EUREKA STREET

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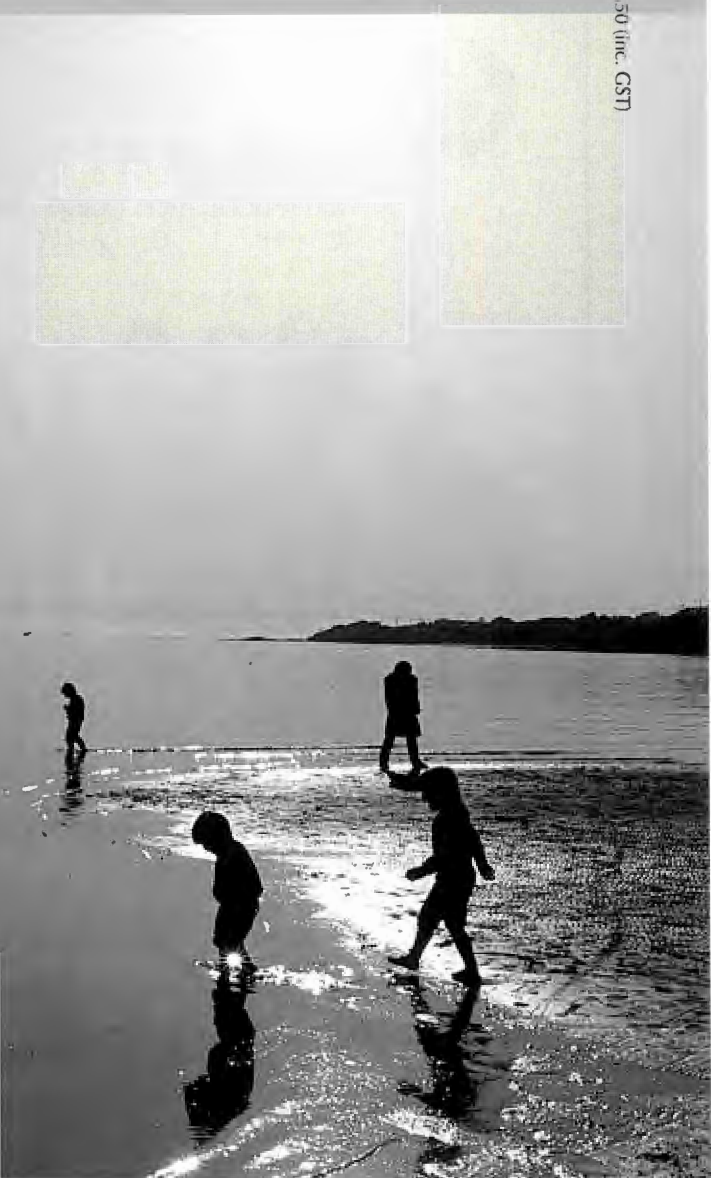

In Kabul:
Dorothy Horsfield

On war:
Bruce Duncan and Andrew Hamilton

Writing the family:
Peter Rose and Tracey Rigney

Tolkien and epic theology:
Dorothy Lee on *The Lord of the Rings*

Summer

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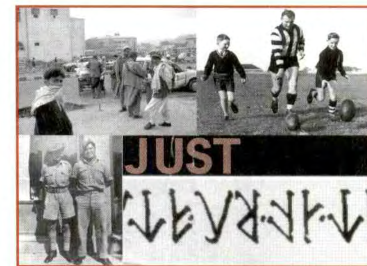

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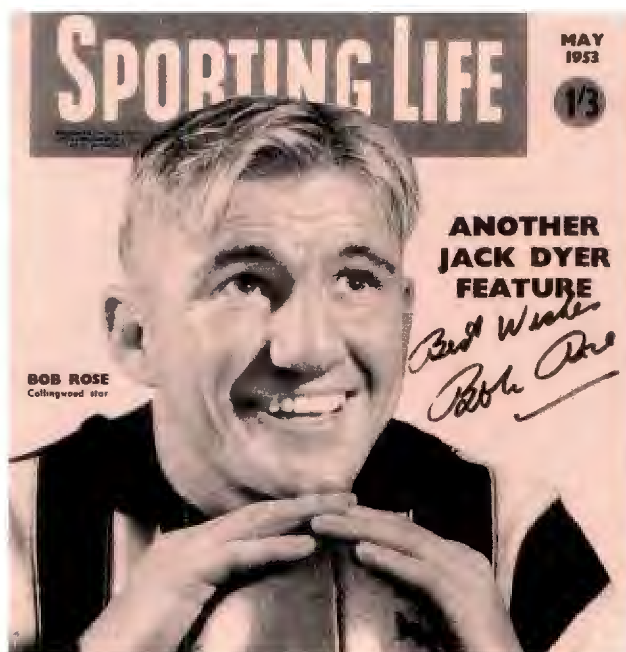


Between overs

WELCOME TO OUR Summer issue. As we prepared this holiday edition it was raining in Victoria. Even a little in New South Wales—enough, thank God, to help douse the bushfires. Very Australian, that—drought here, fires there and hailstones bound to arrive as soon as you set up the annexe of the tent. So pop your *Eureka Street* into a plastic bag—like an orienteer's map—and open at page 24 so you can while away the bad weather, or the humidity, or the longueurs of the Boxing Day Test with this year's worse-than-ever *Eureka Street* Quiz.

Families preoccupy us over Christmas and the holiday season. This month two of our writers take a fresh look at the intricacy of family bonds, and the delicate business of being honest about them in print. Peter Rose (pictured, above right, with his brother Robert, and his father, Collingwood hero Bob Rose, below) discloses some of the difficulties—and the rewards—of writing *Rose Boys*, his poet's account of growing up in a sporting family, and dealing with his brother's life and premature death.

In quite a different vein, Tracey Rigney tells the story of her grandfather, Jack Kennedy, a Wotjobaluk man from Dimboola, who fought with the Sixth Division in Syria and later campaigned for land rights back home. A playwright, Tracey catches the voice and dignity of a man she both loves and admires.

Dorothy Horsfield, in 'Seven days in Kabul', looks at the aftermath of war in Afghanistan, and meets some extraordinary characters involved in its reconstruction.

Back home, Bruce Duncan and Andrew Hamilton examine the theory and practice of just war—and ask whether or not Australia should be involved in Iraq. ■

—Morag Fraser

See page 16 for winners of the November 2002 Book Offer.

A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

From January, the subscription price of *Eureka Street* will rise to take account of increasing production costs.
See page 47 for details.
And keep an eye out for our special offers.

ANDREW HAMILTON

Pressure unrelenting

The East Timorese in Australia

In python stories, the serpent grasps its victims, suffocates them and digests them, and all the while the bystanders stand around in helpless distress.

The python is an emblem of Australian immigration policy that crushes asylum seekers in order to excrete them. It grasps them in detention centres and in legal processes. Then, by depriving them of income and benefits, it 'persuades' them to leave Australia.

The 1600 East Timorese asylum seekers in Australia are now entrapped in this process. Many have lived in Australia since 1990. They sought refugee status, but Australian governments did not at the time consider their cases, fearing the disapproval of the Indonesian Government. In the meantime, they have found work in Australian businesses, have sent their children to Australian schools, and belong in the Australian community.

Their claims for refugee status are now being processed. The East Timorese must show that they would face persecution if they returned to the independent East Timor.

Predictably, no refugee claim has so far succeeded, although a few people have won residence on the grounds of their close ties with Australia. When rejected, they can appeal to the Refugee Review Tribunal, which, however, is highly unlikely to find in their favour. In the event of a second rejection, they can then appeal to the Minister for Immigration for consideration of their cases on humanitarian grounds.

At that point the coils tighten. For when they appeal, they automatically lose their right to work. They recover it only if and when the Minister indicates he will consider their case—a process that takes some months. They will also be deprived of medical and other benefits, and any income they may have received through the Red Cross. They will have no resources for rent, to attend to their health or to buy food for themselves and their families. Those whose balance of spirit is precarious will find their sense of worth put under further pressure. Against the background of these suffocating provisions designed to drive them from Australia, they will rely heavily for support on an already poor East Timorese community.

The East Timorese asylum seekers themselves have become increasingly anxious as their cases are heard and dismissed. Other Australians are also distressed. In Darwin, representatives of business and local government have protested, claiming that the East Timorese belong to their community and must not be deported.

What can be done? Sympathetic bystanders who watch Australian immigration policy at work may feel impotent. But the East Timorese choked by the policy need two forms of support. First, as in Darwin, the Australian community must express its concern at the excision of people from its heart. Protests by activist groups have limited effectiveness, but school communities, neighbourhood groups, workplaces, employers and churches can effectively express their outrage at what is done to their communities by this treatment of their East Timorese fellows and friends. These people have had to live in constant anxiety as a result both of what they suffered in East Timor and of Australian delay in hearing their cases. They have grown into the Australian community. They must be allowed to stay here.

Second, as their cases are heard and reviewed, a growing number of East Timorese need material support. They are unable to work and have no income to feed and house themselves. Many, too, are still so affected by torture and trauma suffered at the hands of the Indonesian administration that they cannot work. They rely entirely on the government grants administered through the Red Cross. And these grants they are now steadily losing. If voluntary organisations, including local churches, do not support and encourage them, how will they survive? And yet the groups most responsive to the needs of asylum seekers are already overwhelmed by the needs of others similarly deprived. New resources are needed.

In stories, pythons are inexorable, and bystanders impotent. Pythons crush, kill and swallow what they snare. In the case of social pythons, bystanders can impede the python only if they are organised and determined.

One way to help is through the Red Cross. The Australian Red Cross, which administers the government-funded Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme (ASAS), is in touch with the more vulnerable East Timorese asylum seekers. It would like to continue to assist them personally and materially. If you would like to help, contact the state office of the Australian Red Cross, or the National Manager of ASAS, Noel Clement, on (03) 9345 1800. ■

Andrew Hamilton SJ is *Eureka Street*'s publisher and has worked with the Jesuit Refugee Service.

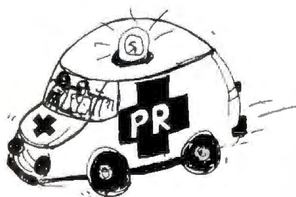
SNAPshot

In memoriam

When Philip Berrigan died of cancer in December 2002 he was 79. His struggle against American war policies had receded into the dimness of recent history in a culture that is now even more disturbed and embarrassed by civil disobedience than it was in the 1960s and '70s. During that time he had been a Catholic priest, a Josephite in a Baltimore parish that was poor and black. His radical pacifism began in World War II. He saw and deplored the discrimination practised against black US soldiers by their own country, and developed a passion for social justice. In Baltimore he founded Peace Mission, an anti-war group that in 1966 picketed the homes of Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, and Secretary of State, Dean Rusk. Berrigan conducted raids on draft boards, burning or spilling red liquid on draft records. In a protest in Catonsville, Maryland, he was joined by his brother, Daniel, a Jesuit priest and poet. Together they became much-feted and extensively profiled celebrities of the peace movement.

The obituary in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* quoted Noam Chomsky's verdict on the two priest/activists: 'heroic individuals, willing to do what many realise should be done, regardless of personal cost'.

Need to know



'Accountability' and 'professional standards' are among the watchwords of the moment. So if you want to hear them analysed and discussed you might like to take in the annual *Public Affairs in the Public Sector* conference in Canberra in March.

The conference, with its panel of experts from the public and private sectors, will address some of the trickier issues that PR professionals have to face day by day. Among them: managing media relations and working with crises (sometimes one and the same thing!). The conference will also look at current ethical issues (yes, that's right—ethics), especially the need to inject corporate social responsibility and accountability into the communications mix.

The speakers form a line of those who know: political speech-writer, Bob Ellis, heads the team of presenters and will discuss the role of 'spin' in today's communications. Marika Harvey, PR Manager for the ACT Government's Chief Minister's Department, will discuss the very pertinent question of how to manage the relationship between ministerial offices and government departments.

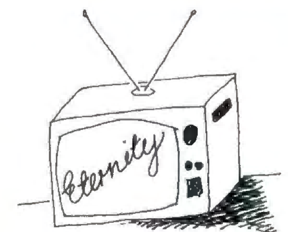
In addition there are speakers from the Department of Defence, Melbourne City Council, Telstra, Westpac, Department of Main Roads Queensland and more.

For more information about the conference, go to www.iir.com.au/marketing or call (02) 9923 5090.

G & S excess

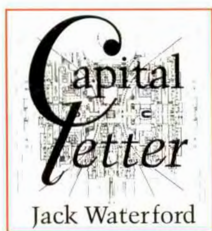
There we were, all 17 of us, at Opera Australia's production of *Iolanthe*. A few husbands and children, some lovers, a friend or three, and Mum. At 81, and in a wheelchair, she was the reason for the outing, a Christmas gathering in fealty to her past triumphs. The sets and costumes were far more lavish, more cod-Victorian than hers would have been in the 1940s when she was Phyllis, yet the parliamentary satire, even on the British system, still seemed fresh, still drew gales of laughter from an audience whose intimate knowledge of the libretto made up for the singers' appalling diction. The honorable (indeed brilliant) exception to this was Denis Olsen who was, as ever, the cynosure of all eyes with his ruthless upstaging business, and of all ears with his pellucid patter. He is no longer young, but his voice has not aged at all: resonant, clear, deep, flexible and steady. The same couldn't be said of the other singers: Iolanthe and the Fairy Queen both had old-lady vibratos that often bent their pitch, particularly at high notes. And when Phyllis began to sing, Mum turned to my sister and said in the penetrating stage whisper of the conveniently deaf: 'Huh! Musical-comedy voice!' When an unfortunate group nearby clapped prematurely she snapped 'Shut up!' All in all she had a wonderful time—it would have been quite disappointing if Opera Australia had been able to match the voices of wartime amateurs a long, long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

Writing on the wall



When Arthur Stace wrote 'Eternity' on Sydney footpaths it was a tender paradox: unendingness in the most fugitive medium—chalk—inevitably scuffed and sluiced away by shoes and rain. He created an illusion of lastingness until he died and the last copperplate sigil flitted away.

Yet on the whole, graffiti goes the other way: it lasts far beyond the currency of its idea. Who can forget travelling to work and seeing 'Out Menzies' well into the '80s? Trevor Chappell's underarm bowling rebuked for years on an inner urban wall; the twist of gender politics in the '70s that declared war to be menstruation envy. The voices were silent long before the paint faded. The scratches in Pompeii were even more personal, more evanescent in their concerns, almost like email. But over the last few years on other inner urban walls, a voice has been crying out on a very particular, very personal issue. 'More older ♀ on TV'; 'More hairy ♀ on TV'; 'More disabled ♀ on TV'; 'More gay ♀ on TV'. You might wonder why the graffitist doesn't just send in a CV to the networks. But lately the graffitist has gone to the trouble of climbing onto a five- or six-foot-high junction box to write 'More older ♀ on TV' over a Chivas Regal poster featuring a pretty girl. This feat makes you wonder whether the writer is in fact old or disabled. Maybe not even gay. Maybe not even ♀. Maybe conundrums are eternal.



Carmen rolls the dice

CARMEN LAWRENCE SPORTS too many scars and has too much history, not least the undying enmity of Brian Burke's old mates, ever to contemplate a future leadership role in the Labor Party. But she has certainly set the cat among the pigeons (in the process initiating the endgame for Simon Crean) and has also probably guaranteed her place in the party pantheon. Indeed, those in the party who are bagging her hardest admit that a majority of party branch members support her views on refugees, and her frustrations with the leadership's incapacity to strike a moral note. That incapacity has become almost a political virtue—proof that the leadership is now so hard-headed and focused that it ignores its members and responds instead to what the electorate 'feels'.

'We need to tell Australians a story about the sort of country we want this to be, what we hope for them and how we think their lives can be improved,' she said as she marched off the front bench.

'Certainly we have to be aware of the community's needs and interests. But we can't keep responding to what is the short-term view of the most audible section of the community. To develop good policy, Labor has to start with set values and ideals to which we aspire as political activists. Otherwise, why bother? Values and ideals shouldn't be for decoration; they are not just a preamble to the policy statements. They should be embedded in it in terms of the decisions and the language. And they shouldn't be abandoned at the faintest whiff of grapeshot.

'As long as Labor tries to argue the case on Howard's territory, then he's the one dictating terms about the political contest and how it's played out. After all, Labor played along with the moral panic surrounding the boat people instead of getting out there and persuading Australians to a different point of view.'

Throw in a few words about timid leaders promoting policies designed with one eye on the polls and the other on media impact, about forelock tuggers and a lack of a compelling leader, and it was pretty mutinous stuff. Pretty disloyal, too, coming from a person who was a political liability for all of her period as a Keating minister, who was hardly a stunning example of adherence to core values as West Australian minister and premier, and who had made little impression as either a Beazley or a Crean shadow minister. But, oh so right, articulating the despair felt by so many in the Caucus and the rage inside the party at large.

Nicely fitting, also, into a major struggle within the Labor Left, in which the NSW-based Albanese faction (to which she belongs) is head-to-head with Martin Ferguson over ideas, ideals and all of the perks of office. Ferguson is entirely unsentimental about refugees and a leading defender of Labor's flirtation with pragmatism. In standing beside Lawrence, the Albanese faction was signalling not only that the push is now on against Crean, but that at least some within the party are searching for some moral authority with which to woo back defectors to the Greens.

Meanwhile, a rattled but unmoved leadership sees appeals to morality or to ideals as entirely the wrong way to go. Let the bleeding hearts go. They may go to the Greens, but their preferences will come back to Labor, after all. No causes. No campaigns. It's a search for the middle ground and the underlying values and beliefs (as revealed, of course, by polling and focus groups rather than leadership or intuition), and for the middle class and the middle-income earners. A middle way, undercutting Howard (it is hoped) by better articulating many of the traditional values, if with a more caring touch.

WERE CREAN MORE PERSONABLE, and quicker on his feet, he might do better with this policy model than Kim Beazley did before him. Except, of course, Beazley was better at this—if only by being more avuncular and sounding rather more sincere. And Beazley failed, being completely outmanoeuvred by a John Howard in only half the form that Howard is in now. And in the process he trashed his party's capacity to appeal to the heart as well as to the brain. Crean himself can't do it and his party knows it. But it cannot think of a more attractive salesman or a more attractive strategy, especially while the party remains in the thrall of those who have made such strategies work so well, with leaders who are at least as unimpressive as Crean, in the states. That the only people who have signalled—subtly—their readiness to lead, were Crean to fall under a bus, are unsellable hacks such as Wayne Swan or unappealing technicians such as Kevin Rudd, underlines the crisis. John Faulkner, alas in the Senate, has the heart and the brain to lead, but not the sense of duty. As someone once commented of the 1930s Tories 'It was the usual collection: those who have been tried and found wanting; those who are wanting to be tried; those who are manifestly wanting and those who are manifestly trying.'

That's Crean's best chance, in fact. Foundering he may be, but there are no other strong swimmers, least of all ones anxious to lead the party into what is shaping up, against either Howard or Costello, as almost inevitable defeat. A defeat, moreover, that would leave most of the party faithful—who hear other sirens, not least those suggested by Carmen Lawrence—fairly unmoved. ■

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

JUST

The history, the current circumstances

Bruce Duncan CSsR

THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT is withdrawing its 450 Special Air Service troops from Afghanistan to Australia so they can be redeployed to Iraq if needed.

Many Christian churches have opposed, or cautioned against, war with Iraq—in marked contrast to their initial support for the Vietnam War in the 1960s. The mainstream western churches, having subjected the claims of the Bush administration to careful scrutiny, remain unconvinced about the moral legitimacy of the war and have refrained from blessing any such endeavour.

Their opposition has presented the US administration with an unprecedented problem of moral legitimacy. The US churches play major roles in shaping public opinion. If they continue to refuse to endorse military intervention, it will create grave problems of conscience for many Americans.

President Bush and Vice-President Dick Cheney have met opposition to pre-emptive action against Iraq even from within their own churches. On August 30, Jim Winkler, chief staff executive of the United Methodist Church's advocacy and action agency, appealed to George W. Bush to refrain from taking military action. 'Pre-emptive war cannot become a universalized principle lest disaster and chaos result', he said. The World Council of Churches also urged restraint, fearful of the cost to innocent civilians.

One of the few religious organisations to support military intervention has been the Southern Baptist Convention, comprising 16 million adherents. Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, claimed (without evidence) that Saddam Hussein planned to use weapons of mass destruction against the United States. Rich Cizik, an official in the National Association of Evangelicals in the United States, also supported intervention on the grounds that Saddam was linked with the al Qaeda attacks (again, without evidence).

The Catholic Church overseas has consistently urged restraint and has refused to accept that the Iraq situation meets the conditions for a just war. The Vatican's Cardinal Ratzinger did not accept the concept of a 'preventive war', insisting instead on the need for the United Nations to authorise any decision for intervention. He considered that any war would wreak more harm than good—hence failing the principle of proportionality.

In September, president of the Italian bishops' conference, Cardinal Ruini, added a warning about the growing differences between the United States and Europe over Iraq. In October the French bishops' conference said the ethical conditions for a just war were not met, including the condition of last resort.

In England, Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor in the London *Times* of 5 September called for Prime Minister Blair to publish evidence that 'the threat posed by Iraq is both grave and imminent…'. The Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, also urged caution. Carey's

continued page 10

IN CHRISTIAN THINKING about war, there have been two main strands: just war and pacifist theory.

Pacifism commits its adherents to a refusal to collaborate with, or give support to, any war.

The position can be grounded in two ways: its adherents can argue either that all war today is intrinsically immoral or that, despite the reasonable arguments in favour of war, the specific teaching and example of Jesus Christ forbids his followers to take part in it.

Many are attracted to pacifism because it is radical and uncompromising. They may also disdain just war theory as a device for allowing those set on war to maim and kill others, while also enjoying a good conscience and reputation. Both the form of argument endorsed by just war theory and its conclusions are, according to pacifists, inconsistent with Christian faith.

Pacifism is often a powerful, mute challenge to the national conscience. But public discussion will be the poorer if it is the only Christian contribution. For if pacifism is grounded in the example of Jesus Christ, it will be able to engage only with Christians, leaving others to get on unchallenged with the making of war. If pacifists argue that all war is immoral, they need to argue their case.

Public argument and conversation are important, because they allow arguments to be scrutinised. They also demand that arguments apply equally to similar cases. The reasons that allow or prohibit us from going to war will also allow or prevent our enemies from doing so.

A recent statement by the United States bishops accepts the importance of public discussion. Because it is pitched

'ar

The arguments **Andrew Hamilton SJ**

within the public debate, it offers a framework for moral conversation without drawing definitive conclusions. It uses the categories of just war theory in a way that shows awareness of their frequent misuse:

> Just war teaching has evolved ... as an effort to prevent war; only if war cannot be rationally avoided, does the teaching then seek to restrict and reduce its horrors. It does this by establishing a set of rigorous conditions which must be met if the decision to go to war is to be mostly permissible. Such a decision, especially today, requires extraordinarily strong reasons for overriding the presumption in favor of peace and against war.

