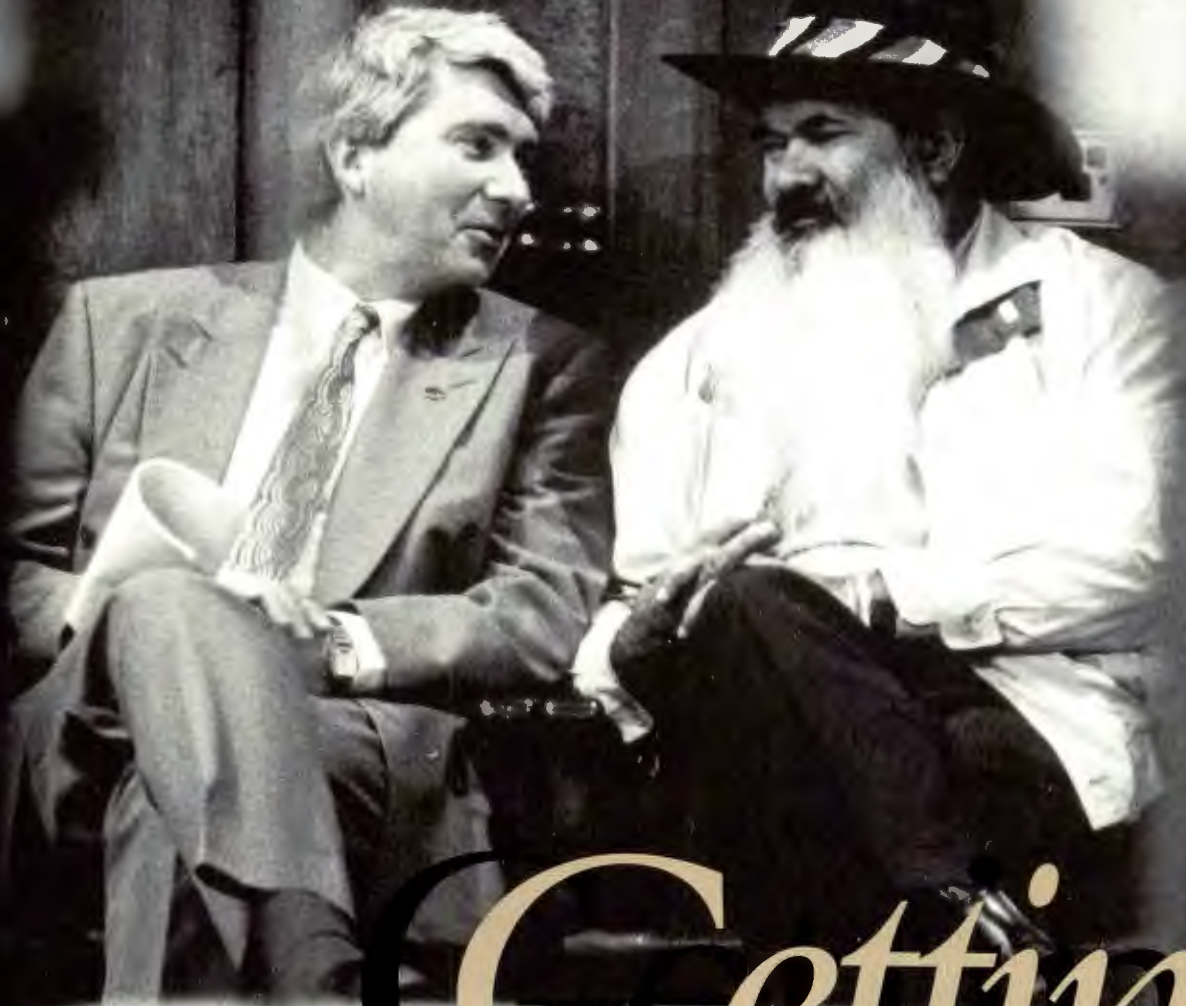


EUREKA STREET

Vol. 7 No. 10 December 1997

\$5.95



*Getting
it together.*

PUT OUR NEIGHBOURS ON YOUR CHRISTMAS LIST



Photo credit: The National.

Caritas Australia is working on the ground with our PNG partner, the Catholic Commission for Justice, Peace and Development (CCJPD), co-ordinating the relief effort of the international Caritas community. Donations to Caritas Australia are sent to CCJPD and reach the people who need it most.

Mrs Kia won't get any vegetables from her garden to feed her family this Christmas.

500,000 people are similarly affected by the severe drought in Papua New Guinea.

Food aid is needed immediately. And even if the drought breaks, food will still be needed until Easter.

Drought and famine don't stop for Christmas.

We cannot let our closest neighbours starve while we get on with our Christmas shopping.

I would like to help Caritas Australia's Papua New Guinea Drought Appeal.

Here's my donation of \$100 \$200 \$50 \$20 \$ _____

I enclose my cheque/money order, OR

Please debit my Bankcard Visa Mastercard Amex Diner's Club

Card Number

Signature

Expiry date

Name (Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss) _____

capital letters please

Address _____ Postcode _____

I would like to donate regularly from my bank account or credit card. Please send me details.

Please send me information about remembering Caritas Australia in my Will.



MAIL COUPON TO: CARITAS AUSTRALIA GPO BOX 9830 IN YOUR CAPITAL CITY.

Donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

Caritas Australia

THE CATHOLIC AGENCY FOR OVERSEAS AID AND DEVELOPMENT

1297ES



*Eureka Street
wishes
all our readers
the peace
and blessings
of the
Christmas Season*

Cover: Frank Brennan SJ and Patrick Dodson, Chair of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, at St Ignatius Church, Richmond Victoria, for the *Eureka Street* Talk at Richmond on the Hill in late October.
Photograph by Bill Thomas.
Photographs pp26-27, 29, 31, 32 by Bill Thomas.

Graphics pp5, 10, 21, 22, 23, 33, 34, 40 by Siobhan Jackson.
Cartoons pp9, 14 by Dean Moore.

Eureka Street magazine
Jesuit Publications
PO Box 553
Richmond VIC 3121
Tel (03) 9427 7311
Fax (03) 9428 4450

CONTENTS

4
COMMENT

7
CAPITAL LETTER

8
LETTERS

14
THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC

16
POETRY
The Right Stuff, by Aileen Kelly
and *Early On, With Smog*,
by Chris Wallace-Crabbe.

17
SUMMA THEOLOGIAE

18
DIANNE'S STORY
Life in the far north of Western Australia
as Dianne Sambo, a Walmajarri woman,
has known it.

21
DOWNSIZING AND THE
CONTENTED SOCIETY
Economist Frank Stilwell on the
shrinking of everything.

24
WATCHDOG ON A LEASH
Moira Rayner looks at the curious
case of the Victorian Auditor General.

25
ARCHIMEDES

26
THE WAY FORWARD
Patrick Dodson and Frank Brennan
speak on the future of reconciliation.

33
THAT HOLY NIGHT
Robert Crotty on the history of the
Christmas Story.

38
BOOKS
Peter Craven looks at Don DeLillo's *Underworld* and Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love*.
Peter Steele savours Eric Rolls' *A Celebration of Food and Wine* (p40); Max Teichmann examines *Political Lives*, Judith Brett, Ed. (p41); Jim Davidson reads *From Tories at Prayer to Socialists at Mass* by Colin Holden (p42); and Michael McGirr reviews Peter and Richard Wherrett's *Desirelines* (p42).

44
THEATRE
Peter Craven and Geoffrey Milne do a double
take on current Irish theatre in Australia.

48
FLASH IN THE PAN
Reviews of the films *Thank God He Met Lizzie*; *Love Etc*; *Road To Nhill*; *Kull The Conqueror*; *Hurricane Streets*; *A Life Less Ordinary*.

50
WATCHING BRIEF

51
SPECIFIC LEVITY

Publisher

Michael Kelly SJ

Editor

Morag Fraser

Consulting editor

Michael McGirr SJ

Production editor

Lynda McCaffery

Production Manager

Sylvana Scannapiego

Graphic designer: Siobhan Jackson

Sub editor: Juliette Hughes

Production assistants:

Paul Fyfe SJ, Chris Jenkins SJ, Scott Howard

Contributing editors

Adelaide: Greg O'Kelly SJ

Perth: Dean Moore

Sydney: Edmund Campion, Gerard Windsor

South East Asian correspondent

Jon Greenaway

Jesuit Editorial Board

Peter L'Estrange SJ, Andrew Bullen SJ,

Andrew Hamilton SJ

Peter Steele SJ, Bill Uren SJ

Business manager: Sylvana Scannapiego

Marketing manager: Rosanne Turner

Advertising representative: Ken Head

Patrons

Eureka Street gratefully acknowledges the support of Colin and Angela Carter; the trustees of the estate of Miss M. Condon; W.P. & M.W. Gurry;

Eureka Street magazine, ISSN 1036-1758,

Australia Post Print Post approved

pp349181/00314

is published ten times a year

by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd,

300 Victoria Street, Richmond, Victoria 3121

Tel: 03 9427 7311 Fax: 03 9428 4450

e-mail: eureka@werple.net.au

Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by

Michael Kelly, 300 Victoria Street, Richmond.

Printed by Doran Printing,

46 Industrial Drive, Braeside VIC 3195.

© Jesuit Publications 1997.

Unsolicited manuscripts, including poetry and fiction, will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Requests for permission to reprint material from the magazine

should be addressed in writing to:

The editor, *Eureka Street* magazine,

PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121.

Scenting Summer

FIRST REMEMBERED SIGHT: my newborn three-years-younger brother, blond and dormant in the hospital. First remembered sound: crows whingeing above the road from Perth to York, as an old car negotiated January's heat. First remembered smell: the magical effusion of a gum-tree sapling, propped in a bucket to be a Christmas tree—and the whole house was filled with its odour.'

Some of it is gone, some not. My brother went, forty-five years later, from another hospital. As I write, another crow makes its protest, though this is thousands of miles from York. But as many have found and find, the scent is virtually immortal. California, Israel, Victoria—foreign terrains all—it does not matter; crumple the right leaf at the nostrils, and that Christmas perpetuates itself. Where a bowed scyther might have been, a child is born once more.

'Comparisons are odorous,' the Shakespearean booby says, and of course he is right. Some things are on the nose, and warrant more than sniffs of disapproval—the sneezes, in fact, of allergy at the disgusting; others sponsor zest. What a curious lot we are, as it turns out, jutting our ways nasally into the air's immeasurable tides and currents, and able at least sometimes to read out of this subdued storm not only our bodily courses but paths for the spirit.

None of the arts could operate if we were not wedded, outright, to the senses, and through them to the worlds we know. Shakespeare, again, has a character wonder at the fact that 'sheep's guts should hale souls out of men's bodies,' such being music's way: but his thousand-fold metaphors are always fleshed in some degree, and he does not shy at smelling. A mettlesome soldier, despising a jack-in-office, says, 'He made me mad / To see him shine so brisk and smell so sweet;' Mark Antony, keening over Cæsar's body, predicts that 'this foul deed shall smell above the earth;' Lady Macbeth, the deed done but not forgotten, senses that 'Here's the smell of the blood still;' and Lear, asked to offer his hand for kissing, says 'Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality.'

Bad news, this, for each of them; but Juliet's savoured rose is better remembered than any of those distresses, and can stand for all the world's good tangs. These, sometimes, come our way for no apparent reason: George Herbert, in 'The Flower,' says 'And now in age I bud again, / After so many deaths I live and write; / I once more smell the dew and rain,' and is twice blessed for the surprise of it all. Whether or not the day's experience, or the year's, is mainly benign, it is open to us to go on testing it, sometimes in very subtle ways, at others in immediate and outright fashion. If lilies do fester, all the show in the world will not disguise the fact.

Politicians, ancient and modern, competing for our allegiance, attempt to flatter us with the assurance that we are discerning, able to sniff out the signs of decay or the odour

of representative sanctity. Freshness, authenticity, dewy being—these we are promised, though admittedly it can be hard work in Australia, where political discourse often reminds me of a line from Raymond Chandler—‘We looked at each other with the clear, innocent eyes of a couple of used-car salesmen.’ And sometimes what we are offered has a couple of mingled airs, the one frank, the other brutal. Mentioning death to a civic official who, briefly, stood in his way, Julius Cæsar said, ‘Surely you know, young man, that it is more unpleasant for me to say this than to do it.’ At least the reek of brimstone is clear there—and no stranger to various Australian commercial and political figures.

We have an appetite for the genuine, though its solicitations can take some comic forms. Many years ago I stood outside two shops in the township upon which Proust modelled some of *Remembrance of Things Past*. One of these advertised that it offered ‘the genuine madeleine,’ the tea-cake whose infusion released so great a train of memories: the other shop said that it had ‘the real genuine madeleine.’ These shops have, as it were, outlets in every continent, with bigger things than cake at issue.

No Proust myself, I like the notion that milieux, societies and lives can be summoned up by something as modest, and incessant, as our scenting capacity. There is more than charm involved here, attractive though that is. I have no doubt that it is possible for most of us to be a good deal more able at imaginative and moral discernment than we seem to be. The pressures towards stupefaction in these areas are very



considerable, harangued, cajoled and harried as we frequently are: there are billions of dollars to be made from psychic anosmia, and nobody need cut a nose off to induce it.

But in spite of all the oafishness, cold-eyed manipulation, and incense to the great god Sloth, remarkable things do happen—random association turned to reverie, and that to artistic formulation, and that to shared illumination, for instance. One of the reasons the arts matter is on account of their ability to distil, at least for a while, some of the testing of life’s air which, as long as we are not quite brutalised, is part of our moral pleasure. At a humbler level, but in the end a more important one, the lives of many look as if they have mastered a homely version of the perfumer’s art, which calls for discerning blending in the midst of intricacy. Part learned, part intuited, their behaviour is good for the rest of us.

Every smell, agreeable, disagreeable or merely puzzling, argues against solipsism. We have it at all only because we treat the air to some degree, and it always points us outwards, if only beyond the nose’s peninsula to the body’s continent. It is a strange thing that the eucalyptus can, like some golden bough, carry me back to early childhood, that lost continent. But then it is strange to be thinking of time at all, as many have found. Or of the self. Or of the world. A happy Christmas to you, whether or not you do. ■

Peter Steele sj has a Personal Chair at the University of Melbourne.

COMMENT: 2

JAMES GRIFFIN

A Scant Christmas on Bougainville

AS THE UNARMED TRUCE-MONITORING SOLDIERS, mainly from Australia and New Zealand, move into Bougainville, reports are not reassuring. Francis Ona, self-elected ‘father of the nation’ of Bougainville, has refused in the past to attend peace conferences or ratify agreements made by colleagues in the Bougainville Interim Government (BIG), notably his Vice-President, Joseph Kabui, or his military commander of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), Sam Kauona. Now Ona has refused to recognise the recent truce process agreed on at Burnham, NZ.

Ona’s latest statement (November 25) warned both Australian and New Zealand troops ‘to stay off’ Bougainville as their safety ‘could not be guaranteed’. Australia is obviously not ‘neutral’ because it has ‘fuelled’ the PNG Defence Force and even New Zealand has ‘provided pilots to fly the Australian supplied Iroquois helicopters’. So, not ‘neutral’ either. A ‘genuinely neutral monitoring group’ is needed and a referendum on secession must be held. Otherwise there is ‘no alternative but to return to armed struggle. I hereby appeal to all Bougainvilleans to stand firm, the battle for independence is not yet over’ he said.

This document has the ring of certain Australian advisors who see the Bougainville war ‘as a class struggle against capitalists’ in which villagers are expendable. They fear that Kabui and Kauona may compromise the ultimate goal. As some BIG-BRA leaders are now openly exasperated with Ona and

accept that the UN will not intervene nor Port Moresby soon collapse through attrition, there is the possibility of fighting between the two groups, especially if Ona’s supporters attack the monitoring force. However, the chance of civil war among Bougainvilleans on a different scale will loom when concern with the peace process gives way to outcomes. The more conciliatory members of the BIG/BRA have not given up on self-determination, which, according to Kabui, ‘is an issue which must remain the property of the people of Bougainville’. He believes that the mechanism has been put in place in Burnham’ and no doubt he was not discouraged from thinking so. At home, sacred blood has been shed for it. But Port Moresby will not yield on this point although it will have to, I believe, on the issue of special status. Even if Bougainville qualified on international criteria for self-determination—and that is extremely doubtful—such an act could have no legitimacy until complete disarmament and a return to socio-economic normality occurred. That is probably ten years off. Kabui and Kauona will hardly wait that long—and certainly not Ona.

The diplomats from the land of the long white cloud started something worthwhile at Burnham but only a stargazer from cloud cuckoo-land would predict an easy outcome. ■

James Griffin is Emeritus Professor of History, University of PNG.

Christmas highlights from Cambridge University Press

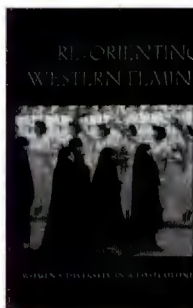
Re-Orienting Western Feminisms Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World

CHILLA BULBECK

This incisive and wide-ranging exploration of the lived experiences of 'women of colour' presents a bold challenge to the hegemony of white, western feminism. Shows how differing understandings of human rights, the family, sexuality, the individual and community contest the issues of contemporary Anglophone feminists.

0 521 58030 7 Hb \$90.00

0 521 58975 4 Pb \$32.95



A Military History of Ireland

Edited by THOMAS BARTLETT and
KEITH JEFFERY

This fully-illustrated collaborative volume deals with all aspects of Irish military history, especially the relationship between armies and soldiers in Ireland with Irish society in general. Illustrated throughout with many striking and unusual pictures assembles many of the leading historians of Ireland to produce a challenging account of the military and Irish society.

0 521 62989 6 Paperback \$39.95

0 521 41599 3 Hardback \$80.00



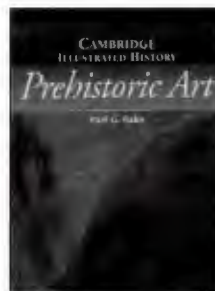
The Cambridge Illustrated History of Prehistoric Art

PAUL G BAHN

Beautifully illustrated in colour with many rare and unique photographs, prints and drawings, this Illustrated History presents the first balanced and truly worldwide survey of prehistoric art.

164 colour plates 352pp 1 map

0 521 45473 5 Hb \$64.95



The Cambridge Illustrated History of Ancient Greece

Edited by PAUL CARTLEDGE

Sumptuously illustrated, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Ancient Greece* offers fresh, novel interpretations of classical Greek culture – devoting as much attention to the social, economic and intellectual aspects as to politics and war.

279 illustrations 400pp 13 maps

0 521 48196 1 Hb \$64.95

The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Middle Ages

Edited by ROBERT FOSSIER

Volume I: 350-950

0 521 26645 9 Hb \$80.00

Volume II: 950-1250

0 521 26644 0 Hb \$80.00

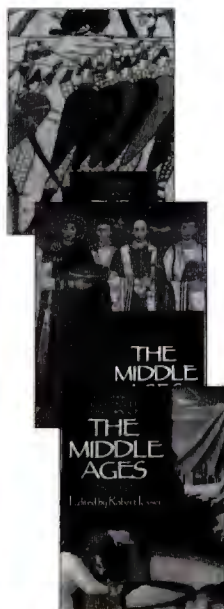
Volume III: 1250-1520

0 521 26646 7 Hb \$80.00

Three Volume Boxed Set

This set of all three volumes provides a beautifully illustrated and accessible guide to medieval society.

0 521 59078 7 Hb \$199.00



Citizens Without Rights Aborigines and Australian Citizenship

JOHN CHESTERMAN
and BRIAN GALLIGAN

This is the study of the ways in which Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders have been excluded from the rights of Australian citizenship, at the Colony, State and Commonwealth levels, over the past 100 years. This is the first study of its kind, and comprehensively covers the policies of Commonwealth and State governments from the 1880s to the 1990s.

0 521 59230 5 Hb \$90.00

0 521 59751 X Pb \$29.95



 **CAMBRIDGE**
UNIVERSITY PRESS

10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Victoria 3166



Howard on the back foot

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL, Sir William Deane, is doing the Government some damage at the moment. But it's not so much that he's provoking them, or that he has a partisan tone. Indeed he is saying much the same as he always has, things that when first said caused the Government no offence whatever. It is just that his repeating himself is serving to underline how much the Government has moved, how illiberal it is becoming about any form of dissent, and how much that illiberalism is hurting the Liberal Party in its own constituencies.

Sir William decided consciously, from the start, that he would use the prestige of his office to lend some non-partisan support to the process of Aboriginal reconciliation. And he wanted to serve as a bit of a nag about the problems of disadvantaged Australians.

That's not necessarily such a radical role for a Governor-General, or even for the sort of figurehead President that most of the politicians claim to want. There are more things that unite Australians than divide them. But the ferocious style of the way so much politics is fought in Australia can tend to mask that fact. A head of state represents his/her country not only to the world but back to its citizens.

Hitherto, however, most Governors-General have played it pretty safe. Their homilies have been focused on our glorious dead, our bad grammar, or uncontroversial issues about the environment. Bill Hayden advanced some not entirely safe ideas—for example about press standards or euthanasia—but within controllable boundaries. The plight of the disadvantaged and the dispossessed, the group for whose interests Sir William has spoken with some persuasive dignity, is inherently less controllable, even when he has carefully eschewed any comment which might lend support to one party or the other. And he has been careful to enter no new arenas on which battle has been joined.

The problem is, however, is that the ground he chose has become a part of the sandpit. It has because the politicians, John Howard particularly, shifted. Howard shifted not only by practical actions which reduced funding and alienated Aboriginal leaderships, but by making it perfectly clear that this was conscious policy.

Howard would, of course, say that he has quarantined some areas—including health and education and the reconciliation process—from any cutback or withdrawal, but his achievements in any area he nominates are difficult to point to, and any number of his actions, whether in relation to stolen children, the Government's handling of the reconciliation convention, or the re-appointment of reconciliation commissioner, Patrick Dodson, and, of course, *Wik*, sends out an entirely different message.

It is perfectly possible that if ever there were an election actually conducted on the question of Government policy towards Aborigines, Howard would be returned. I wouldn't get too passionate about Labor's credentials in the area anyway. But of course, any such election called on such a pretext would quickly become one focused on more mundane concerns. Remember 1987? Ostensibly it was a double dissolution focused on the Australia Card—a concept not mentioned in the campaign at all, luckily for Labor.

But even assuming that Howard is still right in his calculations that there are new votes to be gained in ploughing some continuing resentments in battler Australia against Aborigines and the unemployed, the question of what are the core ideas and ideals of

a Howard Government remain. Howard has achieved, or gone as far as he dares to go, with most of the ideas that he pushed in opposition. Forget about vision. What about some core theme to which the Government can refer or return in times of crisis?

Yet, as the Government has lurched about from crisis to crisis in recent days, the main message coming out is an increasing irritability with the middle-of-the-roaders, including many of the liberals in its own party. Attacks on Deane, on church leaders whose concerns, expressed in moderate terms, are dismissed out of hand, on judges, paranoias about the ABC or the Fairfax newspapers, crude revenges on whole government departments because they are blamed for Howard and his ministers' inept performances on the travel rorts. This is not the redrawing of Australian political culture by the promised disenfranchisement of privileged insider Labor groups—the Aboriginal industry, the multicultural lobbies, homosexuals and feminists allegedly using public power to further their own agendas, while ordinary decent Australians miss out. Instead an embattled Government seems at war with all of the old institutions it might once have claimed it aimed to reinstate and restore.

A major part of the problem is, of course, the National Party, particularly in Queensland. And, perhaps Pauline Hanson, even if her attractions have faded. Howard alienated many rural Australians over guns. When the *Wik* decision was handed down, he allowed hysteria, misinformation and the sheer opportunism of some who seized upon it for their own agenda, to run so strongly and so long in rural communities that all of the political pressure on him was to appease the graziers, (and to save the hide of Tim Fischer). Aborigines hardly got a look-in at all. Yet because Howard's pragmatic solution was so grudgingly won from his right, he probably readily rationalised it as a fair balance when it was criticised from his left. That might explain some of his visible irritation whenever he is reproached on the subject, even implicitly by a Governor-General. It does not excuse it.

HOW A RECORD MAJORITY CAN ALL UNRAVLE! A year ago, the idea that this would be a one-term Government seemed unlikely. Even six months ago, the fruits of some tough decisions taken early on looked as if they would set the Government up well for an election at a time of its choosing.

Now, it seems, it cannot take a trick, and the polls reflect it. Abrupt U-turns on nursing homes. Pragmatics rather than purity on a host of economic issues—alienating his party's economic radicals as profoundly as the social welfare policies have dismayed his moderates. Travel rorts and other disasters, some of which can be laid at indiscipline by his most immediate advisers. His public service legislation now, apparently, in the too hard basket. The international economic outlook now far worse, with unpredictable consequences for his flexibility with the cash at election time. His inability to keep public relations campaigns he has judged are useful for him—his drug offensive or campaigns against domestic violence running.

If John Howard is to win the next election, he needs more constituencies than he presently has, and some bridges to build to many whose support he once took for granted. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

Present indicative

From Sophie Masson

I was deeply moved by John Sendy's review essay, 'The Octogenarian Revolution', in the November issue of *Eureka Street*. It was both courageous and lucid, an admirable expression of something which all too few people on either the left or the right seem to be able to manage.

His sense of the suffering and the 'grotesque nightmare', as he so aptly puts it, of the Russian people and other peoples labouring under the horrors of what had begun as an ideal, his understanding that revolutionaries very often create regimes more barbaric than the ones they replace, and his thoughtful evocation of the place of Australian communism in all this make this essay an important contribution to the understanding of the blood-soaked 20th century and perhaps to the beginning of a new state of being in the years to come.

I hope that the future, however fragmented and incoherent it announces itself, will be free of the unprecedented industrial-scale slaughter and dehumanisation which has occurred in the name of ideology in this century. And perhaps, using John Sendy's example, free of the heartlessness which all too often has accompanied the intellectual espousal of ideology in countries which never felt the totalitarian nightmare.

Sophie Masson
Invergowrie NSW.

Set to rights

From Michael Morgan

I am tired of hearing all this negativity and untruth about Aboriginal people and their culture as expressed by politicians and powerful interest groups, for example the Farmers Federation, mining industry et cetera. I was particularly 'amused' by the comments of Sir John Gorton ('Sir! A Republic must come soon!') in suggesting that Aboriginal people have no rights to the land because they never grew crops (the standard cliché of worth as a human being).

I worked as a teacher with 'traditional/tribal' Aboriginal people in Arnhem Land, the Western Desert and the Tiwi Islands of the Northern

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. If submitting by e-mail, a contact phone number is essential. Address: eureka@werple.net.au



Territory for the past 8½ years, and was married to an Aboriginal woman from Arnhem Land. I think I have a bit more of an understanding of Aboriginal people and where they are coming from than someone like 'Sir' John Gorton, Pauline Hanson, and the 'kings' of vast pastoral properties and mining operations. Of course I cannot fully understand or comprehend Aboriginal culture as I am white and was brought up with my own cultural values, but at least I have a number of insights into Aboriginal culture due to the fact that I have actually been there and have faced Aboriginal culture in a truly personal way. In many ways I have tried to live their culture but not in an 'airy fairy' way.

Do not think that I am some sort of 'black lover' in the 'arty-farty' sense, that just because someone is Aboriginal they must be good. I have found Aboriginal people as a community to be the same as our community. I feel that 20 per cent are great people, 60 per cent are just normal people getting on with their life as best they can, and 20 per cent are 'arseholes'. I have met some magnificent Aboriginal people and others that you wouldn't trust at all.

But getting back to the common misconception that Aboriginal people were nomads, did not grow crops and thus had/have no right to ownership of land, I will explain why this is not so by comparing Aboriginal people's use and ties with the land to Europeans', which in many ways are

very similar. For example, we whites own much land which is totally unproductive. Many own a house, investment properties and holiday shacks with more land than needed to support one's family, and family is the basis on which all humanity operates successfully and survives.

We usually don't grow crops on this land, and basically have this land for leisure and status purposes (who wants to live at their work place?). In comparison, Aboriginal land belongs to family/clan groups. The land is like the family home in that it allows the people to enjoy leisure time and gives the family group a unique identity in terms of what is theirs. However, the family/clan land goes further than our concept of ownership because that land is their 'cathedral' or 'mosque' or 'wilderness' as well as being their 'heaven' when they die. It is also their cemetery. How would we as Europeans feel if our government decided that we had to live where the government ordered to obtain our economic existence, decided that we could not enjoy leisure time as we desired, tore down our churches, banned us from visiting our cemeteries, told us that we were banned from 'heaven' and split up our families (this reminds me of the failed communist system). I know that I would probably 'hit the grog' as my whole life would be destroyed—yet many Aboriginal people carry on, and in fact a majority of Aboriginal people don't drink alcohol at all. Good on them and why not praise these Aboriginal people rather than concentrate on those who have taken to alcohol as a natural human reaction to such treatment. These people have usually lost their culture and have been unable to cope with ours.

It should be noted that I am only talking about 'traditional/tribal/rural' Aboriginal people as I have had not first-hand experience of living with urban Aboriginal people. Let someone more knowledgeable comment on their rights to the land.

