

EUREKA STREET

Vol. 9 No. 7 September 1999

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Gustav Nossal on the centenary of Traralgon's Nobel Laureate

Frank Macfarlane Burnet



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'He loved to speculate, sometimes almost dangerously, from every experiment he performed, seeking to derive general meaning from results which, in the first instance at least, are always highly particular and specialised.'

—Gustav Nossal on Macfarlane Burnet, see p22

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Remember, remember the 6th of November

IN MAY 1888, the editorial-writer of the *Candelo and Eden Union*, a small bi-weekly newspaper on the far South Coast of NSW, posed the following question to his readers: 'When will the Australian republic come?' His answer was sure and swift.

'The Australian republic will come quickly ... As we grow more important and our population increases we think less and less of that old country from which we have come ... We like to call ourselves Australian and feel happy that Australians can grasp each others' hands in the true bond of citizenship ... on the platform of the country's commonwealth.'

If it was easy to be optimistic in 1888, it seems much harder in 1999. Only a little over two months out from the republic referendum on 6 November, the prevailing mood in the republican camp is hardly one of confidence. After weeks of negotiations in Canberra, it is now clear that Australians will face two questions in November.

The first question will ask voters whether they approve of establishing Australia as a republic 'with the Queen and Governor-General being replaced by a President appointed by a two-thirds majority' of Federal Parliament. The second question, in the words of John Howard, will present voters with 'an opportunity to unite the country on an aspirational [sic] issue in a very positive way', by approving the Prime Minister's revised Constitutional Preamble.

The new Preamble is infinitely superior to the Prime Minister's previous draft, but still fails on many counts. There is an irony in asking the people to approve an 'aspirational' Preamble when the people were not consulted in the process of its drafting. After consulting poet Les Murray, historian Geoffrey Blainey, and others who happened to hold the balance of power in the Senate at the right time, Mr Howard produced the final version of his Preamble on 11 August, two days before the legislation was due to be passed by Parliament in time for the November referendum. 'The Preamble can't be changed because we need to pass the legislation this week,' said Mr Howard.

The Prime Minister's understanding of deliberative democracy is novel. When asked why the new Preamble included reference to those who defended Australia during time of war he replied—'We decided last night to put that in.'

The Prime Minister also believes that the Preamble will serve 'as a great contribution to reconciliation'. He describes his effort as a 'positive, honourable, pro-active, contemporary reference to indigenous people in our Constitution'. The word 'kinship', says Howard, 'doesn't carry any particular connotations of ownership, it speaks of their lands not of

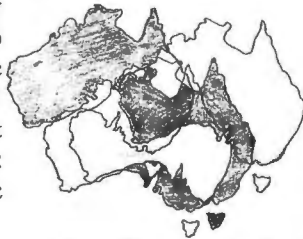
the land; therefore, by definition it is something that relates to land that is owned by indigenous people.' In other words, the white man can relax. Aborigines don't own 'the land', they own 'their land'. These are the words Howard thinks are 'generous'.

But where is the generosity in failing to negotiate with Aboriginal people? The truth is that Mr Howard's Preamble is, as he says, 'a reference to indigenous people' (my emphasis), rather than a document which belongs to indigenous people. Does this mean the whitefella should feel 'honourable' simply because Mr Howard has decided to mention indigenous people in a Preamble which is designed to have no legal effect?

Perhaps there is a more important question to be answered on 6 November: 'When will the Australian republic come?'

The outcome of the question on the republic will hinge largely on the ability of republicans who support the bipartisan appointment model to convince those who are sympathetic to direct election to vote Yes. To win, republicans must find cause for common ground. But there is another, and perhaps even more difficult, task ahead—a successful defence of the proposed model against scaremongers who will mislead in an effort to defeat the republic.

This campaign has already begun. In the interests of informed debate, those who call for a more 'participatory democracy'—Peter Reith and Ted Mack—endeavour to frighten the electorate by



chanting 'Sixty-nine changes to the Constitution!' and accusing the Australian Republican Movement of 'ethnic cleansing'. Add the old favourites such as 'more power to Canberra' and the high fence that is Section 128 (which requires at least four states and a national majority if the referendum is to pass), and it is easy to appreciate the difficulty of the challenge which faces republicans in November.

The referendum will ask voters to continue the tradition of Australia's gradual evolution to independence. The proposed bipartisan appointment model is entirely consistent with the maintenance of our existing political institutions. It offers no radical break with the past. The model's flaws are all present in the current system. Australians will either approve this last conservative step in the process of decolonisation or continue with the British monarch as their head of state.

For this writer at least, the thought of voting to retain the monarchy as the symbol of modern Australian democracy is neither 'positive' nor 'honourable'. Nor does it make sense. The 'historic achievement'-in-waiting is not the insertion of a monarchist's Preamble in our Constitution, but the declaration of an Australian republic on 1 January 2001. ■

Mark McKenna is a post-doctoral fellow in the Political Science Program at the Research School of the Social Sciences, Australian National University.

COMMENT: 2

FRANCIS SULLIVAN

S There's nothing surer ...

STATE AND TERRITORY LEADERS wanted a national health inquiry. The Prime Minister didn't. They got a Senate committee. The inquiry comes as the broader issue of welfare reform challenges most Western democracies.

Whether it's in health care, pension support, aged, disability or unemployment services, reform is complex. On the one hand, the bleak forecast is for ageing populations and diminishing numbers of taxpayers. The community's capacity to sustain safety-net services, pension levels and entitlement schemes (like Medicare) becomes questionable. On the other hand, the gap between the fortunate and the rest is gradually widening. Prosperity for many families is transitory, if not elusive. Many are solely reliant on safety-net services, like public health care and income support, just to get by. In this context, universal health cover is a social good—wage supplement and family assistance package rolled into one.

The latest income distribution figures are stark. The top 20 per cent of households receive nearly 50 per cent of all income. Social security dependency has risen. Over 60 per cent of sole-parent families have welfare as their principal source of income. Over 40 per cent of single people between 15 and 44 have no work or are underemployed.

The group of Australians existing above these levels, without any welfare assistance, are likewise vulnerable to the potentially enormous financial damage that sickness and chronic illness can do to household budgets. Their capacity to purchase private health insurance as a safety net is limited. The inflationary rate of health insurance has averaged around 8 per cent. Real wage growth has not kept pace.

In this context, the economic value of Medicare is that it spreads the financial risk of sickness across the entire community. It ensures that access to essential care is not restricted by one's capacity to pay. This

system only remains effective if everyone contributes, regardless of their health status, age or income.

Medicare's critics label this 'middle-class welfare'. They contend that the well-off are the main beneficiaries of public hospital expenditure and access. Recent research debunks this myth.

When the distributional impacts of public hospital funding are measured on income levels, the Medicare system is found to be biased towards the less well-off. Households with incomes up to \$130,000 receive only 20 per cent of the benefits that households earning less than \$20,000 receive from public hospital funding. Also, when actual hospitalisation was examined, high-income people received around 11 per cent of the public expenditure benefits as opposed to the 17 per cent received by low-income people.

Medicare's impact on equity is compelling. Yet this doesn't dissuade some state premiers from calling for the introduction of means testing for public hospital patients. Means testing, or user charging, is promoted as a way to add money to the system and send 'price signals' to those who use public hospitals. In other words, its supporters want to stop people from taking a 'free ride'.

Even a cursory examination reveals the flaws in this argument. For means testing to raise sums of any significance, the level at which the test would apply is far too low. On the Prime Minister's own figures, single incomes of \$45,000 and family earnings of \$75,000 would attract increased charges.

Before the reform zealots get too excited, it's important to note that a large percentage of public hospital beds are used by people over 65 years of age. Most fall within these income levels. Thus the people

who most need the care will carry the greatest financial burden. Reputable research demonstrates that of those in the highest income grouping, only 6 per cent are over 55 years old. Of those in the lowest income groupings, up to 44 per cent are over 55. Hardly a fair approach for access to an essential service.

Moreover, introducing fees for hospital care is almost meaningless. These 'price signals' are effective where the consumer has a degree of discretion over purchasing a commodity. Being obliged to enter hospital under medical advice leaves little discretion. Means testing merely becomes another form of taxation on the sick.

Undoubtedly, the health system needs more money. The efficiency and social equity benefits of taxation-funded health care are difficult to refute. Just as others call for increased equity contributions through means testing, an increased levy on the beneficiaries of tax reform would deliver substantially more funding without undermining universal access. A mere one per cent levy increase delivers an extra \$2 billion.

Furthermore, the Federal Government sold the GST on the grounds that it would help fund hospitals, welfare and aged services. This new growth tax will come directly from households and should rightly be directed at bolstering essential public services.

The Commonwealth and the states should be pressed to drop ineffective solutions for the health system and demonstrate how the GST monies will be directed towards improving waiting lists and access to other essential services. ■

Francis Sullivan is Executive Director of Catholic Health Australia.



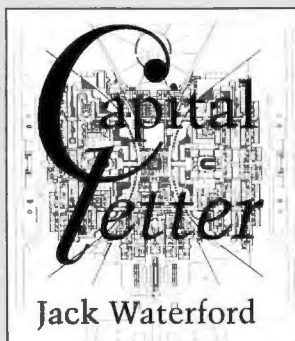
Awards

Congratulations to writer John Honner and *Eureka Street's* design and production team, Siobhan Jackson and Kate Manton, for their success at the recent Australian Catholic Press Association and Australasian Religious Press Association Awards. *Eureka Street* won the ACPA Best Magazine Layout & Design Award and was highly commended for design by ARPA. John Honner's article on competitive

tendering in the community sector, 'Contesting welfare' (December 1998, see left, with photograph by Bill Thomas), was highly commended in the ACPA Best Social Justice category.

Winners

We are pleased to announce the winners of the Jesuit Publications Raffle, drawn on 12 July 1999. The first prize—overseas travel for two from Harvest Pilgrimages—goes to *Eureka Street* subscriber Marian Devitt from Casuarina, Northern Territory. Second prize goes to P. Dalziell, Randwick, NSW; third prize to B. Jensen, Clontarf, NSW; fourth prize to Josie Osborne, Ryde, NSW; and fifth prize to Sr Margaret O'Brien, Darlinghurst, NSW. Many thanks to everyone who participated. The raffle continues to be an important support to our publications.



Defence losing its moorings

IN JANUARY THIS YEAR, the Minister for Defence, John Moore, and his departmental Secretary, Paul Barratt, discussed some problems of military culture.

The culture was, Barratt commented, focused on obedience, discipline, and a chain of command. It was naturally very conservative. But the culture of obedience was very much focused on producing what the boss in the hierarchy wanted, not what the organisation needed. It was not only the military which was the problem. On the civilian side as much as the military side, the lifetime-service model inhibited an openness to new ideas. In defence, everything tended to be done by committees, leading to diffusion of responsibility, confusion and a lack of a sense of urgency.

Paul Barratt was explaining to his minister the reasons for caution in pushing change. And he was doing so against a background of having been told by the head of the Prime Minister's Department, Max Moore-Wilton, that his minister, John Moore, had criticised him to John Howard as 'reigning' over his department, rather than actively managing affairs. Barratt had flown to Brisbane to talk to his minister after his discussion with Moore-Wilton. He thought he had a frank discussion, and, certainly, Moore did not again mention any questions of his style. Barratt survived the Moore-Wilton lemon hunt of April and was confirmed in his position.

But behind his back, the minister continued to bag him, and by July had decided Barratt had to go. Moore had by then fallen for the charms of Malcolm Mackintosh, a can-do man of enormous self-confidence and capacity for 'managing up', much more the type of personality with whom Moore felt confident.

As the axe was being sharpened for a quiet execution, however, someone leaked news of Barratt's imminent demise: Barratt dug in his heels, and the government is now being confronted with a very messy court case about whether departmental secretaries have any expectations of natural justice or fairness in their being sacked.

For Canberra-watchers it's a delicious case, not only for the opportunities provided by the litigation to see chapter and verse of how this government manages relations between ministers and bureaucrats, but also for watching some of the prophecies come true.

The comments about the service culture for example: Defence is now leaking like a sieve—understandably, perhaps, when a part of the subtext of the ministerial leakings about its senior personnel has been how hopeless and hidebound they are and about the need for a new secretary to give the top structure a major shake-up.

That leaking has involved not only the airing of some dirty linen but also a few remarks about the capacity of the minister and his own private office. Barratt's own judgment was that 'the problem with John Moore is that he does not do his homework and he will not listen'.

The government's embarrassment is compounded not only by the fact that Barratt was its own political appointment, but also by the impossibility of negotiating any out-of-court compromise. If Barratt gets a penny more than the going term payout, the government will never be able to get rid of any senior manager without lawyers being present.

Those taking delight in the affair might wonder how much the investment the government has made in protecting John Moore will pay off. Moore is important in the Liberal Party's own networks,

but has never been any great shakes as a minister, political strategist or policy-maker, or, for that matter, chooser of good officials. Nothing in his background suggests any great interest in defence either. Why, suddenly, is he developing such an interest in a portfolio, and acting with such a sense of urgency?

Those relishing his discomfort should at least consider the possibility that he is right. Not perhaps in the way he has gone about things, but right in perceiving that things are badly awry in the Defence Department, and unlikely to be addressed by mere adjustments at the margin.

In fact, the government has been exasperated by Defence for some time, and the essential line of Moore's scorn is a continuation of Ian McLachlan's approach. The government thinks that the strategic situation facing Australia over the past few years has utterly changed, but that the Defence Department's ideas have not. Still less has the department rearranged its budgets or its guns to deal with today's contingencies. The dramatic changes in Indonesia, the crises in Papua New Guinea, the economic and political changes in most of the South East Asian nations, in China and on the Indian subcontinent, bear little relationship to the benign environment of the early 1990s. The failure of Defence is seen not only in intelligence shortfalls in predicting such changes, but in adjusting its own structures and systems to deal with the new situation.

Though the sharp end of active brigades has been increased, more by direct political decision than by policy and programs coming from below, doubts about capacity remain. A major factor in the government's unwillingness to involve itself in a military peacekeeping operation in East Timor has been a frank doubt about Australian capacity to maintain any effort there.

AUSTRALIA HAS BY FAR the biggest defence budget in its region, and an investment in military and intelligence capital which no other country in the region can match. And, over recent decades, it has been able to turn a high proportion of its budget into capital acquisition. But Defence has not been able to make much of an asset of this. It has locked itself into long-term major projects which, at the least, need modern rationales and which ought to have to compete against fresher priorities. The department is also accused of having been slow to adopt the wider cultural revolution which Howard has imposed over the rest of the bureaucracy. It certainly had not had the budgetary discipline.

The politicians, in short, might be right in thinking that making war is too important to be left to the experts.

Does this instinct justify a big shake-up? It justifies something, but just what is not so clear. The politicians themselves seem short on ideas, and some of their meddlings suggest that they too tend to look backwards rather than forwards. Even if they are determined on reorganisation into a system which has the best thinkers and managers in charge, the risk is that wholesale massacres tend to produce higher casualties among the best and the brightest than among the dross—witness the general public service after 10 years of Keating and Howard.

One should not necessarily be against John Howard's wanting a better service from Defence. But, frankly, if I wanted it, I would not have John Moore in charge of delivering the goods. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

Maidenly standards

From *Giles Auty, National Art Correspondent for The Australian*
Tim Bonyhady's article in your last issue has something of the tone of a maiden aunt doling out disapproval and peppermints to undeserving nephews. As one of three of these—Brian Kennedy and John McDonald were the others—I merited only the broken peppermint from the bottom of the handbag for the apparently short-lived verve of my first few articles as art critic for *The Spectator* back in 1984.

In short, the sneering tone was thoroughly familiar to an Englishman accustomed to living in Australia, but the great surprise was to encounter it in a publication which goes out under the imprimatur of the Society of Jesus. For the rest it was tut-tuts all the way, as in: 'Auty has indulged in ever more autobiographical anecdotage.'

In all I wrote some 477 pieces of art criticism for *The Spectator*, whose editors and readers are widely held to be among the more discerning in the world. At the end of my time there I was informed I had become their 'most read' columnist—not too bad, perhaps, for someone writing in the weekly company of some of the top journalists in the world.

While I may not please Mr Bonyhady's prim, maidenly standards, I clearly enjoy the rather unusual advantage for an art critic of being perused consistently by a general readership. While he may think I do it all wrong, evidence suggests otherwise. Before I became an art critic I was a professional painter and thus had some experience, at least, of life in the trenches. Mr Bonyhady prefers to pour scorn, however, on my entire life, dredging out such obscure, hostile references to me as he can find.

This scorn extends to an experience I have written about with some candour and which effectively converted me from a confused young modernist to the artist and writer I subsequently became. Perhaps one of your Jesuits could counsel him on the significance of such experiences?

Reverting to a lower and more pragmatic plane, my personal brief from *The Australian* does not include frequent coverage of private art

Eureka Street welcomes letters from its readers. Short letters are more likely to be published, and all letters may be edited. Letters must be signed, and should include a contact phone number and the writer's name and address. If submitting by email, a contact phone number is essential. Address: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au



galleries—although exactly 50 per cent of my articles for *The Spectator* featured these.

If, as an 'overpaid' journalist, I had to find all my air fares from my own pocket I would comfortably overspend what I am actually paid. In fact, by a little forethought and management, I arrange to give talks and workshops, open exhibitions and judge art prizes even in the more obscure corners of this vast continent. Since much of my travel is covered by air fares supplied for these purposes, I do not feel myself to be compromised professionally when I write about exhibitions in those areas.

But thanks for the slur anyway, Auty Tim.

Giles Auty
Sydney, NSW

Lacking subtlety

From *Gary Catalano*

I can't recognise myself in Tim Bonyhady's glancing reference to me and my work in his article in the July/August issue. In the six years I was art critic on *The Age*, I don't believe I once told my readers what they should or should not buy, and I certainly didn't make a point of being outraged at contemporary art. What did irritate me from time to time was the manner in which certain curators and academics wrote about contemporary art. The distinction is an important one.

Mr Bonyhady, who has had the benefit of a legal training, should be more careful in the way he expresses himself. I would suggest he takes T.S. Eliot's advice and refrains from commenting on a writer until he has read all of his or her work. That way his writing might acquire the authority—and subtlety—it now patently lacks.

Gary Catalano
Clifton Hill, VIC

Serious job

From *Peter Timms*

Linda Williams, in her review of the Melbourne Biennial (*Eureka Street*, July/August 1999), accuses me of being dismissive and claims that my review in *The Age* was a 'denunciation' of that exhibition. Yet she is happy to dismiss me, in turn, as 'a mild-mannered conservative'. I've no idea what that means but it's obviously intended as a personal jibe.

She says that I praised just four works (it was six actually), assuming from this that I 'reject' all the others. She fails to mention that I cited only six works in a negative context also. Unfortunately, I am limited to less than 800 words, so I can't mention everything.

My praise (which occupied almost exactly half of my review) included phrases such as 'this is a magnificent installation', and 'like all the best works in this exhibition (Chad McCall's) is transformative ... precise and exquisitely detailed'. I said there were works in the show that 'will knock your socks off and make you believe that art might yet be capable of re-enchanting the world' and so on. This is Linda's idea of denunciation? Even the Biennial's own advertising included glowing quotes from my review.

But yes, I did think the exhibition as a whole failed, and I tried to explain as best I could why I thought so. I'm glad Linda had a different view, and I was interested to read her comments. But her clear imputation that I was unprofessional and lazy and that I failed to take the exhibition seriously is, in a word, cheap. I might, in her opinion, be wrong, but I do take my job, and the exhibitions I review, very seriously indeed.

Peter Timms
Fitzroy, VIC

Taxing the truth

From Evan Whitton

Moira Rayner rightly complains that 'lawyers don't learn legal history any more' ('What Lawyers Don't Read', *Eureka Street*, November 1998). They will find, if I may say so, my little book, *The Cartel: Lawyers and Their Nine Magic Tricks*, a useful introduction. I don't know where your proprietors stand on Lotario di Segni, Pope (as he became in 1198) Innocent III. Perhaps he was too militant even for the Jesuits but, as the man who invented a legal system based on rational investigation of the truth, he is, or should be, the hero of all who believe in justice.

Our system, by contrast, derives from a medieval craft guild, or cartel, whose product unfortunately happened to be law. Its major aim was (and is) to enrich senior lawyers and their descendants. Having made their pile, they can retire to the status and unutterable boredom of an untrained judiciary; Lord Thankerton knitted on the bench. After November 1215, a few lawyers and judges in London's embryo guild rejected Innocent's system, partly on the time-honoured ground that wogs begin at Calais. Our system was thus able to develop into what it is today: a lucrative game based on a lie: that truth does not matter.

Ms Rayner says she is a lawyer and freelance journalist. This must get a bit tricky; the press has traditional obligations to seek the truth, to interest and amuse the customers, and to serve the community by exposing wrongdoing, particularly that which subverts democracy, e.g. corruption, organised crime and the legal system.

She says I wrote 'a diatribe against democracy, based on lawyers' "take-over" of lawmaking—and perversion of parliament' in *The Australian* before last year's election. It is true that I noted that lawyers got control of parliament in the 14th century and that the common law world still has government of the lawyers, by the lawyers and for the lawyers. But the piece, a short history of censorship from Pope Alexander VI to John Howard, was surely in favour of democracy, not against it.

In *Dangerous Estate*, Francis Williams says the press is 'the one indispensable piece of ordnance in the armoury of democracy'. When Defoe

invented modern journalism at the beginning of the brazenly corrupt 18th century, guildsmen on the bench and in parliament instantly perceived it to be a threat to their power and corruption. To silence the press, judges defined seditious libel as 'written censure upon any public man whatever for any conduct whatever or upon any law or institution whatever', and in 1712, politicians put a tax on newspapers. It immediately wiped out several London journals, including Addison and Steele's *The Spectator*.

The tax on information was lifted in 1855; in 1998, Prime Minister Howard threatened to reimpose it. I wrote: 'Howard's motive may not be that of the corrupt Whig oligarchs, but the effect is the same. Welcome to 1712.' Courtesy of some Democrats, Australia will shortly regress to that inglorious year; we may hope your admirable journal of ideas does not go the same way as *The Spectator*.

Evan Whitton
Glebe, NSW

A shot in the arm

From Ken O'Hara

What should be done to overcome the hospital crisis quickly and for sure?

It seems there's a need to change track fundamentally, and start budgeting for each hospital's actual needs, from the bottom up, rather than continuing the current practice of governments allocating a never-sufficient amount from top central funds, trickling slowly down.

This way, the amount actually needed for maximum hospital efficiency will be clear, with the government then acting to get it.

And with the existing Medicare Levy only providing 10 per cent of total health costs, expanded revenue is vital.

So the ball is now in the court of the politicians and their top health administrators to overcome this deficiency quickly, or our hospitals will surely be continuing to limp along as if on crutches.

Ken O'Hara
Gerringong, NSW

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The Catholic Diocese of Darwin and

The Catholic Elders and Communities of the Eastern Arnernte People

invite expressions of interest in a

GREAT JUBILEE / HOLY YEAR PILGRIMAGE

from

CHARLES CREEK

(Alice Springs)

to ARLTUNGA

to LTYENTYE APURTE

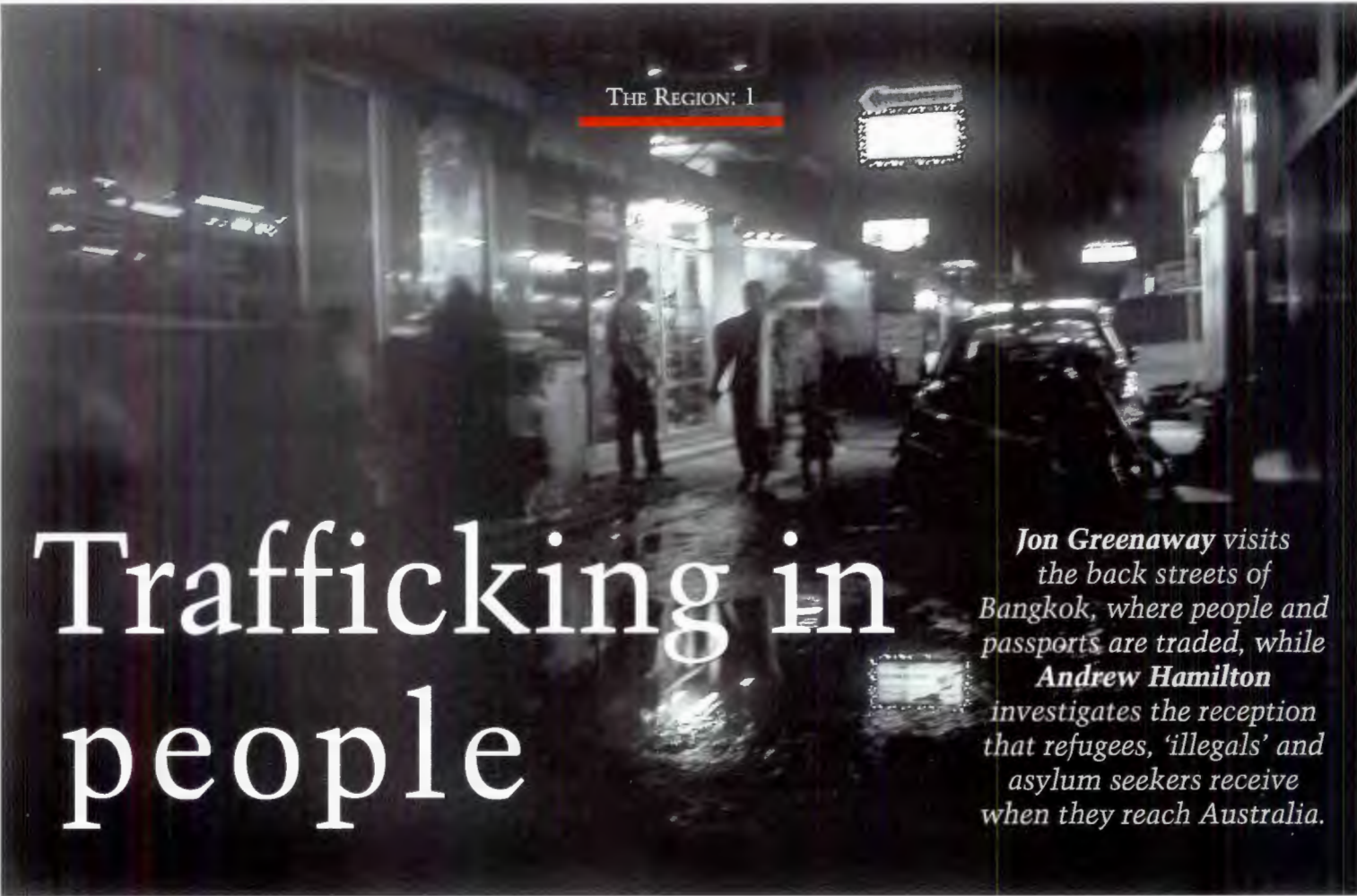
(Santa Teresa)

This pilgrimage over several days traces the story of the people of the Little Flower Mission who were removed, due to World War II, from Alice Springs to Arltunga where they remained for ten years before settling at Santa Teresa. It is designed to be a journey of reconciliation with the past, with the land and with the ancestors and with the forces of history which have moulded the present. It is a journey in Faith and it is a journey in Hope for the next millennium. The Eastern Arnernte people are sharing their story with the wider Church in a sign of trust and expectation of Grace in the Holy Year 2000.