The categories of just war theory, namely proper authorisation, just cause, hope of success and proportion between good and evil caused, offer a shorthand list of questions that Australians might usefully ask about their participation in any war against Iraq.

THE DEBATE ABOUT the proper authorisation of an attack on Iraq has largely been identified with securing a United Nations resolution. The issue is important because it assumes that to be legitimate, war must be approved by the international community and not simply by one nation. While the process leading to United Nations' resolutions can be manipulative and coercive, the demand for such resolutions should be endorsed.

General support for a war, however, does not alone legitimate it any more than it legitimates bullying in the playground. The cause for which the war is fought must be right. There is increasing agreement that the only just cause for which a war may be fought is self-defence. The United States has urged this case against Iraq, claiming that it, in common with other peaceful nations, is at grave risk from terrorism, and that Saddam Hussein's evil disposition and possession of weapons of mass destruction greatly increase the risk of terrorist attack.

This argument for war is vulnerable in its parts and in its articulation. Although Iraq, under Saddam Hussein's regime, acts viciously and has some weapons of mass destruction, it is not alone on either count. The United States itself has a more lethal arsenal, while the Burmese regime, for example, acts equally brutally. But these qualities alone would not justify war waged against these nations. Furthermore, no evidence links the Iraqi Government to terrorism that claims Islamic inspiration. The lack of this evidence, and the relative weakness of Iraq, disqualify a war against it as one of defence against aggression. Rather, it would be a pre-emptive war, fought to prevent the future possibility of terrorism.

The moral consequences of deeming legitimate such a preventative war are enormous. The argument, if endorsed, would justify a military response to almost any perceived threat, no matter how remote. It would also negate the force of another provision of just war theory—that it should be a last resort. The normal responses by a stronger power to real but not immediate threats are monitoring and containment. There is no evidence that those responses have failed in this case.

To be morally justifiable, a war must also achieve its goals. Although some opponents of war claim a war might be long and inconclusive, massive military superiority could be trusted to achieve short-term goals, such as the collapse of Saddam's regime. It is difficult to see, however, how that would help to provide security against terrorism or realise other larger goals.

Just war theory asks finally whether there will be proportion between the good achieved and the harm inflicted by war. This calculus is often discussed in amoral terms. It is argued, for example, that for Australia, the importance of the United States alliance outweighs any moral objections to participation in the war. But in moral argument, the benefit and harm of war must be measured in human and not in geopolitical terms. The killing and maiming, the damage to health, education and spirit, the resentment of losers and the moral blinding of winners must be given their full weight. These consequences are massive and predictable. The benefits brought by modern war are so doubtful as to weigh morally against any decision to go to war. The United States bishops represent Catholic teaching in saying, 'Such a decision, especially today, requires extraordinarily strong reasons for overriding the presumption in favor of peace and against war.'

Although the statement of the United States bishops is open-ended, it opens the way for strong action. In a balanced and apparently anodyne passage, it considers conscientious objection: 'We support those who risk their lives in the service of our nation. We also support those who seek to exercise their right to conscientious objection and selective conscientious objection, as we have stated in the past.'

Because the bishops are so sceptical about the moral justification for military action against Iraq, their support for selective conscientious objection is significant. Governments often accommodate pacifists who believe that all war is immoral. But they are angered by anyone who wishes to opt out of the particular war that they wish to wage on the grounds that it specifically is morally unjustifiable. In this statement, just war theory provides the grounds for making this claim, and the insistence on the right to selective conscientious objection provides the space to act on the claim. ■

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from page 8
designated successor, Rowan Williams, likewise opposed military intervention and was among 2500 signatories, along with six other Anglican and Catholic bishops, to a peace petition organised by Pax Christi and delivered to the Prime Minister's residence. The declaration called an attack on Iraq 'immoral and illegal'.

But the most significant episcopal statement opposing US policy came from the US Catholic bishops themselves. On behalf of the 60-member Administrative Committee of the bishops of the United States, the president of the US Bishops' Conference, Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, Illinois, wrote to President Bush on 18 September expressing 'serious questions about the moral legitimacy of any pre-emptive, unilateral use of military force to overthrow the government of Iraq'. He went further: 'Given the precedents and risks involved, we find it difficult to justify extending the war on terrorism to Iraq, absent clear and adequate evidence of Iraqi involvement in the attacks of September 11th or of an imminent attack of a grave nature.'

The bishops welcomed the US decision to seek UN approval for any action but, on the evidence available to them, opposed 'a pre-emptive, unilateral use of force', which, in their view, failed to meet the traditional just war criteria of just cause, right authority, probability of success, proportionality and noncombatant immunity.

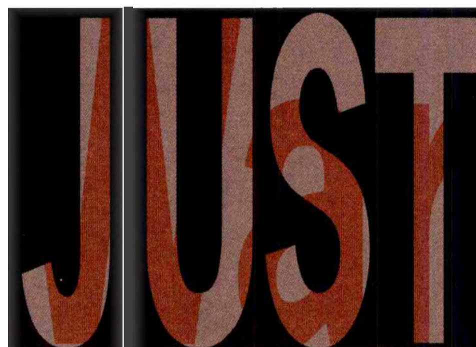
Cardinal McCarrick of Washington on 27 September reiterated that the US needed to produce evidence that it faced an imminent threat from Iraq, lest 'we do something which we would have to say would not be moral'.

The documents released subsequently by Prime Minister Blair and President Bush did little to satisfy these requirements, and certainly did not produce irrefutable proof that Saddam was planning to attack the United States or had links with al Qaeda.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on 13 November reiterated the concerns expressed by Bishop Gregory in September. By an overwhelming vote of 228 to 14, with three abstentions, the full conference declared that :

> Based on the facts that are known to us, we continue to find it difficult to justify the resort to war against Iraq, lacking clear and adequate evidence of an imminent attack of a grave nature. With the Holy See and bishops from the Middle East and around the world, we fear that resort to war, under present circumstances and in light of current public information, would not meet the strict conditions in Catholic teaching for overriding the strong presumption against the use of military force.

The bishops urged the United States to pursue alternative ways 'to contain and deter aggressive Iraqi actions and threats'. They also called for strong steps to reduce or eliminate weapons of mass destruction, and 'fulfilment of US commitments to pursue good faith negotiations on nuclear disarmament under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty'.



The bishops' conference of England and Wales followed with a brief statement calling on their government to 'step back from the brink of war'. Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor, on 15 November, added that the dossier on Iraq published by Prime Minister Blair failed to convince the bishops that the threat from Iraq justified war. The armed forces' Bishop Tom Burns said he feared that British troops sent to fight in Iraq might not be fighting for a just cause.

As a sign of mounting opposition to war in the United States, leaders of major religious traditions have begun issuing joint statements against a war on Iraq. The Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago declared on 1 December that currently 'conditions justifying war have not been met. We still lack compelling evidence that Iraq is planning to launch an attack'.

In Australia, opposition to a war with Iraq has been voiced across the spectrum of churches, including Anglican, Uniting Church and Catholic. In early September in letters to the Prime Minister, Mr Howard, 38 leaders of numerous Christian communities, including at least eight members of the Catholic hierarchy, deplored the possibility of Australian involvement in an attack on Iraq. The Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, Peter Watson, accused the Australian government of a 'major propaganda push' to involve Australia in a war with Iraq. Mr Howard reportedly condemned the views expressed by Anglican and Uniting Church leaders critical of a pre-emptive strike against Iraq (*The Age*, 5 and 8 October).

Archbishop Francis Carroll, Bishop Pat Power of Canberra/Goulburn and Bishop William Morris, chair of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, together with leaders of eight other churches, expressed their concern about Australia's 'unquestioning support' for unilateral US military intervention in Iraq on 23 August. But as a group the Australian Catholic bishops have been slow to respond, issuing their first joint statement on the prospect of war on 29 November.

Even after months of debate, the statement was vague and perplexingly non-committal on whether war would be justified. The bishops made no mention of the US bishops' statement or the opposition to the war by other western episcopal conferences or Catholic church leaders. Nor did they assess the issue in terms of traditional just war criteria, except for recognising that 'any further conflict would be a human catastrophe, with the weakest inevitably suffering the most.'

They urged Australians 'to work and pray for justice and peace', called on political authorities to 'do all in their power to build peace and avoid war', and affirmed that the United Nations 'is the legitimate authority in the administration of Resolution 1441', ensuring that Iraq disarms. They saw the central issue as being 'the possibility that the Iraqi leadership is amassing weapons of mass destruction, implying the threat of an imminent attack.'

But this is precisely the issue: there is no evidence that Iraq is planning an imminent attack on anyone, as the bishops of the USA and England and Wales made clear. Without such evidence, what is the *casus belli*? There is none. Nor are we certain what chemical or biological weapons Iraq has, even the weapons originally supplied by the United States. And if it

has some, does this justify war? Is this the 'last resort'? Why cannot containment be an alternative, as the US bishops suggest?

The Australian bishops did not discuss the US claim to a right of pre-emptive unilateral strike if the inspections fail and the UN refuses to endorse such a strike. Nor did they raise the question of conscientious objection if members of the armed forces consider a war against Iraq unjust.

Just war theory has long recognised a right to a 'pre-emptive strike', but only when an enemy attack was certain and imminent. And in contemporary just war theory, any right to a pre-emptive strike has been down-played, since invoking it would undermine one of the central pillars of international law: the inviolability of national sovereignty.

THE PRINCIPLE OF inviolability of national sovereignty has been the cornerstone of international relations for over 50 years. On occasion, however, it is necessary to override this principle, particularly for humanitarian intervention—as happened in Uganda, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia, for example. In such instances, 'right authority' assumes added significance in just war theory, and ideally the United Nations would exercise that responsibility, although, in practice, political differences may make that impossible. In such a situation, other coalitions might act as a legitimating authority, as NATO did during the Bosnian crisis.

In the case of Iraq, the United States at first claimed a right to act independently of the United Nations, but bowed to pressure from its allies, who were unhappy about its assuming an 'imperial' role instead of relying on and developing the collaborative institutions of international law and governance. Nevertheless, the US still threatens to act unilaterally against Iraq if the inspections fail and the UN does not approve military intervention.

The argument for a right to pre-emptive action rests on a belief that containment of Saddam Hussein has failed, and on an assumption that he possesses chemical and biological weapons and is intent on developing nuclear weapons as a direct and imminent threat against the West and its allies.

What is the force of these arguments?

President Bush argues that deterrence will not work against Saddam since he has used chemical and biological weapons against the Iranians and his own Kurdish populations. But what Bush omits to say is that the United States supported Iraq during the 1980s with weapons and intelligence in the war against a radical Islamist Iran.

Even after the US Congress voted for sanctions against Iraq because of the poison gas attacks on the Kurds, Bush Snr. refused to implement sanctions and continued to supply Iraq with weapons of mass destruction, including anthrax and botulinum toxin and missile equipment. In effect, Iraq remained an important ally of the United States. It is thus not surprising that people in the Middle East see these arguments by the United States as deeply hypocritical.

Moreover, Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, foolish and unjustified as it was, was prompted by real grievances. Iraq had historic claims to Kuwait, but—and more significantly—it was angry that Kuwait was pumping oil out of Iraqi oilfields, flooding world markets and depressing oil prices when Iraq was desperate for revenue to repay heavy debts and rebuild its economy after eight years of war with Iran.

DECISIVE ACTION NEEDS to be taken to reduce and eliminate weapons of mass destruction, but as Richard Butler, former head of the UN weapons inspection commission in Iraq (UNSCOM) in the 1990s, has argued (in *Fatal Choice: Nuclear Weapons and the Illusion of Missile Defense*), the United States itself has failed to promote such disarmament. It remains the largest arms spender and refuses to seize this opportune, post-Cold-War time to set in place an effective international disarmament process.

As this article goes to press, it is not clear whether the new UN weapons inspectors in Iraq will succeed. Ideally, if they were to eliminate any weapons of mass destruction, sanctions could be lifted and Iraq could begin rehabilitation. But if Saddam Hussein refuses to co-operate, containment still offers an alternative to war. In the predominant view of many churches, and on the available evidence, a new war would fail the test of just war theory, particularly on the grounds of 'last resort', proportionality and just cause. ■

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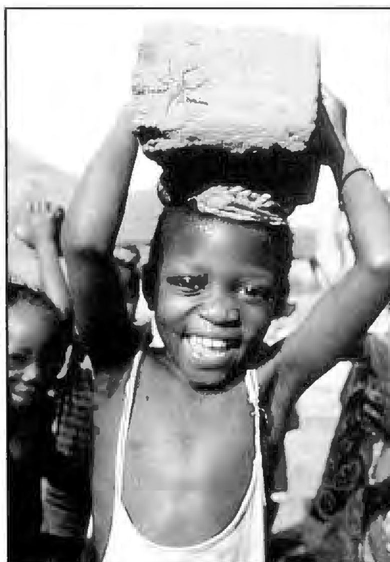

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THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC

On your bus

LEARNING INDONESIA

It's the 604: a public bus that begins its journey in the congested south of Jakarta and winds its way towards the even more congested heart of the city.

The bus has an orange and blue exterior with the route number printed on the front. It's decorated with fast swirls and dynamic patterns. Inside there are rows of plastic seats with leg-room for people with short legs. At the front the driver has surrounded himself with colourful stickers and wind chimes. The bare metal structure is a deep red brown. A combination of dirt, rust and metal fatigue gives one the impression of travelling inside a rotting log.

The passengers sit or stand, calmly squashed together. A young man holds a wad of notes in his left hand and jingles coins in his right. The passengers respond, reaching into pockets, handing over the fare. I have the exact fare ready so my wallet stays in my pocket. I don't want to attract attention.

A baby sits wide-eyed in its mother's lap. The young man, having collected the fares, yells out the doorway at pedestrians, soliciting potential passengers.

I sit forward in my seat to cool the sweat on my back and I notice the stares from the other passengers. It is not often they see a *bule* ('boo-lay': Westerner) this far from the hotel, let alone one travelling on a bus.

Although the attention makes me feel like an alien it also heightens the sense of adventure. I am experiencing what few of my kind ever do—but not without a sense of anxiety. I eye everyone with suspicion. I am out of my element and although I'm trying hard to look relaxed I suspect they can tell. The driver guides the bus through an impossible gap in the traffic and the toot of the horn startles me. The street officially has six lanes but today there seem to be ten, as is the will of the motorists.

A coin is rapped against the window and the bus slows. A man in the street wishes to board. He runs alongside, then leaps on. Further ahead we stop. A sea of gridlocked vehicles stretches into the distance. The only movement is the delicate weaving of the motorbikes through the mess. Finally, they too come to a halt.

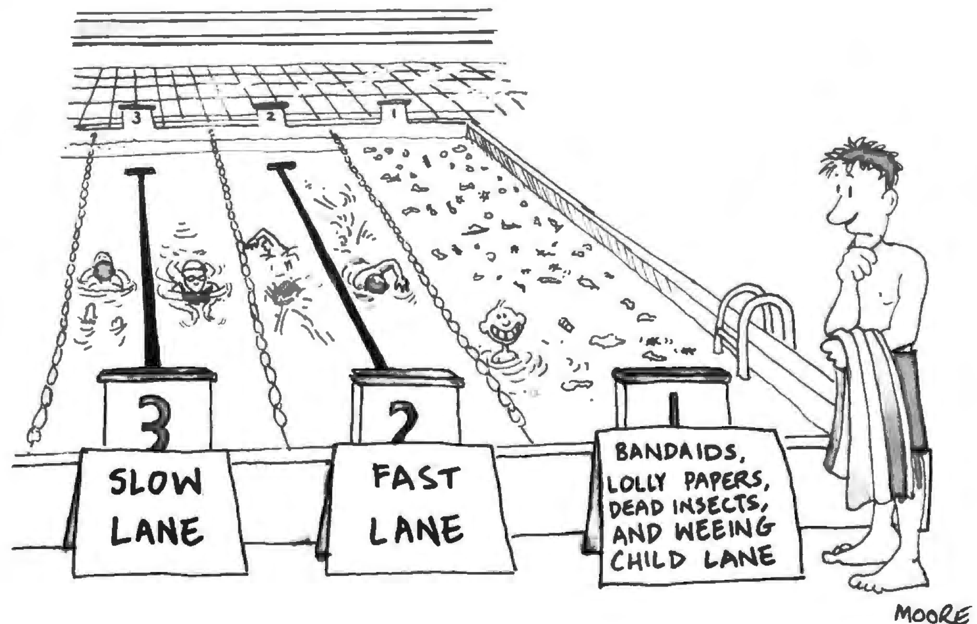
A young man takes advantage of the gridlock and steps confidently onto the bus. He has a ragged look and wild eyes, and carries an old guitar covered in stickers. He begins to play. The chords alone sound harsh and tuneless. But then he sings and I am drawn by the simple poignancy of his song. I notice the dirt on his clothes and the sores on his feet, and wonder how someone so ugly can produce something so beautiful. The traffic begins to move and he accepts coins in a plastic cup before exiting.

It's time for me to get off, and I rise from my seat. As I move towards the door his song is still going through my head. Suddenly some other words come. 'Hati-hati, Grant. Be careful on the bus.' My Indonesian friend had told me of a girl who, after catching the bus, had got all the way home before realising that her bag had been slashed. 'Hati-hati ya, hold your bag in front of you.'

My stop is just up ahead and I step into the doorway. The rushing wind is a welcome relief. I reach up and knock loudly on the ceiling, just like the locals do. The bus slows and I concentrate on the next task: getting off. My Indonesian friend also advised, 'Step down with your left foot first.' This is so you can hit the ground running and avoid falling over. I've done this before so I'm quite confident.

The bus is going slowly enough for me to get off. And yet I sense something—someone standing close behind me. But I'm too focused on the road to turn. The driver is getting impatient. I lean forward and I'm just stepping out when I feel the slightest of touches, like a shadow in my pocket. I whirl like I've been stung, slapping my hand to my pocket. Glancing back as I'm falling out the door, I see a man standing on the second step. His hands are by his sides and he looks so relaxed, so calm. I'm the opposite.

The bitumen greets me unkindly. Legs tangle, stagger, stumble and for a moment I believe I will fall. Instead, I stand there, watching the bus move away with the pickpocket safe inside. The buildings look



Roads to roam

ONE OF THE great enemies of understanding is simple division. When you divide your fellow citizens into Australian and un-Australian, your fellow Catholics into conservative and progressive, church members into practising and lapsed, and theologies into static and dynamic, much satisfaction may be gained, but little illumination.

But these categories can be quite useful if you ask why they don't work. The discovery that many conservative Catholics hold views that have no support in tradition, that some liberals are quite intolerant of difference, and that many practising Christians do not practise the Gospel, may make us attend more closely to the real differences between groups.

In a little book mischievously entitled, *Is the Church too Asian?* (Chavara Institute of Indian and Inter-religious Studies, Rome & Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 2002), Norman Tanner looks at the claim that the Catholic Church is European and not Asian. Tanner's distinction itself will ring strangely in Australian ears, because his Asia includes the Middle East and Turkey. By examining the contribution made by Eastern (Asian) bishops to church Councils, he explores the common presumption that the Catholic Church is radically Western (European).

By including Christian Egypt, Syria and Palestine within Asia, Tanner deals himself a winning hand. By any standards Jesus, Mary, the Twelve Apostles, the Four Evangelists and Paul compose a powerful and decisive Asian foundation for any Christian church! The early church Councils, too, gathered a predominantly Eastern group of bishops to decide questions which had been posed and debated in Egypt and Syria. The contribution of Western thinkers and bishops was relatively marginal.

Only when the Christian East and West were separated by the population movements of the West, and by the rise of Islam in the East, did a distinctively Western church develop. But it long displayed the alternating aggression and diffidence of a church unsure of its own identity. It classified its own Councils as general, not ecumenical, because they did not include the Asian churches. The West without the East was seen as incomplete. Unfortunately, this sense of incompleteness did not last.

In the more recent Councils, bishops from Eastern churches and from the continent of Asia have participated. Tanner illustrates the distinctive contribution of those from the Eastern churches. But the interventions of those from Asia have contained little that is characteristically Asian. These men have generally been formed in a narrowly Roman theology.

Finally, to ask whether the churches are European or Asian is to pose a false question. It is like asking whether chess and Willow Plate are European or Chinese. Like organisms, cultures assimilate and modify what was initially foreign to them. The question left hanging is whether regional churches can bear to see themselves as incomplete. If they do, they will acknowledge the distinctive gift of what lies outside them, and their own need for this gift. That acknowledgment seems to have been rarely made in Europe or Asia, in East or West. ■

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

down impassively and Indonesia goes about its business as if nothing ever happened.

Turning to face a burning sky, I put my hand in my pocket and realise Jakarta has been kind. Relief mixes with victory. I smile as I pull out my wallet. Today I was too quick for the pickpocket.

—Grant Morgan

Kerala leads

GUARDING INDIAN PLURALISM

IN THE SOUTHERN Indian State of Kerala, the success of the world's largest democracy, the world's most religiously diverse secular state, is everywhere evident. In places like Fort Cochin, an ancient trading port on the Malabar Spice Coast, Hindu temples, mosques, a synagogue and churches stand in close and harmonious proximity on a narrow spit of land.

The Jewish community is reported to have arrived as early as the 10th century AD. The mainstream Christian churches followed in the wake of Dutch, Portuguese and British colonial occupation, although there were communities of Syrian Christians long before Europeans even knew of India's existence. Muslim and Hindu communities similarly pre-date, by centuries, the advent of India as a united and independent state. In Fort Cochin, religion is a private matter of identity. Communal tension is almost unheard of.

Under the palm trees and thunderous downpours of the tropics, Fort Cochin somehow keeps at bay the clamour of urban India. Old trading houses with peeling pastel façades decay elegantly. The tranquil streets are lined with spice ware-

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houses from which waft the aromas of cardamom, pepper, ginger, turmeric and spices that once drew merchants from across the world (Vasco da Gama died here in 1524); now men with traditional weighing scales haggle over the prevailing world market prices.

But then, Kerala itself has always been a place apart. In 1957, it was the first area anywhere in the world to have a democratically elected communist government (which, since then, has never been out of power for longer than five years). Although the present Keralan government is led by the Congress Party, the Communist Party of India maintains a powerful hold over the state. On at least two occasions during my month-long stay, all commerce and most road transport was shut down across the state during a *hartal* (strike)—the first in support of improved workers' rights, the second to protest against globalisation. In the biggest cities and the smallest villages, along highways and backwater canals, the hammer and sickle flag flies proudly.

The legacy of both the communist party and other left-leaning governments in the state has been more than simply an international oddity in times when communism is supposedly on the wane. Kerala is renowned for the quality of its education and it consistently records the highest literacy rates (over 90 per cent) of any state in India. The Kottayam district in central Kerala was the first in India to record 100 per cent literacy.

There have been numerous benefits to the state from the prioritisation of education. According to some reports, more than half of the foreign nurses working in the United States are of Keralan origin, and a significant proportion of foreign nationals working in the Gulf countries of the Middle East are Indians from Kerala. Remittances from these workers to their families at home in Cochin, Kasaragod, Kannur, Thiruvananthapuram and Kottayam make an important contribution to the state's economy.

