EUREKA STREET

Vol. 3 No. 9 November 1993 $5.00

Facing up to war

Michael McKernan
Maslyn Williams
Morag Fraser
Peter Steele
Max Teichmann

Veritatis Splendor in review

In his late tragedy, *King Lear*, Shakespeare concentrated the agonies that the 20th century assumes as its own: ferocious war between nation states and within families, torture, betrayal, homelessness and exile.

This month, on the 75th anniversary of the signing of the armistice, *Eureka Street* focuses on war, present and remembered, and on fugitive peace, in 'What Australia remembers', p22; 'To an unknown Japanese soldier, p24; 'Losing the thoughtlines', p26; 'Passages of arms', p28, and 'Alternative worlds', p36.

The blinding of Gloucester (played by Ian Scott) was photographed by Reimund Zunde during rehearsals of the Playbox Theatre production of *King Lear*, which opened in Melbourne in October. After the Melbourne season the Playbox is touring the production in Tokyo, Nagoya, Seoul and Perth. Rehearsal photographs on pp28-31 are also by Reimund Zunde.

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Cover: Australian soldier on the western front.
Photo: Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial (AWM negative E227).

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COMMENT

CHRIS MCGILLION

Goodbye Fr Chips

I WORK FOR a large metropolitan daily newspaper, and frequently get complaints—and on rare occasions compliments—from church officials whose signature line is: 'Look, all we are asking for is a fair go'. What they mean by a fair go is: no sensationalist reporting, an honest attempt to present their church's argument before taking it to task, and a degree of discernment when selecting people involved with any particular church to comment on its activities. Getting the message across is what is important to them; what happens to it after that is somebody else's business. The churches see their role as one of moral teaching, not of political leadership. But this distinction is self-defeating.

Consider what the Catholic bishops have to say in the final report of their inquiry into the distribution of wealth in Australia, *Common Wealth for the Common Good*. The bishops defend their right—indeed, their duty—to comment on social policy. Essentially, they reason that social institutions and practices affect people in ways that are not reducible to the sum of the values and actions of the individuals involved; consequently, for the church to concentrate only on matters of personal faith and morality is to ignore some of the most important factors affecting human dignity, the quality of human relationships, and, dare one say, the prospects for personal salvation. But, having found much about contemporary Australia to criticise from the perspective of distributive justice, the bishops fail to take their argument to its logical conclusion. They come down to urging a 'conversion of heart' on the part of individuals, in the hope that this alone will remove the structural injustices in our society.

This shows a certain naiveté, but much more than that. It shows an unwillingness to accept that social transformation requires not only moral teaching but practical involvement in the political sphere. That does not mean that bishops should become politicians or engage in party political brawls. But it does mean that the churches should offer political leadership.

The Southern Christian Leadership Council, which was formed by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jnr and other church leaders in the United States in 1957, took a different approach to political involvement. The emphasis was on empowerment. The council set as its task a voter-registration drive among blacks in the southern states of the US. Blacks were not to be encouraged to vote for this party or that, but simply to register to vote so that their participation in the political process would force a response from the major political parties, and so advance black social, economic and legal interests.

At a recent 'Church and Social Justice' conference at the University of New England, in Armidale, NSW, delegates raised suggestions about how the churches could most effectively get their message about justice across. Most of the suggestions came down to things like: reducing the denominational duplication

of resources in the field of social policy research, the better to concentrate efforts and expertise; lending more assistance to existing non-denominational welfare/justice advocacy groups rather than risking the churches' credibility through direct involvement; and developing a better understanding of, and skills to deal with, the realities of a mass media-oriented society.

These ideas all have merit, but they tend to miss the point. It is not enough to stand outside the public-policy arena, urging the players on with the latest model megaphone. Nor is it enough to venture into the arena purely for the purpose of more effectively doing the same. That won't change the nature or the outcome of the game; it just adds to the background noise. In a reflective report to the board of the Southern Christian Leadership Council in 1959, the organisation's associate director, Ella Baker, posed the question: 'Have we been so busy doing the things that had to be done that we have failed to (do) what should be done?' Baker suggested, and the council eventually came to endorse, three aims for the organisation: co-ordinating action by local groups, developing potential black leaders, and, most important of all, 'developing a vital movement of non-violent direct mass action against racial discrimination'.

That is a far cry from issuing statements, lobbying politicians, or telling people over and over again about the need to think more seriously about social justice when it comes to underprivileged minority groups. It is political leadership at its best. Some people will view this kind of activity as a dangerous liaison between church and state, but does the separation of church and state mean that morality should become the monopoly of the former, and political activity of the latter?

The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, put the case for the essential indivisibility of morality and politics in the fourth century BC. 'A state', he argued, 'is something more than a pact of mutual protection or an agreement to exchange goods and services.' As if taking a wooden stake to the heart of the economic rationalists of his day, he went on to argue that the mere possession of contractual obligations did not make someone a citizen, for 'a state exists not simply for the purpose of living together but for the sake of noble actions'. According to Aristotle, an association of people that fails to promote justice may be many things, but it is not a state. A citizen, properly understood, is someone who engages in politics to promote virtue and goodness.

It might be added that a church that does not take social justice seriously enough to fight for it may be many things but it is not faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that a follower of Jesus, properly understood, is a citizen out to build a new heaven and a new earth in the here and now. ■

Chris McGillion writes for the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The encyclical

LAST YEAR the American theologian Richard McCormick delivered a lecture, 'Moral theology in the year 2000', at Georgetown University in Washington DC. The lecture, the opening address in a distinguished series on Catholic moral tradition, is worth seeking out in its entirety (see *America*, 18 April 1992), but what struck me most forcibly about it were two terms emphasised by McCormick. Looking forward, he called for a moral theology of 'modesty and tentativeness'.

Expanding his theme, McCormick quoted from a 1981 'dream' (in Martin Luther King's sense) of theologian Karl Rahner's: 'In Rahner's dream the pope is imagined as saying: "The ordinary magisterium of the pope in authentic doctrinal decisions at least in the past and up to very recent times was often involved in error and, on the other hand, Rome was accustomed to put forward and insist on such decisions as if there could be no doubt about their ultimate correctness and as if further discussion of them was unbecoming a Catholic theologian." '

McCormick, like Rahner, has a dream, and it is no less prophetic: 'We are all aware of the genuine complexity of many human moral problems. My dream, therefore, is that acknowledgement of this will take the form of appropriate modesty and tentativeness in authentic church teaching as well as in theological reflection.'

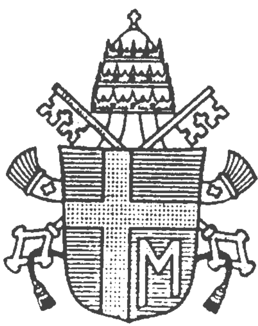
There has not been much talk of modesty, let alone tentativeness, since the release last month of *Veritatis Splendor*, Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter on moral teaching addressed to all the bishops of the Catholic Church. There has been some confusion (many people have not had access to the document, which was selectively released); some anger at an anticipated 'tightening up' of church discipline; and some enthusiastic heralding of a 'return to moral certainties'.

This month, in an spirit of unapologetic modesty, *Eureka Street* devotes its comment pages to a detailed examination of the encyclical and its ramifications. We welcome the response of our readers, whether or not they come from within the Catholic tradition.

Postscript: The English translation of *Veritatis Splendor* opens with these words: 'The splendour of truth shines forth in all the works of the Creator and, in a special way, in man, created in the image and likeness of God. Truth enlightens man's intelligence and shapes his freedom, leading him to know and love the Lord.'

Twenty-five years after Vatican II, women still languish, unacknowledged, in the wilderness. ■

—Morag Fraser



THE CHURCH: 1

WILLIAM UREN

Think of the consequences

IT WAS WITH MORE than a little trepidation that I went in late September to St John's College, at the University of Queensland, to speak at the first National Conference on Death, Dying and Euthanasia. I believe that, generally speaking, the Catholic view on death and dying is highly responsible both from a community and from an individual point of view. Death is an integral part of life, a final incident in an illness rather than a specifically new dimension of it. Death, therefore, should share in the dignity which the community accords to human life. It should not be subject to violence or invasion.

I was scheduled, however, to share the platform in my session with Dr Malcolm Parker, the president of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society of Queensland. I believe that voluntary euthanasia will be *the* bioethical issue of the '90s, even as artificial reproduction was the issue of the '80s. There are articulate, passionate and vociferous proponents of voluntary euthanasia, especially for that small number of cases where palliation is no longer effective and the incapacitated patient is dying in great pain. These are difficult cases to which to respond, and to say that claims of patient autonomy for lethal injections must give way to the community interest in maintaining the interdict against killing can often seem overly harsh and insensitive, especially to those who do not share the Christian view of life as a gift of God over which we exercise stewardship rather than dominion.

It was, then, with some apprehension that I approached the topic I shared with Dr Parker, 'The Sanctity of Life and Resource Allocation'. But in the course of the conference my apprehension eased. Not because, indeed, my articulation of the classical church arguments on the dignity of life and death and on the legitimacy of foregoing disproportionate means of artificial support was particularly persuasive, but rather because, as the conference proceeded, one palliative-care specialist after another intimated, with graphic details drawn from their personal experience, that legalising voluntary euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide was not the way to go if we wanted to ensure that death and dying remained a characteristically human and natural experience, rather than a violent and degrading one.

It would be a disaster if, because of what is in effect an intolerance on the part of the school now ascendant in the Vatican, the Catholic contribution to moral debate were curtailed at this very critical time of evolving community moral consciousness.

I recount this experience because I believe it is a paradigm of the way in which church and community should interact in approaching so many of the ethical conundrums that confront us in the world in which we live, and to which last month's papal encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor,* draws our attention. We do need principles, but we also need experience, 'hands on' experience. We need to draw on a multiplicity of traditions and a multiplicity of experiences, both of theoretical and practical specialists and of men and women in the street.

The church tried this once. In the wake of the discussions of the bishops at the Second Vatican Council, it established the so-called 'Birth Control Commission' with groups of bishops on the one hand and groups of clergy, religious and laity on the other. Some were specialists in the area, others simply spoke from personal experience. Both groups recommended by substantial majorities that the ban against the use of artificial contraceptives for exclusively contraceptive purposes should be revised.

It was not just a crude poll. There emerged from the discussions of this mixed group a new understanding of marriage as a relational reality. It took up the existing tradition and reinterpreted it in the light of the basic Vatican II insight of the complementarity of the unitive and procreative elements in marriage. The experiences of so many Christian couples were integrated with the insights and expertise of the bishops and moralists to articulate a model of the marriage relationship that was, at least arguably, at the same time both true to the classical tradition and responsive to the new understandings of the interpersonal relations of the spouses in marriage.

Only 'arguably', perhaps, and not ultimately persuasively, at least as far as the Vatican was concerned. The tragedy, however, was not necessarily only that the majority recommendations were rejected, but that this model of broad-ranging consultation was sidelined. The witness of experience was once again minimalised, and the commitment to abstract principles and traditions was reinforced.

Veritatis Splendor bears signs that this model continues to hold sway in the Vatican. I do not wish to underestimate the importance of the moralising homily on the rich young man in the first chapter of the encyclical, or the exhortations to courage and integrity in maintaining Christian values in the third chapter, but the guts of the encyclical are in its second chapter. There, a rather idiosyncratic Augustinian and voluntarist version of the natural-law tradition is elaborated, the claims of truth over against conscience are discussed, and various 'errors of the day' are swept aside: teleologism, consequentialism, proportionalism, and the 'fundamental option'. These are the 'adversaries', in the classical tradition of the manuals of moral theology. They are assigned to the rag bag of 'moral relativism', even though, as the encyclical somewhat reluctantly admits, they each contain elements that have been constantly exploited within the Catholic tradition. One has only to think, for instance, of the importance of the notion of proportion in enunciating the archetypically Catholic 'principle of double effect' and in legitimising the withdrawal of extraordinary means of artificial life

support from dying patients to ask whether, in rejecting proportionalism, this isn't just another case of shooting the messenger.

Those who are aware of the profile of the moralists associated presently with the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith will not be surprised that these theories have been singled out for condemnation. Further, if we cast our minds back to the strictures against 'Modernism' at the beginning of the century and the instructions of the Pontifical Biblical Commission against asserting an alternative author to Moses for the books of the Pentateuch and a plurality of authors for the Prophecy of Isaiah, we may well see that what is now happening to moral philosophers and theologians has had depressing precedents in the area of scriptural exegesis. The encyclical claims in paragraph 29 that 'the church's magisterium does not intend to impose upon the faithful any particular theological system, still less a philosophical one', but it is hard to see that in these condemnations it is not severely limiting the range of possible options and attempting to put the lid on what has been for more than 30 years a very lively debate.

> *The problems which are at issue ... have been the very stuff of debate in ethics for many centuries, in the secular as well as in the ecclesiastical, domain. To suggest that the debate is over for Catholics, or that the church has better or more persuasive answers, or that men and women of good will who pursue these issues in the secular arena are inevitably misguided, cannot but seem to be a large presumption.*

It is as important that this debate continue as it was disastrous in 1906 and 1908 that the debate on scriptural exegesis and hermeneutics was suppressed. It took almost 40 years before Catholic scripture scholars were allowed to debate these matters again with their Protestant colleagues. The declining number of Catholic scholars wishing to pursue a career in moral philosophy and theology is an index that there is a parallel feeling of frustration and futility among Catholic moralists in addressing these very central areas of our church and community experience. It would be a disaster if, because of what is in effect an intolerance on the part of the school now ascendant in the Vatican, the Catholic contribution to moral debate were curtailed at this very critical time of evolving community moral consciousness.

For the problems which are at issue are not peculiarly ecclesiastical either in origin or in continuing debate. The relation of action to habit and the way in which this affects imputability, the legitimacy of including and assessing significant consequences in the overall description of the object of a moral act, the way in which artifice affects nature and the appropriate limits that should be drawn to protect against depersonalisation, these are and have been the very stuff of debate in ethics for many centuries in the secular, as well as in the ecclesiastical, domain. To suggest that the debate is over for Catholics, or that the church has better or more persuasive answers, or that men and women of good will who pursue these issues in the secular arena are inevitably misguided—this cannot but seem to be a large presumption. The invocation of the terminology of 'intrinsically evil acts' and 'moral relativism' and the subsuming of contraception into the same category as genocide, torture and slavery should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the orientation pursued by the authors of the encyclical is but one way of investigating the age-old problem of the description of moral acts.

MAY I CONCLUDE with a personal reminiscence. In 1987 after the publication of the Vatican *Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation* I was asked to comment in turn by *The Age* and the ABC. There were three broadly similar questions:

1. Would the publication of this instruction make any difference to Catholics who were involved in the IVF programs, either as doctors or as patients? I replied, of course, that any answer on my part would be mere speculation, but I had my doubts about at least some of the doctors and some of the patients with whom I had been associated in explaining the church's attitude towards infertile couples.

2. Was the instruction infallible? My response was that it was not, that it was on the fourth or fifth level of authoritative Vatican statements, but that it was certainly owed 'religious assent'.

3. What did I think of the instruction? I responded that I could only speak as a moral philosopher, but that it seemed to me in this capacity that the arguments were 'rather weak'.

For these responses I was duly reported to the Archbishop of Melbourne, to the Apostolic Delegate, to the Vatican and to the Jesuit General. Later that same year I was attending a Jesuit conference in Rome on behalf of the Australian province, and I was invited to explain my remarks to an official who occupies a position of considerable eminence in the Vatican and Jesuit hierarchy. I explained what I had said, and obviously it corresponded to the report that had reached the Vatican. There was a bemused silence, and then the official said: 'Yes, it is somewhat difficult. It is reported that Cardinal Ratzinger himself (the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, who published the instruction) is reputed to have said, not that the arguments exactly were weak, but that "the moral psychology of the document needs strengthening" '!

May I respectfully suggest that a comment along similar lines could be made about the present document, and that the best way to strengthen the arguments is not to close off public debate, nor even to confine it to specialists, but to consult a widely representative and informed constituency both of specialists and of those with 'hands on' experience among the People of God. As the encyclical wisely remarks in treating of the necessity to inform conscience, 'Sincerity is no substitute for truth'. Neither, of course, is uniformity. ■

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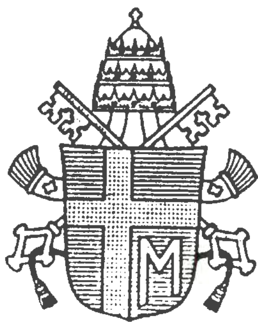

WILLIAM DANIEL

Conscience in question

THE ENCYCLICAL *Veritatis Splendor* is addressed to the bishops of the church, and concerns the method of moral theology. A lot of its content is of a technical nature, although it could have a profound effect on the way in which the Christian moral life is presented in catechesis and the written word. The points at which it may be said to impinge directly upon the life of the layperson are the chapter on the dialogue between Jesus and the rich young man (*Matthew* 19:16) and the section on conscience.

Conscience, says the Pope, is an inner witness to our faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the demands of morality. It is the only witness and a secret one, for no one else knows how we have responded to its voice. Conscience is an interior dialogue we hold with ourselves and with God, and its commands present themselves as coming from God (58). Conscience is a practical judgment that makes known what we are to do, and passes judgment on what we have done. It has an imperative character: we must act in accordance with it. It is called 'the proximate norm of personal morality' (60). This is standard Catholic doctrine, but the Pope is concerned that, with the modern stress on freedom and the dignity of the conscience, people have lost sight of the importance of truth. Conscience does not create moral truth but seeks to find it.

Moral truth is represented in the divine law, which is the universal and objective norm of morality. The judgment of conscience does not establish the law, but bears witness to its authority (60). A great deal of the encyclical is devoted to the importance of objective morality: this surely is a message for modern society, whether Christian or not. In this context the Pope considers the question of erroneous conscience. He quotes Vatican II: 'Not infrequently conscience can be mistaken as a result of invincible ignorance, although it does not on that account forfeit its dignity.'

'Invincible ignorance' is ignorance that the person is unable to overcome. It is the ignorance of the honest mistake—it cannot be set right because, by definition, I am unaware of my mistaken notion. When my conscience makes a judgment out of this mistaken notion, it does not lose its dignity 'because even when it directs us to act in a way not in conformity with the objective moral order, it continues to speak in the name of that truth about the good which the subject is called to seek sincerely' (62). So the dignity of an erroneous conscience lies in the fact that the person is still faithful to the quest for truth, and is still open to its claims. Such a moral act is good even if it is not correct. It is subjectively good, for the will is directed towards goodness, even though the reason has failed to discover the true good in this instance.

The Pope's concern to defend objective morality against subjectivism leads him to the assertion that 'it is always from the truth that the dignity of conscience derives' (63). It is never acceptable, he says, 'to make the moral value of the act performed with a true and correct conscience equivalent to the moral value of an act performed following the judgment of an erroneous conscience'. In support of this he refers to an article of the *De Veritate* of Thomas Aquinas. There Thomas does distinguish between the binding force of a true and an erroneous conscience, but not between the dignity of the two. A correct conscience binds absolutely because its judgment, being true, cannot be reversed. The erroneous conscience, on the other hand, binds in a modified way and conditionally, because it may eventually come to be corrected and its judgment laid aside.

There is more work to be done, I suggest, on the question of the dignity of the erroneous conscience. It is wrong to argue that if we accept the dignity of the erroneous conscience in an ordinary conscientious person, we must logically accept the dignity of conscience of a Hitler or a Stalin. Such people, who are dedicated to evil, have suppressed the voice of conscience—they cannot properly be said to be following conscience at all. As Vatican II pointed out in the passage just quoted, what was said about the dignity of an erroneous conscience cannot apply 'when a person shows little concern for seeking what is true and good, and conscience gradually becomes almost blind from being accustomed to sin'.

The Pope reminds his readers that, in the church and its teaching office, Christians have a great help in the formation of conscience. When the church pronounces on moral questions, he says, it in no way undermines the freedom of conscience of Christians. This is because freedom of conscience is not freedom 'from' the truth but freedom 'in' the truth. Besides, church teaching does not come to the believer as something alien, but as a development of the act of faith by which the believer accepts the gospel and the church. 'The church puts herself always and only at the service of conscience, helping it ... not to swerve from the truth about human good, but rather ... to attain the truth with certainty and to abide in it.' (64)

The Pope speaks severely about dissent from church teaching on the part of theologians, 'in the form of carefully orchestrated protests and polemics carried on in the media' (113). He has less to say about private non-compliance with church teaching. He does reject 'so-called "pastoral" solutions contrary to the teaching of the magisterium' (56), but these are based on a 'creative' view of conscience according to which conscience would make the final decision about what is good and what is evil.

This would not, in my view, rule out the position adopted by the Australian bishops in 1974, who taught that priests in their pastoral dealings might accept the good faith of persons who felt unable to observe the church's teaching on contraception because of special circumstances, e.g. the health of the wife, economic difficulties, unwillingness of the other partner, a threat to the marriage itself. The bishops would say that this person's conscience was in error, but in using the term 'good faith' they were respecting its dignity. ■

William Daniel SJ lectures in moral theology at Jesuit Theological College, Parkville, Victoria.

ANDREW HAMILTON

The claims of integrity

ANY ENCYCLICAL IS LIKE a one-stop shopping centre. Everyone judges it by whether they find what they are looking for, but only the serious shopper tests the depth of its resources. So it is no surprise that the response to *Veritatis Splendor* has been so varied. Before adding to the Babel of opinion about the encyclical, I should name my interest.

Increasingly I have come to believe that there is only one question that offers a promising basis for illuminating discussion about serious matters. That question is, what do we believe in such a way that we would be prepared to stake our lives on it?

The form in which I ask this question as a Catholic is what our faith in Jesus Christ commits us to in such a way that we would be prepared to live and die for it. That is the question on which I look for encouragement and illumination in any discussion about theology. Other questions may be important, but only when that serious question is clearly on the table.

A year or two ago, I would have hesitated to have put the question as sharply as this. For it makes an enormous claim to the high moral ground, and apparently restricts the church to an elite group that can face such questions with equanimity. I know, moreover, my own cowardice and uncertainties all too well to be able to feel comfortably at home in such a group.

It was the opportunity to share the life of rural communities in El Salvador that has made me bolder in naming this as my starting point. In those communities ordinary people with the ordinary range of human strengths and weaknesses had to face this question from day to day. They were called to put their bodies where their answers were, and to make a shared response. If, for example, some of the community were taken by the police for questioning, the others had to decide whether to go down to the police station as a group to demand their release, and so risk being beaten or killed themselves.

Their situation made it important for them to name in practical terms what the gospel committed them to as a community. While they often failed by these standards, they always returned to the central question about the demand of the gospel. But to be able to ask insistently what the gospel commits us to as a community in such a way that we would give our lives to it requires a strong sense both of the community and of a solid moral universe. Both are constantly threatened with erosion. When peace came to El Salvador, the cohesion of the community was threatened by diverging individual interest and a fuzziness about the non-negotiable demands of human dignity.

I also find my own sense of shared commitment to the claims of the gospel weakened by cultural fashions that minimise the claims of the community on the individual and fragment the moral universe. Under such pressure it is easy to settle for less exigent questions and to be less faithful in one's commitments.

With such interests, I found the encyclical home ground. John Paul II introduces the work by reflecting on truth, as he has done in almost all his major addresses. He evokes Havel and Solzhenitsyn, for whom truth makes a public claim. The encyclical says that human dignity is based on a solid moral universe in which there is a stable distinction between good and evil. This moral universe exists independently of whatever the regime declares of it. To speak of truth is also to say that this universe makes a claim on us, and that our response is given urgency and significance by our membership of the human community. This reference to truth underlines the claims that the community makes on the individual, and the objectivity of the moral world.

The encyclical is a document for believers. The Pope's central question has to do with what our community of faith in Jesus Christ commits us to. For that reason he weaves his reflections into a homily on the story of the rich young man. In the body of the text he stresses the objectivity of the moral world and also the claim that the community of faith has on the individuals within it. This involves a strong treatment of the place of the teaching office of the church in declaring the implications of faith in Christ. He concludes with a peroration on the martyrs, who are emblems of the seriousness of moral choice, of its objectivity and of the place of the community. Martyrs mark out the shape of integrity.

From this description of my preoccupations and of the encyclical, it will be clear that I regard it as a good document. At a general level it is an eloquent and even noble claim for truth in the sense that I have described. It defends the solidity of the moral universe and of the community against forces that are seen to erode them. It insists that the gospel makes claims that may be costly to the community of those who follow the path of Jesus Christ.

> *Any appeal for heroism must reckon with the fact that historically there are always as many people who have been ready to kill for the faith as those ready to die for it. A document that criticises schools of thought within the church can easily lead to recrimination and to a hunt for the guilty people ... and to the belief that if they are dealt with the claims of the gospel will adequately have been met.*

To say, however, that the encyclical directs our attention eloquently to the heart of Christian commitment is not to say that its message will necessarily be heard. For there is always the risk that the central question will be obscured by subordinate questions, and so the force of the encyclical will be lost. About this I have three grounds for concern.

In the first place, any appeal for heroism must reckon with the fact that historically there are always as many people who have been ready to kill for the faith as those ready to die for it. A document that criticises schools of thought within the church, as the encyclical does, can easily lead to recrimination and to a hunt for the guilty people, whether theologians or bishops, and to the belief that, if they are dealt with, the claims of the gospel will adequately have been met. In El Salvador, the claim of the gospel on the community

could be diverted to encourage violence against the persecutors. In the same way, an earlier encyclical against Modernism was followed by a witch hunt throughout the church.

This diversion of focus would contradict the claims of the gospel that the encyclical defends. For the readiness to lay down our lives would be replaced by the willingness to destroy others' lives.

Secondly, any appeal for generosity and any invitation to people to accept a solid moral universe and to accept the claims of the community upon them must eventually meet the practical issues in which such claims are cashed. In the communities in El Salvador general exhortation soon turned to the business of food distribution or appropriate resistance to army harassment. When the courses of action involved cost and risk to the community they needed to be commended. At that point, the subordinate questions — those about the procedures and wisdom of the leadership or the need for any planned action—become important. For if they were handled badly, the main issue of peoples' readiness to suffer in the name of the gospel was obscured.

In the reception of the encyclical the issue that has so far dominated media attention has been contraception. This is the point at which many people have seen the chips cashed. It is also the point at which many people have doubted whether the following of Christ demands what the teaching authority of the church says. So, although the encyclical mentions practical issues like contraception only in passing, the burden of its message will be obscured unless these issues are also dealt with. How can this be done?

Implicit within the encyclical is the judgment that some theologians have been influenced by false currents of secular thought, and that their public dissent against the teaching of the church has confused the faithful on issues like contraception. On this analysis, the resultant debate and confusion has made the faithful more vulnerable to other currents of thought that are incompatible with Christian faith. It has also eroded a proper respect for the teaching office within the church. The appropriate strategy, then, will be to ensure that those who represent the church are again faithful in their teaching and do not dissent. When this is done, Catholics will again accept that the demands of Christian life can be declared authoritatively by the teaching office of the church.

