

# EUREKA STREET

Vol. 2 No 5 June 1992

\$4.00

## Playing Trains



**Switching points:** Margaret Simons on railway reform

**Creation, new physics, no new answers**

J.J.C. Smart takes on Paul Davies  
Mark Coleridge juggles with Genesis

**Eamonn in error**

Margaret Coffey on the case of Bishop Casey

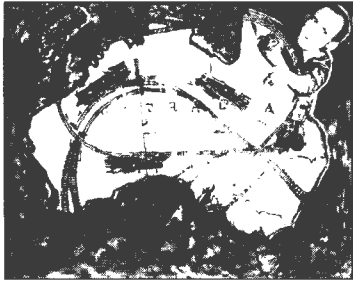


*People's Park, Tianjin, December 1991*

*Photo by Emmanuel Santos*

Elders in Tianjin amuse themselves with pet birds. Each day they take the birds out into the park, release them for exercise and entice them back with food. Before the Cultural Revolution the pastime was regarded as 'bourgeois', and it was banned for a time under Mao Zedong. Now, as politics and ways of life change, owning pet birds has become popular again.

*June 1992 marks the third anniversary of the Tienanmen massacre.*



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## 'A sad tale's best for winter'

**I**T IS WINTER. Sometimes, when that is said, it can carry an emotional freight almost like the 'It was night' of John's Gospel, when Judas goes out into the darkness. The words stand for more than the halt that the wheel of the seasons has made at the moment. Nobody says, 'in the dead of summer', or autumn, or spring; when we say, 'in the dead of winter', we know what we mean. As the skies darken, we have trouble on our hands.

Napoleon said that he wanted 'three o'clock in the morning' courage in his soldiers: the dead of winter is three o'clock in the morning of the year. Things are worse in another hemisphere, they keep telling us. In Iceland, the period after Christmas is the height of the suicide season, partly because the winter festivities have taken place and things still don't seem any better, so they wade out to sea until they drown or freeze. It is not quite like that in Australia.

But at least in southern Australia we are left in no doubt about the season of the year. The air turns sloppy, the earth turns slushy, fires seem too far away, and water—well, water is like the sea's revenge upon the creatures that deserted it those millions of years ago. This is the time of unpleasant instability, chastening, aggressive, inhumane. It is the bleak festival for snuffling, the period in which our bodies are assailed, the months in which adults who otherwise walk tall suddenly wheeze and splutter like small children. It is, as a brilliant villain calls it, 'the winter of our discontent'.

Shakespeare's Richard III was speaking mainly about the political milieu. Today, still, many live in political winters, or in their remnants. I think of two recent visitors to Melbourne, men of the highest distinction. One was Adam Michnik, and the other the Dalai Lama. Michnik, now middle-aged, was first in gaol in Poland at 19, politically vexatious because a free spirit. Outspoken, resolute, very intelligent, and gifted to a high degree with the capacity for eloquent contempt of sleaze and malice, he has been one of the great ones of central and eastern Europe, the people compared with whom its recent gaolers look

like manikins. At a dinner given in Michnik's honour, a passage from one of his writings was read out in which he said that he and his friends had resolved to behave 'as if we were living in a free country'. It is a haunting sentence, and not only because he has paid dearly for following its logic.

It is haunting because it can be applied universally. Ordinary Poles—and Hungarians, and Czechs, and Russians—have lived for decades in a political winter, which has brought distress at best and death at worst. Trying to live there as if one were in a free country must often have seemed like fatuity, a kind of *Unrealpolitik*. Now by analogy, all of us, inhabitants of the land we call 'the world', are visited from time to time by the suspicion that perhaps we should be living 'as if we were in a free country'. Very clearly we are not, at present, living in that country. A world so repeatedly embattled, so given to avidities, so systematically narcissistic, so apt for satire, is not 'a free country'. But it will always get worse, always and everywhere get worse, unless the path of Michnik is taken.

Historically, millions have taken it—have had what Karl Rahner called 'a wintertime piety', a wintertime faith. At their best, those identified as saintly, or profoundly humane, or just damn good people, have been the real custodians of liberty. They have stood for the curious fact that we do not have to be greedy, craven, cruel or despairing. And in this context I think of the Dalai Lama's visit. At Melbourne University, he was given an honorary doctorate of laws—a salute, no doubt, to his invaded people as well as to himself. He spoke with simple eloquence of the human agenda, something calling for the accomplishment of peace and not mere acquiescence in any and every status quo. The remarkably various audience which filled the Wilson Hall gave



*Bondi Pavilion, winter.* Photo: Andrew Stark

*The ancient Irish poets used to compose while lying down, cowed in their great cloaks, in the dark and cold of the beehive stone huts in that often wintry island. What came from those enclosures was not only their own lyrics and epics but, in the long run, Yeats and Heaney, Synge and Joyce. A long winter can breed a long liberty.*

dark and cold of the beehive stone huts in that often-wintery island. What came from those enclosures was not only their own lyrics and epics but, in the long run, Yeats and Heaney, Synge and Joyce. A long winter can breed a long liberty. ■

Peter Steele SJ is reader in English at the University of Melbourne.

him the kind of welcome not commonly found in such places. Perhaps it recognised in this man the following of aspirations that we can all identify in ourselves, be the cultural seasons of the world what they will.

'A sad tale's best for winter! I have one of sprites and goblins', says a character in *The Winter's Tale*, beginning a story which is interrupted and not finished. 'Sprites and goblins', alien spirits often mischievous and sometimes demonic, can haunt our winters, individual or shared. Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*—'light is the left hand of darkness'—is set on a planet whose name is 'Winter', a milieu in which all the human quest for depth of meaning and durability of love has still to be carried through. On the planet we know best, that quest has to be pursued not just through a segment of the year but in every quadrant of the heart.

Two images, in conclusion. First, in Donne's *A Hymn to Christ, at the Author's last going into Germany*, he writes, 'As the tree's sap doth seek the root below. In winter, in my winter now I go'. Winter can at least urge upon us, starkly, the need and opportunity to strike deeper into whatever sources of authentic life we can find. And second, the ancient Irish poets used to compose while lying down, cowed in their great cloaks, in the

## 'Tackle' was really a sidestep

From Robert Castiglione

John Neil OP's appeal to external authority ('A tackle from Notre Dame', Letters, May 1992) in response to Dean Moore's article on the University of Notre Dame Australia (April 1992) confirms the worst fears raised by Moore's article. A reply that simply refers to papal pronouncements precludes reasoned debate and is clearly intended to silence critics.

Moore's article raised a number of important issues, including the financial and educational wisdom of establishing a new university in a state that arguably already has too many; the priorities of the new university; and the sources of its funding. (Are parishes to bear the burden, despite earlier promises that this would not be the case?) Neil addressed none of these issues. His paternalistic 'advice',

*Eureka Street* welcomes letters from its readers. Short letters are more likely to be published, and all letters may be edited. Letters must be signed, and should include a contact phone number and the writer's name and address.



tained by the new university. If students at Notre Dame Australia raise uncomfortable questions, will they simply be met by someone waving an encyclical?

**Robert Castiglione**  
Mount Hawthorn, WA.

*Peter Norden replies:* Having just been 'released' from Pentridge myself, I can recognise the zeal with which retired police officer Eric Horne pursues me. I ask him to consider these questions:

- Should not police give a higher priority to the protection of human life than to the protection of private property?
- How many hardened criminals have stated their intention to commit massacres in Victoria?
- If the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists insists that its members cannot predict dangers of this sort, does Eric Horne believe that he can?

During the 15 years I have spent working with juvenile offenders, the only life-threatening behaviour I have observed in them resulted from the brutality that they themselves experienced in correctional institutions.

## A mention is not enough

From Val Noone

I apologise: in his *Lynched: the Life of Sir Phillip Lynch, Mastermind of Ambush that ended Gough's Run*, and contrary to what I wrote in my review (Jan/Feb 1992), Brian Buckley did mention Lynch's mother ('Lynched and overlooked', May 1992). And yes, it should have been Treasurer where I had deputy leader.

But contrary to Buckley's claim, Dorothy Lynch is not 'described on pp42-43. He mentions her where he writes of her father, grandfather and husband, and he later mentions a Lynch family trust in her name. He does not tell us what she was like, what she did—the occupations of the men are given—or what influence she had on Phillip. In my judgment, in what claims to be a story of Lynch's life such treatment of his mother is careless, male-chauvinist and inadequate.

How much Buckley disagreed with Lynch and whether his arguments about Lynch's real estate transactions are reliable—these questions can be left to others with more knowledge, but I want to question a couple of

## Don't tie police hands

From Eric Horne

Peter Norden's tunnel vision on the serious threat to innocent victims of juvenile violence (April 1992) is to be deplored.

Having spent 37 years of my life trying to protect life and property as a police officer, my experience tells me that in the short term drastic measures are needed to protect the lives of the innocent. Hardened criminals who state their intention to commit massacres must be restrained. Police pursuits of life-threatening drivers must, in most cases, be continued. To abandon either of these courses may only protect the lives of criminals at the cost of the lives of the innocent.

By all means be critical, Peter, but it would be more productive to address your mind to practical remedies to life-threatening juvenile brutality.

**Eric Horne**  
Clayton, Vic.



MOORE

which largely consisted of references to papal and curial documents, is no substitute for the reasoned response that the article deserved.

Many Catholics will wonder whether Neil's letter is indicative of the intellectual standards to be main-

Buckley's comments on Lynch and the Vietnam War.

If Lynch was 'never happy' about the war and 'deeply worried' by the US conduct of it, as Buckley claims, why did Lynch not say so publicly at the time? And if the war was not central to Lynch's early career, then why did Buckley name chapter three of the book, 'Vietnam nearly claims another victim'?

And digressing from his reply to my review, Buckley goes on to repeat that hoary old claim of the Vietnam War propagandists, namely that it was an invasion of the South from the North, with an appeal to some unspecified documentary evidence. As Pete Seeger said: 'When will they ever learn?'

Everyone can now read United States government sources, and Australian military histories, which say, in the words of General Peter Gration, chief of the Australian defence staff, that 'Some of our own official perceptions of the war as an invasion from the north did not fit this local situation where there was a locally supported revolutionary war in an advanced stage, albeit with support and direction from the north'. (*Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, April 1988, p45)

Buckley concluded his letter by criticising *Eureka Street* for 'a tendency to moralise.' In debates over public policy, defenders of the status quo and reformers both invoke moral arguments, and rightly so; but once reformers look like winning a moral argument, some defenders cry 'moralising'.

Val Noone  
Fitzroy, Vic

### Correction

An advertisement in the April edition of *Eureka Street* referred to a workshop on the history of women religious, held in Sydney on April 9-10.

The workshop was sponsored by the Institute of Religious Studies, and not the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia, as stated in the advertisement.

Papers from the workshop are available from the Institute of Religious Studies. The institute's address is PO Box 280, Strathfield, NSW 2135. Tel: (02) 744 7976.

## Dabblers in doublespeak

For us, equity means giving everyone the right to pursue their own goals in life without being penalised and brought back to the lowest common denominator if they succeed. (*Fightback!* p24)

**Y**ES, IT IS ALWAYS GOOD to define your terms. The Liberal Party is to be complimented for setting out this definition of equity in its *Fightback!* document. No doubt, equity is a difficult concept. It is most commonly understood as something to do with social justice, or fairness in society. Indeed, *Fightback!* elsewhere refers to the need for 'fairness between all sections of the community'. But, look again at the *Fightback!* definition of equity and note the bending of the language. In defining equity as 'giving everyone the right to pursue their own goals in life', *Fightback!* effectively defines it in terms of individual freedom. Therein lie three related problems.

First, this definition conflates two equally important attributes of society—freedom and equity. The achievement of one may involve some trade-off in terms of the other. A society based on Social Darwinism—survival of the fittest and rugged individualism—will commonly be one of glaring inequalities of outcome. Conversely, social justice may require constraints on individual freedoms.

Second, *Fightback!* adopts a partial view of individual freedom. It emphasises freedom *to* but ignores freedom *from*, a distinction stressed by my colleague, Stuart Rees. The individual's freedom to accumulate wealth is emphasised; the individual's need for freedom from exploitation is tacitly shelved.

Similarly, the individualistic concept of freedom ignores the economic and social context in which freedom occurs or is denied. The freedom for individual employees and employers to make wage contracts is inherently biased, since the latter have greater power by virtue of their ownership of the means of production. Capital hires labour, not vice versa. To give another example, freedom for logging companies in a deregulated environment would mean the irreversible destruction of native forests and the denial of access to that environmental asset for future generations.

In defining equity in terms of a partial and naive view of individual freedom, *Fightback!* does a grave injustice to the concept and to our language. Equity becomes the freedom of the individual to make a fast buck.

But are such philosophical quibbles missing the mark? Is there a more practical agenda here? Look again at the latter part of the opening quotation from *Fightback!*. The rhetoric about levelling-down is familiar enough. But suddenly a penny drops, a connection becomes evident. Aha, income tax cuts!

Of course, the main practical appeal of *Fightback!* is in those promised income-tax cuts, financed partly by the introduction of the goods and services tax and partly by cuts in government expenditure. 'Without being penalised and brought back to the lowest common denominator' translates in practice into the proposal for less progressivity in the income tax scale. So in the hands of the Liberals, the definition of equity supports a case for cutting income tax rates for the rich!

However, the story doesn't quite finish there. *Fightback!* goes on to state the view that 'we do not believe that we must help those who choose not to help themselves'. This is an attempted rationale for the proposed cuts in government expenditure on the social wage. Those 'who choose not to help themselves', presumably clustered among the unemployed and social disadvantaged, cannot expect the general concern with equity to provide a social safety net.

A bizarre conclusion emerges. The pursuit of equity means lower taxation for the wealthy and less social security for the poor. So, equity means a wider gulf between the haves and have-nots. Social justice transmogrifies into Social Darwinism.

Could even George Orwell have imagined such doublespeak? ■

**Frank Stillwell** is associate professor of economics at the University of Sydney.

# Running off the rails

*State rivalries have bedevilled Australia's transport system since before federation.*

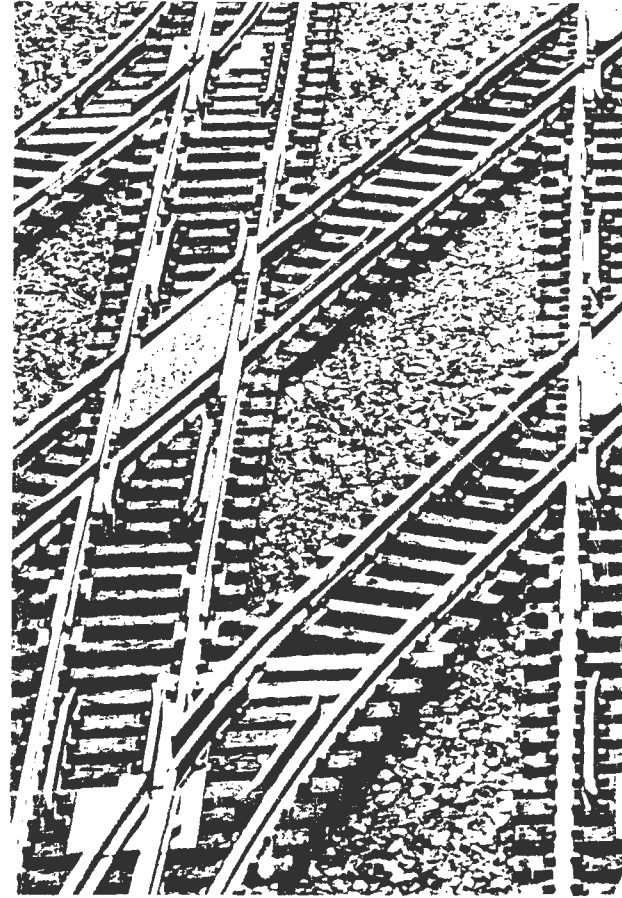
*The One Nation statement signals an intention to end these rivalries and get the country moving, but what is the reality? This month Eureka Street begins a series on microeconomic reform.*

**E**VERY DAY A TRAIN LEAVES BROADMEADOWS, in outer-suburban Melbourne, and begins the trip to Sydney. It pulls up to 70 fully-laden wagons much more safely, and with a fuel efficiency at least three times better, than if the same amount of freight were being carried by road transport. The train is operated by one person.

With such potential for efficiency, the train should be a symbol of everything that a government committed to restructuring the economy would like to achieve. Yet Australia's railways are treated as though they are jinxed. More than any other country, Australia has suffered economically and culturally from the lack of a national rail system.

Rail transport has become one of the saddest and oft-quoted examples of all that is wrong with the way the colonies were stitched into a nation. Everyone knows the bad joke about the different gauges between states: seven authorities competed rather than cooperated. In some ways, things have not improved much. There are now five authorities, and last year a sixth was created—the National Rail Corporation, which is meant to be the answer to at least some of the problems.

Many of those influencing the debate on the economy believe there is little future for trains other than as carriers of bulk freight such as wheat and coal. The Australian Railways Union was recently asked by a journalist to nominate one official involved in rail who was 'pro-train'. The union could not think of a single person. Even train enthusiasts do not deny that rail has been so awful for so long that it is difficult to convince anyone that a turnaround is possible. The federal government's commitment to microeconomic reform has forced a re-examination of rail, but critics believe that doctrinaire economic rationalism and counsels of despair are locking the country into another century of missed opportunities.