Other spin-offs are less obvious, but nonetheless of national significance. Kerala is one of the few states where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (an avowedly Hindu revivalist party which came to prominence as a driving force behind the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodha in December 1992 and now holds power at a national level) has no stronghold, no seats in the state assembly. This, despite the fact that the majority of Kerala's population is Hindu.

It would be overstating the case to suggest that Kerala is free from communal tension. In 1997 in the small fishing village of Vizhinjam, alongside the beach resort of Kovalam on Kerala's southern coast, Muslim and Christian fishermen clashed over fishing and mooring rights. Since then, all has been quiet, although teams of fishermen are now either Christian or Muslim, never mixed, and village life takes place against a backdrop of unease and mistrust. The village is now divided into Christian and Muslim quarters.

On the train from Kottayam to Thiruvananthapuram, an amiable Keralan businessman lamented the fact that if it weren't for the Muslims, some of whom refuse to send their daughters to school, Kerala would long ago have achieved total literacy. Such comments and incidents are significant precisely because they are so rare in Kerala.

FURTHER AFIELD IN India, the picture is not quite so promising. On 31 October 2002, the government of Tamil Nadu (which borders Kerala to the east) introduced a bill which would make religious conversion illegal. Proponents of the bill argue that the legislation is designed to prevent forced conversion through blackmail or bribery. You could argue, equally, that it symbolises a threat to secularism in India.

Earlier this year, the state of Gujarat descended into communal riots after a train filled with Hindu pilgrims, reportedly en route to Ayodha to aid construction of a temple on the former mosque site, was attacked by Muslim stallholders. In September, an attack on a Hindu temple in Gujarat's state capital, Gandhinagar, saw the community once again divided along religious lines. A Hindu friend from Udaipur in Rajasthan told me proudly that she had once employed a Muslim girl because 'she was so nice, not at all like the other Muslims. If only they could all be like that'.

And then there is Kashmir, a state, a disputed territory which lays bare the communalist angst of secular India. In the lead-up to independence from Britain, the rulers of many semi-autonomous princely states around India, on behalf of their subjects, were given the choice by the British authorities to determine whether they wished to join 'Hindu India', or 'Muslim Pakistan'. Kashmir's population was, and remains, overwhelmingly Muslim. Kashmir's maharaja at the time was a Hindu. He chose to become part of India, condemning its people to over five decades of conflict.

For Hindus and Muslims alike, Kashmir has become a *cause célèbre*. Now any Indian government which gave up India's claim to Kashmir, or even allowed a referendum in the troubled region, would be committing electoral suicide. Pakistan's serially precarious governments would similarly sign their own death warrants if they allowed Kashmir to slip from their grasp.

A senior Indian naval officer, who liaises on a regular basis with Pakistani officers, told me that he was mystified that the world held Pakistan and India equally responsible when 'the Pakistanis are the ones in the wrong, so they must take the first step'. Political analysts fill the pages of national newspapers with arguments that if India relinquishes Kashmir, India's natural geographical barrier—the Himalayas—will no longer be able to protect India, allowing India's enemies to sweep into the Indian heartland from the north.

In Kashmir, in Gujarat, in Tamil Nadu, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that secularism Indian-style now entails simply the right—even the necessity—to live as separate communities. This is what led to the partition of India and Pakistan in the first place, and against the wishes of India's spiritual founder, Mahatma Gandhi.

India may be the world's second largest Muslim nation (around 12 per cent of the population or more than 120 million people), but there is a pervasive presupposition that Muslims are the enemy, that Pakistan will always be an enemy against whom protection is required, that the division of communities into mutually exclusive religions is safer than upholding a secular ideal of communal interaction.

Every now and then, voices of reason rise to the surface. Muzaffar Hussein Beig, the Vice President of the People's Democratic Party—a party which is in coalition government in Jammu & Kashmir since the recent elections—argued that 'without waiting, they should open the borders and engage people in trade and commerce, because most people in Pakistan believe that Indians have trishuls (tridents—the symbols favoured by Hindu warriors and holy men) in their hands to demolish mosques, and Indians are of the opinion that Pakistanis are drug-peddlers and have guns in their hands to kill people'.

Such voices are, however, increasingly being drowned out. Slowly, India is dividing into confessional communities, in much the same way as the world since 11 September 2001. With almost one quarter of the world's population and strong community representations of all the world's major religions, India will be at the forefront of any coming clash of civilisations, and conflict between the world's great faiths.

Since independence, India has, remarkably, kept at bay widespread communal tensions, safeguarded democracy despite overwhelming logistical difficulties and been exemplary in reconciling religious difference within a secular framework. That framework has now begun to look precarious, as if India—the world in microcosm—wishes to send a message that coexistence doesn't work; that separation is the answer.

Only in Kerala do such old-fashioned notions as the separation of religion and politics, belief in the possibility of religious harmony, and an understanding of the necessary primacy of education offer a workable alternative vision. **—Anthony Ham**

Sudan in Australia

SETTLING DIFFERENCES

A family sat eating their evening meal in their home. As they cheerfully recalled the day's events one child noticed a snake slink into the house. Panic broke out. Outside was another family with whom the first family had often argued and disagreed. The second family noticed the commotion and immediately called for everyone to go to the aid of the troubled household. Together, they fended off the snake and made the house safe once more. (Sudanese fable)

Religious conflict covers the globe the way water fills a tray. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Irish situation of years past and even the so-called War on Terror, feed—at least superficially—on religious difference. Divided nations embrace peace rarely, and often only temporarily, returning to conflict with depressing regularity.

Africa hosts too many conflicts, and most are made all the more wretched because they happen in the shadows—outside the media spotlight. Sudan, the largest nation in Africa, endures one of these. It has a long history of war and bloodshed and has recently gone through the cycle from war to peace and back to civil war.

Perhaps the most universal religious doctrine is that of concern for the other. A Muslim believes that 'those who act kindly in this world will have kindness.' Confucius taught his followers to help others to achieve their goals as they might wish to achieve your own. 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you', says the Christian believer. A Hindu follows the rule that 'One should not behave towards others in a way which would be disagreeable to oneself.' 'In the garden of thy heart plant nought but the rose of love', says a member of the Bahá'í Faith. A Buddhist calls people to 'hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful'.

How, then, is inhumanity perpetrated at the hands of believers of such noble faiths? And how is it that these convergent viewpoints result in conflict at all? In most conflicts it seems that there is an implied historical obligation to act in hate. Where there isn't, leaders, some with official religious positions, often create conflict by scapegoating minorities, causing a self-perpetuating cycle of hate that no religion condones.

Does this have to be? Of course not. Every now and again, we hear of small-scale reconciliation efforts. One memorable example was a project run in Israel between Israeli and Palestinian schoolchildren. The children were encouraged to

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build a garden together and see for themselves that theirs could be a nation of fruitful co-operation.

* * *

Sudan's wars are being fought along lines of religious difference, at both a national and a provincial level. Nationally, the ruling Islamic military government in the north is at war with the Animist and Christian south. Within the south, centuries-old conflicts prevail along tribal lines—the Nuer and the Dinka, for example, remain at odds. These civil conflicts have displaced four million people internally and have forced nearly a million others to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. The conflict is further complicated by the presence of rich oil reserves in the south. Thousands of southern Sudanese have been displaced in order to access the oil, but the south has seen little of the revenue it has brought to the nation. Of late, the warring north and south factions engaged in a series of complex and delicate peace talks, aimed at ending nearly 20 years of war. Without a ceasefire, however, fighting continued, and despite a tentative agreement the talks broke down and the nation tacitly re-entered civil war.

It is hard to imagine how members of the Dinka and Bare tribes, Christian, Animist and Muslim Sudanese might sit down with members of other Sudanese communities that have caused them immeasurable suffering. And yet every week in Melbourne, over one hundred people do so voluntarily and enthusiastically. Animosity is left at the door with the umbrellas.

Every Saturday in a rundown hall, on a busy road, in a nondescript Melbourne street, a group of individuals gather. This is the Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning (SAIL) Program. It acts as a cultural, educational and social hub for Victoria's fastest-growing ethnic community. The SAIL Program has grown exponentially since its beginnings just two years ago, when five siblings and one nervous tutor first met.

Initially, SAIL provided an English support service for the Sudanese community, as well as mentoring and pastoral care. The rationale was to mentor a new generation of Australians, not just help refugees.

Today, the rationale has not changed but almost everything else has. Now there is a dedicated team of 80 volunteers who provide one-on-one tutoring, free lunch, a computer loan service, home-help service,

Big money

LIKE MOST ORGANISMS, human beings are most comfortable in their own neighbourhood. And that applies to ideas as much as to geography. We often take a shortsighted and prejudiced view when first introduced to a new idea or technology. Older people, for example, often complain about the Internet as a purveyor of pornography and misinformation. Their perspective does not extend to the Internet's capacity to investigate remote medicine, or even to bring live pictures of the surface of Mars.

Many young people have a similar attitude towards globalisation. They find it upsetting, because the power to make local decisions seems to have been usurped by the boardrooms of multinational corporations. But many of our most pressing problems—health, pollution, over-exploitation of resources—are also global, and it will take a global perspective to come to grips with them.

Yet there are precious few human enterprises with the necessary global outlook, says Sally Stansfield, Acting Director, Infectious Diseases, for The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and who was in Australia recently for health conferences. 'Even the United Nations, which is our one instrument supposed to transcend national borders, really doesn't. It is international, but not transnational or global.' So that, says Stansfield, leaves the multinational corporations, along with philanthropy, science, and global civil society.

The Gates Foundation now stands at $US24 billion. To retain its legal status as a philanthropic foundation under American law, it must spend at least five per cent of that figure each year. Not all the money goes into health, or infectious diseases. But Dr Stansfield does still have to decide how best to use considerable resources. 'I sit bolt upright in the middle of the night thinking, "Is this the most strategic thing to do with that hundred million dollars?" '

Why should we care about infectious diseases? Because, she says, they account for 80 per cent of preventable disease in the developing world. 'With increased transport and communications, a risk to the health of anyone in the world is increasingly a risk to each and every one of us. The world needs to work together to address the threat of AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and to study the evolution of resistance to antibiotics.

'We now have tools and technologies to do more about infectious diseases than we have done to date, but they have not been designed for the environments of developing countries. The vaccines are not heat-stable. The drugs are often not designed with cost containment in mind. Research has been directed towards cardiovascular disease, erectile function, and hair and weight loss.'

So how does the Foundation work to change those perspectives? Says Stansfield: 'We can work with governments to ensure that incentives are structured for the pharmaceutical and biotech industries so that there are tax credits or other rewards for investing in R&D, which is important to the developing world ... But we must be careful that we never displace governments from their natural roles and responsibilities. So we seek ways to be catalytic rather than to take on the recurrent costs of delivering health interventions.'

Such thinking confirms the long-term attitude of the environmentalists: the only way to confront overwhelming problems is to 'Think globally, act locally'. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

a library, free excursions, camps, artistic performances, a craft workshop and the same support to newly arrived Sudanese refugees. SAIL is now a sizeable team effort. It has managed to keep pace with the growth of the Sudanese community through the continuing altruism of many individuals, schools, companies and libraries.

The SAIL Program is an embodiment of the United Nations directive 'Think global, act local.' It is not a charity group. There are tutors and students but in practice SAIL has become a place of exchange—of cultures, stories, experiences and hopes. Non-Sudanese SAILors share the past struggles of the Sudanese SAILors, the group's present successes and future hopes. SAIL is one local way of responding to homelessness and statelessness. It is a group which expresses in microcosm the aspirations of peace activists the world over.

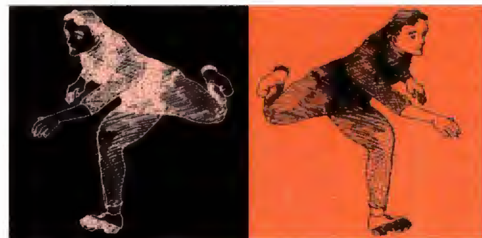
* * *

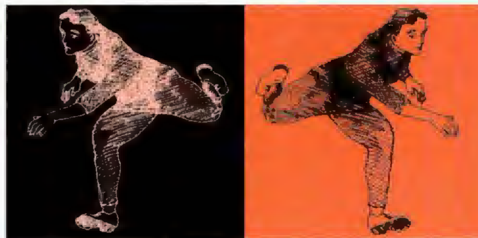
As a tenth generation Jew, I turn up—dare I say, religiously—to a church hall every Saturday for this gathering. My difference, like the differences of every other SAILor, is acknowledged but respected. As with so many Australian volunteer groups, SAIL has attracted a layered and diverse mix of cultures and consequently an impressive conglomeration of belief systems: Christianity, Islam, and Animism in its various forms. Indeed, it could be said that the SAIL Program lives and thrives on difference, and on a healthy dose of mutual respect.

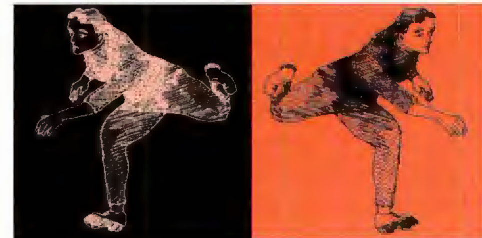
Perhaps the SAIL Program is an example of the tyranny of distance disarming the tyranny of history. Or an exercise in turning 'should' and 'could' into 'is' and 'do'. In any case, it is a very real example of different people sharing their humanity and searching for commonalities.

Every Saturday, I witness a celebration of the human spirit as we work for a better global future.

—**Matthew Albert**
(with research by **Anna Grace Hopkins**)







Coming to terms

REFUGEE FACTS, NOT FEAR

'ABSCONDING' IS AN issue notably absent from the high profile and bitter debate about asylum seekers in this country. There is an anomaly here. Other considerations notwithstanding (security, health and identity concerns among them), the vast majority of asylum seekers are detained to prevent them from disappearing into the community. But all this is about to change, and absconding (along with compliance more generally) will move from the margins to the centre of this most divisive of issues.

In short, the government has met with such unalloyed success selling its hard line to an anxious electorate that it has rarely needed to invoke the spectre of absconding. Consequently, government strategy has remained unwavering, despite sustained criticism from sectors many and varied. The strategy adopted by the human rights community, on the other hand, has of necessity been an evolving one. Increasingly there is a shift in emphasis from criticism of the mandatory detention system to the formulation and promotion of viable alternatives to it. In this new climate, the official line that there is 'no alternative' to mandatory, arbitrary, indefinite detention will become untenable, and the government will turn to the issue of absconding in an effort to derail debate and preserve the current detention regime.

The absconding charge presents a formidable obstacle to those committed to convincing people and politicians that viable, preferable alternatives to the status quo exist. Formidable, but not insurmountable, for the potency of the absconding argument lies in its emotional rather than practical content.

The spectre of absconding arouses profound and deep-seated community fears, the provocative potential of which will not be lost on the conservative political elite. It is likely, however, that little in the way of concrete, verifiable information will be offered to support this presumption, and that fact *is* liable to be lost on an already anxious public.

In reality, reliable international figures on rates of absconding are hard to come by. Those that are publicly available suggest that absconding is the exception rather than the rule. UK Home Office statistics put absconding at less than four per cent of all asylum refusals, while a three-year New York State trial of supervised release of asylum seekers into the community recorded court hearing attendance figures of 93 per cent. And that was after participant asylum seekers had been repeatedly told that they would be re-detained if they were ordered to be removed.

Are these figures indicative of the sort of compliance rates that could be achieved in Australia? I am confident they are, provided that an appropriate framework is established to manage and support asylum seekers entering the community. A well-tuned risk assessment procedure, in tandem with a graduated, comprehensive range of detention alternatives, would achieve very high compliance rates without imposing severe restrictions on the movements of most asylum seekers. Relevant factors would include, *inter alia*: presence of community ties, stage and strength of claim, age/sex/dependants, and access to legal representation. High-risk asylum seekers could be precluded from community release, although it is likely that such individuals would account for only a small proportion of unauthorised asylum seekers. The remainder would be determined eligible for release into the community, albeit under varying degrees of constraint.

Generally speaking, very few asylum seekers pose an absconding risk during the course of the determination process. The incentives for them to comply with official requirements are many and compelling. Even the Department of Immigration and

Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs has acknowledged this to be the case. Conceding this small truth, however, exposes a big lie, for if compliance (particularly absconding) does not constitute the real reason for mandatory, arbitrary, indefinite detention, then we are entitled to ask: what does?

It is only when all hopes of winning official leave to remain have been extinguished that absconding becomes a real concern. At this juncture return to detention could be warranted for some individuals, but relatively higher levels of supervision within the community would suffice for the rest.

Obviously human rights NGOs and asylum seekers would welcome a comprehensive community release scheme. However the government is unlikely to initiate any such alternative until it is satisfied that absconding can be kept to an acceptable level. Which begs the question—what would constitute an 'acceptable' level in the eyes of the Australian government? There is compelling evidence that a zero-tolerance mind-set pervades official thinking on this issue—a mind-set that the current geo-political climate only encourages.

Government rhetoric presents a stark choice between interdiction at sea coupled with mandatory, indefinite detention of those reaching the mainland, and porous borders leading ineluctably to large-scale absconding of refugee applicants into the community. Presented in this way, the latter amounts to an abdication of national sovereignty, leaving the government with 'no alternative' but to impose the former. This bipolar view amounts to a gross misrepresentation of what is a complex issue.

Many constructive alternatives have already been mooted in the Australian context, while global conduct offers nothing but alternatives. In practice, most First World states accept a degree of absconding on balance, the moral obligation to protect those in need being seen to outweigh the deleterious impact of low-scale abuse of the system. Among other things, it is deemed unconscionable to subject a large majority to the trauma of detention on account of the abusive intent of a small minority who may abscond.

Domestically speaking, models developed by the Refugee Council of Australia and the Justice for Asylum Seekers alliance explicitly address community concerns about border integrity and compliance. They take seriously the challenges posed by absconding, but recognise a problem to be managed, rather than an intractable reality that justifies a retreat from basic standards of human decency.

A humane approach to asylum seekers need not come at the expense of the national interest. A compromise can be struck between the rights of asylum seekers and the responsibilities of the state that is beneficial to all parties. The challenge now is to convince the government that it is in the interests of the Australian public to initiate such change. **—Steven Columbus**

This month's contributors: **Grant Morgan** is a freelance writer; **Anthony Ham** is *Eureka Street*'s roving correspondent; **Matthew Albert** and **Anna Grace Hopkins** are the founders and coordinators of the SAIL Program. For more information visit www.SAILProgram.cjb.com; **Steven Columbus** worked in the New Zealand Refugee Status Branch as the refugee determination officer. Currently he oversees publications for the Amnesty International (Victoria) Refugee Team. A footnoted version of this article will be available on the Jan–Feb website.

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DOROTHY HORSFIELD

Seven days in Kabul

'KABUL WILL NEVER become what it was,' Afghan Professor Rafi Samizay says to me.

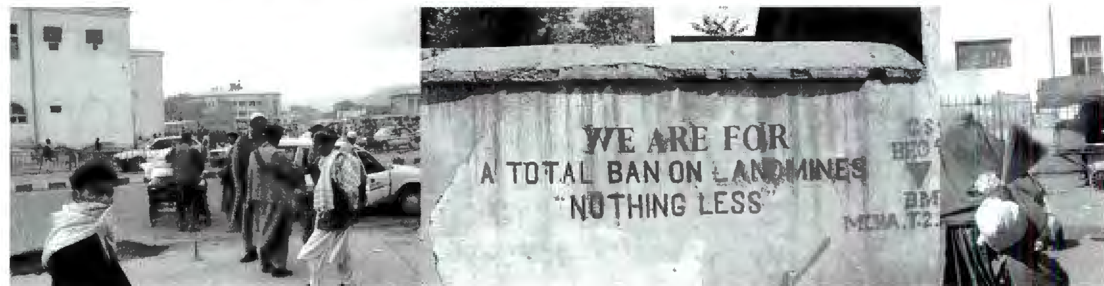
'Besides you have to remember there are no good old days. Even in the '70s there were problems.'

It's the first day of the 'New Vision for Kabul' five-day conference he has helped to organise. Academics, aid workers, philanthropists and businessmen from 25 countries have gathered together for the first time. I'm representing the Rotary Club of Canberra and am the only Australian, apart from the President of the Australian Afghanistan Association, Wali Hakim.

Professor Samizay and I are standing in the autumn sunshine outside the recently renovated auditorium of the Lycée Estiqlal where the conference is being held. Armed boy soldiers in oversized uniforms lounge against the walls, smoking and posing for photographs. They are also wearing black Calvin Klein T-shirts, a gift from the high fashion clothing company. Getting into the conference means two bag and body searches with meticulous attention to cameras and mobile phones. Four months ago the French-built school around us was almost destroyed by bullet and mortar fire.

Professor Samizay's statement seems understandably bleak. Hardly a centimetre of the city has not been damaged or flattened by the war of the northern warlords. Eighty per cent of the adobe houses, block after block along the potholed, furrowed roads, are now dust and rubble. Half of the city's 2.2 million people are squatting in the ruins with three thousand more 'returnees' each day. And with no reliable clean water, garbage disposal, sewerage, drainage, electricity or telephone systems, optimism seems an impossible sentiment.

Across the road from the Lycée Estiqlal is the fifty-year-old, Soviet-designed Kabul Hotel where conference delegates have been accommodated. The corner of the hotel was demolished when the ammunition stores at the Presidential Palace ignited. At the hotel gates, the beggars have gathered. Women in sky-blue chadors squat in the dust. Little kids, skinny as sticks, cry out softly to passersby. By contrast, the crippled boy is fast and efficient, scooting round the corner with broken sandshoes on his hands and dragging his twisted legs. He parks directly in front of us and puts out his palm. Stephen Rossi, the folksy engineer from West Virginia with a plan to rebuild the city's sewerage and drainage system, kneels down and takes the child in his arms. He hugs him then discreetly stuffs a wad of American dollars down his shirt.



The UN-sanctioned International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) patrols the streets and circles the sandbagged airport every hour in helicopters like lethal black insects. The fields around the landing strip are littered with the burnt-out wreckage of aeroplanes and army trucks. The previous day, flying in over the Hindu Kush, the mountains were dotted with deserted settlements of roofless buildings and broken walls. Outside Kabul's island of peace, the war is not yet finished. Inside Kabul there is still a curfew. Nothing moves from midnight to 4am, except for a pack of crazed, half-starved dogs who run yelping through the darkness.

'What's happened during the last 23 years,' Professor Samizay says, 'is very tragic at all levels. It makes you angry. And yet people here are so good—violent and uncompromising on the one hand, gentle and polite on the other.'

