

EUREKA STREET

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Fundamentals

GRAHAM SWIFT WON THE BOOKER PRIZE last year with a startling novel called *Last Orders*. It contains a passage that should be recommended reading for politicians on both sides of the House. It's about waste.

Jack Dodds' father was a butcher before him. He had a lecture that he gave, on wastage: 'Jack boy, it's all down to wastage ... Bones'll cost you and fat'll cost you and shrinkage'll cost you and not having your cutlery ground'll cost you ... You got to keep a constant eye on wastage, constant. What you've got to understand is the nature of the goods. Which is perishable.'

For the last decade our political cutlery has been kept ground, sure enough, and we've kept an eye on fat in Australian life. There's not much left to pare away. We've let shrinkage get a bit out of control. But what we have not done, what our political leaders of either colour have not done, is understand the nature of the goods: perishable.

Wastage is now an entrenched way of Australian life. Wastage of talent, good-will, experience. It's the bones that we are neglecting, the very structure.

Take the ongoing, and offensively euphemistic 'downsizing'. One of the by-products of relentless paring of the Australian labour force—in both private and public enterprise, is the loss of communal or corporate memory, the drain of experience and commitment, particularly at the top where crucial decisions are made. It has happened in the public service, where changeover is now so rapid that many public servants, understandably, have little sense of the rationale of policy, or of the ethical ground of the culture in which they work. You acquire such knowledge over time, and in an atmosphere of security; you don't acquire it if you are always having to look over your shoulder.

When the Civil Aviation Authority, for example, was 'downsized' earlier this decade, redundancy packages were generous, and many of the best left. Downsized and de-skilled. It is happening all over—at the ABC, in universities, in government bodies and instrumentalities as they become politicised or are sold off. Cultures of research, in Telstra for example, in the management of waterways, electricity, are being lost. Waste. It is happening most drastically in schools, where the policy aim now is to employ more and more contract teachers, many of whom are first year out. You can't acquire the culture if you are never in the same school for more than a year at a time.

Most spectacularly, it happens in science, as Professor Peter Doherty and, more recently, the experience of Professor John Funder, have reminded us. When opportunist politics or zealous economics rule the roost you take your eye off the perishable goods. And the good. ■

—Morag Fraser

Given not lent

IN SOME PLACES, THE CURRENT TERM of the academic year used to be known as the Lent term. This may not be much comfort to teachers who are right now beginning to take the strain of another year.

There were certainly days in my own brief teaching career that felt as though they were coming to me from the book of penances reserved for the blackest sins. I presumed that the Almighty, like many of his creatures, had misspelt my name and I was getting somebody else's comeuppance. Some days, I used to go around the staff room and ask more experienced teachers what to do. I recall that two of them gave me the same advice. They gave it for very different reasons.

The first teacher told me that the secret of classroom management was to beat the children into ... I didn't catch the end of this sentence but I presumed he meant into a pulp. In fact he meant I should beat them into the classroom. 'Get there before them. Never look like you're reluctant or afraid. Stand the desk and hold your ground as they file in.' This gentleman used to refer to his students as 'the enemy'. The second teacher told me much the same thing. She said it was important to be

in the room waiting for the class to arrive. But her reasons were opposite. She told me that I should try and establish eye contact with all of the students as they came through the door. I should remind myself that each child who stepped through that door brought a range of experiences I could only guess at.

There might be money trouble at home, their parents might be fighting, their own friends could be giving them a hard time, they might be low on confidence because they missed a place in a team.

For her the classroom was not a battlefield: it was like standing in the surf. The secret of leadership was to try and catch the chaotic waves of energy and make sense of them.

It's easy to recognise these two approaches as common attitudes to Lent, and to the life of faith in general. The first is defensive. It's the attitude which counts lollies and tolls up Masses. The second attitude is accommodating. It makes room for all kinds of unfamiliar and inexplicable experiences. It makes sense of leadership from the cross. ■

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

Peasant revolt, or apocalypse now

THE WEST GIPPSLAND BY-ELECTION RESULT was hardly surprising. Many commentators, including those in this journal, could see the problems coming. If Labor were to acquire even a little potency, the problems for the Government would pile up not just in the bush but throughout Victoria. Even Jeff Kennett could see the way the cards were falling, by the end.

But the result was a mess, and one likely to be repeated elsewhere in the country. Labor didn't dare run a candidate; if they had, as the Labor-backed Independent victor, Susan Davies, remarked, the swing would have been only half, and the Liberals would have won, their Dodo candidate notwithstanding.

The anti-immigration and gun lobby parties won it for Davies in a rebuff to Kennett. Labor is like a red rag to a bull in the bush. So is the Prime Minister, in many places, because he took away the guns.

The continuing dependence of Labor on anti-immigration and gun lobby votes should be disturbing them, for eventually Howard will, quite rightly, blow their cover. And their hiding behind the Democrats and Greens in the Senate.

A former academic colleague of mine was in Gippsland looking over the election. He reports a good deal of structured

disorder, but one clear, communal memory—Kennett's forays into the electorate. Arriving by helicopter with acolytes, and followed by helicopters full of journalists, he breezed into town to give the rustics the good oil from Spring Street. A scene from *Apocalypse Now ...* and in both cases the peasants struck back. The Liberal candidate quite unwisely tagged along with the Red Berets—or were they Green—so as to be noticed.

Kennett has done nothing for provincial and rural Victoria, except downsize it while ignoring it. What use is it, if you're living in Mildura or Cobram, to hear about the fireworks displays on the Yarra, the President's Cup at some Melbourne golf course, the City Link roads project, etc? You're already fully occupied fighting anthrax, struggling to keep open the local hospital, or school, or factory, or train service, or pondering the rural youth suicide rate, which is the worst in a country whose own level is already unconscionably high.

City folk still get circuses, though bread is off the menu. Our bushies are getting neither.

Where, oh where, are the Victorian Nationals? And their missing state leader? In past times in Victoria, the Country Party would break a Coalition, see their partners lose and go it alone

for a while; but they no longer have the numbers. Now, unless they redefine their position and break their snake and bird relationship with Jeff, there'll be no National MPs or voters—the new populist parties and independents will have eaten them.

The Nationals should talk turkey with the Liberals while they still have the chance. They have a little more time, for Victorian voters have too-recent memories of being short-changed by Labor. And the short-changers won't change, apparently. The Liberals should be considering a palace revolution, or else they should require that Kennett alters his style and replaces his friends. Of course, Jeff may not be a free agent, at this stage of his corporate entanglement.

But just as people got tired of the hundreds of new millionaires spawned by Hawke and Keating while the economy was limping and people were hitting the dole queues, so are Victorians becoming sick of the new provincial crop of little mates and instant millionaires scoffing the bread of our children and grandchildren: the Nationals and Libs in Victoria have some hard choices to make—for otherwise it will be the Lord of the Flies. Perhaps they should consider ringing Alan Brown, kicked upstairs to London for doing his job, and for standing up to the monarch. ■

Max Teichmann is a freelance writer and political commentator.

COMMENT: 4

ANDREW HAMILTON

Zero sums

The excommunication of Sri Lankan Catholic theologian, Fr Tissa Balasuriya, prompts questions about the nature of Catholic community

MY EARLIEST AND MOST ENDEARING memory of Tissa Balasuriya was of a lecture he gave in Melbourne some years ago. He was asked, at a time when the question was new and fraught, whether women should become priests in the Catholic Church. The atmosphere became tensely expectant. To heavy silence, he advised his audience not to press for women priests. After a pause, he added, 'You should fight for a woman Pope.' The tension turned into laughter and he returned to the topic of his talk.

The exchange typified Tissa's style—lively, provocative, a bit over the top and ultimately irenic. His writing is like his speech: sharp, stimulating, not closely argued and open to a variety of interpretations. In other words, designed more to elicit thoughtful response rather than to claim a definitive position.

Some years later I was in Sri Lanka for the Jesuit Refugee Service. There I found another Tissa: the inspiring force behind a large relief organisation working on behalf of the victims of the long war. In a tortured land, Tissa was one of the few public, catholic symbols of the desire for reconciliation.

I was deeply saddened then to hear that on January 2 Tissa Balasuriya was declared to be heretical and to be excommunicated. The declaration followed a long investigation into one of his books, *Mary and Human Liberation*, (available in Australian in the journal *Logos*, Volume 29, 1 & 2) and his failure to agree with the Congregation of the Faith on the form of a Creed he was to sign.

Even if it is necessary, excommunication is always a sign of failure in a church which preaches a Gospel of reconciliation and communion. So I must believe that my own sadness is shared as deeply by those who felt obliged to pass judgment on Tissa. Their task, of deciding what is absolutely inconsistent with Catholic belief, is not an enviable one. The only people I can imagine rejoicing are those who want total war rather than

reconciliation between ethnic groups in Sri Lanka.

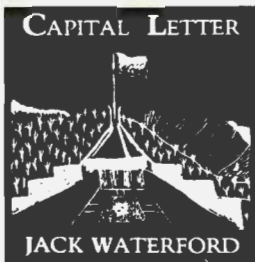
For Tissa, of course, excommunication is not the final judgment. The church's calendar is sprinkled with saints, (as well as our own Mary MacKillop) whose CVs include a spell of excommunication. He has appealed against the judgment, and in the meantime has, paradoxically, been more communicated with than before.

But to those of us who are Catholics, Tissa's excommunication poses hard questions about the way we shape our church life to reflect the Gospel. Does the public excommunication of a septuagenarian confirm our community in faith and love? Do the processes which culminate in excommunication encourage each side to put a favourable interpretation on what the other says? Or do they create an adversarial attitude in which the accuser assumes bad faith and the accused comes to identify submission with the loss of personal integrity? Can we find better ways than this?

Those of us who live in Asia will ponder the question, too. For 1998 will be the fourth centenary of Vasco da Gama's arrival in India. It marked the beginning of European colonial domination over Asia and the arrival of Western Christianity in Asia. The churches of Asia have always had to struggle to separate the christian and the colonial parts of their inheritance. Will Tissa's condemnation help or hinder them in that?

My pressing question, however, is local and personal. If Tissa is knocked out of the ring, will the Church find anyone with the courage publicly to champion the poor, driven and vulnerable victims of conflict in Sri Lanka? ■

Andrew Hamilton SJ is a theologian. He has worked among refugee communities from Central and Latin America, Indochina and Africa.



Ends and means

DO NOT PUT ANY MONEY ON IT YET, but that lot in Canberra could lose the next election. Scarcely a year into government and they are already full of those arrogances, complacencies and petty corruptions of power more usually associated either with sheer amateurism or being in there far too long. And they are making two of the cardinal mistakes of politics—forgetting that the essence of good politics is good policy and forgetting that the journey is as important as the destination.

The best thing going for them is that neither the population nor the Opposition looks yet ready for a transition, that it is not so late in the term that the Government cannot retrieve its position, and that a forgiving electorate might be inclined to dismiss some of the atrocities as being due to growing pains.

Prime Minister John Howard fronted an increasingly critical media some weeks ago to argue that the public is interested in results, and not a bit interested in fine theological points about proper process, or mistakes due to over-enthusiasm by ministers with purity in their hearts. In the short term, he might be right—not least since Labor has done so little, so far, to put itself on the electoral radar.

Yet someone who has traded as well as John Howard on the politics of perception would surely know, first, that there is nothing so fatal for a party as an image of sharp practice mixed with incompetence, and that nothing could be more fatal to his own image, or capacity to lead his party into the next election, than an impression that the good old honest John, a bit dull perhaps, but decent and solid, is just another politician who will stop at nothing when political survival is at stake. The more so indeed, when at the root of his current strategy has been a careful play in the dangerous waters of populism and disillusion with politics.

Some of the problems have been building up for a while. The sleaze factor began with a few opposition hits on conflict of interest, compounded by an injured pretence that nothing really was wrong. It has been aggravated by Howard's own pragmatism at the deals necessary to buy or rent Senate votes—a dirty business at the best of times, but one not usually made any more attractive by the personal involvement of the Prime Minister in securing a Senator privileges on the eve of a crucial vote. Mr Howard is in no way responsible for the trouble some frontbenchers have got into with alleged rortings of travel expenses (a sin, like adultery, which is very bipartisan; the reason why the Opposition has thrown few stones). But he will not thank those who have found themselves accused for reinforcing an impression that the standards are not very high. Some further events on the horizon—changing the cross-media rules in a move expected manifestly to benefit Kerry Packer, but hardly anyone else, least of all the public—may not help either.

Accidents will happen. Where Howard may be making his position worse is with a natural combativeness, very like Paul Keating's, which makes him unwilling to concede that ministers have done anything wrong, or that he has in his handling of it. Or, if some mistake is transparent, a tendency to forgive it with excuses which suggest either that the end justifies the means or that a minister should not be censured

because he is a good bloke. The failure, after a year, of John Herron to make any inroads in Aboriginal affairs is dismissed because John Herron is a noble man who went voluntarily to work in Rwanda. Some over-cleverness by the Transport minister, John Sharp, in seeking to achieve a perfectly reasonable aim of wanting a board of his own cronies rather than the cronies of the last lot, is entirely justifiable because John Sharp genuinely has civil air safety at heart. It may well be true that the broader public does not have the appetite of Canberra insiders for the finer points of detail; but it has been demonstrated time and again that the uneasiness which is inevitably created by a pattern of such indelicacies can smoulder into a bushfire.

Malcolm Fraser suffered in politics from a general impression of untrustworthiness. He would make broad promises with unnoticed caveats, then later, when he turned 180 degrees, insist that no one has misled. A year ago John Howard took maximum advantage of an apparently suddenly discovered budgetary black hole to pick and choose which of his electoral promises were 'core' and which could be discarded. He may not have the same leeway now, least of all when some of his present problems are ones of his own creation. If, as he seems to judge, the budget bottom line is most important, and if, as he seems to have determined, the \$10 billion Defence budget is sacrosanct, the chief areas for further savings are in health, community services and social welfare—with strings of broken promises.