The event will take place over the period of the afternoon of Thursday, September 7th to the afternoon of Monday, September 11th, 2000, though it will be possible for people to take part for a shorter period of time. Each day will involve the Eucharist, listening to each other and celebrating our common faith, campfire meals together and storytelling, and sharing the journey. There will be some walking each day through beautiful Central Australian countryside for those who are able.

Because the non-Arnernte pilgrims will not outnumber the Arnernte, numbers are necessarily limited and priority for those joining the people will be given to: a) any of the separated generation who were removed from Charles Creek or Arltunga; b) priests, religious, lay-missionaries, volunteers and staff-persons who have a connection with the Eastern Arnernte people; and c) representatives of the Australian Army and the Government. There will still be room for other interested parties. All are invited to express their interest by writing for further details to:

Fr Peter Wood, MSC
Pilgrimage Coordinator
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Trafficking in people

Jon Greenaway visits the back streets of Bangkok, where people and passports are traded, while Andrew Hamilton investigates the reception that refugees, 'illegals' and asylum seekers receive when they reach Australia.

HUSSEIN STANDS at the mouth of a side-alley that juts out of 'Little Arabia', a rabbit-warren-like collection of bars and cafés that cater to Bangkok's substantial Middle Eastern community. Somehow he had walked down the narrow lane without my noticing, as he had the first time we met a week earlier, when he appeared in front of a Bangladeshi restaurant a few hundred metres away, begging for help. He is wearing the same rough cotton T-shirt and faded blue jeans.

Agitated, he hops from foot to foot as he again explains that he is in trouble. He reaches into his money belt and pulls out the identity card that proves he deserted Saddam Hussein's army. 'If I step one metre out of my country, they will kill me,' he says, chopping down with his hand like an axe.

Nonetheless, Hussein is still alive. In Pakistan three years ago, he paid agents (whose trade is to smuggle people across borders) to take him to Australia by boat. Three weeks later, after a detour via China, he was caught in Malaysia when the boat ran aground, and was taken to an immigration detention centre outside of Kuala Lumpur. There he spent the next two years of his life, selling cigarettes and soft drinks

to other detainees for profit after buying them himself from the guards for an already inflated price. He made enough money to bribe someone in Malaysian immigration to drop him across the border into Thailand.

He had no passport—that was taken from him when he was arrested, along with US\$3000 he had with him to pay the prices asked by smugglers—so he went to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Bangkok. They rejected his claim for 'Person of Concern' status and rejected it again on appeal. Both times he received the pro forma UNHCR letter that states, in an English clipped of emotion, that he does not qualify as a refugee. No reasons are given, no suggestions offered.

Hussein is not alone. Ask a few questions of any of the people smoking hookahs and drinking sweet, grainy coffee on the side of the streets behind where Hussein stands and you will hear similar stories. Some are fleeing persecution in Iraq, others are drawn by the prospect of a better life in Australia, free of economic sanctions and militarism.

Either way, most of them are caught in Bangkok. They have paid smugglers thousands of US dollars for safe passage to

Australia and been dumped in Thailand, the easiest part of the route. They have managed to get out of Iraq via Jordan or Syria and are waiting to buy, from a smuggler, a passport that will get them on to a plane bound for Sydney or Perth. They have applied to UNHCR, waited several months for the decision, or, if they have already been granted refugee status, they have waited up to two years for embassy officials to decide whether they should be resettled in Australia.

These are the people who have scared the Australian government into spending \$124 million beefing up our coastal surveillance operations and Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs presence at key points of departure around the world. In announcing these initiatives, plus the tougher penalties for smugglers and increased fines on airlines which bring 'illegals' to Australia, Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, stressed that each 'illegal' costs Australian taxpayers about \$50,000 on average.

Alarm at the idea of Australia's being invaded by boat-people carried to its shores by an armada of leaky tubs was raised again with the discovery of a new route down

through the Pacific islands. Landings on the east coast where most Australians live prompted the government's response.

However, while the debate over 'illegals' is driven by this issue, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs estimates that around 70 to 80 per cent of those residing in Australia illegally arrived on a Boeing rather than a boat, and of those, most would have passed through Bangkok at some point. Thailand's relatively easy visa requirements (designed for its tourism industry), its large international airport, and its ability to absorb over one million 'illegals', have made it a major staging point for the trafficking of people to Australia, Europe and North America. Whatever their reasons for leaving their country, nearly all will have contact with a smuggler at some stage. Smuggling is very big business.

PROFESSOR Ron Skeldon is a migration specialist, having taught at the University of Hong Kong's Geography Department for many years before moving to Bangkok. His position there gave him a good view of the exodus from China in the early 1990s. The liberalising of the economy gave Chinese people both expectations beyond life in the village, and the money to pay 'snakeheads' to smuggle them into the US, which all this decade has been able to absorb illegals into the workforce. He says that migration follows a pattern that smugglers themselves foster and exploit.

'Migration, in whatever form, comes with networks: people come from one province, town or even village and when they have moved they send information back which allows friends and relatives to come across. It is a sort of multiplier effect.'

Over the last decade, Australia has become established as a priority destination for Assyrians, Kurds, other minority groups and political dissidents leaving Iraq. They are the largest group—apart from the Burmese—looking to be resettled from Bangkok, and at the moment are causing the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs most concern.

'Alan' is a Kurdish doctor who worked with a non-government organisation in Iraq before he fled earlier this year. He says he left Iraq because NGOs are looked on by Saddam Hussein's regime as part of the international conspiracy against his rule.



These are the people who have scared the Australian government into spending \$124 million beefing up our coastal surveillance operations and Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs presence at key points of departure around the world.

They have been the subject of attack as a consequence of internecine fighting among Kurdish groups in Northern Iraq.

Alan has been interviewed by UNHCR and is waiting for their decision. He knows that, had he managed to get to Australia, he would have stood a better chance of asylum, as only a few of the 10-20 Iraqi cases currently adjudicated by UNHCR in Bangkok each month are recognised. For his own reasons, he preferred to try to get

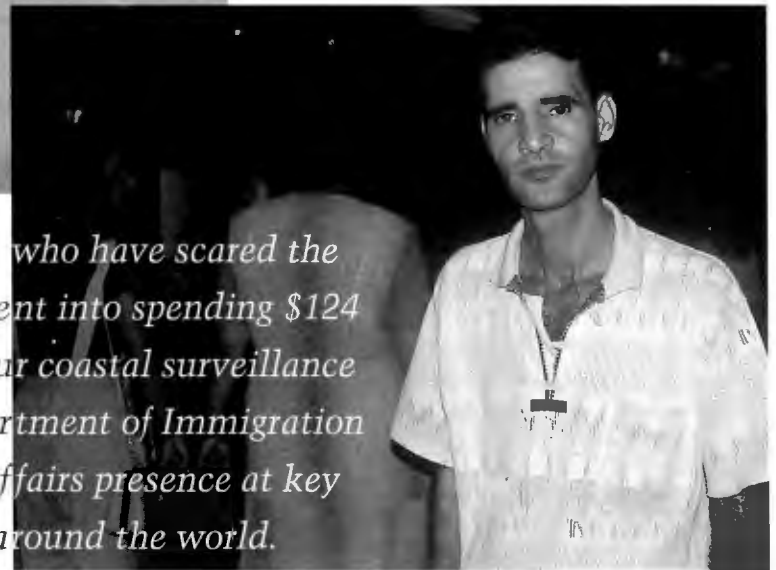
there through more legitimate means. He has quickly discovered that the system is far from perfect.

'I know many people here who do not bother to apply with UNHCR because they think it is useless,' he explains.

'I know it is difficult for them because, with so many people applying, how do you know who is genuine? But if they recognised more people, and resettlement to Australia did not take so long, not so many people would try to get there illegally.'

'Some of them pay \$7000 US, maybe \$8000, for a passport or to be trafficked. Wouldn't it be better if this money was spent in Australia?'

UNHCR in Bangkok is often criticised for not doing enough to fulfil its mandate to protect refugees. In recent months it has been conducting a review of the refugee status of Cambodians who fled the July 1997 violence. According to Jane Williamson, the termination of the refugee status of some of these people who remain in Bangkok is too hasty, even going by UNHCR guidelines, and is based on a flawed analysis of the permanence of the Cambodian peace. Williamson is working with other lawyers for the Jesuit Refugee



Service in Bangkok in appealing these decisions and can see that this is part of a bigger trend in the UN's refugee agency.

'There is a shift going on within UNHCR away from permanent protection towards temporary protection of refugees. Current thinking is that it is better to keep people closer to home in the hope that they can return when peace comes.'

Williamson can see the benefits of this approach. It is part of a more durable

resolution to the conflicts that produce mass exodus, rather than merely coping with refugee problems as they arise. She feels the downside is that it works against those who come to Thailand in search of asylum in a third country. She can also see, however, that UNHCR is under pressure for tight interpretations of the Refugee Convention.

for the airlines as well who will issue a boarding pass, maybe for \$2000–3000.'

He has lived in Thailand for eight years without official status because Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention governing refugees. His applications for resettlement to a number of embassies have been rejected as attitudes towards Tamil asylum seekers have hardened. In

Department suspects that the improvement in surveillance at Don Muang airport is shifting traffic to regional ports not watched as closely as Bangkok's. 'Illegals' fly from Bangkok to Seoul, Taipei or Singapore, for example, before heading to Australia.

And new routes into Australia are constantly being found. In the last week of July, two undocumented Iraqis arrived in Perth on a Thai airways flight that departs from Don Muang but stops in Phuket on the way.

An Australian journalist, based in Bangkok for many years, says that he was approached late at night in a hostess bar in Bangkok's Patpong by two men claiming to be Sri Lankan.

'They asked if I was Australian and then wanted to know if I was interested in making some money. Naturally I was interested, so I asked what they had in mind.

'They told me that I would have a ticket for Perth bought in my name while another person wanting to go to Australia would have a ticket for Phuket on the same flight. After boarding the flight in Bangkok, we would somehow swap boarding cards and I would leave the plane in Phuket as a domestic passenger while the other guy would head on to Perth.

'They assured me that they had a contact in Thai immigration who would stamp me back into the country a couple of days later. For that they said they would pay US\$300 plus \$100 to live on in Phuket while waiting to get the stamp.

'I asked if the other guy was some sort of criminal, but they assured me he was a genuine refugee.'

The name of an Australian passport holder appeared on the flight list on both days the illegal Iraqis arrived.

A highly placed official in the Thai Immigration Department recognises that people will always get through. Don Muang airport hosts 20,000 passengers every day and it is difficult, he argues, to ask Thailand to control the outflow to Australia when Australia cannot control its own borders. So much money is made by the smugglers that it is natural to presume, he suggests, that immigration officials who might earn the equivalent of A\$600 a month would be tempted by bribes. In the last two years Thai authorities have broken two counterfeit rings, only a fraction of those involved, according to diplomatic sources.

While all the parties concerned in the traffic of illegal migrants acknowledge the presence of Bangkok-based smuggling operations, it is difficult to find people who



To the naked eye, fake passports confiscated by embassy officials from people trying to board flights to Australia look near to perfect. Produced with the use of scanners, sometimes it is only the paper quality that gives them away as fakes.

'UNHCR does not want to annoy Western embassies in Bangkok by producing a constant stream of persons of concern who then have to be considered for resettlement. Nor do they want to get the Thai Government offside by turning Bangkok into an even greater hub for illegals through a higher rate of recognition.'

THE ABILITY smugglers have to get their human cargo past immigration and check-in at Bangkok's Don Muang airport has led to a collaboration between immigration officers from the US, Canadian, UK, New Zealand and Australian embassies. Since the beginning of May they have been working in shifts out at the airport, collaborating with airline staff, who refer suspicious cases to them. From 6am to 1am every day, there is a compliance officer on hand to intercept illegals travelling to any of these countries. In the first two months that the roster was in place, 450 illegals were stopped. The Canadian embassy estimates that around 150 got through.

'A good smuggler knows everything,' says a Sri Lankan refugee who prefers not to be named. 'If you don't have a visa, they can organise for Thai Immigration to give you a stamp and they also have contacts working

desperation, he tried to get to New Zealand by buying a duplicate Belgian passport and arranging a boarding-card swap with a legitimate Belgian passport holder.

'What happens is he has a ticket for New Zealand, I have one for Singapore where I don't need a visa,' he explains. 'Our passports are the same except for the photo—even his initial was the same as mine.

'Once we get through we swap boarding cards and tickets. He goes to Singapore and I go to New Zealand.'

He got as far as buying the fake passport for US\$500 before the holder of the original passport pulled out.

To the naked eye, fake passports confiscated by embassy officials from people trying to board flights to Australia look near to perfect. Produced with the use of scanners, sometimes it is only the paper quality that gives them away as fakes. Embassies organise training of airline staff to help them detect bogus passports, but despite this, and the risk of punitive damages, it is easy for busy check-in staff to miss picking up a good fake.

The Department of Immigration admits that it is impossible to stop everybody trying to get to Australia by illegal means, particularly as the smugglers seek out the points of least resistance. Already the

will talk about who they are and where they operate. Alan says it is wrong to think of these people as having a barber-shop shingle out the front and a fake passport factory out the back.

'They do not work out of any one place. Maybe they will meet in a hotel lobby or in a coffee shop and then they will go elsewhere to organise their business.

'They might show off their wealth but they do not want to show off how they make it.'

Not only do Middle Eastern operators work out of Sukhumvit Soi 3 (Little Arabia), but reportedly out of the Grace Hotel that fronts it—Thai immigration describes it as the centre of most of this activity. Other areas exist as well, such as 'Soi Karachi' near the GPO, where Pakistani groups organise passage to Japan and the US.

KHAO SAN ROAD, the street famed for being patronised by backpackers, is also a place where passports and visas can be bought, according to 'Andy', another Iraqi exile. Andy worked in Jordan as a mechanic for three-and-a-half years to raise the money to buy an original Maltese passport that got him to Bangkok. He has been here for six months and is now working for traffickers as a courier.

'I pick up the passport here and then I take it there and collect the money, 200 baht (A\$8) for the taxi and 300 baht (A\$12) for me. I am illegal so this is what I have to do to live.'

Andy has worked for Iranians, Pakistanis and Palestinians. Sometimes he meets them at the Grace Hotel, sometimes Khao San. He believes they can organise anything, because they have the money.

'In Bangkok all of us are poor, or are saving our money, but they have so much money. Everything is money and you can't stop them.'

Andy also suggests that their anonymity is protected by fear.

'Everybody knows everybody in this place,' he says, pointing towards the line of restaurants, 'but not so well they can trust each other. These men are very bad ... very bad.'

The smuggler for whom Andy works has an original Dominican Republic passport with an Arabic name on it. Andy is thinking he might be able to buy it for under US\$1000 and, with a scalpel, substitute his photo for the original. Then he will fly to China and then from there to the Dominican Republic before going overland into the US. He shows me the passport and asks me to translate the personal details from the Spanish. He will go in the hope that no-one bothers to question him.

'People trust the smugglers because they are desperate, they are on the run, they are scared, and they come here with all their money ready to spend,' Alan observes. 'A friend of mine is here. He does not know where his wife and children are. He didn't know anybody in Bangkok.'

'A Pakistani who knew some Arabic overheard him talking on the phone one day and promised to help him get to Australia. He handed over US\$4000 and his passport and that was the last he saw of him.'

Those in search of a better life are ripe pickings for gifted con men. Twelve months ago, Thailand changed visa regulations for arrivals from the People's Republic of China. The requirement that a visa had to be obtained prior to arrival was repealed and now PRC Chinese are given visas on arrival. This was designed to bring in more tourists to boost the cash-strapped Thai economy. It has, however, started a flow from China of people wishing to settle and

work in Thailand's extensive Chinese community.

When an ethnic Chinese with an Australian passport was apprehended in Bangkok in mid July for falsely advertising working visas for the Olympics, it was suspected that recent PRC Chinese arrivals were his target. He ran an advertisement for the first two weeks of June in a Chinese-language newspaper published in Bangkok. The ad called for applicants to work in fields as varied as broadcast media and food preparation. It also asked for US\$2600 for a visa and intensive English training.

When police arrested him he had US\$3500 in his possession and around 200 names on his books. He has since been charged with misrepresentation, which carries a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment and/or a 10,000-baht fine.

Once they get on to a flight to Australia people with false documents most often rip up and dispose of what they have so as not to be sent back to their last port of call for having improper documentation. If they claim asylum yet do not have any papers, the Department of Immigration must first prove that they are not refugees before turning them around. But even with this tactic in operation, the Department has found cause to send some back within two days of their arrival. After spending their life's savings and dodging and weaving their way on to a plane bound for Australia, they end up in a holding cell at an Asian airport. Without any papers, they have no way forward or back. Currently an unknown number of Iraqis sent back from Australia are being held at Don Muang airport with no clarification of their status.

One is reported to have been there for six months.

IT IS NOT ONLY IN AUSTRALIA that the walls are going up. Every Western country is making it more difficult for 'illegals' to arrive. But the more that barriers are erected, the more the opportunities for human traffickers.

Ron Skeldon is doubtful that the government's recent initiatives will have their desired effect.

'Illegal migration is in fact a function of inadequate legal channels available for people to migrate. You are never going to stop the movement of people. We are now more mobile than we have ever been before,' he says.

'One would expect that Australia will see more illegal arrivals rather than less. What is more sensible is to allow the flow



Visa scam arrest, Bangkok

of migration but to control it with short-term visas and the like.

'If the migration is legal then it can be monitored; it is visible. If it is illegal then they are invisible—they just disappear.'

A decision by Britain's High Court in early August recognised that asylum seekers were being dealt with unfairly under measures designed to stop illegal entries. The ruling on three test cases decided that the UK government, in jailing somewhere between 500 and 1000 asylum seekers for using forged documents since 1994, was in contravention of article 31 of the Refugee

Convention. This article states that no asylum seeker should be penalised for entering a country illegally.

In the crackdown on illegal migration (on asylum seekers, in particular), the urban refugee—who is not part of a mass movement of people such as that witnessed out of Kosovo—is becoming unwelcome by association. And they are trying to come to a country that is both scared and angry. Scared by a new influx of boat-people and angered by spurious appeals in the Australian courts by people trying to delay eviction. In this climate the government is

more and more viewing asylum seekers as only illegal entrants and overstayers.

But a world away from the argument about national integrity versus international obligations, are people like Hussein, Alan and Andy. Three very different men with different pasts, yet all caught between somewhere and somewhere else.

I asked Alan what he would do if his case was rejected by UNHCR. 'Something illegal,' he said with a shrug. ■

Jon Greenaway is *Eureka Street's* South East Asia correspondent.

What price hospitality?

THE TWO BIG Australian stories about refugees this year have been the arrival of Kosovo refugees and the coming of people by boat to populated regions of Australia.

The government had originally announced that it would not be giving shelter in Australia to Kosovo refugees, but was immediately forced, by a massive public reaction, to offer them temporary residence. During their stay, they have been welcomed by the Australian public and particularly by the communities surrounding the facilities where they have been housed. Apart from occasional official defensiveness in the face of complaints about conditions, or suggestions that they might be allowed permanent residence, the response to them has been unfailingly warm.

In the first half of this year, boats for the first time brought people seeking residence in Australia to the populated eastern coast of Australia. Public response has been hostile to these people, who are perceived as invaders breaching Australian territorial integrity. Commentators have not discussed the conditions in the nations they left, nor any need they may have for asylum; they have focused on the commercial and criminal involvement in their travel. The boats have been said to have been chartered by criminal gangs, and the people to have been drawn by fraudulent advertising.

The very different response perhaps indicates that in the public mind, refugees are not defined by their danger or their need, but by whether they have been invited to come to Australia.

If that is the case, Australian attitudes to refugees and immigrants are not unrepresentative. Australia, indeed, is one of the few nations that accepts immigrants. Most nations admit people only on working, tourist or other temporary visas. But the attitude of the present government to immigration has been unenthusiastic; it has been criticised for its narrowness by both state governments and by business groups. Immigration is seen as undesirable both for its short-term economic costs and for the social pressures which it is perceived to entail at a time of relatively high unemployment.

Accordingly, the number of immigrants admitted to Australia is low. The emphasis on economic factors, too, has led to an increased emphasis on business migrants, and to a smaller quota of family members. In personal terms, this means that immigrants wait longer before they can be reunited with their spouses or parents.

As is the case elsewhere, the emphasis of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in Australia has shifted from welcoming immigrants to excluding unwelcome residents. When issuing visas, the Department takes into account the likelihood that people will overstay their visas or apply for permanent residence. Given that these categories will include many people from poor or troubled nations, applicants from these parts are often refused visas. Those who do overstay visas are subject to detention and to

penalties which will make it more difficult for them to return to Australia.

The human consequences of this policy surface only occasionally at times of public controversy about the face which Australia presents to the world. Many Third World delegates to a conference for the deaf, for example, were recently refused admission to Australia.

When visitors and applicants for residence are evaluated on the economic benefits they bring and by their readiness to return without trouble, on-shore asylum seekers will be strongly discouraged and all legitimate administrative means will be used to exclude and deter them. They will effectively, if not legally, be regarded as lawbreakers. The initial popular reaction to the detention of asylum seekers is often,

'They broke the law, and so they deserve to be in jail.'

FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS in Australia, the arrival of the Kosovo refugees has been a mixed blessing. The efforts to make them feel welcome, particularly by local community groups, have been exemplary, and have drawn attention to Australia's often-neglected altruistic urge. But the Kosovo refugees have also drawn attention and resources away from other needy groups. Indeed, the argument behind the government's initial decision not to receive Kosovo refugees had some validity. To offer shelter at such distance is massively expensive, and, in principle, resources would be more effectively spent closer to Kosovo.

Perhaps the group most forgotten are the East Timorese asylum seekers, many of whom have been waiting for certainty about their status for six years. While they are no longer an irritant in Australian relationships with Indonesia, the change in Indonesia and in East Timor, together with the focus on Kosovo refugees, has taken them out of the public spotlight. But they remain no less needy or anxious, and their claim for residence is no less pressing than before.

The arrival of Kosovo refugees also led the government hurriedly to introduce legislation allowing temporary residence for refugees. The legislation, which did not receive the benefit of community consultation, may adversely affect future asylum seekers. While the legislation was occasioned by the Kosovo crisis, it reflects a growing international interest in restricting refugees' access to permanent residence. The human consequences of such legislation lie in the anxiety and lack of motivation that breed when people cannot plan for their future because they may be sent back to their own lands when the situation is deemed to have changed. The legislation is therefore of concern.

The situation of most asylum seekers in Australia remains precarious. Detention is entrenched, despite its manifest destructiveness. After a few months in detention, most asylum seekers complain of depression and difficulty in sleeping. This is inevitable when people dealing with loss are deprived of freedom and of the normal interchanges that ordinarily distract us from our problems. In the last two months, incidents at Port Hedland and Melbourne have received publicity. In both cases, the pressures caused by prolonged detention were a significant factor in the incidents. The response—transferring those responsible to prison—treats the symptom and not the cause. It also further confirms the assumption that asylum seekers are criminals who have broken laws by coming to Australia and have only to return to their own lands to be free of their hardship.

Inside information

The following is an extract from a letter by refugee claimants at the Maribyrnong Detention Centre, in which they describe their situation:

'The Australian Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs maintains a policy wherein those requesting refugee status and asylum seekers are placed in mandatory detention. If this policy implied an initial period (e.g. three months), during which the Department began or completed the process of determination of each case then, we believe, this period of waiting could be sustained by most without psychological damage. However, for the majority of detainees, the waiting time is much, much longer. For some, it extends more than two years and the outcome of such confinement is clearly destructive. Those who formulate these policies rarely, if ever, come into contact with any of the people living under these conditions. As you know, refugees have experienced tragedy, trauma and dispossession of family, friends and country. Consequently, detention places enormous stress on each person with the imposed inactivity, with the outbursts (at times violent) which occur from built-up tension and with 'flashbacks', reminders from past trauma.

'We came to Australia with healthy minds, aware of the upheavals and injustices in our native countries. We came desperate to find hope for our future. Yet we see that the Australian Department of Immigration policy brings about the gradual destruction of our hope. Our world is very much aware of what unemployment can do to people of working age. Our question: "Is the Immigration Department aware of what inactivity in confinement can do to a person?"