The professor is an eminent member of the Afghan intellectual diaspora, one of a group of more than 50 engineers, urban planners and architects who have come home deliberately to help plan the city's future. A short, balding man with a creased kindly face, he strives to take a background role in the conference. As a result, almost everyone consults with him frequently and defers to his opinions. He was formerly Director of Kabul University's Architectural School, but was imprisoned during the Russian occupation and forced to flee the country in 1981. These days he heads the School of Architecture and Construction Management at Washington State University, teaching his third-year students to plan buildings sensitive to Afghanistan's geography and culture.

A culture of war, political instability and economic ruin?

Samizay shakes his head. 'Perhaps there is the danger the old guard steps into the political vacuum. But we must not let political manoeuvrings get in the way of reconstruction.'

On the first afternoon we tour the city, pausing at the huge Darulaman Palace on a hillock on the outskirts. The build-

ing was home to King Zahir Shah, the last king of Afghanistan, who fled into exile after a Soviet-backed military coup in 1973. Built in the 1920s, it was modelled on the grand 19th-century German palaces in Munich, and bombed to a ruin by warlord Gulbuddin Hikmetyar in the 1990s. Our tour guide, architect Najim Azadzoi, straight-backed, silver-haired with an aristocratic elegance and impatience, stands in the courtyard with tears streaming down his cheeks.

'We did it to ourselves,' he tells me, 'this destruction. But, yes, of course we will rebuild it.'

For the first time I glimpse the issues behind the conference's dreams for recreating the city. How do you shuffle the priorities: deciding what must be done urgently and what are long-term projects? Squatter housing versus conservation of architectural heritage? Modernisation versus memory? What does sensitivity to

local culture really imply to people who need proper shelter immediately? What does it really mean to aim to reweave the urban fabric into a calm, harmonious, prosperous city?

During the next two days of the conference there is constant talk of the importance of a master plan, a blueprint covering every aspect of redevelopment. It seems clear there is nothing that does not need to be fixed and there's an anxiety about who will steer and fund the implementation of such a multifaceted plan. Everyone is tacitly aware that rebuilding is an integral part of the peacemaking—without it there will be more conflict and political instability. UN-Habitat has helped to sponsor the conference but the UN's pledge of $US4.5 billion to Afghanistan last January has been slow to arrive.

On the third day UN-Habitat Director of Asia and Pacific Programs, Toshiyasu Noda, unveils the 'Draft Reconstruction Vision: *Crescent to Full Moon Initiative*' from the Japanese Society of Civil Engineers. After the lengthy, impassioned speeches of the Afghan professionals, Toshiyasu is cool, logical. A summary of the draft initiative is distributed to the delegates for written comment and we are taken crisply through the main points: population trends, agriculture production targets, landmine clearance, industrial rehabilitation and political unity. It's a humane, comprehensive document which also points out that at $US80 per head per year, the UN billions are far from sufficient. Of course the country will need all the help it can get from NGOs, international aid and private sector investment.

So who on earth would invest in the country right now?

Akil Erturk is a Turkish Business Development Coordinator for an American-based construction company owned by two expatriate Afghan businessmen. He attends all the long conference sessions and tirelessly works the room during the coffee breaks. Over afternoon tea on the Hotel Kabul patio, he tells me he has already been here for weeks finalising approval for a three-star hotel. He describes it as a kind of self-sustaining module, minimally dependent on the resources of the city and dropped into the place by a team of skilled workers brought into the country for the purpose. If all goes well, six months from now he will begin planning a five-star hotel.

Perhaps the hotels will service personnel from the 72 different NGOs now in the city?

Akil shrugs. 'Of course.'

The conference has attracted other opportunistic but cautious investors. Twenty years ago Duane Kissick was an aid worker in Yemen. Now he is the Washington-based President of Planning and Development Collaborative International (Padco). In the heat and dust of Kabul he looks immaculate in a snow-white shirt, well-cut suit and satellite phone. Duane's company tenders to the UN or to NGOs to facilitate and package Third World projects.

'Let's say Kabul needs a new road system,' he says, 'and the UN doesn't have the local knowledge. Padco sends someone in to make it happen. The guy we'll send in here is fantastic—worked for us in East Timor.'

I'M SHARING MY ROOM at the hotel with two other women. One is Professor Arlene Lederman, a Jewish New Yorker with a 37-year association with the country. 'Together we'll write something about how important this conference is,' she tells me. 'You can write and I'm an old Afghan hand.' She taught at Kabul University in the late '60s and is a specialist in the traditional arts of Afghanistan, including carpet-weaving, embroidery, jewellery, leatherwork and woodwork. She is a small, tubby woman whose grey curly hair is streaked with blond. She is also boisterously charming, garrulous and a little deaf so that we have exhaustingly loud conversations across our hotel room.

'When I first met bin Laden many years ago,' she shouts at 5.45am from the next bed, 'he did not even acknowledge me because I was a woman. His relationship with the Taliban is all politics. Do you really think such a rich, upper-class Saudi man would link himself to Mullah Omar if it wasn't politics? That he would marry his 14-year-old daughter to such an ignorant village bumpkin for any other reason? I've been to Kandahar and seen the palace they made for her. How can I describe it? Like marble design painted all over the walls when she was used to the real thing.'

Arlene hops up and comes to stand next to my bed. 'In the US I founded the Afghanistan Relief Committee which supported Bush's war against terror because it got rid of the Taliban.'

'What is at stake in this new great game is oil,' she adds, in no uncertain terms. 'Not for the 21st century. By the 22nd century Uzbekistan oil will be absolutely important.'

Arlene's conference paper is to kindle interest in rebuilding the Chahar Chatta bazaar. The bazaar is part of the history of old Kabul, dating back centuries; a kind of living museum to display the country's art and craft treasures, but also to provide an on-site workshop where such works are created. By the end of the conference Arlene is ecstatic to be appointed deputy chair of the bazaar-steering committee under the chairmanship of 'that gorgeous sexy man', Yousaf Pashtun, Minister for Urban Development. Back in the States she plans to set up the Chahar Chatta Bazaar Foundation.

My other hotel room-mate is Dr Magda Katona, an eccentric Hungarian orientalist with a shock of hair the colour of vanilla yoghurt, a large square jaw and grey teeth tinged with green. She speaks fluent

Russian, as well as one of the local languages, Dari, and humourless gym-instructor English. During the Russian occupation she worked as a translator with the Hungarian embassy but since then has published a book on historical links between Hungary and Afghanistan.

In the late afternoon before dinner, Magda, Arlene and I lounge around the hotel room. We're talking about the savagery of the Taliban's treatment of women, the public executions and beatings in the street and the reasons for it. At a UN-Habitat dinner I had sat next to a UN aid worker who had been stationed in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif during the Taliban regime and who claimed that some of what went on under the mullahs was misreported. 'A lot of women weren't cowed and brutalised,' she said. 'In Mazar there were groups who went fearlessly every day to the Taliban to demand their rights.'

'I can tell you a story,' Magda interrupts abruptly. 'It happened when I was living here before, during the Russians. I was travelling much and my husband also, so I brought from Budapest a governess for my daughter. She was a large woman, very intellectual with advanced training in psychology, a serious person with black-rimmed glasses and thick hair. Together we were here at the Kabul Hotel for a garden party. The Uzbek warlord, General Rashid Dostum was sitting near us. He'd had many women but when he looked at the governess, he combed carefully his moustache. Then he said she must go upstairs to a room and wait for him to come. She would not do it and we explained that she was a serious intellectual. Dostum was just shrugging his shoulders and saying he'd had all kinds of women and now he would try an intellectual. It was because of this situation the governess for safety must leave the country.'

'It is not for laughing,' Magda adds sternly, when I begin to chuckle inappropriately at her heavily accented sense of melodrama.

'I'm telling you,' Arlene says tactfully, 'they treat women like animals.'

'Yes, of course,' agrees Magda.

IN THE EVENING we dress up for a party downstairs at the Kabul Hotel. Magda puts on a traditional Pakistani costume in white trimmed with turquoise with a matching headscarf and pale blue sneakers. In deference to local conservatism, I'm wearing baggy pants, a man's white shirt down to my knees and my head wreathed in a gold silk scarf. Arlene looks me over.

'Round here you're a beauty,' she tells me. 'You've got a good nose on you, you're carrying an extra five pounds and you've got those blue eyes.'

Arlene says she is too old to be a sex object. Downstairs she flirts successfully with every man in her orbit.

The party is 95 per cent male. Men in suits, ties and business shirts are lined up in rows of lounge chairs listening sedately to a group of traditional musicians. After half an hour, Professor Reinhard Goethert introduces himself.

Dressed in a tweed jacket despite the heat, he has a red genial face and walrus moustache. He is from MIT and one of Samizay's oldest friends. His paper that day on the squatter camps, 'the informal settlements', was both compassionately pragmatic and delivered with the heart of a skilled teacher.

In Kabul and internationally, these settlements are of course huge and growing, he said. They are characterised by a process of progressive urbanisation: what begins as a chaos of refugees develops its own infrastructures, such as informal realtors who help in the orderly subdivision of land, or water sellers or moneylenders who deal in microloans. Helping these settlements means agreeing with the community about the immediate problems. For instance, housing may not be a top priority problem but rather clean water, health, education, employment and transportation. And because squatters would like to be like everyone else, providing an address may be the most important priority.

At the party Professor Goethert and I talk about mementoes of Kabul, in particular the lolly-pink, elasticised toilet paper in the hotel rooms and the bottled water with incomprehensible labels in Russian. 'My God, I never thought I see myself in Kabul,' he says.

On the second last day of the conference, the hundred or so delegates divide into four working groups: Urban Management and Planning, Housing and Squatter Settlements, Heritage Conservation, and Infrastructure and Services. We must submit our written suggestions at the last session.

For the first hour of the 'Housing and Squatter' group, Afghan men in their ubiquitous suits make interminable speeches in Dari. They are deciding who will chair the group. I slide out the door to meet an aid worker from the UN's International Organisation of Migration who is to take me on a tour of the squatter camps. Our first stop is Jangalak, formerly a sort of Paddy's Market of Kabul where you could buy almost anything from antique carpets to car parts. Now the Australian government is renovating two buildings there to house and train 700 returnees. It's almost finished and one of the foremen insists proudly on showing us around. On the stairs I ask him questions, including one about cost.

'It is not much for Australia,' he says scornfully.

'How much?'

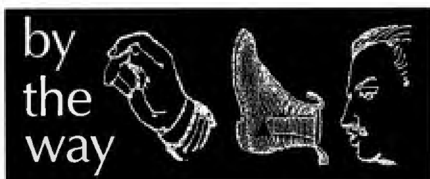
'Afghans are very good refugees,' he tells me. 'They work very hard for themselves and for the country.'

He is the eighth person in five days who has told me this.

On the last day of the conference I return to my working group, which in spite of my misgivings has produced a detailed list of what to do about the informal settlements. At the final session Minister Yousaf Pashtun announces the formation of a steering committee to guide these plans, comprised of local representatives and the expatriate Afghan professionals. As well, a 'New Vision for Kabul' website would be set up within weeks, where the rest of us and the world outside can contribute advice, ideas and aid on how to rebuild a city with hard-won optimism and determination.

As Professor Samizay put it: 'Rebuilding Kabul is like acupuncture. You create bright spots and they radiate along the energy lines of the city.' ■

Dorothy Horsfield is a Canberra writer.



Trammelled

'LOOKIN' FORWARD TO your cup of coffee, Ed?'

'No money, Harry.'

'Don't need any, mate. No worries. I know 'em all down there. Milk and three for you, I seem to remember?'

Ed nods. Or at least I assume he does. I can't actually see either of them because I'm standing—or, more precisely, strap-hanging—with my back to them on a packed Melbourne tram. Turning 180 degrees will discombobulate too many other travellers. But Harry's voice is distinctive, penetrating. It seems to rumble the length of the tram. Its rich, gravelly timbre is the decades-long work of truckloads of tobacco and vast quantities of alcohol ranging, no doubt, from the infamous White Lady (milk and meths), various brown paper-bagged ports, and other fortifications to—in good times—conventional pots of beer.

The tram rolls on. With a precision that is the gift and glory of experienced Melbourne tram drivers, our man expertly misses several green lights, closes last-minute doors on desperate, late-arriving fingers, and clangs the bell at random intervals unrelated to the state of the traffic. Students battle their way on board at each stop, and everyone sways and braces as the driver engineers, for no apparent reason, occasional muscle-wrenching lurches—another indispensable skill from the Melbourne tram drivers' manual.

'Lotsa university students use this tram, of course, Ed.'

'Uni-vers-it-y stu-dents,' Ed says. It's Monday morning and maybe Ed needs to treat words like explosives, any one of which might blow off the top of his aching head.

'What I find,' says Harry to no-one in particular, 'is I get watery eyes in the morning. Could be the drinkin', of course. I dunno. I'm seein' the quack about it next time at the clinic.'

The tram grinds up to the university stop, and waves of students clatter into the roadway with a tintinnabulation of mobile phones. Released from the imprisoning cocoon of bodies, bags and bumping hips, I can now get a look at Harry and Ed.

'I'm sixty-two this year, y'know, Ed. Sixty bloody two,' says Harry. He's a big bloke, blankly smiling, exuding unfocused affability from a ravaged face. Wispy remains of hair sprout from either side of his head in grey tufts. He has a four- or five-day gingery-grey stubble. His gnarled hands are covered in liver-coloured spots. All in all, he looks an unhealthy eighty.

As for Ed, he sits in a sort of catatonic state, nodding every now and then as Harry rattles on about this and that. His stubble is scrubby, his features destroyed by the challenges of the destitute years. In the opposite seat, a dark-suited, corporate-looking bloke desperately ignores them and, next to him, a pleasant-faced, middle-aged woman smiles now and then at Harry and Ed, not realising that they are essentially oblivious of the world around them, merely bumping their monologues and obsessions up against it by chance not design.

Despite the heat, both are in heavy blue jeans to which Harry has added a thick sweater and Ed a duffle coat, boots and a knitted woollen beanie. Wherever they've come from on this shining Monday morning, the choice of ensemble was narrow.

'We'll go into that shady courtyard for coffee. Remember, Ed?'

Ed nods and his face crinkles under his beanie.

The tram creeps into Elizabeth Street. My guess is they're heading for St Francis', where there must be tea and coffee and biscuits for the homeless. For the 'derros' as we used to say, though not all homeless are derros. Ed and Harry are derros, though. 'Dead set', as they themselves might have put it a few years ago, before they lapsed into monologues and mutterings.

Suddenly, shouting and tumult erupt at the other end of the tram.

'By Christ,' says another rough and much abused voice, 'bloody trams always full as a fart. A bloke can't hardly fit on the bastards.'

'Limmo,' Ed says, showing animation for the first time. 'That's Limmo gettin' on, isn't it, Harry?'

Harry nods gloomily and announces that Limmo used to run a fleet of limousines—'that's how he got the name, like'—until things went bad for him. Partly the 'gummint', partly 'the booze'.

'We might see Limmo in the courtyard.' Ed gestures vaguely at the tram windows.

'Possible,' says Harry. But his eyes are dead, and it's hard to know if he's being laconic or just vacant.

THEY GET OUT at St Francis', Harry walking with a protective hand on Ed's thin shoulder. Up the other end of the tram, a commotion and a curt 'By Christ' suggest that Limmo, as expected, is heading for the refuge too.

Missing the green light, we sit there in a silence that is both uncomfortable and sad. Christmas decorations on city buildings present their snow-laden pines and prancing reindeers to the scrutiny of the murderous sun.

'Bad time o' year to be down and out,' says a voice as the doors flap shut.

'When's a good time?' says another voice.

A Salvation Army trooper, who had been watching Ed and Harry with sympathetic interest, says, ' "O scatheful harm, condition of poverty".' Everyone within hearing looks embarrassed. The tram clanks across the intersection and noses deep into the spangled and glittering central business district.

I look back, trying to glimpse Harry, Ed and Limmo at the gates of St Francis', but they are lost in the crowds and dazzling light. ■

Brian Matthews is a writer and academic.

THE RETURN OF THE SIZZLING SUMMER QUIZ

SUMMER QUIZ

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SUMMER QUIZ

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1. What do Richard Branson, the Duchess of York, George Clooney, Brad Pitt and Elle McPherson have in common?

2. In an Australian industrial award, how many matters are allowable?

3. Which word means both the sculptural male figure used as a supporting column in architecture and a character in Greek mythology?

4. Three men won the Nobel Prize for their work on the structure of the DNA molecule. Name them.

5. Who was their female colleague and why did she not share the Nobel Prize?

6. Name the four steam locomotives that were streamlined to haul the Spirit of Progress.

7. In which year will the Gregorian calendar be one day ahead of the true solar year?

8. What year is this, according to: (a) the ancient Babylonian calendar; (b) the Jewish calendar; (c) the Muslim calendar; (d) the current Mayan great cycle?

9. Come on scientists: an equal amount of each spectral colour produces what?

10. What or who or where are the: (a) capsule of Tenon; (b) Lord of the Isles; (c) island of Reil?

11. French astronomer Abbé Nicolas Louis de Lacaille defined several new constellations in the southern hemisphere. Name three.

12. What does the acronym HACCP stand for?

13. Who was 'the furious, black-maned fellow from Treves'?

14. Which three American authors did Tom Wolfe refer to as 'my three stooges'?

15. In Tom Wolfe's novel *A Man in Full*, prisoner Conrad Hensley is inspired by the writings of which philosopher?

16. Who said in 1861: 'Labour is prior to, and independent of, capital. Capital is only the fruit of labour, and could never have existed if labour had not first existed. Labour is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration.'?

17. What is Wednesday's child full of?

18. Who was described as 'an archangel a little damaged' and by whom and when?

19. In which Australian public gallery is Frederick McCubbin's painting 'A Bush Burial' held?

20. (a) Who, in 1658, recorded the *second* definite European reference to a marsupial, and (b) which animal was being very misleadingly described as 'wild cat, resembling a civet cat but with browner hair'?

21. What was the name of Elvis Presley's first professional band?

22. Who was 'gypsied to kill in a silky scarlet petticoat'?

23. I have a base, a collector and an emitter, and the world would be very different without me. What am I?

24. Who was the oldest member of the Beatles?

25. Françoise Athenaïs de Mortemart, Marie Dolores Eliza Gilbert and Margarethe Gertruide Zelle were more famously known as ...

26. Two prominent Australian businessmen had a stressful November last year. The unfortunate A was voted off the board of Coles Myer and the hapless B was voted off the board of the Carlton AFL Club. Name the unfortunate A and the hapless B.

32. Who were the librettists for: (a) *The Marriage of Figaro*; (b) *La Traviata*; (c) *Carmen*.

33. Name the nine bad shots of golf, according to St Harry Vardon.

34. In *The Lord of the Rings*, what are Gandalf's names according to: (a) the Elves; (b) the Maiar?

When you've done your collective best (and mended the family fences), post, fax or email your answers—however few—by 1 February, 2003, to:
Eureka Street Summer Quiz, PO Box 553, RICHMOND VIC 3121. Fax: (03) 94284450.
email: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au

Please include your name, address and phone number.

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iser quiz.

27. Who was the first boxer to beat Muhammad Ali? (Your dad will know.)

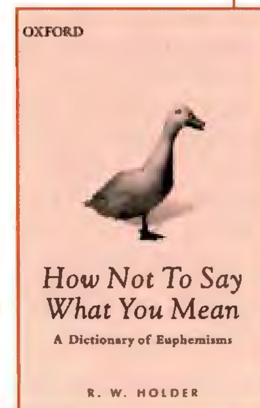
28. These two stars of stage, studio and screen, Marshall Mathers III and Thomas Mapother IV, are better known as ...

29. Provide the given names of: (a) T.S. Eliot; (b) J.K. Rowling; (c) C.S. Lewis; (d) H.V. Evatt; (e) A.D. Hope.

30. A major sporting event to be held in Australia in September will have an opening ceremony that is guaranteed not to be a 'rugged testosterone show'. Name the event.

31. Which sporting heroes are or were known as: (a) Madame Butterfly; (b) the Shark; (c) The Lithgow Flash; (d) the Rocket.

The prize: Oxford's absolutely necessary *A Dictionary of Euphemisms, How Not To Say What You Mean*, by R.W. Holder, for the two nearest correct answers. It's exactly what you will need after completing the quiz with Uncle Ralph and computer-whiz, Cousin Rose.



Winners and answers in our March issue.

TRACEY RIGNEY

Wotjobaluk man

William John Kennedy Snr. is the oldest male Aboriginal elder in the State of Victoria. He fought in the Second World War. He worked on the railways. He campaigned for land rights. And he just happens to be my grandfather. To most people he's known as 'Uncle Jack', but to me, he's 'Pop'. This is his story.

Tell me about growing up.
I was born by the [Wimmera] river in a mud hut, in 1919. [Today you can still see the remains of this hut.] See, well, my Uncle [Walter], he used to get me and teach me things about culture. There was one time when I was four years old ... my uncle and the other elders took me out into the Little Desert. They told me 'wait here and we'll be back to pick you up'... I waited for a while and then started to cry ... then all of a sudden I thought, 'they're trying to tell me something.' So up I got and followed their tracks out ... and here they are all waiting for me. They patted me on the head and said, 'good boy'.

At school I had to speak English ... I got a bloody good hiding if I spoke in [Wergaia] language ... but a lot of it's lost now ...

Well, then, my father, he got rheumatic fever shearing wet sheep and his heart went on him. So I left school [at the age of 13] and worked. I worked on a farm at Woorak near Nhill. Two and six a week I started work for, until it got to ten shillings—that's where it stopped. I was driving horses and I loved horses. When crops grew, I drove teams to strip the wheat off ... I didn't like shearing. They just told me, they said, 'you're not fast enough to shear a sheep'. Well, the quicker you can get down and shear your sheep and straighten up again, well it wouldn't affect your back ... but I was too slow shearing.

What about the war? Tell me about those years.
See ... then the Second World War started—that started in 1939. Well, England and Germany was where the war broke out. Well you see, us Australians, we were naturally straight into it. In 1939 I couldn't join the army, because of my father. You see I wasn't 21 and my father wouldn't sign the papers for me to join. He didn't want me to go ... he reckons it had nothing to do with us. Well no sooner I turned 21—that was in 1940 on the 23rd of March—as soon as I turned 21 I joined up.

It was all right then—as soon as I turned 21 I was my own boss, I could do what I wanted. Except my brother was two years younger than me and he let him join. As soon as I joined up he wanted to join, well he joined ... Father signed the papers for him, but he didn't sign for me because he didn't want me to go ... I don't know why. He just didn't want me to go.

It was the Depression years and there was nothing to do and I was battling for everything. Well in the army I got my clothes free, got my tucker free—everything!

I was five years and about ten months in the army. I went over to Syria, I fought in the Sixth Division. And in the Syrian campaign we fought the Vichy French and a lot from out of Africa—they were real black! But we beat them.

What did you do in the army?
I was a gun layer—I used to lay the gun and pull the trigger ... A 25- pounder—that was the weight of the shells see—that we used to put in and fire. They used to give me the range, elevation, everything like that. I had four bubbles on it to level. I used to do it in four seconds ... course no sooner I'd get the word 'fire' I'd shoot. I got caught one day, yeah. I shut my mouth and pulled the trigger, instead of keeping it open ... felt like the top of my head blew off. Never really affected me though—I'm 83 now and I don't wear hearing aids.