BUT SOME MIGHT THINK that the least forgivable sign was the announcement of a small work-for-the-dole scheme. It is not that it was seized upon, unprepared, so as to distract attention from a worrying lapse of memory by the Prime Minister. It is not that it is necessarily bad—indeed, similar schemes have been operating in Aboriginal communities, with reasonable success and dignity, for many years without civil libertarians getting too upset, and there have been elements of such policy in some of the labour market programs of recent years. Nor is it that it involves a blatant breach of election promise, thinly excused with a claim that the Prime Minister did not personally authorise repeated assertions that he would not do it. Those are sins which, at worst, are venial.

In fact the work-for-the-dole-scheme is not a policy at all, but a public relations package, like the ludicrous Green Corps, but far more disgusting since it is intended only to trade off popular prejudice against the jobless. John Howard knows well—since his office polls relentlessly on such matters—the idea of making scroungers and layabouts work for their benefits is nearly as popular as the idea of stringing up murderers.

When Prime Ministers engage in stunts designed to win the applause of talk-back radio hosts, then bask in that applause to distract attention away from serious matters of government, one can be sure they have reached their peak and are on the way down. That the hill is a fair bit higher than usual may, however, save Howard for a while. ■

Jack Waterford is the editor of the *Canberra Times*.

The big picture

From J.S. Gregory

In response to Robert Crotty's balanced and clear summary of the stages in the quest for the historical Jesus (*Eureka Street*, December 1997), and in particular to his concluding comments that he is pleased the debate has come out in the open (on the internet as well as in Jesuit journals!) but would like to see more informed participants, the following thoughts may be of interest. They are not mine, but those of Dr John Barrett, former Minister in the Uniting church and a distinguished writer of Australian history, including its religious history. He made them in response to my sending him a piece by Phillip Adams on the subject, published in *The Australian* on 3 August last. Adams, while summarising Crossan and others in (for him) fairly straightforward terms, concluded that 'of course Christianity will continue to rely on a hybrid Christ, a mixture of a tiny amount of fact with enormous dollops of faith.'

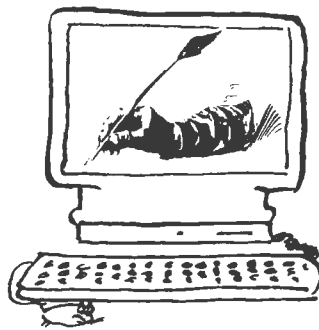
Dr Barrett wrote: 'Phillip Adams is the last man I'd care to have writing about Jesus and Christianity. He's too disturbed, hung up, unsympathetic—can't let it go, but can't embrace it. His tortured mind finally issues in superficial gibes, with a certain longing still adhering.'

'But what a mess everyone's made of the Bible! And it leaves terrible legacies, almost insurmountable problems. The writers of the gospels, following the conventions of the day, and also holding an attitude akin to some of the latter day post-modernists, believed that the end justifies the means; fiction can be declared as fact, and tampering with evidence (eg. the Jesus bit inserted into Josephus) can be legitimately ignored. So, to give Jesus credentials, they invented the birth stories. They invented frameworks and situations for the "life". All of them, and not only John, turned their "lives" of Jesus into theological interpretations into which any helpful, though invented "fact" could be justifiably worked—according to their cultured and literary conventions.'

'I can accept this, but how can it be got across to others? People want to know what Jesus said, Jesus did ...

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'What was remembered about Jesus? He loved God. He loved people. He pondered the scriptures. He reckoned that, if we were spiritually re-born we'd enter here and now a new life ruled by God. He was an encourager: he made many folk feel better, and he actually made some people better. He was a remarkable man. He was also a challenger: some people, especially the comfortable and powerful, felt threatened by him, resented him and came to hate him. He expected all these reactions. He'd heard (or read?) Isaiah and remembered: the poor have good news preached to them, but the servant of God inevitably suffers. It doesn't matter if he spoke or didn't speak of 'take up your cross' in the middle of Mark, when the cross had not been invested with meaning. He might have guessed at what was likely for him and his followers under Rome. He might have actually said those

words later. He might not have said them at all. But they fit the pattern of a man who said the world will make any true follower of God suffer. And this Jesus could cope with life and its problems; we never knew anyone who could cope better. He had an authority about him. He respected religious law and ritual so long as they served man and God, but he denounced them once they became hypocritical and exploitative. And how he could denounce! He was always brotherly, and yet he was never anything but our master. We adored him ...

'And so the impressions, the reports, the accurate or inaccurate "sayings" build up, the remembered and half-remembered words and incidents are passed on and mixed up, the followers find new heart, and something quite remarkable seems to have happened at around the crucifixion to these people, and finally the gospels came to be written as theological interpretations of this astonishing man who, the old ones said, brought us near God, brought God to us, showed us God—was God?

'What matters is the general pattern, the big picture. Crossan and his mates are only clearing the ground of fundamentalist claims; they need to go beyond the trifling impedimenta and consider why all the impediments are there in the first place. They may not be what they seem to be, but they are good indicators of what lay behind them ... they are very much more than "a tiny amount of fact with enormous dollops of faith".'

J.S. Gregory
Balwyn, VIC

Please explain

From I. Goor

Could someone much wiser in the ways of the spirit than I, explain the rationale involved in the expulsion of Sri Lankan priest Tissa Balasuriya?

Granted, I know nothing of the matter except what I have read in the papers, but it seems Father Tissa was excommunicated because he has questioned, among other tenets of faith, the Papal Infallibility.

I have heard no such strong response emanating from the Vatican aimed at the behaviour of some priests who were convicted of gross indecency against youngsters left in their charge.

LETTING GO AND MOVING ON

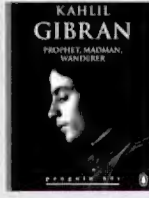
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This kind of thinking makes the Vatican, in my view, appear highly ridiculous.

I. Goor

Tamworth, NSW

See this month's Comment, p6 —Ed.

Moral of the story

From David Ardagh

In reviewing Peter Unger's *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Ignorance* David Lewis offers a suggestion about the role of 'psychological separation' in explaining why we need not give till it hurts to the needy people of 'the South' to preserve our innocence. The relevance of the presence or absence of such separateness is illustrated by contrasting two cases. First, a proposal involving deceptively inducing WW II German bombers to select different targets of air attack to save many. The new 'targets' in this case were not separate in the relevant sense because they were in the predicament of war together: separateness was absent and so the deception would be permissible. On the other hand, in a hypothetical plan by medical authorities to target unrelated people in a kidnap and dismemberment for their organs, the victims are clearly buffered from any guilt in refusing to give their lives by separateness from the predicament of the many sick who could be saved by their deaths.

This suggestion, if I have understood it properly, will not work very successfully for many reasons. The hypothetical treatment of even one of the donors is murder whether or not we consider their 'separateness' from recipients. Its being murder, not their separateness, makes it unthinkable,

unlike the bombing case, where the authorities tried to minimise the result of others which makes this second act thinkable as 'damage control'. The presence or absence of separateness is an idle wheel. Second, wartime examples are always more murky than instructive. Britain itself upheld, if it did not actually initiate, the miserable practice of civilian targeting as a deliberate strategy. An *ad hoc* excuse for changing a bomb target even if acceptable in a grisly war where just war restrictions were flouted *en masse* on both sides will not illuminate steadier peace-time intuitions about duties and shared predicaments. Third, the North and South are arguably 'in it together' in the sense outlined (eco-crisis and disasters driven by Northern economic policies; Northern ghettos for migrants responding to labour-market policy, spread of exotic epidemics in North; fears of Southern nuclear blackmail etc.). Fourth, the de facto conceptual, causal and other factual complexities of giving to aid agencies are strong buffers against any generalised presumption of guilt in the case. It would be wrong to 'give till it hurts' without satisfying ourselves precisely what the 'development aid' was used for and how it was delivered; the actual results in the local community vis à vis increasing self-sufficiency or corruption; whether giving empowering skills or money is best and so on.

Related to the problem of factual complexity above is the point that on a virtue-ethics model, our obligations are connected to our *individual powers* and developed capacities to bring about change in conjunction with others. My positive obligations to do good may differ from yours in what is otherwise the same circumstance because of my power and my commitments. Although negative prohibitory precepts, for example against murder, bind all persons equally, the circumstance 'Who?' can alter specific compliance conditions of a positive general moral injunction such as 'Be kind'. The latter cannot, *ex hypothesis*, take individual circum-

stances and degrees of powers into account. On a virtue-ethics approach, each historically situated person is seen as naturally seeking their own true well-being first, and motivated to accept abstract positive general principles of morality like the Golden Rule as a means to attaining true well-being in each of a number of concentric domains of personal interaction (family, work, leisure, civil and political, society, international contacts through travel or internet, communities of interest, gender, purpose, etc.). Conditions of entry and participation in the domains differ in their specific content and in the moral exactingness or 'modality,' from requirements and prohibitions, to injunctions and ideals, counsels and permissions and one is free to choose how deeply to commit oneself in each. Positive moral injunctions like the Golden Rule do straddle all these domains and apply to all, but are silent on the much larger area covering the details of idiosyncratic moral choice required when the goods of domains



collide as they inevitably do on a daily basis and we must choose good A rather than good B. If I have a debt to A, I should not in justice give the owed money to charity B. But C, with no such debts, may have a duty to give money because he committed himself to do so. If I have four young dependent children, perhaps I need not or even should not volunteer for the risky rescue mission to save fellow miners when there are many eager single fellow miners. If I am wealthy I should give more to the needy.

Unger, like Singer, Solomon and many others since Feuerbach, seems

to wish to base a duty of universal compassion on non-theological premises. This may be possible, but theologies 'from below' (or above) can also help to motivate us and enlarge the scope of our concerns to strangers through talk of the 'Fatherhood' of God i.e. the human 'family' as all 'children' of God. Top-down Christian theology requires 'charity' (including love of strangers, the wicked and enemies) but holds that Church-mediated 'grace' is necessary to perfect it. Dostoevsky jibed at Tolstoy-style universal love 'You cannot make duck-soup without ducks', by which he presumably meant universal love must have some nexus to Universal Love provided by the Russian Orthodox Church. Community Aid Abroad, Amnesty International, World Vision and such secular bodies would seem to show that Dostoevsky was wrong. Still, perhaps theology 'from below' provides a surer foundation for spiritual self-fulfilment through material self-transcendence than Unger's approach. Theology from below would say we can meet 'God' best in the

stranger and the needy, with or without professional mediators such as priests and bishops. We have no absolute duty to give relentlessly till it hurts as Unger believes, but we will find God, and the best in ourselves, in care for the stranger.

David Ardagh
Wagga Wagga, NSW

Fool employment

From Brent Howard

Ladies and gentleman we are gathered here today for the announcement of the Liberal Party's solution to unemployment. Silence please. And the answer is ... lower wages for the lowest paid!

Currently, someone aged 18 to 20 living with their parents would receive \$146 per week if employed for 18 hours per week at an award rate of \$5 per hour once you include a partial job search allowance of \$56. The Coalition's new proposal is to force people to work 18 hours per week for \$90 total. So the government will be compelling people to take jobs for \$56—or nearly 40 per cent—less than the current minimum.

In *Full Employment Regained* the Nobel prize winning economist James Meade writes, 'Full employment in present fully competitive conditions would probably result in an extremely unequal distribution of income... I should regard such an outcome as intolerable. To deal with it would require more emphasis on the distribution of income and less on the level and rate of growth of total output.'

But what is intolerable to civilised people is warmly embraced by this government. If John Howard really had the welfare of the unemployed at heart he would be reducing all middle and high incomes in order to finance decent jobs at a decent wage for all. Instead, the least well placed are scapegoated once again.

Brent Howard
Rydalmere, NSW

No peer

From John Ryan

When I was growing up the two most magical words in my world were Don Bradman. This name could carry my imagination beyond everyday life into another world of great heroes and national pride. It still can. Whenever

I hear the name the associations are still there. The local Picture Theatre Man in the country town where I lived gave out a cricket card of the 1934 Australian team every Saturday afternoon. We never knew who it would be until the first kid at the top of the line sent back the word—Oldfield ... Darling ... McCabe ... Fleetwood-Smith ... I can still remember the electric sensation, standing in the line of kids, when the word came shouting out from the front of the queue: *Don Bradman*...

Somehow, however, this aura is not evoked by hearing the titled name, Sir Donald Bradman ... Even Sir Don doesn't revive the magic. The legend of my world was just *Don Bradman*—nothing could be added or altered.

This recognition came home to me recently when the new postage stamp came out. There he was on the first day cover stirring my memory again—coming out to bat in his pads and batting gloves swinging his bat unadorned by labels or logos. The cover label proclaimed: SIR DONALD BRADMAN AUSTRALIAN LEGEND. No it wasn't. It was *Don Bradman*.

Although his title was the nation's way of honouring its cricket hero, for me, it changed the image. That wasn't my hero. My hero was the *Don Bradman* of my cricket card.

Perhaps a later generation might understand if another legend, Dawn Fraser, had been transposed by an imperial title into Dame Dawn.

Happily for this generation's cricket fan there will never be a Sir Shane.

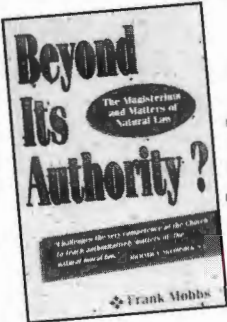
John Ryan
West Pymble, NSW

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THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC



THE MEDIA

For money not love

IN AN INTERVIEW ON A Sunday morning sports program, Ken Arthurson, the retiring chairman of the Australian Rugby League, had an air of tired indignation. Still reeling from the Packer-Murdoch ambush he sighed that in his day a handshake was a handshake.