'The detrimental effects of detention can be verified by officers, doctors, nurses, lawyers, visitors and others who have contact with detainees. The common symptoms are stress, migraine, depression, insomnia, loss of appetite, inability to concentrate. These are usually treated with medication and some residents are sedated, but the majority of detainees refuse to resort to this. While we get medical treatment, the enclosure of the detention centre can only increase the pain and suffering.

'A major concern for us is the children. Women have given birth while here and young children spend their lives confined within barbed wire fences. We have asked ourselves again and again, "Is this the democratic country we thought we were coming to?" or "Is this a country where the abuse of human rights and the rights of the child is ignored?" The Department seems to have no understanding of the suffering they continue to inflict upon us who are in fact seeking sanctuary.' —4 August 1999

Criminals, however, are sentenced before they are detained and can look forward to a defined day of release. Meanwhile, the government continues to propose legislation that would limit asylum seekers' access to the courts, a proposal that has not so far won the support of the Opposition.

Where asylum seekers are regarded as objects of control rather than as subjects of rights, it is to be expected that they will be treated in inhumane ways. The deportation to China of a pregnant woman who faced forcible abortion on return was the most publicised recent case. Sedation, forced feeding, removal without warning, and the use of private security firms to get detainees back to their country of origin, are some of

the other practices that the government has defended. Such practices have understandably been made the subject of a wide-reaching Senate Inquiry.

To come close to people affected by Australian refugee policy is often to be distressed on their behalf. But refugees are the symptom of the lack of an effective will to ensure the equitable distribution of the world's resources. Refugees normally come from nations whose share of the world's wealth is diminishing. The harshness of their reception in developed countries reflects the desire to protect privilege. ■

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



The Month's Traffic



The need to heed

LAST YEAR THE VATICAN put out a document on the Shoah. Eleven pages, it had taken 11 years to write. A few weeks ago, Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy came to Sydney to address some of the criticisms of *We Remember: A Reflection of the Shoah*. Once an Australian bush priest, the cardinal is ending his days in the leadership team at the Vatican. About 600 people turned out to hear him speak at the Wesley Centre (capacity: 900). Organised by Jewish and Catholic lawyers, the meeting's profile was middle-aged, city-dressed and suited, with a sprinkling of clerical collars and yarmulkes. Although it was midwinter, there was very little coughing through the evening.

The main course came early. Crucial to the Vatican document is a distinction between anti-Judaism (theological negativity) and anti-Semitism (racial contempt). Over the centuries the church has taught anti-Judaism, the new Testament superseding the Old Testament. But did this anti-Judaism slide across the demarcation line and reappear as anti-Semitism? The cardinal didn't think so. Or, at least, it shouldn't have slid across—at times he seemed to be walking carefully on eggshells.

Rabbi Raymond Apple wasn't wearing it. He was a good choice to respond to Cardinal Cassidy: an elegant Sydney city man, he was a star at this year's Sydney Bloomsday reading, giving Joyce's 'catechism' episode a lively, stylish airing. He understood the theory of the distinction; but he knew his history too. He was able to quote cases, like the bishops of Slovakia, who would defend only Jewish converts to Christianity, or the papal nuncio in Bratislava, who, when asked to save the innocent blood of Jewish children, replied, 'There is no such thing as the innocent blood of Jewish children. All Jewish blood is guilty, and the Jews must die.' Rabbi Apple was backed up by a second respondent, Professor Colin Tatz of a centre for comparative genocide studies, with more flagrant examples of episcopal anti-Semitism—although Tatz's demand that the church rewrite the New Testament may have been somewhat premature.

There was one very bad moment during the evening. This came when Cardinal Cassidy, at his most engaging, was explaining that the Vatican document was a call for repentance, which means more than an apology. We are all—all Catholics—caught up in the sins of the past, in a kind of collective responsibility. There is a 'conventional' sense of collective sorrow and shame, he said, even though we may not be morally responsible for the past sins of our fellow Catholics. 'The members of the church today cannot be considered responsible individually for what happened in past centuries, no more than Jews today



can be considered guilty for what happened to Jesus in Jerusalem 2000 years ago.' And so the bloody spectre of the Jews as Christ-killers was allowed to walk the stage of the Wesley Centre; until Rabbi Apple dismissed it with courteous contempt.

If that was the bad moment of the evening, the good moment came ten minutes later. Responding to criticism that the Vatican document ducked church responsibility by distinguishing acts of 'the church as such' (not so bad) and acts of 'the Christian world' (bad), the cardinal quoted the present pope that the church 'acknowledges as her own her sinful sons and daughters'. Who are they, he asked? Why, any member of the church, he answered: 'From the pope of the day to the cardinals, bishops, priests and laity, and the guilt is greater according to the responsibility exercised.' Few seemed to notice what was going on here; yet this was a remarkable statement by a Roman cardinal. It may be all right for Dante to consign popes to hell; it's news when a cardinal does it.

If no-one noticed this, it may be because all minds were concentrated on Pope Pius XII. The Vatican document had devoted a considerable footnote to post-war Jewish encomiums of this pontiff, and the cardinal

added more recent welcome evidence in his favour, while protesting at the emotional, unhistorical prosecution of Pius. Again, it was left to Rabbi Apple to put something into the balance. Yes, Pius did assist Jews in various ways and at various times; but there were other times when he kept silent, when conscience would surely have said, 'Speak'. And there were times too 'when he acted, spoke and wrote in ways which he must have known would give comfort to the forces of destruction'.

Nevertheless, some in the Vatican are today considering Pope Pius XII for canonisation, despite Jewish disquiet. If they are serious about initiating a new era of Catholic-Jewish synergism, they should heed what Rabbi Apple said at the Wesley Centre.

—Edmund Campion

Beyond orange

and green

THE IRISH PEACE PROCESS has stalled. The Unionist Party has refused to participate with Sinn Fein in the new devolved Assembly until the IRA commences disarming. David Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, has been under intense pressure from the hard Right of his party to stand by an uncompromising policy of 'No Guns, No Government'. Sinn Fein has said that if the Assembly meets and it is included in the power-sharing constitutional arrangement, then disarmament will commence.

Neither side has blinked so far. Neither trusts the other. All parties have retired to their corners for the European summer to consider their positions.

It would be easy to lay all the blame at the Unionists' feet, but that would be a mistake. In all the grim history of 'Home Rule' and the liberation of Ireland from British rule, it has been rare for the Unionists to have made major concessions in the interests of peace. In the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, however, they did so.

They agreed that the nationalist parties were to be over-represented in the Northern Irish Assembly and government, when it was devolved from Westminster. They agreed to early release of political prisoners, the majority of whom were republicans. Despite the absence of any concrete agreement by the IRA to 'decommission' their weapons, they ultimately agreed to

negotiate with Sinn Fein over power-sharing arrangements. And, on the proviso that the Irish Constitution was amended to abolish a (symbolic) territorial claim over the six counties, they agreed to the Irish Government's taking on a limited role in relation to the province's affairs.

All this was done on the premise that there would be some concrete evidence that, as far as the IRA was concerned, the war was over. The evidence in that regard is mixed.

The British *Weekly Telegraph* newspaper reported on 7 July that significant IRA members are defecting to splinter groups committed to hiding their weapons and continuing the violent struggle. The *Telegraph* stated that British and Irish security forces (Special Branch, MI5 and the Irish Gardai) had intelligence that the IRA has enough weapons to conduct a full-scale war for about six months. On 4 August, it reported the seizure of eight consignments of guns from the US to Ireland, apparently headed for the Northern Irish republicans.

Retired Canadian General, John de Chastelain, has been appointed to head the decommissioning body, but in early July he was able to report to negotiators at Stormont Castle that the only paramilitary organisation willing to commit itself to disarmament was a splinter Loyalist group. Little if any progress has been made since that time. But there has been no reversion to terrorist campaigns by paramilitaries of either side (despite the odd, aberrant acts by breakaway die-hards).

In an attempt to break the deadlock between the Unionists and Sinn Fein/IRA, British and Irish PMs, Blair and Ahern, drew up a blueprint, 'The Way Forward', for the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. Sinn Fein was to be allowed to join the government on 15 July; the IRA was to commence disarming within weeks and to complete that process by May 2000; the International Commission on Decommissioning was to set a timetable for and confirm the commencement of decommissioning; and, most significantly, the new government and assembly were to be suspended by the UK Government if decommissioning was not carried out satisfactorily.

There are obvious problems with this plan. First, it ransoms the future of Northern Irish self-government and power-sharing to the IRA. Second, even if the IRA gives an unequivocal pledge to disarm, the dissidents and splinter groups are not parties to the agreement. Third, there is no fail-safe

Seeking a way

WE ALL HAVE DOG-DAYS WHEN, even if we do not go so far as longing to be delivered from this body of death, we at least dream of other forms of employment. Accordingly, my hopes were temporarily raised recently by an article by Gerald Bray in *Themelios*, a solid periodical from the Conservative Evangelical school. It was entitled 'Rescuing Theology from the Theologians'. If the prisoner is set free, I mused, its kidnappers might also be free to do something more interesting.

It was an enjoyable read: Bray echoed my prejudices. He wants theologically informed preaching that decently conceals its academic plumbing: 'I have a personal rule about this—if a preacher refers to the "meaning of the Greek" during the sermon, there is trouble ahead.' His main concern, however, was to insist that the task of theology is to articulate the faith of the church, and not to present a smorgasbord from it or to make compost out of it for a secular flower bed.

So far, so good. The difficulty comes, however, when we try to say with any precision how theologians will serve the church properly with their work. Recent periodicals, which display multifarious ways of doing theology, underline the difficulty.

Some theologians, for example, are concerned to speak out of the Gospel to their culture. The most recent copy of *Interpretation* (April 1999), with the resounding title 'Apocalypse 2000' takes up the way in which the structure and imagery of the Book of the Apocalypse has helped shape cultural expectations and political rhetoric in the United States. It has provided a language and imagery for reflecting on the social hopes and discontents of different ages. The article shows, incidentally, how malign can be the results when churches assume that they have access to the meaning of Biblical texts without recourse to critical enquiry.

In contrast to this work of exposition, the notable Croatian-born theologian Miroslav Volf reflects from a Christian perspective on the formative metaphors of social life (*Concilium* 1999/2). In his work, Volf has built a theology around the great themes of reconciliation and inclusion. In this article he examines the metaphor of the contract, one which emphasises freedom of individual choice. But it also encourages a view of social relationships as shallow and impermanent. Volf is more enthusiastic about the recent use of covenant as a central metaphor, but points out that in Christian terms covenant is inseparably linked to sacrifice and costly love. These extend beyond inclusion to embrace.

Other theologians reflect on life within the churches. They meet the paradox that to build and understand life within a tradition, you need to go outside it. In *Studia Liturgica* (1999/1), for example, Eugene Brand discusses Lutheran liturgical reform in the United States. He makes the obvious but easily missed point that in developing liturgy in English, the Lutherans inevitably had to draw on the experience, ritual and language of other churches. He shows, too, how more recent liturgical reform in the Catholic Church has necessarily been done ecumenically.

Nevertheless, theologians properly reflect on the practice of their own churches. In the *New Theology Review* (May 1999), Michael Lawler presents ten theses on divorce and remarriage. He is concerned with the sad exclusion from communion of so many divorced and remarried Catholics. Since Luther's time, theses, whether nailed to doors or not, have had a combative and controversial edge. These are no exception, for Lawler addresses head-on the theological justifications for exclusion. These include the arguments that the hands of the church are tied because Jesus forbade divorce and remarriage, that the practice of the church has always excluded it, and that the risk of scandal forbids the divorced and remarried from being admitted to communion. Lawler argues that in the New Testament there are diverse teachings about marriage and divorce, that early church practice shows no sign of hands being tied, and that the current Catholic attitudes have developed through historical contingency, and sometimes inconsistently. On this base, he argues for pastoral flexibility.

I would argue that in his theses Lawler perhaps overplays his historical hand. But his article provides an example of a theologian properly at work articulating the faith of the church. The evils caused by exclusion from the sacraments are so great that conventional wisdom needs to be sifted in robust discussion. ■

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system of accounting for the IRA's weaponry, so that there can be no real confidence in the disarmament process unless large amounts of ordnance are publicly exposed and 'decommissioned'. The plan was rejected by the Unionists.

But to focus on the problems is to deny the reality that for two years the IRA/Sinn Fein position on ceasefire has demonstrably been that they are committed to the constitutional process—all republican terrorism since the ceasefire was announced has apparently been committed by breakaway groups.

It is too much to expect that loyalists and republicans will embrace each other, at least for the foreseeable future. But, as the people of Northern Ireland become used to peace, they will surely demand constitutional, democratic solutions to their problems, rather than a resumption of low-grade civil war. The benefits of peace are already being experienced. There is no future in armed struggle. It is hard to trust and compromise with an armed enemy—the IRA should take the high moral ground and begin to disarm. —Hugh Dillon

Cold comfort

THERE WAS AN AIR of expectancy on the day the first Kosovo refugees were due to arrive in Australia. The hourly radio news service updated their progress through the skies from the other side of the globe. Sensitive to the health needs and cultural beliefs of our guests, Qantas served no fruit juice or alcohol on the trip. The movies shown on board were carefully selected to be light and funny—no drama or war scenes.

Preparations on the ground seemed no less considerate. The reception was thoughtfully low key—a short informal welcome at the airport by the Prime Minister and his wife, without intrusion from the press. Local communities were briefed about their new neighbours. Halal meat was arranged. Community interpreters were recruited and trauma counsellors provided, not only for the refugees but also to debrief the interpreters coping with too many tales of human misery. Australia might be far away, but could be relied upon to host people deserving of the world's care and support.

But then radio news bulletins began to report on negotiations with Kosovo 'protesters' refusing to leave the buses which had transported them to the Singleton barracks in NSW. Their unequivocal

demand was to return to the more congenial Sydney reception centre. For a nation which had recognised and defended the right to strike as a legitimate form of political action, our response was remarkably punitive. The 'rebels' were refused food and water while they stayed on the buses. After a torrid 31 hours, only a small family of three, including a frail 74-year-old grandmother, remained steadfast, refusing to budge.

The list of grievances about conditions at the Singleton camp were, by any objective criteria, reasonable. The army had long ceased housing its robust young 18–21-year-old recruits there except for weekend bivouacs—the living conditions were too primitive. The toilet and shower blocks were some 100 metres from the barracks, too far for the elderly, young and sick to trek, especially at night-time in the two-degree winter temperatures of 'sunny Australia'. And to people from Kosovo with a well-founded fear of perilous cold, the heating arrangements seemed remarkably casual. Then there was the problem of privacy—paper-thin walls made a night cough a shared event and the communal shower blocks offended reasonable requirements of modesty.

A cynical interpretation of these makeshift arrangements would be that it communicated the none-too-subtle message that Australia was a 'temporary haven', not a comfortable permanent 'home'. The government's generosity was also politically cautious—the refugees should not be seen to be queue-jumping for resources inadequately provided to disadvantaged nationals. There was a 'budget' for this humanitarian venture. Dollars, not the needs of people, determined the quality of services and facilities.

How do we make sense of this public mean-spiritedness in a culture which prides itself on its friendliness and willingness to help others? An anthropologist, for example, might conclude that, judged by world standards, Australian culture is not particularly hospitable. In many societies, the obligation of the 'host' is to provide the very best to a 'guest', even at considerable personal sacrifice. The honour of the host, the family and 'tribe' depends upon it. By contrast, Australians have cultivated individualist self-sufficiency. The rules of

reciprocity here preserve the form, but not the spirit, of hospitality—you 'shout' a round of drinks in the expectation that your mates will do likewise immediately. The understanding is that you might 'bring a plate', but always 'grog', if invited to dinner. Such rigid co-obligations are surprising for so affluent a society where there is little risk of eating (or drinking) your hosts 'out of house and home'.

Australians are not deliberately cold-hearted. But we set cultural store by putting up with hardship. Floods, fire and drought are meant to be borne with stoic forbearance. With obvious machismo, Senator John Tierney rushed to the Singleton army base, bounced up and down on the beds and declared that he found the room so hot he had to turn the heating down. 'The showers are outside, all right,' he chuckled. 'It's a bit

like a caravan park.' The Australian standard is the able-bodied bloke, not the weak and vulnerable.

Some of these dominant cultural ideals might have been functional in a harsh new environment. Others may even be understandable as part of the value system of a former (and predominantly male) penal colony. The persistence of such norms despite massive immigration, however, says much about the superficiality of our much-lauded cultural flexibility. Positive values such as the long-standing Australian

concerns with social justice and equity are imperilled if our generosity is arbitrarily confined to helping those we define as 'mates' because they share our own values.

There was something shameful and ugly in our unsympathetic response toward people forced into the unenviable role of reluctant guests. We have cause to be embarrassed. But there is a positive in all this: as our multicultural experience repeatedly demonstrates, encounters with other ways of seeing the world provide useful opportunities to learn a little more about ourselves.

—Kathy Laster

This month's contributors: Edmund Campion is an emeritus professor of the Catholic Institute of Sydney; Hugh Dillon's paternal grandfather claimed to be an IRA volunteer in the 1920s; Kathy Laster teaches law and legal studies at La Trobe University.





Of fertility, motility and ability

ANY LINGERING DOUBTS Archimedes had about the subjectivity of science have been swept away in the past few weeks by an excursion into the area of male infertility. It's clearly just as hard for scientists to rid themselves of the beliefs and taboos of upbringing as it is for the rest of us.

If you trawl the web for information on how lifestyle affects male fertility, what you find is more like an introduction to the Seven Deadly Sins. Advice on increasing male fertility by changing the habits of a lifetime has been posted by private infertility clinics, university andrology departments, and even public health organisations. And it reads like a puritan Bible. Do not drink; do not smoke; do not over-eat; avoid hot baths and tight underwear; too much exercise is bad for you; stay away from drugs (both recreational and prescription); avoid tea and coffee.

Much of the advice seems like common sense. Clearly, leading a healthier life can assist fertility. But when you probe more deeply into the scientific literature, the evidence that any of these practices is bad for you—except in gross excess—is surprisingly thin. A lot of beliefs about the effects of daily life on fertility seem more like an act of faith—and it's faith which just happens to coincide with conventional, conservative Western wisdom about what is good for you.

This is not to deny that science strives to be objective, nor to suggest that researchers have been unsuccessful in finding out about or treating infertility. It's just that when it comes to dealing with the human species, scientists sometimes find it difficult to put things into perspective.

While infertility does not rank highly on the public health agenda, because it is hardly ever lethal, it can have important social health consequences. Any significant threat to fertility can deny men and women the satisfaction of establishing their own family and, if regional or global, could spell the end of particular social groups or even the human species itself.

Thus, when Professor Niels Skakkebaek and colleagues at the University of Copenhagen reported, in 1991, that the sperm

count of human males (the number of sperm in each millilitre of semen) had been dropping dramatically worldwide for at least 50 years, the response was immediate. The Danish findings stimulated a blizzard of research into fluctuations in sperm quantity and quality.

A great debate has ensued between those who believe there has been a worrying decline in sperm quality and quantity, and those who believe things have not changed. Just about the only point on which all agree

is that the present data can be used to show very little, because male infertility and its causes are extremely difficult to measure.

There are at least four reasons for this difficulty. First, the male reproductive system is complex and highly tuned, and continues developing over a lifetime. Many different parts of it can be affected physically and chemically in many different ways at many different times. So there are multiple potential causes of male infertility, any one of which can be difficult to isolate.

The second reason—lag times—is really a subset of the first. Sperm, for instance, take 70 days to mature. So, defective sperm arising from the impact of environmental factors, such as overheating of the testes, may appear up to two to three months later, making it hard to trace back to the cause. Even more difficult to pin down are factors which may have been operative during the early development of the reproductive system itself. The impact of a mother's way of life on her child's reproductive system, for example, may only become apparent more than 20 years down the road.

A third reason concerns experimental technique. Because of social sensitivities about sex and reproduction, it is almost impossible to gather sperm samples from a truly random, unbiased sample of men. 'Most men will not provide sperm samples unless they have some particular concern about their fertility,' says Professor David Handelsman, director of the Andrology Unit at Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. 'So you can never assemble a representative sample without one sort of distortion or another. How many of your friends, if they

were approached at random, would provide a sperm sample just because a scientist knocked on their door and asked them to do it? And any decent study would require men to do so regularly, and in reasonable numbers.'

Finally, there is the question of just what measures are relevant. Until recently, there have been no standard techniques for determining sperm quantity and quality—every laboratory seemed to do things differently. That makes it very difficult to assemble data which are comparable.

THERE'S ANOTHER PROBLEM. Fertility ultimately takes two, a male and a female—a fact that often seems to be lost on doctors. Current estimates are that male problems contribute up to 40 per cent of infertility. But the link between sperm characteristics and fertility can be weak. A sub-fertile man with a highly fertile partner, for instance, may have little difficulty in fathering children. 'The conventional criteria of semen quality are poor indicators of fertility,' writes Dr Stewart Irvine of the Medical Research Council's Reproductive Biology Unit in Edinburgh, UK.

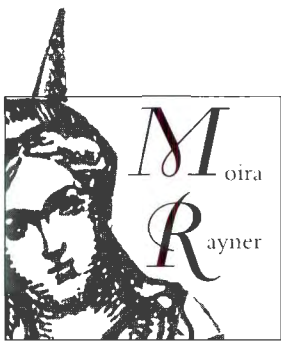
Irvine tells a wonderful story about a couple referred to him for IVF treatment because, although there seemed to be nothing wrong with them, they had not conceived after three years of trying. When Irvine examined them, he found an abnormality of the man's penis which meant that he could not ejaculate normally. The couple subsequently conceived without difficulty by artificial insemination. 'How long does it take to look inside a guy's boxer shorts?' Irvine asks.

So, it seems that it will not be easy to discover how lifestyle affects male fertility, for a series of very good, and very human, reasons.

It's a reassuring confirmation of just how human an activity scientific research can be. In the face of their performance on male infertility, how can anyone argue that scientists are a group of aliens? Beneath their lab coats and underwear, they're just like the rest of us. ■

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The state of Victoria

Amid football finals, the spring racing carnival and the opening of the new tollway system, Victoria is heading for elections. Moira Rayner looks at the condition of democracy and civil liberties in Premier Jeffrey Kennett's 'Victoria on the Move'.

JEFF KENNETT'S popularity has never been higher, especially among young voters and young males in particular, in the newer outer suburbs of Melbourne. His has been a remarkable metamorphosis. Even as he led the coalition to its massive landslide into government in 1992, Kennett was widely seen as a clumsy, impulsive politician, prone to gaffes, personal abuse and intemperate gestures. (He would rather we forget his infamous mobile phone conversation with Andrew Peacock in which he described his political colleague, John Howard, in four-letter words, and his repeated interjections when Joan Kirner, then Minister, spoke in the Victorian parliament, that she was a 'stupid woman'.) Even as her Labor administration was definitively rejected by the people, in 1992 Joan Kirner was still by far the people's preferred premier.

Now, as the celebrity premier, with his carefully crafted 'rough-diamond' media image, heads into his third electoral contest, and an undoubted third win, it is hard to recall (and younger voters simply don't) that this was the man dismissed as a 'boofhead' in the '80s and a buffoon in the '90s. The Teflon premier personifies his government, thriving despite scandals, professional opposition and popular protest at the wholesale changes wrought, in just seven years, in the structures of governance. He has effectively silenced his critics, both within and outside his government and his party. He has no heir apparent: there is no sign that he has any plans, or another place, to go. Jeff Kennett's face is an icon, as Nicholas Economou and Brian Costar remark in their introduction to *The Kennett Revolution* (UNSW Press, 1999), of 'the most robust example of the way the Liberal Party of Australia's approach to government and politics altered under the influence of neo-classical liberalism'.

As Costar and Economou write, the Victoria of 1999 has thoroughly cast off traditional liberalism, both the paternalism

of the Bolte years, and the small 'l', social-democratic liberalism of Hamer and Cain. Victoria was the cradle of a liberalism which used state intervention to achieve equality of opportunity, so important to liberal philosophers such as John Stuart Mill. Since 1992 that public infrastructure, established



over 150 years of conservative administrators (Labor governed for just 19 years in all) has been dismantled. The 'conservative' social and political culture which saw Melbourne described as 'grim city', the home of Protestant wowsers and a bastion of social conservatism, has gone with it.

It is timely to review what Kennett has wrought.

The most obvious change is the personification of government in one man. Victoria has a new verb: to be 'jeffed'. Jeff's foibles, now he is so powerful, seem amusing, reportable, and almost endearing. The bullying tone has softened into cajoling and

cosying, though critics are quickly labelled disloyal, selfish and un-Victorian, and dismissed. His government's willingness to seek out major events, such as the Grand Prix, and create new projects, such as the Docklands stadium, CityLink and Crown Casino, has invigorated business (and a certain chauvinism). The Victorian premier has also embraced multiculturalism (one of his most attractive acts was his genuine rejection of One Nation policies), supported moves to liberalise laws to allow the terminally ill to die with dignity, and (off and on) advocated drug law reform. He is, of course, a minimalist republican.

THE MOST PROFOUND effects of the Kennett reign, however, strike at the heart of good governance. These transformations are complete and probably cannot be undone. In the name of small government, free-market policies, and individual choice, no area—not even justice—has been left untouched. Paradoxically, the effect has been an increase in central government control and regulation, largely under the personal control of the premier himself. Even the heads of the departments report not to their ministers, but to the premier, personally.

The greatest changes came quickly, as the new administration cashed in on the atmosphere of 'crisis' which it could blame on Labor. But benefits—such as the minimisation of state debt through public asset sales and the efficiencies of privatisation, corporatisation and restructuring of the public sector—have come at the cost of accountability.

The changes to the public sector and to industrial relations have been immense. In reframing the employment market, for example, Victoria abolished the old award system and Industrial Relations Commission in 1993, then simply handed over its own new system to the Commonwealth in 1997. In the process, it abolished its own (not particularly tame) creature, the

Employee Relations Commission, and dismissed its Commissioners, for a second time. ERC President, Susan Zeitz, was not appointed to the federal body—a breach of the doctrine which requires judicial officers to be appointed to equivalent office in order to maintain tenure and the public interest in judicial independence. But the Kennett government has been characterised by a willingness to eliminate statutory and judicial watchdogs on its activities.

