a unique code for well over a century. Martin Flanagan has apprehensions about the future. He quotes Phil Cleary on the danger to Australian football, 'You keep changing things, and then one day you find you've changed one thing too many and the magic's gone'. It's the magic that the crowds turn out to see, and the Polly Farmers who inspire another generation of footballers. It's the clubs that provide the glue that holds it all together.

These are the lessons of history. It will be a tragedy if the 'change makers' ignore them. ■

John N. Button is the former Industry Minister and ALP Senate leader.

More than almost any other player, Farmer is remembered for the creative way in which he enhanced the skills content of the game.

On the road again

True North, Jill Ker Conway, Hutchinson,
London 1994 ISBN 0 09 17475 1 RRP \$29.95

IF WE ARE PREPARED to accept the *Oxford Companion to English Literature's* assertion that, in the late 20th century, a picaresque novel is one that describes 'the adventures of a lively and resourceful hero on a journey' then *True North*, the second volume of Jill Ker Conway's autobiography, fits the bill. Her journeys and adventures might be as much intellectual as physical but they clearly demanded a resourcefulness every bit as determined as any displayed by *Moll Flanders* or *Tom Jones*. Indeed, she seems to have negotiated those travels and travails with the same apparent insouciance as they did, emerging stronger as a person, with sense of humour and perspective intact.

All the more astonishing is the fact that she achieved all she did despite the fact that, even though she was a highly intelligent student and would-be scholar, she met—in Australia, the United States and Canada during the 1960s and '70s—almost unremitting discrimination because of her sex. Far from being defeated by this, however, she appears to have been made stronger and more determined by the obstacles put in her way.

At least part of this strength of character and persistence stemmed from the belief in herself she had developed in childhood despite, or perhaps as a result of, the conflict-ridden relationship she had with her tyrannical mother—a relationship central to *The Road from Coorain* and periodically referred to in this book. Surprisingly little bitterness about any of this is evident in *True North*, although there is a strong and justified exasperation at the stupidity of a society that deliberately excludes the talents and experiences of women from meaningful academic, political, social and economic life,

except in the most superficial way.

Instead, the author simply catalogues the manner in which she and her four female housemates were treated by parents, men, society and the law in their various cultures. All this is overlaid with wry amusement at the fact that, in contrast to the way they were dealt with because they were females, the women—Shiite Muslim, New England Congregationalist, devout Catholic and cheerful Jew—made up a mini-hotbed of intellectual, racial and religious tolerance. And they needed this mutual support. In a world where women could not be resident tutors in the Harvard Houses, and where male thesis directors saw every woman (but not any man) who contemplated marriage and a PhD as a 'frivolous' person 'who would never make a committed scientist', they bolstered each others' egos and encouraged each others' ambitions. The house they lived in became a world in which the women shared their successes and sorrows and took intense pleasure in 'each other's company and the enchantment of sharing a collective life of the mind.'

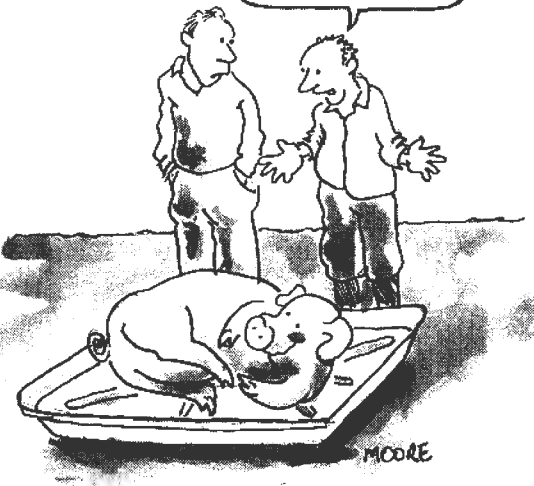
Neat aphorisms puncture the text. Harvard men are 'walking volcanoes ... giving off constant puffs of talk' while the Radford women were 'less inclined to bubble over, but more likely to have read the text.' Her delight, then and now, in the intellectual drama going on about her during her time at Harvard, is

very evident: 'I'd never been so happy ... people of every age resonated to ideas, cared about them, and thought it important to talk about them, and with me.'

As I sat reading these words, I recalled the noisy intensity with which a tutorial group of Women's Studies PhD students, from all points of the globe, had sat in a cafe opposite the University of Adelaide the previous day engaged in a spirited discussion on the role of women in late 20th century Australian society. And how I empathised, too, with her experience of the cavalier and patronising attitude of male doctors to her painful and debilitating gynaecological problems. Things haven't changed much.

True North is not just the story of Jill Ker Conway's 'getting of wisdom'. It is also a delightfully personalised account of the places she travelled to in the years it took to complete her thesis. Harvard, Toronto, New York, Groton, Cambridge, Paris and Rome are all described by someone whose eyes saw as much of the distant past as they did of the immediate present. She evokes, with an enviable economy of words, an Ontario made up in part of satellite suburbs with 'tract housing and vast apartment buildings' but also of a 'more genteel city' where 'the efficient fish merchant still delivered the most modest orders'. It was the antithesis of the 'gentle Cotswold

WE FIND THAT GIVING THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE LYING IN A POLYSTYRENE TRAY EASES THEIR SLAUGHTER ANXIETY!



hills, grey stone villages, and quiet rivers', 'the gardens and the glorious buildings' of the English countryside she had earlier experienced.

Scattered through the text are reminders that in Australia, Canada, Britain, the United States and Europe, women and girls were still denied much of the fun and many of the opportunities men and boys took for granted. Whether it was a tiny tot's father taking her brother but not her 'to the hockey rink where the best coaches offered instruction' or 'the female rule of waiting to be asked (out)', or the fact that even prize-winning female students could not, on graduation, go on to be instructors at Harvard as their male colleagues did, women's options in the '60s and '70s were limited in a way that men's were not.

Jill Ker Conway is an astute judge

of character—including her own—noting failings and foibles as well as more positive attributes with a generally generous spirit and wry humour. The spectres of her childhood, familiar to readers of *The Road from Coorain*, linger on, but by the end of *True North* I had the feeling that she had got them pretty much under control. They would always be there, of course, but, neutralised to a great extent by the happiness she had found in her marriage to John Conway (who had his own demons), they were no longer going to impede, much less dominate, her progress through life. ■

Janine Haines, a former senator and leader of the Australian Democrats, is researching a PhD in Women's Studies at the University of Adelaide.

BOOKS: 3

LEONIE PURCIVAL

Behold the woman

Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective, edited by Catherine Mowry LaCugna, Harper-Collins, San Francisco, 1993. ISBN 0060649356 RRP \$29.95

CATHERINE MOWRY LACUGNA was in Australia for, among other things, the 6th International Feminist Book Fair. But she is very clear that she is *not* a feminist theologian. She repeats this claim in the introduction to her new book *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, which she says 'is *not* a book about feminism'. LaCugna says that she is simply a Christian theologian, whose task is an investigation into tradition, and an attempt to discover the riches and wealth of Christian tradition in such a way that insights from the past can be retrieved and made to shed light on current issues and problems. This may seem a little like hairsplitting, but it is an important point: she is firmly staking a claim for the middle ground, refusing to allow her 'theology from a new perspective' to be dismissed as a minority interest and so thrust to one side.

That bold and thoughtful ap-

proach characterises this exceptionally clear book. LaCugna brings together a range of articles from some famous names, some of whom might not be as hesitant as LaCugna about being identified as 'feminist theologians': Anne E. Carr, Sandra Schneiders and Elizabeth Johnson. LaCugna has a gift for choosing impressive contributors. I'm only sorry this collection was not available when I was labouring through some of my units of theology. The essays give a succinct and critical summary of traditional teachings on topics like the Trinity, Christology, the church, the sacraments, moral theology and anthropology. And one does not have to merely pretend to understand, as is sometimes the case when one is reading Rahner. Most of the collection is written in a matter-of-fact style which assumes that the reader is intelligent but not necessarily experienced—ideal for those just paddling around the edges of theology.

Methodology is one of the concerns of *Freeing Theology*. LaCugna says that when you look at the Christian doctrine of God (as she has done specifically in her earlier *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* [1991]) you need inevitably to look at the nature of theology itself, since you have to ask what making statements about 'God' means in the first place, and that is a methodological question.