With the loyalty and camaraderie gone from a game that used to trade on the idea of mateship, the Australian Rugby League is now fighting for its survival in the courts. It seems that the best they can do is negotiate a compromise with the emergent Super League from a position of strength. In this way they might avoid being totally eclipsed by the Murdoch shadow.

It's not surprising that the ARL looks like the kid caught with the stolen doughnut that the schoolyard bully has just shoved in his hands. The Packers have backed away from supporting the ARL, which first Kerry and then Jamie protected with considerable ferocity. Without exclusive access to Channel 9, it will be difficult for the ARL to compete with Super League for market share, given the latter has a superior calendar of representative matches.

But what has been revealing (or unrevealing as the case may be) has been the treatment the press has given the Packer-Murdoch détente. There has been little or no recognition of how the ARL has been deserted, mainly observations of how good Super League will be (mostly in the Murdoch papers—surprise, surprise) and hand-wringing at the prospect of having one competition again.

One extraordinary fact that has received little or no mention has been the contractual obligation the ARL has to Channel 9. Under current arrangements the ARL must make all their games available for broadcast on Channel 9 first. Now that the Packers have decided to bet each way and broadcast Super League as well, they are certainly not going to allow the ARL to jeopardise 9's ratings by broadcasting their games on another channel. Though in Ken Arthurson's way of thinking, that would be the honourable thing to do—it's small wonder the old-style 'leaguies' have been taken for a ride.

One thing that the ARL seems to have going for it is the support of Optus Vision. The pay TV network has spent some \$120 million propping up the competition—an investment from which they'd want to see some return. But even here there are problems. The agreement between the Packer and Murdoch camps paves the way for big changes to pay TV in Australia at a time when that other media tycoon, Kerry Stokes, is circling Optus Vision.

The decision of the Packers to screen Super League matches indicates that they are not overly concerned about their Optus Vision investment of 5 per cent equity, or the option to go to 33 per cent. The financial pages have surmised that the Murdochs



and the Packers are agreed on issues of content and are prepared to complement each other as long as this agreement remains. Kerry Packer's loss of interest in pay TV appeared to be confirmed by reports that he may soon be able to increase his stake in Fairfax, a long-held desire. Senator Alston has confirmed that his department is drafting legislation that will replace cross-media ownership rules with a 'public interest' test administered by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.

However it might also mean that the Packers have an inkling that Kerry Stokes may soon have the other Optus Vision shareholders in his pocket.

Stokes' Seven network is in dispute with the other Optus Vision shareholders over an internal deal last year—to which Seven was not a party—that would have increased the Packer influence over Optus. A hearing was due to commence in the NSW Supreme Court on February 24. If the Court determined that there was a breach of the

shareholders' agreement, Stokes would have the option to buy out the remaining 98 per cent of shares. Moreover he could pick these up at 85 per cent of cost, or a market value agreed to by the participants, whichever is the lower. And it seems that Stokes is playing tough. Seven has valued Optus Vision shares at the princely sum of three dollars—a ploy to drive down the market price.

A compromise is likely, as Stokes is not about to buy up Optus lock, stock and barrel, particularly after expanding his ownership of Channel 7. However more influence would supplement his free-to-air and movie production interests very nicely. And it leads to some interesting conjecture over what he might do with Optus Vision's interests in the Australian Rugby League.

He could pull the rug from underneath the ARL and concentrate on Australian Rules. On the other hand, if antagonisms arise with the Packers and Murdochs as a result of Stokes' powerful combination of free-to-air and pay TV, he might allow the ARL to continue to fester (providing they themselves wish to continue) as a thorn in the monster's side.

All of this wondering aside, there is no doubt the recent moves leave the ARL isolated, and there seems no relief in sight. Without any constant ally in the corporate battle over Rugby League, and in the middle of a leadership change-over, they probably feel as though they've been blindfolded, shoved in a raft and pushed down the Franklin River armed only with a paddle-pop stick. And the fact that the press is generally content to focus on their troubles now that Super League has got the jump on them won't make their task easier. No questioning the damage to the game, or bemoaning the destructive fickleness of our media barons. It will be interesting to see if ARL players and clubs, court battles aside, vote with their feet at the end of the year.

What the ARL competition has, which Super League lacks, is depth. Some 500 top juniors are signed with the ARL. There is also the administration, there are the school associations, and the club networks, built up over some eight decades. If Super League is to continue, it needs to be able to find the players to replace its first generation of footballers, and clubs need to develop long-term player policies. But depth is one thing the pay TV dollar does not possess, nor does

it pay much heed to the notion of respect.

At the time of writing there was a case before the NSW Industrial Court which shed a sharp light on the malaise of Rugby League. It involved six Super League players fighting to overturn the loyalty contracts, which they signed with the ARL, thus enabling them to move on to their new Super League contracts. The ARL was fighting to preserve them.

'Loyalty contract'—it has a curious ring to it doesn't it? —Jon Greenaway

SPORTING LIFE

Hot to trot

AFTER FIVE AND A HALF YEARS, the trots were back in Townsville. In August 1991 the Willows Paceway had been closed, as unprofitable, by the Queensland racing minister, Labor's Bob Gibbs. Soon afterwards, it was reincarnated as Stockland Rugby League Stadium, later the home of the North Queensland Cowboys. Harness racing at Townsville seemed to have followed Cairns into oblivion—until a by-election at Mundingburra which proved the catalyst of larger changes than this. Racing minister-in-waiting, Russell Cooper, reached into the pork barrel and promised the citizens of Townsville that the trots would return to their original home at the Showgrounds. On 8 February, he was there with a microphone and unseasonable tie to declare that it was indeed happening.

I was in attendance too, in search of my bearings. Three months in North Queensland and I had not yet made it to the gallops at Cluden. What was I doing at the trots? Getting there was easy. The Showgrounds is passed by the train-line to Cairns; sits in the shadow of Castle Hill. In the distance is Mount Stuart, while palm trees were blown by the warm wind on the far side of the track. The restart nearly did not occur, after 162mm of rain on the Tuesday left parts of the track crumbling. But everything on the night was as most would have wished, including the ultimate reassurance to punters: close them down, move the venue, seek them in any state, the trots are still the 'red hots', solemnly shiftiest of all Australia's racing mediums.

A fair crowd was in, plenty of children among them, including a dozen or so who

would drive in the two Shetland pony races. The Castle Hill Lions' Club had the hamburger and dagwood dog franchise. That sad supposed entertainment for the young, a jumping castle, was blown up by the back gate. Downstairs the Town and Country Bar was four-sided, open-aired. Cairns Draught—'The North's Own Beer'—was advertised, but not for sale; XXXX—'Queensland's Own Beer'—could be had abundantly. Upstairs, the T & C offered a \$10 'one service only' smorgasbord, stroganoff and rissoles in tomato gravy prominent.

I headed to the betting ring, prepared to be surprised but soon routinely disappointed by the cowardice of those who come to field. Eight minutes before the first race no bookie had posted a market. Nor did they until a runner obtained the scratchings from the tote. And then it came—7/2 the longest price on offer for any of the seven runners! 'They'll kill it again', a grizzled veteran accurately complained. They sure will, by betting to a winning margin of more than 300 per cent.

After a country and western rendition of the national anthem, the odds-on favourite for the first was a (surprise) scratching. The stewards were unaware that Clearly Supreme was still in Mackay. This left the race to Talkin Turkey which crossed, led, won easily and—on the tightest pacing track that I have ever seen—had to pass the winning post four times in a 1900m event. The Turkey was the first of three horses offered for sale in the racebook by the Hanzelmann clan (S.A./R.D./B.H./J.H.) of Mackay. This was the best tip of the night. Furey's Feneto also won as did Scotch Poacher. The Hanzelmanns' support was crucial to the meeting, a share of its spoils their due.

A rare win for me came with the quinella in race two when Flash Navajo beat Son of a Joker. But how to line up the Tweed Heads with the Toowoomba form? That of unraced three-year-olds and seven-year geldings in the same race? Scepticism helped. After Ms Bronte Schaper had coaxed another effort from Indigo to win the third (beating Pretty Boy, driven by Allen Cullen, who had broken his pelvis at his previous drive at the Showgrounds, thirteen years before) a big field of nine fronted for the fourth race. Touch of Vanity was odds-on but—sadly—broke, tailed off hopelessly and followed the field at 2000M distance. This was a rough-house event, proving that a genuine contest on a track so small is liable to be hair-raising.

Before the last, I left the Showgrounds

to those desperates whom once we fondly called diehards. At least the 3500 of them had ensured the temporary resuscitation of another ailing part of the fabric of provincial and working-class Australia.

—Peter Pierce

EXCURSIONS

Club revolution

YES, I REMEMBER Barvikha, the sanatorium where Boris Yeltsin often goes to get a new lease on life. While he does so his people try to master the business of surviving with an incredible mixture of stoicism and apathy and his impatient underlings joust for favourable barrier positions in the fun and games which will follow his demise.

Long ago, in 1964, I spent several weeks at Barvikha among some of the élite of Soviet society, weeks which strengthened a growing realisation that swallowing Soviet ideology and attitudes could leave a nasty taste and rot feeble minds like mine.

Cynical Russians called Barvikha 'communism for 40 people', for it was built on Stalin's orders in the early 1930s to cater for the health of his cadres. Run by the Ministry of Health it used to be renowned for its staff.

It stood in forest not far from the Moscow River, an hour's drive from the city centre, near where Hitler's invading tank divisions were halted during World War Two.

My stay there occurred only because I accompanied the President of the Communist Party of Australia, Dick Dixon, for a series of talks with the CPs of Indonesia, the USSR, Italy, and Romania. Dick was still recovering from a heart attack suffered at Barvikha in 1960 and the Russians wanted to monitor his condition. I tagged along and also had some minor ailments treated.

The place provided no riotous living. It was comfortable, spacious and old-style. The huge main accommodation building sported endless corridors and miles of windows. The gardens had delightful lilac avenues, and large beds of asters, snapdragons and other annuals. The extensive forest housed beguiling squirrels and woodpeckers. The walks rounded a pretty lake. Every few yards seating served the needs of the tottery. Doves of nurses, attendants and medical personnel

of all kinds catered for the aches and pains. Uniformed militiamen guarded the gates and patrolled the grounds at night.

Films screened most nights. Musicians performed occasionally. Nurses supervised consumption of medicines, mineral water and yoghurt. The meals, non-fatty, unsweetened, unspiced, and uninspired, were probably healthy if not very palatable.

High-fliers like Yeltsin were not in evidence in 1964, only Party secretaries from Tashkent and Minsk, directors of large industrial enterprises, ambassadors, and famous retired actors.

Under Stalin, N.A. Mikhailov served as long-time secretary of the powerful Komsomol, the Soviet youth organisation, which probably says a lot about him. Currently the elderly Ambassador to Indonesia, he displayed immense interest in the talks we had just held with the Indonesian communist leaders, Aidit, Lukman and Njoto. He spoke English and wanted every detail about our conversations in Jakarta, every nuance of attitude, because the huge Indonesian Communist Party was lining up with Mao Zedong in the Sino-Soviet dispute. But it mattered little. Before a year had passed Aidit, Lukman and

Njoto had been blown away with hundreds of thousands of others in the Suharto-led bloodbath of 1965.

Valerian Zorin, earlier Soviet Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs who had been in Prague in 1948 when the communists under Klement Gottwald took over Czechoslovakia, wandered about the garden with his wife.

In the dining room each day a man entered to make slow progress to his table because he bowed to the people at every other table on the way. Startling stuff for Australians to see. On the second day Dick said with typical Aussie disrespect: 'John, who is that bastard?' 'Dunno', I replied, 'His face seems familiar. Probably an actor.'

Some hours later it dawned upon me. David Oistrakh, the world-famous violinist whose records even then enchanted me nearly as much as they do today. The fact that Oistrakh bowed not only to the Barvikha diners but also to big brother did not diminish his superb artistic talents nor my glow of pleasure whenever we met on the pathways through the forest or saw him kissing his middle-aged wife's hand or cheek on some seat near the lake.

Paul and Eslanda Robeson spent three months at Barvikha in 1961 following Paul's mental breakdown and attempted suicide. The sanatorium library contained a small English section which numbered several Robeson-donated volumes. Thanks to them I discovered John Galsworthy and C.P. Snow and remain forever grateful.

'Here the doctors have the power', we were told by our Soviet minders. But one morning as I sat in Dick's room while a doctor examined him, Boris Ponomaryev, the politburo member in charge of relations with foreign communist parties, walked in unannounced to pay us a visit. Instantaneously, the poor doctor scrambled to get her equipment and herself out of the room within embarrassing seconds.

The lordly airs of leaders and the authoritarianism of the Party were evident for anyone who looked. I saw grown men jump to their feet to reply like automatons when questioned by some bigwig.

One sunny afternoon we strolled down a leafy tree-lined road, a part of the grounds we hadn't explored before. Within minutes, to our surprise, we came to a high wooden wall. Putting my eye to a hole in the wood I was startled to look upon the central square of a small village. No doubt this village supplied the labourers who serviced the sanatorium. Kerchiefed women talked, swept, washed clothes, peeled vegetables.

On one side peace, quiet and luxury, on the other toil, ordinary folk, the drab real world. Overall, a Kafkaesque scene with me on the borderland but still within the castle of socialism for the elite peering into the illogical village of 'socialism' for the masses. For some time I peered through that hole in the wall, wondering, confused, seeing things that were not visible, things I didn't want to see.

Soon after we spent a couple of hours in the Central Committee offices in official talks with Brezhnev and Ponomaryev, where Dick committed us pretty heavily to Soviet attitudes while, as the junior partner, I remained silent.