Pop shows me photos from war. I study his face as his mind revisits these places.
We were just out of Damascus—that was the end of

the Syrian campaign ... it snowed for a week. Well, I got the photos here, where just the top of the tent is showing. We used to have a rope running from our tent to the toilet so we knew where to go. You couldn't see anything. It was Christmas, 1941. That's my first white Christmas and I said that I don't want to see another one! I'd put all my clothes on to go to bed, and we had to stop in the tent for a week! We did nothing.

When did you leave the army and what did you do?

The 24th of the tenth, 1945 was when I was discharged—an honorary discharge on account of long service. But about mid-1946 ... you see I wanted to join the Occupation Forces, where I'd go to Japan and that. I was walking down the street and I read on the front page of the newspaper that Bob Menzies didn't want any Aborigines, or people with Aboriginal blood to enlist in the Occupation Forces, 'because they were too illiterate' ... so I didn't join.

I was out at Antwerp. There was rabbits everywhere—millions of them! We killed them for skin. They went up to a pound a pound for skin. You'd get about two to three hundred rabbits. I then worked on the salt lake, then I went from there and settled down a bit. My twins were born in 1951.

We [Pop, Nan, Mum and Uncle] lived in Antwerp, then came to Dimboola. We lived over the other side of the river, in the Common. Then they built us houses in Dimboola. We got our first house and moved in. At that time I was working on the railways. First of all I was stacking barley bags, then I was doing maintenance work just to keep the train on the line. Looking after the tracks as a repairer. Then I was super-repairer after a couple of years ... Just close on 30 years I worked on the railways.

* * *

Pop retired in 1979, the year I was born. He now lives in Dimboola, still a father to his twins and grandfather of three. He is the proud elder of the Wotjobaluk. The lands of the Wotjobaluk, which he has fought long and hard for, cover both the Little and Big Deserts in north-western Victoria and extend as far east as Mt Arapiles and the Black Ranges. Recently we were given a native title determination from the State government over a portion of our land claim, which our community is very excited about. For the first time in south-eastern Australian history, native title exists, and it exists on our land. Without his knowledge and wisdom, I doubt that we would have been given this determination. A humble man, Pop is precious—just like the land. ■

Tracey Rigney is a writer, playwright, and one of *Eureka Street*'s FEST Fellowship recipients. Her play, *Belonging*, premiered at The Playbox in Melbourne in February 2002.

Photograph above: Jack Kennedy (right) and friend, Sergeant Percy Kimpton, in the main street of Damascus ,1941.
Photographs courtesy of Jack Kennedy.

ESSAY

PETER ROSE

The Consolations of Biography

IMPROBABLY, GIVEN MY interests and the subsequent direction of my life, I come from a sporting family. It is that quintessential Australian world that informs my book *Rose Boys*, as it goes on informing my life. My father, Bob Rose, played for the Collingwood Football Club in the 1940s and 1950s. His four younger brothers all played for Collingwood, too. They were known as the Rose Brothers. Dad won more Copeland trophies than anyone before him, he helped win a premiership in 1953, he was the first Australian Rules player to be dubbed 'Mr Football'. Later, after a stint coaching Wangaratta, where I grew up, he returned to coach Collingwood into some of the most celebrated grand finals on record, including the 1970 grand final, perhaps the greatest individual game of them all. Sadly, Dad lost all three grand finals, by just a few points. He later coached Footscray and had a second stint at Collingwood in the 1980s. He served on the Collingwood committee for decades. When he resigned in 1999, his official connection with the club had lasted for more than 50 years.

My family's link with Collingwood didn't end with the Rose brothers. My brother Robert—my only sibling, three years my senior—also played for Collingwood. Promising though he was as a footballer, Robert was a much better cricketer. Even as a young schoolboy, much was expected of Bobby Rose Junior, as he was known. He realised much of that potential in his teens, first playing cricket for Collingwood, then for Victoria. By 1974, when he was 22, Robert seemed to be on the verge of Test selection.

Apart from his precocious sporting prowess, Robert was an adventurous young man, to put it euphemistically. He was hedonistic and immensely popular. He wasn't called 'Rambles' (after the Nat King Cole song) for nothing. Trevor Laughlin, one of Robert's cricketing mates at Collingwood, remarked many years later that he and Robert had always thought of themselves as 'bullet proof' in their wild days. I was struck by this. I had no such sense of recklessness or invincibility. When I was an adolescent I was bookish, morose and abnormally isolated. The contrast between my innate fatalism and Robert's boundless assurance was the first of many I examined in *Rose Boys*.

Robert was alluring to many because of his undoubted humour and charm, but also because of the glamour that sport confers—almost uniquely confers—on the young and athletic in our society. When I interviewed people for *Rose Boys*, many of them referred to Robert as a 'golden youth', unconscious of the fact that our father had been described in exactly those terms half a century ago. So many of the journalistic tropes used to describe Dad's prowess were later applied to Robert—all those floral allusions. If I had shown any sporting ability, they would doubtless have sprung them on me too, a kind of banal birthright.

Had that been the innocent end of the story, had Robert Rose gone on to play for Australia, and achieved a certain average, followed by the cricketer's usual apotheosis—a lucrative contract as a television commentator—I wouldn't be speculating about the consolations of biography. Robert and I were both irascibly close and boisterously competitive as children. We had little in common. I didn't like the way he treated people, especially women, and I'm sure he was frustrated by my bookishness, my isolation, my general weirdness, as he saw it. Quite possibly we would have drifted apart as grown men.

MY REASONS FOR WRITING *Rose Boys* were quite different from those of a conventional sporting biographer. I knew it would be possible to write a straight biography of Robert (just as someone is now at work on a biography of my father), but I had no interest in being the one to do so. Although sporting references pervade the book, and although Victoria Park forms the affectionate tribal backdrop to the early chapters and my adolescence, *Rose Boys* is essentially about other themes: family, obligations, moral limits, disability, masculinity, and above all, mortality.

For the reality is that my brother's life—*all* our lives—changed forever in 1974, when Robert was 22: blithe, blond, sunny, interested chiefly in the nirvana of sport. That's when Robert was involved in a car accident and broke his neck, instantly becoming a quadriplegic, with one of the highest levels of paralysis it was then possible to survive—from the neck down. For the next 25 years, until

his death in 1999 at the age of 47, Robert was totally dependent every minute of the day on other people, and totally dependent on modern medicine, which had kept him alive in this depleted condition—something that would have been impossible just a few years earlier because of the nature of Robert's injuries. There followed a quarter of a century of fluctuating health, long illnesses, wretched pressure sores that kept Robert in bed for years at a time, intermittent depression, an almost inevitable divorce (Robert's wife was 19 when it happened), and the numberless daily frustrations and indignities that any quadriplegic suffers.

But those years also brought the many rich insights that perhaps only the grievously disabled and afflicted among us can fully attain: new friendships, several years of relatively even health, a second major relationship when Robert was in his wheelchair, richer moral qualities in my brother, his extraordinary courage and stoicism, and the profound rapport he enjoyed with our parents.

Indeed, mindful of those warm and emotionally fulfilling years for the family, I kept reminding myself as I wrote the book that I had a duty not to produce an unalleviated 'library of lamentation', to borrow Oscar Wilde's description of his post-prison book, *De Profundis*. I hope I haven't done that, but I know that the tendency in a relatively short biography is to dwell on starker moments and the more critical passages in the subject's life. For a poet-biographer, this may be even more of a temptation—an occupational hazard, if you like. Wilde again, this time to André Gide: 'Il faut vouloir toujours le plus tragique' ('One must always seek what is most tragic'). Seamus Heaney put it another way: 'The true subject is loss.'

FROM THE OUTSET, I thought of my book as an exercise in fraternal juxtaposition—part autobiography, mostly biography—in which my own life experience would be a factor, obliquely, but always secondary to the major theme and the major interest of the book, which was Robert's ordeal. Most writers want to do things a little differently, but it's not easy, given the riches and burden of literature, in all its consolidated forms. I knew that there had been few if any Australian books about two very different brothers written by one of them. The Wherretts' book comes to mind, but there are clear differences, the collaborative nature of it being the most obvious. I was also aware of the surprising dearth of books about that intense, internecine and intoxicated world of Australian Rules.

Why I wrote *Rose Boys*—why I *wanted* to write it—why I *needed* to write it—is another story, and still something of a mystery to me. I realise that people entertain sundry, even conflicting, motives for writing any book, from the metaphysical to the prurient, from the commercial to the lyrical. Writing a book about one's dead brother, about a hard death following two decades of sorrow and slog and survival, is rather different. Putting oneself through it is one thing, but putting other people through it—forcing them, if they choose to read it, to relive traumatic events and their painful aftermath—is even more dubious. My parents are still alive. We're very close. I have responsibilities. My father may, like all canny sportsmen, have enjoyed publicity, understood it, and used it to his advantage, but my mother is an extremely private person, with a powerful dislike for publicity and the exposure that comes with Australian Rules celebrity in Melbourne. My mother doesn't actually believe in airing secrets about other people. Hadn't she endured enough prying into her private life?

Father, sons and brothers. Above: Bob Rose with Robert. Left, Robert and Peter. Page 30, Bob Rose in *Sporting Life*, Peter, Bob and Robert on the field. All images courtesy Peter Rose.

This is the challenge, the everlasting moral dilemma for any writer of family memoirs, especially one that deals with profound affliction and highly delicate material, and that sets out to tell the story in blunt, journalistic detail.

For a time, the irresolvability of these ethical questions had a paralysing effect on me. I found it impossible to start the book, and reached a point when I thought I would have to abandon the project. I kept finding ever more ingenious reasons for not beginning. Research can be a wonderful excuse.

How to write about the living, the dead, a brother who did not give me permission and who might not have approved of such an intimate portrait—one that shows him, I trust, in a noble light, but also discusses painful and tragic incidents in his life. How to reveal Robert's story to his only child, Salli, my adored niece, who was only eight months old at the time of the accident. The most disconcerting moment in my research came when I interviewed Salli, one of several interviews I undertook with Robert's family, partners, friends, sporting colleagues and medical carers. Salli chilled me by admitting that she had no memory of her life until she was about 12—none at all. The reasons for that kind of amnesia weren't hard to deduce, for Salli's infancy and childhood were shadowed by great trauma and unhappiness, but it was chilling nevertheless. Was I to endow Salli with a memory, a memory laced with sorrow and conflict? Was I the one to tell her about the circumstances of her parents' separation two years after Robert's accident?

And why go over a story as terrible as Robert's? Why force people to relive it? Why relive it myself? Why did I so want to be in the car when Robert had his accident? Why did I feel I had to describe that night? Why such dreadful actuality? I went as far as Far North Queensland in fact, and tracked down one of the two men who were in the car with Robert and who survived the accident. (Robert Bird, who was also playing for Collingwood at the time, gave me a remarkable interview—the first time he had discussed that night with anyone.)

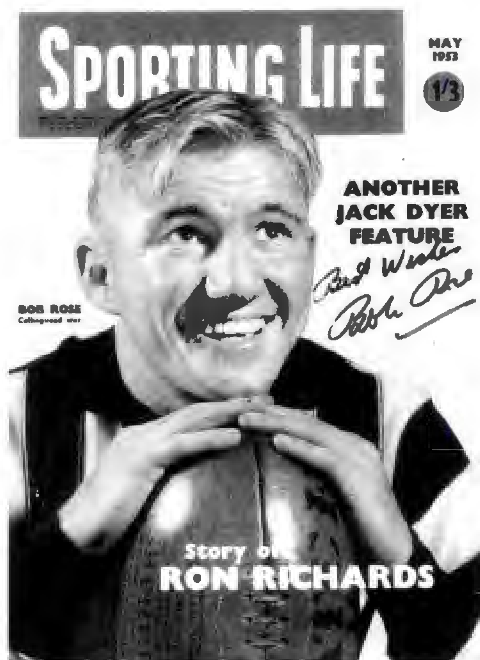
Why did I choose to describe Robert's death in such graphic detail—punishing detail, I know from readers' letters? Why

did I describe my mother unpeeling the sheet as Robert lay dying and revealing his network of scars? Why did I need in my book to go back to the coroner's office and identify Robert the night after his death, recognising him as in the dream that provided a sort of leitmotif for the book? At some level, this was undoubtedly morbid work, with a pathology of its own.

I suppose all I can say by way of explanation is that I belong to a generation of writers—a generation of human beings—accustomed to openness and unfettered analysis of the emotions and personal dilemmas. For me, in a way, there was no choice. The book was there. It was a fact. The subject was irresistible. We all have our reasons and our needs. This is the biographer's questionable but inalienable urge—the need to pursue his or her obsessions.

Henry James, subtlest of novelists, played with the idea of writing a 'brotherly autobiography' about his relations with William James. Unfortunately, he never wrote it. But he did leave us two late, densely textured, masterly memoirs of his own, *A Small Boy* and *Notes of a Son and Brother*. Of his reasons for writing them he said: 'I did instinctively regard it at last as all my truth, to do what I would with.' That 'at last' is telling—the note of belated retrospection, possibly of tardy tribute—and 'the all my truth ... to do what I would with'. They are the biographer's and the autobiographer's responsibilities, and dispensations, and audacity. Summing up one's own life is hard enough, ludicrous enough in a way. Daring to reduce *another* random complex breathing life to ink and paper, to careful phrases, to anatomies of emotion, is even more temeritous. But go on doing it we surely do, in increasing numbers. The attractions are considerable; the liberty is large.

Candour, this thing called candour, is all we have. It is clearly what the reader—and the publisher—expect. I often thought of those lines from Robert Lowell's poem 'Epilogue': 'Yet why not say what happened? ... We are poor passing facts, / warned by that to give / each figure in the photograph / his living name.' In writing my book, though previously an incorrigibly non-visual kind of writer, I found myself relying on old family photographs, for corroboration of my themes, and sometimes for new themes. In doing so, I too was trying to give each figure in the photograph his or her 'living name'. This act of remembrance and evocation proved to be the first of my consolations in writing *Rose Boys*. Until then, I had never written about my childhood or adolescence, except for a few random and often occluded personal poems.



Rose Boys begins with several chapters about my upbringing in Wangaratta and later at Victoria Park, where I seemed to spend most of my childhood when not at school. Later chapters, especially those describing Robert's accident and the shattering consequences for him and the family, were of course far from enjoyable to think about or write, but those early chapters were quite different: celebratory, nostalgic and surprisingly fluent.

Previously, I had never really thought about my sporting background, the profound influence it had on me, and the paradoxical nature of my membership of such a milieu. Perhaps, to a certain degree, I hadn't wanted to examine those personal implications, of membership and unsuitability. Now I was free to roam around in my imagination, going back to those charged clubrooms and grandstands, remembering the fervour and absurdities of organised sport, renewing conversations with all those idols and elders and journos and players' wives—the teeming and affectionate tribe that was Collingwood for me in the 1960s and 1970s:

> When I was young the first question strangers asked me was, 'And are *you* going to play for Collingwood?' Like all mantras it never changed: the wording, the intonation, the expectancy, the profoundly innocent goodwill. They cocked their heads and waited for an answer. How could I disabuse them?

My memory, normally unreliable, suddenly became vivid and insistent, with a new kind of automatic spring. Nevertheless, I was under no illusions about the

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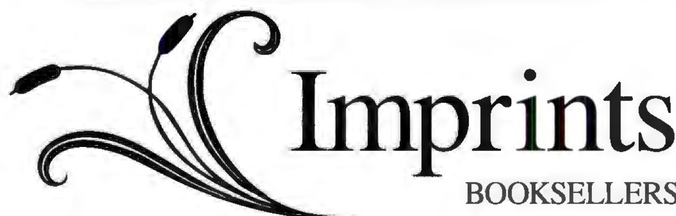

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sanctity or veracity of memory. Although I was able to draw on a huge body of journalism written about my father and brother, plus the interviews I conducted with the survivors, in the end I was left with my own impressions, fully aware how capricious, elegiac and downright apocryphal they can be. This was highly subjective work. 'Each man is a memory to himself,' says the poet-figure in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. Marina Tsvetaeva, the great Russian poet, went further when she said: 'The memory is compliant, and for me is identical with the imagination.' That very compliance or plasticity was the key.

Of all the consolations I drew from this, for me, new genre, the most surprising and welcome was the literary transformation, or should I say relaxation, that was required. Before this, I had only published poetry. Most of my poetry is fairly densely textured, relying on allusion, association, obliquity, and employing a reasonably ornate diction and range of references. Some of my poetry, I'm well aware, is quite obscure. It's a kind of poetry that goes so far in divulging its meaning but leaves part of the work of deconstruction up to the reader. Let me illustrate this with a poem that demonstrates some of these qualities. It is titled 'Greening', but is *not* about environmental matters:

> Let's not watch the main event,
> let's watch the people.
> There we shall be beautifully private,
> each lake with its own suicide,
> those grand disclosures
> aching on a beach.
> Your beauty is the last quotation,
> an available dark.
> In the forest, single lights flicker,
> day rapturously evokes night.
> Soon we shall descend
> into the public acre,
> a rhapsodist will forfeit
> his throne by the view.
> So let's postpone matter for a while:
> the ritual caper, an auspicious turn.

My reason for citing this poem was not to deprecate the power of poetry nor to disown this particular poem. But *Rose Boys* clearly had to be written much more directly. My brother, the focus of the story, was a laconic bloke without any side. His story was too stark and confronting to be sugared by me. To have ironised Robert's condition in the modern fashion would have been ludicrous. (I like that quote from Henry Louis Gates: 'We live in an age of irony … even the mediocre lack all conviction.')

I was determined to avoid any trace of sentimentality, which is not easy when you are writing about terrible events, a pitiable condition, the slow destruction of a family member.

Thus began the challenging but illuminating process of paring back the story to its essence, gradually eliminating all those digressions and allusions and quotations we writers love to employ. For me, it felt paradoxically liberating to be writing in a language that was not exclusive or marginal, a language that took the reader into my confidence and did not merely address the air. I hoped that something of the universality and suggestiveness of poetry would inform the memoir, and I did draw on that early poem about my brother in which I belatedly recognise him in a dream, but generally I knew I had to find a plainer and franker voice to tell Robert's story. My discovery of the pleasures and rewards of that kind of candour has been belated, but profound.

Readers are turning to memoirs and biographies in increasing numbers, making it one of the dominant genres of the decade, but they expect openness in the narration, a lack of tonal complications, and they certainly won't put up with authorial evasion or condescension.

Putting these literary considerations aside, I wanted above all to place on record a frank, sympathetic account of what happened to Robert, and the terrible repercussions that profound disability has for the victims and their families. I wanted to show the reality of quadriplegia—the daily grind, the inconvenience, the humiliations, the domestic, financial and emotional consequences. I wanted to break down some of the ignorance about spinal cord injuries. I wanted to portray Robert's second life—the sorrow, the struggle, but also the goodwill and the devotion and Robert's astonishing courage and lack of self-pity.

I took up an editorial from the Melbourne *Herald* in May 1974 that was headed 'The message of Robert Rose': a plea for greater care on our roads, and better funding of our hospitals. My challenge was at last to determine what the message of Robert Rose had been for *me*—what we had actually meant to each other:

> It is time to listen to my brother whose message, laconic but self-evident to many in his life, I somehow never fully heeded. If I am to overcome these eternities of maladjustment, as a friend put it when Robert died, I must try. Brothers so close yet so incongruous meet improbably in this shifting text.

One of my modest hopes for the book was that it might help other families who were going through what we did. I remembered that no such book had been available in 1974—no books, no counselling. So *Rose Boys* had a modest political aim, as well as satisfying an obscure and perhaps indefinable personal need.

I also hoped it might assist the work of a new charity we have created to help people with spinal cord injuries—the Robert Rose Foundation. Perhaps, I thought, if people read my book and were moved by Robert's story they might want to help other young people in his situation. Not that I delude myself that I will ever fully understand what my brother went through. It is impossible to exaggerate the difficulties that quadriplegics have to face day after day, year after year. Disability on such a scale is just like war in Graham Greene's epigram: 'The nearer you are to war, the less you know what's happening.'

As for the ultimate consolation I derived from thinking about Robert's life and about the way disability transforms the victims and the people around them, let me look to another quotation from Henry James. It doesn't come from one of James' novels, but from a remark of his to his nephew Billy James, son of the great philosopher. Billy had asked Henry what really mattered in life. I'm always rather moved by Henry's response, by its grave simplicity. It was the summation, after all, of a life almost abnormally devoted to literature, to the art of fiction at its most sophisticated, to the grandeur and terror and subtlest shadings of human consciousness: 'Three things in human life are important,' Henry James said to his beloved nephew. 'The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. The third is to be kind.' ■

Peter Rose is editor of *Australian Book Review*. This is an edited version of the 2002 Colin Roderick Lecture, delivered in Townsville and Cairns in July 2002.

Of gods, monsters and fairytales

Tolkien's epic resists allegory, but **Dorothy Lee** found it open to mythological and spiritual exploration.

I'VE BOOKED MY ticket for *The Two Towers*, and I've seen its predecessor, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, three times. Nothing unusual in that, you say. Except, I'm the type who prefers books to movies—hands down. I'm unconvinced that the visual medium can capture the imagination or comprehend the subtleties of the written word. So I feel the need to justify my enthusiasm (especially given the inexplicable omission, in Peter Jackson's direction of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, of Tom Bombadil, and the pointless replacing of Glorfindel by Arwen—not to mention a certain loss of *gravitas* in the plot and characterisation).

The justification: ever since reading Classics at university, I've been a sucker for epic stories—for high tales of gods and mortals, with all their strength and frailty, heroism and fear, love and hate. And *The Lord of the Rings*, even on the big screen, is a modern epic in the style of the ancient myths. Of course, it isn't written in poetry like Homer and Virgil. But Tolkien's epic tries to make up for not being in poetic metre by including poems and songs all the way through—as Tolkien also does, though more humorously, in *The Hobbit*. Needless to say, the poetry (along with Tolkien's graceful prose) is lost in the movie.

J.R.R. Tolkien was part of a literary circle called the Inklings, which included such luminaries as C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams. They used to meet during the 1930s and '40s in the small back room of an Oxford pub called The Eagle and Child. There, in an atmosphere that must have been loud and stuffy, they smoked pipes, drank beer, and read their stories aloud. Most of the gathered writers shared a love of myth, and were steeped in the Classics and other mythologies, including the old Norse legends. They were also, in their different ways, committed Christians—although in those pre-ecumenical days, the Catholic–Protestant divide between Tolkien and C.S. Lewis became increasingly difficult for them both.

One common characteristic of the Inklings was that they took myth seriously, and for them 'myth' didn't mean untruth but a story of gods and heroes that expressed the deepest truths. In an increasingly secularised and pragmatic age, the Inklings believed that mythology should be allowed its own integrity and not be relegated to the nursery. That meant resisting what they saw as the dangers of allegorising. Both Tolkien and C.S. Lewis refused to allow their stories to be turned into allegory. Their tales were to be read and valued in their own right, and not for any covert message that the acute reader might detect.