Many Catholics, however, offer another diagnosis. They say that it has been the spontaneous judgment of many Catholics about the morality of contraception that has made them suspicious of church authority on other areas to do with the gospel. In this respect the moral theologians only reflect that judgment of Catholics. On this second reading, the crisis facing the teaching office in the church is more severe, for it now must commend its own wisdom and authority to interpret the claims of Christ in detail. To curb the dissent of moral theologians would only suppress the symptoms of a deeper malaise.

If this explanation of the crisis that the encyclical addresses has any validity, the subordinate questions of its style and language, and of the process by which it was written, assume greater importance. For the more they alienate Catholics, the less effective the encyclical will be in commending the larger question with which it deals. Attention will remained fixed not on the common claims made by faith in Christ, but on the virtues and defects of people and procedures.

Which of these diagnoses is correct is a matter for judgment. There is evidence for both. But the question does impinge on the way the encyclical will be heard.

Thirdly, the support that the encyclical has received from some circles outside the church paradoxically gives me grounds for concern. For some of those who have commended it most vigorously to the church have also been noted for their vigorous support for various varieties of economic liberalism. These doctrines have been notable for reducing society to individuals motivated by the desire for wealth, and are most strongly opposed to public restriction of profitmaking from activities that the encyclical would term immoral. The adherents of these doctrines have promoted the fragmented moral order that the encyclical deplores. The fact that the encyclical, which is based on the story of the Jesus' lament for the rich young man's predilection for wealth, should win support in such circles, shows that it is easily misunderstood.

Finally, though, the encyclical does ask and insist on the right question: what are we willing to stake our lives on together in our following of Jesus Christ. But in posing this challenge, the Pope is not a lone Horatio on the church bridge.

In the daily life of the church this question is commended constantly. In El Salvador, the living memory of Archbishop Romero and of the martyred Jesuits and catechists provoked it daily. I find it kept alive constantly by the lives of refugees and of voluntary workers who have faced and answered the large question with their lives. Most will never read the encyclical, but they have kept the faith. ■

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THE CHURCH: 4

RAY CASSIN

Letters from on high

AFTER THE PREVIOUS bout of papal-encyclical writing, which produced *Centesimus Annus* in 1991, the American Protestant theologian Harvey Cox was moved to write: 'The secular realm must be wincing in embarrassment about the derivative quality of this ho-hum document. But let us be more generous. What is exhausted is not the Pope but the social-encyclical genre itself, with its improbable claims to universal validity and its consequent temptation to resort to bland truisms. My hope is that *Centesimus Annus* marks not only the 100th anniversary of papal social teaching but the end of that chapter in Christian history.'

Veritatis Splendor doesn't quite fit into what Cox calls the 'social-encyclical' genre, because its scope is considerably broader than that of what used to be called 'the worker question'. But it's a pretty safe bet that Cox still thinks that encyclical writing should be a closed chapter in Christ-

ian history. I suspect that the only judgment he might want to change is the one about bland truisms.

John Paul II has been a prolific writer of encyclicals, having presented the church with 10 in his 15 years as Pope. They have been rather longer than the encyclicals of most of his predecessors in this century, and he has had a greater propensity than most of them, except Pius XII, to use the genre not only to address specific pastoral questions but also as a vehicle for programmatic theological reflection.

I think Cox is right to suggest that the encyclical genre has outlived its usefulness, and the reasons why he is right go beyond the content of any one encyclical. Popes have always written letters, of course, and issued their proclamations and condemnations. But the great age of encyclical writing is relatively recent; the encyclical is a particular style of papal utterance that reflects—and partly constitutes—a particular style of papal government.

The kind of encyclical with which we are now familiar became the popes' favoured medium of communication after the papal states were absorbed by the Kingdom of Italy in 1870. Pius IX, that fainthearted liberal turned thoroughgoing reactionary, shut himself up in the Vatican and refused to deal with the secular power he believed had stolen his patrimony. Thereafter, the popes, as princes without a princedom, had to address their appeals not to fellow sovereigns but to the bishops and faithful of the Catholic world. The formal dispute between Italy and the Holy See was settled by the concordat of 1929, but the modern encyclical has continued to be a strange hybrid: part pastoral exhortation, and part missive from a prince in exile, seeking to rally his faithful subjects. It is a defensive genre, suited to an institution that feels beleaguered.

But defensiveness can take time to run out of vigour—about 100 years, as it has turned out. Here is Pius IX's feisty successor, Leo XIII, catching up with the industrial revolution in *Rerum Novarum* (1891): 'The elements of the conflict now raging are unmistakable, in the vast expansion of industrial pursuits and the marvellous discoveries of science; in the changed relations between masters and workmen; in the enormous fortunes of some few individuals, and the utter poverty of the masses; in the increased self-reliance and closer mutual combination of the working classes; as also, finally, in the prevailing moral degeneracy ... wise men are discussing it; practical men are proposing schemes; popular meetings, legislatures and rulers of nations are all busied with it.'

THEY DON'T WRITE 'EM like that any more, which is both a good thing and a bad thing. Good, because complex post-industrial societies in the late 20th century could not easily be described by the sweeping judgments that seemed possible in 1891. And bad, because the forceful rhetoric in which those sweeping judgments were expressed is now all spent.

By way of contrast with the grandiloquent Leo, here is the ponderous John Paul II, marking the 100th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* in *Centesimus Annus*: 'The Pope's [i.e. Leo's] approach in publishing *Rerum Novarum* gave the church "citizenship status" as it were, amid the changing realities of public life, and this standing would be more fully confirmed later on. In effect, to teach and to spread her social doctrine pertains to the church's evangelising mission and is an essential part of the Christian message, since this doctrine points out the direct consequences of that message ...' This reads like a memorandum from Sir Humphrey Appleby, without the jokes.

The Cambridge historian Eamon Duffy argues that 'Catholicism is a conversation, linking continents and cultures, and reaching backwards and forwards in time. The luxury of sectarianism, of renouncing whatever in the conversation cannot be squared with the perspective of one's own time and place, is not an option.' Quite so, Eamon, quite so. And what a pity that some of the occupants of St Peter's Chair have been less than adept at the art of conversation.

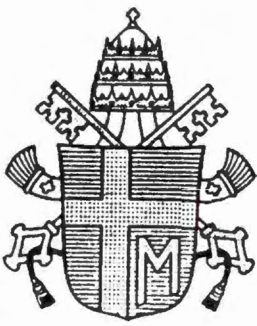
After Pius IX farewelled his troops at the Lateran Palace, withdrew into the Vatican and shunned contact with modernity as represented by the Italian state, it became customary among political Catholics to refer to the Pope as 'the prisoner of the Vatican'. The phrase has disappeared, and rightly so, but the psychological reality to which it referred has not. For even a much-travelled pope like John Paul II can be a prisoner, a prisoner of his own rhetoric.

Perhaps John Paul would say that in *Veritatis Splendor* he has kept up his end of the conversation that Duffy talks about, by taking issue with theologians who are too deeply imbued with the perspective of modern pluralist democracies. But a conversation needs at least two interlocutors, and it is not obvious, from the way *Veritatis Splendor* treats our theological tradition, that a conversation is going on.

The theologians whom the encyclical castigates as 'teleologists', 'consequentialists' and 'proportionalists' have built their work out of many sources, including the analysis of moral judgment to be found in the second part of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* and the theories of virtue ethics that various secular philosophers have developed during the past three decades. Not all of those secular philosophers have been Catholic, though in their arguments most have delivered at least a passing nod to Thomas as well as to his (and their) philosophical mentor, Aristotle. It is a sad irony that, in their knowledge of what Thomas actually says, those secular philosophers have shown themselves to be better participants in the conversation than has the Pope.

There are good Catholic reasons for sharing Harvey Cox's Protestant doubts about the continued effectiveness of the encyclical genre. It is not a question of whether popes should sometimes offer general reflections on moral questions; of course they should. It is a question of how best to keep the conversation going. And at the moment there is not much sense that the Vatican is interested in a conversation 'reaching backwards and forwards in time'. Reading *Veritatis Splendor*, one feels that the dialogue only moves between Rome, *circa* 1870, and Warsaw, *circa* 1950. (The encyclical's heavy dose of Augustine does not contradict this; it confirms it.) Catholicism has a much longer history than that, and its conversation should reflect that history. ■

Ray Cassin is a member of *Eureka Street's* staff.



JOHN E. RYAN

Sweet grapes and sour grapes

A homily for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

I expected my vineyard to yield sweet grapes. Why did it yield sour grapes instead?

THE POPE'S ENCYCLICAL addresses some controversial moral issues: questions such as abortion, birth control, divorce, homosexuality and premarital sex. Indeed, these are not just controversial issues; for many people, they are issues of life and death!

In the context of today's readings I found myself wondering what effects this encyclical will have on our church. Will it produce sweet grapes or sour grapes? Will it lead us to greater life and the mutual love and support we are called to as the church, or will it bring further antagonism and divisions? Certainly there is a danger, as recent history suggests, that such statements often end up with yet another group being alienated from the church.

With these thoughts in mind I began to ask how I might prepare to receive this teaching positively and fruitfully. In response I found myself recalling some truths of our faith.

First, the name of this encyclical is 'The Splendor Of Truth', and it is well named, for it is the church's role to lead us to freedom, life and truth. If then we are genuinely trying to serve God and our neighbour and find that for whatever reason it is binding us, destroying us or leading us into confusion and conflict, then we may presume that we are not getting its true message. While what the Spirit calls us to is not always easy the Letter to the Galatians tells us that the fruits of the Spirit are: love, joy, peace, patient endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness and chastity.

As we well know, there is a lot of confusion around many of the issues that this encyclical touches on. While it is the role of those in authority in the church to articulate for us the story of how the Spirit is calling us, it is often hard to find ways to express this story adequately. It is very easy for the true message to get lost in the transmission. So if those fruits of the Spirit are not in evidence, then whatever it is that we are hearing, it is not from God.

I then recalled that too many of us, even as adults, still rely almost exclusively on the voice of the Spirit as it comes to us from the external authority. We are not well attuned to listen to that inner voice which the external story sets off within us. It is good to remind ourselves again that although we should always respect and remain open to the external teaching, the ultimate voice that we all have to obey is the inner voice of our conscience. Our conscience is nothing other than the voice of the Spirit within us.

In seeking to prepare myself to receive this encyclical fruitfully, I found myself recalling that life as we live it is inevitably a complex matter. Often enough we find ourselves faced with conflicting values and for the sake of doing one good thing we might have to pass up or miss out on something else. For instance, in order to protect our family we might sometimes be forced to tell an untruth. The nitty-gritty circumstances of day-to-day living can demand that we be selective in choosing what good things we are able or not able to do.

If we have not yet come to know God as mercy and compassion we will have difficulty in living with the inevitable messiness of life. At times we might find ourselves seeking more clarity than it is possible to have. And we may be unable to rest with the knowledge that all God asks of us is our reasonable best shot. Some of us find it hard to live with imperfection and accept the fact that we all sin many times each day. All of us are in constant need of God's mercy and compassion. (*Proverbs* 24:16).

Without this basic awareness of our sinfulness, we get into all sorts of game-playing and do all kinds of funny things with what is demanded of us. Whenever our image of God falls short of seeing Him as mercy and compassion, we can easily make the rules, the laws and teaching into idols.This is like living with a sign post rather than moving towards the place to which the sign post points.

Let us remind ourselves that in so many areas of life we are unable to live up to the full demands of the gospel. How many of us can live up to the call and challenge of fraternal charity? All of us fall short many times, and we should not expect it to be all that different in areas of sexual morality.

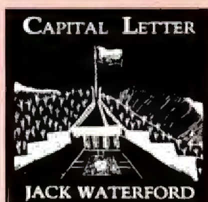
Please God, the release of this new encyclical will give us all an opportunity to look again at the way we live and our attitudes to the directives regarding morality that come to us from the teaching authority within the church. As the Gospel reading reminds us, there is a real possibility that those who produce sour grapes will lose the Kingdom. ■

John E. Ryan is a priest of the diocese of Sandhurst.

THE SCHEME
THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS IN CHILD CARE IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The Catholic orphanages in W.A. managed by the Christian Brothers (1897 - 1983) have become controversial since the release of books and T.V. mini series such as 'Lost Children of the Empire' and 'The Leaving of Liverpool'. THE SCHEME is a history of the four institutions: Clontarf, Castledare, Boys Town, Bindoon and St Mary's Agricultural School, Tardun in the context of the media controversy. Heavily based on primary sources, liberally illustrated, THE SCHEME faces the issues squarely: apart from the formal history chapters, sections include: 'Physical abuse in the traditional orphanage'; 'The sexual underworld' and 'Pocket money, wages, 'slavery' and 'exploitation'. Author: Barry M. Coldrey, Ph.D

Hard cover, with detailed endnotes and comprehensive bibliography, plus a complete register of staff and students who worked in the four institutions; (4000 names). ISBN 1 86307 027 3. Austed Publishing, Perth. R.R.P. $29.95 plus $2.50 p. & p. release date: mid-November 1993. From: 53 Redmond Street Manning, W.A. 6152. P.O. Box 106, Como. W.A. 6152. Ph.: (09) 450 5311 Fax: (09) 450 6370. Cheques: 'Christian Brothers'.



Leading means more than surviving

It was a great triumph for Paul Keating when he signed up the Aborigines on the Mabo deal, and—more or less—the dissident senators on the budget bills. Or so all the commentators said. There was a lot of chat about his new mood of determination since returning from overseas, and how he was finally getting back to work. But don't get too optimistic. Keating's presidential style is changing yet again—he is in his third transformation in 18 months—but there are still serious flaws in his style of government and they have every capacity to bring him down.

Keating has certainly moved out of the prolonged daze that, since the election, saw him lose almost all interest in the day-to-day workings of government. Instead he concentrated on some big issues, but even then he devoted almost all of his time to broad principles, failing to involve himself in the nitty-gritty. That style was beginning to hurt him very badly, not least amongst his core supporters on the Labor right. It was Keating's inattention to detail, his failure to ensure that hard political calculation went into the budget process, which made the Dawkins' budget such a fiasco, and which prolonged the agony of rescuing it. Keating's first response to the problem was a virtuoso display of his monstering talents—which worked not a jot—and a now familiar pattern of missed meetings and mucking around. When he finally turned to it as a problem, we saw the wheedling and wooing Keating at his best. But why did he wait so long?

Similarly, Keating left Mabo drift along far too long, leaving the negotiations to others and astonishingly ignorant of any points of detail, until finally he was shocked by the realisation that the package being stitched up faced fundamental opposition from Aboriginal interests. Previously he had thought that the loud noises were mere negotiating ploys. Again Keating showed a skill: his focus on a political result is such that he can do a complete policy somersault overnight, without a blink, in the interests of an enduring deal.

These, and some other signs of a new self-confidence, along with the disappearance of much of the moody, aggrieved, withdrawn and nasty-tempered persona often on display of late, have sent Labor's morale soaring. But pessimists wonder how long it can last. Why, for example, did it take Mabo and a trip abroad to make Keating realise that things were seriously awry? Even if both the evidence and the media's focus on it is disregarded, he had been getting all the warning signs from factional colleagues; yet he rebuffed them with a ferocity that may have left lasting wounds.

But the real problem is with the routine business of government, and, to a degree, with festering discontent from the drawn-out succession struggle. Keating is not governing through Cabinet. It is partly because he has been disengaged: thinking grand and noble long-term thoughts about Aboriginal reconciliation and republics rather than watching the till; keeping an eye on ministers in trouble; paying attention to issues that might blow up; and, not least, playing with the levers to deal with issues such as unemployment. He was always bad at meetings—particularly at chairing them—and always better with informal discussions and doing things on the run. Keating may have had deep contempt for Bob Hawke and his lack of ideals and inability to 'nurture' the party, but Hawke, for his faults, was not a bad manager, conciliator and chairman, and ran a fairly smooth machine.

Most of the Cabinet ministers who stayed with Hawke to the end (although, it is to be remembered, it was just these who told him his time was up) have not been reconciled to Keating. It is not their fault—the goodwill, generally, is there; it is simply that Keating has not developed a basic working relationship into any sense of partnership, shared goals or political friendship. That many of them are functional ministers, more or less bound to oppose him on details of the noble goals (over Mabo, say), probably does not help. It was their absence from the inner councils that meant that very little political nous or hard judgment went into the budget details; Keating was also absent from the thinking process, and Dawkins, for all of his abilities, simply lacks gut instinct.

These ministers are, essentially, putting their heads down and concentrating on their departmental level work, and taking care to keep out of the spotlight. One does not hear much voluntarily from, say, Robert Ray, Kim Beazley, Gareth Evans or Nick Bolkus at the moment. Not even the supposed young blood—Michael Lee or Michael Lavarch—have made any impact. Peter Baldwin, sensibly, is keeping his head down. Brian Howe, Alan Griffith, Simon Crean and Ros Kelly are also quiet, though less comfortably so. Bob Collins is licking his wounds, and John Dawkins ought to be. Bob McMullan is enhancing a reputation, but very quietly. Laurie Brereton is well on the way to proving that hubris can strike twice in the one place.

A change in Keating's office is one cause for hope. Keating's former chief adviser, Don Russell (now ambassador to Washington), ran a chaotic organisation. But a bright young bureaucrat—Allan Hawke, a former deputy secretary in the Defence department—has taken over. He is putting a lot of work into rebuilding bridges: chatting up the backbenchers, listening to the ministers and trying to get some order, priority and strategy into affairs. He is starting to break down some of the anger at Keating, but so far it is not clear that Keating has taken an eye off the road map to put it back on the road. He won't get there unless he does. ■

Jack Waterford is deputy editor of *The Canberra Times*

Women form ordination group

From Marie Louise Uhr

I have read with delight Pamela Foulkes' two articles on Catholic women, ordination and the church (*Eureka Street*, August and October). It's clear that Catholic women in Australia are becoming increasingly concerned about the church and their place in it: this, as Foulkes implies, probably explains the number of groups women are forming. And there is now one more group to add to her list. As her October article was being written, a national special action group to work for the ordination of women was formed in Canberra and this was announced in Melbourne on October 1st at the Third Ecumenical Feminist Theology Conference. This announcement was greeted with acclamation and has been warmly supported throughout the community.

Our name is 'Ordination of Catholic Women' (OCW); we intend not only to advocate the ordination of women in the Catholic Church, but also to support those women seeking ordination.

Further information can be obtained from me, as convenor, on (06) 251 4513, or by writing to us at PO Box E418, Queen Victoria Terrace, Canberra ACT 2600.

Marie Louise Uhr
Canberra, ACT

Degrees of difference

From A.L. Pritchard, executive director, Open Learning Agency of Australia, and D.R. Jones, consultant, Open Learning Agency of Australia.

In 'Doing time, by degrees' (*Eureka Street*, June-July 1993) Professor Fred Jevons suggests that the Open Learning Agency of Australia will be interested in his analysis of the state and possible futures of higher education. He's right. We are. Jevons' ætiology and diagnosis of the present state of higher education are penetrating. The demands of increasing numbers of increasingly diverse for a practically limitless variety of education must be met by expanding and diversifying the forms of education and its classification and certification of students and studies. The 'two year degree' as described by Jevons may or may not have a place in Australia's response to the demand for more and various higher education; the principles behind his proposal are less problematic.

The growth of 'mass' higher education beyond the needs of small economic, professional, social, intellectual elites is a hallmark of all 'advanced' 'western' societies in the latter 20th century. Australia is no exception, though it lags behind some pacesetters. Here, as everywhere, mass higher education and the onset of 'universal' (well over 50 per cent) post-school education makes new and different as well as enlarged demands on the providers of education. Older students who have not studied recently, underprepared or unconventionally educated students, extraordinarily experienced and prepared students, part-time students, isolated or otherwise disadvantaged students all require new modes of teaching and learning. The needs of industry, commerce, democratic decision making, high technology, post-industrial employments, and human curiosity will require a much needed increased range of subjects, combinations, and applications.

As Professor Jevons makes clear, these varied needs cannot all be met by the traditional Australian university offering the traditional Australian three-year degree. Indeed, the traditional university may be financially and intellectually crippled if it tries to be all things to all people. For the foreseeable future at least, there will be an important place for the full-time education of recent secondary-school leavers in a limited range of specialised disciplines, though the three-year degree, neither general in scope nor sufficient preparation in depth, may lose popularity and relevance. And although research and good teaching are not inextricably linked, they will remain wedded in many institutions. But such institutions and arrangements may not remain the primary focus, and certainly not the sole focus, of higher education.

New and reformed and diverse institutions, subjects, methods, and arrangements are being added to higher education. These additions to the scope of higher education are based on several principles which lie behind Jevons' proposal for the two-year degree. One is the continuing or even increasing need and demand for liberal or, more accurately, general education as a preparation for employment and life generally or a preliminary to more specialised study. Another is the need for higher education to be flexible and adaptable to increases to knowledge and new means of employing it. A third is flexibility in the means of teaching and learning, so that new knowledge may be acquired throughout life and under all sorts of circumstances.

Dividing education into smaller or shorter blocks, first general, later specialised as required, is a common and effective means of meeting the needs for flexibility and for both general and specialised education. Much of the recent reform of European higher education has involved deconstructing the long and rigid path to a single university degree and replacing it with shorter, potentially cumulative courses of study and certifications. French higher education now involves two year segments intended to prepare both those who go on with higher education and those who step out into the 'real world' at some half-way point. The community or junior college, found throughout North America and elsewhere, offers two-year qualifications as a response to many needs: terminal and temporarily terminal training, general and in some cases remedial education, a relatively inex-

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.

pensive and widely available preliminary to more advanced and specialised education, the opportunity for selection and self-selection for advanced study, the dropping out without undue frustration or waste of those who reach limits of their interest or ability, etc.

Reforming or adapting education by putting it in smaller packages has a long and effective history, beginning well before the two-year college and the 'associate degree', much less the use of terms like 'modularisation'. In the post-Civil War United States the needs, for both liberal and an increasing range of specialised study, the variable preparation and goals of students, and the philosophical imperatives of democracy and choice were met first at Harvard, then more generally, by electives, units of study, credit points: in modern jargon, modularisation. University degrees would be assembled by the student out of blocks of study or credits. The requirements of method, rigour, and cohesiveness would be met by requiring 'majors' or sequences of study; the need for general education and the well-rounded mind would be met by 'distribution requirements'—the insistence that students study something different to their major interests.

Decades before the discussion of 'life-long learning', modules of learning, credits and credit transfer had made America the home of the flexible and portable credential. The unit (elective, credit, module, etc.) of learning has been an effective cure for the problem of a rigid and prescriptive curriculum dedicated to providing one sort of education for one sort of student. (The prescription need not be universally applied. A century after Elliot introduced electives at Harvard, institutions and faculties with prescriptive curricula still flourish alongside the modular mode. Reform in higher education is often additive, at least at first. The new appears beside the old; over time a dialectic of competition and co-operation often leads to a new synthesis, by which time the initially apparent conflict may be long forgotten.)

Today in Australasia, the principle of the building block or module of knowledge, capable of being fitted into many patterns, is part of many new or expanding developments. It lies at the structural heart of most programs of part-time, adult, distance, and life-long education. Credits for clearly defined units of knowledge, and the transferability and accumulation of these credits, are rightly perceived by Australia's Department of Employment, Education and Training as important contributors to the expansion and adaptability of post-school education. New Zealand has taken these

principles further: its Qualifications Authority hopes to define all learning experiences in modular, credit-bearing terms so that all these units may be fitted into a national framework of credentials and qualifications.

Open Learning is in the business of offering first class learning opportunities, defined as units of knowledge. These units are creditable towards a growing range of degrees and awards. The quality of the units is assured by such customary mechanisms as expert review and over sight by established institutions, but the real basis of our credibility is our excellence. Modules of knowledge are prepared by the best scholars (indeed, preparing an Open Learning unit which may then be offered for some years is an excellent way to combine teaching and research without overburdening the researcher) and delivered by a mixture of traditional and new high tech means to anyone anywhere.

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A dog's breakfast

Pay TV will mean much more than the arrival of special-interest channels for news addicts, sports junkies and film buffs. It also heralds changes for Australia's public broadcasters, the ABC and SBS. ***Mark Skulley*** *sorts through the tangle of hopeful entrepreneurs, hesitant politicians and harassed media bureaucrats who will decide Australia's communications future.*

Photo: Bill Thomas

AT THE HEIGHT OF THE GULF WAR, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi personally called the foreign desk of the Cable News Network in Atlanta and asked for airtime. They hung up, twice. The Libyan ambassador then called, wanting to know why nobody would speak to his leader. Two hours later, Gaddafi burst through Libya's isolation by going straight into the ether. The *Los Angeles Times* later commented about CNN's coverage: 'It was perhaps never so clear as during the war that television had become a full-fledged participant in international affairs rather than simply a witness.'

CNN is only a blip on the big picture. The world's fastest-growing industry—communications—plans an 'information superhighway' into the home. Alliances are forming for the 21st century amid the convergence of telephone technology, computers, television, videos and movies. The latest manoeuvre is the $45 billion merger in the US between the Bell Atlantic telephone company and Tele-Communications Inc, America's biggest cable-TV outfit.

Australia's pay-TV policy has been pulled in opposite directions for more than a decade, by free marketeers in the communications bureaucracy and by the long tradition of political patronage towards media proprietors.The Hawke and Keating governments have had eight communications ministers since 1987. Pollies of the mulberry-faces-dozing-deep variety saw pay TV as just more telly. Australia is finally getting pay TV because it would soon be widely available from foreign-owned satellites, subject to scant government regulation and little profit for locals.

The Keating government opted for a satellite system (see box on p17) using digital compression technology, which vastly increases the number of channels but is still not commercially available. The government legislated to delay introduction of the cheaper MDS system, arguing it was not the best technology and could not be received by all Australians. Optus was also sold the troubled Aussat satellite system for $800 million on the understanding it would carry pay TV.

In theory, the first player, not the best technology, will be the big winner in the pay TV market. Satellite and MDS systems need different decoders for home reception, and viewers are unlikely to buy both. Rupert Murdoch failed to win a licence to broadcast pay TV in Britain, but his Sky TV got in first, using a Luxembourg-based satellite system. His competitor had better technology but never caught up, and the two later merged to form BSkyB.

A minnow in the broadcasting pond, UCOM Australia, and another related company, eventually won the controversial tenders for the two main satellite

licences.At the time of writing, UCOM had passed scrutiny from the Trade Practices Commission in its bid for licence A (four channels) and had a month to settle the $97 million purchase price. Details were unclear on ownership of licence B (four channels), the only licence open to existing media proprietors. Setting up a satellite delivery system is expected to take 12-18 months and to cost perhaps $300 million. Pay TV via MDS can start after the satellite service begins or in January 1995, so it's still an open race.