BREZHNEV HAD JUST RELINQUISHED the Presidency of the USSR to take charge of the daily work of the CPSU. A colourless conservative, he strove to project an image of honesty, simplicity and sincerity but didn't quite succeed in the role. 'We've nothing up our sleeves', he said waving his suited arm. Yet three months later he had deposed the earthy, unpredictable Khrushchev.

Dick's commitment to the USSR meant little as not long afterwards the CPA started to criticise it and was soon regarded by the Russians as anti-Soviet.

Barvikha didn't cure me but it gave me time to think and food for thought. I left still hoping that democratic reforms would come to the USSR and that the socialist cause would be revitalised and redeemed and I went home determined that the CPA had to reform, democratise, shed fundamentalist doctrine and cease to worship foreign gods.

But the socialist cause, to which so many devoted their lives, had been mortally wounded by immense brutalities and crimes. 'From each according to ability to each according to need' had become a forlorn dream. Yet it took another ten years before I relinquished all positions in the CPA. Then more years passed before the dreams turned into nightmares. But that is another story.

Maybe, next time he is at Barvikha, Boris Yeltsin could have a look for that hole in the wall.

—John Senty

This month's contributors:

Jon Greenaway is *Eureka Street's* assistant editor.

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John Senty was the Victorian secretary of the Communist Party from 1963-74 and the national chairman from 1972-74.

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Afghanistan's principle conflict

Last financial year Australia spent \$4.5 million of development aid in Afghanistan. In 96-97 \$6 million will be spent in a country ruled by Taliban zealots. But tying aid to humanitarian principles can be self-defeating argues **Nathan Rabe**.

AS A CHILD GROWING UP in India my friends and I used to quote a local saying whenever we climbed up a particularly steep hill in the center of town, '*Kulri ki chardhai/jaisa Kabul ki lardai*' ('Climbing up Kulri is as tough as the battle of Kabul'). The battle we referred to was a page of school boy history—the British army being driven out of Kabul by wild tribesmen in the Afghan wars.

The latest Afghan war is now entering its 18th year. The forces of the former 'Islamic' government and its allies from the north are bogged down in a military morass with the ultra-orthodox Taliban student movement. Neither group can dislodge the other from its positions. And Afghans continue to be sacrificed before an indifferent world.

I visited Afghanistan soon after the Taliban captured Kabul, an event as unexpected as it was sudden. Like Mao's Red Guards, these religious zealots appeared on the horizon as the shock troops of an austere cultural revolution. Claiming the sanction of God and scorning all dissent, the Taliban articulate an atavistic social vision derived more from tribal tradition than any recognisable stream of Islam.

Not surprisingly, Afghanistan remains bitterly divided. In fact, prospects for a peaceable reconstruction of the country are as dim as they have been at any time in the past 20 years. While the Taliban view their role as reconciliatory, they have managed to alienate everyone except their fellow Pashtuns, the largest minority group in a land of minorities. Most other communities, especially Hazaras, Uzbeks and Panjshiris, see the Taliban as committed to their ultimate destruction. Tension between Pashtuns and other Afghan communities is historic but rarely in recent times has the split been as open, dangerous or hateful as it appears today.

Afghanistan has been severely traumatised in a short space of history. Successive governments have brutally attempted to transform a delicate, isolated and incredibly diverse society into a democratic Republic, then a socialist super-state and finally, a strict Islamic theocracy. Out of the ensuing chaos the Taliban claim

to have established law and order. And indeed, the large part of the country under their control does experience relative security and 'normality': fertile branches of Afghan life such as a rich heritage of music, mysticism and poetry have been declared evil and their enjoyment not only forbidden but punished. Recently a 12-year-old boy was publicly punished for offending Taliban sensibilities—he was playing football. Afghans, even many Pashtuns, told me repeatedly and bitterly, 'These Taliban and mujahideen are not students or soldiers of Islam. They are *munafaqeen* (hypocrites) and want only one thing—absolute power.'

The arrival of the Taliban on the scene has split not only the Afghan people but the aid and development community as well. The Taliban's general insensitivity to human rights issues, the resort to violence to maintain order and an utter unwillingness to compromise has made many governments, donors and humanitarian/development groups uneasy. But the restrictions on female education, employment, dress and movement has precipitated a mini-crisis. Some aid groups have ignored the whole issue of human rights and continue to work. On the other end of the spectrum, several outspoken groups have demanded governments and agencies 'live up to their principles' and withdraw completely from Afghanistan or suspend activities as a point of pressure.

OF COURSE, A REDISCOVERY of misplaced or compromised principles in itself will not do a thing to improve the lives of Afghanistan's tortured people. The problem facing humanitarian groups in Afghanistan is not a lack of principled approaches but too many conflicting principles and a chronic, unresolved confusion about the real purpose of development and aid delivery. No credible aid/development group or donor condones the Taliban position on women in Kabul. And, undoubtedly, the right of self-determination should not be denied to Afghan women or men. If, however, as some voices have demanded, the international community

were to withhold all assistance to Afghanistan in defence of this principle, it would be jeopardising the preservation of other fundamental principles. Is it a principled stand to deny assistance to an entire people because the rights of a segment of that society (the women of Kabul and other urban centres) are threatened? Are we morally justified imposing conditions upon our charity? Especially if those conditions defend principles that most Afghan people do not value in the same way we do?

Aid and development agencies speak constantly of the need to be culturally sensitive. This process demands a respect for the principles and values of the community with which aid agencies work. Is the aim of relief assistance to give only to those who live in certain areas controlled by forces we find ideologically compatible and to hell with the rest? The growing distrust many people in the developing world, especially in Afghanistan, feel toward the external, 'western' world derives from their conviction that their cultures, societies and families are slipping beyond their control. Giant corporo-cultural forces like MTV and Coca Cola are not the only enemies. Aid/development groups are increasingly seen as an integral part of the same alien, threatening juggernaut.

Even a superficial reading of history suggests that the Afghan people have never tolerated a government they consider inimical. The Taliban will not prove the exception. The Afghan people can take care of the Taliban. In this, they do not require external assistance. But the Afghan people all need assistance to rebuild their homes, canals, schools, mosques and hospitals. They want their fields to be clear of mines and full of crops. What they neither want nor need is the moral posturing of aid and development groups. Afghanistan does not require further cultural reconstruction. The present mess is a direct result of such attempts. ■

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Better the Cheryl you know



CHERYL KERNOT REALISES that she is about to hand the Howard Government the trigger for a double dissolution and with it, she believes, the power for some cynical political manoeuvring.

She intends to fight 'passionately' against proposed budget measures delaying migrants' entitlement to benefits. 'If you have a migration policy, then you have a responsibility to the migrants that come in under it,' she says. The proposed measures are 'despicable'. The Labor Party is expected to vote against them as well, and there it will be: the trigger the Government needs to go back to the people. The only question is, when and how will Howard use it?

Kernot doesn't believe it will be immediate. 'You don't wait all those years for government just to take a risk one year into your term, and Australians don't necessarily accept that anything is important enough to send them back to the polls within a year,' she says. Rather, she suspects that Howard will use the trigger as an excuse to go to an election towards the end of next year. The main motivation would be to have a joint sitting of Parliament on the Government's return, and overcome all the blocking that the Democrats, Greens and Independents in the Senate had done in the interim.

'Joint sittings are full of nasties, because they would have the numbers to push through everything that has been on the table and hasn't been passed by the Senate beforehand. So whatever they wanted to do with native title, fiscal measures—everything would go through.'

The scenario Kernot is predicting highlights both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Australian Democrats'

position in the year that marks the party's twentieth anniversary. Almost every year in those twenty, some commentator or other has predicted the party's demise. It has survived, the research shows, because the general public want a check on a government's use of power. Now, if Kernot is right, by opposing government moves, she will simultaneously hand them the weapon to overcome the block, at least in the short term.

A double dissolution probably wouldn't be bad for the Democrats in terms of electoral success. Thanks to the lower quotas required, they could quite confidently expect to hold or increase their numbers. But what is the point of it all?

The party has survived, but without being able to convert its support into significant Lower House representation. Confined to the Senate, it can frustrate, delay, and at its best, import new ideas and be seen as the nice guy in a nasty political game. But will it ever be more than a frustration, a check, and a hurdle for Governments to overcome?

At its recent national conference, the Democrats considered a number of papers from academics examining various aspects of the Democrats' organisation, parliamentary role and power. The academics brought good and bad news. On the one hand, said Tim Battin of the University of New England, the Democrats role on social justice should be envied by other parties, but this was perhaps more a comment on other parties than on them. 'On economic and social policy, the Democrats in 1997 mostly resemble the enlightened liberals of yesteryear ... On foreign policy ... or foreign aid, or human rights more

generally, they often resemble the idealists of the Labor left, when we had such a thing,' Battin commented.

The Democrats have always sworn that they will not bring down a government by blocking supply. Dr Hiroya Sugita, author of a major study of the party, said that this placed the party in a 'Catch 22'.

The Democrats had, by opposing some budget measures, the Australia Card and aspects of Industrial Relations legislation 'prevented the government of the day from implementing harsh, unfair and even Draconian programs ... as a consequence of the restraints imposed by the Democrat Senators' presence, Labor and the Coalition have probably been saved from massive voter backlash ... Without representation in the Senate and the balance of power there, the Democrats would be irrelevant and might have disappeared years ago. At the same time, the Democrats' preparedness to work responsibly within the existing system ... has precluded a voter backlash against the entrenched party system. Had such a backlash occurred, the Democrats might have been a main beneficiary.'

KERNOT WAS CLEARLY CHALLENGED by the findings of the academics—she referred to them several times during the course of this interview—but although she is intensely frustrated by the watchdog and review role, and wants to expand it, she has no ambitions for the Democrats to do anything other than 'work responsibly within the existing system'. This, she says, is one of the main points of difference and causes of tension between the Greens and the Democrats.

For those who want to see a realignment in Australian politics, one of the great disappointments of the last decade has been the failure of the Democrats and the Greens to build an effective national alliance. The two parties now compete head to head—a decision Kernot made. Asked about the Greens, she speaks carefully. It is clear that there is tension, and even some anger.

'There's such little space to share in alternative politics in this country that when you don't devise a plan together and compete head to head then one has to lose. We lost one in Tasmania. We gained one in West Australia.'

There was a time when a national alliance, if not an amalgamation, seemed more likely. Members of both the Tasmanian Greens and the Democrats were surveyed. Both surveys said that while the members didn't want an amalgamation, opportunities should be sought to form alliances over particular issues. As well, the Democrats and the Greens cooperated over the Brisbane City Council elections, sharing out wards, not running against each other and matching candidates to issues and areas. Incredibly, the Socialist Workers Party, not known for its ability to work co-operatively with others, was also involved in this campaign, and it worked well.

Moves towards a joint Senate ticket in Queensland followed, but came to an end over the issue of what would

happen if there was a double dissolution. Which candidate would give up their position? But even as attempts at alliance were advancing in Queensland, the West Australian Greens made it clear, according to Kernot, 'that they wouldn't have a bar of it, so really a national allied Senate ticket was never a possibility ... I think the election of the WA Greens has made it harder for one party to emerge.'

Kernot agrees that apart from the question of blocking supply (which the Democrats rule out, but the Greens say they might do in exceptional circumstances) there are few policy differences. Rather, the problems are of political style, and belief in the political system.

'I think we try to get change from within the system, and we have had some success with that, ... but it seems to me that their stated aim is to destroy the process by using the resources of the process, and to bring about a different form of government.'

'They are more anarchic. They are friendly anarchists. That is a point of difference when it comes to how you operate together. So while we have a few policy differences, and our policies reflect very similar goals ... I think they are a little bit different as people. Nothing that would make it impossible to talk to them, but if you are ever in a coalition, you would have a lot of disagreements about how to operate.'

'I'd throw myself under a bulldozer for a few causes, but in the end you have to be part of the process.'

It was the experience of being locked out of the process that crystallised Kernot's political ambitions. In the mid-1970s, she moved to Queensland for a teaching job, and was instantly

'I feel very frustrated by only being allowed to sit in judgment on others. I hate sitting in judgment on others, because it implies a certain moral rectitude, as though you don't have any right to views or ideas of your own, and I want to be here for ideas.' Photographs: Richard Briggs



shocked by the political culture there.

'I was attracted to social justice values of the ALP, but alienated by their male domination and factionalism. And I was repulsed by the big business domination of the Liberal Party, and I am not a natural Country Party person or DLP, so there was nowhere I felt comfortable.'

'Queensland was the big catalyst for me. It only took me about a week to see exclusively National Party males on TV for me to think, "Who is speaking for me?"'

Then came the Right to March campaigns, a political proving ground for so many of Queensland's activists. Kernot was involved.

'The epiphany came, if you can call it that, when I went to the Queensland Parliament and watched the abortion debate.'

They locked the gates of Parliament! They actually locked the citizens out of Parliament! So I found a public phone and rang up my local member, because I had just moved to a new area and he had written a letter saying if there is anything I can do let me know.'

Her local member agreed to help her get in, but with the proviso that she stayed for the entire debate. It went until the small hours of the morning.

'That was the epiphany for me, because I knew there were no women, or only two, but I didn't realise what impact that had on legislation, and I listened to that whole debate, talking about fertility and reproductive control on women's bodies, and the lack of sensitivity and the lack of understanding. I just looked down on the floor of Parliament and thought this is so unbalanced, and I thought: I could do that, women could do that, women should be making this sort of debate more representative. I've never forgotten that moment.'

TWENTY YEARS ON, she still believes women have a long way to go in politics. 'We've made little gains, we're being heard, but we're not at the main table, so gosh, the job's not done. It won't be done until women are in Cabinet in roughly equal number, so you can have the important first debate about what's on the agenda, what's important, rather than just coming in and fiddling at a later stage.'