Using the people of East Arnhem Land as an example of what I know most about (my ex-wife was a member of this culture), in fact distinct land ownership has been and still is entrenched among Aboriginal people. Family/clan groups have distinct land boundaries. Even now, I have been out shooting buffalo with a group of Aboriginal people from the same tribe but different family/clan groups, and Aboriginal people not from that land



This month, the writer of each letter we publish will receive a pack of postcards featuring cartoons and graphics, by *Eureka Street* regulars, Dean Moore, Siobhan Jackson and Tim Metherall.

have said that they couldn't shoot the buffalo or take the meat without permission from the owners (sounds very much like European hunting/property rights to me). Also, everyone knows the name and boundary of their family land and the proudest statement from Aboriginal people is 'that's my country'. In the area of East Arnhem where I worked the Nungummajbarr family's country is Wurnajbarr/Miwul, the Murrungun family country is Alhargan, the Magurri family/clan owns Gulurrug, Ngalmi's own Marraiya et cetera. And all their hunting rights, spiritual togetherness and so on are based around their land. That is their land just as John Smith's is 26 Main Street, Sydney.

Also, the people look after their 'crops/fisheries/livestock' just like us Europeans: the grass is burnt to promote new growth for bush crops (the same as farmers fertilising the

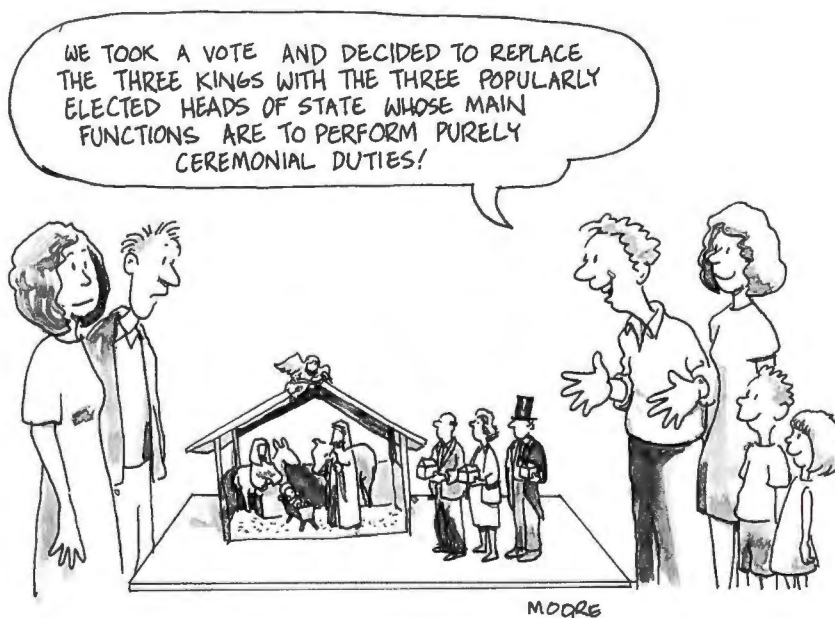
land); the burning of the grass provides fresh growth of grass for the stock, for example, wallabies, bush turkey, buffalo et cetera, by promoting germination (the way farmers plant new seed in fallow paddocks for future feed for their sheep and cattle); quotas apply to the fisheries by ensuring that only enough fish, turtle, dugong et cetera is caught to sustain future stocks (the same way as the government controls our fisheries for sustainability).

Also, Aboriginal people are/were not nomads. They only hunt/hunted across their own family land and only cross(ed) land boundaries for ceremonies or with permission from other landowners in times of drought (a form of social security which allows the people to survive in hard times). If someone has too much they are willing to provide for other members of the tribe/language group (sounds like how our government/culture operates). Aboriginal people may have wandered, but only over their own land; huge pastoral property owners should thus fit into the category of 'nomads', only their land is much bigger and usually only supports a very small immediate family. Kerry Packer and Rupert Murdoch are the 'true Australian nomads' as they wander the world and their huge pastoral properties but without having a true 'home base'. They survive without having any care for or ties with the land and don't produce any crops, unless you call money a crop. They wander and take what they feel they need and do not share it fairly with the

rest of their Australian 'family'. What a contrast. Maybe Pauline Hanson, 'Sir' John Gorton and co. should attack these 'Aboriginal' Australians.

Finally, it seems ironic that pastoralists and farmers are the greatest critics of Aboriginal people, claiming that they would waste the resources of the land. It seems that these people use a disproportionate area of our country to support a very small number of people. For example, a husband-wife cattle station family uses as much land and resources as did/could provide for around 50-1000 Aboriginal people. Their profit is often nil, they pay few or no taxes, get free education and board for their children at the urban school they choose, pay no tax on vehicles, get diesel subsidies, drought relief funds, AUSTUDY, isolation allowances etc. However, such Aboriginal people living in isolated areas get no cheap lease over crown land (often they get no land at all), get poor education, pay tax on vehicles, pay around \$1.50 per litre for diesel, often are provided with no housing, get no more money from the government when times are hard, must buy their food from the community store often at over twice the price of what it costs in the major town.

I challenge all non-Aboriginal Australians to live as an Aboriginal person for a year in an isolated community and see what their attitude is at the end of that experience. There is no sugar and honey or manna from heaven. I know that as a European teacher I lived like a 'monarch' and this goes for any other non-Aboriginal working in an Aboriginal community. I was provided the best housing rent free, my food was flown in from Darwin or Alice Springs free of charge, I received an isolation allowance from the Territory government and another from the Commonwealth government. I had air conditioning, I had rain water, I was first attended to at the clinic in most instances. In contrast, my qualified local Aboriginal teaching colleagues were provided with no housing and a number actually lived in corrugated iron humpies with no water or power. The funny thing is, many of the Europeans thought they were 'doing it hard', as their money accumulated in the bank and they paid off their second and third property in Alice Springs or Darwin or Sydney or Surfers. And what is more 'amusing' is that many of the Europeans were out-and-out racists (not all of course,



the same percentages apply as those I mentioned above) while the Aboriginal people were accepting of our 'wealth' because they thought Europeans were there to help them—the old missionary mentality will take a long time to dissipate.

It is my belief and that of many other 'fair minded' Europeans that the government funding for Aboriginal people is not helping Aboriginal people as they have no control over that money at community and family/clan level. The government is simply improving the economic well-being of the white population. The Aboriginal people are not a 'nation' but a grouping of small family groups which also adhere to the 'government' of the tribe as a whole. Why not give the money directly to the 'community' and let them decide how they can better their own lives? Of course, there will be some corruption and mistakes will be made, but as is commonly said, 'you only learn from your mistakes', and at least the mistakes are Aboriginal people's own mistakes and not ours. If Aboriginal people want the help of us whites then let them choose who they want to help and not let our government decide who will 'help'. Aboriginal people are human beings with the same aspirations as all human beings, only they have different coloured skin, a different culture and different beliefs. This is what makes our country of Australia great: we are all different. However, true greatness as a nation will only come about when the attitudes, injustices and untruths of the past are rectified. Give Aboriginal people 'a fair go!' Give *Wik* in its original form a go, but don't be fooled by that 'bad' 20 per cent of Aboriginal people who will use land rights for their own benefit and not really respect the ingrained beliefs of those Aboriginal people who 'live for their land'.

Michael Morgan
New Town, TAS

The full treatment

From David Freeman

Tim Bonyhady's treatment (*Eureka Street*, October) of Peter Beilharz's recent book, *Imagining The Antipodes—Theory, Culture and The Visual in the Work of Bernard Smith* (CUP, 1997), disturbed me as regards Bonyhady's and *Eureka Street's* discursive purposes and ethical practices. I am not competent to assess Bonyhady's broader treatment of Smith so won't. Let me declare conflict of interest up-front. I am an associate of Beilharz; each of us has substantially more self-respect—and, I hope, taste—than for either to countenance me upon his casting couch as bidder, toady or acolyte. Bonyhady is clearly intelligent and erudite; these are not my bones of contention. Those which are cannot possibly fit here, so a small percentage will suffice.

Bonyhady suggests that Beilharz is not sufficiently familiar with Smith's work to be analytic, and thus loses all capacity to be critical of it. The irony is sumptuous; this is so consummately apt of his judgment of Beilharz. I gleaned no sense that Bonyhady was familiar with much of Beilharz's eight books, several hundred articles and reviews in journals or *Thesis Eleven* (a leading international journal of social and political theory that Beilharz co-founded in 1980).

Why doesn't Bonyhady engage at least as much with what Beilharz *does* write as that which he does not? If Bonyhady actually believes as he claims—that Smith's life's work is massive, multi-disciplinary and under-critiqued, then it surely follows that specialists across a range of disciplines are justified in undertaking analysis of its utility to their discipline. Is there not a narcissism in criticising Beilharz for not knowing what

Bonyhady does about Smith but neglecting those things that Beilharz knows and Bonyhady presumably does not?

Bonyhady, we discover, despises reductionism. Someone should hold his calls while he patents that idea. Anyone who has spent a day in academia or pondering ideas at all will concur. Of all the injustices Bonyhady does Beilharz, perhaps that which left my jaw most agape was his accusing Beilharz of reductionism, i.e., collapsing Smith to a core idea. Yet Beilharz's book is crystal-clear that he is mainly exploring Smith's utility to social theory; that Smith has *many* arguments significant for it; and that how many more nuggets must there be for other disciplines, to whose researchers he urges establishing a posse and setting off upon the Smith trail. Yet readers of your Bonyhady piece previously unfamiliar with Beilharz may dismiss Beilharz as one more monochromed reductionist—when his has so consistently been a voice for conceptual richness and nuance. Beilharz is consistently wary of arguing for a single approach, paradigm or analytic tool *precisely because* he is so resolutely anti-reductionist.

Any thinking person would like popular culture to be more critical. Few would be silly enough to demur from Bonyhady's motherhood statement advocating greater robustness in this. But Bonyhady goes on to imply much more than this, that Australian academic and intellectual culture borders on being acritical. The 'proof' is that Smith is under-critiqued, with Beilharz's commending various insights of Smith illustrative of this cravenness. It is implicit that Bonyhady regards the urban design, art, art history and related worlds he inhabits as possessing overly-deferential, even pathological, respect for Smith. I am in no position to assess whether or not that is the case. It is a quantum leap (of Evil Knievel-level wildness) to extrapolate this judgment to Beilharz. Bonyhady commits several flaws of logic here, eg apples-and-oranges and a straw-man. Bonyhady's argument, if converted to a form of logic, might read: if A is a problem (Australian culture is insufficiently critical), and if B is a problem (art world impressed by Smith to an excessive, ultimately unhelpful, degree), and if C (Beilharz's treatment of Smith) has some superficial similarities with A and B, then C is a problem. But C is apples to A and B's oranges. Both Beilharz and the social sciences are proceeding from an entirely different place.

Let me deal with Beilharz first and then (at least my experience of) the social sciences.

Beilharz has accumulated such a substantive *corpus* of work that it would be reasonable to make its development and propagation the sole focus of his remaining output. Yet he avoids narcissism and thus, for example, promotes and interprets Smith and

Advance Australia Where? We can imagine the future!

AQUINAS ACADEMY Summer School

12–14 Jan 1998

Politics, Social Action, Indigenous Australians, Battlers, Power

Speakers include Chris Sidoti, Linda Burnie,
Robert Fitzgerald

<http://www.giga.net.au/edu/aquinas> Tel (02) 9247 4651

such Europeans as Cornelius Castoriadis, Zygmunt Bauman, Agnes Heller and Ferenc Feher. Contrast this with the lampoon of the self-aggrandising, middle-aged male academic, ostensibly focused upon the world's problems, but collapsing that which one has borrowed into that which one has figured out and packaging the lot as 'my' approach, perspective or—mercy—paradigm.

Over the years, Beilharz has analysed the limitations of many ideas, systems and thinkers. What is wrong if there is the odd counterweight where he indicates the most useful or impressive exemplars he is aware of? The pop psych practitioner in all of us might cheerfully pipe up that this may even suggest some sort of inner balancedness. Bonyhady—who hates reductionism—sees the incapacity to critique; I see a lifetime of critique with some generosity and humility thrown in.

The social sciences hardly has an incapacity to critique; arguably most working within are sated by it. Critique is probably what is most valued. Academic journals and postgraduate theses consist essentially of it. This makes the social sciences remarkably useful to society, offering robust analytic tools.

But critique has its limits too. Once a scholar is across the theoretical traditions, academic research and writing become—at some level—relatively straight-forward. One can take almost any phenomenon and 'deconstruct' it, putting it through its hoops—the main social science theories—and exposing how compromised the phenomenon under consideration is in their light. One then works up some witty conference papers around a slightly cynical and knowing approach, where the audience just knows that the speaker is about to expose how the phenomenon mirrors and replicates powerful vested interests.

But more than this is needed if the social sciences is also to contemplate ways of 'doing' society that might actually be *useful*. Exclusively valuing critique does not equally require people to say what—on balance and in the circumstances—they advocate or could find a liveable outcome, and why. Public policy, public debate and 'alternative imaginaries' of what could be may thereby be diminished. So engaging exclusively in critique may sometimes be, at some level, too easy, even the soft option. The interesting bits of grey—for example, desirable but mutually-exclusive choices, or the 'least worst' outcomes one would have to choose between if actually holding the levers—can be avoided, flattened out, defined away. (*Contra*, nervousness about commending this or that is understandable; after all, this century contains numerous incidents of foolhardy imprimaturs given to dubious practices or dodgy regimes).

So I want to suggest both that the social sciences in Australia does not conform to

Bonyhady's assumption of under-baked critical faculties, and that there is positive value in sometimes affirming that which may be useful.

So how could Bonyhady have misread Beilharz so fantastically? It all resonates a little with the common fundamental epistemological and communicative problem where the message Beilharz intends to, and does, send is not that which Bonyhady receives.

Overall I can't help wondering if the article allows *Eureka Street* and Bonyhady a Straw-Man, enabling both to self-constitute as courageously standing up for critical culture in Australia. We all want that. Along the way, someone who has done as much in its service as Beilharz seems to me an ill-conceived target.

David Freeman
Parkville, VIC

Tim Bonyhady replies:

David Freeman misunderstands the place of Peter Beilharz in my essay in October's *Eureka Street*. While my essay was triggered by *Imagining the Antipodes*, Beilharz's new study of Bernard Smith, it was not an essay about Beilharz. It was an essay about Smith. Hence there was no need for me to engage with Beilharz's books and articles apart from *Imagining the Antipodes*.

Freeman also misrepresents both *Imagining the Antipodes* and my response to it. While *Imagining the Antipodes* is primarily an attempt to present Smith as a social theorist, Freeman conveniently ignores Beilharz's claim that Smith is 'best read' as a theorist of peripheral vision. In my essay I argued that Beilharz was wrong. I suggested that Beilharz's preoccupation with theory led him either to ignore or distort many of the most interesting things which Smith has written and that, in doing so, he had diminished rather than enhanced Smith's achievements. Far from setting up a straw man, as Freeman suggests, I judged *Imagining the Antipodes* against Beilharz's own claim and found it wanting.

Freeman is equally misconceived when he suggests that I see no place for the affirmation of great figures in our culture. Much of my essay was devoted to doing exactly that—giving a richer account of Smith's work than Beilharz's one-dimensional *Imaginations*. But I also argued that Beilharz did Smith and his readers a disservice by being uncritical of Smith's work. In particular, I suggested that because he failed to engage with the remarkable empirical base on which Smith has built his theories, Beilharz was in no position to analyse, let alone question the validity of Smith's major arguments. Far from calling for a facile deconstruction of Smith's writing, my point was that Beilharz was already too superficial.—**T.B.**

I WANT TO INVEST WITH CONFIDENCE

AUSTRALIAN

ethical TRUSTS

Agribusiness or reforestation.
Mining or recycling.
Exploitation or sustainability.
Greenhouse gases or solar energy.
Armaments or community enterprise.

Investors can choose

Through the AE Trusts you can invest your savings and superannuation in over 70 different enterprises, each expertly selected for its unique combination of earnings, environmental sustainability and social responsibility, and earn a competitive financial return. For full details make a free call to

1800 021 227

Investments in the Australian Ethical Trusts can only be made through the current prospectus registered with the Australian Securities Commission and available from

Australian Ethical Investment Ltd

Unit 66, Canberra Business Centre
Bradfield St. Downer ACT 2602

Fencing the spoils

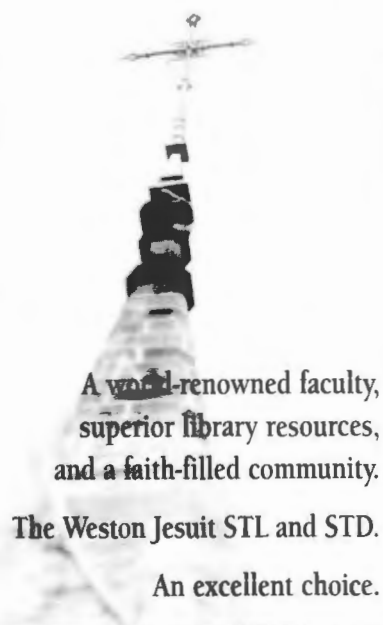
From Anthony Brown

In the many articles published recently on Native Title, Wik, and indigenous rights, I cannot recall any reference to Captain Cook's instructions to the British Admiralty dated 30th June, 1768.

These directed him '... with the consent of the natives [my emphasis] to take possession of Convenient Situations in the Country in the Name of the King of Great Britain; or if you find the Country uninhabited take possession for His Majesty by setting up Proper Marks and Inscriptions, as first discoverers and possessors'.

Cook formally took possession of the entire eastern coast of the continent (by the name of New South Wales) in August 1770. His own writings and those of Joseph Banks show that he had contact with various Aboriginal groups, but at no time did he seek their prior consent for taking possession of their land. I would have thought that, quite apart from the specious argument of *terra nullius*, the fact that Cook exceeded his instructions casts some doubt on the validity, if not the legitimacy, of all actions resulting from it. Its morality is, of course, another

Licentiate and Doctorate in Sacred Theology



Biblical Studies

Richard J. Clifford, SJ
Daniel J. Harrington, SJ
John S. Kselman, SS
Stanley B. Marrow, SJ

Church History

Francine J. Cardman
Janice S. Farnham, RJM
John W. O'Malley, SJ

Moral Theology

James F. Keenan, SJ
Thomas Massaro, SJ
Edward V. Vacek, SJ

Historical and Systematic Theology

Khaled Anatolios
Kevin Burke, SJ
Peter E. Fink, SJ
Roger D. Haight, SJ
Brian O. McDermott, SJ
J. Randall Sachs, SJ

Pastoral Theology

Katherine M. Clarke
Margaret Eletta
Guider, OSF
Thomas A. Kane, CSP

WESTON JESUIT School of Theology

A Course of Action

For information please write or call:

Mary Pat St. Jean

Director of Admissions

Weston Jesuit School of Theology

3 Phillips Place, Dept. W8

Cambridge, MA, USA 02138-3495

Telephone (617) 492-1960

Fax (617) 492-5833

matter. On this issue, it is interesting to read the comments of the French navigator and explorer, Nicholas Baudin. Writing from King Island in Bass Strait to his friend Governor Philip Gidley King in December 1802, Baudin had this to say:

To my way of thinking, I have never been able to conceive that there was justice or even fairness on the part of Europeans in seizing, in the name of their governments, a land seen for the first time, when it was inhabited by men who have not always deserved the title of savages or cannibals that has been freely given them; ... it would be infinitely more glorious for your nation, as for mine, to mould for society the inhabitants of its own country, over whom it has rights, rather than wishing to occupy itself with the improvement of those who are far removed from it, by beginning with seizing the soil which belongs to them and which saw their birth. (*Baudin's letter, in French and English translation, appears in Historical Records of NSW, vol. V, pp826-833.*)

Baudin's views seem amazingly modern and would not be out of place in the Wik debate today. One would like to know Governor King's thoughts on first reading them.

Anthony Brown
Maylands, SA

Beam me up

From Michael Buhagiar

The lives of mythic figures such as Germaine Greer, Clive James, Barry Humphries and Robert Hughes, illuminate eternal principles, barely hinted at, however, by Jim Davidson ('Jokers from the Pack', *Eureka Street* November '97).

Moving to England is often symbolic of identification with the rational principle: in mythic terms, at-one-ment with the Father. And yet, unless the rational system of this figure fully comprehends the import of mystery, his influence will be inadequate. In Eastern terms, the lower (pelvic-abdominal) *hakras* of Hindu Kundalini yoga must be worked through before the highest stage, and ultimate illumination, can be reached. In Occidental terms, the Goddess (identified with the earth, the mystery of Creation) must first be embraced for Eternity to be known. Those who, through fear or negligence, have skipped the lower *chakras* have a persistent aura of essential separation from the ultimate value symbol, and their work will be second-rate.

As his *Unreliable Memoirs* makes clear, the death of Clive James' father in the war, and his sense of emotional estrangement from his mother, were powerful factors in his flight. And for all his critical brilliance, his

extraordinary breadth, and deep humanity, he has failed to write truly timeless poetry, the ultimate artistic activity, and most honest, which has meant so much to him. And it is precisely that essential separation, born of failure properly to embrace his roots, that we feel in his work: for example, in his excoriation of the very great Irish-Australian poet Christopher Brennan, who was determined to look himself in the eye at whatever cost (most tellingly, in 'The Shadow of Lilith'), and made the conscious decision to return to Australia when he had Europe at his feet. And it is Brennan who has won through to the prize.

Germaine Greer, similarly, has evidently been unable, or unwilling, to face up to the mediocrity of the Sydney Push of the '50s (so brilliantly illuminated by Anne Coombs in her book *Sex and Anarchy*) who, she confesses, are still her inspiration, in spirit. The Push were inner-city dwellers whose closest contact with Nature was at the race-track. They determined to take on their masters, with their stifling Apollonian conformity, at their own game—to fight fire with fire. And yet, water is usually the better option: the fluid principle, Nature's own, as Plutarch so brilliantly observed.

Humphries' move, on the other hand, was just that: a conscious search for a wider stage for his already highly developed talent. Cut off from the Mother-Goddess at an early age by the rationalist, sterile, and imperceptive hand of High Presbyterianism (still active locally in the work, for example, of the Donalds Aitken, Anderson and Horne), his life has been an instinctive journey to regain Her, with the help of Dionysius and his twin weapons of compassion: alcohol and the stage). And it is Humphries who, alone of the four, has produced the truly timeless art.

Robert Hughes is the least originally creative of the group, having given up his artistic hopes at an early age. His flight ended one step beyond, in the USA, which, a monstrous growth from the single cell of High Protestant puritanism, dissected from Britain, has failed to synthesise a religious artist, or an artist of the female form, of any note. And the really interesting question is: whence the spiritual torment, to the point of breakdown, that bedevilled him throughout the writing of *American Visions*, his chronicle of American art? To the Freudian, of course, this presents no difficulty.

The ultimate aim, though, is to penetrate beyond all pairs of opposites to where the Father and the Goddess are one: to Dante's 'Light which in itself is true', for example, which transcended even the Trinity. And it was Beatrice who took him there. A point of profound relevance, one would think, for the contemporary Church.

Michael Buhagiar
Carlingford, NSW

Position vacant

The Way Community is currently looking for two people to work in the position of Coordinator in 1998. The Coordinators will be working in conjunction with volunteers to provide a home for elderly alcoholic men and hospitality for visitors from the streets of Fitzroy, an inner suburb of Melbourne. The position requires two or three days commitment per week and is reimbursed according to the needs of the Coordinator and the time they are able to give.

Enquiries to Gen, John or Leon: 03 9427 4898

TED KENNEDY'S ADDRESS 25 YEARS AT REDFERN

ESSAY PUBLISHED BY
EREMOS INSTITUTE IN COOPERATION WITH CCIP

\$5.00 PLUS \$2.00 POSTAGE

16 MASONS DRIVE

NORTH PARRAMATTA 2151

FAX (02) 9683 6617 PHONE (02) 9683 5096

Spiritual Companionship Formation

A course for those exploring the spiritual journey

This is the fourth year this ecumenical course is being offered.

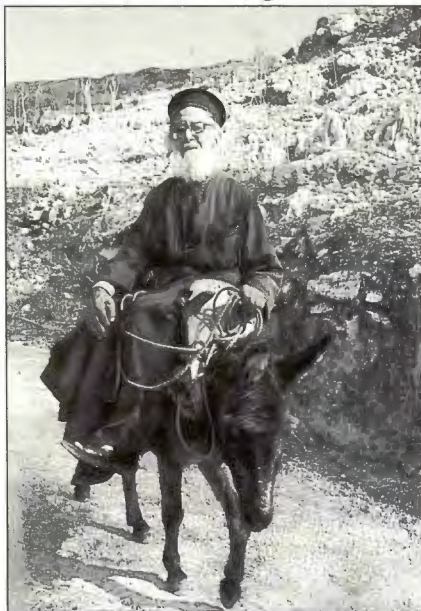
It is part of the ongoing program of the Australian Network for Spiritual Direction.

The course comprises a guided reading program February to July 1998 and a residential school at the Anglican Retreat House Cheltenham 6 to 14 August 1998.

Full details are available from
The Registrar (Mrs Pam Hydon)

3 Dalton Court,
Mulgrave, VIC 3170

Greetings!



See next month's *Eureka Street* for further details and distribution of raffle books.

Take the trip of a lifetime!

Christine and Michael Wood, from Hobart, sent us this card from Greece—a stopping point after their time in Rome. They were the lucky winners of the major prize in last year's **Jesuit Publications Raffle**.

Once again we would like to offer *Eureka Street* readers the opportunity to win a never-to-be-forgotten trip—or one of the other wonderful prizes.

Entering the **Jesuit Publications Raffle** is a way you can help us ensure our continuing financial viability, and also an opportunity for you or one of your friends to win a great prize.

First prize

**Your chance to see the world!
\$10,000 worth of air travel and
accommodation for two people**

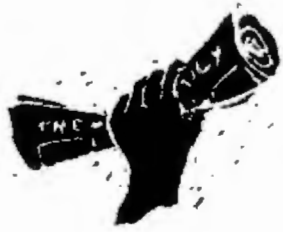
In addition to the major prize there will be:

2nd prize: Domestic air travel to the value of \$800

3rd prize: A colour television set

4th prize: Mobile telephone

5th prize: Mobile telephone



THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC



Bringing up the rear

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL mooted the idea of the synod of bishops evolving into an on-going legislative branch of the Catholic Church. Pope Paul VI initially approved the idea but his 'reforms' turned the synod instead into an instrument of central control. Synods are called at the Pope's discretion, stage-managed by the Curia, and subject to a Vatican spin on their deliberations. In 1980 a synod was used to purge the Dutch episcopacy of progressive bishops; subsequent synods have pushed one papal line after another.

Thus, on past form, the Synod of Bishops for America, currently under way in Rome, looks set to hobble further the Church in Latin America and to strengthen the hand of traditionalists in North America—traditionalists like those US bishops who recently urged a return to banning meat on Friday as a response to the evils of abortion, euthanasia and drug abuse. Such an outcome would have repercussions for Catholicism worldwide. If Australian Catholics don't immediately appreciate the connection, it may become obvious to them when the Synod for Oceania gets under way in November next year.

For a connection there certainly is. When the Latin American bishops met at Medellin, Colombia, in 1968, to consider the Latin American situation in the light of Vatican II they ended up severing a centuries-old alliance between the Church and the region's ruling élites. For Catholics outside Latin America, this development was less dramatic than the way it came about. The bishops had adopted a more inclusive approach to decision-making at Medellin, inviting delegates with hands-on pastoral experience from all sections of the Church to ensure the broadest representation possible. They also adopted a new way of thinking—an inductive and exploratory approach to issues rather than the usual deductive, dogmatic one. These were revolutionary changes inside the Church. They ensured that Medellin's signature declaration of a 'preferential option for the poor' meant not only a re-alignment of the Church's class interests but a new way of defining Church as well.

The counter-revolution has been under way ever since.

When the Synod for America was first flagged by Pope John Paul II at the Latin American Bishops Conference in Santo Domingo in 1992, he suggested it would provide a 'still wider exercise of episcopal collegiality' that might 'find ways to solve the dramatic situation of vast sectors of the population who aspire to a legitimate overall progress and to more just and decent living conditions'. That was already a step back from Medellin's call for 'global, daring, urgent, and radically renewing change', but at least it was pointing in the same direction.

By 1994, however, the focus of the synod had shifted completely to 'the new evangelisation' in John Paul's Apostolic Letter on preparations for the millennium, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*. The *lineamenta* or discussion paper for the synod (prepared by the Curia) completed the retreat. The document concentrates on the need to convert hearts rather than to change unjust economic and political relationships; the 'preferential option for the poor' has transmogrified into a more obtuse 'preferential love for the poor'; and it is suggested that the Church might respond to fundamental social problems by '[helping] in areas which touch the basic things needed for a dignified

human life—food, housing, education, clothing, medicine, et cetera'. In other words, charity is back in vogue, abstract theology is again providing answers about questions even before they've been agreed on, and personal piety once more takes precedence over effective social action. The selection of delegates for the synod has been skewed to guarantee the appearance of compliance with this shift in thinking. The US and Brazilian churches—the two most independently-minded in the Americas—have been under-represented, the voting has been stacked with delegates from each of the Vatican departments and papal nominees, and, though men's orders are represented, there will be nothing heard from women religious or the laity.