Anne E. Carr's chapter in *Freeing Theology* picks up this concern and, again, is a good treatment not only of feminist concerns, but of general theological method. She offers a critique of tradition that is not estranged from it. Carr also considers the question of what is meant by 'experience'—a question that does not always get careful consideration from so-called 'contextual' theologies. Importantly, she stresses that what is being talked about is the *interpreted experience* of women, i.e. not merely subjective or individual accounts but written and enacted sources. The emphasis on women's experience is a counter to what Carr calls a history of exclusion—the caricaturing or stereotyping of women in Christian tradition.

LaCugna claims that most Christian feminist theologians and advocates have been Catholic, because the Catholic Church, by forbidding women's ordination, has forced the hundreds of theologically trained Catholic women into academic theology rather than presbyteral ministry; further, the sexism of the tradition, with its predominantly masculine metaphors for God, invites the sharpest critique.

No self-respecting Protestant theologian would accept this view without demur, and in a recent interview LaCugna did agree that women across denominations are grappling with very similar issues. But she argues that there are distinctive habits of mind that belong to different denominations. She claims that the Catholic instinct is always to search out the tradition, and that could include the mystical tradition as well as the dogmatic tradition.

Another habit of mind she associates with Catholic theologians has to do with metaphysics. She consid-

ers that Catholics have a highly developed speculative tradition, and a tendency to want to draw on it in a way that she doesn't find to be the case for Protestant theologians. She argues that the nationalist commitments of Orthodox theologians often shape their theology in a specific and different way again. These are interesting observations, but LaCugna's categories seem a little neat, even myopic. If Protestantism lacked a dogmatic tradition we would not have had the Reformation in the first place.

Despite the usefulness and thoroughness of *Freeing Theology*, LaCugna's approach displays the weaknesses common to attempts to formulate contextual theologies within an academic framework. The vitality of other theologies happy to call themselves feminist is missing from this collection. It is a teacherly book which touches on the questions of women's oppression and struggle, and it says that it is interested in the question of engaged theology as against speculative theology. But it is revealing that, when asked about the points of engagement within her own theology, LaCugna identifies them as being in the liturgy, which she sees as another special Catholic commitment. But the truth is that any Christian should be able to make this claim.

LaCugna is slightly more specific—she sees that much of what she does is a crossover with liturgical theology, and that since her stated purpose is not to be a pastoral theologian she doesn't concentrate on those concerns. However, given that a political context can't be avoided when considering women's issues both inside and outside the church, one wonders whether this is quite enough. Perhaps mine is an excessively idealistic expectation, but it would be refreshing and inspiring if a leading woman theologian (feminist or otherwise), the recipient of prestigious awards and a 'frequent public lecturer on the American speaking circuit' were something more than a highly competent member of the academy that is itself under critique. ■

Leonie Purcival is a postgraduate theological student and a Uniting Church ordinand.



The experience of innocence

Don't you sing! Memories of a Catholic Boyhood, Dick Hughes, Kangaroo Press 1994. ISBN 0864176104 RRP \$19.95

DICK HUGHES IS A LEGEND, one of Australia's great jazz pianists. This, his second book, is a touching and completely authentic account of growing up in Melbourne suburbia in the late twenties and thereafter, as a member of a tightly knit Catholic family. The two poles between which he moves are his grandmother, who brought him up, (his mother had died very early on,) and his beloved, normally absent father, who seemed her very opposite. The father, another Richard Hughes, was the famed war correspondent, who mixed with the great. He also worked with Anglo-American intelligence during the

Cold War—targeting the Russians.

Trying to balance the demanding, claustrophobic world of his puritanical, life-denying Catholic grandmother with that of a free-thinking insouciant father, substantially occupied young Richard's psychic existence. This conflict, for boys, was not uncommon in those pre-liberation days.

Young Richard's father left the Church at 14 when his mother told him the Church barred the works of H. G. Wells, whom he admired. He returned to the faith only on his death bed, with the help of his son, who had kept the Faith.

The tyranny, small-mindedness and suffocating tedium of that earlier Australian world, and the crippling effects upon sensitive enquiring children can now only be imagined—one had to live through it. I endured the Protestant version of it—and it could be very nearly as damaging. The free-thinking, selfish father was idolised as an heroic rebel; the mother-figure was a frustrated, controlling dogmatist.

Of course, both parents had been locked into false positions. Sex—or rather its denial—was, it sometimes seemed, the primary obsession of the female custodian—with all the prurient fascination and ambivalence that goes along with this. The author has some cogent and poignant things to say about this. The males escaped to the company of their mates—their denial.

YOUNG RICHARD WAS KEPT away from girls, from neighbours, from dancing, from his preferred tastes in books; vetoed in his attempts to explore the world of music, loaded with guilt for everything that went wrong in his grandmother's daily life. And he was obliged to learn to bend to the narrowness and the uninspiring rigour of what was Catholic education. He escaped into fantasy, meanwhile yearning for his father's visitors from Sydney. Young Hughes was, and is, very proud of his father.

Hughes Snr had his share of troubles. His brief marriage was unhappy; his wife died suddenly, leaving him with a little child. Journalistic life made the role of caring parent a very episodic affair. Obviously a man of great gifts, his own father had taken him out of school at 14. No reason. Fathers did that sort of thing to us—regularly. Hughes Snr pursued the familiar escape route of the bon viveur, bon vivant, brilliant conversationalist, and wanderer.

Hopeless at sport, and an isolate, young Dick Hughes depended very much on local radio, especially their wonderful serials. *The Shadow of Fu Manchu*, based on Sax Rohmer's stories was his obsession in 1939 and 1940. It was mine. He had a particular crush on a slave girl—Egyptian—called Karamaneh. So did I. He offers this description of Karamaneh. 'She

threw open her cloak, and it is a literal fact that I rubbed my eyes, half believing that I dreamed, for beneath she was arrayed in gossamer silk which more than indicated the perfect lines of her perfect shape, wore a jewelled girdle and barbaric ornaments ...'

The Chinese Nationalist Government persuaded Hollywood in 1932 not to make any more Fu Manchu films. Racist they said. But enough of this High Culture. Young Dick had to grow up, in the end. The War came, followed by the infantile paralysis epidemic, which affected 2000 Melburnians in a population of just over a million people.

Dick, who'd nourished a long affair with trains, especially railway engines, tired of solitary impersonations of steam engines, wound down his weekend suburban train-tripping with Grand Pop, and moved inexorably towards jazz and girls. But dancing was to remain a lost cause.

Father came to and fro. Senior, who always called his son 'Mug,' became more and more famous in the journalistic world with each year. The males grew closer as the son approached manhood, and the father mellowed. Junior stopped praying that his father would find Jesus again, but still hoped he might. His Dad remarried at last—a Jewish lady—and spent more time in Asia. Finally his father fell mortally ill. During this illness, Hughes Snr received his last Communion. He shared the host with his son. A few weeks later Senior died.

ONE STRANGER PIECE of intelligence, as the author calls it. His father had—'thanks solely to the intervention of well-meaning, but ill-informed and panicky Hong Kong friends and advisers'—cut his son out of his will. Strange indeed. Like sending your clever son out to work at 14.

Looking into this strange pre-War fishbowl, the split between the Catholic and Protestant parts of Australia ran like an ugly fault line through the whole society. We knew little about Catholics—they had their own family life, their church, their schools, their legends of British rule in Ireland, their resentments at the Wasp

monopoly of power; and the Protestant hijacking of patriotism. The Irish were *terra incognita* to many of us non-Catholics. This split ran on into the public service workplace—where the Masons and Catholics set the agenda and carved up the jobs.

Those of us who belonged to neither found themselves isolated. Which is why World War II and the coming of the Americans was such a liberation. At last something we could unite upon.

MANY IRISH HAVE BEEN paying back the English for all this contumely ever since—and I can understand them. But this is a way of continuing the old conflict in a different form—nowadays via the Republic. And the rush to the Right by many Catholics during Cold War was not, alas, wholly a matter of religious piety, nor perception of the evils of Communism; not even a grab for power in the ALP.

It was a way of demonstrating one's patriotism, and joining, or re-joining, the mainstream of Australian political society. This because the Irish, along with the Labor Party, had been stigmatised—pretty successfully—as suspect on patriotism, as being, even, not quite Australian (i.e. British).

But the cure, of lining up with the detested Wasp Conservatives and joining the Cold War McCarthyite push, was worse than the disease, which had been steadily abating. We who belonged to neither camp could only look on with despair, as we are doing again. Investment in conflict and misunderstanding seems the Australian way of life.

This story carries up to Dick Hughes' 18th year. His stoical, relaxed way of describing conditions of utter loneliness, of living in a cold, manipulative world of adults, with its contrasting flavours of rejection and affection, of relentless pressure to excel, to win, indicates a remarkable maturity, and joy for life. I await the next stage of his odyssey—the diary of a happy survivor. ■

Max Teichmann is a Melbourne writer and reviewer.