Waiting in the mounting yard is the heayweight PMT consortium—Kerry Packer's Nine Network, Murdoch's News Corporation, Telecom and the Seven and Ten networks. The cut-throat ratings battle between Nine and Seven makes the group unstable but they are stayers individually. News Corp has the Fox film studios and television network in the US and splurged $770 million for control of the Hong Kong-based Star TV, the dominant Asian satellite broadcaster. It plans a network covering Europe, Asia and the Americas and wants to link up with a major telephone company.

Murdoch has proposed that News Corp issue 'super shares' to existing shareholders. A massive issue of new shares with reduced voting rights would inject $4 billion-$5 billion into the company while allowing the Murdoch family to maintain control. The controversial super shares are allowed in the US but are new to Australia. News also has to turn around the loss-making Star TV and overcome restrictions on satellite broadcasting in some Asian countries.

News Corp and Telecom are major shareholders in the Seven network and are investigating joint ventures in Asia. Faced with competition and eventual privatisation, Telecom plans to lift its earnings overseas and in new ventures at home, using pay TV to help pay for the hardware. Telecom claims that its ADSL technology, which transmits video signals on existing copper telephone wires, will be ready for commercial use in 1995-96—although industry insiders say that is a highly optimistic expectation. Telecom has also called tenders for a pay TV network using a mix of coaxial cable and fibre optics.The huge capacity of fibre optics allows the 'interactivity' needed for future services such as movies on demand, distance education, games, gambling, voting, home shopping and banking, digital video library access, home security and energy management. But a coaxial fibre-optic pay TV network is some years and many billions of dollars away.

PAY TV ARRIVES during a budget squeeze at the ABC. Managing director David Hill has been chasing a wider audience for a leaner, more commercial ABC. Staff numbers have fallen by about 1000 since 1989, but wage and salary costs are still rising at a faster rate than budget increases. During 1988-92 Hill increased the revenue from sources such as ABC products, concerts and co-productions from $36 million to $86 million.

More controversial is the sponsorship of ABC programs. *The Investigators* accepted $20,000 from the NSW Law Society against the wishes of staff. The weekly sheep dog trials have signs for Pal dog food in key camera angles. The co-producer of *Consuming Passions*, the Perth-based Markham International, sent a letter last year assuring potential sponsors of 'considerable scope in suggesting recipes, treatments and personnel involved in each show.' Five episodes of *Consuming Passions* have been rejected for not meeting guidelines covering sponsorship.

The ABC's satellite service into Asia, Australia Television International, has perhaps ironically, been criticised for only getting three sponsors since it began in February. ATVI is transmitted via Indonesia's Palapa satellite, which has a 'footprint' covering 15 countries including Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong and south China. It shows ABC programs such as *Play School*, *Lateline*, *Mr Squiggle*, *Quantum* and *Four Corners*, plus its own nightly news bulletin, assembled by a small team in Darwin led by journalist Prakash Mirchandani.

The service was begun with a one-off federal grant of $5.4 million, and is believed to have about $3 million left plus about $1 million from sponsorship. In a troubled start, former *Sixty Minutes* producer Ben Hawke succeeded ABC staffer Bruce Donald as head of the project after Donald quit, citing 'fundamental differences' with David Hill. Donald insists ATVI is 'very sensible' expenditure with potentially large benefits in diplomacy, trade and strategy.

Richard Broinowski, the former general manager of Radio Australia, who worked on launching ATVI, supports the service but is disappointed at its programming: 'I think the idea was that Asia had an educated, sophisticated middle-class who were interested in a regional slant on current affairs and culture.' Broinowski says the service has been undersold in the region, doesn't show the range of Australian culture, from music to multi-ethnicity, and has too much 'Aussie' sport such

Pay TV means paying more for extra channels brought into your home for perhaps $30-$50 a month for a subscription package. The basic delivery systems are:

Satellite: Broadcasts direct to home receiving dish. A 60cm dish in south-eastern Australia and Perth will get good pictures, bigger dishes needed elsewhere. Equipment possibly two or three times as expensive as MDS.

MDS: Radio microwaves transmitted from a beacon on the ground. Equipment will possibly cost about $400-$500. Operates on line-of-sight, causing problems in hilly locations like Sydney.

Hybrid systems: A mix of satellite and MDS technology, still the most likely set-up for Australia.

Optic fibre/coaxial cable: Medium of the future but rolling out the fibre-optic network is massively expensive. There have been trials in Sydney's Centennial Park and in Wollongong.

as rugby league and the AFL. 'Australian businessmen in the region seem to be cleaning up their act, but some of them are still very parochial,' Broinowski says. 'If they start liking ATVI too much then perhaps it's not showing the most appropriate programming to attract indigenous audiences.'

ATVI's line-up has been boosted by the *Phoenix* crime series, *Foreign Correspondent*, Open Learning programs and a selection of SBS shows. Local broadcasters in the Philippines, Singapore, Bangkok and China's booming Guangdong province have agreed to use part or all of the service. ATVI director Ben Hawke says its news is 'sensitive without being censored', with the ABC's regional correspondents supplying more Asian content than either CNN or the BBC World Service. Radio Australia has begun providing news bulletins on ATVI in Indonesian, Cantonese and Mandarin.

AT HOME, THE ABC WILL GET satellite licence C for two pay-TV channels—one for news and information, and another for children's shows between 6am and 6pm and an evening mix of documentaries and cultural programs including Australian drama, music and comedy. The news channel's 70-100 journalists will focus on national politics, with live crosses to important news conferences, parliamentary sittings and committee hearings, plus detailed information on finance, sports and weather.

The PMT consortium

Kerry Packer: controls the Nine network, Australian Consolidated Press, which publishes half of Australia's best-selling magazines, 15 per cent of John Fairfax newspapers.

Rupert Murdoch: News Corp publishes 66 per cent of Australia's capital-city daily newspapers, and more of the Sunday papers. Has 15 per cent of Seven network, controls Pacific Magazines and Printing (26 per cent of magazines).

Telecom: Local telecommunications giant with $900 million profit last year and operating revenue of $12.7 billion. Has 10 per cent of Seven network, investigating Asian joint ventures with News Corp.

Seven network.

Network Ten.

The ABC will have a wholly-owned subsidiary called Astra, which will have a majority shareholding in the operating company. Private investment of $37.5 million-$87.5 million is being sought. The ABC's head of pay TV, Kim Williams, says the corporate structure will insulate the parent from any risk apart from the one-off federal grant of $12.5 million. 'None of it will proceed if it doesn't add up.'

Williams—a friend and possible successor to David Hill—refuses to be drawn on whether the ABC pay channels will take advertising once it is allowed in 1997. But he points out that the ABC and BBC are the only state broadcasters that do not take advertising, and that even the Beeb gets compulsory licence fees. He also cites the audience that US television networks have lost to pay TV in the last decade. 'I think there's a lot of self-serving, comfortable armchair rhetoric that always gets engaged in an organisation as large and as complex as the ABC. That's not to pooh-pooh criticism. I just think a lot of criticism is built upon romantic notions of the way life operates which are in blind indifference to what's happening in the legislative forums of the nation, what's happening in the broadcasting markets and what's happening with audiences.'

Bruce Donald, a former member of the ABC executive, says the overall cost of the ABC joint venture will top $200 million over several years. He can't see the ABC getting a return on its money in the current pay TV market. 'I'm now of the view that the ABC should cut its losses and use the $12.5 million of public money for something better—improving programs rather than getting obsessed with delivery systems. That won't be popular with David and Kim because they have put their professional lives on this, but I think they should be bigger than that and they should admit that the time has come to cut their losses.' Williams retorts: 'Bruce Donald is talking through his hat ... Bruce has had no involvement whatsoever in any of the business planning to do with pay television.'

David Hill is also at odds with Peter Manning, until recently editor of ABC television's news and current affairs. The two differ on internal management issues, but Manning has also sought to insulate the ABC's free-to-air news and current affairs from possible commercial connections. Hill insists they are safeguarded.

Chris Anderson, a former chief executive of John Fairfax newspapers, was appointed this year to a new position above Manning overseeing ABC TV news and information services. Anderson praises Manning and ABC news and current affairs, but says all organisations have to change. 'I'm not talking about sponsorship, for goodness' sake. I'm open to new programming ideas. We've got to reach a broader and more diversified audience ... the demographics are slightly skewed towards an older audience.' Is Manning in management limbo? 'My role is to oversee news and information and current affairs ... Manning's job is as the editor of the news and current affairs service on television, and that job remains.' Soon after *Eureka Street* spoke to Anderson, Manning switched jobs and became general manager of Radio National. A new position of managing editor for TV and radio, ranking above Anderson's present job, has reportedly been created. It is believed Anderson will apply for the post.

SBS WILL HAVE a wholly-owned subsidiary involved with private investors in an ethnic language service using leased capacity. It will show six hours of new programs a day 'turned over' twice on four channels—Italian, Greek, Arabic and Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese). The managing director of SBS, Mal-

colm Long, says the pay channels will be 'obviously and consciously different' from the free-to air service. 'What people seek is a very broad service which includes variety, soaps and game shows as well as news, current affairs, movies and so on. Long says the SBS free-to-air service is watched by four million Australians a week, and is used regularly by 50-70 per cent of the ethnic community.

Steve Cosser's Australis Media holds 12 MDS licences in both Sydney and Melbourne and plans to have channels operating by the end of the year in Italian, Greek, Arabic, Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin) and Vietnamese. Carl Johnson, managing director of the company's operating channel in Melbourne, TeleItalia, says the 1000 subscribers tend to be blue-collar, older Italians, unlike the core SBS audience of middle-class English speakers. 'They don't want Fellini movies. They tend to watch the Italian equivalent of *Sons and Daughters* or games shows, popular movies.'

Pay TV will allow a host of 'narrowcasters' appealing to limited or localised audiences such as services in ethnic languages and special interest groups. Michelle McAuslan, principal solicitor with the Communications Law Centre, says that narrowcasters face few checks on foreign ownership and media concentration. She says the public also needs a window into the regulation of broadcasting. 'Not necessarily a full hearing in the courtroom sense, but putting all the relevant documents on the public record and allowing comment.'

The legislation creating the Australian Broadcasting Authority allows for investigations but public hearings are not mandatory. ABA spokesman Donald Robertson says: 'It's something that we don't have a policy on. It depends on the particular investigation.' Since Murdoch is an American citizen, the ABA may have to rule on whether the links between News Corp and Telecom make them associates. News Corp and Telecom hold 25 per cent of the Seven network between them, and the limit on foreign ownership is 20 per cent. The Trade Practices Commission and the ABA may have to rule on the PMT syndicate if it eventually wins a pay TV licence. Telecom is in a private pay TV syndicate and is required by the telecommunications regulator, Austel, to allow other players equal access to its network.

Rupert Murdoch sees the bigger picture. He said in a major speech in London that advances in telecommunications had liberated people from the 'once powerful media barons' and proved George Orwell wrong. 'The Bosnian Serbs can't hide their atrocities from the probing eyes of BBC, CNN and Sky news cameras; starvation in Africa can no longer be ignored, because television brings it into our living rooms; the extraordinary living standards produced by free-enterprise capitalism cannot be kept secret from a world that sees how Lucy lived, and how Bill Cosby's Dr Huxtable proposes in a supposedly fractured society.' ■

Mark Skulley is a freelance journalist.

Old wrinklies

WRINKLES IN TIME is the witty title of George Smoot's about-to-be-published story of what Stephen Hawking called 'The scientific discovery of the century, if not of all time'. This is a 'folksy' book. Cosmological threads are woven in and out of stories about peoples and places. The basic plot, however, has to do with Smoot's discovery of evidence for cosmos-wide ripples of radiation that, he claims, are echoes of the initial explosions at the moment that stars and galaxies began to form, only a few hundred thousand years after the Big Bang.

Big-Bang theory does not account for the rapid formation of large-scale structures early in the life of the cosmos, unless there was some kind of 'hiccup' or 'anisotropy' in these growth stages. How and when did 'solid matter' evolve? Since 1974, Smoot and his team, who work out of Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory in California, have been seeking for evidence of such ripples in the fabric of space-time in the background radiation of the cosmos. A satellite launched in 1980 provided 70 million measurements a year, surveying the entire sky for minute variations in temperature.

Because many other cosmic research programs have been found to be inconclusive, Smoot's research was both meticulous and shrouded in secrecy. He offered his students outrageous rewards if they could find any error in his calculations. But, as he got closer to mapping the universe with a pattern of 'starting points', Smoot became more and more excited. In the spirit of Archimedes, early in the morning one of his assistants left a print-out under his door with a note attached saying, 'Here are the plots you asked for. Eureka?'.

What he found was a trace of the universe at 300,000 years old, except that the ripples were much more than 300,000 light years across. Without these ripples, matter would be evenly distributed across the universe and no galaxies would have formed. Knowing how and when 'lumpiness' began in the universe, we can also guess more about the future of the universe. And of course, none of the speculation is certain, even though the evidence is strong. Similar evidence from rival research teams proved to be corrupted by temperature effects from rocket engines in space!

Unlike Stephen Hawking and Steven Weinberg, in many ways his mentors, Smoot does not find modern cosmology providing him with reasons for being sceptical about a creator. Indeed the reverse is true.

Wrinkles in Time, about to be published in Australia by Penguin, is entertaining, honest, humorous and reverent. Smoot is not entirely accurate in his survey of the relations between cosmology and religion, but neither is he dogmatic. There is an attractive, self-effacing goodness and wonder here: for a scientist, Smoot copes well with mystery. Good summer reading. ■

—John Honner SJ

Report

Dave Lane

The noose on the news

ALTHOUGH THE Trade Practices Commission's attempt to break the newsagents' monopoly on the distribution of newspapers in Victoria (*Eureka Street*, August 1993) has been stalled by legal action, a similar challenge by one of Australia's smaller daily papers is proving something of a bonanza for the residents of the nation's capital.

In September *The Canberra Times* launched its own distribution network, and Canberrans have since got their home-town daily delivered cheaper and earlier. The number of retail outlets has also been expanded, to include supermarkets and corner stores, and the paper offers retail outlets better commissions than newsagents offer their subagents for high-volume sales.

Most of Canberra's newsagents have reacted by taking legal action. They have appealed to the Federal Court over a retail sales agreement the paper now wants them to sign, claiming it is anti-competitive. They have obtained an injunction to ensure that they continue to receive supplies of *The Canberra Times* until a further hearing on 12 November. The NSW/ACT Newsagents Association has kept its distance from the court action, however, preferring negotiations with the paper.

Nick Samaras, the general manager of *The Canberra Times*, compares his paper to daily staples like bread and milk, and that is where the newspaper is now being placed—alongside the basics of life at supermarkets or convenience stores. Night owls can pick up a copy at one of the city's five 24-hour supermarkets by 2am each day, and *The Canberra Times* will supply any shop that can sell more than five copies of the paper a day.

Readers are also enjoying the benefits of a price war, as newsagents offer 10 per cent discounts to counter the paper's promotion of hefty savings for home delivery. *The Canberra Times* now comes with the promise not only of arriving at the front door earlier—by 6am—but also at a lower price. Discounts for home delivery range from 21 per cent to 36.5 per cent below the deals offered by newsagents. The paper now reaches about a quarter of Canberra's homes, a figure considered well below potential and one which triggered the paper's decision to directly employ delivery contractors. Although Canberra newsagents have now lost about 10 per cent of their home delivery trade, store sales have remained static. Samaras says that sales in supermarkets and other new outlets, which are now into their thousands, are boosting overall figures and are the result of impulse buying.

This move by *The Canberra Times* challenges the claim by newsagents that they alone can get newspapers and magazines to consumers most effectively and cheaply. It is this claim which forms the basis of the newsagency distribution monopoly throughout the country. The Trades Practices Commission has, in the past, been prepared to accept this assertion of public benefit and endorse what would otherwise be illegal restrictions on trade.

The Canberra Times was able to break the monopoly because it is no longer owned by one of the big two publishers (Murdoch or Fairfax), who, together with newsagency representatives, run the NSW/ACT Newsagency Council. The Canberra daily changed hands four years ago, and a smaller media entrepreneur, Kerry Stokes, now controls the paper through Federal Capital Press.

The one other capital-city daily to break its links with the traditional newsagency distribution system is *The West Australian*. The Perth morning daily has been having a profitable run since its resurrection from the ashes of the Bond empire nearly two years ago and, like *The Canberra Times*, it is not controlled by Murdoch or Fairfax. The paper's publisher, WAN Ltd, has quit the state's Newsagency Council and in September it announced that it would deal directly with shops and home-delivery contractors.

Newsagents are also under pressure from another source, as some magazine publishers contemplate withdrawing titles from newsagents and selling through shops that connect more directly with their readership. The first to go down this track was one of the country's oldest rock music magazines, *Juke*, which, with a new format, is being sold through Brash's music shops.

In Victoria, the Trade Practices Commission's ruling in July, which was meant to begin the gradual deregulation of that state's newsagency system, has been suspended because of legal moves to block the changes. The challenges, in the form of appeals to both the Trade Practices Tribunal and the Federal Court were not made by Victorian newsagents, however, (the commission arm-twisted them into accepting its determination) but by the Queensland Newsagents Federation. The federation is spearheading a campaign to maintain the monopoly system throughout Australia. The tribunal will look at the matter again towards the end of November, and all parties now await a ruling by the Federal Court.

The commission's determination has also been appealed against by convenience-store groups and sub-news agencies, which argue that the ruling does not go far enough towards deregulation. They are also objecting to the Queensland Newsagents Federation intrusion.

The Queenslanders say that public benefit is the issue at stake. The federation used the Freedom of Information Act to check on the Trade Practices Commission's comments register, and found there had been only 26 complaints about newsagents in four years. That, says the federation's chief executive, Ken Murphy, is hardly sufficient evidence to claim the system is not working well for all.

While the commission is engaged in protracted and expensive legal debate, however, the newspaper buying public will have a chance to make their own judgment, by watching the ACT to see whether *The Canberra Times* continues to provide a cheaper, more convenient way to pick up the paper each morning. ■

Dave Lane is an ABC producer.

Report

Frank Brennan

A Cook's tour from Malo to Mabo

THE BOAT RIDE FROM Thursday Island to Bamaga on the tip of Cape York can be rough. But on this last occasion, it was a pleasant trip early in the morning. The boat was powerful; the skipper knew the reefs and currents. My travelling companion was David Passi, the Anglican pastor of the island community of Mer. He and James Rice were the two successful litigants in the Mabo proceedings.

The bishop's plane having crashed the day before, David and I had to organise an island hop to make it to the clergy conference, where land issues were the main agenda item. Nearing the mainland, David pointed, 'That's Possession Island'. I replied, 'So that's where Captain Cook started it all'. Cook had sailed up the coast of the mainland and planted a flag on this island, claiming all he had sailed past in the name of his king. David, with a broad grin agreed: 'Yes, but he had his back to Torres Strait when he did it.'

That day, David explained the Mabo case to his fellow islander clergy. Holding up his arms, he described the two laws: 'One says 'Might is right'; the other, which is Malo's law [the traditional law of the Mer community], says 'This is our land because it was given us and our ancestors by God.' We have to educate the people of the first law that this second law is right. We have won half the case. We have got the land. But the other law still has not recognised our right to the sea.' The previous day on Mer, James Rice had driven me around the village in a beach buggy. 'Have you always lived here?' 'This is my island,' he said, 'this is my destination.'

Meanwhile in Canberra, Aboriginal negotiators and the Prime Minister had fallen out with each other. Mabo was a mess. The Murray Islanders were oblivious to the mainland machinations. They had two concerns: uninvited fishermen invading their waters and the constant television references to 'Mabo' depicting the wrong flag. In passing, one of Eddie Mabo's nephews expressed embarrassment that his name was always on TV and even on T-shirts, while there was never any mention of Passi or Rice. The public phone outside the community store was my only contact with Canberra, where Mabo was playing itself out as if in another country. The day's final irony was the realisation that, according to the High Court judgment, native title to land where David Passi lives was extinguished last century. David lives in the church house, on land first leased to the London Missionary Society. Ten days later the Aboriginal negotiators completed a midnight deal with the Prime Minister in Canberra. I took off for Western Australia, which, as that state's Premier, Richard Court, says 'is special'—it is the state where Mabo has greatest practical significance. Canberra was just as remote for these people at the opposite end of Australia from the Torres Strait. Everyone was talking about Mabo. Keating's Mabo package will only pass the Senate if he wins the support of the WA Greens. The latter, presumably, will be at least as responsive to the wishes of WA Aboriginal groups as they were to the wishes of Margaret River wine growers during the wine-tax dispute.

The Prime Minister did well, because unlike the Premiers he negotiated directly with Aborigines and spoke for their interests as well as for the developers. Some premiers have treated Aboriginal rights as if they are contrary to their state's interest.

WA Aboriginal leaders like Robert Bropho will oppose any legislation, because Mabo does not address the needs of fringe dwellers and it confirms the extinguishment of native title on areas like the Swan Brewery site. Others, like Rob Riley from the Aboriginal Legal Service of WA, will be wary of any Commonwealth legislation that leaves too much to the discretion of Richard Court. Rob Riley has already identified the legislative extinguishment of native title on validated pastoral leases and the extended cut-off date of December 1993 as unacceptable elements of the Canberra package.

The Aboriginal negotiators in Canberra have had their ups and downs with Keating. The June proposal to the premiers was described as a 'slimy document'. The September outline of legislation was labelled 'putrid'. The Commonwealth's rationale of the package was a dose of 'moral scurvy'. Once there was agreement not to 'suspend', 'roll back' or 'disapply' the Racial Discrimination Act, but rather to roll up all the nasties contrary to Aboriginal interests and to label them a special measure for the purposes of the Act, the Aboriginal negotiators were prepared to commit themselves to a negotiated outcome.

They described that outcome as an historic decision, even though they secured only half the demands they had put as their bottom line ten days before. They did well, having achieved all that was achievable from a pro-development Cabinet anxious about federal-state relations. The Prime Minister did well, because unlike the Premiers he negotiated directly with Aborigines and spoke for their interests as well as for the developers. Some premiers have treated Aboriginal rights as if they are contrary to their state's interest.

The test of Keating and the Aboriginal negotiators will be the acceptance of their package by the Greens and Aboriginal groups of Western Australia. Keating put his authority on the line with his Cabinet to win endorsement for the package. The Aboriginal negotiators risked their political futures with a volatile constituency just by coming to the table. They now await judgment from the West. Meanwhile the islanders are speaking of autonomy behind Cook's back, confident that Malo's law is strong enough to bring that other law into line. ■

Frank Brennan SJ is a visiting fellow in the law program at the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University.

MICHAEL MCKERNAN

What Australians remember

EACH OF THE FIVE DIVISIONS of the first Australian Imperial Force built a memorial after the First World War, to commemorate mates who had been killed and to recall the high point of the division's fighting. Four of these memorials are in France and one is in Belgium; four are simple stone obelisks, one is a statue.

The statue is on a main road, between Peronne and Bapaume, but the others are at out-of-the-way places. The most remote is the 4th Divison memorial, near the tiny French village of Bellenglise. The Australian obelisk stands on a high point of no beauty, drama or apparent military consequence, in the midst of fields. A six-lane motorway, out of sight but less than 100 metres away, provides a constant rumble of traffic. I do not know what was unearthed when roadmakers dug deep into the soil to build the motorway, but when workers built the TGV train line through the Somme valley, not so very far away, they carted 100,000 tonnes of metal. The train line is certainly narrower than the motorway. A farmer at Bullecourt, home of the Australian Memorial Park, told me that he had begun to dig up a tank, buried for more than 75 years.

The 4th Division fought in all the major battles on the western front in which Australians took part, and by 1917 its members had earned a reputation as shock troops. Charles Bean wrote that the division had 'the least polish but the most numerous battle scars'. At Bullecourt, on 11 April 1917, the division lost two-thirds of the men who entered the fight, but by the Battle of Hamel in July 1918 the division had begun to record some victories on its list of battle honours. It was near Bellenglise, assaulting the Hindenburg Line in September 1918, that the division recorded its last victory against the Germans. There was sense in placing the memorial at that remote spot, even if probably it has only been seen by a handful of Australians. Bellenglise was the last site visited in August and September by 'Australians on the Western Front', a commemorative mission of 14 First World War veterans, seven war widows and their caravan of helpers. It was thought too difficult to take the party's buses to Bellenglise, so most of them—and most of the media—missed this final act of commemoration.

I had been asked to provide an historical commentary at all the sites we visited, but at Bellenglise there was a private commemoration to be done as well as a public one: I had two great uncles who served in the 4th Division, in the 14th battalion ('Jacka's Mob'). Both were killed in the fighting at Hamel in 1918.

This commemoration business is a curious thing. I had not previously visited an uncle or aunt's grave, and, with neither the time nor much inclination for family history, I do not even know with complete accuracy how many great aunts or great uncles I possess. Such is the record-keeping of modern warfare, however, that anyone with an hour or so to spare may learn something of death at the front.

Claude Thomas enlisted in August 1915 but only transferred to the 14th battalion much later, to be with his brother. A mate who had worked with him in the Service Corps tried to talk him out of joining the infantry, without success. In July 1918 he was in the trenches at Hamel as the opposing artillery began 'duelling', as military historians would put it. A piece of shrapnel hit the parapet in front of him and glanced off, striking his cartridge pouch. Five cartridges exploded, killing him instantly. He was buried behind the trench the next day.

Claude's brother, Clarry (curiously, the priest who taught me Latin at school always called me 'Clarence'), was kept out of the line after that, at least for a while.

But, as the chaplain, Frank Rolland (the first Australian clergyman to be knighted), later put it: 'the absence of reinforcements owing to the failure of conscription' made it necessary to put in every man who was able to fight. In that letter of condolence to grieving parents is evidence of the awful social, political and religious division that the war caused in Australia. Clarry was killed at Morlancourt, 34 days after the death of his brother; a piece of shell hit him in the neck and he died instantly. I was the first of the family to see either man's grave. They, and thousands of others, are commemorated by the obelisk at Bellenglise.

There was much pomp and ceremony during the week of the commemorative mission, particularly at those events that the Governor-General attended. He must be formally welcomed and farewelled with the 'vice-regal salute', and the tour leader, the Veterans Affairs Minister, John Faulkner, and the chief of the general staff, Lieutenant-General John Grey, were also accorded their own protocol. We had taken along an Australian band and guard of honour to provide these and other services, so at times we were very grand indeed. The French seemed anxious at least to match the Australian military presence, and often we had two bands to listen to and the Governor-General had two guards to inspect. There was also, naturally, a contingent of French officials to match the Australian contingent.

In all this formality, it might have been possible to lose the meaning of the mission. What moves a government to send men and women who are well beyond their 90th year, on an arduous journey, halfway round the world? We may assume that the travel is hazardous, and certainly it is costly. So far as I know, no other nation despatches its citizens on such journeys; indeed, the French have recently cancelled a commemorative activity in Paris on 11 November, as if through lack of interest.