Kernot has chosen her theme for this year. It is to talk about the role of government, particularly as concerns public ownership of assets, unemployment and job creation. It is an agenda she has chosen partly out of frustration at the 'keep the bastards honest' role to which, she reluctantly accepts, the Democrats will be confined for the foreseeable future.

'There is a tension between what our leaders want, which is for us to actively seek power in the lower houses, and have balance of power or a presence there, and the role the public still largely ascribes to us, which is the role of watchdog.'

'Australians still believe that the way to get change is to change sides every few years, but they complain at the same time about the sameness of the political parties.'

'I feel very frustrated by only being allowed to sit in judgment on others. I hate sitting in judgment on others, because it implies a certain moral rectitude, as though you don't have any right to views or ideas of your own, and I want to be here for ideas. When I nominated for the leader's ballot I said that I accepted the public's role for us, and that we would always continue in that role, but I also wanted us to also be involved in the debate on ideas.'

One idea that is engaging her at present is unemployment. Last week she launched an e-mail debate on jobs at an Internet Cafe. Four papers on unemployment were commissioned by the Democrats, put on the Net and responses invited.

'I know that is only of use to people who have access to the Net, but it is a hell of a lot better than the debate that goes on in this place, and the constant resort to non-solutions.'

'I cannot accept this old thinking that says you pull a lever called growth and bingo you've got jobs. We need to look at the role of government in a modern economy, and the role of industry in generating jobs.'

Kernot says that one of the Democrats' main, but least publicised, contributions to the debate over industrial relations

legislation was to bring to the bill a different concept of what work might mean.

'What we are seeing is not the end of work, but I suspect it is the end of male dominated full-time working days. We have to look at new ways of sharing the available work, re-adjust our views of what we need from work.'

'The irony of Martin Ferguson suddenly discovering job sharing, when it's been our policy for 20 years ... and then again you have to have appropriate protections, and I think an awareness and thought-through approach to that is one of the things we brought to that debate, and it is reflected in the legislation that was eventually passed.'

She is interested in models emerging from Europe, where companies and employees agree on ways of sharing around available work in hard times. Such agreements, she says, take high levels of trust between unions and employers and in Australia, this doesn't exist: 'We have no true history of industrial democracy.' Unions, Kernot says, are important in the same way that strong regulatory agencies are important in free markets. However, her 'small l' liberal instincts revolt at the idea of compelling membership.

It is hard to credit, but Cheryl Kernot claims that she really believed John Howard when he talked about lifting parliamentary standards and ending nepotism and jobs for the boys. Kernot, in Parliament for six years, had never before been through a change of government, and in some ways she was optimistic about what it might bring.

'I think John Howard led people to believe it would be different, but in fact from pretty early on it's been the same. The appointment of Andrew Peacock, Michael Baum, all the mates. I have sat here and listened to all that vicious diatribe about mates and the Labor Party, so I had this naive expectation that perhaps that they were reviewing their own operations. Maybe they really did care about the growing public cynicism, and were serious about changing standards of parliamentary behaviour and so on.'

'But on the one hand, Howard has made these appointments, which are no different to Paul Keating's appointment of mates, and on the other hand some of his colleagues have let him down as well. It makes you wonder. I sometimes think to myself is that all there is? I am waiting for something else to happen, and nothing happens.'

ASKED ABOUT THE BUDGET DEFICIT, she says with a chortle: 'I'm glad Peter Costello has a three billion dollar black hole, because the way he used the Beazley black hole was quite dishonest.' She claims Democrat party research has shown that if the Liberal Opposition had succeeded in blocking all the Labor Government initiatives that it opposed over the last 13 years, then the budget black hole would presently be thirty-six billion dollars.

But in any case, 'We shouldn't be hung up about balanced budgets. I'm not saying we should be running huge deficits, but sometimes Governments have to spend money in order to provide jobs and create infrastructure.' She supports the Government in seeking to fill the black hole by closing tax loopholes, but she also wants a rigorous examination of subsidies, including things like the diesel rebate scheme, which is a National Party sacred cow.

Kernot's speech to the Democrats' national conference in January was entitled 'the leadership test'. In it she accused Howard of 'gift wrapping' his party in a dishonest 'moral tone'. Where, she asked, was the concern for social justice?

In fact, all of Kernot's first speeches for the year have been littered with references to that catch-all term, social justice. What does she mean by it? She is aware of its slipperiness. 'People like Hugh Mackay say you shouldn't even use that term because it is too big, too amorphous,' she says.

Generally, though, she sees the Democrats to be concerned with a sense of community. Within this is a concern for the underprivileged and less well off, and a concern for equity. Public ownership of assets is part of the sense of community, although 'its horses for courses'.

Perhaps a Government doesn't need to own an airline, she agrees, but Telecommunications companies, utilities and a strong and vigorous public education system are core government functions. In general, social justice for the Democrats means an opposition to the economic rationalism that has taken over both the major parties.

Economic policy is one of the main ways she sees the party as having changed under her leadership from the Don Chipp 'keep the bastards honest' days. 'One of the things we found out during the recent debates is that Chipp has never changed his Liberal views on economy. We have much greater emphasis on public ownership and mixed economy than he ever had. As far as our policies on environment, Aboriginal land rights and so on, we haven't changed, but we have devoted a lot more time to economic debate than he ever did, or than Janine (Haines) ever did, although I think she was a great leader.'

She says the party has moved from being a single issues green and peace party to one with broader concerns, and a serious engagement with the economic agenda.

'I think the best way of putting it is that we don't just keep the bastards honest, we give the bastards a few ideas as well.'

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EAMON DUFFY, A CAMBRIDGE-BASED HISTORIAN, is always worth reading. His contribution to the latest *New Blackfriars* (January 1997) is entitled 'Rewriting the liturgy: the theological implications of translation'. Extracts from this paper appeared in *The Tablet* (6 July 1996, pp. 882-3), but here we have the real thing. Duffy does not appear to be concerned with questions of inclusive language so much as with making a series of well-argued observations about the dubious theological and aesthetic qualities of the liturgy's 1973 translation. Furthermore, he explains some of the elegance and humour in the original Latin prayers and suggests truly beautiful new translations.

For those following the debate about the requirement of celibacy for priests in the Roman church, Michael Winter has written a very trenchant, informed, and persuasive critique of recent documents in his 'A new twist to the celibacy debate' published in *Priests and People* (November 1996). His quotation from Canon 13 of the Greek Council of Trullo in 692 tells us much about the early traditions of married priests in the Church:

In the Roman Church, those who wish to receive the diaconate or priesthood promise to have no further intercourse with their wives. As for us who keep the Apostolic Canons, we permit the continuation of the conjugal life. Whoever wishes to dissolve such unions will be deposed and the cleric who, under pretext of religion, abandons his wife, will be excommunicated. The subdeacons, deacons and priests must always abstain from sexual intercourse with their wives during the time when they exercise their sacred functions, for the council of Carthage has ordained that whoever serves in the sanctuary must be pure.

Coming from the University of Cincinnati is a journal with the irresistible title *Mystics Quarterly*. The December 1996 edition leads off with a very touching essay on the theological questions raised in the recently discovered writings of a thirteenth century Magdeburg mystic, referred to by some of the locals as 'The Monster', now known as Margareta the Lame.

The American journal *Commonweal* always features writing of refreshing directness. In the 25 October 1996 issue, Rand Richard Cooper presents a compelling three-page essay with the self-explanatory title, 'The Dignity of Helplessness: What sort of a society would euthanasia create?'

My favourite pieces of information, however, come from articles in the heavyweight theological journals *Theological Studies* and *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie*. These may take a while to arrive on our wharves, but the wait is usually worthwhile. In the June 1996 issue of the American *Theological Studies* there is an astonishing article by Michael Slusser, 'The Ordination of Male Infants'. Slusser, who has a D.Phil from Oxford and an associate professorship at Duquesne, argues in a very scholarly way that, according to current church law, any baptised male can be ordained, including infants, and concludes, 'There is, in short, much to recommend and nothing to prevent the Church from ceasing to claim, even in the most abstract and theoretical way, that it has the power to ordain male infants.' Slusser thus argues for a revision of canon 1024 of the Code of Canon Law, which states succinctly that 'Only a baptized male receives sacred ordination validly'.

Finally, in the Innsbruck journal *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* (118:3 1996) we have a long report on the publication of the collected works of the late Karl Rahner. There are 32 volumes planned, and the project will take about ten years to complete: in his lifetime Rahner published something like 5000 articles and books in various translations and editions. One timely volume has already appeared—*Sämtliche Werke* volume 19—containing Rahner's reflections on the Church immediately after Vatican II.

The next to be published will be volume 2, gathering most of Rahner's early philosophical work and suggesting a stronger connection with Heidegger than had previously been evident. One treasure to come will be Rahner's doctoral thesis from Innsbruck, a study of the patristic motif of the origin of the Church in the side of Christ, which has never appeared in print. Rahner's early lecture notes from the classes he taught in 1937/38 are also being carefully collated and edited. Keep your eye on this space for further news.

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Neither a borrower

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA is familiar to most Australians as a cultural monument. Its austere design, based on that of a Greek temple, recalls the origins of European civilisation. Most visitors will have glimpsed Captain Cook's log-book, or some other of the four and a half million books, maps, pictures, manuscripts, newspapers and music-scores it contains. It is Australia's largest library, and the most important library relating to Australia and its people. It has been a leader in library technology, and its planned 'World 1', an electronic network connecting Australian and New Zealand libraries, was vaunted as the world's most advanced such project. It was also, until recently, Australia's last and best chance to create:

a great public Library on the lines of the world-famed Library of Congress in Washington, such a library, indeed, as shall be worthy of the Australian nation; the home of the literature, not of a State, or of a period, but of the world and of all time ...

as a Parliamentary Committee of the young Commonwealth of Australia expressed it in 1907. That hope was never fully realised although the Library (under several names) did grow steadily, and quite rapidly, from the 1950s to the 1980s. In the 1990s it has narrowed its scope and cut back its collecting. For the foreseeable future the hopes of 1907 have been abandoned. At the end of 1996 it was also forced to terminate World 1.

The Library's responsibilities have never been defined too precisely. However, the *National Library Act* of 1960, which created the Library in its present form, specifies as its main tasks:

to maintain and develop a national collection of library material, including a comprehensive collection of library material relating to Australia and the Australian people;

to make library material in the national collection available to such persons and institutions ... as the Council determines with a view to the most advantageous use of that collection in the national interest.

The first task was, until recently, understood very broadly. The Library enormously expanded its Australian holdings, but also collected material from many other parts of the world. Large formed collections were acquired, often with the help of special Commonwealth grants. These collections were then extended by acquiring more recent books in the same fields, and




subscribing to relevant journals. In retrospect, it could well be argued that the library took on too many responsibilities for its funds to support. However, it also laid the basis of many collections highly relevant to Australia's history and interests. Let me mention just two of many.

An outstanding acquisition was the David Nichol Smith collection of British literature, particularly of the 18th century. At one stroke this gave Australia a more important collection of books from the century and country of our national founding than many other research libraries had collected in decades. It provided the means for much historical and literary research, and the basis for a series of Nichol Smith Eighteenth Century Seminars (which have recently been revived).

ANOTHER IMPORTANT ACQUISITION was the Speros Vryonis collection of Byzantine literature and history, including many rare editions of mediaeval Greek texts. At first sight this collection seems less relevant to Australia, until it is recalled how many Australians have come from Greece and other countries of the Byzantine and Eastern Orthodox traditions. These and many other such collections were imaginative, but highly appropriate, acquisitions

In the 1980s the Library's perspectives began to narrow, and in the 1990s, many would argue, they have become blinkered. To some extent this situation was forced on the Library by Australia's economic difficulties, declining real funds, escalating book prices, and a steady increase in the number of books and journals being published. However, it is hard to resist the conclusion that there has also been some failure of vision. The Library administration, and its Council, have failed to convince the Australian government and people that the Library was worth supporting fully. They have not campaigned very hard for private and corporate support, unlike, say, Australia's public art galleries.



Two things are certain: the production of printed books and journals continues to expand; and Australian libraries are collecting a smaller and smaller proportion of them.

nor a lender be

This is an ominous situation, and one which the National Library's own policies have done nothing to improve.

These aspects of the plan were never discussed publicly before the memo was released, by which time the cuts were already under way. Knowledge of them has spread only gradually, until last year when, as *The Australian* put it in an editorial of 16 May 1996, 'the whistle has been blown' by a group of 'academics with a professional interest in Europe.'

The Library *does* still collect Australian material of many kinds, and Asia-Pacific material, but less comprehensively:

The library remains committed to developing collections relating to South-East Asia, East Asia, South Asia and the Pacific Islands ... Asia and Pacific-related collected material will remain focused on current public affairs, principally for the post-World War II period, but with a general historical background of the modern era provided ... an adequate range of cultural material will continue to be collected as well.

As regards the rest of the collection:

Client support and onsite use require that the Library maintain a collection of reference material of general scope ... a basic collection of library material will be maintained covering politics, economics and social and cultural issues ... It is unlikely that the basic collection will include many non-English language titles.

In other words, most of the central areas of knowledge—philosophy, religion, history, anthropology, law, music, art, literature and science—will simply be dropped. Even politics, economics and sociology will only be collected at 'basic' levels.

In numerical terms the cuts are extraordinary. Total spending on all printed material (even including the Australian collection) has fallen to about \$5 million a year, or only 9 per cent of the Library's budget. In the late 1980s the Library purchased over 30,000 overseas serials. Today the figure has fallen by half. Purchases of overseas books have fallen even further, from about 45,000 to 16,000 a year.