*Photo left:
Dick Hughes
on his first birthday,
with his mother.*

The war we'd rather forget

DISTURBING THE WAR at first sight seems an odd title for a book about Vietnam. It is not until the last page that its provenance emerges. Ammon Hennacy, an American peace activist, was challenged by a police officer during an anti-war picket to explain why he was disturbing the peace. 'I'm not disturbing the peace,' Hennacy said, 'I'm disturbing the war.'

Disturbing the War, sub-titled *Melbourne Catholics and Vietnam*, is about the people in Melbourne who disturbed the war and those who promoted it.

In lesser hands than those of author Val Noone, it could have become tritely parochial. It is illuminatingly global—Melbourne could be New York, London, Toronto, Auckland—any setting where the Vietnam war divided the community.

The forces of propaganda which gave religious justification to the war were the same everywhere—only the personnel were different. New York had Cardinal Spellman ('May my country be always right, but right or wrong, my country.').

Melbourne had B. A. Santamaria, a man of such persuasiveness that he was manifestly the primary authority on what most Australian bishops thought on almost any matter of national or international importance at that time.

He developed seemingly compelling and profoundly simple theories about the nature of the communist threat to Australia from within and without. He convinced most of the bishops that the war was about the survival of Christianity—and

DIGGERS

"How we got out alive I'll never know," said Sergeant Robert Buick, of Brisbane.

"I've never seen anything like it in my life."

The fighting erupted as Deltas company moved through the rubber plantation on a routine patrol.

Suddenly the guerrillas opened up from all sides with mortars, recoilless rifles, and machine guns.

For three hours, the Aussies battled fiercely but were losing until Able Company, mounted in armoured personnel carriers, broke through to them.

"If the armoured personnel carriers hadn't arrived we would have had it," said Major Harry Smith, of Brisbane, Delta Company's commander.



Lance-Corporal Jack Jewry

OLDIER WHO WENT

Disturbing the War—Melbourne Catholics and Vietnam, Val Noone, Spectrum Publications, Melbourne, 1993. ISBN 0 86 786127 4. RRP \$29.95

particularly Catholic Christianity—in Asia and Australia.

Ammon Hennacy provides a deeper link for this book than just the title. He was closely associated with the New York *Catholic Worker*—a monthly pacifist paper founded in the 1930s by the late Dorothy Day and a peasant philosopher of French background, Peter Maurin.

The Catholic Worker was—and remains—not so much a journal of news and opinion as the reflections of a group of people about their own lives as peace and social justice activist—their support for the poor through the founding of Houses of Hospitality, their opposition to war through refusal to pay defence taxes, their support for exploited farm workers.

Their example provided a model for the life of Val Noone and his wife Mary and their family—living in the inner Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy. Noone, a Melbourne diocesan priest for 10 years, is now a lecturer at the Victoria University of Technology. He and Mary, with friends, once ran a House of Hospitality in Fitzroy. Dorothy Day stayed with them.

The Vietnam war was, for most people who lived through the times, a defining experience—and, for many, also a refining experience. It defined attitudes to peace and war, to patriotism, to the limits of authority of governments and churches when pronouncing on the rightness or morality of war.

It was a refining experience, too, because many people who were initially inclined to support the war in time modified or totally reversed their views. There was some movement in the other direction as well—but the comparison is between a torrent and a trickle.

Noone has a sympathetic understanding of both viewpoints. He came from a pro-Santamaria family. As the war grew on the Western consciousness through the late fifties and early sixties,

NOONE WAS A STUDENT for the priesthood in Melbourne. That exposed him and his fellow students to the Santamaria view of the war as a crusade for Christendom. It seemed to make sense. Like most Catholics, he was predisposed to the view that the Church would not condone lies.

Noone's book is unashamedly partisan—a partisanship born of half

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page 2

a lifetime of trying to get somewhere near the truth of things—yet painfully fair to those who disagree. It is condensed from his doctoral thesis which was sub-titled provocatively 'A Participant's Study of Peace Work in a Pro-war Church.'

Noone came only gradually to the view that the Australian role in the Vietnam war was a 'social sin based on lies'. This review is written by one who experienced a similar emerging opposition and whose small role in mobilising Cath

olic questioning of the war is mentioned in the book.

I WRITE NOW BECAUSE, many months after the publication of this meticulously researched and finely written book, little note has been taken of it in the mainstream media. There have been many histories of the war and books of personal experience, but little scholarly analysis of why Australia was there.

Like the Japanese un-remembering World War 2, are we cultivating a national amnesia about the Vietnam war because, in retrospect, most Australians regret it?

Noone's book is a unique social study—an immensely valuable source book for students pondering why nations go to war. It draws on world-wide influences—be they strategic analyses such as the domino theory, or charismatic propagandists such as the US medical worker Dr Tom Dooley—which were used to create a climate of crusade of good against evil.

The book casts the Australian Catholic Church as a pro-war institution which demonised the enemy and abandoned the distinction between God and Caesar throughout the Vietnam war.

It also accuses B. A. Santamaria and his organisation the National Civic Council of falsifying the nature and facts of the war to justify an anti-communist position.

The book's cover tells much about the pro-war climate which was carefully cultivated in Melbourne Catholicism from the earliest stages of the build-up to full-scale war. It shows a photograph, taken in 1957, of Archbishop Mannix at his residence 'Raheen', with prominent Vic-

torian clergy and Santamaria welcoming the President of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, a Catholic in a largely Buddhist community and almost completely lacking in popular support.

Even the Melbourne *Catholic Worker*, which was later to become a vital outlet for Catholic dissent about the war, praised Diem as 'a great Asian'—an encomium demonstrating how little Australians knew or cared about Vietnam's recent history.

'By propaganda,' Noone writes with controlled anger, 'a population was prepared for a war they knew little about.'

Jesus and the prophets walk through the pages of Noone's book, imbuing even its strongest criticisms with a charitable attempt to see how so many came to an opposite view.

His conclusion is local but universal: 'If rank-and-file Melbourne Catholics can break out of a strait-jacket of lies, so can others.'

His message is hope: 'Hope means, among other things, affirming that newness is possible, that war and destruction is not inevitable while people can contemplate the possibilities.' ■

Paul Ormonde is a Melbourne writer. He was founder of the Pax peace movement in the 1960s and was a

member of the editorial board of the *Catholic Worker* from 1959 until its last edition in 1976.

Disturbing the War is available through leading mainstream and religious bookshops and Readings, in Carlton, Melbourne. Also available by post on application to Spectrum Publications, P.O. Box 75, Richmond 3121, Victoria, with cheque for \$29.95 (includes postage).

Talking Points

The Grove

'The Grove' is a non-profit women's centre in Melbourne's northern suburbs. About 500 women use its library, counselling facilities and courses, or take part in lunches and dinners, retreats and worship sessions. However, the Sisters of Mercy, who have provided accommodation and support since the centre began in 1991, cannot guarantee space beyond next year. The management committee is urgently seeking alternative sponsors and, especially, alternative accommodation.

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It's hard to keep a good myth down

EUREKA STREET TRIED to contribute its mite to the long-awaited, joint-authored, Evatt Foundation-sponsored centenary biography of Australia's most enigmatic politician. Readers may recall that in the August-October 1992 issues, three articles were published on sportsman-entrepreneur-political fixer-Catholic philanthropist John Wren, after the discovery of a cache of letters. Among them were 10 by H. V. Evatt to Wren requesting political favours and revealing a lengthy inter-family friendship.

No hint of this relationship seems to have surfaced in the Evatt archives or family memory, not even from Mrs 'Mas' Evatt, who seems to have known the Wrens quite well. I could only conclude some suppression followed the publication of Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory* (1950), not to mention the Labor Split of 1954-5.

One of the co-biographers has visited me to authenticate the newly discovered correspondence, which surely provides some astonishing insights into Evatt's politicking and, I would think naïveté, but they are not what adulators want to see. This is especially so, as the correspondence is not as unfavourable to the allegedly sleazy Wren as it is to the allegedly principled Evatt. So it has been difficult not to use Buckley's treatment of these letters as the first yardstick for the thoroughness of this biography.