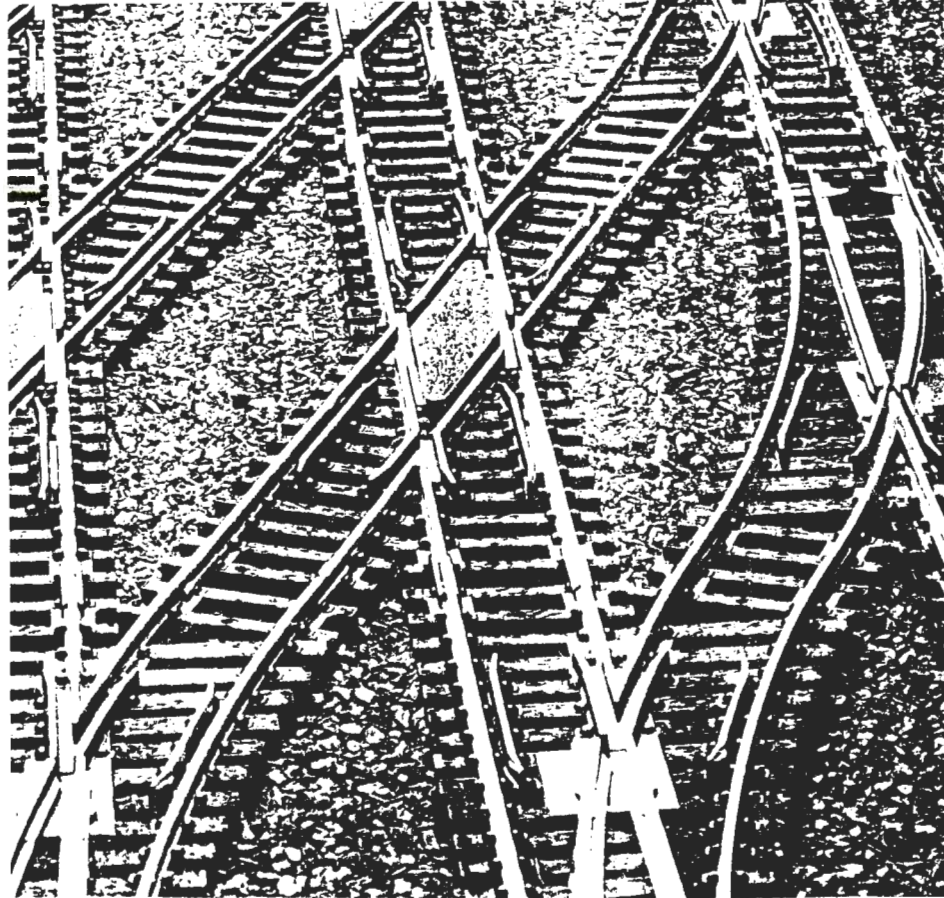
Rail transport is at least eight times safer than travelling by car, and can be up to ten times more fuel-efficient, yet almost everywhere it is losing customers to road transport. On the Sydney-Melbourne route, rail's reputation for slowness and unreliability is so bad that many customers prefer to send non-bulk freight by road, even when rail would be cheaper. The dirty carriages, tepid tea and stale sandwiches served up to passengers, plus the ridiculous length of travel time—up to 15 hours from Melbourne to Sydney—act as further disincentives.

According to Professor Colin Taylor, of the University of Queensland's department of planning, middle-headed connections have not helped. The train from Brisbane to Sydney used to miss the connection to Canberra by zero minutes—one train would pull out as the other arrived, meaning connecting passengers had to wait 24 hours before continuing their journey.

On the last available figures, 63 per cent of passengers carried between cities go by car, compared to 15 per cent by air, 13 per cent by bus, and only three per cent by rail. Of interurban freight, 41 per cent goes by sea, 24 per cent by road, and 35 per cent by rail. Most of rail's share, however, is accounted for by wheat, coal and the like. Only six per cent is 'ordinary', i.e. non-bulk, freight. Here road transport dominates, even when rail is cheaper.

**R**AIL'S FINANCIAL LOSSES are enormous, although their true extent depends on how you do the counting. Governments have used railways as instruments of public policy, tolerating losses in order to provide services that are considered socially necessary. Some state rail systems count the subsidies provided by governments to run these services as revenue, hiding the total cost to the public purse. According to the Commonwealth Grants Commission, in 1986-7 public transport deficits





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represented nearly 10 per cent of general public-sector outlays in Victoria, and six per cent in New South Wales.

The creation of the National Rail Corporation, a commercial body that has the state rail authorities as its shareholders, was hailed by Barney Cooney, a Victorian ALP senator, as 'a ringing endorsement of rail transport'. But critics such as Dr Don Williams—the chairman of Australian National, the only rail authority to have turned deficits into profits—think the tone is hollow. Williams described the creation of the corporation as 'the worst option ... analogous to reinventing the break of the gauge.'

The corporation will run a national freight network, leasing rolling stock and tracks but leaving the specifics of reform to the states. Many passenger services and branch lines will also be left to the states, or 'reviewed', which means they will probably be closed. The operational details are still being worked out, but bold projections of a \$1 billion boost to the economy and hundreds of millions of dollars in savings have been made.

To add to the flurry of activity, in February the federal government released its *One Nation* statement, which commits it to spending \$500 million on the interstate railway network. The gauge between Melbourne and Adelaide will be standardised and the Melbourne-Sydney line upgraded, creating a 'spine' coastal route from Brisbane to Perth, with Melbourne as the hub. The \$500 million comes on top of the National Rail Corporation's \$100 million-a-year budget. The money represents a massive upgrading of the system, but it is still minuscule compared to the \$2 billion spent each year on maintaining roads.

The money can only be welcomed, and even the Opposition has not found much to criticise in the plans. Yet there are problems that suggest less than careful

planning. For example, the standard-gauge 'spine' envisaged by *One Nation* will cut across the vital freight branch lines from Victoria's wheat country. These branch lines are not standard gauge, so the new line could make them useless.

There is no mention of this problem in *One Nation*, but sources admit that in the back rooms of rail bureaucracies a lot of midnight oil is being burned in the search for a solution. And of course, the fastest route from Sydney to Perth is not via Melbourne. At present, plans involve 'reviewing' the more direct route via Parkes and Broken Hill. If this turns out to be a case of 'reviewing' meaning closing, the implications for Perth will be enormous.

**T**HE DOMINANT ATTITUDE is that the future of rail is primarily in the transport of freight, with passengers coming a poor second. Since the proposal for a Very Fast Train between Melbourne and Sydney was abandoned, there has been no talk of providing trains that would attract tourists or business travellers. This is contrary to thinking overseas, where fast passenger trains are in the forefront of new transport technology and government investment.

Colin Taylor, a self-confessed rail enthusiast, believes much of the research that has gone into decision making on rail has been superficial, emphasising cost-cutting rather than ways of attracting passengers and freight away from road and air transport. 'The result of this narrow thinking is a counsel of desperation and despair,' Taylor says. 'Many of the assumptions behind the consultants' reports are going totally unquestioned. Of course there is a desperate need for more efficiency, but it's a mistake to equate efficiency with hacking something to pieces. It's all very well to have one main line, a trunk line around the coast, but if you cut off all

the branches then the trunk will die.'

Many of the figures cited in the road-versus-rail debate are dubious. Most state rail authorities run at enormous deficits, yet rail enthusiasts claim that road transport is also effectively subsidised. They say that if estimates reflected the true costs of road maintenance and road accidents, rail would look far more competitive. On the other hand, critics of rail from the Institute of Public Affairs, a right-wing think tank, point to the underestimating of deficits by state rail authorities. The authorities' estimates often exclude capital charges on borrowings and count government subsidies as revenue.

A European would be astonished that experts advising on the reform of the railways in our continent should make no mention of the technology and coordination devoted to the Channel Tunnel. The tunnel illustrates how the largest capitals in Western Europe were able to persuade their railway bureaucracies to coordinate railway systems based on contemporary technology. It exposes the failure of governments in Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney to persuade their bureaucracies to modernise technology and coordinate management in Australia's largest transport corridor. The railway between Sydney and Melbourne encapsulates all that went off-track with Australian railways in the 1980s. In no other country, I confidently assert, would cities with such populations, interests in common and distance apart be linked by so poor a track. In Europe freight on such a line would throughout the 1980s have been carrying container wagons hauled by electric locomotives. It is some 100 kilometres too long, and the sharp bends, steep grades and numerous tunnels were installed last century. The only recent construction is that recommended by my government between East Hills and Glenfield. —**Gough Whitlam**, 24/4/91.  
*(excerpt from his submission to the Industry Commission)*

Last year the Industry Commission released a report on rail transport that is regarded as a key influence on the direction taken by the National Rail Corporation. The report attacked governments for misallocating resources to unprofitable services, and recommended an emphasis on bulk freight and the closure of many branch lines and passenger services.

Colin Taylor is strongly critical of the report, which, among other things, cites but does not question the estimates of rail deficits put together by conservative organisations such as the National Farmers Federation. 'If that report was presented to me as a thesis,' Taylor says, 'I would mark it 'fail', and tell the student to go back and do more research.'

The emphasis on freight and the 'review' of branch lines was a theme repeated by Booz Allen, an American firm of consultants retained first by the New South Wales government and then by the National Rail Corporation. At the insistence of the Australian Railways Union, another firm, Jacana Consulting, was also hired to review the corporation's investment program.

**J**ACANA RECOMMENDED SPENDING an extra \$1.5 billion over 10 years to bring about a transfer of intercity freight from road to rail. (About \$6 billion in federal funds has been spent on roads in the past 10 years.) Jacana proposes less emphasis on the 'spine' railway, upgrading and better use of the line through Parkes and Broken Hill, and the building of new lines inland. As Andrew Wilkinson, an information officer for the Australian Railways Union, says, it would be 'more of a network'. The proposal also, of course, offers more security for rail employees, who would suffer huge job losses under the Booz Allen proposal.

Jacana estimates that its plan would lead to revenue increases, with a return on the capital investment after nine years. And there would be savings because of lower road-maintenance costs and fewer road accidents. An increase in rail use would also be environmentally desirable. 'The current National Rail Corporation program is based on quick-fix solutions,' says Wilkinson. 'It's a patch-up job.'

Asked about the Jacana proposal, the rail corporation's chief, Ted Butcher, says: 'Jacana have come up with some interesting ideas, but they were employed at the suggestion of the unions. Our consultants (Booz Allen) said the best financial return on the freight line would be if it went through Melbourne, even though that is not the shortest route. Jacana have a different perspective, but it would mean spending a lot more money, and we simply aren't going to get that unless we show that rail can work.'

Is the National Rail Corporation the best body to demonstrate that? Many of the details of how it will operate—what it will own and what it will lease—are not yet clear.

**R**AIL'S MOST CONSPICUOUS SUCCESS STORY has been Australian National, the authority created when the Whitlam government offered to take over the failing state rail systems in the early 1970s. Only Tasmania and South Australia accepted the offer, and their railways were amalgamated with the old Commonwealth railways to create Australian National. At a time when all state rail authorities were racking up frightening deficits, Australian National drew up a 10-year plan that has resulted in its freight services running at a profit. The authority receives federal supplements to operate some loss-making passenger services, such as the Indian-Pacific and the Ghan, but other loss-making services have been eliminated and staff have been cut by 43 per cent.

**L**AST YEAR THE CHAIRMAN of Australian National, Don Williams, criticised the rail corporation's plan in a background paper submitted to the Economic Planning and Advisory Council. Williams cited Australian National as the best model for reform of the railways, concluding that integration of all rail authorities into a federal system would yield benefits of \$3 billion to the economy. In contrast, the 'partial integration' of freight services proposed by the rail corporation would yield only \$1.5 billion. The corporation's plan, however, is the one favoured by the states. They fear federal takeover, and working with the corporation would leave them in substantial control of the railways. However,

as Williams points out, therein lies the weakness of the corporation, since the states have a poor record on rail reform.

The head of the National Rail Corporation, Ted Butcher, admits that more could be done. 'Rail has no credibility,' he says. 'What we have got to do is use this new injection of money to show what rail can do. Then more might be possible.' But the impression remains that Australia is approaching the future of rail with at least as much reluctance as enthusiasm. ■

**Margaret Simons** is a freelance journalist. She writes regularly for *Eureka Street*.

## The Rattler

with apologies to Gerard Manley Hopkins

*I caught this morning's menace, kingdom of transport's tyrant, rattling rust-red rat trap in his riding  
Of the flat metallic underneath him rigid rail, and subdividing  
Commuters in carriages. How a shuddering stop as we halted  
at Erskineville station made me cling  
To the railing! Then off, off forth with a spring,  
As a P-plate learner leaps and then stops and then leaps again;  
while I am deciding  
Whether to risk it right into town, or go hiding  
In Redfern—the deceive of, the bastardy of the thing!*

*Brute ugliness, dirt and old age—oh God, now the overhead cables here  
Buckle! AND the sparks that break from thee then, a billion  
Times more frightening, more dangerous than bussing down the Hume  
by Pioneer.*

*No wonder of it: sheer plod makes transport policy vaudevillian,  
As fiscal conjurers make trains—ah, disappear  
And buses, too, to save the odd half million.*

**Dermot Dorgan**

(The last of Sydney's 'red rattler' trains was taken out of commission at the end of 1991)



## 'The leaving of Galway'

I HAVE A MEMORY of Bishop Eamonn Casey standing in the middle of a crowded restaurant in Melbourne in 1970, singing in a good tenor:

*Oh God be with you Kerry  
Where in childhood I made merry.  
You could hear the fiddler tuning up  
And resining his bow ...*

I have a photo from the same day of Bishop Casey with a half a dozen or so Kerry priests working in Melbourne. Most of them are dead now but they were familiar faces in my Kerry parents' house and one of them gave us the photo as a memento. It was that sort of occasion.

Ireland had never done very much for its emigrants, and the Irish church's contribution was a desultory effort at saving their faith when they got to the foreign shore of their choice. Despite this the Irish people—most of them, anyway—have a great attachment to their place of origin, and Kerry people have a peculiarly strong sense of themselves. Even if 'there was nothing there' the place holds on to them.

So Bishop Casey was a fillip. At the end of the night his pockets were filled with bits of paper carrying greetings to mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters back home whom he would ring on his return. And he did. It was an exciting way to come across a priest, never mind a bishop, who identified so vividly with what moved emigrant people—who understood the 'ruin of the spirit' (his words) that came about if you ignore it.

He had started out writing letters to young people who left his parish in Ireland to go to work in England; then during his holidays he would visit them. He became chaplain to the 10,000 Irish who lived in Slough, an industrial town near London, and that's how he came to be known more widely—because he didn't stick to expectations. He ended up in 1968 as chairman of Shelter, the British national campaign for the homeless. Then he was made Bishop of Kerry; at 42 he was Ireland's youngest bishop.

I remember he was liked a lot in Kerry. You'd often hear people telling tales of his joviality and of the speed at which he drove to his house at Inch and the cathedral in Killarney. My father said to me that it was just as well he wasn't made Archbishop of Dublin, but in Irish terms Galway is important enough.

The city is lively, with lots of young people who are well-educated by Australian standards. There's a university, a touch of cosmopolitanism—many people

have lived and worked outside the country—an Irish-language culture keeping life up in Connemara and, right through the diocese, unemployment and emigration.

What went on with Mrs Murphy in the early '70s is not that interesting, except insofar as it was a sign of naivety and vanity. What does interest me are the images I have of Eamonn Casey as Bishop of Galway. Remember when Ronald Reagan paid a flying visit to Ballyporeen in 1984? Well, Bishop Casey declined to welcome him, out of solidarity with the peoples of Central America. That was a shining moment in all the sludge of American-style 'roots' sentimentality.

I have another image of him from Galway, as the bishop who exerted his authority to prevent tubal ligation being carried out in Galway hospitals run by religious orders. (In other words, in Galway hospitals.) For my friends in Galway it proved a point: an Irish bishop's spots don't change. It wasn't so much the content of the edict as its style. It struck me then that all the social activism had been very much '50s-style, the sort where the priest does things for the people. The engaging personality disguises the real relationship, and the theological and pastoral imagination doesn't extend to the quite different complexities of Ireland in the '80s and '90s.

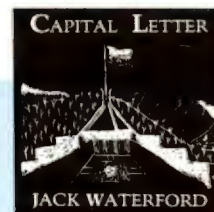
I have a final image of Bishop Casey, presiding at a crowded Sunday Mass in a Jesuit church in Galway. A number of children were being confirmed. It was one of those liturgically dead occasions you come across so often in Irish churches. You got the feeling that absolutely nothing was being got out of the symbolism of all those children standing there except the comfortable assumption that they would all grow up to be good Catholics.

I suppose that Bishop Casey thought he was going to something, rather than simply fleeing when he went to America in May. The tension of the past 20 years or so must have been wearing. But, as my father said to me, 'Ireland is full of women whose husbands have ske-daddled. Adding one more shows very poor form.' So in the end Bishop Casey is just one kind of old-fashioned male/cleric, and I hope it's that recognition that shakes the church in Ireland.

As a young man, Bishop Casey had a talent for linking himself profoundly with the people. Sonia Wagner, in her booklet *Understanding Ministry*, quotes a Jesuit rector addressing a group of young men facing ordination: what he asked was not 'Are you strong and talented enough to be a priest?' but 'Are you weak enough?' Maybe that question should be asked again—long after ordination. ■

**Margaret Coffey** is a producer for ABC Radio National.

*In the end Bishop Casey is just one kind of old-fashioned male/cleric, and I hope it's that recognition that shakes the church in Ireland.*



# That flap about the flag

**I**S PAUL KEATING ON A WINNER with his new nationalism, promoting the idea of a republic with a new flag, and a rewriting of the history books to emphasise Australia versus the world in World War II? Certainly, he is in for a long campaign that poses considerable risks. If there were a referendum tomorrow, Keating probably could not muster a majority on the flag or a republic. Few people who feel a need for the trappings of nationhood regard them as central to their lives, whereas many who oppose a republic or a change in the flag feel strongly about these issues. If letters to editors are any guide, some people would even react by forming a guerrilla movement in the Great Dividing Range.

And of course, the mere fact that Keating's views are sincerely held, and not a ploy to divert attention from the state of the economy, does not put them beyond criticism. The notion that he has discovered Asia as an area upon which Australia should focus is complete nonsense. He is treading a path marked out by the Caseys, the McEwens, the Spenders, Holts, the Whitlams, the Frasers and the Hawkes. What is more, although the characterisation of Menzies-era Liberals as lickspittles of foreign interests has a germ of truth, the archives of the time demonstrate another side of these men. One might still disagree with their conclusions about where Australian interests lay but, far from mirroring what emerged from London or Washington, Menzies and his colleagues often exercised great skill in manipulating their 'great and powerful friends'.

There are plenty of people who are not necessarily alarmed by the idea of a republic, but whose support would depend on the absence of any significant breach with the past. Conservatism of this sort focuses on three issues. First, there is the question of whether an Australian republic would simply delete from its constitution any reference to the monarch or governor-general, and substitute 'president'. In short, the monarchical system without a monarch.

There are alternatives: the president could be elected by popular mandate, or by Parliament. Or there could be a complete restructure of government along American lines, with a separation of powers between the legislature and an executive presidency. A Prime Minister who did not want to frighten the horses would be best advised to opt for a president appointed by the executive council, and avoid like the plague any suggestion of a presidential election. An elected president could become a damn nuisance, able to claim a mandate to act in defiance of the elected government.

A second problem is that the Australian constitution is essentially a compact between the states, allocating certain functions to the Commonwealth and reserving the rest to themselves. Unlike the constitutions of some other countries, it is only in a limited sense a compact between the government and the people, by which citizens allocate certain powers to government and reserve certain freedoms to themselves.

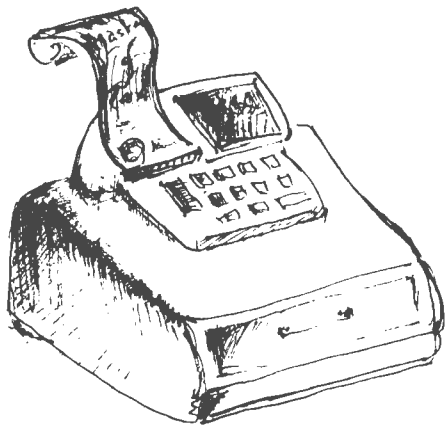
Hence Australians have been suspicious of the idea of granting power to politicians, even if that power is merely being transferred from the states to the Commonwealth. It is easy to defeat a referendum proposal by arguing that it will increase the power of politicians. The creation of a figurehead presidency need not do this, but it would not be difficult to construct a propaganda campaign to the contrary. The monarchy or the governor-generalship could be portrayed, however inaccurately, as bulwarks against the abuse of political power.