The cuts involve an enormous number of the world's most influential books and journals in most areas of knowledge. They also include much of direct national significance, which is missed simply because it is published overseas. The cancelled journals, for example, included *Antiquity*, which regularly publishes discoveries in Australian prehistory, including the recent Jinnium finds. This particular journal has now been discreetly reinstated, after protests in the national press, but the thousands

At the same time, the Library has enthusiastically embraced new information technology as a solution to its problems. This technology may well be the solution to some problems, but it has certainly not yet made collections of printed material unnecessary. At present we are all either too close to or too distant from this technology to be sure what it can and cannot do. Two things are certain: the production of printed books and journals continues to expand, and Australian libraries are collecting a smaller and smaller proportion of them. This is an ominous situation, and one which the National Library's own policies have done nothing to improve.

The Library is at present carrying out a *Strategic Plan, 1993-1998*. This plan specifies three priorities: collecting Australian documentary materials of national significance; promoting the Library as a national cultural and information institution; and improving the access of all Australians, through the national system of libraries, to the materials and information they need. It also foreshadowed 'a reduction in collecting and processing of printed materials published overseas,' as a means of paying for the other priorities

The plan was discussed in a series of consultations around Australia which the Library arranged in 1992. Even at that stage objections were made to the plan, but they were not allowed to have any effect on it. Most of the comparatively small number of people (mainly other librarians) who attended the consultations made no objection because they did not yet know what the plan really involved. That only became clear in May 1995, when a memo of the Library suddenly announced a 60 per cent cut in acquisitions of overseas material:

The Library will no longer receive, for example, many standard subject-oriented periodicals, most scholarly books on standard academic subjects, the literature of the world, law ... science and technology ... music.

of other titles of equal relevance to Australia have not.

The Library frequently claims that this cancelled material is now available in electronic form. In fact the contents pages of many journals can be searched on-line, but articles usually have then to be copied and faxed to readers, at their own cost (which is often prohibitive). This system is no adequate substitute for the traditional library, where the researcher can browse freely in a wide range of journals (although it is useful for getting occasional articles from less common journals). Even more to the point, comparatively few books are available electronically, and this situation gives no sign of changing. In fact it is now widely accepted that printed books will remain the most appropriate technology for disseminating longer and more permanent texts.

SOME INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS may be made (omitting for the moment the world's largest libraries). The National Library sometimes compares itself favourably with the National Library of Canada, which collects only Canadiana. However the Canadian policy is compensated by much larger funds for university libraries, in particular the University of Toronto Library, which holds some 9 million volumes, and this year has an acquisitions budget of \$19 million—three times the figure for the largest Australian university libraries, and nearly four times that of the National Library.

Another possible comparison might be with the Bavarian State Library (which I cite because an Australian study by R.L. Cope and F.G. Kaltwasser, *Focusing on the Bavarian State Library*, has recently appeared). This is not strictly a national library but it serves a population in South Germany roughly equal to Australia's (though of course much more concentrated), and has a comparable budget. Mainly by keeping its staff down to about two-thirds of the National Library's 600 it manages to acquire 165,000 books and 38,000 journals a year. These figures are much closer to what is required nowadays for a comprehensive research library, and are normal for, say, large American university libraries.

The National Library sometimes suggests that it should collect 'material which will help Australians to understand themselves'. This is an acceptable idea, but it must surely be taken in a much wider sense than at present. How can we understand ourselves without a wide knowledge of Western philosophy, religion, history, music, art and literature, given that we are, demographically and culturally, a mainly European nation? How can we study the aboriginal part of our people without a wide range of anthropological and archaeological literature? How can we understand our Asian neighbours, and our own Asian population, without extensive material on their religions, histories and cultures? The Library's claim to still be collecting an 'adequate range' of such material is far from the truth.

It has, naturally, been suggested that the Library has changed its directions as part of the previous Labour

government's 'push into Asia' economic strategy. The Library has rejected this suggestion, on the grounds that it has been interested in Asia since the 1950s. The disclaimer is disingenuous, in that it is the decision to stop comprehensive collecting from Europe and America (and even most cultural material from Asia) which is the issue. As *The Australian* put it:

The library's new policy does amount to a profound cultural and geographical shift for an institution designed to serve the nation's broad cultural interests...If the overseas collection needs to be cut, there is no logical reason why the cuts should be based on geographical criteria. This is a shortcut to cultural impoverishment.

The *National Library Act*, as noted, specifies a second main task for the Library, that of making 'library material available' to persons and institutions, for its most advantageous use in the national interest. Traditionally this has been done by way of loans of books and journals to other libraries. More recently, the library has developed an 'Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN)', which indicates library holdings throughout the country, and other bibliographic information.

Four years ago the Library, in cooperation with the National Library of New Zealand, launched its ill-fated project to expand and replace the ABN with the National Document and Information System, or 'World 1', which would give access to data on library holdings around the world, and

also allow data to be retrieved and transmitted between Australian and New Zealand libraries.

The concept sounded fine, and was promoted in a series of road shows around Australia, but it overlooked certain inconvenient facts. All data has to be 'held' somewhere before it can be retrieved, and under the Library's policies less and less of it was likely to be acquired in Australia. Further, much, and probably the most significant and reliable, scholarly data still exists only in printed form, and the costs of converting it to digital form on any large scale are prohibitive, even when copyright allows this. On the other hand, data already in digital form can be transmitted easily between any two computers, and does not need a library network. The development of the internet has already outflanked limited national cost-recovery networks of the World 1 kind.

IN ANY CASE, the project was dogged by technical difficulties, and consequent cost blowouts. It seems that the software chosen for the search functions of World 1 proved unsuitable, and efforts to find alternatives only created further difficulties. At the end of 1996 the Library was forced to announce the termination of the project. Up to the time of writing it has refused to give any information on the costs of the collapse, but they must be very considerable, especially if wasted staff time is taken into account—certainly far more than the Library spends on acquisitions.

How can we understand ourselves without a wide knowledge of Western philosophy, religion, history, music, art and literature, given that we are, demographically and culturally, a mainly European nation?
How can we study the aboriginal part of our people without a wide range of anthropological and archaeological literature?

The Library, however, drew at least part of the funds involved from subscriptions to the existing ABN and, as this is a co-operative venture, it is obliged to provide some kind of service in return. Accordingly, it has announced a new venture, the 'Networked Services Project' which, we are assured, will use only existing and tested electronic products. Typically, however, it has given very little information on exactly what the new project is intended to achieve, and a very short time in which to comment on it

An Australian Library Summit of 1988 also launched the concept of the 'distributed national collection (DNC)', which considers all the holdings of 'public' Australian libraries (including university, state and parliamentary libraries), and not just the National Library, as being part of the "national collection" which should be made available to the whole country. A first stage of this project is to map the holdings of all the libraries by a 'conspectus' method. A second, and much more difficult, stage is to designate particular libraries as the 'national collection' in particular areas. The National Library has not in fact yet been able to make such agreements with other libraries, except in a few comparatively marginal areas. The funding of university and state libraries is too low, and too uncertain, to allow them to guarantee they can collect many areas to 'national' levels. In fact, the 'Big 8' university libraries have cut their acquisitions of books by about 30 per cent in the last 10 years, and the state libraries by even more.

The DNC would not in fact solve all Australia's library problems, even if some other libraries were better funded. Any serious research needs a good reference library on the spot. It is simply not practical to send large amounts of printed material around the country, and even less practical to get it from overseas. What the DNC can do is indicate where a researcher will find the best collection(s) of material in the relevant field. There is in fact much to be said, even with Australia's scattered population, for concentrating large comprehensive collections in a few libraries. A researcher, who may have to come from elsewhere, can work very fast in such a library, providing it holds the essential books and journals that are needed.

The National Library has also suggested, as a justification for its policies, that it is wasteful for a library to collect material which will be used only occasionally. There is however an argument for doing just that. Nicholson Baker, in the *New Yorker* of 4 April 1994, points out that we will probably buy our own copies of books we use frequently, whereas:

Libraries are repositories for the out of print and the less desired, and we value them inestimably for that. The fact that most library books seldom circulate is part of the mystery and power of libraries. The books are there, waiting from age to age until their moment comes. And in the case of any given book, its moment may never come, but we have no way of predicting that, since we are unable to know what a future time will find of interest.

This may seem impossibly visionary in today's economic climate, but it is the outlook which has created the world's great research libraries, and is the reason scholars visit such libraries from all over the world.

One puzzling aspect of the present situation is the role of the National Library's Council which, according to the Act of

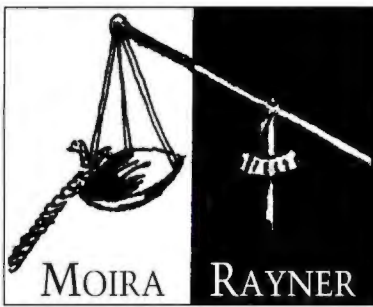
1960, has ultimate responsibility for the Library's policies. The Council has been almost totally silent in the present controversy. Its only public response is that the Library does not have the funds to collect everything (which is obvious). It has not explained why the Library cannot spend more than 9 per cent of its budget on acquisitions, or why it is European and American material in particular which has been cut so drastically. It has not made any comment on the failure of World 1, or the aims of its successor. It has repeatedly been asked to publish minutes of its meetings, but it has refused to do so on the grounds of confidentiality. One naturally wonders whether the Council is anything more than a rubber-stamp for decisions made by the Library's administration.

THIS, AND OTHER ASPECTS OF THE LIBRARY'S ACTIVITIES, will unfortunately confirm the rest of Australia's suspicions about official Canberra. The Library's collection and electronic policies have a superficial plausibility, but they are the decisions of bureaucrats, not scholars and researchers. It is impossible to get members of the Library staff (who in their own fields are expert, dedicated and extremely helpful) to make any public comment on the library's policies without authorisation from their Director-General. This is a tragic situation. However, equally tragic has been the almost complete silence of scholarly institutions elsewhere in the country. No academy, learned society, university or library association has made any public statement on the National Library's collection or electronic policies. We Australians pride ourselves on our scorn of authority, but we can be remarkably complacent about bureaucratic decisions. In this case we have, by default, allowed one of our most important cultural institutions almost to destroy itself.

The National Library is an institution all too emblematic of our schizophrenic age. On the one hand it has accepted the big bang of new information technology, far too gullibly. On the other hand it has imploded its traditional library activities to the point where it is almost obsolete as a research library. It has wasted a great deal of public money which might have been spent on acquisitions of permanent value to Australia. Even with this black hole at its heart it might still have some function as a cultural monument, but this will not be what the Parliamentary Committee of 1907 hoped.

That Committee, as noted, held up the Library of Congress in Washington as a model for our own National Library. There have been suggestions that the Library of Congress should disperse its collections among other institutions and become a 'national information broker' and 'referral agency'. That is, follow in part the new policies of our Library. On 7 May 1996, the Joint Congressional Committee on the library rejected any such suggestion, and reaffirmed the Library's historic mission of maintaining 'a universal collection'. A subsequent management review of the Library also criticised its digitisation project as largely pointless, given the limits of present technology. These are decisions which our own Library, and Parliament, would do well to consider. ■

Robert Barnes is a Senior Lecturer in Classics at ANU in Canberra. In 1987 he was awarded a Letter of Recognition by the (then) Library Association of Australia for services in developing the ANU Library.



Cooking the books

SINCE THE 1970s Auditors-General have come to intrude on bureaucratic business. Auditors-General have, since the 1970s Coombs Royal Commission into government administration, broadened their role from vetting the books to auditing overall performance and efficiency. They have probed into programs and policy, government enterprise, the management of public debt and even, in the case of the Victorian Auditor-General, sensitive social and legal policy. In 1996 Ches Baragwanath went so far as to review the effectiveness of Victoria's child protection system: a damning report vindicating the criticisms of Justice Fogarty which had been dismissed as 'uninformed' by the Kennett government. Baragwanath even reviewed the Children's Court. He then found that his talents were better appreciated by Mr Kennett when the coalition was in opposition.

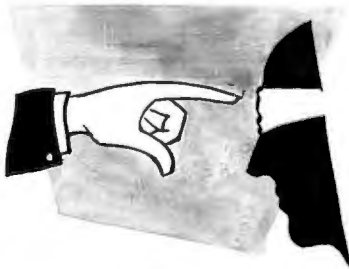
The Kennett government, though, has a way of dealing with critics. Victorians have been so desensitised to attacks on their statutory office-holders (the DPP, and the Law Reform, Liquor Licensing, Equal Opportunity and Health Services Commissioners, to name just some of the disappeared) that the removal of the President and members of the Employee Relations Commission went virtually unremarked in February. This was not so, though, when Mr Kennett announced a review of the Victorian Auditor-General in November 1996. The excuse—that the review was required under national competition policy—fooled no-one. Even senior government members expressed alarm—while Jeff was overseas.

Mr Baragwanath went spiritedly to the defence of his role. A cautious and conservative official, he nonetheless wrote to every Member of Parliament, spoke to the media and wrote to the Chairman of the Review, that it was 'inappropriate for the Government, as the subject of my audit, to commission a review which directly questioned whether the Auditor-General should undertake audits on behalf of the Parliament and taxpayers and seeks to influence the manner in which external

audit services are to be provided.' Any such review, he said, should be the sole prerogative of the Parliament, not government, and the proposal was inconsistent with the 15 reviews of Auditors-General in Australia undertaken over the last 13 years.

The Victorian government was aware of the need to separate the functions of one limb of government from the other. Baragwanath's second report on the Children's Court was never tabled, after the Attorney General objected on the ground that it infringed the doctrine of the 'separation of powers' to seek to review the exercise of judicial discretion. She was right, actually, but the breach of the same doctrine occasioned by the executive's seeking to review Baragwanath's *parliamentary* function, did not concern her in the same way.

Baragwanath asked for and got the support of all his colleagues, the Australasian Council of Auditors General, who publicly asserted that the independence of the office, and the function it performed, was under threat from the Review.