Although Buckley says that the letters call for 'frank comment', nothing of an inter-family connection between the Evatts and the Wrens is even suggested. The stereotype of Wren is trotted out *de rigueur* and, we are told gratuitously and irrelevantly, that 'a cynic would say that Wren aimed to buy his way into heaven through his close association with Archbishop Mannix'. No doubt the late Frank Hardy would have said that, but scholars do not have to be so fleering or simple-minded. Buckley excuses the associ-

Doc Evatt: Patriot, Internationalist, Fighter and Scholar, Ken Buckley, Barbara Dale and Wayne Reynolds, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne 1994, ISBN 0 582 80719 0, RRP \$49.95. **'Red Ted', The Life of E.G. Theodore**, Ross Fitzgerald, University of Qld Press, St Lucia, 1994, ISBN 0 7022 2649, RRP \$24.95

ation with Wren because Evatt lacked a 'traditional' (e.g. trade union) base in the ALP and, anyway (using a *tu quoque*) 'Arthur Calwell (also?) admired Wren'. But we are not told why. The matter just hangs there, making Calwell look rather silly. But then he was a Catholic too, no doubt looking for a devious route to heaven.

Only two of the 10 letters are considered. In one, Evatt asks for Wren's support in contesting the Deputy Prime Ministership in October 1946. According to Buckley 'it is rather surprising that he won' but again we are not told why. In fact, in view of Evatt's intellectual eminence in the party and the quality of the opposition (Eddie Ward came second), it is not surprising at all. Evatt had been worried that he came from the same state as Prime Minister Chifley, but then, so did Ward.

Buckley goes on to say that it is 'unlikely' that Wren gave any assistance because of what appears in the second letter (actually a cable) they choose to cite. In it Evatt knocks back Wren's request, on behalf of Archbishops Mannix and Duhig, that Australia oppose the exclusion of Franco's Spain from the UN. This inference, that Wren was involved in petty payback, is utterly unwarranted. That Wren did not have that sort of influence is not considered at all.

The first letter cited is footnoted with an adequate attribution; the second is not footnoted at all. This is not a matter of pedantry, because a copy of Evatt's cable (from New York) ought to exist somewhere. If it is not in the Evatt archives, some thought

could be given to their condition. Buckley *et al* have fudged issues raised by the Wren cache.

Irrespective of this Buckley *et al* disappoint, although the book is best of the three—not four, as the foreword says—full-length biographies' of Evatt so far. It is far from being comprehensive: an assessment of Evatt's work as a jurist is to come out as a separate monograph. In short, the biography is too short to be, as Neville Wran said at the launching, 'definitive.' If Alan Martin's *Menzies*, a relatively straightforward subject, needs two volumes, so does Evatt's multi-faceted career. Some sections are scrappy. Where Kylie Tennant's hagiograph (1970) gave several pages to Evatt's defence of Irish envoys, O'Flanagan and O'Kelly, against deportation in 1923, they do not get a mention here.

Alan Dalziel's memoir (not a 'full-length biography'), *Evatt The Enigma* (1967), has insights that could have been explored. Dalziel, who was Evatt's aide for 20 years, sharply observes how Evatt had 'an early commitment to the Groupers and the 'Movement' and how, in 1949, those who later became recalcitrants in Victoria 'had Evatt's confidence, uneasy though it was'.

BUCKLEY, HOWEVER, praises Evatt's 'principled' denunciation of the Groupers in 1954 and thinks the Split was unavoidable because Evatt 'fundamentally ... was concerned about the integrity of the ALP'. That was an issue, certainly, but was it so simple? Evatt's skin, after his Petrov histrionics, was on the line too. Dalziel thought 'the showdown finally came because (Evatt) tarried too long in making a decision which way the Labor Party should go.' No attempt is made to analyse why NSW Catholic Laborites mainly stuck to Labor, and comments about Catholics are facile.

None of this detracts from the praise given to Evatt for 'his finest

hour', the defeat of the anti-Communist referendum in 1951. From this distance one can marvel that, but for this highly neurotic leader, the majority of Australians would have voted in favour of a sneak society. Reynolds also makes coherent sense of Evatt's far-from-radical foreign policy as Alan Renouf in *Let Justice Be Done* (1983) and W.J. Hudson (e.g. in *The Monthly Record* April 1991) have done before him. Evatt thoroughly deserved his presidency of the United Nations in 1948. Yet we are little closer to unravelling the 'enigma' even though Buckley suggests Evatt could have been a long-time sufferer from epilepsy. That does not help much even if, as he says, Manning Clark was too. So was Dostoevsky.

Ross Fitzgerald deals with that other tragic politician, E.G. Theodore, who was 'Red Ted' as a trade-union musterer, radical Queensland Treasurer and Premier (who abolished the Upper House), and Commonwealth Treasurer in the Great Depression with a Keynesian perspective before its time had come. But Theodore was also 'Kirribilli Ted', representing a Labor electorate from an architect-designed North Shore harbourside mansion with three floors, wide balconies and 'a devoted gardener, Hogden, who had followed the family from Brisbane'.

In *The Turbulent Years* Jack Lang, malevolent antagonist, reported one of Theodore's ripostes on the hustings: 'Simply because a man works in the abattoirs, there is no reason why he must live in them.' Interjectors querying his Labor credentials were 'leather-lunged low-brows.' In 1929, Theodore polled 77.91 per cent; in 1931, less than 20 per cent in the same electorate. He lost to a Langite, Sol Rosevear, who later became Speaker under Curtin and a foe of the Big Fella.

Yet it was not just pelf which was the problem, but how Theodore got it. A Tory-manipulated royal commission in 1930 ruled he was corrupt when Premier in the Mungana mine dealings. A jury in a civil court later acquitted him, or at least held that the charges were not proved—but the rules of evidence were different then.

Fitzgerald is very partisan, choosing to gloss over what was certainly 'conflict of interest', a concept his namesake of the late 1980s royal commission fame thought somewhat lacking currency in the Joh-Hinze bailliwicks—and, indeed, elsewhere. Gough Whitlam in his foreword to a previous Theodore biography by Irwin Young (1971) was similarly partisan. I would have thought Kett Kennedy in *The Mungana Affair* (1978) had the definitive word on Theodore's 'honest graft', which is what Tammany Hall would have called it. 'Yes, we have no Munganas,' heckled the Tories and Langites as they pitched Theodore from politics to make millions in newspapers with the Packers and in Fiji gold mines with them and Wren.

Wren named a racehorse after Theodore but his long association with Fitzgerald's hero wins him no kudos. Unlike Theodore, we are told, Wren 'played dirty' with 'lesser men', was 'unscrupulous', and 'pretended to be a Robin Hood, taking from the poor to give to the poor, usually himself first, and then the deserving poor, the struggling Irish Catholics of Collingwood.' Fortunately there is no footnote to this, or we would probably have got Frank Hardy or his 'pupil', Manning Clark, as a source. But I doubt if either of these authorities would have thought Theodore needed Wren to teach him to be secret in his business dealings.

Fitzgerald has, for the most part, capably filled a gap in the shelf of Australian biographies even if his sometimes jaunty prose irks (e.g. 'filthy rich', 'fork out'). So do statements such as: 'But it was Jack Lang himself who has paid the most significant tribute to his greatest enemy: "Of all my political opponents E.G. Theodore was the toughest ... when he was beaten he didn't squeal".' Really—sounds like a footy commentary. So does: 'The public had lost faith in Edward Granville Theodore ...' (cf. for emphasis, Ronald Dale Barassi!). And the continual inelegant interchange of 'Ted', 'Theodore', 'EGT.' etc, without rhyme or reason, is quite ridiculous. ■

James Griffin is an historian and critic.

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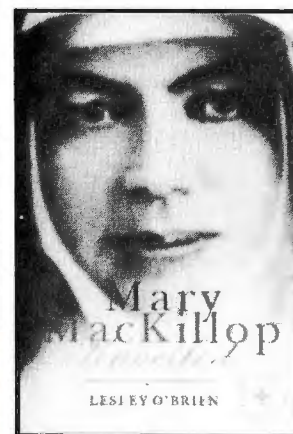
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Lesley O'Brien presents a very good, down-to-earth understanding of the difficulties Mary MacKillop had to endure. I feel that past pupils of the Josephites, like myself, as well as many other readers will be delighted with this account of such a great life.

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Gathering plays

DOROTHY AND GRISELDA couldn't come, but more than 450 women did gather in Adelaide's strangely balmy winter weather to celebrate theatre at the Third International Women Playwrights' Conference.