So what drives Australians to do these things? In part, there is a promotional purpose. Despite the perceptions about Anzac and all that it means, Australian military history now appears to be unknown among all but a handful of people, usually with a personal or family interest. Watching an Anzac Day march in the 1950s or '60s was an exercise in folk memory. The arrival of each battalion would set people in the crowd talking, accurately and in detail, about the places of service, the achievements and the losses. Today, only well-briefed television commentators can come up with the same amount of information. Places that were once household names—Fromelles, Pozières, Passchendaele—are now unknown to those grappling with Mabo, the republic and Sydney 2000. Sandy Stone may have ensured permanent recognition for Gallipoli Crescent, but does anyone in Hampton, where I once lived, twig to the meaning of Imbros, Lagnicourt and Hamel streets? The military-history 'true believers' cannot understand this, and seek to use the services of the few survivors to bring the nation to a better state of mind.

The veterans themselves certainly give the organisers a 'marketing edge'. Even Australians esteem grand old age, and part of the charm of the thing is simply the capacity of these very old men to keep on going. In Turkey, three years ago, young Australians backpacked all over the peninsula in the hope of meeting some of the heroes. I have a beautiful series of photos of some of these encounters, which clearly illustrate the mood of reverence the old men arouse. There were far fewer backpackers in France and Belgium because, for Australians, the western front seems to have far less drawing power.

The organisers clearly hoped that media attention would encourage greater Australian interest in the western front, and that the recital of Australian disasters and triumphs would trigger greater interest. Military history occupies an odd place in Australia at present. When the Governor-General allowed himself to use colloquial invective in describing the British high command (Haig was a 'knucklehead'), he was castigated by some media commentators. He must have been pleased with the extraordinarily strong support in an *Australian* editorial. The writer used the Governor-General's comments to claim the right for all Australians to elaborate their version of the past. It is unusual for historical matters to arouse such passions and notoriety, and Australian historians rarely gain the attention of the mainstream media except in moments of high academic bitchiness. The organisers should have rejoiced that the mission was, at least, noticed.

It could be argued that only on the western front has military action by Australians ever affected the course of world history. Commonly we play in the reserves, but for a few months in 1918 Australians were in the main league.

For it is their view, I think, that what Australians endured and achieved on the western front was formative in the development of Australia. It could be argued that only on the western front has military action by Australians ever affected the course of world history. Commonly we play in the reserves, but for a few months in 1918 Australians were in the main league. The AIF paid a terrible price for its prominent role, of course, and the destruction of so much that was good in national life urges some to keep its memory green. For a little while, what Australians did mattered. That is important for those who want to draw attention to the Australian story today.

It was at the smaller commemorations, at the divisional memorials or at unique battlefields like Fromelles or Mont St Quentin, that this side of the mission had the best chance of exposure. At the larger ceremonies, the old men and women were swamped and diminished. National life had swept by them, and although all the speeches attempted to put them at centre-stage, it was the Governor-General or the French minister who dominated. But at Bullecourt, where the Australians suffered a terrible thrashing, the entire village turned out to cele-

To an unknown Japanese soldier

Konnichiwa! Wherever you are,
My own unknown soldier.
You who those many years ago
(For the honour of your Emperor)
Shot the brother I loved.

Had your bullets missed or merely winged him
He would, God willing, have been eighty today,
And being twins we would have had a modest dinner together
(Spare ribs were our favourite dish)
With a selected bottle of red
Which afterwards would have been emptied leisurely
Over a game of chess.
But he is dead,
So I boil an egg and play against a computer instead,
Though computers don't drink
Or eat spare ribs,
Nor give the slightest flicker of a grin
When making an astute move.

The trouble is that computers know nothing
Of the subtleties of love
That can bind brothers as close to one another
As man and loving wife
(Minds linked since infancy).

You did it so neatly, like a parlour trick,
Just a twitch of the finger
And he stopped as if shocked
Then slowly twisted into a heap to lie
Curled like a foetus in some woman's womb.

Did you cry 'Banzai' or 'Long Live Nippon'?
Did you nod with professional pleasure
Or feel an instinctive flicker of regret?

Sometimes I wonder if you're still alive,
Or did you, too, die for an idea
That had its roots in some ancient fear or hate?

Do sons and daughters dutifully mourn on appropriate occasions
And teach their children the sort of lore
That you and my brother died for?

This morning, at the super-market bottle shop,
I bought a cask of unobjectionable red
And a small flask of sake,
And when my frugal evening meal is eaten
I shall drink to you both.
Then, ignoring the computer,
Will sit by an open window and watch the moon
While composing a salute to my brother and you
As you cross the vast emptiness of death together
With no remembrance of the moment which linked you forever
In a sinister innocence, victim and killer.

Silly, isn't it?
Sayonara, wherever you are.

Maslyn Williams

brate the Australian veterans, emotion took over. There French children laid individually fashioned wreaths and sang, with spirit, a Gallic version of *Advance Australia Fair*. At Mont St Quentin, memory of the risk of the Australian assault so overwhelmed a veteran that, in a soldierly way and early in the morning, he needed a strong drink to steady himself. And at Bellenglise, words seemed futile when set against the fact of an exploding cartridge pouch from which there could be no protection.

Australians do have a past, as they now stridently assert. For some, the past is best found in personal rather than national stories. The meaning of Vietnam is not found only in the diplomatic histories, or the detailed analysis of a battle like Long Tan, but in the veteran bound to his wheelchair, whose memory of events even 30 minutes old cannot be relied upon. The impulse that led to the building of the divisional memorials—and no other nation seems to have been so assiduous in building such monuments—leads now to the need to visit them in commemoration. This type of remembrance is based on the belief that individuals, not armies, matter. That sacrifice, freely given, merits national recognition. Australians have remembered, in an Australian way. But it is fair to wonder if they always will. ■

Michael McKernan is deputy director of the Australian War Memorial.

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Report: 2

Jon Greenaway

Conventional solutions

Australia's Constitution is notoriously difficult to change: the Constitutional Centenary Foundation believes a convention is the best way to tackle the process.

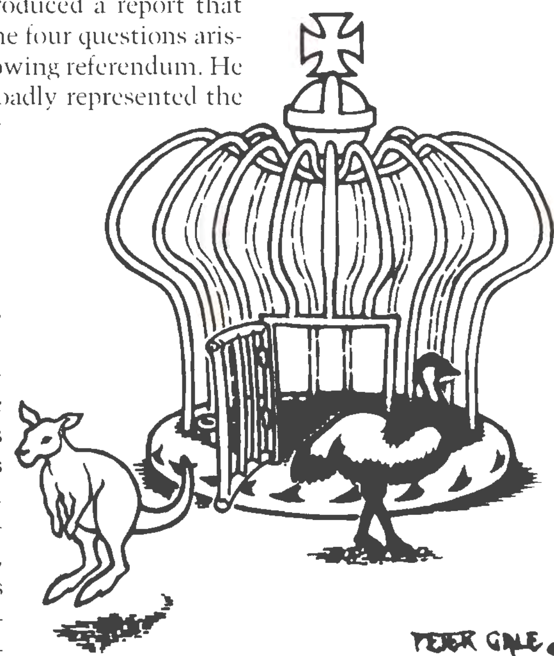
In 1897-98 the National Australasian Convention sat to discuss whether the colonies should form a federation of states. Delegates were elected by New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania, and a party of parliamentary members attended from Western Australia. Queensland did not take part. The proposal arising from the convention was put to the public in the four states that had elected delegates, and was passed in all except New South Wales. Reservations in that state concerning the nature of the draft legislation resulted in the threshold number of votes being raised and subsequently not reached. Following negotiations at a premiers' conference, the motion was passed at a second referendum. Soon after, Queensland voted to join and later so too did Western Australia, virtually as the ink from Queen Victoria's pen was drying.

The executive director of the Constitutional Centenary Foundation, Denis Tracey, regards federation as one of the great events in Australia's history. The foundation was formed two years ago to commemorate this achievement and to encourage debate on constitutional change. To foster the process of examination and debate, the foundation has suggested that a forum be established along the lines of the national convention. Tracey is actively non-partisan and believes the foundation's most notable success in two years is in not having offended anyone. The organisation wants to promote informed debate in place of argument about preconceived ideas. As the name suggests the foundation is concerned with the Constitution as a whole and its charter extends beyond the Republic and Mabo. Some of the issues they wish to promote are: a four-year term for the House of Representatives, the independence of the judiciary, and a bill of rights.

Almost in spite of this, cutting ties with the monarchy and the reconciliation of Aboriginal and white Australians will inevitably be at the heart of any plan for constitutional review. If legislation is passed to enable a convention, the manner in which constitutional reform is debated will be just as crucial to its success as the nature of the proposed changes themselves. If there is continued conflict between the parties on these two issues, it is unlikely that other initiatives will attract the attention of the public gaze. Tracey believes that bipartisan participation is the only way to prevent debate at a convention from becoming irrelevant.

The foundation proposes a convention of about 100 delegates. Along with politicians, both past and present, would be a significant number from other sectors of the community, drawn from each of the states and territories. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups would also be represented. It is hoped that legislation creating a constitutional convention would be enacted in 1995-96, so that the convention could sit in 1997-98—appropriately, 100 years after its ancestor.

Tracey and his foundation believe that the inclusion of non-politicians is vital to the success of the proposed convention. In the 1970s a body was established by the Whitlam government to review the Constitution. Members were drawn from Commonwealth, state and local governments, producing material that achieved very little. In 1987-88 the Constitutional Commission, headed by Sir Maurice Byers, produced a report that Tracey lauds; however, none of the four questions arising from it was passed in the following referendum. He argues that a convention that broadly represented the community would have a better chance of achieving its objectives because 'people are going to be more inclined to trust an organisation ... in which they had a bit more involvement and input'.



The foundation's proposals are very much in their infancy. How delegates would be appointed, what the terms of reference would be and how the process should be conducted are questions yet to be answered. These will have to be clarified if the government is to consider the plan at all, especially since the Senate has shown a tendency to be uncooperative. Nevertheless, the precedence of the 1890s convention will lend momentum to their cause, as will the support given by the chairman of the Republic Advisory Committee, Malcolm Turnbull. Such a forum has the potential to provide much towards public discussion; the question is whether it can navigate through the political turbulence with the skill of its predecessor in the 1890s.

Even if Australia wakes up on New Year's Day 2001 with the Constitution unaltered, the Constitutional Centenary Foundation would be content if there is a greater awareness of how we are governed. According to Denis Tracey this will depend on how the issues are presented to the public—'The media would have a key role in popularising without trivialising the process; you need to come up with all sorts of imaginative strategies to make this accessible to the people out in the suburbs.' ■

Jon Greenaway is a freelance journalist.

INTERVIEW

MORAG FRASER

Losing the thoughtlines

Nenad Miscevic

NENAD MISCEVIC IS CROATIAN, from Zadar on the Dalmatian coast. He describes his home town fondly: 'A beautiful place, with monuments from the Renaissance and medieval times. It was a tourist destination, and was becoming an intellectual centre.' Not any longer. Zadar has been under intermittent Serbian attack for two years. It has been savagely bombed, people killed, buildings and monuments destroyed.

I met Nenad in Lower Austria in late summer, a morning's drive—as Australians measure distance—from Zadar. Sarajevo itself is less than a day away. He was on a brief visit to the picture-book village of Kirchberg am Wechsel for a philosophy conference, seizing a prized chance to meet colleagues from all over Europe, Australia and the US. In Zadar he had been teaching under alert for months, running home when the alarms went off, going back afterwards to classes. 'It's eerie', he says, 'to be examining abstract philosophical matters with students when there is a general alert on.'

'Imagine if Australia now got into a war with Japan, and you have a lot of people of Asian and mixed origin in Australia. How would Australians react? This has been happening in Croatia. Radical rightwing nationalism is really making life unbearable.'

Nenad is a large-gestured man, and, despite the gravity of his conversation, full-bloodedly funny. 'Tenacity is a wonderful thing, isn't it?' I venture. 'It has its limitations,' he tells me, and laughter leaks out of his eyes as he brushes aside ludicrous summer grasses and squints into a benevolent sun.

Zadar exemplifies the subtle and deep changes that overtake a community at war; it also demonstrates the fragility of academic communities, the vulnerablity of any community devoted to learning or peaceful common purpose. Zadar, like so many places in 'ex-Yugoslavia' (which is what he calls it), now has systemic wounds. They won't be shown on CNN but they will determine the shape of life for generations. Nenad describes them like this:

'Two years of war have created almost an unbearable atmosphere within the region. The patriotism which is still the driving force behind our tenacity has begotten a real rightwing nationalism.' Nenad insists that he is Croatian patriot, but being one doesn't seem to skew his analysis. He describes the erosion of tolerance: 'We can defend ourselves passively but we are not able to go into offensive. The frustration that is begotten by that turns into a hatred against local Serbs, against people who are not of purely Croatian blood.

'Imagine if Australia now got into a war with Japan, and you have a lot of people of Asian and mixed origin in Australia. How would Australians react? This has been happening in Croatia. Radical rightwing nationalism is really making life unbearable.' Life for intellectuals is unbearable, he says, using the term 'intellectuals' comfortably, as Europeans do.

The early days of the war, as he describes them, had an air of shared adventure. That has gone. 'The first year we were mainly struggling with bombings. We were staying in the university, taking turns in guarding the buildings, organising shelter for people living in the neighbourhood and for our colleagues. These were beautiful days, these were romantic days. Then this internal struggle started and that was not romantic at all. It was a very bitter experience.'

Nenad is caught in historical pincers. Philosophy, his profession and, clearly, his passion, is only taught at two universities in Croatia, Zagreb and Zadar. But in Zagreb, he says, 'The philosophy department is also under fire but for different reasons—for being Marxist and leftist. These were the non-conformist Marxists who were in conflict with the government. They have done a lot for the freedom of the press, for the liberal face of life in Zagreb and Croatia. But they are still on record as being Marxists so they are now under fire for that. Some of them have already left the country.' Nenad will probably leave too, for Slovenia. Temporarily, he hopes. His wife and child don't want to go.

For women in Croatia the war has closed in on freedom: 'There has been a continuous process of the emancipation of women going on in ex-Yugoslavia. Croatia was one of the leading forces. There was a group of women—seven or eight intellectuals, journalists, writers, philosophers—in the front line, and during 15 years the emancipation of women has made giant steps. Now it's all lost.

'War has brought to the forefront the traditional virtues associated with physical force, physical courage; it has brought violence.'

In Nenad's town, bombing has been the form war has taken. Why the stress on physical 'virtues'? He is a large, muscular man, and persuasive when he admits that 'It's the whole

mythology of virility. Now that the boys are becoming important, the girls are becoming less important.'

Religious life for women in Croatia had been changing before the war, with their active participation not only religious life but in administration and teaching. I asked Nenad what has happened now. He registers embarrassment, talking to someone from a Catholic journal. Go on, I prod. 'Well, what you get now is a very rightwing, very primitive Catholicism becoming dominant. This puts women ideologically in a very bad position. A divorced woman in certain regions is already quite problematic.'

I wonder aloud how much ecclesiastical support the new conservatism has. He is happier with political than with church-political analysis: 'I wouldn't know. I know that our bishops and cardinal are very reserved in their pronouncements. But the fact is that this is in the air. Feminism was traditionally associated with leftist movements and so it is now seen as part of the communist movement.'

The conversation is becoming clear-cut. From here it is easy to discern villains, plot the shifts, the reversions, the inevitable patterns of war. Maybe because of the morning air. Or the long view. From where we are sitting you can gaze clear across the valley to a rural cameo. A silent tractor inches its way up a slope and corn slides into moiré patterns behind it.

EARLIER, WALKING UP through the spruce village to meet Nenad I stopped to spell my way through Kirchberg's history, hammered in copper on a plaque in the town square. Since 1216 this tiny paradise has seen plague, Turkish invasion, famine, French wars, floods ('Hochwasserkatastrophen' they are called), ecclesiastical division, lightning strikes and Russian occupation.

Up on the hill we laugh again. Then Nenad tells a terrible story, about what he calls 'the whole thing'. 'A few years ago, the patriotic Croatian leaders organised a movement to get their kids out of the Yugoslav army. It was called the Bulwark of Love and it gained great support in Croatia. They were travelling around from one military object to another and making demonstrations—give us back our sons etc. Then President Tudjman made a complimentary comment. He said that it's very good that they are getting their sons out of the Yugoslav army. We need them for the Croatian army.'

I asked about the allegiances of the women who went on the campaign. 'It was very different for different mothers. There were some who would object to their son serving in any army, some who were afraid of their sons going into civil war, and some who were enthusiastic about taking them from the Serbian army and putting them in the Croatian army.'

Along with certainty, information is in short supply now, because of the war. And corruption within the government has eroded national purpose: 'People who were ready to sacrifice their material well-being for the war, for the defence of their country, have become bitterly disappointed. The freedom of the press was first seriously infringed and is now reduced.'

Again, the ironies of history: 'In the communist regime, all the newspapers were state-owned. When the communist regime was weakened, the journals and television had become practically independent, though theoretically still state-owned. Now the state has simply taken back the whole thing. People are very poor now, so the main sources of information are radio and television, and they are super conformist, super authoritarian.'

A flutter of applause from an upstairs window greets the end of a paper on the philosophy of mind. People from the Gymnasium behind us spill out on to the grass, arguing brightly. 'What hope is there for you, for thinkers, for your country?' I ask him. 'The only hope for us is that the war ends soon.'

And when is that likely to be? 'This I don't know; no one knows. But I'm sure when the war ends that Croatia will find back its liberal face, its long-standing liberal tradition.' I tell him he is more sanguine than I would be. But what choice has he?

For Nenad Miscevic and many like him in ex-Yugoslavia, ideas are a lifeline. The West can help by providing places for students in universities outside the war zone, by providing the raw material of ideas. Scholars need journals. They need access to papers, to international discussion. One journal subscription can leaven the morale of a whole department. Oddly, mail is uncensored.

Then there is political support. He is very specific about the kind that is helpful, and very much the assertive patriot in his analysis: 'It is very important that the West support democratic tendencies within Croatia. Very often western institutions condemn the Croatian government and then, *ipso facto*, all of Croatia. This is killing us. It means that if you criticise your government then you are seen as being on the side of the enemy.

'What you get now is a very rightwing, very primitive Catholicism becoming dominant. This puts women ideologically in a very bad position. A divorced woman in certain regions is already quite problematic.'

'It should be made clear that Croatians are victims in the war, that we are on the right side, but with the bad luck of having a rightwing totalitarian government.'

And Serbia? What potential does he see for internal democratic dissension there? 'I think the potential is very small. It seems that the condition of intellectual survival there is to believe that everyone is equally guilty in this war. So there will be no free movement of thought for a very long time to come. When I meet my Serbian colleagues abroad—the only opportunity we get now to talk—we have come to the point of trying not to talk about the war. I regret their blindness, but on the other hand I respect their struggle for democracy. So we talk about old times.'

This time we don't laugh. I tell Nenad it is hard for a non-Aboriginal Australian to understand his world, to countenance the inevitability of bloody conflict on our own soil. He looks at me quizzically and says, 'It must be a very boring place, this country of yours.' ■

Morag Fraser is the editor of *Eureka Street*.

The text of her interview with Nenad Miscevic was transcribed by **Jon Greenaway**.

ESSAY

PETER STEELE

Passages of arms

GOING TO SEE A MORTALLY ILL FRIEND IN HOSPITAL, I passed Napoleon's Military Bookshop, and remembered dejectedly an old thought—that war is a way of finding a use for that otherwise useless thing, death. A couple of days previously I had heard an authority on the dangerous little upstart describe him as 'a warlord—he liked to make war on people'. Quite so, I thought: and the world should be in other hands. But when I put my nose into the bookshop, the second book I saw was *Women Warlords*, and I thought that I could do better at the hospital.

My friend died that night, and I am in no hurry to get back to Napoleon's. If I wished to do so, I would have readier access there than I would to the oddly-titled adult bookshops a block or so away. Bylaws shield us from some of the prancings of the sexual appetite, lest Venus flood our streets. Napoleonic fervours, by contrast, which stain maps red with our own precious rivers, are there to be enthused about by man, woman, or child. Hatred's incontinence is big magic.

THIS IS SIR THOMAS NORTH, rendering Plutarch's *Life of Julius Caesar*, which looms behind Shakespeare's play:

> Then this soldier, being the hindmost man of all the captains, marching with great pain through the mire and dirt, half-swimming and half afoot, in the end got to the other side; but left his shield behind him. Caesar, wondering at his noble courage, ran with joy to embrace him. But the poor soldier, hanging down his head, the water standing in his eyes, fell down at Caesar's feet and besought him to pardon him, for that he had left his target behind him. And in Afric also Scipio having taken one of Caesar's ships, and Granius Petronius aboard on her amongst other, not long before chosen Treasurer, he put all the rest to the sword but him, and said he would give him his life. But Petronius answered him again; that Caesar's soldiers did not use to have their lives given them, but to give others their lives; and with those words he drew his sword and thrust himself through.

This is celebrity writing—writing up The Great Soldier himself, decorating the anonymous footslogger, aggrandising the pride of Petronius, and carrying the whole business across into phrases which are cadenced against one another with the smoothness of long-practised drill movements. Shakespeare himself might have been pleased with the ambiguity of 'the water standing in his eyes', and may have been echoing the spirit of the last sentence at more than one point in his own *Julius Caesar*. North writes like a man who believes that elevation is called for when the matter of war is at issue. Translating violence into prose, he transfigures it.

There is more at issue here than the adulation of violence which makes possible much of the 'R'-rating industry. We are in fact close to that mystery whereby something good is recurrently plucked out of the heart of evil. Shakespeare, often a trafficker in accounts of lethal violence, succeeds almost as often in delineating these things handsomely and movingly. He is rarely orgiastic in the way he handles war or war-makers. Henry V's 'Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;/ Or close the war up with our English dead' is a model of soldierly eloquence—the pep talk as high art—but it is far from the last word on the conduct of what Othello, elsewhere, calls 'the plumed troop and the big wars/ That make ambition virtue.'

War, for Shakespeare, is in part a craft, something instrumental, the pursuit of power by the most drastic of means. Sometimes it is inane: often it is hubristic: always it is risky. Because it is, to put it mildly, a curious form of behaviour, it calls for skilled verbal couching. There is something open-mouthed about Shakespeare's address to war, something thunderstruck about his grappling with it. As lived war presents incessant moral challenges to those engaged in it, represented war presents incessant imaginative and linguistic challenges. Shakespearean military eloquence is a process of trying to meet these last.

'War writing' may have the accent on the first word or on the second, and the difference is not slight. David Jones, whose *In Parenthesis* is the one indisputable English masterpiece to come out of the First World War, was to write later, in a piece called 'Art in Relation to War',

> Not only the Preface for Christmas, not only Norman vaulting, not only Piero della Francesca's *Nativity*, but Rommel's desert tactic and Nelson's Nile touch, are empty of all significance—"they need not have bothered", unless form is good in itself. And for a thing to be good in itself it must be part of the whole good and that good is clearly not "of this world". For here 'goods' do not fulfil each other, they cancel out as often as not.'

After torture, the blind lead the mad: Ian Scott as Gloucester and David Roberts as Edgar (Poor Tom). King Lear, Act IV

Photos pp28-31 taken by Reimund Zunde, during rehearsals for the Playbox Theatre's spring season of King Lear.

Jones never got the stink of the trenches out of his nostrils, but he also never stopped trying to rear out of the mud something emblematic of human goodness. That is Shakespeare's instinct, and some of it clings to North's Plutarch.

A*utres temps, autres moeurs*. This is Randall Jarrell, of all too many occasions in our own times:

> There set out, slowly, for a Different World,
> At four, on winter mornings, different legs ...
> *You can't break eggs without making an omelette*
> —That's what they tell the eggs.

Jarrell too knows what he is doing. He wrote many poems about the Second World War—nobody calls it the Second Great War, thank God—and they range in perspective from 'The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner' through 'Mail Call' to 'The Survivor Among Graves.' The four lines above are the whole of 'A War', and they are full of the astringency which contempt brings to cant. What helped to hurt Jarrell about that war was not only the Lenin-like adducing of any old means to serve the good old end, but the unwarranted assumption that the end would be secured at all. 'We become the thing we fight', Orwell wrote: Jarrell was haunted by the nightmare of just such a futility.

RIGHT—*Fragile peace: Cordelia (Melita Jurisic)* King Lear, Act IV.

BELOW—*Kingship and dignity in exile: Lear (Carrillo Gantner) and Poor Tom (David Roberts).* Act III.

Jarrell's bitter little verse might be thought of as a counter-incantation, a dismantling of those verbal enchantments whereby our race seduces itself towards self-destruction. War-chants, ritualized boasts, patriotic hortations, propaganda's shrillings, 'I could not love thee (Dear) so much,/ Lov'd I not Honour more'—such things have been in possession of the instinctive consciousness for as long as we have had human records. They are not to be dislodged by even the best of arguments, it would seem. But at least they can be defaced, from time to time.

In earlier times, a device much in use against cavalry was the caltrop—an iron ball with four protruding spikes so arranged that when the ball is on the ground one of them always points upwards. Verse like Jarrell's is a kind of intellectual and imaginative caltrop: it brings the rushing or hustling mind to a halt. This is one of the typical uses of satirical writing. Most of us have bustling minds, 'getting over the ground as lightly as possible' as one celebrated general described his aim, and dogmatic or propagandistic utterances play upon this fact. Persuaders, hidden or open, put most of their efforts into consolidating and intensifying present convictions, so that the 'obvious' is back-lit into vividness. But it is possible to adopt a different policy. The poet Juan Ramon Jimenez scribbled in a notebook, 'If they give you lined paper, write the other way', and Jarrell is

At dawn I awoke, and what I saw all around were numerous objects I'd miraculously not tripped over in the dark. These objects were dozens of dead German boys in greenish-gray uniforms, killed a day or two before by the company we were relieving. If darkness had hidden them from us, dawn disclosed them with open eyes and greenish-white faces like marble, still clutching their rifles and machine pistols in their 17-year-old hands, fixed where they had fallen. (For the first time I understood the German phrase for the war dead: *die Gefallenen.*) Michelangelo could have made something beautiful out of these forms, in the Dying Gaul tradition, and I was startled to find that at first, in a way I couldn't understand, they struck me as beautiful. But after a moment, no feeling but shock and horror. My adolescent illusions, largely intact to that moment, fell away all at once, and I suddenly knew I was not and never would be in a world that was reasonable or just. The scene was less apocalyptic than shabbily ironic: it sorted so ill with modern popular assumptions about the idea of progress and attendant improvements in public health, social welfare, and social justice. To transform guiltless boys into cold marble after passing them through unbearable fear and humiliation and pain and contempt seemed to do them an interesting injustice. I decided to ponder these things.

writing the other way. Somebody said that universities bring out all capacities in people, including the capacity for stupidity; war can bring out all capacities, including that for intellectual alacrity.

