

EUREKA STREET

Vol. 2 No 2 March 1992

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On the Spin



Women and theology: the feminist agenda

European synod: the last curtain

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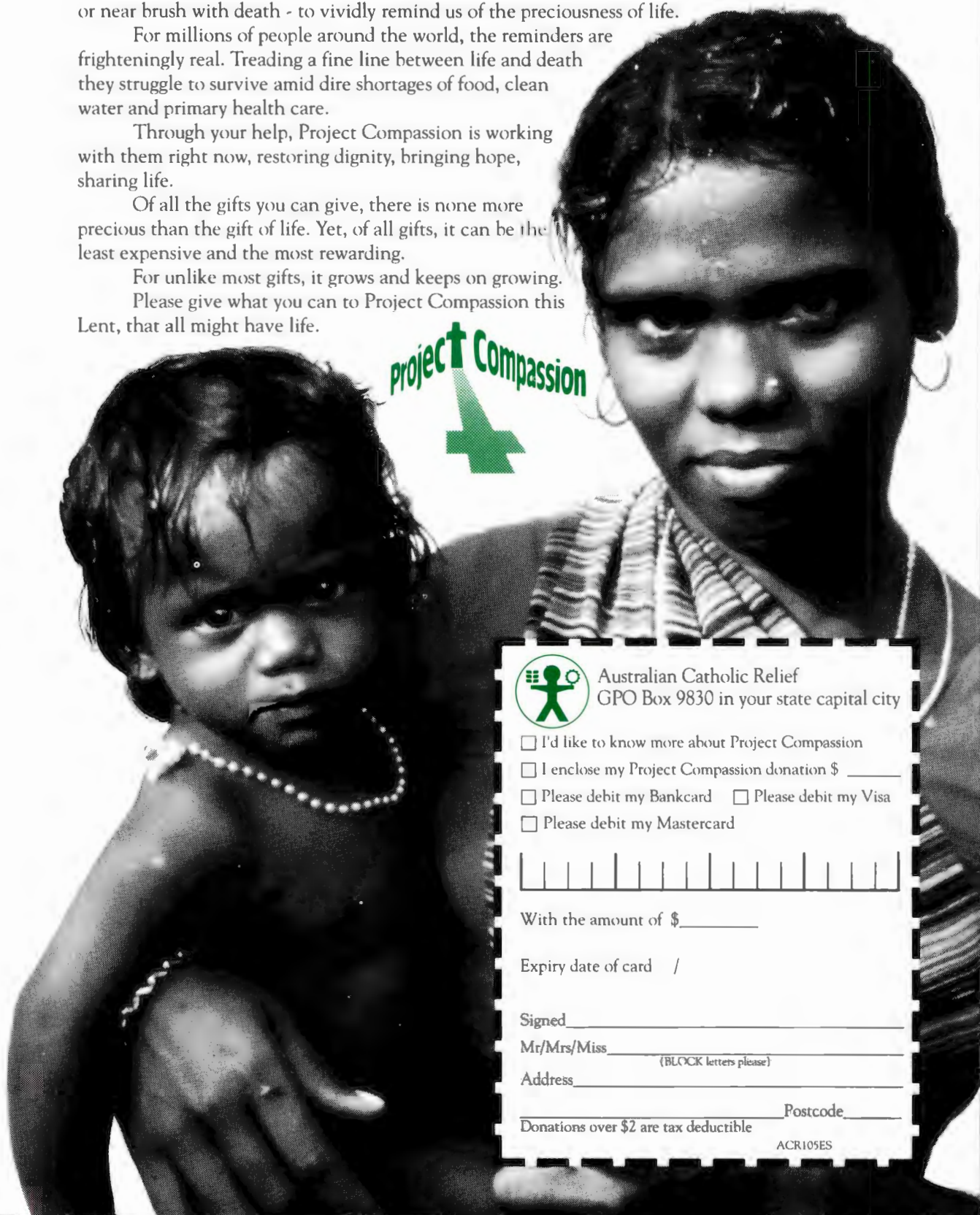
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EUREKA STREET

Volume 2 Number 2
March 1992

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

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The wry season

THERE'S NO DENYING that Lent, particularly, is a season of Christian work. Exhortations to repentance abound in the liturgy: 'Turn to me and I will turn to you, says the Lord of hosts' (Zech. 1:3). A formidable contract! Some may respond with zest, as to an invigorating challenge; others, more of us I suspect, feel some element of misgiving about a sober experience of weakness advancing to confront them.

In a long tradition of Catholic spirituality, from Augustine through Aquinas and Trent, that summons of God through Zechariah. 'Turn to me', has been linked with another text which, significantly, is in the form of a prayer; 'Turn us to yourself, O Lord, and we shall return (Lam. 5:21). Lenten ascesis has to be located in the ambit of these two factors; not just in the stillness of a circle centred upon the command of God, but with the dynamism of an ellipse with its dual centres of divine command and human prayer.

In the call to obedience God assures us of the reality and the value of our deeds—'Whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water ...' (Mt. 10:42): but in giving the cup we need to know the stream from which we ourselves must draw to be a faithful giver—' "Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water". Now this Jesus said about the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive.' (Jn 7:38f).

The Greek poet George Seferis, having passed through periods of great doubt concerning the value of his works, fully aware that he was living in a time when a poet—even a Nobel laureate—could expect oblivion rather than fame, distilled from that awareness a profound conviction, even what he called a dedication: 'It is not *my* work that interests me above all else; it is *work*, without a personal pronoun, that must live, even if our personal contributions are consumed in it.' (*Diary*, Wed. 15 March 1950).

We can hardly imagine anyone more identified with his work than a creative artist. Seferis the poet, a true 'maker', shapes words to give form to his dearest perceptions and values, and yet here he is, peaceful in the recognition that there is something much greater going ahead, the making of his whole community, which no person can claim to possess. Years of serious work taught him to keep his seriousness for something other than himself.

It's a good lesson for the work of Lenten penance, and all the more difficult to learn inasmuch as this latter is not just the shaping of a verbal image of one's life, but of life itself. And the best opportunity that most of us have for learning this lesson is to develop a benign sense of the ridiculous. Consider the forty days of penance. The forty days over, what, apart from the forty days, has been completed? Am I now a man of prayer? Has the urge for alcohol, chocolate, tobacco, TV, etc, been quelled? Are the hungry fed and the homeless sheltered?

Hopefully, each of these, somewhat. But what is certain is that on the fortieth day I will still need to be praying with mind, heart and body for the coming of



Study for Maria

RUSSELL DRYSDALE

the Kingdom. There could not be a more effective way of impressing upon us the limitation and the poverty, the poignant littleness of our self-chosen spiritual tasks. Sometimes the most effectively mortifying dimension of a penitential work 'successfully' accomplished is the question it generates of itself—so what? It can all leave us feeling a little foolish, inclined to leave the ascetic contest to the few heroes and to the earnest children who are as yet so sweetly innocent of their ineffectualness.

In all this it is only discouragement, which is implicitly a disappointment in ourselves, that is wrong. As St Teresa says, genially and firmly, who do you think you are anyway? All the ascetic heroes themselves have been fools, happily, for Christ, not just for extravagance

of penance but, most importantly, in taking themselves and their best of works with profound unseriousness.

And yet there is a work which has been completed, a human mind, heart and body made utterly right, beyond all conceiving. Moreover, it is for us, ours for the accepting, and indeed it is this 'living work', in the words of Seferis, which gives sense to our little labours upon ourselves. To say that Lent ends with Easter means that its goal is the Resurrection. Lenten discipline is the expression of hope in new life.

On Easter Sunday, 1945, Seferis sat alone in his room in Athens, grieving over the city's tragic political confusion and bitter civil strife. He could hear the sound of drinkers in the bar nearby. No doubt, even fresh at the end of Lent, 1945, they still had their share of common indulgences and evasions, and yet: 'In the taverna they are singing *Christos anesti*, Christ is risen—all thirsting for that Resurrection'. (*Diary*)

'The work' that is larger than any of us but includes all of us is God's work, grafting our minds, hearts and bodies into Christ's. It keeps alive the hope in a poet's travail, in a drinker's song and in yet another Lent. ■

Ross Collings OCD is prior of the Discalced Carmelite house of studies, Box Hill, Victoria, and lectures in systematic theology at Yarra Theological Union, Box Hill.

Long views for lean times

THE IRISH HAD, according to the writer Sean O'Faolain, a two-bob-each way phrase for their politicians. They used to call them 'the men in charge of Change'. It was a nice way of conveying exactly what they wanted from those elected—leadership, someone in charge—and what they most feared but nonetheless expected from their politicians—'Change'.

We are not very different. Australians are demanding leadership, stability *and* change from their politicians—men and women. But they are also in a mood, with some cause, to shoot any politician, federal or state, Labor or Liberal, who moves—the more so if the movement is towards an election. In such a charged atmosphere it is not easy to take the long view. We are more likely to see—in fact, *are* seeing—reactive politics and successful lobbying from those with the wherewithal or the muscle. Not that there isn't a need for symptomatic relief. There are 780,000 people officially registered as jobless, many others have dropped out of the count and school leavers will swell the numbers even further when they come into the official reckoning next month. So a benign, Keynesian about-face is welcome on Paul Keating; it is understandable that the immediate priority should be action.

Nonetheless this is a crucial time for maintaining the long view. It is also a time of extraordinary fluidity and hence of opportunity. But we need hard thought and inventive planning for this country of ours, which has one foot still in the industrial 19th century and another pointed towards the problematical international capitalism of the 21st century. The old ideologies no longer explain the way Australia should structure its economy, its agriculture and industry, nor the direction to be taken by its culture.

The categories of right, left, radical, conservative no longer help in the analysis of political trends. The most radical proposals for social change are coming from the so-called conservative forces. Instance Mr Hewson's *Fightback* program with its implications for wholesale change in Australian industrial relations. Nor is it any longer safe to pigeonhole public commentators. Alignments have altered, distinctions have blurred: witness B.A. Santamaria's stringent criticism of Liberal proposals to 'revamp the labour market'.

It is a lean time, but Lent has always been an invigorating season. We should take advantage of it. ■

—Morag Fraser, editor

From the publisher

WE'RE A YEAR OLD: *Eureka Street* celebrates a full year of issues with this March edition. While not exactly a bouncing baby, the enterprise shows all the signs of health and prospering that one would hope for in new life: a consistently high quality of thought and style in the writing and design of editions; a growing circle of good writers; appreciation from readers and commentators; an increasing number of subscriptions.

We've learnt from our mistakes, too—the stories that we missed and the ideas that didn't work out. We don't have enough women writers. The most consistent criticism that we have received is that at times we are too demanding of our readers. Point taken. But I'm pleased that the criticism is not the reverse, dismissing *Eureka Street* as lightweight and a disappointment.

A magazine has to pay its bills to stay alive. *Eureka Street* is no exception. But this magazine is not just one more title in the stable of Consolidated Press or News Corporation. It is distinctive in its origins, and in the tradition of faith, thought and ethical focus from which it emerges. It will thrive if the people in and around it remain a broad and invigorating group.

Eureka Street aims to be part of a conversation about what is most significant to Australians, fashioning ideas, attitudes, a language. And the magazine is a springboard to a much wider project that we plan to build in the coming years, beginning with a lecture series and the joint sponsorship of conferences.

We'll keep you posted. ■

—Michael Kelly SJ

GUEST OPINION

JOANN WOLSKI CONN

The challenge of feminist theology

THE GOAL OF FEMINIST THEOLOGY is to put itself out of business. Like evangelism, feminism aims to become unnecessary. This will be a reality when theology is as inclusive of women's experience, in all its diversity, as it is of men's. Since feminism is understood in different ways, grasping the challenge of feminist theology means that our first question must be foundational: Which feminism? The second question concerns the challenge feminism presents to theology as a vital discipline: What does feminist theology want? The third question is raised for feminist theologians and everyone who is open to our project: How can we best interpret our experience of the loss of meaning?

Which feminism?

In broadest outline, feminism is both a coordinated set of ideas and a practical plan of action that is rooted in women's critical awareness of how a culture, controlled in meaning and action by men for their own perceived advantage, oppresses women and dehumanises men. That is, feminism is a critical *evaluation* of the experienced world.

The case for feminism is usually made from one of two primary perspectives: relational or individualist. Individualists argue for the moral equality of men and women who share the same human nature and, therefore, deserve equal rights. Relational feminists affirm equality, yet stress 'the difference difference makes.' That is, they respect the unique socialisation our culture gives women and men, and insist that society value women's special contribution with the same status and rewards it confers on men for their contribution. They are wary of claims for the 'complementarity' of women and men because, most often, that term refers to women 'completing' men by serving men's interest.

Both individual and relational feminism have strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, asking 'which feminism?' does not mean choosing only one. Rather, it asks us to notice the biases and strengths of whatever type of feminism informs any theological position. For example, relational values sometimes romanticise women's qualities, and individual values can exaggerate autonomy. Authentic feminism, I believe, promotes autonomy for the sake of genuine relationship.

The theological project

When feminists desire to identify themselves as Christian and Catholic, they face a religious context that relates to them in contradictory and conflicting ways. While affirming that women are baptised into Christ as fully as men are, church teaching and practice also

ignore, demean and even oppress women. It is this experience of a patriarchal religious world that feminist theologians evaluate. What feminist theology wants is a complete transformation of theology from within.

How will this happen? It has already begun in the feminist theological project that can be schematised in six logical steps and tasks.

Step one is to notice and demonstrate the fact that women have been ignored in the field. By now, this is obvious to most scholars.

Step two. A theologian must show that the sources are characterised by much hostility, diminishment, frivolity or romantic mystification.

Step three. Scholars must search out and write about women overlooked in scholarship. For example, research on discernment has been almost synonymous, for many, with Ignatius Loyola. Now, feminist scholarship reveals that discernment is richly developed in Catherine of Siena.

Step four is to revise the reading of old texts by asking new questions, questions that cause the texts to lose their power to exclude or restrict women. For example, recent scholarship of Teresa of Avila's prose style reveals that what male commentary had admired as 'feminine charm'—self-deprecation and irony—might better be understood as deliberate rhetorical strategies of empowerment.

OUR MOST FUNDAMENTAL problematic text, of course, is Scripture. As one leading American Catholic biblical scholar, Sandra Schneiders, frames the question: 'How can Scripture, once its androcentric, patriarchal and misogynist content has been identified, function normatively for Christians, especially women?' New questions must surely be raised, and, to quote Schneiders again: 'Our tradition suggests that nothing, no matter how seemingly sacrosanct, is beyond question. Certainly the decision that the Mosaic law need not be imposed on Gentile converts will never be surpassed in radicality. Ordaining women priests would be far less innovative.'

These new questions involve the process of entering the text 'not as an answer to our question, but as a guide for working out our own answers. How did the early Christians struggle with such issues as Mosaic observance [or] church order? Maybe what we need to learn from the text is not what we are to do but how we are to go about deciding what to do.'

Step five is the methodological challenge that forces theology to redefine borders, goals and consequences. For example, we previously assumed Scripture was a sacred border or norm, and now we see that that norm itself must be challenged. Another example would be the definition of theology as faith seeking understanding. Given theology's pervasive male-centredness, must it not also become faith seeking purification and conversion?

Step six. The final task is to work towards an integrated discipline that is not reduced by its prejudices

against women, ethnic groups, other religions or anything else, but represents humanity in all its messy diversity. Transformed theology will include what has been ignored or neglected. It will reappropriate what has been alienated or demeaned. This goal seems a long way off, so my last challenge is addressed to myself as a Catholic feminist theologian.

Spiritual darkness and loss of meaning

We all experience the struggle, the frustration and the temptation to quit when we grasp the magnitude of the project of transforming theology. But even more, in letting go of past certitudes in order to move into an unknown theological future, we also experience a profound loss of meaning. We wonder: What does this mean? How can we best interpret this experience? Can we authentically name it a dark night of the spirit as described by John of the Cross?

John, and all great teachers of the spiritual life, try to help us find new meaning when our convictions about faith no longer hold. When the meaning of our *selves* as Catholic theologians seems totally inadequate and, therefore, one's very self is questioned or threatened, might

we appropriately contemplate his advice to those who have devoted themselves to the life of faith? 'These proficients are still very lowly ... because the gold of the spirit is not purified and illumined ... Wishing to ... clothe them with the new ... God leaves the intellect in darkness, the will in ... anguish, by depriving the soul of the feeling and satisfaction it previously obtained from spiritual blessings.' Surely a 'memory in emptiness' fits the experience of one whose memory of traditional Christology and Christian anthropology brings emptiness at the realisation of their profound inadequacy or brings pain at their restrictions on women. ■

—America magazine

Joann Wolski Conn recently completed a term on the board of directors of the Catholic Theological Society of America.

The ordination of women

The battle fought out in a Sydney courtroom has not put a damper on the quest for the ordination of women in the Anglican Church. The next round will be fought in the Anglican General Synod, in July. In our April issue, **Alan Gill**, former religious affairs writer for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, ponders the likely outcome of the Synod vote and raises the question: Is a split inevitable?





The odd couple



Bob Hawke and Robert Menzies have more in common than just geography.

ON A RECENT ROAD TRIP from Melbourne to Adelaide I encountered, not far from the South Australian border, the road to Jeparit. A short time later, over the border, I came across Bordertown. It struck me as curious that Australia's two longest-serving prime ministers could be born outside the capital cities yet, in a continent of Australia's size, relatively close to each other: Robert Menzies in Jeparit and Bob Hawke in Bordertown. Comparisons between Hawke and Menzies are irresistible, and they go beyond mere curiosity.

The most obvious similarity is length of office, and there is a danger that mere longevity can be regarded as the main achievement. Most leaders would wish to avoid such a judgment of history, and Menzies struggled to do so. In his own writings after retirement, Menzies identified two main achievements: the stability of the Liberal-Country Party coalition and the strength of the Australia-United States alliance.

The former can be viewed as an essentially political achievement although, as the Tasmanian election demonstrated, stability of government is deemed worth having. Whether the American alliance, as interpreted by Menzies and his successors, qualifies as an achievement is even more dubious, especially among those who believe that the Evatt-Whitlam view of Australia's international role is more appropriate for an independent state than the subservience practised by Australian conservative governments.

There is more agreement about Menzies' achievements with regard to the development of Canberra and

the fostering of tertiary education. These are substantial contributions for which he deserves credit. Although Menzies' policies did not include free tertiary education for all, there was a growth in spending on tertiary education and a system of scholarships that seems generous when compared with the HECS regime, let alone the full-fee system towards which we seem to be heading.

