

EUREKA STREET

Vol. 2 No. 9 October 1992

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Where Columbus didn't
go...

and
where
he did

On tour,
east and west:
Bruce Williams,
Peter Pierce,
Robin Gerster

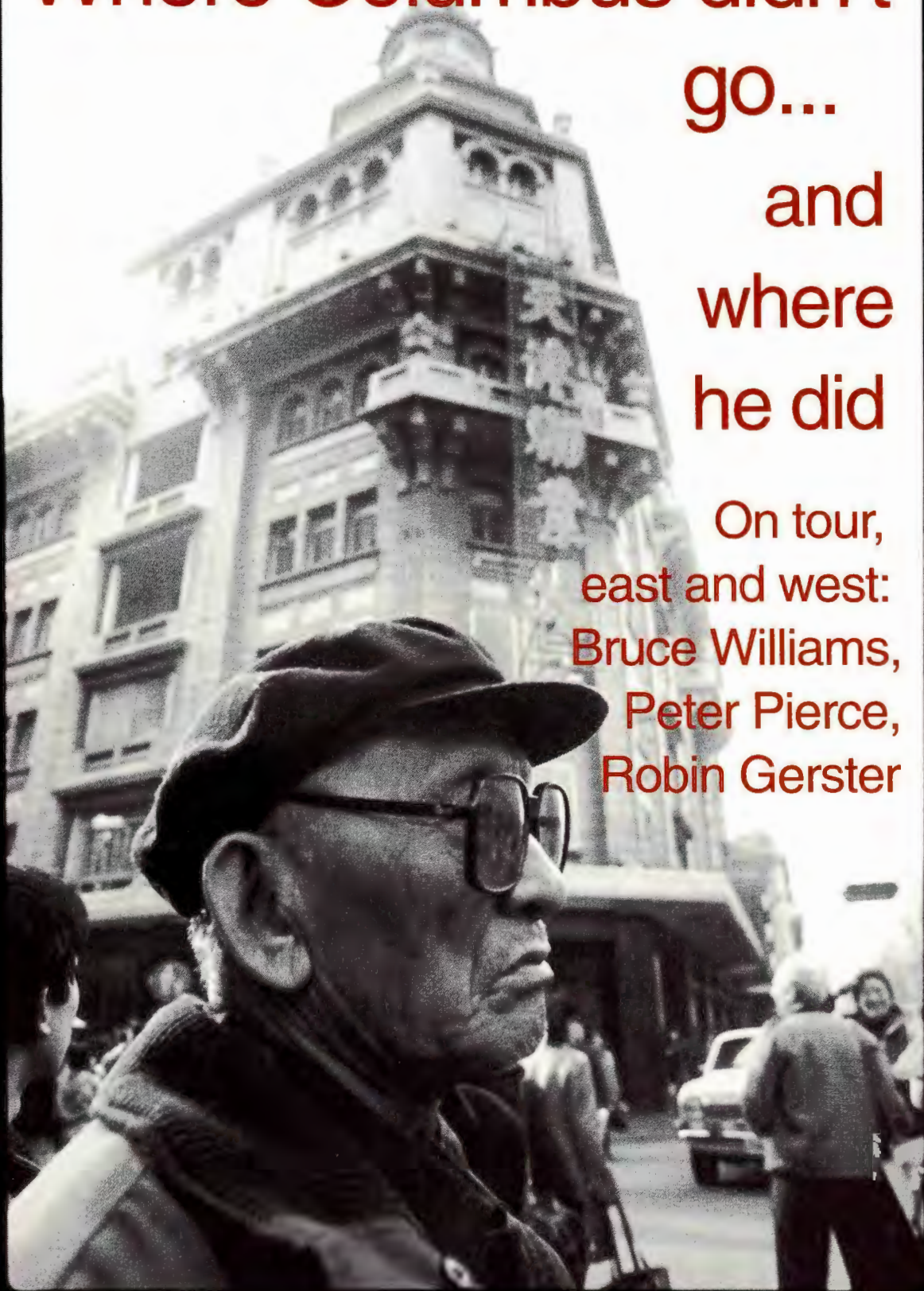
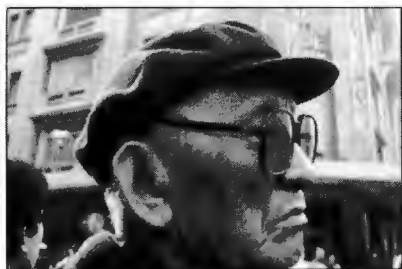




Photo: Missio.

'With what right and under which justice do you hold these Indians in such cruel and atrocious slavery? Are these not human beings? Do they not have a soul? Are you not bound to love them as you love yourselves?'

The Dominican friar Antonio de Montesinos roused the settlers in the 'New World' with these words in his Advent sermon in 1511. Today there is a larger-than-life statue of Montesinos in the port of Santo Domingo. He still poses the same questions. See 'Two Cheers for 500 Up' (p5), 'Blinded by the Light' (p12) and 'Columbus' (p38).



EUREKA STREET

Volume 2 Number 9
October 1992

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology



ICAC chief Ian Temby speaks for himself: p7

Cover photo: A member of the Tianjing city planning office in Jei Fang Bei Road, the 'Wall Street' of Tianjin.

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Tel (03) 427 7311
Fax (03) 428 4450

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Choices, choices

'FREE TO CHOOSE' said the spine of the book. I opened it and flipped through. It was by Milton Friedman, and it helped to give a bad name to liberalism. Not today, thanks, Milton; I'm choosing elsewhere. *I Choose Freedom* said another book, read when I was a schoolboy. It was about making an exit from Soviet constraints. Apart from that, I remember nothing of it: but its title can still issue a summons.

We are only as good as our choices. Unable to construct ourselves radically, we still go on construing ourselves tellingly—going for this story rather than that, this policy, these yearnings, these cessations. We do this in the midst of fear, bafflement, sloth, and often labyrinthine opportunities. We do it because, in the end, 'choice' is not only a noun, but an adjective. The choosing itself is part of our prize.

'Choose, challenge, jump, poise, run ...' wrote Richard Wilbur, in a poem about 'Grace'. It sounds boyish, which can creep back towards being infantile. But Wilbur's poem, celebrating finesse in its many forms, is really against going off half-cocked: for him, expert choice presupposes tensional predicaments. *Choice* magazine could hardly have a readership if we did not find ourselves tugged this way and that amid supposed excellences.

'Elegance' can sound like a luxury, but no mathematician will think it merely that; the elegant solution to the problem is the one with the fewest loose ends—which is, as etymology suggests, the best-chosen one. To live life thoughtfully, not under beleaguement or automatically, is to develop a certain precision in stepping: not necessarily the delicacy of the high-wire walker, but certainly that of the creek-crosser on the slippery stones. A lot of adults, at least in the 'western' world, find much of that in life.

An adult inevitably, and a Jesuit by choice, I think of these things often. Ignatius of Loyola prefaces his cardinal visionary document, the *Spiritual Exercises*, by saying that it is a handbook for the liberation of the heart, so that its readers and practisers may choose well. My own view is that if the Jesuits have one thing more than another to offer the world, in all circumstances, it is a certain judiciousness, a certain stylishness, in making free choices. The readiness to go that route is, of course, not at any Jesuit—or any other institutional—dictation. Liberty of spirit is divinely offered and humanly chosen, or it is not there at all.

'Existentialism', someone said ironically, 'means that nobody can take a bath for you.' Whatever its extravagances, it means more than that. It presses the view that our lives need not be governed by track-habits and prejudice, by soliciting fears and engulfing greeds. It supposes that we are more than the residue of the past, more than the condition of the future. I am not much of a one for 'isms', but that much I can take. *Bonne chance* at the next election: whether or not the candidates need it, you do. ■

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

Two cheers for 500 up

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS TEND to be edgy affairs nowadays. This emerges clearly if we compare contemporary celebrations with previous ones. At the 400th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the Americas, for example, red wine and purple prose flowed unstinted. The grounds for celebration then seemed self-evident: the discovery of the Americas, the bringing of civilisation and Christian faith, the triumph of the exploratory human spirit. Many Latin American cardinals and bishops even demanded that Columbus be canonised a saint.

At anniversaries we do not simply celebrate the past, however, but appraise our own society and culture. So the celebrations of 1992 differ from those of 100 years ago. Both the prose and the festivities reflect our more recessionary times and our greater parsimony with praise. In particular, they mark our more hesitant affirmation of our own culture. Whereas 100 years ago Western culture was seen as a single whole that brought blessing to whatever it touched, now all culture is generally seen as fragmentary. We are uneasy with large abstractions, like 'European' or 'Latin American' culture. We want to know which European, and which Latin American culture we are talking about. We distinguish Indian cultures from *mestizo*, wealthy from poor.

Moreover, if we hear that European culture was a gift, we want to know to whom it was a gift, and who paid for it. We suspect that beneath gifts lie interests. So, if Spain or Portugal brought gifts to the Americas, we want to know what was their angle or kink. Nor do most people have much confidence in the explicit systems of belief that help shape cultures. The collapse of communism has fed a more general modern scepticism about religious faiths, like Christianity and Islam.

The fragmentation of our sense of culture also expresses itself in a kind of ecological vision, in which cultures are seen as natural species that should be preserved. To interfere with them or kill them is regrettable, if not criminal. Within this perspective, the anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the Americas should not be celebrated, for it was the first germ of an infection that would lead to the destruction of Aztec, Inca and other cultures and their mutation into a hybrid culture. It was an ecological disaster.

As a reaction to attitudes current 100 years ago, this hesitation has much to commend it. It insists, rightly, that we should look at the underside of societies

Centenaries invite us to look realistically at people of mixed virtue and wisdom. Even when we have taken his limitations into account, Columbus was an interesting human being of considerable courage and spirit. It is a pretty miserable society that can celebrate only what is perfect.

and cultures, and not merely celebrate the wealth and status of the winners. It is right also to insist that when cultures meet, many values can be lost, and that what emerges is not always admirable.

In the face of such strong reservations, it may seem odd that anyone would want to celebrate the Columbus quincentenary, let alone defend its celebration as energetically as many, including Pope John Paul and various Roman congregations, have done. Yet their attitude deserves a hearing, if only because at several points it challenges our contemporary conventional wisdom. According to this account, centenaries are not only celebrations of our own culture and times, but times to examine the past and to try to enter it on its own terms.

This implies a rare degree of humility about the partial character of our own conventional wisdom. Centenaries also invite us to look realistically at people of mixed virtue and wisdom. Even when we have taken his limitations into account, Columbus was an interesting human being of considerable courage and spirit. It is a pretty miserable society that can celebrate only what is perfect.

The quincentenary, too, insists that culture is not simply something to be preserved, but that it is alive and constantly changing in order to adapt to new challenges. From this perspective, to regard native cultures as inevitably crushed by Western culture is a covert form of cultural imperialism. It has been said that canon law was the Pharisees' revenge on Christianity; in the same way, Latin American cultures may be seen as the subversion of Western culture by the natives.

The celebration of the quincentenary also impels Christians to ask whether they see Christian faith as a gift, and whether it is right to preach to those who do not believe. While our prevailing culture has many reservations about commending religious belief, it has fewer about commending belief in equality or economic theory. Is that consistent? Finally the quincentenary puts sharp questions to Australians about what we make of immigration, about the propriety of celebrating the achievements, of, say, Jack Lang or Daniel Mannix, for all their limitations, and about the place which religious faith should have in Australian culture. ■

Andrew Hamilton SJ teaches at the United Faculty of Theology, Parkville, Vic. He spent the first half of 1992 on sabbatical leave at the University of Central America.

Mad about Madonna

From Clive Keeley

I've just finished reading *Eureka Street* vol. 2 no. 8. As a public servant who will soon feel the cutting edge of economic rationalism, I found that Jack Waterford's Canberra Letter painted an accurate picture of our battered bureaucracy.

Your Quixote columnist's thoughts on how to deal with our revolting new \$5 note were suitably republican. An expensive shower curtain perhaps, but I am sure many Australians would enjoy seeing the face of the foreign potentate covered by mould.

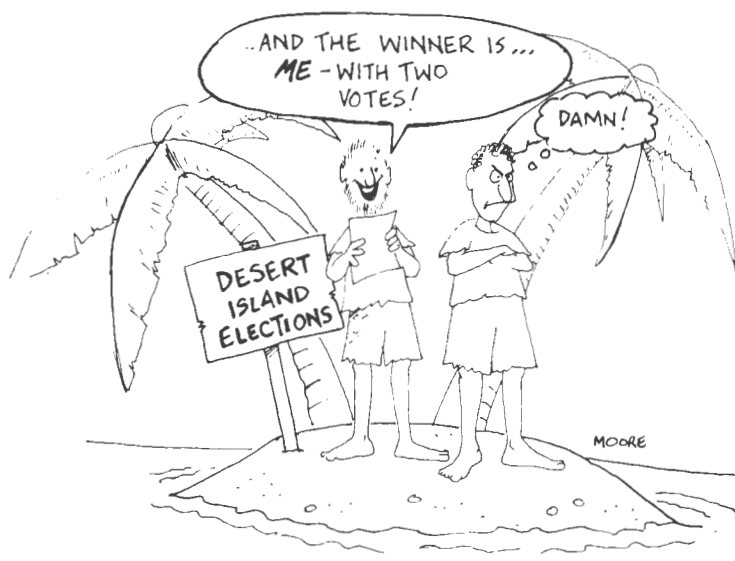
I must report, however, that vol. 2 no. 8 has cost you a reader. My teenage daughter regards your film review on p40 as a libellous attack on Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone. She has passionately declared that she will never read *Eureka Street* again.

Clive Keeley
Lesmurdie, WA

Media misled on Rio summit

From Bruce Duncan CSsR

It seems that the Western press was 'taken for a ride' by reports that the



Vatican had kept the population issue off the agenda at the Earth Summit in Rio. Not only Michael Breen (*Eureka*

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.



Street, September 1992) and Malcolm Fraser were misled; so were the Archbishop of Canterbury, Phillip Adams and P.P. McGuinness in *The Australian*, and Pamela Bone and Fia Cumming in *The Age*, all of whom gave the church a caning. Despite weeks of effort to reply to these accusations in various papers, I have not succeeded.

Those familiar with the Vatican position will know that the papacy supports population planning as long as the freedom of married couples is respected. (See *Development of Peoples*, 37.) The church recognises that there is a genuine population problem in many, but certainly not all, countries.

As to methods of family planning, the church has not changed its teaching on contraception, but this must be understood within the general context of moral theology. Pope Paul VI recognised a method that might be seen as 'strict in principle but liberal in practice', and commended his teaching to Catholics to see what was possible in their circumstances.

It is true that the church was slow to recognise that even using the natural methods of family planning was legitimate, but the Vatican Council clearly supported this more liberal view. The implications of the doctrine of religious freedom have also been applied only slowly. In 1990 the Philippines' bishops moved to a new position that has won wide support.

After holding back population

programs for many years, they acknowledged that their country faced a major population problem, which was impeding development, and that their government had a duty to slow population growth. While preferring natural methods of birth control, Bishop Claver said that the church would not try to impose this view on non-Catholics, or on Catholics who could not agree with it. The bishops refused abortion as a method of birth control, and coercive policies. But they did call for full information about birth control for all people.

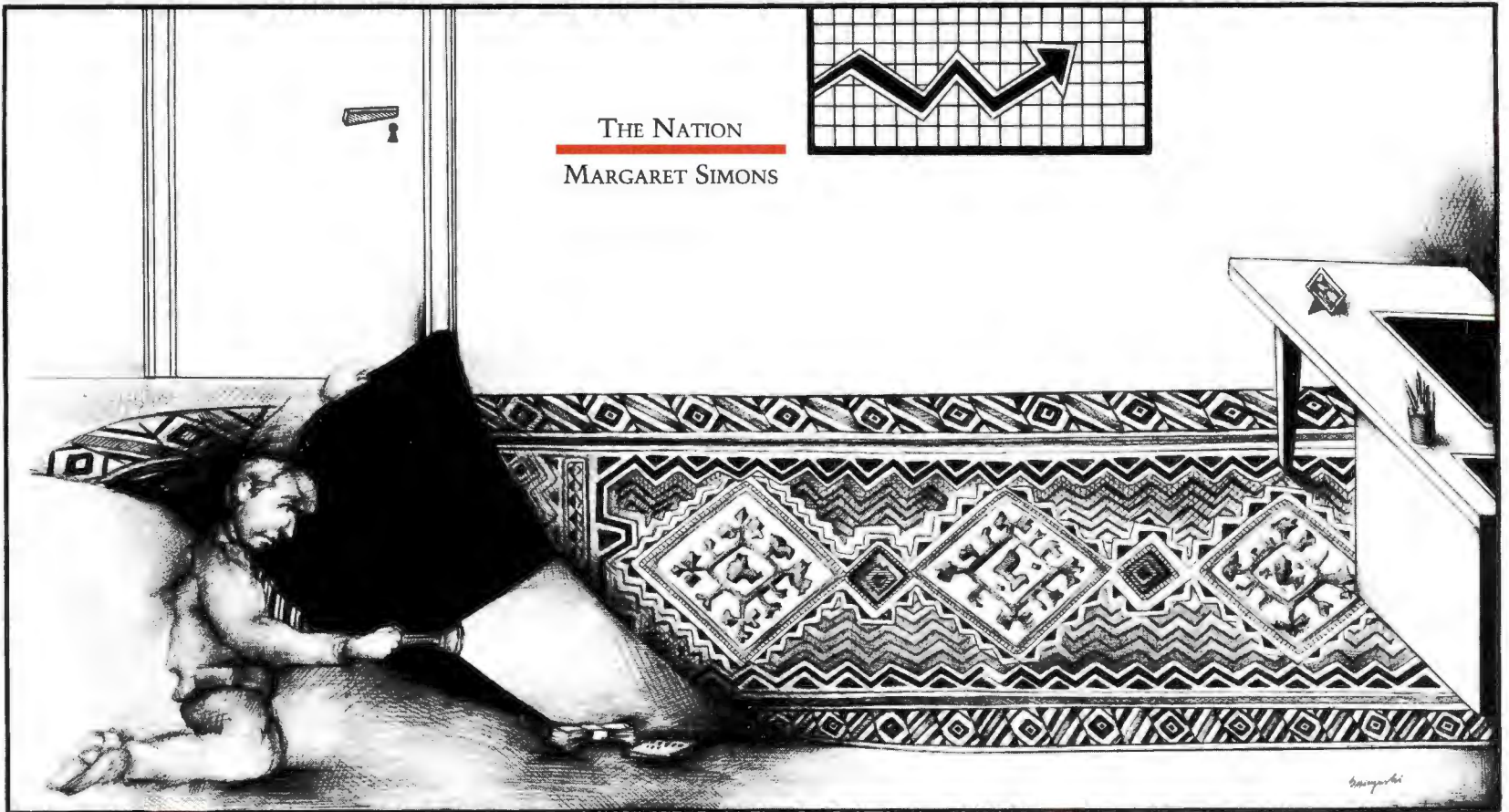
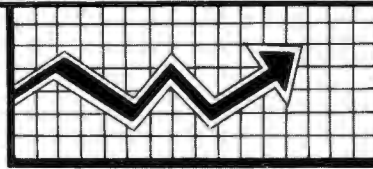
Contrary to press reports, the Catholic position on population planning is very close to that of leading development economists such as Professor Michael Todaro of Princeton, whose *Economic Development in the Third World* is a standard text.

Some light was shed by a front-page report in Sydney's *Catholic Weekly* (5 August 1992), which quoted the first assistant secretary of the Canberra office of the Department of Health, Housing and Community Services, Marie Coleman, who chaired one of the sessions in New York. Mrs Coleman, who is not a Catholic, said that the media had been fed a line about supposed Vatican intransigence, as part of the UN population agency's battle to avoid funding cuts.

Dr Nafis Salik, the executive director of the UN Population Fund, visited Australia this year and was interviewed by the *Catholic Weekly* (26 August). She denied that the agency's funding was under threat, but admitted that there had been a difference of view with the Vatican about whether to use the term 'family planning' or 'planning responsible family size'. Dr Salik said that faxes lobbying against the Vatican had been sent from her office, but that the person responsible had been reprimanded.