There were delegates from countries as disparate as Iceland and Jamaica, South Africa and Malaysia, Ireland and East Timor. More than 40 plays were performed in full and extracts read from 60 others, and the Murphy Sisters bookstall stocked hundreds of titles. The conference was opened by Muriel van der Byl, artist, performer and the custodian of Kaurna, the land on which Adelaide's Festival Centre is built. Muriel also designed the poster for the conference. After welcoming del-

each country to identify themselves. At first the introductions were greeted with polite, enthusiastic clapping for each group, but by the time most countries had been acknowledged, the mixture of cheering, whistling, stamping and celebratory cries had set a tone of excitement that was to characterise the week. Running concurrently with workshop and information sessions were forum/performance sessions open to all delegates, and late in each day there were play readings and free performances. Although most performances were over by 11pm it was rare to be asleep before midnight, as informal appraisal sessions happened at the end of each day throughout the festival.

Virtually every delegate had a different program, but there were

tries brought an emphasis on storytelling and exchanging of experiences that permeated the conference. This was enhanced by the perspectives offered by writers and producers such as Deborah Levy and Joan Littlewood from England, who talked about their very different styles of work; workshops with Jenny Kemp, Peggy Phelan and Peta Tait, dealing with the body in space and writing the body; and ritual drama with Kim Kum Hwa, from Korea.

Ideological and political differences were apparent at all sessions—as a thematic element of many, but also when women spoke, sometimes out of turn, about the oppression experienced in their specific cultures. These were moments of deep emotion: Melinda Bobis' cantata of the warrior woman; June Mills' song about burying the dead in the Larraikia culture; or Sheela Langeberg's play *Maija of Chaggaland*, about her mother's life in Tanzania. Others grabbed the stage briefly to promote their political agenda.

Underlining and embodying difference and identity was clothing. A conference attended almost entirely by women was likely to be more colourful than one attended by men in suits. The international flavour of this conference provided a brilliance, on and off the stage, and the sense of colour and fun was heightened by a talented face painter. These weren't the usual stars-and-flowers face paintings—no two were the same, and individual works of art walked around each day: Donna was transformed into a cat, MaryAnne wore a dragon and Therese Radic became an eagle in flight.

MANY OF THE WORKSHOPS and forums were backed up by performances elsewhere on the program and many of the forums included performed extracts from the work of the playwrights speaking in the session. This provided an instant connection between theory and practice, and although they were tantalisingly short, it gave a strong sense of each play. The conference company of five actors who performed these extracts showed remarkable adaptability as they switched from role to role and from session to session. The



Conference participant: Beverly Hanson, from Jamaica.

Photo by Lisa Thomasetti

legates to her land she introduced the Jumbuck Mob, South Australia's first Aboriginal youth theatre group, who led visitors into the opening ceremony. Marjorie Fitz-Gerald, as chair of the conference, asked delegates from

common elements that prevailed. Ritual, storytelling, identity, language and laughter, were keynote topics on separate days. The large number of delegates and presenters from Asian and First World coun-

Balancing Ibsen

The Lady from the Sea, by Henrik Ibsen. Melbourne Theatre Company production, directed by Roger Hodgman.

Playworks Showcase forum employed a different group of actors who performed extracts from 10 new Australian plays, and the Artspace play readings were ably directed and performed by students of the Flinders Drama Centre. For a week delegates argued about identity, theatrical representation, sexuality and the body, gender constructions, ritual, language of the body, language of culture(s) and the merits of the multitude of plays seen. And yes, there were some complaints, but discussion groups provided an opportunity to air complaints and redress any perceived gaps in the program. Complementing these critical appraisal sessions was a system of open caucuses programmed for women with special interests. With the opportunity always available for people to create their own forums it was only the very shy or the sulky who failed to connect with those who had similar concerns.

ALL FORUM/PERFORMANCE SESSIONS that had non-English-speaking presenters were provided with efficient simultaneous translations. The arrangements for translation from English to other languages seemed to be a bit more *ad hoc*, and sitting among people murmuring translations into Chinese, Italian, Japanese etc proved rather distracting. Despite the absence of Dorothy Hewett and Griselda Gambaro, two distinguished women playwrights I had particularly wanted to hear, the conference was still packed with the famous, the talented and the innovative.

Although the playwrights took centre stage at this conference, the balance that was achieved between a smoothly run program and the expression of diverse interests must be acknowledged. And credit must be given to Julie Holledge, Phyllis Jane Rose and Helen Rickards for bringing the conference to Adelaide, consulting nationally and internationally on program and format, organising the necessary funding and keeping the conference on a week-long high. ■

Carolyn Pickett teaches theatre and drama in the School of Arts and Media, La Trobe University.

IBSEN'S POWERFUL DRAMA has, at its centre, the relationship between Doctor Wangl and his wife Ellida, the 'Lady' of the piece. Ellida is the doctor's second wife and the doctor is, in a sense, Ellida's second husband.

As a young woman she was involved in a passionate relationship with a sailor. He went to sea, and—Ellida supposed—died. She marries the widower, Doctor Wangl, but is unable to enter her new life with her husband and her two step-daughters, Hilde and Bolette. She remains tied to the sea, wracked with guilt and inexplicably resentful of her loss of freedom—the freedom which the sailor represents.

Ibsen himself worked with the belief that Norwegians are spiritually tied to the sea; the fjords, to him, represented a literal and an emotional backwater. The sea meant freedom, chaos, passion and mystery. Like his Norse forefathers, he was fascinated by the mythologies of the open sea and the analogies that could be drawn between the rawness of the northern seasons and the life of a mortal soul. It is this balance that he examines in the *The Lady from the Sea*.

It is the play's challenge to embody these enormous themes in a theatrical setting.

Ellida is one of the most difficult roles an actress could take on as it is she who must carry the emotional weight from beginning to end. Josephine Byrne didn't quite get there, but she came close, only occasionally illustrating the old theatrical adage—it doesn't matter how *much* you feel but how *accurately* you feel.

The weakest link in the piece was the portrayal of the stranger by John Brumpton. The stranger represents the danger and passion of the world of the play. Brumpton was wooden and monosyllabic. It was extraordinary that an actor, with six weeks' rehearsal, could do so little with a relatively small part. And more extraordinary that a director could let him get away with it. David Latham as Arnholm, the epitome of middle-class Norwegian values, seemed overly technical and mannered. But these performances will surely improve as the run continues.

Highlights were Frank Gallacher as Doctor Wangl and Frances O'Connor as Bolette. From the moment Gallacher walked on stage it was clear he knew exactly what he represented: Ibsen's hero, a middle-aged man capable of humility, love and change.

Frances O'Connor delivered an astute study of a woman prepared to sign away her life to a man twice her age to extricate herself from the present situation. For a modern audience to understand this struggle on something more than an intellectual level it is imperative that Bolette be convincing. Some of the lines O'Connor had to deliver to justify her character's decision would have been hard enough to deliver in 1888. In 1994 they could be real stinkers. But in O'Connor's performance the lines carried. The audience understood her motivations exactly. The support cast were also strong.

Hodgman's direction was strong, but with occasional lapses—as when he left the cast in flat lines across the stage. Perhaps the problem here lies with the Melbourne Theatre Company's practice of turning over so many productions each year. The demands on individuals, in particular the artistic director, Hodgman, to churn out so much work, can generate a production-line feeling. It is difficult to make art in a factory. The art may start to reflect the machinations around it rather than the talents within it.

But the negative aspects of the technical production I have mentioned only serve to highlight the strength of some of the acting performances. This production of *The Lady from the Sea* will engage anyone who enjoys uncluttered dramatic performance and has an interest in the first incarnations of naturalistic theatre. ■

Peter Houghton is a Melbourne actor and playwright.

T Ice is nice and the slicker go quicker

TIME WAS WHEN ICE DANCING shared the status now so richly deserved by synchronised swimming. Like ballroom dancing, it was proles' genteel-night-out, hedged by dress-rules and movement restrictions that betrayed the organisers' fears of dropping aitches and influence. Torvill & Dean changed all that. Suddenly it was Art, and skating judges fell over themselves trying to define and contain the phenomenon.

In Torvill & Dean's latest—and reportedly last—show tour, *Face The Music*, the whole ballroom/ice-dancing/judging connection was sent up in an extended comic piece. Sequin-sewing, rivalry and regimented choreography were all there to be laughed

at. The two 'judges' were buffoons in the old circus tradition, indeed they were skated by Konstantin Golomazov and Igor Okunev, who had been with the Moscow State Circus on Ice. The audience got the jokes; they were onside, and none of them, myself included, could even remember the names of the two couples deemed superior to Torvill & Dean in this year's Winter Olympics at Lillehammer, by the kind of judges that would have had Picasso painting by numbers.