The third problem is a more difficult one, involving both the fact that the inherited and adapted British system works fairly well, and a strong Australian resistance, even among Australians of non-British descent, to official orthodoxies about multiculturalism. For example, I am of Irish descent, brought up to hate the English for what occurred in Ireland and old enough to remember religious and class prejudices that involved attitudes to the English as well. I have no difficulty in insisting that we are an Australian nation and not a British one. But no amount of this inculcation robs me of regard for the British constitutional and legal inheritance, for the English language, or for the extent to which Australia's history and culture are bound up with those of Britain.

**O**NE OF THE REASONS that Australia has so successfully attracted migrants is its social and institutional stability. The root heresy in multiculturalism is an insistence that no one system or set of beliefs is intrinsically better than any other. We are constantly told, for example, that Australians from southern or eastern Europe, and even more Australians of Indo-Chinese background, have no reason to identify with Britain. I have never seen statistical evidence in support of such claims, and my instinct is to distrust them. I suspect that conservatism, even about symbols, might be more profound among people of non-English speaking backgrounds, if only because of the number who came here as refugees, or for the stability that Australians so infuriatingly take for granted.

It's all about symbolism, of course, on both sides of the debate. For Keating, removing the Union Jack from the corner of the flag reflects not only the fact of independent nationhood but the perception that Australia's destiny no longer turns on its relationship with Britain. The reaction of his critics reflects the fear that a way of life is at risk. In the long run, the view that Keating represents is bound to win, if only by attrition. The formal links with Britain—apart from cricket and rugby—are increasingly irrelevant, especially as Britain's own sovereignty disappears in a united Europe. The politician who manages the symbolic changes will be the one who recognises what has happened in the popular mind, not the one who seeks to anticipate it. ■

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



# Trading places

*When a university touts for business, educational ideals are at risk.*

**A** KEY FEATURE OF TERTIARY EDUCATION in Australia since 1986 has been the influx of full-fee-paying overseas students. In June 1990 it was estimated that there were 65,000 overseas students in Australia, of whom 44,000 paid full course fees. Public universities earned more than \$150 million from this source of revenue in 1990, providing a welcome supplement to the tightly controlled funds from the Department of Education, Employment and Training.

Given Australia's economic position, it is not surprising that an opportunity to reduce the trade deficit was grasped and exploited, but this state of affairs is a far cry from education as foreign aid. The countries from which Australian universities are seeking students do not read like a Who's Who of Democracy. Most are sexist, authoritarian and racist, most have indecent disparities between rich and poor, and there is no prospect that our provision of education will change any of this. Courses in moral philosophy and democratic theory—let alone women's studies—are not much in demand among full-fee paying overseas students.

Some authorities have winced at the crass tone of certain promotional literature, which has read more like a company's boast of record profits than the documentation of an institution of higher learning. In the search for more presentable motives, or at least respectable spin-offs, a version of the economic trickle-down theory has been advanced. In other words, visiting students from authoritarian regimes will absorb some of the values of liberal democracy while here and take them back to their home countries where, from their leadership positions, they will influence others. Such a theory is plausible under certain circumstances, especially if there is a compulsory humanities component in all courses, but the infrequency with which it is articulated shows what a minimal role it plays in official thinking.

The phenomenon of full-fee-paying overseas students has been assisted by the corporatisation of tertiary institutions, and universities have witnessed the triumph of business principles, practices and jargon. Students are no longer students but customers, clients, stake-holders—anything but students. And note the hideous 'offshore' for overseas! All tyrants know the value of language in exercising control and this 'business-speak' has been useful in reorienting tertiary education. Universities have seen an influx of corporate types into the ranks: accountants and others with narrow educational backgrounds who care little for academic values and view universities as just another enterprise.

In this, they tend to mirror common perceptions about the federal education bureaucracy. These people are not exclusively to be found in administration. Their values are shared by certain academics in some of the newer 'disciplines' such as business or computing who, come the anticipated free market for university labour, expect to command huge salaries.

In this environment, administrators who cling to more traditional values and who choose to work in tertiary education partly because it is *not* like business, are increasingly marginalised, like their academic colleagues. In many universities, a necessary condition for administrative promotion is to make clear one's adherence to anti-collegial models of 'management' and to mock the notion that staff should have any say in decisions that affect them.

The quest for the overseas student dollar is consistent with patterns now fully established in the tertiary sector. Universities vie with each other at trade fairs in Asia and beyond to attract the children of these countries' moneyed elites. Some university graduation ceremonies, ranging from the modest to the extravagant, are now held overseas. One university took an entourage of twenty to a popular holiday destination. The team included a senior administrator to carry the ceremonial mace in the academic procession. In a concession to sexist culture, wives are sometimes taken as 'hostesses'; what Australia's two female vice-chancellors make of this practice is unclear. Needless to say, such entourages do not stay at the Asian equivalent of the YMCA, nor are they stacked down the back of economy class in the aircraft. Rumour has it that one university even paid the hotel bills for parents attending its Asian graduation ceremony.

**S**UCH EXTRAVAGANCE IS DEFENDED ON economic/public relations grounds. The money comes from the overseas students, not from federal funds, and in the quest to be regarded as the best no PR expense is to be spared. Many large universities include a PR person among the ranks of its fatter fat cats. One wonders what fraction of a typical overseas fee—about \$12,000 per year for an undergraduate—goes on this excess.

One university, defending an Asian escapade, saw it as complementing the Australian government's efforts to rebuild links with Malaysia (damaged by that nasty beast, free speech in Australia). As if the efforts of Evans and Hawke were not enough! Given the historic role of universities as defenders of free speech and dissent, one



## Watch it, wimp!

**G**EORGE BUSH, AT THE LAST US presidential election, went to some lengths to argue that he was not, as his detractors suggested, a wimp. Flying combat planes from and to aircraft carriers on stormy seas during World War II certainly seems unwimpy, as, even more so, seems his apparent dedication to his family during various traumas.

The president-to-be could have mustered a better defence, however: as any scientifically literate person knows, it is yet to be proved that such things as wimps actually exist. And if wimps have not been proven to exist, how could George be a wimp? He might as well be a unicorn.

A wimp, of course, is a Weakly Interacting Massive Particle. Physicists have been searching for them for some time. The problem, you see, is that there is not enough matter in the stars of our galaxy to explain the gravitational forces that hold it together as it keeps turning in a vast circle around its centre. Our galaxy ought to weigh ten times more than it appears to.

So where is the extra weight hidden? One suggestion is that there are vast numbers of wimps floating around. The reason why we have not noticed these particles must be that they do not interact noticeably with other matter. They are virtually 'invisible'.

The hunt for wimps is now on in earnest. The best way to discover a wimp is to have some very sensitive detector located in a place where it will not be disturbed by any other vagrant radiation. In the north of England, just outside Whitby, a detector has been set up 11,000 metres below the surface of the earth, in a salt and potash mine. The idea is that any other particles or radiation passing through the earth will have been absorbed at this depth. The only sorts of things that could pass through such depths of rock and clay would have to be very wimpish indeed. So the scientists sit and wait by their detectors, allowing for all other forms of local radiation, and hoping for the flash of scintillation that indicates some other visitor to the depths of the earth. They are still waiting.

Whitby is already famous for other scientific discoveries. It was Captain Cook's hometown. Cook is celebrated, of course, for having taken an expedition to Tahiti to observe the transit of Venus. Under the disguise of this scientific expedition, however, he also carried out secret instructions from the Admiralty to find out more about the unknown Great South Land, and we are testimony to his achievement.

Which raises a question about the discovery of wimps: what else is at stake here? A wimp-gun is not going to be of use to anybody—the bullets would pass straight through their intended targets—and wimps can't be traded, kept in boxes, or used as jewellery. The wimp hunt looks like pure, unadulterated science—a wonder indeed. ■

—John Honner SJ

might expect vice-chancellors to be on the other side of the fence. However, that would not be good for business.

As the net extends beyond Asia and to the Middle East, the question of the treatment of women becomes critical. A university that sent promotional material to a trade fair in Saudi Arabia was told it was unsuitable because the photographs depicted male and female students together, and women with uncovered flesh. There are two problems here. First, the university is being told to depict itself in line with grotesquely sexist values. Second, if it obliges it is surely misleading the 'customer' to imply that Australian campuses are other than what they are—places where men and women can be seen together, as can, weather permitting, bare flesh, male and female.

Surely, at a point like this, the appropriate response may not be tame compliance. At what point do Australian universities say 'We're not doing business with this regime,' or 'We're not compromising on these fundamental values'? In this market, that point seems a long way off, if it exists at all. But perhaps it is not surprising in an environment where someone can seriously suggest that Colonel Rabuka should be awarded an honorary degree by an Australian university.

It is essential that some of the issues raised by the phenomenon of full-fee paying overseas students should be discussed, both within universities and in the wider community. Arguments based on crude cultural relativism can be anticipated—that we should not judge these countries by our own liberal standards, that we should tolerate their intolerant traditions and practices, and that the only perspectives we should take are commercial ones. This may be an appropriate response for business, but in this framework it is difficult to envisage the university in its traditional role as defender of dissent.

In some cases, an honest defence would be more embarrassing. It is likely that some universities depend on revenue from overseas student fees for a good proportion of their ordinary services, and budget accordingly. The impact of a sudden loss of these fees would be devastating for more than one university. This, of course, is reason for more criticism and inquiry, not less.

There are signs that some Asian governments, mindful of the foreign exchange consequences of students travelling to Australia, are likely to seek a change in arrangements. Some Australian universities already teach courses at South-East Asian venues and this trend seems likely to become more common. On balance, this seems to be a preferable model for the provision of educational services, providing some vague prospect of these countries eventually using the facilities and educating their own. In the meantime, imperialism is far from dead in this part of the world. ■

**Paul Rodan** is an administrator at Monash University and president of the Australian Colleges and Universities Staff Association.

## Moving on

**F**IFTY YEARS AFTER the foundation of the Movement, not all passion is spent. The organisation still has its true believers, old, and, perhaps surprisingly, young, along with still angry antagonists. But the fact that last month only about 60 people attended a conference on 'Fifty Years of the Santamaria Movement' suggests that most contemporary Catholics can only wonder at the acts of faith made by so many of their forebears in the political and theological infallibility of B.A. Santamaria (the Bishop in Short Pants, as some used to call him).

The situation came into fascinating focus at the conference, held at the State Library of New South Wales on the very day that the US fleet was in town—nuclear weapons and all, we assume—to mark the 50th anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea.

Santamaria, 50 years ago, had just begun the work of organising the Movement, initially through the fatherly cooperation of Archbishop Mannix but by 1945 with the formal authority of the entire Catholic hierarchy, who assumed control of the organisation 'in policy and finance'. The Movement's activities were secured by oaths of secrecy among its 3000 members—a security largely unbreached from its foundation in 1941-42 until the Labor leader, H.V. Evatt, unmasked it in 1954.

The conference was a good-humoured mix of both sides of an issue that can still raise the temperature—*Catholic Worker* types such as Jim Griffin, Colin Thornton-Smith and myself, peace activists such as Roger Pryke and Val Noone and, on the other side, the former NSW Liberal leader Peter Coleman, Movement activists Frank Rooney and John Cotter, and the lapsed Movement adherent, Gerard Henderson.

If anyone ever doubted the active role of the Catholic bishops in the work of the Movement, Edmund Campion's keynote address put doubt to rest. He had the figures. Daniel Mannix provided £3000 seeding money in the early 1940s and in 1945 the

bishops of Australia agreed to provide £10,000 a year. You won't find any reference to that in back copies of *The Catholic Weekly* or *The Advocate*.

How, one must ask, was one young man—in 1945 Santamaria was only 30—able to lead the hierarchy of Australia into a political adventure that was in complete collision with church tradition on direct intervention in party politics, and on what should be the proper relationship between church and state? The potential for



Photo: *The Age*

sectarian backlash in a society where 'Micks' were still locked in bitter rivalry with freemasons, 'Proddies' and others, was seen as a risk worth taking.

**J**IM GRIFFIN, A HISTORIAN of the Mannix era, suggested in an aside to me a theory on the secret of Santamaria's influence. Griffin had heard it from Kevin Kelly, a former Australian ambassador to Argentina. Kelly believed that most of the Catholics who might have provided a counterweight to Santamaria in his dealings with

Mannix—and no doubt most of the other bishops—were at the war. It was also a matter of common observation that Australian bishops, although comfortable with canon law and school building projects, were not too interested in, or even aware of, the theology of church-state relations.

The conference quickly began to operate at two levels—the same levels that had marked divisions in the church throughout the Movement controversy. On the one hand, the primacy of 'fighting the Comms' in the labour movement, and on the other, the principle that in a plural society the church should have no role in party politics—especially a secret, manipulative one. Santamaria was invited but declined because he was planning to be overseas. His views, however, were well represented.

Peter Coleman, former Liberal politician and former editor of *The Bulletin* and *Quadrant*, gave an erudite presentation on the link between the Movement and some of James McAuley's finest poetry. The epic poem *Captain Quiros* was, in McAuley's words, 'the work I was born to do'. It was, Coleman said, inspired by the Movement.

Ann Daniel, speaking on 'Women and the Movement', really told us of the invisibility of women in the Movement, making observations that even in unions where women were dominant during the war—clerks, shop assistants, teachers—the Movement's permeation of these bodies was controlled by men. Daniel was married to a Movement organiser, had 10 children, and in time became disillusioned with the Movement. She went on to become associate professor of sociology at the University of New South Wales.

Her comments on the low positions of women on the Movement totem pole brought the day's first drama—a gutsy contribution from a young university student, Prue Gordon, who declared herself to be a National Civic Council member and



reported that there were now three women on the NCC's executive council. Prue reminded one of a new Joan of Arc, but on meeting her over coffee it became clear that she hadn't been experiencing visions of saving Australia. Her contribution assured those who were not absolutely sure that the NCC still existed that indeed it did, and that 50 years on NCC women could be other than makers of scones and carriers of tea.

Gerard Henderson, a former back-room strategist for Santamaria and author of *Mr Santamaria and the Bishops*, titled his contribution 'B.A. Santamaria, Santamariaism and the Cult of Personality'. In half an hour Henderson made many dramatic points but none like his first: Santamaria had an agenda for his organisation that went far beyond defeating communism.

Henderson quoted a letter from Santamaria to Mannix in 1952, in which Santamaria spoke of introducing into state and federal parliaments 'large numbers of members who should be able to implement a Christian social program'. This, said Santamaria, 'is the first time that such a work has become possible in Australia and, as far as I can see, in the Anglo-Saxon world since the advent of Protestantism.' Labor might not have been in the wilderness for 23 years if that letter had fallen off the back of an ecclesiastical truck.

**H**ENDERSON'S DESCRIPTION of the Santamaria 'cult' in the church and the Movement was the ignition point at which the two levels on which the conference was operating became starkly clear. Frank Rooney, a Movement man from Newcastle, gave a compelling picture of the thousands of Movement men who did the hard and often risky work of organising the battle against Communist power in the unions—the doorknocking, the pamphleteering, the exposure of corrupt Communist tactics. No church-state theology here. There was an enemy to be beaten, and Rooney and the boys in the ironworkers union did it.

John Cotter, a former full-time Movement man, gave a warm, whimsical description of undercover Movement tactics—the split letters inviting the faithful to secret meetings, the complex classification of enemies and

friends—for example, N1, N2 and N3, indicating non-Catholic friend, non-Catholic but not committed, and hostile non-Catholic. Cotter enjoyed the battle, and was always grateful that Santamaria had rescued him from the boredom of the Commonwealth Public Service.

**T**HE FINAL ADDRESS was given by Edmund Campion, who teaches history at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, which organised the conference together with the State Library Association of New South Wales and Sydney University's department of government and public administration. Campion's speech was a masterly balance of scholarship, analysis and sympathy, along with a firmness of judgment about the Movement. It was particularly insightful on why the church in Victoria and New South Wales took such passionately opposing views once the Movement had become a matter of public scandal.

New South Wales already had experience of splits, and had a long tradition of close relationship between the Catholic Church and the Labor Party. The politics of NSW Catholics and their bishops reflected the pragmatism that goes with the responsibility of government. Victorian Catholics, on the other hand, had known only a brief period of Labor rule, hence they clung to the luxury of being more 'pure' and visionary. Compromise did not come easily to them.

By 1955 Australia had a split Labor Party and a split Catholic Church, and the beginnings of a political climate in which Catholics could more easily dissociate themselves from their Labor past and move towards conservative politics through the staging post of the Democratic Labor Party. As Edmund Campion summarised the situation: 'The Movement tried to sacralise Australian politics. It ended by politicising religion.' ■

**Paul Ormonde** is the author of *The Movement*. (Nelson, Melbourne, 1972.)

'Santamaria's Movement: 50 Years On'. Selected papers from this conference are available from our bookshop for \$12.95. They are the first edition of *Eureka Street Papers*, a new occasional publication of this magazine. To order, see form on p43.



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# Calling in Columbus' debts

*As the 500th anniversary of Columbus' voyage approaches, Australian Aborigines and other indigenous peoples are asserting a new kind of self-determination.*

**A**SISTER OF ONE of the young Aboriginal men whose death was investigated by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was addressing a group of Catholic bishops. She spoke of the difficulties in convincing her young people to play the rules of the game. 'There's no justice,' the youngsters reply, 'there's just us'. Songwriter Paul Kelly, who has befriended many many Aboriginal artists, sings of *Special Treatment*, itemising the policies inflicted on Aborigines since European settlement. His song fails to

*Even if the day were approaching when Aborigines as a group were no longer poor, disadvantaged and dispossessed, Australians would still need to consider the issue of indigenous rights. Five hundred years after Columbus, these are still uncharted waters for the international community.*



convince many white schoolchildren, who think the problem is Abstudy and other special benefits and programs aimed at providing equal opportunity for Aborigines.

With great fanfare, handshaking and backslapping, Robert Tickner, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, tabled the response of all Australian governments—except for the recently elected Tasmanian government—to the royal commission, announcing an extra \$150 million in programs.

The only problem was working out which level of government would pick up the tab. The fine print revealed it was \$30 million a year for the next five years. Most of the funds will go to stretched Aboriginal legal services and the development of new programs aimed at beating the grog. The commission made 339 recommendations, each of which has now been comment-

ed on by each government. Despite the investigation of 99 deaths, no police or prison officer is to face serious criminal charges. No money has yet been allocated for new initiatives to relieve disadvantage, or to set right the underlying causes of Aboriginal alienation.