The Synod for Oceania looks set to travel the same road to the past. Its *lineamenta* (available on the Internet) emanates from the same mindset, if not necessarily the same minds, behind the *lineamenta* for the Synod for America. Many of the phrases are the same, as are the authorities appealed to (chief among them John Paul II himself) and the priority of concerns. More importantly, the *lineamenta* signals the same intention to obliterate legitimate cultural differences between the churches in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific and to impose a Roman ecclesiology on all. If it can be done



to the Church in Latin America and the US it will be done here.

How long before we are all being told to eat fish again on Fridays?

—Chris McGillion.

The battered baht

EVERY NOVEMBER FULL MOON the festival of Loy Krathung is celebrated in Thailand. Under a blanket of noise created by kids with their fireworks, people gather by the waterways with wax boats that carry flowers, incense and a candle. The candle and incense are lit and the boats are sent on their way, free to go where the current takes them. Traditionally lovers send two boats, away side by side, which will then testify as to how the relationship will fare. If they stay together and the candles remain lit for some time, that augurs well. If they separate or one capsizes, then—well, offering up to the spirits is a stupid idea.

But the Thais also send these boats forth as tributes that might assist in the fulfilment of their wishes. Perhaps this year one or two bore with them the hope that national affairs might repair themselves.

The year since the last Loy Krathung has not been a good time for Thailand. The election of that month created the Chavalit Government, with the promise of national prosperity underpinned by strong economic growth. That government—and according to the pessimists the promise as well—is no longer around. But throughout the present currency turmoil and liquidity problems, which precipitated the Asia-wide slump, many Thais have put their faith in a draft constitution currently being promoted by the new government, led by Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai.

How important this new constitution is to the Thais was obvious to any Bangkok visitor during the week when it was tabled in parliament. Taxi-drivers, shopkeepers, and office workers all had their radios tuned into the debate—perhaps because this constitution, as opposed to the 15 that have preceded it since Siam did away with absolute monarchy in 1932, was drafted under a mandate from the people. An elected Constitution Drafting Assembly, comprising 100 members, produced the document after eight months of deliberations—in a way similar to our own constitutional convention, but with the power to initiate, not just recommend.

There are some very western touches

about the new constitution: cabinet members must declare their assets to a newly created Counter Corruption Commission and resign as MPs; elections will be run by an electoral commission instead of the Interior Ministry; voting will be mandatory and an element of proportional representation will be introduced; Senators, and local administrative councillors, will all be directly elected. However the concern is that, even though the draft was passed by parliament with a thumping majority, too many politicians are threatened by the new culture to pass the draft in its present form.

Dr Borwornsak Uwanno was secretary to the Constitutional Drafting Assembly, and currently is secretary to the Scrutiny Committee, charged with overlooking the Constitution's implementation. He is particularly hopeful that the counter-corruption measures will help put an end to old-style money politics. But he stresses that the Counter Corruption Commission must be powerful.

'What is important is to have a body which is powerful to implement these new laws,' he says, 'and the problem with the new Commission is that it is appointed by the Cabinet.'

'The Speaker of the Senate has told me that they will be moving to appoint another Counter Corruption Commission which will supervise the affairs of parliamentarians—the former will investigate bureaucrats.'

The former Prime Minister, Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, is one old-school politician who is not comfortable with these changes. His party has as its base the rural North East and patronage and personal loyalties are the corner-stones of his support. While he vacillated over offering his support during the run up to the vote on the constitution—and his Interior Minister Sanoh Thienthong registered this outright opposition—he is not alone in his concerns. Most of Thailand lives in the provinces. On minuscule incomes compared to the Bangkok elite, they are used to accepting payment for votes (there are estimates that around A\$1 billion was spent purchasing votes for last November's election). More than half of today's MPs might have to find new campaigning methods to secure re-election.

The power of money politics is not easily defeated, however. Chavalit received much of the blame for Thailand's fiscal crisis. As the pro-constitution lobby, conspicuous with their green ribbons, connected the current crisis with the need to implement the new draft, Chavalit and his party sought

to bring in support from the country. Farmers from the North East were bused into Bangkok to bolster the Prime Minister and protest against constitutional change. When interviewed by the media, many of these people openly said they had planted their crops and had little to do on their farms, so took the offer of a paid trip into town. Their presence made observers a little jumpy during the lead-up to the parliamentary debate and vote in September.

What remains to be seen in the coming months is whether there will be any change to the draft; whether parliament tries to water down some of the new provisions as they move to enact them. The new government, however, looks as if it will offer its support if it can stay together before elections are due early next year (there is a problem in that the Government's majority is dependent on 12 dissident MPs from the Thai People's Party). There will undoubtedly be opposition to some measures (for example those that require MPs to have tertiary qualifications), which are more easily argued against than the core principles. It is another question altogether if there is to be an attack on the initiatives to make government more honest and effective.

On this point Dr Borwornsak notes that the main problem the new Constitution faces is not so much contrary individuals in power but the lack of a democratic culture. He describes the efforts of the CDA as the start of institutionalised democracy.

'We have to remember that in 18th century England there was election-rigging and vote-buying. You cannot change culture overnight but the draft will help in the basic areas.'

The Chairman of the Constitutional Drafting Assembly, former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, echoed this point in an interview with *Asia Week*. (To page 17)

HOW GREEN HAS AUSTRALIA BECOME?

an assessment



\$5.00 (including postage) from SEARCH
Foundation (ACN 050 096 976) Rm 610,
3 Smail St, Broadway NSW 2007
Ph: (02) 9211 4164 Fax: (02) 9211 1407
email: search@magna.com.au

EARLY ON, WITH SMOG

*Vinyl street, cherry-red cars, the dusty shops TO LET
that's life this morning,*

genuine like hay fever.

*The rule of local shitheads marches on,
suggesting 'Land of Hope and Glory'*

done with gumleaves on the Mall

by pimply Year Nine students, minorly tattooed.

Even the kerbside plane trees are acting rheumatic.

Pure beef are the frontpage faces, damp and red,

fit for a boardroom trauma,

but Missus Roofless trudges from the park,

her dressing-gown done up with binder twine,

gear in a plastic roll.

The economy she lives in (barely)

is not capable of care because

money can only measure surfaces,

marrying nothing but itself.

These are the bone-dry years of qualified hate.

*Why do the 90s townhouse draughtsmen
primp little pediments on top of everything,*

or green and salmon lattice? To what end?

This is material drearsville, pretty much

late in civilization's dreck and text,

the macworld only offering

some Turkish Humphrey Bogart padding by

like Heraclitus in a mackintosh.

And what in fact might his hopes be,

at the wrong end of a century?

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

THE RIGHT STUFF

*You slit my skin briskly
discard the seeds
chop cheese with rice and spice
according to taste*


*pack the savoury mix
into my green torso
and braise on a bed of scallions
in a covered pan*

*My darkness grows mellow
my steam rattles the lid
I am ready for your guest*

*My bitter seeds
nestle in the compost
Remember how to sprout*

Aileen Kelly

(Aileen Kelly will visit Ireland in 1988 as
winner of the Vincent Buckley Poetry Prize.)



SUMMA theologiae

Drawing lines

From page 15. (It is an irony that Anand was first made Prime Minister after the military deposed an unpopular government in 1991). He noted that:

'People are not accustomed to the principles of democracy, to the philosophy. It is not about participating in elections. It is about involvement in the decision-making process and in the governance of the country.'

Interestingly, Anand said in the same interview, published before Chuan became Prime Minister in the middle of November, that he, as leader of the Democrat party, was the kind of man who could bring about such a change.

In this respect, the new constitution may find it has a friend in the current economic crisis. The magnitude of foreign cash reserves held in Thailand is still being guessed at by analysts. Also there is the problem of the 58 insolvent financial institutions. It will be very hard for opponents to defy the strong support that the transparency and anti-corruption provisions enjoy because they are popularly regarded as the solution to the problems that are central to the current downturn. Those who want reform are always helped by financial downturn. That being the case, the new constitution won't save Thailand from its current problems, but it may help it avoid future ones in a climate where international investors expect more from Asian governments. Other Asian countries are also experiencing related difficulties but Thailand seems closer to a resolution that will satisfy the superficial demands of the money markets. The big test is whether their new Constitution will satisfy themselves.

—Jon Greenaway.

This month's contributors: **Chris McGillion** is the opinion page editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. **Jon Greenaway** is *Eureka Street's* South East Asian correspondent.

COUNSELLING

stress, grief, relationships,
workplace issues
Mediation

divorce/separation workplace
contact

WINSOME THOMAS

B.A. (Psych) Grad.Dip. App.Psych.
M.Ed. Admin, AIMM, AHRI.

Tel 0418 380 181
or 9690 7033

CONFIDENTIALITY ASSURED

THEOLOGY IS LARGELY ABOUT DRAWING and crossing boundaries. In this month's crop of theological magazines, boundaries abound.

In *Interpretation* (June, 1997), a magazine presenting the results of scholarship to the educated but not professional reader, Michael Barré discusses the portrait of Balaam in Numbers chapters 22-24. Balaam was a persistent source of perplexity to the early church. He was a diviner, did not belong to Israel, but acted as a true prophet after being addressed by his donkey. By Christian standards he lay beyond the pale, but the stories showed that God was not limited by boundaries.

Two contributions in the November edition of *New Blackfriars*, the English Dominican journal, have to do with boundary riding within the Catholic church. The editorial discusses the excommunication of Tissa Balasuriya, concluding that 'even Christians who believe that procedures are required to protect the faithful from heresy must wonder whether in Tissa Balasuriya's case anything like justice has been done.' Another article shows the difficulty in drawing boundaries. The Protestant writer, John Hick, whose views on the unique place of Christ were criticised by Cardinal Ratzinger in an address to the Latin American bishops, claims that the Cardinal was familiar with his views only at second hand.

The boundaries between Christians and Muslims form the subject of frequent discussion both in political and in theological terms. In his study of the crusades in the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (October, 1997) Christopher Maier discusses the way in which liturgy was used in the preaching of the Crusades. A programme of special services and processions were devised, and the success of the Crusade abroad was seen as dependent on the prosecution of a moral and spiritual crusade within the Christian community. The relationship between Christians and Muslims, however, was presented as unrelievedly hostile. Christians prayed: 'We humbly beseech thee to snatch from the hands of the enemies of the cross the land which thine only-begotten Son consecrated with his own blood and to restore it to Christian worship.' The ambiguity entailed in this snatching became clear only subsequently when the costs of warfare were paid in blood and meanness of spirit.

I was intrigued also by another, more literary, snatching of Muslim holy places by Christians that was effected surely by mistake. The cover of the November edition of the local *AD 2000* bore a handsome photograph of the Blue Mosque in Istanbul. But inside, it was appropriated to the sixth century Christian church, Sancta Sophia.

For an Australian reader exercised by the cultural wounds caused by the *Wik* legislation, the July edition of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* carried a fascinating and evocative discussion of a photograph. The snapshot, which was taken in 1873, portrays Samuel Crowther, the first African Bishop of Niger and a former slave, with African and English Anglicans. They are sitting under the Wilberforce Oak, under which in 1787 William Pitt, Wilberforce and William Greville had planned the bill which would abolish slavery. Seventeen years later, Crowther and most of his African clergy were forced out of office by the Church Missionary Society finance committee. A mixture of narrow evangelical prejudices, delegation of responsibility to youthful zealots, and the malign influence of Sir George Goldie, the head of the Royal Niger Company to which the CMS was in fief, destroyed the church. Goldie believed that leadership of the church and of society could not properly be exercised by Africans. The photograph is a poignant reminder that in the Nigerian church, as in Australian society, good intentions and church loyalty were no substitute for moral perception and courage.

Finally, the October edition of the *Journal of Religious History* explores the boundaries between secularism and the churches in Australia. D. Beer investigates the University of New England, described in its early years as 'the holiest campus'. The central place enjoyed by religious societies in the university declined in the 1960s. The writer believes that changes in Australian society were largely responsible for the decline, although the responses of the churches and bodies like SCM, contributed to it.

The article reveals the relative inability of any church and movement to resist a sea-change in which allegiances become more temporary and provisional. The boundaries between church and society are permeable.

Like a nation state, theology is perhaps at its best when its boundaries are clear, but when citizens from other countries are hospitably received. ■

Andrew Hamilton sj teaches in the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne.



Dianne's story

BEFORE MY MOTHER GAVE BIRTH TO ME, my mother's cousin, Evelyn Boxer, and her husband found a blue tongue lizard which was the sign my mother was going to have a baby.

They killed the lizard and ate it. After eating the lizard they both got sick. 'We must have had the dreaming of the baby someone here is carrying', they said. They all looked at each other and all said, 'Not me' and others said, 'Don't look at me, I'm not going to have a baby.' My mother's cousin said to my mother, 'Must be you now, Daisy'. So this went on and on: 'We'll see who is carrying.' Then my mother got sick instead and she finally had me. That is how I got my dreaming, the blue tongue lizard.

When my grandparents were young kids they used to live at Sturt Creek Station with their parents. My mum's Uncle Speiler was the third youngest brother in the family. He was a good horseman and a good rider. He used to break in horses. No man could beat him for breaking in the horses. Speiler is my grandfather on my mother's side.

My grandfather Speiler gave me a bush name when I was young—Wyijiji. He gave me this name after my great-great-grandmother.

My Dad's father has passed away. My father is the oldest brother in his family. He has a stepsister and three younger stepbrothers. When my Dad's father was alive he used to work at the stock camp on Billiluna Station with Sean Murphy, who was the station manager. My grandfather used to look after the young men at the stock camp, telling them where to go to look for cattle around the Lake. Sean Murphy and my grandfather used to get up in the morning and fly to Mulan Lake in a plane. They would fly over really low, making all the old people scared.

They were showing off. My grandfather's brother, Patrick Smith, used to go bull riding in the rodeos in Queensland. He used to be the best rider and he won a lot of trophies. My grandfather Speiler taught him how to ride.

In the community we are all related by skins. The skin system tells us the right relationships between people in our community. We get our skin from our mother. All my kids are Jungarrayi and Nungurrayi because I am Nakamarra. My mother was Napanangka. When they are older my boys will marry a Nangala and my daughter will marry a Jangala. Through this skin system we know who it is right for us to marry. In the community we often call ourselves by our skin name because this way we know who we are related to.

When I was little I lived at Sturt Creek. I didn't go to the school there when I was old enough for pre-primary, because we didn't have a teacher. I used to go to stock camp with my grandparents and watch them work at the yards, branding the wild horses and cattle. I stayed there until I was six years old and then I moved to Christmas Creek.

From there I went to Billiluna to stay with my grandparents on my father's side. My grandfather Speiler is a special person in our family because he is the one who keeps the rules of the family. He tells us about our culture and our law. He tells us about the Dreaming and where we were born. Speiler is also the joker in our family. He makes jokes to all the people around the community, no matter if they are men or women.

Speiler is the person for the law. Sometimes he doesn't like having law now because he is getting older. His wife is getting old too. Me and my big sister look after him and his wife. We show our respect for our family by doing this.

One night, when I was young, Speiler came to Billiluna from Sturt Creek. They told him that I was there and he said: 'Bring that little girl to me'. He told them, 'I'm taking her away from you mob because she's not staying with you mob.' That night I ran away from my grandparents at Billiluna with my Jaja, Speiler. My big sister Sylvia was with us too.

We walked to Mayarra Pool and then to Sturt Creek, taking short cuts. It took us four days to get back to Sturt Creek station just walking along the Sturt during the big wet season. We didn't starve, as Speiler went hunting for goanna, sand frogs and black-head snakes. These were the food me and my big sister lived on, as well as sugar bag and bush berries.

After that we stayed at Lupuw, near Sturt Creek, till we were old enough to go to school. Father Heavern came to Sturt Creek because there was a lot of station girls not going to school. He said to the old people, 'How come the station kids are here and not going to school?' He took some of the girls to Balgo and then came back for the other girls from Ringer Soak to take them to Balgo as well.

AT THE DORMITORY ME AND ROSLYN were the youngest kids from Sturt Creek. Every morning we had to pray before going to school. Sister Immaculata looked after us in the dormitory. We used to be late for school because of praying. The Headmaster used to get upset when we came late for school and he would tell us to line up for the cane, all the girls from Ringer Soak, Sturt Creek and some from Balgo and Malarn. Some of the girls were planning to run away from school because the Headmaster was too strict. He always told us to come to school on time. We told him that before coming to school we had to make our bed, clean around the dormitory and pray.

We had our holidays only three times in the year and every holiday Father Heavern would take us back to Sturt Creek and Ringer Soak. When the holidays were over Father came back to pick us up. One time I didn't go back to school—I walked from Sturt Creek to Billiluna.

Then I went to school at Billiluna. Sister Bernadette was my teacher and the school was in the shed near where the Store is now. We didn't have chairs, tables or a black-board on the wall. We had a board on wheels and flour drums for chairs and tables. That was in 1979.

We didn't have a proper church, we used to have Church in the caravan. The two Sisters, who were the teachers, used to live in a caravan too.

In 1985 I went to Nulungu College in Broome for secondary schooling. Nulungu College was a boarding school. I was a good kid when I was there and didn't feel homesick. I had a lot of friends from different places when I was there. Some girls from Malarn, Halls Creek, Balgo and Billiluna were planning to run away from there, but not me. They were teasing me, saying 'You're not a good girl'. They were trying to get me to go with them. They left during the night but they got caught

in the morning, when they were walking through One Mile—Brother Negus caught them. He took the girls back to the dormitory and made them do 'work force'—cleaning up.

When I left school at the end of 1985 at 16 years old, I started looking for jobs around the community. I asked some of the people around to help me find a job.

The first job I had was at the clinic: I had to clean the floor and fix some of the people who had bad sores and things like that. I used to help look after the old people, but the job in the clinic didn't suit me and I went to look for another one.

Half way through 1986 I got a job at the Language Centre in Halls Creek. I didn't like working in Halls Creek because I was the only one from Billiluna working there. I had lots of friends there but still I was homesick. People from Billiluna came visiting me, mainly young girls, and they were forcing me to go and have fun. I used to think to myself 'When you see your own countrymen, you'll get homesick or get carried away with mates. But this time they are not going to take me away from my job, not this time, no way! They think mates can take you away from a good job when you work hard.'

When I was 20 years old I came back to Billiluna and applied for a job at the school. I started working on Monday morning. I am still working as a Teaching Assistant while I am studying and I really enjoy my job.

In the old days people used to camp near Mayarra Pool. They had no houses there in those days so they used to build their own



Dianne Sambo and family



bush humpies out of sticks and spinifex grass. These were good wind breaks and kept them warm in the winter.

There was a station manager's house where the Billiluna community is today and the people used to walk from Mayarra

Pool each day to work. They would work for food, tobacco and things like that. In these old times the men and women had their pride, they worked hard: the men breaking in horses and moving the cattle, while the women worked around the garden, in the shop and cleaning houses of kartiya. Each night they would walk back to Mayarra Pool.

The traditional language people spoke in the community was Walmajarri, because this is Walmajarri country. Some of the old people were moved to Sturt Creek and they learned to speak Jaru while they were there. Now some people speak Jaru here, even though this is really Walmajarri country. Because people have moved around, other languages are spoken in this community. In Billiluna today you can hear people speaking Kukatja, Walmajarri, Jaru, Nardi and Walpari. We also use sign language to communicate with each other. Today children learn from their parents how to use sign language and how to speak with and understand the old people.

As well as language, we teach our children, when they are very young, how to read the tracks on the ground. My daughter, who is four years old, can read the tracks of another person and tell where they have gone. She looks at the tracks of her friend, Azrienne, to find where she is when she wants to play with her, she also looks for the tracks of her brothers when she wants to find them.

IN BILLILUNA TODAY we have our own store and store manager, a clinic with a nurse, our own office, adult centre and school. Some of the people from the community work in these places. Some women work in their houses as well as in the shop, clinic, office and school. The men work at keeping the community clean—they collect the rubbish and take it to the rubbish tip.

Some young men are councillors and have to go to council meetings. We elect community councillors and a chairperson for the community each year, usually in July. Robert McKay is the ATSIC regional councillor for this region. He comes from Billiluna. We are proud of Robert. ATSIC meetings are hard meetings for him.

Billiluna is the best place to live in for the kids. They can play safely around the community and their grandparents can teach them how to go hunting and gathering bush foods. Their grandparents also teach them all about the Law and teach them their own languages.

In Billiluna the old people want the young people to work hard. They are trying to get the young people to run the community by themselves. The old people want the young people to work around the community: they get upset when

they see many young people sitting around and not working or caring for the place.

In the old days, people were strong in their culture and language, stronger than they are now. The government policies have changed people and their way of living. Now we have money and we buy our food from the shop—we don't go hunting for our food. Young people today have licences to drive cars and drive wherever they want to go. The old people used to walk long distances going from place to place; they were clever the way they could find their great-great-grandmothers' country without having to follow a road. Some people have given away their great-great-grandmothers' country for mining. They don't 'see' with their eye what they are doing. They are destroying their own land and their language. Today some of the young people are killing themselves with the drink and some are

suiciding because they have lost their spirit. Some people are mixed up in their heads because they have lost their culture and their language.

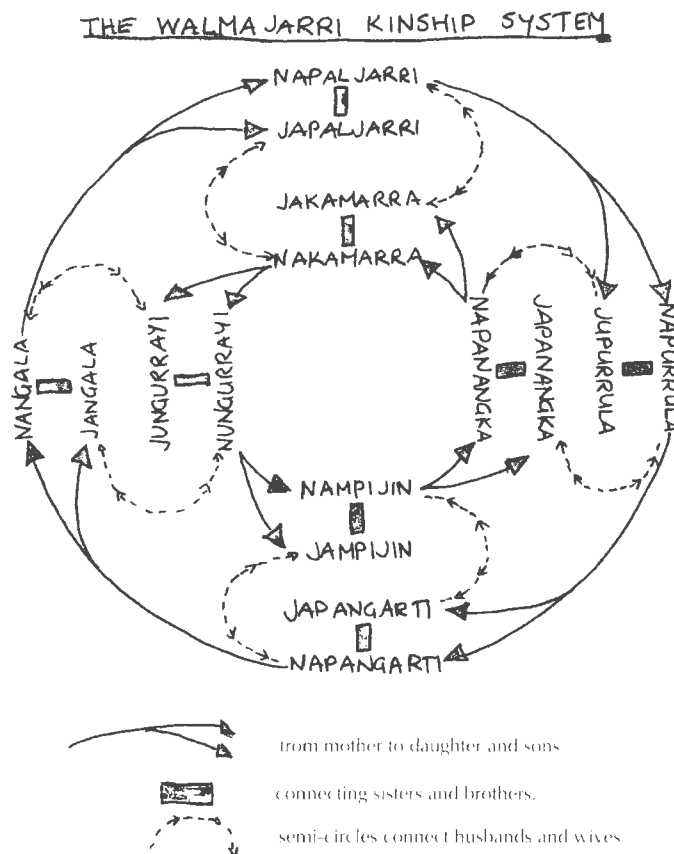
THE OLD PEOPLE tell stories by drawing in the sand. My grandfather used to tell me stories by drawing on the ground and tell me the stories as he was drawing. The old people today still tell stories to the little children by drawing on the ground to help the kids understand.

In the future I will continue to work at the school. This is most important to me, because I want to be a teacher. I have been working at the school for a long time now, and I am looking forward to becoming a qualified

community teacher. Margaret is the first community teacher for Billiluna and I might be the second one. My job at the school keeps me busy, and I know I will have to work hard at my studies to become a teacher. I wonder if my sons and daughter will follow in my footsteps.

I am going to send my kids to the High School in Halls Creek when they get older so that they can be with kartiya kids as well as Aboriginal kids. I want my kids to have friends both ways and to learn to understand English better. I want my kids to have a better education than I had when I was a kid. I didn't go to a high school with kartiya kids, there were only Aboriginal kids at Nulungu when I went there. ■

Dianne Sambo has lived all her life in the far north of WA.



Downsizing and the Contented Society

'... we tend to meet any new situation by reorganising; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion and demoralisation'.

—Gaius Petronius Arbiter AD 60

DOWNSIZING CAN BE GOOD FOR YOU. The best place to start is in the wardrobe. Culling out those rarely worn clothes, for donation to a charity or even for a garage sale, is 'win-win' downsizing. It feels good: it does good. It is also gentle reminder of the folly of those consumerist values about more being better.

Downsizing housing provides another example. Moving from living in a house to a small flat, as I have recently done, is not usually seen as a upward social mobility but it may be conducive to a more simple, contented life. Our urban planners, arguing for urban consolidation, contend that more of us will have to adjust to this pattern, because of the environmental and economic constraints on continuing to use land so generously in the process of urban development. Downsizing in transport—replacing gas-guzzling cars by less environmentally rapacious vehicles—has a similar rationale.

As an economist, particularly one concerned with the environmental limits to growth, I therefore start with a predisposition to some forms of downsizing. Economising requires the avoidance of waste. Applied to the public sector and to business enterprises, the rationale for such economising is obvious enough. In the public sector we must use our collective resources wisely. The legitimacy of the system of taxation and public provision depends on the avoid-

ance of obvious wastes and inefficiencies. If the opposite of downsizing is feather-bedding then it is hard to oppose in the name of efficient resource allocation. Likewise, in the private sector of the economy, greater efficiency in the use of resources (labour, capital and land) reduces costs, and therefore potentially adds to market shares, output, income and employment. Therein lies a significant paradox. According to the advocates of downsizing, 'lean and mean' business practices may be needed in order



to ensure the existence of buoyant employment opportunities in the national economy in the longer term. This is the declared logic of 'economic rationalist' practices in a globalising world economy—ever more 'competitiveness' is the condition for survival. Cut now, thrive later.

On closer examination this standard neo-liberal economic rationale looks rather more shaky. First and foremost, it subordinates other social concerns to the narrowly economic. One is reminded of the President of Brazil who said 'the

economy is doing fine but the people aren't'. Even within the confines of a concern with economics there are some dubious underlying assumptions. The emphasis on fostering 'competitiveness' through downsizing, for example, can have depressing effects on the aggregate demand for goods and services. Fewer workers usually means lower wages and therefore less consumption spending. The domestic market stagnates or contracts. So the capacity for economic growth comes to depend more and more on exporting the goods and services being produced. But if all other countries are pursuing a similar strategy this becomes ever harder. The problem of the deficiency of aggregate demand becomes globalised. John Maynard Keynes returns with a vengeance. The generalised pursuit of 'international best practice' becomes a race to the bottom.

This reintroduction of a Keynesian perspective, however unfashionable, is an important reminder of the fallacy of aggregation in the neo-liberal economic prescriptions. What helps to increase the efficiency and profitability of any one business enterprise may not be good for all businesses when all pursue the same strategy. So it is with downsizing. One firm's downsizing is another's loss of customers. The aggregate economic and social outcomes can be quite perverse. Widespread unemployment, greater

economic insecurity, increased inequality in the distribution of income and wealth, a fracturing of the spirit of coöperation which is the prerequisite for economic productivity, a breakdown in social cohesion, the proliferation of social pathologies, crime and drug abuse—all these are foreseeable consequences. Indeed they are already happening in Australia. Their connection with the twin policies of 'economic rationalism' and 'corporate downsizing' warrants careful consideration.

It is useful to differentiate three types of downsizing. Downsizing Mark I involves closure of business operations: this is zero-sizing. Nissan's decision to terminate its Australian car production was a case in point. BHP's decision to shut its Newcastle steelworks and the closure of Berlei Bras in Lithgow are two more recent examples. The loss of domestic markets following reduction in tariff protection has been an important element. Structural economic change always has its casualties, of course, but in the current period the processes of reabsorption of displaced workers are manifestly inadequate. Skills mismatch, geographical immobility and the sheer lack of new growth points are basic problems. Growth in unemployment levels are a predictable consequence. Evidently, downsizing Mark I is socially harmful unless new economic opportunities open up as rapidly as others close down. This condition is increasingly difficult to achieve in a world of globalised 'competitiveness', especially for a nation like Australia whose regional neighbours have vast pools of cheap labour for low-cost production.

Downsizing Mark II involves increased intensity of labour—getting more work out of less workers. To some extent the push for this sort of downsizing is a response to those same pressures of globalised 'competitiveness'. Here is the context in which downsizing can be seen as an extension of scientific management (as with Frederick Winslow Taylor) or increased exploitation of labour (as with Karl Marx), depending on your point of view. Working smarter or

just working harder? Increasingly authoritarian relations of production, speed-ups and unpaid overtime are the hallmarks of this type of downsizing. Increased personal stress is a predictable result. This is illustrated by one research study by Deborah Schofield (University of Canberra) which demonstrated a higher incidence of physical ailments among the unemployed, and a higher incidence of unhealthy life-style practices among those working very long hours. This sort of downsizing leads to the antithesis of a contented society.

DOWNSIZING MARK III involves higher productivity. It is typically associated with technological change which makes possible the production of more with less. This sounds much more attractive. Indeed, to the extent that such technological change eliminates humdrum toil, and to the extent that it is accompanied by the more equitable redistribution of work (which it currently isn't), it would be welcome. It could provide the technological basis for a progressive society in which economic concerns no longer dominate our existence. Of course, we would have to ensure that the technology is compatible with ecological sustainability. Given that, we could then pay more attention to institutions for the equitable distribution of work. The French social scientist Andre Gorz (in *Paths for Paradise*) has painted an attractive picture of how we might share the work needed to produce the goods and services for good material living standards.