So in a way it was sad to see them being defensive; in fact, the opening of the show made them seem like has-beens, with huge banners of their Sarajevo triumph in '84, four other pairs dressed in the instantly recognisable purple *Bolero* outfits, dipping and weaving in tribute. It was elegiac, it was worrying—until the real Torvill & Dean began to skate.

It is strange to think of an art form that requires its practitioners to strike attitudes while wearing ankle-boots with knives on them, yet when the best skaters do it, it is easy to see them as soaring birds, or angel-fish gliding; the ice makes movements more concentrated. Speed becomes hectic, arabesques more languorous. For many, the technical demands absorb everything; one must, after all, remain upright. Torvill & Dean are wonderful technicians, but not the only ones in the craft. Why are they so much better than the others? Analysing it can be as ponderous as the search for the perfect golf swing in diagrams: the unique neatness and economy of Jayne Torvill's movements make Dean's flamboyance more remarkable; they play out subtleties of male-female interaction that prove they are great actor/dancers. The cho-

reography is part of it. They choreographed most of the show themselves, and the results were stunning. Orff's *Carmina Burana* has been done before by ballet companies, and it can be a trap, even for established and accepted artists. Some years ago I sat through a leaden effort by, of all companies, the Nederlands Dance Company, and there was an unspeakable yo-ho naughty nuns version on the TV about five years later. The Torvill & Dean version was classy; brief enough not to tire the audience, and with flair, drama, pathos, eroticism were all there in perfect proportion.

Perhaps that is what it is. Other couples, post-*Bolero*, tried to be passionate, to be erotic, to be 'daring'. That usually meant that they would snarl and flounce a bit, but it didn't work. The chemistry was missing. The spontaneous joy occasioned by the form of a sea shell, a Greek vase, or a Mozart aria, was missing. The ice was full of Salieris at Lillehammer.

How the god entered their machine is unknown; we can only see the results. It only remains to wonder what will happen when they retire. Their success has not really resulted in a flowering of the craft—the vigour and thoroughness with which would-be emulators have been penalised has had the effect of confining the innovation mainly to them. The skaters who are in the company with them are excellent, but look unremarkable against them, perhaps because the Torvill & Dean phenomenon casts into shade anything next to it.

And there isn't much hope of a new breed of bold, independent youngsters following on. Budding skaters are warned against 'flashy, crowd-pleasing moves' if they want any hope of success, because the career path of the young skater still winds up through the tortuous ranks of international competition, with its implacable faceless judges—has-been skaters with questionable agendas.

Strictly Ballroom indeed. *Valete!* ■

Juliette Hughes is a regular contributor to *Eureka Street*.





Family values 1

Bad Boy Bubba, dir. Rolf de Heer (independent cinemas). Beware of films offering a director's statement at the box office. De Veer says he wanted to make a film 'about the importance of being loved as a child' that would 'give real pleasure to at least some in the audience'. So he puts a boy alone in a cellar with his mother for 35 years. The mother (Claire Benito) beats Bubba (Nicholas Hope) and tells him to sit still when she goes out because Jesus is watching. She keeps a gas mask near the door: the boy believes that you can only breathe in the cellar. When she comes home, she has sex with the boy.

The boy tortures the cat. He ties the cat in Clingwrap to test his mother's theory about breathing. The cat dies. His father, a drunken priest, turns up and beats the boy. The boy Clingwraps his parents, leaves them to die, trashes the cellar and escapes into the streets of Adelaide. They are scarcely better than anything he has known up to now.

At first, Bubba imitates people he sees in the streets. But once the film decides it needs to redeem the nightmare it has created, it does so by having people imitate Bubba. He stumbles into a band and sings the phrases his mother and father have belted around his ears. The band attracts a cult following and changes its name to 'Clingwrap'. Its fans dress like Bubba.

Bubba also meets Angel, a nurse

in a home for the disabled. She has had a horrendous childhood herself. Their relationship takes off when Angel exposes her breasts to him while he's under the shower. He's on safe ground here, they look just like his mother's breasts. Bubba jilts Rachel, one of the disabled patients who has also never known love, and has a baby with Angel. The film ends with improbable scenes of domestic bliss.

Enough? Thankfully, I have forgotten most of the things that are done to cats and cockroaches in this film. What happens to the people is bad enough. *Bad Boy Bubba* is indescribably vile. If De Veer believes his own director's statement, he must be living in a cellar.

—Michael McGirr SJ

Eureka Street Film Competition

Ah, the family that shaves together ... Caption this meeting of the brothers Marx and we'll award two tickets, to the film of your choice, for the answer we like best. (Answers crediting dialogue to Harpo will go straight to the WPB, OK?) Send entries to: *Eureka Street Film Competition*, PO Box 553, Richmond, VIC 3121. The competition winner for June-July was the Rev. Tony Baker, of North Adelaide, who thought Hugh Grant was thinking: 'I prefer funerals to weddings, because the girls look just as good and you don't have to bring a present.'



Family values 2

True Lies, dir. James Cameron (Greater Union). It's not true that all the good Arnold Schwarzenegger jokes

have already been told. There are some new ones in this hugely entertaining, if obscenely expensive, action movie from the director whose *Terminator* films made Arnie the lovable humanoid that he is today. Here is a sample: Harry Tasker (Arnie), believing that his wife Helen (Jamie Lee Curtis) is cheating on him, decides to beat her supposed lover to a pulp. Harry's friend Gib (Tom Arnold), realising he must dowse this rage for Harry's own good, grabs him by the shoulders, gazes into those Terminator eyes and says: 'Try and get in touch with, you know, your *feminine* side.'

By far the best joke in *True Lies*, however, is implicit in the film's theme. For Harry is an urbane, international superspy whose middle-class wife and daughter think he is a dull, middle-class computer salesman. His time and energy are divided between keeping them in that state of blissful ignorance and saving the world from blackmail by nuclear terrorists. But it all threatens to fall apart when Harry fears that his wife's affections are straying because life with him is so boring. Harry Tasker is a sort of family-values version of James Bond, and Cameron uses this walking contradiction to spoof both Bond-type spy movies and the cant of family values, while dealing out all the special-effects wizardry of the action genre.

I confess to a certain unease at having enjoyed *True Lies*. Not because of its gleefully over-the-top, carefully choreographed violence, and certainly not because of what it satirises. I simply wonder why, when people are starving in Rwanda and Bosnia and God knows where else, we scarcely bat an eyelid at the Hollywood fantasy factory spending \$US120 million to make froth like this.

—Ray Cassin

Family values 3

The Crow, dir. Alex Proyas (Hoyts) opens with a long shot of a darkened postindustrial cityscape, full of threat and portent. The scene, adapted from a detail of a Hieronymus

Bosch painting, is an early sign of the intelligence behind this rich, multi-layered film. It is a story of love, murder and revenge that is slowly and elegantly told, yet has been shot and edited in rapid-fire MTV style. This creates a fascinating tension.

The Crow has been marketed as a 'young' film, with its MTV look, grunge/gothic soundtrack, and Brandon Lee looking precisely like Robert Smith from *The Cure* (James O'Barr modelled the original *Crow* cartoon character on Smith). But it is also conventional, even traditional—in the mythical elements of its plot, and even in its musical soundtrack. There are snatches of gothic rock throughout, but mostly the background music comprises sentimental love themes.

Lee is very good as the Crow, returned from the dead to take vengeance on those who murdered him and his fiancée. Many reviewers have suggested that the film's power is a result of Lee having died during the making of the film, but this is untrue. *The Crow* is inherently powerful and

The Crow is one of the best films of the year so far—not great, perhaps, but serious, art-full and sure to enrapture future cult audiences.

—Tim Mitchell

Family values 4

Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, dir. Gus Van Sant, (independent cinemas), is the story of a girl called Sissy (Uma Thurman), who is born with extraordinarily long thumbs. After a visit to a psychic, Sissy's mother gives up on her daughter's ever finding a husband, and her beer-swilling dad adds that 'she ain't real bright neither'. As the film progresses Ma, and, I think, Pa, are proved right.

Finding no place for herself in her parents' neat fibro-duplex world Sissy hits the road and, you guessed it, becomes the self-proclaimed queen of hitchhikers (the thumbs, remember?). In her travels she runs across the Countess (John Hurt), a badly made-up New York drag queen with a beauty products business. Hurt's performance is the most self-assured in the film, which is otherwise littered with aimless subplots and bad performances.

Anyway Sissy eventually meets up with a band of cowgirls, who have taken over the Countess's Oregon beauty ranch 'The Rubber Rose'. She falls in luv with head girl Bonanza Jelly-Bean' (Rain Phoenix), is separated from her, reunited and eventually loses her forever.