The truth is that population issues were on the agenda at the Rio, and that a consensus, which included the Vatican, was reached on these. It is curious that the press has so uncritically accepted reports of the Vatican holding ridiculous views—the more so because, to the best of my knowledge, these false reports have not been corrected.

Bruce Duncan CSsR
Box Hill, Vic.



Commissions and omissions

ONE OF THE FASCINATING THINGS about Ian Temby QC, cool customer and head of New South Wales' controversial Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), is that he claims, with one exception, to be unable to remember telling a lie at any time in the past 20 years. The exception is that he has lied about matters sexual: 'I don't want to appear precious. The fact is that up until 10 years ago I was not a sexually faithful person and I lied about it.'

'I try very hard to tell the truth. There are sometimes shades of meaning and sometimes one is troubled by omissions from statements. Also, our capacity for self-delusion is infinite, and I don't have a perfect memory. I make a conscious effort not to tell untruths or, indeed, mislead.'

There is more than just voyeuristic interest in these confessions. They are significant because of the judgments that Ian Temby made in his report on the role of the then NSW Premier, Nick Greiner, in the Metherell affair. Temby claimed that community ethical standards of honesty and integrity for public officials had changed, so that political appointments to the public service—'jobs for the boys'—were no longer acceptable. This was one of the factors behind his finding that there were reasonable grounds for Greiner to be sacked.

Temby also found that Greiner and others had lied to the media. 'It is not a criminal offence to lie,' Temby said, 'and as I was reminded so often during the course of the hearing, the ICAC is not a court of morals.' But

he hoped politicians would conclude 'that standards of candour are lower than they need be.' Temby's finding that Greiner's conduct was corrupt was overturned on appeal, but it was already too late for the Premier. In the wake of the appeal court's decision, some suggested that the fight against corruption had gone 'too far'—that the standards Temby had tried to set were too high.

Although his finding has been overturned, the decision of the appeal court does not mean that the issues raised by Temby's report will go away. Has the community become less tolerant of cronyism and lies in public life, or is it indeed possible to take the fight for integrity 'too far'?

The '80s was not only the decade of capitalist robber barons, it was also a time when the Australian community began taking special measures to bust organised crime and corruption. During the past decade Australia has had a plethora of royal commissions, and three special crime-busting bodies have been set up: the National Crime Authority (NCA) at federal level, the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) in Queensland, and the Independent Commission Against Corruption in NSW. Some politicians in Western Australia and South

Australia now argue that ICAC-type bodies should be set up in those states as well.

ALL THESE BODIES HAVE BEEN CONTROVERSIAL, and their existence raises questions about the functioning of Australian democracy. Why are special organisations



You have to have a high amount of faith in normal institutions, faith that they will continue, before you can set up an ICAC, otherwise it is a recipe for bloody revolution.

—IAN TEMBY

needed, if the normal checks and balances of the Westminster system, and the ordinary law-enforcement agencies, are working effectively?

Comparisons can be misleading, and there are important differences between the three crime busters. The ICAC is concerned only with public officials, has an educative function, and has no power to prosecute. The CJC is responsible for criminal-law reform, for crime statistics and for research as well as investigations into corruption. As for the NCA, exactly what its role should be has been one of the main causes of controversy in the years since it was set up. Critics of the authority, including civil libertarians and some police forces, say that it has no function, and should be abolished.

Yet there are similarities. All three bodies have powers similar to those of royal commissions but are permanent bodies, whereas royal commissions are usually set up to address a particular issue. The existence of the ICAC, CJC and NCA means that in the fight against organised crime and corruption—in the struggle to lift standards of honesty and integrity—the

community has traded off some of its civil liberties.

THE HEAD OF THE NATIONAL CRIME AUTHORITY, Tom Sherman, has an undoubted commitment to civil liberties. He comes fresh from an extraordinarily successful stint as head of the Queensland Electoral and Administrative Review Commission (EARC), the CJC's sister

body, which in the years since the end of the Fitzgerald inquiry has reformed the state's electoral boundaries and much of its legislative framework. The EARC is the most open statutory body ever set up in Australia, and has also picked up that hot potato dropped by federal politicians—a bill of rights to safeguard the rights of the individual.

How does this sit with Sherman's new job as head of one of the most secretive and potentially intrusive bodies in the country? He says: 'I think civil liberties are important, but there is a delicate balancing act involved here. Look at what's happening in Italy with the Mafia. I don't want to suggest that we have a problem of that scale, but if you want to protect the rule of law you need bodies with special powers to deal with special problems.'

'I think that at the end of the day society has to make up its mind whether current mechanisms work with sophisticated organised crime. If you look back through history you will find that most bodies are created to address a particular problem. Go back more than a century and you wouldn't have an institutionalised police force. I'm sure that if you went back and looked at the *London Times* of 1840 or 1850, whenever the inland revenue was established, you would find those sorts of debates going on in media in those days.'

As head of ICAC, Ian Temby sees the trade-off between liberty and integrity somewhat differently. The commission does have intrusive powers, but they impinge mainly on public officials and government bodies, and he believes they fit naturally with the traditional checks and balances of the Westminster system. 'The ICAC may be best viewed,' he says, 'as a third leg of an integrity triumvirate, with the other legs being the Ombudsman, who manages proper administration, and the Auditor-General, who is concerned with financial propriety. The ICAC is concerned with integrity in general conduct. If you view it like that there's nothing very smashing about it. From time to time each of those bodies, if they are doing their job, will do something which is fairly controversial.'

Temby believes the establishment of the ICAC was not, as some believe, a symptom of declining confidence in democratic institutions but an expression of faith in their robustness. 'Although certain things we have done have been greeted with a certain amount of shouting and arm waving,' he says, 'the fundamental institutions of government have remained unaffected. They have continued to function effectively.'

'You have to have a high amount of faith in normal institutions, faith that they will continue, before you can set up an ICAC, otherwise it is a recipe for bloody revolution. I could not see an ICAC-type body operating as it was meant to in Britain, where such matters are sorted out, if they are at all, between clubbable chaps.'

It's very clear that in parts of Asia such an organisation would have an effect which would be destructive.'

Temby's view sits well with Tony Fitzgerald's justification for setting up the Criminal Justice Commission in the wake of his inquiry into corruption in the Queensland police force. The commission, Fitzgerald said, should be part of the normal democratic process—he wanted it to be 'independent, but not autonomous', part of the machinery of democracy rather than something operating outside it.

EACH OF THE CRIME-BUSTING ORGANISATIONS reports to the parliament that created it through a parliamentary committee. The NCA's relationship with its committee has been stormy, and in the past the authority has tried to withhold information from the committee. On the other hand, committee members have been accused of placing security at risk by leaking material from confidential briefings. The CJC has found a strong ally in its committee, which has been quick to leap to its defence. This has in turn laid the committee open to allegations that it is too close to the body it is meant to be monitoring.

Some critics, including the investigative journalist Bob Bottom, say that politicians should not be trusted with power over bodies that may have to investigate corruption in government. Yet what alternative is there? Organisations with intrusive powers over citizens can hardly be allowed to run around unchecked. As Sherman says: 'In a democracy there is no choice. If the elected representatives can't do it, then there's something wrong.'

IF THE ICAC SURVIVES the controversy over the Metherell affair, it will be because it has three years of quiet, worthy and creditable work behind it—work which has significantly contributed to improvements in public administration.

In Temby's words: 'Six months ago we were an accepted part of the furniture. We were seen as functioning effectively and we were viewed as an uncontroversial body. The Metherell matter has changed that but I don't think it will change things permanently.'

The ICAC's credibility was hard-won—when its tenure began, the commission was presented with a list of more than 70 matters that the Liberal Government wanted investigated. Most were old Labor Party scandals, such as the Love Boat saga and the Enmore conspiracy allegations, but Temby made it clear that he had no intention of entering such

politically charged ground. He says: 'I'm interested in practical, useful outcomes and you tend not to get those in old matters that others have had a go at. The former Premier's conduct was always impeccable. Certainly he never suggested I should do over the ALP. He might have had a hope, but I don't think he had an expectation.'

Why, then, did Temby put all that credibility at risk by entering on the Greiner investigation? 'We did nothing until the 13th day after the appointment was made, and it was clear that there would be an inquiry of some sort. The cry was corruption. That was the word that was being used, and we are the anti-corruption body. We could hardly leave it to someone else to do. I never doubted that if adverse findings had to be made, there was potential for considerable downside, but once you reach the point where it's your work and you can't properly leave it to someone else, then you have to do it regardless of the downside.'

The CJC is in sharp contrast to the ICAC. It has been constantly in the headlines, and the controversies in which it has been involved have generated far more

I think civil liberties are important, but there is a delicate balancing act involved here ... at the end of the day society has to make up its mind whether current mechanisms work with sophisticated organised crime.

—TOM SHERMAN



Problem child

THE MOVE TO SET UP SPECIAL BODIES to fight crime and corruption began after a string of royal commissions in the late 1970s and early 1980s—Moffitt, Woodward, Williams, Stewart and Costigan—found organised crime operating at almost every level of Australian society.

The National Crime Authority came first in 1984, after the controversial closure of the Costigan royal commission. The staff of that commission were rolled into the authority, which was created by an Act of Federal Parliament, supported by the states.

The purpose of the NCA has been one of the hottest subjects of debate, with state and federal police forces claiming that it 'poaches' on their territory. The authority has also been hobbled by a hostile media, which regretted the end to the crusades of the Costigan royal commission.

Broadly, the NCA is meant to investigate major or 'organised' crime in cooperation with other police forces, and to collect, analyse and disseminate intelligence about criminal activities. It has a staff of 377, including seconded police, and a budget of \$22.5 million.

The authority's longest-serving chairman, Justice Stewart, was criticised for being too secretive and for a lack of 'runs on the board', i.e. major prosecutions. Since he left in 1989, the authority has had four chairmen. First came Peter Faris QC, who lasted only seven months. He resigned on the grounds of ill-health, soon after Victorian police found him near a Melbourne brothel, carrying a large amount of cash. He was replaced by Julian Lecke, as acting chairman, who was in turn replaced by Justice Phillips.

Phillips announced a change in direction for the authority, with more emphasis on the investigation of white-collar crime. This was widely, though wrongly, interpreted to mean that the authority was abandoning the pursuit of drug dealers. Six months ago Justice Phillips was replaced by Tom Sherman, who came fresh from successfully establishing the Queensland Electoral and Administrative Review Commission.

Sherman, who has taken on a job many believe to be 'mission impossible', argues that good work done by the NCA has been neglected by the public, partly because of excessive secrecy. He intends to be more open with the media.

With a bureaucrat's understanding of the importance of function, Sherman plans to use the analysis of intelligence to determine which areas require the co-ordination and special powers of the NCA. 'Take car stealing for example,' he says. 'The NCA could seek references from states and Commonwealth, and then have a large group of police investigating the problem in a co-ordinated way, so people engaging in these activities feel the combined heat. Depending on the matter, we might involve Customs, Tax, and so on. I don't think that sort of coordination has ever happened.' ■

—Margaret Simons

heat than light. The worst example began earlier this year when the state Police Minister, Terry Mackenroth, resigned after it had been found that he used taxpayers' money for private expenses. Apparently intent on bringing others down with him, he made a series of allegations against the Police Commissioner, Noel Newnham, who had been brought in as an 'honest cop' to reform the force.

Mackenroth's allegations proved to be groundless, but the ensuing investigation showed up other discrepancies in Newnham's travel expenses. What followed—another investigation, an appeal, and an investigation into the conduct of the appeal—generated enough heat to gut Newnham's career, and badly singe all the other agents of reform. Almost everyone involved, including the Premier, Wayne Goss, the CJC chairman, Max Bingham, and leading members of the Queensland bar, behaved badly. Yet nothing was resolved and now Mackenroth, who in this and other matters has shown himself to be an enemy of the Fitzgerald reforms, is expected to rejoin the ministry after the election.

Some people's standards haven't changed. In Queensland, apparently, it still helps to be a mate.

Likewise, the National Crime Authority has also had almost nothing but bad publicity, and has looked very much like an organisation in search of a role. Sherman defends it thus: 'For the first five years of its life the NCA had a sunset clause. That is not very conducive to strategic thinking. The imperative was to get runs on the board. When I came along the thing that struck me most was the word "national" in the title. We should be concentrating on national problems and we should identify what they are by sharing and coordinating intelligence.'

FUNCTION IS THE KEY. The crime-busting bodies that have survived and prospered are those, like the traditional police forces, whose tasks have been clearly defined, and which have achieved a balance between necessary secrecy and public accountability.

As to whether community standards have changed, with the CJC still struggling in Queensland, the NCA searching for credibility and Temby's understanding of the meaning of corruption overturned by an appeal court, it seems that Australians are still far from clear about the sort of society they want, and how many sacrifices they are prepared to make to achieve it. ■

Margaret Simons is a regular contributor to *Eureka Street*

Famine in Somalia/Africa

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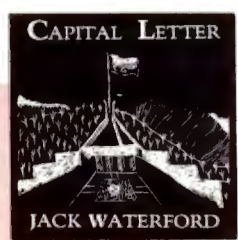
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Perils in the power of one

TWO THINGS STAND IN THE WAY of an automatic Hewson victory at the next election. The first is John Hewson himself, a strangely brittle if driven man, who is capable of becoming an electoral issue in the same way that his rival Paul Keating already is. Will it be a case of victory going to the less unpopular man? The second obstacle is whether a Hewson-led Liberal Party can maintain the sort of broad electoral support that it needs to win.

The two problems come together in the personality of John Hewson. Although the ideological tendency he represents is now the dominant one in Liberal parliamentary politics, he is not leading the party simply because he won an argument. He is there because the Liberals, who have lost election after election in the past decade because of poor leadership, decided on massive change. There are many in the Liberal ranks who have little time for Hewson or his ideas, but who want victory and see him as their only chance.

When the *Fightback!* policies were launched, Hewson marketed them well. The economy was at bottom and Labor, tired and out of ideas, was plainly in disarray. Even the ALP's best friends thought that the best rejuvenation treatment would be a term in opposition. Hewson, in contrast, seemed to have ideas. And he was bold enough to take risks. The conventional wisdom then was that to talk openly of a new tax was suicide; Hewson's willingness to do so seemed refreshingly honest. Yet it was not the content of the plan that took people's imaginations, so much as the fact that he had a plan at all.

Since then, Hewson has become messianic about the plan: it and only it can rescue Australia. Early outbursts of sniping from traditional Liberal supporters—the big manufacturers, for example—were sold by Hewson as a plus: they meant that voters would not see the party as being in the pocket of the big end of town. Hewson has always despised the interest groups, and in an era of extreme cynicism about politics he thinks that a straightforward 'I'm-being-honest-with-the-electorate approach' is a selling point. Moreover, the plan has become a sacred text, and Hewson is beyond being consulted about it.

His troops were warned at the outset that there would be false prophets—that some people in the party would be invited to set up secret caucuses to influence policy. These false prophets would not only be ignored, but punished. In the early days this message did not have to be driven home. Liberal politicians know that opposition disunity is usually the only thing that can save a government from the price of its incompetence.

In Paul Keating, Labor has a politician with a genius for taking the fight to the enemy. Voters may loathe him, but he is the best in the business at defining the issues. Keating has a plan, too, and it appeals precisely because its approach is not ideological. The Keating plan makes some ritualistic bows at ideas with which most people feel comfortable, and borrows some of the more

useful Hewson ideas. Essentially, however, it is markedly flexible.

Hewson has not seen any need to adapt to this approach—after all, his plan is perfect. And switching may seem to be a sign of weakness. On the latter point, Keating has developed a successful line of attack on Hewson's dogmatism: Hewson is the 'feral abacus', a 'paranoid' who wants to set fire to the Australian economy in the belief that economic man will rise from the ashes.

The Opposition Leader openly scorns the captains of industry, telling them that have spent too long cuddling up to the government and that it is time to face the chill winds of international competition. Keating, on the other hand, has them onside, expressing doubts about Liberal policies. The doubts do not have to be too strong, since Hewson can be relied upon to snap at the slightest hint of deviation. His inflexibility already has many Liberal backbenchers squirming, and some are starting to make their reservations public.

The Hewson personality is not only interesting in gladiatorial terms. It raises real questions about how he will perform in government—if he gets there. He is not waiting for bureaucratic advice about how to implement his policies. Detailed plans have already been drafted by committees of true believers, and there is a schedule for the first year of government.

Kaiser Bill, so the legend goes, became a prisoner of railway schedules. His general staff had drawn up a war plan to get men and materiel to the front. It required mastering every detail of the railway systems in territories through which the armies would have to pass, and then devising complicated timetables so that resources could be concentrated in the right place at the right time. For one reason or another, the plan went awry. If Point X was not taken within 10 days, for example, there would be a bottleneck, meaning the next objective could not be taken in time, and so on. The general staff did not have the flexibility to adapt their plans to circumstances.

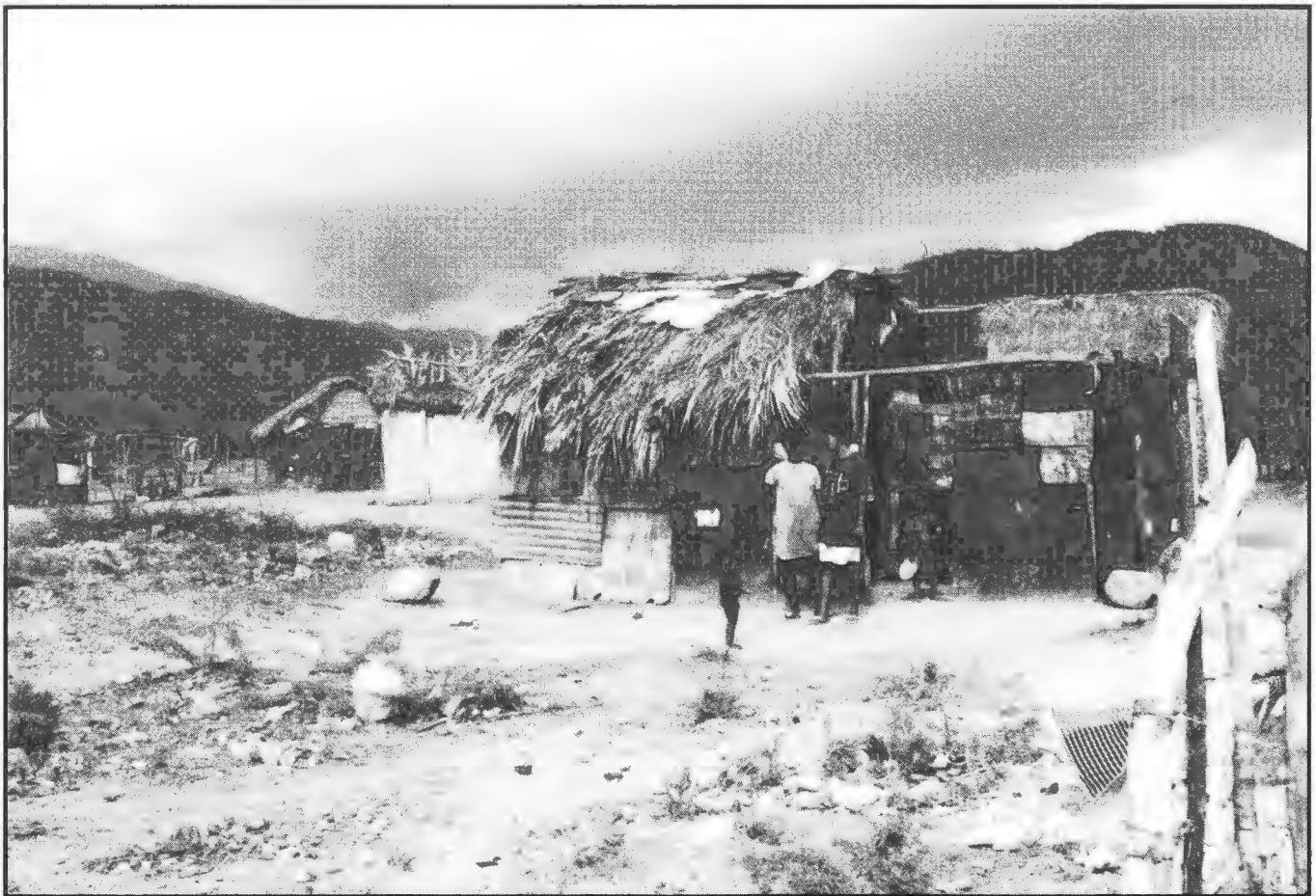
For Prime Minister Hewson, a time will come when the program—assuming it has got through the election unscathed—requires a flexibility it has not had before. What if a manufacturer calls his bluff and closes down a major factory? Or if there is a sudden exchange-rate crisis having nothing to do with Australia as such, but with some adventure by, for example, the Bundesbank? Or if a major insurance company faces collapse because of CBD land prices? Sooner or later, something will call for the sort of intervention that, by current dogma, is anathema.