JARRELL'S GENERATION OF AMERICANS at war produced many writers, whether in poetry or in prose. Paul Fussell was one of them. At the age of 20, on 11 November 1944, he led 40 riflemen into a night relief in Alsace. He recalls:

> We and the company we were replacing were cleverly and severely shelled; it was as if the Germans a few hundred feet away could see us in the dark and through the thick pine growth. When the shelling finally stopped, at about midnight, we realised that although near the place we were supposed to be, until daylight we were hopelessly lost. The order came to stop where we were, lie down among the trees, and get some sleep. We would finish the relief at first light. Scattered over several hundred yards, the 250 of us in F Company lay down in a darkness so thick we could see nothing at all. Despite the terror of our first shelling (and several people had been hit), we slept as soundly as babes.

One of Fussell's aids to pondering these things is the recollected *Dying Gaul.* David Jones, in 1959, recalls being trained, 50 years before, to draw the Dying Gaul by gazing at 'a plaster cast of a Roman marble copy of a Greek bronze ... erected at Pergamon by an ally of Rome, King Attalos I, to celebrate his victory over groups of Celts operating in Asia Minor in the third century BC—the forefathers of Paul's "bewitched" Galatians'. That density of reference is not in Fussell's mind as he makes his allusion, but to bring in Michelangelo, and the monumentalising *'die Gefallenen'*, tends to knit 'these objects', the dead boys, back into cultural memory just when they have been expelled by humanity from humanity.

The original *Dying Gaul,* regarded from above, is collapsing upon the oval war-shield which thus frames him: the artefact does him a last service by helping to carry him over into art. Similarly, Fussell's play upon 'greenish-gray uniforms' and 'greenish-white faces like marble' is a reminder that careful characterisation of any event 'others' it to a degree, and to a welcomed degree. But his second-last sentence, with the eloquent understatement of its final words, signals that it is a bestial, a dehumanising 'othering' that has previously been visited upon the killed soldiers. Montaigne speaks of 'an art that wrestles against the art' in writing. Fussell, for all his careful calm, wishes to display outrage from the heart of his own saying.

'I decided to ponder these things' is much of a piece with Augustine's, 'I became a great puzzle to myself', and the first points, as the second did, to a lifetime's reflection and writing on embattled humanity. Fussell has written much not only on the wars of this century, but on the torsions of 18th-century literature, thought and feeling. Perhaps he found these last matters congenial because that is the great period of satirical writing in English, but he is also particularly good at identifying the instinct for tragedy in such writers as Swift and Johnson. That we should, so commonly, and apparently so unalterably, behave in dysfunctional fashion, beating the ploughshares of life into the blades of death, and that this so frequently and spontaneously wins enthusiasm, argues not just a blundering spirit but a self-annulling one.

It is as if war provides, under its own special laboratory conditions, experiments in human bizarrerie. Everybody knows that some things can be learned from war—for instance, various surgical techniques—and some things about war—for instance, the lessons that pack the libraries of staff colleges. But it is harder to say whether, under its tutelage, we learn much about human nature at large. You would think that we would, but we do not seem to do so. There are plenty of aperçus to be had—Hiram Johnson's 'The first casualty when war comes is truth', Sherman's 'War is all hell'—but something impedes their being taken to heart. They have the status of slogans rather than the authority of insights. American soldiers in Vietnam referred to America as 'the world', and things learned out of the world may be lost, to the world's loss. 'Why this is hell, nor am I out of it', says Marlowe's Mephistophilis, and he is talking about being among *tout le monde*.

'COURAGE, GARRULOUSNESS AND THE MOB are on our side. What more do we want?' wrote Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, in the late 18th century: and, 'A handful of soldiers is always better than a mouthful of arguments'. That century had any number of field marshals' batons in its knapsacks, inherited from the preceding centuries. Life-as-warfare could easily be translated, in the milieu of public enthusiasm, into warfare-as-life, and off the legs went again, at four or any other hour. Civil war, international war, revolution and counter-revolution—they had a currency which was as mysterious a thing as commercial currency can be, waxing and waning under influences which were both obscure and only partly governable. This brought out the satirists, Swift among them. Here he is, mouthing through Gulliver, his mug's mug:

> Sometimes the quarrel between two princes is to decide which of them shall dispossess a third of his dominions, where neither of them pretend to any right. Sometimes one prince quarreleth with another for fear the other should quarrel with him. Sometimes a war is entered upon because the enemy is too strong and sometimes because he is too weak. Sometimes our neighbors want the things which we have or have the things which we want, and we both fight till they take ours or give us theirs. It is a very justifiable cause of war to invade a country after the people have been wasted by famine, destroyed by pestilence, or embroiled by factions among themselves. It is justifiable to enter into a war against our nearest ally when one of his towns lies convenient for us or a territory of land that would render our dominions round and compact. If a prince send forces into a nation where the people are poor and ignorant, he may lawfully put half of them to death and make slaves of the rest in order to civilise and reduce them from their barbarous way of living. It is a very kingly, honourable, and frequent practice when one prince desires the assistance of another to secure him against an invasion that the assistant, when he hath driven out the invader, should seize on the dominions himself and kill, imprison, or banish the prince he came to relieve. Alliance by blood or marriage is a sufficient cause of war between princes; and the nearer the kindred is, the greater is their disposition to quarrel. Poor nations are hungry, and rich nations are proud; and pride and hunger will ever be at variance. For these reasons, the trade of a soldier is held the most honourable of all others, because a soldier is a Yahoo hired to kill in cold blood as many of his own species, who have never offended him, as possibly he can.

Swift's own epitaph, in St Patrick's, Dublin, says that he has gone where savage indignation can no longer tear his breast. Wherever that may be, it is possible that he misses the indignation. Celebration and denunciation are his two preferred intellectual modes, and the second has the edge. In the present passage, he is hagridden by the sense that war is a moral botch disguised as reasonable behaviour. Swift's contemporaries invoked 'Reason' as though it were in truth a divinity, and an immanent divinity at that. By contrast, he thought most of humanity foolish at best, and frequently knavish—and never more so than when given to war. But when it comes to soldiership, it takes one to know one.

The oldest of wargames is chess, and the piece from *Gulliver's Travels* has both the strategic and the tactical air of good chess. The combination of trenchancy and elegance which runs through the prose is the sort of thing called for on the black-and-white board. The controlled redundancy of 'sometimes ... sometimes ... sometimes ... sometimes' swells through the tally of 'good' occasions for warmaking. Paradox as commonplace takes its place in this calculus of the crazed—'the nearer the kindred is, the greater is their disposition to quarrel'. 'Poor nations ... variance' tightens the whole into epigram: and the final sentence, heard as outrage, is factually accurate about, say, standard training in the Ro-

man army. If it is said that this way of writing is cartoon-like and hence not to be taken seriously, Swift's retort would no doubt be that in war we rapidly make grotesques of ourselves. And if it is replied that this does not happen to every person, every time, then he would challenge us to be confident that no such deformation would be visited upon us or embraced by us. Thoreau wrote that it is a property of wisdom not to do desperate things: Swift thought war a desperate thing, and if it is also the 'last reason of kings', so much the worse for the kings, not to speak of the rest of us.

IN 1970, W.S. MERWIN PUBLISHED a bookful of short prose pieces. One of them is called 'Postcards from the Maginot Line', and these are the first and last of its four paragraphs:

> This morning there was another one in the mail. A slightly blurred and clumsily retouched shot of some of the fortifications, massive and scarcely protruding from the enormous embankments. The guns—the few that can be seen—look silly, like wax cigars. The flag looks like a lead soldier's, with the paint put on badly. The whole thing might be a model ....
> They have been coming for months, at least once a week. All signed simply 'Pierre'. Whoever he is. He certainly seems to know me, or know about me—referring to favorite authors, incidents from my childhood, friends I have not seen for years. He says repeatedly that he is comfortable there. He praises what he calls the tranquillity of the life. He says, as though referring to an old joke, that with my fondness for peace I would like it. He says war is unthinkable. A thing of the past. He describes the flowers in the little beds. He describes the social life. He tells what he is reading. He asks why I never write. He asks why none of us ever write. He says we have nothing to fear.

Merwin has published 13 books of his own poetry, many translations, and several prose works. If he has a dominant motif in all of the writing, it is, 'Think again'—whether as warning, or as haunting: characteristic titles are, 'Unchopping a Tree', 'For the Anniversary of my Death', 'Shaving without a Mirror'. Merwin is a gainsayer of the obvious. He is also a writer who for most of his life has been trying to call a halt to our institutionalized forms of life-profanation. 'Postcards from the Maginot Line' comes out of such a matrix.

The Maginot Line, designed to shelter France against German invasion, was in the event an immensely expensive and elaborate blindfold over the national consciousness. It was redundant the moment the German army invaded in 1940—the last fort surrendered, unassailed, on 30 June. Thirty years later, by supposition, Merwin is still receiving postcards frequently from one of the countless garrisoning 'Pierres', an Unknown Soldier who, hovering 'there', sends signals of serenity to a particular American. This is fantasy, but as Merwin casts it, haunting fantasy.

It takes its force partly from the fact that Pierre's recitative—'he says ... he says ...'—is in the voice of the dead, though from one who does not know that he is dead. The brunt of much prophetic saying in the Old Testament, as in the New, is that people are walking dead: Merwin, here as elsewhere, is trying to haunt the morally or spiritually dead into life. However, unlike his father, he is not a professional preacher, and his devices are obliquity, evocation, and provocation, rather than proclamation. The 'still, small voice' is his preferred idiom, and an arrival of words, as plain and strange as that of his imagined postcards, his chosen mode. But he does not think that we have nothing to fear.

FROM TIM O'BRIEN'S *The Things They Carried*:

> They carried USO stationery and pencils and pens. They carried Sterno, safety pins, trip flares, signal flares, spools of wire, razor blades, chewing tobacco, liberated joss sticks and statuettes of the smiling Buddha, candles, grease pencils, *The Stars and Stripes*, fingernail clippers, Psy Ops leaflets, bush hats, bolos, and much more. Twice a week, when the resupply choppers came in, they carried hot chow in green Mermite cans and large canvas bags filled with iced beer and soda pop. They carried plastic water containers, each with a two-gallon capacity. Mitchell Sanders carried a set of starched tiger fatigues for special occasions. Henry Dobbins carried Black Flag insecticide. Dave Jensen carried empty sandbags that could be filled at night for added protection. Lee Strunk carried tanning lotion. Some things they carried in common. Taking turns, they carried the big PRC-77 scrambler radio, which weighed thirty pounds with its battery. They shared the weight of memory. They took up what others could no longer bear. Often, they carried each other, the wounded or weak. They carried infections. They carried chess sets, basketballs, Vietnamese-English dictionaries, insignia of rank, Bronze Stars and Purple Hearts, plastic cards imprinted with the Code of Conduct. They carried diseases, among them malaria and dysentery. They carried lice and ringworm and leeches and paddy algae and various rots and molds. They carried the land itself—Vietnam, the place, the soil—a powdery orange-red dust that covered their boots and fatigues and faces. They carried the sky. The whole atmosphere, they carried it, the humidity, the monsoons, the stink of fungus and decay, all of it, they carried gravity. They moved like mules.

We speak of people 'bearing arms', and of others 'bearing children'. In both cases we have in mind the experience of carrying, and the experience of undergo-

ing something onerous. 'I can bear it' or 'I can't bear it', we say, of any number of things. There are also overtones of honour or distinction attaching to arms-bearing and child-bearing—implications of initiation and adulthood, much as when, in Kipling's *Kim*, a character boasts that he both 'shot and begot' men. O'Brien's men are carriers, bearers, of goods and ills, things palliative and lethal. Individual bodies, and this whole small 'body' of people, carry about them and within them the insignia of many meanings. Elsewhere in the book, the fortunes of particular people are explored, but in the passage quoted the men are indeed like a mule train, slung about with objects useful, decorative, or afflictive, but in any case unable to be shrugged off.

What we are looking at here is a late-20th century version of that ancient trope, the military microcosm. The most famous example of this in the western tradition is the shield of Achilles, as described in the 18th book of *The Iliad*. There, the shield, which is also made to be 'borne', portrays war and peace—in principle, all the world's affairs. Symbolically, Achilles will take the world into battle when he goes: but not even the world will be able to keep him from his death. When W.H. Auden wrote his *The Shield of Achilles* in 1952, he turned a grieving gaze upon the shining metal and saw that:

> The mass and majesty of this world, all
> That carries weight and always weighs the same
> Lay in the hands of others; they were small
> And could not hope for help and no help came:
> What their foes liked to do was done, their shame
> Was all the worst could wish; they lost their pride
> And died as men before their bodies died.

This tragical ethos has crept into most deliberated writing about war in our time. A great deal of writing is not of that kind, certainly, otherwise there would be no *Soldier of Fortune*, and no Napoleon's. But the lost innocence of *The Shield of Achilles* is likely to be replicated whenever current or future wars are named attentively. They shared the weight of memory', says O'Brien, and, elsewhere in the narrative, it is clear that the men do just that. One feature of our species' behaviour is that, jointly at least, we carry remembered knowledge, remembered agendas. We are the vectors of the past. In his *Of Arms and Men*, Robert L. O'Connell quotes an authority on the longbow as saying,

> It has been discovered again, or perhaps it was a knowledge never quite lost, that within a yew log, rightly cut from the tree, are the natural components of a 'self-composite' weapon, the perfect natural material to resist tension, the sapwood, lying next to the perfect natural material to resist compression, the heartwood.

Later in the book, after quoting Leonardo da Vinci's celebrated description of war as 'the most bestial madness', O'Connell reports:

> Drawing on history, the speculations of contemporaries, and his own protean imagination, Leonardo describes at one point or another caltrops, fireballs, poison arrows, torsion catapults, scythed chariots, Greek fire, mortars, cartridges for small arms, air guns, steam catapults, a Gatling-type gun, rocket launchers, armored vehicles, submarines, and chemical warfare.

And, near book's end, on 'the era of the gun', 'Of all the arms conceived by Leonardo, only chemical weapons were still being handled with some forbearance.' 'Forbearance' is rich: reflected upon, it might remind us of debts owed to our predecessors, as well as responsibilities owed our successors.

A LAST WORD: John Pudney's *Missing:*

> Less said the better.
> The bill unpaid, the dead letter,
> No roses at the end
> Of Smith, my friend.
>
> Last words don't matter,
> And there are none to flatter.
> Words will not fill the post
> Of Smith, the ghost.
>
> or Smith, our brother,
> Only son of loving mother,
> The ocean lifted, stirred,
> Leaving no word. ■

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A little down, but far from out

'I HEAR THEY BURNED YOUR MAGAZINE.'

'No, just threatened to. The would-be incendiary had calmed down by the time he found the matches.'

'Oh. Still, it was a good story. I'll keep repeating it except when you're around to deny it. Who was the incendiary, anyway? A zealous animal liberationist who wanted to punish you because you confessed to killing a bat?'*

'That was in a different magazine. I have had complaints about the bat, but so far they haven't included any threats about bonfires. No doubt the complainants are just and compassionate judges who accept my assurance that I feel genuine remorse.'

'Unlikely, mate, unlikely. There's no fun in being a judge if you're gonna let the culprit off the hook. Besides, it *was* a deed of unparalleled peversity. Even the fact that you owned up to it is shocking. You've no shame, mate, no shame. A decent person would've just buried the bat and not told a soul. Why, if wasn't for the fact that it's your round, even I probably wouldn't want to be seen talking to you.'

I order two more pots. 'Peter, your wish is granted. Drink alone.' I fall off the bar stool, but am pleased to find myself on both feet when I make contact with the floor. And the pot has retained most of its contents. I lean against the bar, and after blinking a couple of times am further pleased to find that most of the objects in my field of vision are in focus.

A moving indiscriminate mass looms up on my left, and then it too comes into focus. It is the woman in the flower-pot hat who has been trying to attract Peter's attention all night. Evidently, Flower Pot has decided that action has a better chance of success than has enticement. I swerve to let her pass, and she gathers up enough momentum to launch herself at the object of desire. Peter and his bar stool crash to the floor, with Flower Pot on top of them. This mountain of human flesh and tubular steel revolves a couple of times, scattering drinkers on all sides, and then lies still. Passion overcome by inertia.

From beneath the mountain a faint voice, which I recognise to be Peter's, pleads for rescue. I decline to go to his assistance or to Flower Pot's, and step over them instead. I lurch towards the end of the bar, looking for Sancho and Mrs Sancho, whom I know to be somewhere around. The bouncer has seen all this but can't be bothered disentangling the mountain either, because he has a real fight on his hands.

Moving around the band—and weaving and bobbing almost in time with the pseudo-Irish reel it is playing—are a very tall shearer and two dwarves. The dwarves are twins who appear to do everything together, including picking fights with solitary shearers. This particular shearer has been cadging drinks by telling people that he is stranded in Melbourne because floods have cut the Hume Highway. It is true that the highway has been cut, and it is probably true that he is a shearer. But the name of his alleged destination in New South Wales has changed with each new round of drinks. The reason for his quarrel with the dwarves is not clear, though he is clearly less enthusiastic about the fight than they are. None of the three is is having much luck in landing a punch, because each is also trying to avoid the clutches of the bouncer. It is a Keystone Cops kind of fight but I do not find it comical. The shearer and the dwarves are more depressing than Peter, and more depressing than Flower Pot. Almost as depressing as magazine burners, in fact.

Sancho and Mrs Sancho are outside by the hot-dog stand, where they have met a neighbour. The neighbour carries a small, evil-smelling dog with long hair, and she is treating them to an extended discourse on the art of toilet-training one's pets. Sancho and Mrs Sancho are very polite people. They do not interrupt her by saying anything pointed, such as 'Excuse us, but we are less than fascinated by dog turds.' I notice that neither of them has bitten into a hot dog yet, and that Mrs Sancho is looking a little green. The neighbour doesn't appear to have noticed either fact. Sancho turns to me and raises one eyebrow, which I take to mean 'Please get us out of this.' I desert them and head for home.

On the street I pass the shearer, now ejected from the pub and his evening of free drinks. He is sitting on the kerb, sobbing. In the open air I begin to sober up, and the melancholy that has been clawing its way around the corners of my consciousness all night gradually takes over.

When I get home, something is wedged inside the screen door. It is a postal tube, and inside is a small wooden stake filed to a point at one end. The accompanying letter, headed 'Nightmoves Corp, The Castle, Transylvania,' reads: 'Dear Quixote, Nightmoves Corp has become aware of your recent horrific experience with one of the Bloodsucking Creatures of the Night. We enclose a free sample of one of our company's products, the Magnum Bat Eradication Device (BED). Upon encountering a BAT, the BED should be produced with a flourish and thrust towards the assailant. This, together with a statement of your intent to defend yourself (we recommend something like "Are you feeling lucky, bat?") is usually enough to make the little bloodsucker flee.'

Sometimes, a single anonymous message can do more to dispel depression than all the boozy bonhomie in the world. Seizing the BED, I raise it skyward in defiance of the night's demons, real and metaphorical.

Are you feeling lucky, bats? ■

Ray Cassin is the production editor of *Eureka Street*.

* Quixote's bat encounter is reported in *Eureka Street*, May 1993

MAX TEICHMANN

Alternative worlds

AFTER EVERY MAJOR WAR this century, and after the Gulf War, the peoples of the world have been promised a new deal, a new order, a better, safer place in which to live. The rulers have felt that some kind of hope, some form of reparation, was necessary after the carnage, the endless sacrifices, the sense of being puppets in the hands of leaders who never told them, never asked them, and seldom considered them. But the promises have rarely, if ever, been kept.

Lloyd George promised that Britain's World War I army would come home to a land fit for heroes, while Woodrow Wilson called that war the *last* war, the war to end all wars. The League of Nations would stop competition turning into conflict. In 1945 we were promised One World, with freedom for all and freedom from fear. The United Nations, using the Charter, would spread the ideals of liberty, justice and peace throughout the world. We would turn swords into ploughshares, and the merchants of death would be put out of business.

All of those promises had a shelf life of about six months. If the peoples of this earth want peace and justice and a tolerable life, they should not wait on their governments, as these are now constituted. They will have to do it themselves—if it is ever to be done. Locke put this matter at his deliberately ambiguous best: if the impasse is complete, then we should appeal to heaven. This has often been construed as alluding to revolution. The question, for me, is not whether but how.

When the Berlin Wall came down, the end of the Cold War was announced. Disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament, and the destruction of chemical and germ weapons would be pushed through. As there were no tangible military threats, all or most of the world network of bases would disappear. There would be a peace dividend, and some of this would go to the stricken countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviets, partly to stop them collapsing, partly as a reward for throwing off their rulers and the communist system, partly as a bounty for wishing to embrace democratic capitalism, and as an inducement to do it quickly. The United Nations would cease to be the neutered poodle of the two super powers, and begin to come into its own as the independent voice of the world community—which, after all, was the original intention in establishing it.

These were all aspirations voiced by masses of people in the West, picked up by the media and somewhat reluctantly backed by Western governments. As for disarmament, only the US and Russia seemed to match words with deeds. Britain, France and China made it clear they were not in the business of giving up the bomb, for without it they would be militarily insignificant.

The NATO organisation, deeply entrenched in European society, alternately denied that the Russian threat was at an end and came up with new projects for remaining in uniform. Plans for using NATO forces as peacekeeping units-cum-intervention forces in Europe, the Gulf, or anywhere in the world were just the most widely publicised aspects of the NATO bureaucracy's resistance to change.

EVERYWHERE, the understanding of what was to be treated as important and as requiring collective action began to change dramatically. The activities of killing, of spying and subverting, of propaganda and psychological mobilisation, of censorship and news-rigging, were to become far less credible, while other major world issues, some gigantic and possibly insoluble, started to move to centre stage. I will remind people of them in a moment. What I intend to do here is to delineate the new order we *could* have had after the end of communism, and then the new order that I fancy is taking shape. Neither resembles the collage of matchbox covers and snake-oil rhetoric cobbled together by George Bush to justify the casual butcheries of the Gulf War.

The idealist position—the new order that could have been:

1. General disarmament would take place, as had been intended in 1945, only to be sabotaged, purportedly, by the Russian threat. This threat has now disappeared.
2. The enormous arms trade could wind right back. It was running at a trillion dollars a year. The annual sale of arms to developing countries had been proceeding at tens of billions a year, making a mockery of aid programs to such places. If non-Western countries, especially, though not only, the Middle-Eastern and Pacific-rim nations, were rich enough to buy huge quantities of modern weapons, then they were able to not only feed their own peoples, but also to help the poor in other countries.
3. It appeared to be possible, at the end of the Cold War, for environmental issues to be tackled by the countries that virtually decide how they and everyone else should live. The best, and possibly the only place where decisions and changes of global import could be made was the United Nations, freed of its great-power dominance. This UN, more and more, was where the greens were directing their attention.
4. Only an international co-operative effort could destroy the drug trade. The extent to which this trade has penetrated the legal, judicial, political, policing and financial systems of the world is horrendous, though not very well known. In a way, these spinoffs from the drug industry are worse than the number of people it kills, maims or impoverishes.
5. The new world order would have to face the fact that 100 million people are migrating every year and that there are at least 20 million refugees, with numbers bound to rise as the result of war, economic collapse, extreme poverty, or the fracturing of political legitimacy. Attempts by individual countries or groups of countries to protect

themselves are quite understandable, to me, but they have the effect of pushing the victims and migrants elsewhere. Only a global effort to deal with these pathological processes, at their source, would suffice.

6. Linked to the above is the fact that the world's population is running out of control. Either many people will live miserably while others live well, or they will try to gain access to what the others have; or else they will try, by a mighty effort, to grow economically. The effects of this last strategy upon the world's resources probably cannot be calculated, but analogies from earlier phases of industrialisation and urbanisation make for small comfort. Once again, only global cooperation would have a chance of success, even if only partial, and provisional, in securing a liveable world.

7. A new world order, such as we could have had, would have to decide what to do about the increasing numbers of societies doomed to disintegrate, under the present international anarchy. Should the UN take sides in civil wars, punishing seizures of power by e.g. military juntas? Should it attempt to redress the absence or paucity of human and civil rights in so many countries? And what should be done about post-Cold War imperialists who refuse to mend their ways (including 'allies')?

8. What have been described above are the symptoms of pathological economic and political systems: a gross maldistribution of wealth, with the strongest preying on the weakest by a variety of means, including setting them against one another. The long struggle, conducted partly through the old United Nations, to start redressing the gap between rich and poor nations has failed. If anything, things are getting worse. This is a sobering thought, for if redistributive justice is unattainable beyond a narrow range, then the perverse inputs into our global existence, outlined above, will continue.

That was the global agenda which confronted us at the end of the Cold War: a time of great challenges, of new opportunities and of a renewal of hope. What happened?

Political realists would tell us that, in a bipolar world, if one of the major actors collapsed the remaining one would inherit the earth. That is, unless it walked away and left the remaining countries to dispose of their own and others' affairs as they wished. Many people in the US have wished that America would do just that.

Alternatively, the US could identify itself with a world body that would tackle the problems of global order for the good of all. *That* would be a remarkable act of self-abnegation and has yet to be seen, although some journalists and political publicists talk as though it goes on all the time.

Or, faced with the new supremacy of the remaining superpower, countervailing forces would start to assemble as in the old balance-of-power system, to contain and negate the new colossus.

Finally, the overwhelming military power of the colossus would not prevent its economic decline, just as Britain's military eminence last century did not prevent her being passed by other economic rivals, such as Germany and the US. Even the empire did not keep Britain great, but possibly made things worse.

THOSE ARE THE SORTS OF THINGS a realist would say, so let us run through the realists' alternative scenarios. The Americans are not going to withdraw from the world system, as they did after World War I. They have said that they will not, and are more politically and militarily active than for years past. They say they wish to involve others, by which they appear to mean suborn them. It is a replay ofthe 'free-world' global alliance.

For a short time after the end of World War II, Americans seemed to believe that they were the masters of the universe, what with the bomb, enormous wealth, Japan and Europe prostrate, and the colonial empires breaking up. The United Nations was firmly in their control, with a little help from their friends. Aid programs, the CIA and the Bomb seemed able to take care of just about everything. But the Soviet Union's acceptance of the challenge of the nuclear arms race, the rise of China, the emergence, under cover of the superpower deadlock, of the Third World bloc, and the gradual distancing of Europe and Japan from US political agendas, steadily reduced the US to the status of first among equals. Early signs of American inability to accept this situation might be detected from the ubiquitous McCarthyite mindset that emerged from the Korean War onwards, and later, the regrettable inability to accept defeat in Vietnam.

In other words, the dream of 'manifest destiny' was never really renounced, and now that the communists have fallen into disarray and discredit, and the Third World has sunk like Puff the Magic Dragon, Americans can go on like it's 1945 again.

Great powers, like ruling classes, rarely resign. Historically, most of the countries that deferred to the League or to the UN did so under duress of one kind or another. In the past, the global hegemony of one great power has usually been prevented or checked, when it has been prevented or checked, by the countervailing force of other countries, or groups of countries.

The second possible scenario, that the US should work, with humility and open-mindedness, within a refurbished, impartial and genuinely independent world body, was an option approved by very few Americans, be they isolationists or interventionists. Great powers, like ruling classes, rarely resign. Historically, most of the countries that deferred to the League or to the UN did so under duress of one kind or another. In the past the global hegemony of one great power has usually been prevented or checked, when it has been prevented or checked, by the countervailing force of other countries, or groups of countries.