WHAT WERE THE Inklings reacting against in their dislike of allegory? It's obvious that no storyteller—especially a writer of what we call 'fantasy'—would want his or her narrative to be read only for the insights it gives into something else. Stories are not orange peel to be discarded once the 'real' message has been found. But the reaction against allegory arises also from the work of scholars on the parables of the Gospels. The early church, according to these scholars, seriously misread the parables. Parables, they argued, work by drawing people into an *experience* of God's kingdom, rather than by giving a moral message. Set within a narrative frame, they are symbols, not allegories. But the early Christian community gave the parables a moralistic or allegorical twist and, in doing so, distorted them.

The example most often cited is Augustine's interpretation of the Good Samaritan. Interpreted through the lens of the Fall and Redemption, each element in this parable has significance. The traveller represents humankind beaten up and robbed of its immortality; the priest and Levite who pass by on the other side stand for the Mosaic law and the old covenant; the Good Samaritan is Christ who rescues fallen human nature; the inn to which the wounded

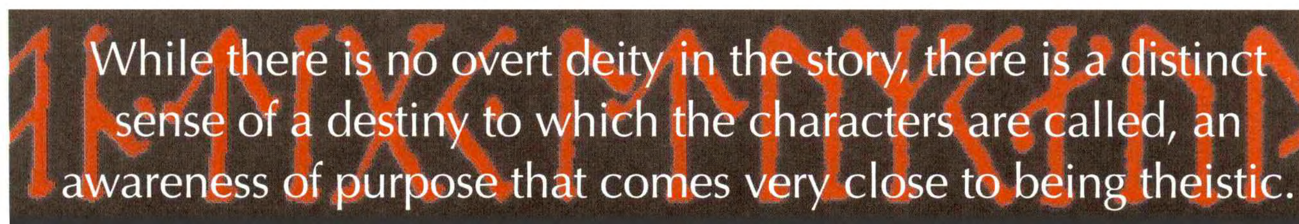
man is taken is the church and the innkeeper represents the apostle Paul. To our ears this may seem a bit ridiculous (although in general Augustine, even by our standards, is an insightful interpreter of the Bible). Yet the parable in Luke's interpretation already *has* allegorical elements. His context is a dispute between Jesus and a scribe on the meaning of the command to love our neighbours as ourselves. As Luke has it, the story is about how radical such love needs to be. The traveller represents the 'neighbour' who is to be loved and the Good Samaritan is the benevolent Christian who follows the example of Christ.

According to scholars, a different interpretation emerges once the parable is stripped of its explicit allegory and removed from its narrative setting. Jesus' listeners would have identified not with the Samaritan but with the Jewish traveller on his way to Jericho. They were perfectly familiar with that particular stretch of road. In a culture where ritual cleanliness was vital, especially for those officiating in the Temple, the hearer wouldn't be altogether surprised that the priest and Levite don't want to risk uncleanness by touching a body—even if they break the Law's demand that the stranger and alien are to be cared for. What would stagger Jesus' hearers, however, is the response of the Samaritan. Samaritans were members of an alien and despised race who also followed the Jewish Law. The Samaritan traveller's indifference to the ritual code as well as his extraordinary compassion towards a Jew are unsettling and disturbing. The roles of insider and outsider are reversed. The last person Jesus' audience would expect becomes the very one who exemplifies the 'neighbourly' love of God.

While this interpretation has allegorical elements, the real power, according to modern scholars, lies in its overturning effect on the hearer's world view. The story works in a symbolic rather than allegorical way. There is no moral at the end: the experience of hearing the story is enough to transform the listener. The sense of relief and yet distaste at the actions of the Samaritan turns the hearer's world on its head, paving the way for a radically new understanding of the grace of God.

One of the great Protestant theologians of the 20th century, Paul Tillich, made a useful contrast between symbol and sign. Despite superficial similarities, he argues, signs are *signposts* pointing the way to somewhere else. Symbols, in contrast, not only point you in the right direction, but also take you there: a signpost and a mode of transport combined. Signs are restricted in meaning and have a fairly simple, one-to-one correspondence with the thing signified. Symbols are more ambiguous, lending themselves to multiple levels of meaning. This definition, supported also by the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, places symbol, sacrament, parable and myth on the same level, each capable of communicating mystery and transcendence. Allegory, in this definition, especially in its cruder forms, is closer to sign than symbol.

It was this kind of symbolic interpretation of myth that Tolkien and C.S. Lewis wanted to recover; one where the story was allowed to stand by itself, in all its power. Tolkien succeeded more than did C.S. Lewis in his Narnia tales, perhaps because Narnia is a world that intersects with ours, in contrast to Middle-earth, which is a different realm altogether. It's hard to make an explicitly Christian story out of *The Lord of the Rings*. The Narnia books, however, quiver with Christian meaning from start to finish. By the end of the series, the narrative strongly suggests that Aslan is Christ in different guise. Other elements fall into place: creation, the Devil, the paschal mystery, the church, the apostles, the age to come, and so on. The Narnia books tell the story of salvation in a mythological form that is identical, in many respects, to the biblical story. Their allegorical force, at least for adults, is not hard to perceive, though my guess is that, for children, the Narnia stories are appreciated simply as stories (as their author would have preferred).



C.S. Lewis also wanted his lesser-known novel *Till We Have Faces* to be read as myth. Yet it too has allegorical elements, whatever the author's intentions. To my mind, this is one of Lewis' best novels—much better than his adult trilogy that begins with *Out of the Silent Planet*. *Till We Have Faces* tells the Classical story of the secret love between the mortal woman, Psyche, and the god of love, Eros. Psyche is extraordinarily beautiful and resented by Eros' mother, the goddess Aphrodite. Wishing to know the identity of the lover who comes to her by night, Psyche breaks her promise and lights the lamp, spilling a drop of oil on the sleeping god and causing him to wake. As a result, their love is discovered and Eros vanishes. Psyche searches everywhere to find her divine lover, and Aphrodite for a time imprisons her;

finally, the two are reunited. Lewis relates the myth through Psyche's sister, who is so ashamed of her own lack of beauty that she wears a veil and rules as queen with her face always covered.

In retelling the story, C.S. Lewis is heir to an ancient history of interpretation of the soul's relationship with the divine—a mythic interpretation that also has allegorical aspects. 'Psyche' is the Greek word for soul and 'eros' is one of several Greek terms for love, as well as representing the divine realm. In Lewis' hands, the story recounts in mythic form the soul's journey to God. It depicts the transfiguration of the central character from ugliness to beauty, from self-rejection to self-knowing and love.

The question is whether it is possible to be too rigid in rejecting allegory. A myth can retain symbolic meaning as well as narrative impact, while also including allegorical dimensions. The problem with modern readings is the insistence that a story be read at one level only. In the early church, passages of the Bible could be read at several levels at the same time. Admittedly, the early church disagreed about the extent of such multiple readings: Antioch favoured the more literal approach and Alexandria the allegorical. Yet by the Middle Ages, there was consensus that a passage could produce a literal meaning and a spiritual one, a moral lesson and a spiritual truth, an individual application and a community one. The same passage could yield more than one meaning. In the case of the Good Samaritan, for example, the message that Luke detects—the radical love of neighbour—can be held alongside the theme of overturning grace. And, at another level, the whole story can be read (as in Augustine) as a succinct summation of the human condition in its brokenness and need of healing. The problems with allegory come only when we assume that, once we've found the 'key', the story can be set aside; or, when the allegory is crude and ill-fitting, in the closing off of other interpretations.

In a letter to a friend in 1953, Tolkien himself described *The Lord of the Rings* as 'a fundamentally religious and Catholic work'. Tolkien's writing can be interpreted at more than one level, including the theological. The story unquestionably exists in its own right (as myth and symbol), yet it also has elements of allegory. While there is no overt deity in the story, there is a distinct sense of a destiny to which the characters are called, an awareness of purpose that comes very close to being theistic. Speaking of the strange history of the ring, for example, Gandalf says that first Bilbo and then Frodo were somehow *meant* to find it. There is a sense of a transcendent Presence, a providential Power that ordains events, giving life on Middle-earth intrinsic meaning and purpose.

There is a mystery that hangs over Middle-earth in Tolkien, a mystery undispelled by *The Silmarillion* and its account of the events of Middle-earth's early history. At the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, we do not know where the ships that leave the Grey Havens are going. The elves depart Middle-earth when their time is over, and Bilbo and Frodo accompany them. Later so does Sam Gamgee, at the end of a rewarding and eventful life. But what or where their destination is we do not know. The book gives the sense of realms beyond Middle-earth—not just other lands but other dimensions of existence, already portended in the joy and immortality of the elves, the most spiritual and spirited of all the creatures of Middle-earth.

ONE OF THE most profound aspects of *The Lord of the Rings* is its portrayal of evil. Although the figures of Sauron and his followers—the nine Ringwraiths and the orcs—are painted as unequivocally evil, others are more ambiguous. Saruman the Wise, once head of a noble school of wizards, turns to evil through his greed for power. Gollum is a pitiable, treacherous creature fatally addicted to the ring, without the resources to break free of its grip. The reader can't fail to feel some sympathy for him and, in the end, thanks to the mercy that saves his life, he plays a vital (if unintended) role in destroying the ring. Finally, there are characters like Boromir, essentially good in themselves but so eaten up by the malevolent power of the ring—so filled with hopelessness and despair—that they are led into uncharacteristic actions with tragic consequences for themselves and others.

In all this, *The Lord of the Rings* has a vision of good and evil locked together in mortal strife. There is no doubt that goodness will prevail, even if the characters themselves fail to survive and even if this period of history is lost. Yet there is no sense that evil is either inevitable or necessary. On the contrary, evil is an invasion into the beauty and goodness of the world, to be cast out with courage and integrity. In this regard, *The Lord of the Rings* is rather different from the Susan Cooper series, *The Dark is Rising*, which has a Manichaean flavour to it. Although good and evil contend in Cooper's novels, they appear as equal forces needing to be kept in balance, without hope of a final overthrow of evil. Tolkien's vision is much closer to the Christian vision: indeed, his portrayal is deeply influenced by biblical apocalyptic.

While there is no explicit Christ figure in *The Lord of the Rings*, several of the characters, in different

To say that Tolkien is 'really about' the existential battle between good and evil, or about salvation history and the church, or (in Jungian terms) about facing the shadow, shows an inability to value the story as story.

ways, parallel Jesus in the Gospel story. There is Gandalf the Grey, for instance, who falls into the depths of the Mines of Moria while contending with the terrifying Balrog. Later, to everyone's astonishment, he re-emerges victorious as Gandalf the White. Frodo, the leading hobbit, reluctantly yet tenaciously plays the role of Ring-bearer and makes the hard, painful journey to the fires of Mount Doom in the heart of enemy territory. Aragorn, whose identity is hidden, is finally revealed as the true King of Gondor, whose advent will restore the fortunes of Middle-earth. And Galadriel, the elven queen in the forest of Lothlórien, has Madonna-like qualities in her compassion for and guidance of the Fellowship in their quest.

It would seem that the Inklings' rejection of allegory, however understandable, is an overreaction. Allegory does not need to be set in such stark contrast to myth and symbol. They needn't be seen as mutually exclusive, providing that the story is heard in its plenitude of meaning and neither ignored nor abused. To say that Tolkien is 'really about' the existential battle between good and evil, or about salvation history and the church, or (in Jungian terms) about facing the shadow, shows an inability to value the story as story. It's very different to say, however, that there are striking parallels between one world view and another, or that Tolkien's mythological and symbolic world is open to other possibilities of interpretation.

WHAT WE CAN say about Tolkien's symbolic universe in *The Lord of the Rings* is that, while it is not an explicitly Christian novel, its mythology shapes the reader in much the same way as biblical mythology. There's a striking coherence between the two mythologies, a sympathy, a similarity of values and longings. Above all, there's a sense that victory comes by going through suffering, not by sidestepping or denying it; that it's often the humble and weak who achieve what the great ones can't; and that goodness and beauty will finally triumph over evil.

I understand why *The Lord of the Rings* is said to be the most popular book of the 20th century, a century both of technological advancement and appalling manifestations of evil and suffering. The myth captures the experience of the 20th century perhaps more than anything else has: its darkness and despair, its loss of meaning. Perhaps our culture is not quite as secular as it appears on the surface. Perhaps, after all, Christianity in the West is not on its last legs. Perhaps, in the interplay between symbol and allegory, mythological tales like *The Lord of the Rings* (even in the movie version) have the power to bring us back to a vision of the world that's finally redemptive. ■

Dorothy Lee is Professor of New Testament at Queen's College, in the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne.

Reflective Insulation

You just walk out of the world, and into Australia. (Lawrence)

Dozing mere afternoon away
hot and salty, outside time
you do not see the powderblue
of distant hills, beyond that cape:
everything has become marine
with gulls for scattered punctuation.

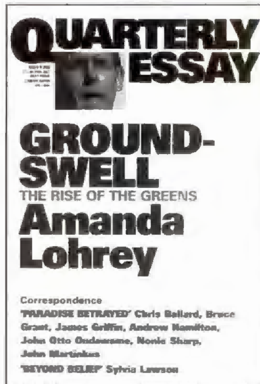
Huddled all together lie
the igneous and stratified:
craglet, pit and water pebble,
mini-tarn, long crinkled shelf
yellowish, ginger, tan, wet-black
with a hint of half-decayed
kelp, sea-lettuce—something off.
Could be a dead penguin, eh?

Meanwhile, back there on the sand
listening to the Test match rhythms,
elastic theology on the green
or psychic stress enacted by
a flanneled ghost in the machine.
Days are seasons of the psyche,
fresh waves crash against the sill,
over after over.
Sandstone
is the metaphysical pavilion;
our old friend the summer's ocean
finding odd gaps in the field.

Epics within epigrams
and the stink of restlessness,
but on the sand it feels like Bush Week,
folk with towel and radio
crescent between quotes of rock,
off which those yellow-eyed silver mullet
patiently abound.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

THE SHORTLIST



Groundswell: The Rise of the Greens, Amanda Lohrey. *Quarterly Essay* edited by Peter Craven, Black Inc., 2002. ISBN 1 86395 227 6, RRP $11.95.

As a sometime lecturer in political science at the University of Tasmania, Amanda Lohrey has been close to the furnace in which the Australian Greens Party was forged. *Groundswell: The Rise of the Greens* is eighth in Peter Craven's remarkable *Quarterly Essay* series: in it Lohrey charts the party's history and describes its constituency. From her analysis, it is clear that efforts to label the Greens' rise as being nothing more than a function of the Democrats' decline or a simple defection of Labor's disenchanted Left are wrong-headed. Lohrey sees the Greens' constituency as a new one, based 'on a new paradigm or grand narrative of what politics is about, i.e. the "ecological" '. That is not to say that ex-Labor or Democrat or even Liberal voters have not felt disenfranchised by their old party loyalties and resorted to the Greens. But Lohrey makes crucial distinctions that enhance understanding of the Greens phenomenon, not just in Australia but worldwide. A Green vote can no longer be seen as soft, single-issue, or volatile. She also points out that as the Greens become more successful, the rhetoric against them will become more hectic in proportion to their perceived threat to established powers. The warning signs to Labor in particular are clear: John Button's contribution to the series (Issue 6 *Beyond Belief: What Future for Labor?*) becomes even more interesting when read in conjunction with Lohrey's.

—Juliette Hughes

The Tournament, John Clarke. Text Publishing, 2002. ISBN 1 877008 37 0, RRP $28.00

Magritte and Dali are paired in a tennis tournment against Hammett and Chandler. They win, of course, with their capacity to change the game between points, and to play shots which land in a different dimension from the one they began in.

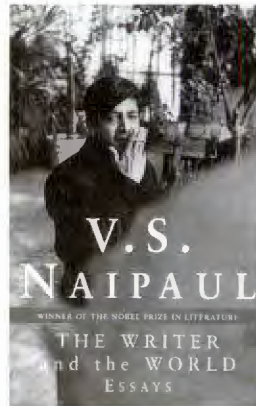
John Clarke carries off well the conceit of a tennis tournament in which the cultural icons of the 19th and 20th centuries are steadily despatched. His humour is not subtle, but it is knockabout and inventive. He concentrates on what all tennis commentators see as the Heart of the Matter (Greene, incidentally, loses to Kazantzakis in four sets during the first round), the court chat between players and with court officials.

So, Fermi asks for a ruling on 'whether "on" the line was "in", in the same sense that "on the line" was "in the line".'

'If you have a ball, for instance,' he said, 'which is clearly out, and which marks the round outside the line, but which brings up dust, having struck the outer extremity of the line with its inner extremity, can it not be said that dust is the criterion, rather than the inness or the outness? I think we should be clear about these things.'

Raymond Chandler is more given to soliloquy after his loss to Rodo, 'I lost a game and got something wet from the court-side fridge. I tried to sip it but I wasn't fooling anyone. The place was a mess. Someone could clean up later. Right now I had to think. I went out again and bent a couple at the guy up the other end. A dame behind me yelled, "Out." She was right. It was that sort of a day.'

It beats watching tennis on the box. And best of all, the cultural anti-heroes lose big time. **—Andrew Hamilton SJ**

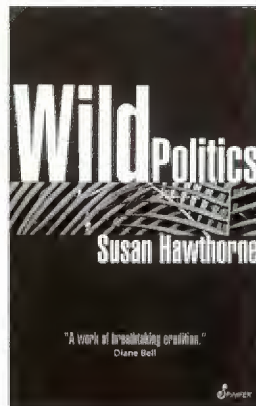


The Writer and the World: Essays, V.S. Naipaul. Picador, 2002. ISBN 0 330 41290 6, RRP $30.00

Naipaul's essays, written between 1960 and 1990, bring alive half-remembered events and half-familiar people. People as diverse as Mailer, Jagan, Duvalier and Malcolm X are depicted by a writer with an eye for the telling detail and the exact phrase.

We read a novelist's critical essays less for the world that his eye sees than for the gaze which he directs on it. Naipaul's perspective is distinctive. He distrusts passion and rhetoric in political life, seeing in them the destruction of the small orders that guarantee peace and tranquillity. In that sense he is conservative.

To maintain that perspective, you need to distance yourself a little from the lives of people who are the cause of passions. Naipaul's detachment is delicate: he preserves distance while offering immediacy in his observation of the relationships and habits that form the surface texture of life. The inner struggles, the vulnerability and the injustices of those whose inner life he portrays lie under the page. These are the aspects of humanity that might arouse vicarious passions. **—A.H.**



Wild Politics, Susan Hawthorne. Spinifex, 2002. ISBN 1 8766756 24 1, RRP $29.95

Wild is for the surprising, for the card that confounds those who think only in suits. In Susan Hawthorne's broad-ranging exploration of the challenges facing us today, the opposite of wild is narrow, controlled, separate, abstract and universal. When the universal and separate rules the local and connected, people are subordinated to profits.

Hawthorne celebrates the local in the image of biodiversity. Biodiversity is vulnerable both to the planning that exalts economy of scale, and to a culture dominated by consumer choice. To ensure biodiversity, you need to privilege the networks of local relationships over the exploitation of resources.

I found her evocation of political priorities appealing and surprisingly familiar. Underlying her vision is a philosophy that sees the world not in instrumental terms but as a whole formed by a complex set of interrelationships. Her treatment left me with one question. If you are to privilege the local and particular as a centre of value, do you not need also to defend the universal? Certainly, the preciousness of each human being can be defended only by laws and attitudes that apply to all human beings. **—A.H.**

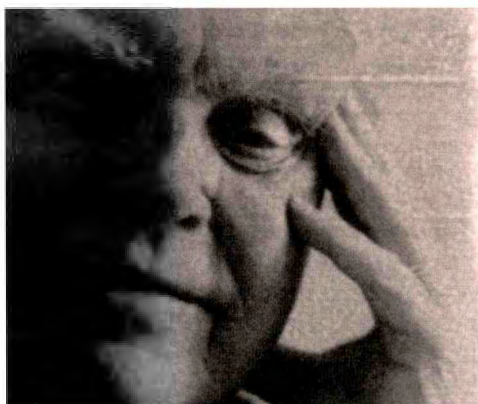
KEVIN HART

Found in translation

New and Collected Poems 1931-2001, Czeslaw Milosz. Allen Lane, Penguin, 2001. ISBN 0 713 99549 1, RRP $121.50, $80
To Begin Where I Am: Selected Essays, Czeslaw Milosz. Edited and introduced by Bogdana Carpenter and Madeline G. Levine. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001. ISBN 0 374 25890 2, RRP $72

THAT CZESLAW MILOSZ is a commanding figure in contemporary letters goes without saying. When he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1980, at the age of 69, the tribute was immediately recognized as entirely appropriate. Even those who rarely read poetry applauded the Swedish Academy's decision. Milosz had been known for 30 years as a trusted witness of the allure and horror of totalitarianism, and *The Captive Mind* in particular was widely held to be a central work in the political imagination of the 20th century. Born in Szetejnie in rural Lithuania, Milosz has remained faithful to his origins in central Europe, even though extreme politics have forced him to live most of his life in exile: first in France and then, for many years in the United States. When language is controlled by the state, no poet can serve; and Stalinism was uncompromising in its hold on language in Poland. A poet above all, Milosz had to choose between the country for which he wrote and his freedom to write. It was a cruel choice. Prized for the humanity of his moral vision, as evidenced in many essays and lectures, he is more highly regarded for his verse. And had he not elected a life in exile, a life largely spent unable to speak the language in which he writes poetry, we would not have this vast body of work before us.

'I belong to the estate of Polish literature and to no other,' Milosz declares in the opening essay of *To Begin Where I Am*, and towards the end of the collection he adds, 'Polish is my fatherland, my home, and my glass coffin. Whatever I have accomplished in it—only that will save me.' These are forceful and honest words; and yet Milosz is revered in America as well as Poland, and the bulk of his admirers, including me, approach him solely in translation. Without a doubt, Milosz's moral authority has lit the way to an appreciation of his poetry, especially in the United States. And once the poetry is read one must be impressed by the range and intensity of the work. Here is a massive body of writing with deep roots not only in European history but also in western philosophy, a work that responds to political horror while affirming the beautiful, a ceaseless and passionate meditation on life that is religious yet never at ease with ossified doctrine.



FASCINATED BY the aesthetic and moral dignity of Milosz's work, the reader without Polish cannot go much further and experience the poetry as poetry. On the basis of these words from 'A Magic Mountain', Milosz would surely agree: 'And Chen, I have heard, was an exquisite poet, / Which I must take on faith, for he wrote in Chinese.' We can discern something of the grandeur of poems such as 'A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto', 'The Master', 'To Robinson Jeffers' and 'Elegy for N. N.', but always with a sense of their distance from us. When we hear 'plain speech in the mother tongue', Milosz says, we should 'be able to see, / As if in a flash of summer lightning, / Apple trees, a river, the bend of a road'. And so we do; but when we hear poetry in translation we see those things as if through a fog. With poems like 'Dedication' and 'Ode to a Bird', which are moving lyrics even in English, I find myself pressing fingers on the page, as though the poem were covered with layers of tissue paper that I must smooth over in order to see the words more distinctly.