In such circumstances Hewson would be a horse without form, one whose style hitherto suggests that he lacks the creativity to adapt to circumstances. For Dr Hewson and his brand of true believers, such a crisis would quickly threaten his style of leadership. ■

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



Whatever the economic and political realities, the lighthouse represents a bid for Dominican regional leadership ... In this part of the world, gestures are action.



Blinded by the light

A monument to folly or a beacon of hope: the Columbus lighthouse in Santo Domingo focuses all the tensions in the European legacy in the Americas.

ON 12 OCTOBER 1992 a rival to the Southern Cross will appear in the skies over the Americas. In Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic, the most powerful lighthouse ever built will blaze its cruciform beam into the sky to mark the quincentenary of Columbus' landing. Within this vast building illustrious guests from church and state, from the New World and the Old, will witness the final interment of the great admiral's bones. Everyone has something to celebrate, and none more so than the republic's president, Joaquin Balaguer, for whom the opening of the lighthouse will fulfil a lifetime's ambition.

President Balaguer has committed a very large sum of his people's money to this project. No one knows exactly how much, and Balaguer does not head the kind of government from which figures, as such, are available. The president, unfortunately, will not see the beam irradiate the clouds, for he is blind. There is a distinct possibility that no one else will see it, either: the first time the light was tested, it blew out the entire electrical system of Santo Domingo.

El Prado, 'The Meadow', is a collection of shanties on the edge of a small, dusty town, two hours from the capital of the Dominican Republic. The shanties are made out of material collected from garbage dumps—a few concrete blocks, panels cut from milk tins—held together by the local wattle-and-daub. There is nothing so formal as a street, just rock-strewn open space, with one larger area cleared for a baseball pitch. Occasional labouring, hawking and (illegal) charcoal burning bring in what income there is. The labouring rate is US\$2 for a 10-hour day but it's not on offer every day, or even every week. You see men returning from a day's work, 30 of them jammed together in the tray of a company truck.

An international development agency, on the sponsorship model, has recently begun operations in El Prado. The local people have formed a communications committee to consider administrative detail—the exchange of mail, when reports are due, and that kind of thing. What fires the imagination of the committee,

however, is the prospect of visitors. We sat under a tree, the people from the agency and the communications committee, and discussed these matters. One man asked what happens if a donor from the United States visits and has an accident—trips over and breaks a leg, perhaps. Will the community be liable for the medical expenses? I reflected that it was a good thing that the development agency had insurance. Otherwise, it would be hard to explain that the bill for one broken American leg—assuming a clean break—would equal the combined annual income of 20 El Prado families. Another man worried that, if there were dancing to welcome the visitors, they might be shocked. Here in the Dominican Republic we dance like this, he said, demonstrating a tight hold.

The Dominican government is not indifferent to the plight of its poor. President Balaguer's administration spent more than it could well afford last financial year, putting up housing developments in urban areas. More than it could afford, that is, given what it was spending on the lighthouse. But there are limits, and there are contradictions. If you ask about El Prado, you will be told it does not exist. After all, it is not on the map. The site for the Columbus lighthouse was cleared by bulldozing away 50,000 fringe dwellers. Some were rehoused. The rest disappeared into other slums, which in Santo Domingo are tucked away in warrens behind the main streets, or on the edge of town. On the parkland around the lighthouse stand new sets of townhouses; to get one you need a government job.

So, what to make of the lighthouse? Another folly in the annals of arbitrary rule, another example of how not to do it in a developing country? On the face of it, yes. But there seems to be an unusual degree of wholehearted support for the project from those whose perspectives might be expected to be different. Pope John Paul will be there to see the light switched on, as will King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofía of Spain. Such people cannot be ignorant of the ironies and the injustice involved, nor indifferent to the needs of the poor. But there is a great deal at stake, for Columbus' landing is

For most of us it is impossible to live with the idea that the past is nothing but a record of horror ... only in the pages of 1066 and All That could the entire history of the Americas since 1492 be described as A Bad Thing.

the junction of many lines of symbolism.

Some interpret President Balaguer's lighthouse as a statesman-like initiative; rather than mindlessly celebrating the past, he is making use of it. Along the road to the airport at Santo Domingo are plaques representing all the nations of the Caribbean. Whatever the economic and political realities, the lighthouse represents a bid for Dominican regional leadership, an assertion of temporal and moral priority, and a symbol on this scale, in a region afflicted by both poverty and tourism, may well be a source of pride and admiration. In this part of the world, gestures are action.

For a lot of other people, however, such *Realpolitik* counts for nothing against their belief that the lighthouse is a monument to moral outrage. 'Hispaniola', as Columbus knew the island, was no more *terra nullius* in 1492 than Australia was in 1788 (see *Eureka Street*, July 1992). There were already people living on the island, and they were wiped out through a combination of maltreatment and disease. The present inhabitants of the Dominican Republic are black and mulatto, many of them descendants of the African slaves the Spaniards brought in when they ran short of labour. They feel little sense of connection with the original inhabitants, who were known as the Tainos. The historical sketch in the official tourist guide steers the reader in the right direction with block capitals: 'The island of Hispaniola', it begins, '... which the native Taino Indians called Babeque or Haiti, was discovered by CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS ...'

FOR CRITICS OF THE LIGHTHOUSE, Columbus' landing symbolises the conquest of all the Americas, North and South, and the outrage extends to all the victims of colonialism—to the dead, but also to their descendants who still struggle in the countryside, in slums and in reservations from Tierra del Fuego to Baffinland. In August the *New York Times* published a grim survey of the plight of Latin America's Indians. Kirkpatrick Sale's thoughtful book *The Conquest of Paradise*, a rich discussion of the Columbus legend, adds the environmentalist reminder that the conquistadors of the New World have an urgent need to learn something from those same Indians about how to dwell with the world. For Sale, it is imperative that we rethink the exploitative values masked by the heroic of the Columbus legend.

Thus the debate, pitched between a conservative desire to celebrate the glories of civilisation and the faith, and a radical demand for ugly truths to be exposed. Robert Hughes, in a *Time* essay, puts it this way: 'For our predecessors (Columbus) was Manifest Destiny in tight, whereas a current PC ['politically correct'] book like

Kirkpatrick Sale's *The Conquest of Paradise* makes him like Hitler in a caravel, landing like a virus among the innocent people of the New World.' This is grossly unfair to Sale's book, which is largely a dispassionate study of images of Columbus. But Hughes goes on to make the legitimate point that polarising of the kind he gibes at eliminates the true complexity of history. Moreover, if we were to follow only the logic of indignation, it is hard to see that anyone, anywhere, would ever have much to celebrate.

IN THE UNITED STATES the Columbus celebrations began early this year and have flowed on, city by city, state by state, with each week bringing news of some fresh junketing. In Boston a million and a half people—more than the population of the city—turned out to view the Tall Ships. The whole fleet came to Newport, Rhode Island, which often plays host to grand events, but in the capital, Providence, we had to make do with just one replica of the *Niña*. People stood on the deck and said how wonderful it was to have sailed halfway round the world in a little boat like that.

The mayor of Providence, Vincent ('Buddy') Cianci jun., is a streetwise gentleman who has been mistaken, on ceremonial occasions, for a stand-up comedian. Cianci presides over a city divided in many different ways, and where views on the quincentenary differ widely. (His budget committee cut the budget for the festivities in half.) There are growing numbers of Hispanics, including many from the Dominican Republic, and there are African-Americans. Politics and business life are dominated by people of Italian descent, and there are a lot of others, like the Knights of Columbus, for whom the quincentenary means an occasion for considerable splash. But Providence is also home to large numbers of displaced and persecuted people, like the Hmong from Vietnam. It used to be home to quite a few Native Americans, too. Cianci is aware that the tides of opinion are not favourable to conquistadors just now.

His solution: turn the quincentenary into a festival of multiculturalism. Celebrate the ideals of diversity and mutual dwelling in peace. 'It is fitting,' he said when unveiling a refurbished statue, 'that today in Elmwood our neighbourhoods reflect the many cultures of a world that was opened by discovery.' He didn't say anything about the worlds that were closed. Cianci's strategy, and he isn't the only dignitary using it in the US this year, is to shift the debate away from the question of what happened way back, and to concentrate instead on whatever is praiseworthy in our present arrangements.

To adulate the past, to revile it, to ignore it in favour of communal self-congratulation—these are the favoured simplifications. There will be no breaking their hold on those who above all want to be clear and definite. In my mind, Cianci's benign plurality is ruled out by the memory of El Prado. There is a need to remember the violence and injustice of the past because it is still going on, and not only in the Dominican Republic, where it takes the form of neglect, but in the many

countries where Indians and other minorities are persecuted. Past and present cannot be wrenched apart. At the same time, for most of us it is impossible to live with the idea that the past is nothing but a record of horror, Stephen Daedalus' 'nightmare' from which it is our duty to wake. Nor need we try: only in the pages of *1066 and All That* could the entire history of the Americas since 1492 be described as A Bad Thing.

The problem (as it was in the Australian bicentennial year) is partly the equation of 'celebration' with 'having a good time'. Alastair Reid, writing about the Dominican quincenary in *The New Yorker*, closes by saying: 'About the wrongs of the past we can do nothing, but we can at least look at them squarely, and see them clearly.'

And at the wrongs of the present? It is to be hoped, for example, that Pope John Paul will bring to bear on President Balaguer the same kind of suasions used on the leader of the Ivory Coast in the matter of the giant cathedral. Even so, it will not be enough if private negotiations are reported belatedly, in the specialised media, while the public events are proclaimed as an unequivocal triumph. What is needed to restore life to the meaning of 'New World' is a solemn celebration, one that both expresses dismay at the bloody past and responds to the present call from the people of El Prado and all those others who have little to celebrate. To say Mass on such an occasion is considered essential; to say, loudly and clearly, how its symbolism should be applied is an urgent duty. ■

Bruce Williams is senior lecturer in drama at La Trobe University, Victoria. He has been taking sabbatical leave at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island.



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Just genes?

IN THE VENERABLE international science journal *Nature*, virtually all of the 20 or so full-page colour advertisements these days are for various kinds of equipment that would offer an edge in gene stripping, DNA sequencing, and so on.

Most telephone directories give you the name you are looking for, followed by a number: the code is already unscrambled. But imagine a telephone directory that listed the numbers in sequence, followed by the names. It would not be very practical, and our first task would be to list all the names in alphabetical sequence and attach numbers to them. So also in genetic engineering: science is engaged in unscrambling thousands of genetic codes into their special significances.

There is a gene, for example, that produces the alpha-isoform of the calcium-cadmodulin-dependent multifunctional protein kinase II. By removing this gene from the DNA of mice, a mutant animal is produced that seems normal except for its ability to cope with spatial learning tasks. The brains of these mice display other characteristics of memory loss, particularly a greatly impaired long-term potentiation of synaptic transmissions. Similar research on other genes helps to build up a picture of how DNA shapes the design, construction, and maintenance of our bodies.

Genetic research offers simpler and better ways of treating many serious bodily malfunctions, especially cancers and viruses, perhaps even schizophrenia and depression. One may fear the commercial exploitation of such discoveries, but that has always been the ambiguity of scientific research.

We should not assume that one can totally understand the whole by understanding the parts. One of the curious results of the research into the mutant mice, for example, is that the particular gene under investigation is 'regulatory' rather than 'obligatory'; that is, the whole organism can find ways around particular problems. Any forces that attempt to break down complex organic structures are often compensated for by processes taking place within the structure itself.

Our purpose, the future towards which we move, may be as important in our evolution as the molecular mechanisms that shape us.

Genetic engineering, in so far as it ignores the future to which we are drawn, may simply entail removing undesired genes: this is a kind of racial cleansing, a censorship of ideas, a power play. The impetus for this wonderful scientific research must surely be our loving care for the infirm among us rather than our ambition to achieve control of our own destiny. The former is an acknowledgement of our weakness and our need for one another, the latter merely another bite on that apple from the tree of wisdom and knowledge, taking us even further from the paradise of God's dreams. ■

—John Honner SJ

Transplants and rejections

It is often claimed that missionaries are agents of colonialism. But both defenders and opponents of the view tend to assume that missionaries have been more successful than is in fact the case.

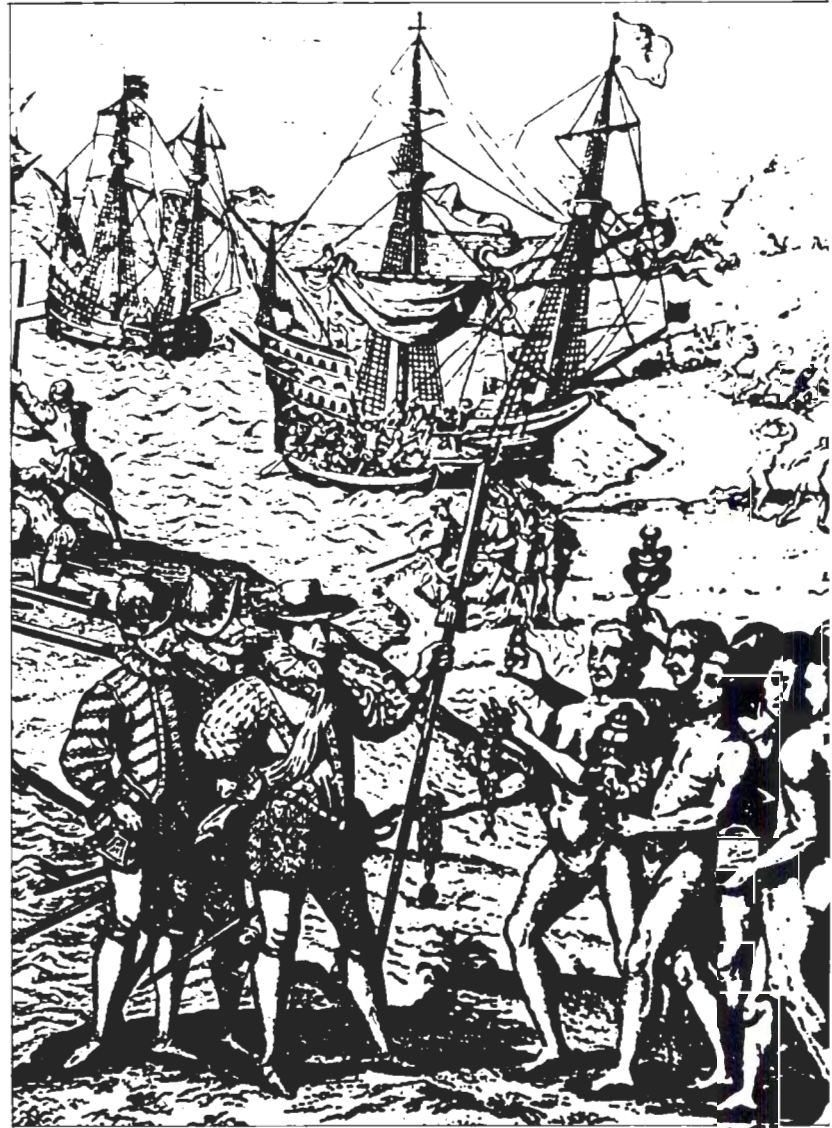
I WANT TO QUESTION AN ATTITUDE towards the role of Catholic missions in the oppression of Amerindians since the time of Columbus. This attitude was expressed most dramatically by Amerindians themselves, in an open letter addressed to the Pope on the occasion of his first visit to Peru: 'We, Indians of the Andes and America, have decided to take advantage of the visit of Pope John Paul II to return his Bible because in 500 years it has given us neither love, nor peace, nor justice. Please give it back to our oppressors because they need its moral precepts more than we ... It was the ideological arm of the colonial assault.'

The academic version of this attitude fills out that final sentence (itself a sign that a kind of academic missionary has been successful among some Amerindians). It would go something like this: In the name of pacifying the Indians and harnessing their labour power, Catholic Christianity was successfully imposed on them and, with varying degrees of intention on the part of successive generations of missionaries, became a sort of hegemonic ideology.

In other words, Catholic Christianity's myths and models for living became the means through which colonial and neo-colonial rule was established over the Indians. I shall examine how well this view fits what we know of four phases of Catholic missionary activity in Brazil.

The Jesuits and the Tupi-Guarani, 1549-1767

The Portuguese Crown was always less subtle than the Spanish in its attitude to the Indians, and agonised less about them. The 16th century historian João de Barros probably represented Portuguese attitudes accurately when he wrote ... 'that the church gave the Portuguese a free hand to make war without provocation on non-



*The arrival of Columbus in America. Theodor de Bry, C16th
Photo: Missio*

Christian peoples, to reduce them into slavery and to seize their lands since they were "unjust possessors of them". The infidel, in the eyes of the Portuguese, had neither rights of property nor personal rights. The salvation of his soul justified the loss of his personal liberty.'

This suggests an attempt to give religious legitimacy to the suppression of the Indians, rather than hegemonic control over the Indians themselves. But key Jesuits working among the Guarani would have none of such legitimations, although in their desire to protect Indians from Crown and colonists they did work hard to establish a kind of ideological hegemony.

For these Jesuits, protection implied conversion—indeed, one of the principal reasons for protecting the Indians was to save them from the corrupting influence of the colonists, as well as from enslavement. Initially the Jesuits seem to have thought that it would be easier to convert Indians than Moors and Jews—the Indians seemed to have no idols, and little religion of their own. In their spirit of thunder, Tupa or Tupana, they seemed to have some intuition of God. In their myths they seemed to have some knowledge of the Flood; and there were signs that the ubiquitous St Thomas had passed through, leaving vague collective memories to build on. [When Portuguese missionaries reached India, they dis-

covered a Christian community that claimed to have been founded by St Thomas the Apostle.]

But, as well as having to dodge the Indians' sports of death—war and cannibalism—the Jesuits encountered several problems. One was the Indians' nomadic way of life, which, the Jesuits slowly discovered, involved a prophetic tradition of belief in an earthly paradise. A start towards conversion would be made, then Indians would move on and conversion/protection would have to begin all over again. Other problems included the lack of a centralised political authority, so that a strategy of converting leaders was not possible, the Indians' stubborn attachment to their shamans, and their exuberantly cheerful immorality.

There was another problem, which the Jesuits did not recognise but which, I would suggest, was the greatest problem for their project of conversion. This was the identification by the Indians of the Jesuits as *maira*, or especially powerful shamans. So identified, the Jesuits were confined within Indian beliefs about the order of things, and their prospects of winning converts curtailed.

To deal with the problems they did recognise, the Jesuits decided that conversion/protection required subjection of the Indians to colonial authority—meaning subjection to enlightened officers of the Crown, not to local colonists. Under Mem de Sa, the third governor of Brazil, who arrived in 1557, the famous 'reductions' were set up: Indians were gathered together into Jesuit-controlled settlements, curtailing nomadic tendencies. The Jesuits then selected political leaders, through whom they policed their version of moral behaviour.