Despite a few tantalising flashes of promise throughout the film, *Cowgirls* just never hits its stride. As soon as a character or episode begins to get interesting, it's abandoned. This is a very disappointing offer from Van Sant, who made his name on good eccentric, hip films like *Drugstore Cowboy* and *My Own Private Idaho*.

—Catriona Jackson

Family values 5

Three Colours White, dir. Krzysztof Kieslowski (independent cinemas) is a story about a Polish hairdresser (Zbigniew Zamachowski) in Paris, whose beautiful wife (Julie Delpy)

leaves him because he is impotent. She turns him out on to the street, depriving him of his business, but a friend smuggles him back to Poland where he becomes rich as a property speculator in the new capitalist economy. He then fakes his death to lure his wife to Warsaw to claim the estate. When she arrives he contacts her and, all vigour apparently restored, they become lovers again. But he is officially dead, and she is arrested and imprisoned for his murder. They are reconciled but cannot be together.

Does that tale of love, frustration and revenge add up to more than a very black comedy? It could be viewed simply as such, but in fact the relevant interpretive colour is the white of the title. *Three Colours White* is the second part of Kieslowski's trilogy evoking the three colours of the French flag and the slogans of the 1789 revolution: blue (liberty), white (equality) and red (fraternity).

The trilogy both endorses and dismantles the ideals of the revolutionaries, teasing out the point at which they become chimerical. In *Blue*, the protagonist (Juliette Binoche) found that the exercise of choice limits as well as liberates. In *White*, the distortions of passion and power in human relationships suggest that there is simply no such thing as equality. And *Red*? It's a story of forgiveness and transcendence, integrating the themes of both its forerunners. Watch out for it.

—Ray Cassin

Family values 6

Le Petit Prince A Dit, dir. Christine Pascal (independent cinemas) has some beautiful cinematography, by Pascal Marti, and some genuinely moving performances, particularly from Marie Kleiber, a little girl who makes you actually care what happens to her character and to her damaged and irresponsible parents. The film has been hailed as avoiding cliché, but seems to have lost something in the effort.

To some extent the problem lies with script and direction. There are charming moments—a scene in



moving, and only afterwards does one reflect on the levels of death associated with the film.

What one does try to identify are the sequences where computers were used to manipulate Lee's image in order to complete the film. These aren't apparent at all, which raises the possibility that eventually live-action films may be made entirely by computer. Actors will just sell their image to a studio and a computer will do the rest for them. A distressing thought, but that doesn't mean it won't happen.

which father and daughter sing together in the car is one—but they don't overcome the exasperation one feels at the mad irresponsibility of dragging a very sick child half-dressed from hospital, to go on a jaunt from Switzerland to Italy. The journey allows for some beautiful scenic shots, but they have not been worked into the plot in plausible ways.

Richard Berry and Anémone are excellent as the parents, giving a great sense of the complex attraction/repulsion of separated spouses who end up strangely *en famille* once more with their dying child.

—Juliette Hughes

Family values 7

Little Buddha, dir. Bernardo Bertolucci (independent cinemas). What is happening to Bertolucci? *The Last Emperor* had patches of banal spectacle, but *Little Buddha* is a travesty.

Take Western ennui, in the form of a sour Seattle engineer and his well-coiffed 'math-teacher' wife and perfect blond son, and blend with a scurry of Buddhist monks (why must all Hollywood Buddhists look as though they are eternally escaping a napalm attack?) who are abroad searching for the reincarnated successor of a revered lama, and you should get interesting friction. But this is Bertolucci with his edges knocked off. He succeeds only in rendering one of the great world religions as a sequence of gnomish pleasantries and politically impeccable wishful thinking. (There turn out to be three reincarnations of the lama: one fair, one dark and one a girl.)

The interwoven story of Siddhartha and his journey towards wisdom yields some pleasures. For brief moments the screen becomes a transporting Mughal hunting scene, all gold and dust, smelling of elephants. But it is scant compensation for the bathos of Keanu Reeves' central performance as Siddhartha—it's on a par with Jeffrey Hunter's Jesus. Reeves makes pantomime of the aspirant Siddhartha. As the mature Buddha he is risible—a gym-slim Ken doll with a dumb grin. Maybe it's because he can't hack the lotus position. Or the body tan.

Bertolucci is clearly searching. That is admirable. But you can't comprehend or convey Buddhist myth, serenity or mystery with time-lapse photography and a heavy hand with the kohl.

—Morag Fraser

Family values 8

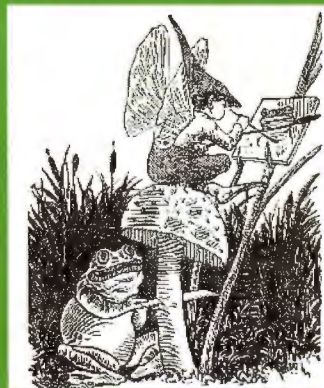
The Flintstones, dir. Brian Levant (Greater Union). The summer box-office hit in North America this year has been *The Flintstones*. But it is as much a marketing phenomenon as it is a film. The hype has ensured that those millions of people all over the world who grew up watching the TV series will see the movie, if only to discover how the cartoon has been transposed into film. And that curiosity does maintain interest for half an hour or so. Are the actors like the cartoon characters? Are the household appliances right? Does Fred bowl with his twinkle-toe technique? And will Dino knock him over when he arrives home from the quarry?

The answer to all these questions is 'yes'—the movie faithfully evokes the cartoon series, much of it is fun, and like the series it is full of dreadful puns. The B52s become the BC52s (though why not use a band with a readymade name like Dinosaur Jr?), the secretary at the quarry is Sharon Stone, the kids play in Jurassic Park, and the Flintstone family goes to the drive-in to watch *Tar Wars*—a film directed by George Lucas and produced by Steven Spielberg.

But after half an hour you get bored. The story has a dated, 1960s feel, having the white-trash characterisation of *Roseanne* but lacking the complexity and ambiguities of that series. And the drive-in movie that the Flintstones watch, as in the cartoon series, becomes a pointless framing device. What they/we will see, according to the sign at the entrance to the drive-in, is *Tar Wars*, but what they/we actually watch is *The Flintstones*. As with most of the puns, the drive-in becomes an excuse for a Hollywood 'in'-joke. Hollywood navel-gazing is pretty much all you get in *The Flintstones*. But there's a market for it.

—Tim Mitchell

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News from nowhere

BOB HAWKE'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY was launched on 16 August. Paul Keating was described in an ABC TV news bulletin that morning as 'uncharacteristically silent' on the subject. But his silence is in fact wholly characteristic; one of the reasons Paul Keating came to power and stayed there is that he knows exactly when to be quiet—including, or indeed especially, during an auto-foot-shooting exhibition by an adversary.

For, as far as its effect on the Prime Minister is concerned, the Hawke book looks set to do the opposite of what its author intended, and Keating isn't going to spoil it all by joining in. The book is receiving saturation TV coverage, and the media doesn't need any help from Keating to show the damage Hawke seems quite ready to do the party in the quest for vengeance and vindication, or the unattractive character traits being revealed in the process.

One wonders how all this publicity is going to affect the sales of the book. It seems, after all, not to be a very good book; nor, indeed, does it appear to be a particularly accurate representation of events. Even longtime supporter Gareth Evans, asked about the validity of Hawke's claims to have been a key player in the Middle East negotiations, replied 'Well, if he was, none of us knew anything about it.' The kind of publicity the book is getting might deter as many potential readers as it will attract.

Even so, it would be very interesting to know what sort of deal was done with whom by whom in order to get the last two episodes of the ABC's classic *Labor in Power* series back on the screen the week before the book came out. Much of it was old news by then, but, as with a 19th century novel, there was still a lot to learn if you concentrated on character over event. Peter Walsh, Bob Collins and Barrie Cassidy all revealed themselves as delightful: witty, benign, resigned. We saw, yet again, Paul Keating say that this was the sweetest victory of all—an odd remark when you think about it; did he really intend to call to mind, at that most vulnerable of moments, that other, bloody, victory by virtue of which he was there at all? Was it a calculated gamble or a Freudian slip?