The government has dealt with 'justice' with the same policies it has used in all its other reforms. It has abolished independent offices, such as the Law Reform Commission, and removed the inconvenient powers (and sometimes the incumbents) of offices such as the Director of Public Prosecutions. It has privatised 'justice' mechanisms, such as prisons (leading to a 1999 coronial inquest on excessive deaths in custody in the Port Phillip prison), chipped away the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court (and cut out access to judicial review entirely, in some notorious cases), and increased access costs and obstacles to administrative tribunals.

But the greatest change is to Victorian society. The introduction of a gambling culture has had a detrimental effect both on the economy (now reliant on its gambling revenue) and on social well-being, as the recent Productivity Commission Report has revealed. The restructuring of local government, and changes in the nature and availability of community services—health care and state education, particularly—changed the role of non-government organisations and their capacity to advocate the interests of the disadvantaged.

This has all been possible because of the 1992 election, which handed over control of both houses of parliament to the executive. Without an effective opposition, with limitations on freedom of information and the right to seek judicial review of administrative action, with the growing use of 'commercial-in-confidence' exemptions to the duty to disclose public expenditure, and with the gutting of the office of Auditor-General, there is now virtually no check on executive power in Victoria. This is unhealthy for representative democracy, and is certain, over time, to lead to abuse.

One of the greatest casualties of the last seven years has been the status and influence of the media. Politicians must be accountable and not just through elections. Since the Victorian parliament no longer provides a check on administration, the 'watchdog' role of the media, scrutinising government's daily activities and the

political process, becomes far more important. But in this, Victoria's media have been remarkably ineffectual. The massaging of the message through public relations, entertainment and the advertising focus of the administration—the premier used to be in advertising—has been brilliant.

As the new premier, Jeff Kennett just refused to deal with journalists he regarded as not on side. In one 1994 ABC television report, ABC journalist Ian Campbell shot footage of a sad little group of reporters reduced, in their search for comment on matters of the day, to hanging out in the anteroom of commercial radio station 3AW, scribbling notes as a loudspeaker transmitted a Kennett interview with that station's Neil Mitchell—a scene reminiscent of Queensland premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen's 'chooks' scrabbling for a few grains of news. The media's impotence was perhaps symbolised by the very public collapse on Channel 7 by an upset anchorwoman, Jill Singer, immediately after she announced that a profiled story on Mr Kennett's share-dealings had been pulled moments before she went on air. She later gave sworn evidence that this was after direct intervention from the premier with station management.

Both the major Melbourne daily papers have broken stories which, if the people had reacted, could have destroyed the Kennett government. Each has revealed scandals at the heart of government probity—the tendering process for the casino, the detrimental effects of the new gambling culture, child protection scandals, ministerial misuse of government credit cards, extraordinary share-dealings, and even gross, personal ministerial misbehaviour. Yet whatever they reported, the public either wasn't listening, or couldn't be influenced.

This was a true achievement, within so short a time. It has been temporally associated, perhaps coincidentally, with changes in *The Age*, once a quality broadsheet which has seen several changes in editorial direction and today has a 'tabloid' feel, a 'lifestyle' emphasis, and a sinking circulation.

What are we left with? A can-do, ideologically driven, undoubtedly efficient, centralised, authoritarian and, for the moment, unchallengeable executive whose ethos is wrapped up in the personality packaging of just one man. ■

Moira Rayner is a lawyer and freelance journalist.



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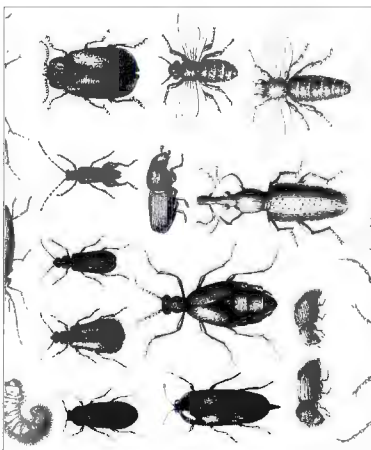


Sir Frank Macfarlane Burnet

OM, FRS, Nobel Laureate

1899–1985

On the centenary of Macfarlane Burnet's birth, fellow scientist G. J. V. Nossal reflects on the life and work of this remarkable man—a life that ranged from beetle collecting to winning a Nobel Prize for Medicine, from heading up the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute to writing 16 books in 15 years after 'retiring'.



Above: Burnet, still working post-retirement in the mid 1960s, at the Microbiology Department, University of Melbourne.

FRANK MACFARLANE BURNET WAS BORN IN TRARALGON, a small Victorian country town, on 3 September 1899. Both his parents were of Scottish stock, his father a country branch manager of the Colonial Bank, who had arrived in Australia in 1880. Mac, as he was called from the beginning, was the second of seven children.

In 1909, the family moved to Terang, and in 1912 young Mac won a state scholarship to attend Geelong College as a boarder. During school years, some of the key characteristics of the later scientist became manifest: a keen interest in nature, shown best by his avid passion for beetle collecting; clear academic excellence (he graduated dux of the school in 1916); and an innate shyness which was to dog him for most of his life. In 1917, Burnet won another scholarship, this time to Ormond College, University of Melbourne, where he spent the whole of a war-accelerated medical course.

Burnet became pathology registrar at The Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in 1923, thus beginning an association that was to last over 42 years. Charles Kellaway was appointed the second director of the Hall Institute in that year, and immediately set about planning the further training of someone he immediately recognised as a most significant protégé. In 1925, Burnet set sail for London to work for two years at the famous Lister Institute under the directorship of C. J. Martin. The only other interruption to Burnet's work in Melbourne was a two-year stint (1932–34) at the National Institute for Medical Research in London under the great Sir Henry Dale.

Burnet became Assistant Director of the Hall Institute in 1927 and Director in 1944. Kellaway declined to back Burnet for the top job, believing that administrative responsibilities would take away from Burnet's laboratory bench time and worrying that his shyness and absence of obvious leadership skills might set the Hall Institute back. The Board ruled otherwise and Burnet proved himself to be an outstanding and inspiring Director for a full 21 years. After his retirement in 1965, Burnet moved to a suite in the Microbiology Department of The University of Melbourne, where he devoted himself to scientific, popular and philosophical writings. During the next 15 years, there was a phenomenal yield of 16 books and countless lectures and articles, attesting to the extraordinary range of his scholarship and industry. Burnet died on 31 August 1985, just three days short of his 86th birthday.

Let me close this sharply truncated curriculum vitae by referring to Sir Macfarlane's family. He became engaged to Linda Druce, a young teacher, in 1926 and they married in 1928. It was a close and enduring partnership, Linda throwing her considerable intelligence and energy into supporting Burnet's career and sharing in both his trials and triumphs, until her death in 1973. The Burnets had three children, Elizabeth, Ian and Deborah, who took a keen interest in his work and in the Hall Institute. Deborah (tragically no longer with us) in fact worked as her father's research assistant in the early 1960s. In later years, Burnet took great joy in his seven grandchildren. In 1976, Burnet married Hazel Jenkin, a widowed volunteer librarian in the

Microbiology School and a former concert singer. They spent a companionable decade together in her comfortable home in Canterbury.

To understand Burnet's scientific contribution, we must project ourselves back to 1923, a much simpler time in medical science. The differences between viruses and bacteria were understood only in the most shadowy way. The gene was a theoretical concept. DNA as the



Graduation, 1918

genetic material was still three decades away, as was the polio vaccine. Scientific equipment was simple and cheap: a microscope, some pipettes, test tubes, syringes and needles, bacterial growth media, an incubator, a centrifuge and a modest supply of laboratory animals. In most fields, what was needed was not some small incremental addition to knowledge but a blazing insight to illuminate the darkness.

Burnet and the Secret of Life, 1923–33

Burnet's scientific work can be broken into three phases, though these overlap and the strands intertwine. We can term them 'Burnet the searcher after the secret

of life' (1923–1933); 'Burnet the microbe-hunter' (1933–1957); and 'Burnet the explorer of the body's natural defence system' (1957–1965).

In a sense, Burnet stumbled on his first research field. Doing a routine bacterial culture on the urine of a patient with a kidney infection, Burnet noticed two large clear areas on the otherwise uniform lawn of bacterial growth. He realised that these must have represented the growth of what d'Herelle had described a few years earlier—bacteriophages, literally eaters of bacteria. Burnet worked out methods by which a single bacteriophage infected a single bacterium. Nothing happened for 40 minutes but then, all of a sudden 50 bacteriophages were released. There could be only one explanation. A virulent organism must have multiplied in the host bacterial cell, finally killing it and releasing 50 progeny in a single burst. Burnet further worked out that there were instances where the phage did *not* kill the bacterial cell. Instead it slipped unnoticed into the hereditary constitution of the bacterium, that is, into what we would now call the bacterial genome.

The ability of the bacterial cell to carry the genes of an extrinsic virus was a truly novel concept. The amazing thing about Burnet's probing the secrets of phage behaviour was that, a decade later, Luria, Delbrück and others were to pick up the findings and build on them the skeletal structure of the new sciences of microbial genetics and molecular biology. Not for the only time in his life, Burnet was years ahead of the field in his thinking.

Burnet the Microbe-Hunter, 1933–57

Burnet the microbe-hunter emerged during his second stint in London. By the early 1930s, the critical differences between bacteria and viruses were becoming apparent. The National Institute for Medical Research was prominent in the field. There in Hampstead viruses were visualised for the first time, and their size measured more or less accurately by passage through graded filters.

But one bad bottleneck remained. Viruses could not be grown in the test tube and in fact most had not been isolated in pure form at all. Top priority in Hampstead was given to influenza, for



Portrait by
Sir William Dargie,
circa 1961.

How did the virus get into a cell? What happened when it got in? How did the virus get out before infecting the next cell? He answered these and many related questions of a fundamental nature. In medical science, basic research and practical application are never far apart. Knowing about specific receptors for virus entry opens up the possibility of blocking the receptor and preventing infection. Knowing that viruses can recombine genetically inside a cell affords the opportunity of designing strains which lack virulence but retain the capacity to provoke an immune response, thus constituting an ideal vaccine. Knowing that an enzyme may be required for viral release and spread suggests that an inhibitor of such an enzyme may be an anti-viral drug. The exciting new drug Relenza—developed by Peter Colman, Mark von Itzstein and colleagues in conjunction with Biota and Glaxo-Wellcome for prophylaxis and treatment of influenza—rests heavily on Burnet's work of 40 years previously, as Colman has generously acknowledged.

Burnet the Explorer of the Body's Natural Defence System, 1957–65

Burnet had flirted with immunology since the 1930s. He struggled to understand two basic points. First, how does an animal distinguish between 'self' and 'not-self', mounting a vigorous immune response against the latter but naturally tolerating the former? This applies, among other things, to foreign cells or tissues. Mismatched red blood cells provoke strong antibody formation, the body's own red blood cells do not. A kidney graft from an unrelated donor causes a massive, destructive immune attack unless halted by drugs, but the white blood cells which serve as the body's policemen do not invade a person's own kidneys. How do the white cells know the difference?

In 1949, Burnet, in a monograph co-authored with Frank Fenner, made a bold prediction. The capacity to distinguish self from not-self was not innate, it had to be learned by the immune system during embryonic life. If one could introduce a foreign substance or cell into an embryo, while the immune system was still in this immature, learning phase, one might be able to trick the body into accepting the foreign

the good reason that the 1918–19 pandemic of flu had been devastating, causing far more deaths than World War I. Burnet records the excitement when the breakthrough came. Nasal washings from influenza patients had been inoculated into all kinds of experimental animals. One day, Burnet's colleague, Laidlaw stopped him on the stairs. 'The ferrets are sneezing,' he trumpeted. Fabulous though the isolation of the pathogen in a ferret was, this was hardly the most practical way to learn more about the flu virus' habits, let alone to grow enough virus to make a vaccine. Burnet set about finding a better way, growing viruses in embryonated hen's eggs. To this day, his methods remain the preferred technique for growing enough of both the influenza virus and the yellow fever virus for the manufacture and mass production of vaccines.

Returning to Melbourne in 1934, Burnet worked on poliomyelitis, making the crucial observation that there was

more than one strain, an essential prelude to later vaccine developments. He studied herpes, the agent for cold sores; psittacosis or parrot fever; scrub typhus; a slightly different kind of organism that came to bear his own name, *Rickettsia burneti*, the causative organism of Q fever; canarypox; and, largely through guidance of others, Murray Valley encephalitis and myxomatosis.

Indeed, an argument could be made for Burnet's having become, by 1950, the world's leading animal virologist. But time and again he turned back to influenza. His interests in this organism were both practical and theoretical. From a practical point of view, he attempted to make a live, attenuated influenza vaccine given as a nasal spray and in fact he got permission to test this on 20,000 army personnel, but unfortunately without success.

The theoretical work centred on the mysteries of viral replication. Burnet addressed himself to three questions.

material as self. Burnet attempted to gain evidence for this theory but failed. Stimulated in part by Burnet's theory, Billingham, Brent and Medawar in London introduced living cells from one strain of mice into embryos of another strain. In later life, the treated mice happily accepted skin grafts from the cell donor strain but not from a third, irrelevant mouse strain. The treated mice had been rendered specifically immunologically tolerant, and Burnet's theory was vindicated. While that particular protocol was obviously not applicable to humans, Medawar's experiment had shown that successful transplantation of organs and tissues was possible in principle. For their discovery of immunological tolerance, Burnet and Medawar shared the 1960 Nobel Prize for Medicine.

The second aspect of immunology to puzzle Burnet was the fact that animals seemed to be able to form antibodies to almost anything. Imagine how many different bacteria and viruses there must be in the biosphere. Choose to inject any one of them and a mammal forms antibody specifically targeted to that particular microbe. Furthermore, animals can form antibodies even to synthetic organic chemicals that have never existed before in nature.

The generally accepted theory for the specificity of antibodies was the so-called direct template theory. A foreign molecule, technically termed an antigen, enters the cell and the antibody molecule forms itself in direct contact with that template, much as plastic or metal can be moulded against a die. Burnet was not satisfied with this direct template theory because it failed to explain many fascinating features of the immune response. For example, why did a booster shot of a vaccine evoke much more antibody than the first injection? And why did the quality of an antibody, that is the tightness with which it bound to the target antigen, improve with successive immunisations? Burnet picked six or seven such holes in the direct template hypothesis and struggled to find an alternative overall theory.

Burnet built on Jerne's idea that antibodies were in fact natural substances, present in minuscule amounts even before antigen entered the body, and that somehow antigen merely accelerated the formation of the right, pre-existing

antibody. Burnet added the essential element that the diverse natural antibodies were present as receptors on the surface of very diverse lymphocyte white cells. Each lymphocyte was pre-committed to the formation of only one antibody. When an antigen entered, it sooner or later found the *right* lymphocyte and triggered it into extensive multiplication and mass production of the right corresponding antibody. Thus antibody formation was due to *clonal selection*. Furthermore, the correctly selected cells could mutate, and later injections of antigen could stimulate improved variants, thus explaining why antibodies got better after repeated immunisation. Immunological tolerance resulted because exposure of immature lymphocytes to self antigens destroyed rather than stimulated the relevant cells. Finally, auto-immune



Nobel Laureate, 1960: At the Nobel Prize ceremony with joint-prizewinner Sir Peter Medawar (on the left).



disease was the result of inappropriate division of a forbidden anti-self clone.

This new clonal selection theory of antibody formation was published in 1957 and in expanded form as a monograph in 1959. Research of the next decade substantially verified its essential elements and it became the central paradigm of immunology. Burnet the theoretical explorer of the body's natural defence system had achieved his ultimate destiny as Australia's and one of the world's greatest medical biologists.

Burnet as a Scientific Generalist

This skeletal outline of scientific discovery fails to do justice to Burnet the scientific generalist. He had a most unusual capacity for taking scientific data of diverse kinds and finding associations that no-one else had ever thought of. This capacity for synthesis was fed by wide and disciplined reading. A new finding somehow had to be integrated into his scientific *Weltanschauung*. He loved to speculate, sometimes almost dangerously, from every experiment he performed, seeking to derive general meaning from results which, in the first

instance at least, are always highly particular and specialised.

Burnet took real joy from scientific discovery. While one's own findings necessarily have a special emotional *Gestalt*, Burnet could also get a real thrill from someone else's breakthrough, always believing that it might help him to see the big picture. In a sense, the whole world was his laboratory. But he was also a gifted and industrious experimentalist spending endless hours at the laboratory bench, frequently performing repetitive and routine manipulations. His oscillation from the particular to the general was, in my experience, almost unique. It served him well in his role as a director of an institute. Burnet was not a natural administrator. I am sure that over the 21 years of his reign at the Hall Institute all the staff, visitors and students thought of him primarily as a scientist and only incidentally as the person who controlled the purse-strings or hired and fired the staff. Burnet spelt out the Institute's main research theme, but it was left to the individual scientists to position themselves within that umbrella. Each scientist was given great freedom in research and also total and sole credit for any discoveries made

Burnet was never at his best in open debate. Many scientists sharpen their wits during the thrust and parry of a vigorous discussion with a gifted colleague. Burnet always preferred to attack ideas in the quiet of his study with pencil and paper, returning the next day with some new insight. He played little part in the open discussion sections of major international meetings. He states in his autobiography: 'I have spent my working life on the periphery of the world of science. I have always retreated to the smaller country where I could be less subject to the two pressures of competition and conformity.' I fancy that Burnet rather enjoyed his role as a slight outsider. This solitary way of working allowed his originality to flower, untrammelled by passing scientific fashion.

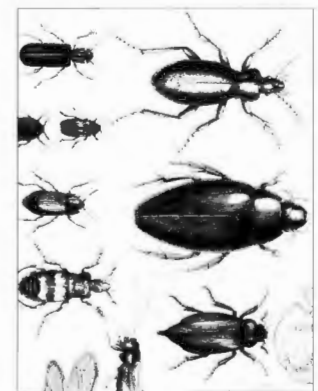
Burnet and *Götterdämmerung*

Did this scientific paragon have no Achilles heel, no flaws in his scientific makeup? There are a couple which we must record. Burnet had a mistrust, almost a fear, of technology. The most complex scientific apparatus he ever used

was a microscope. He gravely overestimated the difficulties in two techniques essential to virology, namely tissue culture and molecular biology. I believe his switch from virology to immunology arose at least in part because he saw virology coming to require technically more demanding approaches.

Towards the end of his reign, the Hall Institute, by international standards, was ridiculously short of space, equipment, facilities and finances. As medical

there is no useful application to medicine or any other practical matter.' This pessimism led to some extraordinary comments about molecular biology: 'Molecular biology as now practised is ... very largely a laboratory artefact that has never been brought into useful relation with biological realities.' So much for the DNA industry and the wonderful products, including vaccines, made by genetic engineering! 'The human genetic equipment in every cell is of a complexity



Portrait by Clifton Pugh, 1966

research became more complex and as its centre of gravity therefore shifted into domains that Burnet could not understand, much less control, he entered into a *Götterdämmerung* phase which, given his great prestige, could have been quite damaging to his successor. Pared down to its essentials, this claimed that all the great discoveries capable of helping humanity had been made, that the time of great elucidation had come and gone. Thus he stated: 'The likelihood that new knowledge will be applicable to any matter of human significance or broad intellectual interest is becoming progressively smaller ... It is becoming more evident in biology that beyond a certain level of theoretical knowledge

and order which is completely beyond an approach at the chemical level.' So much for the human genome project, destined to complete that very task over the next five years.

Of the many books written post-retirement, one of the most thought-provoking is the last, *Credo and Comment*, published in 1979 when Burnet was 80. In it he rehearses the 'big bang' theory of the origin and evolution of the universe, asserts the centrality of the life process, considers the key tenets of sociobiology, and speculates on the 'strange urgency on the part of nature that every possible combination should be tried lest some desirable combination should never find opportunity to emerge'.

This implicit assertion of purpose in Darwinian evolution is surprising in one who had formerly been a militant atheist. He supposes that 'God, nature or evolution is so constituted that there must be a constant searching for and achieving of creativity, a progressively higher level of complexity, understanding and control of significant areas of the universe'. He states that 'the biological scientist can go no further than God as the shadowy personification of the unknowable principle of constantly emerging novelty'. Such a God may be omnipotent and omniscient 'but he has limited himself to a single way of attaining the divine desire by providing infinite opportunities for an infinitely improbable event to occur'. Thus does the great biologist bend just a little in the direction of religion.

Influenced by Alfred North Whitehead, Burnet seems to be groping for a view not too distant from that of Teilhard de Chardin, so trenchantly derided by Burnet's fellow Nobel Laureate, Peter Medawar. Burnet once told Davis McCaughey that some of the things a Christian theologian was concerned with expressed his thought in another idiom. The powerful humanism of *Credo and Comment* may show that Burnet's Presbyterian upbringing exerted a continuing effect.

Honours and Awards

Both the scientific peer group and the civil sector showered Burnet with honours. He won the Royal and Copley Medals of The Royal Society. He served as President of the Australian Academy of Science. In the United States, he was a Foreign Associate of the National Academy of Sciences and won the Lasker Award. He received countless honorary doctorates, including those from Oxford, Cambridge and Harvard. He was knighted in 1951 and received the Order of Merit in 1958. The Nobel Prize in 1960 could have been won three times over.

The Burnetian Legacy

The Burnetian legacy can be examined at three levels: personal, institutional and global. At the personal level, he was a huge influence on every scientist who worked within his orbit. Many of these have gone on to be leaders of Australian medical science. Names like Ada,

Fazekas, Fenner, French, Gottschalk, Mackay, Metcalf, White and Wood to mention just a few, are surely ones to conjure with.

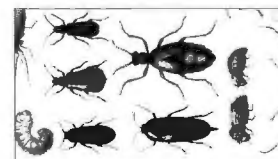
The Institute which he dominated for so long became in his time one of that small handful of medical research centres whose name is instantly recognised around the globe as making a pre-eminent contribution to the march of world science. It is for others to judge the Nossal years, but the fifth Director, Professor Suzanne Cory, is surely enhancing the Hall Institute's reputation while leading it into new and exciting directions.

But the global legacy is the most important. Burnet's three phases of research involved the three threads being woven into a unique and beautiful tapestry through a blending of separate disciplines. Concepts were borrowed from microbiology, biochemistry, immunology, genetics, oncology and epidemiology to synthesise a holistic view of infectious diseases and the host's immune response. Burnet saw the centrality of immunology before anyone else. This discipline has

expanded dramatically, yet many of Burnet's ideas remain paradigmatic. Of course it has moved in different directions and is exploring new depths. This is how it should be, must be. Despite his gloomy prognostications, Burnet would have been the first to delight in the new approaches to auto-immunity, allergy, transplantation, immunisation and cancer which the subsequent 30 years have brought. He would also have marvelled at our understanding of the genes, molecules and cells of the immune system, so much more profound than he or anyone else could have imagined. I would like to think that in less gloomy moments he would also have revelled in the challenges of how much more there is to know, and in the power of the techniques of the new biology.

Burnet stated that incursions from the outside world, such as infection or trauma, were easier to deal with than chronic degenerative diseases of uncertain and complex causation. What

would he have thought of the aggressive and so often successful treatment of heart attacks by angioplasty, clot-busting drugs or biologicals, and stents to prop the arteries open? What would he have thought of severe rheumatoid arthritis being materially ameliorated by injection of antibodies against powerful inflammatory molecules? What would he have made of cures of adult leukaemia through new forms of blood cell transplantation using CSFs, genetically engineered



Burnet with his successor at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, Gustav Nossal, circa 1965.

molecules discovered in his own beloved Hall Institute?

These and other stunning advances are blunting the attack of many chronic diseases. Were he able to revisit us on 3 September 1999, his 100th birthday, and were I to tell him all that, I fancy he would stand with eyes downcast and half closed, brow puckered in concentration, curled right forefinger held to his lips in a characteristic gesture of deep puzzlement, then gradually his face would relax into a self-conscious little smile. 'Gus,' he would say, 'I think I'll have to develop a new working hypothesis!' ■

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Black and other arts

Jim Davidson goes to the Grahamstown Festival and discovers South Africa in microcosm.

IMAGINE A PLACE with half the Victorian buildings of Ballarat transposed to Bacchus Marsh, only with the surrounding housing estates replaced by African shanties and matchbox dwellings, and you have something rather like Grahamstown. Even so, for the 50 years to 1870 this was South Africa's second-largest town. Kneecapped by the gold and diamond discoveries to the north, and then (for previous impertinence) relegated by the Cape government to a branch railway line, its days of greatness ended abruptly. But a lingering sense of entitlement continued—and continues still—to hang about the place.

In the 1960s it was realised that the town had two great assets. It was the nodal place of English colonisation in South Africa, a place with tap roots: at least a quarter of a million people could be claimed as descendants of the 1820 Settlers. Moreover, in the full flush of civic pride, the pioneers had started three or four of South Africa's most famous schools (to which was later added a small but reputable university), together with other public buildings. Perhaps the town, small though it was, could be made the site of an annual festival.

And so, with the blessing of the Nationalist government (delighted that the local English were earthing themselves in South Africa, rather than pining for the mother country) a large monument with a theatre and various halls soon arose above the town.

The result is not a thing of beauty; indeed it could be described as a cross between a schloss and London's Festival Hall. But it functions splendidly as the focal point for a festival.