FROM THAT TIME TO THE PRESENT, controversy has raged about the rights and wrongs, the achievements and disasters, of the reductions. Defenders of the Jesuits cite their success in protecting the Indians from enslavement and extermination by the settlers. They point out that the Jesuits tried to engage with Indian culture, rather than simply to replace it, producing dictionaries of the Indian languages and allowing native music and dance in religious ceremonies. Great care was given to building Christianity on foundations that the Jesuits believed, mistakenly, were there in Indian cosmology and language. And the defenders of the Jesuits point to the disasters that resulted when, in a peculiar collusion of Enlightenment statebuilding with colonial covetousness, the Jesuits were expelled in 1767: the Indians were wiped out along most of the east coast of Brazil.

Critics of this view argue that the Jesuits did very well out of the reductions, which incorporated the Indians into a tightly controlled capitalist enterprise that the Jesuits ran for their own benefit. I am not concerned to adjudicate between these competing views; my interest is to see whether the Jesuit missions can in fact be characterised as the 'ideological arm of the colonial assault'. I doubt that they can, and here I present my tendentious questions and a few sketches of answers.

1. Allowing that the Jesuit missions might themselves be represented as some sort of colonial assault, do we not have to distinguish between various colonial assaults that in this case are in conflict with one another?

2. Given that the Jesuits were, judged by word and action, attempting to stave off and contain other colonial assaults—and, despite dreadful failures like that depicted in the film *The Mission*, were frequently successful during a period of more than 200 years—what basis is there for the case that they represent the ideological arm of the assaults of Crown and colonists? Not much, unless it be maintained that insofar as the Jesuits did convert the Indians, they weakened them for self-defence. This argument cannot be sustained, and one reason why it cannot is suggested by my third question.

3. Did the Jesuits succeed in converting the Indians to a hegemonic ideology at all? There are documented cases of Jesuits being frustrated to discover, from time to time, that they and their myths had been incorporated into an intact Indian system of beliefs about the world and its inhabitants. A description of Indians and Indian settlements made 50 years after the dispersion of the reductions suggests that descendants of the refugees were both fitting into the subordinate place allowed them in colonial society and maintaining a sort of cosmological independence from it.

1810

In this year Henry Koster, an Englishman resident in north-east Brazil for most of the years from 1809 until his death in 1820, travelled north and, fortunately for us, recorded his astute observations in *Travels in Brazil*. In Ceara he visited some Indian villages, in one of which the vicar 'resided in a building which had formerly belonged to the Jesuits'. Koster notes what presumably he was told on this occasion, possibly because what he was told accorded with what he later observed personally in Pernambuco: that surviving Indian groups maintained a secret Indian religious life and, unlike blacks, refused integration into the society and culture of their conquerors. Let me quote you some passages from this good Anglican gentleman's descriptions of these villages.

'The Indians of these villages, and indeed of all those which I passed through, are Christians; though it is said that some few of them follow in secret their own heathenish rites, paying adoration to the *maraca*, and practising all the customs of their religion. When the Roman Catholic religion does take root in them, it of necessity degenerates into the most abject superstition.

There was another problem, which the Jesuits did not recognise but which was the greatest problem for their project of conversion ... the identification by the Indians of the Jesuits as especially powerful shamans. So identified, they were confined within Indian beliefs about the order of things.

An adherence to superstitious rites, whether of Roman Catholic ordination or prescribed by their own faith, appears to be the only part of their character in which they show any constancy.

'The Indians are in general a quiet and inoffensive people ... Their lives are certainly not passed in a pleasant manner under the eye of a director, by whom they are imperiously treated; consequently it is not surprising that they should do all in their power to leave their villages and be free from an immediate superior; but even when they have escaped the irksome dominion of the director, they never settle in one place ... [The Indian's] favourite pursuits are fishing and hunting; a lake or rivulet will alone induce him to be stationary for any length of time. He has a sort of independent feeling, which makes him spurn anything like a wish to deprive him of his own free agency; to the director he submits, because it is out of his power to resist.'

Koster goes on to write about the remarkable persistence among the Indians of what he regards as vices and virtues of 'the savage life'. His lists of vices, in particular, sound much like the lists of Jesuits two centuries before.

I suggest that Koster's account of Indians and Indian communities in the early years of the 19th century amounts to a testimony that, despite their defeat and pacification in areas of white settlement, the Indians had successfully resisted ideological or cultural domination by missionaries.

Interestingly enough, Koster was disposed to believe that conversion to Catholicism might work to subdue and control. Running through his *Travels* there are many comparisons with negroes who, he believes, had been so tamed—'if men are to exist as slaves, this is doubtless the religion which is the best adapted to persons in a state of subjection' (Koster, 128). But his stories and descriptions all suggest that the Indians were good neither as slave labour nor as free, precisely because they had never been successfully

ideologically softened for the colonial assault through successful conversion.

The Jesuit mission among the Rikbakca, 1962-1973

In his 'Missionaries and frontiersmen as agents of social change among the Rikbakca' Robert A. Hahn reviews the apparent destruction of Rikbakca culture and the successful invasion by whites of their territory, despite the efforts of Jesuit missionaries, following old patterns, to protect the Indians by gathering them into a reserve. He acknowledges some successes on the part of the mission—territorial consolidation, and regularisation of

economic and political relations with outsiders. But in all of this, Hahn claims, the Rikbakca had no choice. He sums up his argument thus:

'In this work of pacification, the missionaries claim to be the servants of God; I have argued they are the servants of industrial society. In seeking to save the souls of Rikbakca and to promote Rikbakca well-being, they have led the reduction of the Rikbakca population and the restriction of its life-space; Rikbakca have become orphans of their past and foster children of a society which wants not them, but resources of the land they lived from.'

Here again is the notion of the missionary as an agent of colonial assault. But all the evidence Hahn presents on the sequence of events suggests to me that although catechesis and conversion came before the destruction of Rikbakca culture, they were accompaniments rather than causes of this destruction. Blaming the missionaries amounts to arguing *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. And again, there is not much evidence that real Catholic christianising took place at all. All the evidence points to the fact that the frontiersmen and industrial products have been much more important than the Catholic message itself in subverting the Indian way of life.

The Council of the Indigenous Missionary—1970s to the present

I came across the *Open Letter to Pope John Paul* quoted above—the most eloquent statement of the line that I am questioning—in an article by Dom Pedro Casaldaliga. Dom Pedro is the bishop of a frontier diocese, a member of the Council of the Indigenous Missionary (a pastoral commission of the Brazilian Bishops' Conference) and a protagonist of liberation theology: he cited the letter with approval and endorsement. I take issue with him in order to ask, as dramatically as I can, one final question of the line: is the Catholic missionary enterprise so uniform that it has had, and still has, the capacity of uniform effect, i.e. subversion of any and all Indian ways of life?

Dom Pedro describes the work of the Council of the Indigenous Missionary as a complete inversion of the 500-year history of evangelisation that he condemns. Catholic missionary endeavour is now to be profoundly anti-colonial, distinguished by what he calls inculturation rather than by imposition of a Europeanised and dogmatised Catholic culture that must not be equated with faith in Jesus of the Gospels. It is to be distinguished also by 'incarnation in specific time and place, in the struggles, the hopes and processes of all the people of this great country'.

Two elements of this new ideology are worthy of note. First, the missionary defines himself or herself as living out a Christian vocation through acts of solidarity with Indians in their struggle for land rights and for physical and cultural survival. This solidarity is not passive, for the missionary has something to offer: in dialogue with indigenous peoples, the missionary par-

*In the new ideology,
Indian societies are
redefined. Their
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missionaries!*

ticipates in a 'conscientisation' of them into a deeper understanding of their liberation struggle.

Second, Indian societies are redefined. Their struggle for survival is drawn into a Judaeo-Christian narrative of the journey of liberation, from the Exodus onward. Those myths and habits of Indians that the Jesuits of the early reductions found so problematic—like the nomadic habit at the call of shaman-prophets—are reinterpreted so that the mission to the Indians becomes a mission for the renewal of missionaries! The Indians, in their quests for earthly paradise, the land without evil, are seen as archetypal seekers after the Kingdom of God on earth.

This brief outline of the Council's inversions of at least some previous Catholic missionary projects does, I think, establish grounds for questioning the uniformity of Catholic missionary attitudes. Let me finish with two examples, which suggest that, even at a time when Catholic missions have 'got their act together' in a way not seen since the first Jesuit reductions, there are interesting variations.

The Little Sisters of Tapirape share the incarnational theology of the Council of the Indigenous Missionary but exhibit less of its liberationist historicism. They do not approach the Indians through an appropriation of their myths but believe that a sort of incarnational dialectics will follow from sharing the work of daily survival and developing individual friendships. That seems to me a rather profound difference from the Council's position, though of the kind we shall get used to as we abandon stereotypes of uniformity and further question the myths of Catholic missionary history.

The second example departs even further from the practice and vision of the Council. The Salesian mission of São Marcos, like the Jesuit reductions of old, has succeeded admirably in securing the physical survival of about 2000 Xavante Indians. The Salesians, most of whom are Italian, are as firmly in control of their Indians as ever the Jesuits were; and, with the additional power that modern technology gives them, they may well embody the myth of the missionary as the ideological arm of colonial assault. At the same time, of course, their very departure from the models provided by the Little Sisters and the Council of the Indigenous Missionary suggests that the myth radically homogenises Catholic missions in Brazil. ■

Rowan Ireland is director of the Institute of Latin American Studies at La Trobe University.

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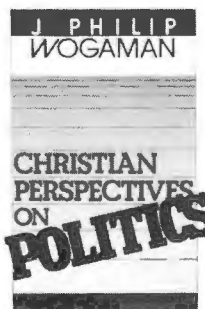
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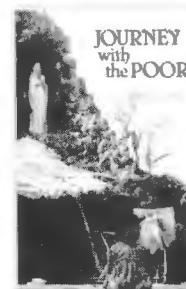


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A touch of soap-powder Gothic

SHE WALKS INTO THE LAUNDROMAT and casts a disapproving eye over the place and its occupants. Including me. Well, I can't blame her for that. I hate laundromats. Or rather, I hate sitting in laundromats. All that time spent watching one's clothes revolve in the drier, with everyone else in the place looking equally oppressed by the same tedious exercise. It's even worse than being in the queue at a doctor's surgery, stuck next to a hypochondriac who wants to tell you about his ailments. At least in a doctor's surgery you can hope that the doctor will do something painful to the hypochondriac.

In laundromats, a malicious Quixotic imagination offers no consolation. I can't, for example, hope that the two racist bores who have been lecturing me about Asian immigration for the past half-hour will find that their clothes have been shredded by the washing machine. If that happened, it would keep them here longer. The lecture, delivered by the woman between bursts of instructing her male companion how to separate the clothes and allocate them between machines, is about falling quarantine standards. Apparently, the ethnic hordes who frequent laundromats are the bearers of hideous communicable diseases. 'You've always got to use the hot-water cycle,' declares the she-bore. 'You can't be too careful.' I am not sure whether this unsolicited advice on sartorial hygiene is addressed to me or the he-bore. If the latter, he ignores it too. He is busy trying to force a bent \$1 coin into the slot on the washing machine. He succeeds only in jamming the slot, and the machine becomes inoperable.

After a cursory inspection of the he-and-she bores, I decide that there is probably considerable health risk in using a washing machine after *them*. I also decide that there is little future in making this judgment out loud, and turn my attention to the recent arrival. She has caught the drift of the she-bores' monologue, and the odoriferous drift of the he-and-she bores themselves, and wrinkles her nose. Perhaps she thinks that I endorse the she-bore's opinions, for she does not return my smile. I think there will be no racist sermons from her, for the cut of the clothes, the cut of the hair, and a battery of stickers adorning the backpack in which she carries her washing all broadcast the message 'politically correct'.

The PC young woman, feeling my gaze on her, turns aside as she empties the contents of the backpack into a machine. This is laundromat etiquette, an unspoken way of declaring 'these are very private things I'm washing so don't stare.' I don't, of course. But I decide that I will break one of my rules and persist with an attempt to draw her into conversation. Even the rigidities of the politically correct are preferable to the theories of the he-and-she bores.

Having discreetly deposited her soiled whatever-they-were in a washing machine, Ms PC produces a book from a sidepouch on the backpack and takes a seat. She

is not absorbed in the book and from time to time she looks up, ready to repel advances from the he-and-she bores or myself. I glance at the book's cover. It is *The Portable Nietzsche*. This may provide a topic of conversation that will confound the he-and-she bores, so I take a chance.

'I wonder whether Nietzsche is really appropriate reading in a laundromat.'

'Why?'

'Oh, I've always thought that some things are beyond soap and water.'

The expression on Ms PC's face passes from distaste to contempt. 'I think Nietzsche would be very proud of being read in a laundromat', she says, turning away again.

Rebuffed. OK, so it was an excruciatingly bad joke and she probably thought I was making fun of her. Now I'm at the mercy of the he-and-she bores again.

Fortunately, they too have found some reading matter. It is a magazine, either *People* or *The Picture*, and the she-bore is reading out bits of it to the he-bore. It is an article about *The Addams Family*—the television series, not the movie—and the gist of it is that most of the cast have died of cancer. Why this should be significant the article does not appear to explain, but the he-and-she bores are overjoyed at finding another medical conspiracy theory. He responds with 'oohs' and 'aahs' as she announces each succeeding revelation: 'An' it says Gomez is dead, an' Lurch, an' Uncle Fester!'

'Maybe they caught it in a laundromat?' I volunteer. He-and-she glare at me. They think I am making fun of them, too. They're right.

I shrink into the solitude of my seat, wondering if the drier will ever get through its cycle. Perhaps it is the hypnotic effect of the revolving tub and the hum of machinery, or perhaps it is the heady smell of soap powder and the he-and-she bores, but I begin to hallucinate. The images of Lurch and Fester and Grandma Addams swarm before my eyes, and as I look across to where the he-and-she bores are sitting, they appear to be transformed into the ghouls I already believe them to be. I turn to Ms PC to see if she has noticed, and find that she is now a kind of Wednesday Addams clone, complete with faintly menacing curl of the lip on an otherwise impassive face.

The horror passes, and I return to laundromat reality as the drier with my clothes in it grinds to a halt. As I retrieve them, a man enters the laundromat, checks a still-turning drier and sits down. He too has a book. Deciding that bad luck can't really run in threes, even in a Gothic laundromat, I glance at the title.

It is *The Poem of the Man-God*. I grab my clothes and run. ■

Ray Cassin is production editor of *Eureka Street*.



Don't kiss me, Hardy

'A Vaudeville of Devils' III

James Griffin concludes his analysis of recently discovered correspondence between John Wren, H.V. Evatt and friends.

SO WHAT ISSUES ARE RAISED by the recently discovered letters from Dr H.V. Evatt to John Wren? And by related materials about Evatt, Wren, the Australian Labor Party, the Catholic Church, Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory*, and those (e.g. Manning Clark, ABC television) who accepted Hardy's portrayal of Wren as an evil, underworld figure. According to Hardy, Wren was a sort of Al Capone, working with the Catholic Church, and especially with Archbishop Mannix, to corrupt the ALP and subvert its socialist ideals.

A first and unavoidable observation is that Alice Evatt did not tell her husband's authorised biographer, Kylie Tennant, that he and John Wren had been friends, and that for at least eight years she herself had been solicitous for the welfare of Wren's daughter, Mary. Alice Evatt must have visited Studley Hall. She, and perhaps other Evatt family members, could have spared Tennant her indignation at the fact that Mannix and Wren—with his 'finger in the underworld and more than a finger in Labor politics'—were friends. I presume that correspondence from Wren was destroyed personally by Evatt, or is in his archive but has been overlooked. Did the Evatts drop Wren after the publication of *Power Without Glory*? Hardy maintains that Clive Evatt offered to defend him without a fee. (*The Hard Way*, p 164)

It will not surprise observers of Evatt that he was frenetically ambitious, captious of honours—apart from knighthoods—and careless of the conventions by which they were granted, and paranoid about those who held views contrary to his own (e.g. Sir Gilbert Dyett in Letter H). In 1944 Evatt asked Mannix to silence the *Catholic Worker's* opposition to his 'powers' referendum. Of course, Mannix did not. But Evatt is not the pure wheeler-dealer. His stern refusal to back down over Franco and the United Nations at the request, relayed through Wren, of two politically influential archbishops—almost certainly Mannix and Duhig—establishes him as a man of principle and foreshadows his later refusal to support the banning of the Communist Party.

Evatt treats Wren as a man of profound influence, at least in Victoria and Queensland, and even of residual

clout with the non-Labor Prime Minister, Joseph Lyons. Did he have personal ground for this? Was Jack Lang correct in suggesting that Wren was influential in having Evatt and McTiernan put on the High Court in 1930, during Prime Minister Scullin's absence overseas and against Scullin's wishes? Lyons was Labor's Acting Treasurer at the time.

But what did Evatt get from his association with Wren? Not the appointment to the judicial committee of the Privy Council (Letters A-B. For details of these and the other letters see *Eureka Street*, August and September 1992). And Wren did not get Evatt on to the Advisory War Council. Evatt did that himself, gradually, and during that time never looked like becoming Prime Minister. He surely got campaign funds (Letters E-G). I don't know yet how the repatriation issue in Letter H was settled. Evatt did become Deputy Prime Minister in 1946 but not, it seems, through Wren. The five candidates and their scores on the first ballot were: Evatt (27), Ward (22), Dedman (12), Calwell (11), Drakeford (4). With preferences distributed Evatt (43/33) defeated Ward who got all the votes of his fellow dissident, Calwell, and only those. (P. Weller, ed., *Caucus Minutes*, vol 3, p399)

Contrary to the *Daily Telegraph's* (4 October 1946) and Evatt's prediction of a non-New South Welshman being favoured to balance Prime Minister Chifley, both Evatt and Ward came from the same state as their leader. The vote was along right/left lines, it seems. How much did Evatt understand about what was going on in the ALP?

FOR THAT MATTER, HOW INFLUENTIAL WAS WREN, even in Victoria? Chris McConville has cogently discounted the idea of a Tammany machine boss even being possible in Australia.¹ In 1924, at the height of his alleged powers in Collingwood, Richmond and Fitzroy, Wren was unable to prevent the socialist, Maurice Blackburn, from becoming the endorsed candidate for Fitzroy electorate. And in the following year Wren's notable henchman, 'Sugar' Roberts, was temporarily expelled from the par-

ty for his actions against Blackburn. Roberts was himself still being refused endorsement for municipal elections in 1935, although in the intervening period he had been Collingwood ALP branch president.²

Wren was unable to prevent John Cain from defeating his family friend, Herbert Cremean, for the state ALP leadership in the late '30s. The federal electorate of Yarra, which included Richmond, was represented through the 'Wren cra' and until the 1955 ALP split by Frank Tudor, James Scullin and S.M. Keon. Biographies of Tudor (*Australian Dictionary of Biography* vol.12) and Scullin (see *Eureka Street*, August 1992) make absurd the notion that they took orders from Wren, though certainly Scullin and Wren were friends. Wren

may have had no more luck influencing these leaders than he did with Jack Lang (*ibid*).

WHAT IS INDUBITABLE is that he gave money both for electoral expenses and for personal loans. Letters in this regard have come to light from P.J. Kennelly and E.G. Theodore. In this regard, however, we can make an analogy with Wren's relationship to the Collingwood Football Club, which he is generally thought to have almost 'owned'. Richard Stremski's *Kill for Collingwood* (1986) shows clearly that Wren was principal patron from World War I until his death, but he was not chairman of selectors or backroom 'president'.

Stan Keon's attack on Wren in the Victorian Parliament in 1948 raises a major problem in interpreting Wren's influence and methods. Speaking on a Trotting Bill that would affect Wren's interests, Keon said: 'Those who can be bought will be bought. Those who can be intimidated will be intimidated. Those who have honour and integrity will be won over by donations to some charitable cause.'

This statement would seem to support Hardy. Keon had won preselection for Richmond in 1945 by overcoming Wrenite branch-stacking. In 1948, however, he had his sights on Scullin's seat, which was expected to go to Jack Cremean, who was a 'Wrenite', a former secretary to Arthur Calwell, and the brother of Herbert Cremean. Eventually Keon scuttled Cremean's chances: there was more to his diatribe than an attack on corruption.