Each of us could enter into a form of 'social contract' to perform some 20,000 hours over our lifetimes, scheduled between periods of full-time work, part-time work, and extended periods of leave according to our personal preferences. Downsizing Mark III, in other words, opens up attractive socio-economic possibilities, but only if we can make the necessary institutional adaptations to ensure that its fruits are shared.

This is the opposite of what is currently happening. The elements of collective control over processes of economic social change are being rolled back in favour of a more individualistic, profit-seeking, market-oriented system. That is the essence of the 'economic

rationalist' approach. It is an assault on the institutions which have historically constrained the inherent tendencies to economic insecurity and economic inequality in the market economy—the welfare state, the public sector and the trade unions. The influence of those protective institutions is now being scaled back by the neo-liberal policies of 'small government', privatisation and deregulation. The result is 'capitalism in the raw'.

This is not a context in which it is easy to reconcile the economic interests of the rich and powerful with the collective concerns for a contented society. Its proponents argue that there is no alternative—the infamous TINA syndrome. On this reasoning being 'lean and mean' may be a necessary evil. We must have faith that more 'flexibility', 'incentivation' and 'smaller government' will eventually bear fruit. But does the rhetoric match the reality. A recent book by American political economist David Gordon directly addresses this issue. Its title is *Fat and Mean*: it is sub-titled *The Corporate Squeeze of Working Americans and the Myth of Managerial Downsizing*. Australia is not America (yet) but Gordon's book provides a clear warning of what lies ahead if we go further down that road. It is, of course, a direction in which some of our political leaders and economic commentators are now pointing, arguing that greater labour market flexibility and wider wage disparities are the preconditions for long-term employment growth. Gordon characterises this as 'the stick strategy'. However, his evidence reveals that the emphasis on cost-cutting does not apply equally to the managerial and supervisory ranks. Contrary to the 'lean and mean' corporate rhetoric, the proportion of supervisors to people supervised has risen significantly in the last two decades. This is no accident. Rather, it reflects a two-way process. More coercive labour relations require more supervisors, while payment of managerial and supervisory salaries requires yet more austerity to be applied to the conditions of the workforce. 'Corporate bloat', to use Gordon's term, and a wages squeeze are two sides of the same coin. Comparable data on the ratio of managerial and supervisory to productive workers are not available to test this hypothesis for the Australian case. However, *prima facie* evidence



exists in the form of Australia's growing inequality in the distribution of income and wealth. This is well-documented. CEO remuneration packages have grown to quite bizarre proportions while, on the other hand, there has been a significant expansion of the secondary labour market where wage incomes are low and/or irregular. The proportion of part-time and casual jobs has risen sharply, constituting in effect the reproduction of a 'reserve army of labour'. Between the two extremes, there is a shrinking middle. The 'trickle down' process seems ever more ineffective in redistributing economic rewards. The two mechanisms through which that trickle-down has traditionally operated—wages and welfare—have been a particular target for 'economic rationalist' policies. The result is the emergence of the sort of 40:30:30 society Will Hutton's book *The State We're In* has described in the UK: 40 per cent of the population prospering from technological progress, structural economic change and the exercise of corporate power, while 30 per cent are 'battling' in the secondary labour market to retain some stake in the economy, and 30 per cent are more-or-less permanently marginalised from the mainstream of economic life. This is the sort of society which a 'fat and mean' economy generates.

THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE. Indeed, one of the principal lessons of studying political economy is that there are always alternatives. In Gordon's book the posited alternative is the 'carrot' strategy, embracing policies to replace the climate of fear and insecurity with more coöperative industrial relations and more egalitarian income distribution. This, he argues, is a more sustainable path to a productive national economy. In the Australian case, there are some significant foundations on which that alternative could be constructed, perhaps more so than in the American case, but they are rapidly slipping away. As I have argued more fully elsewhere (in *The Human Costs of Managerialism*), 'nurturing, building and sharing' can become the organising principles of economic life, replacing the

'slash and burn' approach of economic rationalism. Nurturing requires the development of our human capital through better-resourced child care, education and training. Building requires coöperation between capital, labour and government, drawing on our collective savings to finance productive investment and creating new industries embodying principles of ecological sustainability. Sharing requires the redistribution of income through a more equitable incomes policy and a progressive taxation system. Only with a belief in fair shares in the fruits of progress is there likely to be the coöperation necessary for collective success. That is a feature of economic institutions, just as it is of households or sporting teams.



The dominant trend is in precisely the opposite direction—emphasising surgery rather than massage or dietary supplementation to heal the ailing economic patient. 'Economic rationalism' in public policy and corporate downsizing as a managerial strategy are the 'macro' and 'micro' variations on the neo-liberal economic theme.

To my mind, they are the terrible twins of the 1990s. They render the achievement of a contented society ever more elusive. Mark you, there is one sense in which the term 'contentment' does have currency. It is the ironic sense in which American political economist J. K. Galbraith titled one of his books *The Culture of Contentment*, pointing to the tendency for the more affluent strata of American society to withdraw from participation in the polity. Private schooling, private health insurance, private security guards patrolling private residential enclaves—these are the visible manifestations of that segregation.

Being niggardly with welfare and 'tough on crime' are part of the same package. The legitimacy of any more general role for the state in the pursuit of collective societal goals, and the willingness to finance the state through taxation, are the causalities of this 'culture of contentment'.

There are some awesome political-economic choices facing us in the late twentieth century. The fad for corporate downsizing can be seen to be part of a broader process which constitutes, in effect, a renewal of the principles and practices of Social Darwinism. The alternative, which would build more effectively on Australia's actual 'comparative advantage' in economic, social and ecological balance, would require more democratic and coöperative processes to shape our collective future. Of course, in the processes of technological, economic and social change some activities will grow and others will shrink. In that sense upsizing and downsizing are inexorable: the task is to manage the processes of change, putting in place the institutional mechanisms to smooth the transitions and control the directions of progress. It is those aspects that are currently so sadly lacking.

Downsizing has its place, but it is in restructuring for ecological sustainability (and in the wardrobe), not in the development and use of our human resources, not in our economic security and certainly not in our aspirations. ■

Frank Stilwell is Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Sydney.

AUGUSTINIANS

*Sharing life and ministry together
in friendship and in community
as religious brothers and priests.*



*'You and I are nothing but the Church... It
is by love that we belong to the Church.'*
St Augustine

Please send me information about
the Order of St Augustine

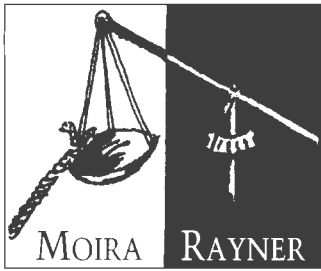
NAME

AGE PHONE

ADDRESS

..... P/CODE

The Augustinians Tel: (02) 9938 3782
PO Box 679 Brookvale 2100 Fax: (02) 9905 7864



E Watchdog on a leash

EVERYONE keeps waiting for Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett to go too far.

He may have done it, late in the day, on November 17. At his personal insistence a highly controversial bill that affects the responsibilities and influence of the Victorian Auditor General passed noisily, the government having the numbers, and dissidents in Kennett's own party having been persuaded into obedience.

Essentially the Act separates the Victorian Auditor-General from a new government business enterprise office, Audit Victoria, controlled by a government-appointed Board, which will farm out government auditing work to private sector firms, leaving Ches Baragwanath, the current Auditor General, with a supervising role.

In a compromise that satisfies nobody but Kennett's backbenchers, the Auditor-General is permitted to retain some staff, but not operational authority over the audits themselves. He will be required to co-sign audit reports indicating he is satisfied with another auditor's work.

In an open letter, on 30 October Mr Baragwanath declared that:

... any so-called 'concessions' or 'compromises' embodied in the Bill pale into insignificance when considered against the devastating impact on the Auditor-General's operational independence which would result from the Government's proposed changes ... While the Bill purports to give total discretion in the performance or exercise of my powers, it effectively removes all operational discretion. Under the Bill, the Auditor-General will be stripped of the power to directly carry out audits which will leave the Auditor-General without an ongoing audit investigatory arm to serve without fear or favour the interests of the Parliament and the community ... In effect, what the Government will achieve will be a world first, unfortunately—an Auditor-General's Office without auditors.

No one but his own parliamentary members has supported the Victorian Premier in his pursuit of the Auditor General, from the moment his appointed committee recommended the new model. Baragwanath's peers in Australia and New Zealand rejected the justification offered for the change—national competition policy. So did all Australia's accounting,

auditing and related professional bodies, including the Victorian Law Institute, and the Bar Council. Even the Victorian Liberal Party, at its annual conference, called for the proposals to be withdrawn, though its parliamentary members withdrew their opposition, after a private briefing from the Premier in which he persuaded them to accept, sight unseen, his 'compromise' proposals.

In early November Norm Geschke, for many years Victoria's Ombudsman, and advocate of government propriety, wrote an extraordinary letter to the *Age*. The proposals, he said, would 'castrate' the Auditor General. 'Enough is enough,' he wrote:

'when the Premier becomes a dictator with complete disregard for the views of the majority of Victorians, of reputable public institutions, of leaders of religious communities, of members of his own political party and is prepared to destroy the essence and mechanics of independent public accountability he has gone too far.'

He went on to describe the legislation's purpose as 'a deliberate attempt to obscure from public knowledge the financial manipulations and mistruths of government and bureaucratic actions.'

One can only be astonished at the Premier's persistence. What possible 'public interest' could justify it? The stated aim is to improve efficiency, but the performance review of the Auditor General's office had put in a glowing report and, as Baragwanath himself pointed out, the Commonwealth's own amendments to the National Audit Office, post-Hilmer, and in compliance with national competition policy, had preserved that troublesome office's autonomy and control of the audit process.

BARAGWANATH HAS BEEN—as his office requires him to be—a critic. The government was at least a little embarrassed by his special reports on its failure to charge Crown Casino \$174 million in licensing fees, and the administration of the Casino-fund Community Support Fund (May 1996); his revelation of the state of the child protection system ('Protecting Victoria's Children', June 1996) his findings that the Metropolitan Ambulance Service had disregarded its own guidelines in awarding contracts (April 1997) and his revelation that the government stood to lose about \$4 million a month through government credit cards in May of this year.

Mr Kennett's response to the public campaign to 'Save the Auditor General' spearheaded by Liberty Victoria, and to Baragwanath's public defence of his function and efficiency, has become increasingly tetchy. He accused Baragwanath of political impropriety when the Auditor General defended his position and wrote to parliamentarians, twice, asking them to protect his role as their officer. Kennett asserted that Baragwanath had failed in his duty and might even have been, somehow, complicit in Victoria's economic decline under Labor, particularly in failing to reveal the incompetence of the Victorian Economic Development Corporation. Baragwanath was appointed a few weeks before the last election Labor won, in 1988, and was critical of its role thereafter. It was not the auditor general but private auditors who were involved in—and were later sued over—Victoria's two greatest single financial catastrophes, the collapse of the Tricontinental Bank and the Pyramid Building Society.

Mr Kennett has worked assiduously, since 1992, to silence critics. He controls the contracts of the most senior public servants, in his own office. He declined to re-appoint the Liquor Licensing Commissioner who had investigated his office's handling of the premier's application for a licence, after he had sold fund-raising wine from his Premier's office. He abolished the office of Commissioner for Equal Opportunity after challenges to the discriminatory effects of the closure of schools and proposals to jail women prisoners in men's prisons. He squeezed the Director of Public Prosecutions (who had publicly considered charging him with contempt, and had prosecuted John Elliott) into resignation by ensuring that the DPP lost control over his office's resources.

He curtailed access to Freedom of Information—from which he benefited extensively while in opposition—and limited the Supreme Court's jurisdiction to hear citizens' challenges.

Yet in opposition Mr Kennett enjoyed and profited from the Auditor General's exposures of Labor's financial failings. In May 1992, Baragwanath's critical report on Labor's \$700M bayside project made him detestable in the eyes of the Kirner government. Shortly after the Coalition administration roared into office Kennett praised



Sticky wicket for Occam

Baragwanath, saying he 'deserves the full support of the parliament and the public.' The whole 'Guilty Party' campaign of the 1992 election was inspired by Baragwanath's reputation for integrity and fiscal rigour.

So what went wrong?

The trouble is in the nature of democracy in Victoria. It is rare that any government controls, and indeed dominates, both Houses of Parliament, as has been the case in that State for more than 5 years. Watchdogs of any kind, who are not directly appointed or dismissible by the Premier, especially those who report to Parliament and talk to the public, deliver a weapon to the enemies of any government. An 'audit' defies the natural desire of the powerful, and of institutions, to make decisions secretly, and to feed just the good news to the public—who use that information to decide how to vote, next time.

Baragwanath warned, when the Maddock committee initially proposed to fetter his authority, that the changes proposed could render Parliament impotent to fight oppression and corruption by any future government: 'this situation has already occurred in Queensland and Western Australia in recent years, and required a substantial reassessment and strengthening of public accountability arrangements in those states.'

THE FORMER COMMONWEALTH Auditor-General, John Taylor, warned that to attack the auditor-general, was to seek to weaken the Parliament's ability to hold the executive to account, and that this was 'to attack and weaken the centrepiece of our defences against tyranny and corruption. It is an attack on the people itself' (*Age*, 5 December 1996).

So where is the principle of the traditional Liberal? I think we can see it in Ches Baragwanath. He is a loyal guardian, but in other times, if other traditional checks and balances still restrained the power of the executive, nobody would pay much attention to him. A statutory auditor is a highly specialised kind of accountant. His duties sound rather stolid and uninteresting: reporting to Parliament on how well the public's money is spent, in the public interest. It is not an heroic role, yet Baragwanath has become a symbol of stoicism, courage under fire, and understated integrity. His is the face of the new kind of hero: the principled public servant. ■

Maira Rayner is a lawyer and freelance journalist. She was Victorian Commissioner for Equal Opportunity.

OCCAM'S RAZOR IS UNDER THREAT. Not the ABC Radio science program, but the fourteenth century pronouncement of the Franciscan friar and early Oxford don, William of Occam, which has gone on to become one of the central tenets of practical science. And part of the challenge to the Razor's sway is being mounted from Australia.

William of Occam was a no-frills philosopher. He went straight for the simplest, most economical and most efficient, rational explanation. 'It is vain to do with more what can be done with fewer,' he wrote. And ever since, it has been accepted scientific orthodoxy, that of two competing hypotheses (which explain available evidence equally well), the simpler is to be preferred. In fact, what began as a rule of thumb has over the centuries become entrenched law.

One corollary of Occam's Razor is that it provides a mechanism for determining a 'right' answer. The result can be seen in the relentless drive for universal laws, such as a grand unified theory of physics or a single ultimate cause of diabetes. The power of the Razor ruled supreme until the complexity encountered in such fields as biology and computing, which developed rapidly after World War II, began to make Occam's adherents feel distinctly uncomfortable. Open revolt, however, has emerged only in the past few years, as researchers have begun to work the boundary between the two.

Biology was always complex at the level of organisms and species. But what struck scientists hard was the revelation of how astonishingly complex are interactions at the molecular level, the very place where reductionist researchers went looking for their universal laws. In fact, the permutations and combinations of molecular biology would have been too hard to handle but for the advent of computers. These machines thrive on complexity—doing calculations, taking measurements over and over again. But in solving one problem, computers created another, by generating masses of data. Again, they could come to the rescue, storing and sorting through all this information. But who was to instruct them as to what to look for?

Enter the Data Miner—an information-handler who uses computers to detect previously unsuspected inter-relationships and patterns in data. One such is Vladimir Brusic who works at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research in Melbourne. Trained as a biomedical engineer, he is now a leading light in the field of bioinformatics. He recently faced criticism from the referee of a paper he submitted for not using simplifying assumptions in his data-handling techniques: the crime of not wielding the Razor. Brusic remained firm: he did not think the simplifying assumptions appropriate. 'Computer scientists ... are always trying to make assumptions about data to simplify their task. But to understand the biology, it is important to retain its complexity.'

While biological systems are extremely complicated—many times more complex than anything in engineering—the problem of handling complexity is a general one. Earlier this year, Dr Geoff Webb, a reader in computing at Deakin University in Geelong, caused a stir worldwide with a paper in the US-based *Journal of Artificial Intelligence Research*. His work showed that in some situations, more complex explanations of the available evidence gave more accurate predictions and results than simpler ones.

'By using Occam's Razor, data miners are potentially missing much of the information in the data. Occam's Razor guides the user to look for simple explanations. But what good are simple explanations in a complex world?' Dr Webb says. If the simplest explanation is not necessarily 'the best', then what is? Could it be that there is no one 'right' answer out there? That the best answer depends on the context? Webb certainly thinks so. 'Many scientists regard science as looking for the correct model ... I think there are different models best suited to different purposes.'

Archimedes is relieved that these heretical views have so far been confined to the abstruse world of science. Just think of what havoc they could wreak in politics and religion if let loose among such simple, certain and efficient doctrines as economic rationalism and religious fundamentalism. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance scientific writer.

The way forward

On the day that the Native Title Amendment Bill passed through the Lower House, the day that Nugget Coombs died, Patrick Dodson and Frank Brennan came together in Melbourne, at St Ignatius Church, Richmond, to talk reconciliation.



Patrick Dodson—Chair, Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation:

‘I want to acknowledge the Kulin nations, on whose country—traditional country—this church and many other wonderful things have been built, and extend our appreciation to their descendants and to their forebears for this opportunity to meet and talk about things that are to do with the reconciliation of our spirits and the reconciliation of our humanity.

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has been a unique opportunity in this country: the parties in Parliament unanimously agreed to the legislation that set up the Council some six or seven years ago and provided to the Australian nation an opportunity, over a ten-year period, to try to come to terms with those things that have been the cause of discord and division, that have been the cause of misinterpretation, that have been the cause of hurt and frustration, and injustice. But [it is an opportunity] also to look to the future—how we might go forward into the next century as friends, as equals and as people with some pride in our effort at grappling with these complex, cross-cultural interpretations and understandings about each other. The Council also addresses the physical requirements, like health and housing, education and employment, so that the quality of life for indigenous people in this country is something about which we no longer cite reports highlighting the over-representation of the indigenous people on many of the social-indicator areas.

I think this country has responded well, generally, to the process of reconciliation. Cast your minds back to five or six years. Probably, for a lot of you here, the word “reconciliation” has a Catholic resonance, but for those for whom it doesn’t—and there are many in this country—it seemed a big type of concept, a concept that was about whether I, personally, wanted to do something in terms of reconciliation or not. It was a matter for me to make some choice. That’s still a strong view held by some of our political leaders— that this is just a matter of individual choice. That defies the history that we are gradually understanding better: the history of dispossession of the Aboriginal people; those policies that have led to the denial of their full citizenship of this country, and the legislation that denied that; the bureaucratic activity that lorded over and determined the direction of life for many Aboriginal people, which has probably gone on unknown to most



Australians; and those more heinous activities like the removal of children from their mothers, their families and their country.

These are not things of the past. As a child, I remember hiding under the scrub, watching the welfare chase two young people. They caught them, and they sent them to Croker Island.

And the past wasn't that far away, the past where there was fear generated by bureaucrats who, for whatever reason, believed that it was important for Aboriginal people not to speak their language, not to abide by their social customs, not to retain that extended family relationship, to discard most of their cultural and social value systems, and try and approximate to something that was often clothed as Christianity, Christian principles. There's something fundamentally wrong with that notion.

THE WAY FORWARD in the reconciliation process is fundamentally to reassess our notions of who the Aboriginal people are. And I don't mean simply how you identify Aboriginal people because that was part of the early history—the old stud book approach. So, while we have a desire to see equality, we have a desire to see justice, we have a desire that people enjoy the benefits of our society, but the indigenous

people are unique in this nation: they are the first Australians. And by virtue of that they are entitled—even though it's not recognised or accepted—to maintain their own cultural identity. And part of that cultural identity are their beliefs; their connection to land; their ability to hand on to their future generations their traditions and customs, interpretations and views of the world.

That's a fairly difficult matter for many of us, because we've grown up with the notion that people are the same, and therefore they ought to all conform to certain ways of going about things, and in a way that's true. In a society as complex as Australia, made up of the richness of so many cultures and histories from different nations, it is very important that those cultures are allowed to flourish, and influence, as they do, the fabric of our social and institutional life.

For the indigenous people, the reconciliation process is about how the nation can walk into the next century with pride in having resolved the causes of division and discord. Now, you'd have to be, not an optimist, but you'd have to have some faith in something other than politicians, if you believe that's going to happen in the next three years.

And that faith is in people like yourselves—in the Australian people who believe that we have come to a stage in our country where the nonsense of whether the pendulum has swung too far or not stands naked by the very facts of ongoing injustices to the indigenous people.

There is a real need for us to resolve the land issues, but those issues are not as horrendous or as dramatic as we were led to believe through some of the advertising we saw when the *Wik* judgment came down. The institutions of Australia, the courts and political institutions will always defend the majority values. It's very rare that the indigenous people do in fact have a victory. The only victory that we can all share in has been the 1967 referendum where, for the first time, this nation decided that it wanted to do something positive and constructive. Whatever our views about the referendum in terms of citizenship, it did give the Commonwealth power to pass laws for Aboriginal people. Now, 30 years onwards, we're now faced with the prospect that the momentum that went into creating the change to give the Commonwealth that power is capable of being used to the detriment of the indigenous people by virtue of the *Native Title Amendment Bill*.

*Kitchen negotiations:
From left, Paul Lane,
Fr. Frank Brennan,
Br. Jack Stamp (who
prepared the meal)
and Patrick Dodson.
Photographed in
St Ignatius Presbytery,
Richmond, by Bill Thomas.*

*'Imagine what it
feels like as one of
those Aboriginal
negotiators four
years on, when you
see the new Prime
Minister on
television, saying
that there is now a
veto exercisable
over 78 per cent of
the Australian
land mass.
It's a lie.
And it has to be
named as such.'*
—Frank Brennan

'We have major challenges in the reconciliation process. Remember that this Council is due for re-appointment, and some will not be re-appointed; those matters are to be decided by Cabinet ... It will be a question of course of the quality of those that are appointed whether they perceive the challenges to be integral and important to the future integrity of this nation or whether they simply pass them over as part of all that so-called rhetoric that belongs in the past.'

—Patrick Dodson

The road to reconciliation has those sorts of challenges. They are part of what we have to resolve. Reconciliation isn't a personal matter. It is about how we respond politically to those sorts of issues, particularly the resolution of the *Wik* and Native Title issue. And how it's resolved will send a message to indigenous peoples that either yes, there can be everlasting justice experienced in this country, or no, it is not possible in this country.

WE ARE ALSO FACED WITH THE QUESTION OF THOSE PEOPLE who were taken away. And whether we are capable of responding as a nation, and saying sorry to those families and those individuals whose lives have been disrupted and so changed. It's a real question for the reconciliation process, because if there's no apology, how do those people find peace within this Australia? How do they find peace in this country, when they feel that nothing good has ever happened to them?

The cuts to fiscal programs people can live with. From time to time those things are necessary, and we all have to tighten our belts. The \$400 million that has been taken off ATSIC over these next three years is creating its own kinds of problems, but people have to adjust to that. But the slur on people who work in those organisations—that they're misusing public funds, or that they're misappropriating them—is something that has become a mantra which denies the integrity and credibility of those who are genuine in trying to provide a service without adequate resources.

We have yet to face another challenge on the road to reconciliation, and that is the question of sacred sites, cultural heritage protection. There is a Federal Act that is subject to review, and there was a report written by Justice Evatt in relation to it. It is now in the process of being considered so that it too will become more workable and more responsive to the needs of developers and State Governments and everyone else—except those to whom the heritage is integrally connected, the indigenous people. That's a challenge that we've yet to face. And in the wake of the Hindmarsh Bridge comments, and the ridiculing of people's beliefs, there is something that we, if we believe and expect people to respect our views, have to learn about indigenous peoples' beliefs, their spirituality and their religious practices, and how we can cooperate to ensure that development and peoples' cultural identity and their places can sit together.

We have major challenges in the reconciliation process. Remember that this Council is due for re-appointment, and some will not be re-appointed; those matters are to be decided by Cabinet and whether the current membership remains or not, those challenges will still be there before us. It will be a question of course of the quality of those that are appointed whether they perceive the challenges to be integral and important to the future integrity of this nation or whether they simply pass them over as part of all that so-called rhetoric that belongs in the past.

There is a matter that the Council is charged with under the Act and that is, whether we as a nation are capable of entering into some kind of agreement. People have had all sorts of words for this: whether it's a document, whether it's a treaty, whether it's some kind of memorandum. And contract law is part and parcel of many things in this country. But when it comes to indigenous people entering into an agreement we seem to find it difficult to accept their capacity to negotiate such a deal with us, or their very right to negotiate.

THAT MATTER IS SOMETHING THAT WE WILL HAVE TO CONSIDER in these next three years: whether we as a nation, as we get to the turn of this century, are capable of formulating a set of words that contain some principles that set out the nature of our relationship and our understandings. Not that it creates a separate nation, but something that in fact poses obligations on all sides, as well as acknowledgements of those rights that go beyond simple citizenship rights; that come from the very culture and society of the indigenous people, and that we as Australians are prepared to accept, and make room for within the complexity of our democracy. That's a very big ask: within three years to come up with a consensual position across this nation to a set of words that tries to encapsulate and symbolise how we might go into the future, recognising the terrible things of the past, hopefully to have done with them, put them away, or dealt with them satisfactorily, or at least having gone down the path of resolving them to a better degree than we have in the past. That's an onus that the Council has to carry. It has to report to the Parliament about its consultations and deliberations at some stage over these next three years.

Remember that the vision of the Council is a vision that talks about a united Australia, that respects this land of ours, values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and provides justice and equity for all. And to make that real and to try and encapsulate that in a document is going to require a lot of hard work: intellectual work, works in schools, works in clubs, for taxi drivers, people on the streets, football clubs, wherever they are. And there are many, many Australians who have taken up the challenge of reconciliation, who have identified issues that are

crucial and important at their regional and local areas but who are also not unmindful of those national issues that go to the very heart of our integrity and pride as a nation of people. And it's those people and, I hope, many others, who will need to sustain this process beyond the formal three-year period. Because if you simply take any one of those issues that I've highlighted as matters on the road beyond here, they are complex and difficult: the Native Title issue; the cultural heritage matters; future funding and bench-marking to get better outcomes for public outlays; the future of cultural heritage; the document issues. I'm sure we have the ability to grapple with them and to find ways through them. But none of them will ever get off the ground in any satisfactory way unless people, like yourselves and others, are prepared to let our political leaders know when you are dissatisfied with them. And that requires you to understand some of the information that underpins these issues.

But we are, I believe, at the point where many Australians want to go into the next century feeling that we've put ourselves to the test, as it were, we've tried our bit to contribute. But we must be very clear that there are some people who would dash it to the ground; there are some people who would turn it into something else. And that is what we have to be vigilant about. We have to work through those complex issues, we have to build relationships where we can recognise friendship, warmth, where we get a sense of belonging, where indigenous people can see the window of opportunity through the eyes and hearts of many good non-aboriginal people in this country, as I've had those opportunities from many, many non-aboriginal people that I've met. And I regret today the passing of Nugget Coombs as one of those great Australians, who provided, in his own way, leadership, not only on the macro-stage of Australia, but in the early periods when we were trying to work out governments and, lobby them and find ways of dealing with them.

There are many Australians in that category and that should not be forgotten. But there are some people who wish to turn back the progress and the development and the direction that has been developed in the last 30 years in this country. They want to take us back to the simple, simplicity of the "assimilationist" philosophy, and simply say we're all the same, there's nothing unique about the indigenous people. Well—that's been the message for 200 years, and it hasn't advanced our relationship. I suggest it's wrong and it's outmoded. We have to find a way where the indigenous people are able to feel and understand that their right to their cultural identity is something we, as Australians, are prepared to make a place for.' ■



FRANK BRENNAN SJ, Director of Uniya, the Jesuit Centre for Social Justice.

'It's a wonderful privilege and a great moment of reconciliation for an Australian Jesuit to share the sanctuary of this church with Patrick Dodson.

Reconciliation, I think, is a difficult business because people like Pat are intimately familiar with our culture and religious traditions, far more than any of us will ever pretend to be with the cultures and religious traditions of his people. And so, it's relatively simple to utter the words of respect in acknowledging the Kulin people, but we know that from people like myself it rings a little more hollow that it does from someone like Patrick Dodson.

I last saw Pat ten days ago, at a place called Mowanjum, outside Derby up in the Kimberleys. We were there to honour an old man and have the funeral rites of a well-known Ngarinyin man who, since his death, can be known simply as the name, Mowaljarlai. At that funeral there were many tributes that came from all over the world—he'd recently returned from Paris where he had met with archæologists about the new cave paintings that had been discovered there in France.