The final possibility that a realist contemplating a world after the fall of the Wall might posit is that of an America in irreversible economic decline—an America for whom the possession and periodic display of superior military might, would be seen as a gigantic irrelevance. The treaties and endless international conferences so loved by the media and the American public would still go on, so long as the president or secretary of state got star billing; but the economic strength would inexorably shift to Europe and Asia.

The US, under Clinton as under Bush, is trying to halt this decline and to make the world market subservi-

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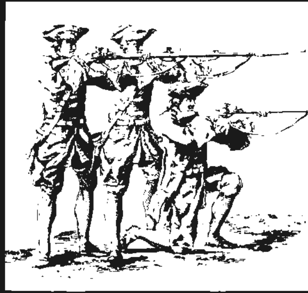

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EUREKA STREET

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ent, as it was in 1945, to Anglo-American financial power. It will be interesting to see whether this can be achieved. Most likely it would have to be done by the usual means—finding ways of destabilising the competitors, as the British did with the Spaniards, the Dutch, the French and finally, the Germans. They would like to do the same again, but need American help. The option of war is nowadays ruled out—except with Arabs—though one cannot be completely sure. But there are many new 'peaceful' ways available, besides the traditional ones of playing countries off against one another, bribing or suborning sections of the competitor's elite structure, and so on. (The CIA's budget was recently raised by a billion dollars.)

International organisations such as the UN, GATT, the World Bank and the IMF are being pressed into service, as well as the speculative parts of the world money market. What is being described is a strategy of disruption and destabilisation, based upon a zero-sum game. Your loss is my gain. It goes against the conventional profession of growth through co-operation, rather than conflict or competition. This was the prevailing economic and political formula of Western opinion makers until the end of the Cold War. Indeed, we still hear it advanced but reality belies appearance even more obviously now than before.

Whether the US can claw her way back to world economic primacy has to be seen—but the projects and aspirations of the people mentioned in our beginning have little relevance, unless they can be manipulated, or turned into profit. Thus the grass-roots conservation groups in America have been scandalised by Clinton's enlistment of their principal leaders and peak councils in support of the North America Free Trade Agreement. Grass-roots groups maintain that US environmental and health standards would be weakened by the agreement, and seem to be right about this. But they find that big environmental groups are now very close to big business, and that former environmental activists are now members of the Clinton administration. Australia, of course, has also been going through this, and there is no reason why such tactics cannot work with the members of other states—for money talks all languages.

In the meantime, with all this polite warfare between the US, Europe and to a lesser extent Japan, the promises made to Russia and Eastern Europe have not been kept, and the forces of chaos, crime and corruption now rampant in those lands are possibly unmanageable. We have had to watch Boris Yeltsin's special units bombarding Russia's parliament, observed by Muscovites who'd brought along their children and picnic baskets. We were watching the end of a political system that had been groping towards democracy, only to be replaced by that apparent Russian fixture, a new Tsar.

Yeltsin has no ideology, no moral and political principles, other than those of unrestrained capitalism. This may have been an initial relief for most Russians, after 70 years of brainwashing, but the moral vacuum has now turned into a black hole. Yeltsin's attacks on parliament, the media, political opponents, the constitution and local democratic bodies of considerable antiquity, have been interpreted in the West as his having to destroy democracy in order to save it for the future.

As usually happens after a military coup, new elections and a new constitution have been promised, with the whole thing being conducted against the backdrop of a muzzled press, a scattered opposition, and massive election funds for the incumbent. What's new? A new balloon has floated in from the Atlantic: some peoples may not be suited to democracy, and the Russians may be one such people. So we needn't have got our shirts in such a knot during the Cold War, fellow freedom lovers.

Capitalism is the first priority, the highest moral value, not democracy, nor individual freedoms—that appears to have been Clinton's choice; and Western Europe, fearing that Yeltsin would not surrender without civil war, with all that might imply for new floods of refugees, has settled for the easy option. So we may look forward to a future of political and economic turmoil and conflict: the same old theatre of cruelty. ■

Max Teichmann is a Melbourne academic, writer and reviewer.

ANDREW BULLEN

Frank Webb: *Il miglior fabbro*—'the best of us'

23 November 1993 marks the 20th anniversary of the death of the Australian poet, Francis Webb. Webb, a schizophrenic, died of a coronary occlusion caused by excessive medication administered for his condition. He was on his way to Mass at the time.

THIS IS HOW Bruce Beaver in the twelfth of his *Letters to Life Poets* celebrates Frank Webb:

> *I remembered Swift's*
> *fascination with the insane, I whistled*
> Childe Rolande to the Dark Tower Came
> *outside the grimy walls of Callan Park.*
>
> *Inside*—Il miglior fabbro—*the best of us all*
> *chewing bloody knuckles, wept dry,*
> *daft as a headless chicken circling the dust.*
> *Where are the prayers said for him ...?*

Twenty years after Frank Webb's death there remains, looms up indeed, the most uncompromising collection of poetry in our culture to provoke an answer to that question. Webb's poetry repeatedly draws his readers toward the abiding questions we flinch from.

Who else among Australian writers exposes our human frailty so directly, and by exposing his own so relentlessly? Who else shows our fellows so constantly wincing in pain? Who has heard the gospel with such aching attention?

Whatever our local names for Jerusalem, that place of death and resurrection, Webb's was 'Ward Two'.

As an inmate there himself, he discovers, in a sequence of eight poems, the conditions of our fellowship. Nowhere more so than in *Harry*, which celebrates (that is the word) the 'moron' set somewhat apart by his fellows, because he reveals to them the truth of their condition by his attempts to write what his fellows yarn about:

Etching by Tim Metherall

> *It's the day for writing that letter, if one is able,*
> *And so the striped institutional shirt is wedged*
> *Between this holy holy chair and table.*
> *He has purloined paper, he has begged and cadged*
> *The bent institutional pen,*
> *The ink, and our droll old men*
> *Are darting constantly where he weaves his*
> *sacrament.*

Webb sees, and his twisting, wry, tough language tries to make us see, that Harry is 'this pudgy Christ'. To our abiding question 'Where is God to be found?', Webb gives the blunt reply: 'Where we do not want to look, which is everywhere'. His poetry is notable for its repeated struggle to wrench its way towards receiving the insight that those we reject and marginalise are the ones who reveal God to us. It makes brutally clear that suffering is the true path—you have to be an inmate of the same ward to see the Harries of this world for who they are. No less notable, and for the same reason, Webb's poetry does not quit this insight once it is gained—once in such a place of revelation, you stay there. Webb died there, 20 years ago:

> *Because the wise world has for ever*
> *and ever rejected*
> *Him and because your children*
> *would scream at the sight*
> *Of his mongol mouth stained with*
> *food, he has resurrected*
> *The spontaneous though retarded*
> *and infantile Light.*
> *Transfigured with him we stand*
> *Among walls of the no-man's land ...*

With the closure of large institutions the mentally sick may be less hidden nowadays. Many of the homeless in Australia suffer from schizophrenia, as did Webb; but still he asks 'What do we see?' *Harry* is a more radical poem than even Les Murray's deservedly popular *An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow*, because a total acceptance of the claims it makes upon us demands that we look at Harry and say not so much 'There, but for the grace of God, go I' as 'There, with the grace of God, go I.' The poem, it is worth adding, is the best thing written in Australia about the priesthood.

The moral power of Webb's poetry justifies the verbal straining he so frequently is forced to, for somehow, anyhow, he has to make our 'giddy alphabet' carry unspilled 'the cruet of innocence'. Although here he speaks with the mumbled whisper of an altar server, his kind of music is more often made from sounds of stress. He loved Mahler, and splendidly called Bruckner that

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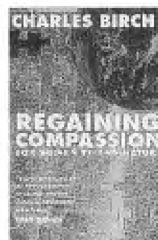

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'devisor of symphonic boa-constrictors'. There are times when Webb's readers know what it is to be coiled about by poetic boa-constrictors. It is hard to extricate ourselves from this poetry. As far as his music goes, when he is happy Webb hears church bells, either ringing throughout creation as 'Bells, bells of ocean' in his Christmas poem, *Five Days Old*, or in 'Gay golden valleys of banter' ringing throughout *Bells of St Peter Mancroft*, and so revealing 'A frisson of gold at the centre/Of prayer, bright core of life.' Both these poems nevertheless reassert his conviction, his repeated discovery, that we must 'blunder and wander' beyond the bounds of normalcy, and acknowledge that 'To blown straw was given/All the fullness of Heaven'. How right that Michael Griffith's biography of Webb is titled *God's Fool*.

How strange that the other Australian poet worthy of such a title is John Shaw Neilson. How intriguing that his music, almost in extreme contrast to Webb's volatile sounds, is about as close to silence as pure words can get. Intriguing, too, that Neilson has been acknowledged as their master by figures as formidable as James McAuley and Judith Wright. Is it then purity of spirit—and Neilson and Webb have it in such differing ways—that ultimately singles out who is to be recognised by fellow poets as *il miglior fabbro*, the 'better craftsman'? Maybe Eliot's naming Ezra Pound as such in the dedication of *The Waste Land* suggests not, though there's a poem that winds its way through hell and out. So back to *The Divine Comedy*, where the phrase is first used, as Dante meets in Purgatory the famous Provençal troubadour, Arnaut Daniel, whom he, and Petrarch, too, acknowledged as master. For his part, Beaver assuredly acknowledges Webb to be his pre-eminent precursor and guide through his own inferno and purgatorio—'Dark light dark sings all my tiny heart' as Webb puts it in *Ephpheta*. And in *Five Days Old* there is a momentary paradiso—'My trembling is all my prayer.'

Webb's work gives the gospel to us straight. That is why his writing coils and wrenches and staggers. What makes him difficult reading is that to read him is to undergo a kind of final judgment. He is in our streets, too. ■

Andrew Bullen SJ is a poet and teacher.

• Michael Griffith's biography of Webb, *God's Fool*, is published by Collins/Angus & Robertson. On 20 November friends and fellow poets will discuss Webb's work in a one-day seminar at the North Sydney campus of Australian Catholic University. Enquiries: (02) 739 2192.

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EXPLORATIONS

MARK DEASEY

Monumental preoccupations

CAMBODIA'S CONTRADICTIONS AND UNCERTAINTIES—of war and the shaky UN peace, of a glorious past and a precarious future, of poverty for most and conspicuous new wealth for a few—are demonstrated more starkly in Siem Reap, home to the Angkor monuments, than anywhere else in the country. I first went to Siem Reap in 1988, on a half-day tour of Angkor Wat and the nearby Bayon temple. Flights then were few and irregular, and priority was given to 'fraternal socialists'. Australian aid workers were low on the list, and more than once I had been moved down the queue because a Bulgarian or East German delegation had arrived at the last minute.

Eventually a well-placed friend pulled strings and got me on an excursion arranged for resident Vietnamese academics and technicians. I departed on the morning flight from Phnom Penh, the sole Westerner on a plane with 44 Vietnamese and a French-speaking Cambodian guide. Security was a fraught issue even then. We were luckier than many in being taken to the Bayon temple, the forest surrounds of which precluded visits on 'bad' days. This was followed by a brisk tour through the vast spaces of Angkor Wat itself, before lunch in the dining room of the otherwise empty Grand Hotel in Siem Reap.

Now two, or three or four planes a day bring tourists on the 45-minute flight across the Great Lake from Phnom Penh. The most direct land route is effectively impassable, the road being little more than a series of pot-holes through swamp and forest territory that is largely under Khmer Rouge control. But the tourist traffic is outstripped by the volume of UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) personnel and goods arriving and departing. Australian, Bangladeshi, Dutch, French, Malaysian and Tunisian troops throng the terminal at Siem Reap airport, and in town the dozen new and refurbished hotels are overshadowed by the sprawling French barracks, the pre-fab Australian camp and communications centre—it looks like a Kimberleys mining camp—and the Indian-run field hospital. Several bars decked-out with coloured lights do a noisy trade among military and tourist clientele, and the markets probably sell more beer than any other single commodity.

My host this time was the local head of UNESCO, which is trying to co-ordinate international efforts to restore the Angkor monuments. We were taken to his home in the Angkor Conservation Authority's compound on the edge of town. There, behind high ochre walls and shaded by huge trees which carpet the ground with their aromatic dry leaves, are several vast warehouse-workshops. There sculptures and carvings from the temples are restored, repaired, or in the case of the most vulnerable, copied, so the originals can be kept safe until security from theft can be better ensured. The sight of so many ancient and priceless sculptures, casually disposed in sheds and shelters, is bizarre. A team of 15 archaeologists and restorers from India came here in the mid-1980s, and until 1991 they provided the only help coming from the outside world. UNESCO, the International Labour Organisation and several others have now joined in, but the Indian team continues steadily as before.

It's partly the forest reclaiming the past, and partly the past being reclaimed from the forest—ficus tree trunk near the Ta Prohm temple.

Photo: Mark Deasey

The permanent sign comes soon, we hope: marker indicating provincial human rights office.

Photo: Mark Deasey

We spent the remainder of the morning at Angkor Thom ('Great Angkor') the ruins of the great walled city of the Khmer Empire. Even the few short kilometres along the forest road from Angkor Wat was enough to leave 90 per cent of the tourist traffic behind. Those who did make it were hushed by the towering trees and ruined Bayon temple, with its faces carved in the smiling likeness of King Jayavaraman VII. As we perused the bas-reliefs, with their amazingly vivid depictions of war and peace under the Khmer kings, we could hear shell fire echoing in the distance, probably 40km away through the forest towards the Thai border.

ANGKOR HAS BEEN FIERCELY HELD by the Phnom Penh government, which has promoted the revival of Cambodia's culture and traditions as part of its claim to legitimacy. The monuments have been no less fiercely fought for by the Khmer Rouge, whose model of a regimented society owes at least as much to the methods of the 12th century Angkor Empire as it does to Marx. Prince Norodom Ranariddh's faction also contests the right to win it, to reinforce its claims to hereditary feudal sway over Cambodia. All have incorporated the image of Angkor, in various stylised versions, onto their flags.

The afternoon took us further along the narrowing forest road to the Preah Khan ('Sacred Sword') temple, a dense mass of colonnades and courtyards that may have functioned as an academy. After negotiating a way in through the rubble of a collapsed wall overgrown with creepers, we met a New Zealand archaeologist from the World Monuments Fund, supervising a team of Cambodians who are clearing away 20-odd years of jungle growth so that restoration work—which is expected to take 10 years—can begin. She led us to a point on the western wall where a great garuda, the mystic eagle/griffin of Hindu mythology, had been brought to see the light of day. At one point along the track lay a recently felled tree, a 25-metre giant of several decades growth. Half its bulk had clearly been sawn with hand tools into planks; this circumvents the ban on log exports, as illegal timber-cutters (some of them reputedly the same police who are meant to prevent the traffic) cut up trees where they fall and speedily move the crude planks over the short distance to the Thai border.

Thieving of all kinds can be breathtakingly blatant. On a visit two weeks previously, my host had seen two Thai men emerge from a vehicle, armed with a tape measure with which they measured the head of a gateway naga (seven-headed serpent) before testing its weight for transportability—all quite unabashed by the presence of uniformed UNESCO staff. They departed nonchalantly, no doubt to return under cover of dark. Angkor has belatedly been given worldwide listing as a protected site, and acquisition of its artefacts can now lead to prosecution. But collectors with more money than scruples still find middlemen willing to run the fairly small risks.

Returning through the thorny scrub to Preah Khan, we passed the travellers' infirmary built by Jayavarman VII. The academies, hospices and other public buildings of his reign have earned him the reputation of being an enlightened and benign monarch—the fact that these great works were built with the labour of armies of slaves, is glossed over. In enchanting contrast to the massive slave-built structures, however, is Banteay Srei. Much fuss was made of Paul Keating's visit there in 1992, as the temple is in a remote part of the forest, more than an hour's drive along rough roads from Siem Reap, and overshadowed by a mountain long known as a Khmer Rouge hide-out.

In such a location, the lyrical beauty of Banteay Srei is all the more captivating. Tradition has it that the temple was built by a monk who enlisted the voluntary help of the local people. Built on a very human scale, it nestles in the shade of huge forest trees; the carvings in rare pink sandstone are of a delicacy and finesse unmatched elsewhere, and the smiling sculpted doorkeepers seem to offer a personal greeting. But enjoyment of the dappled light playing on the bas-reliefs is mixed with a constant nervousness of what the forest and the mountain could be hiding: at the first gateway, a red skull-and-crossbones affixed to a makeshift fence warns that there are mines laid around the temple precinct. As at all the monuments, there are armed guards on duty but here they patrol more vigilantly, mindful of every step the handful of visitors take.

Three-quarters of the way back to the relative security of the town, we stopped to see Ta Prohm, one of the last temples to be discovered. Entering from the north gate, we fought our way through dragging scrub and over piles of tumbled masonry to come with a shock into the central courtyard. It is impossible not to be overcome with awe at the trees of massive girth with their great roots sundering roofs and walls. The trees form a dense canopy, casting the whole into deep green shade. The few visitors apart from ourselves were Khmers on holiday from Phnom Penh, the young women armed with suitcases full of petite tailored outfits, in which their swains were to photograph them daintily posed against naga heads, pillars or tree boles.

THE LATE AFTERNOON brought some respite from the round of weighty temples, as my host took me out to the great Baray—a vast irrigation reservoir built by the Angkor kings , and restored to operation in the 1960s. This water supply, irrigating the fertile plains through the dry season, is in part responsible for Siem Reap's relative prosperity. It was Chinese New Year, and much of the town's population, Chinese or otherwise, had come out to promenade along the top of the dam wall,

where refreshment vendors were positioned, and photographers were touting for trade. A boatman, his chest decorated with a semicircle of sacred charm tattoos, rowed us the mile out to the small island in the centre of the lake, where a few remains of a temple sit among the water plants. In a well in the temple courtyard was once found a great cast bronze image of Vishnu. The boatman told us he'd been born by the lakeshore and lived there all his life, but had never known how wide or deep the lake measured, how old the temple was, or to whom it was dedicated. I hastily leafed through the guidebook—written by a French archaeologist in the 1960s—to find what he wanted.

One UNESCO staff member had previously worked as head of the provincial fisheries department, and on the Sunday his successor invited us to lunch at his office, which floats on the Tonle Sap lake. With a slab of Steinlager to sweeten our welcome, we drove from town down the river bank road, first through the lush irrigated orchards, then the great expanse of rice land, until the grey-green swathe of mangroves announced the edge of the Great Lake. The fishing settlements rise and fall with the lake, which doubles its area when the Mekong floods push the Tonle Sap river back up its channel. Several thousand people live in a floating town on the shallow waters of the lake, harvesting one of the world's most abundant fresh-water fisheries. A waiting boat took us down the narrow channel lined with houseboats to the open lake; the air was thick with the smells of rotting reeds and sun-warmed fish entrails.

About half the population here are ethnic Vietnamese. Many have been in Cambodia for several generations and speak Khmer more readily than Vietnamese, but this has not spared them the wrath of the Khmer Rouge or the pro-American right. They are accused of being disguised Vietnamese troops or insidious colonisers, fit to be massacred or driven out. When we picked a dead waterbird out of the lake, we were told by our host that this was because the Vietnamese used poison to stun fish. They are also blamed for dynamiting and other practices that are reducing fish numbers—though close observers admit that Khmers sometimes do likewise.

But it was a pleasant and indolent Sunday lunch in the fisheries office on its raft, with the vast brown and blue expanse of lake and sky at the door, and the small craft beetling to and fro. The Steinlager (Victoria Bitter and Foster's are also being heavily promoted, by competing importers) washed down freshwater prawns, dried fish cooked in sugar palm syrup, and a stew of fresh fish and water vegetables. On the way home, we drove to the top of Phnom Kraum, a bare nob of a mountain standing alone on the lakeshore plain. In Angkor days the crumbling shale temple on its summit was used as a lookout for the raiders from Java and the Cham empire who sailed up the Mekong from the South China Sea and gradually weakened the Khmer empire. Khmer Rouge raiding parties still travel by dinghy under cover of night from the forests of Kompong Thom to terrorise lakeshore communities, and infiltrate Kompong Chang and Pursat provinces to the south.

On my last evening before heading home, I found myself at sunset at the top of the Ta Keo temple, yet another massive structure in grey granite and sandstone. It is stark and undecorated, as the king who ordered its construction was murdered before the flat stone surfaces were carved, and the usurper, as was the custom, abandoned the project to set about building a monument to his own greater glory. This practice accounts for the great number of temples of the period, and the abruptly shortened reigns of most of the Angkor kings. According to a Cambodian folk tradition, the massive effort required to build so many temples in so short a time, leaving perhaps hundreds of thousands of slaves dead, left the Khmer people exhausted and frightened of their rulers. When the empire crumbled they went to hide in the forests, and have been unwilling ever since to re-emerge and rebuild a great nation.

Post script: Phnom Penh, July 1993. My friend Vuthy flicks through photos he took from his balcony in April, the day the Khmer Rouge attacked Siem Reap. A flurry of figures in the trees, not much more. There are other shots: displaced people camped at Angkor Wat. It was probably never the Khmer Rouge's aim to capture and hold Siem Reap town—the scare and headlines were points scored enough. But more of the countryside was rendered insecure, and the peasants, whose fate is never as newsworthy as that of tourists, gathered up their few transportable belongings and took shelter in the galleries of the monument. Cooking pots, straw mats and blue plastic tarpaulins are strung between columns and bas reliefs. In one photo the director of UNESCO, ill at ease, in his apple-green Lacoste and tailored khakis, stands amidst a dusty rural throng. The tourists may take a while to come back. ■

Chronology

AD802 Jayavarman II founds the city of Angkor.
944 Rajendravarman expands Khmer influence into north-east Thailand, wins eastern territory from the Chams; introduces tolerance of Buddhism.
1003 Suryavarman extends Angkor's control westward; expands trade.
1120-1150 Angkor Wat built at the command of Suryavarman II. Suryavarman campaigns against Vietnam.
1181 Jayavarman VII succeeds; Buddhism established as state religion. Jayavarman orders building of the Bayon, Ta Prohm, Preah Khan and Neak Poan temples, as well as hospitals and hostels.
1191 Jayavarman captures the capital of the Cham kingdom.
13th century Khmer capital shifts from Angkor to Phnom Penh; slow decline of the Khmer power begins.
1560s Brief restoration of Angkor.
1853 France begins to establish influence over Cambodia.
1953 Cambodia gains independence from France.

Mark Deasey is Indochina program co-ordinator for Community Aid Abroad. He has lived and worked in Cambodia for three years.

Books

Ross McMullin

In short, it's Manning Clark

BECAUSE OF PETER RYAN'S remarkable hatchet job on Manning Clark, Michael Cathcart's abridgement of Clark's six-volume history has enjoyed considerable unsolicited publicity arising from a hostile source.

Numerous conservatives have long felt aggrieved that Clark's idiosyncratic, anti-establishment interpretation of Australia's past became so popular that in many homes possessing few other historical books it is accepted as the authoritative history of Australia. He has been assailed by conservative critics for a very long time. As far back as 1949 they were attacking him in the Victorian Parliament so flagrantly that a young, quietly-spoken backbencher, Frank Crean, rose to defend Clark against what he described as 'character assassination'. Evidently, it has been acutely annoying to Ryan and his fellow-thinkers that Clark managed to boost the demand for his history by becoming a household name as a thoughtful commentator with an opinion on a wide range of issues.

Conservatives have long felt aggrieved that Clark's idiosyncratic, anti-establishment interpretation of Australia's past became so popular that in many homes possessing few other historical books it is accepted as the authoritative history of Australia.

I happened to take a different view. I welcomed his public appearances (with or without his bushman's hat) and his quietly-spoken pronouncements. (Since, like him, I enjoy cricket and barrack for Carlton in the AFL, maybe I'm biased.) I remember, for example, his comments on television the day Lionel Murphy died, when his gentle words contrasted with the bitter argument about Murphy's career between two others on the program (David Marr and Marcus Einfeld, if memory serves correctly). And I liked his reply when, in a television interview one evening, Richard Carleton asked him for his impressions of the Hawke government's performance; Clark encapsulated his view of its emphasis on cautious economic management rather than visionary reforms with this comment: 'The government has shown that it can defend well on a sticky wicket, but now it should start thinking about hitting some sixers'.

Manning Clark's History of Australia, abridged by Michael Cathcart, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1993. ISBN 0 522 84523 1. RRP $39.95

Even Peter Ryan has praised the grand vision that underlay Clark's multi-volumed history, but other critics besides Ryan have contended that the writing of Clark's history did not live up to this noble conception. They have objected to his quirky prose, to many of his interpretations and to his excessive factual errors. But much of this criticism ignores the fact that Clark did not claim to be writing *the* history of Australia—indeed, he deliberately called his work *A History of Australia* to indicate that it was one historian's very personal view.

Cathcart has stated that when he began the task of turning Clark's six volumes into one he was soon overwhelmed by the immensity of the project he had agreed to undertake. 'This is insane', he thought, 'I can't do this, it's too hard.' After a while, though, when he had absorbed himself in the 'rhythm of the prose', something seemed to click, and from then on he was right. (Ryan, without seeing Cathcart's volume, was contemptuous: the abridger faced 'hardly ... a serious challenge. He need—metaphorically—merely stick a pin in the mass and allow the gaseous verbal excess to hiss its way out.')

Cathcart concedes that the quality of the writing in Clark's 'vast, open-ended saga' is uneven: according to Cathcart, Clark's 'style was often incantatory and repetitive; his examples were many; his opportunities for diversion were unlimited'. What Cathcart was striving to do was 'to preserve Clark's core narrative, to develop his key characters, to dramatise his principal conflicts and to liberate Clark's prose at its best'.

However, Cathcart says that he has refrained from trying to 'resolve disparities or to 'sanitise' views that have become unpopular, or to eliminate Clark's less fashionable mannerisms'. For example, as Cathcart explains, the occasional use by Clark of a present-tense 'voice which he thought of as a Greek chorus, announcing arrivals and offering a demotic appraisal of public affairs', was retained in the abridgement even though Cathcart was well aware that many readers found this unusual device a jarring intrusion into the narrative. I'm one of those who don't like the device, but I accept Cathcart's explanation for including it in his abridgement.

Cathcart has done a difficult job well. The result is a racy story that is very readable. In Cathcart's hands, overuse does not dull the freshness of the concepts and phrases that became notoriously Clark's, such as 'Yarraside', the 'kingdom of nothingness', 'God was on the list of missing persons', and the perennial conflict be-

tween 'the enlargers of life' and the 'moral gaolers' and 'straiteners of humanity'.

It is to the credit of both Clark and Cathcart that some of the descriptive passages of significant events work well in the shortened version, such as the ceremony marking the federation of Australia. Clark would have been pleased that his coverage of the controversial bodyline cricket series has been trimmed relatively lightly; a footnote in Volume VI listing the references supporting his account—written over half a century after the events he is describing—of the absorbing second match of the series contains several newspaper sources supplemented by 'personal memories of the game'.