Menzies was a parliamentarian. He purported, excessively perhaps, to revere Parliament as part of the British inheritance and he dominated the House of Representatives. But Menzies governed in an age when television had yet to debase politics, and when mastery of the House was more important. His television appearances were effective enough but, by today's standards, pompous and patronising. Journalists stood respectfully when he entered a news conference and it is difficult to imagine him submitting to the indignity of the gutterstop interview that is now the norm. Nor would he have taken kindly to the detailed probings of today's political journalists. It may have been expressed more lucidly, but Menzies was a master of the 'Don't you worry about that' style of response long before the Bjelke era.

HAWKE WAS NO PARLIAMENTARIAN. He came to Parliament late in his career, never sat in the House of Representatives as Opposition Leader, and found that the hectoring style that had served him well in the union movement was less suited to the theatre of the

House. He was fortunate not to face a quality parliamentarian as Liberal leader, or his demise may have been hastened by the inadequacy of his performance in the House. Hawke's appeal was never through Parliament, nor much through his party, either. It was direct to the people, as that phrase is understood in the television age. It is paradoxical that communication via the distorting lens of television, with its emphasis on the glib and superficial, should be seen as any sort of democratic advance. But it must be conceded that Hawke knew the medium, played it well and used it as a vehicle for his advance to, and survival in, the prime ministership.

IT IS AMUSING that Hawke was labelled a populist—mostly by the same sort of illiterates who misuse 'charisma'. 'Populist' is not a synonym for 'popular' and many non-populists—Menziez, for example—can still be popular. One can see why the intellectually lazy would regard Hawke as a populist: his claim to enjoy the company of ordinary people, his love of the adulation of a crowd and his affection for sport, this last quality being one he shared with Menziez. The substance of populism involves more, however, than pressing the flesh. It entails a distrust of experts and a contempt for theories removed from experience, and sees the solution to the polity's ills in the wisdom of the ordinary people—which is why populism is often found on the edge of agrarian politics. Bureaucrats and intellectuals are out, John Citizen rules, OK? An obvious danger of populism is that it may drift into bigotry, racism, intolerance and general illiberality.

By this more rigorous definition of the term, Hawke was anything but a populist. It is difficult to imagine a government more dominated by experts and theorists, and more detached from the experiences of ordinary citizens, than Hawke's. Ordinary people do not believe that they 'have to have' recessions. A government so influenced by new-right, free-market dogma, by nostrums peddled by cossetted, narrowly-trained economists, is a far cry from populism. Of course, in the technocratic late 20th century, it is silly to pretend that governments are not dominated by experts or that the wisdom of the people plays any role except at election time. That being so, inaccurate use of the label 'populist' should be abandoned. By my count only Jack Lang, and maybe Joh Bjelke-Petersen and Henry Bolte, qualify as authentic 20th century Australian populists.

The patrician Menziez never claimed to be a populist. As a conservative, he had little difficulty with the philosophy that a leader should lead, but preferably in a way that preserved the existing order through meeting material needs. But, although no populist, Menziez had a healthy disrespect for grand theories. He had little time for dogma, whether of the left—naturally enough—or the far right. Menziez' backbench always included a ginger group clamouring for more strongly rightwing policies, domestic and foreign. He ignored them. The test of a theory was its practicality—Treasury take

note—and failed economic theories were quickly abandoned. This clearly happened after the 1961 credit squeeze, when unemployment reached the then politically near-fatal figure of 100,000. Menziez was pragmatic and flexible, and although this did not endear him to the ideologues, he saw that as a virtue, not a vice.

Perhaps most contention now centres on Menziez' economic record, with free-market devotees—loudly in the ALP, more softly in the Liberal Party—asserting that this was a period of laziness, over-protectionism and assorted other vices that offend new right dogma. These criticisms should be taken with a grain of salt. It can be argued that the test of an economic record should be the well-being of the people, not adherence to an economic theory. By this standard, Menziez may not deserve the opprobrium lately heaped on him. But then, ordinary citizens do not write for the financial pages and they do not run the Treasury.

In Menziez' time, economic life was simpler. One suspects, however, that given his scepticism about theory and his support for the mixed economy, Menziez may have noted that the successful national economies of today are those with a good dose of government intervention. Such a commonsense view never seemed to attract much support within the Hawke government. It may be fair to conclude that, although Hawke expressed his disdain for dogma—especially the dogma of the left—he was, in practice, fatally seduced by the dogma of the right.

MENZIEZ VIRTUALLY FOUNDED the Liberal Party, and so had little historical baggage as he led it to victory after victory. By Australian rightwing standards, he democratised political practice, ridding the major conservative party of its overt dependence on Melbourne financial groups and introducing a branch structure that offered at least a token role for middle-class political activists. It became the most viable of Australia's main non-Labor parties, surviving loss of office as neither of its predecessors had.

Hawke, in contrast, started from a party with a more democratic history and yet rendered the ALP less internally democratic than at any time in its history. Branch numbers are at an all-time low and party conferences have become showpieces, with decisions made beforehand and votes locked in. That is not to say the Liberals are now more internally democratic than Labor—that would be nonsense. Conservatives cannot make credible claims to internal democracy but labour

Hawke was anything but a populist. It is difficult to imagine a government more dominated by experts and theorists, and more detached from the experiences of ordinary citizens, than Hawke's. Ordinary people do not believe that they 'have to have' recessions.

parties must, and therein lies the ALP's problem as it nears what will probably be a period of opposition. The greatest danger lies in succumbing to a belief that party democracy is a luxury, and should be put 'on hold' when seeking to regain government. This view already has many adherents, and warrants debate within the party and the wider community.

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, Hawke's four victories have rid the ALP of its reputation as an election loser. One should not underestimate the importance of this for Labor's collective psychology as it operates within the Australian party system.

In a characteristically robust article in *The Sunday Age* (14 January 1992), Fred Hollows asserted: 'The role of the national government in a capitalist country is to make capitalism work well for that country.' By this test, which I believe is a fair one, my suspicion is that Menzies qualifies for a pass grade. As for Hawke, I'm not so sure. ■

Paul Rodan has lectured in politics at a number of tertiary institutions. He is now an administrator at Monash University.

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Keating cock-a-hoop

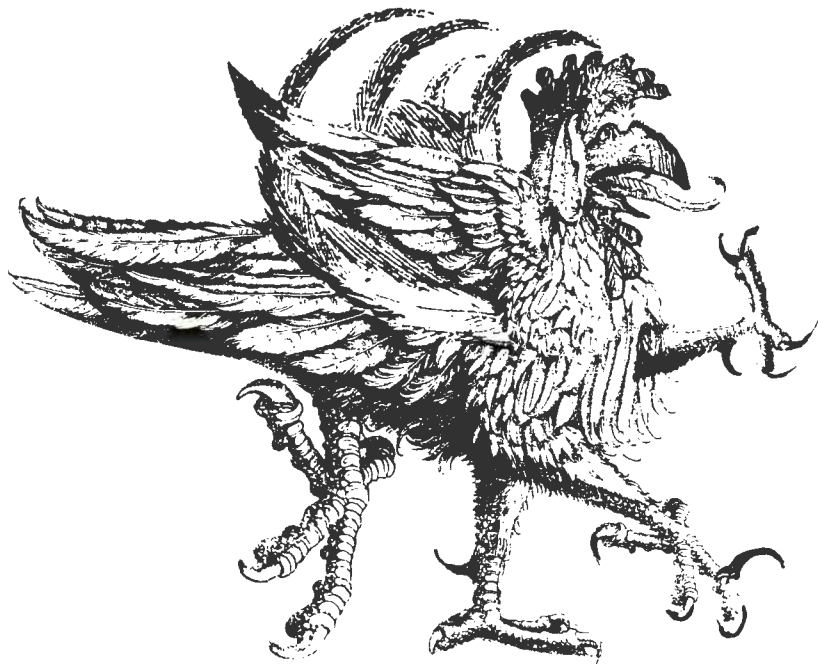
BOB HAWKE HAD TO GO, according to the Labor Party's powerbrokers, because he had lost 'it'. Presumably, Paul Keating replaced him because he possessed 'it'. Initially, 'it' appears to be an elusive, mysterious power to inspire the party and, it is hoped, the electorate. 'It' is a fleeting visitor and may depart from its host unawares; nor can 'it' be regained by good works, industry or force of will. The 'it' of leadership seems to be irrational, unpredictable and potent.

After reading accounts of the ALP leadership tussles during the last six months of 1991, however, it is not hard to guess what 'it' really is. It is not intellectual sparkle, homespun shrewdness or political nous. The 'it' of Labor leadership is that all-too-familiar masculine mystique, *machismo*. The powerbrokers, it seems, had readily concluded that unhappiness with Labor's performance was attributable not to rational causes but to disappointment at a loss of virility in Canberra.

Hawke and Keating slugged it out publicly, with egos in full view, and the battle imagery used in the media is revealing. Keating was portrayed as the boy wonder who had won a seat in Parliament when most other 'boys' were still worrying about whether they needed to shave every day. The portrait was of a 'driven' and unashamedly ambitious Keating declaring, 'It's simple. I want his job.'

Such single-minded obsession is the stuff of election victories. Remember that Hawke had impressed the party faithful with a similar manly resolve when ousting Bill Hayden from the leadership. Hawke, too, had been born to be king. For the Labor Party, changing leaders is merely a recognition of the force of male destiny. When there is a clash of destinies, victory belongs to whoever is left at the end of the affray with teeth bared and weapon intact.

It was clear that Hawke's time was up when the media images of him started to dwell on his ageing. In 1983, Hawke's hair had 'the colour of stainless steel, not silver.' But by 1991 he was often described as looking



'haggard', 'tired', 'drained' and 'stooped'. What a contrast to the 'zeal' with which the Hawke who had 'it' bedazzled the electorate a decade ago.

Australian *machismo*, however, is less rigid than some overseas varieties. Our former Prime Minister was a sensitive bloke who cried a lot, but from a position of strength this was forgivable. His resolve in giving up the grog was not a sign of wimpishness but of strength of character. Keating of course, has his own style; with his Zegna suits and elegant presence he is a sophisticated reincarnation of the Australian 'lair'.

The new leader, like his predecessor, is charged with the task of seducing the electorate. The fact that Keating is horrendously unpopular, however, is no bar to ultimate success. After all, seduction is the art of persuading a weaker party to accept the inevitable.

The wives were not left out of the subtle shift in imagery. Hazel Hawke has come into her own as a matriarch—one of the 'strongest women I know', her husband tells us, adding that she has 'tackled tougher things than this'. Now she will look after the ageing lion. Anita Keating has been portrayed as the 'mysterious', stylish woman in her prime. She is, we are assured, a 'charming' and intelligent hostess who will provide the right support for the new Prime Minister. The many references to her former career as a flight attendant are often veiled references to her sex appeal. In Australia, female flight attendants have long been held to be mere symbols of feminine beauty and subservience.

THE WHOLE STORY HAS A CHIVALRIC QUALITY. The old chief had stayed on too long, breaking faith with his restless would-be successor. The young warrior was therefore justified in dethroning the old man and ascending to what was his by virtue of age and strength. The chief took his leave with dignity, at least initially, withdrawing to devote himself to his family and that other passion of the retired Australian male, sport. Oth-

er pursuits have been announced subsequently.

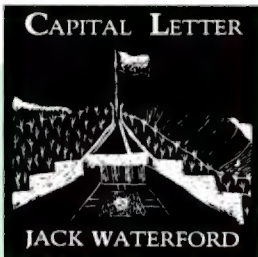
There is nothing wrong with myths and metaphors in modern political life; the trouble comes from the way in which these images shape political practice. Decisions, for example, need to have 'balls', so that immediate and decisive action is valued over more considered, gentler approaches. 'Toughness' is prized over sensitivity and empathy for others—was this really 'the recession we had to have'?

And there is the mistaken belief that government is effective only when likeminded young, virile, macho men are given free reign. John Dawkins no doubt will be able to trample on his opponents just as convincingly as Treasurer as he did when he was Education Minister.

YET RUTHLESS PURSUIT OF POLITICAL AMBITION IS NOT the only path to success. The Victorian Premier, Joan Kirner, refused to participate in the machinations to depose her predecessor, John Cain. Her reward for this loyalty was succession to the premiership with clean hands. In a hopeless political environment her non-combative style, although not turning the electorate round, has earned her its respect. In Western Australia, despite occasional resort to strong-arm tactics Carmen Lawrence has demonstrated a similar tenacity; it has won her grudging admiration within and outside the party.

Perhaps the Labor Party's biggest mistake in the Hawke-Keating years has been to confuse leadership style with coherent policy. The overwhelming attachment to a myth of macho power may be a fatal error, for Labor cannot afford to underestimate the electorate by parading before it primitive paradigms. 'It' is hardly a sophisticated solution to our complex social, economic and political problems. ■

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Inside the real world

BILLY McMAHON, THE LAST TREASURER to become Prime Minister, used to complain that his old business contacts in Sydney provided a more reliable intelligence service than the Treasury. The Canberra boffins, McMahon used to say, were too wedded to their economic models and statistics to notice what was happening in the real world.

When Paul Keating was Treasurer, he was fond of pooh-pooing those who claimed to be able to spot economic trends faster than his advisers. Remember how long it took Keating to realise that he and the Treasury had driven the country deeply into recession, and how scathing he was about the doomsayers until, finally, even the Treasury statistics proved them right?

From the Lodge, however, Keating has begun saying something similar to McMahon. As the Cabinet swung round the country with bureaucrats in tow, consulting unions, business leaders and others about the contents of last month's economic statement, Keating was staggered at how few of the captains of industry and commerce were known personally to the government's senior advisers, and how often they had to be introduced by ministers.

A similar noise comes from the Opposition Leader, John Hewson, whose *Fightback* document promises to relocate a division of the Treasury in Sydney, to bring it 'closer to the real world'. The promise has been derided by some commentators. The Treasury's reading of the economy was no worse than that of, say, the Reserve Bank, which is located in Sydney. Indeed, some would argue that the Treasury pays too much attention to Sydney financial markets, and too little to industry or the Commonwealth Employment Service queues. If the Treasury were to be relocated in the real world, the best place might be in Geelong or Wollongong.

There is a lot of nonsense talked about Canberra being full of third-generation public servants. A far higher proportion of Canberra's population was born outside it than is the case in any other major Australian city, and there is a continual turnover as public servants are transferred in and out. Further, the nature of centralised public administration requires a continuous watch on the provinces. If you want provincialism, go to Sydney or Melbourne.

These musings, and the mischievous thought that some future historian may find even more parallels between Paul Keating and Billy McMahon, are prompted by an array of mixed signals from government about the future of public administration.

On the one hand, there has just been a changing of the guard at the top level of permanent officials, though it is still hard to say what should be read into it. Mike Codd, head of the Prime Minister's Department under Bob Hawke, either fell or was pushed onto his sword

when Keating arrived. He has been replaced by Mike Keating, former head of the Department of Finance. Mike Keating, like Codd, was an architect of the new managerialism and the triumph of economic rationalism within the service—another mechanistic economist with limited capacity to inspire.

Yet, in the dying days of Codd and the early days of Keating, there are signs that the managers of the public service are anxious to widen the debate about what public servants are and should be. There has been, for example, a deliberate discussion of both general and specific ethical issues (Should public servants take part in frequent-flier schemes? Answer: No.) Discussion papers are emerging on accountability and other issues that were too often swept aside during the past decade.

On the other hand, the government, after a fierce debate with the senior bureaucracy is now going gung-ho into enterprise bargaining. The idea is that tomorrow's public servants will be on individual contracts, limited by time, setting goals and standards, with terms and conditions not necessarily comparable with those of any other public servant.

It is all very market-oriented, and not without risks. In the old days, public servants were chosen and promoted by merit—one of the great protections against too much Canberra chauvinism—belonged to a generalist stream for which outsiders classified jobs so that the rewards were comparable across departments, and had permanency and security in exchange for salaries below those in the private sector.

All of that is now gone, or in the process of going. The question is whether the new system can guarantee the same degree of public service neutrality and commitment to the public interest. How easy is it to be neutral when promotion depends on the department head, who in turn is on a contract to please the minister? How will equality of opportunity survive when departments have no broad employment goals but a thousand separate contracts? How does a public servant, employed to do a specific job in the knowledge that he or she will be rewarded on the results of the job, keep in sight the question of the public interest? Do we want government lawyers to be paid by results? Or Social Security counter clerks? And if the answer is yes, how can we be sure that the ideal results will not be fewer payments?

The aim of these changes, of course, is to bring the public service into the 'real world'. As an old Canberra cynic, I believe that it will make the service even more a culture of insiders, protecting and building up a class much like themselves, far better paid but rather less accountable. It will be the sort of Canberra that outsiders believe already exists. ■

Jack Waterford is deputy editor of *The Canberra Times*.



Hoist with their own façade

Banks pinned their hopes on their high-flying entrepreneurial customers in the 1980s. Now, they want to say 'We're sorry.'

IT WASN'T SO LONG AGO that banks denied having an image problem. They saw themselves as solid corporate citizens, knowing and protecting their shareholders, staff and customers, who, poor things, knew not where their best interests lay. Bankers were patrician figures in a society that accepted the cautious conservatism of the institutions they represented.

Those days are gone.

Respect for banks and bankers had already begun to erode by the 1980s, when a wave of deregulation swept through the industry. But the changes wrought by freer competition, and by new banks with different interests and motives, soon led to a widespread belief that banks had not been giving everyone a fair deal. And an emerging consumer militancy demanded that banks and other service providers should conduct their relationships with customers with more openness and honesty.

In this environment, Australian banks were also on the verge of a period of great expansion and healthy profits. The major players had resources and the readiness to expand overseas and into new areas such as stockbroking, insurance and superannuation. Technology was making it possible to complete the mundane tasks of banking more efficiently, and to offer a wider range of products and services. Banks were becoming more sophisticated.

So were their customers. They were getting used to the new services, but were also increasingly less tolerant of the arrogance and inflexibility of banks towards complaints, and of the banks' perceived lack of understanding for customers in financial difficulty. According to Alan Cullen, the executive director of the Australian Bankers Association, deregulation and the new technology meant that the banks were concerned initially with developing new products and services. But 'as the process continued, it became obvious the human factor hadn't been given enough priority,' Cullen says. 'People wanted information and control over the process.'