At a funeral in a remote part of Australia like that, it all takes a few days—getting there, getting away, waiting for planes, sitting around and having barbecues. It allows plenty of time to tell great stories about the deceased. The favourite reconciliation story I heard about Mowaljarlai over these days, went like this: recently under the intricate processes of the *Native Title Act*, a miner by the name of Joseph Gutnik, who lives here in Melbourne, was wanting to use an expedited procedure to get access to the Ngarinyin lands in order to engage in exploration. As the barbecue story had it, the elders for Mowaljarlai and his mob explained that there was probably very little

that could be done. Mowaljarlai, with his universal wisdom, sat around the camp fire one night, and said to people, tell me about this man, Gutnik. He was given some details, but then he asked, This fellow Gutnik, is he a religious man? And he was told that indeed he was a religious man. And he asked for details about his religion. And when details about his religion were given, Mowaljarlai observed that, with particular relation to men, there were some common practices between the two religions. So Mowaljarlai thought the best thing to do would be to go and see this Mr Gutnik. He asked where he lived, when told that it was in Melbourne, he said that he would go to Melbourne and see Mr Gutnik. He had the good fortune to be accompanied by an SBS television crew, I'm told.

He arrived at the office, so the barbeque story has it, of Mr Gutnik, and said that he would like to see Mr Gutnik. And he was politely informed by the secretary that an appointment would be necessary. Mowaljarlai indicated that he understood what appointments were about, but indicated that, as he understood that Mr Gutnik actually wanted to come and mine on his land, Mr Gutnik would also know what appointments were about. Mowaljarlai looked around, I am told, and observed that the seating was very adequate, and he had plenty of time to wait because he had come a long way. And so he would wait until an appointment could be arranged.

The end of the story has it, that no expedited procedure under the *Native Title Act* was utilised, and that to this day, no new exploration grants have been granted over Mowaljarlai's land.

We can engage in whatever we like about 'white fella' legal processes, but I think Mowaljarlai was onto something. It was about a meeting of people who come together in respect, with recognition, with a sense of the different perspectives of cultures and traditions.

That's the good news; the warm, fuzzy news about reconciliation.

I'VE JUST RETURNED FROM PROBABLY THE MOST HARROWING FIVE DAYS I have spent in 15 years of this work. I've been visiting salubrious places in Australia like Walgett, Lightning Ridge, Brewarrina, and Bourke, meeting with pastoralists the length and breadth of the Western Lands area of New South Wales.

Now I've been forewarned; I've already got into trouble for saying that it's easy for Victorians to talk about reconciliation in the wake of *Wik*. I'm fairly unapologetic because it *is* easy for Victorians to talk about reconciliation in the wake of *Wik*. In places like the Western Lands area of NSW this land is a tinderbox. Reconciliation is a dirty word. People do not come to meetings like this and sit silently and patiently and say, "what can we learn?" People are very afraid. People are full of mistrust. The battle-lines are drawn. It is said, and this is no parodying of it, that the main streets are now the domain of the young Aboriginal delinquents and that the pastoral properties are the domain of the white pastoralists. And that any attempt by Canberra, or Sydney or well-meaning Victorians to change that will be greeted with everything but acceptance.

And what we see in this part of Australia at the moment, at this time in our history, is that, indeed, mistrust is at an all-time high. I have met with probably a couple of hundred pastoralists over the past five days. In those days I have met people who feel completely alienated and disempowered, not only from politicians and from lawyers but also from churches—they feel completely cut-off, and misunderstood in the city. This is not to argue a case for the pastoralists over against the Aborigines, but it is to say that reconciliation is a very vexed question when it comes to a conflict of rights; when we're trying to look at the appropriate balance, not just between mistrust and trust, but between certainty and uncertainty. And I'd venture to suggest that there are no easy answers.

But there are a few things that have to be insisted upon: it has to be seen now as fundamental, as Patrick Dodson has put before us, that where common law rights have been recognised by the highest court in the land then it is not for any parliament to play around with them. The principle of non-extinguishment has to be firmly adhered to. Also those rights have to be given the same protection as the rights of any other persons, and in particular, there should not be any discrimination on the basis of race.

Now in applying those principles of non-extinguishment, and non-discrimination, there may be a need for some compromise, there may be a need for some simplicity and for some certainty. But it cannot be simply at the cost of Aboriginal Australians. Those days are gone forever. And so, when it is proposed in legislation that, for example, a pastoralist might voluntarily surrender their pastoral lease to a state government, and then the pastoralist might request a good state government to compulsorily acquire the native title rights of the Aborigines and then the state government might then grant to the pastoralist a right of exclusive possession, it has to be said, whatever the social or political problems in the Western District of NSW, that is a racially discriminatory solution.

And if it's *not*, then it has to be conceded—not only in theory but also in practice—that it should be equally possible for the Aboriginal native title holders to approach a friendly state government and say, "We will voluntarily surrender our native title rights. We would now like you to compulsorily acquire the pastoral lease, then issue us with a freehold title giving us, the native title holders, a right of exclusive possession."

Of course, we've never heard that from Aboriginal Australia. Not just because they don't have the power, but they also have the respect for those who are pastoralists, and others in this community who have to coexist in order that all might thrive.

WHEN WE COME THEN TO THE VEXED ISSUE of the relationship between Aborigines and mining companies, we have to remember that the most that Aborigines were granted in 1993 was not a veto—they wanted a veto over development on their land. Sir Edward Woodward said in 1974 that to deny them a veto over development on their land was to deny the development of their land rights. It was Prime Minister Keating who said, "I won't give you a veto, I'll give you a right to negotiate: six months to talk about it. If you don't reach agreement it goes to independent arbitration; if the independent arbitrator agrees with the Aborigines, the State Minister will have the power to override that decision in the state interest."

And Aboriginal Australia accepted that. They said that that was a decent thing. That in the national interest they would wear that even though it was nothing like a veto.

Imagine what it feels like as one of those Aboriginal negotiators four years on, when you see the new Prime Minister on television, saying that there is now a veto exercisable over 78 per cent of the Australian land mass. It's a lie. And it has to be named as such.

There are then other complex measures with the forthcoming legislation where all parties concede that there is a need for greater simplicity and certainty. But for that to be done there's got to be a spirit of trust, an accommodation, a spirit of negotiation, particularly with those who are most affected: Aboriginal Australians.

Let me come to one other issue which highlights that. I returned to my office in Sydney yesterday after that trip through the Western Lands. Waiting for me was a letter from Senator Herron, the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. I, a white Australian, had spent some months, I *hope* in a fairly conciliatory tone, suggesting particularly to Aboriginal leaders, that some of the criticisms of the Federal

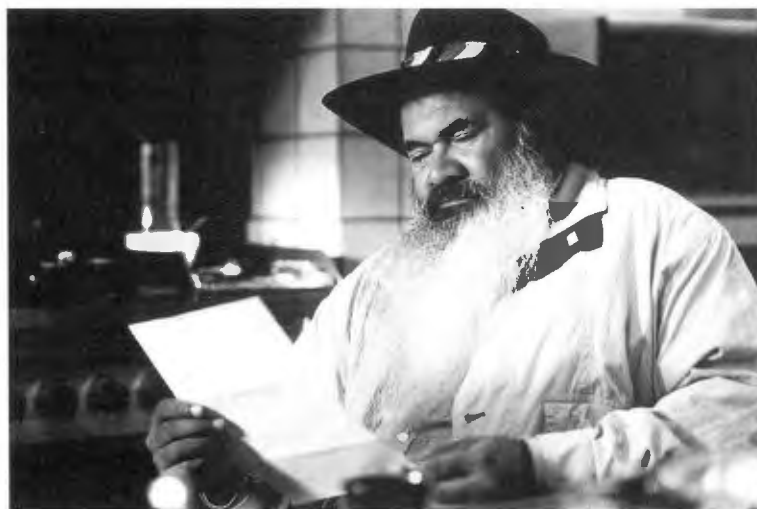
Government for its failure to apologise for the stolen generation might be a little too rushed.

THE ARGUMENT WHICH I SOUGHT TO PUT was simply this: the Federal Government, when they receive reports of this kind, do not make a response except to Parliament, and they don't respond to Parliament until they have received feedback from all the relevant government departments and the state governments in question. I was fortified in this view by the expression of views by the government over time that it was open to all options proposed by Commissioner Michael Dodson and Sir Ronald Wilson—except that of financial compensation.

I had written what I regard as a fairly conciliatory letter to the Prime Minister on August 5, on this occasion, commending him for the personal apology which he tendered to Aboriginal Australia at the Reconciliation Convention in May. And you will recall that Sir William Dean, the Governor-General had done the same. Since then we have seen State Parliaments pass similar resolutions of national apology, and even here in Victoria, Premier Kennett spear-headed such an apology in this Parliament.

Senator Herron wrote to me:

"The Prime Minister acknowledges and thanks you for your support for his personal apology to indigenous people affected by past practices of separating indigenous children from their families. However, the government does not support an official national apology. Such an apology could imply that present generations are in some way responsible and accountable for the actions of earlier generations; actions that were sanctioned by the laws of the time and that were believed to be in the best interests of the children concerned."



'Can you imagine what it feels like as a white Australian involved in these issues to have received a letter like this and sit down this afternoon over a cup of afternoon tea in the Richmond presbytery, and to bring it to the attention of one of the most respected Aboriginal

leaders in the country, and to learn that the Aboriginal leadership hasn't been informed of this policy position by the Australian Government?'

—Frank Brennan

'There are some people who wish to turn back the progress ... and the direction that has been developed in the last 30 years in this country. They want to take us back to the simple, simplicity of the "assimilationist" philosophy, and say we're all the same, there's nothing unique about the indigenous

A few questions come readily to mind. The first is this: if they are the concerns that could be implied from a parliamentary apology, why can't they be implied from a personal apology by the Prime Minister? Why can't they be implied by a personal apology by the Governor-General? Why can't they be implied by an apology by the State Parliaments which, after all, carried the responsibilities for these policies, and not the national Parliament, up until 1967? And really, is that the concern? Or, is there something else? Are these the things which are thought to be implied or, is there something else which is really at play? It is said by many including this government, that to apologise in this way is something that is not true to what we are about. As Senator Herron has said, "such an apology could imply that present generation are in some way responsible and accountable for the actions of earlier generations." I wonder whether it is that simple.

Let me give an example: Within the last 18 months I was privileged briefly to visit Assisi, and I saw that splendid Basilica there, part of which is now in ruins as a result of the recent earthquakes. And I tried to imagine to myself the other day, if I was visiting Assisi at the time when that happened, and I ran into one of the Franciscan monks or one of the locals from Assisi, I don't think I'd be stretching things too far to say to them, "I'm sorry". And in saying I'm sorry, I don't think that any of them would take it that I was making a statement that I was in some way responsible and accountable for what had occurred. Though there are some members of this government who might think that. But to make an apology in those circumstances, of course, requires some effort to take a stand in solidarity. It requires some fidelity to standing in solidarity with those who are suffering the impact of past events, and in taking that stand in solidarity, in feeling something of the pain, to say sorry. I readily concede to members of our Federal Government that they are not yet in that situation, but I cannot accept the reasons that are given.

THERE'S A FURTHER POINT THAT I'D MAKE ABOUT RECONCILIATION. Can you imagine what it feels like as a white Australian involved in these issues to have received a letter like this and sit down this afternoon over a cup of afternoon tea in the Richmond presbytery, and to bring it to the attention of one of the most respected Aboriginal leaders in the country, and to learn that the Aboriginal leadership hasn't been informed of this policy position by the Australian Government? No, this information is to be disclosed to people like Frank Brennan, but not to Aboriginal leaders like Patrick Dodson. That I find appalling. And it's that sort of attitude which militates against a move towards real reconciliation.

We know that reconciliation is not simply a task for government; it's a task for ourselves. And for those of us who do live in the comfort of the cities, we have to admit that there is a lot of trouble out there in the bush and that *Wik* does propose to us major challenges as a nation. But if we are to move from mistrust to trust, from uncertainty to certainty, it is essential that the voice of Aboriginal Australia be heard; that it be heard with respect, with recognition, that there be a commitment to justice. And if that is denied, either in terms of process or of outcomes, we will be a nation which is radically unreconciled. And that is something that which will rebound, not only to the disadvantage of indigenous Australians, it will rebound to the

disadvantage of us, who happen to live in the convenience of the cities and it will also rebound to the disadvantage of those white pastoralists, who are presently concerned about their well-being, in terms of their family homes, their businesses and their future.

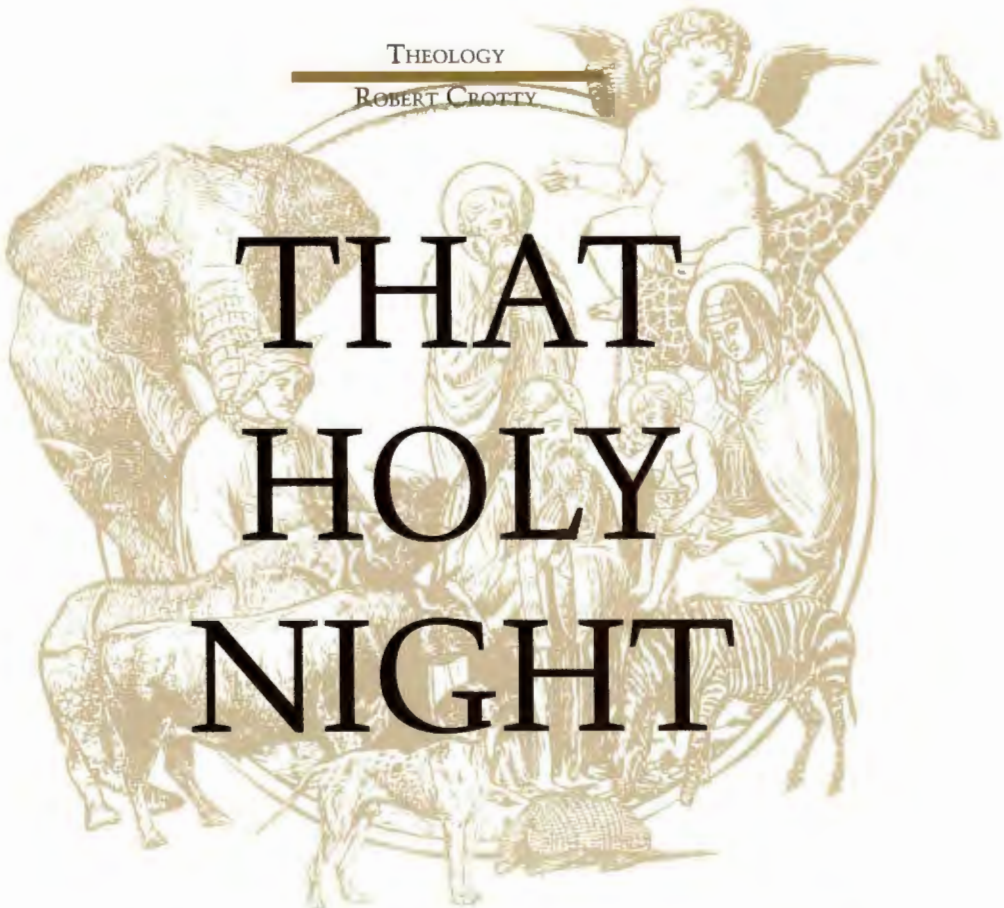
Reconciliation is therefore, a national task as well as a personal commitment. And in the month ahead, as the country wrestles with the amendments to the *Wik* legislation, if we in any way deviate from the principles of non-extinguishment and non-discrimination, we will stand condemned. Symbols alone will count for nothing, but without those symbols and without due process, we will have abandoned the process of a true reconciliation for the future. ■

This is an edited transcript of the second *Eureka Street* Talk at Richmond on the Hill, given on October 29, as part of a series jointly sponsored by the magazine and the Jesuit community at the Parish of St Ignatius, Richmond, Victoria.

people. Well—that's been the message for 200 years, and it hasn't advanced our relationship.'

—Patrick Dodson





THAT HOLY NIGHT

THE CHRISTMAS SCENE WITH ITS CRIB and standard figures is only too familiar. It recounts visually that on December 25 of the year 1 AD¹, a child was born of a virgin mother, with his rather aged foster father in attendance, in a cave which was being used as a stable in the town of Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph are depicted in travelling garb since they have come to Bethlehem from their home in Nazareth. The journey is in response to a decree of the emperor Augustus, requiring a census of the whole world. Joseph belonged to the family of David, and Bethlehem had been the birthplace of David.

So it was that Joseph had come to Bethlehem to register in the census despite Mary's advanced pregnancy. The birth takes place at night in the cave and the child is placed in a manger. Along side them are an ox and an ass. Shepherds, alerted by an angel, come to visit the new-born child. Also, three wise men, kings from the East—named Melchior, Gaspar and Balthasar—arrive, following a mysterious star. They have brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh for the child. They are usually seated on camels and wear kingly crowns.

Despite the tranquillity of the night a sombre cloud hangs over the scene, since the onlooker knows that soon Herod, the king of Israel, who had questioned the three wise men and ordered them to report back to him after they had discovered the child's whereabouts, is about to organise a mass slaughter of young children in Bethlehem.

This Christmas scene, replete with its pictorial information, will soon be erected in Christian churches, civic centres and schools. It will adorn a multitude of cards and posters. Most people assume that the scene reflects the Christmas story as told in the Christian gospels. But how much of the above information is really in the official or canonical gospels? Frankly, not much. Any astute reader of the gospel stories could ascertain that they do not contain many of the details that are in a Christmas scene.

What Christmas details are in the gospel?

We can take the items of the Christmas scene that are not found in the biblical narrative one by one. First, only the gospels of Matthew and Luke have an account of Jesus' birth. Mark's gospel begins with Jesus in his prime and John begins with a theological hymn. The dearth of knowledge about Jesus' birth and early years was filled by the apocryphal ('hidden') infancy gospels. These were never accepted as official documents by the orthodox church, but they had a wide influence particularly when stories from them were collected by Jacapone da Voragine into a thirteenth century document called *The Golden Legend*. Scholars are in broad agreement that the gospels of Matthew and Luke (the identity of the two authors is most uncertain but I will continue to refer to them as 'Matthew' and 'Luke' for convenience) can be dated to a period between 70-80 AD, some forty to fifty years after the death of Jesus, a relatively long period for eyewitness accounts of the birth and infancy to have survived.

To begin with, the gospels do not mention a cave, nor even a stable. Luke does refer to the child being laid in a 'manger'. Now the Greek word *phatne*, which we translate into English by 'manger', means the stall where animals were tied up for feeding or the trough for feeding. It could be a movable container or a cavity in the rock. It might, of course, be implied that if there was a manger, it would very likely have been in a stable. But no stable is mentioned explicitly in Luke or Matthew.

It was the *Protoevangelium of James*, written sometime before 200 AD, which described a presumed stable in more detail. The stable was, this text claimed, a cave: 'He [Joseph] found a cave and brought her [Mary] into it.' Ever since, depictions of the scene have included a cave, based on the apocryphal writing.

A significant detail in Luke's gospel was that the child was placed in the manger (whatever that was because, as the usual

translation goes, 'there was no room in the inn'. But the Greek of Luke does not mention any 'inn'. The text reads that 'there was no place in the lodgings'. 'Lodgings' is not necessarily an inn. It describes literally the place where travellers would 'lay down' their baggage, a caravanserai. It is most likely that Luke's gospel is relating that either because of lack of space or because of decorum, Joseph and Mary did not stay in the caravanserai with the birth imminent. They went elsewhere, where there was a manger.

What of the animals—the ox and the ass? They do not rate a mention in the gospels. It might be argued that if there was a stable to go with the manger then most likely there would have been animals to go with the stable. That is guesswork and not gospel story. The ox and the ass actually derived from early Christians meditating on the text of Isaiah 1:3 and searching for a Christian meaning:

The ox knows its owner,
and the ass its master's crib;
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand.

It seemed to these early Christians that, if there were presumed animals in the presumed stable, they must have been an ox and an ass, since Isaiah seemed to have prophesied as much centuries before. Hence, the Christmas scene acquired a cave that served as a stable with an ox and an ass who fed from a manger (the sole detail recorded in the official gospels).

Then in 325 AD Constantine the Great had a large basilica constructed over some caves in the Bethlehem area and authoritatively identified one of them as the birth stable of Jesus. This cave under the Basilica of the Nativity is still venerated by throngs of pilgrims today. Any further controversy over the birthplace of Jesus was stifled by the imperial identification. But there is a further complication about the child's birth place. Matthew's gospels makes no mention of a manger. He tells us that the wise men came to visit Jesus in a 'house'.

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother. (Matthew 2:10-11)

Matthew's gospel presumes that the child was born in Joseph's house which stood in Bethlehem. If we only had Matthew's gospel to go by, there would be no reference to any previous residence in Nazareth—Joseph and Mary had always lived in Bethlehem and there the child was born, in their own home. It is only Luke who refers to the journey from Nazareth.

When we return to the text of the gospels, we find Mary is centre stage. Both Matthew and Luke claim that the conception of Jesus was wondrous in that Mary was a virgin at the time. Actually they both speak of a virginal conception, not a virginal birth which would normally mean that her hymen was not ruptured. The *Gospel of Mary* (written during the second century AD) would go further than Matthew or Luke and state that Mary had taken a vow of perpetual virginity. The child was conceived without sex and thereafter Mary did not have any sexual relations.

By the time of the *Protoevangelium of James* the perpetual virginity of Mary has been explained further. The text makes Joseph into an old man, a guardian rather than a partner of Mary, his

age presumably putting him beyond sexual desire. Hence we have a Joseph depicted with long beard and stooping gait.

Disconcertingly, the gospels do not seem to back up the perpetual virginity of Mary since they mention that Jesus had three brothers and some sisters. Mark names the brothers as James, Joses, Judas and Simon although he allows his 'sisters' to remain nameless. The *Protoevangelium of James* and other Christian writers solved this dilemma by making the 'brothers and sisters; into children of Joseph by an earlier marriage. As Joseph, in the *Protoevangelium*, says to the angel who informs him of the impending birth:

I am an old man, and have children, but she is young, and I fear lest I should appear ridiculous in Israel. (8.13)

BY THE TIME OF THE SIXTH CENTURY document, the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, the familiar Christmas story's details were taking shape. Jesus was born in a cave, which was used as a stable, watched over by an ox and an ass. The Virgin Mary, who would remain ever a virgin, was attended by two midwives. One of the two, who was not Jewish, dared to test with her hand to see whether physically Mary was still a virgin. Her hand withered as a punishment for such audacity.

What of the date of the birth? Is the night of December 25 of the year 1 AD mentioned in the gospels? There are no indications of the time of Jesus' birth in the gospels unfortunately, neither time of day nor date.

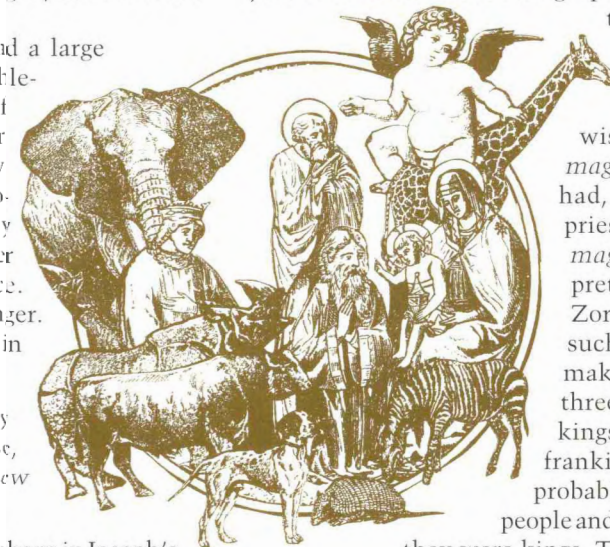
Matthew does mention the wise men from the East, who he calls *magoi*. The Greek historian Herodotus had, centuries earlier, described a priestly caste of the Medes, also called *magoi*, who had the ability to interpret dreams. They would have been Zoroastrians. Perhaps Matthew had such people in mind. However, he makes no mention that there were three of them nor does he call them kings. He describes their gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Three gifts probably gave rise to the notion of three people and the gift of gold may have suggested they were kings. They were later put on camels.

The three kings were given names and a personal dossier in the *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy*, a document of uncertain date: Melchior was old and came from Persia; Gaspar was young and came from Arabia; Balthasar was in his prime and came from India. But all these were details added much later, none of them are found in the gospel accounts.

What really happened?

Having excised the extraneous items that later tradition added to the gospels we are left with the two stark stories of Matthew and Luke and it is now relevant to ask what is historically reliable in them. Frankly, again, not much. That should not be a surprise either. Christian ministers in the mainstream denominations have long known from their theological studies that the details in Matthew and Luke concerning Jesus' birth and infancy were historically unreliable.

In the first place when we put the two gospel stories of Matthew and Luke side by side there is a startling result: the stories simply



do not tell the same tale. They contradict each other and defy harmonisation. We can align them in this way:

MATTHEW	LUKE
Joseph and Mary originally live in a house in Bethlehem	Joseph and Mary originally live in Nazareth
The child is born to a virgin mother in the house	They come to Bethlehem because of a world census ordered by the Romans
Wise men, bearing gifts, arrive following a star. In Jerusalem they had met Herod.	The child is born to a virgin mother and laid in a manger
The wise men thwart Herod's plan to find Jesus	Angels reveal his birth to shepherds
Joseph and Mary flee with the child to Egypt	The child is circumcised and then taken to Jerusalem
Herod slaughters children in Bethlehem	Jesus is recognised as the messiah by Simeon and Anna
Joseph, Mary and Jesus return from Egypt	
Joseph and Mary settle in Nazareth because they fear Archelaus, son of Herod.	Joseph and Mary return home to Nazareth.

It is quite clear that there are two different stories here with minimal overlap. The only common links are that the child was born of a virgin mother in Bethlehem and the family later lived in Nazareth.

WHAT COULD AN HISTORIAN CONCLUDE from the narratives in the two gospels? As one I would not like to be given the brief to defend any aspect of either Matthew or Luke's story apart from the fact that Jesus was actually born somewhere in Palestine around the beginning of the first century AD. I will examine the other details.

We begin with the date of Jesus' birth. Because Luke 3:23 tells us that Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his public ministry and Luke 3:1 tells us that this took place in the fifteenth year of the emperor Tiberius, early Christian authors consequently rejoiced over having one certain date. Tiberius' fifteenth year was 782 AUC in the old Roman calendar. So 782 minus thirty years gave 752 which was made 1 *Anno Domini*, 'the first year of the Lord', in a new Christianised calendar devised by the scholarly monk, Dionysius Exiguus, in the sixth century.

But making 752 equal to 1 AD creates a new problem since Matthew's gospel relates Jesus' birth to Herod the Great, who slaughtered the innocent children in Bethlehem and died while the family were in Egypt. By other means we know that he died in 748 AUC or 4 BC by this new reckoning. He could not have played the part that Matthew ascribes to him in his gospel since he had departed this life prior to the birth of Jesus.

Luke had given a world-wide census during the governorship of Quirinius as the reason for Joseph and Mary travelling to Bethlehem. Can it be dated? There is no evidence that the Roman emperors ever performed such a census. When Quirinius was appointed governor of the Palestinian area, he did hold a census but only in Judea, not Galilee, and that was in the year 6-7 AD. Any year assigned to the birth of Jesus is an educated and approximate guess.

What of the precise 25 December date? The first time there is any record of the birth of Jesus being celebrated on this day was in 336 AD, a long time after the events. December 25 was the Roman solstice. It was also the Roman feast of *Sol Invictus*, the Unconquered Sun god of the Romans. When in 313 AD Constantine the Great declared that Christianity was a legitimate religion, it gradually began to take over Roman customs and festivals. By the end of the fourth century Christianity would become the sole legitimate religion in the empire. By that time many Christian churches (certainly not all since many churches in the East continued an ancient practice of acknowledging his birth on January 6) were celebrating the feast of Jesus' birth on December 25, thus ousting *Sol Invictus*.

In short, I would have very serious doubts about the year 1 AD for the birth of Jesus; I would discount 25 December completely and, despite 'Silent Night', there is no evidence of any time of day for the birth. It was another apocryphal gospel that informed the world that the birth took place 'after sunset'.

But perhaps the most contentious historical issue in the Christmas story is the virginity of Mary. The virgin birth or virginal conception in both Matthew and Luke is dependent on a misinterpretation of Isaiah 7.14 and the need Christians had to defend the messianic claim made for Jesus.

Christians too readily presume that all Jews around the time of Jesus were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the messiah (a Hebrew word meaning 'the anointed one', *christos* or Christ in Greek) who would gather the Jewish people together and lead them to a liberated life. They often presume, too, that Jews expected a divine messiah. Both presumptions are ill founded. Some Jews doubtless expected a messiah; others expected a number of messiahs; others expected a undefined divine intervention which was not at all explicit in its details. No Jew of that time was capable of thinking in terms of a divine-human messiah.

The early Christians, who were of course Jews, made it clear that Jesus was the messiah or *christos* (hence 'Jesus Christ'), and certainly felt the need to prove from the Hebrew Scriptures that a specific messiah had been foretold and that Jesus fulfilled all the criteria. Hence, they made use of the Isaiah text which Matthew actually quotes:

A virgin (*parthenos* in Matthew's Greek; '*alma*' in Isaiah's Hebrew) shall conceive and give birth to a son and his name shall be called Immanuel.

The text of the Hebrew Scriptures usually used by the early Christians was in Greek and in that language *parthenos* meant a physical 'virgin'. But the original text of Isaiah was in Hebrew and its text stated that an '*alma* shall conceive'. Now an '*alma*' is a 'young woman', who of course might or might not be a virgin. In the original context of the saying, Isaiah was almost certainly referring to one of the pregnant wives of the eighth century BC king of

Jerusalem, Ahaz. Her giving birth, the prophet was saying, would be a sign of hope to the Israelite nation then under dire threat.