Patrick Dodson, an Aboriginal leader and former royal commissioner, now has the difficult task of convincing Aboriginal groups to back the government's Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, which has a decade to investigate the desirability of an 'instrument of reconciliation'. He is right when he claims: 'The question that must be directed to critics of the process is what is the practical alternative to reconciliation? I think the only alternative is to do nothing. I believe we have reached a stage in our evolution as a nation where neither Aboriginal nor non-Aboriginal Australians can afford for that to happen.'

Yet some Aboriginal groups think they would be better off with nothing; they are so mistrustful of Australian political processes that they see no gain in negotiating concessions within limits set by non-Aboriginal moralising and domestic political realism. They see no point in getting things settled so the line can be drawn. They would prefer sporadic gains and the assurance after each encounter that the last word has not been spoken on Aboriginal rights. For them, treaty talk is the invention of bourgeois non-Aborigines who are anxious to clean up the nation's backyard before the international spotlight zeroes in. Some Aborigines see future international embarrassment without a treaty as their chief political lever.

**T**HE IRONY OF WHITE AUSTRALIANS moralising about East Timor and Indonesia while regarding Aboriginal claims to self-determination as romantic rhetoric has not been lost on some Aboriginal leaders. President Suharto gave us a taste of things to come when he went on the attack welcoming Mr Keating to Indonesia claiming that history showed that all modernised countries 'had their ups and downs before they achieved modernisation. They were rather fortunate because the technology of communications and development of the media was not as advanced as it is today. Their shortcomings and faults which definitely existed in their development were not disseminated quickly everywhere and were not exaggerated.'

In 1987, 58 per cent of Australians polled supported the idea of a treaty. The latest poll shows 65 per cent.

Young people, alive to the music of Yothu Yindi and emerging as the first school graduates to have undertaken Aboriginal studies in their curriculum, are 83 per cent in favour of a treaty. Naturally the percentages in rural areas are less. Even those in favour have little sense of what the process or content of any treaty would be. If constitutional recognition of indigenous rights is to be on the agenda, majority approval will be essential. Aboriginal rights will have to piggyback on more mainstream issues such as the republic and a bill of rights. No Aboriginal measure will get up unless it has the support of the main political parties. Dodson and his followers are right when they say there is no option but to support the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation if constitutional entrenchment of rights is to be even theoretically under consideration, let alone actually placed on the political agenda.

**I**N THE PAST DECADE Aborigines have been travelling to Geneva for meetings of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, which is drafting a declaration of rights of indigenous peoples. Many indigenous groups have been investigating the concept of self-determination within the legal framework of the nation states built on their dispossession without consent or compensation. Both the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights proclaim: 'All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.'

In international law, self-determination has come to have a technical meaning in the decolonisation process. When a colonial power is withdrawing from a territory, the people of the territory are to be assured a free choice in determining their political future. Indigenous peoples are now attempting to argue by analogy that they too are 'peoples' in the sense recognised by international law, and so have the right to determine their future, whether as part of the nation state in which they live or as a separate state or entity enjoying international recognition. This argument has had little appeal to governments, which are prepared to concede only greater autonomy within the nation.

There is now a domestic meaning of self-determination that, while not claiming sovereignty, connotes more than self-management. It incorporates the notion that indigenous organisations and representatives should be able to shape policy for their people and not simply manage government programs, run cooperative enterprises and administer local government functions for communities which happen to be indigenous. This political term has no guaranteed legal content. Continued attempts by Aboriginal leaders to extend it to self-determination as recognised in international law sense take no account of the UN's position that any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country is incom-

patible with the purpose and principles of the United Nations Charter.

Even if the day were approaching when Aborigines as a group were no longer poor, disadvantaged and dispossessed, Australians would still need to consider the issue of indigenous rights. Five hundred years after Columbus, these are still uncharted waters for the international community. One of the prime purposes of the UN is to promote and encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to race. There is a well-developed jurisprudence of discrimination legislation that permits temporary measures of benign discrimination, even on the basis of race, because such measures help racially identifiable deprived groups to participate more equitably in the general society of which they are a part. It is hardly likely that the UN would encourage or permit the recognition of permanent measures of benign discrimination in favour of indigenous groups as part of its charter for promoting human rights without distinction as to race.

At last year's session of the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, the Brazilian observer delegation expressed the view that some articles of the draft Declaration of Indigenous Rights would 'hardly be accepted by most governments if their present language is maintained: for instance, those provisions which tend to attribute to indigenous people the right to self-determination similar to that enjoyed by sovereign states under international law.' If pressed, the Australian government delegation would add the same reservation.

**O**N 12 OCTOBER, Columbus Day, the world will mark the 500th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of the Americas. Indigenous peoples will remind us that Columbus discovered nothing that had not already been discovered, inhabited, and reflected upon for centuries by entire societies that were to suffer from colonisation. But on Columbus Day this year the UN Secretary General will formally open the International Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples, with the theme 'Indigenous Peoples—A New Partnership'. The General Assembly's resolution establishing the forthcoming international year makes no mention of self-determination. The Australian government, however, in welcoming the UN initiative has said, 'It will be an opportunity to reflect further on what the right to self-determination means for indigenous peoples.'

Robert Tickner has taken his lead from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and



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enunciated self-determination as a key concept of government policy. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has suggested that with changes in the international system, 'the concept of self-determination must be considered broadly, as peoples seek to assert their identities, to preserve their languages, cultures and traditions and to achieve greater autonomy, free from undue interference by central governments. The challenge to governments is to respond effectively to the growing demands of indigenous peoples in this area.'

Self-determination, subject to the constitution and laws of the Commonwealth of Australia, ought now be seen as a non-controversial statement of the legitimate and recognisable aspirations of Aborigines seeking maximum community independence while remaining part of the nation state. This month the Keating government is to make a second response to the royal commission, announcing measures for Aboriginal employment, training and enterprises that will have some prospect of fostering Aboriginal economic self-sufficiency—a precondition for real self-determination.

In the decade ahead, those Aborigines who oppose a treaty aimed at entrenching domestic self-determination for Aboriginal and Islander communities will be joined, for self-interested reasons, by miners and pastoralists. Those Aborigines seeking incremental gains at home will add local self-determination to land rights, community government, and Aboriginal participation in the administration of government service programs, thus maximising their hopes of doing their own thing within the Australian nation. They will face many obstacles. They will not get there alone. But they have some strong allies, including the recently formed Constitutional Centenary Foundation, chaired by Sir Ninian Stephen.

**T**HE FORTHCOMING DECISION of the High Court in the Mabo case, which provides the court with its first opportunity to consider the *terra nullius* doctrine, may open the gates for a new understanding of land rights and self-management proposals. They might be seen not as welfare measures but as the recognition of property and personal rights under the rule of law. The day may dawn when Aborigines will be able to say, with dignity and without feeling they have sold out their heritage, 'There's not just us'.

That would be the start of justice. It would even warrant a new flag, marking the end of 'special treatment'. When Bob Hawke and Gerry Hand promised Aborigines a treaty in 1988, Wenton Rubuntja, an elder from central Australia and now a member of the Council for Reconciliation, said: 'We have to work out a way of sharing this country, but there has to be an understanding of and respect of our culture, our law. Hopefully that's what this treaty will mean.' ■

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## I Peace: one ste

**I**N EL SALVADOR THE ROAD TO PEACE has been hard, but the caravan has not halted. The initial euphoria at the signing of peace accords between the government and guerillas of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FLMN) has given way to a recognition that the accords will not be implemented without a struggle.

To understand why, it is necessary to remember the circumstances in which they were signed. The agreement came after great international pressure on a government that had begun peace talks reluctantly. President Christiani was persuaded to take a personal part in the negotiations, and to attend the signing, only when pushed by the United States government. Many members of his party opposed negotiations with the FLMN and remain resolutely opposed to what they see as the betrayal of El Salvador.

The same international pressure that led to the accords also meant that they were drafted and signed in haste. As a result, the three broad areas in which they can be grouped were not worked out in equal detail.

The area to which most detailed attention was given was naturally the disengagement of the two armies. A timetable was drawn up to ensure that the armies separated peacefully, and the early stages of this disengagement have been completed satisfactorily.

## T 40 million

**T**HE VIETNAMESE REFUGEE PROBLEM may be winding down and 370,000 Cambodians are going home, but the need for emergency relief in the region has not abated. Attention has shifted to refugees spilling over the borders of Burma (Myanmar), where for 40 years the Karens and other ethnic minorities have been at war with successive governments in Rangoon. Since 1984 refugees from these groups have sought refuge in Thailand, and there are now 65,000 Karens, Mons, Karenni, Shans and Kachins living in Thai camps. Burma's 'minorities' are not small—the Karen claim to number 10 million, although no census has taken since 1945. The Rohingyas in Arakan State number five million.

A new wave of exiles has appeared since December 1991, when Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the opposition to the military regime in Rangoon, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The State Law and Order Restoration Council—'SLORC', as the military rulers style themselves—has tried to crush all dissent, forcing Burmans, Tovoyans and Rohingyas to seek refuge in Thailand, Bangladesh and India.

Since May 1990, when SLORC refused to recognise national elections in which Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won a majority, universities have been closed, dissidents and their families harrassed, and mail from overseas opened. Aung San Suu Kyi is under house arrest in Rangoon.

# Forward, but more steps back

The accords also spelled out the process by which El Salvador would be demilitarised: disbanding of the FLMN and the government's special forces, and formation of a new police force. This process has only just begun, and the important decisions that will deprive the officers in the armed forces of their political power have yet to be taken.

Finally, the accords only touched on national reconstruction, including the attitude to be taken to the atrocities of the war, aid for new economic ventures and rights to land occupied during the war. So far, the groups opposed to the accords have concentrated on the land issue. They want to disallow claims to land occupied during the war by the peasants, while insisting on the right to remove peasants who have been working it. This is done in the name of the 'right' to private property.

In one case, a court order was obtained to clear peasants from land they had been working, and a Jesuit priest working in the area was arrested and deported when intervening. The clearance and destruction of the peasants' houses was of dubious legality, and certainly contrary to the intent of the accords.

The campaign to prevent the occupation of private property has been led by a group representing business interests, who have also refused to join discussion of

national reconstruction until the land issue is resolved. A large shoe manufacturer has also closed down all its factories on the pretext of union violence. The aim appears to be to provoke the unions and peasant groups into actions that can be interpreted as breaking the accords.

In the worst instance of this provocation, a union organiser was found killed in a manner reminiscent of the death-squad killings of the 1980s. This has been the most sinister threat to the peace, because political killings in which the murderers can act with impunity effectively prevent popular political organisation.

So there are threats to peace in El Salvador, but there remain grounds for hope. The popular desire for peace is great, and groups that deprive people of peace will be seen as traitors. Furthermore, outside observers have been invited to monitor the progress towards peace, and national reconstruction depends upon overseas loans.

For the peace to last, of course, reconstruction will have to address the inequitable distribution of wealth that led to war.

—Andrew Hamilton SJ ■

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EL SALVADOR

# Burmese can't be wrong

The regime has cited doctrines of racial and religious purity to justify expelling the Rohingyas, who are Muslim, from the state of Arakan. 'Myanmar is a Buddhist country,' declared a SLORC spokesman, who did not add that the Rohingyas have lived in Arakan for 400 years. By the end of April this year more than 240,000 Rohingyas had fled into Bangladesh. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has declared their plight a matter for priority attention, and the US government has pledged \$3 million in aid to help Bangladesh cope with the inrush of refugees. In late April I saw the Rohingya refugee camps near Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. Despite an agreement between the Bangladesh and Burmese governments, a refugee leader in Dechua Palong Camp no. 2 claimed to represent the 20,000 in his camp when he said the refugees would not return until Aung San Suu Kyi was in power.

The Muslim members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Malaysia and Indonesia, have expressed concern at their brothers and sisters in religion being driven from their homeland, suffering rape and torture along the way. ASEAN's doctrine of 'constructive engagement' with Burma has cracked wide open, and suddenly it has become all right to talk about religious persecution. The publicity that the Rohingyas have received will also benefit the Karens, who are mostly Christians.

The Karen, Rohingyas and other ethnic groups have changed their goals since SLORC refused to honor the 1990 election. Formerly they sought independence, but this demand has been set aside and they have united with the National League for Democracy to form the Democratic Alliance of Burma. The alliance's immediate goal is to persuade foreign governments to cease recognising SLORC as the legitimate government of Burma, hoping that once the regime is isolated it will collapse.

Recent events have put SLORC opponents into a spin. Within one short week in late April, General Saw Maung was replaced as SLORC chairman by Than Shwe; Aung San Suu Kyi got visiting rights; a ceasefire was declared with the Karen in the Thai border and 38 political prisoners were freed. But analysts in Bangkok do not assume this means SLORC is breaking up. It may just be bending to the wind of international opinion.

What happens if the alliance does unseat SLORC at the United Nations is unclear, as the various pro-democracy groups would then be in competition. Aung San Suu Kyi's party won the 1990 election on a limited franchise, for few members of the minorities had a vote. It is abundantly clear, however, that democracy is what the 40 million people of Burma, whether Burmans or members of the minorities, want.

—Alan Nichols ■  
*Alan Nichols, an Anglican priest from Melbourne, works with the Jesuit Refugee Service in Bangkok.*

BURMA



## Looking for signs and wonders

**F**ORTY YEARS AGO André Malraux declared that 'the chief problem of the end of the century will be the religious one,' adding that he did not 'exclude the possibility of a spiritual phenomenon on a global scale.' And now, indeed, we are faced with a movement that began in English-speaking countries but which has spread like wildfire throughout the West: the New Age.

Its essential idea is that humanity is entering an age of spiritual awareness, of harmony and light, that will be marked by profound psychic changes. According to New Age theorists, the year 2000 will signal the passage from the astrological Age of Pisces to that of Aquarius. In particular it will witness the second coming of Christ, whose 'energies' are said to be already at work in the swarm of spiritual experiments and new religious movements. The New Age is a millenarianism: it rests on the expectation of a thousand years of happiness mentioned in the Book of Revelation. It articulates the ancient myth that is ever in the human heart, that of the Golden Age.

How old, then, is the New Age? It has ancestors and distant precursors, but most of its ideas and practices were born in the 1960s, at a farm in California called Esalen. Psychotherapists, artists and scientists came to Esalen to create a 'movement for developing human potential', and this community still flourishes. It's founder, Michael Murphy, explains: 'Nobody encourages the profound development of the individual any more. Formerly that was the role of the religions but today Esalen wants to create the modern equivalent of Renaissance man by blending without prejudice Chinese techniques of the fifth century and the achievements of cybernetics.' Murphy and his colleagues want to widen the perceptions of people in the West, to release their bodies and psyches, and to explore the whole range of philosophies, especially those from the East.

We turn to another place: Findhorn, an arid, windswept valley in northern Scotland where in 1962 Peter and Eileen Caddy set up camp and planted a vegetable garden. The vegetables they harvested from this land where previously nothing had grown were enormous, a fact they attributed to their dialogue with 'the spirits of the plants'. A community grew up around the vegetable garden, and it has helped shape the New Age conviction that humanity is both part of the universe and a microcosm of the whole.

**I**N 1967-68, THE COUNTERCULTURE movement was born in the United States. It was characterised by the struggle for the rights of minorities, feminism, demonstrations for peace in Vietnam, and the use of hallucinogenic drugs. The hippies sang of peace, love and universal harmony, and formed communities to participate in the creation of humanity's future. Sects grew up like weeds on this fertile ground, and many of them are still to be found in the New Age movement.

Finally, in 1976 the journalist Marilyn Ferguson published an article based on her research on the brain, entitled 'The movement that has no name', which put forward a new and strange system of thought involving many disciplines—medicine, philosophy, spirituality, science, art and education. Ferguson's movement with no name is what has since come to be called the New Age, or the Age of Aquarius.

Other ingredients entered into play as well: schools of psychotherapy that deal with personal relationships, and which are associated with such names as Wilhelm

*New Age practices have entered wider business circles as well. There are multinational companies that admit to using seminars on Zen, shamanism and voodoo techniques to train their executives in 'pushing beyond the limits', and astrology and numerology are commonly used to select the right applicant for a job.*

Reich, Kurt Lewin, Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow; studies reconciling the views of quantum physics and those of oriental philosophy, in particular *The Tao of Physics* by Fritjof Capra; the success in France of *The Morning of the Magicians* by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, and of the journal *Planet*, which espouses many New Age themes, from occultism to mysticism, and from flying saucers to parapsychology. It went so far as to include the ideas of the famous Jesuit palaeontologist Teilhard de Chardin whom the New Age claims as one of its intellectual masters. Wasn't he already talking about 'planetary consciousness'?

When the golden Age of Aquarius arrives, it will supposedly herald the death of the Age of Pisces and of Christianity, periods characterised by division and violence, hate and war. It will be inaugurated by the second coming of the cosmic Christ, which will coincide with the coming of a new kind of world religion. For no spiritual system, according to the 'children of Aquarius', will be able to impose itself on humanity through a single language. In the background of this spiritual hospitality, which offers to synthesise all religions and to take up where they leave off, there is a bitter denial of any transcendent revelation; and this denial is aimed chiefly at Christianity.

**W**HAT IS THE CONTENT of this new religion of Aquarius? The formula of the gnostics of the first Christian centuries was, 'I take hold of my good where I find it.' The children of Aquarius say, 'From the moment that this works for you, it doesn't matter what you believe.' And just as the first gnostics adapted Greek or Persian mythologies, so the New Age appropriated to itself many currents. This is a contemporary version of gnosticism, where you construct your own belief by accumulating knowledge—supposed to be a secret—that is culled from every quarter. And so, in the New Age, one draws as much from Buddhism—especially Tibetan Buddhism—as from Hinduism, Sufism or the biblical tradition. It is a matter of uniting that which was diverse; a cumulative, but reductionist, syncretism.

The New Age is also a collection of practices that are seemingly at odds. It borrows freely from different techniques of meditation to reach a 'new cosmic consciousness' by illumination. Often, simple techniques of developing consciousness are confused with mysticism. There is an impressive array of schools of psychotherapy that take this direction—sophrology, rebirth, self-directed training—but there are also creative activities such as sculpture, pottery, music and psychodrama, autohypnosis, and voodoo. A person transformed by such experiences would supposedly reach illumination by discovering that they are a simple spark of the divine. For the New Age, the divine is not in fact a person, but the most highly developed expression of the cosmos. And a human being is not someone entering into a relationship with others, but a simple wave on the cosmic ocean, a part of the Great Whole.

In this way the New Age presents itself as a vast movement of spiritual seeking. But, unlike the established religions that impose a codified relation with the divine, New Age religions want to establish an immediate contact with divinity that dwells in each person. On this view, God is no longer transcendent, and the human person discovers that he or she is God. The New Age represents one of the most typical expressions of the new way of being religious, and of paganism. Its implicit creed, common to many movements which lay claim to it, has many similarities with that of esotericism and of occultism.