In the late 1980s, when the federal government turned to monetary policy to dampen a boom-time appetite for imports and debt, rising interest rates also put the heat on banks. As their customers struggled with heavier loan costs, the surging profits of the major banks

soured the customers' image of these institutions. And when those customers were farmers and small traders, the frequent sight of bank agents moving into farms and shops meant further bad public relations for the banks.

Bank-bashing was becoming a national past-time. In May 1989 *The Bulletin* ran a feature article on the changing relationship between banks and customers. The magazine's cover screamed 'Why the Banks are Bastards'. Reluctantly, perhaps, banks realised they had to do something. The most tangible sign of their collective acknowledgement of past sins and commitment to change was the establishment in 1990 of an independent, but industry-funded, ombudsman scheme. Graham McDonald, a former presidential member of the federal Administrative Appeals Tribunal, was appointed as Australia's first banking

ombudsman, to arbitrate disputes between banks and their customers.

ADMITTEDLY, THE APPOINTMENT OF McDONALD and his staff was preceded by some heavy lobbying by consumer groups, and by noises from Canberra that the federal government was considering imposing an ombudsman on the industry anyway. But McDonald says that the attitudes of bank executives were changing—they had begun to realise that their stodgy approach was losing them not only customers, but money as well.

In any dispute with customers, McDonald says, banks had been geared towards protecting their own funds and were reluctant to concede that errors even occurred. The general response to persistent complaints was to wait for customers to take action in court—a forum in which the banks' resources gave them an enormous advantage over customers.

Further, in a rapidly changing market the steady earnings from traditional retail banking had become, McDonald says, 'a corner of profitability that needed to



'Large, conservative, and dull. Reassuring in times like these, isn't it?' So one New York financial institution advertises itself. Australian banks find it hard enough to be reassuring, and have not yet begun to be dull.

be nurtured.' This need, together with the pressure from consumer groups and the federal government, has seen the creation of a dispute-resolution process that McDonald estimates will receive 5000 written and 40,000 telephone complaints in the year to June 1992.

MCDONALD CAN RATTLE OFF a long list of once-frustrated bank customers satisfied by the ombudsman's resolution of disputes and, implicitly, by the banks' willingness to participate in a process outside their own offices and in an environment that is less intimidating than the courtroom. While this has been applauded by customers who have formal dollars-and-cents disputes with their banks, however, it means nought to those who do not. The frustrations of millions of bank customers who are convinced that they pay too much for their home loans, for access to credit-card debt or for cheque books are not going to be addressed by the arbitration of Graham McDonald.

Blaming the banks can be an easy way out for politicians who are reluctant to take the full consequences of their own decisions, and in the winter of 1990 the then Treasurer, Paul Keating, was giving the banks heaps. Keating's reliance on monetary policy to rein in the excesses of the late 1980s meant that high interest rates helped engineer the 'recession we had to have'. But after pushing cash interest rates as high as 18 per cent, authorities had been cutting rates for half a year. By last October, five per cent had been shaved from official interest rates, although bank lending rates had fallen by considerably less.

Keating called on the House of Representatives standing committee on finance and public administration to inquire into the importance of the banking system to the Australian economy, the profitability of banks, the effectiveness of competition and the benefits that competition giving to consumers large and small. Seven years after Keating had begun the process

of financial deregulation, the committee's chairman, Stephen Martin, was to report on its success or failure.

The banks took the Martin inquiry seriously. Their public statements expressed gratitude at being given an arena in which to answer their critics, but many senior bankers feared the inquiry could usher in a return to regulation. With the collapse of major building and friendly societies in Victoria, concerns over others elsewhere, and the heat from Canberra over lending margins, banks feared a return to interest-rate restrictions and over-zealous supervision. In effect, the inquiry hearings saw banks beating their breasts and intoning *mea culpa* for their lending excesses during the 1980s.

Westpac's managing director, Frank Conroy, said the inquiry had created a 'fertile climate' for banks to rethink their customer relationships. And in October last year, a month before the Martin report was released, Westpac set out to improve its tarnished image. Its bungled handling of the foreign currency loans controversy and frantic attempts to suppress publication of the infamous 'Westpac letters'—letters of advice from Westpac's lawyers acknowledging the scope of the currency loan problem—meant the bank had a major crisis on its hands. The centrepiece of the campaign was a 40-page booklet, *You and Your Bank*, that Conroy hoped would put customers 'back in control' of their banking.

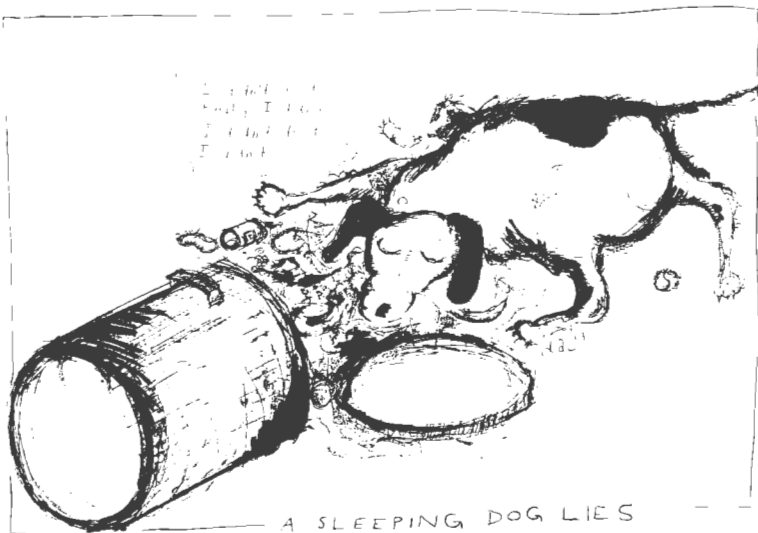
SEVERAL MONTHS BEFORE Westpac's yearning for better communications with its customers, the ANZ Bank was also attempting to shape a new image. In the middle of last year the bank launched an advertising campaign with the message: 'If you can change, so can we'. The ANZ's general manager for public affairs, Matthew Percival, said the campaign reflected 'the resurgence of traditional social values in the 1990s, defiantly leaving behind the high-flying entrepreneurial '80s.

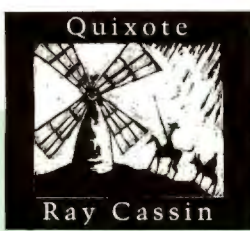
'What we're trying to do is defrost the brand,' Percival said. 'Banking is seen as hard, cold, and remote and our advertising has been at the extreme of that. Our communications have not been very warm, even a bit frosty.'

Consumer groups argue that there is still a long way to go in achieving better and fairer bank-customer relationships. They want more independent counselling for borrowers who find themselves in difficulty, and are worried that the spread of the user-pays principle to basic banking services will place a heavy burden on low-income groups. Although the banks now admit that they made serious mistakes in the 1980s, and are trying to convince the community that they have changed, it remains to be seen whether the change goes beyond advertising campaigns.

To use Matthew Percival's analogy, there is a lot of ice still to melt. ■

Matthew Doman is a reporter with *The Australian Financial Review*





Memory lane has been torn down

A FEW CENTIMETRES from the tip of my nose glint the spectacles of Carmen Lawrence. Not, I hasten to add, because I am engaged in intimate conference with the Premier of Western Australia. Indeed, at the time of my encounter with them, Dr Lawrence's spectacles are considerably more than a few centimetres from the tip of *her* nose. She is in Italy, and the spectacles are in a display case in the State Museum of WA. Really. It is not an exhibition devoted to Great Political Visionaries of Our Time and their Visual Aids. It is an exhibition devoted to the ALP centenary, so there are various memorabilia of Labor leaders, such as John Curtin's walking cane and Carmen Lawrence's spectacles. Brian Burke's stamp collection is not in the exhibition. Perhaps the museum could not afford it. It is difficult to mount expensive exhibitions in a recession.

My visit to Perth is much taken up with memory, if not always of memorabilia. I leave the museum and Carmen's visual aids, and walk round the city. I find that many of the things which might have been memorabilia for me have disappeared. They have been replaced by the bright, the shiny and the squeaky clean. But not everything has gone. There is still His Majesty's Theatre, one of the finest Edwardian buildings in Australia. The gold rush in WA, unlike later mineral booms, produced buildings that deserve to survive. And tonight there opens in His Majesty's a play about memory, *Jeffrey Bernard is Unwell*.

It is, not surprisingly given the title, a play about the memory of Jeffrey Bernard. He is *The Spectator's* 'Low Life' columnist, the original legend in his own lunch time. And dinner time. And in this case breakfast as well, for the play describes his mental meanderings during a night spent locked in a pub. There is a lot about pubs in Bernard's columns. Non-bibulous types have noted that pubs occasionally function as a venue for Quixote, too. Here I must come clean, for everyone has their heroes and Bernard has long been one of mine. He has made the pubs of Soho—the grotty old Soho, not the cleaned-up Soho that is even tackier—as famous as Garrison Keilor's Lake Wobegon. Except that Lake Wobegon and its inhabitants exist only in Keilor's imagination; whereas Soho, and most of Bernard's characters, are as real as His Majesty's Theatre.

I take my seat in the stalls and renew my acquaintance with the building. A couple behind me are also admiring the theatre. They are obviously not locals, for the man says, 'Imagine finding a theatre like this in Perth.' I apologise to them for eavesdropping and then explain about the glories of gold-rush architecture. I tell them forcefully that since Perth is older than any Australian city except Sydney and Hobart, they should not be surprised to find that it has old buildings. I forbear to add that most of the gold-rush architecture has been knocked down. Taking me for an offended resident, the man apologises. Or at least he says he is from Brisbane, which I suppose amounts to the same thing.

Fortified by my display of pique, I turn to the stage. The play is about to begin. Dennis Waterman, the actor playing Bernard, lurches about in a plausible portrayal of a drunk who has a story to tell. All drunks have a story to tell, of course, though usually they are interesting only to the drunk. I am a Bernard devotee because his stories are usually interesting to others as well. But that is when they appear in print. As a three-dimensional character on stage, he is only mildly amusing. The audience is treated to a string of anecdotes from his *Spectator* columns, interspersed with imagined conversations between Bernard and former wives, drinking mates, gambling mates, policemen and magistrates.

I am even more disappointed in the unmasking of the poet of low life than I am in the disappearance of Perth's gold-rush architecture. The latter can always be blamed on philistine politicians and greedy developers. But the exposure of an illusion always makes one feel partly guilty for having been deceived in the first place. During the interval I listen to the Brisbanians behind me complain about the play. Bernard is tiresome, they say, a middle-aged adolescent who thinks he is the centre of the world. I consider explaining to them that it is all very different when you read the words of the master. On stage the world that revolves round Bernard may clearly be held together with stamp hinges, but in print you can ignore that. You become part of Bernard's world and not just an onlooker.

I refrain, however, from casting pearls before Brisbanians. And I only half-believe my apologia for the world according to Bernard anyway. So after the play I have a drink in a pub that not even Bernard could pretend was appealing and then plod home. All is grey. Most of the city in which I grew up has been torn down. And the only building that the redevelopers missed has just witnessed the deflation of my fantasies.

When all else fails, turn to the great Don. My distinguished ancestor was in the fantasy business when Jeffrey Bernard was still drinking milk. At home I flip through *Don Quixote* and find the story of how the sad knight sends Sancho Panza to announce his arrival to Dulcinea. Do you remember it? Sancho cannot bring himself to tell his master that there is no beautiful lady named Dulcinea living in the slum the Don imagines to be a palace. So Sancho relies on his master's capacity to accommodate reality to his fantasies. Knowing that the Don can look at a windmill and see a giant, he points out three peasant girls riding on donkeys and says, 'See, here are Dulcinea and her ladies coming to greet you.' The Don shades his eyes, squints, and says, 'They look just like peasant girls on donkeys to me.'

When the Don runs out of fantasy it's time to put the book down. ■

Ray Cassin is production editor of *Eureka Street*.



All talk, and plenty of action

A conversation with Radio National's new religion editor, Paul Collins, is not like having tea at the vicarage.

PEOPLE KNOW I'M A PRIEST, I don't pretend I'm not a priest. But I am not employed as a priest by the ABC. So says Father Paul Collins, appointed in January as specialist editor of religious programs at the ABC. According to Collins: 'One of the decisions I took when I first joined the ABC was that I would simply be Paul Collins. Not act as a Catholic priest or call myself a Catholic priest.

'At weekends I work in a parish, and I belong to a religious order, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. But it seemed to me I was an employee of the ABC and had no right to foist my opinions on the ABC or the listening public. My task, as I saw it, was to act as a reporter and commentator on what I saw happening within the religious community. I think that was a correct decision, and have stood by it during my time at the ABC.'

Not everyone will agree with his reference to not 'foisting opinions'. 'Dissenter' and 'new-church liberal' are among the kinder comments made about him by conservative Catholics. Some see him as a virtual fifth columnist.

The 51-year-old priest has many interesting traits, not the least of which is an ability to sound opinionated and reasonable, sometimes simultaneously. I put the 'fifth column' remark to him and the 'reasonable' side replied. 'Fifth columnist? It's a fair enough suspicion. If someone of the right, with well-known views, were being appointed, I would be concerned also. What it doesn't do is to allow that I'm a reasonably fair-minded person. In fact I'm a much safer person to appoint than someone of no known view. That person may well have views and biased attitudes and they're not known. Mine are out there for everyone to see.'

Collins has impish features, with a permanent twinkle in his eye. His views on matters such as a mar-

ried priesthood, women clergy, and the origins of the ordained ministry are liberal, so clashes with church authorities are inevitable. A typical incident was his brush with Bishop George Pell on the Couchman program that followed *Brides of Christ*. A few years ago, a clash on TV between a priest and a bishop from the same diocese would have been unthinkable.

There are widely differing accounts of what transpired. According to Collins: 'Bishop Pell was invited to appear on the program, and was happy to do so, as a defender of Catholic orthodoxy. He said, among a number of other things, that Christ had instituted the Catholic priesthood and I said that historically that wasn't entirely correct; that the priesthood was an office that had developed over the centuries. That is what our tussle was about.

'I also said I didn't think he was hearing what a number of people were saying about their experience of the church and what had happened to them in the church, and the church's rigidity with regard to questions of contraception, celibacy of the clergy and such like. I said to him fairly forcefully I didn't think he had heard what they said and wasn't prepared to grant any credibility to what they were saying, and that

I thought he was mistaken in doing that.'

AS A PRIEST IN A RELIGIOUS ORDER, Collins is not directly subject to diocesan control, which in his case is perhaps just as well. Collins believes the church has failed to come to terms with contemporary issues. His views are spelled out in his two books, *Mixed Blessings* and *No Set Agenda*. *No Set Agenda*, published at the end of 1991, is zany dedicated to Johannes Chrysostomos Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. It has been attacked in the official Catholic media but generally praised elsewhere.

Collins has, in the past, made criticisms of Pope John Paul: 'It's ironic really—it was *he* who got me the job.' Collins chuckles at the memory of his entry into religious broadcasting. It came about shortly before the 1986 papal visit, when Collins had recently finished *Mixed Blessings*. Among those who read it was David Millikan, whom Collins has now succeeded at the helm. 'He approached me and asked if I would come on board as a kind of commentator for the papal tour.'

Collins, then completing a PhD in Australian history at the ANU, took a fortnight off from his studies and became part of the ABC team. A year later he was offered a permanent job. Since that time he has become one of the ABC's more colourful identities. For three years he acted as commentator on the television program *Compass* and now presents Radio National's *Insights*.

As head of ABC religious programs he has insisted on living in Melbourne, although two-thirds of the department's staff are in Sydney. Colleagues consider this arrangement 'workable', since the trend now is for people to 'work in clusters, on particular programs, rather than as an organised department.' His 'specialist editor' title masks ABC politicking; it is a downgrade from that of his predecessor, David Millikan, who was director of religious programs—'d.rel' in ABC parlance—and a fully fledged departmental head.

MILLIKAN HIMSELF, who left in December when his five-year contract had expired, is about to become a Uniting Church parish minister—a role he once rejected—and has been appointed part-time editor of the ecumenical magazine, *Outlook*. An ABC management spokesman denied that there had been an attempt to 'get' Millikan, and said there was no desire to diminish the role of religion.

In the last ABC shakeup, about a year ago, control of radio religion was given to an augmented 'spoken word department', under the control of Dr Norman Swan. To many in the church this—particularly the loss of autonomy—was very suspicious. Some saw it as a secular humanist plot. The downgrading of 'd.rel', and fears that this area of broadcasting was now in the hands of those who would hasten its demise, caused 11 denominational leaders—including Cardinal Clancy—to write a stiff letter of complaint to the ABC chairman, Professor Mark Armstrong.

Their protest might have been stronger but for a feeling, expressed in private rather than in public, that the program makers themselves have a misdirected emphasis, i.e. that religion is paraded in terms of novelty and sensation, and that the evangelical elements are ignored.

There is a basic philosophical argument as to what religious broadcasting is about. Is it about promoting religion—an evangelical role—or is its role journalistic? Collins finds the question interesting: 'Kenneth Henderson, who was in many ways the founder of the

Continued p19



I'm a much safer person to appoint than someone of no known view. That person may well have views and biased attitudes and they're not known. Mine are out there for everyone to see —PAUL COLLINS



Divine follies

MISHAPS, AS WELL AS SUCCESSES, are treasured by staff of the ABC religious department. Like the time Bishop Thomas Muldoon is said to have tapped the microphone during a radio Mass from Mosman, and muttered 'There's something wrong with this mike.' To which the congregation dutifully roared back: 'And also with you.'

In the late 1960s, the decision was made to liven up TV's *Divine Service* by using still pictures during the sermon. By the standards of Auntie, this was revolutionary. Instructions were given that the device was to be used sparingly. On day one, a television Mass, the preacher referred to the Pope. A production assistant, on cue, slotted in a photo of Paul VI. Alas, something went wrong. A faint, ghostly image appeared for a split second, and disappeared. The next day a woman with an Irish accent rang to report a miracle in her living room. 'I was praying for the Holy Father, looked up, and there he was looking at me from my TV.'

ABC religious broadcasting began in an auspicious manner, nearly 60 years ago, on Sunday, July 3, 1932. There was High Mass from St Mary's Cathedral and Anglican Morning Prayer from St Paul's Church, Redfern. To avoid sectarian rivalry, they were broadcast at the same time, 11 am, on 2FC and 2BL respectively.