There are times when the writing in the abridgement is superbly vivid and entertaining. I liked the arresting sentence describing Eric Campbell of the New Guard as 'a braggart, a strutter and a limelighter'. And I enjoyed once again Clark's analysis of the various reasons prompting Australians to enlist in 1914: 'One was attracted by "brilliant uniforms, marching soldiers, music, drums and glory"; one was "itching to git a dig at few Germans"; one wanted to "do his bit to wipe out such an infamous nation"; one was there because if he had not been there he would never be able to look any decent girl in the face again; one was there because he would not be able to "look men in the face again"; and another was there because he would not have to look his wife in the face again for quite a while.'

Wherever possible Clark told Australia's history through the experiences of individual people, and he was irresistibly drawn to stories about tragic characters, especially if they were fatally flawed. Accordingly, this book contains plentiful references to predictably prominent people like Henry Lawson, Alfred Deakin and, in the chapter about the ill-fated expedition he headed, Robert O'Hara Burke. Cathcart also manages to find room to include in his big cast such quintessential Clark characters as C.Y. O'Connor and W.J. Chidley.

Peter Ryan has recorded that a storeman at Melbourne University Press, flicking through the gleaming pages of Volume VI when it had just arrived from the printer, was appalled to read that Phar Lap had won the Melbourne Cup twice. Ryan is hardly likely to read Cathcart's abridgement, but if that storeman ever does he will be relieved to find that the error he spotted has not been repeated.

Some other slips in Clark's volumes, however, have not been corrected. The age at which Jack Lang is said to have died is wrong. There is a case of mistaken identity concerning the AIF general who gave an emotional speech in Melbourne in December 1915; both Clark and Cathcart name him as 'Major-General I.G. McKay', presumably intending to refer to Iven Mackay, when it was in fact someone altogether different, James W. McCay. And the assertion that the political entity which became known as the Australian Labor Party was spelt Labor 'officially since 1891' is a very dubious one when the party's official report of the proceedings of its own supreme policy-making body, federal conference, was referring to the party as the Australian Labour Party as late as 1908.

My main reservation about the abridged volume is that the necessarily heavy pruning has sometimes resulted in characters and themes appearing in the narrative without sufficient explanatory connection or context for the uninitiated, but this is more of a comment on the magnitude of the task than a criticism of the way Cathcart has undertaken it. The absence of footnotes is appropriate—those interested can consult them in the original volumes—and the abridgement comes with its own index.

Cathcart wanted his abridgement 'to show Manning at his best', and 'to open Clark's rich and strange Australia to a wider public gaze'. He has succeeded in doing both. ■

Ross McMullin is a freelance historian. His most recent book is *The Light on the Hill: The Australian Labor Party 1891-1991.*

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FESTIVALS

MARGARET SIMONS

Not a word out of place

A FEW YEARS AGO, Brisbane seemed, to the casual visitor, to be a city almost entirely without bookshops—other than the sort that sold books on how to look after your indoor ferns, and Jane Fonda's latest workout. There *were* bookshops, of course, but you had to know where to look. Compared to Adelaide, a city of fewer people but more literature, the written word was almost invisible. Thanks to Expo, and a fast-expanding population, Brisbane has changed quickly. For the southern visitor, the first impression is of relaxed prosperity. People here talk about the recession, but there are brand-new shops everywhere, and the old ones have all been renovated.

Brisbane is more sophisticated, but the written word still doesn't draw much interest. Writers' Week, held as part of last month's Warana festival, had an exciting program—including a trip to Stradbroke Island (BYO shade, pillow and picnic basket) to celebrate black Australian writing, and to pay tribute to the late Oodgeroo Noonuccal. Yet attendances were poor. On a sunny Sunday afternoon, local writers read their work to an audience of fewer than 40 people, tucked into a corner of the art gallery.

Thea Astley, who has drawn audiences of up to a thousand at recent Adelaide and Melbourne writers' festivals, spoke on the same day to a half-empty auditorium. There were perhaps 200 people present. Astley, and the man sharing the stage, Canadian writer David Adams Richards, were talking on the topic 'Heartlands'—the places that they love, and that inspire them to write.

Astley talked about how the unease and tension of the far north Queensland rainforest inspired her. 'Whatever conversations I hear and use, whatever characters I notice on aeroplane flights or in shopping centres, they all get transported to somewhere north of the Tropic of Capricorn in my writing.' Astley has now moved south, but says that although her present home is 'very beautiful' she doesn't believe she could write about it.

The heartlands of writers do not always return the love, or take the writing to their hearts. But perhaps it doesn't matter. Richards told the gathering about his upbringing in remote northern Canada, among people who proudly wear the label 'redneck'. He addressed the Brisbane audience wearing a baseball cap (the right way round) and a tough-man air. He spoke of the difference between the people he grew up with, who did not read novels, and the creative writing community he had come to know. 'I have dear friends in the creative community,' he drawled, 'but I believe that if I had to make the choice in a heartbeat, I would want to be with the people I was born with, rather than with the people I have come to know.' ■

Margaret Simons is a freelance writer. Her recent novel, *The Ruthless Garden*, is published by Angus & Robertson.

GEOFFREY MILNE

Spring on the boards

THE DILIGENT THEATREGOERS of Melbourne are feeling hungover, having just got through the eighth Melbourne International Festival of the Arts and the eleventh Melbourne Fringe Arts Festival. The Melbourne International Festival began in September 1986 as part of Gian-Carlo Menotti's Spoleto Festival of Three Worlds; September was chosen largely because that was then the only time of year when the newly-completed Victorian Arts Centre's theatres were available. The Melbourne Fringe Festival pre-dated Spoleto by three years and was already tentatively established in the spring timeslot.

Typically based in the inner-northern suburbs of Fitzroy and Carlton, the Fringe Festival's theatre content this year was spread more widely than previously (to include the North Melbourne Town Hall and even more venues south of the Yarra). It was also a festival notable for the strength and volume of its theatre program. Considerable debate has focused on the Fringe board's 'open door' policy, whereby anyone who pays a $30 fee can perform in the festival. In other words, there is no artistic direction (or interference, as some fringe artists would have it) in this festival. There have certainly been some pretty amateurish and tedious performances over the years, especially in the New Short Works and Women's seasons, which have often been used for undergraduate exercises undeserving of a paying audience.

But the Fringe's open-door policy allows for a great deal of diversity and for a lot of work which we might not otherwise see. It is not only the unknown, the young and the up-and-coming who get exposure in the Melbourne Fringe Festival; a number of well-established artists and companies also choose to work in the Fringe from time to time, often to very good effect.

Australian Nouveau Theatre is a case in point. This company has regularly performed in 'mainstream' arts festivals, including Perth, Adelaide and Singapore, and three times under the Spoleto/Melbourne International Festival banner. This year they gave a spirited performance, under the Fringe's auspices, of the Austrian playwright Thomas Bernhard's *Force of Habit*, a rather slow and dated revisiting of themes associated with the theatre of the absurd. Handspan Theatre, too, has been associated with a number of high-profile international festivals; they used the 1993 Fringe Festival to unveil a splendid series of beautifully realised and poignant short pieces of puppetry and visual theatre by four of their women members, under the title of Meta Four. I am sure we shall see more of these works in the future.

A newer, movement-based performance group called 'desoxy Theatre' (formed in 1989 by Teresa Blake and Daniel Witton) produced one of the real successes of Fringe 1993. In a work with the intriguing title of *The Cobra Itch*, we got contemporary dance, some highly acrobatic and graceful gymnastics, projected slide and film images and spoken-word drama in a beguiling and at times breathtaking amalgam. By contrast, La Mama Theatre weighed in with a relatively orthodox play by Bruce Thomson, *The Eye of Martha Needle*. This portrayed moments in the real life of one Martha Needle, who killed a number of people in Richmond in 1894 with rat poison but who remained totally unrepentant and unremorseful when she was hanged at the Melbourne Gaol. The play was given an elegant production by Ariette Taylor, and collected an ABC Radio Fringe Festival Award.

Elsewhere, there was a production of Jack Hibberd's 1984 adaptation of De Maupassant's *Odyssey of a Prostitute*; a Melbourne University student production of Aphra Behn's *The Rover*; a curious adaptation of Calderon's *Orfeo* in the bowels of the old CUB brewery; and *New Anatomies*, an interesting semi-documentary play by Timberlake Wertenbaker, about another real-life woman called Isabelle Eberhardt, who traversed the North African deserts dressed as a male Arab.

The 1993 Melbourne International Festival (Richard Wherrett's second and last) also kept the theatregoer busy, and the consensus among colleagues is that, although it looked ordinary on paper, it worked rather better in practice. (Perhaps festival-eve events like the appointment of Leo Schofield as Wherrett's part-time successor and the death of a previous director, John Truscott, diverted attention away from the festival program itself.) In its first seven years, this festival averaged just over four drama events each year (including cabaret, performance art and mixed-media production, but not including opera and dance); this year's festival brochure listed eight productions worthy of the theatre reviewer's attention.

There were also three music-theatre events: Chamber Made Opera's production of the American Robert Ashley's *Improvement; Don Leaves Linda* (about which I didn't hear a bad word), the much-touted one-night-stand of *Sondheim's Follies* (which many of those lucky enough to get in proclaimed the high point of the festival) and a Sydney-made confection entitled *Simply Irresistible*, starring Judi Connelli and Caroline Gilmer.

In spoken-word drama, Wherrett's programming was the first in eght

years to achieve a balance between exciting international productions, good work from interstate companies and individuals, and local work. Furthermore, this year's seemingly vague theme of 'triumph in adversity' manifested itself much more effectively than last year's apparently sharper Columbus theme. What was also interesting in this year's theatre program was the tendency for the plays to come in pairs. Thus we had two works examining death and AIDS, two remarkably contrasting approaches to Shakespeare's neglected (probably justly) *Titus Andronicus*, and two singularly different plays from leading Australian theatres for young people.

Death and AIDS, and death from AIDS, lay at the heart of the distinguished Sydney photographer William Yang's slide show and largely autobiographic monologue *Sadness*, which quietly but quickly became one of the hot events of the festival (not surprisingly, perhaps, since the Beckett Theatre in the Malthouse seats barely 200). But Yang's piece was also suffused with life; somewhat in the style of a thriller, it was a triumphant account of his search for identity as well as a chronicle of death. The Melbourne playwright Michael Gurr's play about living with AIDS, *Desirelines*, was rather less satisfying as an evening in the theatre, despite its more orthodox dramatic structure and a definite ring of truth, coming as it did out of a series of workshops conducted among AIDS sufferers. The play's unrelieved tone of grief and anger gave it the feeling of a polemical pamphlet.

EASILY THE BIGGEST theatre event was the Romanian National Theatre of Craiova's *Titus Andronicus*, which had five performances in the cavernous State Theatre (in Romanian, with deadpan, heavily-accented Shakespeare in headphones, which in my case failed to function). What was impressive about this production was the relative simplicity of the means of its image-making. Apart from some remarkable Guignol-style shadow play and a marvellous sense of ritual and ceremony, the staging was based largely on wheeled, hospital-style furniture and a number of flowing, unbleached calico cloths. The overall shape of the production was thus faintly reminiscent of the famous white box style of Peter Brook's Royal Shakespeare Company productions of the 1970s, but vastly more flexible. Although I found it hard to get involved in the performance, it was fascinating to see how certain theatrical traditions have evolved in Europe in a way that doesn't happen much here. The Romanians certainly earned a place in an Australian festival but it is ridiculous that they should have come all the way here for just one long weekend in one Australian city, to be seen by fewer than 10,000 people.

Highly strung Titus: Renato Cuocolo in the Theatreworks production of Titus Andronicus.

Photo: Lyn Pool

The Melbourne-based alternative company Theatreworks attacked the play rather differently, commissioning David Pledger to translate and adapt it in such a way as to make it relevant to Australia's multicultural community. Pledger stripped Shakespeare's play back to the essentials of its action-plot, casting the warlike Goths as Vietnamese-Australians and splitting the Romans (for reasons best known to himself) into two groups, with Titus, his followers and some of his family speaking Italian, and Saturninus and his people speaking English. The part of the utterly evil 'Moor'—who is responsible for some of the most unspeakably dreadful actions in the play—was given to a Woiwurrung-speaking Aboriginal. The bizarre jumble thus achieved was, oddly, comprehensible enough linguistically, but its effect was to highlight hostilities in our supposedly jolly multicultural community.

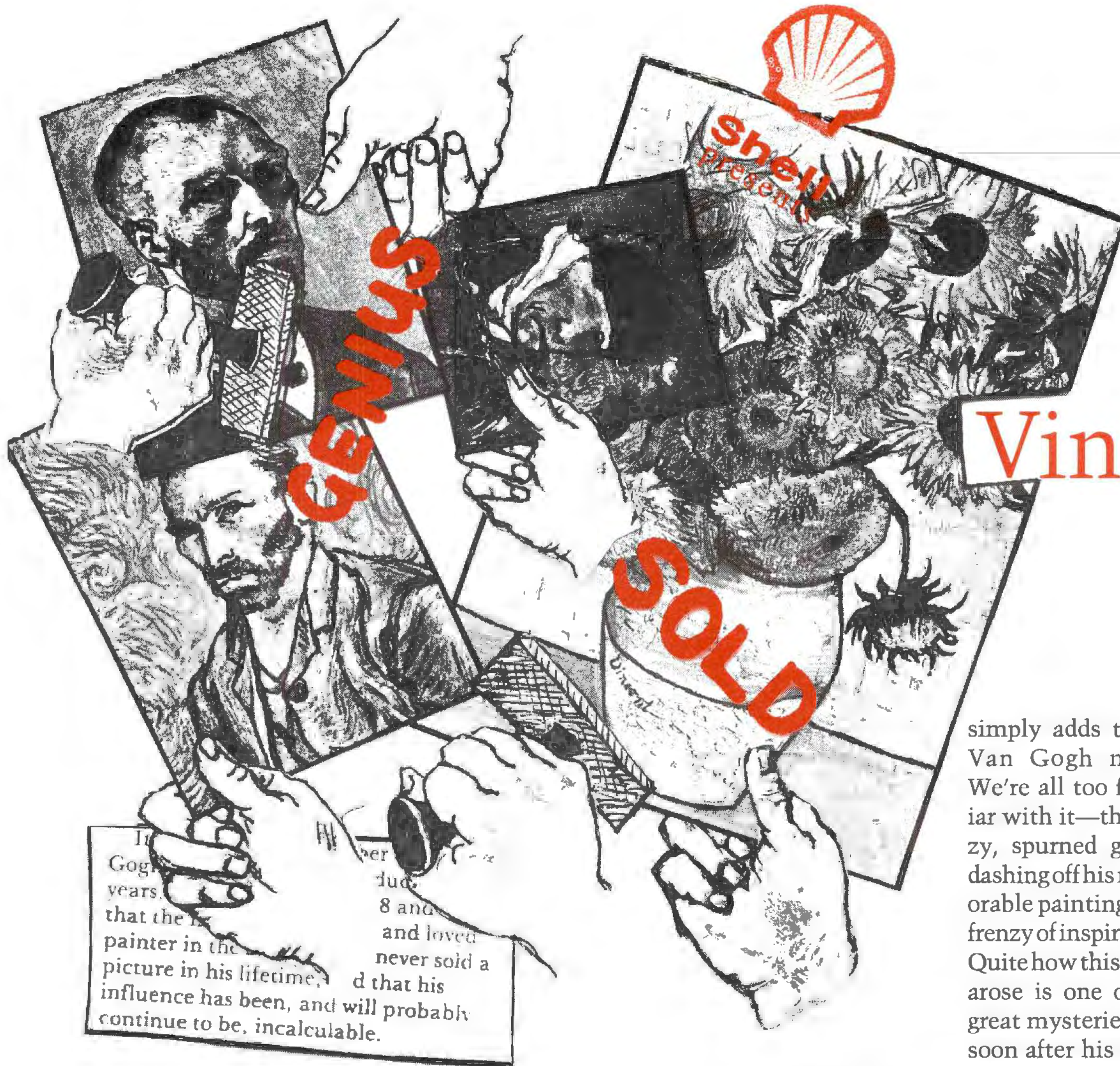
Adelaide's leading theatre for young people, Magpie Theatre, brought its 1992 Adelaide Festival hit, *Funerals and Circuses* (by the Aboriginal playwright Roger Bennett) to the Melbourne International Festival, while Melbourne's equally celebrated Arena Theatre co-produced (with the Melbourne Theatre Company) Mary Morris's adaptation of the widely-read children's book by Morris Gleitzman, *Blabbermouth*. This latter was a delightfully gentle look at disability (the inability of the central character, Rowena, to speak) triumphing over adversity, in a play for primary school children that worked very well. The former was a hard-hitting and potentially very strong play (not necessarily for youngsters at all) about intolerance and prejudice, intermarriage and reprisal in a rural town. It suffered a bit, however, in the transfer from the intimacy of Adelaide's Theatre 62 to the sprawling and less-focused space of the Universal Theatre in Fitzroy.

Crossroads Theatre's production of Englishman Daniel Scott's rather tedious play about domestic violence, *Below the Belt*, failed to show this enterprising Sydney alternative theatre company off to its best advantage. Diana Bliss's production of Paul Doust's *Lady Bracknell's Confinement* gave the festival its theatrical dessert (with the redoubtable Gordon Chater coming out of retirement to tell this preposterous but entertaining story) after its many solid main courses.

In many ways, this was, the most interesting Melbourne Festival since 1988. There are nevertheless a number of problems about this festival (and about Australian festivals generally), to which I shall return next month. ■

Geoffrey Milne is head of the division of drama at La Trobe University, and a drama critic for the ABC.

DAMIAN COLERIDGE



Vincentomania

VAN GOGH IS BIG MONEY all right, and don't we love the irony of it. It has become a journalistic cliché: the artist who didn't sell very many pictures when alive, (he sold about 40), but whose work is now so expensive that it is impossible to insure. 'They reckon he was mad,' said the filmmaker Paul Cox, 'but it is we who are mad.'

The ironies abound, and all the more so in mid-November, when the most costly exhibition yet to come to Australia, *Vincent Van Gogh—His Sources, Genius and Influence*, opens at the National Gallery of Victoria. Not only is it costly to bring here—each Van Gogh picture has its own courier, for instance—but, with an entrance price of $16 a head, even the exhibition's curator, gallery director James Mollison, concedes that it is 'a big ask'. Just to break even, the exhibition will have to pull in more people, and more dollars a day, than any previous show. 'I'd love to see its budget' commented one connoisseur of these matters.

The talk about money, of course, simply adds to the Van Gogh myth. We're all too familiar with it—the crazy, spurned genius dashing off his memorable paintings in a frenzy of inspiration. Quite how this myth arose is one of the great mysteries; but soon after his death in 1890 people were complaining about how difficult it was to see the pictures because of the stories that surrounded them. The art critic John Berger took up this point in his TV series and book, *The Ways of Seeing*. Berger showed Van Gogh's last painting, *Wheatfield with Crows*, without a caption, and then with a caption which described it as Van Gogh's last work.

Stories still circulate about the pictures as we continue to tell the Van Gogh story either in song—Dong McLean and a recent musical—or painting, or especially film. From Vincent Minnelli's 1956 Metrocolor biography *Lust for Life*, starring Kirk Douglas as your full-on mad genius, to Paul Cox's dignified *Vincent: The Life and Death of Vincent Van Gogh* (1987), with John Hurt reading from Van Gogh's letters, and Robert Altman's *Vincent and Theo*, concerning the brothers Van Gogh and the art market, there has been no end of films on Van Gogh. 'Did you see the Altman film?' I asked a film critic recently. 'No', she replied, 'I saw the shorts for it and I thought "not another film about Van Gogh as a god, as a great sufferer".' Interestingly, she considered that Van Gogh and other 19th century artists had purposefully constructed themselves in this way, as mad, which is another contemporary telling of the story.

For their part, Mollison and the exhibition tell the story of a young Dutch artist who began painting in earnest, in 1880, at the age of 27. Five years later he was in Paris, where, as one of a younger generation of artists who swapped pictures and ideas, he had the good fortune to discover colour and a marvellous, intense way of applying paint. During the next five years he painted the great, exciting works that we admire still, then he died. In one sense, his career was just beginning. Had he lived, by 1900 he would have been a successful artist on his way to becoming one of the most successful artists of all time. (Though try imagining him old and rich like Picasso.)

It is a story which attempts to demythologise Van Gogh. The Van Gogh of this exhibition is an artist who, according to Mollison, was 'no more mad than anyone else'. After the triumph of the Van Gogh centenary retrospective in Amsterdam in 1990—there were more than 600 works and the TV rights were sold to Japan—Mollison decided that the time was right to present Van Gogh as an artist like any other: 'I believe that Australia got the show because I presented the notion of an exhibition that would rid one community—the Australian community—of all the silly romantic myths that have emerged around this man.'

This was the serious, art-histori-

cal point that the proposed exhibition intended to make. And these days you don't get a loan of any pictures, let alone Van Goghs, unless you're making a point, in the style, say, of the recent, successful exhibition *Rubens and the Italian Renaissance*.

So how does this exhibition make its serious historical point? There are 63 works, 24 of them by Van Gogh. Which ones, you ask? Well there is a certain reluctance on the part of the National Gallery of Victoria to let us know this before the show opens, just in case we're expecting to see all the famous ones—*Starry Night*, *Sunflowers*, *A Cornfield with Cypresses*—and are disappointed at not seeing them. But Art Exhibitions Australia Ltd was able to provide a list and there are some outstanding Van Gogh works including *The Chair with the Pipe* and *The Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin*, but will it be enough, given that the Van Gogh works carry the show?

The other 39 pictures either chose themselves—26 of them are from Australia—or were chosen to reveal something of the sources and influence of Van Gogh's work. Among the sources are the work of Millet and some mid-19th century British and Dutch painters, as well as works by French contemporaries such as Seurat, Manet, Pissarro, Monet, Signac and, by all accounts, most marvellously, Gauguin. His influence on other painters, (if only for 10 minutes in some cases) is demonstrated in works by Kandinsky, Braque and Nolde. The exhibition does not include any work done after 1916, so that if the notion of tracing Van Gogh's influence on Australian artists like Grace Cossington Smith, John Perceval and Brett Whiteley was considered, it was in the end rejected, because it would have moved the exhibition way beyond the bounds set by James Mollison: 'a contained exhibition that does explain the genius of Van Gogh ... where he comes from and where he went to'.

READING SOME OF the newspaper reports on the exhibition, you might think it's the first time this sort of show has been mounted. In Australia, yes; elsewhere, no. The Art Gallery of Ontario's 1981 Van Gogh exhibition, *Van Gogh and Cloisonism*, was described by Robert Hughes as placing Van Gogh 'in a clear but somewhat unfamiliar cultural context, so that he is not seen as an inspired half-madman working out his obsessions in isolation, but as an artist in constant dialogue with his comrades.' Sounds familiar enough. Different pictures, similar intent. The *Van Gogh in Arles* and *Van Gogh in Saint-Rémy and Auvers* exhibitions, held in 1984 and 1986 respectively at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, were quite specific, different sorts of shows; but another 1990 exhibition, *Van Gogh and Modern Art: 1890-1914*, first seen in Essen and later in Amsterdam, outlined the extent of Van Gogh's influence in the 20 years after his death, an outline followed by this exhibition.

The exhibition would not have happened without Mollison's drive and experience, but considering this line-up of exhibitions it would seem that when he visited the Rijksmuseum seeking to borrow pictures, he was presenting a familiar enough line on the demythologising of Van Gogh. I suspect the museum directors had heard it all before, but the Australian gallery-going public haven't, so perhaps they decided to do us a favour, given that very little of Van Gogh's work has been seen in Australia.

Mollison is aware that any exhibition which sets out to demythologise Van Gogh runs the inevitable risk of remythologising him. (Then again, maybe we need to do that.) Perhaps it is why he is somewhat wary about over-promoting the exhibition. Not that the Victorian State Government and Tourism Victoria want to over-promote it, but for the first time, as part of the push into 'event-related' tourism, the State Government has encouraged Tourism Victoria to get right behind an exhibition. There'll be the vision board display at Melbourne Airport, flags up in the city, irises and miniature sunflowers in boxes outside the gallery in St Kilda Rd., displays in city department stores, packages for New Zealand and interstate visitors, all with a view to pre-selling the exhibition.

There is plenty of advice around suggesting they are on a winner with Van Gogh, but Mollison is not so sure—and anyway, 'it's just another part of the mythology of Van Gogh. Because we've got the name we think this is going to cause money to flood into an exhibition.' (Certainly having the name has meant that Shell—a Dutch firm—gave more money to this exhibition than any sponsor in the history of arts patronage in Australia. Esso may have 'presented' Rubens, but not with the razzamatazz of Shell as they 'present' Vincent Van Gogh.)

WITHOUT PEOPLE and money flowing into the National Gallery of Victoria and the Queensland Art Gallery, however, we won't see such big, expensive exhibitions in the future. It's a bit of a bind if you don't want to over-promote Van Gogh. How can you not? After all, the blockbuster exhibition is a part of the leisure industry and *Vincent Van Gogh—His Sources, Genius and Influence* will have to compete for the consumer dollar over the summer. It's all a part of the big new development in the tourist industry; what the art historian Anne-Marie Willis calls 'cultural consumption,' and what the trade calls 'experiential tourism' or 'value-added experience'. Van Gogh is very much a part of this development, as is Aboriginal culture. We get to see the Rijksmuseum pictures now because it's off-peak for tourism in Holland, but come the northern summer each Van Gogh is expected back on the walls in Amsterdam, welcoming the visitors.

It's all a part of the big new development in the tourist industry; what the art historian Anne-Marie Willis calls 'cultural consumption,' and what the trade calls 'experiential tourism' or 'value-added experience'. Van Gogh is very much a part of this development, as is Aboriginal culture.

With all the talk of money, myth and influence what about the pictures themselves? What is it about them that moves us and fascinates us still? For Mollison, the sense of immediacy in the painting is 'greater than [with] Raphael or Rembrandt. There we don't have the feeling that we're in the presence of the man who made them.' When Robert Hughes reviewed the 1984 exhibition *Van Gogh in Arles*, he referred to the same immediacy and the way in which 'all signs of

extreme feeling in Van Gogh were tempered by his longing for concision and grace.' Two years later, Hughes referred to the beauty and emotional range of the work Van Gogh did in the last year of his life.

It is this, and not simply the stories which surround them, that enables Van Gogh's images to have a symbolic power. The tree, or field, or flower is so powerfully, immediately present as a tree, or field, or flower, that we can speak of it as symbolic. It's this sort of intensity, an intense fidelity to appearances, which explains something of Van Gogh's attraction.