The new human being no longer has need of revelation. The slogan 'it's true if you believe it' recalls the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge, so that they might 'become like gods'. Such a person has no further need of grace; it is sufficient to activate the powers, as yet underexercised, of one's consciousness. As an autonomous being, the person no longer has need of salvation, since salvation is brought about by the self, thanks to the rebirths that automatically give assurance of purification.

The human being will have no further need of redemption by the cross of Christ, for deliverance from evil is in one's own hands. Health of the body will be recovered by the new therapies, health of the spirit by the practices of developing consciousness, health of the soul by interior illumination. Jesus becomes only one of numerous manifestations of a cosmic Christ that came down upon him at his baptism in the



Jordan, but which left before his death on the cross. One is clearly, and radically, outside Christianity.

In North America the New Age has become a profitable business, offering a banal psychobabble that preys on vulnerable people who are seeking some significance in life. In the manner of what Marilyn Ferguson calls a 'sweet conspiracy', the penetration of New Age beliefs and practices in society has taken many forms. Radio and television broadcasts that peddle holistic medicines, meditation methods and astrology are increasingly numerous. And a new musical fashion has become the rage: New Age music is 'aquatic and positive, synthetic and fluid', a music of the cosmos, of ethereal vibrations and of the subconscious level of thought, built on murmured messages of planetary brotherhood.

Through the influence of Murphy's Esalen community, New Age practices have entered wider business circles as well. There are multinational companies that admit to using seminars on Zen, shamanism and voodoo techniques to train their executives in 'pushing beyond the limits', and astrology and numerology are commonly used to select the right applicant for a job. With the New Age, the irrational has come striding in through the front door. Nearly one European in four believes in reincarnation, one in two regularly consults a horoscope, and one in three believes that the predictions of clairvoyants and fortune tellers are true.

The New Age is less a structured movement than a network of criss-crossing threads, in which good grain is often mixed with bramble. If the New Age attracts, it is because it promises health, happiness and meaning to life, and, going beyond individual unhappiness, because it wants to respond to the sickness of society in general. The climate of hope and fear typical of our age has given birth to an expectation of the end of this world and to the desire for another one. This movement represents a utopia that is sufficiently vague to allow anyone to project his or her religious aspirations within it.

This is where the New Age represents an important challenge for Christianity. Not because of some of its techniques, which have their own value: meditation, gentle therapies, dynamic psychology. But one of the explicit goals of its originators—even if it is not always recognised by its followers—is to propose a world supra-religion of the Age of Aquarius, that will take the place of Christianity. Indeed, without always knowing it, many Christians exercise a double membership. The Bible is used abundantly in the New Age, but it is interpreted from a gnostic point of view.

**I**T IS IMPORTANT FOR CHRISTIANS to take seriously the questions raised by the New Age, lest they be too quickly dismissed. As Paul VI said, the Holy Spirit sometimes speaks to us through unbelief, it also speaks to us through the new spirit of religion. It is a matter of responding, from the heart of Christianity, to the expectations revealed by the return to the religious: the need for a unified vision of life; the desire for togetherness and human warmth; the search for the origin of all things. Many children of Aquarius want to experience God directly, in a kind of wild quest that drives them towards cosy groups where there is singing, dancing, and where you feel good together. Many people today are in fact looking for a religion of the emotions rather than one of ideas. Therefore, without confusing the spiritual with the irrational, there is a need to discover in Christianity the sense of the body in prayer, of festivity in the liturgy, of 'enfleshed' symbols that speak to the heart and the senses: water and light, fire and incense, gestures and images.


The new awareness of religion can become an opportunity for evangelism, for to evangelise is to tell the Christian story in clear speech, amid the throng of street entertainers hawking their wares in the great circus of contemporary religion. But to be heard, we need to move out to be with people in the areas in which they ask their questions. Even if their customs, their vocabulary and their practices disconcert us intensely, what is at stake merits the effort. ■

**Jean Vernet** writes for the French Jesuit journals *Christus* and *Cahiers pour croire aujourd'hui*. This article, which first appeared in the December 1991 edition of *Cahiers*, was translated by Christopher Willcock SJ.


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## The future is in your hands



JUDY-ANN STEED IS OUTLINING her services on the phone. 'There's no nude bodies,' she explains. 'First I look at your palm and then I read the tarot and answer any questions you may have. Just to finish off I make heat in my hands and run them over your shoulder, neck and arms. It takes about an hour and there's no manipulation.'



At 47, Judy-Ann has spent most of her working life in journalism and public relations. She has worked in such matter-of-hard-fact environments as the Brisbane office of *A Current Affair* and Melbourne's Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute. Yet she believes she has always had a 'sixth sense'. When she was working for the *Sunday Times* in Wellington, for example, a colleague offered to show her how to read the tarot cards. This colleague had been married three times and, having been transferred from New York, was getting pretty bored in New Zealand. She taught Judy-Ann the cards on a Sunday and died suddenly the following Friday. She was 35. 'It was most extraordinary,' says Judy-Ann, 'because her death spread was actually in the cards. I didn't realise it at the time but when I looked back I did.'



Such experiences culminated about four years ago when Judy-Ann went for a holiday to Fiji and found herself picking up a book on palmistry. She noticed a couple at the resort who seemed miserable, so she went over to them and asked if they would mind her having a look at their hands. 'I said "Don't worry about the IVF program. Everything will be OK." I said it for no reason at all but their jaws just dropped.' Word spread, and for the next two weeks staff and guests kept her busy with requests to have their palms read. 'In every case it was so accurate that they said "how did you possibly know that?" But what was becoming clear to me was that I was actually helping people.'

Judy-Ann meets clients in the sunroom of her house in the Melbourne suburb of Elwood. A consultation has the appearance of helping people through a friendly chat rather than of consorting with mysterious powers in a darkened closet. 'I'm very careful in what I say. I never say anything negative because there's enough negatives in this world.'

The meeting may involve working out a 'wish list' of the client's aspirations for the next five years, talking about the memories of a painful childhood—traces of which she finds etched on a palm—or deciding that the client should keep a diary to become less preoccupi-

pied by their immediate troubles. 'Generally people walk in here with a feeling of tenseness but when they leave they have relaxed.' Body language is important. 'I can tell if someone has health problems by the way they present their hand, whether it is open or closed.' Similarly, the tarot cards are read in conjunction with her impression of the way a person sits in front of them.

'The cards allow a peep into what may be if you go along a certain path. I mean, if you don't stop at a stop sign—a pain or something—when life throws it up to you, you may be in trouble. The same with the palm; it is really a map of one's life. Provided you become aware of a danger, you can adapt and look at things in a different way.'

Judy-Ann was brought up a Catholic and went to a Catholic boarding school. She gave up practising the religion in the '60s, because of the 'the pill issue, and because the church had abandoned the Latin Mass. But aspects of Catholicism have stuck with her, not least a belief in free will that isn't compromised by reading the future in a palm or tarot cards. 'Really, I see more what has been in a person's life that they have yet to come to terms with, and perhaps a general guide to what is ahead.'

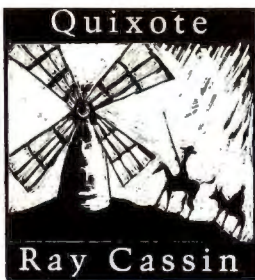
**D**OES SHE BELIEVE IN GOD? 'Yes, definitely.' When she is able to tell strangers things about themselves, is she receiving revelations from God? 'It's something I had never, up until this moment, thought about. Now you mention it, I suppose it must mean that because how else am I receiving thought patterns? It takes no conscious effort other than me tuning in like an antenna.' Judy Ann's antenna must be pretty good. Shortly before I arrived she was able to tell a woman she had never seen before that she, the stranger, was working near the window on level 24 of Sydney's Australia Square.

Judy-Ann has diverse business interests. She presents a weekly arts program on Melbourne radio and is a distributor for a health-food company, demonstrating the products from her home. This business, which she says is growing at a rate of 25 per cent a month, has been in Australia for two years and already has 20,000 distributors. 'My motto is to become healthy and wealthy.'

Finally, I have the chance to put a couple of questions to the cards. Will Fitzroy make the six in the AFL? 'I see more positives than negatives there.' What about the North Sydney rugby league club? Are they destined to play in the grand final? 'Something happening to them now is of dire consequences. There's success there, but the knives are out.'

An hour's consultation with Judy-Ann Steed will cost you \$50. ■

**Michael McGirr SJ** is a Jesuit scholastic. He is a regular contributor to *Eureka Street*.



## Of politics and the \$50 note

**M**ODERN BANKING NOT ONLY HELPS to pass the time—the queues are too long and the tellers too few—it also helps to tell the time. If the automatic telling machine will only dispense \$50 notes, it must be Sunday morning. Most people who get cash from a telling machine want it in \$20 notes, so by Sunday the weekend's shopping and revelry have exhausted the supply of this useful bit of currency. And most places that are open on a Sunday morning do not appreciate customers who tender \$50 notes.

Perhaps it is a covert way of encouraging people to save, I wonder as I take my place in the Sunday-morning ATM queue. If so it is futile. Despite the fact that you have to wait twice as long in the queue, because everybody first goes through the routine of asking the machine for twenties rather than fifties, no one actually gives up in dismay.

How many times have you heard someone say 'You know, this machine's absolutely right. I should leave the money in the bank, where it can benefit me and the economy. I can go without \$20 to buy my milk/orange juice/newspaper/multifruit muffins from the local deli. I'll go home and skip breakfast today.' Never, right? People just mouth a few expletives, take a fifty instead of a twenty and steel themselves to argue with the guy in the deli who doesn't want to change the fifty.

The queue is getting smaller, and now there are only two people in front of me. At the head of the queue is a woman who spins things out by trying a whole set of linked credit cards and ATM cards. She appears to believe that even if the machine has run out of twenties it will print some more, out of respect for a person who owns so much magnetised plastic.

The machine has no respect and chews up two of her cards. She gets into the passenger seat of a Porsche parked by the kerb and explains this outcome to her male companion behind the wheel. The whole queue, full of bleary-eyed Sunday-morning class hatred, cranes to hear their conversation; the gist of which is that all is not lost because he too has a full set of magnetised plastic and knows of several other likely ATMs.

I try to imagine what it is like to spend one's Sunday morning driving round in a Porsche, being insulted by machines that won't give you a \$20 note. I am heartened by this image.

I am so heartened that I decide to forgo offering \$50 in exchange for a six-pack of multifruit muffins, and to search for more satisfying refreshment instead. I wander along Brunswick Street, noting the newspaper poster: L.A. RIOTS—BUSH SENDS IN TROOPS. I decide that people who own Porsches in Los Angeles probably aren't stopping at ATMs right now. They probably aren't driving at all.

This morning there are soldiers in Brunswick Street, too. Unlike the soldiers in Los Angeles, they wear dress uniforms instead of riot gear. They are preparing for a parade in which the 10th or the 11th Prince of Wales something or other will receive the freedom of the City of Fitzroy. A few Fitzroy residents lounge against lamp posts, muttering that by extending this welcome to the regiment Fitzroy council has failed some test of political correctness. But considerably more civilians, '60s hippies and the 1990s kind, seem to be there just for the show. A newspaper photographer is taking a picture of a girl wearing cheesecloth and beads. She has wrapped herself round a soldier, and raises a fingertip to stroke the ostrich-feather cockade in his beret.

**I** PAUSE IN FRONT of a café. The waiter scrawling the names of various dishes on a blackboard menu looks as if he eats \$50 notes. The pub across the road is just opening. It smells worse than the café but in most other respects seems more inviting. Inside a young woman is playing pool by herself and two men lean against the bar. The older of the two looks as though he spent all of yesterday there and will do the same again today. The other idly wipes a glass, his gaze turned away from the window and its view of the parade. A tattoo on his arm declares him to be a Vietnam veteran. The barmaid raises an eyebrow at my \$50 note but the man wiping the glass says 'Don't worry, mate, I'll change it at the café.'

He grabs the note and disappears across the street. Then the barmaid tells me not to worry, because she 'knows his name'. 'You mean he doesn't work here?' 'No, he hangs around and picks up glasses. But he's a customer.' The old man contributes, 'If it'd been me, mate, I'd still be running.'

I am wondering if I will see my \$50 again when the vet returns and hands me two twenties and a ten. He announces, to no one in particular, that 'the blacks sure ripped up Los Angeles, eh?'. The barmaid asks why and he explains about the police beating of Rodney King. 'They hit the poor bastard 86 times.' It is actually 56 but I decide not to correct him. A discussion ensues about Aborigines, with the barmaid arguing that they get as hard a time from Australian police as black Americans get in LA. The vet does not like this move to home ground. He is angered by her comparison, and by my suggestion that prior ownership of the country gives Aborigines a legitimate grievance. 'They weren't here first,' he roars, 'the kangaroos were!'

There is silence, broken only by a click as the lone pool player sinks the eightball. ■

Ray Cassin is production editor of *Eureka Street*.

# Shifting alliances

*The victory of left-wing independent Phil Cleary in the Wills byelection has drawn attention to the number of former ALP members who are pinning their hopes on new social movements. Here two ex-members of Labor's Left explain their reasons for leaving.*



*No more compromise: Peter and Joyce Milton.*

**I**'M NOT PERSONALLY DEPRESSED, but I am politically depressed', admitted Labor's former MHR for La Trobe, Peter Milton, as he explained a personally momentous decision he and his wife Joyce had recently taken.

Peter Milton was being sincere about his feelings, but doesn't look depressed in the slightest. He is 63 but looks years younger. He talks fluently, with a slight Londoner's accent derived from his birth and upbringing in that city. As he reminisced in his Boronia home about his decade in Parliament in the 1980s he exuded friendliness and vitality, bustling purposefully from room to room to answer the phone, put the kettle on or grab a book to check something.

When I arrived one Friday morning to discuss his political career he was answering an SOS from a neighbour with car trouble; dressed in short-sleeved check shirt, trim shorts and sockless trackshoes, Milton was cheerfully grappling with the problem, although the neighbour's inadequate tools had made the task much harder than it should have been.

The grave step arising from Peter Milton's political depression was his decision to sever his links with the Victorian Left, his political base throughout his decades of activism in Australia. The significance of this resignation is illuminated by an outline of his political career.

Having survived the Blitz, Milton joined the British Labour Party at the age of 16 and was a local branch secretary when he emigrated to Melbourne with Joyce and their three children in 1961. He became an assistant registrar at Melbourne University, where he also completed a part-time arts degree. As a committed socialist he had always gravitated towards the left wing

of his party, in Britain and Australia, but had not considered standing for parliament until the Left in La Trobe, where he was a resident and local branch member, were looking to run a candidate of their own in the preselection prior to the federal election due in 1980.

After agreeing to stand, Milton won the preselection ahead of four other candidates, including Tony Lamb, who had held the seat from 1972 to 1975, and ABC broadcaster Terry Lane; at the ensuing election Milton defeated the Liberal incumbent (who had unseated Lamb in 1975).

Throughout his parliamentary career Milton remained a staunch left-winger, implacably opposed to uranium mining, privatisation and the Hawke government's implementation of economic policies like deregulation and the 'level playing field'. In his August 1984 report to the ALP branches in La Trobe—at least every quarter Milton not only distributed a printed report to local ALP members, but also made available another separate one to the electorate as a whole—he admitted his chagrin that during the first 17 months of the Hawke government there had been, from his viewpoint, more defeats than successes in terms of the government adhering to the party platform.

**W**HEN THE DECISION to sell uranium to France was announced in the 1986 budget speech, Milton and two backbench colleagues sparked a minor controversy by dramatically walking out of Parliament in protest. Again Milton pointed to the breach of ALP policy involved which was, according to him, openly conceded by the Prime Minister in a private meeting with the rebellious trio.



Photo: Bill Thomas

It would be misleading to suggest that Milton felt continually frustrated during his stint in Parliament. He is proud of a number of the Hawke government's achievements and his own chairmanship of the influential standing committee on the environment—for seven years he retained this position and his contribution was widely commended.

But there were many times during those seven years after 1983 when he encountered rank-and-file ALP activists who were disaffected and disillusioned with the government. Although sympathetic to their concerns he urged them to stay in the party and to fight for what they believed in.

**H**E FEELS DIFFERENTLY NOW, however, believing that too much has been compromised and conceded. Although unable to bring himself to resign his membership of the party, he feels unable to associate himself any longer with the Left. While in parliament he often had spirited discussion with Brian Howe about the appropriate role of the Left in caucus and government; under Howe's influence, Milton asserts, the Left has become too conciliatory, too accommodating.

Joyce Milton shares her husband's views. Also a committed activist for decades, she marched alongside him in the anti-nuclear protests in England during the 1950s, has served on the Victorian ALP's administrative committee, and was in fact the first Milton invited to become the La Trobe Left's preselection candidate in 1979. It was only after she declined that her husband was asked to stand.

Like Peter, she is friendly and hospitable, recognises the capacity of senior figures in the party, but longs for

someone with the drive and determination to take on the forces of conservatism as wholeheartedly as the leading character in the outstanding British television series, *A Very British Coup*.

As well as being personally compatible, the Miltons were, in Peter's words, 'a political partnership'. They complemented each other's talents and interests neatly. Joyce acknowledged that Peter's work experience and tertiary education equipped him with greater ability to analyse policy issues, and that he was more suited to the 'front-person', public speaker role. With keener insight than Peter when reading people's motives and assessing the political implications, she felt more comfortable in an organisational capacity, where she was an influential figure behind the scenes.

Peter can be amusing when recalling aspects of the operation of their political partnership. When the relentless grind of functions became unpalatable and he expressed reluctance about attending a particular one, his 'commissar' (Joyce) would sometimes reply 'Well Peter, of course no one can force you to go, but all I can say is that it would be politically very foolish not to turn up.' Whenever Joyce took that line, he says with a smile, he knew he had no choice, and off he would go.

**T**HE MILTONS WERE AN EFFECTIVE political partnership partly because they have respected each other's identity, and it was characteristic that they withdrew from the Left in separate, differently-worded letters. Where do they go politically now? They're not sure. Both attended a meeting late last year of the the Rainbow Alliance; Peter's proposal that the alliance should include in its platform economic policies opposed to deregulation and the level playing field was accepted at that meeting. He believes they could improve the organisational name, which in his opinion gives the counter-productive impression of a group of people who don't have their feet on the ground. Peter and Joyce are far from certain that this new entity will be a congenial political home for them.