The first religious program on ABC television went into viewers' homes on November 11, 1956. It was called Bible Background. According to the program notes for that day: 'Canon H.M. Arrowsmith, secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society, introduces a film ... on how the Bible came into being.' A few weeks later, on Sunday December 9 1956, the first *Divine Service* was televised, from St Paul's (Anglican) Cathedral, in Melbourne.

The religious department has a low priority when it comes to booking outside broadcast vans. A televised service from St Andrew's Cathedral, arranged months in advance, with a choir and two orchestras waiting in the wings, had to be cancelled so that the OB units could cover ladies' lawn bowls.

Over the years some real 'characters' have been employed, in one way or another, by the department. My favourite was Patrick Kavanagh, now retired, who was responsible for many of the *Divine Service* telecasts. Pat doubled as a sports producer and sometimes seemed to have had a problem differentiating between footy and religion. Squeezing into the cramped outside broadcasts van to watch him at work was an experience. At a High Mass from a new Benedictine church he deployed the four camera operators as though they were at a grand final, shouting 'Now' at exciting moments, such as when the communion cup was lifted.

In 1980 a televised service from Garden Island dockyard encountered problems when a dozen or more elderly naval veterans fainted due to the heat of the TV lights. Then, at the beginning of the sermon, two of the four cameras developed a fault. Undeterred, Pat asked the preacher (a retired naval chaplain) to remain with a few members of the congregation after the service. The sermon was refilmed, preached to a carefully edited congregation of six, and inserted in the right spot for later transmission.

Like other television programs, *Divine Service* had to be cued. Usually this was done via a secret signal between a technician and the officiating priest or minister, but occasionally things went wrong. At a service in the chapel of St Paul's College at Sydney University, the college principal, the Rev. Dr Peter Bennie, started off down the aisle, altar servers in tow, while the cameras were still warming up.

The alert technician, realising what was happening, ran behind them calling out: 'Stop, stop.' Bennie ignored the protest. The problem was patched up during editing, and viewers were none the wiser. An identical situation arose in Perth, but there the chaplain at Guildford Grammar School protested: 'This is divine service, not divine circus.'

Officiating clergy are supposed to prepare a detailed script for producers to follow. A trendy cleric once took Pat Kavanagh by surprise, introducing a motor cyclist, halfway through his sermon. The cyclist, supposedly representing the prodigal son, roared his machine up the aisle, demolished two cameras and knocked off a battery of lights.

The occasional live telecast presents particular problems. There is a convention that sermons on radio or television should last no more than 12 minutes. Several years ago the ABC televised a Saturday service from the Great Synagogue. The preacher was the Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, Dr Immanuel (now Lord) Jakobovits, who is gifted but longwinded. He had spoken for about 40 minutes, and was still in full flight when the telecast was abruptly terminated and viewers switched to golf.

Radio, too, had its moments. On one occasion the Catholic composer and musician, Malcolm Williamson, who is Master of the Queen's Musick, was playing the organ in an ABC recording studio. Each time he hit a certain high note, a bird in a tree near the window started to mimic. Recording was brought to a standstill, while an assistant went outside with a ladder, and duly dislodged the bird from its perch. ■

—Alan Gill

From p17

department, argued that ultimately his was a kind of evangelical task, proclaiming the Gospel. But he would not have used those terms. He would have spoken in terms of demonstrating [to listeners] that religion is rational, that religion makes sense, and that religion is something that ought to be talked about.

'I am inclined to agree with that. Interestingly, his view of which religion ought to be talked about is that it should be Christianity. We have now shifted to an attitude that is more objective, to report on what is happening in the wider communities of faith.

'I see it as a two-way street. On the one hand to report to the general Australian community what is happening in the various religious communities in Australia. But on the other hand to ask the religious communities the kind of questions that the Australian community would direct to them. So it is a task of mirroring the one to the other.

'We do have to become more multicultural. We have to reflect the wide variety of communities in Australia, and cannot simply be exclusively Christian. We should comment more on the communities staff members don't belong to. We must have an ability to see those communities as they see themselves.'

BOTH COLLINS AND HIS PREDECESSOR are products of a new approach at the ABC, which favours personalities rather than technical expertise and traditional program making skills, i.e., the showman rather than the craftsman makes the running.

David Hill himself is believed to favour the new style, which is shared by others now in executive positions. Surviving veterans in the religious department are unhappy with the changes. Nor is the 'new look' confined to religion. According to an insider: 'The name of the department is Radio National, and all these other little units are just subsections. Specialisations are disappearing hand over foot.'

Though himself part of the 'personality' star system, Collins is hardly inexperienced. 'Far from it,' said a colleague. 'He is a man, like Millikan, who likes to buck the system. He has very strong leadership material, as demonstrated by the fact that he has stood against the establishment in so many ways. He's like Bob Santamaria in his younger days, before he espoused political conservatism.

'A fifth columnist? I don't think so. He is certainly a non-conformist, a liberal, in his attitude to the church. He's an individualist who gives his comments without fear or favour.' ■

Alan Gill was religious affairs reporter for *The Sydney Morning Herald* from 1971 to 1988 and worked for the ABC religious department in 1980.



Science as wisdom

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS SPENT seven years trying to convince various monarchs of Europe to fund his expedition to sail westwards to India. When Columbus eventually got to the court of Aragon, Queen Isabella's adviser, Luis de Santangel, persuaded Her Majesty that the journey would not cost very much compared to the great rewards it promised. So began another scientific quest, aided by the promise of profit and power. Financially, it must have been one of the best investments in science ever made.

Columbus, as we all know, had an error-factor of 100 per cent in his calculations of the circumference of the earth: he only got halfway around the globe. The India that he discovered in 1492 turned out to be what we now know as the Americas. One of his ships was wrecked there, half the crew having to be left behind. They were all dead when Columbus returned a year later. On his fourth trip he lost 20 ships and 500 men in a storm. In a very questionable use of his knowledge of astronomy, Columbus prophesied an eclipse of the moon, scheduled for 29 February 1504, thus persuading the 'Indians' that the God of the Christians was very powerful and that the Indians had best supply the survivors of his party with food. Or else.

Scientists want to know answers. But to whose questions? Some scientists get an idea about the possible answers to their questions and then devise theories and experiments to confirm their intuitions. They end up only being even more sure about what they thought they knew in the first place. This very limited form of knowledge is science as power, the science of confident certainty.

Other scientists, however, seek to find what is there—not just what they think might be there. They search for answers to the most profound of all questions: why is it that something 'is', and how can it 'be'. This is science as wisdom, science always open to revision, science always humble before more questions. Einstein, despite his prejudices, was a classic of this type: he sought to think the way that God would think: to follow the tracks of 'the old one', as he put it.

Science as knowledge closes doors, covers over unanswered questions, pretends to be in control, but always crumbles on the shaky ground of its own provisional and biased certitudes. Science as wisdom is an 'unveiling' of reality, an unlayering of skins, a partnership in revelation.

So let's hear it for Australian astronomer Matthew Bailes, part of the team that discovered the first new planet since Pluto was identified in 1930. This planet is not part of our solar system, but hangs around a pulsar—a very dense spinning star—called PSR 1829-10. It was discovered after scientists became puzzled by a 'ripple' in the pulses coming from the star. ■

—John Honner SJ

Haughey in hindsight



Pic: Courtesy of The Age

IT IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE Irish politics without Charles Haughey. Few Irish leaders evoked such contrary feelings. You either loved him or loathed him; no other emotion seemed possible.

On the one side, people would tell you he was ruthless and opportunistic, prepared to discard old friends if that was required in order to fulfil some ambition. They would point to his shabby treatment of his deputy and one-time inseparable friend of Brian Lenihan. They would instance his dispatching to Europe of Ray McSharry, a longtime supporter, but seen by many as his most natural successor.

And of course, there was his sacking of Minister for Finance Albert Reynolds, one of his most devoted followers and leader in the internal coup that saw him take over from Jack Lynch as Fianna Fail leader in 1979. Two other members of that group of five were also subsequently sloughed off.

Another area frequently harped on by his opponents was Haughey's wealth. He has a commerce degree and is a qualified accountant. The accountancy firm of Haughey Boland, one of the biggest and most successful in Ireland, still bears his name, although he has not been associated with it since entering the Dail in 1957. He is also a qualified barrister, but has never practised.

Nonetheless, Charles Haughey is one of the wealthiest men in Ireland. People will say they you cannot accumulate wealth on a politician's salary. He has been steadfastly and quite properly silent on how he made his money, but many Irish people—especially

of the astringent kind encountered in Dublin pubs—will suggest methods ranging from the grossly libellous to the impossible if imaginative.

As against all this, Haughey was an enterprising and reforming Minister for Justice from 1961 to 1964. One of his successes in that portfolio was his firm dealing with the IRA of the time. He was a hard-headed Minister for Agriculture from 1964 to 1966, not afraid to take on the notoriously inward-looking Irish farm lobby.

He was Minister for Finance from 1966 to 1970, at a time of rapid economic growth. He introduced free public travel and free electricity for pensioners, and tax concessions for artists and writers. Although at one time people might have told you he was the best Minister for Finance the state ever had, the number holding that view has tended to fall over the years. He was a hardworking and popular Minister for Health and Social Welfare from 1977 to 1979, and has been either Taoiseach or Opposition Leader since then.

THAT ALL ADDS UP to an impressive record of public service and one which cannot be lightly thrust aside because the person in question doesn't meet our image of what the holder of public office should be.

Haughey had the ability to attract very loyal friends and equally ferocious enemies. The fact that many of his staunchest supporters were rural deputies—trendily dapper, quaintly accented, unpractised in media ways—meant that he became associated with what was viewed as a redneck clique within the party. This made him

easy meat for political commentators and leaders of opinion.

On the other hand, there were incidents which might have finished the careers of many a politician. The media can scarcely be blamed for their anger when investigations into these were unable to be completed. Apart from his wealth, mentioned earlier, some examples will give a flavour of the controversy that was never far from Haughey. In 1970, while he was Minister for Finance, 100,000 pounds of taxpayers' money went to the relief of distress in Catholic enclaves in Northern Ireland. How that money was used has never been completely explained but there is a belief that some of it went towards the purchase of weapons and towards support for one or both factions of the IRA.

He was one of four men tried in October 1970 on a charge of conspiracy to import arms illegally. All four were acquitted. However, in his summing up, the judge said that either Haughey or his accusers had committed perjury. One of Haughey's close friends is beef millionaire Larry Goodman, whose business methods are under investigation. There have been allegations of improper collusion between some of Haughey's ministers and Goodman companies.

HHAUGHEY FAILED TO SATISFY the public about his or his government's involvement in the sale of a semi-state company and in large profits made on property transactions in the Dublin area. In answering a Dail question on one of these matters, Haughey had to resort to verbal casuistry of a most unconvincing kind. When the opposition called him a liar, there was embarrassing silence from members of his own party.

In 1982 a man wanted for murder was found hiding out in a flat owned by the attorney general. In Ireland, the attorney general is appointed by the Taoiseach and retires from office with the Taoiseach. The young man in question pleaded guilty, so the full story never came out. Haughey characterised this incident as 'grotesque, unprecedented, bizarre, unbelievable', or as Conor Cruise O'Brien gleefully pointed out, GUBU, an acronym which remained with that Fianna Fail administration and has stuck to its leader ever since.

During the election of February 1982, Haughey's election agent, a solicitor, was arrested and with his daughter, charged with personation. They were seen attending different voting locations, accepting ballot papers and allegedly using them. The district justice dismissed the case because, he said the nature of the secret ballot precluded anyone from being certain that voting had taken place. People were uneasy with this outcome, particularly since other cases of personation had drawn prison sentences.

And of course, there was the tapping of the telephones of journalists Bruce Arnold and Geraldine Kennedy on the orders of the Minister for Justice, Sean Doherty. They received monetary compensation in subsequent civil action against the state, but the events eventually came back to finish Haughey's career.

Speaking in the Dail on Charles Haughey's first day as Taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald, the Opposition Leader referred to Haughey's 'flawed pedigree' and to matters that could not be raised even in the House. That statement, out of character for the normally gracious FitzGerald, left a residue of bitterness between the two leaders which never cleared, but was seen by the Irish people as indicating undercurrents of scandal. That scandal could be as delicious as you wanted.

SO WHAT DO WE MAKE of Charles Haughey? Internationally, he has represented his country well. He has a great deal in common with Bob Hawke and their friendship was entirely believable. In his time, he ruffled Mrs Thatcher's feathers, but that can hardly be a bad thing. Future historians will describe him as the dominant figure in Irish politics for a quarter of a century. They may be in a better position to look behind the many controversies and judge him on his record. I give one example. In 1988 the total value of Irish exports was \$US18.7 billion. Given the difference in population, that contrasts favourably with the corresponding figure from Australia of \$US32.7 billion. Charles Haughey must be given some credit for that. For many his departure will be the occasion for tears. Others will breathe a sigh of relief. Me? I shed a little tear of relief. ■

Frank O'Shea teaches at Marist College, Canberra.

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Feasts and seasons

*March 17 is St Patrick's Day, and although the feast is still celebrated in Australia its glamour has dimmed. The terms 'Irish Australian' and 'Australian Catholic' no longer mean more or less the same thing. **Edmund Campion** reflects on the popular religion that the Irish brought here with them.*

TWO CENTURIES AGO Irish convicts and settlers brought their spirituality to Australia as a people's religion. Their way of looking at the world as coming from God's hand marked them out from others here. Before bishops, priests, nuns or monks came, popular Catholicism arrived here as a poem that celebrated and supported the life of its people. Bits of the Catholic poem were passed on, chiefly by mothers, as prayers, devotions, stories and religious practices. The coming of the priests shaped these bits and pieces into a coherent church. By the second half of the 19th century, when the parish system was well established all over Australia, Irish popular religion had not only survived here, it was flourishing.

By then, the centre for this Irish religion was the parish church. It was the sacred place where adherents got in touch with the numinous and holy. Presiding over it was Jesus present in the tabernacle above the high altar. Everything about the church—lighting, decoration, architecture—focused the eye on the tabernacle. Not even the demands of liturgy could displace it. Entering a church, one fell silent and blessed oneself with holy water. Everything emphasised the church's sacrality: the silence, holy water, candles, flowers, incense, sanctuary lamp, stained glass, crucifix, stations of the cross, and even the discomfort of the benches. All day people would come and go, in touch with the infinite there.

Every church had an image of the Sacred Heart. French in origin, devotion to the Sacred Heart had quickly become a major strand of Irish religion. Cheap, bright pictures and statues were to be found in many homes too, often honoured by a flickering devotional lamp. The popularity of the Sacred Heart devotion shows the success of Irish Catholicism in translating rarefied theological doctrines into a religion accessible to everyone. Behind the easy accessibility of this Irish popular religion sat a tough-minded theological tradition. It was full of sentiment but not merely sentimental.

Something similar can be said of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the first of the saints. Culturally, the notion of the Communion of Saints is one of the things that makes Catholicism different. Other religious traditions have heroes and heroines, gurus, pundits and martyrs. In Catholic tradition saints are not dead he-

roes but living contemporaries. They pray for you and they become your role models. There were saints for every circumstance: saints for pawnbrokers (Nicholas of Myra), pharmacists (Cosmas and Damian), philosophers (Catherine of Alexandria), policemen (Michael) and prisoners of war (Leonard). Whoever you were, whatever your station or problem, there was a saint who would understand your case and perhaps help you.

The patron saints of nations acted in a similar way; they personified the style of Catholicism peculiar to that nation. This is why St Patrick was so popular in Australia, where vast numbers of churches, parades and festivals were dedicated to him. To his devotees he was the personification of Irish religion. In lauding St Patrick they were affirming that to be Irish was to be Catholic. The more Irish you are, the more vigorous will be your Catholic faith, their great chieftain, Archbishop Daniel Mannix, told them on St Patrick's Day, 1924.

To tap into this rich network of saints there was an extravagance of prayerbooks and devotional aids. No meagre corner store offering a few lines of devotion, this was a vast emporium from which one might pick and choose. The liturgical remoteness of the Latin Mass encouraged parishioners to get on with their private prayers while Mass was proceeding. Thus the distance between Mass and Mass-goers accelerated the growth of this popular religion.

NEVERTHELESS, MASS WAS an essential part of this Irish religion. At the very least—but it was more, of course—it was a core reference point. Mass gave consecrative purpose to that sacred space, the parish church. It was also a reference point for another constituent of popular religion, sacred time. New meanings were given to otherwise ordinary calendar months because they were also the seasons of Lent, Easter, Christmas. November was the month to pray for the Holy Souls; May belonged to Our Lady and March to St Joseph; June was devoted to the Sacred Heart and July to the Precious Blood. Not only months but also days could be caught up and enhanced as sacred time. The devotion of the Nine First Fridays is a good example of this, as are other novenas and triduums. With a day itself there could be many religious moments, times set aside for morning or

evening prayer, grace at meals, the Angelus and the family rosary. These were moments when time stood still and became eternity. Sunday was a sacred time shared with all Christians. Friday, on the other hand, was special to Catholics because on Fridays they abstained from meat and, on the Fridays of Lent, fasted.

Fasting and abstaining were imposed by church law, which was seen as sacred law whose imperatives came from God. With sacred space and sacred time, sacred law is a third constituent of popular religion. There were laws about everything: laws about women wearing hats in church and laws about flowers on coffins; laws about Lenten observance and laws about receiving Holy Communion at Eastertide; laws about who could wash the altar linen and who could not; laws forbidding priests to stay out late at night, laws forbidding them to frequent theatres or racecourses or prize fights; laws forbidding them to join political parties or read unCatholic papers or to become guardians or tutors; laws ordering them what to wear and where to live.

IT WAS AS RABBINICAL AS JUDAISM. For ordinary Catholics this legalism somehow validated it: only an authentic religion could make such demands. Looming over all the laws of the church were the Ten Commandments—sacred law *in excelsis*. The keepers of the law and its interpreters were the hierarchy. The strangest thing about them was their celibacy, which itself authenticated their authority and explained their fascination with

sexual sin. In Irish religion the hierarchy had taken over the leadership roles of the old sept chieftains.

Of all the hierarchical chieftains, the High King was His Holiness the Pope. His special concern was the content of the faith as it was presented to the faithful in creeds and other formulations. The creed was part of sacred law, something to be accepted, not debated. Thus the catechism was a precious element of Irish religion for it spoke of a body of revealed truth which was handed down by magisterial adepts to their pupils. The faith was not a tool of intellectual exploration but something to be accepted because of its sacred authority. That is why the single most important document in Australian Catholic history is the penny catechism.