'Alma was later mistranslated as *parthenos* when the Greek text was produced some two centuries before Christian times and it seems that there were some Jews who then pointed to the fact that the new times, when Israel would find its freedom, would be ushered in by a messiah who would be born of a virgin. Both Matthew and Luke have incorporated into their birth stories an established Christian tradition that Jesus was born of a virgin and consequently had a claim to being the messiah. It needs to be said that neither can be presumed to be interested in the biology of virgin births; their interest was in establishing Jesus as the messiah of Israel.

But not only was the messiah of Israel expected, by some at least, to be born of a virgin. He was also expected to come from Bethlehem, the birth place of David, king of Israel. David, the exemplary king of Israel and therefore the 'anointed one' or messiah *par excellence*, was regarded by many Jews at the first of all the great deliverers of the people. It seems that there was an established opinion that any messiah would have to come from the line of David. Another prophetic text, this time from Micah, was interpreted as indicating that the messiah would actually come from David's birthplace in Bethlehem:

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
From you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days. (5.2)

The location of the birth of Bethlehem could well have been motivated by the Christian need to substantiate a Davidic lineage for Jesus. Matthew's story has Joseph and Mary living in Bethlehem; Luke's story invokes a 'world census' to bring them there. We noted above that no such census was ever recorded and even when the Romans did have a local census there was no requirement to return to an ancestral home, which would have had no practical purpose for them. Taking into account the Christian agenda of trying to 'prove' that Jesus was the Davidic messiah and the lack of sources available to Matthew and Luke, the historian in me would wager that Jesus was conceived in the normal way by two Jewish parents, named Joseph and Mary, and born around 4 BC in Nazareth not in Bethlehem.

What of Matthew's star which guided the wise men? Despite valiant attempts to identify it, no convincing astronomical evidence can identify any remarkable 'star' around that time: Halley's comet, a supernova and a planetary conjunction have all been tried. There is no historical or astronomical evidence to substantiate the wonder but, as will be shown below, every reason to believe that Matthew invented the star for the legitimate purposes of his story.

Nor is there corroborating evidence for any mass slaughter of Jewish children in Bethlehem under Herod the Great. The Jewish historian of the first century, Josephus, went out of his way to denigrate Herod the Great and gave particulars of his brutality. He mentions no wanton slaughter of children in Bethlehem, surely one of the most monstrous crimes of all time. I doubt

its historicity. The historian is, as historians should be, quite sceptical. But that is not the end of the matter. There are other truths beyond historical truth. What do Matthew and Luke's stories tell us as *stories*?

Matthew and Luke as stories

As historical sources the Matthew and Luke stories are practically worthless. But they are brilliant and dynamic stories which have been grossly devalued because readers, especially Christian readers, have treated them as history rather than Christian drama.

Instead of expecting then not finding history, Christians should have read the stories in Matthew and Luke as stories. For too long we Westerners have imbibed the Enlightenment idea that only history and science convey real meaning. Stories too can be very meaningful.

If we take the gospel story of Luke first, it can be shown that he drew on story material in circulation in early Christian circles. He manipulated the material very cleverly to demonstrate that there has been an orderly change-over from one group, that of the mainstream Jewish people of Jesus' time, to the Christian group, which was also Jewish. He did so by comparing and contrasting the births and infancies of John the Baptist, representing the Jewish people of Jesus' time and Jesus, the representative of the Jewish people who would eventually become Christian.

THIS 'CHANGE-OVER' MUST BE CAREFULLY UNDERSTOOD. The idea that a Christian church immediately supplanted or replaced the Jewish synagogue is to read back too much into the story. 'Christianity' in the first century was one form of Judaism. It was a Judaism that was revitalised in the eyes of followers of the dead Jesus. The purpose and direction of Judaism, from their perspective, had been re-envisioned. The emergence of 'Christianity' was much like the beginning of the Protestant churches of the Christian Reformation in the sixteenth century. The Reformers did not cease to claim to be Christians, they simply saw themselves as reformed and renewed Christians.

Luke's sacred story

Luke laid out his material into two corresponding narratives. It should be noted that, in other gospel passages, John the Baptist does not seem to know Jesus or the claims he made despite Luke's image of them as cousins. That relationship is historically doubtful. This is how Luke's structure looks:

A. TWO ANNOUNCEMENTS 1:5-56

1. Announcement of birth of John 1:5-25

An angel appears to Zechariah and announces that he and Elizabeth are to have a child, wondrously conceived since they are both aged. Zechariah is afraid.

2. Announcement of birth of Jesus 1:26-38

An angel appears to Mary and announces that she is to have a child, wondrously conceived since she is a virgin. Mary is afraid.

3. The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth 1:39-56

The two children meet while still in their mother's wombs.

B. TWO BIRTHS AND CIRCUMCISIONS

1. Birth and circumcision of John 1:57-2:40

There is rejoicing over the birth of John the Baptist. He is circumcised and it is revealed that he will be a prophet. A hymn proclaims his greatness.

2. Birth and circumcision of Jesus 2:1-40

There is rejoicing over the birth of Jesus. He is circumcised and it is revealed that he will be a prophet. A hymn proclaims his greatness.

3. Jesus enters the Temple 2:41-52

Jesus the messiah undertakes his work.

Luke's description of the birth and beginnings of Jesus is not historically preoccupied. He did not intend to teach history. He wanted to convey a complex theological message: John the Baptist is Judaism as it was, while Jesus is renewed Judaism (or Christianity), which only makes sense if you happen to be Christian.

Matthew's sacred story

We can compare this Lukan literary construct with the corresponding infancy story in the gospel of Matthew.

1. Birth of Jesus 1:18-25

prophecy in 1:23—Jesus is given the name of *Immanuel*

2. Coming of the wise men 2:1-12

prophecy in 2:6—Jesus will be born in David's Bethlehem

3. Flight in to Egypt 2:13-15

prophecy in 2:15—God calls his son from Egypt

4. Slaughter of the children of Bethlehem 2:16-18

prophecy in 2:18—Rachel weeps for her children

5. Return from Egypt 2:19-23

prophecy in 2:23—Jesus is given the name of *Nazorean*

The material has been divided into five (a very acceptable Jewish number) sections each with a 'prophecy' from the Hebrew Scriptures which was deemed 'fulfilled' in the event recounted. The entire literary complex is clearly marked off as a self-contained section at its beginning and end by a specific title bestowed on Jesus: *Immanuel* in the first section and *Nazorean* at the end. By means of this literary construct Matthew intended to parallel the births and beginnings of Jesus and Moses.

In the first of five sections Jesus' birth is announced. It is a wondrous birth: Jesus is born of a virgin. It is claimed that the text from Isaiah had foretold the event, and the sacred title of *Immanuel* ('God-with-us') is given to the child. The second section introduces the wise men from the East. They have interpreted a star as a sign that a great person has been born. The star is simply a part of the narrative. The other character in this section is Herod, King of the Jews, who is warned of the impending birth by these wise men. The historian Josephus relates a Jewish tradition that the Pharaoh of Egypt had been warned of Moses' birth by 'sacred scribes'. Jesus is being compared to Moses. The enemy who conspired against Moses was Pharaoh of Egypt; the enemy who conspired against Jesus is the king of the Jews. A second prophetic text from Micah is appended:

he was born in Bethlehem, the city of David, because like David he was intended to lead Israel as its messiah.

MOSSES HAD LED ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT in the Exodus and his oppressor was the Pharaoh. In the third section of the infancy story Jesus goes into Egypt and his oppressor is Herod, the King of the Jews. Jesus is revealed as the new Moses who would lead his people from slavery and bondage in a new Exodus. A third prophetic text from Hosea shows that this flight into Egypt is another Exodus, except it is in reverse.

A fourth section parallels the events at the birth of Moses with those at the birth of Jesus. The Pharaoh had ordered the slaughter of all the young Israelites in Egypt; Herod slaughtered the young children of Bethlehem in Israel. A fourth prophetic text has Rachel, whose tomb stood outside of Bethlehem, weeping over all these dead Israelite children.

The finale has Jesus return to Galilee where his ministry was to begin. The fifth prophetic text used in the conclusion is otherwise

unattested in any of the scriptures known to us. It bestows a enigmatic title on Jesus: *Nazorean*. Certainly it was known that Jesus had lived in Nazareth and *Nazorean* sounds close to 'Nazarene' (a 'person belonging to Nazareth'), but that is a surface meaning. Isaiah had written that the coming messiah would be a 'branch' coming from the 'root of Jesse', the father of David. In Hebrew the word for 'branch' is *nezer* and *Nazorean* would have stimulated ideas of the coming 'branch from Jesse', the messiah who would bring salvation. Finally, sometimes a great Israelite leader was known as a *nazir*, a person consecrated to God by vow. Jesus was also a 'nazirite', close enough to *Nazorean*.

Which meaning did the name *Nazorean* have? Probably all of them. Jesus of Nazareth, the branch from Jesse, was an Israelite holy person. Together with the earlier name, *Immanuel*, the two titles sum up Matthew's prologue. Jesus has come from God, therefore he is Immanuel, and he is to begin from Nazareth the sacred messianic work to which he is totally dedicated. Therefore, he is *Nazorean*.

Matthew has creatively used five fulfilment texts, most probably texts in circulation for some time among the early Christians. He also inherited from the Christian community a tradition which paralleled the life of Jesus and the life of Moses, partly on the basis of the book of Exodus and partly on the basis of oral traditions about Moses. The end result is a remarkable piece of literature, full of meaning so long as it is not read as garbled history.

I do not want to desecrate Christmas or to challenge deeply held Christian beliefs. I want instead to decry the fact that the Christmas story has been made into a pseudo-history. As such it can never withstand scrutiny. Pseudo-history draws scorn upon itself, and rightly so since it trivialises what is profound. What is there of history in the strict sense in the gospel stories of the birth and infancy? Probably, little more than that Jesus was born—full stop. Christians can never prove that their religion is historically true on the basis of their sacred stories. But Matthew and Luke have used considerable literary skill and the most acute religious insight to portray the precise reason why Christians should celebrate Jesus' birth. For Luke, Jesus is the prophet-saviour who leads a revitalised Jewish people, a people full of hope and purpose. For Matthew, Jesus is the New Moses who readies his people to set out once more on an Exodus seeking freedom. The narratives in Matthew and Luke are two profound Christian statements, which can be accepted or rejected. They cannot be historically proved or disproved since they were never intended to make historical claims. They stand beside the other stories of the world's religious traditions from which humanity may choose or not choose. Each of the two gospel statements, that of Matthew and that of Luke, has its own message and its own medium. Each is a good way of interpreting life.

If Christians want to celebrate in a Christian fashion at the Christmas season then they should take either Matthew or Luke (not unite them into a ludicrous hybrid) and see it as a dramatic literary whole, a piece of sacred theatre, not as an historical account and not intended primarily for children but for mature adults who have some control over literary subtleties. They could celebrate a religious drama which has the potential to give them an ultimate focus, the profoundest perspective on life and its meaning. ■

Robert Crotty is the author of *The Jesus Question: The Modern Search For The Historical Jesus*, published by HarperCollins.

Footnote: 1 While normally following the convention of using BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era), I have used BC and AD in this article since they correspond to the topic.

Fire down below

Underworld, Don DeLillo, Picador, 1997. ISBN 0 330 35432 9 RRP \$35.00
Enduring Love, Ian McEwan, Jonathan Cape, 1997. 0 224 05031 1 RRP \$32.95

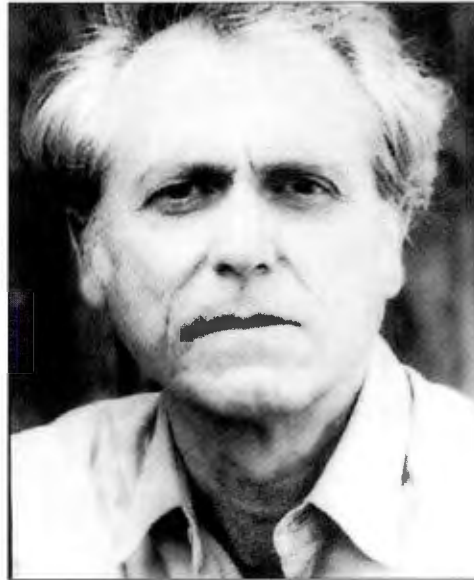
OF ALL THE WRITERS who have come out from under the carpet of postmodernism in English in the last twenty or so years, Don DeLillo is the most impressive. He starts out as a suave and superior tinkerer with genres, embroidering at the edges of SF, giving new insinuations of paranoia to the thriller, and then, with *White Noise*, he writes a masterpiece, one of the funniest, blackest novels of our period. He follows it, unpredictably and oppositely, with the sober and painstaking re-imagining of Lee Harvey Oswald and the Kennedy assassination in *Libra*, a novel that demythologises the most dramatic event in post-war American domestic life.

In his most recent novel, *Mao II*, the prose was a degree richer and more classical than the spare and grainy prose of *Libra*, but this story about a writer and his dealings with a group of terrorists made it clear that Don DeLillo was the novelist who could show what the language of our own moment could do. With no hint of flashiness, with nothing but rhythm and pace, he looked like the writer you would point to if you wanted to show a visiting spaceman how coolly and expertly fiction could be crafted by the major American writer now at the height of his powers.

Five years after *Mao II*, *Underworld* comes like a revelation, full of portent and blackness and riddling digression. At more than 800 pages it spans a near-encyclopaedic representation of American society and its preoccupying themes from the early '50s until the present. It is a complex, free-wheeling, structurally aberrant book that brings to mind such diverse figures as Melville and Dos Passos.

It begins with a *tour-de-force* description of a famous 1951 baseball match in New York and the young black teenager who ends up with the baseball that was hit into the crowds at the climax of one of the most historic games. That ball passes eventually into the hands of Nick Shay, another New York adolescent at the time, a boy from the Bronx, who, in his middle-age maturity, becomes an executive in Waste Disposal.

Nick is the sympathetic focus of this novel: it is his sensibility that seems closest



Photograph of Don DeLillo by Andre Kertesz.

to that of the novelist even though he is a figure of considerable toughness and coldness. Early on, he visits an old flame, now a famous, elderly sculptress, a woman with whom he had sex when he was a boy even though her husband, a school teacher, was some kind of saint. He also—though it takes almost the entire novel to find out quite how—killed a man during this same raw youth.

It is testament to how extraordinary a book *Underworld* is that this summary of one element of its plot suggests so little of its flavour. It is a kind of collective portrait of a bygone New York, lovingly reconstructed, set as if in formal contrast to a world which is not so much instantly obsolescing as turning itself, second by second, into retro trash, into literal garbage which is both revered and feared.

The image, late in the book, of a post-Soviet Russia where waste can itself be nuked is an especially black extrapolation of one of the obsessive themes of a novel which encompasses (at grand and mannered lengths) the scatologies of Lenny Bruce, screaming 'We're all gonna die' at the height of the Cuban missile crisis, and J. Edgar Hoover, who appears first at the baseball match (in the company of Frank Sinatra and

Jackie Gleason), and then, many years later, at a hippie party hosted by Truman Capote: J. Edgar Hoover who was obsessed by germs and how to avoid them.

If DeLillo is any kind of postmodernist—which is pretty questionable in itself—*Underworld* shows him to be a postmodernist at war with the postmodernist imagination. *Underworld* (the book takes its title from a once 'lost' film by Eisenstein) is an almost magical realist lament for New York. It is saturated realism, sculpted and observant, from a novelist who has been to school with Flaubert and Joyce. The magic is in the realism.

The effect is both monumental and free-ranging in a consistently disconcerting way. The obsession with the baseball, for instance, is not allowed to overwhelm the book and overdetermine it in the direction of symbolism. *Underworld* is one of those novels in which the author seems to take as much satisfaction in loose ends as he does in arbitrary connections; part of the logic seems to be to figure forth the surrealistic weirdness of human connection and family resemblance.

SOME OF THE GLOWING PARTS of *Underworld* never connect with each other except in the reader's mind. Paradoxically, this gives DeLillo's book an extraordinary panoramic sense of the everyday. It is not, like Joyce's *Ulysses*, focused on the unfolding present, nor like Proust on the multiple ways in which the past can be represented, but on the ways in which the past dwells within the present—the *longue durée* of both individual and collective experience.

This is one of those books that scatters its different narratives like so many cards thrown in the air. DeLillo is constantly jumping from character to character and from the '50s to the '90s and everywhere in between. The fact that he does this while producing an absolute and steady sense of ongoing narrative flow is a tribute to both the economy of each of his wildernesses of stories and the brilliance of the total design.

In its long penultimate movement *Underworld* is the story of Nick, of the burning moment of sex and the crazed moment of killing, each of them done with

a steadiness and freedom of line which no modern fiction has surpassed. *Underworld* looks like a fractured *bildungsroman*, full of rage and physical intensity, but made more complex and mysterious by the crooked, indirect path that leads to it.

The structure one of those vertiginous 'winding stairs' that recalls the pyrotechnics of Ford Madox Ford. Its vision, if it is schematised, is a black and oracular withering of everything playful and throwaway in our civilisation. The implicit moral emphasis is the very opposite of fashionable: it takes late twentieth century vogues and spits them out of its mouth.

Yes, this is a dark, nearly sinister book by one of the century's highbrow masters and it is pessimistically preoccupied with entropy, both personal and political. But it is also a book which pulsates with a sense of the excitement of sport, the pain of children who have lost a father, the satisfaction of married life, the legacy of great teachers, the glory of the democratic community of postwar New York, the deep moral value of fun, the sadness of brothers and their bonds, the urbanity of Jesuits and one or two things which can be said for and against the religious tradition. It is a sparkling jigsaw puzzle of a book, absolutely compelling even when it is most challenging. This year will not produce any book more spacious or exciting.

...

Of that cluster of novelists now in their late forties who have reshaped the English novel in the last 15 years or so, Ian McEwan is probably the most popular and arguably the most central. He doesn't have the verbal fireworks of Martin Amis or the humour. Nor has he, like Julian Barnes, written one book which will almost certainly last forever, but his fiction is consistently expert and suave, it has the authority of a novelist who never writes badly and it is imbued with a vision which is dark, a taste of salt and blood, even though the style is open, engaging, full of hope.

McEwan has a common touch even though his instinct is to go for subject matter that is punishing, damaged and calamitous. A loved daughter just disappears, a friendly stranger turns out to be the most sinister kind of sadist, two people have to cope with the physical reality of a dead body. The sex-and-violence connection runs deep in McEwan's fiction and contributes much of its power of blackness yet it is somehow compatible with a characterisation that is humane, and a sense of human possibility that is promising and sane. This may be only to say that McEwan is the classiest kind

of popular novelist and that the particular edge he has in relation to his contemporaries comes from the fact that he is much the most readable member of their company.

His new novel *Enduring Love* in some ways challenges that proposition, even though it is, in its way, a kind of thriller. The opening section of the novel, the set-piece and to some extent the primal scene, is written in McEwan's densest and most elegant prose—it almost resists the reader even though it is fraught with significance and portent.

THE PROTAGONIST IS a scientific journalist, highbrow but popularising, who finds himself assisting at the site of a catastrophe. An air balloon with a young boy inside gets out of control in turbulent weather, somewhere in the English countryside, and our hero is one of several men who try to drag it back to earth. He does not try as hard as one man, a doctor, who dies in the attempt.

Among the other failed saviours and survivors there is a man with a private income to whom the journalist utters a couple of meaningless, intense words in the hysteria of the moment. This fellow becomes obsessed with the older man, he not only falls in love with the journalist but his erotomania takes the form of imagining that he has been encouraged, and the Other is not only complicit in this perfect love but he needs to be saved from his atheism by his lover's enflamed Christian love.

This is Clérambault's syndrome, apparently a documented form of mania which one occasionally encounters by other names. In *Enduring Love* the sufferer lays siege to the 'beloved', writing daily letters, hiding behind hedges in his street and generally driving him around the twist. Part of the subtlety of *Enduring Love* is to reduce everything midway to a point of indeterminacy where, like the hero's wife, we are not sure whether or not he has invented his amatory persecutor, where the dancer ends and the dance begins in a schizophrenic psychodrama that may be unfolding largely (but what does 'largely' mean?) in the character's mind. This is dark and piteous stuff, whichever way you look at it, and McEwan is brilliant in the way he dramatises material that could sink into the stasis of enacted fixation.

The journalist is married to a literary scholar preoccupied with Keats, a strong loving woman who adores other people's children in the absence of her own. Her distress at his new 'relationship' is handled

with a wholly credible apprehension of people's irrational unpredictability. As it unfolds—always a step ahead of the reader's expectations, despite the traditionalism of the groove—*Enduring Love* involves shots fired in public places and knives held to throats, but in a narrative notable for its chasteness and lack of sensationalism.

There is also a subplot about the wife of the doctor who died during the balloon incident and who has her own particular ritual of catharsis to enact over her husband's death.

Enduring Love also has a kind of non-fictional coda which, in a remarkable structural effect, packs as much of a punch as anything in its differing spheres of action, whether psychodramatic or Hitchcockian. It also ends with a brief passage that flames with aberrant life.

Hitchcock is probably the right analogy for McEwan because there is an abiding sense of grace in the normality which the novelist, like the film-maker, finds in every signature of the observable world, even the texture of the curtain when it is rent. ■

Peter Craven writes a column for the Higher Education Supplement of *The Australian*.

For books on...

- ★politics and social change
- ★gender issues
- ★media
- ★environment
- ★fiction, second-hand...

THE NEW

INTERNATIONAL BOOKSHOP

OPEN 7 DAYS 10:30-6:30

The **New International** is a new, co-operatively-owned-and-run bookshop located in **Melbourne's Trades Hall**.

Come and try out our coffee shop, pick up information on our program of events, book launches and speakers, and browse amongst **Melbourne's biggest selection of critical, independent writing.**

CNR LYGON & VICTORIA STS,
CARLTON PH 9662 3744

MELBOURNE'S ALTERNATIVE BOOKSHOP

A supper to colour dreams

YOU ARE DRIVING from Sydney to Melbourne, and having fuelled both the car and yourself at Albury you swing once more into the seat. On the regional radio, a farmer is being interviewed. He makes the usual strategic concessions to the interviewer, and then throws away the line that he is exporting plane-loads of lettuce to England, to lift the heart and cleanse the blood of Messrs McDonalds' patrons. The interviewer, thunderstruck, fences as best he may. You drive on, contemplating some late-twentieth-century equivalent of Coleridge's ghost-ship, this one blasting through the eerie darkness, those green cold growths ferried to another world.

Meanwhile, your crew protests, for a while, at what you have gulped, the span of one or two European countries behind you, and about the same to go before you sleep. And there we have it, taken on board by the one person—food as boundlessly majestic, ceaselessly imperative: and food as nothing but stuffing, as the old Roman sausage, *farci-men*. lent name to farce. There is something here to flesh out not only our rather intractable bodies but our hungering spirits as well. Except in the direst circumstances, complexity will rarely be lacking.

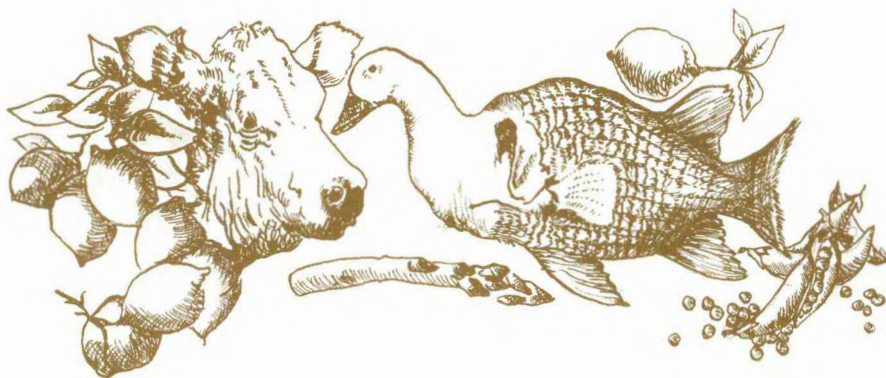
What could be more innocent than the apple, so often the apple of our eye? But the nipped skin, on one account, embitters all human predicaments, from that moment until the world's great fruit is transfigured, definitively—if that happens. What could coax us forward if not bread and wine, the one excellent for survival, the other fine for celebration? But none of the millions of Christian ceremonies has put them on the table without allusion to a deathly shadow, the wine soured, the bread disintegrated. If we had never had comedy, never had tragedy, we would still have had food: and perhaps food would have done the job.

Not without thought however—thought as to preparation, milieu, companions, outcomes. Even the scrappiest of recipe-books pays some attention to these matters,

A Celebration of Food and Wine. Eric Rolls, (3 vols). University of Queensland Press, 1997.

ISBN(s) 0 7022 2722 6; 0 7022 2960 1; 0 7022 2962 8 RRP \$29.95 each volume.

however curtly. An acquaintance of mine has on his telephone message-machine the one-word injunction, 'Speak!': but humane transactions cannot long be conducted in such terms, and most of us want, and have wanted from the breast or the bottle, more largesse than can be there in the austere



command, 'Eat!'

Eric Rolls understands this, through and through. His aptly-named trilogy, *A Celebration of Food and Wine*, is braced by an enthusiasm for conviviality, and might be seen as either the outcome or the origin of any amount of it. Not, heaven knows, that he cannot play the astringent. In an earlier book, *Sojourners*, he observes in passing that 'The general standard of Chinese restaurants in Australia, as with French, Italian, Greek, or any other restaurants, is atrocious.' *A Celebration* is rich in casual comments such as, 'I have no time available to drink gin. It would confuse both the day and the wines at dinner,' 'The only decoration on a dinner plate should be fired on to it in the kiln', 'Why is it that modern plant breeders consider everything but the essential?', 'There are no good mashers.' He has, in other words, a properly large number of crotchets: but he is never a curmudgeon.

The volumes are subtitled, respectively, 'Of flesh, of fish, of fowl,' 'Of grain, of grape, of gethsemane,' and 'Of fruit, of vegetables, of vulgar herbs, of sugar and spice.' These designations already hint at an array of

elements in the book itself. Part autobiography, part gustatory manual, part travelogue, part history, it makes its own way by its own rules. It might please the shades of those two widely-read and deeply cherished writers on food and its arts, Elizabeth David and M.F.K. Fisher, since it combines zest, expertise, and a musing reminiscence something after their fashion. Here, for instance, is the first paragraph of the first volume:

My first memory of good food is beside a winter fire as a five-year-old. When 'bedtime-soon' was announced, I took a green apple, speared it with a length of fencing wire, held it over the red coals until the skin bubbled and juice began to spit, then I took it off, allowed it to cool to handling temperature, spread it with honey gathered

from feral bees and bit into it sweet, sour, crisp and soft, a supper to colour dreams.

In all, there are 513 pages in which, at any moment, something like this is liable to appear. After all, the book is to end by saying, 'Too little poetry has been written about food, possibly because it surpasses words. It carries its own nobility. And so ends a celebration of food and wine which, like sex, I find indistinguishable from a celebration of life,' and Rolls never has to look very hard to find warrant for diverse ways of couching the celebration. His introductory paragraph has an eye to food as something memorable, to the days' cycle, to nature's gifts and human calculation, to the plenitude of imaginings. It also begins to establish a sense of the comradesly—'companions,' after all, are literally the breakers of bread together—which will first license and then welcome *A Celebration's* vivacious ramblings.

All cooking, from the simple to the sumptuous, is a kind of transformation, and as such it is potentially fascinating: there is an alchemist behind every apron. Ruefully, we can all attest that the codes

and calculations can go disastrously wrong, as in the complaint, of a certain meal, that the food was a comedy and the wine a tragedy: or, as in the cartoon of a couple of eighteenth-century old salts, one saying to the other, 'Lilliput is all right, if you like nouvelle cuisine.' Rolls' book comes from the man who, in *They All Ran Wild*, described memorably the malign results of alterations to Australia's flora and fauna; and *A Celebration* is often intent on warning its readers against follies and blunders. But its ethos is overwhelmingly one of enthusiasm, and amongst the favourite words are 'honour,' as in 'Parsley honours Lebanese food,' 'rejoice,' as in 'Tomatoes cooked and fresh rejoice when sprinkled with basil,' and 'surprise,' as in 'Rather tasteless fish like Sweep, which sometimes hook themselves two at a time on offshore reefs when one is hoping for Snapper, can be

surprised by chilli sauce.' Rolls' money is usually on the festal.

Which can start anywhere. Here he is, for instance, taking off from earlier historical and aesthetic remarks about Broad Beans, and a subtle recipe for their cooking:

Broad Beans are sold dried along with many pulses: round, oval, kidney-shaped, red, white, black, yellow, green, cream, brown. Each need different soaking times and different cooking times. All should be washed with fresh water after soaking then cooked for a while with the lid off to evaporate the poisonous cyanogen always present, especially in lima and red kidney beans. Cooked with a fresh pig's trotter, a ham bone, chicken giblets, cubes of steak, a knuck of salt pork, with leeks, onions, mushrooms, tomatoes, various herbs, anything to match and complement the

flavour of the particular beans, they make a breakfast to enrich the whole day.