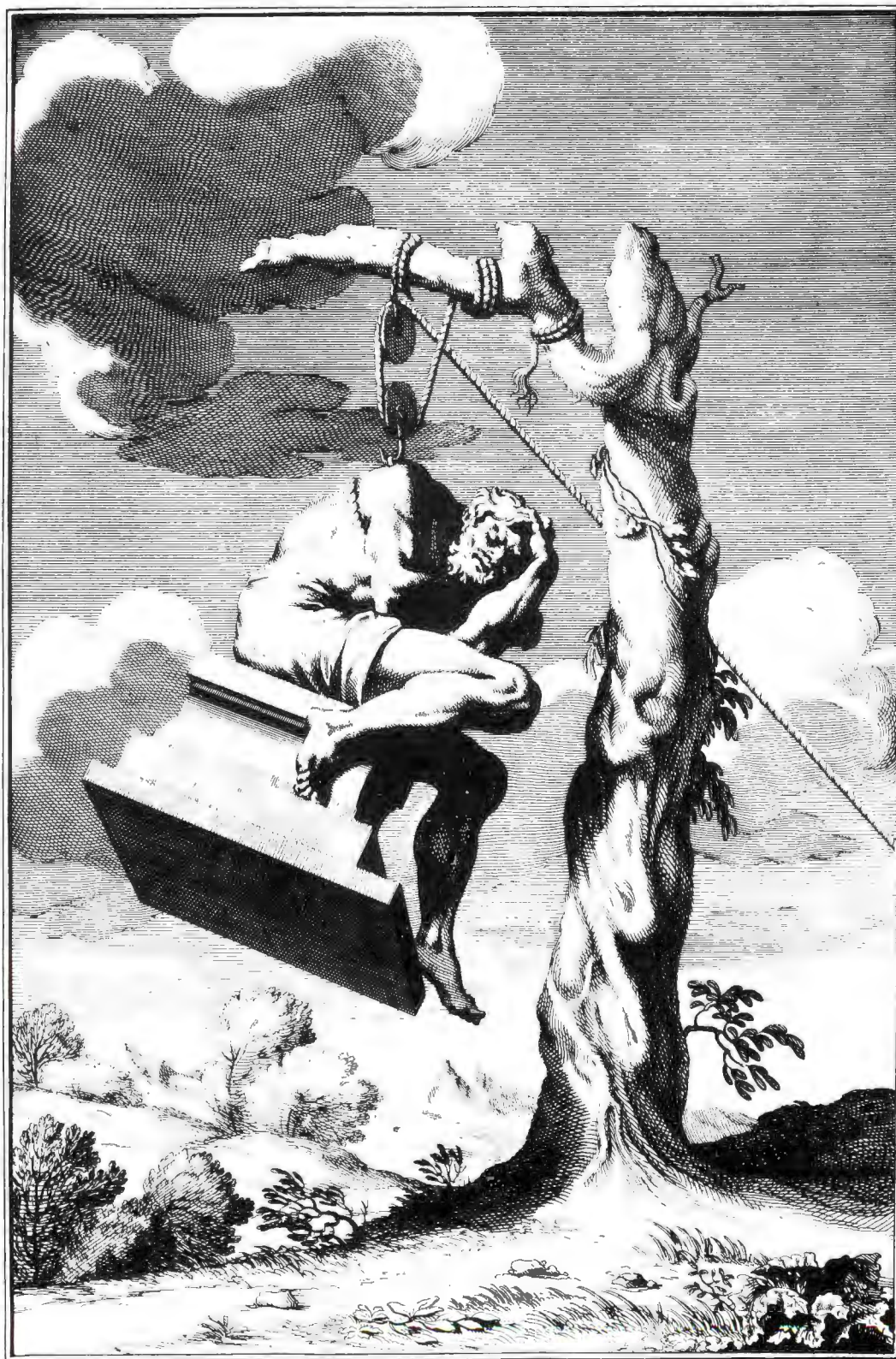
Even within sections of the Left, let alone among the wide spectrum of ALP stalwarts generally, there is of course strong disagreement with the Miltons' response to Labor's performance during the 1980s. The ALP has always been an umbrella party comprised of individuals with widely varying views about the desirable pace and priorities of change. Another characteristic it has frequently demonstrated is its capacity for regeneration and renewal.

If Labor's current difficulties lead to a phase of internal reassessment later in the 1990s, that process may not be truly effective without the participation of activists with the idealism and commitment of Peter and Joyce Milton. ■

**Ross McMullin** is the author of *The Light on the Hill: The Australian Labor Party 1891-1991* (Oxford, Melbourne, 1991)

# Wonder does not an answer make

From Alberti's 'Ten Books on Architecture', Florence, 1485.



*Since the time of Galileo, physics and theology have gone their separate ways. In recent cosmology they appear to be converging again, but the marriage is not quite harmonious.*

**The Mind of God**, Paul Davies,  
Simon and Schuster, 1992.  
ISBN 0 671 71069 9. RRP \$34.95

**P**AUL DAVIES IS AN EMINENT PHYSICIST and cosmologist who has also written many books on these subjects for the general public. The present book has much excellent popularisation of cosmology and related subjects, though I have minor quibbles about a few things to do with logic, such as the account of Gödel's theorem and of Turing's proof of the unsolvability of the halting problem, which could have been a bit better done even at the popular level.

However, in this review I shall concentrate on Davies' excursions into theology, and the physics as it especially affects this. I warn the reader that though I am writing for a Catholic journal I am not writing from any theistic point of view. I would urge, nevertheless, that theologians should be strongly encouraged to take an interest in modern cosmology, as a few of them indeed do. I have a feeling, however, that the comfort that traditional believers will take from this book may sometimes be in inverse proportion to their understanding of it.

Sometimes it has been thought that the cosmic 'big bang' implies a prior cause, a creator God. In reply some philosophers have urged that there need be no first moment in the universe, since time might extend

finitely into the past and yet be like the positive fractions, of which there is no first one. As Davies explains, the cosmological hypothesis worked out by Hartle and Hawking is a bit different. According to their investigation of the tiny compressed space-time with which the universe began (less than ten to the power of minus thirty three centimetres radius) there is no point that is uniquely 'first', and more importantly it makes no more sense to ask what happened before such a point than it does to ask what on the surface of the earth is north of the north pole. (It was space-time and not just its contents that has expanded to its present vast size.)

Hawking has suggested that this may do away with the need for believing in a creator God. (I am slightly puzzled as to what Hawking might have meant by the phrase 'The Mind of God' in the conclusion of his *Brief History of Time*, and which Davies uses for the title of his book.) No theologian ought to be worried about there being no time before the universe began. St Thomas, at his best, thought of God as being outside time altogether, and of creation as a non-temporal sustaining of the whole space-time universe. Davies sees this point very well: the real puzzles are better put as 'Why does the universe exist at all?' and 'Why is the universe as it is?' Davies is more concerned with the latter one.

As a preliminary objection to a theistic answer here, let me repeat the intelligent child's question 'Who made God?' The Thomistic answer is that God is a necessary being, and so his existence needs no explanation. Unfortunately the Thomist notion of a necessary being has come to seem quite unclear to present day analytic philosophers. We understand what it is for a proposition such as 'either it is raining or it is not raining' to be *logically* necessary, but no existential proposition can be necessary in this sense. (And if it were it would be empty of factual information.)

On the other hand, it is hard to see what other sense of 'necessary' will fill the bill. Thus we might define a necessary being as one which needed nothing outside itself for its existence. God would certainly be a necessary being in this sense, but what argument would there be against an atheist who

held that the physical universe itself is a necessary being in the sense of not requiring anything outside itself? This sense of 'necessary' is clearly not strong enough for the theist's purpose. I suspect that Aquinas was not clear about the matter and that a suitable sense of 'necessary' is impossible to find, though I shall come back shortly to an interesting suggestion which was put forward by the philosopher of cosmology John Leslie.

Philosophers and scientists have wondered at the fact that there are beautiful and elegant systems of laws of nature. Why is the universe not totally chaotic? Paul Davies expounds modern physics and cosmology in a very readable manner so as to bring out this sense of wonder. Certainly this invites a theistic answer, though I think that the answer is open to the 'Who made God?' type of objection. If God made the laws of nature, then presumably there must be as much complexity in him as in the system of laws itself, and so Ockham's razor suggests resting content with the physical universe. Nevertheless this theistic answer has come to seem more compelling, at least psychologically, since recent investigations of the extraordinary 'fine tuning' of apparently unrelated constants occurring in these laws. Without such fine tuning a universe such as ours, with galaxies, stars, planets and life could not have existed.

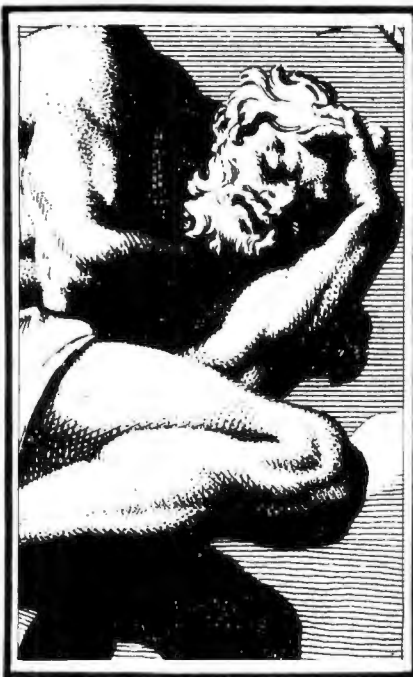
THESE RELATIONSHIPS ARE mind-boggling indeed and are very well discussed by John Leslie in his book *Universes* (Routledge, 1989). Leslie is sympathetic to non-theistic answers (such as the 'many universes' hypothesis of Brandon Carter) but he himself opts for a theism according to which goodness tends to come into existence. Davies gives this answer rather short shrift on pp171-2, and I too have difficulties with it, even though I find it interesting. One difficulty is due to the fact that I regard ethical principles as expressions of our desires or attitudes, not statements of fact about the world. Leslie also has problems about the existence of pain and other evils, which leads him into what I consider to be metaphysical implausibilities, but of course he is not alone among theists in having trouble with the problem of evil.

Leslie's God is not what I could consider to be a personal one, though I think that he would reply that the theologian's notion of a 'person' is often a very analogical one indeed. Leslie traces his theory to antecedents as far back as Plotinus and even Plato.

Brandon Carter's answer to the problem of fine tuning is that there are infinitely many universes (perhaps we should call them 'subuniverses', if 'universe' is used to refer to *everything*). Most of these universes will be chaotic, and in an infinitesimal proportion of them will there be by chance the relations between constants of nature that allow galaxies or stars or planets to form, let alone living beings. We are of course in one of these, since we are here to tell the tale. A similar answer is due to Andrei Linde, who has a theory that the universe inflates after the big bang with all sorts of random symmetry breakings so that the universe divides into infinitely many subuniverses, of which what we regard as our huge universe is only one infinitesimal part.

Davies regards Carter's idea as going against Ockham's razor, the principle that in our theories entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity. In the end I am inclined to think so too, though this is less clear in the case of Linde's theory. We must remember that multiplication of entities does not go against Ockham's razor if it simplifies total theory and provides explanation. In my opinion the most congenial non-theistic explanation of the fine tuning would come from a final unified theory of the sort that Stephen Hawking envisages for the future, in which the laws of nature are related to one another in a simple manner, and the fine

*Davies confesses to mystical feelings, and so perhaps should anyone who contemplates the wonders of physics and cosmology. Awe and wonder are appropriate, and these emotions are the basis at least of pantheism. Pantheism seems to me to differ from atheism only in one's attitude to the universe. Not for nothing was Spinoza described by some as a God intoxicated man and by others as a hideous atheist.*



tuning is made unsurprising. A perhaps misleading analogy is as follows. The Euler number ( $e$ ), the square root of minus one ( $i$ ) and the ratio of a Euclidean circle to its diameter ( $\pi$ ) may seem at first sight to be unrelated, and it may be a matter for wonder that  $e$  to the power of the product of  $i$  and  $\pi$  is equal to minus one. When we see the proof of this it seems obvious

and unmysterious, even though still beautiful.

Davies confesses to mystical feelings, and so perhaps should anyone who contemplates the wonders of physics and cosmology. Awe and wonder are appropriate, and these emotions are the basis at least of pantheism. Pantheism seems to me to differ from atheism only in one's *attitude* to the universe. Not for nothing was Spinoza described by some as a God-intoxicated man and by others as a hideous atheist.

Even more mind-boggling is the question not just of why the universe is as it is, but of why there is anything at all. Unfortunately, though I *feel* that it is a profound question it does seem to be without any possible answer. Perhaps we should be content with an impossibility proof, as in mathematics. For example, a lot of people have wanted to find a method of constructing a square of the same area as a given circle, using ruler and compass alone. Mathematicians have stopped trying since the proof that  $\pi$  is non-algebraic (transcendental) showed

that no such method can possibly exist.

**P**ERHAPS THE MYSTICAL FEELING is just one of intellectual frustration, though I do not like to think so. Perhaps there really is a 'mystery at the end of the universe' (see Davies' final chapter). On the other hand we may recall F.P. Ramsey's remark (in a different connection) that 'What we can't say we can't say, and we can't whistle it either' in his *Foundations of Mathematics* (Kegan Paul, 1931) p238.

At any rate, Davies has made a valiant—even if inevitably frustrat-

ed—attempt to 'whistle it'. He is well-read in certain areas of philosophy and theology, though I think (perhaps I'm prejudiced!) not always the right ones. I suspect that Davies thinks that free will depends on randomness or unpredictability (see p115 and pp192-3). I am not sure that this would mean that free will is also incompatible with determinism. Model theory in modern logic enables us to define determinism differently from Laplace's famous definition in terms of predictability by an infinite calculator who knows the present positions and motions of every particle in the universe. A system can be deterministic but unpredictable.

In any case, there is a well-known thesis of compatibilism, which is accepted by many contemporary phi-

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*I have a feeling  
that the comfort  
that traditional  
believers will  
take from this book  
may sometimes  
be in inverse  
proportion to their  
understanding of it.*

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losophers, that even if determinism were true we could still have free will. This thesis is often taught to first-year students. According to this view, free will is a matter of being determined by one's beliefs and desires. (Not always: a kleptomaniac may be held to be not free, or at least not responsible, because his desires cannot be modified by argument or by threats of punishment.)

After all, would not indeterminacy or randomness diminish one's freedom, so that one might do what one didn't want to do, as if (say) a quantum mechanical trigger in one's brain led us to do something disgust-

ing or horrible? On this compatibilist view we indeed need an approximation to determinism on the macroscopic level for free will to be possible. The classic article about this is R.E. Hobart's 'Free-will as involving determination, and inconceivable without it', published in *Mind* in 1934.

**A**T ONE POINT Davies flirts with process philosophy, deriving from A.N. Whitehead. I have many objections to this, one of which is that Whitehead wanted to import biological ideas into physics, when in fact it should be the other way round, as is shown by the successes of biochemistry and molecular biology. Another is that it involves notions related to that of a flow of time, whereas I hold that such notions are absurd and that a tenseless language without notions of an objective past, present and future is appropriate for cosmology.

Theologically, I find the process philosopher's temporal and finite God less believable than Aquinas' transcendent, eternal and non-temporal one. The process philosopher's concept of God seems too much just that of one more wonderful thing within the universe, and yet something for which we have no evidence. Such a concept of God is not big enough to do the required intellectual job. The question remains as to whether there is any intelligible concept that could do so. ■

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## EUREKA STREET

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## Two into one will go

**T**HERE ARE A FEW THINGS about the biblical accounts of creation that might not please a scientist like Paul Davies. One of them is that the Book of Genesis begins with not one but two versions of how it all happened. It would surely have been neater and less confusing to settle for one of the two accounts, but the Bible opts for both. In the argot of biblical study, Genesis 1 gives us the Priestly account and Genesis 2 gives us the Yahwistic account.

This is all the stranger, given the Hebrew Bible's genius for melding different texts with hardly a trace of a seam. But in the account of creation there is no attempt to do this. The Bible chooses juxtaposition, and the question is *why*? One part of an answer is that it makes clear from the start that there are, at least, two valid, indeed complementary, ways of looking at the same vast phenomenon. There is no one 'right' account of the creation that offers guidance in assessing the relationship between physical and metaphysical readings of the event.

**F**OR ALL THEIR DIFFERENCES, however, the two versions converge at key points. First, they discount the possibility that there was no beginning, that the physical universe has always existed. For the Bible, there was a beginning, and the agent of the beginning was the one who is designated mysteriously in Genesis 1:1 as *Elohim*. The biblical God is bounced on to the stage immediately but namelessly; and throughout the Bible he will refuse to name himself. This, it seems, is a God who names himself *by what he does*; and what he does is bring the order of creation from the chaos evoked in Genesis 1:2, the chaos of the void, the darkness, the waters.

He may be a God of action, but he is also a God who speaks. In fact, it is his word that does the acting. This is one point where the Bible parts company with the other creation stories of its time. In them, the creator-god enters into battle with the sea monster,

symbol of chaos, defeats the monster and so brings to birth the order of creation. But in the Bible there is no sea monster in sight, and no battle. A word is spoken: 'God said, "Let there be light", and there was light'. It is the *word* that creates worlds. In that sense, the universe is undergirded more by language than by the mathematics that so impress Paul Davies.

The two versions also agree that the divine act of creation is a process. They recount the process differently, but in both stories we see a God who works step by step. They also agree that in the process of creation, the appearance and role of the human being are exceptional. In the Priestly story (Genesis 1), the creation of the human being comes last, as the climax of the process. The Yahwistic story (Genesis 2) is still more radically humanist: the man is created first and the woman last, so that the entire process of creating the universe is embraced by the process of creating the human being.

The Bible rules out a sense of the human being as just one of many elements of the physical universe. The Yahwistic story has the human being as collaborator, even co-creator with the God who brings the creatures to the man so that he may name them. By virtue of the act of naming—the capacity for language—the man shares the divine work of bringing order from chaos. This could not be more different from other creation stories of the time, such as the *Enuma Elish*, in which the human being is created to be slave of the gods.

However emphatic the Bible is that there was a God-driven beginning, it says nothing of *why* God chose to create. Paul Davies and others may discern in the universe a miracle of design that suggests a purpose, but what that purpose may be the Bible does not say. It tells us what God has done and how, but says nothing of why. Under the influence of late Jewish apocalyptic, the New Testament looks to an end, which it describes as

the return of the Risen Christ to judge the world. Paul describes the intervening process as a gestation (Romans 8:22), imagining 'glorious freedom of the children of God' (Romans 8:21).