Sacred space, sacred time, sacred law—in all these ways the eternal broke in upon the temporal, and the Irish who brought their popular religion to Australia lived in an unseen world that was as real to them as their new surroundings of gumtrees and kookaburras. The creation and development of this popular religion is the finest achievement of Irish Catholicism and its great gift to Australia. For unless a belief expresses itself as a people's religion it will never be a mass movement. Conversely, if it stops being a people's religion it will dwindle to the half-life of a sect or an elite. That's not what Christ came for. ■

Edmund Campion is a Sydney priest. He teaches history at St Patrick's College, Manly.

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Old rationalist asks new questions

Helen Garner's first novel in seven years, Cosmo Cosmolino, will be launched during writers' week at the Adelaide Festival this month. Michael McGirr asked her about the new twist in her fiction.

McGirr: Tell me about the experiences that led you to write *Cosmo Cosmolino*.

Garner: Sure. I'm a bit wary because there are some experiences which, when you talk about them, you feel you will lose. I don't want to betray the reality of my experiences. It's only quite recently that I've discovered that a transcendent world exists. In a sense, writing the new book has been a way for me to work these things out.

Seven or eight years ago a very painful thing happened to me, in my second marriage, that was very difficult to get over at the time. My life was in disarray. At the same time, I was having the strange experience of a visitor who would come to me. A presence manifested itself. It stood behind me at odd moments and was terribly frightening to me, not because it would harm me or was bad but because I didn't know what it was.

One thing I knew was that if I turned around and faced it—acknowledged it was there—then my marriage would be over. Instinctively, I felt this was what it meant. But otherwise I was afraid of it because I thought maybe I was going crazy. I didn't at any point think it was the devil or a ghost or anything like that. I never dared to look around.

Was it like the presence of a friend?
I didn't feel that it wished me ill or wanted to hurt me. I felt it was like a challenge. It would cause everything



to collapse and I would have to make something out of it that was better than what I had.

What did you do about it?

I keep a diary every day. Have done so for many years. But this experience was so scary and important that I didn't even write it down there. I tried to talk to one person about it and he was even more frightened than I was. Then I wrote to another friend, Tim Winton, and told him about this thing. It didn't alarm him in the slightest. He said, 'You know what I think it is? I think it's the Holy Spirit. I'm not going to push that interpretation on you. But one thing I do know is that if something comes to me in the dark, I call out and ask it to identify itself.' But by the time I got the nerve to tell him about it, it had stopped. It's never come back.

By the same token, my life did collapse and reform. I spent a year by myself with my daughter and during that year I spent a lot of time up the bush. I started going to church but at that stage that it didn't really help me that much. I went to an Anglican church and I went to communion a few times. I was looking for something but I didn't even know what I was looking for. It's very hard to talk about these things because they don't fit into any scheme.

But because of that strange visitor I became closer friends with Tim, and because Tim is intelligent and talented and straightforward, I stopped being embarr-



-assed about thinking, 'Was there such a thing as God?'

Did you speak to other people about your new interest in God?

The other thing I found out when I did nervously bring up the subject with other people I knew was that, to my surprise, people were not at all adverse to talking about it and they didn't think I was crazy.

In my generation it was just given that you were some kind of rationalist. Our whole growing up was largely conducted in political terms. We did genuinely feel that certain things were to be protested about and I don't mean to belittle that.

I don't mean to make nothing of the whole experience of feminism, which has been terribly important in my life. Nor of the whole experience of collective households and of people needing to live in a way that enabled them to bring up their children if their marriage was broken, which is what happened to me. These were the things that created a parallel culture to the mainstream and that has been my experience in life.

As I grew up, belief in God was seen to be a sign of weakness. That's the way people I knew would see it. Over the years, some people I knew did become born-again Christians. Within our group this was mostly people who were seen as losers—people who were not coping, who were not strong. The main feeling we had for them was embarrassment.

So this, of course, fed back to me when this thing impressed itself into my life. I thought 'I can't talk about this to people I know because they'd be embarrassed.' I didn't want people to turn away with that little smile people have. But I've got tough about it now. And I've also found that I'm not the only person in the world who has had spiritual experiences.

Have the experiences of this mysterious visitor come back to you?

No, they haven't.

Have you tried to call them back?

No, I haven't done that either. And because I didn't write any of it down I can't date it or fit it precisely into the content of the other things I was doing at the time. But I was sorry. After it didn't come back I thought I'd missed my chance. Do you know that poem by D.H. Lawrence about the snake? A person gives way to a stupid urge to kill a snake with a lump of wood. But the snake wriggles away in an undignified manner and the poem ends with the attacker saying 'I missed my chances with one of the lords of life.' I've often thought of that poem because I feel that I missed my chance with this thing.

Has your spiritual life developed in other ways since then?

I don't think it spoilt anything, that I missed my chance. Maybe it's come back to me in other ways. I lived in Sydney for two and a half years, and during that period I went to church regularly. I went to an Anglican church and I loved it. I felt nourished by it. Sometimes I felt filled with joy going to communion. I'd had myself baptised and confirmed when I was 22, when I was living at Janet Clarke Hall. But that only lasted about two weeks and I just forgot all about it and went back to my wicked ways.

But the church in Sydney was very important to me. There was a good vicar there and what he said made a lot of sense to me. Unfortunately, he got promoted and came back to Melbourne and was replaced by a raving fundamentalist. I left after that. But I sort of feel as though I know how to find nourishment in other ways. It's as if the experience has seeped into my ordinary life and changed it. Now I don't need this being to stand there.

What led you to that church in the first place?

I didn't know where to go. I have a sister who's been a Christian all her life. She's the only one in my family who's really into it. This is in Geelong, where I was brought up. When she left school she went to New Guinea to be a missionary for a year and so forth. She's

a bit of a theologian really, she's read tremendously. But she's left the church now. She left over the issue of the ordination of women—she was in the MOW (Movement for the Ordination for Women) for years. She's very high church. Now I wanted to go to church. I wanted to crawl up to some place and ask for help. But I didn't know where to go and I could have asked my sister but she seemed totally concerned with the politics of the church. I subsequently realised I was wrong but that was my impression at the time.

I didn't know where to go. I was pretty unhappy too. I was, you know, in shock for a year. So everywhere I went there seemed something wrong. Either there was really daggy guitar music going on or there was a lot of incense-swinging, which I found gruesome. I can't handle the theatrics. By the same token, I can't handle the raving fundamentalist, low-church types. It was hard for me to find a home. Yet every time I went I learnt something. I was filled with need and I didn't know what I needed and I didn't know who I could ask or where to go. But I went. And even when I was sitting there, deeply resisting it, filled with pride and anger and sadness, even so something would always happen that would make a penny drop somewhere.

How did being in the church affect you?

Maybe when I started going in Sydney it was at the right time for myself. I was personally much happier. I wasn't

in that state of screaming, wretched need. I was in a state where I could calmly approach, calmly sit down and see what happened. Also, the vicar had a part to play. He was a thoughtful and quiet sort of person. He would talk about himself in church, but in a way that was of use to you. He seemed to give full credence to doubt. When he left this old fundamentalist replaced him. He was absolutely on the rampage.

I realised retrospectively that the previous bloke had had a very subtle mind and was prepared to accept that people came up against brick walls in their search for whatever it is we're searching for. He gave full value to the moments when you didn't know what to do and everything you'd been taught was useless. He just said, 'Wait.' And this other bloke had no idea. He was the sort who said, 'You must believe.' And I just felt I wanted to go up and strangle him. It was so sad.

The other thing I discovered which I loved—and I think you only discover this by going along repeatedly to the same church, although I didn't socialise much with people in the parish—was that it was

a pretty motley bunch. People came from here and there. More than that, they came to the church in ignorance from outside, like anyone approaching an institute. You

imagine that everyone who goes to church has got it all worked out. You think all these people who come to church know why they're here, that they read the Bible, that they know what they believe and that they come to go through these rituals. But when I'd been there long enough I realised that this is total bullshit. Everybody was searching. They didn't know. The whole thing turned for me from being monolithic and impenetrable. It collapsed into a whole lot of people, and that was really wonderful. I loved it because the congregation got up in their daggy clothes and read. And sometimes people sang. One time a man got up and played a Beethoven sonata. Others did a little Bach thing. Not brilliantly, but it didn't matter. I liked the level of the music.

I also got to love that moment in the service when you greet people. Once I would have found that super daggy; I was embarrassed by my own need to be in church. But after a while I found that whoever thought of the moment when you turn and face the people around you was a genius. Because if you're vain and proud, like I was and still am sometimes, and you go along to church then you're wasting a lot of energy despising the people near you. They've got a stupid book, or shoes, or something. You wonder what you're doing here with these dags and think 'I'm too cool for this'. You can't think that when somebody just puts out their hand says 'Peace to you'. The hostility just dropped off me. I found it quite moving.

The Bible figures prominently in the new novel. What place does it have in your own life? Have you gone back to it?

Oh, yes! I had a two-year grant from the literature board in '89-90 to write a book, and I knew at least one of the characters was going to be a born-again Christian. But I had great trouble kicking it off. So I thought 'Let's read the Bible'. I was vaguely familiar with it from school and I've done an arts degree and you can't read English literature without some familiarity with it. But I didn't know how to start.

In Sydney I used to walk to work past the Cat Protection Society Opportunity Shop, and I often went in there looking for books that were nice and cheap. Once I was looking along the bookshelf and I saw a modern translation of the Bible, I think by J.B. Phillips. So I just picked it up idly and flicked through it and it fell open at the scene where Jesus is being betrayed in the garden, and then they take him away and interrogate him and, as this translation said roughly—I can't stress how important this moment was for me—'They took him outside and beat him up.'

When I read that, it caused something like a massive shift of continental plates for me. I thought, 'That's what they did—they took him out and beat him up.' And when it was presented to me in those terms I thought, 'This is a real story.' It's not just a splendid piece of literature, which is the way I used to feel about it. So I took that book home. It cost 50c or something. I got out my old King James version, which I'd had

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since I was confirmed, and I also went and bought the Jerusalem Bible, because it was so hugely annotated. So I sat down with these three and I began to read in a complex way. I started with the New Testament because it was familiar, then I went back to the Old Testament. It took months. But when I say I have read the Bible, I mean I have skimmed it. Really all I did was get a map of it.

What was it like to read the Bible?

I wept buckets. I laughed and I was terribly shocked. It shocked me because it is so violent. Get into the Old Testament and there are stories of rape and murder and savagery. But the main thing was that I dimly began to perceive a whole historical territory. I'm really bad at history. I'm really good on now. I'm not very good on the future and I'm hopeless at the past. But I found it a profound experience to read the Bible. For instance, I realised why the story of Ruth is so important. It's a beautiful story in itself but the fact is that she's an ancestor of the house of David and so the whole thing began to throw itself out like a vast map. And it was challenging—just the things that Jesus said, a lot of which I didn't understand but wanted to.

Did you come to understand anything about God?

I really have no idea. That's the hard part. But I had a funny conversation with Ed Campion once because we were both on the literature board of the Australia Council together. At the time I was living in a house with a born-again Christian and we had bitter arguments about these things. This was before I started to go to church. We later became good friends. But I just couldn't believe his simplistic approach to things—I was fighting very hard not to have to take account of this stuff myself. I was trying to tell Ed Campion about this, and I

was laughing about this bloke, and I said 'He actually believes he knows Jesus personally and that Jesus is a personal friend of his.' And Ed said, 'But I believe that.' And I was shocked because Ed is so urbane. We both burst out laughing but I was laughing from shock.

Then he started talking about having been brought up a Catholic and how Catholics really are introduced to these characters in the story, in the Bible, as if they were real. He believed in the saints and the Virgin Mary and so forth. That brought me to realise how little that means to me. It's not useful to me somehow. It doesn't suit my style of imagination. I actually rather envy that Catholic thing of the richness of imagery—which simply doesn't exist in the Protestant way of thinking about things, which is so grim and responsible.

So can you imagine God?

I just don't know. It's as if now isn't even a good time for me to try. It's not something I can understand intellectually. About Jesus. I don't know Jesus. I don't think it was Jesus that stood behind me. I'm quite familiar with the belief that Jesus did exist and is as we've been told he was. It doesn't interest me at all to find alternative explanations for the resurrection. The resurrection for me—I don't care if it's true or not—I just think it's wonderful. Easter and Pentecost are my favourite times.

I don't know much about God. I know about the Holy Spirit. I have a friend who's swung right around from being Maoist to having some kind of religious interest. He's still in a state where it's hard for him to discuss it. But he told me he had a lot of trouble with the Holy Spirit. I was amazed because for me it's the easiest way in. If I was going to name that thing behind me it was the Holy Spirit. And I've felt the Holy Spirit present at other times.

When we say the creed in church someday I just rattle it off with everyone else. But other days I feel I have to keep my mouth shut and the only thing I can say is 'I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life' and that's as much as I can say and I'd be lying if I said the rest. Even on an extreme day when I don't know what the hell I'm doing there at all I can still say that really wholeheartedly. That's all I know from my own experience. I'm not interested in saying what I believe in. I'm interested in saying what I have found. ■

Michael McGirr is a Jesuit scholastic and a regular contributor to *Eureka Street*. His review of *Cosmo Cosmolino* will appear next month.

You imagine that everyone who goes to church has got it all worked out. You think all these people who come to church know why they're here, that they read the Bible, that they know what they believe and that they come and to go through these rituals. But when I'd been there long enough I realised that this is total bullshit. Everybody was searching.

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Collateral damage again

Civilians have borne the brunt of the conflict in Bougainville, reports Jeremy Moss, who visited the island in December.

MANY PEOPLE HAVE DIED ON Bougainville since the imposition of an indiscriminate blockade two-and-a-half years ago. The blockade has caused a critical shortage of basic medical supplies, and preventable diseases such as malaria, pneumonia and tuberculosis are taking a heavy toll on the population.

Dr Charles Lubai, director of the Red Cross on Bougainville, took me to the Arawa hospital. There I saw row upon row of empty beds, and bed frames from which the mattresses had been stolen or taken and burnt. Treatment at the hospital is reduced to a minimum because of the shortages. Seriously ill patients are simply sent back to their villages. While I was there a 12-seater air ambulance arrived to find 144 seriously ill patients waiting to be flown out.

Conditions were similar throughout the island. Of the dozen or so health centres that I was able to visit none had enough medical supplies to treat anything more than minor injuries. Health workers went without pay, often making trips as far as the Solomons to obtain and smuggle back medicines. At a village in the west of Bougainville, women told me that their children were at risk from diseases such as measles or whooping cough because there had been no vaccination since the crisis began. One woman died after haemorrhaging dur-

ing labour. The doctor could do nothing for her because he had neither anaesthetics nor sterile instruments with which to operate.

In some of the worst hit areas villagers were embarrassed about speaking to me, because they had barely enough clothing to cover themselves. In some of the villages higher up in the mountains people are making clothes from the

calico of old umbrellas, and digging up bodies to reclaim items of clothing. Since 1989, when the fighting started in earnest, the island's basic services has been almost totally destroyed. What transport remains is in poor repair, making travel extremely difficult. To reach one of the more remote areas I had to take a very slow canoe trip through waters under surveillance by Papua New Guinea patrol boats.

The effect of the war was evident everywhere: gutted schools and health centres, burnt-out cars, dozens of wrecked houses. One village I visited near the former Panguna Copper mine had been attacked by PNG troops because they believed it sheltered Bougainville Revolutionary Army soldiers. On one occasion the villagers were rounded up and marched to one of the 'care centres', as PNG calls them, for interrogation. Old people told me how they had been forced to stand with their hands above their heads for hours while the soldiers beat people at random. The villagers also reported that it was common for troops coming down from the mine site to stop and fire their weapons at villages along the way.

The combined effects of social upheaval and the collapse of services have reduced the population of the capital, Arawa, from 6000 to about 1000. It is virtually a ghost town. During my stay numbers fell further as people returned to their villages for fear that the soldiers would return. Just after I left the island an estimated 500 PNG troops landed near Arawa and patrol boats have since shelled villages in the area, raising the prospect of an escalation of the conflict.

Australia has supplied training and weaponry to the PNG army, including the loan of four helicopters that were used to strafe villages (the helicopters made notorious by *Four Corners*). The patrol boats, which ensure that few supplies get through to Bougainville, are also supplied by Australia.

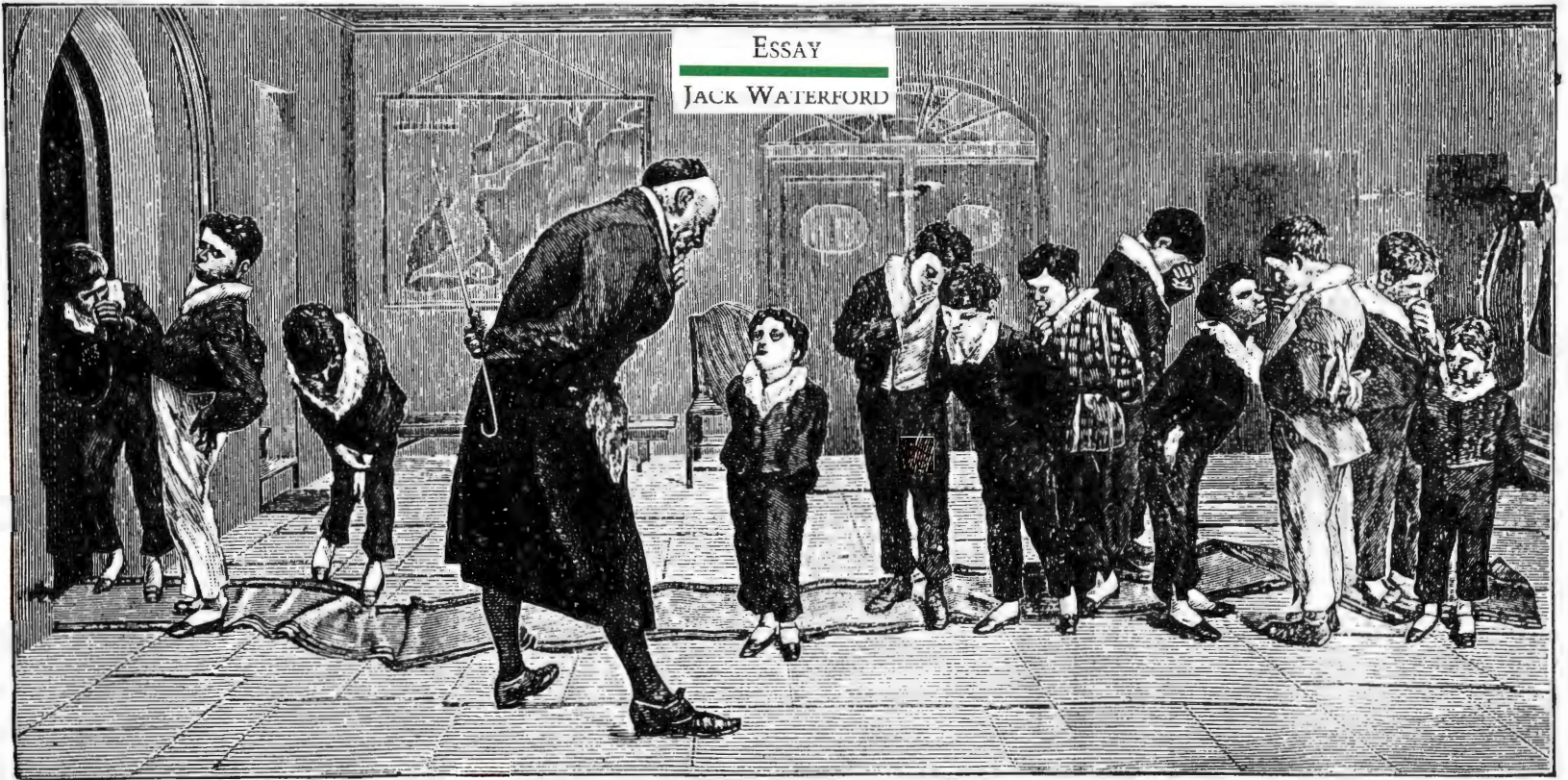
Australia's influence extends even further. When I arrived in the Solomon Islands—the only route into Bougainville—I was met at the airport by a colonel from Australian army intelligence. He was fully aware of why I was in the Solomons and knew everything, from my passport number to my Bougainvillean contacts in Australia. And, although he said that he would not try to stop me, the colonel made it clear that I would be in serious danger if caught by PNG troops. As I was preparing to leave, another Australian arrived in the Solomons, intending to set up a shortwave radio network on Bougainville to provide a link with the outside world. He had boarded the plane in Brisbane with radio equipment worth \$6500. It was 'lost' en route.