'The health of poetry', Milosz remarks, lies in capturing 'as much as possible of tangible reality'. To read and reread his poems is to gain some sense of what Milosz has experienced, and the ways in which experience has occurred for him. He has moved through a world that presents itself in terms of fierce contrasts: brutal politics and the fragility of love; the beauty of art and its dealings with evil; the quest for meaning and the loss of sense. At no time, though, has Milosz succumbed to despair. For him, meaning occurs in and through the tensions of life; poetry always breathes in hope even though it cannot always speak of it. Hence Milosz's impatience with Philip Larkin's 'hectoring about nothingness'. I remember an essay, not included in *To Begin Where I Am*, in which Milosz said of Larkin's 'Aubade' that it was a poem eminently endowed with all the qualities of literary excellence except one—hope. 'Aubade' is a direct confrontation with death, 'the anaesthetic from which none come round', as Larkin puts it, and is as piercing a witness to a life stripped of all religious consolation as one could look for. But is the poem without hope? To be sure, it denies any hope of personal immortality for reader or writer, yet the very fact that Larkin has written the poem and published it means that he had hope of communication, hope that others, at least, might be honest in their acceptance of finitude and, implicitly, that 'the uncaring / Intricate rented world' might become a little more caring.

To read Larkin, for all his fear of the void, is to enter a world in which each and

every word has been delicately weighed and placed precisely where it should be. Regardless of what we think of the 'little England' his poems project—its sorrowful diminishments, its meanness, its will to mediocrity—we value the experience of his language. After reading Larkin for an hour we might long for the larger gestures of Milosz's 'ecstatic praise of being', although when we leave the Englishman for the Pole we have to live with lines that no decent poet writing in English would dream of publishing. 'Shout, blow the trumpets, make thousands-strong marches, leap, rend your clothing, repeating only: *is*!' The vigorous thought is to be honoured, but the line would be crossed out in any undergraduate exercise in creative writing.

In the end, it is not the fact that Milosz writes in Polish that impoverishes our experience of his verse. After all, people read his fellow Pole Zbigniew Herbert without being all that bothered by translation. Rather, what impedes our reception of Milosz is that he belongs to a class of poets whose high rhetoric and generosity of gesture sit awkwardly in English. When we read Herbert's poems in translation, their concepts appear sharply behind the English. Consider the prose poem 'Violins':

> Violins are naked. They have thin arms. Clumsily they try to protect themselves with them. They cry from shame and cold. That's why. And not, as the music critics maintain, so it will be more beautiful. This is not true.

And when we read Tomas Tranströmer's lyrics we find them so visually exact that the passage from Swedish to English seems hardly to matter. When he writes 'All I want to say / gleams out of reach / like the silver / in a pawnshop' we feel that the lines survive translation, even if local effects have been lost. Milosz is different. Drawn neither to the brilliant idea nor to the arresting visual simile, he forever reminds us that he is distant from us in his very practice as a poet.

How does one capture 'tangible reality'? By performing a double task, Milosz admits. On the one hand, the artist must be passive, receiving 'every poem as a gift'; while, on the other hand, the artist must keep his or her mind and will forever alert. The poet is therefore in the world and withdrawn from it at one and the same time. Political poetry is rarely successful, he suggests, because it tends to prize the political over the poetic. Only indirection works, as in 'Campo dei Fiori', a lyric from 1943 that evokes the suffering of Polish Jews by picturing the execution of Giordano Bruno in 1600. People came out into the piazza to see the burning of the man who had defied the Church, but only for the first moments of his torment:

> Already they were back at their wine
> or peddled their white starfish,
> baskets of olives and lemons
> they had shouldered to the fair,
> and he already distanced
> as if centuries had passed
> while they paused just a moment
> for his flying in the fire.

Yet Milosz cannot help but elevate the poetic over the political at the end of the lyric—'on a new Campo dei Fiori / rage will kindle at a poet's word', he says—and the introduction of the author himself, and talk of the power of art, can only seem intrusive. That said, 'Campo dei Fiori' is one of the most successful poems in English in the entire collection. One can only wish that Louis Iribarne and David Brooks had translated more of the master's work.

THE EXPRESSION 'tangible reality' also bespeaks something of central importance to Milosz's poetics: a faith in the earth as our true home and in the narrow limits of human moral improvement. He does not affirm the incarnation of God: 'What can we, ordinary people, know of the Mystery?', he asks. Nor, though, does he insinuate that everything proclaimed by Christianity is a fiction: there *is* a mystery that runs throughout life, and it is not to be reduced by apostles of the enlightenment. His religion is a very modest affair:

> May we not care about what awaits us after death
> But here on earth look for salvation,
> Trying to do good within our limits,
> Forgiving the mortals their imperfection.
> Amen.

Straightaway we recall his words about his mother tongue: 'Whatever I have accomplished in it—only that will save me.' Even Philip Larkin could subscribe to such a shrunken creed, although his attitude to its consequences differs markedly from Milosz's.

Larkin, though, was sufficiently hard-headed that he would not have agreed with Milosz's special pleading for poets before the court of ethics. 'A good person will not learn the wiles of art', the Pole declares, while in 'Biography of an Artist', he opines of a painter, 'he promised his soul to Hell, / Provided that his work remained clear and pure'. We've heard that sort of thing before, from W. B. Yeats for one, although Milosz presents the view in a stronger and more disturbing fashion in one of his most compelling poems, 'The Master', a dramatic monologue spoken by a composer. 'They say that my music is angelic', he begins, and we are left in no doubt that he is a very great artist. But from where does high art arise?

> No one knows how I was paying. Ridiculous, they believe
> It may be got for nothing. We are pierced by a ray.
> They want a ray because this helps them to admire.

There is no such ray, we are assured; rather, the master has gained insight into the human condition by unnamed acts of evil that haunt him still. He cannot repent because the beauty of his music rests on the acts he has committed. The poem concludes:

> And yet I loved my destiny.
> Could I move back time, I am unable to guess
> Whether I would have chosen virtue. My line of fate does not tell.
> Does God really want us to lose our soul
> For only then He may receive a gift with out blemish?
> A language of angels! Before you mention Grace
> Mind that you do not deceive yourself and others.
> What comes from my evil—that only is true.

The Milosz who chides utopian visions in his essays and poems, and who reminds us we live in a world torn by evil and misery, is also the poet who readily concedes that art is complicit in making that world. He bears witness to the tragedies around us and to art's equivocal relations with those tragedies. ■

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PETER STEELE

The human as such

Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic, Terry Eagleton. Blackwell Publishing, 2002. ISBN 0 631 23360 1, RRP $52.75

Nobody could accuse Terry Eagleton of lacking a policy. Years ago, asked why he wrote about literature, he replied in my hearing, 'To help bring about the arrival of socialism.' Nothing in *Sweet Violence* suggests that he has changed that agenda. Early in the piece he claims that 'It is capitalism which is anarchic, extravagant, out of hand, and socialism which is temperate, earth-bound and realistic.' The reader has been given notice.

Trenchancy though is not Eagleton's only mode. He writes, for instance, 'In many of its aspects, religion today represents one of the most odious forms of political reaction on the planet, a blight on human freedom and a buttress of the rich and powerful. But there are also theological ideas which can be politically illuminating, and this book is among other things an exploration of them.' For reasons which do not matter here, I came to the book with no high expectations; in the event, though, I think that Eagleton has gone about his grave task very well.

That task consists in a rethinking of the character of tragedy. The first chapter, 'A Theory in Ruins', consists of a critical overview of the ways in which, in older and in modern times, tragedy has been conceived. Eagleton has always been good at surveying fields, usually with an eye to the cockle as well as the wheat, and so it goes here: it is a Good Thing, for example, to be Raymond Williams or Walter Benjamin, and a Bad Thing to be Dorothea Krook or George Steiner. The Eagleton who elsewhere makes clear how thoroughly he loathes the Catholicism of his childhood can still write, betimes, in the spirit of a medieval scholastic theologian, determined to make clear just who are the enemies and who the friends.

By contrast, though, with some of those predecessors, he has a genuinely vivacious mind, which can be generously inventive even when it is being mordant.

Eagleton usually writes as though he is fired as much by what he is reading as by his prior notions about it, which is a rarer thing than it sounds. For instance, when he says that

> ... the world of Samuel Beckett, in which things appear at once enigmatic and baldly self-identical, seems less a place which once had a meaning which has now haemorrhaged away than one which calls that whole rather peculiar way of looking into the question. Maybe what we call nihilism is just the wish that things had meaning in the sense that fish have gills, and the fury that they do not ...

one might agree or disagree with the philosophical position which Eagleton favours, but still find Beckett's writing illuminated, either way. In a chapter called 'Freedom, Fate and Justice', Eagleton remarks:

> To see Greek tragedy as poised between the heroic-mystical and the rational-legal is to say that, like Freud, it is struck by the paradox that the very forces which go into the making of civilization are unruly, uncivil, potentially disruptive ones. This is most obvious in sexuality, at once anarchic passion and anchor of domestic life. But much the same is true of material production—the raw, earthy energies on which civilization is reared, and which bulk large in the myth of Prometheus.

Reading this, I think of the Auden whose intellectual energy was constantly seeking variety of experience and also appropriate forms for that variety, parities among the disparities: Eagleton too is notably a 'maker', a fashioner of shapes amidst the shifts. Firm in his own faith in the possibility and the desirability of political transformation, he can still be hospitable towards foreign insights and haunting questions. Significantly, *Sweet Violence* ends with a quotation from the end of Kafka's *The Trial*, in which Josef K., about to be executed, glimpses, at a distant window, a human figure stretching out its arms: 'Who was it? A friend? A good man? One who sympathized? One who wanted to help? Was it one person? Was it everybody?' It would be a bold, or a blockish, writer who thought Kafka easily amenable to domestication, but Eagleton is surely right to invoke that master of concern and enigma when he has himself been attempting to pick his

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way through the labyrinth of tragedy.

The modest parlour game called 'Cull the Index' is suggestive where Eagleton is concerned: 'Nabokov, Naipaul, nationalism, naturalism, Nature, Nazism, necessity' it goes: 'negativity, New Testament, Nietzsche, nihilism, Noh theatre, nominalism, normative tragedy, novel, Nussbaum.' Index making is itself an art for adepts, but even so, this roll-call, taken at random, suggests some of the spring of Eagleton's mind. There is a price to be paid for this, of course, which is that the reader can feel a little like a sparrow in a modern city, restlessly aware that something is likely to come roaring past at any moment, rarely sure whence, and sometimes uncertain why. But then, Eagleton himself is in effect that sparrow, and the city is the whole world, material, social, conceptual, and imaginative. Elias Canetti remarks derisively how odd it would be to imagine someone saying to Shakespeare, 'Relax!': it would be pretty odd, though for different reasons, to be saying it to Eagleton either.

The fact is that while the declared ambit of *Sweet Violence* is the character of tragedy, Eagleton is on the spoor of the human as such. Chapter titles like 'Heroes', 'Pity, Fear and Pleasure', 'Tragedy and the Novel', 'Tragedy and Modernity', and 'Demons' are so many signals that whatever else tragedy proves to be, it can be a lens for the inspection of what some still call human nature, and others, more guardedly, the human condition. 'The human condition' was an expression invented by Montaigne, and there is a streak of the montaignean in Eagleton's own manner. He refers at one point to 'the sceptical, self-ironizing prose style of Montaigne, a writer with what Claude Rawson has called "a temperamental shrinking from catastrophic perspectives" ', and although Eagleton is not much of a one for shrinking from things, he nourishes wariness in a good cause—that of taking the measure of human behaviour, again and again.

This book takes its title from Sir Philip Sidney, whose *An Apology for Poetry* Eagleton quotes at the point where a murderous tyrant 'could not resist the sweet violence of a Tragedie'. Eagleton is properly dismissive of sentimental indulgence in such a one, but he remains fascinated by the element of paradox in much human behaviour. I cannot be sure whether he believes that the paradoxical

can be explained, without remainder. Part of him, the favourer of Marxist doctrine, is drawn in that direction, and part of him, the questioner of all doctrine, is drawn elsewhere. Montaigne (again) speaks in an essay of 'an art which wrestles against the art' in thought, and that disposition is given a good run in this book.

For me, the most striking, and at times haunting, parts of *Sweet Violence* are those in which 'the Law', in various of its pluriform expressions, is being reflected upon. The Old and the New Testaments are of course major players here, but so is an ensemble of later writers, among them Shakespeare, Racine, Kafka and Freud. Usually, Eagleton resists the temptation to make them fit too polished a theme or theory, and one has a sense that he is thinking his way through them, rather than just past them. In his chapter on 'Tragedy and the Novel', he points out that:

> Jane Austen's novels give us a record of experience, but along with it the norms by which that experience should be judged and corrected; and literary form is one vital bearer of these norms. But form in other hands can easily become ironic, since like the Law in St Paul it only serves to show us how far the shabby content of our lives falls short of it.

Perhaps all this is indeed fostering the arrival of socialism, but for those with other things on their minds *Sweet Violence* may still be worth the candle. Near the end of the book, Eagleton writes that 'To strive for objectivity of judgement in fact demands a fair amount of courage, realism, openness, modesty, self-discipline and generosity of spirit; there is nothing in the least bloodless about it. But the true paradigm of objectivity is not epistemological but ethical. The model of objectivity is a selfless attention to another's needs.' A rich mix, this, but a good one: and the book aspires to be of that kind. ■

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PENELOPE BUCKLEY

The word shifter

City and Stranger, Aileen Kelly. Five Islands Press, 2002. ISBN 0 86418 798, RRP $16.95

WHY DID Yeats write

> Fish, flesh, or fowl commend all summer long
> Whatever is begotten, born and dies.

and not 'Fish, flesh, and fowl'? I imagine because 'or' is better rhythmically. Aileen Kelly has this kind of ear: stubborn, meticulous, inventive.

> In the freshening pond pobblebonks yell for the brief
> comfort of procreation, the myth of escape.

Strength and poignancy are hurried into that little preposition: 'for' in exuberance, and out of need. Her poem 'Notes from the planet's edge' might have given Kelly's magnificent second book an alternative title: it is testimony to its brave humanism that *City and Stranger* is a truer name.

Not that 'City' is ever-present. In the cover picture and matching sequence 'After Drysdale', the city is an absence, or an emblem of displacement. Against the desert is the human figure, 'lump of enduring female'. Somewhere in that lump, a distorting memory is held, as 'sad shoes' or 'gigantic handbag'. The city is lost, but the stranger is the very embodiment of the human. You don't need a city to be alone, only dislocation and some kind of memory.

A city will do it. The title poem wryly celebrates a random occupation by the unknown, 'a short-rent flat' in the kind of city across the world that Kelly's ancestors once left. This poem maps a psychic space before the poetry comes. In that preliminary idleness, 'you're never truly alone'. Alone comes later:

> you're reading
> with a postcard from the familiar to book-
> mark where you think you can return.

You can return, but you bring with you what you have left behind. It won't leave you alone, and it won't quite leave you 'Partnered, settled, childed'. You are always in two places and absent from two places, inhabited by conflict, strange to yourself.

'The whirlpool' takes this preoccupation up directly ('an arrow labelled You / Are Not Here.') 'First lesson' involves a collision of different life forms in one space, when a curious child tries to ingest experience: 'the ice ... worked / its way down longer ... a strange / relish of roosting starlings ... /... all their dropping-germs / frozen alive woke in my belly ...'. Primal instincts collide, the lodestone can work backwards. You switch on the TV and 'the city is burning' but you don't know which city. 'For us / it was bombs'. Distinctions collapse like buildings. The city may be a metaphor for the sane mind: 'my city humming with wax-making and stinging'

('Aftershock'), or interiorized in the rogue body ('Cross country'):

> in my body, heart-city of graffiti:
> MUTATE NOW AND AVOID THE RUSH;
> REAL PUNKS CANT SPELL QUEECHE;
> THE MEEK DONT WANT IT.
> Pun-scutted, chrome-eyed, the city's rodent peeps
> from its burrow reamed in the heart's right chamber ...

In that delightful poem of self-reclamation, the 'skin-naked self' is restored in a suburban garden. But there are many in this collection where the self seems barely to have a skin. In 'Notes from the planet's edge', the planet is 'still testing its options / between life and vacuum'. By one option,

> The last tadpoles
> strangle
> sun-pinched in mud.

By another,

> The last tadpoles
> stumped
> drift down and rot.

Between these painful possibilities human beings 'insect over the surface with oars and rods.'

> All
> over the planet's knobbly rind
> the frogs are dwindling
> but their mud our mud
> is starred with the invisible sift of space.

Lines of separation disappear in the planet's 'knobbly rind', and human feeling flows across a vanished boundary with a shock ('their mud our mud') which is more than empathy and marks a dispossession of wherever it had been before.

The shift of pronoun is characteristic of Kelly, as is the discipline with which it is used. In 'Documentary', there is another such shift, another underwater death.

Here the human is segregated in the grey world of obsessive memory, as the speaker's father watches old film.

Each night (I suppose
now there's only me to dream
his silent history)
his friends walked the undersea
terrain from which no bubbles rise.
They carry their dead his dead each
other in disintegrated arms.

'[N]ow there's only me' has all the sorrowful ambiguity of keeping someone company who is no longer there. That bleakness recurs.

But the poems speak to each other. 'Simple' is an exquisite history of the down-sizing of God.

Fetching the paper I thought I heard you
sigh
or laugh in the mintbush by my gate
and who was it flipped the petals, hiding
under a single
petal, little god? But when I turned a wet
leaf
there was only a websoft texture,
an intimate scent
that troubled my fingers till someone
ground the coffee.

Facing that is the minimalist 'Fog'. This appears a negative influence, a blank. Then it starts to talk.

Understand me
if you must.

I would rather you
put out blind hands into
my swathed
handfuls of darkness
until you begin to touch.

This fog both is and is not God (and not the little god that flipped the petals). The two poems form a paradigm of ways to be and not be in two places at once: in time and on the page, in formal possibilities fulfilled and excluded.

This is a poetry of great exposure. Pronouns are volatile, the centre of self migrates. There are several dynamic by-products of the shifting pronoun: 'Scarecrow', 'Next field' ('I am straw. Fear climbs me ...'), 'The right stuff' ('You slit my skin briskly ... / I am ready for your guest'), 'Three wild angels'. But the metaphors are sustained: both terms develop with inspired impartiality. So it is with the cat's neat poem 'Found', 'Cop-out', 'Sister', 'Pippins', that scary city poem 'To a son' and 'Curtains', where the volatile pronoun is the punning subject, as a mouse-sized 'i' tries ('put a pox on yr willy') to provoke a lion-sized 'You'.

Much of this book is hugely funny. The wit is invigorating even as it scares you. As was said at the launch of the book, Aileen Kelly's work is terrifying. But it is also fortifying. While 'self' is stripped and peregrine, there is a spirit of facing up to one's own history. 'Open house' zig-zags between the pits of class or clan disloyalty and paranoia, and ends by acknowledging the philosopher's descent to earth as serious, while those of the poet are absurd.

Perhaps the shatter
of significant bones in your long
fall to hard ground set you that shape. My
falls
are short, absurd. Tangling bruised on
public land,
knocked from breath and composure ...
I am barrowed away by practical neigh-
bours
and abandoned on my own doorstep.

I am just going outside, I may be some
time.
When my freezedried foot has learnt to
kick some shit
out of this stubborn constipated world
maybe I'll come back sober.

All do fall down, but only the falls one takes oneself are funny. At ground level, this indestructible difference between the self and others is fortifying. You can also trust the syntax.

Perhaps 'A new and accvrat mappe' best shows the kind of synthesis Kelly can make of potentially estranging difference. The speaker tries to be her own interpreter, translating sound into vibration:

My jump vibrates the floor to warn
you silent boy ...
I wake the floor, rattle the cups
to tell you there are dragons in your path.

The silent boy, from his beneficent, brilliant world, gives her dragons back:

You show me patiently finger-spell and
pencil ...
And now with inks and oils how
sunlight strikes a fire
off green lizard skin.

A bottle of red to anyone who can find me a better poet writing in Australia. ■

Penelope Buckley is a writer and former lecturer at the University of Melbourne.

BOOKS:4

ALEX McDERMOTT

Caught behind

Don Bradman: Challenging the Myth, Brett Hutchins. Cambridge University Press, 2002. ISBN 0 521 82384 6, RRP $39.95

DON BRADMAN is an Australian icon, yet he was such a distinctly un-Australian hero. Teetotaller, Protestant, Mason, closer to his wife than his mates, a leader, a loner, never one of the boys—the list of culpable behaviour goes on. Always shrewd and calculating, in both his batting and business endeavours, he never bet on horses, never swore. Not rugged. He is un-Australian in the way Menzies is un-Australian. Both were patriots, but patriots of a nation founded on British blood and Empire. That is just one of the paradoxes of the Bradman myth that Tasmanian sociologist Brett Hutchins has set himself to solve in *Don Bradman: Challenging the Myth*, and he does the job pretty well.

The 'true' Australian, as first described and analysed by Russel Ward in *Australian Legend*, was egalitarian, a swearing and drinking male who bonded with other blokes of his type but was ill at ease with women. He was the product, Ward assures us, of the distinctive, masculine ethos that sprang up in the Australian bush in the 19th century—a tradition and shared set of values bequeathed by countless gold-diggers and shearers, ex-convicts and stock-drovers. It took the first Sydney Push of the 1890s—which included the *Bulletin* writers, the Henry Lawsons and Banjo Pattersons—to assert that the bush didn't just foster brutes, as had been previously thought. Rather, it was the cradle

of a distinctively Australian civilisation. The cities were unstable, as the 1890s Depression proved, while the bush was the home not just of the weird but of the truly authentic and real.

Since this argument was first coined in the 1950s, it has been criticised for leaving out as much as it includes. One thing it fails to explain is how Don Bradman has been incorporated into the Australian tradition; how a man who was consistently sober, reliable, monarchist, monogamous and ruthlessly accumulative, whether at work or play, could so effortlessly become the definitive Australian hero.

Hutchins provides one answer. Alongside the Wardian bush ethos there is the social conservative tradition, both Australian and Anglophile. The Menzian worship of British institutions, culture, values and habits is the final apotheosis of a very British cult of respectability which took root and flourished in this very alien ground, living on in Australia's longest serving prime minister's mind well after the British themselves had packed up their empire and gone home to join a European union. In this context Bradman joins with politics to make an Anglo-Australian sort of authority and legitimacy. He is used to reinforce dominant social values, and to convince us that stability, predictability and methodical cultivation of talent can be just as Australian as doing just enough work to get you through to next smoko.