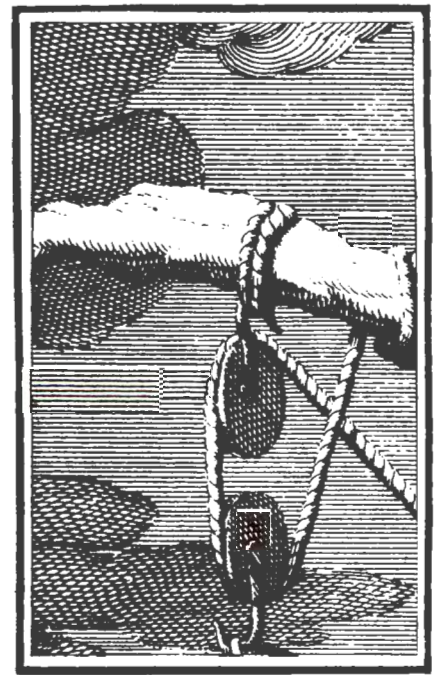
But this is not so much the goal for which creation was destined from the start as a restoration of creation as it was before the Fall. A vision of this kind implies a crucial element of which the physical sciences can take no account—the element of sin, understood by the Bible as that radical power which disfigures the creation, which reverses the process of God's work and brings chaos from order.

A second point of perplexity is the Bible's notion of God's freedom. Paul Davies objects to the notion of a God who at times chooses to infringe the magnificent laws that undergird the universe. These laws, he claims, have about them an absolute quality to which even God is subject.

The Bible does not agree. It makes it plain that only God and his freedom are absolute and demonstrates this repeatedly as God either infringes or transcends the laws of creation. He is quite literally a law unto himself, and this is never clearer than in the greatest moments of his intervention—most spectacularly, of course, in the Exodus and Resurrection stories.

**I**S THE LANGUAGE of the Bible the language of the physical sciences? Certainly not. Are the two languages contradictory? Certainly not. They are no more contradictory than the two mythic interpretations of data that the Bible juxtaposes in the beginning. We all grapple with data; we are all purveyors of myth. ■

**Mark Coleridge** teaches biblical studies at Catholic Theological College, Clayton, Victoria.



## A theology of bird watching

**A**S A LITERATURE PERSON among theology students I keep finding myself discussing Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem *The Windhover*, because it features in two books by theologians. Both Sallie McFague, in *Speaking in Parables*, and Hans Urs von Balthasar, in *The Glory of the Lord* (vol. 3), understand very well how poetry works: they respond to it as experience, not as coded information to be solved into definitional language.

Unfortunately, neither of them understands this particular poem. The problem is not that they are not 'critics', for many critics have missed the point here too, and not necessarily for lack of theology. The problem is that they are not birdwatchers.

The habits of kestrels are so noticeable that Hopkins would never have wondered if everyone knew them. The kestrel soars, like other hawks, on breezes and thermals; when it sees

an interesting movement on the ground it 'stands', holding position with small ripples of the wingtips. All this is in the first eight lines of the poem. Characteristically, a kestrel then folds its wings and drops like a stone onto its target, resuming flapping only as it takes the prey, with split-second timing, to avoid a crash.

This is what the septet of the poem refers to: the bird crumples ('buckle') and falls from heaven to earth. Not recognising this fall, von Balthasar seeks crucifixion imagery in a soaring bird's extended wings, imagining it showering down the 'embers' of the last line. Nor does McFague recognise it. She seeks crucifixion imagery in 'buckle'—the bird destroyed in some way connected with 'I caught'.

Surely, however, it is not primarily crucifixion Hopkins sees in the kestrel, but incarnation: the heavenly king's oldest son ('dauphin') and be-

loved ('minion') makes himself little, falls to earth and in that action reveals just how 'lovely' and 'dangerous' he is. We could only glimpse this while he remained in heaven. Paradoxically, he shows 'fire' when he seems least glorious: if the power of God is to shine through the earthly he must plod the earth like a ploughman. To reveal the glory of God Christ must fall and be broken open, like apparently dead embers revealing inner fire—that is the true crucifixion imagery in this poem.

Regrettably, theologians are no more likely than literature people to obtain a research grant for a good pair of field glasses. But they might care to join the critics at the football to lay solid foundation for reading Bruce Dawe. ■

**Aileen Kelly** is a Melbourne poet and teacher.

### Timing

'Unfortunately, yesterday was the last day' — heard on radio

*Damned if I know whether to feel like Donne  
Or like the White Rabbit. History's coming up trumps  
Is good for the Bible, bad for the nerves, and faintly  
Hard lines on the students. Wrapped in green  
Identifying sheets, their exercises  
Sleep, as it seems till heavenly cows come home;  
No grade shall bless them and no comment blame —  
They're altogether otherworldly now.*

*Squinting, like Dante's tailor threading a needle,  
I look for angel-trails, in vain, Downtown  
Upmarket glassy boxes head for clouds,  
Odd seagulls cartwheel in the washed-out blue,  
Persons go in and out of trams escaped  
From Oz or Luna Park. Pleasure's as usual,  
Business up the creek. A feather of cloud  
Catches a thermal and makes for higher things.*

*What happens now? Is it like that hotel fire  
In lowering heartsick Cardiff years ago?  
Should I stand in the lobby, a bunch of travellers' cheques  
A passport and a diary stuffed in pockets,  
Hopeful and helpless? An entirely golden tree  
A short stone's throw away is trying to tell me  
Something about the next step, flinging its wealth  
To the wind, free-handed, and tipping me the wink.*

**Peter Steele**

## Olivier Messiaen 1908-1992

**L**AST MONTH IN PARIS, the composer Olivier Messiaen died after surgery at the age of 83. He was a profound and enduring musical force whose effects have marked nearly three-quarters of this century. Born in Avignon on 10 December 1908 to parents of considerable literary and linguistic gifts, Olivier Messiaen soon gave evidence of a musical ability that was demonstrated equally at the piano and in composition. The influence of Debussy, particularly the score of that composer's opera, *Pelléas and Mélisande*, was decisive in persuading the young Messiaen to become a composer.

After an early childhood spent in provincial France, he entered the Paris Conservatoire when he was 11, finally leaving that institution after gaining an impressive collection of *premiers prix* for a range of musical achievements. The external events of Messiaen's life are unremarkable. For a man who had such a profound influence on musical life around him, he had little desire to be embroiled in the dramas, political or musical, that pepper artistic endeavour. For the most part, he was a solitary figure. Although he taught many of today's leading composers, among them Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen, he did not found a school of 'messiaenism'.

After the death in 1959 of his first wife Claire Delbos, Messiaen married a gifted pianist in his class, Yvonne Loriod, who was not only an inspiration for the many piano scores he wrote but was a strong musical and personal support to him for the rest of his life. During World War II he was taken prisoner by the Germans in 1940, and transported to a camp in Silesia where he wrote his only major chamber work, *Quartet for the End of Time*. In 1941 the work was given its first performance in the camp, by prisoners playing whatever instruments were to hand. Later that year he was repatriated for reasons of health and became professor of harmony at the Paris Con-

servatoire. The influential postwar years of his teaching were done under the rubric of professor of analysis, aesthetics and rhythm, and it was not until 1962 that he was appointed professor of composition at the conservatoire. Large-scale works flowed from his pen, among them: for the piano, the *Visions de l'amen* (1943) and the *Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jésus*

is universal in nature and its relationship with the divine by using all the means, from the simplest to the most demanding, at the composer's disposal. The desire to bring into one the many aspects of the natural world continued to be the genesis of works up to his death. His last completed work, *Eclairs sur l'au-delà*, for an immense orchestra, is due to be given its first performance in New York in November.

In spite of the amount of travelling he undertook, in particular his trips to Japan and the United States, a number of elements remained constants in his life: his position since 1931 as titular organist at the church of La Trinité in Paris, where he was still playing in his last years; his devotion to the task of teaching students, both at the conservatoire in Paris and those who came to him privately; his fascination with the world of rhythm, whether it was the metrical systems of ancient Greece, or the Hindu rhythms of traditional Indian music; his lifelong interest in the world of birdsong and his nearly encyclopaedic command of its repertory; but perhaps most significantly of all, his deep commitment to and knowledge of the Catholic faith.

His critics have often struggled with this element in his works. It is clear not just in the titles he chose, for example, *The Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ*; *Meditations on the Mystery of the Blessed Trinity*; and his only opera, *Saint Francis of Assisi*; but also in his use of Latin plainchant and other ingredients that are more difficult

to describe: those long sections where extreme slowness speaks of a mystical rapture that has escaped the constraints of time. His musical language, which is so readily recognisable, and the complete assurance of his technique have left their mark on a body of work that now stands as the affirmation of a man of great kindness and limitless vision. ■

—Christopher Willcock SJ

*All our scientific research, mathematical proofs, biological experiments do not save us from uncertainty. On the contrary, they increase our ignorance by showing ever new realities under what is believed to be reality. In fact the only reality is of a different order: it is located in the area of faith. It is by the encounter with an Other that we can understand it. But one must go through death and the resurrection, and this supposes the leap beyond Time.*

*Rather strangely, music can prepare us for this, as an image, a reflection, a symbol. In fact, music is a perpetual dialogue between space and time, between sound and colour. It is a dialogue which terminates in a unification: Time is a space, sound is a colour, space is a compound of superimposed times, compounds of sounds exist simultaneously as compounds of colours.*

*The musician who thinks, sees, hears, speaks by employing these fundamental notions, can, to a degree, approach the Beyond. And, as St Thomas says, music carries us to God 'by default of reality' until the day when God himself will dazzle our eyes 'by excess of truth'. This is perhaps the acoustical meaning—and also the directional meaning—of music. —Olivier Messiaen*

(1944); the commission for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, *Turangalila-symphonie* (1948); and the austere work for organ, *Livre d'orgue* (1951).

Indeed, most of his work from the 1940s onwards is conceived in such vast forms that a single work will usually occupy an entire concert. His interest was not simply to produce works of unbridled gigantism, but, more controversially, to express what

# We'll never see his like again

**I**T IS CURIOUS HOW FEW novelists have chosen to write about Napoleon. There is Tolstoy, of course, and Stendhal. But the Bonaparte of *War and Peace* and *The Charterhouse of Parma* amounts to little more than Hegel's world-historical figure, a sort of mechanism for unleashing the forces that enmesh the other characters of those books.

Sundry kings, queens, emperors and larger-than-life folk have fascinat-

*The Death of Napoleon*, Simon Leys, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1992.

ISBN 1 86373 260 8 RRP \$11.95

'real' emperor. They feared him for his ruthlessness while they scorned him because he was a parvenu. He was the man who did not fit in.

Simon Leys reportedly claims that *The Death of Napoleon* has 'nothing to do with history, politics or even with Napoleon himself'. Certainly, the book's hero has nothing to do with our received image of the emperor—vainglorious after Austerlitz, stern and terrible after Borodino. But Leys'

Napoleon is still most of all the man who does not fit in, and his distance from the real Napoleon consists in the fact that he gradually becomes *any* man—or woman—who does not fit in.

The book is an exercise in stripping away all the accretions of circumstance, all the details that identify someone as *this* person rather than another, and asking 'What's left?' The novel, brief enough to be read at a sitting, is a miniaturist gem. Leys has given us an anti-Tolstoy in length as well as in subject matter. The Russian master tells us what happens when individuals are swept up in events not of their making, and how they in turn transform those events

**B**UT LEYS GOES A STEP FURTHER, forcing us to ask whether it is possible to conceive of individuals outside the flow of events at all. *The Death of Napoleon* hacks a path through traditional philosophical tangles about personal identity and recent arguments among literary theorists about subjectivity. Mercifully, it does so in lively, simple prose, without resort to the abstruse. The method is simple. We

are asked to assume that the exiled Napoleon has secretly left St Helena, his place being taken by a former sergeant who has acted as his double in the past. The defeated emperor, disguised as a cabin hand on a sealing ship, will return to France, there to reclaim the empire and *la gloire*. But glory, at least in the form in which he expects it, never comes.

**H**IS TROUBLES BEGIN on board ship, where the sailors, noticing his resemblance to the emperor, nickname him 'Napoleon'. This amuses everyone except the boatswain, a confirmed Bonapartist who thinks it an insult to his beloved leader that a clumsy cabin hand should be given the same name. For security, Napoleon is content to go along with the joke. What better way of losing one's identity than by being compared with one's real self?

Inevitably, this 'real' self surfaces at a time when he feels least threatened by discovery. The only person aboard who suspects that Napoleon may really be someone other than Eugène the cabin hand is the ship's cook, Nigger-Nicholas, who one morning calls him on deck to witness the dawn

And this '... was indeed an extraordinary sight. The sky was divided between night and dawn—blue-black from the west to the zenith, pearl-white in the east, and was completely filled with the most fantastic cloud architecture one could imagine ... The entire sky was caught in an interrupted surge of energy, frozen in motionless chaos. Above the smooth, translucent sea, everything was in a state of suspense, waiting for the sun.' (p12)

*La gloire* indeed. Napoleon is

ATTEMPTS TO BOOST MORALE ON THE RETREAT FROM MOSCOW ...

NOW, WHEN WE GET TO "MERRILY," YOU GUYS COME IN WITH "ROW, ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT"!



ed writers of historical fiction but Napoleon has not often been among them. Perhaps this continues the disdain felt by his contemporaries. General Bonaparte may have dominated Europe but to his enemies, and even to some of his friends, he was never a

MICHAEL MCGIRR

## In the middle of a dark wood

*The Last Magician,*

Janette Turner Hospital, UQP, 1992.

ISBN 0 7022 2405 7 RRP \$29.95.

entranced by the sight, and Nigger-Nicholas confirmed in his belief that that this is no ordinary seaman. This passage comes early in *The Death of Napoleon* but it is pivotal for the whole book. In witnessing the kind of glory that human beings cannot make, Napoleon has been given an intimation of mortality; the rest of the tale is about how he comes to recognise it, and who he becomes in the process.

In telling that tale, Leys shifts from lyrical to flatly ironic mode as he catalogues Napoleon-Eugène's misadventures and growing sense of displacement. The ship lands at Antwerp instead of Bordeaux, and he misses a planned rendezvous with Bonapartist plotters.

To get to Paris from Antwerp he must pass near the scene of his defeat at Waterloo, so he takes a guided tour of the battlefield with a party of English tourists. Various local inns boast of having 'the room where the emperor slept the night before the battle', none of which is recognisable to Napoleon. He ends up arguing with a supposed veteran of the *grande armée* about the disposition of troops on the day of the battle. Already, 'his' history is being taken away from him.

**I**N PARIS HE TAKES UP with the widow of a Bonapartist officer. She is a not very successful fruit seller and the aging loyalists who surround her are a timorous lot. When Napoleon reorganises the fruit business on military lines, making lots of money by a surprise assault on the markets before other sellers can get into position, the gratitude of the old Bonapartists is underwhelming. The only one among them who recognises Napoleon counsels him to remain a successful seller of watermelons: *la gloire* is for 'history'.

And history soon evades the emperor for ever, when he learns that the impersonator on St Helena has died. Since the world knows Napoleon to be dead, only a madman could claim to *be* Napoleon. In one of the book's funniest scenes, he visits an asylum where all the inmates wear approximations of his famous bicorn hat and grey field coat. Is his claim now any better than theirs? ■

Ray Cassin is production editor of *Eureka Street*.

**J**ANETTE TURNER HOSPITAL'S new novel is set among the prostitutes and street kids of Kings Cross. So it is disconcerting to find her, as I did, at the high table of Melbourne University's Ormond College, taking her place as a visiting writer. '*The Last Magician* was a painful book to write,' she says. 'There came a point at which I was afraid to go on with it.'

*The Last Magician* is about pursuit. It imagines an alternative world called the Quarry that starts in the rift valley of the Redfern railway station, burrows into the sandstone and fills the tunnels under Sydney. Nobody knows how big this world of feral people has become. Train passengers sometimes catch a glint from human eyes in the darkness underground, but otherwise an invisible society lies 'nestled in the cracks of the official world like a hand inside a glove'. The Quarry is a source of countless rumours; word has it that something similar is sprouting under Toorak and St Kilda. People live in fear that some taint of it may pass 'as invisibly as a virus into the world of order.'

This image has shades of New York's subway dwellers, but for me it brought to mind the urban myths that were part and parcel of growing up in Sydney: we always believed that fresh water still flowed in the Tank Stream under Bridge Street, and that men lived in disused underground railways, like the one that went under North Sydney to the northern beaches.

Catherine Reilly, the Cat, is a figure from the Quarry. When her backward brother, Willy, is killed, the Cat becomes the scapegoat, disappearing into the barred world of reform school and then into the Quarry. The absent



Janette Turner Hospital.  
photo: The Age.

Cat becomes the most powerful presence in the book. Pursuing her, other characters descend into the Quarry's outermost circle from a bar called The Shaky Landing. As with much of Turner Hospital's writing, *The Last Magician* is profoundly evocative of images from Dante, and her narrative is as thick-piled and teasing as a Botticelli painting.

Elusive figures seem to cling to Turner Hospital. An earlier book, *The Tiger in the Tiger Pit*, follows a woman in flight from her family. Another, *Borderline*, tells the story of a Salvadoran refugee who remains just beyond the grasp of those trying to locate her.

'In my experience with the Sanctuary Movement,' says Turner Hospital, 'the greatest hardship of the relatives of those Latin Americans who have been "disappeared" is the gradual, maddening grief that can't ever graduate into open grief. They live in a perpetual twilight, bracing themselves because their loved ones might be dead, but they could also bump into them again unexpectedly.'

Turner Hospital's stories echo her own experience. Her life has been one of constantly moving on, a fact that occasioned the title of her first book of stories, *Dislocations*. She spent the first seven years of her life beside the

railway in Ringwood, a Melbourne suburb, before her family went to live by another railway line in Brisbane, leaving behind her friends and grandparents. 'I felt these people were lost but all the more powerfully present precisely because of their absence. I mean, they remain with you all the time in your mind.'

The pattern has been repeated many times. From the age of 24, Turner Hospital has lived almost entirely outside Australia, mainly in India, the United States and Canada, where her husband, Cliff Hospital, is a professor of theology in Kingston, Ontario. 'So these books I write do hook into an inner feeling of my own about the need to be perpetually finding missing people.'

Turner Hospital is preoccupied by a missing God. She grew up in a fundamentalist Protestant household where the Bible was read aloud at dinner each evening—'We began with Genesis and worked through to Revelation'—and the cadences of the King James version can still be heard in her prose. 'I have tried to break out of these rhythms but I am steeped in them.' The strong sense of pursuit in her recent writing is partly a quest to replace the God constructed by her childhood faith.

**P**ERHAPS I KEEP DOING stories about the missing one in an attempt to fill what Salman Rushdie talks about as "the God hole". But I know that, like a bird which has been limed, part of me is inescapably Christian.' (see box). Maybe this is because 'the God hole' is so painful to live with. In one of Turner Hospital's short stories, a character trying to explain death to her children remarks that 'after all, everyone has a closet theology, a resurrection trump. Let them have their Grandfather's castles, whatever helps.'

There are many more voices echoing around in *The Last Magician* than those familiar from the King James Bible. We are led into the story of *The Last Magician* by Lucia Barclay, university graduate and old girl of one of Brisbane's 'best' private schools. Her name resonates with both Lucifer and St Lucy, references that play off one another as we follow her life of prostitution.