If Australia remains an obliging ally, and PNG continues its war against the island, as the recent landing of troops signals that it will, there can only be a worsening of conditions for an already war-weary Bougainvillean people. ■

Jeremy Moss is a postgraduate student in political philosophy at the University of Melbourne.



Signs of blockade: vehicles now only fit to block roads.



The best days of my life

Jack Waterford is writing a guide to English grammar for cadet journalists on The Canberra Times, where he is deputy editor. He gleefully accepted an opportunity to address a headmasters' conference, so that he could 'persecute a captive audience with a complex of reactionary ideas about bringing back the cane, grammar and external examinations and why and how my cadets can't spell.' By the time he came to speak, however, his message had become 'totally self-indulgent in a completely different way: If you can hear me, thank a teacher.'

I DID NOT HAVE a strictly conventional education but I owe a lot to teachers. And to Arthur Mee, for his 10-volume *Children's Encyclopaedia*, full of stirring poetry, noble deeds, British Empire ideals, and ideas for things to make and do. It came out first in about 1910 and was occasionally and mildly revised until about the 1940s. It was excellent value for money, but was still a real cost to the person who first brought it to my attention in the mid-1950s. She was an Aboriginal woman who had been persuaded to part with sixty quid for a set—an awful lot of money, and the more so since at the time she was living in a dwelling made of flattened-out kerosene tins, on the edge of a village in western NSW.

She was maybe 18 years older than I, she could read and write and was the proud possessor of this set of Arthur Mee's. When I was four her husband came to work on my father's station, and she got some work helping my mother, who was then nearly halfway through a process of producing children at 15-month intervals.

My father was a Depression boy who had left school at 12 to work on a farm and had got his property by soldier settlement. My mother had her Leaving Certificate, via boarding in a country town. Both loved books and appreciated the value of an education: it was what they wanted most for us. But it had not really arisen as an issue when, at five years old, one of my legs was snapped by the hydraulic press of a tractor. The leg was in plaster for nine months and I was completely grounded, miserable and with nothing to do.

But my friend was there with her *Arthur Mee's*. And she would read to me—tales of the kings and queens of England, potted biographies of the explorers, children's stories and verse, suggestions about making paper hats, or explanations of how magnets worked. And one day she read to me, from Volume 10, the poem *How Horatius Saved the Bridge*, by Lord Macaulay. It was the most wonderful thing I had ever heard. It is just the sort of poetry, I should imagine, that is explicitly not taught these days, but it had wonderful rhyme and metre, and went on for 70 stanzas, full of the most sententious sentiment. It begins:

*Lars Porsena of Clusium,
By the nine gods he swore,
That the great House of Tarquin
Should suffer wrong no more.
By the nine gods he swore it,
And he named a trysting day,
And bade his messengers ride forth
East and west and south and north
To summon his array.*

It goes on and on, with odd strands I can still remember, such as:

*Then up spake brave Horatius
The captain of the gate
'To every man upon this earth
Death comest soon or late
And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers
and the temples of his gods!'*

And this one, which I remember especially fondly:

*He reeled, and on Herminius,
He leaned one breathing space
Then like a wild cat mad with wounds
Sprang right at Astar's face.
Through teeth and skull and helmet,
So fierce a thrust he sped,
The good sword stood a hand-breadth out
Behind the Tuscan's head.*

We understood scarcely half the words of it, of course, but it was wonderful and entrancing stuff, and, beast that I was, once we had found it, I demanded that she read it to me over and over, day after day, until we had half-memorised it and I was prompting her as much as she was prompting me. And one day, damnit, I discovered I could read, and read it myself.

MY MOTHER HAD BEEN WATCHING the process, not discouragingly, though she did not like the way I tyrannised my friend. So she decided that I really had to get some schooling, and wrote to the correspondence authorities. Could I be started off? The answer was no; the correspondence system had an inflexible rule that no one could start until they were six.

'But he's driving us mad,' my mother protested. 'He can already read. His favourite poet is Lord Macaulay.' But I was not allowed to start. By the time I was allowed I had devoured every *Readers' Digest* that had ever been printed, not to mention all the wicked books now properly banned: Enid Blyton, W.E. Johns and so on.

We lived 30 miles out of town, on a road three miles in from the main boundary. Our mailbox was a 44-gallon drum with one end opened, and the routine of the mailman was that he would come down the road, dropping off mailbags at each box, go to the next town, have a jar or two, then go back picking up mailbags from the boxes as he went. Each mail would contain a week's correspondence lessons.

I would ride out to the mailbox with the mailbag, its key and a pencil, and when the mailman came, open up the week's lessons, sit astride the 44-gallon drum and do them. One had to cheat a bit. I always copied out the dictations, making a deliberate error or two. When it was done—an hour or two's work—it would go back into the envelope,

THE NOBLE BEDE WITH HIS SCHOOLBOYS



BEDE, TRANSLATOR OF THE BIBLE 1200 YEARS AGO,
TEACHING HIS BOYS IN THE SCHOOL AT JARROW.

Picture: Arthur
Mee's *Children's
Encyclopaedia*

and, the job done, that was my week at school. The best days of my life.

Within a couple of years, I had two sisters also on correspondence. My mother became somewhat more conscientious, even trying to set up a school room in our house. One dread year, she hired a governess from Sydney to supervise us. We were

horrid to her, though the local lads for miles around were not; I do not think we ever had so many visitors in our life.

WHEN I WAS NINE my mother threw in the towel, and my sisters and I went off to school by bus each day. At the local town I discovered myself miles ahead of many in my classmates in the amassment of trivial historical facts, and miles behind in things like sums. I fell madly in love with the girl sitting next to me and let her copy my examination papers: we seemed to take it in turn coming first and second. But I was miserably unhappy with the travelling, the dust and the teasing from kids on the bus. So I was sent off to boarding school, and that was where I acquired almost all of my formal education.

It is conventional for people to say such experiences were miserable—mine was not a bit, though I made at least a few teachers' lives miserable and, by the end, was regarded as a 'bad attitude' case. I had marvellous, professional and dedicated teachers who loved learning and who loved their kids, even if, by modern day standards, their ideas of instilling knowledge were at times heavily on the prescriptive and, more than occasionally, on the disciplinary side. They were almost entirely members of Catholic religious orders, but I do not believe for a second that the dedication, quality or idealism of teachers in other school systems was lower. Indeed, teachers in government schools were probably better qualified. But we were all united by common curricula.

That unity was a great help to me. My parents could not afford to send me, and later my brothers and sisters, to boarding school. One of the ways in which we made up the financial gap was by scholarships or bursaries. We were crammed for them. I got a state bursary at the end of primary school—my chief memory of cramming for it is memorising about 20 fordigraphed pages of dates from 1200BC to AD1900. And thanks to the Wyndham scheme changeover, occurring all round me, I also got an intermediate state bursary, and a Commonwealth scholarship next year at school certificate.

I have no complaints about the curricula before Wyndham, so far as they affected me, but am inclined to think that the Wyndham scheme was a great advance for the focus that it put on general education, and on giving everybody a smattering, at least, of everything. I sat four subjects for my Higher School Certificate, four because first level maths and science counted as three subjects. With English compulsory, that left only one other subject. Choosing economics instead of modern history, ancient history, or Latin—all subjects in which I dabbled—was a real wrench.

THE SCHOOL I WENT TO was noted for the ferocity of its discipline, though most of it was focused on having us where we were supposed to be at particular times, rather than on misshaping our impressionable minds. Our Latin teacher believed that conjugations and declensions could be drummed in at one end or the other, and declared that he did not care much which. One of the maths teachers taught my classmates and me formulae by belting the backs of our fingers with a ruler, saying as he did it things like 'How many times do I have to tell you, Jack, that $(a + b)^2 = a^2 + 2ab + b^2$ '. I can still remember most of my formulae, and occasionally even use them.

Otherwise, we could more or less say what we liked in classroom and had, I think, rather more academic freedom than most kids of our age at the time. The signal breach of clear freedom that I recall was when I was in Year 12, and an English teacher, a young English honours graduate with a passion for Gerald Manley Hopkins, began declaiming *The Windhover*. Out of the corner of his eye he saw me talking and rounded on me; 'What's that you said, Waterford?' 'Nothing, Brother'. 'I saw you talking. What did you say? Out with it.' I said, 'Well, it looks like Father Hopkins has been on the altar wine again, doesn't it?' I was flogged for that, but it was worth it. I met that teacher again recently. He left his religious order and now works in the office of the Minister for Education.

I had the most marvellous mathematics teacher ever known, who took eight classes a day, four with first level kids, with each of us getting our own tailored program. There were 24 in



AT LYME REGIS TOOK PLACE ONE OF THE MOST ASTOUNDING MEETINGS IN THE HISTORY OF GEOLOGY. MARY ANNING, 12, CAME UPON THE FIRST ICTHYOSAURUS FOUND IN ENGLAND.

Picture: Arthur Mee's *Children's Encyclopaedia*

my particular class and each of us stumbled in our own way into a need to learn calculus, matrices and probability theory, and we were encouraged to specialise in the area we were best at. I know it is quite wrong in this modern day to mention anything elitist like examination results, but in the 10 years before I had him, his students had topped the state, I think, eight times, and about 80 of his students had been in the first 100. There was, as I have said, a statewide curriculum, if not a national one. But I fancy that my teachers saw themselves as individuals with wide scope to work at helping students to learn, rather than as passive factory hands doling out prescribed information. They were highly respected members of a middle class that set a high priority on educating its children, to give them opportunities their parents had missed.

WE HAD HEADMASTERS, TOO. Even in those days, headmasters had to have an eye for public relations and two eyes for a budget, and they had to worry about things such as performance monitoring. They had fewer resources to work with, but perhaps the fact that they were forced to find many of their own resources gave them an independence that is now more difficult to attain.

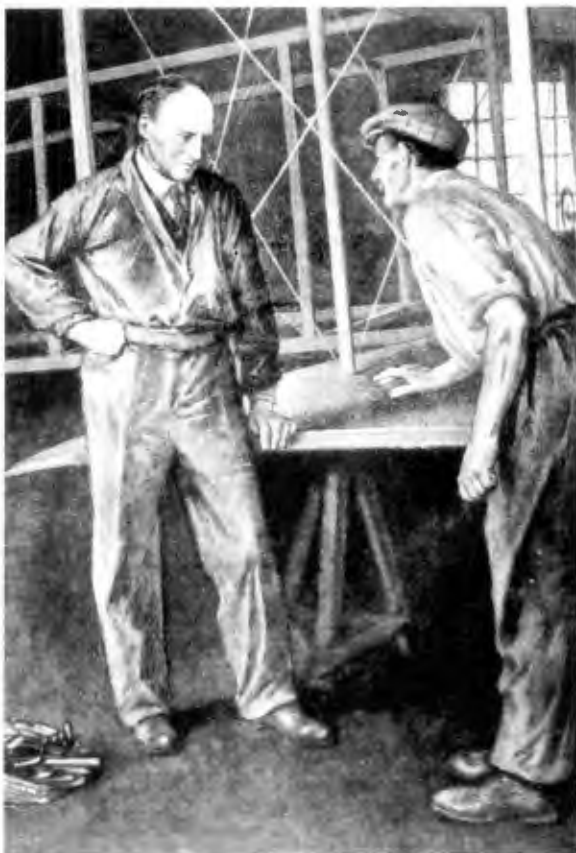
Life was not made easy for headmasters: students would not agree to play any role in management or discipline. We had an unwritten understanding: provided their storm-troopers did not go around actually searching for evidence of misfeasance, we would accept as reasonable any flogging to within an inch of our lives that was dished out. Every six years we got a new headmaster, and each new headmaster would survey the scene, decide it was barbaric and decide to introduce a prefect system. And every time that happened the relevant senior class—this was a tradition which even in my times spanned 80 years—would approach the headmaster and tell him that if he were foolish enough to do such a thing, first, they would not be prefects, and second, if any bloody prefect either dobbed anyone to a teacher or punished anyone himself, we, as a group, would tear him limb from limb. It was definate, it was anarchic, but it worked.

In my early teens my parents sold their property and went further out. And my youngest sibs went to the local school, 17 miles away as the crow flies, but 75 as the school bus ran, a two-hour trip over dirt roads. The Goodooga public school was a set of corrugated iron sheds. I was in my last year at the boarding school, and the NSW Education Department was doing the rounds looking for people to sign up for teachers' scholarships. I heard the spiel and said to one of the teachers: 'Your tale of teaching by the beach at Collaroy Plateau is very touching and inspiring, but what would be the prospect of being posted to Goodooga Public, where they teach in tin sheds, and the temperature reaches 105° Fahrenheit, 50 days a year?' He looked at me, and said: 'Do I know you? I taught at Goodooga for three years.' To be fair, the last time I was at Goodooga the air-conditioning plant at the new school was twice as big as the whole of the old school.

Most educational theories run in cycles. We are living in a rotten phase of one cycle, which demands that teachers turn out robots for the workforce. The opposite end of the cycle, of course, is a demand for generalist learning. There are other cycles. The current anti-meritocratic meretriciousness has a long cycle, and the economic mania of our political masters has a shorter one. The problem is that we have struck most of the peaks of these cycles at once.

In ordinary times, I would counsel educators and administrators to play the accelerator and the brake, to watch the cycles and resist the peaks, either by braking as you come towards them, or accelerating as you go away. The problem, I suspect, is that many of the barbarians are already inside the gates. It is not simply a matter of nutty politicians; many of our education bureaucrats are worse. To those of us who are not barbarians, I counsel patience. If the kingdom of heaven is not at hand, I can at least promise that within a decade we will have driven every economist and every social engineer off the face of the earth. And then, maybe, I will be writing about how unworldly educationists are, and how a bit of exposure to market discipline is warranted. ■

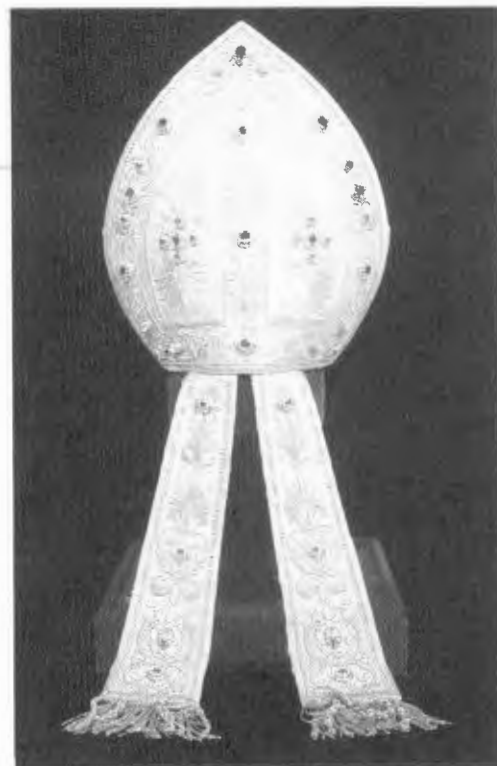
WILBUR WRIGHT THINKS IT OUT



WILBUR WRIGHT AND HIS BROTHER ORVILLE THINK OUT A PROBLEM IN THEIR WORKSHOP

East met West, but that was it

If Pope John Paul was hoping for a celebration of the collapse of communism when the the synod of European bishops ended on December 12 last year, he must have been disappointed.



ATOTAL OF 120 bishops converged on Rome from across Europe last November, for the first meeting of its kind in the modern history of the church. But the time for triumphalism, which may have seemed appropriate when the Pope called the synod in April 1990, was already past.

In his quest for a new Europe reunified on the model of the old, with Christianity as the glue and the Vatican at the top of the heap, the Pope urged his guests to see the events of the past two years as a 'sign of the times'. The times, however, might be moving in directions not entirely pleasing to the Holy Father.

Yet as one senior delegate commented, the synod had come 'too late to celebrate a victory, but on the other hand too soon'. The rapid changes in Eastern Europe, and the growing conflicts between constituents of the old Soviet empire, are yet to be resolved.