Himself a poet, Rolls knows that a catalogue can be more than a tallying, and can itself begin to sing—as his list of the pulses, pronounced aloud, begins to do. As farmer-poet, he also assumes that processes have to be worked through, and that nature, amenable to being charmed, is not to be mocked. The sainted Mrs Beeton, who died at the age of twenty-nine, says in the introduction to her book that if she had known what was involved in its writing she might never have done it. Rolls, a much older hand, must have known what he was facing. At its end, *A Celebration* shows all the élan with which it began. ■

Peter Steele has a Personal Chair at the University of Melbourne.

BOOKS: 3

MAX TEICHMANN

Means to bitter ends

PSYCHOANALYSIS, AS JUDITH BRETT points out, is a no-flight zone, so far as most political theorists are concerned, and *terra incognita* to the general public, teachers and educationalists. And for all but a few journalists. This is true whether one is concerned with the theories: the various therapeutic techniques and the reasoning behind these techniques, or with the ways in which psychoanalytically oriented thinkers have employed analytic concepts, in trying to interpret literary, artistic, political or anthropological material.

Journalists, who possibly know even less about these matters than any of the other groups mentioned above, are especially scornful of efforts by writers such as Brett, Little and Stan Anson to introduce new conceptual dimensions in exploring politicians such as Menzies or Hawke. This is the demesne of the journalists; the stories should only contain gossip, innuendo and anecdote. Along with permission to make generalisations and engage in a measure of pure or impure speculation which would bring blushes to the cheeks of people like Brett and her colleague. But ultimately, most latter day journalists appear temperamentally averse to penetrating

Political Lives, Judith Brett,
Allen and Unwin, 1997.
ISBN 1 86448 309 1 RRP \$19.95

beneath the surface of just about anything. Brett and colleagues examine Hawke, Keating, Whitlam, Fraser, Menzies, Calwell, Hasluck and Suharto; a worthy enterprise, though, almost of necessity, not especially sensational.

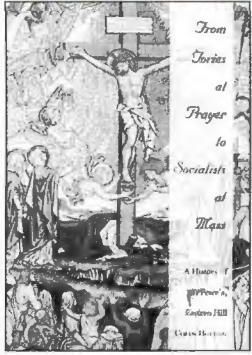
Two main explanatory devices give the collection its general direction: Narcissism and Resentment. There is now a great deal of material on narcissism—indeed it is the flavour of the decade—but far less on resentment, whereas I consider the latter the bitter flavour of the entire century. Indeed so entrenched is this type of behaviour and motivation in Australian society and character that it passes unnoticed, right in front of our eyes. For many, it is now the normal way of talking and thinking.

In Brett's collection Whitlam, Hawke and Keating receive the most attention partly because they were the most exotic. *Charismatic*, some used to attest. They constitute a major break from the type and style of earlier Labor Leaders, of whom Hayden was perhaps the last. Beazley is in

some ways a survivor from an earlier, less confrontational era. In manner and, I suspect in philosophy a liberal conservative, he has been forced to adopt the body language and the tactics of people whom he once sought to avoid.

But as to the charismatic trio—I think they can be at least partly accounted for by sociological, rather than psychoanalytic factors. They have lived and been major actors in an era of populist demagoguery. We have had populist demagogues before—Billy Hughes, Lang and Bjelke Petersen. Menzies could turn on his own brand of aristocratic demagoguery. Kennett is in part a demagogue; Chipp was a small-scale populist demagogue, Gorton a populist.

But the domination of our system by a new kind of media driven and defined political agenda, which Hasluck noticed already appearing, as he wrote in 1968, required that political leaders, almost forcibly separated from their, or their party's policies, must be of a certain kind. So that politics could be about leaders, not policies, and public politics be one-dimensional; theatrical, gladiatorial and appealing to sentiments, not reason; Hawke was most successful at this game, for (To page 43)



From Tories at Prayer to Socialists at Mass, St Peter's, Eastern Hill, Melbourne 1846-1990,
Colin Holden,
Melbourne University Press, 1996. ISBN 0 522 84682 3 RRP \$49.95

St Patrick's Cathedral may be a force, but the

crucifix across the road—Australia's only wayside shrine—reminds Melburnians of another Christian presence. Tucked in serenely by trees and an obscuring entrance, the Anglican church of St Peter's has been the centre of Anglo-Catholicism in the city for almost a century, and of a great many myths besides. One of them, elaborating the 19th century idiom of High Church people 'going through the trapdoor to Rome', tells of a tunnel link with the Cathedral—a kind of permanent Red Sea crossing facility. The fabric of the church is said to include spars taken from Australia's most tragic shipwreck, that of the *Cataraqui*. Nearby is a pole where Squizzy Taylor crashed his getaway car; the crank handle was embedded there for years. More augustly, Melbourne was proclaimed a city in this church. But with characteristic theatricality, the ceremony is now usually recalled as having taken place on the steps.

Then the well-known penchant of Anglo-Catholics for ceremonial—which the present author concedes sometimes takes precedence over much else—could always prompt a little self-parody, as in the parishioner who would arrive just as the service was about to start, in full episcopal

drag, and then depart in peace just before the service ended. As a lady visitor remarked on another occasion, 'What a beautiful sermon and what a beautiful service, it was wonderful but of course I belong to the church of England!'

The Tories at prayer—to allude to Colin Holden's title—included Collins Street doctors and Mrs Childers, whose husband would return to England to become Disraeli's Chancellor of the Exchequer. Also in the congregation was a Collingwood nightsoil carter; the church laboured hard to include working class people from adjacent suburbs, and at one point its charitable efforts exceeded that of any other Melbourne Anglican parish. Twice it established missions in Fitzroy, as well as being responsible for inviting the Brotherhood of St Laurence to Melbourne from Newcastle. As Holden explains, there had always been a nexus between Anglo-Catholicism and the working class, at least as far as the church was concerned: the emphasis on the doctrine of the Incarnation instilled a heightened sense of human worth, and the need to work against the social factors that would obscure it.

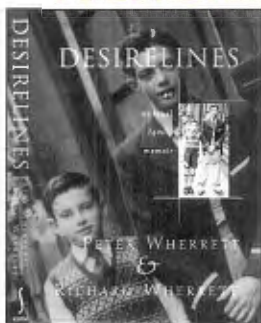
The story of St Peter's is very much focused on three men—Father James Cheong, the Melbourne Chinese who served it for a lifetime—and two of the incumbents, E.S. Hughes and F.E. Maynard. Hughes was a vigorous man—capable of toughing up hooligans—who introduced ritualistic practices and, assisted by his wife's wealth, established a flourishing school. Australian born, he was nationalist within an imperial context, fantasising at the time of Gallipoli that the southern cross might fly over Sancta

Sophia. (Sixty-three men and a woman of the parish were to die in that War.) Maynard, Hughes's successor, was a much more original thinker.

He was an engineer by training, and the purported scientific basis of communism appealed to him—as did the efforts of the 'Red Dean', Hewlett Johnson (who preached at St Peter's) to reach the alienated masses. But Maynard was sceptical of communism's capacity to function properly without the nourishment of Christianity. 'Ultimately', he said, in a tag which applies just as well to our own times, 'it is either God or Self that we worship.' In 1936 he proposed to the Anglican synod that a careful study be made of fascism and communism, to determine 'whether the good is the essence and the bad the accident, or the bad the essence and the good the accidents.'

Colin Holden's account tapers off after Maynard's resignation in 1964, but it is virtually impossible to continue an institutional history almost to the present with the same degree of analysis that can be applied to the past. The stage is too small, the passions often too intense. So there is little here on the question of the ordination of women, and an implicit, rather than stated, sense that the church may have been more vigorous in 1971—when a surprising 40 per cent of its congregation were graduates—than might be the case now. Even so, this is a finely nuanced study, a real contribution to Melbourne's social history as well as a record of its religious past. ■

—The subject of **Jim Davidson's** biography *Lyrebird Rising*, Louise Hanson-Dyer, was christened at St Peter's in 1884.



Desirelines: an unusual family memoir,
Peter Wherrett and Richard Wherrett,
Hodder Headline, 1997.
RRP \$29.95
ISBN 0 7336 0485 4

This book takes its name from an image in

a play by Michael Gurr. Gurr refers to the paths that are often worn in grass or garden beds by people who don't stick to the marked paths as 'desirelines', 'the way people want to go.' The title is tinged with irony because for most of their lives the brothers Peter and Richard Wherrett have followed quite distinct desirelines. Peter became a

motoring enthusiast, then a motoring columnist and is best known as the earnest presenter of TV motoring shows such as *Torque* and *Healthy, Wealthy and Wise*.

Richard, nearly five years younger, became one of the country's most accomplished directors for the stage and a key figure in the development of the Sydney Theatre Company. His particular contribution to the second half of *Desirelines* is a window on theatre in this country in the years when the lethal potential of AIDS was becoming known. The brothers were never estranged, not in any bloody sense. It's just that for some of the most significant years of their lives they didn't talk very much—the things they had to talk about were too painful to broach.

Desirelines is a seemingly untypical account of growing up in the 1950s. Sure there are fishing trips, six o'clock closing, lawn bowls, gramophone records and adventures in motor cars. But there were also emotional spaces in the Wherrett household so private that not even the people who lived there were able to enter them. Mr Wherrett Snr was the least successful of his brothers and became a pharmacist in a family of doctors. He ran a shop on Victoria Rd, West Ryde, one of the suburbs of Sydney which generally manages to escape the social pages. Eric Wherrett was an epileptic. He was an alcoholic, capable of violence. He was also a cross-dresser, a habit around which the entire routine of the family had to be constructed.

There were times on the weeks when the two boys and their mother, Lyle, had to make themselves scarce so Eric could transform himself.

Peter also developed the custom of cross-dressing, a predilection he was at pains to keep hidden from his father. Yet Peter's reflections on the psychological complexity of this behaviour are candid and astute. He

(From page 41) that is the sum of the man. Whereas Whitlam was genuinely interested in the intellect and in policies, and Keating would have liked to have been. The Liberals, since Menzies, have been ill suited to this way of doing politics, and cannot really handle the media, partly because they despise and distrust it. Kennett defied gravity, as did Bolte and Menzies; but it's a hard act to sustain. So Paul Hasluck, who thought the Press Gallery either incompetent, or venal, was not so much a fish out of water, as just too normal for the frenetic kind of hallucinatory politics that was taking over.

In the circumstances, one would expect successful leaders to be gregarious, exhibitionistic, interested in the appearance rather than the reality. To be into aggression, power, winning, rather than compromise or coöperation. But pretending to be a good egg at the same time. One should not expect them to be reflective—Hamlet never got to be king. As to the resentment which was supposed to influence many of Calwell's internal transactions, the period from Whitlam to Keating, according to Lindsay Rae, was, despite the Dismissal, still one of optimism and belief in inevitable progress. So hubris, chutzpah and hype (manic defences against anxiety or doubt), were the key notes of their address. So Fraser was seen as a party pooper, as Howard is now. Only when things turned sour, as Keating moved in, did we start to have the bitter and resentful style of political language and argumentation.

This threatens to become ubiquitous, partly because the media and important subcultures in our society have always been motivated by envy, covetousness and resentment. A social-psychological base was already there—waiting for a superstructure of legitimacy.

There are indeed many bona fide existential causes to make people feel resentment, or indignation. But the psychologically important cases here are those of people or groups who are almost

does not become trapped in the same way as his father did. Peter recalls looking at himself for the first time in the mirror, dressed and made up as a woman. He felt himself falling in love with this female stranger, who happened to be himself.

Similarly, as Richard began to better understand his homosexuality he describes the dangers of falling in love with men who

invariably resentful, the condition being, so to speak, endemic, rather than situational. Thus, merely by way of example, the Hanson people, it seems to me, point to a number of important grounds for resentment, on the part of many Australians. But from the smallish contact I have had with the spokespeople, and the way their critiques and complaints were often couched, I suspect that their resentment is endemic. It would not be easily dispelled, no matter how many changes were made, or promised. On the other hand, it has been either a shortsighted or a dishonest tactic by the rest of us to concentrate upon the personal flaws of the proponents—flaws shared by many other mainstream actors—and to ignore the possibly valid difficulties and varieties of culture shock which their supporters are signalling.

To risk a generalisation, I think resentment plays a much more central role in the psyches and political style of the extreme Left and extreme Right, than it does in the mainstream.

THE STUDY MORE OR LESS in isolation, of important political actors, is perfectly above board—although I suspect that looking at other classes of prominent persons, not so obviously mirrors of their time, might yield more abundant fruit. Brett and Co's procedures can only accomplish modest things, and can produce, at least for some of us, a perception of a certain thinness of affect. I suspect that this is the result of deciding to exclude the Unconscious, that dynamo at the centre of psychoanalytical explanation. Of course our writers are not psychoanalysing their individual subjects—how could they? But this inevitable limitation of explanatory power can leave us with much of what we began. So we are tempted to tiptoe back to sociology, or let the journos back into the game. But this should not be the end of the matter.

A more fruitful enterprise at this stage in our affairs, and concerning many more

look too much like himself. In many ways, this is a wise and honest book about the sterility of narcissism. It shows what can happen when nice people look hard in the mirror. ■

Michael McGirr *SI* is *Eureka Street's* consulting editor.

people, could be a return to a psychoanalytically informed study of particular social classes or sub cultures. Writers such as Fromm, Reich and Adorn attempted this before and after the War, with very mixed results.

Thus, Fromm's linkage of the post-1918 beleaguered German Mittelstand with vulnerability to the appeals of Nazism, I found a stimulating approach. The attempt to delineate an authoritarian character, or personality type—first of the right, then of the left—did give us a better understanding of psychopolitics, and totalitarianism, which sociology and political science hadn't really provided. A return to the successors of those beleaguered classes, plus the farmers: a closer look at what makes New Classes tick; whether there is now a Nihilistic (as against an authoritarian, or a narcissistic) Personality operating in society are subjects worth tackling. Otherwise, they will be left to journalists and ideologues.

To talk, as we do, about galloping Materialism, the Me generation, late capitalism and the merging of Art, Show Business, Politics and 'Lite' into one horrendous porridge of Magic Mushrooms, is interesting, but just touching the surface.

And, surely, psychoanalytically oriented observers should be giving us a gimmick free) non-journalistic diagnosis and prognosis of the tragic social and psychological vulnerabilities exposed by the epidemics of drugs, (\$7 billion per annum, rising exponentially), gambling and interpersonal breakdowns, which are sweeping through some Western societies, certainly ours.

Our psychoanalytic theorists should not be leaving this field so much to others. None of this is to withhold praise from Brett and her symposiasts—for it would be like demanding that an apple become an orange. In fact, they have made it possible for us to understand these eight political actors a good deal better than we did before. ■

Max Teichmann is a freelance reviewer.

The Irish in season

Geoffrey Milne and Peter Craven review the most recent invasion

FOR A NATION WITH SUCH a strong Irish background as ours, it is surprising that we see relatively little Irish drama.

Leaving aside George Bernard Shaw (whose plays are now mostly out of fashion and hardly Irish anyway) and Oscar Wilde (again, hardly an 'Irish' dramatist), the most performed Irish writers in Australia recently have been contemporary dramatists Brian Friel and Frank McGuinness, while Sean O'Casey and Dion Boucicault also still get occasional outings. In fact, one of the most popular and widely seen productions of Irish drama this decade was Gale Edwards' lively and colourful production of Boucicault's *The Shaughraun*, which premiered in Brisbane for the Queensland Theatre Company in 1993 and was promptly included in the repertoires of the Melbourne Theatre Company, the State Theatre Company of South Australia and the Sydney Theatre Company over the next year or so.

Equally prominent was *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel's study of rural life in County Donegal, circa 1936; the MTC, the STC and the STCSA hosted the Abbey Theatre of Dublin's autumnal-hued and rather elegiac production in 1992/93, while the QTC created its own version in 1994. (The Abbey's only previous trip to Australia was to the Adelaide Festival in 1990, with a widely-acclaimed production of O'Casey's *Shadow of a Gunman*.) Nearly as prominent as those two plays has been McGuinness' *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, which was produced by the MTC and by the Ensemble (in Sydney) in 1994 and by the Hole in the Wall in Perth in 1995 and again last year. I suspect, though, that its popularity owed more to its small cast and its subject matter (an Englishman, an Irishman and an American imprisoned in a Beirut hostage crisis) than to its Irishness.

An earlier production of a McGuinness play was seen at Sydney's Crossroads Theatre for the Festival of Sydney in 1990, directed by Macliosa Stafford, now artistic

director of the famous Druids Theatre Company in Ireland. This was *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching to the Somme*, a larger-scale play about men and bonding in World War I. Crossroads, whose artistic director was Irishwoman Clara Mason, was something of a champion of Irish drama; one of the finest productions of a Friel play I have seen in Australia was her lovely, stark rendition of *Faith Healer* in 1990, with Pat Bishop, Danny Adcock and the visiting Irish actor Eamon Morrissey in the title role. At other times, they did adaptations of works by James Joyce and some Samuel Beckett. Alas, Crossroads has disappeared, a victim of Sydney property development. Elsewhere, Friel and his brethren continue to surface from time to time in the state theatres' repertoires, like the MTC's gorgeous production of the otherwise over-rated *Molly Sweeney* in April this year.

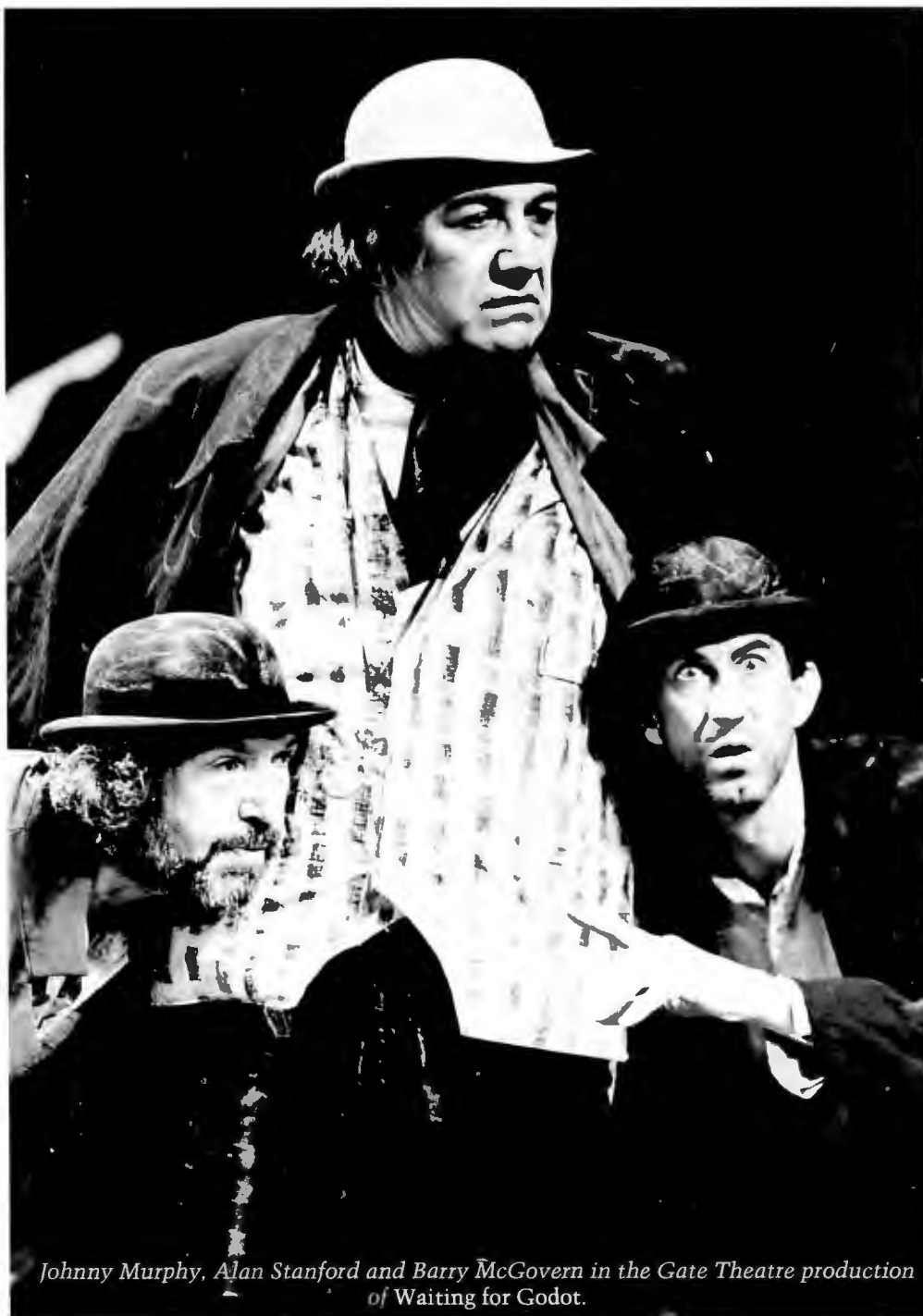
Irish theatre companies are also occasional Festival visitors to Australia, although fewer and further between than continental European and flavour-of-the-decade Japanese ones. Apart from the Abbey's visit to Adelaide in 1990, the Druids came to the Festival of Sydney in 1995, with the contemporary playwright Vincent Woods' *At The Black Pig's Dyke*, one of many harrowing plays about 'The Troubles'. In 1994, a Dublin company called Co-Motion Theatre brought another contemporary play, Pat McCabe's *Frank Pig Says Hello* (adapted from his novel) to the Melbourne International Festival. That—plus actor Maggie Millar's occasional 'Bloomsday' party-piece, *Mollie Bloom*, and local playwright Jill O'Callaghan's *Some Mother's Son*, a gripping present-day drama of a family caught up in the continuing aftermath of the same troubles—brought the grand total of professionally-produced 'Irish' drama in Melbourne over the past eight years to seven!

That statistic was almost doubled in the

space of just twelve days in October this year, when the 70-year-old Gate Theatre of Dublin was effectively made company-in-residence at the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts. This excellent company gave us five productions from their extensive repertoire, one by an actor/writer in the company and the other four by Samuel Beckett.

The contemporary work, *Catalpa*, written and splendidly performed by Donal O'Kelly. This extraordinarily detailed monodrama deals with a seldom-remembered incident in Western Australia's history, namely the 1876 rescue by an American whaling ship of six Irish nationalists sentenced to life in Fremantle Gaol. This is a flashback story, told by a young film-maker whose treatment of this remarkable story has been rejected by Hollywood. Dejected, he returns to his simply-furnished apartment to brood over his failure, but soon launches into a re-enactment of the story in which he plays George Anthony, the land-bound husband, new father and ex-whaler commissioned to captain the *Catalpa* on its hair-raising journey from New Bedford, Mass., half-way round the world under the pretext of a routine whaling voyage.

THROUGH THE JOINT GUISE of the would-be film-maker and the increasingly central character of George, O'Kelly also portrays the entire ship's crew, the commissioning agents, the six Fremantle Fenians as they await their rescue plus everyone else in the story. He also evokes his wife, her mother (who made him swear on her deathbed never to go to sea again), his daughter and— even more spectacularly—the one whale and her calf that they catch before detouring around the Cape to Australia. It's an acting tour-de-force and it's aided by extremely clever use of the stage furniture (the curtain is now his wife's shawl, now the whale's blood) and by Trevor Knight's



Johnny Murphy, Alan Stanford and Barry McGovern in the Gate Theatre production of *Waiting for Godot*.

Barry McGovern's Didi; how they always seem to find a way together (if only to 'pass the time, while waiting') is given a new insight by their portrayal as landless Irish accused of trespassing on the land of a very English-landlord Pozzo (Alan Stanford). This is a play that can stand attempts to give specific contexts to its timeless and almost placeless evocation of alienation and despair, in ways that the parallel English- and Australian-written 'grunge' theatre of misery cannot. Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and F***king* and Raimondo Cortese's *Features of Blown Youth* (seen in the same Festival amongst the Becketts) are so gritty-realist and locked into their time and place that what we see is all we get.

Next up was *I'll Go On*, a bravura solo performance of some of Beckett's fiction by the outstanding Barry McGovern. He gives us a long swag of *Molloy*, a substantial passage of *Malone Dies* and then a last great breathless gush at the end of *The Unnameable*. I'm not generally a lover of literary theatre, but there is such a sense of character and individual voice in these pieces, they are so beautifully (and simply!) staged in Colm Ó Briain's production, designed by Robert Ballagh and lit by Rupert Murray, and they are so compellingly acted that they coalesce as typically wayward, personalised Beckettian mono-drama. McGovern peoples the stage with a substantial cast of secondary characters and evokes some excellent detail, such as when Molloy—cycling to his mother's bedside—runs over an upper-class lady's dog and when Malone describes the mysterious appearance and disappearance of food as he waits in his cell to die. The work is also full of Beckett's bleak wit. Molloy regales us with an endless story of how he painstakingly organised several methods to ensure a way to suck 16 stones in various pockets in correct order—only to defuse the whole thing by saying he couldn't give a tinker's curse about the wretched stones. In the end, this was not my favourite piece; it is just too misogynist and plain mean.

By contrast, the mean and misanthropic monodrama *Krapp's Last Tape* works remarkably well. Again, it's beautifully staged and lit in a cramped, almost pitch-dark, eye-straining little space and it's given a highly detailed, realistic—and very English—performance by David Kelly. Again it's very funny; as he listens to the tape of his pompous younger self, for example, prattling on about how everything was 'unforgettable', it slowly dawns on us that the 69-year-old present Krapp

'film score', played live at the side of the stage.

O'Kelly's historical story gains additional poignancy in that, while the Fenians' rescue is a sensational success (a wrong righted) it's also an ironic failure: the captain and crew get nothing out of it and many people (especially all the women in the story) are wronged along the way. I found it all a bit overwrought, but it was certainly a most impressive start to the Gate's mini-festival.

At most Melbourne Festivals, this alone would have set the critics raving about the Gate Theatre of Dublin. But this year's once-only Festival Director Clifford Hocking knew better: too often, companies

are brought out to Festivals to do their one (often tired) party-piece and the Gate were given the rare opportunity to show their wares in an extended showcase.

The really serious stuff came from their Beckett productions, the first of which (and my highlight of the Festival as a whole) was a luminous *Waiting for Godot*, directed by Walter D. Asmus. This is whipped through at near record speed, but by no means at the cost of the tragedy or the comedy. In fact, the funnier the studiously repeated verbal and physical vaudeville gags of Vladimir and Estragon are, the more achingly poignant their doomed plight becomes. But this production also rediscovers the innate humanity in Johnny Murphy's Gogo and

finds it hilarious rather than saddening (as it is often played) when it dawns on him equally slowly that he has forgotten practically all of it! Likewise, his abandonment of the present recording—often played as a fit of impotent pique—is in Kelly's performance a perfectly realistic gesture of self-realisation: if annual tape recordings of a few day-to-day musings are all that are left of the literary magnum opus promised in the past, why bother? These fresh insights are subtle, but they force us, often, to question previously held suppositions about the plays.

Seeing *Endgame* last in this sequence is a case in point. First, seeing it in its enclosed, grey, roofed-in box-set in the same theatre in which we previously saw *Godot* in its wide open spaces forges a suddenly persuasive continuum between the two. Then seeing Alan Stanford as the blind, wheelchair-bound Hamm lording it over McGovern as his able-bodied but reluctant servant Clov in *Endgame* recalls his blind Pozzo lording it over everybody, especially the moribund Lucky, in *Godot*. Has Lucky's demise somehow allowed Vladimir to fill his luckless shoes? Is this end-of-world scenario what waiting for Godot was for? And what are we to make of the final tableau, when Clov (hat and coat on and with packed suitcase in hand) stands at the door ready, finally, to go ...?

The questions raised in this Gate season are tantalising and welcome. We have been in the presence of an outstanding theatre company, full of gifted actors, designers and directors and with a star in his own right in lighting designer Rupert Murray. The principle behind their whole season emerged out of the blue (or out of the dustbin) and with breathtaking clarity and simplicity in Nell's line in *Endgame*: 'Nothing's funnier than unhappiness.' The point is, if you can't make Beckett funny and human, there's no point trying to make him merely lachrymose or tragic, an idea which the young 'grunge' writers of today might also find worth contemplating. ■

Geoffrey Milne is head of theatre and drama at La Trobe University.

WAITING FOR *GODOT* MUST COME close to being the most celebrated play of the entire postwar period. This piece of elegiac farce for two actors who are interrupted—twice—epiphonically by another, contrasted, duo,

has remained perennially fashionable partly, one suspects, because the tragicomic nature of the piece stops its existentialism from becoming portentous, and partly because it is such a pure piece of theatre, one so dependent on actors and directors hitting the right note or making the right move.

The plot is almost as familiar as that of *Hamlet* by now. Two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, wait for the coming of the enigmatic Godot. The tension and desperation of the boredom they feel issues into arias of near-despair and improvised routines of near-euphoria, but the waiting is all. In the midst of it, towards the end of the first act, they are visited by a bombastic,



violent character, Pozzo, who has on a rope a menial called Lucky who recites a parody of profound thoughts in one virtuoso speech. When they return in the second act, Lucky is struck dumb and Pozzo is blind.

The play is an extraordinary two-hander for actors of some virtuosity because it throws both Vladimir and Estragon back so much on the elementary rites of individuation, tone of voice and striking movement. They are as alike and as distinctive as Laurel and Hardy, Flanagan and Allen, Pete and Dud, and the particular *pas de deux* of poignancy and farce they enact lends itself to the interplay of professional clowns, or in any case, two actors who are good at suggesting depths of implicit emotion or physical ineptitude.