The Wren legend made a melodrama of that too. That evening Keon was rung up, by a noted clergyman, among others (personal communication Keon—Griffin, June 1986), and told not to take his usual walk home through Fitzroy gardens. However, as Keon said, he at no stage received threats of violence from Wren and did not believe Wren directly responsible even for the bashings that occasionally took place around polling booths. Richmond, he said, was 'just a bit tougher' than other places. Keon had more trouble when campaigning against Jim Cairns in 1955: windows smashed, dead cats thrown inside, etc. (*Copping It Sweet: Shared Memories of Richmond*, 1988). And, incidentally, to complicate neat theories, while Jack Cremean got the Hoddle seat in 1949 as a consolation prize, he sacrificed it in 1955

when he could have gone with 'Wrenites' and mainstream Labor.

Catholic churchmen were in a favourable position to know about Wren's allegedly evil doings. Patrick Phelan, Bishop of Sale (1912-25), (see *ADB*, vol.11) a scholarly and honourable man, was parish priest in Collingwood from 1896 to 1900, when Wren was on the make. Phelan publicly acknowledged Wren as a friend as well as benefactor. Conservative Catholic leaders, such as Dr Nicholas O'Donnell (*ADB*, vol.11) and Dr A. Kenny (*ADB* vol.9), would surely have warned Mannix off association with Wren in 1913 if he had really been in the underworld. O'Donnell was the brother of Detective-Sergeant Dave O'Donnell, whose house, Hardy believes, was bombed on Wren's orders. Hardy's research, however, evidently did not lead him to the *Gisborne Gazette* (2 April 1926) where the victim exonerates Wren from blame, as he did at the time.

There were advisers, however, who quite reasonably believed that Mannix had compromised himself by associating with Wren. As Calwell said, Wren lived 'by the principles of commercial morality'—political, too—and that left 'much to be desired.' (Preface, H. Buggy, *The Real John Wren*, 1977, xi-xiii). But in general, those who dealt with Wren admired him as a man of probity. Evatt obviously thought so. Still, there are problems in assessing the relationship of Mannix and Wren. Fr William Hackett SJ (*ADB* vol.9) was, at least after World War II, an intimate of the Wren household as well as Mannix's confidant. In a series of ingenuous letters to his sister in Ireland, which he had no reason to think would end up in the Jesuit archives in Australia, Hackett described Wren as 'a man of high principle, of deep religious feeling' (2/7/51); 'somewhat dull, because his main interests are money and the power that results' (20/7/51); and 'extremely generous' although 'he never gives me money' [for the Central Catholic Library].

Hackett was shocked by *Power Without Glory* and the verdict at Hardy's trial (1951), and Mannix told his clergy that he 'never had any idea or suspicions that Wren had engaged' in any of the dubious activities described in the book (N. Brennan, *John Wren—Gambler*, pp215-6). But Mannix and Hackett surely discussed the 1948 attack on Wren by the staunch Catholic Actionist, Keon. A person who should be able to throw light on Wren's relationship with Mannix and the Movement is B.A. Santamaria, but so far he has not chosen to do so.

Finally there is Frank Hardy, and his claims that *Power Without Glory* is based on scholarly research. In an interview published in *The Canberra Times* (23 August 1992), Hardy commented on my article in the August *Eureka Street*, and on a report of it in *The Sunday Age* (2 August 1992). He was reported as saying that apparently the Jesuits and *The Age* (*sic*) were 'out to get'

*Hardy is a
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himself and Manning Clark. Clark's obsequies last year were conducted at St Christopher's Catholic Cathedral in Canberra with the Rev. Dr J. J. Eddy SJ presiding.

Hardy claims that Clark used to consult him for 'facts' on Wren and Henry Lawson (about whom Clark is also inaccurate). Moreover, he has returned to an allegation which he had previously seemed to recant (*Who shot George Kirkland?*), that Ellen Wren committed adultery, had a son by a bricklayer employed at Studley Hall and was ostracised intramurally by her husband. Hardy says he has fresh evidence. But even if such evidence is forthcoming, would it excuse a 'revelation' that in itself had no public benefit, and humiliated an elderly woman and her family?

HARDY, AN INEXHAUSTIBLE WINDBAG, has for decades cited a theory of 'composite' characterisation in regard to *Power Without Glory*. But in fact, even in the most trivial details the identifications are clear. For example, the distinctive name of Mrs Wren's defunct child is given to the allegedly illicit offspring. (For that matter, he gave John West's eldest daughter the same married name, Andreas, as Wren's). Hardy is a 'biographer' when it suits him, and a novelist with a creative writer's freedom when he wants to take liberties with the facts.

After Wren's death, Fr Hackett wrote (19/11/53) to his sister about 'poor Mrs Wren ... She told me many wonderful things about her husband. The priest who married them over 50 years ago said—"You are not marrying a man, you are marrying a miracle".' Hardly the words of a wife as ill-treated as Ellen Wren is alleged to have been.

Hardy is insistent that his research on Wren went far beyond pub crawls in Richmond and Collingwood and bar talk with such inner-suburban notables as Cornelius Loughnan and 'Sugar' Roberts, the reportage of which relies on Hardy's memory. I can well believe that he and his aides visited the Mitchell and Victorian State libraries and read royal commission reports, parliamentary debates and newspaper files. But what Hardy will not tell us is what he found in these places that seems to have eluded scholars e.g. information on the murders and mayhem allegedly masterminded by Wren.

One of the most vehement denunciations of Wren during 1901-10 came from a certain Cornelius Crowe (*The Inquiry Agent*, 1909), whom Hardy may have read. No less than Detective-Sergeant O'Donnell called Crowe 'a half-daft sort of fellow, who nursed a grievance against members of Parliament and all from the Chief Commissioner downwards. He was continually making false and libellous statements which emanated in his own crazy cranium.' (*Gisborne Gazette*, 2/4/1926).

Other material that Hardy did read, from *The Bulletin* and *The Lone Hand*, falls far short of the indictments of *Power Without Glory*.

Wren was no saint. He made his fortune by breaking the law. And a stupid law it was, too—the tote has been legal now for decades. To break that law with impunity, however, Wren would have needed enforcers. It

would be naive not to imagine that he paid bribes and interfered with witnesses against him. In a tough society that discriminated against his class he acted in objectionable ways but they were ways that, judging by his popularity, the workers of Collingwood felt were justified.

From the closure of the Johnston St tote in 1906, by which time he may have been a millionaire, Wren would seem to have been a law-abiding productive sports entrepreneur and businessman with a flair for political meddling (as, say, Herbert Brookes was among the conservatives). There is no doubt that he enlisted some politicians to look after his interests but there were others, like Frank Brennan, whom he helped without expecting reciprocal favours. The least he was entitled to expect was a presumption of innocence before being believed guilty of Al Capone-type crimes.

Power Without Glory and the ill-advised court action taken against Hardy reversed the onus of proof. In 1976 an ABC television series entrenched the ethnosectarian prejudice of the book, and the evil of John Wren is now part of folklore.

ON THE DAY BEFORE John and Ellen Wren's last surviving offspring died, the *Good Weekend* magazine (11 April 1992) ran an article by a hometown pagliaccio, Vince Sorrenti, on local monuments unlisted by the National Trust but 'part of the psyche of each city' in Australia. Among them was the Tote Hotel in Collingwood, 'steeped in history ... emblematic of the people in its neighbourhood. The "infamous underworld figure, John Wren" ... between the wars and beyond ... used the Tote as the centre of his activities ... regular drinkers tell stories about Wren and the secret tunnels under the road to his SP bookmaking office'!

There are four gross errors of fact there but the crowning one (or is it two?) is (are): 'He was a feared man among the locals of Collingwood, or Carringbush, as it was then known.'

It is tempting to add to the Wren legend and have John F. Wren expiring after reading that *Good Weekend* with Henry Ford's dictum, 'History is bunk', on his lips or, better still, with the final words of Leoncavallo's clown: 'La commedia e finita!' ■

James Griffin is emeritus professor of history at the University of Papua New Guinea.

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance with research of Mr Geoffrey Browne.

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Orientalizations

In China with Peter Pierce,
Emmanuel Santos
and Hwa Goh.

In Vietnam with Robin Gerster

Bemused in Shanghai

DIAGONALLY OPPOSITE THE SHANGHAI HILTON, and resting for parts of each day in its shadow, is one of the city's many People's Parks. There, on an April morning two women are receiving ballroom dancing lessons on an open-air stage. In a wooded corner of the park, at a table that they long ago commandeered, six old men smoke and play cards. Another man walks past, staring intensely at the two white billiard balls in his right hand. Nearby someone practises Tai Chi. Seen on its home ground, this Western fad of the 1980s seems to channel the aggression that proximity to so many other humans must build in the Chinese.

These outwardly familiar urban scenes are more disquieting than the shocks about which we have been forewarned: the jammed buses pushing past on cue;

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street-markets with frogs and snakes for sale; grey, desperately overcrowded, low-rise apartment buildings up each alley, and always, the invasive, deranging din of honking and hawking.

In the park, because it is quieter, we are able to hear the question of the young man who politely accosts us. 'What is the capital of Saskatchewan?' he asks, with no more introduction than 'Excuse me'. Is there a penalty for the right answer? Telling him that I think the provincial capital is Regina, not Saskatoon, I mention that actually we are Australians. He's not bothered.

Back in the tumult of the main thoroughfares of Shanghai, carts drawn by spavined donkeys compete for right of way with buses and the ubiquitous fleets of bicyclists. When traffic clears, it is most likely because of an accident or an arrest. On our first night, coming in

from the airport, passing through ill-lit streets and between high grey walls that hid houses used as the dwellings of rich Europeans in the film *Empire of the Sun*, we skirt a fatal head-on collision.

Daylight reveals a subway system that has not progressed far beyond the random demolition of parts of city blocks. Toiling in shop doorways and at the heads of alleys are not only the predictable bicycle repairmen, but others who, by mending disposable cigarette lighters, are working to some incalculably small economy of means. Everywhere bamboo scaffolding props buildings that teeter out over the footpaths. Life in the alleys means communal toilets, telephones, wash troughs, ovens. Bedding is briefly and constantly aired for the next shift of sleepers.

Here is the semblance of an austere but vital communal life, yet it is palpably menaced. Along one alley a chauffeur-driven limousine nuzzles its way, stopping every 20 metres or so for the well-heeled, fleshy men in the back to work their extortion on the people of the neighbourhood. And five minutes walk away is the Shanghai Hilton. In its vast lobby, men and women move as if in narcotised slow motion to shift dust back and forth across the marble floors.

For centuries Shanghai, the economic powerhouse of China, complained that much of the wealth it produced was milked by Beijing, the northern capital. Now Shanghai faces competition from the south, from the freed-up economic zone centred on Guangzhou and Shenzhen. The belated first reaction of the city officials of Shanghai was to institute a massive urban clearance operation. Nowadays visitors to the city are conducted with pride not to the majestic stone European buildings of the Bund, but to the eight-lane highway being blasted along its route.

Works of engineering are greater cause for civic gratification than the Museum of Chinese Antiquities. A new inner city tunnel was proudly exhibited to us on three consecutive days. We were taken one afternoon to the Huangpu River, a tributary of the Yangtze, which divides Shanghai east and west. The trip was not to view the marvellously varied river traffic, but in order that we might be driven in a slow, looping progress around the ramps that led to the new Huangpu bridge.

*Photo on previous page:
Bicyclist in front the
Italian Concession, early
morning, Tianjin
Photo: Emmanuel Santos.*



The destination was Pudong, that is, east of the Huangpu River. This is an enormous factory and financial development whose 30-metre long banner proclaims that the centre is 'Building Shanghai into a foreign-oriented, multi-fondontal [sic] modern cosmopolis'. Set among condemned blocks of flats, market gardens and beetling hills of black coal, Pudong, by Deng's decree, will be the centre of the commercial revitalisation of Shanghai. Here such 'little economic tigers' of Asia as Singapore and South Korea will be challenged. And nearby, city officials hope, a track will be built as the base for the return of horse racing and its attendant gambling revenue to China. Already Guangzhou and

offered a richer experience of Chinese eclecticism even than the Pudong banner. In the first of them, a concert began in admonitory fashion with *The East is Red*, the Maoist anthem adapted from a Shaanxi folk song, before the band broke into *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*. Everywhere in China the musical accompaniment to one's travels was perplexing. At the Hilton brunch on Easter Sunday, Western-style opera singers performed arias from Handel's *Messiah*. Perched above the dining room, they looked down on a hulking papier-mâché model of the Arc de Triomphe. When, in a French restaurant in Beijing, the management learned our nationality, the resident harpist played *Click Go the Shears*. In one middle school's excellently equipped language laboratory, advanced students of English were being instructed that morning from a tape of The Seekers asking *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?* Just one of the many solecisms I committed in China was to have remarked that this was a protest song in America at the time of the Vietnam War.

Tea house toff: An actor from Beijing Opera at a tea house in Tianjin. A troupe from the Opera performs at the tea house on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

Photo: Hwa Goh

China bans laughter in Tienanmen Square

By CATHERINE SAMPSON and PASCALE TROUILLARD in Beijing

CHINA has banned laughter in the vicinity of Tienanmen Square, where hundreds of people died during protests by economic reforms is partially responsible. Once it was possible to buy someone with a television set or a video recorder, but now that the

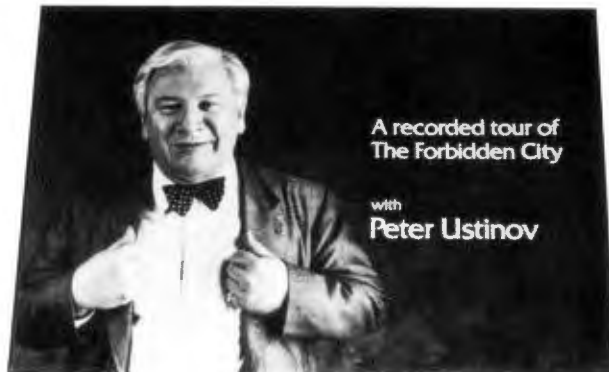
Beijing have staged trial meetings, where Mongolian jockeys came south to ride, and betting was prohibited.

The two middle (high) schools which we visited are in the crook of the approaches to the bridge. They

The second of the middle schools was run by a personable and resourceful man whom my wife identified unerringly as the Oscar Schindler of Shanghai. While his well-furnished and spacious school suggested that he had considerable political pull, he *seemed* iconoclastic, insisting on the need to 'break the iron rice bowl' (that is lifelong guarantees of employment), complaining of the pampered issue of mandatory one-child families. But which ten-

dency or party line were we hearing? Each voice to which one listened in a semi-official setting carried the undertone of political direction.

Nevertheless, this principal had created an oasis in this part of the city. His school is close to a political



prison. Across the road there is a park which was appropriated for the people in 1949, that cut-off date in so much Chinese discourse. But inside the school, the principal tends an English garden of his own planting. So that we could shake hands and wish them well, he pulled two newly-weds from their car. He runs his street, school and students with affable ease. And of course, like Oscar Schindler, he is also a factory manager.

Most Chinese middle schools contain communities of people who live and work on the premises. They may be manufacturing track suits, or ballpoint pens, or black and white television sets. Dormitories, kitchens and dining hall are provided, together with the services of a dentist and a barber, although many Chinese women—apparently objecting to the expenses—clip their hair short and wear wigs. A significant percentage of the wages of other workers in the school—its teachers—must be found from the output of the factory.

Oscar, along with others in his position, receives a share.

POLITICAL OFFICERS UNDERTAKE the surveillance of teaching staff, factory workers and—without evident amusement—such interlopers as we were. Some red-neckerchiefed Young Pioneers also evidently relish the power over classmates of their monitors' roles. In a meeting of students we grieved at how they lived with the consequences of imaginative repression as well, when a girl constructed for us a glum homily on the need for hard work. Her text was 'an old Chinese saying' (we'd hear many): 'Don't wait until your hair turns grey.'

The intellectually domineering notion that China is, as its name indicates, the centre of the world, that its systems of thought are sovereign, is a self-conception at once frightening and beguiling. Its force is exerted on the casual, but attentive traveller, let alone upon those from the West who choose or have to live there. The ultimately self-destructive quality of this mind-set was re-

cently asserted in W.J.F. Jenner's incisive study, *The Tyranny of History. The Roots of China's Crisis* (see review in forthcoming *Eureka Street*). Jenner comments on how 'we outsiders are so readily drawn into this admirably well-invented and restricted past.' Moreover, to the Chinese who uphold its values, 'any other kind of policy seems inferior, if not barbaric, by comparison'.

The mental world of China was also one of the subjects of a more popular treatment of its contemporary life. This was the mini-series, televised earlier this year, *Children of the Dragon*. Adapted by Nicolas Caswell from the novel *The Avenue of Eternal Peace* by a sometime Australian cultural attaché in Beijing, Nicholas Jose, the series did not receive its just deserts from reviewers—a pity, because its perception of bureaucratic obduracy, institutionalised deceit, lying and obstruction as signal modes of official Chinese discourse was acute, almost in spite of the plot.

Hampered by bad dialogue, *Children of the Dragon* also risked dramatising the Beijing massacre in the late spring of 1989, thereby testing production resources and threatening to swamp the smaller scale dramas in its foreground. But these problems had their instructive sides. Will Flynn (Bob Peck), professor of thoracic surgery at Sydney University, turns up in Beijing to seek out Professor Han, his scientific mentor. Han is in political detention, although the Chinese authorities raise an insidious doubt as to whether he had ever existed. Not unreasonably, Flynn is asked the resonantly vulgar question: 'So tell me Doc, what's a bloke like you doing in China?' Near the conclusion of the series, Dr Monica Scott (Linda Cropper, playing an American), opines with her countryfolk's perennial blend of optimism and self-loathing that 'China is everything America isn't and I can be of use here.' Finally she fields a query from the professor: 'You'll stay in this country after what's happened?' ... 'This is China, Will.'

Perhaps unwittingly, *Children of the Dragon* comprehended the drive towards the comfort of cliché that any foreign experience—and especially one as ter-

Vegetarian panda turns carnivorous

A giant panda in Sichuan Province, southwest China, has devoured dozens of goats since January 1991 and still roams freely in villages there, according to yesterday's *Workers'*

throat, severing the veins with its powerful maul.

The panda proceeds to chew the goat's leg, back and finally its head. After the feast, the panda has a sound sleep in the mountain.

rifying as that of China—encourages. The cartoon bubbles given to the characters were the mystifying counterpart of the earnest demystification of China's self-image which was conducted through the narration

of the events at Tienanmen Square. In this aspect of its story, the issue of what one is allowed to believe in China, as distinct from what impressions and judgments of one's own are reliable, was the simpler business of the series.

ON THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY of the June massacre, the Chinese authorities banned laughter in Tienanmen Square. Traces of the damage done to the urban infrastructure by the movement of masses of tanks and troops in from the outskirts of Beijing to assault the students were still palpable in the ruin of roads and bridges, but the interdiction of hilarity had the authentic ring of repression speaking in a language grotesquely inapposite, yet implacable.

The polite forms of hosts' and translators' talk are insidious, as they emphasise—in diplomacy's disingenuous idiom—the 'deep' and 'frank' exchanges that are taking place. Jenner remarks how the Chinese bureaucracies attempt to charm Westerners by making them feel 'that they have a unique rapport with their Chinese hosts and are under some kind of indefinable obligation

not to cause them embarrassment or difficulty.' This fairly summarises what complicated the courtesy with which we were received. And of 1989, as distinct from 1949, there was no mention.

To travel in China is first to plunge into epistemological uncertainty, to be brought to doubt the simplest evidence of one's senses. A cartoon by Qian Rang in the *China Daily* (which is edited by an Australian) depicted two men who halt at a new bridge. Neither will go first. In the end they wade through the stream and come up dripping, arm-in-arm, on the far side. What did the cartoon purport? Was it a criticism of rural backwardness; a caution about Chinese engineering? In fact not at all, but we needed a political refugee to explain to us back in Australia that the reference was to a Deng homily on political struggle: 'Find the stepping stones before you cross the river'.