Holland's Andrianus Cardinal Simonis, in the conservative camp, said later that 'two shadows hung over the synod'—the disintegration of Yugoslavia and moves for greater integration within the European Community. The synod heard accounts of the war in Croatia and of attacks on Croatian Catholic clergy by Serbian militia, and soon declared its support for the independence of Croatia and Slovenia. In almost the same breath, it sent a message to European Community leaders meeting in Maastricht, endorsing the road to European unity—'More than ever, the people of

Europe want to be united in new political structures'. The bishops seemed no more capable of reconciling the two ideas than their political counterparts had been. Said one: 'If we recognise Slovenia and Croatia, I can see problems with Czechoslovakia, Belgium and other federal structures. However, in this case, it seems the ideal must give way to practical reality, making a "divorce" the only solution.'

It is difficult to ignore the religious dimension of the Yugoslav conflict, which pits Orthodox Serbs against Catholic Croats. A 'shadow' with a long history, it may prove trifling in comparison with the even longer shadow drawing across Europe in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

The Pope is convinced the key to European unity lies in the rediscovery of the only common denominator it ever had, Christendom. The synod was supposed to have given fresh life to ecumenism; instead most of the Orthodox, led by the Russians (the eastern 'lung', in papal parlance), stayed away.

THE PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW, Aleksei II, said in November that the synod was an 'internal matter' for the Catholic Church. Several reasons have been suggested for his refusal to send 'fraternal delegates' to the synod: the continuing fight in Ukraine over the restoration of property confiscated from the Greek-rite Catholics in 1946, and

claims that Rome is proselytising in Russia.

The latter issue was fuelled last year by the appointment of three bishops in Russia and two to Bielerus [Byelorussia]. Earlier appointments of Latin and Greek-rite bishops in Ukraine did not help. Referring to Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, the apostolic administrator in Moscow, the patriarch asked during a visit to Anglican leaders meeting at Lambeth in England, 'How would *they* [the Catholics] like it if we set up an Orthodox Bishop of Rome?'

The Vatican insists that the appointees are 'apostolic administrators' who happen to have the rank of bishop. Although ecumenism appears to have gained little from the synod, many in the Vatican did admit the appointments were a bad move. A 'psychological error', said Cardinal Simonis. And Bishop Pierre Duprey, of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, reportedly said 10 days before the synod opened that a 'whole series of mistakes' had been made. Others say the appointments should be rescinded.

Fr John Long SJ, a Russia expert not invited to the synod, has attacked self-proclaimed evangelists moving into Russia as 'well-intentioned but often ignorant'. The general secretary of the Council of European Churches, Dr Jean-Eugene Fischer, warned the synod of the danger to the delicate politics of ecumenism posed by 'missionaries who pay no heed to the local church'.

Michael Bourdeaux, the director of Britain's Keston Research Centre, which has been monitoring what was the Soviet Union for more than 30 years, said he was sad the Russians had stayed away and found it hard to believe their claims that they had not been consulted about the appointments. 'The synod could have been a great forum,' he said 'but there seem to have been no waves of new inspiration. The Russian Orthodox are in great need of outside help, as is everything else in Russia.'

Bordeaux is sceptical about Orthodox claims of a Vatican campaign in Orthodox Russia. 'I recently met Archbishop Kondrusiewicz. His HQ is very modest indeed—he has a vestry, no apartment, no secretariat. There is no question of the Vatican pouring in millions there.'

An Oxford-based Vatican watcher, Peter Hebblethwaite, said the appointments were 'ham-fisted' but that Aleksei was making some big mistakes himself. By demonstrating hostility to Rome, Hebblethwaite said, Aleksei had only increased the importance that would be attached to any papal visit to Russia. Hebblethwaite believes there may now be a chance to end the schism of 1054, the last great 'curtain' dividing Eastern and Western Europe. Conservatives might well disagree.

Cardinal Simonis said the main stumbling block to definitive reconciliation was that Moscow was prepared to recognise the Pope only as a *primus inter pares* ('first among equals')—not good enough for the Rock of Peter.

Time and again the pontiff and his allies have warned of the 'dangers' of hedonistic western society, and of a western church that has gone soft. In the run-up to the synod the message remained the same. 'Today we are witnessing an ideological and spiritual vacuum which calls for a religious rebirth,' bishops were told in April 1991, in a document prepared under the aegis of the general secretary of the Synod of Bishops, Archbishop Jan Schotte. It went on, 'the East stands out because of its strong faith.'

Four months before, the Pope told the Vatican diplomatic corps that the people of Western Europe seemed 'to be affected by a certain lack of idealism ... may they learn again how to be silent, to meditate, to pray.' Shortly before the opening of the synod the Archbishop of Paris, Jean-Marie Cardinal Lustiger, opined in the left-of-centre French daily *Le Monde*, that 'communism was a Western misadventure that occurred in Eastern Europe'.

In Poland, as in other former Eastern bloc countries, the crumbling of communism has unleashed a heady desire to emulate Western Europe, to equal its wealth and embrace its val-

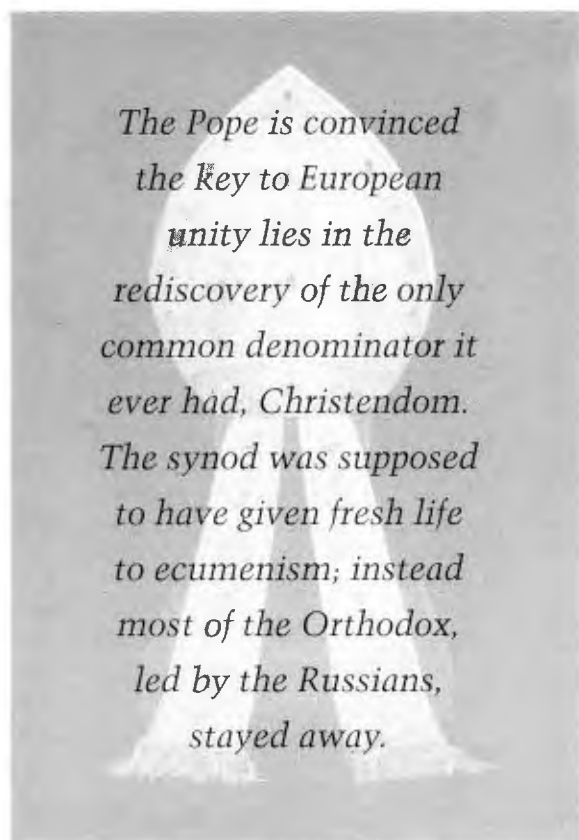
scrappy October elections were no cause for celebration, in the Vatican or anywhere else. The ex-Communist Democratic Left Alliance won 13 per cent of the vote, second only to the centre-left Democratic Union, with 14 per cent.

The synod devised no practical measures for carrying out the 'decade of evangelisation'—the vehicle for winning a dechristianised Europe back to the fold. But few bishops had expected such a concrete result. Most agreed that the western half of the continent got to know the eastern half a little better.

Much time was taken up with accounts of how the church had suffered at the hands of its communist oppressors. The encounter gave delegates from the east a chance to tell their western counterparts what they needed, in material and spiritual terms, to rebuild their shattered churches.

The president of the Italian bishops' conference and the Pope's Vicar of Rome, Camillo Cardinal Ruini, was assigned the task of organising a body to follow up the deliberations of the synod. Observers of Hebblethwaite's disposition, however, see little future in it. He says the Council of European Bishops' Conferences will simply have a better base from which to pursue its own work on ecumenism.

The president of the council—Carlo Maria Cardinal Martini, the Archbishop of Milan—reportedly finds the pontiff's talk of a 'new evangelisation' misleading. The mission has always been there; what is new is the situation in Europe. ■



ues. And the Church has had to conclude it is not the unequivocal beneficiary of 'God's victory'. As John Paul II found on his last trip home in August, the church faces a growing credibility problem. Its apparent rigidity and claim to the role of exclusive moral arbiter in Poland, particularly on abortion and compulsory religious education, have disillusioned many Poles.

Elsewhere—in Hungary, for instance—the church has been discredited for its apparent lack of opposition to the former regime. Poland's

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BRETT EVANS

Living on the edge

Australia's Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s, Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, Melbourne University Press. ISBN 0522 84477 4 RRP \$34.95

The End of the Cold War in North East Asia, Stuart Harris and James Cotton (editors), Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1991.

ISBN 0582 87102 6 RRP \$19.99

THE TUMEN DELTA IS NOTHING but rice paddies and marshland. Some time in the future, however, it could become the site of a hi-tech metropolis, serviced by 'smart' buildings, international airports, railheads and ports, that would rival existing *entrepôt* cities like Rotterdam and Hong Kong in size and economic importance. Adelaide's Multifunction Polis is a mere suburb compared to this \$30 billion development.

And where is the Tumen delta? It is the riparian border region that separates North Korea, China and the newly independent Russia. In February 1992 the United Nations Development Program brought together these three nations, as well as Japan, South Korea and Mongolia, for talks on how best to develop this economically strategic region for the benefit of all involved.

On paper, the economic complementarity of these countries is breathtaking. Imagine the effects that Japanese and South Korean capital and technology could have on the virtually untapped natural resources of Siberia and Mongolia with the aid of cheap Chinese and North Korean labour. Welcome to the north-east Asia of the 21st century.

That these historically antagonistic nations can sit down together to discuss such a project is testament to

how much the international system has changed since the end of the Cold War. The motivation behind Japan and South Korea's involvement is equally instructive. As the *Far Eastern Economic Review* has pointed out: the Tumen Project 'provides insurance for north-east Asia's trading dynamos against any future protectionist policy lurches by such groups as the EC and the North American Free Trade Agreement countries.'

If there is a 'new world order', its newness derives from the fact that geo-economic questions are slowly replacing geo-strategic considerations as the primary motivation of foreign policy. With the decline of the United States there is no longer a single hegemonic power capable of creating and maintaining the 'international public goods', such as the liberal international trading regime, that were taken

for granted in the decades after World War II.

The international economic system seems to be at a crossroads. One fork leads to managed trade, regionalism and maybe the creation of trading blocs. The other fork leads to the continuation of the postwar liberal trading system, underwritten by a revitalised General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and greater macro-economic co-ordination by the G7 group of leading industrial nations.

But which is more likely? Unfortunately for Australia, it seems to be the former.

The industrialised nations chorus their wholehearted approval for free trade while busily constructing regional economic pacts—just in case the liberal trading system begins to collapse—and thereby help to create what they claim to abhor. The Europe-



Pic: Andrew Stark

The federal Labor government has consistently failed to link its industrial and trade policies: it has placed its faith in the market at both the international and domestic levels

an Community finally becomes a single market this year, and the North American Free Trade zone will soon be a reality. In January 1992 the ASEAN nations agreed to establish their own free trade area. And as we have seen, the north-east Asian nations are beginning to put aside decades of enmity and prepare for the future in a pragmatic manner.

So far, the Uruguay Round of GATT has failed to fulfil its promise and the January meeting of the G7 nations showed once again how difficult it is to coordinate domestic economic agendas in the international interest.

Given these trends, what should Australia be doing? We are a middle-sized power with a resource-based economy dependent upon free trade in

an era of increasing closure. Optimistic commentators emphasise our economic complementarity with Japan and South Korea. But how long will this much vaunted 'complementarity' last once Siberian coal and Mongolian timber starts to flow out of the Tumen Delta?

Cursed to 'live in interesting times', Australia must find innovative foreign policies. During the next decade the key split in Australia's foreign policy debate will occur between the 'Americanists' and the 'Asianists', with the former fighting a rearguard action against the inevitable advance of the latter. Swept into this debate will be the issues of immigration, republicanism, multiculturalism, international trade and domestic economic policy.

IN WHAT IS VIRTUALLY an election platform on foreign policy for the Labor Party, Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, and long-time party stalwart Bruce Grant, have come down firmly on the 'Asianist' side of the debate in their new book *Australia's Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s*. In contrast to most writers on Australian foreign policy since 1951, Evans and Grant have not felt the need to place the ANZUS alliance at the cen-

tre of their analysis. Yet, despite this admirable recognition of the new realities that confront Australia, the authors soon return to espousing Canberra's conventional wisdom on a wide range of topics, particularly international economic issues.

Australia's Foreign Relations is dedicated to 'the men and women of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade'. No doubt there is an autographed copy on the desk of every department officer; unfortunately, the book reads as though they might have written most of it.

In the world portrayed by Grant and Evans, policy is 'proactive' and 'entrepreneurial', 'niche diplomacy' is the order of the day and 'enmeshment' with Asia is the name of the game. Though not unexpected in a book co-authored by a foreign minister, it should not go unremarked upon: the language employed is often bland, bureaucratic, and platitudinous, hardly the sort of robust prose you might have expected from a man nicknamed 'Biggles'.

Once they become *ex-insiders*, free of the political pressures imposed by high office, the Evans-Grant team could produce a classic book on Australia's foreign relations. It's a pity they didn't wait. For the moment, however, this book does serve some purpose. As a comprehensive record of the government's policies and public rhetoric it is a useful document, although though it often reads like a summary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's annual reports. It can also be quite revealing, especially in its contradictions.

On the question of human rights, for example, Evans and Grant counsel against quixotic policies and argue for a balance between the needs of *realpolitik* and Australia's commitment to liberal-democratic freedoms. Yet with regards to trade issues they adopt an excessively Panglossian position which assumes that free trade is in every nation's benefit and will be pursued, therefore, by every 'rational' statesman. It's no good 'tilting at windmills' when it comes to human rights, but it seems we live in 'the best of all possible worlds' with regard to trade. In the view of Evans and Grant, regionalist or bilateral trade policies that undermine the present liberal trading system should not be 'con-

templated except in an environment where existing multilateral disciplines ... have weakened to the point of breakdown.' Mightn't we go down with the ship, though?

AUSTRALIA HAS TWO potential life rafts. In 1989 the Australian Government launched Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC), a multilateral organization that involves the 12 major trading nations of the Asia Pacific and is designed to encourage and maintain the principles of trade liberalization in our region. Similarly, the Cairns Group of Fair Traders in Agriculture, which is led by Australia, operates within the GATT process to encourage reform of the American, European and north-east Asian agricultural markets. So far the effect of both has been negligible.

Taking its cue from the dominant discourse on economic policy in Canberra, the federal Labor government has consistently failed to link its industrial and trade policies: it has placed its faith in the market at both the international and domestic levels. For example, Australia has no Ministry of International Trade and Industry as does Japan; instead it divides these functions between the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Industry, Technology and Commerce. Is this acceptable, given the rapidly developing trend toward closure in the international economic system? *Australia's Foreign Relations* gives no sense of the important connections between domestic and foreign policies.

Unless it deals with the domestic structures of nation states in an informed and critical manner, writing on foreign policy quickly becomes obtuse. Luckily, Australia is blessed with a community of scholars who possess international reputations in this field of study. Though you might not agree with their analyses or conclusions, most of the contributors to *The End of the Cold War in North East Asia*, edited by Stuart Harris and James Cotton, write in a manner that appropriately mixes domestic and international perspectives.

A summarising paper by Nancy Viviani is particularly useful. In analysing modern international relations, scholars confront a 'triple puzzle'. Somehow they must learn to inter-

mingle three analytical frameworks: 'one for the state and civil society, one for states as unitary actors (which they are not) in the international system, and one for states and other actors in the international system.' How else can they begin to explain the trend toward closure in the international system brought about by entrenched interest groups such as Japanese and European farmers, or the equally strong tendency towards 'federalism' or 'consociation' that is apparent in institutions as diverse as the European Community or the Commonwealth of Independent States, or the effect that such trends will have upon the world's multipolar system?

For example, Australia plays little or no role in the relationship that is most important to its long-term economic survival, that between the United States and Japan. This important relationship, now on the verge of breaking down into a 'Trans-Pacific Cold War', hardly rates a mention in *Australia's Foreign Relations*. In the Harris and Cotton volume, on the

other hand, a variety of essays and perspectives give an interesting account of this conflict.

In 1980 the American people elected a president who promised to make the United States 'stand tall again' by increasing defence spending and simultaneously reducing personal income-tax rates. Despite the nostrums of the 'Laffer Curve', which prophesied that tax cuts would actually lead to higher tax receipts, the US federal budget ballooned under the effect of Reagan's spending. America was forced to borrow from abroad to cover this deficit, and in 1985 became the world's biggest debtor nation.

JAPAN, MEANWHILE, had accumulated a historic capital account surplus due to its high domestic savings rates, shrewd investment habits, high quality research and development and aggressive trade policies. The economic logic of this situation was overwhelming: the victors of World War II were soon in hock to the vanquished. Japan is now the pre-eminent eco-

nomie power and the United States is in the midst of a recession that rivals our own in severity.

The 'Trans-Pacific Cold War', therefore, is driven by the domestic policies of *both* nations, particularly national savings and investment policies, and is accentuated by their conflicting ideological attitudes towards trade and capitalism itself.

By attempting to solve the 'triple puzzle', commentators—and perhaps foreign ministers—might develop policies more in tune with the realities of the international system. When he was Treasurer, Paul Keating remarked that the federal government's superannuation policies represented 'Australia's last chance'. Unless we invest this huge, and growing, pool of national savings wisely, in industries that create both jobs and exports, we could be looking towards a dim future. Australians don't usually think of superannuation as an arm of foreign policy. Maybe they should. ■

Brett Evans (no relation) is a Sydney writer.

CHINA REPORT

Deng's comeback

NEARLY A YEAR after his last appearance, in Shanghai, (*People's Daily*, Feb. 15, 1991) Deng Xiaoping surfaced in public during the week of January 19 to 25, in the special economic zones of Shenzhen and Zhuhai (*Dagong Daily*, Hong Kong, Jan 22-24, 27).

In these cities he was joined by State Chairman Yang Shangkun. At a time when Hong Kong rumours have it that the health of other leaders is none too good, and after the satisfactory conclusion of the Sino-US talks on the protection of intellectual property, the visit was not fortuitous.

Deng, who had chosen to start the Lunar Year of the Ram in Shanghai, decided to end it in the South, another stronghold of the open door policy. After a month devoted to meetings of all kinds, throughout all sectors of society, and at which the question of reforms was high on the agenda, Deng's southern tour gave a boost to the

open-door policy and the reform program in general. The party general secretary, Jiang Zemin, was also in Shanghai calling for a greater 'liberation of thoughts' and an acceleration of the reforms (*People's Daily*, Jan. 20).

Although in early 1991 the official media had stressed the achievements of Deng Xiaoping as the initiator of reforms ten years before, speaking of him as a leader of the past, the second half of the year saw a change of tone and his directives were given a new prominence. For instance, the *People's Daily* editorial after the eighth plenum cited Deng's call for efforts to convince those who do not believe in socialism. According to Hong Kong newspapers, this was a quotation from a conversation Deng had with Jiang Zemin and Yang Shangkun on September 25 during the Central Conference of Enterprises.