The early ones, like the Shakespeare Festival of 1976, tended to be eurocentric and—within the context of Afrikaner hegemony—were concerned to maintain English-language culture in South Africa, complete with its manifestation in new works. This emphasis on language meant that blacks would come to be included too (as eventually were Afrikaners), if not in the Main program then certainly on the Fringe. And almost from its beginning, the Grahamstown Festival functioned as an important site of protest. Nationalist government

policies that could not be criticised overtly, because of heavy censorship, might be attacked through plays written about contemporary situations. People still talk about one which dealt with the return of a raw Afrikaner youth from military service in Angola to his traditional rural family: as they listened to the dialogue, the audience didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

But the Festival can no longer grab the spotlight with protest, and there is a feeling abroad that it needs a new guiding vision: numbers attending have slipped in recent years. Rumours have spread that the Standard Bank, the main sponsor, is likely to scale down or withdraw its support. In fact the bank was particularly generous in enabling a very full program to be mounted for this 25th festival. From the rest of Africa were brought dance companies and an orchestra, while from Europe came (among others) baroque musicians, flamenco dancers, a Cambridge choir, the Philippe Genty Company and the Nederlands Dans Theater. These, combined with local offerings—some 200 on the Fringe alone—gave the Festival an unusual depth of field. Moreover, lectures, film shows, poetry readings and exhibitions, to say nothing of open air markets and houses turning into temporary restaurants, meant that the whole town was effectively taken over. Students from the university's journalism department assumed their usual role of producing a daily festival newspaper, and also got up a satellite television channel. Nelson Mandela agreed to become patron, giving his blessing from the portal of the cathedral. 'I welcome you to the Festival,' he said, 'if you are poor or rich, if you are black or white, if you are local or foreign.' The rhetoric these days is one of inclusion.

CERTAINLY AN OUTSIDER was struck by the appropriately African emphasis of much of the program. But some of the biggest set pieces of the Festival, while addressing themes such as life in contemporary Johannesburg, or the return of a community to their traditional land, chose to do so partly with music. This may reflect the contemporary urge towards more fluid art forms; but the effect was to dampen down urgency, and to turn drama into pageant and display. This element of celebration does not come simply from being staged

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for a festival, and from being able to draw from unaccustomed pots of money. It stems even more from people not yet being used to hearing the sound of their own voices on stage. When speech does occur, it often runs the risk of becoming a declaration; of not being shaped sufficiently to enmesh with the lines of other characters.

One production which used musical elements very tellingly was that by Third World Bunfight, as they are engagingly called, in *The Prophet*. This dealt with the appalling story of the Xhosa cattle killing of 1856–7, a cargo cult movement which spread through these parts as blacks hearkened to the prophecies of an 11-year-old girl.

They destroyed all their corn and cattle so as to ready themselves to be rejoined by warrior ancestors, whereupon they would be able to drive the white man into the sea. The results were calamitous: anything up to 100,000 people may have died in the famine which followed, while white conquest of the region was accelerated. How then might such a painful set of events be restaged? Previously the company had taken up another outbreak of hysteria, based on contemporary witchcraft; that production had, from all accounts, rawness and urgency. But this one dealt with a national cataclysm, albeit a long time ago. A path therefore had to be found which, while allowing a convincing dramatisation, might also have something of the character of a requiem, cauterising the wound even as it re-examined it.

The drama therefore unfolded liturgically. On entering the vast space of the old power station, one noticed seven figures like statues of Rameses seated at intervals around the hall; their eyes were sealed. When the Xhosa came on and made for the central podium, they were children; the statue figures intoned a monotonous chant. Grown men exchanged roles as ancestors, as warriors, and even as doomed cattle, their path always a circular one trailing through the audience. The prophecies, thanks to amplification and a drooping intonation, were eerie in their effectiveness, all the more so for the massed chant in the background. Later, the steady pace of the piece was punctured by two bold theatrical moments. The first was when a symbolic sun rose, and the Xhosa held their breath in expectation that it would stop in the middle of the sky, as foretold; this Sun *did* stop, but then moved on. Later, when a second date for the miracle had been given, and more intensive preparations made—echoed here in a rising crescendo joined in even by the statue figures—the sun rose again, but this time, before having the chance to move on, it was knocked sideways. These were real *coups de théâtre*, since the intensity of each moment eclipsed both common sense and historical knowledge. Of course the production was not flawless: often the voices did not carry sufficiently. But it had a notable soundness of structure, even if some allusions were obscure, while the detail could be impeccable. Three white children were used as redcoats: as they picked over the bodies of the dead Xhosa, the tentative character of neat, ten-year-old boys suggested nothing so much as vultures.

There was not much sense of contemporary issues being addressed. Southern Africa has the world's worst

AIDS rates, but so far as I could see the disease was represented only as a gay white problem. Cape Town is probably the rape capital of the world; but rape too seems to have been rarely confronted. Even in the cheeky *Vagina Monologues*—a one-woman show put on in the hall of the prim Diocesan School for Girls—it was largely transposed to Bosnia. Perhaps the all-pervasive issues of race and the need for transformation effectively crowd out all others.

Excepting crime, that is. Despite a notable (and rare) police presence at the Festival, a critic was pickpocketed on the very first day—leading to squawking of an altogether different kind—while a visiting dance troupe were rudely awoken by a gang of thieves. The New Yorkers were shocked; but Pieter-Dirk Uys, South Africa's Barry Humphries, would have said: You're in the Eastern Cape, and this is the province where they've even stolen the deficit. Criminality was constantly referred to in the Festival's stage works. A character in *Love, Crime and Johannesburg*, a musical with a thin plot strung around a real-life poet who was jailed for robbing a bank, nihilistically observed that 'There's no history. There's no past. There's no right or wrong.' The show ended with talk of a general amnesty for criminals, businessmen and politicians (almost interchangeable commodities), the audience being comforted with the assurance that 'Everything will be all right—in a hundred years' time.' Meanwhile, the young black comedian David Kau ended his show saying that some people would have realised he wasn't a stand-up comic—and yes, they were right. The small audience then found themselves confronting a glinting gun.

ONE EXPLANATION for the contemporary omissions is that the past is still there, just beneath the surface—and that bits of it still project into the landscape of South African life. In a moving monologue on the Fringe, *Woman in Waiting*, Mannic Manim dealt with the life of a black servant woman. Her constant marginalisation, as an incidental consequence of a white madam's capricious change of plans, was brought out forcefully. But more theatrically effective were the scenes drawn from childhood, when she had accompanied her mother (represented by a huge dress) to Durban. There one day she had gone with her to work—since otherwise they rarely saw each other—and then, when abandoned, went looking for the loo. She found it, only to be bawled out by the white master. Worse, her mother came running, and to the child's consternation, fell into an apologetic heap. When the scene was over, the little girl turned round and said, 'You must be a very important person, Mr Toilet, to be treated in this way.' Then she opened the lid. Inside was a dress, of normal dimensions now. Her mother had been cut down to size.

It is not only blacks who bear the scars of the past. It comes as a bit of a shock to find a man not yet 30 old enough to have been conscripted into the old South African army. As a morale booster, he and his mates were

Reaching out, alas, is still fairly symbolic. The programs have been substantially Africanised, and to some degree so have the performers. But it must be depressing for a black stand-up comic like David Kau to find himself playing to entirely white audiences.

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trooped into a hall to hear the State President open parliament. But it was the wrong year: 1990, when De Klerk announced the release of Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC. Greig Coetzee, in his show *White Men with Weapons*, notes the effect on the Afrikaner officers, and milks it for all the comedy it is worth. But the sense of futility he detects first in them he has come to experience himself. There they were, 'at the bottom of Africa with our arses on the line'. And what was it all for? Nobody can say, but all bear its mark. 'Living dinosaurs are what we've become, white men in Africa.'

Another show, *The Story I Have to Tell*, bravely brings these black and white perspectives together. The phrase comes from the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and three actors are matched by three people who gave testimony before that body.

To go through this re-enactment must be difficult, particularly as they have done it for some months now. One woman spoke in Sotho—which made it impossible to pick up the nuances of her story. (The multilingual nature of South African theatre is striking, and often impressive, especially when one finds it exemplified in the range of one actor.) But the other two had clearly been affected not only by their experiences and their testimony, but also by the continual re-enactment. One, a tall, striking black man with a powerful presence, described how he had been framed, and jailed for a crime he did not commit; word has it that when he first took to the stage, he could not face the audience. Similarly, the second woman had also been transformed by the experience. Initially she had told her story of police rape and brutality and, believing it would not do much good, had decided not to go to the commission: it was the audience response which had prompted her to do so. Here, too, audience interaction followed the narrations. So keen is the desire for acknowledgement and healing—the nation is still in therapy—that even some

quite stupid statements seemed to be tolerated. Rather, ignored as irrelevant; for as an officer of the TRC remarked, the limitations of the commission could be accepted when it was seen for what it was, not as a conclusion, but as 'the beginning of a journey'.

SCEPTICAL OF MOST political rhetoric is Pieter-Dirk Uys, who for a week drew a couple of thousand people a day to his satirical shows. Having performed at Grahamstown almost since the Festival began, this time he had five quite separate shows on offer. One was a cabaret centred on Noel Coward and Marlene Dietrich, while another was in Afrikaans only—since the old woman character he creates so hates the English that she

can't bring herself to speak their language. That still left three for me to go and see. Only one of them I thought a bit thin, *Going Down Gorgeous*, a series of sketches—written over 20 years—in the life of a *kugel*, a South African Jewish princess. But the character is herself shallow, milking the system while professing to oppose it. Indeed the old Jewish refugee lady in *Dekaffirmed*, a collection of sharp sketches, was a much more fully realised character. No black characters appeared, although Uys does do them; instead it was a cavalcade of figures from the present and the recent past. At first the audience felt indulged, for there are some very good jokes at everybody's expense. But then just before the end of the program, on came Uys as a CNN reporter in the year 2004, giving a horror scenario of how the country might have gone under black rule. If the audience hadn't been jolted already, it had to take this blow quite manfully. More agreeable for them was the focus of the fifth show, Tannie Evita. She is Uys' Dame Edna, who more or less makes it up as she goes along—and every bit as entertainingly as Humphries. There was scarcely a line repeated from her last appearance in Grahamstown three months ago, when she toured the country in a bus, urging people to register to vote.

ONE OF THE SENSATIONS of the Festival was *Boots*, an artfully packaged burst of gumboot dancing. Originating on the mines of the Rand, gumboot dancing is energetic and enthralling—for about a quarter of an hour. It involves men slapping their sides, bending double and also slapping their booted shins, all the while jumping to a variety of rhythms spelt out by jingling metal rings attached to their ankles.

Very sensibly, after the worldwide success of *Tap Dogs*, our very own Nigel Triffit was called in to help fashion an entertaining hour-long show from the dancing. Fitting out the dancers in blue jeans, coloured headbands and sweatcloths dangling from their belts, their casual stylishness was clinched by the cool metal set, all platforms and rectangles, serviceably made to suggest everything from a shower to a mineshaft. Exuding sexuality—and even suggesting taking members of the audience to dinner (still a bit more daring in South Africa than most places)—each dancer had been encouraged to project his distinctive personality by gesture and insinuation. For coherence, the show relied on occasional speech or song, but was swept along by the raw energy and good-natured exuberance of the black dancers. At *Boots'* end, the overwhelmingly white auditorium rose in a standing ovation.

This desire to reach out was also apparent in another Australian contribution. Queensland University of Technology sent along a student group to join two other young companies, from Pretoria and Hong Kong. The Chinese came on first, and then a largely white company. Were these the Australians? After 60 seconds there was not the slightest doubt. The way those beefy guys were picking up and throwing about those sheilas, they could only be Queenslanders. To be fair to them, the piece was called *Tension*. And what was interesting about the style of dancing was that it demonstrated a brutalism caused by

physical confidence into art. The program moved on to conclude with a collective item from all three groups, giving the festival one of its moments of epiphany. At one point a black dancer came on stage alone, danced a few steps, and was joined by a fair-haired Queenslander. The two men shook hands, African style, then pulled away from each other and leant back in tandem. The crowd wildly cheered, for it was at once a vision of a white Australia purified of racism and of a confident, multicultural South Africa.

REACHING OUT, alas, is still fairly symbolic. The programs have been substantially Africanised, and to some degree so have the performers. But it must be depressing for a black stand-up comic like David Kau to find himself playing to entirely white audiences. The charge of elitism is therefore to some degree justified, since ticket prices are such that many people, certainly most blacks, are simply excluded from attending. At the same time, there are reports of complimentary tickets for blacks having gone unclaimed: the whole ambience remains intimidating. It is quite otherwise with whites. For them, the National Arts Festival becomes the ideal way to take their culture: on a binge, away from the crime-infested streets of the big cities, where many people do not feel safe at night. As in so many respects, South Africa exemplifies postmodernism; Festival audiences also to some degree differentiate themselves. The young people who stayed away from the Monteverdi opera comprised almost the entire audience for *The Vagina Monologues*.

Crowds may have been slightly down for this year's festival, but ticket sales for the Main were up. The Grahamstown Festival needed this boost, for it is increasingly under competition from up to a dozen festivals elsewhere in the country. Indeed, two rather more folksy ones have sprung up on either side of it, in places on the way. More serious is the effect of the newish Oudtshoorn Festival which, now that Afrikaans-speakers feel besieged, is drawing away Afrikaans writers, performers and audiences.

But the Festival, even should it be scaled down, is unlikely to die—indeed other gatherings now supplement it. The ANC is aware of how important it is for the Grahamstown economy, and as a showcase for the town, the experience can encourage white people to send their kids there to be schooled. With less than 30 per cent of the town's workforce in full employment, the place needs all the help it can get. Burnt-out buildings stand in the main street, and have for months; there is not enough money or confidence to restore or rebuild. Meanwhile, the annual vision of Camelot has faded. For the moment, the street kids, having huddled in groups busking outside Festival venues, have vanished. But any day now they will be back, begging. ■

Jim Davidson, who is currently researching in South Africa, teaches a course on the Rise and Fall of Apartheid at Victoria University of Technology. He attended the Standard Bank National Arts Festival in Grahamstown (29 June–11 July).

OBITUARY

LINDA MCGIRR



Jennifer Paterson 1928–1999

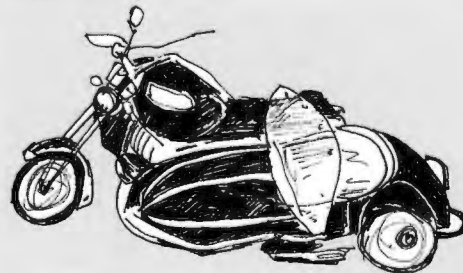
WE ALL SAY WE ADMIRE someone who dances to her own tune, yet we rarely see anyone who does, rarer still on TV.

We are bombarded with endless interviews with soapie starlets, sex symbols and song-stresses. Even our women newsreaders are indistinguishable from catwalk models.

Curious then that we ever had the pleasure of Jennifer Paterson on our screens—fat, bespectacled and, worse still, well over 60. She appeared, not as someone's grandmother, but in her own right as a chef with years of culinary experience following on from a successful career backstage in theatre and television.

Witty, well-read and remarkable in her genuine interest in people and places, she took us from convents to breweries, scout camps to The Ritz, lunching with cricketers, choirboys and bikies, travelling from place to place on her much-loved motorbike with her collaborator Clarissa Dickson-Wright in sidecar. With Clarissa, she rejected the pretensions of foodies who prepare meals with the sterility and precision of micro-surgery.

Her funeral was a Requiem Mass in the Brompton Oratory. At Jennifer's request, the Mass was in Latin, and her motorbike helmet was placed on her coffin, remaining there throughout the service. ■





Alila Steven from Areki Village goes fishing early every morning. It took six months for people like Alila to feel confident about going back into the water.

Life after the big wave

At 6.45pm on Friday 17 July 1998, a sudden and massive movement in the ocean floor caused a tsunami, or Bikpela Solwara (Big Wave), that thundered along the north coast of Papua New Guinea. It left 2200 people dead and devastated the lives of thousands more.

Writer and photographer **Peter Davis** spent time in PNG during the first anniversary of the tsunami and discovered that restoring normality after such destruction is a complex process.



A makeshift grave marks the resting place of tsunami victims.



Ben Amaal, Manager of the Care Centre in Yakoi Village, smokes a hand-rolled cigarette called a spear. 'Australian newspapers make the best spears,' he says. 'The print doesn't get mixed up with the tobacco.' Amaal says it will be another two years before the disaster region returns to anything near normal.

School children at Wauroin village. Some of their songs are now about family they lost to the big wave. 'Everybody here has lost someone,' says Eddie Romere, the school headmaster.



the big wave

Helicopters became a common sight and a lifeline during the months of the emergency response.



Indonesian witness

Ibu Sulami spent 20 years in Indonesian jails. Now 74, the former General Secretary of the Indonesian Women's Movement was one of many imprisoned in the aftermath of the 1965 coup.

Peter Mares interviewed her in Tangerang, West Java.

THIRTY-FOUR YEARS AGO, on the night of 30 September 1965, there was a mutiny in Jakarta. Army units led by Lieutenant-Colonel Untung murdered six top Generals, ostensibly because they were plotting against Indonesia's founding President Sukarno. The rebellious officers then captured a radio station and declared a revolutionary council.

The coup attempt was short-lived. Major-General Suharto, 44-year-old commander of the army Strategic Reserve (Kostrad), mustered loyal troops and quickly crushed the rebellion. With the Generals dead, Suharto emerged as the most powerful military figure in Jakarta. He used his new strength gradually to sideline, then eventually replace, Sukarno.

The coup attempt is known as Gestapu (*Gerakan September Tiga Puluh*, The September Thirtieth Movement) and it was blamed on the Indonesian Communist Party, the PKI. A ruthless military-backed crackdown on the party and its sympathisers followed. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed. No-one knows the exact number, but most researchers consider half a million to be a reasonable estimate. Hundreds of thousands of others were arrested. More than ten thousand remained in jail without trial or charge for well over a decade.

Indonesia's greatest living author, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, was among those arrested and transported to a penal colony on the remote island of Buru. A collection of his prison notes and letters has just been published in English by Hyperion as *The Mute's Soliloquy: A Memoir*:

During these past twelve years I have indeed seen far too much death. At the

Tangerang Detention Centre there was a period when between two and four prisoners died every day. The same was true at Salemba Prison. The prisoners' reserves of strength were sapped by forced and constant hunger; the end result was beriberi and all the complications that ensued ...

Most of the first men to die were farmers who, because of the physical labour they were forced to do, required larger rations of food—rations that were not given to them. After suffering a month of near starvation, when their families were allowed to visit and brought with them baskets of boiled cassava, they would eat until their intestines ruptured.

Pramoedya and most of his fellow inmates were eventually released in 1979, but their freedom was conditional. All former detainees had their identity cards stamped with the code 'ET' (*eks tahanan politik*, former political prisoner), a stigma which restricted their right to travel, limited their access to education and other government services, prevented them (and often their relatives) from working in any public sector jobs, and which banned them from all political activity, including voting.

The arbitrary mass arrests and killings of late 1965 and early 1966 loomed large through the Suharto years, even though they were rarely discussed. The massacres were an ever-present warning of the danger of dissent; the lurking terror that helped to ensure obedience to Suharto's New Order regime. Even today, many Indonesians would rather forget that the killings ever took place.

Since Suharto's fall in May last year there have been constant calls for a thorough investigation into the wealth of the former president and his family and the corruption, collusion and nepotism that characterised his 32-year dictatorship (a term which even Foreign Minister Downer now uses to describe the regime with which Canberra was once so cosy).

Less prominently reported are the calls for Suharto to be prosecuted for his role in crimes against humanity, particularly the 1965–66 massacres that accompanied his rise to power.

Leading the push for a thorough investigation into the killings is 74-year-old Ibu Sulami, who spent almost 20 years in Suharto's jails. When the killings took place, Ibu Sulami was on the run, moving from house to house in Jakarta to evade arrest.

'I did not see very much of the killings with my own eyes,' she told me. 'But sometimes I would be staying somewhere and I would hear someone being arrested in the house next door and it was a very frightening time. And I did hear a lot of stories coming in from the provinces and it has become an obsession of mine ever since really, to find out whether these stories were all true and to bring it out into the open.'

Today Ibu Sulami lives in a simple house in Tangerang, an industrial city in West Java, that runs into the urban sprawl of Jakarta. She looks frail, but her memory is sharp and she has summoned the energy to delve into the most sensitive period in Indonesian history. Since 1994, Ibu Sulami has been systematically investigating the 1965–66 massacres, trying to account for the people who died and to pinpoint

responsibility for the killing. She is not driven to avenge her own suffering; at least there is no trace of bitterness in her words. Rather, Ibu Sulami is seeking justice so that ghosts can be laid to rest. She wants to soothe souls through a proper and public accounting of historical events.

Five years ago, Ibu Sulami began touring the provinces and talking to the families of victims, especially the wives of men who disappeared without a trace: 'Often they were still waiting for their husbands to come back,' she says. 'A lot of them have never remarried since that time and they are very anxious to know what happened to their husbands. They wonder, if their husbands are still alive, why have they never come back? Are they in jail or were they killed? And if so, who killed them and where are they buried? That sort of knowledge is very important to them.'

AT THE TIME of Gestapu, Ibu Sulami was the General Secretary of Gerwani (*Gerakan Wanita Indonesia*, the Indonesian Women's Movement) which had been established in 1950 to fight for equal rights: 'I grew up in a village and you know there were so many cases of discrimination between men and women,' she says. 'Boys at that stage could continue with their education as far as their means allowed, but for girls, as long as they could read and write, well that was it. Like me, for example. My older brother was able to go to higher education, but my younger sister and I were only able to go to primary school.'

'I was very attracted to Gerwani because I felt it was working to elevate the dignity of women and overcome the inequality and the discrimination.'

Gerwani established kindergartens and ran courses in midwifery and literacy. The organisation also campaigned for equal rights in marriage and for stronger rape laws. By 1961, Gerwani claimed nine million members and had become increasingly close to the Indonesian

Communist Party, although the organisation was never formally affiliated with the PKI.

After the coup attempt of 30 September, Suharto made Gerwani a key target of his crackdown on the left. Lies were spread through newspaper and radio reports saying that Gerwani women had



Today Ibu Sulami lives in a simple house in Tangerang, an industrial city in West Java, that runs into the urban sprawl of Jakarta. She looks frail, but her memory is sharp and she has summoned the energy to delve into the most sensitive period in Indonesian history.

castrated the six murdered generals, gouged their eyes out and then danced naked in celebration before the chairman of the communist party. In his *Historical Dictionary of Indonesia*, Robert Cribb writes that 'special attention was given to the destruction of Gerwani, on the grounds that it allegedly encouraged women to abandon their duties within the family and promoted sexual promiscuity'.

Nothing happened at Gerwani headquarters for the first three days after Gestapu. Then on the fourth day a group of soldiers arrived at the office and demanded that Gerwani members surrender, with their weapons.

'In truth, there were no weapons in the office,' says Ibu Sulami. 'All we had were bamboo musical instruments called *anklung*. We had lots of them because we were preparing to celebrate Gerwani's anniversary and we had about 500 *anklung* ready for people to play in a street procession.'

'The military suggested to the people round about that the Gerwani office was stacked with huge stores of money, sugar, rice and other things. So the people looted the place, but there was nothing there, just a little bit of food, nothing at all. And the crowd outside were all screaming, there's no money, there's no food, we were being lied to!'

Ibu Sulami fled from the office to a friend's place and for the next 18 months she lived as 'a hunted person', moving from house to house and never sleeping in the same bed two nights running.

Eventually, during a sweep called Operation Vampire, she was arrested by the Jakarta military command.

'It was really terrible,' she recalls. 'I was beaten for about ten days and they kept on interrogating us during that time. I was asked questions again and again and I did not want to answer.'

'They asked whether Gerwani was involved in killing the generals. But Gerwani had nothing to do with it, so I kept my silence.'

'They were also asking whether I knew someone called Sam, who was one of the figures involved in the coup and who was a friend of the leader of the communist party, Brother Aidit. But I'd never met the man, I didn't know him at all, so I just couldn't answer the question. They kept beating me up. They'd wake me up at one in the morning to destabilise me, to put my nerves on edge so that I would answer their questions. Many other women were also treated like that.'

'The interrogations eventually got so ferocious that the women were stripped and it was absolutely inhuman what was happening to them at that time.'

Ibu Sulami says that a lot of girls were arrested at the same time as her. They were just 14, 15 and 16 years old, too young even to join Gerwani, but under torture they were forced to 'confess' to Gerwani's role in the coup attempt.

'The young girls who were arrested at the time were really very badly treated, they were beaten almost to death in the Guntur military police headquarters in Jakarta,' she recalls.

The girls were also used to further Suharto's propaganda campaign against Gerwani: 'There were prostitutes who were forced into saying that these young women had been recruited by Gerwani to provide sexual services to the troops who were supporting the coup attempt.'

AS A LEADING FIGURE on the left, Ibu Sulami was one of the relatively small number of political prisoners eventually brought to trial. In 1975, she was sentenced to 20 years' jail after being found guilty of slander. The charge had nothing to do with the coup attempt, but with her involvement, while on the run, with a legitimate organisation called 'Supporters

of the Command of President Sukarno'.

'The treatment was awful for the first years while I was in military detention. Later, Amnesty International and the Red Cross took up my case and I was then given a blanket and a mattress and conditions got a bit better. But it was still pretty terrible.

'It was a deliberate policy to lock us up with ordinary criminals and I shared a cell with ordinary criminals virtually the whole time I was in prison. The idea was to prevent us from communicating with other political prisoners, but this did have a positive side because the ordinary inmates were willing to share their food with us and so we never starved.'

Criminal prisoners enjoyed greater rights and privileges than the political prisoners and they helped Ibu Sulami to keep her brain occupied by slipping her paper and pencils so that she could write during the night. Then in the early morning the other inmates would take the writing materials back again and hide them for her.

In this way, Ibu Sulami was able to complete a novel, a novella, a collection of short stories and some poems. All are in the process of being published in Jakarta.

Ibu Sulami was eventually released from jail in 1986. She had been given two years off her sentence, but only on the condition that she report each month to the Attorney-General's office.