A sculpture in the Forbidden City shows one lion playing with a ball, another with a child. Which is the mother, which the father? On the correct answer to the riddle that every guide poses to Western tourists depended an understanding of the Chinese traditions of

Permanent public service: Concrete ping-pong table in the Peoples' Park, Tianjin.

Photo: Emmanuel Santos.





*Winter brew:
A boy at a tea house
in Food Street, Tianjin,
pours 'dragon tea',
a traditional winter
dessert made of
rice gruel flavoured
with sugar beans
and other sweeteners.
Photo: Emmanuel Santos.*

childrearing. The excellent Reeb beer of Shanghai, which came in dark winter and pale summer varieties, didn't fool us for long as to the means by which it acquired a brandname. In a Szechuan restaurant in Beijing, however, 'frog family style' looked straight-forward, but 'shredded snake-headed fishmeat' was a worry, as was 'hump's paw'. Was it camel or bear being offered at 220 yuan (\$55) a serve, or some grisly hybrid?

At the same time, China provided brutal material in public view that hardly admitted misinterpretation. In railway stations not far from tourist destinations, posters illustrated not scenic wonders but crimes. One showed a wrecked train which had been bombed by terrorists; the eviscerated corpses of the victims; finally the three condemned men, bearing placards which elaborated their sins.

Rumours complement the surfeit of signs and sights in China. Where do they originate, and whose interests do they serve? Is it true that, before staging the 1990 Asian Games in Beijing, the authorities rounded up many street beggars, packed them into trains for a free ride 200 kilometres away and then dumped them? Was a soccer match interrupted in Shanghai so that a public execution could be staged for the edification of the spectators? Engrossing and horrible, are these stories reinforcements of totalitarian state power, or signs of its terminal decay?

How 'China' seeks to control one's perceptions of it is a principal theme of *The Tyranny of History*,

Children of the Dragon, and of my reflections after a short stay. Country of rumours, it is also a culture of fairy tales. They are routinely preferred in the *China Daily*, which sets its face to the West with a fare of bad news about the rest of the world and good tidings of China, and which prints letters exhorting students to work harder alongside cautionary tales of teenage, especially female, delinquency. Inevitably, this being China, there will be pandas. Exploited in acrobatic shows, merchandised around the world as a benign national symbol, treated with the semblance of veneration, pandas can apparently misbehave as well.

In mid-April, the *China Daily* excelled its regular series of beast fables with the tale of a giant panda that had abandoned eating bamboo to feed on goats. Two paragraphs detailed the manner in which he dismembered the hapless animals. Villagers, 'heartsick to lose so many of their goats ... still see the panda as a state treasure more valuable than their herbs.' In the Yi national language of the people of this village, the panda is nicknamed 'attractive girl' and they take turns looking after it. Blending mystification with coercion, this tall tale is a patent if unfathomable allegory of the political system in China. And it provokes a bemused, horrified laughter that no edict can quell. ■

Peter Pierce, lecturer at the National Centre for Australian Studies at Monash University, visited China earlier this year.

'Here the sharks cruise'

IN DOWNTOWN SAIGON STANDS A BAR called 'Apocalypse Now', its name scrawled in a replica of the title design for Francis Ford Coppola's film. The bar's presence, slightly affronting to travellers who expect the country to repudiate its popular image in America, suggests a couple of contradictory things about Vietnam today. It indicates the country's readiness to refer to its long military ordeal with ironical good humour, and a refusal to wallow in the earnest nihilism of the former adversary; but it also proclaims a wanton embrace of the West.

Vietnam, and especially Saigon—everyone still calls it Saigon, not Ho Chi Minh City—is cashing in on the war. 'Here the sharks cruise,' writes Margaret Drabble in *The Gates of Ivory*, her novel set in Indochina. In contrast with the more ascetic and ideologically pure Hanoi, Saigon is a frankly mercenary place, notoriously vulnerable to foreign influence: in his fictional epic *Saigon*, Anthony Grey speculates that the city could derive its name from the Chinese 'Tsai Con', meaning 'Tribute paid to the West'. But it would be wrong to view Saigon as an aberration. What is happening there, actively encouraged by the government in Hanoi, merely exaggerates a national tendency. Drabble again: 'Hanoi is the past, Saigon is the future.'

The city has always had a reputation for rapacity. In *All the Wrong Places* the English correspondent James Fenton, who witnessed Saigon's fall to the North Vietnamese in 1975, wrote of the shameless *saue qui peut* that overtook the city in the last days of war. 'The first thing the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong saw as they came into Saigon,' Fenton writes, 'was crowds of looters dragging sacks of rice and cartons of luxury goods. It must have justified their view of the degeneracy of the city.' The saintly among the NLF, Fenton observes, were soon drawn into the city's web of 'aged corruption'. Years earlier another Englishman, Geoffrey Gorer, who toured Indochina on a 'pleasure trip' in the 1930s, was similarly appalled by the 'viciousness' of the place. Every

rickshaw boy, Gorer thought, was a whispering pimp: 'Madame français, missou? Madame metisse? Madame annamite? Boy francais?'

Seductive Saigon still grasps at the visitor, though the sex scene seems pretty tame by international standards. The big hotels issue instructions from Saigontourist, the official tourist organisation, warning that 'prostitutes are not allowed', but 'Saigon tea' is still being served in the euphemistically-named 'sauna and massage' centres located in every tourist hotel. The rickshaw drivers, spruikers, street girls and touts, even the beggars, are fatalistic and friendly, as anxious to make your acquaintance as to take your money. Practical help is appreciated: a promise to pass on letters to relatives in Richmond or Cabramatta—the cost from Vietnam being prohibitive—brings responses of delirious gratitude.

But Saigon remains a city that contrives ingenious methods to extract money from visitors. When I was there in June, a man outside the Municipal Theatre tried to sell me his pet puppy. It would have made interesting hand luggage. Knocked back, he proceeded

to wash it lovingly from a bucket by the kerb. In Saigon you might be offered mouldy packs of lewdly decorated playing cards, torches shaped like hand guns, and bottles of invigorating fermented snake's blood. The *Miss Saigon* T-shirts hawked by street vendors have 'Saigon Vietnam' flashed assertively across the back, as if to tell the world that the city is a real place, not just the name



Photo: Robin Gerster

of an American musical; the contemporary appropriation of Vietnam by American popular culture serves to remind one that wars are not only decided on battlefields.

At the Museum of American War Crimes, for a couple of dollars one can buy the identification labels ('dog tags') of dead GIs. Tasteless? No doubt. But perhaps not in a country which suffered and still suffers at the hands of a superpower that, by its continuing trade embargo, reveals an unwillingness to bury the humiliation of military defeat. And in any case, plenty of American tourists seem eager to buy the tags as 'poignant' souvenirs. In a country where poverty is endemic, western tourists are viewed as repositories of untold wealth and treated as fair game. The intelligent urchins who lurk in Saigon's tourist quarter may be keen to get ahead, but most are doomed to flogging postcards on the streets, or worse. An article in the English-language *Vietnam News* reported an alarming increase in school drop-outs, and concluded that more than 60 per cent of children under five in the Ho Chi Minh City district—a relatively prosperous region—have 'no chance of schooling'.

The Vietnamese government hopes that business investment and tourism will answer the country's socio-economic problems, and it is prepared to compromise political doctrine in order to facilitate both. It is often said that the Vietnamese love books—Hanoi has an 11th century Temple of Literature, dedicated to Confucius, that honours men of literary accomplishment. But the book displayed most prominently in a leading Saigon bookshop when I was there was a translation of Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, printed in Hanoi in 1989.

Saigon is alive with chain-smoking businessmen, discussing, plotting, dreaming deals. The air in hotel lobbies is thick with news of opportunities and 'joint ventures' like the Norfolk, a modern 'businessman's hotel' built by the Australian and Vietnamese governments. Australians are reputedly in the vanguard in this economic opening up of Vietnam: a Korean businessman at the Continental Hotel shook his head ruefully and told me Australians had the game sewn up. Funny, the door at the Austrade office in Saigon's main boulevard, Dong Khoi Street, was locked on the two occasions I visited. A hundred metres away, the 'Floating Hotel' is moored in the Saigon River, its rooms off-limits to Vietnamese. Towed to Vietnam from the Barrier Reef, where it went bust in 1989, this monstrosity is a reminder of what Australian business 'acumen' sometimes produces.

Tourists inject much-prized hard US currency into the economy, which is why Saigontourist takes them round in late-model Toyotas and Renaults, as if they were VIPs. The contemporary western traveller to Vietnam is likely to have a more idealistic notion of his or her role in the country. Traditionally, the tourist has been as much a pilgrim as a pleasure-seeker, and to an Australian of my generation, whose moral and political attitudes were shaped by the controversy surrounding

Australia's military involvement in Vietnam, a trip there is akin to a pilgrimage.

In *The Gates of Ivory* Margaret Drabble alludes to Vietnam as 'the legendary country', and indeed the place does possess a mythical quality derived from its centrality in cultural and political discourses during the past 30 years. Read about, hotly debated, but visited by relatively few, the very name of the country is integral to the broad cultural mythology surrounding 'the '60s'. Thus the American journalist Michael Herr could write on behalf of a generation at the end of his memoir *Dispatches*: 'Vietnam Vietnam Vietnam, we've all been there.'

A VISIT CONFIRMS RATHER THAN EXPLODES the '60s fantasy. Saigon is frozen in time, somewhere around 1965. Pleasantly tree-lined, with more-or-less uniform two-and-three-storey buildings, it is an old-fashioned, 'horizontal' city, especially compared with the angles and verticals of urban extravaganzas like Hong Kong. Its cartography is wonderfully symbolic. Dong Khoi Street was once the Rue Catinat made famous by Graham Greene in *The Quiet American*, and later the infamously raunchy Tu Do Street during the American presence. The street runs from the docks on the river all the way up to Notre Dame Cathedral, linking the related goals of commerce and religion that impelled the French to colonise Vietnam.

In the 18th century Saigon grew from a fishing village to a city through a symbiosis of mercantile and missionary energies. The latter were particularly those of the French Jesuits, who became influential in many important aspects of Vietnamese culture, including the development of the Latin-based script used in the written language. Tourist hotels associated with the war years, such as the Rex and the Caravelle (once owned by the Catholic diocese of Saigon) enfold their guests in a decor of outrageous kitsch that is reminiscent of the Australian bourgeois 'featurism' of several decades ago. Away from the big hotels, the traveller is constantly dragged back through time to a point where it almost seems that no war ever took place. This is due to the Vietnamese fondness for '60s pop music. When I visited the Museum of American War Crimes, an attendant was listening intently to the Bee Gees' *Spicks and Specks* blaring from an antique transistor radio.

In the surrounding provinces few signs of the war are visible, apart from an apparent dearth of middle-aged and old men. The southern landscape I travelled through belied the common assumption that the war was environmentally catastrophic for Vietnam. Take the Cu Chi district, known for the tunnel system used by the Viet Cong to retain control of a key strategic area within 50 kilometres of Saigon.

In the late 1960s Cu Chi was declared a 'free-strike zone' by the American military, and became 'the most bombed, shelled, gassed, defoliated and generally devastated area in the history of warfare'. Now, during the rainy season at least, the area is paradisiacally tropical,

and the celebrated villages of Cu Chi are pictures of Oriental serenity.

The enormous Viet Cong CEMETERIES that dot southern Vietnam, however, are reminders of the horrors endured. I encountered one such graveyard near the village of Long Thanh in Phuoc Tuy province, on the way to the resort town of Vung Tau, on the South China Sea. A rubber plantation in Long Thanh was the scene of a battle between Viet Cong and outnumbered Australians in August 1966. Books have been written about the encounter by Australians anxious to find a Vietnamese symbol to rival legendary sites of Australian heroism, such as Gallipoli and the Kokoda Trail. But at Long Thanh itself few seemed to have heard of the battle, let alone possess a sense of the immense significance it held for many of my countrymen. What has been promoted as a major military event to Australians was, apparently, just another skirmish to the Vietnamese.

Tourists disoriented by the Vietnamese time warp may be refreshed by comic incongruities at odds with the grim picture of the country constructed over the years. The big glass doors at the Rex lure the visitor with the words 'Be treated like royalties'. By the tunnel remains at Cu Chi, where attendants praise the valour of the Viet Cong in prevailing over horribly claustrophobic conditions, an alfresco restaurant promotes its 'fresh air' and 'natural, romantic atmosphere'. The guides, either those working for Saigontourist or those who operate independently at places like Cu Chi, seem just as interested in western culture as in propagating ideology. The guide on a hair-raising voyage down the Mekong near My Tho, with the monsoon blowing hugely, hadn't heard of *Apocalypse Now* but had read and enjoyed *Gulliver's Travels*.

IT'S EASY FOR A WELL-MEANING, guilt-ridden Western tourist to sentimentalise Vietnam, especially if one has been insulated from the realities of the country by staying in luxurious hotels. Many people will go there, as John Pilger noted of more intrepid travellers to Saigon in the early '70s, 'to get the stamp in their passport'.

And try selling the virtues of Vietnam to some expatriate Vietnamese. En route to Saigon I stopped over in Hong Kong, where thousands of Indochinese boat people remain incarcerated in camps. The *South China Morning Post* had on its front cover a photograph of a weeping Vietnamese woman at Kai Tak airport, in the process of being forcibly repatriated to her homeland—a picture of misery resembling the famous photograph of Mrs Petrov at Darwin.

It's hard, though, not to like and respect the Vietnamese. A moment in the Bamboo Bar at the Continental, the wonderful hotel where Pyle and Fowler drink in

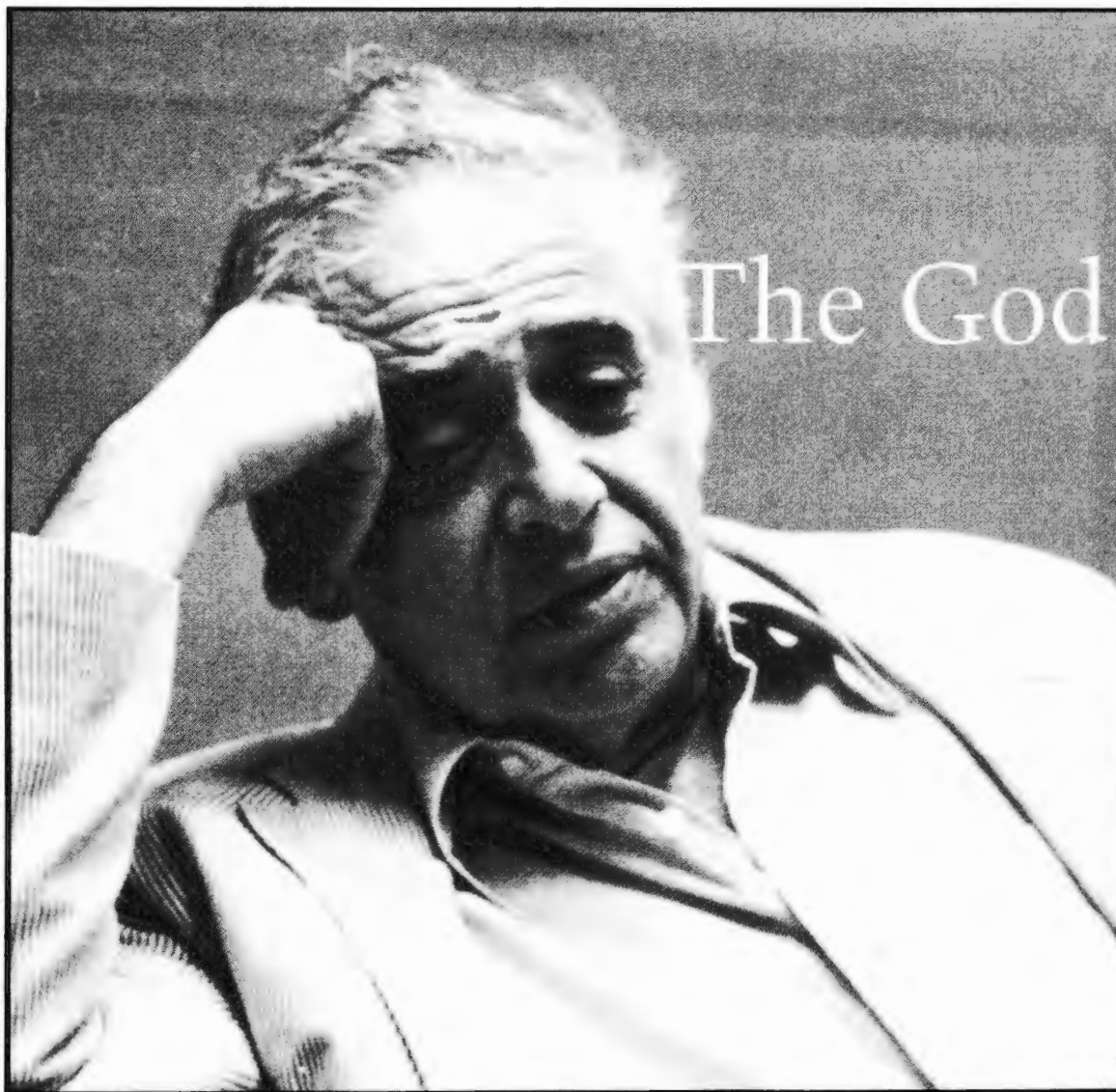
The Quiet American (the film of the book was shown on the in-house video when I stayed there) seemed to distil one's feelings about the place and its future. To an audience of three, a young female violinist accompanied by a pianist worked her way through a range of popular western melodies, including a version of *A Whiter Shade of Pale* so devastating I wished I had a tape recorder handy. Diligent, decorous and competent, the violinist represented some of the things that are impressive about the Vietnamese.

It seemed a pity that she wasn't playing music from her own culture; there is a danger that in catering so slavishly to the West, Vietnam will become like everywhere else. Yet one suspects that Vietnam hasn't fought so long and hard for its independence to sell it off now to the highest bidder. And in any case, the Vietnamese have an uncanny ability to process western influences into something indigenous and original. The famous Caodai Great Temple at Tay Ninh, for instance, described in *The Quiet American* as 'a Walt Disney fantasia of the East', provides a marvellous illustration of the Vietnamese ability to fuse Oriental and Occidental, as does the fact that it monumentalises. ■

Robin Gerster is the author of *Big-noting: The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing* (1987), which won *The Age* Book of the Year Award in 1988, and co-author of *Seizures of Youth: 'The Sixties' and Australia* (1991). He visited Vietnam on a study grant in June 1992.



Photo: Robin Gerster



BOOKS

KEVIN HART

The God

within

The solitude of Harold Bloom

Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present, Harold Bloom, Harvard University Press, 1989. ISBN 0 674 78027 2 RRP \$19.00. **The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation**, Harold Bloom, Simon and Schuster, 1992. ISBN 0 67167997 X RRP \$40.00. **The Book of J**, Harold Bloom, with David Rosenberg (translator), Grove Weidenfeld, 1990. ISBN 0 67973624 7 RRP \$23.00

Photo: Mary Price

THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM, people say, is to educate one's readers! Whoever wants to be educated, let him educate himself. This is rude: but it can't be helped.' So wrote the father of German Romanticism, Friedrich Schlegel, in his *Critical Fragments* of 1797. Criticism, for Schlegel, is not a matter of establishing general rules for evaluating literature, and the critic has no business trying to teach and enforce aesthetic norms: national cultures must be left to look after themselves. The ultimate aim of literature is the reader's self-cultivation, no more and no less; and the critic's proper task is to respond directly to the text, always seeking 'the *individual* ideal of every work'. True criticism is an art. 'Poetry', Schlegel said, 'can only be criticised by poetry'.

Harold Bloom rarely refers to German Romanticism, and I cannot recall him ever quoting from the *Critical Fragments*. Yet in several essential respects he follows Schlegel

point by point. Of all contemporary critics Bloom is the most rude. It is a role he has come to relish. By 'rude' I mean that he is always antithetical and vigorous, often discordant and immoderate, and sometimes wild and wrongheaded. When coming into his first maturity as a writer, he set himself against the academic orthodoxies of his day: the new criticism, and a widespread belief in the infallibility of T.S. Eliot. And now, in a period when critics tend to explain literature by its historical and political contexts rather than by its formal structures, he remains in fierce opposition to the status quo. How he names his adversaries speaks worlds. In the sixties and seventies his target was the 'mouldy fig' professors (formalists and moralists), while in the eighties and nineties it has become 'the school of resentment' (feminists and marxists). Both groups systematically devalue the self, Bloom argues, and for him it is precisely the self that is central to art.