Not only are the major themes of economic reform hotly discussed,

reforms of the political system are now being mentioned also. One of these concerns the transformation of party and government organs at county level into economic entities. This will not lead to a radical political change but in the countryside it could have an effect similar to that of the suppression of the communes in 1982.

A consensus has seemingly been reached at a higher level, based on a Dengist pragmatism. Domestically, there is greater confidence and more official openness. Internationally, even if Premier Li Peng's tour in Europe and participation in the 'world summit' at the United Nations may not be the easiest of exercises, the government will have scored some points.

The reformist line is back in command, but action rather than words, implementation rather than blueprints, are what is needed now. ■

—China News Analysis

THESE TWO BOOKS further mark the centenary of Pope Leo XIII's social encyclical of 1891, *Rerum Novarum*. Duncan sets the encyclical in the context of the history of Catholic social thought, and Molony traces its development from the numerous drafts prepared by Leo's assistants to the document finally issued in his name.

Rerum Novarum reflected a worldwide revulsion against the poverty and deprivation of working people. In Australia, 1891 was also the year when the shearers flung themselves into the greatest strike in their history and Labor representatives sat in colonial parliaments for the first time. In Adelaide the Rev. Charles Latimer Marson, a high-church Anglican, established Australia's first Fabian Society. The year before, a Victorian Catholic layman, William Archer, had become the first Australian member of the London Fabian Society.

In hindsight, what is striking is the passionate intensity of the demand for reform and how much many of the reformers, Leo included, had in common. All were outraged by poverty and were determined that the needs of the poor should be met. Molony credits Leo with having had the courage 'to turn to the workers, the masses of the people, and give them a role in making the future' by recognising the legitimacy of trade unions and the need for state intervention. Mr Justice Higgins, of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, is credited by Molony with having drawn on *Rerum Novarum* in the preparation of the Harvester judgement which gave rise to the basic wage.

After Marson returned to Britain, his colleagues in the Church Socialist League there included the young G.K. Chesterton. Beatrice Webb's often-quoted diary entry that 'Social questions are the vital questions of today. They take the place of religion' reads oddly in the face of the fact that only journalists outnumbered the clergymen among her fellow members of the London Fabian Society. The society's existence stemmed in part from the Land Reform Union, which had in turn been established largely at the instigation of the Rev. Stewart Headlam's Guild of St Matthew. The guild,

Back to the future

The Worker Question: a historical perspective on *Rerum Novarum*, John Molony, Collins Dove, 1991. ISBN 0 85924 997 2 RRP \$34.95.

The Church's Social Teaching: from *Rerum Novarum* to 1931, Bruce Duncan, Collins Dove, 1991. ISBN 0 85924 996 4 RRP \$39.95

in which Marson was also prominent, was Anglo-Catholic and outspokenly socialist.

The question arises why, given that the reformist culture of the day was subject to so conspicuous a Christian influence, were not more Catholics encouraged by *Rerum Novarum* to follow Archer's example and throw in their lot with the reformist mainstream? Why instead did the new century find them caught up in the general tragedy of estrangement, in which groups of good will have been held back from acting together to eliminate poverty and advancing the well-being of working people?

Molony has a relevant anecdote: 'Many years ago, Bishop Basil Roper told me a story of an event in his life which he much regretted. Before the First World war he was a young priest at the cathedral presbytery in Ballarat, Australia. One day, he was called to the parlour where a young man awaited him with a small document in his hand. It was a copy of *Rerum Novarum* and the young man wanted the priest to explain its contents to him.

'The priest was forced to tell him that he could not do so because, although he was aware of Leo's encyclical, he was unable to explain it, as he had never studied it. The young man went away unsatisfied and, according to the bishop, ceased from that day to interest himself in the social teachings of the church to which he belonged. It was regrettable because he was James Scullin, who later, in the very week of the Wall Street crash in New York in 1929, became the first Catholic prime minister of Australia.'

Duncan likens the church to 'a great caravan of diverse peoples along with their baggage of history, ambigu-

ity, human failure and even betrayal, as well as their riches of wisdom, heroic witness, hope, faith, and love'. Similar attributes characterised Vincenzo Gioacchino Pecci, who assumed the throne of St Peter as Leo XIII in 1878. The 'baggage' that he brought with him included remembered grievances such as the suffering inflicted on the church by revolutionary France and more recent outrages at the hands of liberalism and freemasonry.

Liberalism in the British or American sense was unfamiliar to him. Leo had had little opportunity to familiarise himself with institutions or affairs other than in Europe, and the socialism against which *Rerum Novarum* fulminated was the Marxist socialism of the continent, not British Fabianism.

Leo's constraints in no way impaired his acute consciousness of the impoverishment and suffering of the working people who comprised the overwhelming majority of his flock, in circumstances where, as Duncan observes, 'Industrialisation generally eroded the ancient familial structure of Europe and destroyed the communal economic base, resulting in the alienation of workers from the land and customs as they crowded into cities in search of work, bidding against each other, and being reduced from persons with a recognised place in society to an anonymous mass of individuals struggling to survive'. 'Labour', Bishop Gaspar Mermillod warned Leo in 1889, 'is treated as a mere commodity, the existence of the workers is at the mercy of the free play of material forces and the workers are reduced to a state that recalls pagan slavery'.

Leo's response, in turn, was conditioned by further 'baggage', compris-

ing the remedies proposed by Catholic social thinkers before him. Reformers of the stamp of Félicité de Lamennais, Frederic Ozanam and Philippe Buchez in France, Wilhelm von Kettler in Germany and Giuseppe Toniolo in Italy had grappled with poverty and the social question, and offered solutions as different as the mixture of 'romantic conservatism with Protestant social reformism' advocated by the Prussian Karl von Vogelsang, and the close approximation of Christian Democracy in its modern industrial and parliamentary forms advocated in France by Leon Harmel.

Leo's role, therefore, was less to break new ground than to arrive at a compromise acceptable to most of the elements within his disparate following. There are obvious parallels with the preparation of the major policy speeches by modern political leaders. Any prime ministerial or presidential speechwriter will empathise with the octogenarian Jesuit, Matteo Liberatore, who fleshed out the broad directions laid down for the encyclical by Leo, and with Cardinals Zigliara and Mazzella, who were entrusted with keeping Liberatore's formulations within the bounds of prudence—witness passages from Liberatore's draft in Zigliara's handwriting, which effectively suggested 'Isn't that going too far? It is the Pope who is speaking.'

Molony explains how the notion of a family wage, included in Liberatore's initial draft, survived subsequent editing by his more cautious fellows in a form explicit enough for Cardinal Manning to be able to claim that the church endorsed the family wage.

The outcome enables Duncan to conclude that:

LEO PLACED HIMSELF close to reformist socialism and committed the church to work for reform within existing institutions, even trade unions. Though the credit for the workers' movement belongs to the socialists, Leo endorsed it with the full force of his authority, and advanced a critique of capitalism and the demands of the workers. Catholics could no longer use the church as an excuse for inaction.'

Even so, the triumph was short-lived. Duncan describes vividly how *Rerum Novarum* was compromised

by division, both within the church and between the church and groups outside it that broadly shared the encyclical's outlook. The anti-Modernist movement that flourished under Leo's immediate successors was a setback to the social objectives that he had championed, stultifying the growth of Christian Democracy, aborting the alliances with other reformist groups and, ultimately, opening the door to the accommodation with fascism with which some Catholics allowed themselves to be tainted.

Little encouragement was given to creative application of the principles of *Rerum Novarum*. It was not until after the Second World War—and largely in isolation from mainstream Catholic thought—that the parish priest at Mondragon in the Basque region of Spain, Father Jose Maria Arizmendiarieta, was able to break through the conceptual obstacles to the development of co-operation as a valid alternative to private and public sector enterprise, or that the credit co-operative movement established in Quebec at the turn of the century by Alphonse Desjardins began to achieve its potential as a mechanism for the socially responsible mobilisation of capital.

A century on from *Rerum Novarum*, the problem of poverty remains as intractable and corrosive as ever, even where, as in Australia, it has assumed new forms. The likely capital requirements of Third World and postcommunist economies in the decades ahead mean that this country will not easily be able to rely on the rest of the world to underwrite a level of consumption that we are unwilling to fund for ourselves. Here, as throughout the English-speaking world, we are witnessing the emergence of new concentrations of wealth and poverty on a scale not previously experienced in the postwar period, with a corresponding shrinkage of the middle class to which most Australians suppose themselves to belong.

Although we are only beginning to acquire the underclass with an entrenched culture of dependence that is now so great a source of concern among analysts in the United States, the risk is plain. Also at risk, consequently, are the central human values that Leo expressed so eloquently in *Rerum Novarum*:

'Man himself can never renounce his right to be treated according to his nature or to surrender himself to any form of slavery of the spirit. In this matter it is not a question of rights which a man is free to renounce, but of duties towards God which must be held sacred.'

OUR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL irresponsibility is jeopardising rights that the generations after us will only be able to recover with the greatest difficulty. It follows that all the heirs of the great 19th century tradition of reformism to which *Rerum Novarum* belongs—Catholic, Fabian, liberal or otherwise—have an obligation to offer alternatives to the resurgent tradition of Manchester-school, *laissez-faire* economics that now dominates our public life. The divisions that in the past have held us back from talking to one another should be subordinated, in the interests of achieving a greater cross-fertilisation of ideas.

There is great irony and great hope in the fact that the ideal of co-operation, to which both Catholics and Fabian socialists subscribed at the turn of the century, has been vindicated so triumphantly through the Desjardins movement and at Mondragon. Further, it has triumphed in circumstances where the rival claims of the statutory corporation and the command economy have so comprehensively been shown to be bankrupt. To the extent that the ethic of co-operation was never so resolutely discarded in Catholic as in socialist thinking, a measure of humility on the part of socialists is appropriate.

Humility likewise dictates that theories such as guild socialism and distributism should be re-examined—less in the hope that they have any comprehensive solution to our problems, than for their potential as points of departure for new solutions. A rich moral and intellectual inheritance has been handed down to us, and better use should be made of it. ■

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FLASH IN THE PAN

JFK, dir. Oliver Stone (Hoyts and Greater Union). America needs heroes and martyrs. Liberal America needs them badly; the plausible candidates are thin on the ground. In *JFK* Oliver Stone plays Angel's Advocate in the case for Jack Kennedy's canonisation. Kennedy himself never makes an appearance, except through newsreel footage and simulated newsreel footage, but his presence is felt throughout.

The film's message is very direct: if Kennedy had lived there would have been no Vietnam, the Cold War would have ended in the early sixties, and a culture of prosperity and social justice would have flourished. But all these dreams were shattered by a conspiracy involving the CIA, the FBI, organised crime, the military-industrial complex, and even Lyndon Johnston.

To send that message Stone makes use of Jim Garrison's investigation into the Kennedy murder. Kevin Costner plays Garrison, obsessed by the impossibility of Lee Harvey Oswald's having assassinated Kennedy alone. In a gut-wrenchingly nauseating subplot, Garrison's wife (Sissy Spacek) tearfully watches their marriage go down the tubes because of Garrison's obsession, until Robert Kennedy is killed, and she comes to share the obsession. Donald Sutherland has a cameo appearance as X, the mysterious ex-military official who meets Garrison outside the Lincoln memorial, confirms his worst fears, and adds new ones.

The film's hyperbole does very little to aid the real case for there having been a conspiracy to murder Kennedy. It fails completely to balance the conflicting demands of pseudo-documentary and drama, and it is at times embarrassingly didactic. But it is over three hours long and, and I still wasn't bored. Maybe I'd like a liberal American martyr too.

—David Braddon-Mitchell

Cape Fear, dir. Martin Scorsese (Greater Union and Hoyts). That this film has not succumbed to assault by buffery is further proof, were any required, of the Scorsese genius. In *Cape Fear* there is enough pastiche piled upon allusion to leave those who saw their first thrillers in film appreciation class quite breathless. This is fortunate, because in that debilitated state they have spared us too many discourses about whether Scorsese has used or abused Hitchcock *et al.*

Eureka Street Film Competition

Why is Alfred Hitchcock sitting beside his chair rather than in it? If you think you know, tell us and we'll award two tickets, for the film of your choice, for the answer we like best. Write to: *Eureka Street* Film Competition, PO Box 553, Richmond, VIC 3121. The winner will be announced in May. The winner of December's competition was Anne-Marie Strickland, of Prahran, Victoria, who thought that Scarlett O'Hara's Christmas present to Ashley Wilkes would have been a Melanie doll with pins in it.



Essentially, Scorsese has taken the plot of J. Lee Thompson's 1962 version of *Cape Fear*, sieved it through his own murky religious sensibilities with a little help from writer Wesley Strick, and entrusted delivery of the product to his most favoured collaborator, Robert de Niro. The result suggests that the Italian-American,

Catholic anxieties that have fascinated Scorsese and de Niro ever since *Mean Streets* (1973) lose surprisingly little when translated into hillbilly, Southern Baptist anxieties.

De Niro plays Max Cady, an ex-convict intent on punishing his former lawyer, Sam Bowden (Nick Nolte), for suppressing evidence that would have shortened his sentence. Specifically, Cady wants to rape Bowden's wife Leigh (Jessica Lange) and daughter Danny (Juliette Lewis), and then to murder the whole family. He undermines the Bowdens by exposing their own frailties and, in the high point of this campaign, lures Danny to meet him alone. The mixture of dread, excitement and adolescent awkwardness with which she responds steals some of the horror from the film's subsequent violent conclusion. It also establishes Lewis as an actor of great promise—no small achievement for someone playing opposite de Niro at his obsessive, menacing best.

—Ray Cassin

Prospero's Books, dir. Peter Greenaway (independent cinemas). In many ways *Prospero's Books* is Greenaway's most self-indulgent film to date. John Gielgud plays Prospero, and is the voice for most of the other parts, in a loose adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, played against the background on Greenaway's typical painterly tableaux. The degree of detail in these tableaux changes constantly, to reinforce the themes of the play. In the foreground we get Prospero's books themselves: they are computerised animations, that from time to time superimpose themselves on the screen and are described in a voice-over derived, it seems, from Douglas Adams' *Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy*. Prospero's cell is cluttered with young men and women, striking ornamental poses or urinating into pools of water.

How damaging is the indulgence? The books themselves fascinate, though the constant underlining of images and ideas in the various layers of the film becomes tiresome. But at the end of the film a little magic happens. As Prospero renounces his power over the play the other characters speak with their own voices, in a moment of liberation that justifies Greenaway's previous vocal omni-

presence. At the same time, the elaborate tableaux disintegrate, the bevy of young men and women drops to the floor and the spirits are dismissed. At the end of *The Tempest*, Prospero casts his staff into the sea, no longer in need of contrivance and magic. Can we hope that there is a lesson in this for Greenaway?

—David Braddon Mitchell

Barton Fink, dir. Joel Coen (Hoyts). *Barton Fink* is a marvellous success. It both laughs at and participates in a whole range of genres: the thriller, the Hollywood movie and more. Stereotyped characters are cut from cinematic cardboard but are wonderful in their glittering two-dimensionality—living animation. Yet at the same time the film has a prepossessing coherence and sense of control.

Strolling anxiously throughout the opulently malign world of Hollywood is Barton Fink himself (John Turturro), a desperately earnest leftwing playwright, who has been persuaded to come to Hollywood after his first New York success. In the pursuit of fidelity to the Common Man, he moves into a drab hotel, where he meets Charlie (John Goodman), an apparently common man, who says that he sells peace of mind for a living. In a way he does. Barton's fate is linked with that of the Common Man, but before then the tour of Hollywood in the reign of Sam Goldwyn is at times funny, at times frightening, and at times achingly lyrical.

It's a film whose details resonate long after you've seen it. The pattern of the wallpaper in the hotel, the print in Barton's room (which is brought to life in the final scene), the appropriateness of Judy Davis' exaggerated and slightly unconvincing southern drawl, all burst into my mind whenever I'm reminded of the film. Don't wait for it to come back as a late screening at your local rep cinema. See it now.

—David Braddon-Mitchell

The Addams Family, dir. Barry Sonnenfeld (Hoyts). Television shows like *The Simpsons* and *Married with Children* were not the first to satirise America's obsession with happy families and Mom's apple pie. Before them reigned the 1960s sitcom *The Addams Family*, which in turn was inspired by Charles Addams' cartoons

in *The New Yorker*. Sonnenfeld's film should please devotees of both its fore-runners—it has acquired the genuinely macabre, sometimes cruel, flavour of the cartoons without obliterating the slightly campy style of the TV series.

The plot of this *Addams Family* is thin, but all it has to do is string together the one-liners and sight gags anyway. The film scores chiefly on successful casting: Raoul Julia as Gomez reveals comic talents unsuspected by those of us who have known him only via *Romero* or *Kiss of the Spider Woman*; Anjelica Huston is a seductively funereal Morticia; Christina Ricci (the younger sister from

Spotswood, dir. Mark Josse (Hoyts). A bad recession is a good time for the release of a comedy about the failures and inefficiencies of Australian manufacturing. *Spotswood* depicts the humanisation of Wallace (Anthony Hopkins), an industrial efficiency expert. Wallace is hired to advise a failing moccasin factory in an industrial suburb of Melbourne, and what happens next is obvious from the beginning. After recommending that the factory cease making moccasins and start selling imports instead, Wallace repents. He makes friends among the collection of eccentrics who work in the factory, suffers a crisis of conscience and finds salvation.



Mermaids) as the po-faced Wednesday proves that at least one American child star can act instead of merely looking cute; and Carel Struycken, as Lurch, proves that playing the giant in *Twin Peaks* can lay the foundations of a career after all.

The film's one real innovation in the treatment of its material has irritated Addams purists. Thing, that disembodied hand from the box, is now disboxed as well, appearing as a sort of free-floating bodily appendage. A Thing without a box, say the purists, is completely demystified. True. But hey, even an inverted happy family needs a 'dog' to play fetch.

—Ray Cassin

Hopkins, in the wake of his success as the cannibal genius Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs*, is a sure drawcard for *Spotswood*. He plays the uptight Wallace with aplomb, and there is a strong Australian cast, including Ben Mendelsohn, Angela Punch McGregor, Alwyn Kurts and Bruno Lawrence.

The period in which *Spotswood* is set is not specified, but most likely it is sometime in the sixties. This raises again a question that is so often asked about Australian film makers: why are they more concerned with idealising and sentimentalising our past than with portraying our present?

—Andrew Nette

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