That, and the stories we go on telling ourselves, as if we were attempting to remythologise Van Gogh. Not in the sense of telling sweet lies about him, but rather, as the Benedictine monk Sebastian Moore once said, 'because myths are the way we talked about ourselves before we learnt to lie'. Perhaps the Van Gogh story gives us access to the most vital of our myths, the myth of transformation, at whose heart 'is the sense of the human self as uniquely precious'. Can art do that? Maybe. We will have to wait and see. ■

Damian Coleridge is a freelance critic and writer.

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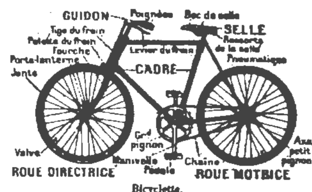

EXHIBITIONS: 2

MARGARET SIMONS

Looking up north

THERE IS AN IRONY in the selective way Australian perspectives of South-East Asia have changed. When it comes to economics, we recognise and even envy the energy of our neighbours. Our future, we are told, depends on catching the tails of the tigers. Yet our understanding of the arts of South-East Asia is frozen in time. Tourists go to the region and expect to see ancient dances, costumes and gold-plated Buddhas. We have been interested only in the classical—art as art history.

Thanks to the director and staff of the Queensland Art Gallery, the ice is being shattered. The result is surely one of the most exciting—and under-publicised—exhibitions mounted in Australia in recent times. The Queensland Art Gallery is staging the first of a series of Asia-Pacific Triennials of contemporary art, coinciding with Brisbane's Warana Festival of the Arts. The exhibition is easily the most challenging part of the festival.

The paintings, sculptures and installations on show at the gallery are bold and fresh, and one can only wonder at the effect the triennials will have on Australian artists. The effect is potentially profound, and an important part of our growing relationship with Asia. The Australia Council made one of its largest individual grants to assist with the exhibition, and private sponsors have also helped.

The exhibition includes Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook's boxes of men and their reflections. Black metal boxes, each open, contain white outlines of nude figures, which are reflected in deep, dark still pools underneath. There is a stillness about the imagery, the dark water and the reflections. Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook says 'It is the line between people in an open space and their shadows ... between the fighters and the losers; it's the line where one decides whether to live or die ... or in a Buddhist way, it's the dividing line between knowledge and ignorance.'

Another of her sculptures is a thin black boat, again filled with dark, reflective liquid (it is motor oil), in which is reflected a shape that might be a woman, or might be the sail. Two hands are hanging on to the edge of the boat—but they come from the depths *inside*, rather than trying to climb into the boat from the outside.

At the entrance to the exhibition is a giant incense stick, slowly smouldering. A second look reveals human faces embedded in the stick, waiting for the fragrant flame to reach them. This is a work by Malaysian artist Kungyu Liew. Another work, by Indonesian Dang Christano, consists of suspended 'trees' with flowers—for those who have lost their lives—scattered underneath them. Much of the Indonesian work clearly refers to human-rights abuses, yet the Indonesian co-operated with the gallery in the exhibition.

In a catalogue essay, the gallery's director of international programs, Caroline Turner, points out that art critics have largely ignored the development of art in the region, or have seen it in terms of its integration of western tradition. Socio-economic contexts have been over-emphasised at the cost of mystical-aesthetic contexts. 'The history of the region,' Turner writes, 'is one of cultural engagement and adaptation which may make Western influences seem minor to future historians.'

Nearly 200 works by 76 artists from 12 countries and Hong Kong are included in the exhibition, in what gallery director Doug Hall describes as 'the most extensive, intellectually demanding project the gallery has ever undertaken'. Further triennials are planned for 1996 and 1999.

The Queensland Art Gallery is adventurous and energetic in ways that can elude its southern counterparts. The triennial is the product of that spirit, and of the keenness of the overseas artistic communities to communicate with Australia. ■

Margaret Simons is a freelance writer and a regular contributor to *Eureka Street*.

• *The Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* is on exhibition at the Queensland Art Gallery until 5 December.

Better and better

In the Line of Fire, dir. Wolfgang Petersen (Hoyts). Clint Eastwood is in danger of giving mid-life crises a good name. Having demythologised the western—and his own career—in *Unforgiven*, he has now co-operated in the shredding of his other screen persona, the tough-guy cop. And, as in *Unforgiven*, the tone of regret never becomes irksome because there isn't a Sensitive New Age Whine to be heard.

The line of fire in question is the path that an assassin's bullet must travel in order to connect with the body of the US president. Frank Horrigan (Eastwood) is a Secret Service agent, i.e. if the need should arise, his job is to place his own body between the bullet and the president. On a significant occasion early in his career, in Dallas on 22 November 1963, Horrigan failed to do this. Now, 30 years later, he is trying to prevent a psychotic former CIA agent, Mitch Leary (John Malkovitch), from assassinating another president. In the process, Horrigan takes what amounts to a remedial course in sexual politics from a young female Secret Service agent, Lilly Raines (Rene Russo).

Those are the elements: the good guy and the bad guy who seek to manipulate each other's insecurities, and the wider context of an America that is still living on the psychic legacy of the Kennedy assassination. It all sounds familiar, but *In the Line of Fire* is saved from being just another chase movie by the superb performances of Eastwood and Malkovitch. Indeed, the latter gives such a convincing portrayal of evil incarnate that he should beware of being pigeonholed by casting directors as Hollywood's new resident psycho. After all, Bruce Dern and Jack Nicholson are at the mid-life crisis stage as well.

—Ray Cassin

Apocalypse bore

The Nostradamus Kid, dir. Bob Ellis (independent cinemas), is a kind of *Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* with a generous dose of religious anxiety. Despite Ellis's protestations that the film is not autobiographical, it is impossible to avoid identifying the hero, Ken Elkin (Noah Taylor), with Bob Ellis. In case you forget whose story it really is, Ellis' mellifluous voiceover is there to keep you on track.

> **La Dolcissima Vita**
>
> As *Eureka Street* went to press, news came that Federico Fellini, long-ailing, was near death and had been anointed by a hospital chaplain. So no film competition this month, folks, just a tribute to the director of *La Dolce Vita* (from whence comes the above still), *La Strada*, *Juliet of the Spirits*, *Ginger and Fred* and many more.
>
> The winner of September's film competition was Kim Miller, rector of the Anglican parish of St Alban's, Kooringal, NSW. Kim's best (i.e. worst) dinosaur joke was:
> *Q*. What do you call the bishop of Jurassic Rome?
> *A*. Pontifisaurus Rex.

Elkin's escape from a regimented Seventh Day Adventist childhood into the sexual turmoil of Sydney in the '60s provides some sharp and often funny insights into religious disillusionment and tortured adolescence. But, although *The Nostradamus Kid* is critical of Adventist beliefs, it has no brief to vilify the sect. In the film's idyllic holiday-camp scenes, which are full of horses galloping in Blue Mountains' mist, Ellis treats his abandoned faith with affection. At university, when all that seems to be left of his character's Adventism is fear of the Apocalypse, the Adventists are still 'my people'. And Elkins/Ellis continues to crash through relationships compelled by a troubled desire for 'fullness of response'—his former pastor's 'good and sufficient' definition of love.

But, despite some deft dialogue and great cast—especially Alice Gardner and Miranda Otto—*The Nostradamus Kid* doesn't quite work. By the end I had had enough of Elkin's relentless lustful depression, and wanted to block out the voiceover.

—Jane Buckingham

Life as it is

Blackfellas (independent cinemas), dir. James Ricketson, is set among the Nyoongahs, who live in Perth and the south-west of WA, and is based on Archie Weller's novel, *Day of the Dog*. The main character, Doug Dooligan, gets out of jail and wants a job so he can buy back his father's country property. But he's torn between going straight and old mates like Pretty Boy Floyd, a charming small-time crim. Doug falls for a wild young girl called Polly, and the whole crew looks to be headed for a fall.

The film is as rough as a hessian bag, and rightly so. It shows the realities facing black urban fringe-dwellers—boredom, no jobs, police harassment, drinking, footy, hot cars and petty crime. John Moore (Doug) is strong and expressive, and David Ngoombujarra (Pretty Boy) is perhaps a future star. Jaylene Riley (Polly) and Lisa Kinchela (her older sister) are convincing. The supporting cast and locations give it a sense of life that overcomes creaky turns in the plot, and miscasting in the role of Doug's white mother.

Overall the film is pretty good, funny in parts and moving in others. It recalls Australian films from the 1970s such as John Duigan's *Mouth to Mouth*—not slick, but a lot of heart. Ricketson, who also wrote the screenplay, is said to have spent five years working on it, and consulting the Nyoongah community. 'Over the

Talking Points

Australia
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An open forum at St Mary's College, Melbourne University, Swanston Street, Parkville. Speakers: Tony Blackshield, Marjorie Thorpe, Geoff Clark and Jocelyn Scutt. Admission: $5, or $3 conc. Contact: Rainbow Alliance, 35 Argyle Street, Fitzroy 3065. Tel (03) 419 3613.

Mass for East Timor

The East Timorese community of Victoria invites you to attend a Mass for East Timor at St Patrick's Cathedral, East Melbourne, on Friday 12 November at 8pm. The principal concelebrant will be Bishop Belo of East Timor. There will also be a fund-raising dinner for East Timor at Central Hall, 20 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, on 15 November at 7.30pm. Tickets: $30, available from the Timorese Association of Victoria, tel (03) 302 1896.

Families and Violence

A conference at Macquarie University, Sydney, on 4-5 February 1994, sponsored by Australian Catholic University and Centacare. Goals: to explore factors contributing to violence in Australian families, and to investigate strategies for addressing violent behaviour. Contact: Christine Trimingham, tel (02) 739 2248, fax (02) 739 2105.

years I've put more and more of myself into the story,' the film's publicity notes quote him as saying. Maybe *Blackfellas* would have been even better if it had stuck closer to Archie Weller's original story.

—Mark Skulley

Hatchet match

So I Married an Axe Murderer, dir. Thomas Schlamme (Hoyts). A movie with a title like this ought to mock itself and a few others as well, and fortunately this one does.

Charlie McKenzie, (Mike Myers of *Wayne's World* fame), is a pretentious beat poet who performs in a club on Jack Kerouac Lane in San Francisco. He finds Harriet (Nancy Travis), the girl of his dreams, working behind the counter of a butcher shop. The dream begins to turn sour, however, when he reads a tabloid newspaper story about a serial killer and realises that the details of Harriet's history match details in the story.

Myers shows his versatility by playing not only Charlie but also Charlie's father, Stuart. As the latter, he almost steals the show from himself. Stuart, who looks like a cross between Andy Warhol and one of the Proclaimers, has a Glaswegian accent strong enough to strip paint and a caustic wit to go with it. Brenda Fricker, as Charlie's lustful wife, May, is also a treat, and so is Anthony La Paglia as Charlie's friend, Tony Giardino, a cop who desperately wants to be like his heroes, Starsky and Hutch.

It is a good thing these characters are so rich; otherwise the limited scope offered to Travis and to Amanda Plummer, as Harriet's cryptic sister, Rose, would be annoying. Their talents deserve to be better used.

—Jon Greenaway

Tropical haunts

BeDevil, dir. Tracey Moffat (independent cinemas), tells three tales of evil and hauntings in Australia's tropical north. They are drawn from Moffat's childhood memories of stories told by relatives, and display, in a lighter vein, the same artistic ingenuity as her acclaimed short film, *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy*.

BeDevil toys with our expectations of Australian indigenous and migrant culture. The angry, abused Aboriginal boy in 'Mr Chuck' is set against the irrepressibly cheerful, Evian Water drinking, country-and-western singing Aboriginal woman in 'Choo Choo Choo Choo'. In the third, least effective, story the friendship is tested by the demands of his small-time, comical ambition.

But *BeDevil* offers more than humour and insight. It is a showcase not only for Moffat's talents, but also for those of cinematographer Geoff Burton and production designer Stephen Curtis. The film's very ordinary characters—old drunks, *nouveaux riches* housewives and town pedestrians—are pushed into extraordinary real and surreal landscapes, where bedevilment pricks through the surface, bubbles up from swamps and transfixes cars.

Even when presenting prosaic reality, *BeDevil's* visual power sometimes makes the clever, poignant script seem almost redundant. In 'Mr Chuck' the image of the Aboriginal boy touching a glass wall displays his wretchedness more starkly than any words: the evil that licks his feet is more than ghostly.

—Jane Buckingham

Home and away

Homelands, dir. Tom Zubricki (independent cinemas). This documentary might have been made for refugee chaplains, though it is of much wider interest. It tells the story of a family that emigrates from El Salvador to Australia, and studies their life in Australia and the return of the husband and wife to El Salvador.

The interest of *Homelands* lies in the way that Zubricki is drawn into the lives of his subjects, who describe their lives and conflicts in intimate detail. The filmmaker, like the chaplain, is drawn into a world that is foreign to him, and the wanderings of body and spirit of those whom he meets clearly lead him to reflect on his own identity. That has also been my own experience as a refugee chaplain.

Perhaps, too, Zubricki is like a chaplain in that he identifies more easily with the woman of the family than with the man, but ultimately is made an outsider to the lives of both by the strangeness of their memories and of the world of guerrilla warfare in which they last found a home. The more articulate the couple become, the woman in personal terms and the man in social analysis, the less the filmmaker understands. He becomes part of their lives, but remains an observer.

In the film's final sequence, Zubricki, again like a chaplain, seeks a way to describe this story of displacement. Another refugee, from Chile, says: 'We know where we are born. But where we shall die, no one knows.' It is the moving end of a moving film.

I had only one reservation. Much of what the refugee chaplain knows is covered by the confessional seal. Should there be something of the same sort for makers of documentaries when they enter private lives?

—Andrew Hamilton SJ

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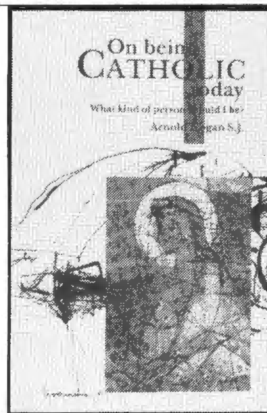

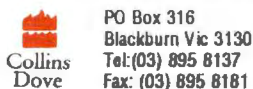

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Good companions

Eureka Street is happy to recommend the latest (10th) edition of *Halliwell's Filmgoer's Companion*, that A-to-Z of just about everyone, and every topic, associated with the cinema and its history. The first edition to be produced since the death of Leslie Halliwell, it is edited by John Walker, who brought out the 8th edition of *Halliwell's Film Guide* in 1991. Invest in both the Halliwell 'bibles', and you can settle all those family arguments about late-night movies. (They certainly help settle arguments at *Eureka Street*.)

Shakespeare & Co.

Much Ado About Nothing, dir. Kenneth Branagh (Greater Union); *Macbeth* and *Othello*, both dir. Orson Welles (independent cinemas). It's high season for Shakespeare again, exactly as the drama merchant of Avon might have liked it. Branagh's sunny, bound-to-be-a-hit *Much Ado* is playing simultaneously in state capital cinemas, and the restored and digitally remastered Mercury Theatre productions of Welles' *Macbeth* (1948) and *Othello* (1952) are doing the art-house circuit.

Branagh's second screen Shakespeare is an exuberant, open-hearted affair that will draw a new, young public for the play with its witty filchings from screen classics: the horsemen out of *The Magnificent Seven*, the comedy duo out of *Monty Python*, and *Three Musketeer* pranks from everywhere else in the history of screen comedy. But the film doesn't rely on comic cross-referencing for its strength. From the outset, against the competition of a Tuscan summer (in lieu of Shakespeare's Messina), it makes joy of poetic language. And in Emma Thompson, as the word-sharp Beatrice, it has one of this century's great exponents. It is hard to imagine how Thompson can get any better. (There are still the tragedies, of course ...). In *Much Ado* she is caustic, modest *and* vengeful. She even makes embodied sense of hack praise like 'radiant'. Branagh is an engaging Benedick, improving as his role darkens, but delightful also as he cavorts in the fountain, baptised in love.

Michael Keaton (Dogberry) and Ben Elton (Verges) make a manic pair. The opening-night audience (predominantly young) loved them for their shameless *Python* stealings, but also for their invention. Pity that Keaton's Irish accent shades off into mumble sometimes. As the young lovers, Kate Beckinsale (Hero) is adequate but Robert Sean Leonard (Claudio) tries to do Method with his sooty eyebrows—not enough in a play/film that runs so strongly on words. Richard Briers is a convincing and sympathetic Leonato and Denzel Washington a genial Don Pedro. As his bastard brother, Don John, the villain spoiler of pastoral harmony, Keanu Reeves looks saturnine but can't act.

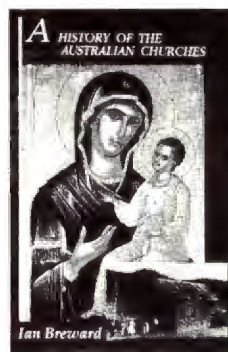
The film's froth is balanced by a great closing scene in which the camera draws slowly up and back from epithalamic revelry until, in a god's eye view, the players become Bruegel ants, fixed in their hapless glee. Vengeance, Don John and the follies of honour crouch, off-camera left. In the Shakespearean landscape, Death is the shadow of celebration.

You have to be grateful for the opportunity to see the restored *Othello* and *Macbeth*, but Welles' best efforts went elsewhere—in the rarely shown *Chimes at Midnight* or in Carol Reed's *The Third Man*, which Welles did on the side to earn more money for *Othello* (filmed intermittently over three years). Michael McLiammoir is the strength of *Othello*. His powdered and theatrical Iago has the chill, inexplicable menace of an IRA executioner:. 'Strangle her in her bed',—and Othello does. *Macbeth* is an obscure, ill-paced production, making one wonder how completely Welles understood the play. And its stagey Scots accents would shame a Chum commercial.

—Morag Fraser

Ticket offer

The first 15 people to take out subscriptions to *Eureka Street* will receive double passes to see *Like Water For Chocolate* at one of these Melbourne cinemas: the Brighton Bay, the Longford and the Kino. Fill in the form on the inside back cover, and mark it 'film offer'.



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Doug testing

SBS RAN A PROGRAM about the early pioneers of radio in the United States. Their problems in overcoming sceptical public opinion were illustrated by the response of one old man to a vox pop on the amazing new technology. 'I don't hold with furniture that talks,' he said. It was hard not to sympathise with that view at 4.30am on the day that the success of Sydney's Olympic bid was announced, when the furniture wasn't just talking, but screaming its lungs out. 'Wake up Sydney! Wake up Australia!' it shrieked, as if there was any choice in the matter. And that was just the ABC.

Things were worse on Sydney's commercial stations, with 2UE's populist talkback host and failed rugby league coach Alan Jones making sure that 'those who keep ranting and raving against the monarchy' were fully informed about Princess Anne's heroic role in the voting process. 2GB knew better, however. Their resident shrink, Shirley Smith, assured us that 'energy, positiveness and faith' were the key factors in Sydney's triumph.

Try as you might, there's been no escape from the Olympics. Sydney's two highest-rating FM stations each ran a phone-in poll on the vital question of whether the bid committee should get a ticker-tape parade through the city. And the (ex-)Minister for the Olympic Bid, Bruce Baird, went on 2GB to boast about organising a reunion of Stalag Luft B veterans for the benefit of the Norwegian IOC member.

Those two FM stations, 2MMM and 2DAY, have got more on their minds at the moment than the Olympics (though not much more). The fact is, they can no longer claim the dubious honour of topping the ratings, having just been overtaken by the upstart 2WS, which recently moved from AM. Triple M has counterparts with the same name in Perth, Brisbane, Melbourne and soon in Adelaide, while 2DAY is linked with FOX-FM in Melbourne and AM and FM stations in Canberra and Adelaide. Until the arrival of 2WS, the rivalry between the two in pursuit of the 'young adult' market (and I use the term loosely) was a reliable constant on the Sydney radio scene, with competition especially fierce over the breakfast slot.

In the blue corner, in more senses than one, is Triple M's Doug Mulray. Mulray, who made his name on the ultra-politically correct Triple J, has evolved (or regressed) into a self-consciously tasteless and 'controversial' presenter, whose stock-in-trade is crude innuendo. There's nothing Mulray and his listeners appreciate more than a good joke about farting or a bit of titillating byplay with his (female) acolyte, Sam, whose sole function seems to be to act as the foil for Mulray's scintillating *double entendres*. The widow of an Australian soldier killed in Malaysia actually wrote to request 'any fart jokes, or jokes about balding short men', which would 'help ease our pain'. Whatever gets you through, I suppose.

MULRAY'S APPEAL DEPENDS on whether you find his strenuous attempts to be offensive funny, or just plain offensive ('Speaking on behalf of the few heterosexuals in Sydney ...'). He's like the drunk at an office Christmas party who thinks dropping his trousers and exposing himself to women is a measure of their broadmindedness rather than his maturity. If you don't think it's terribly witty, you must be some kind of prude, or, worse still, gay. To judge by the ratings and the millions of bumper stickers in Sydney proudly proclaiming 'I'm Doug Dependent' (geddit?), it's a message that appeals pretty strongly to a large proportion of 20-somethings.

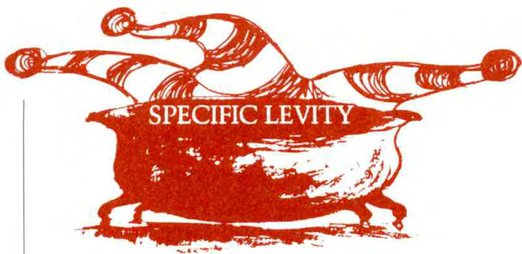
Farting and the Olympics are equally popular topics with the rival Morning Crew on 2DAY. It's a similar mixture of conservative music choices ('the best from the '60s, '70s and '80s', but not '90s), feeble gags and helpless laughter whenever anyone mentions sex, which is about every 30 seconds. But whereas Mulray's success is built around his own 'personality', 2DAY shares the blame between Wendy Harmer and several anonymous giggling blokes. Harmer and her sidekick, Jean Kittson, rehash familiar personae from *The Big Gig*. The boys' role is less clear, although pathetic skits on the Olympics have featured prominently in the past weeks (farting to be introduced as a demonstration sport, that kind of thing).

The atmosphere of both shows may be one of forced hilarity, but the rivalry is deadly serious. That's obvious simply from the absurd grandiosity and ever-increasing value of the prizes on offer every morning. 2DAY offers $10,000 every hour to a caller just for naming the singer and title of one song played to them. Mulray tops that by giving away tickets to see Madonna—in Tokyo. The Morning Crew come back with the ultimate prize. You've guessed it—a seat at the Olympics.

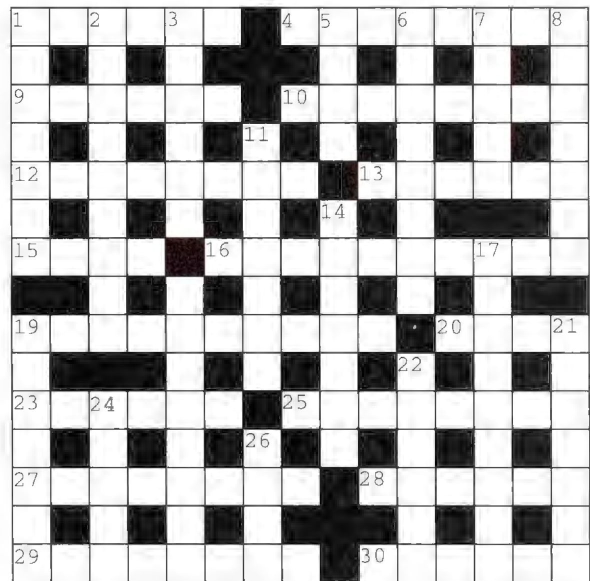
All of which makes dismal enough listening. But the most remarkable thing about both shows (and 2DAY in particular) is the almost total collapse of the barriers between news, sketches, advertising, phone-ins, music and chat. So-called news bulletins include barely-concealed plugs for products from companies like Nissan, which appears to be marketing its new model solely as a news item (with depressing success).

The opinions expressed on 2DAY's aptly-named 'Reaction Line' are also peddled as news, with the result that Kittson's attempted send-ups of news broadcasters aren't so much parodies as pale imitations. Sponsorship of rock tours and events such as Triple M's 'Rocktober' extravaganza entwine the performer, the station and the sponsoring company in one indivisible package. Advertising as entertainment, and entertainment as advertising, have never been marketed more successfully. No wonder we were perfect for the Olympics. ■

Mike Ticher is a Sydney journalist. He's just remembered how nice Melbourne is around September.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no.18, November 1993



Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

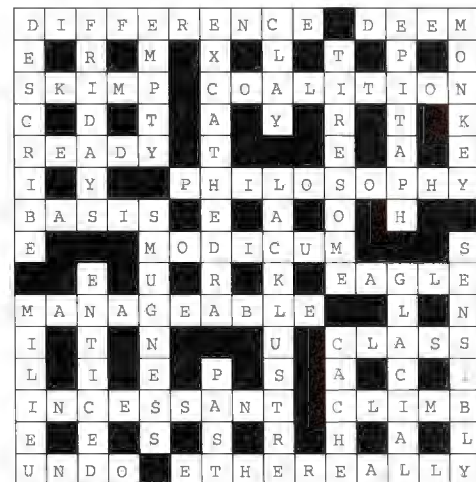
ACROSS

1 A parish without Sunday leader becomes social outcast. (6)
4 To keep the house in order, mop daily until the millenial event. (8)
9, 10 Little problem to the French. (6,8)
12 Envisioning knightly life, mistake worker on the railway. (8)
13 Add 500 to media extravaganza to get symbol of royal power. (6)
15 Make a faux pas on the excursion? (4)
16 The miscreant exhibits the gender aspect of wrongdoing. (10)
19 The effect on health of mixing egg with bile? Nil.
Or, at any rate, hardly significant! (10)
20 Return of emotion may be indicative of judgment. (4)
23 Sounds as if old flame wrote to use up—energy perhaps! (6)
27 Little Lulu ran around the Churchman. (8)
28 It's for counting the new AusCab trips. (6)
29 Rained down gifts to demonstrate Eastern communist liberality. (8)
30 Hidden word to deride me and humiliate me. (6)

DOWN

1 Offer the gift here and now! (7)
2 Improving the club by replacing umpire or dynasty! (9)
3 Covering expression of boredom? No question to begin with! (6)
5 Sway back at the sneering look. (4)
6 It's strangely alarming to be on the edge. (8)
7 Fix it firmly in mind that I'm on the garden-plot. (5)
8 Just fancy! Dear me! Right here a visionary! (7)
11 You may call Bjorn Borg an iceberg, but it is part of his constitution. (7)
14 Roars for the fire-pumps. (7)
17 O! That echo! Could be the cause of this pain! (9)
18 Contend with quarters of the European city. (8)
19 Unnecessary endless teases! (7)
21 Presidential avenue that I traversed between mother, daughter and son. (7)
22 Anguished bleats came from the animal stalls. (6)
24 In the camp at Iona there is a courtyard. (5)
26 Confront the dial to save prestige, perhaps. (4)

Solution to Crossword no.17, October 1993



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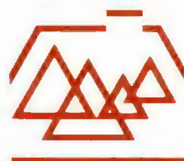

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