Although Bloom does not call on Schlegel for intellectual support, he often looks to Milton's Satan, the archetype of the Romantic hero, for encouragement. Why Satan? The opening books of *Paradise Lost* tell us. After losing the battle for supremacy in heaven and finding himself cast into hell, Satan refuses to repent and accept a God who would remain forever outside him. He elects self-reliance or solitude. For Bloom it is a haunting image of the dynamics of literary history. The strong poet, he teaches, is the one who foreswears another's imagination, who quests ever more inward, risking solipsism, and who eventually finds the spark of uncreated divinity far inside. By contrast, the weak poet yields to what abides outside the self, finding God in another's imaginings, whether they be embodied in normative religious creeds or in their secular alternatives: national culture, political correctness and scholarly methodology.

If Bloom can be brought into focus by comparing him with Schlegel, that focus can be sharpened by contrasting him with the same writer. Both critics prize irony and associate it with freedom, yet where Schlegel sees irony as detachment and objectivity, Bloom regards it as a drastic swerve from an overbearing influence, or as the clash of incommensurate realities. Still more important, where the German longs for a synthesis of poetry and philosophy, believing that at heart they are just different forms of religion, the American firmly asserts the independence and absolute priority of poetry.

ONE OF THE FINEST LIVING CRITICS OF English Romanticism, Bloom is himself a Romantic. Poetry for him, as for Blake or Shelley, is visionary because it is original and powerful and never merely because it uses religious imagery. Since he writes with a high ambition, and since he rejects all strict distinctions between poetry and criticism (taking creativity rather than genre as his touchstone), he can legitimately desire to be considered a visionary writer himself. Almost more than his elevation of the self above ethics, form and history, it is this literary ambition that angers his antagonists. For the 'mouldy figs' it is anathema because they conceive criticism as a secondary and derivative activity, something that occurs in the shadow of creativity. And for the 'school of resentment', who see criticism as a species of political intervention, it is an index of Bloom's élitism and rampant individualism.

Friedrich Nietzsche gave his *Twilight of the Idols* the arresting subtitle 'How to Philosophise with a Hammer'. The hammer was not to be a mallet used to wreak havoc on the past, nor was it to be a judge's gavel. It was to be handled firmly yet gently, like a tuning fork. His project was 'to sound out idols', to determine whether their apparent weight and solidity were real. All of Bloom's books could be subtitled 'How to Criticise with a Hammer'. Here he is in *Kabbalah and Criticism* (1975) identifying four old idols of the academy:

1. There is the *religious* illusion, that a poem possesses or creates a real *presence*.

2. There is the *organic* illusion, that a poem possesses or creates a kind of *unity*.

3. There is the *rhetorical* illusion, that a poem possesses or creates a definite *form*.

4. There is the *metaphysical* illusion, that a poem possesses or creates *meaning*.

All these idols are hollow, Bloom assures us. A poem's presence is a promise; its unity exists in the reader's good will, and nowhere else; its form is merely a metaphor; and its meaning exists only insofar as it substitutes for another poem. In short, poems are shifting relationships between forces and not stable entities, what philosophers call 'aesthetic objects'. All in all, philosophers are the guilty party in Bloom's drama, for their primary categories—being and knowing—perpetually lead us astray when reading literature which is an affair of action and desire, of possession and power.

Nietzschean though he is, Bloom has little in common with those who see the German as the professor of linguistic nihilism. Today we very readily form an image of Nietzsche the reductionist, the one who claimed that God and the self are illusions created by grammar. Bloom's Nietzsche, though, is the severe prophet of the will to power, the passionate advocate of art, the diagnostician of cultural malaise.

His proper place is with Carlyle, Emerson, Freud, Kierkegaard, Ruskin, Pater and Wilde—a far more fruitful conjunction, Bloom thinks, than the more fashionable company of Bataille, Deleuze, de Man, Derrida, Foucault, Heidegger and Lacan. It is this latter cluster of thinkers that has prosecuted, in ingenious and rigorous ways, the demystification of meaning. Scrupulous as it is, this relentless critique has under-spiritualised criticism, impoverishing our imaginations. Equally dangerous, though, are those critics, heirs of Auerbach and Frye, who have over-spiritualised criticism by treating art as a displaced theological category. Bloom seeks a middle way, being neither seduced by consequent linguistic analysis nor tempted to believe in literature as a calm, ideal order.

One might say, then, that he seeks

the spiritual. Or one might say that he seeks the literary. The burden of *Ruin the Sacred Truths* is that it makes no difference which word one chooses, for imaginative writing stubbornly resists the categories of sacred and secular. 'If you wish', he says, 'you can insist that all high literature is secular, or, should you desire it so, then all strong poetry is sacred. What I find incoherent is the judgment that some authentic literary art is more sacred or more secular than some other.' This is a line of argument, attractive to Romantics, that has been on the books for two hundred years, since Herder's reflections on the Bible.

But Bloom makes it his own, memorably so, both when commenting on scripture and on literature. Thus he judges the three greatest writers of our century, those of the highest spiritual authority, to be Beckett, Freud and Kafka. It is as good a list as any of the kind, which are all polemic, and to object that Proust and Tolstoy are not included is to miss the point. Bloom would probably be happy to add them.

One writer he would not be happy to include, however, but who certainly should be there, is Heidegger. Like Freud, Heidegger has decisively shaped twentieth-century thinking and writing. His analyses of anxiety, concern and death, and his broodings on the withdrawal of God from our world, give eloquent testimony to the spiritual agony of our time.

BLOOM'S REVALUATION OF MODERN poetry—the slighting of Eliot and Pound, and the elevation of Stevens and Hart Crane—is well-known to students of literature. It has affected a generation of readers who are now disposed to see modernism as a blocked Romanticism, not as a decisive turn from it. And no one these days is taken aback to hear him stressing the importance of neither over-spiritualising nor

*America's war
against Iraq,
Bloom shrewdly
observes, was a
true religious war,
not Christianity
versus Islam but
rather America
versus 'whatever
denies the self's
status and
function as the
true standard
of being and
of value'.*

under-spiritualising art: we know that he sees today's literary academics in religious terms, as either priests or sacrifices, and that he styles himself a Jewish Gnostic. (I will return to this a



little later. I suppose that critics always knew, deep down, that one day Bloom would turn to the Hebrew Bible; yet his part in *The Book of J* has been a surprise for literary critics and biblical scholars alike.

For literary critics it has been, in some respects, a very welcome surprise. In the '70s especially, when Bloom was developing and illustrating his views of poetic influence, it seemed that his theory pertained only to post-enlightenment writing. Today the situation is quite different. We have his introductions to several hundred books of all periods published by Chelsea House (which contain some of his freshest, most vivid criticism), a number of striking essays on Shakespeare, and his commentary on some of the oldest biblical narratives. We can begin to appreciate the full scope of Bloom's poetics of influence and judge it for what it is: a pragmatic theory of canon formation that takes the sublime as its ground.

BLOOM'S REFLECTIONS ON THE CANON now begin at the beginning, in the 10th century BCE. Orthodox Jews and Christian fundamentalists aside, scholars generally agree that the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, were not written by Moses but are in fact a patchwork of texts woven together about 400 BCE. The oldest of these texts—now dispersed through Genesis, Exodus and Numbers—was written by an author whom scholars

call the Jahwist, or J for short.

On Bloom's reading, J is the most original storyteller in western history, a writer whose narratives are so sublime and so uncanny that no one since has been able to read them with adequate critical insight, let alone absorb and transcend them. Of western writers only Shakespeare meets J's challenge, and he does so by radically changing the nature of representation. Everyone else is contained in that original vision. And that covers all religious writers, including those who compose the New Testament.

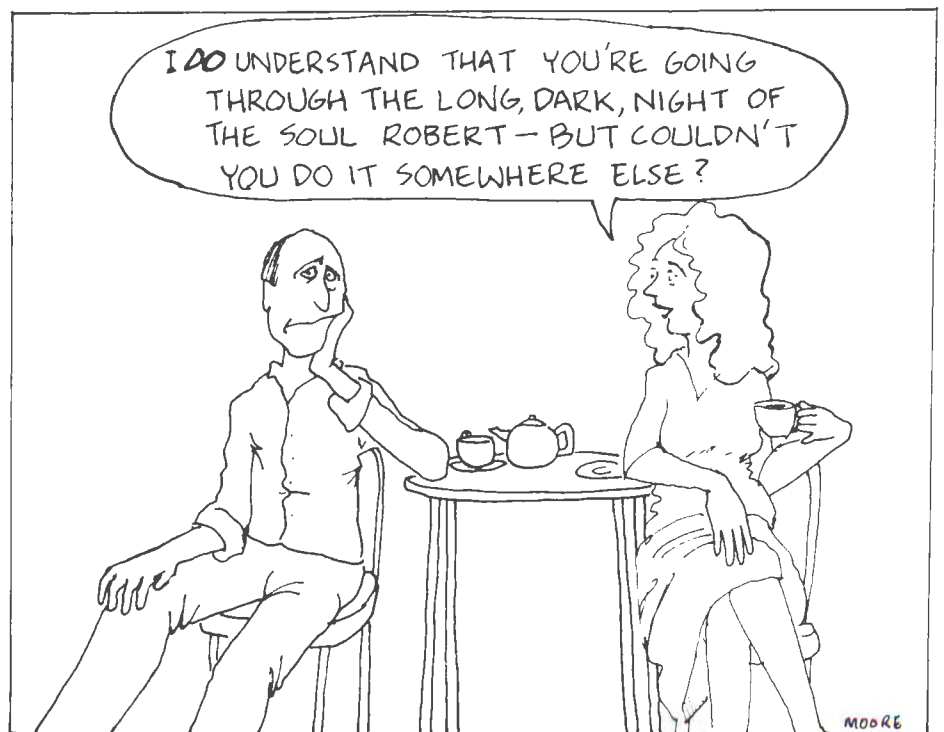
All western religions are founded on J's stories—or, rather, founder on them. For J is always approached as a religious writer, a moralist, a theologian, and is none of these. If we accept any of these characterisations a set of nasty questions appears. 'How can Abram haggle with Yahweh? How is Jacob able to wrestle a nameless one among the Elohim to a standstill, whether the angel be Michael, Sammael, or the messenger of death?' And more to the point, how can we make sense of Yahweh, the all-powerful deity who sits under the terebinth trees at Mamre and devours roast calf and curds, and who attempts to murder Moses?

The traditional answer has been

that J is guilty of naive anthropomorphism, the figuring of God by way of human attributes. Bloom rejects this *tout court*. For him J is a supreme ironist, an intensely sophisticated writer who sees life as a clash of unmatched realities. The stories of the Fall, Babel, the wrestling match at Peniel, and all the rest, are narratives, terse psychologies of Yahweh, and not religious speculations.

J's Yahweh is not a representation of the Most High but a literary character, a wayward trope of the self. Following Emerson and Nietzsche, Bloom proposes that all our religious faith is founded upon an extended and highly exuberant metaphor. Bloom is no less exuberant. 'From the standpoint of normative Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, J is the most blasphemous writer that ever lived.'

While Bloom's excursions into biblical commentary are of considerable interest to the literary critic, they can only dismay the exegete. Where scholars generally believe J's stories to have been written by members of a community or a tradition, Bloom insists that we are dealing with a unique historical individual, and that this person was a woman. To find Bloom, whose theory of influence many have thought to be centred exclusively on male psychology, arguing that the



entire western tradition begins, and begins strongly, with a female writer is a wonder in itself.

Was J a woman? To say it is historically unlikely is a grand understatement, so we look for the evidence. It is all psychological. To be sure, any construction of J will be a working hypothesis, and Bloom's is as bold as they come; but hypotheses have to be tested, and this one will be found wanting as soon as one moves from aesthetic and psychological reasoning to historical and social grounds.

AT FIRST GLANCE *The American Religion* seems to show Bloom passing from aesthetics to sociology. A second glance reveals that he has expanded the realm of the aesthetic: he is concerned with America's religious imagination, its originality and zest. Equally, though, he is troubled by its dark side: the virulent expansion of fundamentalism (a sect of 'know-nothings', he says), and the sick Republican faith of the fetus and the flag. He defines a new phenomenon, the American religion, which echoes Christianity but which differs decisively from it.

It has three fundamental principles. 'The first is that what is best and oldest in us goes back well before creation, and so is no part of the creation. The second is that what makes us free is knowledge, a history of facts and events, rather than a belief founded upon mere assent. The third is that this freedom has a solitary element in it, an element imbued by the loneliness of belated American time, and the American experience of the abyss of space.'

If Bloom is right, then all the religious groups he discusses—Mormons, Christian Scientists, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Southern Baptists—are as gnostic as they are Christian. We can best grasp what that means by listening to one of the Hellenistic gnostics, Monoimus: 'Abandon the search for God and the creation', he tells us, 'Look for him by taking *yourself* as the starting point. Learn who it is who within you makes everything his own and says, 'My God, my mind, my thought, my soul, my body'. The God within is the true divinity;

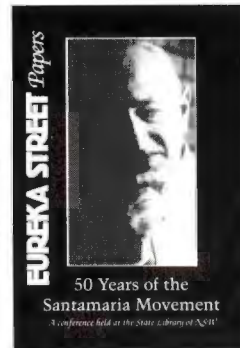
the God outside, Yahweh or the Father, is false and perhaps malevolent.

This quest inwards for the true divinity is far from simple or painless. It is a passage from knowing to unknowing, from reason to thought; and it requires a violent and stringent negation of every received image of God. Only the élite can hope to defend themselves against the claims of traditional faiths and save themselves from a universe of death. The American religion is gnostic to the extent that each individual believes he or she communes freely with God in the innermost self. But it is an attenuated gnosticism, one that has long been thoroughly democratised. There is no great spiritual struggle, no negative way: everyone can find the God within, everyone can be a mortal god. The political consequences of the American religion are everywhere apparent. America's war against Iraq, Bloom shrewdly observes, was a true religious war, not Christianity versus Islam but rather America versus 'whatever denies the self's status and function as the true standard of being and of value'.

Apart from that last point, Bloom could be talking about poetry. For him, the strong writer quests ever inwards, searching for what is truly uncanny and sublime—that which is not created by another. But it requires great strength and tremendous discipline to find the deep self and to be original. For the young American poet, the great figures of the past—Dickinson, Whitman, Crane and Stevens—seem to have said everything. One writes a poem only to find that it speaks in their voices, their tones, their rhythms.

These writers cannot be avoided by any aspiring poet but it is certain death not to swerve away from them. As literary history lengthens, as the canon of poetry grows, the chances are that young poets will be crushed by the weight of past literature. In Bloom's vision of America it is increasingly easy to be God and increasingly difficult to be a poet. ■

Kevin Hart is associate professor of critical theory at Monash University. His most recent collection of poetry is *Peniel* (Golvan Arts). OUP has published his critical study, *A.D. Hope*.



Telling it
as it is
(and was)

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50 Years On

Assessments of the Movement by historians, political and social commentators, and participants in its activities.

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and your prayer to life

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS

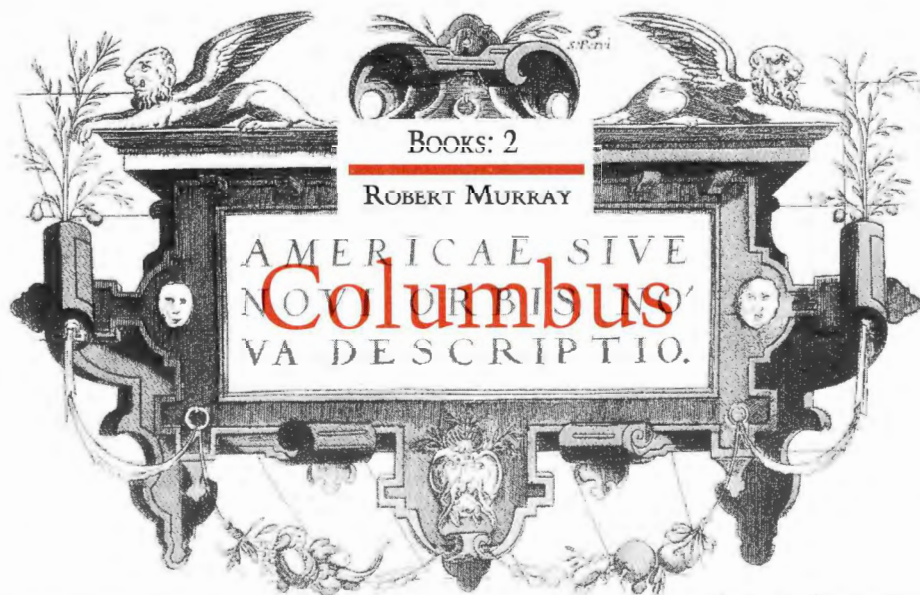
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BOURNE, VIC. 3205 PH: (03) 699 4973



THIS BOOK IS A GOOD STARTING POINT for those who want to learn something about Columbus and Latin American history, both of which impinge on some of the great issues of our own past. It is a sensible and skilful recreation of the explorer's times, and, at 194 pages of text, mercifully short.

Fernandez-Armesto presents his subject as an extraordinary individual—a near-genius navigator, vaultingly ambitious, obsessive, devious, visionary and, towards the end, a little cranky. That, of course, sounds like a lot of gifted people, but the importance of Columbus' extraordinary explorations overshadows his personality. Though the 'Admiral'—a title he extracted for the first trip across the Atlantic—would probably not enjoy the observation, his greatness was thrust upon him.

What emerges from this book, and from much other recent writing on the subject, is how inexorable the process of European colonisation was. Five hundred years ago, Portuguese sailors had found their way down the coast of Africa and the Spanish had colonised the Canary Islands. Merchants, kings and bureaucrats in both countries sensed that there were great trade opportunities and great prestige to be won out in the 'ocean sea', and the clergy sensed that there would be great missions. Iceland and Ireland no longer seemed to be the frontier of the world.

There was the prospect of finding more islands like the Canaries, the Azores and Madeira; or of finding a short route to Asia, or even to the Antipodes—which were as yet unknown but whose existence had long been suspected. Whatever happened,

Columbus by Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, OUP, Oxford 1992.
ISBN 0 19 285260 4 RRP \$16.95

land for tropical goodies like sugar and spice, not to mention souls, was close to a certainty, and there was a good chance of gold.

Columbus at various times considered all these categories, depending partly on whom he was trying to influence, and he was delighted when, late in 1492, he found the islands of Cuba and Hispaniola (the modern Dominican Republic and Haiti). His first landfall, on 12 October 1492, had been on a small island in the Bahamas, which has never been satisfactorily identified.

The subsequent decision to establish a colony was almost a reflex action. There was gold to be bartered for or otherwise collected, fertile land for growing sugar, and naked Indians to be clothed and Christianised. It is often forgotten—particularly, in this country, in the light of the dispute about the doctrine of *terra nullius*—how naturally the instinct to colonise came to Europeans. Columbus went back to Hispaniola with a 'first fleet' of 17 ships as early as 1493.

It was partly the Italian in him. Genoa, his birth place, and Venice had long had trading communities in Spain and Portugal, and these communities were his model for Hispaniola. Spanish colonists would trade, mine, farm and Christianise, using the apparently delightful Indians for labour, and then ship their gold back to Spain. God, the Columbus family's financial and social fortunes and the European

desire for better-tasting food would all be satisfied, and Portugal's colonial ambitions would be forestalled.

As far as we know, it had been so for thousands of years. The Phoenicians, the Greeks and the Romans all colonised in this way: if there was peace, a stable government and a mutually comprehensible language, they negotiated; if not, they just colonised amid the 'barbarians' anyway.