The independence of Auditors-General had been put on the Council's agenda two years before, shortly after the then Commonwealth Auditor General, John Taylor, resigned. He had been in prolonged dispute with the Commonwealth's Finance department, because he objected to their seeking to hold his office accountable to them.

Taylor had also drawn acerbic criticism from the (Labor) Ministers of the day. It is well to temper outrage over Mr Kennett's review by recalling the parliamentary tongue-lashings from the then Treasurer, John Dawkins, questioning Taylor's officers' qualifications and understanding of the issues on which Taylor had been severely critical: the growing liabilities of the federal government sector and failure to set aside funds to meet future debts. Taylor resigned after his investigation of the 'sports rorts' affair.

Though Auditors-General are considered to be Parliamentary Officers, their position is actually rather ambiguous. Once upon a time (when I was a law student) there was a simple view of the division of

political power in a democracy. The three organs of government, each checking and balancing the power of the others, are the Parliament, individuals elected by the people as their representatives to make laws; the Executive, people appointed to apply and administer those laws; and the Judiciary, who determine disputes, including disputes about the validity, meaning and application of laws as well as the legality of individual, institutional and 'governmental' behaviour.

It never was, really, quite that simple. We constantly reinvent our checks and balances on public power because it is always shifting. The problem of modern democracies is how to keep government accountable. In the last 30 years brigades of statutory offices have been created by Parliament to do that: Auditors-General are more venerable public defenders.

THE AUDITOR'S INDEPENDENCE from government was, and is still, obviously essential. The Western Australian Royal Commission into WA Inc, in 1993, and the 1989 Queensland Fitzgerald Commission of Inquiry both called for reinforcement of its role and powers. In the Commonwealth, New Zealand and the UK Parliaments the Auditor-General is described as an independent officer of the parliament. In South Africa, the Auditor-General is a constitutional Office. Though there is no constitutional necessity to appoint an Auditor-General, the office exists in all Westminster systems and the function is protected in all other democratic structures.

Should government departments select their own, private auditor? The Australian Council of Auditors General remarked that it seemed 'implausible' that any Parliament would wish to allow it, that national competition policy did not require it, and that, 'as a community we must protect and support the role of Auditors-General as one of the very few ways of ensuring proper accountability by government ... A "hands-off" approach by government to the role of Auditor-General is the only acceptable way our democratic process can be safeguarded.' It went on to assert that 'Allowing government agencies to appoint their own auditors would ... go totally against all the



findings of recent reports and reviews, both in Australia and overseas, on the role and independence of Auditors-General. It would, indeed, weaken the public sector audit significantly against all comparatives, including audits of publicly listed entities.' In fact Victorian Treasurer, Alan Stockdale, when in opposition, had said so in April 1992, identifying the potential for conflict of interest in private auditors whose firms also deliver consulting services.

Any auditor may become too close to the client and imperil their objectivity. The Council of Auditors General identified an apparent example in the outcome of the Rothwell case in Western Australia, whose auditor was hand-picked by Rothwell's chairman. In the private sector it is accepted that the body to be audited should not appoint its own auditor. Under the Corporations Law the shareholders of public companies, not their Directors, make the appointment. In government the 'shareholders' are the citizens, whose interest is all the more vulnerable in that they have no choice about 'investing' in government business. The Auditor-General owes them a duty of care as the 'owners' of the whole business of government. Since there is no competition for, no market forces regulating, the delivery of peace, order and good government, the fact that the Auditor-General has a monopoly on government audit is not anti-competitive; government has a monopoly over public resources, too. Competition policy is intended to preserve the public interest. An Auditor-General protects that interest.

There will always be a tension between accountability and the organisational needs of government bodies; between agencies' and auditors' goals and cultural assumptions. There will always be tension between open, accountable government, and narrowly conceived goals of administrative efficiency. That tension is what keeps the genie of self-interest and *folie de grandeur* in the bottle. Mr Kennett has to lose this one. ■

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A The truth is out there

AMONG THE THOUSANDS OF WORDS written after the release of the Mansfield Inquiry into the ABC, Archimedes has failed to notice any reference to science, despite a more than usual interest.

You see, Archimedes had a hand in putting together one of the 10,000 submissions to the Inquiry from the Australian Science Communicators (ASC), an organisation representing some 500 people from the media, industry, research organisations and education. Not surprisingly, the ASC submission focused on the ABC's responsibility to report, comment upon and present debate about science and technology. But what may surprise reporters of the Inquiry's outcome, is that the ASC submission was hardly a lone voice. There were 125 others specifically to do with science.

This did not escape Bob Mansfield's notice. These submissions, he said, 'made strong representations regarding the importance of the ABC in communicating science and technology issues to a broader audience. I am satisfied that if the ABC ceased to broadcast specialist information programs, no other broadcaster would assume responsibility for them.'

He went further. 'I do not accept the view that [specialist information programs] should be regarded as a low priority because of small audiences for some of these programs, or that the ABC should consider delivering them as elements of a subscription service. Given the importance of authoritative information to the development of democratic and civil rights, they must be seen as one of the higher priorities of public broadcasting and remain available for general reception.'

Clearly Mr Mansfield believes that the reporting of science is an important function of the ABC. But the support of Bob Mansfield may not be enough to save science coverage on ABC television. The ABC has become one of the foremost reporters of science worldwide because it has developed radio and TV science units filled with specialists trained to understand, assess and communicate science. Quality science programming depends upon these groups. And if they are to be maintained that means making enough science programs to justify their existence, and being able to train enough people to continue their work—all of which involves allocating scarce resources to broadcasting science.

'Science television is not cheap,' writes Alison Leigh, an executive producer in ABC's television science unit, in a letter published in the *Age* and *The Australian*. 'Budget cuts have already jeopardised the ABC's capacity to maintain its specialist science communication staff in the short term, and to build a similarly experienced specialist staff in the long term.' The number of programs to be made for *Quantum* this year, for instance, has been cut drastically. For the past month and a half, we have been watching a series made for the American market by the BBC, narrated by Agent Scully of *The X-Files*.

It is not that the Federal Government is unaware of this. Science Minister Peter McGauran, a true enthusiast, has provided the ABC with money to appoint three trainees, who will learn to be TV, radio and multi-media science reporters. But will the ABC be in a position to employ them when they are through? If this seems to suggest some lack of coordination between ministers over science policy, it would not be the first time.

Science and technology pervade all areas of government. Yet, rather than expend the intellectual effort in coming to grips with the implications of this, governments have tended to appoint a science minister to handle 'science'. While science minister McGauran is trying his hardest to attract young people into science and engineering, education minister Amanda Vanstone can calmly discourage them by doubling the fees of the tertiary degrees in those very areas. And, as government money is poured into co-operative research centres, money for the university infrastructure on which they are founded is slashed to the bone.

Former Prime Minister Paul Keating recognised this problem of lack of co-ordination, and instituted the Prime Minister's Science and Engineering Council so that scientists and engineers could meet directly with all responsible ministers. Unfortunately, Keating was not so successful in ensuring that ministers were present. Many of the meetings were short of front-benchers.

To his credit, Prime Minister John Howard has seen fit to continue supporting the council and its meetings—the last one was even open to the public. Let's hope this is a sign that he will take the role of co-ordinating science policy seriously. Otherwise, one suspects Peter McGauran is going to need all the help he can get to avoid drowning in a sea of apathy, taking with him the nation's hopes for an effective science effort and a future as a 'clever country'. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

Let's twist again

The only certainty in Australian higher education is that it will go on being reviewed.

Richard Johnson looks at what might be expected from the West Committee while Don Anderson asks some of the questions that remain outstanding.

SENATOR VANSTONE has set up yet another review of Australia's much-reviewed higher education sector. Apart from those who just give a weary sigh and look for their redundancy package, what might the review achieve for students, for university staff, and for the rest of us Australians?

First, let us look at the members of the Review Committee. Some people seem traumatised by the fact that the head of the committee will be a secondary school headmaster. Well, there are headmasters and headmasters: in an earlier generation, Sir James Darling, Brian Hone, Colin Healy, Mark Bishop were not unimpressive people (not to mention the women in similar positions) and there have been some like Wilfred Frederick who moved from a headmastership to a university chair, or Tom Coates who moved from an associate professorship to a headmastership.

I do not know Mr West, but I suspect I know his type, and to criticise on the grounds that he has never been on a university's staff is trivial. He is well educated, and has been preparing students for university for most of his life. The real questions are going to be, is he intelligent? Is he open-minded? Is he a good chair of committees?

Peter Baume, Lachlan Chipman and Kwong Lee Dow are well known in higher education and know it well. Baume is currently a professor in the medical faculty at the University of NSW and chancellor of the Australian National University. Chipman is by discipline a philosopher and worked for many years at the University of Wollongong, then a few years at Monash before moving to become vice-chancellor of Central Queensland University. Lee Dow is by first discipline a chemist, has been Dean of Education at Melbourne University for almost 20 years and for several years

pro-vice-chancellor, and is a long-serving member of the national Higher Education Council. Collectively, the three are of high standing, cover a range of disciplines, types of university, and state concerns, and are probably as knowledgeable about higher education in Australia as any three individuals one could find.

The other three panelists are less well known in the sector. Doreen Clark has a PhD in organic chemistry; she heads a chemical and microbiological research

at least two degrees each; a mix of public sector and private sector, of education and industry. The terms of reference are so broad that the committee could comment on anything it felt minded to do. What are the issues before it?

The most important issue is the one that has bedevilled Australian higher education for at least 20 years: nobody seems to know what it is for. There is no shared concept of the nature of a university, or the natures acceptable within the range of universities, and not much attempt to address the question. Most of what one reads publicly about universities concerns funding them, the number of people who enter and leave them, the people who work in them, and the ways they are managed. The same questions could be asked about bus systems or public lavatories.

Some people have taken umbrage at Mr West's comments distinguishing between 'education' and 'training'. At risk of sounding like a first-year Philosophy student, I would say it depends what you mean by each of those words. Mr West is not unaware that the university from which he holds a Master's degree in Latin

also offers training in how to drill holes in teeth, how to assist in the birth of a calf or a human, and how to draw plans for buildings and machines. He may not be aware that a few years ago after amalgamating with the Conservatorium, it offered an associate diploma in piano-tuning; perhaps it still does, and if so, one hopes it does it to the same high standards it expects elsewhere. There is training that is underpinned by theoretical knowledge, as in dentistry, veterinary science, medicine, architecture, engineering, and musical performance, and there is training that is not, as in learning to use a key-cutting machine or an electric drill. I would trust the committee to know



BEST PRACTICE

Through creative supervision Sarah's dyslexia had generated three new Boards, two committees and a restructure

company, and is a member of the Council of the University of Technology, Sydney. Thus, she combines high scholastic standing, current academic involvement, and commercial success. She is the only woman on the panel, but it is unlikely that she will be a 'token' member. Gary Banks is an economist who has wide experience in public policy issues in Australia and abroad, and has been a lecturer at UNSW. Clem Doherty was an electrical engineer and has had extensive senior experience in the commercial side of advanced telecommunications.

So—all people of high achievement and distinction, three academics, all seven with

the difference, and not get my knickers in a knot over it.

In *The Australian* of 23 January 1997, Professor Ken McKinnon, one of the most notable of recent vice-chancellors, commented that if the committee tried to define the nature of the modern university, he wished them luck—implying that the task was impossible. Yet because we do not attempt it, we drift. I doubt if this committee will come up with a definition to stand for all time—but John Henry Newman's definition is well past its use-by date and should be reverentially laid to rest. It would be a help if the committee would come up with some definitions or ideals which the government would accept and which we

could all understand and, if necessary, try to amend.

This is what the Murray Committee, which laid the foundations of Australia's postwar university achievements, did. Sir Keith Murray and his colleagues studied the Australian university scene, then, in effect, said to Bob Menzies: 'This is what an Australian university should look like in the second half of this century; and this is what it will cost you'. The next twenty years were the nearest we have ever come to a golden age for academe.

From what is known of the West committee, I suggest that its ideal will not be John Dawkins' crude engine of economic growth; at the least, West, Chipman, Baume,

and Lee Dow would not sign to that. Nor will it be the ivory tower divorced from issues of employment, careers, and industrial development—not with three industrial policy people on the committee. They will be well aware of the potential and the problems of telecommunications, multimedia, and the internet, which are exercising many academics at present; Mr Doherty will bring that expertise.

It will, I suggest, be a strong committee of a certain kind. West has made a successful career on the conservative side of school education. Chipman was a notable member, along with Leonie Kramer, of the Australian Council for Educational Standards, a group with conservative views on

Then think again...

AFTER THE COMMITTEE settles on clear purposes for the university in twenty-first century Australia there are numerous problems still to be solved.

Five pressing ones, left over from the Dawkins era, have been exacerbated by the current administration. Each of them invites interventionary solutions and it will be of no little interest to see how this particular Committee deals with them.

First is the question of diversity. Just what sort of diversity is desirable and how can it be maintained? We have had a diverse set of universities but there are strong Procrustean forces at work. For example, all 36 public institutions want to be in the research game and to have postgraduate research students. (The PhD load has been growing at an annual 16 percent since Dawkins; contributed to disproportionately by the former CAE universities). The old binary line was meant to ensure that different sorts of higher education institutions stuck to their missions. That failed, but are there other structures or incentives that can deliver a desirable diversity or does the Committee think that the aggregation of thousands of individual choices in a deregulated system will deliver the best possible system?

That takes us to the second question. Regulation, or co-ordination as it is more politely referred to, has been a feature of the Australian system ever since Menzies created the first Universities Commission in 1957 as a source of specialised and disinterested advice. Co-ordination and the development of a 'balanced system' continued to be the responsibility of

statutory commissions until Dawkins abolished CTEC in 1988. Since then DEETYA has regulated the system. Regulation has never been heavy-handed, academic freedom has never been infringed and institutional autonomy has been respected; at the same time it has prevented grossly inefficient duplication of services which unfettered competition between institutions would have produced.