Slowly she began to investigate the mass killings of 1965. She researched the locations of mass graves and made lists of the names of people killed, the names of people arrested and jailed, the names of people sacked from the jobs or disadvantaged in other ways for decades because of their links, or suspected links, to the banned Indonesian Communist Party.

The work had to be carried out in a secretive, conspiratorial way: 'We visited a lot of areas, 19 districts in fact, mainly in East and Central Java, to look for graves and we actually found a lot of evidence. It was not just the bones we found, but a lot of eyewitnesses who could talk in detail about the killings that took place in their own villages.

'We went to a lot of the burial grounds, which were often quite difficult to reach, but we were helped by a lot by people who lived nearby, who were quite happy to show us where these burial grounds were. They weren't afraid even

though Suharto had not yet been toppled from power.'

Ibu Sulami has now set up a foundation to continue the work, with Pramoeodya as patron. It is staffed mostly by bereaved relatives of the victims of 1965. But even though Suharto is no longer President, the work remains extremely sensitive, difficult and dangerous. The Indonesian military has no interest in seeing its past crimes uncovered. Neither do civilians who took part in the blood-letting. Indonesia's National Human Rights Commission also turned down an invitation to support the foundation's research, even though it is investigating numerous other massacres and abuses from the Suharto era.

Ibu Sulami rejects suggestions that the massacres represent such a traumatic moment in history that they would be best left alone, and that revisiting the killings will only stir up painful memories and invite conflict and reprisals at a time when the people of Indonesia are striving to rebuild their damaged nation and to reconcile competing ethnic, religious and class interests through a reformed political system.

'It is very easy for people who have not suffered a loss to say these matters should be left alone, but for the people who were involved and who suffered the loss of loved ones, they are continually having nightmares and are worrying about what happened. So I think it is very important for them that this matter is continually talked about. There needs to be a lesson for people also. The killing of just one person is already a crime. So how much more terrible is it when more than one person is killed? The murder of hundreds of thousands of people must be talked about and accounted for.

'The resolution of this matter is like a struggle for a civilisation, to ensure that things like this will not recur in the future. The past is the past, but these matters must be resolved for coming generations, for posterity. It's in no-one's interest to keep it covered up any longer.' ■

Peter Mares is presenter of *Asia Pacific* on Radio Australia and Radio National (weekdays at 8.05pm, Saturdays at 8.05am). Peter would like to thank David Bouchier from the University of WA and Nuim Khaiyath from Radio Australia's Indonesia service for their assistance with translations for this article.

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The many anxieties of Australia and Asia

Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia, 1850–1939, David Walker, University of Queensland Press, 1999.

ISBN 0 7022 3132 2, RRP \$29.95

IN *IS AUSTRALIA AN ASIAN COUNTRY?* (1997), Stephen FitzGerald argued that the Australian commitment to Asia is still not a commitment of the mind. Not being an intellectual engagement, it is 'therefore almost incapable of sensitivity to subtlety or sub-text or silence ...' FitzGerald emphasised the necessity of becoming Asia-literate as an exercise of great urgency. The alternative is to risk being left behind by an Asia which is simultaneously a 'cosmopolitan jostling of countries and cultures and peoples more distinct from one another than anything we have in Europe', and also an emerging community of states with potential to exclude a failure to the south.

David Walker's *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia* is a 'commitment of the mind'. Walker explores our real and imagined encounters with Asia over the period 1850–1939. A further volume will bring the story up to the present. At the heart of Walker's project is a demonstration of the role history can play in correcting the failure identified by FitzGerald.

In the mid 19th century, travel writing on the subject of the East began to generate a keen readership. Journalists, traders, intellectuals, missionaries and tourists found a responsive audience in the Australian colonies. The curiosity of the audience was probably as diverse as the opinions of the travel writers. Both constructed many Asias: the most powerful fears and phobias, the scariest caricatures and motifs are matched by a string of more sympathetic perspectives.

Heightened Australian interest in Asia was sparked by the sudden arrival of Chinese goldseekers, by Commodore Perry's action in forcing Japan open to the West in 1853–54, by the Indian Mutiny of 1857–58, and by a sustained fascination with the glories and trials of British rule in



India, allegedly the testing ground of British character. 'Antique' India had other claims too: the belief that Aryan civilisation had begun there encouraged the view—Deakin was an exponent—that to know about civilisation one had to know about India.

For a time, the conception of an aggressive Asia bent on conquest was rivalled by 'a golden, aestheticised Orient', manifested principally in a fascination with Japanese aesthetics, though the appeal of other qualities might equally have changed our history. In the year 1877, the missionary and theosophist, Wilton Hack, was sufficiently impressed by the industry and frugality of the Japanese to invite them to colonise the Northern Territory, with the backing of the South Australian government. The Japanese government, not overly keen on the Northern Territory and beset by its own problems, declined. This sort of reticence did no harm to Japan's popularity.

The rage for Japanese culture, and particularly for Japanese fabrics and art objects, had already engulfed the elites of Europe and Australia. By the 1890s there were two books published on the subject of Japan for every three books published on France, according to the US Library of Congress catalogue. The Japanese were constructed as the 'ideal foreigners', not unlike the British in their enterprise, good

manners, cohesion, artistry and 'cultivated women'. Walker traces their impact on European taste and cultural sensibility through to Australia. Monet's Japanese footbridge is matched by the 'Austral-japonaiserie' that was evident in the '9x5 Impressions' Exhibition of 1889.

In the same year, the remarkable James Murdoch, novelist, scholar and Japanophile, reported that 'Australian popular opinion is wonderfully, favourably inclined towards Japan and the Japanese'.

This was overstatement, but Japan was doubtless perceived as an 'enchanted land' before it was seen as a threat. Walker documents how both the cultural and commercial appeal of Japan presented a worrying challenge to the advocates of race purity. One side thought a growing exchange of goods and culture would enrich Australian civilisation; the other said it would bring destruction.

Threat was embodied in the 'awakening East', a phrase that signalled an East transformed from a languid, unchanging state into something active, mobile, militarised and threatening. *Anxious Nation* traces this shift in language. The book's originality and importance hinges on the interaction it documents between Australian contemporary perceptions of Asia and Australian self-understanding.

Asian 'others' were always defined against notions of the racial self.

IN ENTERTAINING short chapters, Walker covers some of the hottest topics of the period—the nature of the Australian landmass, the moral and practical imperatives of settling the 'Empty North', the meaning of the word 'desert', race degeneration, blood, sex and mixed marriage. The sustained interplay of these themes makes the book's readability, lightness and humour

all the more remarkable. Walker shows how opinion was constructed with an eye to geopolitical consequences. Thus, for example, if the Australian land mass was potentially rich all over—one of the fondest fantasies in our history—then it had to be quickly claimed by vigorous white settlement. If, on the other hand, it was largely desert, then this fact had to be proclaimed loud and clear, to dissuade invaders from the north. Every argument, it seems, had its ‘anxious’ corollary.

An awakening East powerfully affected the way British-Australians saw themselves and their country. They knew they were a small, mostly coastal and urban population and that translated into an anxiety about the future and a fear that, as lazy and languid city folk, they might be surpassed by more

dispossession? Answer, yes and no.

The idea that Australia might be an Asian land accidentally settled by Britons unsuited to both climate and regional culture was a disturbing undercurrent. Asia’s carefully noted energies were matched by new concerns about malign intelligence and ‘inscrutability’, best embodied in the fictional Dr Fu Manchu. ‘The Doctor’, writes Walker, ‘infiltrated Chapter 13 of this book one dark, mist-shrouded morning, enjoying, no doubt, the superstitious dread his presence there would cause.’ *Anxious Nation* entertains.

Some of the anxiety traced here is explicitly gendered. Would the male or the female principle win out in Australian life? How to understand these principles at work to the north, not five days’ steam away? In

elaborate welcomes during the 1906 visit too. In the wake of Japanese victory over the Russians, perceptions were shifting from ‘enchanted’ and ‘aesthetic’ to ‘disciplined’ and ‘soldierly’, but the reception was still rapturous, in one port after another. The dissenting press blamed female weakness, among other failings, for this ‘misguided’ enthusiasm. Hospitable females were dubbed ‘George Street Geishas’ by *Truth*, which claimed their behaviour made criticism of the debasement of women in Japan that much harder to sustain.

Worse still, Japan was celebrated by some as the embodiment of a new Elizabethanism. For Australians who had formed the idea that they would be the new Elizabethans—creative, adventurous and heroic, a *racial* inheritance—this was particularly galling. ‘Here were the “imitative” Japanese, showered with adulation, at just the moment when the eyes of the world should have been occupied upon the newly created Commonwealth of Australia’, writes Walker. The dissenting press, notably the *Worker* and the *Bulletin*, was astonished at the enthusiastic welcome given to Japanese squadrons. Walker devotes a chapter to this rapturous reception, to the clash of opinion where formerly a monologue had prevailed in our historiography.

SUBVERSIVE TEXTS surface in every chapter. In response to the puffed-up bush manliness of the invasion scare novels, Rosa Praed wrote *Madam Izan: A Tourist Story*, published in 1899. Here race and gender are knitted into a satiric pattern. Praed reversed the accustomed roles for her travellers: her women are courteous, curious and open-minded about Japan. Her ‘ill-read men’ are good bushies who are ‘bewildered and hostile in the face of sophisticated Japanese difference’. Praed is part of a lost conversation, an intriguing ambivalence in our culture, now resurrected by Walker. In that conversation some Australians did ponder the benefits of fusion between East and West. Within its broader themes, *Anxious Nation* charts the odyssey of the ‘sympathetic Asianists’ in our history.

But a white man in Australia might, equally, get anxious about England. Walker notes a number of not entirely consistent worries. Some, like William Lane, blamed Britain’s aggressive trade policies for ‘awakening China’, echoing the labour press in general. Louis Esson worried about the colonising arrogance of the English, the impact of their venality and bureaucracy,



In 1933, the Dean of Canterbury suggested that Australia should share the Northern Territory with Japan to help reduce international tensions. The local press had a field day.

vigorous races to the north and become the ‘white Aborigines of the Empire’. The declining birthrate became a focus of heavily gendered fears: city life was seen as draining the virile, masculine qualities of the race (a theme Walker has followed since his fine and funny essay, ‘Seminal Loss and National Vigour’, appeared in *Labour History* in May 1985). Enter ‘Asia’ as a kind of rhetorical device to compel whites to do their duty and fill the country. Enter the ‘sturdy bushman as race hero’, though here a key text in the discussion of blood and the bush—C.E.W.

Bean’s *Flagships Three* (1913)—is missing.

WALKER ARGUES THAT the ‘awakening East’ accentuates the ‘powerful masculinising and racialising impulse in Australian nationalism’. This is not new. What *is* new and important is the way he ties this understanding into a review of contemporary debates about life and land in Australia. This is done with economy, style and wit. The best sentence in the book—‘Narrative loves danger’—has all three. By examining a range of literature, from scholarly papers to newspaper controversies to invasion narratives, Walker documents the survivalist anxieties at the heart of Australian nationalism. Could Anglo-Saxons take the heat of the North? Could they contemplate the meaning of Aboriginal

1900 the *Town and Country Journal* ran an article on ‘The Contempt of Asiatics for Europeans’, in which gendered meaning was foremost: the encounter between the ‘Asiatic’ and the European was likened to that between ‘a clever woman’ and an ‘average and slightly stupid man’, the latter no match for this female ‘other’.

Walker links the self-doubt at the heart of Australia’s survivalism with a misogyny evident in the fear both of Asia and of the rise of the ‘new woman’ in Australia. That feminist female was identified as self-seeking and sexual, a kind of racial betrayal. Some saw that betrayal confirmed in the declining birth rate. Says Walker: ‘Women were viewed with great suspicion. They were given many of the elusive properties of water. They were gushing, tidal, uncontrolled, all-engulfing’, like the feminised ‘bush spirits’ of a Sydney Long painting. An Asia enhanced by a feminine cunning and cruelty, and the new woman in Australia, constitute one of the key interplays in the anxiety Walker documents. Amidst the many propaganda fictions about the Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi, one title stands out: *The Woman Who Commanded 500,000,000 Men* (1929).

When the Japanese squadron came to Australia in 1903, the *Argus* noted culture, order, efficiency and competence in these visitors. There were vast crowds and

and the loss of Asia as a colourful spectacle for travellers like himself. Needless to say, he despised W.H. Fitchett, the great late 19th-century imperialist propagandist. But the greatest concern was focused on British 'racial appeasement' as manifested in the 1894 trade treaty with Japan and the implications for a white Australia. What about building trade with 'natural allies'? There was the suspicion that England saw the White Australia policy, and its colonial precedents, as national selfishness. In 1933, the Dean of Canterbury suggested that Australia should share the Northern Territory with Japan to help reduce international tensions. The local press had a field day.

Great anxiety fuelled plenty of crackpot thinking about the land. Hot climates became a worry. Sir Charles Dilke denounced the 'labour-saving banana' as the 'curse of the tropics'. Australians worried about the problems of 'languor' and 'tropical neurasthenia' were not so sure about the banana. On the other hand, Randolph Bedford was certain about the carrying capacity of dry country—he challenged anyone who doubted it to go look at the green grass on Kalgoorlie's racecourse. He said Lake Eyre could be the world's greatest rice field. (Atomic idealists after World War II made similar claims about the multifarious benefits of nuclear power, so we cannot be too hard on Bedford.) Dr Richard Arthur campaigned to fill the north with good white citizens. He told the editor of the *Australian World* in London: 'never a word about the Yellow Peril, or Socialism or strikes. And print everything you can lay your hands on to the detriment of Canada.' How many scheming lies can we put down to 'anxiety'?

In Walker's book, crackpot opinions and big fibs are contextualised. They figured in dialogues, driven by both fear and reason, which somehow advanced our collective understanding of the land and ourselves. By the mid 1930s, the remarkable Griffith Taylor, speaking for 'scientific inquiry' against ignorant bombast from the likes of Bedford, had helped to shift the debate around 'Australia Unlimited' fantasies to a more sober estimate of Australia's diverse environments and the skills needed to settle people in them. Concerns about environmental degradation also played a part. Walker links the controversy that dogged Griffith Taylor's career to his insistence that Australia had a classic Oriental desert at its very heart. The Oriental associations of 'desert' were an affront to his opponents, intent as they were on redeeming the

wilderness, not herding camels or becoming Arabs.

A new problem followed from the controversy which the name Griffith Taylor signified. The limits to Australia's carrying capacity meant that Australians had to think of new ways to keep Asia in Asia. While the Great War refuelled fears of race debilitation, environmental realities shifted some thinking from anxious speculation and its mad schemes towards an understanding of needs in Asia and how they might be met. Walker resurrects some great moments. In 1923, Griffith Taylor walked into the lion's den: he addressed a meeting of the Sydney Millions Club. He challenged the stupidity of racial purism with a favourite party trick, showing the unhappy audience a slide of Robert Louis Stevenson standing beside his Samoan cook. He argued that, by ethnological standards, 'the cook was a more intellectual type than the famous author of *Treasure Island*.' He called for 'accommodation' with the East, for inter-marriage of Australians and Mongolians (whom he admired) and thus a phasing out of White Australia.


The strength of feeling against racial inter-marriage was reflected in popular fiction and films about doomed inter-racial love. The idea of moving closer to Asia did not win out. Even in commerce, where opportunity beckoned, industrialists and marketers seemed half-hearted. In a chapter called 'Money For Jam', Walker quotes a European manager in Tsientsin who would not sell Australian jam to the Chinese because the tins looked so alarming. The use of icons in labelling was careless: 'Asian consumers often assumed they were being offered tinned koala or platypus, delicacies for which they were unprepared.' *Anxious Nation* shifts from the realm of culture to the world of trade and back again and concludes with a chapter on the Institute of Pacific Relations, an organisation which was ahead of its time, well-informed on Asia and driven by a desire for understanding and accommodation. In the Cold War, a subject for the next volume, the IPR was savaged.

Walker is an editor of the *Annotated Bibliography of Australian Overseas Travel Writing* (1996), so it is no surprise to find that traveller's books provide a good bit of the scaffolding in this study, albeit interlaced with literature on land, population, climatology and so on. My gripes are few given the achievement here, but I do wonder whether the reliance on travel writing throughout *Anxious Nation* makes for some

problems. In the case of the Indian mutiny, for example, commentary is drawn from books, mostly travel tomes, which appeared several decades after the event. In Sydney at the time, there was open debate about British misrule and cruelty, and at least one appeal to the ladies of England to commend mercy to their men. Walker merely quotes the *Argus* on the 'ferocious cruelty' of the Indians. What's missing is the contemporary milieu, notably a colonial ambivalence towards the British, which influenced debate about events in India. That ambivalence has a history fired by experience in other parts of Asia too, something which is acknowledged.

Walker has mapped out an entire field and shifted the discussion of our relationship with multiple Asias nearer to the centre of historical debate. In diving parlance, the degree of difficulty in his project is high. It's a triple somersault with twist, pike, and a travel book under each arm. It is a great contribution to a 'commitment of the mind' to a future *with* or *in* Asia. Which preposition will it be? ■

Peter Cochrane is a freelance historian based in Sydney.



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Revival of the heart

The Folded Leaf, William Maxwell, The Harvill Press, London, 1999.

ISBN 1 86046 545 5, RRP \$19.95

IN THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS, Christopher MacLehose of Harvill has been enabling the British and Commonwealth worlds to discover the fiction of William Maxwell, the man who edited Updike and Cheever and Eudora Welty. Maxwell was the author of one novella, *So Long. See You Tomorrow*, as spare and sad as anything in American literature, as well as a host of stories and novels that reinforce the sense that the American empire extends to language and narrative.

Last year Harvill published *Time Will Darken It*, Maxwell's 1948 novel about the chaos that is caused, the bittersweet upshot, when Southern cousins come to stay in an Illinois town just before World War I. Now he has brought out Maxwell's 1945 novel, *The Folded Leaf*, set in Chicago and Indiana in the 1920s. It is a book about the friendship of two boys, Lymie and Spud, and it is quite extraordinary.

The Folded Leaf has a heart-stopping poignancy and believability which is beautifully observed and deftly, even elegantly, written, but which at the same time has a rolling narrative assurance that draws the reader into the novel's world. It is, among other things, a novel about obsessive romantic friendship between young men, but in such a way that we are left wondering if our own generation knows anything about the archaeology of human feeling. It is also exceptionally well-made without being remotely arty.

The world of Maxwell's fiction is a little bit like the world of Christina Stead's. It is sensuously intense and psychologically intelligent, but without theorising or psychoanalytical explicitness. It also has the dramatic sharpness and luminosity, the sense of beauty inhering in a black-and-white plainness, that you get in some of the great films of the '40s.

It's the story of Lymie, the physically weak, crypto-arty kid, and Spud, the athlete and physical beauty. Spud saves Lymie in a swimming pool when they're teenagers and they subsequently become inseparable. Spud takes his friend home to his poor but affectionate family's place (Lymie's mother is dead) and they become the kind of David-and-Jonathan duo in which the butch figure, Spud, is more openly physical, but it's



Lymie, the introvert, who stores everything up in his heart.

They are room-mates who share a bed at college and they kick around with the same pair of girls. Spud becomes a star young boxer and there is a ritual at the gymnasium whereby Lymie waits and ties his gloves on for him. Eventually—perhaps inevitably—the story darkens and something like tragedy intervenes. None of this is done cornily, but rather with a sureness of touch that compels admiration even as it quickens excitement.

The Folded Leaf is a staggering naturalistic novel (or very nearly one) from a world we have lost. It is a rich, ample book full of scenery and smells and details of fraternity initiation ceremonies and old antique dealer

landlords of boarding houses and academic parties and boxing rings. It comes from some intimately familiar lost continent of human representation. It is pretty clearly in the 'Come back on the raft, Huck honey' tradition which Leslie Fiedler was so leering about when he dubbed the American tradition a homoerotic tradition of Boys' Books, but Maxwell has no overt truck with the notion that love is reducible to sex. *The Folded Leaf* is a very adult, old-fashioned book which is a million miles from *Death in Venice* (although its account of obsession is brilliant and electric) and it is far more assured than the early fiction of Gore Vidal, for which it may or may not have served as some kind of precedent.

It would be anachronistic to describe *A Folded Leaf* as a gay book. It is in this respect far less gay than *Brideshead Revisited*, which traces something like the same ambivalence and which has a comparable trick of focusing on love between young men, as if sex were an impossibility or an irrelevance. It does this with an extraordinary quiet power. This lyrical, half-frightening story of boys who choose each other as brothers, who flare and mingle with each other and break apart amid much grief, has a greater ring of truth than most contemporary fiction.

It is as if the conventions of the '40s novel released something in Maxwell which allowed him to write with enormous freedom. *The Folded Leaf* only occasionally breaks into innovation and then in the nearly unnoticeable way of presenting daydream as if it were unfolding reality. The technique is seamless and it makes the world of '20s America look as if it were the natural location of a drama of jealousy and tension in which the actors had the faces—almost—of children.

THERE'S NOTHING very modernist about Maxwell, though his prose is sinuous and he seems aware of every dark place the heart can find in itself and in others.

He has the gift of being able to dramatise situations effortlessly using oblique (as it were 'overheard') dialogue, and he knows how to spotlight two contrasted inarticulate figures without for a second allowing the reader to think that the world they inhabit is in any way unreal or lacking in vividness.

At the centre of this novel is the parable of the man who gives away a coat, the most precious thing he owns. *The Folded Leaf* is a story about sacrifice and the fierce striving for a resting place. It's about grief too, and

destructiveness, but it's also about the holiness of the heart's affections.

It's a long time since I read a novel as confident and modest and spaciouly sane as this one. There is very little in the way of surface drama in William Maxwell's book, but the intensity of the style is remarkable. Maxwell's writing is for people who like the traditional satisfactions of sophisticated straightforward fiction but who won't compromise on subtlety and do not want them cut-price. The cover of this book shows two boys boxing by what looks like a lake, the latter shining through the chiaroscuro of the sepia photograph. The boy on the right, narrow-waisted with broad shoulders, looks as if he will rapidly dispose of his opponent, who has his head down, his gloved hands shielding his face; but they are locked in a formal dance.

It is perfectly suited to this flawlessly written story of private life in a social setting. My only question mark about *The Folded Life* was whether it didn't once or twice head towards sentimentalism, but I don't think that is a judgment which can stand. The moments of greatest dramatic intensity are very stark moments indeed. Besides, Maxwell's novel is, among other things, a novel about growth, and it earns its optimism. A novel as unambiguously good as this (never mind great) makes you want to sit down and read the rest of the writer's work. Readers who are just discovering William Maxwell should be grateful to Harvill for the 1200 pages or so of his work which are now in print. ■

Peter Craven is currently editing the *Best Australian Essays 1999*.

BOOKS: 2

PETER PIERCE

Hannibal leftovers

Hannibal, Thomas Harris, William Heinemann, London, 1999.
ISBN 0 434 00940 7, RRP \$39.95

ALREADY AN INTEMPERATE admirer of *Red Dragon* (1981) when in 1988 I came to review its sequel, Thomas Harris' *The Silence of the Lambs*, I called him 'the poet of horror'. Peter Craven once went further, likening Harris to Dostoevsky.

But Harris' lineage is American. Like his great contemporary, Cormac McCarthy, he is an heir of Hemingway, whose influence is apparent in the command of dialogue and in arresting passages of violent action. Harris has other distinctive strengths: insight into the psychopathology of his murderers, intricate but plausible criminal investigations and a wide and esoteric body of knowledge that he deploys with pedantic relish.

All his books contain brilliantly drawn minor characters, who live for us vividly, in their terrible isolation: the scandal-mongering journalist Freddy Lounds; the funeral attendant Lamar; the grieving, upright parents of murdered Frederica Bimmell; Will Graham's wife Molly; the autodidact Barney, erstwhile guard of Hannibal Lecter, among many. These are the achievements, not of a formulaic thriller writer, but of a richly skilled novelist, whose

resources of language, imagination and cunning are at the service of a nihilistic vision of a world of serial killers, victims and hunters.

The latest of Harris' novels markets itself with a single word title: *Hannibal*. The front cover blurb adds what fans of Harris have long desired but—in the 11 years since *The Silence of the Lambs*—began to fear would never happen: 'The Return of Hannibal Lecter'. Yet, intriguingly, disturbingly, that is not exactly what we get. Lecter has altered himself physically, better to hide from a legion of pursuers and his internet fans. Collagen has changed the shape of his nose, surgery removed the extra middle finger on his left hand ('the rarest form of polydactyly', as Harris precisely notes).

Lecter is older, nearing 60 (although, as John Sutherland observed in the *TLS* of 18 June, Harris fudges the chronology), but for all that, he remains a genius whose IQ and ego (as Harris is fond of telling us) are not measurable by any means known to man. Lecter is a polymath, a lover of arcane knowledge, a gifted musician and a man apparently immune to emotion.

Among literary portraits of genius, Sherlock Holmes' dark side is perhaps the nearest analogue.

In her essay in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World* (1998), Maggie Kilgour observed that Lecter's name holds out tantalising clues: Hannibal was Freud's favourite general, while the surname reminds her of Baudelaire's line, '*hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère*' ('hypocrite reader, my likeness, my brother'). In the earlier novels, such resonances were part of a mystery cultivated in tandem by Harris and Dr Lecter. Now, and with chilling unexpectedness, Hannibal dispels the mystery. The novel does not so much complete the trilogy that began with *Red Dragon*, as form a sequel to the film of *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). This last incarnation of Lecter (a figure now belonging more to cinema than literature) owes much to Anthony Hopkins' silky performance and to the weight of expectation which the film created.