And so it was, more or less, in 1788. Despite the obvious differences, there seem to me to be uncanny resemblances between the sentiments of the Mediterranean in Columbus' day and those of Britain three centuries later. The need to relocate convicts may have been the main reason for the settlement at Sydney, but otherwise the rationale was similar: establishing a small, trading-type colony that could also civilise, Christianise, and forestall the rival colonial power (in this case the French).

From the acorn of Columbus's colony in Hispaniola, of course, would grow an oak tree as great and complex as the empires of Greece and Rome—to a large extent at the expense of those whom he was resolved to call the 'Indians'. His early experiences with the native inhabitants, while reasonably well-meaning, established a pattern that was to endure in three continents: almost anything that anybody on either side did, whatever their intentions, turned out to be wrong.

I was struck, reading *Columbus*, by the similarity between Columbus and William Dampier. Both were self-educated visionary adventurers, with a world-view rare in their time and an eye for trade opportunities. Dampier seems a bit nicer personally, and also not as lucky. The Spanish and Dutch

had already claimed the wet tropics that interested him—what is now Indonesia and the Philippines—while the dry tropics he found in what is now Western Australia famously did not engage his sympathy. Besides, it was many times more distant from Europe than Hispaniola, and the late 17th century was the heyday of European colonisation in North and South America.

If one is looking for an arbitrary dividing line between medieval and modern times, it is still hard to go beyond the year 1492. Half a millennium later, we are only beginning to understand the transformation that Columbus' discoveries wrought, in medieval Europe as well as in the Americas themselves. The clash of cultures, which to men like Columbus at first seemed so easy to remedy, has had an outcome so complex that it still defies human wit and imagination to resolve it.

Columbus contains many scattered references to religion—appropriately so, for these voyages marked the beginnings of the rich, and until recently not too controversial, history of Christianity in the Americas. As Fernandez-Armesto tells that history, it is tangential to the main story, presented in a matter-of-fact way and without any attempt to score points.

Fernandez-Armesto, who taught at Oxford for many years, crossed the ocean blue himself this year, as visiting professor at Brown University, Rhode Island. He is general editor of *The Times Atlas of World Exploration*, and director-designate of the Oxford Comparative Colonial History Project. He has rejected much of the suspect material that has accrued around Columbus over the centuries, and still found enough authentic sources to give a lively, convincing portrait of the man.

Among the myths a book such as this will help to dispel is the notion that Columbus' contemporaries believed the earth to be flat. Few of them in fact thought so, though few had any idea of its size, either. Some thought it was bigger than it is, others that it was smaller. Columbus was the first, however, to realise that it is not a perfect sphere. ■

Robert Murray is a freelance journalist and historian.

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It's still the same old story ...



FLASH IN THE PAN

Patriot Games, dir. Phillip Noyce (Greater Union). From the red-on-totalitarian-grey credits it is clear that *Patriot Games* is a post-Cold War film in search of a villain. So enter the Irish, as the Ulster Liberation Army, set to 'strike the royals and the ruling classes' in Whitehall, only to be confounded by the intervention of a hero, sometime CIA operative Jack Ryan (faultlessly played by Harrison Ford).

In Tom Clancy's airport-lounge best seller from which the film is adapted, the Irish terrorists are Cromagnon killers. Noyce, by contrast, allows his film to stray into history and motive. Why do any of these men kill? 'Rage, pure rage' answers Ryan, in one of the film's best scenes. So 'patriotism' is only a teaser. For the first half at least, the film is about tribalism and revenge.

The cast is talented and convincing. Patrick Bergin and Sean Bean give the Irish side of the story a chill authenticity, and there is the bonus of Richard Harris as a Sinn Fein spokesman, his morally frayed face a register of every compromise. Versatile David Threlfall, as the ill-fated Irish interrogator, is wonderful.

Patriot Games falls apart half-way through as Noyce goes after adrenalin thrills and cutesy American family values. But see it anyway, if only to understand the insidiousness of remote-control killing. One scene, in which the CIA wipes out a terrorist camp in Libya, demonstrates how easy it is to degenerate into subhumanity when the enemy is only a flickering amoeba on a video screen. Terrorism in suits.

—Morag Fraser

Zentropa, dir. Lars von Trier (independent cinemas). This film is pitched at the second person. It begins with an unseen narrator (Max Von Sydow) doing his best to hypnotise you ('At the count of 10 you will be in Europa') and, with brutal symmetry, ends with the same voice passionlessly announcing your death ('At the count of 10 you will be dead') In between, this chilly, cerebral, sometimes dazzling film jerks you one way and then another as you are made the innocent victim of the confusion and terror of Germany in 1945.

'You' are Leo Kessler (Jean-Marc Barr), the typical innocent abroad—young, bland and American. You arrive in postwar Germany, intending to 'show Germany a little kindness for a change', and land a job as a trainee sleeping car conductor for the Zentropa railway company.

Thus begins a series of dismal misadventures as you fall for the boss's

Germans a little kindness, but the filmmakers are not. This is an unsympathetic film in which images of great suffering sometimes become ridiculous amid scenes of farce and melodrama. But it looks magnificent, with stark blacks and whites enhanced by sumptuous interpolations of colour.

Lars von Trier is a talented and intelligent director but in *Zentropa* he has created a rather uneven film. It is by turns incisive and glib, inventive and banal. And somewhere, somehow, it runs off the rails.

—Damian Cox

Edward II, dir. Derek Jarman (independent cinemas). There is no doubt that this film of Marlowe's *Edward II* is both beautiful and superbly controlled. The sets are operatically spare, the lighting magnificent. Steven Waddington's Edward has just the right mixture of fixity and irresolution in his love for Gaveston (Andrew Tiernan). And Tiernan is magnificent as Gaveston—the slow-burning rage at how his homosexuality and class affect him is extraordinarily well sustained.

Tilda Swinton's portrayal of Edward's wife, Isabella, is equally effective. The intensifying homophobia she suffers in an enclosed, almost entirely homoerotic world is managed perfectly, as is her consequent gradually growing bitterness and dangerousness.

Despite all this, there is something ultimately cool about this film. I don't think that the slightly didactic interpolations—crowds wearing gay-rights T shirts, unnecessarily underlining Jarman's message—are the problem. In many ways, the production would work better on the stage, where the grandeur of it would be in relief. The intimacy of cinematic form seems to call for something more direct.

A comparison with Jarman's marvellous film of *The Tempest* is revealing: one of the high points of that film is an incongruous performance of *Stormy Weather*, which unexpectedly changes the atmosphere and then vanishes. An equivalent moment in *Edward II* is the appearance of Annie Lennox for a single song. But here nothing is changed, no mood is altered. It is incongruous, but homo-generously so.

And so too with the ending—and

Eureka Street Film Competition

Yes, after 50 years Bogart, Bergman and their fight for love and glory can be seen again in the new print of *Casablanca*. Tell us who they were fighting, i.e. who played the archfiend Major Strasser, and we'll award two free tickets, to the film of your choice, to the first correct entry we receive. Write to: Eureka Street film competition, PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121.

The winner of the August film



competition was Tim Skinner, of Kambah, ACT, who thought that Dracula would say to the Caped Crusader: 'Let there be no bat blood between us.'

daughter, become embroiled with German partisans fighting the American occupation, and, in the film's funniest sequence, face the all-important examination for sleeping-car conductors.

Leo may be concerned to show the

an *Edward II* whose end chills as little as Jarman's is disturbing indeed.

—David Braddon-Mitchell

Deadly, dir. Esben Storm (Hoyts). The fate of this Australian thriller forces me to break a sacred vow of the film reviewer... THE POLICE SERGEANT DID IT.

Deadly ran for only a fortnight in Melbourne, after being woefully underpromoted. It's the story of a city cop who is moved to desk duties after accidentally shooting a junkie. The cop is told by a superior that all will be forgiven if he goes to an outback town and files a routine report on the death in custody of an Aboriginal named Jimmy—i.e. if he closes the file within 24 hours.

The cop sets out to do just that but is needled into digging deeper by Daphne, an angry, articulate and beautiful Aboriginal woman who owns the local motel. It turns out that the wife of the town's police sergeant was in love with the dead man and had had a child by him.

It's a constant disappointment to white supremacists everywhere, but some white women do fall in love with black men. And vice versa. Yet, making sexual jealousy the primary motive for a story about black deaths in custody skirts the central point. The deaths-in-custody issue is about impersonal, institutionalised racism—the prisoners died because they were black, whereas in this film the dead man could have been white and still been killed by a jealous husband.

Esben Storm deserves praise, however, for making a reasonably entertaining film about a difficult, unpopular subject. Jerome Ehlers is fine as the city detective, although he persists in wearing a cross between a Drizabone and a trench coat that in real life would have amused a country town for weeks.

Lydia Miller is the stand out as Daphne, John Moore as the dead man's brother throws off enough anger to make a blue heeler wince, and Bill Hunter is as loathsome a country publican as you'd never want to meet.

Three people were in the cinema when I saw *Deadly*. It is better than that, despite the resort to good cop/bad cop shootout in its finale.

—Mark Skulley



Whatever the outcome of the monarchy v. republic debate, it is clear that in the little town of Waikerie, in the Riverland of South Australia, the hereditary principle is well-established. Our correspondent reports that the district clerk is a Mr Burgomaster, and the man who has just submitted a successful tender for mowing public lawns is called Mr Clip.

★★★

The latest spate of feminist and masculinist (yes, we know, but what else do you call them?) books is, no doubt, some sort of guide to prevailing attitudes to gender. But the occasional jibes prompted by such books are what reveal the true savagery of the sex war.

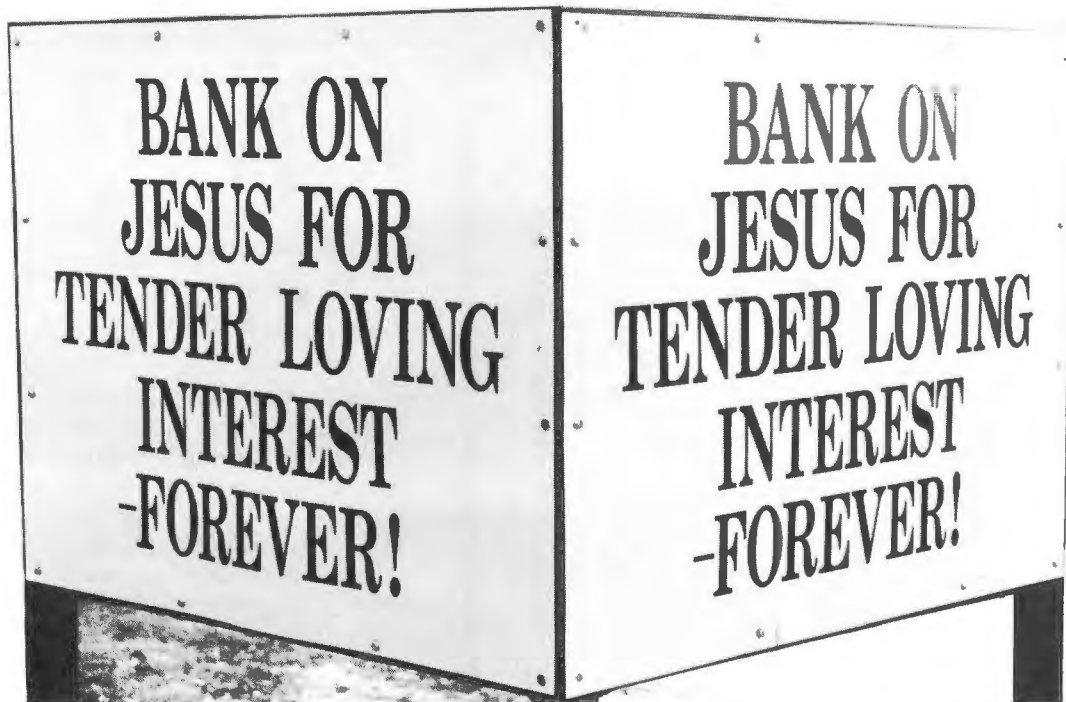


Photo: Bill Thomas

A contributor to *Eureka Street* describes her book discussion group:

'We were sitting around, giving potted reports of recent feminist or men-ist [her word, we don't like it any better than 'masculinist'] books we have read—*The Beauty Myth*, *Iron John*, *Men: the Darker Continent*, etc. This last-named title had been under discussion for five minutes or so when a woman sitting at the other end of the room, and looking rather puzzled, leaned forward and asked: 'What's it called? *Men Who Aren't Incontinent!*'

★★★

Who was seen in hot pursuit of John Halfpenny as the trade union stalwart left ABC Radio's Melbourne studios recently? Malcolm Fraser, that's who. Did the patrician grazier want to remonstrate with Brother Halfpenny about their political differences? No, he wanted 'to touch him for a donation' to CARE's African famine fund.

★★★

Finally, a message from our straight man. Alex Miller wants to contact anyone who shares his interest in late second/early third century BC Carthage. Really. You can write to him care of the editor, *Eureka Street*, PO Box 553, Richmond, VIC 3121. We're just letting you know, OK?

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Rite on

THERE IS GOING TO BE A BAPTISM at our house—that of our elder son, aged eight. The question this raises in most people’s minds is ‘Why’? In our case, the answer is simply that our son and his schoolmates are preparing for their first Eucharist. But a more pressing question, in most Catholic minds, will be ‘Why *now*? Why didn’t you get him “done” when he was a baby?’

For many Catholics, a baptism is an important, enjoyable formality, part of showing off the new baby. An unbaptised child is not a consideration. For others, it is a ritual engaged in for family expectations: ‘My mum would kill me if I didn’t’. Or a long-term hedging of bets: ‘In case we want to get him into a Catholic school.’ Some of my son’s schoolmates were baptised at age four for just that reason.

For still others, a baptism may be a way of calming the nerves of new parenthood: ‘Are we doing *everything* we’re supposed to? What if anything happens and he’s not baptised?’ Do those ancient fears of baby souls lost in Limbo still move parents to have their children baptised?

When my son was born, I was not closely attached to any church community. I had some contact with other Catholics, friends and colleagues, but none with a parish. My partner, who has no religious affiliation, sees the baptism of babies as entirely pre-emptive: ‘If it is significant, why do they have no say?’ On a more emotional level: ‘How can we promise our children away like that?’ Of course, as one of the tribe, there isn’t any ‘away’ for me. I’m comfortable with the tribal rituals. But I couldn’t say, ‘Oh, it’s just a ceremony.’ As I thought about it, I found that I *did* believe a baptism would be a definitive step: an entry into the Catholic community.

We decided that our son could make up his own mind about it. And as his mind was then preoccupied with milk, and subsequently with climbing, Matchbox cars and asking

questions, that shelved the matter for some time. Later we moved to a new suburb, one where every woman at the shops has kids. Gradually I became involved in the local parish, where the priest was a man I knew and admired. We decided to send our son to the local Catholic school. That was a big decision—it meant I would have to be *more* Catholic, and my partner supportive.

When the question of a baptism was raised, I found to my surprise that I was not pleased. I thought that my son would forget about it. He did not. I realised that I was embarrassed, fearing that people might think me a neglectful mother. I confessed my son’s unbaptised state to several friends who were unperturbed, which helped. Then I asked the parish priest if it was possible to have a small family baptism—not at the 11am Mass on Sunday, where everyone in the parish would see me. Of course, was the reply. We’ll make a nice family one that everyone can feel happy about. Not a test or an obligation but a welcoming-in.

Coincidentally, my sister is also resolving the same dilemma. She has no affiliation with the church except through her son’s school, and her guilt has been pump-primed by her parish priest, who grilled her about her beliefs. Fortunately, her son’s teacher has been kind and welcoming. Each year, the teacher told her, a couple of children are baptised just before their first Eucharist.

I am more focused on the upcoming event, on what it means for me, than I am on the actual candidate, our son. Perhaps this is because, since I was only three months old at the time of my own baptism, it is the first time I have ever really *felt* something about the sacrament.

I think my partner has a point. ■

Ruth Pendavingh is a Melbourne teacher.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 7, October 1992.

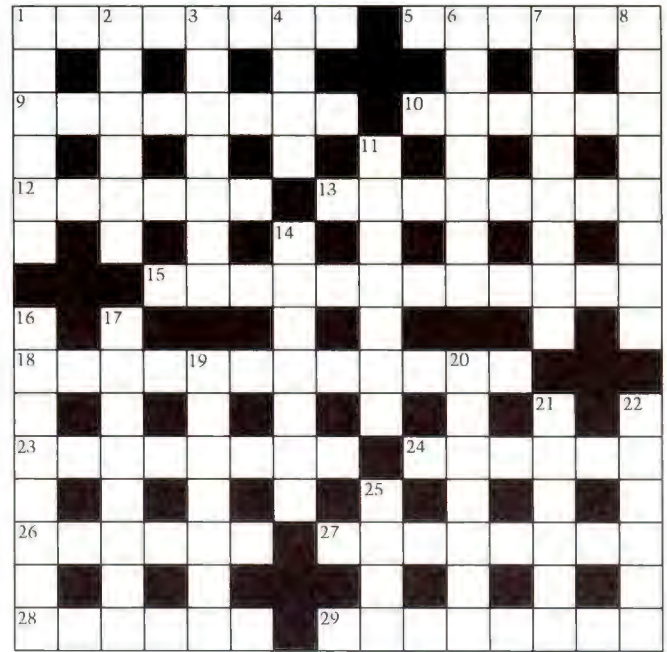
Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

- 1 In favour of modernity! It's said to be what the seer did. (8)
- 5 Frustrate herein with wartime hostility. (6)
- 9 The Greek letter used in the code is pi—irregular and intermittent. (8)
- 10 Loath to read a piece of poetry (6)
- 12 A snub of no consequence. (6)
- 13 Charges with the responsibility of making the required test runs somehow. (8)
- 15 Concoct a sounder stew for this exotic sauce. (5-3-4)
- 18 At six fifty-one invented story about a malevolent aspersion. (12)
- 23 The blushing player was the editor (biblical). (8)
- 24 Pegs on anyhow rather than throw it in. (6)
- 26 A twinge in the groin I injured at the start. (6)
- 27 Like a gazelle one leapt wildly. (8)
- 28 Along the track it has a drink between points. (6)
- 29 I hear the gifts have made an appearance. (8)

DOWN

- 1 I feel most liberated on the no-toll road. (6)
- 2 Fruit is in the water fall. (6)
- 3 Competence is displayed, though it sounds like a refusal to ask the way. (7)
- 4 A way out for former sex-appeal object. (4)
- 6 In a state of perturbation he'd over-reacted and remained suspended in one place. (7)
- 7 So a brain confused, or brawn contused, can show a spot that's bruised! (8)
- 8 After changing the rate, certain riches follow. (8)
- 11 Being an eccentric, her aunt would dig up what was buried. (7)
- 14 23 loses 500 to become a responder. (7)
- 16 Anything exaggerated drove one to distraction. (8)
- 17 Otherwise, club in the G.G. with 50 others for avoiding work? (8)
- 19 False deed or party intrigue? (7)
- 20 Anti you or pro us, he madly plays his lyre—for Offenbach? (7)
- 21 'In states ... , and accents yet unknown' [Julius Caesar] (6)
- 22 Honour Paul's midnight ride. (6)
- 25 Go SW in, or NE out, it's a single continuous action. (4)



Solution to Crossword no.6, September 1992

W	O	R	D	B	O	O	K		E	R	A	S	E	R	
E	E		E		D				E		U		O		
I	C	H	T	H	Y	I	C		G	L	E	N	D	A	
G	A		O		N		M		I		S		D		
H	U	S	T	L	E		S	I	D	E	S	H	O	W	
T	H		D		S		S		V		A		A		
			A	S	H	W	E	D	N	E	S	D	A	Y	
P		M					A		A			E		S	
A	N	A	E	S	T	H	E	T	I	C	S				
S		L	U		I		E		O		E		E		
T	H	E	S	S	A	L	Y		G	N	O	S	I	S	
I		D		P		I		D		C		P		S	
C	H	I	V	E	S			R	E	H	E	A	R	S	E
H		C		C				E		R		I		N	
E	N	T	I	T	Y			B	R	U	N	E	T	T	E



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