As Lucy, a name she wears like a costume, she hands out keys to the

## I In the Moody and Sangster

**I** HAD A POWERFUL EXPERIENCE when we were in India on a sabbatical. I had spent my university years trying to distance myself from what had begun to be the rather stifling intellectual and social hold of the Pentecostal Church. But I married an ordained Methodist minister and always still saw myself as Christian, until we left Australia and went to Boston in the late '60s.

Here for the first time, however, I got to know a lot of Jewish intellectuals, many of whom were the children of survivors, but some had had horrific experiences themselves during the War. I was also reading, for the first time, postwar Jewish novels by Andre Schwarz-Barte and Elie Wiesel. I felt overwhelmed.

I went through a period of feeling really ashamed to be Christian and wanted very much to distance myself from that. I never, never saw myself as an atheist but certainly, for a period, as agnostic. But then, curiously, I had an almost Pauline reconversion when we were living in South India in 1977.

We found a little church of St Francis, built in the late 15th or early 16th century. Of course, this was Francis Xavier's turf. Vasco da Gama had been buried there. It had been built by Portuguese Jesuits, then by Dutch Protestant traders and by Anglicans during the Raj. Now it is part of the Protestant Church of South India. I was quite awed by being in a church that had had this succession of worshippers. So many waves of history had passed through.

All of a sudden, at the front of the church, the organist and youth choir came out for practice. They began singing a hymn from the Moody and Sangster Hymn Book. Only evangelical Protestants used it. It was really schmaltzy: dreadful words, dreadful music, dreadful theology, dreadful everything. But it was an absolutely weird moment. I couldn't put together the fact that here in this ancient church in the middle of a Hindu city where they had buried one of the world's greatest nomads, Vasco da Gama, I was hearing, in Malayalam, a hymn that I had sung in my childhood in Brisbane.

I was overwhelmed. You know, I hate those hymns now. But my eyes were streaming and Cliff and I went down and sang along with the group in English. I felt powerfully that inescapably I was Christian. It's like deciding again that you're an Australian, no matter how long you've been away. It wasn't a question of dogma so much as realising there wasn't anything I could do about it.

In a way, it seemed so emblematic of my nomadic life. That I, of all people, who was taught that Catholics were 180 degrees out of phase, would, on the other side of the world, in South India, in a church built by Jesuits, start singing a Pentecostal hymn and kneeling on the kneelers of the church there and weeping. It was incredibly powerful. It felt like all the symbol systems of my life happened to congregate at that moment.'

—Janette Turner Hospital

story and pursues the reader with riddles about her own reliability. At one stage she says, 'I find that the past lies in wait, just ahead, around every corner.' It is this inability to imagine a future made out of anything but the past that brings her to a sad bind. Turner Hospital does not herself make a scapegoat of the past. In a 1991 essay she writes: 'homeland is where the senses steer by instinct when the reins are let go.' It is not necessarily a place

we've ever been before. The redemptive quest in *The Last Magician* is not about finding but about letting go.

This novel is not for the complacent reader. Riddles, insights and ironies appear like beads of sweat on the brow of a book that works hard for its ideas. But the ideas are thrilling, and so is the story. ■

Michael McGirr SJ is a regular contributor to *Eureka Street*.

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## FLASH IN THE PAN



Marlene Dietrich, 1901-92

*Naked Lunch*, dir. David Cronenberg (independent cinemas). This film features insect-like aliens known as mugwumps, which were described by the *New York Times* as a 'rather *soignée* strain of monster'. As one may deduce from that comment, *Naked Lunch* is not for your average popcorn muncher.

Cronenberg is a talented Canadian whose previous films—*The Fly*, *Dead Ringers*, *Scanners*—have gleefully skated between horror, fantasy and realism. In *Naked Lunch* he takes William S. Burroughs' 1959 novel of that name as the starting point for a story about a Burroughs-like character, William Lee, who stumbles along as a pest exterminator in New York until he and his wife, Joan, get hooked on bug powder.

Lee is warned about enemy undercover agents by a giant cockroach with a talking anus, and shoots his wife in a 'William Tell act' that goes astray. (This echoes Burroughs' real-life shooting of his own wife in 1951.) Lee goes to ground in 'Interzone', a Tangier-like setting, where he gets hooked on an even stronger drug, 'black meat' from giant Brazilian centipedes, and grapples with his homosexuality.

Underneath the weirdness is yet another tale of writers struggling to write, expatriates playing up, confusion over sexual identity, and the world squeezing into your head whether you like it or not. It's all played deadpan. Peter Weller, of *Robocop* fame, is fine as William Lee; Judy Davis is equally good in a dual role as Lee's wife and

the wife of another expatriate writer in Interzone; and Roy Scheider is suitably oily as the mysterious Dr Benway. The film looks great, has evocative music by Howard Shore (who also scored *Silence of the Lambs*) and the 1950s wardrobe is a treat. (They just don't make that colour brown any more.)

So all the elements are good; whether you think they add up to a good film depends on whether you can laugh at scenes such as that in which Lee meets his first mugwump, sitting on a barstool smoking a cigarette. He is introduced to the alien: 'I'd like you to meet a friend of mine ... He specialises in sexual ambivalence.'

—Mark Skulley

*Europa, Europa*, dir. Agnieszka Holland (independent cinemas). This film is good enough to bear comparison with Louis Malle's superb treat-

### Eureka Street Film Competition

To salute the memory of the great Marlene, we'd like you to tell us which film she is talking about in this quote: 'At the time I thought the film was awful and vulgar, and I was shocked by the whole thing. Remember, I was a well-brought up German girl.' We'll award two tickets, to the film of your choice, to the first correct entry opened. The winner of April's film competition was John Toohey, of Bronte, NSW, who thought Ronald Reagan was saying, 'Now you tell him, Barbara. George was a good vice-president—he should run for the top job.'



ment of related themes in *Au revoir Les Enfants*. Both films are based on real events, but Malle's film has more of the tang and menace of reality than *Europa, Europa*, even though it has none of the violence and brutality.

*Europa, Europa* follows the harrowing and sometimes comic adven-

tures of Solly (Marco Hofschneider), a Jewish boy in Nazi Germany, as he passes for an Aryan in the army and then in a Hitler Youth school. He is almost unmasked several times, but avoids disaster and eventually surrenders, in a German uniform, to Soviet troops. They don't believe his story and hand him over to Jewish survivors of the death camps; he is about to be shot when he is recognised and saved by a long-lost brother.

In spite of the 'true story' tag, and the undoubted role of happy coincidence in any such survival, the film is artistically flawed by this *deus ex machina* outcome and by the picaresque structure of the tale, which tends to soften the impact of the hideous events framing the hero's struggle to survive.

Even so, the film captures brilliantly the mysterious cohabitation of venomous racist attitudes with normal, generous human impulses. Those who want to base morality on local community can learn of the power of community and culture to promote the darkest evil. The best scenes in the film are those in which the hero rides a tram through the Jewish ghetto of a Polish city. The windows are frosted to protect Aryan eyes, but there are enough fissures to reveal the hell that human beings have made.

—Tony Coady

*Ben Hur*, dir. William Wyler (independent cinemas). 'Bigger than *Ben Hur*' boasts the cliché, and this new 70mm print of Wyler's 1959 epic is in fact bigger than the 35mm version familiar to Australian audiences. And what a relief to discover that a post-Spielberg audience can still respond to what Hollywood used to call 'spectacle'. The prologue, with its school-pageant Magi watching a mechanical star track across a painted backdrop of the sky over Bethlehem, will raise more smiles than it did in 1959. But the film's famous set pieces, such as the chariot race and the sea battle, still manage to thrill in 1992.

And even to horrify. Those who rail against the portrayal of violence in films such as *Cape Fear* and *Silence of the Lambs* sometimes speak as though it is a new phenomenon. But *Ben Hur* gives us limbs lopped off and faces burnt away in the sea battle, and a flaying in the chariot race. Oh, and



that crucifixion, too. Perhaps violent acts by 'normal' people in exotic locations are less shocking than violent acts by psychopaths in familiar locations. But we have seen blood and gore before.

*Ben Hur* does differ from recent film fare in its treatment of the gospel story, which interweaves with the tale of the Jewish prince, Judah Ben Hur (Charlton Heston), and his hatred for the Roman tribune, Messala (Stephen Boyd). Jesus pops up all the time in *Ben Hur* but we never see his face, presumably in deference to Hollywood Protestant piety, circa 1959. Yet somehow this disappoints less than theologically more ambitious films such as *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *Jesus of Montreal*. We are not asked to believe that when Willem Dafoe or Lothaire Bluteau speaks, it is Jesus speaking. We just witness his effect on people, and are left to fill in that blank face ourselves.

Miklos Rozsa's otherwise stirring score descends to the mawkish and the maudlin in the Jesus scenes. But when was the last time you went to a movie that had a real overture, and not just music for the opening credits? Or to a movie that runs for four hours, and needs an intermission? Or saw the man with looks that kill, Frank Thring, doing his thing as Pontius Pilate? Treat yourself to *Ben Hur* again, and savour the cinematic nostalgia.

—Ray Cassin



"WELL, YOUR T.V. IS FINE BUT I THINK YOUR HUSBAND MIGHT BE DEAD."

*Meeting Venus*, dir. István Szabó (independent cinemas), is effectively two films. The good half is a wise allegory of *fin de siècle* European unity in comic chaos, using the old trope of the theatrical family (in this case *Opera Europa*), and a show that must go on. It has the historical density and nous one expects from Szabó, whose earlier films included *Mephisto* and *Colonel Redl*.

The rest of *Meeting Venus*, however, is miscast melodrama, unaccountably starring thin Glenn Close as Wagnerian soprano, Karin Anderson. Niels Arestrup, looking like a middle-period Brando but without the presence, is endearing enough as the hapless Hungarian conductor, Zoltan Szanto, whose pure, artistic zeal is being frustrated by the Parisian arts bureaucracy, old-fashioned intrigue and the theatre's industrial relations,

which are by command socialism out of the Marx Brothers. But every time Arestrup/Szanto begins to engage your interest his performance gets deflected into the soft-centred romance with the film's star soprano who can't sing and is no dab hand at dubbing either. Attic grimacing doth not a diva make. 'You have The Most Beautiful Voice I have ever heard,' Szanto tells Karin. Of Kiri Te Kanawa, whose off-stage voice it is, you could believe it. But Glenn Close, onstage, sings by striding around like a Katherine Hepburn in full flight, transmitting her vocal efforts through the pockets of her flapping raincoat. How could a fine director have got it so wrong?

If you can ignore Close, the rest of the film is marvellous. Cluttering Szanto's efforts to rehearse *Tannhäuser* ('music by Richard Wagner' boasts the credits) is a grand cast of maniacs, from Szabó's usual stable, with additions like the wonderful Bergman actor, Erland Josephson, playing a sage, worldly Spaniard. Add a paranoid East German tenor, a Felliniesque Venus and her fat-lipped lover, a feral second-rank soprano and a Russian Jewish répétiteur who sings Stalin's favourite song, and you have the makings of what should have been a great movie.

—Morag Fraser

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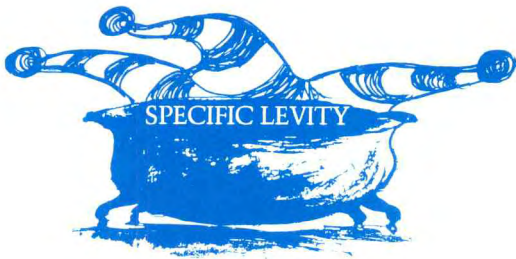
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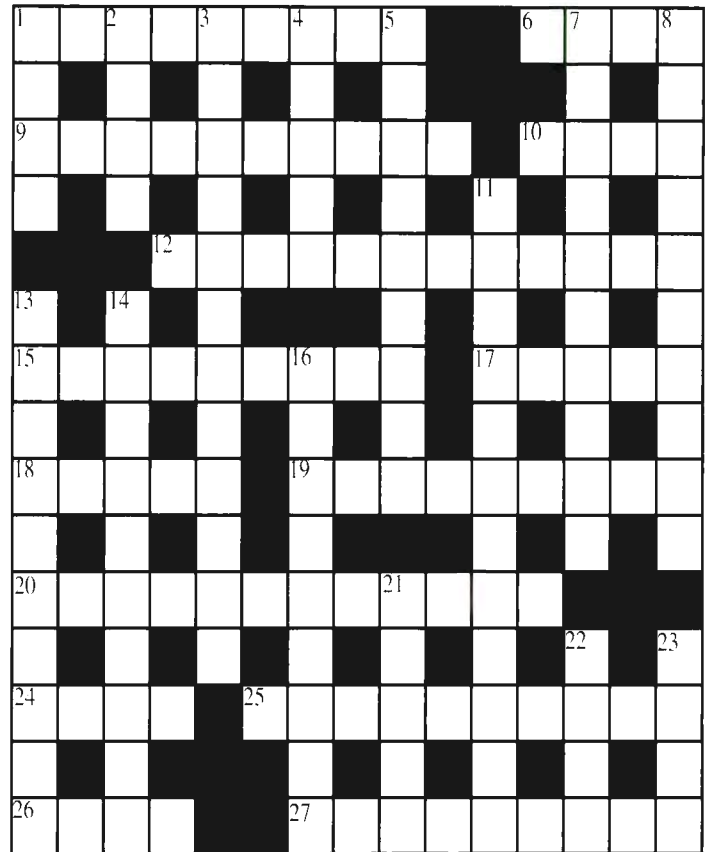
Devised by  
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## ACROSS

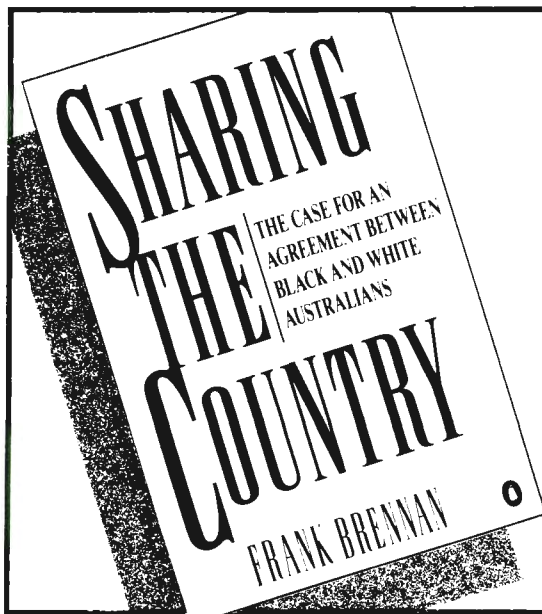
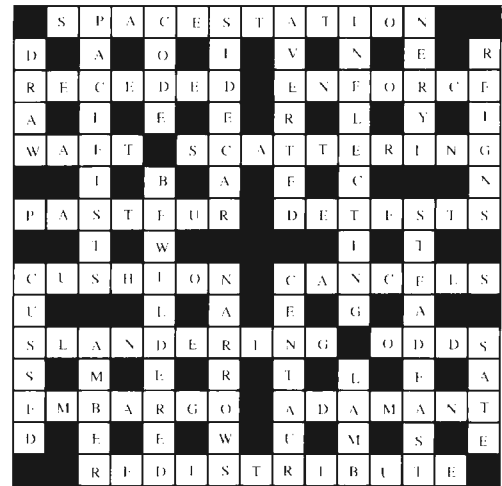
- 1,6. GGSE. A morning recipe? (9,4)
- 9. Make jokes in this ludicrous situation (5,5)
- 10. They are past, so are we. (4)
- 12. The gambler should keep a log-book in order to improve his performance. (6,6)
- 15. Some people are upset, but Ellen and I are overflowing with enthusiasm. (9)
- 17. How poetic! The sun-god over there is clad in silk-like garb. (5)
- 18. The brightest star, the first of a series, is now in a terminal phase. (5)
- 19. The pedestrian going by, out of the West, is like a sparrow perching on the housetop? (9)
- 20. A stiff-necked people, in an ill-humoured race, for this long trek. (5,7)
- 24. Is it common sense to the Greek mind? (4)
- 25. Struggles even to begin a cheer for the aircraft carrier. (10)
- 26. Not odd; on the level. (4)
- 27. He follows her to find the saintly old king of Kent. (9)

## DOWN

- 1. South of us, it is disagreeable. (4)
- 2. What rubbish! A register to go to the Roman funeral? (4)
- 3. There is some confusion about the French realms. Liaise with the revolutionaries so that you may proclaim them in song. (12)
- 4. Crumbed stale bread produces very little. (5)
- 5. Honours with an award of French boxes? But they are empty! (9)
- 7. The broken ivory egg I gave to Hildebrand indicated his place in church history, (7,3)
- 8. Fancy footwork in the ballroom space tends to obfuscate. (4,6)
- 11. A deep ravine with an eastern direction—an alternative source of inspiration for this writer. (6,6)
- 13. Maybe the new-fangled crane rising over this bizarre scene is a sign of cultural revival. (10)
- 14. The market economy! To make more than the others, go all out for the Italian leader. (10)
- 16. The sleeper's profession, perhaps, under cover? (9)
- 21. Could be a cut above, but for some not charismatic enough. (5)
- 22. Use this to turn over the garden tools. (4)
- 23. It can rotate to make the ends go up. (4)



## Solution to Crossword no. 2, May 1992



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by Frank Brennan

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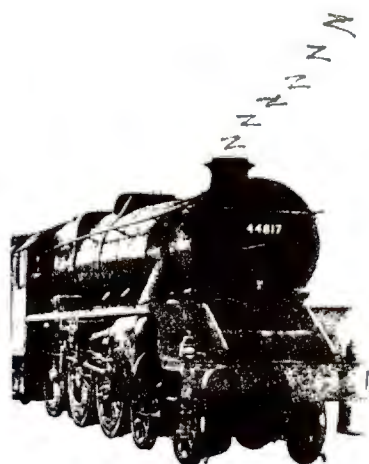
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## Back From The Dead!

Mr SPEAKER—The honourable member for Menzies will cease interjecting.

Mr KEATING—  
I think the only thing that Senator Walsh has done is bring the *Australian Left Review* back to life. I thought it had gone out of business—no offence intended to my colleagues on the Left, no offence at all. I thought it had actually faded away quietly, that it had quietly gone out of business, but Walshie has brought it back to life. It is an ill wind that blows no good, I suppose, from that perspective.

It's not easy to keep in touch with the issues when you've got a busy job, like being prime minister. But, as thousands of others have noticed, *Australian Left Review* is well and truly alive, and even kicking. In the last few months, we've challenged economic orthodoxy, debated citizenship and nationalism, and dissected the views of such diverse figures as Eric Hobsbawm, restaurateur Stephanie Alexander and Desmond Morris (oh, and Peter Walsh). We're sure even Paul could find something to interest him in *ALR* if he really tried.



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