FULLY TO APPRECIATE what has been lost, we need to backtrack. *Red Dragon* begins when stoic Jack Crawford of the FBI lures Will Graham out of retirement to catch a killer of two families of five, whom tabloids such as the *National Tattler* have dubbed 'The Tooth Fairy' because he likes to bite. Graham is the man who caught Lecter, and was almost fatally stabbed for his pains. It is he who informs a colleague, and the reader, that Lecter is 'not crazy', that 'he did some hideous things because he enjoyed them'. 'He has no remorse or guilt at all.' Ultimately, 'he's a monster'. That word reverberates through each book of the trilogy. Lecter, whom Graham interviews both to seek help with the 'Tooth Fairy' case and out of a fearful curiosity of his own, has the last word on his 'manhunter' (title of the very good film made of *Red Dragon* in 1986, directed by Michael Mann): 'The reason you caught me is that we're just alike.' Lecter's horrible revenge is to set the murderer on Graham and his family, just when we assumed that the horrors of the novel were done.

In the next instalment, *The Silence of the Lambs*, another investigator calls on Lecter. FBI rookie, Clarice Starling, has also been despatched by Jack Crawford. She is after another serial killer, whom the papers have rechristened 'Buffalo Bill', 'because he skins his humps'. Both this man, (actually Jame Gumb) and 'The Tooth Fairy' cum 'Red Dragon' (Francis Dolarhyde) desire a transformation of themselves. Dolarhyde

speaks of his 'Becoming', wherein he turns into the Red Dragon imagined by William Blake. In one of the most shocking scenes in a truly frightening book, he enters the Brooklyn Museum and eats the Blake painting of 'The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun'. More mundanely, Gumb seeks to become his lost mother, and thus is sewing a suit made of the skins of the women he has murdered. Harris invested

'A census taker tried to quantify me once. I ate his liver with some fava beans and a big Amarone.'

less energy in this portrayal, for in the second novel, the infinitely more complex figure of Dr Lecter is also on the loose.

When Starling asks Lecter what 'happened' to him, he answers reprovingly: 'Nothing happened to me, Officer Starling. I happened. You can't reduce me to a set of influences. You've given up good and evil for behaviourism.' Then he offers her an admonitory anecdote: 'A census taker tried to quantify me once. I ate his liver with some fava beans and a big Amarone.' The story follows of how he served the sweet-breads of his patient, Benjamin Raspail, to the president and the conductor of the Baltimore Philharmonic. (Lecter, let us admit, makes us laugh, if from a safe distance.) His courtesy—both in conversation and in the letters that the authorities improbably do not censor—is also disarming. As no-one since Graham has managed, Starling will learn to imagine Lecter's desires and intentions. She will also learn, at the cost of some humiliations, never to seek to quantify, or to explain them.

The more disconcerting than that Harris, returning to Lecter now, does reduce him to a person whose eating habits can be explained. Worse still, he bestows on his 'monster' a biography which, if hardly conventional, makes him more like all of us than he had ever been before: born of aristocratic lineage in Lithuania circa 1938, growing up on the family estate near Vilnius, his father was a count and his Italian mother a Visconti. This information has been gathered for Mason Verger, one of Lecter's victims who survived having his face eaten by dogs and who now plots revenge: he is arranging for Lecter to be devoured alive by pigs specially bred from savage varieties around the world by a family of sadistic Sardinians. Lecter also had a sister Mischa, 'long dead and digested'. For once Harris is not playing fair. We are led to suppose that Lecter did the digesting, when, in fact, after

the estate was bombed and their parents killed in 1944, Mischa and Hannibal were taken by German army deserters. Plumper than her brother, Mischa was the one eaten. Hannibal 'did see a few of Mischa's milk teeth in the reeking stool pit his captors used'.

And that, we appear meant to infer from this grisly detail, was the trauma that explains Lecter's subsequent career. Since then he has come to recognise 'how his own modest predations paled beside those of God, who is in irony matchless, and in wanton malice beyond

measure'. No wonder—we are hardly prevented from reflecting—that Lecter became a connoisseur and collector, in his richly stored 'memory palace', of the fatal collapses of churches. We seem to be asked to accept that Lecter's past is the partial justification for his homicidal career. The problem is that the last person likely to urge such extenuation is the Lecter whom we used to know, the villain of the first two novels. In the third, behind the endearingly familiar title *Hannibal*, he is no longer the same. This eponymous hero has become someone who 'very much liked to shop'; who takes his Fauchon lunch on a trans-Atlantic flight to avoid airline food. Most disconcerting, he lets himself be captured, because of the quixotic gesture of leaving Starling a \$300+ bottle of Château Yquem of the vintage of her birth year.

THIS IS A LECTER who invites our sympathy, rather than horror or reprobation or guilty laughter. Hannibal is not the Lecter with whom the first two novels of the trilogy were engrossed. To be sure, in *Hannibal*, Harris puts Lecter through some familiar paces. After dazzling a small, irritable, self-important group of scholars in Florence with his lecture on Dante and Judas Iscariot, the linkage between avarice and hanging, Lecter escapes from the first Verger-inspired attempt to capture him. He informs Detective Pazzi (who twigged, unfortunately for him, that the distinguished Dr Fell was in fact the infamous Dr Lecter) that 'I'm giving serious thought to eating your wife.' Then he arranges his death in a manner which recalls Botticelli's painting of Pazzi's disgraced and hanged ancestor, Francesco de' Pazzi.

Ghastly brio was always Lecter's long suit. The problem, in *Hannibal*, is that he lacks a foil. There is no Will Graham, nor the younger Starling. Disillusioned and disgraced by the FBI, she will, in effect,

switch sides. Leaving Lecter on essentially uncontested ground (Sardinian assassins and pig-herders apart), the novel loses intensity. Harris does not seem to mind. He prepares a last scene of excess. As Dr Chilton, director of the asylum for the criminally insane, hounded Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (dooming himself to the edible fate that Hopkins encourages audiences to smirk about at the end of the film), so Starling is persecuted by Deputy Director Krendler. He is that stock 1990s villain, a would-be politician, and in Verger's pocket. In Lecter's words, Starling is 'a warrior'. The conflict between the heroic realm and the realm of politics that trammels and betrays it, is as old as Norse saga. Starling chooses at last to escape into a luxurious if dangerous exile. Impossible at first to imagine, she becomes Lecter's companion and lover, offering him her breast, and then learning Italian better to converse with him.

Before then, Krendler has come to dinner. Kidnapped and drugged by Lecter, the FBI man has his skull neatly sawn off and watches—his attention necessarily drifting—while Lecter and Clarice eat his frontal lobes with a sauce of caper berries. The dirty dishes are emptied into his vacant brain pan.

Thus Lecter avenges Starling, as earlier he had revenged himself on the egregious Chilton. But what has Harris done? This culminating horror (the pigs have had their fun and Verger's lesbian sister has done away with him with the aid of a moray eel) makes unfilmable the novel that the success of the film of *The Silence of the Lambs* dictated (perhaps to a reluctant and even nervous Harris). Evidently Jonathan Demme, who directed, and Hopkins, who won a Best Actor Oscar, do not wish to be involved in the cinematic adaptation of *Hannibal*. But if not them, others will be.

All the artistic compromises which Harris has made, lessening the austerity and power of his art, his fidelity to comprehending the worst of what we might be, will matter not at all when box office takings are projected. Harris will be a beneficiary at the expense of his own genius. There have been few sorer circumstances to ponder in modern American literature, or in the show business that can attend its popular forms. This is especially so when the author is as eccentric, reclusive and imperiously indifferent to those who might have edited him as Thomas Harris. ■

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Stage business

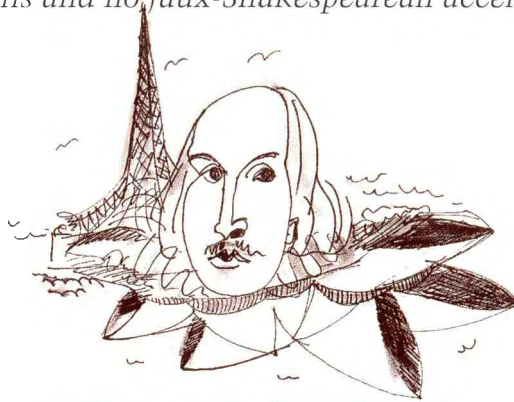
Playwright Jack Hibberd says Australian theatre is in crisis. Director Barrie Kosky says we mustn't do Shakespeare, or at least not the way we're doing it—give it to Circus Oz instead. Peter Craven takes heart from two recent Australian productions and argues for a national style with no frills and no faux-Shakespearean accents.

EUGENE O'NEILL is the father of modern American drama. Without him, Miller and Tennessee Williams are inconceivable. Without him, we would not have the tortuous psychodramas of Edward Albee or the familial free-for-alls of Sam Shepard. He gave the American theatre its dialogue and its dilemma. The dialogue tended to consist of how to kill a loved one, with actions or words. The dilemma was how to travel with this abiding premise of heartbreak and horror without turning the play itself into a carousel of melodrama and masochism.

Long Day's Journey Into Night is O'Neill's masterpiece, and the towering nature of its authority is heightened by the fact that its production was so long delayed that it appeared in the midst of other plays from the school O'Neill had spawned.

It's the story of a family engaged in a moment of self-vivisection. Tolstoy says that an unhappy family is unhappy in its own way, but the great family dramas are as intimately familiar as one's own 'domestics' and are written in a language which is in no way beyond the level of our nightmares. We feel for these people and are appalled by them because they go for each other and continue to love each other in ways that stare us out of thought, because what we recognise are our own fears distorted or transfigured in some moment of violence or agony of vehemence.

Hamlet is famously the play in which the leading actor has licence to play himself (or some extroverted and configured version of the gestures of that self), but *Long Day's Journey* is like a part for a quartet of Hamlets, each haunted by his own ghost, each on a vengeful quest to break down the spirit of the others, as if revenge had become a psychological and self-destructive compulsion, inseparable from the bond of love and the pieties of attachment.



What Australian theatre needs at the moment like a shot in the arm is more of this naturalism and this—for want of a better word—classicism. It does not need pseudo-boulevardier hacks falling on their bottoms pretending to be Trevor Nunn.

All of this gives the play an extraordinary warmth. Its very idioms seem so rooted in universal habits of mind (self-delusion, self-revelation and pride, self-satisfaction, criticism of others, castigation and calamity and attack with long knives) that it now appears almost comic in its exhibition of the postures through which we strut.

Long Day's Journey Into Night is as fresh and as black as the day Eugene O'Neill wrote it. It is the confabulated story of a family on one not-uncharacteristic day of crisis. This is the day when the younger Tyrone son, Edmund, is diagnosed as having

consumption and told that he will have to go into a sanatorium. It is the day when Mary Tyrone, the mother, loses her long battle with narcotics and the day when James Tyrone, hack actor and raconteur, proves himself to be a miser and his elder son, James junior, twists himself into a coil of treachery and intelligence.

One of the deeply American things about this play is that the Tyrones are presented as profoundly ordinary people even though the family quartet constitutes four of the richest parts in modern drama.

The most widely seen version of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is Sidney Lumet's film with Katharine Hepburn and Ralph Richardson as Mary and James Tyrone, and Jason Robards and Dean Stockwell as the sons. It is a gift of a play for actors, bringing out the full range of whatever light and dark they have in their bag of tricks. People tend to remember like beacons the performances they have seen: Olivier at the National or Jack Lemmon on Broadway. I once saw Prunella Scales (Sybil from *Fawlty Towers*) as a sturdy Mary Tyrone and then, a week or so later, the great Bibi Anderson, ravishing and ravaged, in a Swedish production directed by Ingmar Bergman.

The first thing to be said about Michael Edwards' production of O'Neill's masterpiece with Robyn Nevin and John Bell for the Bell Shakespeare Company is that it is up there with productions that people remember for the rest of their lives. This is a supple, intelligent, ferociously invigorated representation of O'Neill's drama and it's not only the best thing I have seen the Bell company do, it is one of the best productions to be seen on the Australian stage in years.

Michael Edwards, an Australian who works in America, gets more imaginative mileage than you would expect from the simple decision to dispense with American

accents almost entirely, and the effect is marvellously liberating. Of the principals, only Nevin has a faint touch of lace-curtain American and the effect slightly weakens a strong characterisation. The decision to dispense with twangs allows the cast room to act and the upshot is to make the play all the more immediate and intimate. It remains an American play set in a particular period but the dominant absence of faux American highlights the reality of the world of the play through every notation of expressionism and naturalism, so that the voices of pre-World War I America and of contemporary Australia are fused without any self-consciousness or fakery.

The play was staged in Melbourne under something like ideal conditions at the Fairfax and that intimate drama-friendly space showed an excellent production with maximum light and shade and subtlety.

It is a word-heavy play, of course, as well as one in which the sorrows of the world catch fire in a whirl of adrenaline and braggadocio and alcohol and drugs. The text is cut to a spare (!), calamitous three hours which seems not a moment too long. It is as deep and dark as a well while remaining free and moody and improvised.

John Bell as James Tyrone gives what may well be the performance of his career. This portrait of an ageing stager seems to me a deeper and less mannered thing than his famous Hamlet of a generation ago. It is a scaled-down, fine-grained portrait of an intelligent man baffled by pain and rage and personal weakness. It has been easy to forget what a fine naturalistic actor John Bell is, because he is characteristically seen in a haze of Shakespearean mannerism. Here the residual actor's manner is given an ironic distance and is played on shrewdly as the true element of James Tyrone's long farewell to his potential greatness. The terrier-like, slightly Olivierish voice, is pulled back and the effect of the whole characterisation is likeable, bloodcurdling and deeply poignant. I'd give John Bell all the Green Room awards in the world for this performance. It is a true vindication of his reputation as an actor.

Robyn Nevin as Mary Tyrone is not quite so successful. The production allows her to adopt a set of genteel mannerisms which are appropriate enough to the character but which do not come across as completely natural to the actress. Nevin allows herself, as to some extent she must, to be dulcet and fey where her natural bent is fire and flint and wiriness.

Her finest moment is when she raves on, stoned, to the Irish serving maid: she sings with the relaxation the narcotic has given her, all tears are wiped away and the world of memory, of all small things, is for a moment enchanted. Nevin is brilliant in the realism she brings to Mary Tyrone's addiction, the wringing of the hands, the compulsive giveaway talkiness and the sense of being insulted and injured and having no recourse.

Both the sons are very fine indeed (even though one knows that they are being held up and stimulated by the electricity and sheer histrionic stamina of Bell and Nevin at the height of their powers). Benjamin Winspear as the young, tubercular brother Edmund, has an open, almost dazed, gentleness, a kind of boyish sense of wonderment and irony that is exactly right for this character. He is not, as some Edmunds are, a passive witness to this festival of domestic horror, but adrift and wide-eyed in the whole sea of love-hate that has overtaken him. Everything in Michael Edwards' production allows Winspear to express his dramatic range without impediment. No doubt as an actor he has much to learn but he has mastered what he needs to play this 'nice' boy beset

with the stark ravaging phantoms of his family.

As the older brother, James junior, Sandy Winton is dazzling. This is the kind of 'supporting' acting one dreams of in this country, though it is in fact wrong to subordinate any of the main parts in O'Neill's play. Winton's performance is full of openness and easygoing humour, its bluntness never overdone. But it has moments, too, of deep and lacerating nastiness that carry absolute conviction. He also carries off the quite formidable trick of playing a character who is, at one point, quite drunk, without resorting to caricature or stereotype. It's a performance of penetrating intelligence and plausibility and charm.

This production of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is a winner which should tour the whole of the country and become part of the permanent repertoire of the Bell Shakespeare Company. But not because there is anything particularly progressive or flash about it—no dog would learn new tricks from it. It simply has a compelling dynamism, an extreme efficiency of action, and performances which look like a moral revelation simply because they are meticulous and fully imagined and come from fine actors who fit their parts, more or less, like gloves.

THE MELBOURNE Theatre Company's double Pinter bill, *The Collection* and *The Lover*, was a return to the seductive space of the Fairfax and in some ways to the efficiencies and elegancies that underpinned *Long Day's Journey* and gave it its sense of universal emotion through common cadence.

The Fairfax is a splendid, intimate space, ideally suited to the sinister power plays, the black transfigurations of basic English language—intimately familiar and intimately soiled—which are the stock-in-trade of the vintage Pinter of nearly 40 years ago.

In *The Collection*, a young man intimately but equivocally linked to a much older man is taxed by a stranger. The stranger says that he is the husband of a woman with whom the younger man has slept. On the other side of the stage we see the wife, preening with a kitten, dealing with the avenger as husband. In a crucial scene the older man, the protector, talks to the putatively adulterous wife who has romped it home (or has she?) with his young friend. The play is a short masterpiece, full of a world of complexly slippery but nakedly comprehensible psychosexual nightmares,

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so familiar they make the audience flinch. The repressive urbanity of the set of star chamber inquisitions in living rooms is so stark because commonplaces and civilities are wielded like whips.

Jenny Kemp's production is terrific, full of pace and portent. Again, the dropping of any pretence at English accents (as with the disavowal of stage American in the O'Neill) liberates the actors so they can stick, with musicianly precision, to the rhythms of Pinter's pattering dialogue. There can have been few dramatists in any age so experimental and 'original' who had at the same time such a massive naturalistic gift, such a microphone of an ear.

The sweet scarifying nothings of Pinter proved adaptable to the cinematic masterpieces of Losey and the laconic eloquence of a range of film-makers. In *The Collection* he is served splendidly by his quartet of actors. Robert Menzies, Bruce Myles, David Tredinnick and Melita Jurisic have an ensemble strength and sense of actually hitting the note (not swerving around it) which is rare in Australian theatre.

Menzies in particular has a sharp, hectic quality which is in no way separate from this actor's classical strength. He can hear the pauses in Pinter the way the Shakespearean hears the rise and fall of the line. But each of the actors gets the necessary knife-edge restraint to allow Pinter, that poet of intimidation, to sound like himself.

Bruce Myles is as nasty and insinuating as Donald Pleasance in the role of the older art dealer in *The Collection*, and he directs *The Lover*, which is rather more of a scherzo, though a masterly one, with considerable skill.

The Lover is almost a two-hander—like Noel Coward and Gertrude Lawrence in one of the subtler chambers of hell.

Again Menzies' acting has a hectic brilliance and precision. At times Melita Jurisic seemed to me to be overplaying the Jean Greenwood-like voice of deep honey she assumes for this role, but physically she is marvellous, fiery and then disarrayed, torn, distracted.

One had the strange illusion with this Pinter duo that these plays were being performed as they were written. It is an illusion, of course. Any achievement of the theatre will be a victory of interpretation, but it was nice to see it working so tacitly and implicitly without show or swank.

I suspect what Australian theatre needs at the moment like a shot in the arm is more of this naturalism and this—for want of a better word—classicism. It does not

Tadpoles

'One is very still
it may be shy
or perhaps
it's missing its mother.'
he says peering into the bucket.

We are digging a pond
beside the young fig tree
frogs are what we want.
What I've got
cannot be described
but when I look at him
my heart's
a bucket full of tadpoles.

Norfolk Island Pine

The pine tree stands
a chalice full of sky.

Beyond,
the sea is also blue
and is what the land sips
every day.

Birds are singing
in the Tree of Heaven*
which holds the feeder
full of seed.

The lawn is a green cloth
on this earth.

All I need to do
is pray
to be a glass of poetry.

* *Ailanthus altissima*. Also called Marryattville Tree.

need pseudo-boulevardier hacks falling on their bottoms pretending to be Trevor Nunn. It needs chamber style productions, perhaps especially of the classic modern works or in the classic modern style. Paradoxically this will be, if only as a whisper and a trace element, a national style. What else would it be?

If the Bell Shakespeare Company would learn to do Shakespeare with the restraint

and intensity that they have done O'Neill; if the MTC could get on to its main stage the feeling for words and fundamental dramatic solutions—rather than extrinsic hyperbole and declaration—that it showed in Pinter ... well, then we might have a mainstream theatre worth spitting at. ■

Peter Craven is currently editing *Best Australian Essays 1999*.

Grand tours

In Sydney and Brisbane in winter, Geoffrey Milne unearthed some broad contrasts in Australian theatre.

IN SYDNEY, I caught one of two Shakespeares, Neil Armfield's *As You Like It* for Company B at Belvoir St; the other, a *Macbeth* with Colin Friels and Helen Buday for the Sydney Theatre Company, opened after I had moved on to Brisbane. Armfield productions have been all over Australia this year. Most centres have seen *The Judas Kiss*, which finished its long tour in Brisbane in mid-July, while the superb *Cloudstreet* was in Melbourne in July before travelling to Adelaide in August. So it was interesting to see Armfield at work back home at Belvoir St Theatre; interesting, but ultimately a bit disappointing.

This *As You Like It* begins on a large wrestling mat covering the whole of the standard Belvoir corner space, padded underneath for the match between Charles and Orlando. At the end of the first act—when half the cast are banished or planning to leave the court in sympathy—the mat is winched up to reveal a greensward of forest lawn beneath it and a wonderful Elizabethan 'heavens' painted on its underside. Disarmingly simple, but powerfully effective, tricks of this kind are meat and drink for Armfield.

So is unorthodox casting, some of which works very well here and some less effectively. Rosalind and her father, the exiled Duke Senior, are played by Aboriginal actors Deborah Mailman and Bob Maza, which adds another layer to notions of dispossessed status. On the other hand, casting Silvius (Bradley Byquar) as an Aboriginal forest landowner seems somehow at odds with this. Aaron Blabey, as a nerdy little Orlando, makes a fine contrast to Mailman's very butch Ganymede, while Jacek Koman's Jaques is a moody study in stoic resignation. Diminutive Kirstie Hutton is a smashing foil as Celia and the wooing scenes surrounding the interval are sexy, pacy and very, very funny.

But there is some casting that is just plain dumb. It is hard to fathom why

Matthew Whittet's Touchstone is played as a crotchety, cross-dressed governess or why Geoff Kelso's doubling duties include a vaudeville-tarty Audrey; the resultant coupling of a 'female' Touchstone and a 'male' Audrey thus ends up as an idea yielding bewilderingly little substance. Tess Schofield's postmodern costuming (while not as silly as Judith Hoddinott's for the recent *Bell Merchant of Venice*) is also a mixed blessing. Ganymede is suitably boyish in a schoolboy suit of Ginger Meggs vintage, for example, but poor old Bob Maza looks ill-at-ease in a Fijian chieftain's skirt with flowers in his hair.

In short, this is an incomplete blueprint for a production. When Armfield's playful direction, personality-based casting and simple but insightful stage tricks all gel together (as in *Cloudstreet* or the 1983 *Twelfth Night*), the whole is far greater than the sum of a production's disparate parts. When they don't, the result suggests that here is a director who's doing too much too distractedly.

I also saw Kim Carpenter's Theatre of Image at work for the first time in Sydney. This visual theatre company has been producing shows for adults and children for a decade and this year's kids' show, in association with the STC at the Wharf, was a revival of a modernised *Hansel and Gretel* by Carpenter and Richard Tulloch first seen at Belvoir St in 1991. Relocating the story to a Sydney family whose father is summarily retrenched but whose new stepmother likes to live the good life (which makes it hard to feed their kids) is a sound enough idea, at least to begin with. And the visuals—some inspired puppetry, outstanding object manipulation and

Carpenter's trademark colourful production design—are mostly brilliant, if a shade repetitive. But the dramatic development is too slow too often (it takes an age to set up the fabulous transformation which sends the Mother Hubbard-inspired 'witch' into the fire, for example), the plot options are mostly soft, and promising threads remain frustratingly unconnected at the end.

SOFT OPTIONS also seem to be the order of the day at the Twelfth Night Theatre in Bowen Hills, Brisbane. The long-serving pro-am company which built this theatre in the early 1970s and gave it its name sadly no longer exists, but the pro-am tradition embraced by the current commercial management under Gail Wiltshire sadly still does. Going to Twelfth Night Theatre (especially to a Saturday matinée) is a reminder of what commercial theatre was like in the 1970s, when British TV stars were brought out to take leading roles alongside local TV personalities and other amateurs in lightweight foreign plays. This year's July production paired Britt Ekland and Iain Fletcher (better-known as DC Skase in *The Bill*) in Daphne du Maurier's 'spectacular stage romance', *September Tide*, ahead of an 'Australian Tour'—to the



Rod Quantock's last stand

Gold Coast Arts Centre and to His Majesty's in Perth in August.

This is one of du Maurier's rare attempts at stage writing, apart from adaptations of her own fiction like *Rebecca* (1939) with which Twelfth Night had great success several years ago. *September Tide* is set in 1948 Cornwall, where the Ekland character,

Stella Martyn, is preparing her home for the arrival of her newly married daughter, Cherry (who bears surprisingly little resemblance to her Scandinavian mum), and obnoxious, hard-drinking painter husband, Evan (the Fletcher vehicle). The young couple plan to holiday there before moving to America once Evan has created a bankable body of work. One night, while he is busy painting (a portrait of mother-in-law, as it happens), Cherry goes off to the pictures with a girlfriend but a big September storm erupts and Cherry can't get home. Meanwhile, Stella and Evan snuggle up in front of a palpably cellophane fire and scoff her last bottle of pre-war Burgundy—and a predictable love affair begins. In Act 2, things become strained between all parties (including Stella's old boyfriend, a yachting type who handily has access to plenty of post-war rationed Scotch), but luckily Cherry never finds out about what happened on that night of the September tide and Evan (played here as a rather stolid beatnik prototype) has the decency to decamp with his unloved wife before more irremediable damage is done.

A very conventional, if over-decorated, box set and acting hewn from the oldest of English wood make this tired old stuff anything but spectacular, while the utter predictability of the plot robs it of any real sense of romance. But it does take place on a stage, so at least a third of the promotional slogan is in good faith. Twelfth Night's October production is Kay Mellor's *A Passionate Woman*, starring Onslow from *Keeping Up Appearances* and Tracey from *Birds of a Feather*. This seems to say it all, really.