Beckett's own dream casting for Vladimir and Estragon was Buster Keaton

and Marlon Brando. Alec Guinness and Ralph Richardson turned down the opportunity on the advice (a subsequent source of shame to its giver) of John Gielgud but *Godot* is the most notable male tandem bicycle of the theatre since *Othello* and the two tramps have been played in this country by Barry Humphries and Peter O'Shaughnessy in the first production and, twenty or so years down the track, by Mel Gibson and Geoffrey Rush. And only this year—some years after the Dublin Gate production was first mounted—Peter Hall, *Godot*'s first English producer—has done it again with a cast that includes Ben Kingsley and Nicol Williamson.

THE DUBLIN GATE PRODUCTION is solid, realistic and worthy. The stage in Walter B. Asmus' production is not only bare and austere (as it more or less must be) but Louis le Brocquy's design is plain and dull, a fact which is highlighted by the size of the Melbourne Playhouse stage. This is a sprawling and staggering *Godot*, each step purposive and noticeable rather than quicksilver or mad.

And the acting is congruent with this. You feel watching this production of *Waiting for Godot* that Beckett is being performed less because the Gate has an affinity for the contemporary of Ionesco or Genet, than because they revere the countryman of O'Casey. This is a very Irish Beckett with lots of realistic grubbing physical detail and with a fine line in sharply observed naturalism. The sense of lived-in isolate individualism is more marked in the first half of the play where Asmus directs s-l-o-w-l-y, giving a textbook latitude to the case for excruciation and torpor. At this point Vladimir and Estragon look like dishevelled amiable acquaintances rather than distracted soul mates in a distorting mirror of hope-and-despair.

The notation is sharp, private, individualised. It is as if character will be revealed in time rather than that identity will be manifest from the start as it should be in this play. At the same time the audience cannot fail to be aware of what a formidable performance Barry McGovern is giving as Estragon and how sharply Johnny Murphy keeps his theatrical distance.

Both actors deliver their lines in a musical 'low' Irish which contrasts with the mellifluous Anglo-Irish of Pozzo (Alan Stanford) and Pat Kinevane's tonally wide-ranging Lucky.

In the second half things speed up to a point where the dramatic electricity may

actually make things go a bit too fast. The duet—there's no other word for it—between Vladimir and Estragon, which has the leitmotiv of 'leaves' repeated with multiple tonal variations, was flatter than it should have been, less lyrically charged. None of which is meant to diminish the power of the performances, McGovern's in particular. He gives Vladimir a kind of imperious, bristling dignity and an intensity which is always impressive and technically interesting.

This was a good production of *Godot*, even a very good one, which nevertheless tended to domesticate the play's comedy and drama to the sharply particularised faces of one kind of experience. There is nothing wrong with this in itself, but the kind of human faces Beckett needs, the apprehensions of grace and the reality of the pratfalls, are both more clowning and more lyrical than this grainy and thorough realisation can dream of. This is a *Godot* after the pattern of a Jack Yeats painting or, in Australian terms, a Counihan.

Krapp's Last Tape is Beckett's more famous one-hander, the only play he wrote for a solo actor, which belongs to the same period as *Godot* and *Endgame* and is likely to live as part of the general dramatic tradition. The play was originally written for Patrick Magee and it is a bare 45 minutes long. An old man shuffles on to the stage, mutters a few words, then proceeds to play a tape in which, as a much younger man, he remembers his life.

OCCASIONALLY HE MUTTERS OR expostulates or changes the tape. The power of the play comes from the tension between the hauntingly lyrical, disappointed but yearning, eloquence of the text as it is written and enunciated, and the wan decrepitude, the mute horror and deep sadness, of the old codger who has to listen to the exhibitionism of a past self.

The Dublin Gate production of this aria of self-revision and self-reviling has, as Krapp, an actor about as far removed from the pyrotechnics of Irish folksingers as it is possible to get. David Kelly—who was the first actor to play the part in Ireland back in 1959—creates a riveting dislocation between the voice which remembers and the body which reacts.

Kelly's performance is a study in restraint and the dramatic power it generates. The voice is Anglo-Irish, refined, lyrical—a voice that understands that the emotion is in the cadence and there has to be poetry, however toned down, if you're

going to show pain. It is almost as though the spectral physical presence of the actor, with his black empty eyes, is like the spirit of Beckett's own scepticism about the eloquence which he parades within the inverted commas of the action.

The whole short play is like a *memento mori* within a *memento mori*: an infinite regress which represents not only the limits of human happiness but the limits of any artistic representation. Faced with such material David Kelly balances expertly between authority and understatement. There is no milking of the action, no clown-like commentary on the text, just the sharp discordance between the two personae of a figure we know to be different phases of the same character. Thirty years ago I saw Elijah Moshinsky direct Max Gillies in this part. The conception and the performance were much more visually inventive, there was much greater sprawl and business and clowning, but there was nothing like the same angry brilliance of the eye or the same grave music.

Endgame is, I suppose, the greatest play of the postwar period and the play in which Beckett allows the richest dramatic interplay to his central figures. After the lyricism and clowning of *Waiting for Godot* with its Tweedledee-Tweedledum tramps, Hamm and Clov in *Endgame* are contrasts from the world of cartoon or ancient typology: The Fat Man and the Thin Man, the bass and the tenor, King Lear and the Fool. Beckett is not quite susceptible to political allegory even though his minimalist canvases show traces of the lines of colour which have been wiped out. From this not quite permissible point of view, *Endgame* abstracts a world glowing with the suggestion of postnuclear holocaust in the same way that the waiting in *Godot* is probably flavoured by Beckett's experiences in the French Resistance, constantly waiting for a contact who might not come.

The play is histrionically rich in a way Beckett was never again to allow and it asks for the greatest actors on earth. Hamm, the old blind stager in the wheelchair, is the actor-manager of his own pain, to which Clov, his manservant, ministers chorically and chronically—he can no more sit than Hamm can stand.

Elsewhere, as a further modulation of merriment through misery, Hamm's mother and father, Nell and Nag, live in rubbish bins from which they pop up to be fed. *Endgame's* sharp tonal contrast and elaborate duet or repartée make it a

consistently funny play even though it is also a kind of tragedy in inverted commas, a tragedy which has as its framing device the impossibility of tragedy.

The Dublin Gate production of the play directed by Antonio Libera is cast to strength and has considerable style and power. Alan Stanford is nearly ideal as Hamm: the rugged Anglo-Irish voice with its dark recesses of oil, and its natural fruitiness is used to superb effect. This is the kind of old-style 'grand' acting which is fading fast from the face of the earth, and in Hamm Stanford has precisely the vehicle to showcase its effects and give himself an ironic distance from them. My only reservation is that it is such a finished performance that, although Stanford captures all the black irony and much of the melancholy of the part, he didn't actually move me on the first night, though this may have been merely fortuitous. At every level of gesture and tone however, and with superb sense of the rhetoric and rhythm of the part, this is a splendid performance.

AT TIMES PERHAPS there could have been more variation from the actual formality and music of the dialogue with Clov. There's a sense in which the deepest moments of feeling in Beckett are hidden in the pits and hollows of the texts. Barry McGovern, fine actor though he is, stays rather remorselessly in one register throughout his characterisation of Clov. It is a glittering, scathing, performance, of great technical authority, but too simply the walking bitter thin man.

McGovern's refusal to touch the gentleness or lyrical grain in Clov is particularly marked in the soliloquy, just before the end, which he gives a rat-a-tat metallic quality, like a dragged-out curse, rather than the wondering heartsorrow, the mysterious sadness of Beckett's words.

Not that this makes for anything but a strong revelatory *Endgame*. a lot better than one could hope for. Nell and Nag have precisely the right blend of hilarity and poignancy, and they are spacious and characterised rather than caricatures.

The Irishness—which is there as the merest tone colour—works very well in this production because the tarnished gentility of the accent suggests a nearly vanished world, fiercely democratic in its sharper instinct, which has nevertheless known the bitterest kinds of clan warfare. ■

Peter Craven used to be theatre critic for *The Australian*.

FLASH IN THE PAN



Lurv with Verve

Thank God he met Lizzie, dir. Cherie Nowlan, (independent cinemas). This film boasts 1997 AFI award-winners, Richard Roxburgh, (best performance by actor in a leading role), and Cate Blanchette, (best performance by an actress in a supporting role). Roxburgh (above, with Blanchette) won for his performance in *Doin' Time for Patsy Cline*; in *Lizzie*, he's outshone by the screen presence of Frances O'Connor as Jenny (inset).

Lizzie takes realistic view of the whole romantic love thing and its tremulous relationship with marriage. It charts familiar late-twentieth-century territory: first you live with your 'true love' until love fizzles out for reasons unknown or unexplained. And minus wedlock, no one fights to maintain it. Then you find another and marry fast, before the gloss has worn off. Or as 'Lizzie' puts it, 'You don't expect me to make this kind of commitment to someone I really know, do you?'

The set-up is that Guy and Lizzie are getting married, but during the ceremony Guy remembers—relives—the love of his (past) life: Jenny. One suspects he's realising he's marrying the wrong one, but his chosen partner—a doctor, more sophisticated, and

pedigreed than Jenny—is probably more 'appropriate'. But you are not quite sure.

Frances O'Connor's performance as the love of Guy's (Roxburgh's) twenties, is wonderful: she's warm, funny, enticing—a female character you can laugh at and with. In the film's best flashback scene, Jenny heaps virtually every household item onto the dining room table just as Guy's parents arrive for dinner. (She does this because Guy has told her that her efforts to set the table are useless and she should lay out everything that people might need during the meal. So she does.) Her virtuoso explanation of such bizarre behaviour is out-of-control mad: you feel quite embarrassed and breathless. Until Guy asks, 'Why are you doing this?' in front of his shocked and bewildered parents. And she says, 'Cause I hate you!' Now, you wouldn't expect that to be a good moment, but the anger drains from her face, a smile emerges, and Guy says, 'That's OK then. As long as you're not going off me!'

Their whole relationship is a bit like that: intense, spontaneous, volatile.

Lizzie? Well, she's different. She understands: one has to be practical, pragmatic, life's all about compromise. (Pity.) But I liked *Lizzie* nonetheless. It's mature. Or something of that nature.

—Lynda McCaffery

... and other bruises

Love etc., dir. Marion Vernoux, (Elsternwick Classic & Longford Cinemas.) Basically, *Love etc.* is the film we would have had if *My Best Friend's Wedding* had been directed by J.P. Sartre rather than P.J. Hogan. Both films explore the moral dilemmas generated by the incompatible demands of love and of friendship, but where *My Best Friend's Wedding* plays Julia Robert's amoral self-absorption for laughs, *Love etc.* tosses its characters straight into a pit of existentialist angst and wrings every ounce of suffering that it can out of them—although both films seem to suggest that bad karaoke singing is becoming an essential '90s courtship ritual. Oddly enough, the film's flyer describes it as a comedy.

Benoit (Yvan Atta) and Pierre (Charles Berling) have a long-standing friendship based on symbiotic parasitism; Pierre—irresponsible and charming—acts the playboy with stockbroker Benoit's money, and in return, dull, shy Benoit gets a social life by proxy. This all changes when Benoit answers Marie's (Charlotte Gainsbourg) ad in the 'personals' column. She is quiet, methodical, anti-social—a perfect match for Benoit. They meet, marry, and suddenly Pierre is peripheral. He promptly decides he's in love with Marie, and although she rejects him out of hand, when she fails to tell Benoit about Pierre's advances, their fate is sealed. By this betrayal of omission, all three are doomed to their own separate, personal kind of heartbreak.

Love etc. is moving, but it grates that neither Benoit nor Marie is dull or plain, despite repeated assertions to the contrary, and Pierre comes across as a more egotistical brat than sophisticated charmer. Still, the fact that none of them ends up being all that appealing or particularly happy rings true, downbeat though it is. I can't help wondering what would have happened if Benoit had passed the karaoke love test just that little bit better ...

—Allan Thomas

Nhill obstat

Road to Nhill, dir. Sue Brooks (independent cinemas). The wit of Australian films seems to get drier and drier, but it's hard to recall anything as laconic as *Road to Nhill*. It's a simple story. Four lady bowlers, from a

country town, are on their way home from the green. They are hardly in the first flush of youth, but their uniforms are starched and ironed and they look a treat. Unfortunately, their car fails to take a corner and they run off the road. With as much dignity as they can muster, they gradually extricate themselves from the upturned vehicle. This scene is poised precariously between tragedy and farce, but gradually a wry sense of the ridiculous begins to win out.

The four lady bowlers are discovered in their distress by Maurie (Paul Chubb), a local pig farmer, who ineptly initiates a rescue. This brings into play the volunteers of the local CFA who are keen to put on a good show, the local ambulance unit which can't find the scene of the accident, and the local policeman who happens to be having an affair and misses out on all the action. The emergency services know far less of what's happening than the town gossips. The four lady bowlers are the only ones who keep calm.

One of the most appealing features of the film is the fine Australian cast: Bill Hunter, Patricia Kennedy, Alwyn Kurts, Monica Maughan, Terry Norris and Kerry Walker are among them. Phillip Adams is the voice of God. All of these actors—some of them not young—can create extraordinary characters from the smallest gestures, even from the way they handle a teapot.

And Nhill, of course, like many of the towns between Melbourne and Adelaide, has made other appearances in the yarts. In Jack Hibberd's *Stretch of the Imagination*, Monk O'Neil describes himself as a Nhillist. This film is at the other end of the stretch. It's about the way lives overlap, flow into each other and sometimes collide. It's a very funny film with hardly a funny line in it.

—Michael McGirr SJ

Play it Kull, boy

Kull the Conqueror, dir. John Nicolella (general release). Every year or so there has to be a sword-and-sorcery epic. They used to be sword-and-sandal, but the myths of Greece, Rome and the Bible have given way to Tolkienesque derivations that suit an age less pious but just as hungry for the numinous.

The producer's family has a long and quite honourable tradition in epic making: Raffaella de Laurentiis is the daughter of Dino de Laurentiis, maker of *Barbarella*, *Flash Gordon* and *Conan the Barbarian*—all good, solid watchable films with touches

of wit and intelligence. The target market for *Kull* is clearly teenage boys who play *Ultima* and *Diablo* on their computers when they should be using them to write essays on Greece, Rome and the Bible. There will also be great support from the gay lobby: the well-muscled Kevin Sorbo is also the lead in *Hercules*, the low-budget TV series that has become a cult hit.

Sorbo reminds me of Clint Walker, a chesty actor from the 1950s who starred in *Cheyenne*, a Western that provided lots of opportunities to flex pectorals at the ladies. It had a theme song that we kids reduced to 'Cheyenne, Cheyenne, Cheyenne is a very big man ...' and used as a skipping song. Nothing as resonant or memorable happens in the *Kull* soundtrack, which has some very undistinguished plain-label heavy metal to punctuate the action. *Highlander* had Queen, and it was the right combination: great action and terrific music created something memorable. *Kull* isn't up to *Highlander* standards—it's more in the style of *Dragonheart*, from the same production company—but will provide lots of young lads with something harmless to do for an afternoon in the school hols. As my 17-year-old nephew said after the preview: 'It's not Shakespeare, but it's a hoot.'

—Juliette Hughes

Get the wind up

Hurricane Streets, dir. Morgan J. Freeman, (Independent cinemas). A variant on the *Anthem to Doomed Youth* school of drama, this is quite a good film, although it depicts not so much hurricane streets as unpleasant avenues of medium zephyr. It tells the story of a 'club' of boys, still at the bike-riding age, in lower Manhattan. They steal CDs and shoes to resell to other kids; hang out in their clubhouse—an empty bomb shelter—and engage in what is basically small-time crime.

Filmed in a naturalistic style, with a good feeling for the urban environment they inhabit, the focus of the narrative is Marcus, a fifteen-year-old living with his grandmother because his father is dead and his mother's in jail. Indeed the performance of Brendon Sexton III in this role is the reason to see the film. He does a fine job conveying the web of morality, guilt, hopefulness and despair that ensnares the gang as they are pressured to upgrade their activities to a more serious level of wrongdoing. All Marcus really wants to do is escape from his own particular reality and

return to his boyhood home in the clean air of New Mexico. Somewhat inconveniently, he falls in love with a Latino girl, who shakes him from his alienated state and helps propel him into a series of confrontations, not just with her overprotective father, but with the law, other gang members and the city itself.

The film's problem is that it reveals little we haven't seen before. The streets of New York have been worked over so many times by so many competent directors before Morgan J. Freeman. The plot in its latter stages requires two devices so obvious and clumsy that they detract from the serious character development. Still, Freeman does have a fine feel for realism and I warmed to the lead character as he started to become just as exasperated as I did with the constant 'faux-homeboy' posturing of his gang.

—Victor Nurcombe

A bit extraordinary

A Life Less Ordinary, dir. Danny Boyle, (Independent cinemas). Figment Films, which brought us *Trainspotting* and *Shallow Grave* has managed a change of style in this romantic comedy/fantasy, obviously aimed at a wider audience than their earlier movies. *A Life* is the story of two very different characters—princess and pauper—brought together by fate, then manipulated by two rather twisted angels, played by Holly Hunter and Delroy Lindo. This film's version of heaven is 'NYPD White', and the two angel 'cops' must bring these two opposites together if they want to keep their jobs—and world peace.

Figment films is the creation of Danny Boyle, Andrew McDonald and John Hodge—director, producer and writer respectively—and actor Ewan McGregor. *A Life* represents a complete departure from the gritty, in-your-face cynicism of their previous efforts, and shows a certain bravery in the face of current disenchantment with all things romantic.

Ewan McGregor plays the leading 'boy', whose life has been very, very ordinary: he's lost his job, his girl (to a gym instructor) and his house. So he gets very, very mad, storms the boss's office, gun in hand, demanding his cleaning job back. And that's where he meets *her*—the boss's daughter (Cameron Diaz). A kidnap follows and the adventures begin. It's a wild ride, but not the *tour de force* that was *Trainspotting*.

—Melanie Coombs



Square eyed in Gaza

THERE HAS BEEN stiff competition for Watching Brief's worst program of the year award, but if you knock out all infomercials, soaps, *Ricki Lake* and *A Current Affair* (they can go in the Hall of Infamy) you're still left to decide between *Party of Five*, *Weddings*, *The Price is Right* and those supposedly one-off specials

such as *Playboy's Really Naked Truth 2*.

I wonder if it is a coincidence that all these foulnesses are emitted from the commercial channels. In the interests of fairness, one has to mention Seven's *Eric*, which showed the considerable abilities of Eric Bana. (But of course Seven has let him go. He follows Jill Singer, Jana Wendt and an army of talented production staff into pastures pinker. Talent is a dangerous thing God wot.)

But take heart: it's not all vast deserts of postmodernity. The same channels also bring us *The Simpsons*, *The X-Files*, *Cracker*, and various home-grown efforts that rate very well and occasionally aren't bad, such as *Blue Heelers*, *Funniest Home Videos* and *Healthy, Wealthy and Wise*. The last, on Ten, is notable chiefly for having the wife of a state premier as a presenter. The poor lady is given some awful jobs to do such as trailing around Tuscany. I do hope that they give her a credit card to defray her expenses.

In the meantime ABC and SBS keep making and buying hard-nosed documentaries and great shows such as *The Lakes*, *Pie in the Sky*, *Hamish MacBeth*, *Race Around the World*, *Full Circle With Michael Palin*, and *Wildside*. The ABC is still willing to take chances on production, as evidenced by *Raw FM*, which has been panned by some critics. I think they're demanding something of it that was never intended. It's obvious that it's meant to be watched by people only a little older than the *Heartbreak High* audience, which is watched by upper primary and lower secondary kids. Although it's occasionally obvious that the dialogue is a very bowdlerised version of 'normal' later-teen patois, there is still much to enjoy. The music is good, and some of the performances are terrific, notably Nadine Garner's as the blind DJ. If the script is occasionally a little earnest-and-worthy, it's compensated for by the way it points to some of the essence of youthful anger and despair in urban Oz: the knowledge that being parented by the Me-Generation has not been all roses and Sheila Kitzinger.

Wildside, on the other hand, which screened as a two-part pilot in November, is completely adult and satisfyingly so. It explores the same area as *Phoenix* and *Blue Murder*, albeit as fiction as opposed to their docudrama. Fiction it may be, but the territory is familiar: paedophile rings, police corruption and murder. An honest cop Billy McCoy (Tony Martin), returns to Sydney after four years' exile overseas since a gruelling conflict over police corruption has destroyed his marriage and career. His troubled adolescent son is missing at a time when boys are turning up as raped corpses. *Wildside* is more than watchable—it contains moments of recognition, where you think 'That's absolutely right', particularly when McCoy is trying to get information from the angry street kids who were his son's

companions. Martin is a powerful actor, who can, as we saw in *Blue Murder*, convey an intensity, a sense of being dangerous when pushed too far. As McCoy he gets plenty of frustration as his son's friends evade his questions, full of sullen young fury and hard-faced hedonism. The ending gave several good loose ends to follow when *Wildside* returns as a series next year.

When I was 15 it was Mother Marie Thérèse and the fate of heretics. Nestorius, we were told, received condign punishment in this life (as well as, presumably, the next) for asserting that Mary was not the mother of God. 'His tongue rotted in his mouth,' she said, 'because he blasphemed the Mother of God.' None of that wimpish heroin and homelessness for my generation—we were raised with all the gory details of the Forty Martyrs, mortal sin and the DLP.

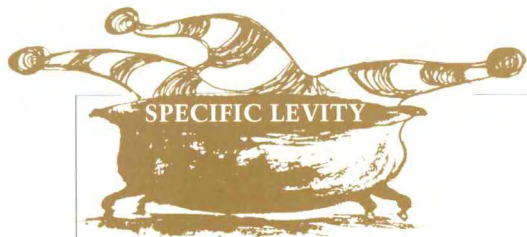
I was reminded of all this when I previewed SBS' forthcoming 6-part series *Saints and Sinners: The History of the Popes*, starting on Sunday, December 14. The Irish-based production traces the papacy from its beginnings through its shadowy early history to the present day. The contributors include J. Murphy O'Connor, Henry Chadwick and Eamon Duffy, so a sense of credible scholarship pervades. It is much more interesting than *Inside the Vatican* which screened earlier this year on ABC, although its underpinnings are more solid and sober. That's not to say that it's dull, though: the camera work on various locations is lush and immediate, and the story, as it unfolds, is fascinating.

MOTHER MARIE WOULDN'T HAVE APPROVED of its exposition of some of the popes and their politics. Marcellinus, who figured in my father's 1929 *New Catholic Dictionary* as a saint in whose pontificate the Diocletian persecution began, is revealed by *Saints and Sinners* as a craven who offered sacrifice to the Roman gods and died in disgrace. The tone of Anthony Clare's narration at that point is quite compassionate—not everyone has the gift of heroism after all. But it would have embarrassed Mother Marie, who had enough trouble with the abolition of Sts Christopher and Philomena. (Very inconsiderate of the Vatican, one thought, leaving a whole mob of people with desanctified names, medals and holy pictures.)

The most interesting impression I got from *Saints and Sinners* was the tenuousness of the line of succession in the first millennium or so, with rival popes, antipopes and what have you. And the account of the finding of the supposed skeleton of St Peter underneath St Peter's in the 1940s had me thinking along the lines of Phillip Adams when he commented some years ago about the Shroud of Turin, that even if it turned out to be an image of a crucified man from the right time, how do we know it was *that* man? Equally, the discovery of bones in an old graveyard requires somewhat more than their approximate age as evidence to satisfy anyone more sceptical than the editors of the *Fortean Times*.

And while we're on the subject of scepticism, I think the Worst Program award has to go to *A Current Affair*. Or *Weddings*. Or *The Price is Right*. Or *Party of Five*. All right, dammit, *Party of Five*. Or *Current Affair*, or ... ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer and reviewer



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 59, December 1997

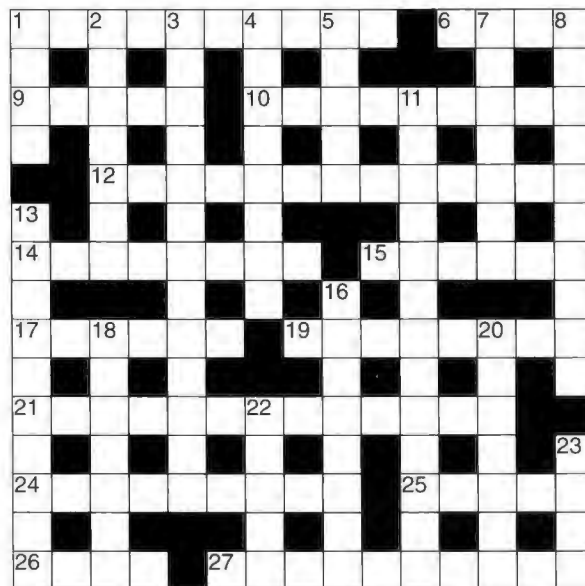
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

1. It seems that Chris was angry when he heard about the design that had been hatched. (10)
6. Was ambition such a motive for Macbeth? (4)
9. Design for modern overhead railway, perhaps. (5)
10. Completely opposed to help returning to this system of measurement. (9)
12. Study the domestic animal English people regard as belonging to a series. (13)
14. Claim sty is somehow supernatural! (8)
15. No bias formed judgment about the art of growing small? (6)
17. Re-sort the list, please. (6)
19. Cryptically use rare T-square to discover where your heart is when you find this—biblically, anyway. (8)
21. Those getting off the train are looking for jobs, perhaps? (6,7)
24. Maintaining that in gravity, short sibling can possibly achieve weightlessness? (9)
25. Being realistic, change of heart brings me down to it. (5)
26. Every way points to the Orient. (4)
27. Many 21s have been subject to this appraisal. Fools people in the street! (10)

DOWN

1. Officer has split second to get to the lake. (4)
2. The Archipelago, East or West, holds 100 pointers. (7)
3. You can spend about fifty provided the god of love embraces you briefly. How wonderful! (13)
4. Travel elsewhere? A wry idea, for a change. (4,4)
5. At starting price, consumed heaps! (5)
7. Some, that is, several to start with, join political factions. (7)
8. Makes peace between the opposing teams with unexpected score line of 100. (10)
11. English political party took in 'headland speeches' with great nicety of detail! (13)
13. I am a journalist. I have a story that you will find affecting. (10)
16. Hearing about New Guinea threesome. Eternal trouble? (8)
18. One way or another, miss early school divisions. (7)
20. Press pus out on top to prevent infection rising? (7)
22. Fifty tunes in the sanctuaries. (5)
23. Of breathy humour, there's not a jot! (4)



Solution to Crossword no. 58, November 1997



CARL MERTEN SCULPTURE AND SILVERWARE STUDIO

PUBLIC, PRIVATE AND CORPORATE
SCULPTURE COMMISSIONS
MEDALLIONS, BAS-RELIEF, FIGURATIVE
AND CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE
IN BRONZE, SILVER, STONE AND STEEL
SCULPTURE AND SILVERSMITHING COURSES

BE CREATIVE, WITH CARL MERTEN

'CHINOOK' Torryburn Road Uralla NSW 2358
Ph: 02 6775 5593
email: modoz@northnet.com.au
website: <http://www.com.au/neiss/modoz/html>

Counselling

If you or someone you know could benefit from professional counselling, please phone **Martin Prescott**, BSW, MSW, MAASW. Individuals, couples and families catered for:

179 Centre Rd,
Bentleigh 3204
ph (03) 9557 8525

EUREKA STREET

& TEXT

Special book Offer

THE SUMMER GAME BY GIDEON HAIGH



Gideon Haigh has established himself as one of Australia's most elegant and entertaining cricket writers. His new book revisits the so-called quiet years of Australian cricket, between the retirement of Don Bradman and the appointment of Ian Chappell as captain, and finds that they weren't so quiet after all. *The Summer Game* is ideal summer reading.

Thanks to TEXT PUBLISHING, we have eight copies, each worth \$39.95, to give away. To enter, just put your name and address on the back of an envelope and send it to 'Eureka Street December Book offer', PO Box 553, Richmond, Vic, 3121.

AUSTRALIAN BOOK REVIEW

in December/January:

Elizabeth Jolley on Ruth Cracknell's memoirs

Michael Cathcart on Manning Clark

Jenna Mead on Germaine Greer

Carmel Bird on Thea Astley's *Collected Stories*

John Birmingham on
Linda Jaivin's *Confessions of an S & M Virgin*

Don Anderson on Rod Jones' *Nightpictures*

Robert Adamson on
Fay Zwicky's *The Gate Keeper's Wife*

Inga Clendinnen on biography

New Subscribers \$55 for ten issues *plus* a free book
Ph (03) 9663 8657 or Fax (03) 9663 8658

**While you fill your
plate this Christmas
make sure this bowl
isn't empty.**



Give to the Christmas Bowl

(Generously please)

CALL TOLL FREE 1800 025 101

OR USE THE REPLY PAID ENVELOPE AVAILABLE FROM YOUR PARISH.



THE CHRISTMAS BOWL

Your church is a member of the
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN AUSTRALIA

www.christmasbowl.com.au

CHURCHES WORKING TOGETHER

ISSN 1036-1758



9 771036 175017