Combine this influence with the Bradman industry—the ever increasing production, sale and consumption of a 'wide array of Bradman-related products'—and you have a self-perpetuating cycle, a commercialised tradition, one which makes money for many while also affirming core elements of the conservative tradition. 'Those seeking to demythologise the Don face a considerable task', Hutchins muses darkly. 'Popular hagiographies, members of the cricket fraternity, sections of the media, the memorabilia industry and people such as the present prime minister influence the way we conceive of the Don.' We are confronted with a legend that is masculinist, monocultural and 'largely positive' about Australian identity, and Bradman is part of this fabric, implicated in 'these reductive and narrow configurations of gender, cultural and historical identity'.

Hutchins looks at the way the achievements and legacy of a sporting hero came to enshrine a particular mode of national being, a kind of verbal iconograph that someone like John Howard could pit against the demons of multicultural Australia. Hutchins does his analysis very well. He examines not only cricket's role in developing a sense of specifically British (yet quasi-autonomous) nationhood in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but also the way in which Bradman's own life, achievements, characteristics and beliefs came to be incorporated into a quite Australian story, even though Bradman himself was 'never quite typical'. He is a sportsman who incorporates—and to a certain limited extent transcends—two distinct strands of Australian history: the boy from Bowral, and the loyal servant of the King.

But when we try, like this, to explain why Bradman has become ensconced in myth, we have always to come back to the fact that he was the finest cricketer who ever lived. His batting average so far surpasses that of all others that Peter Roebuck, celebrated cricket writer, was right to remark after Bradman's death that not since Shakespeare has one individual so outshone all contemporaries. If you average 99.94 runs every time you walk out to bat then you could be Jack the Ripper and still be incorporated into a nation's psyche—however ambivalently. Hutchins acknowledges Bradman's statistical prowess in his first chapter, though a little grudgingly. You get the feeling that he'd prefer it if Bradman's achievements had been not much more than average, thus providing further proof that Bradmania is no more than the creation of an Anglo-Protestant elite conjoined with a posse of marketing executives.

WHICH IS FINE as far as it goes: it is important, and salutary, to have a sceptical analysis of the particular stories and cultural configurations produced by one man's sporting ability and personal character. But it is a pity when there is no room in the analysis for the mythic aspect of sport, where spectators identify so vividly with individuals and teams, and not because the spectators are dupes of dominant institutions, texts and powerful people. A myth inspires passionate identification with its 'truth' for deep reasons. A myth, wrote Mircea Eliade, is a 'true story' because it is 'sacred, exemplary and significant'. Sport is living myth in that it is a human drama continually enacted, revealing for participants—and spectators *are* participants—something authentic about themselves and their place in the world. It is this sort of thing that Manning Clark probably had in mind when he pointed out that most Australian men experienced their moments of spiritual epiphany while watching sport.

In Don Bradman's case his mythic aspect was perhaps best put by singer and songwriter Paul Kelly, whose lyrics announce that 'He was something like a tide, he could take on any side', that 'They always came for Bradman 'cause fortune used to hide in the palm of his hand.' And yet the story of this figure of quite elemental power is also 'the story of a man'. This is more than simple false consciousness, and it too can be caught in the net of sociological inquiry. Why do people react so strongly when watching other people dressed up in funny clothes, chasing, throwing and whacking a ball around? Those questions belong here too. ■

Alex McDermott is completing a PhD at La Trobe University, and is the editor of *The Jerilderie Letter* (Text publishing).

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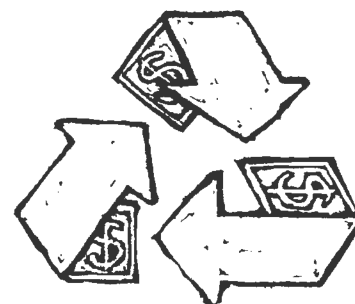

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FLASH IN THE PAN

Screen Greene

The Quiet American, dir. Phillip Noyce. Now that it has secured release in the United States one can begin to think critically instead of politically about Phillip Noyce's translation of Graham Greene's famous 1955 novel. No more alternating anxiety and indignation that a fine film might sink because of distributors' blue funk—or worse. Not that the politics will go away. Greene's caustic account of love, treachery and high-intentioned CIA terrorism in mid-20th century Saigon was shocking when it was published, and it remains so. Little wonder that American audiences couldn't stomach the film in its try-out screenings after September 11th.

At the heart of *The Quiet American* is a scene of sudden, ferocious carnage. Greene tells it in myopic detail. Noyce, wisely, does the same. The camera catches fragments, shards of the moment that lodge in memory, like shrapnel. And despite all that we know now about horror, what happens remains in some way unassimilable. That is Noyce's extraordinary achievement. He doesn't sate the imagination: he sharpens it. And we reel.

Noyce is a veteran director of action movies (*Patriot Games*, etc.) and knows every special-effects trick in the deck. But here he distils horror by showing it in slow passage through the ageing, reptilian contours of Michael Caine's face. Caine (above, with Do Thi Hai Yen) plays Greene's English journalist, Fowler—routinely sardonic, curious, but too long-standing an ex-pat to be ambitious, or even surprised. Then suddenly, the rind is peeled off the man's face and mind.

Caine's performance is subtly stellar, but not upstaging in a film full of angular and beguiling acting. Brendan Fraser, as the quiet Alden Pyle, is both bumble-footed and ominous—culpable innocence more frightening than anything Machiavelli could manage. Fowler and Pyle share a compromised passion for the beautiful Phuong, played with dignified allure and just enough fatalist pragmatism by Do Thi Hai Yen. Graham Greene would, I think, have owned them all. **—Morag Fraser**

Frog principles

Tadpole, dir. Gary Winick. The eponymous Tadpole, otherwise known as Oscar Grubman (played by newcomer Aaron Sanford), is a precocious 15-year-old who lives on the Upper East Side, speaks French, quotes Voltaire and doesn't like girls his own age. In short, he's a bit of a pill—like a lot of teenagers.

He wouldn't be very interesting at all except he harbours a grand passion: Tadpole is in love with his forty-year-old stepmother, Eve (Sigourney Weaver). On the night he decides to declare his heart, however, our Lothario-in-waiting wavers, gets drunk, and almost by accident goes to bed with Eve's best friend, instead—the gorgeous and sexually pragmatic Diane (Bebe Neuwirth).

But Oscar is no ordinary boy. Putting honourable intention above hormonal impulse he shuns the prospect of regular sex and continues to pine for the impossible. Hard to believe, but that's the plot.

To its credit, *Tadpole* isn't simply a coming-of-age comedy; it's just as much about the weariness and compromises of middle age. Oscar is attractive to the older women in the film because of his vitality and naivety; as the film-makers make clear, he's a conduit to types of happiness and sadness that they know they'll never experience again.

Unfortunately, though Winick's film aims for charm, it all too often delivers preciousness. If the maestro of New York romantic comedy hadn't become so lightweight himself in recent years, you might damn *Tadpole* as Woody Allen Lite, but at just 78 minutes, the film is too short to really overstay its welcome and the performances are uniformly excellent.

Tadpole also throws up some interesting questions about the digicam aesthetic of American 'indie films'. What is the point of them? Cheap and easy to shoot, they get made because they can get made—an achievement in itself, I suppose—but they look terrible up on the big screen. Television's *The Sopranos*, for example, is better filmed, just as well acted, and ultimately not as ephemeral.

—Brett Evans

Pottering about

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, dir. Chris Columbus. When I heard that Spielberg had wanted to collapse the first three Potter books into one film, set the plot in the US, and cast Haley Joel Osment as Harry, I was relieved that Columbus' first effort (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*) had been a tad on the homage-ish side. The sequels were bound

to be better, I reasoned: the books tended to deepen as the characters matured. There was reason to be optimistic about this sequel. The first film's rather subdued acting could be excused by the fact that it had had to set the scene, give the background to the few stylites and anchorites who'd never heard of the stories. So many characters had to be introduced and it had to contend with knowledgeable fans and fervent demand for it to be faithful. Columbus' team of art directors succeeded wonderfully with the look of it, making it a delight to watch. The acting was a worry, though. How on earth did Columbus manage so to tone down the likes of Robbie Coltrane, Julie Walters and Maggie Smith? Some performances survived the numbing touch of his direction: Alan Rickman as Snape, Rupert Grint as Ron Weasley and Tom Felton playing bad lad Draco Malfoy were the only ones who still had a bit of life in them.

Now in the second episode, the special effects are still fine (although the basilisk looks all wrong—more like a conger eel with a Jurassic Park head). But the acting has descended to wooden, even leaden (especially when Columbus, time and time again, gets clunky reaction shots from the children: 'Look scared.' 'Look pleased.' 'Look surprised.'). Only Kenneth Branagh survives the numbing-down; he is perfect as the charlatan Gilderoy Lockhart, though I suspect even he was told to hold back. The exception to this enforced restraint is poor Rupert Grint, who, with a comical Mickey-Rooneyish face, is forced to grimace and mug endlessly.

The next episode will be directed by Alfonso Cuarón, a bold choice. Perhaps he will allow the actors a little more expression, but who will he choose to do Dumbledore now that Richard Harris is dead? The children's bet is on Ian McKellen, who does a great Gandalf. In fact, it would be a good thing if the next Harry Potter director took some hints from Peter Jackson on how to adapt a book with fidelity and divine fire. **—Juliette Hughes**

Body-wise

Lovely & Amazing, dir. Nicole Holofcener. December is the month of critic-proof blockbusters, films for kids reviewed by adults, and early Christmas turkeys which are leftovers from a distributor's too-hard basket. *Lovely & Amazing* is an exception. In a neatly honed 90 minutes it has more impact, more memorable scenes and more sheer class than any of the lumbering two-and-a-half-hour-plus epics now about. Although billed as a comedy, there is at times a fine line between a laugh and a lump in the throat.

Jane (Brenda Blethyn) and her three daughters all ooze personal insecurity. Jane, loving, maternal and quite daffy, thinks that the only path to self-respect is through liposuction of ten kilos of fat from around her middle. To her mind, the very prospect of this reduction will make her attractive to the doctor who is doing the job.

Michelle (Catherine Keener, who was wonderful in *Being John Malkovich*) can't sell her artistic endeavours, knows that her husband is cheating on her, and, approaching middle age, is flattered by the attention of an under-age youth with whom she works. Elizabeth (Emily Mortimer) is a struggling actress/model who is her own body's greatest critic and thinks that lack of sex appeal is the reason for her lack of personal and professional success. The youngest sister, Annie (Raven Goodwin), an adopted eight-year-old African-American, is overweight and turns to McDonald's for comfort.

This mishmash of insecurities results in some hilarious scenes, while other moments make you squirm in your seat. The film is dominated by the strength of the character development and, despite my irritation with all the characters at one time or another, they stand up to the ultimate test: I cared about them.

I won't forget one scene in which Elizabeth invites her sleazebag actor-lover to inspect and criticise her naked body. She stands before the camera nude and vulnerable and unprotestingly accepts his comments, as the camera coldly probes what she perceives to be her imperfections. It is a brave scene which she carries off with delicate, childlike naivety. One day Emily Mortimer will be very famous indeed.

Despite the strength of the performances, the film might invite the criticism that ultimately the story goes nowhere. But the reality is that for 90 minutes you are utterly involved in the lives of all four characters and you leave the cinema feeling that you haven't had enough. Don't let *Lovely & Amazing* slip through without your seeing it. **—Gordon Lewis**

Ringing success

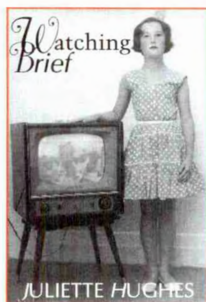
The Fellowship of the Ring, dir. Peter Jackson (extended version DVD/VHS release). We watched this as a family, hobbit-lovers all: nudging each other with excitement as it began. Hopes were high, because all we'd asked last year of the cinema version was more: more of Jackson's vision, so like the pictures in our heads when we read the book. And we were well satisfied: he gives more time in Lothlórien, more background in Hobbiton, a filling-out of dialogue, a pace that lets you observe more. The extended version is around four hours, giving an extra half-hour—which is all gain, because this could be one of the most beautiful films ever made.

Interiors ravish: Rivendell, seen autumnally, elegiacally, its beauty and melancholy evoking the end of the age of elves in Middle-earth; the cosy polished curves of Bilbo's hobbit hole, Bag End. And with all New Zealand to play with there are huge vistas that feel familiar yet have an essential strangeness. It starts you musing on other breathtakingly beautiful films: *The Big Country*, *Gone With the Wind*, *Dersu Uzala*. But none rivals Jackson's *Ring* in sheer scope and intensity, the almost Hitchcockian attention to detail (as when the ring of power falls to the floor, with a leaden thud that belies your expectation of a bright gold bounce).

And the actors are given range to explore the characters: Sean Bean's Boromir is a study in sheer tragedy; Cate Blanchett's Galadriel is utterly right in its depth of regal maturity; Orlando Bloom's Legolas is perfection. Elijah Wood's youthful Frodo is full of pain that never lets one forget the burden that is the ring; Ian McKellen's Gandalf is definitive; Viggo Mortensen's quiet, intense Aragorn is all the more powerful for its subtlety.

Beauty, power, fantastic imagining, wonderful realisation, morals firm yet utterly compassionate: I found all these in it. Jackson should take a few years off to teach other film-makers how to adapt a book properly. He was wise to release the shorter version as the first offering: he won a new following that will be led to the extended version and to the books. Now we are all counting sleeps to Boxing Day, when *The Two Towers* is released.

—Juliette Hughes



Distant voices

I WAS WATCHING a Missy Elliott video on MTV the other day, wondering why her face always reminds me of someone. Then I watched the Ovation Channel on the new Optus/Foxtel mélange. It was showing an amazing program called 'The Art of Singing, Golden Voices of the Century'. This was the second episode (the first one was lost to me in the quagmire plenitude of cable program guides), and it was about opera singers of the 1950s and '60s performing on television. When Leontyne Price came on as Aida, singing the most sublime 'O patria mia' I have ever heard, it struck me finally that there was the resemblance: high cheekbones, almond eyes, generous mouth, and a fine nostril flare. But how things have changed now. Dulled and battered by too much bad music played by the young 'uns (though I have to admit parts of it are good) I was surprised to learn that as late as 1963, Joan Sutherland did a live TV performance of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*. That was a rather unpatronising choice for the network-watching masses: certainly not as easygoing as the ubiquitous *Butterfly* or *Carmen*. I watched it all entranced, because these performances were, unlike Missy's, completely live—no Pro Tools or LogicAudio to tidy up any blunders. There she was, Joan before she was anything like a dame, a big black ship in full sail, rippling the runs and nailing almost every high note bang on without safety nets. As did Fritz Wunderlich, Jussi Björling, Giuseppe di Stephano and Victoria de los Angeles. Such riches demanded attention and consideration, and it needs to be said again: once there used to be live-to-air opera on TV.

But if Sutherland was La Stupenda, there should have been a like term for Leontyne Price that conveyed the velvet gold, the tensile strength and warm sweetness of her tone, the lavish technical ability that took each note and spun it into silk. Sheerest beauty then contrasted with the acclaimed but vocally very flawed *Tosca*, the Covent Garden production that had Maria Callas teamed with Tito Gobbi's matchless Scarpia. Seeing Callas doing 'Vissi d'arte' near the end of her voice's tether, despite her artistry and musicality, and seeing Price in the heyday of hers, made me wonder what it was about Callas that kept, and keeps, us all listening and watching. She was more than a singer who could act and look good: she had the genius of making one feel with her, not simply contemplate her. It was surely not for her voice's beauty: a strange, strident, catarrhal tone it was, as though you were hearing the arias on a different instrument from normal. A ram's horn rather than a French horn, perhaps, pressed and stretched and pushed by main force into the shapes that her excellent musicianship demanded, full of strange power and emotion but liable to waver, to howl, to screech and to crack if conditions were not optimal. And singers so rarely are in optimum condition: Feodor Chaliapin, the great Russian bass, said once that if he were to sing only when he was in perfect health and tone, he would sing maybe twice a year. The rest of the time is dependent on bedrock technique and whatever trickery is at one's disposal. But Callas was too proud to trick anyone. Her Violetta was stunning, but the documentary showed her in a bootlegged film from the Lisbon production of *Traviata* doing the last high note of the death scene with a chaotic wobble and squeak: she was determined to attack it pianissimo as the score demanded. Anyone else would have hit it square and then softened off, but she refused to spare herself or us. It reminded me of Janis Joplin hefting her ruined, cracked larynx through 'Mercedes Benz'. Think of that last, heavy-beating vibrato gone feral: Callas in Lisbon was like Joplin in LA.

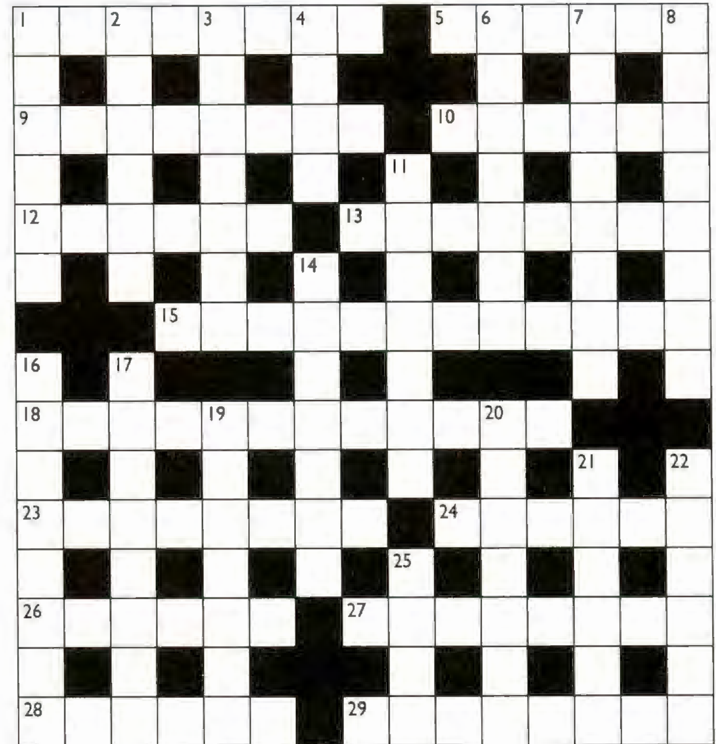
NOTHING COULD HAVE shown more clearly how damaged her voice was. My mother always says that any note that you can sing pianissimo, clearly and without wavering, is one that you can also sing fortissimo. It's a sign of good health, proper vocal technique and an undamaged set of vocal chords. Callas lost her soft notes along with other good things in her life: like that other gay icon, Judy Garland, performance displayed her raw bleeding spirit, the spirit that rode her frail flesh till it failed.

These days you can sing 'live' into a mike that sends your voice through a pitch-correction system: pop singers in stadiums use it all the time because most human-scale abilities are defeated by the demands of huge spaces and heavy amplification. If I've just described to you some of the best stuff I've seen during 2002 then it needs to be said how much it contrasts with so much else on offer, particularly in music. The first-mentioned Missy Elliott is a rap artist of considerable ability: you need perfect timing to be able to rap, even if the vocabulary is limited. Now that I have seen her face for what it is, a classical singer's template, I wonder how her voice would soar if she sang true to it. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 110, January–February 2003

Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM



ACROSS

1. Happily named cat, tail docked, goes to the metropolis, showing contentment. (8)
5. Put a stop to drinking this. (6)
9. Having authority, small in size, age about right. (2,6)
10. Can south-east London initially be described as showy but cheap? (6)
12. Make it difficult in the rear. (6)
13. I said 'Gone?' Distressed at the news, perhaps, I suffered greatly. (8)
15. Occasion for a continental celebration? (9,3)
18. Late on 29-across, counting from Christmas (as Shakespeare wrote)? (7,5)
23. Being on the way out, going round south gate, perhaps. (8)
24. Unusual relics I detached with this instrument. (6)
26, 8-down. Breaks in the routine of education—including 29-across. (6,8)
27. Two slide awkwardly across the water when the moon influences them. (3,5)
28. Edward, turning, embraces sibling briefly. Don't carry on! (6)
29. Possibly, any pipe heard initially would do to celebrate this day? Manifestly! (8)

DOWN

1. It can go up or down, in the air or on the stair! (6)
2. A nuclear accident—the queen was missing, thus creating a gap. (6)
3. Large estate in Bordeaux, perhaps. (7)
4. At first she got her swimming gear back to front. (4)
6. Greek letter dead against Tuscan wine. (7)
7. Were they picked on trial? Lateral thinking by Border. (4,4)
8. See 26-across.
11. A GI can't possibly be related on the male side. (7)
14. Mad keen to scratch? (7)
16. Emphasised the importance of having some senior journalists around the lock. (8)
17. Switches off the electricity with great pleasure? (8)
19. In pronouncing somehow a soft double 'u', his statement appeared inanely foolish. (7)
20. Federal senator at the summit. (4,3)
21. Current publicity backing first class area of Canada. (6)
22. The leading champion, somewhat out of practice, became quite bad-tempered. (7)
25. Jointly-owned enterprise can become, if modified, a place of confinement. (2-2)

Solution to Crossword no. 109, December 2002

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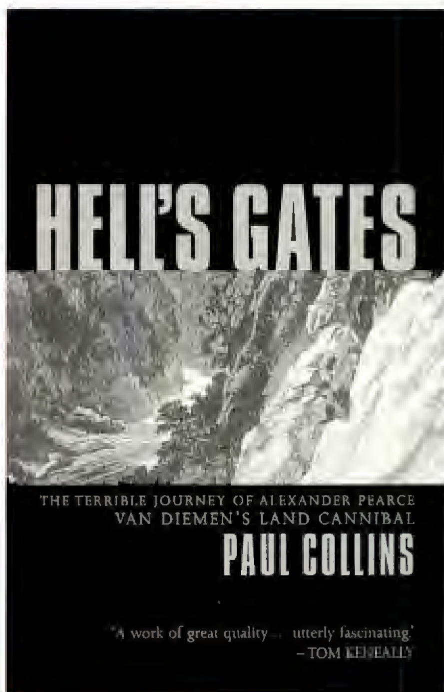


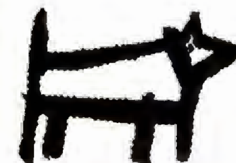
Hell's Gates

by Paul Collins

Hell's Gates tells the story of Alexander Pearce, transported from Ireland to Tasmania in 1819 for stealing six pairs of shoes. Pearce escaped from Sarah Island prison in Macquarie Harbour and survived a nine-week trek into the heart of Tasmania's south-west wilderness by eating his fellow escapees. He was convicted of murder and sentenced not just to be hanged, but to have his body dissected—a rare humiliation reserved for the worst murderers. It was, as Collins writes, a case of science cannibalising the cannibal.

Paul Collins is a broadcaster, theologian and historian. He is the author of six books, including the controversial *Papal Power*. *Hell's Gates* examines the relationship between the hell on earth that was 19th-century Van Diemen's land, and the depths to which Pearce and his fellow escapees descended.

Thanks to Hardie Grant Books, *Eureka Street* has 10 copies of *Hell's Gates* to give away. Just put your name and address on the back of an envelope and send to: Eureka Street January–February 2003 Book Offer, PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121.



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