Across the Brisbane River at the Queensland Performing Arts Complex, there was a stylish new Australian play called *Vertigo and the Virginia*, written by Melbourne émigré Sven Olsen for the Queensland Theatre Company, which has been as visible on national tours lately as Sydney's Company B. This is a classic Australian family drama set simultaneously in a city in the present and in old Adaminaby in 1949–50, when the Snowy Mountain Authority was about to flood it in preparation for the new hydro-electric and irrigation scheme that became legendary in post-war Australian engineering and social history. In the contemporary timeframe, teenager Caylam plagues his mother Ruth (played with consummate edginess by Carol Burns, pictured) to tell him the truth about what happened in those fateful days when she was just a slip of a girl. The flashback

action illustrates Ruth's and Adaminaby's past via her mother Frances—and triggers repressed memories of events which Ruth is too disturbed to reveal without deep soul-searching.

Without giving away too much of a nicely shocking plot, the past relationships between Frances, her husband (unseen on stage) and a Yugoslav immigrant worker, Voya, have momentous impact on those between Ruth, her father and (in the present)



Carol Burns in *Vertigo and the Virginia*.

her inquisitive son. Olsen's spare but accomplished writing, and the simple but eloquent staging by director Tom Gutteridge and designers Michelle Fallon (set) and David Walters (lighting), combine to draw compelling drama out of this rich material. Through much of the action, Ruth and Caylam and Frances and Voya are all on stage at once and both narratives merge seamlessly into one discontinuous but ultimately satisfying story. Memories are beautifully refracted through the imaginative stage-set in the intimate Cremorne Theatre, which takes the metaphorical form of a snowdome; the mountain snows occlude the little house inside it for a while, but when they recede (as the dam-waters did recently in a drought to lay bare the skeleton of old Adaminaby) the truth comes flooding back.

This is a terrific little play and it is very well acted. Angela Campbell is gorgeous as a late 1940s Frances; young Jason Gann is splendid as the (perhaps slightly formulaic) modern interlocutor figure and Brisbane stalwart Eugene Gilfedder achieves the

querulous righteousness of Voya very strongly. It's a production which would make an excellent buy-in for Griffin, Playbox or the Perth Theatre Company. If it does appear elsewhere, don't miss it.

MEANWHILE, Melbourne in July and August found itself in the grip of political theatre (mostly of German-language origin) dealing with the rise of totalitarian rule. The Melbourne Theatre Company's new Artistic Director Simon Phillips' first production in that role happened to be a never-less-than-competent and often quite theatrically exciting production of *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, Bertolt Brecht's parable play (written with Margarete Steffin, typically not credited in the program) about the rise of Hitler in the guise of Chicago gangster. Poignantly, Phillips' production overlapped with the first American tour (of the same play) by the Berliner Ensemble; it will also be the final tour of that legendary company, which is closing down after 50 years. At the same time, allegories covering similar terrain by the Swiss playwrights Max Frisch (*The Fire Raisers*) and Friedrich Dürrenmatt (*The Visit*) were also seen in revivals of differing quality in fringe venues like Wax Studios and the Carlton Courthouse.

But the most confident and accomplished Australian purveyor of contemporary political rhetoric in the English language is longtime survivor of the Melbourne comedy scene, Rod Quantock.

His most recent piece, *A Major Event*, sub-titled 'The Final Report of the Comedian General on the State of the State', is a brilliant satirical version of an auditor-general's report focusing on social and aesthetic rather than financial issues. Coincidentally, the actual auditor-general in Victoria, Ches Baragwanath, retired in the week that Quantock's show, with trademark blackboard, chalk and talk, opened at the Melbourne Trades Hall, where it is to run until 4 September. Sadly, Quantock has flagged this as his final political comedy solo piece; he feels there is nothing left to say about the ship of state as steered by J.G. Kennett.

I think he's wrong. There will be more to say and I hope Quantock—one of the most gifted minds and mouths in Australian comedy—will take the chance to say it. ■

Geoffrey Milne is head of theatre and drama at La Trobe University.



English infusions

Tea With Mussolini, dir. Franco Zeffirelli. You tend to forget that Zeffirelli has been an anglophile for most of his lavish directorial career. From the early *Taming of The Shrew* (1967) through *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) to *Jane Eyre* (1996), he has mined English writers—and to fine effect. They have, after all, consistently turned in top-drawer, infinitely adaptable material and don't get into a lather about copyright.

For this charming but disappointing film, Zeffirelli has been loyal—having John Mortimer write the screenplay with him—but not wise. Mortimer does satiric surfaces—robustly amusing, as in his *Rumpole* series. But for this loosely fictionalised account of Zeffirelli's own wartime boyhood and his adoption by the ladies of the English community in Florence during the fascist period, you need more than witty punchlines and the patina of English eccentricity. But Zeffirelli is too fond and Mortimer too hearty to making anything more taxing than an entertainment out of potentially rich material. Shakespeare does help them out though: in one scene the young Luca/Zeffirelli is sent into exile in Germany to get the schooling his opportunist father thinks will benefit him. The ladies cushion the child's departure by doing a chorus of *Henry V's* St Crispian's speech: 'He that outlives this day, and comes safe home/Will stand a tip-toe when this day is nam'd ...'

The cinematography is delicate and hazy, doing justice enough to Tuscany to make you understand why this odd little band of time-warped English women might

have risked themselves to stay and help preserve it from German explosives and the juggernaut of allied victory. The acting is alternately chiselled and outrageous: Maggie Smith (left) and Joan Plowright play ladies, (Plowright very convincingly), while Cher and Judi Dench let themselves go royally. The Italian actors perform like stock Italian characters in a pre-war English B

movie—oddly embarrassing in a film from a director who ought to know better.

—Morag Fraser

Kubrick veneer

Eyes Wide Shut, dir. Stanley Kubrick. I went there ready to like the film, to ditch reservations about the relentless publicity campaign and its glossy stars, because it was, after all, a Kubrick. Kubrick—who gave us *Dr Strangelove*, *The Shining*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Full Metal Jacket*—has been one of the most profound of directors, one of the few (along with Scorsese and Coppola) with *gravitas*.

Eyes Wide Shut promises much in the first few minutes. The fact that Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise are married adds a tinge of authenticity to the mild bickering of the film couple—the William Harfords—getting ready to go to a ball at the preposterously opulent mansion of an influential friend. Harford is a New York GP, doing very nicely, but not in the plutocratic leagues his friend Ziegler inhabits.

The longueurs begin at the ball, with exhaustive takes of endless platitudinous conversations as both Harfords flirt with strangers. So far, so good. Kidman does a very good tipsy scene with a smarmy Lothario. But when the dialogue turns to why she won't go upstairs with him, the script loses its grip. She says, 'Because I'm married', and he replies that women only marry to lose their virginity because then they can do what they want. This must come straight from the 1901 novel from which the film was adapted.

No director is perfect, and if Kubrick was brilliant at broad-brush narrative, pushing boundaries of slow observation to the limit, then his limitation was that his female characters were always secondary. In *Eyes Wide Shut*, the women are all objectified to a degree that does not accord with a truly contemporary exploration of sexuality. Women are sexually reckless and impulsive (read 'frail'), Kubrick is saying. When Harford's wife reveals that she has fantasised about another man, it sends Harford on an obsessive quest for revenge. As you would, says the film, without a milligram of irony.

It is all lushly contrived, every scene tweaked into perfect shape, not a bibelot amiss. But the narrative falls to pieces as Harford cons his way into a high-society orgy, only to be discovered and threatened with all sorts of nasties if he tells anyone. But what is there to tell? The orgy is like the film itself—pompous, self-conscious and rather old-fashioned: people dress up in cloaks and masks so that they can have it away on coffee tables and sofas in front of each other. (Yawn.) The idea of People In High Places needing to go to some Château de la Rumpy-Pumpy to have anonymous sex is, again, a strange one. Why bother? (Maybe they're all Republicans—it's well known that conservative politicians are impotent without a scuba suit, a bunch of dahlias and a small llama. No wonder they hated Clinton.) It was meant to be disturbing and frightening but it's not—it is actually rather funny because the film takes itself so lethally seriously. The soundtrack is full of portentous semitones here, a seam that was surely mined out by *Jaws*: DAA-DER, DAA-DER, etc. Or perhaps a slowed-down *Pink Panther* ...

If you want a great film about sex and death and obsession and grief, get out the video of Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris*.

—Juliette Hughes

Two hands clapping

Two Hands, dir. Gregor Jordan. I've always wanted to go camping with Bryan Brown. He looks like the sort of bloke who'd know what to do if it rained. In *Two Hands*, taking a trip into the bush with the unsavoury Pando (Brown) would probably mean you were going to be shot.

Pando is a big bad man in Kings Cross, who cruises the streets in a low-slung, hotted-up Ford Falcon accompanied by his goons. Jimmy (Heath Ledger) is a young

fellow working as a tout outside a strip joint. His luck is about to change. Pando offers Jimmy a simple job. The job turns sour and Jimmy looks like he's in line to take an unpleasant camping trip with Pando, a large gun and no waffle-maker.

Enter Alex (Rose Byrne), an angel with peroxide hair just arrived from the country. Her dairymaid blush shames the nastiness of King Cross. She offers Jimmy a chance to work in a rustic trade somewhere up north. I thought she was going to ask Jimmy to work on her dairy and make *real* money. But no, Jimmy has to shoot a few cops first, but the love of a good woman seems to ensure he'll remain a good bloke—just as long as he can find a paddle for his barbed-wire canoe.

Two Hands has a couple of genuine belly laughs; armed robbers who plan hold-ups and childcare in the same conversation offer the best laughs.

The casualness with which people are blown away, drowned and run over probably does make this a hip film. Even so, *Two Hands* might have some real meaning; sometimes we're made to wonder if places hold memories of past wrongs.

Maybe it will be flawed heroes like Jimmy who'll right the wrongs embedded in the bush and beneath the city asphalt. Then again, *Two Hands* might just be another film about nothing. It's worth going and spending 103 minutes making your mind up.

—Paul Sinclair

Extraordinary Joe

My Name is Joe, dir. Ken Loach. There's something incredibly beautiful about the plainness of this film. It covers familiar territory for director Ken Loach, focusing on a community battered by mass long-term unemployment, drugs and poverty. Despite the potential for bleakness and misery, Loach offers us something more difficult to understand and to show: the possibility of hope amid hopeless conditions.

The Joe of the title (a wonderful performance by Peter Mullen) is an unemployed alcoholic, with nothing to show for his 37 years, and no prospects either. All he has going for him is 11 straight months off the booze, the local unemployed workers' soccer club which he coaches (who have only won a single game, ever), and his friend Shanks, who took him to his first AA meeting. He meets Sarah, a local community health worker, and despite the gap in their social class (she has a job you see), they begin a tentative but hopeful romance.

Each of them, in their own way, is committed to the battered community they live in. They first cross paths attempting to help Liam, an ex-junkie and drug-dealer trying, like Joe, to stay straight. Unfortunately, Liam's wife is still using, and has racked up impossible debts with the local dealers in doing so. The dealers, of course, will have their due, one way or another. In his attempts to protect Liam, Joe gets drawn inextricably into an increasingly impossible and desperate situation, where his desire to do the right thing by everyone around him backfires tragically.

This is a familiar plot—the good man cornered by fate is a classic formula for tragedy. What makes this story so affecting, however, is the simplicity of its telling. It's as if, in offering us these characters' stories in such an unadorned, straightforward manner, Loach is affirming his faith in the value and significance of their experience just as it is. Perhaps more importantly, by giving it to us directly, he also gives us nowhere to hide from the rawness and the raggedness of that experience.

—Allan James Thomas

Play to the end

Playing by Heart (dir. Willard Carroll). It's worth staying to the end of *Playing by Heart* to see how the seemingly separate strands of the story all come together. Not that you'll be bored in the meantime. For most of the film, we follow five distinct relationships. While each of them is vibrant and engaging, it's hard to find any point of connection between them, except for the fact that they all take place in Los Angeles. Indeed, you begin to suspect that this is something like *New York Stories*, except that these narratives run concurrently rather than sequentially.

You wonder if perhaps Willard Carroll, who wrote the film as well as directed it, has created a loose structure to fit the emotional claustrophobia he is exploring. But then, in the final 20 minutes, the strands come together so easily and simply that the result is delightful. Each strand of the narrative has been strong. The final fit is well nigh unbreakable.

Paul (Sean Connery) and Hannah (Gena Rowlands) have been married for 40 years. They live in comfort. But Paul has been diagnosed with a terminal disease and there are some issues which have been unresolved in their marriage for 25 years. Meanwhile, Joan (Angelina Jolie) is cruising clubs and

runs into the surly, withdrawn Keenan (Ryan Phillippe).

Meanwhile, Gracie (Madeleine Stowe) is having an affair with Roger (Anthony Edwards). Mildred (Ellen Burstyn) is waiting by the bed side of her dying son, Mark (Jay Mohr). Meredith (Gillian Anderson) is doing her best to fend off the attentions of Trent (Jon Stewart). Such stories are the bread and butter of living in a western city. They are told with humour and wit. Carroll's direction uses the talent of his big-name actors without allowing them to dominate the large cast. This film surprises you by showing how much these characters have invested in each other. Take your cynical friends. It will do them good.

—Michael McGirr SJ

Bubble and squeak

Bedrooms and Hallways, dir. Rose Troche. 'Wild Men' weekends, the sexual fantasies of London real-estate agents, screwball pop psychology and sharp domestic wit makes this romp round London relationships enormously engaging. *Bedrooms and Hallways* is lightweight cinematic delight.

The plot twists fancifully around the gorgeous gay Leo (Kevin McKidd), who is persuaded to attend a New Age men's group by his open-minded but straight business partner. Somewhere between the 'honesty stone' and the group sauna Leo admits to finding a fellow member of the group attractive—a revelation that unleashes a flood of confused sexual shenanigans, reassessments and aggressions. Everything it seems is up for grabs—literally.

With the men's group in a shambles and gay Leo in love with straight Brendan (James Purefoy), enter Sally (Jennifer Ehle), Leo's high-school sweetheart and straight Brendan's ex-long-term girlfriend. What to do? Whom to turn to? Which team to bat for?

Yes, this is soap, in fact it's a bubble bath, but I enjoyed it from start to last.

Hugo Weaving is masterful as a gently menacing real-estate agent in lust with the sartorially outrageous Darren, while Simon Callow and Harriet Walter put in mischievously over-the-top performances as the New Age group leaders. In fact, all the film's players, big and small, are ripper. London itself puts in a handsome, if heavily disguised, performance—endless sunshine and pots of red geraniums add charmingly to the soapy fantasy of it all.

—Siobhan Jackson



Homage to catatonia

THERE WAS A GREAT cartoon in the *New Yorker* about 20 years ago showing a middle-aged, middle-class Midwest couple sitting in front of their TV, in attitudes of great despondency. I can't remember the cartoonist's name, but he or she

was brilliant: the line-and-wash conveyed noble resignation and fortitude on the part of the husband who comforted his distraught wife: 'Perhaps the viewing will be better tomorrow night, dear.'

There have been many evenings lately where my beloved has had to be strong and comforting and Mills-and-Boonish for me, as my morale dipped to something between Blanche DuBois and Mrs Gummidge. 'When are they going to put on something decent on a Tuesday?' I would wail, and people fearing for my reason's delicate balance would hurry with cups of tea and concerned offers of St John's Wort. TV reviewing is not for the fainthearted, you know. I bet you think it's all *French @ Saunders* and *Four Corners*. Instead one regularly risks apoplexy (watching that travesty of *Great Expectations*), nausea (*This is Your Life*), hives (*A Current Affair* and *Today Tonight*) and catatonia (*Jerry Springer*, *Rikki Lake* and *The Footy Show*). Think of your columnist boldly going where no intelligent lifeforms have been detected, even watching *Home and Away* for you. (I don't want to talk about it any more, doctor, and can I have some more of that St John's Wort? And make that a *large Gin & It*.)

Tuesday is infamous in our house because of *Funniest Home Videos*, *The Drew Carey Show*, *The Bill*, *Water Rats*, *Party of Five*, *Dawson's Creek* and several other relentless-boring-bastard programs. You can of course watch *The Cutting Edge* that night if you're feeling strong enough to hear about ever yet more monolithic cruelty and corruption in the world. And *Inside Story* is often so worthy that you find yourself longing for the schlock and levity of *Compass*. Yes, I know *Foreign Correspondent* is worth waiting up for. But I wish they'd put it on earlier, instead of the four-thousandth episode of the bleeding *Bill*.

The network channels have choking wastelands where all you have on offer are brain-rot sitcoms whose scripts are all self-congratulation for overworked quips, repetitive medical or cop operas, something sensitive about Mongolian party politics on SBS and netball on the ABC. Having cable makes it all farcical on bad nights because you're paying \$56 a month upfront for it, not just with eight cents a day on your tax, or long loud commercials for which they edit key narrative from the shows ... Bad cable tends to manifest as every news channel doing sport or business, every movie channel doing a '70s flick with Burt Reynolds or an '80s telemovie about a mom with cancer, and all the documentary channels doing the 15th repeat of 'Cute Dolphins'. This leaves you with the Lifestyle channel doing Tai Chi with two pyjamaed health freaks, or the music channels. But on nights like these, V-Channel will be all soporific R&B clones, or else something loathly of the Marilyn Manson eat-the-babies type. The country channel won't be Dwight Yoakum or Reba McEntire but will feature interchangeable whingers in fringed jackets. You flick to World Movies and it's something with Gerard Depardieu *again*. Or something dark and amoral and bloody miserable about Belgians. You flick

again (the remote control batteries wear out fast) and there are repeats of *That Girl*. Yes, at other times, there are *Peter Gunn*, *The Avengers*, *The Saint*, *The Persuaders*, *Rhoda*, *Saturday Night Live*. But always when you're asleep or at work. Only nocturnals, shift workers and anally retentive types who are both organised enough to remember to buy video tapes *and* know how to program the video ever get to watch the real goodies. The prime example of this lunacy is arena's programming of *The Games* at 4pm every day.

IT'S TIMES LIKE THESE you want *Good News Week* or *Media Watch* all the time. Channel Ten is sailing pretty close to the wind with *GNW* because it is only a matter of time before they'll get tired, doing two shows a week. They haven't yet, but they need really good guests to keep things flowing. Rod Quantock always delivers on *GNW*, as do Greg Fleet and Peter Berner. Lately, however, they've been starting to put on some girlies who are only there for looks, unlike Kate Fischer, who was edgy and funny. Bring her back, I say. Mikey Robbins and Julie McCrossin can usually cover for the comic deficiencies in their teams, but when you see guests really earn their place, such as when Berner did a brilliant stream-of-consciousness word-association version of 'Clancy of the Overflow', it raises your expectations. I'm wondering if there's been pressure from the channel to hire younger guests in order to fit the perceived mid-20s demographic that Ten has been chasing. At present *GNW* has to compete with *SeaChange*, *Home Improvement* and *60 Minutes* on Sundays and *The Footy Show* and Berner's own new show on ABC on Thursdays, so all of its ratings are hard-won. People who make the jump from *This Is Your Life* etc. will be rewarded: *GNW Night Lite* has Flacco and Sandman—fantastic clowns, introducing the young audience to irony, observation that hovers on the edge of the ontological abyss, and the sheer grip of real performance art.

There was a good crackle in the air when Tim Ferguson and Richard Fidler were brought on (on separate shows). Something of the tension of old Doug Anthony Allstars suggested itself each time, hovered like the smoke trail of a snuffed candle and then dissipated under *GNW*'s strong format and the blaze of Paul McDermott's authority. McDermott is a born frontman, a natural flint-hearted showman who holds the reins and knows when to ply the whip. Recently my heart was warmed by the skit he did with Robbins, projected through a distortion screen that made them resemble the prognathous Packers. It was one of the times when McDermott's ability as an ensemble player showed again; Robbins' neanderthal growl as the old man was belly-laugh stuff, and refreshing proof that moving from the ABC hasn't interfered with *GNW*'s independence. In fact, as McDermott said evilly one night, now they don't have to be balanced. It gave me a cold feeling, however, as I imagined Howard's hollow men in charge of our national broadcaster, grimly clocking each reference to politics on a balance sheet to make sure the noses of the government weren't pulled more than the Opposition's. What happens with other ABC programs dealing with stuff that matters? It makes me wonder, as Robert Plant sang in 'Stairway to Heaven'.

Juliette Hughes is a freelance reviewer.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 76, September 1999

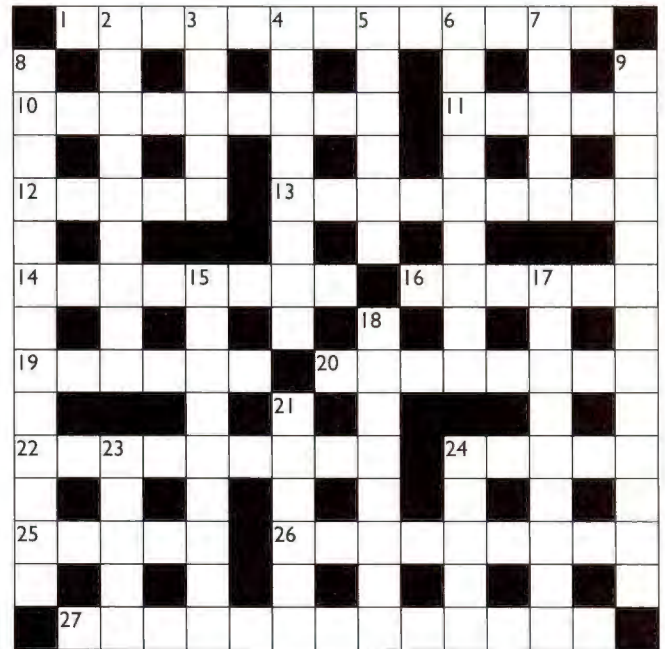
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

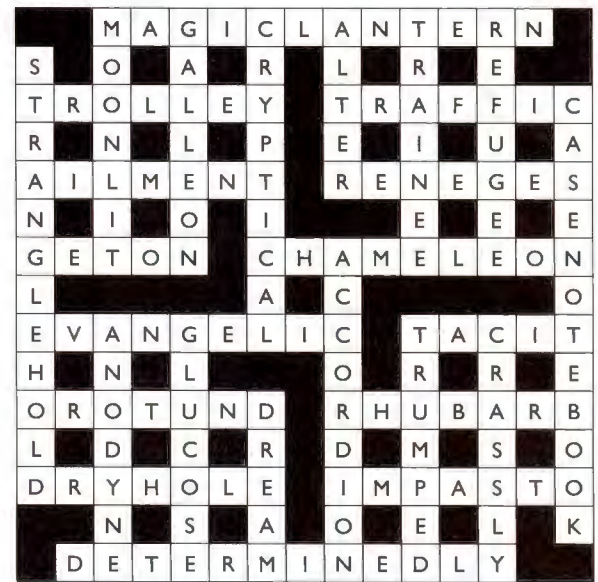
1. They're top of the ladder, in a geographical sense, but will they be 20 with pride? (8,5)
10. Scandalising people, painting the town red? (9)
11. Parisian speaks to the aforementioned in the same way. (5)
12. Hearing about first test for 100 dinars in Iran. (5)
13. Worked out how queen, being inside, was cut out. (9)
14. With a change of leader, could be on the other side. How appropriate! (8)
16. Part-time tenor is on duty for evening prayer. (6)
19. Tiers of battery hens, perhaps. (6)
20. Jeff and Bob, possibly, go to the MCG to see them play. (8)
22. Proceeds, we hear, with propensity to benefit someone such as a 27. (9)
24. At this point, we hit the bull's eye. (5)
25. My friend in Paris takes a turn with my friend from Barcelona. (5)
26. Temporary accommodation at 4, East Avenue? It's undecided! (9)
27. Those who hold a post when carrying skaters from the frozen river, for instance. (6,7)

DOWN

2. Fee to hold a jockey, perhaps, for future races. Pity arena won't be ready! (6,3)
3. Which theatre seat do you want? Why beat about the bush? (5)
4. It's not customary to have a teaset in use for a liqueur. (8)
5. Excellent golf holes played by some footballers. (6)
6. Unseemliness of peculiar sort of art in back of gallery. (9)
7. 'Them', in other words! (3,2)
8. Bear the cost of the dance for the end is nigh! The participants hope to be 20. (8,5)
9. The sort of medals Peter didn't have. (Acts, 3) (4,3,6)
15. Rots in limbo, maybe, in its crater. (9)
17. Draw Van Gogh's missing appendage, say, in a more superficial way. (9)
18. Quiet about number in front of church—what a charade! (8)
21. What a nuisance the French are, pounding away with this. (6)
23. Cook I introduced to the boss. (5)
24. American state in receivership to begin with, solves its problems with style. (5)



Solution to Crossword no. 75, July/August 1999



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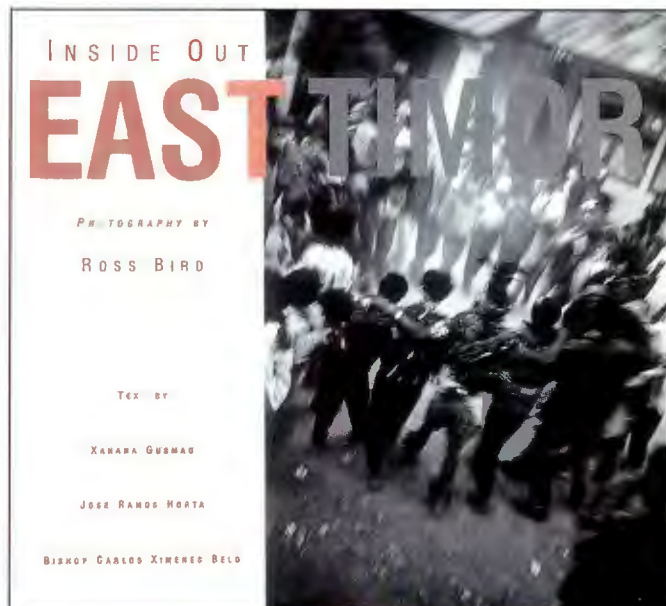
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