Meanwhile, the episode of *Four Corners* that went to air the night before the book was launched was devoted to Gerard Henderson's profile of Hawke. Cleverly entitled 'The Loved One'—which for those who need reminding is, in the Evelyn Waugh satire of the same name, a polite euphemism for 'corpse'—it featured imaginative questions, lively structuring, cleverly chosen interview subjects and a beautifully written script. It also showed that Hawke has not lost his habit of talking about himself in the third person, a quirk which he shares with Alexander Downer and about the psychological implications of which one can only speculate. One of the things that made this program so exceptional was Henderson's general attitude to political journalism: unlike, say, Nine's Laurie Oakes, he cares more about analysis and ideas than he does about one-upmanship, point-scoring and scoops.

While all this was going on, Graham Richardson, on Nine's *Sunday*, was discussing Labor's new initiatives to get more women into the party. 'The women are coming,' he said to the camera by way of conclusion. 'I'd say it was a good thing if I thought it would make the world a better place—but politicians are politicians, no matter what their gender.'

Well, actually, Richo, no. It was after all you yourself who, two weeks before, did a cute little feature on the same program, speculating about who might succeed Keating as Labor leader. You structured it like a set of racing tips; you gave odds. Your other two controlling metaphors were war and football. You implied, in short, that the real point of politics is to provide an arena for men to compete with and sometimes attempt to kill each other. But perhaps when the discourse of politics becomes less exclusively masculine and aggressive, the practice of politics will change accordingly. (It was enlightening, if depressing, to see former Hawke speechwriter Graham Freudenberg explaining on *Four Corners* that he'd always thought of Hawke's word 'consensus' as 'only rhetoric', as though he—a speechwriter of *all people*—considered language to be somehow both less important than, and easily separable from, its subject.) I've heard the word 'larrikin', for example, used half-a-dozen times during this Hawke TV blitz, and always as a term of unqualified approval. When our model for heroism becomes something other than the image of a naughty little boy, we might start getting somewhere, or at least start getting somewhere different.

Kerry O'Brien's *Lateline* on the ABC also devoted an entire program that week to the Hawke book, lining up an array of panellists (including a dour Paul Kelly—*The Australian* editor, not the songwriter, alas—and an uninspired Barry Jones) whose cumulative effect could only be described as soporific. I know these things are at least partly determined by which city you're in, but I couldn't help dreaming up my own team and wishing they were doing it instead. I would have had Judith Brett and Graham Little, both lecturers in political science, both expert handlers of psychoanalytic frameworks for reading political character and motivation, both authors of highly original books interrogating the genres of biography and/or autobiography, both thinkers whose fluency, lucidity, breadth of knowledge and passion for ideas have been demonstrated repeatedly on TV and radio over many years. I would have added Hawke's publisher Louise Adler, who accurately describes herself as being endowed with 'loads of chutzpah'; *Canberra Times* editor Michelle Gratton, whose eyes were full of tears when Hawke appeared for a news conference after he lost the leadership; and maybe I would have kept Barry Jones, who in that company might have been more interesting than, in the event, he was. ■

Kerryn Goldsworthy is a Melbourne writer and teacher.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 26, September 1994

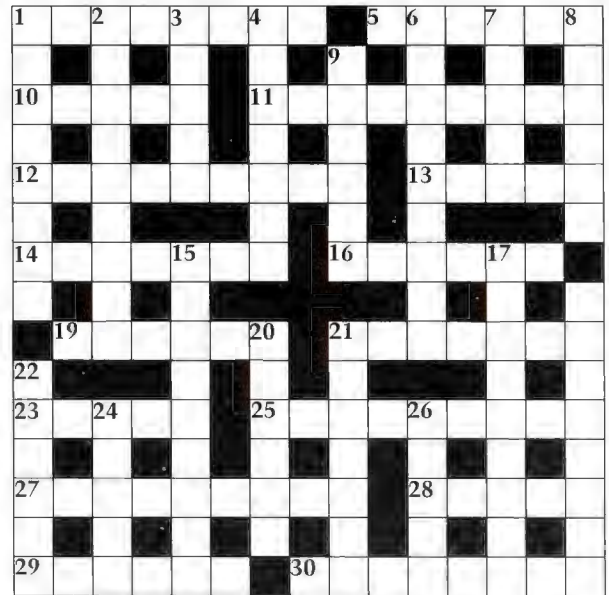
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

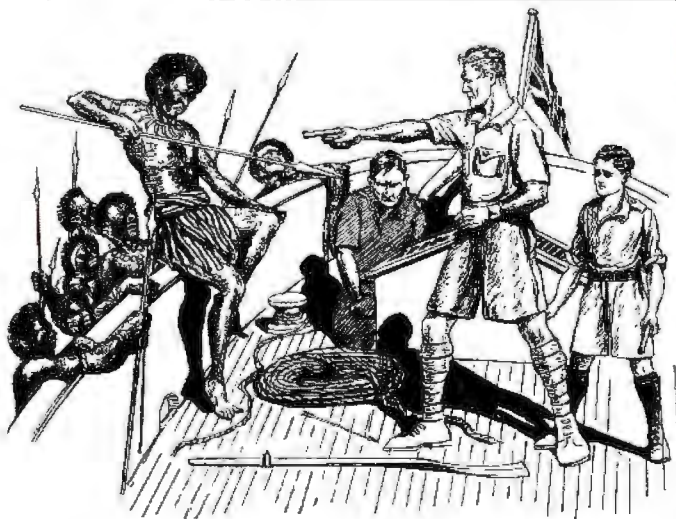
- 1 Unload the fish to make the pudding. (8)
- 5 Rare vehicle caught in south-east direction. (6)
- 10 The dawn—of understanding, perhaps—came when witty pun was returned to us. (5)
- 11 Going to earth for a solid basis. (9)
- 12 More satiated than ever with oaten cakes. (9)
- 13 Feast in theatre attic! (5)
- 14 Ned gave as good as he got in retaliation. (7)
- 16 Educated but sounds tense! (6)
- 19 Hides vanished from established firm. Reorganisation needed. (6)
- 21 It goes round and round, back and forth, it's all the same! (7)
- 23 Overturn English coin in America and France. (5)
- 25 I'm returning to have mixed grill before morning—just a small amount. (9)
- 27 With circumspection, perhaps, duly rent quiet property. (9)
- 28 A girl astray! (5)
- 29 Burnt or raw, this colour can be found in Tuscan town about North. (6)
- 30 Public demonstrations in favour of exams. (8)

DOWN

- 1 Getting rid of messy soap lids! (8)
- 2 One cent Emma mistakenly paid for pie-filling. (9)
- 3 Sounds as if race circuits' standards decline. (5)
- 4 Denied donkey went round opening. (7)
- 6 Wild corn cut round street to make room to build. (9)
- 7 Bring up new melodies at the beginning of Easter. (5)
- 8 Place for height when breath plummets to bottom. (6)
- 9 Good French openwork fabric headgear. (6)
- 15 Leave with Ben but without sentimental intermediary. (9)
- 17 Casual outcome of most Irish exchanges. (3,2,4)
- 18 Some R.I.P.s can make pledges for future life. (8)
- 20 Hostility shown towards me, tiny though I be. (6)
- 21 Could be the ABC that produced early 'Queen' broadcast. (7)
- 22 What a commotion when peculiar cat lost tail! (6)
- 24 Being a hundred short, accuse someone of impudence. Might go well with 1-across. (5)
- 26 Unskilful use of mixed paint. (5)



Solution to Crossword no.25, August 1994



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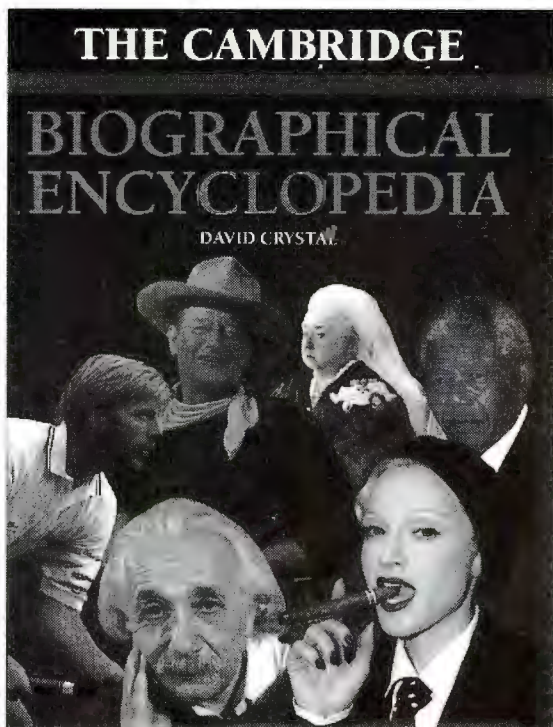
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