Thirdly there is the deteriorating quality of teaching and the poverty of the undergraduate experience. Unit resources for teaching have declined by around 50 percent due to the Dawkins cuts, followed by the Vanstone cuts and made worse by new universities shifting funds from the undergraduate teaching area to postgraduate and research.

What does the Committee regard as the nature of a university education? Should students expect to be members of an academic community, known to their teachers and with access to them? And should the curriculum remain highly specialised, decided on by professions, faculties and departments; or should graduates of Australian universities be distinguished by their general intellectual skills and an understanding of the society in which they will practise their professions?

Fourth is the question of access and equity. Australia can be justly proud of the extent to which, over the years, various programs have contributed to what became one of the most accessible and representative university systems in the world. The country has benefited from the contribution of talented graduates from modest family

backgrounds who, in more restrictive systems, would never have had the chance of a university education. But in the last decade there has been a social regression with a diminishing proportion of enrolments of bright students from poor families. We can expect the Committee to espouse intellectual élitism; but does it also want universities to revert to being socially élite institutions?

FINALLY THERE IS THE QUESTION of funding. Since 1973 the Commonwealth Government has been the sole source of public funds. That is unlikely to change. But how much should it be, what agency should advise the government on level of funding? The Committee would do a service to universities and the country if, following its statement about university purposes and the consequent diversity and functions and objectives, it estimated the resources that would be necessary to achieve those objectives, their sources and structures for delivery which gave institutions an adequate planning horizon.

Clear purposes, desirable diversity, efficient co-ordination, quality undergraduate education, equal access for talent and resources to achieve the objectives—if Mr West gives the government wise counsel on these, his fame will be as the fame of Murray; and, if the Prime Minister takes heed, his will be as Menzies'. ■

Don Anderson is emeritus professor and visiting fellow at the Australian National University and visiting fellow at Southern Cross University.

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curriculum. Baume is a former Minister in the Fraser government. Banks is Executive Commissioner with the Industry Commission, and therefore may be expected to have economic rationalist leanings. Clark and Doherty are senior executives in the private sector, where few lefties are found. Lee Dow is a professional educationist who has served governments of both persuasions without letting his political views show.

It might come up with a vision of a university that many people will be happy with: that is, an old-fashioned pretty conservative vision. What else would you expect from a conservative government? This is the government the people elected and, according to the opinion polls and the recent Victorian and Western Australian elections, the majority are still pretty happy with that stance.

If people want to disagree with this committee's approach and recommendations, I hope they do it on the basis of alternative visions, not bleating about funding and sectional interests.

'A conservative vision' is a phrase that will send shudders down some spines. Some people will foresee the end of Women's Studies, degrees in Leisure and Recreation, and interdisciplinary approaches; they might expect a turning to year-long units with sudden-death exams at their end, courses exclusively based in the traditional disciplines, a diminution of student choice, even a return to compulsory Latin. Personally I doubt it.

There has certainly been adverse comment on the fact that the recent vice-chancellor of Cambridge University, Sir David Williams has been recruited as a consultant to the committee. It is true that Cambridge is an old university with great strength in the traditional humanities and sciences. People seem to be overlooking that it has in recent years, during Sir David's vice-chancellorship, built up to the nearest that Britain has come to Silicon Valley and is a notable centre of the most advanced communications technology in partnerships between the university and private enterprises.

My own guess is that this will be a committee that combines conservative values with a push towards using advanced technology in educational processes. Mr Doherty is a former director of McKinsey & Company and led its Asia-Pacific Telecommunications, Electronics, Media & Multimedia Sector, and was co-leader of the Global Telecommunications Sector. It will be piquant to see how the values and approaches of Oxbridge of the thirties, or a good American four-year college, are blended with computer-assisted

learning, multimedia and global access to education.

A CONSERVATIVE committee might recommend to Australian governments and universities to pay much more attention to good teaching and real learning and show genuine concern for students, individually and not just as a mass; fully to support excellent research but cease demanding 'research' activity, no matter how pedestrian, from every academic; and end the frenzied emphasis on publication, which demoralises many good teachers and destroys forests without greatly advancing human wisdom.

They might also suggest that universities take seriously the business of ensuring that all their graduates, in every field, can speak and write English fluently, clearly and cogently. Employers have consistently rated this as one of the two most important of all skills, but university teachers have consistently rated it as seventh in importance out of ten.

Of course, many people have been saying these things for years, and it ought not take another year, \$2 million, and the time of several very busy people to make it heard. Still, if it does get heard it will be worth the cost. ■

Richard Johnson is a former senior academic and current Visiting Fellow at the Australian National University. He is also a former bureaucrat in the Commonwealth's Education portfolio. He now works on consultancies with a group of similar retirees known in DEETYA as 'Dad's Army'.

THE NORTH

An Irish Diary, Part I



T

Thursday June 27 (The day before, in London)

THE SAVILE CLUB. My friend the Politician says he never could make out the Northern Irish accent. 'It's a foreign language', he says. 'I know you won't take offence', he adds, 'I've given you my views on the Irish before. We should pull out and leave them to it.' It stung me the first time he said it, the unfairness of it, himself a Welshman with the look of one of those engine-room taffies I remember from war films. (My mother said they were known not to keep themselves clean underneath.) The English must smile to see the Celts fall out amongst themselves. But then we started talking about the Irish (Irish-Catholic) influence in Australia, particularly in the arts. It surprised me how new this was to the Politician, a learned man, and his son, an historian, sitting with us in the Smoking room.

Then a man came across, bending at the waist, and said in a campy voice 'Oh do forgive me accosting you like this but look, please, take a look at this'. It was a key-ring made from a horse shoe or gun metal, oval, with the inscription James—or John—Pearse, hanged in New South Wales in 1862. 'I was given it by an Australian friend. And you see I heard you talking and I couldn't help myself. Do you mind?'. The man pulled up a chair and lit a cigarette. The Politician drew on his cigar and smiled brilliantly. 'You see I'm a County Antrim man myself, lost the accent of course. I work at the UN, in New York. Peace and conflict. The Middle East, of course, Ireland's too hard! Anyway I had this Australian friend, and when I heard you talking about Ireland and Australia (Ostralia) I just couldn't help myself'.

'Not a member, surely', said the Politician, not unkindly, because the man was knowledgeable and the talk had turned literary. Eliot's alleged anti-Semitism, Yeats. 'They took out the mirrors on the stairs because of Yeats', the Politician said. 'He was so vain about his appearance that he kept everyone waiting for dinner, stopping on every landing to admire himself'. When the man from Antrim left, the Politician's son said 'He told us, you didn't hear. He's a member of the University Club in Dublin, they have reciprocal rights'. 'Ah', said his father. I was struggling against the old, childhood feeling of being embarrassed for the Irish, ashamed that I still had to. It was getting late and the Politician turned to me 'When are you off then? Are you taking your wife and daughter?'

Friday June 28

PEREGRINE WORTSHORNE IN TODAY'S *SPECTATOR* sounds more Unionist than the Unionists. Gerry Adams looks uncharacteristically ill at ease on the television since the Manchester bombing. And now there's been another big IRA mistake, they've killed a Garda man. The Irish police have raided one of their armouries. The mood is very much against them.

I wrote about it in *Letter to my daughter* and now I'm taking my daughter to the country where I was born. In the plane I warn her Belfast's not pretty, but the rest of the country is. Descending into Aldergrove on the edge of Lough Neagh I hope she'll see white-washed cottages but the cloud is too low. I ask the man at Hertz about the traffic regulations. He says 'Ah well, you've raised a wee point there I'm not so sure of myself'. The Daughter is telling a Queensland man who's been touring Spain she doesn't know Essendon's place on the ladder.

We drive round Belfast's new ring road, past the historic shipyards with their Gog and Magog cranes, on to the seaside town of Bangor. The weather's blowy but after registering we leave our bags in the room and get out and stretch our legs on 'the front', where the Daughter begins to understand why Irish children had donkey rides, sandcastle competitions and amusement arcades to while away our summers: 'Wouldn't have been much sunbaking'. I'm asked, not for the first time, to explain again how Northern Ireland is and isn't part of Britain. Bangor, like the whole of County Down, is heavily Protestant. Rows of mid-Victorian hotels and guest houses are set on the hill that circles the bay. A painted board near Pickie Pool says The Wages of Sin Are Death. (I worried about that 'are' when I was eight, though it must have been repainted.) Looking back, we see how the beach has disappeared under a marina; that explains why the front's so tacky, many of the shops derelict. We learn later that it was forced on the locals and the boats belong to people who live miles away. *C'est la vie*, as they must say even in Ulster. The Daughter says 'Like the Grand Prix'. Round the point, leaning into the cold wind, we can see Scotland.

On the way back we have ice cream the colour and smoothness of custard. We can't finish all our dinner of fish and chips and peas and carrots, and have to drink pints of water because of the salt in it. We're almost scared to ask for anything, or say thanks, because of the rain of 'greats' and 'that'll be grands' that'll fall on us. Nothing is too much trouble. On the television an Irish woman reading the news deplors the IRA's 'antics' and I tighten up, expecting such frivolity to be punished.

Saturday June 29

UP EARLY, WE RACE BACK TO THE AIRPORT TO MEET THE TEACHER, straight from yard duty at Princes Hill school. (She had a week of term to do before she could catch us up.) After a long shower she's

game for whatever's on, and we drive to Lisburn where they tell us at the Church of Ireland Cathedral it's only open on Sunday. I find this sad and funny at the same time. The Orange decorations are up in the square and there are bands playing in the warm sunshine. We buy buns and stand eating them and listening. One band is all piano accordions, the next all flutes. The Daughter hears the Carlton anthem in one of the medleys. There's some grey hair, old blokes who'd been bandsmen in the war, but a lot of young ones too. They're all in new-looking uniforms, fresh faces under peaked caps, shiny shoes, black skirts and stockings on the women. One band wears black with red and gold braid. As they change over, there's that happy—but to me sadly remote—sense of importance and belonging as they work out who's going in whose car and how to find the next venue. They've come out to practise on many a cold winter's night for this. Up the square, at the Cathedral, my mother, at the age of these girls, played the organ when she wasn't out dancing.

I can't stop pointing out the signs of peace since I was last here. We haven't seen an armoured car or a soldier, and not a single gun. Hardly even a policeman. Our hotel



in Bangor, once O'Hara's Royal Hotel but recently changed hands, is next to a court house: two years ago that court house was inside a bomb-proof cage and surrounded with the RUC in flak jackets holding machine guns. Now its lovely grey stone façade is exposed in the sun and there's only an elderly guard on the steps. Everybody says there's no going back. Peace has come too far.

The worst news of the day is the murder last night of a man who ran a Chinese takeaway in Belfast. Nothing sectarian, we are relieved to hear. The news interviewed his brother and we couldn't help noticing the broad Belfast accent coming out of his sad Chinese face. (Some basic ego-centricity says everything that's foreign is foreign by reference to me, as if foreigners never talk amongst themselves. I was totally surprised once in a Frankfurt restaurant when the waiter offered to translate the Italian menu and only turned it into German!)

We go with friends to their golf club for dinner. The sun is still golden at nine o'clock and we look over Belfast Lough to Carrickfergus, thinking of Seamus Heaney's poem and Van Morrison. Our friends vote Alliance Party, that is equal Catholic and Protestant, a refuge for Protestant ex-Unionists and Catholics who don't vote UDLP. But not much of a refuge. They lost badly in the recent elections, voters shifting left and right and Cyril says he's afraid they're only splitting the anti-Unionist vote. The golf club's non-sectarian too, but Cyril, who's been President, admits not many Catholics have applied. No woman can go higher than vice-President. Cyril's wife Barbara got a hole-in-one here last summer.

Enormous amounts of food, though nobody here looks fat. Three thick slices of turkey breast, large serves of roast potatoes, mashed potatoes, chips, peas and carrots. But still the drinking's the thing. Our contribution was the wine—Oxford Landing Chardonnay and a Spanish red—but it might as well have been the water. Swallowed in a minute and back to the Bushmills. Even among the Protestants, when there's the money it's whiskey a man buys you when he says 'will you have a wee drink?'. They all went home from the club in taxis, the men to pick up the cars with, I suppose, a hair of the dog before doing the Saturday shop.

A woman tells me she is going for a holiday in Vancouver. She has an old school friend emigrated thirty years ago. 'They're unfriendly out there, but', she says, 'My friend still hasn't a real Canadian friend. Only friends from here'. My own father used to say of people in Northern Ireland that their world's too small. I remember him arguing with my mother and us children agreeing with her, we didn't want to go away, but he took us away all the same. A man says to me as we leave, to give the jet-lagged Teacher a chance to rest, 'So you're from around here then? You weren't born in Australia? We don't have to be polite to you?' I say that's right, in Belfast, brought up near Magherafelt, then Bangor. 'Well then you'll not mind me saying you've a *tarrable big bally* on yer'.



Sunday June 30

THE BREAKFAST IS THE ULSTER FRY, which at least in regards to having its name in capital letters I suspect is something of a ruse, like the Ploughman's Lunch. But the thing itself is certainly substantial: eggs, sausages, bacon, black pudding, potato bread, soda bread, half a fried tomato. There's also toast and marmalade, of course, and for starters a choice of grapefruit pieces, tinned prunes, cereal or porridge, and fruit juices. There's any amount of tea. The Teacher settles for a poached egg. The Daughter finds she's partial to the potato bread. I ask have they half a fry and can they hold the black pudding.

We read the London (that is, Murdoch) *Times* which is free with the room and, as we discover later, available even in remote towns in Kerry and Clare. Today there's a moving editorial on the Battle of the Somme which was fought eighty years ago tomorrow. There are articles on Northern Ireland's terrible contribution, through the 36th Ulster Division that was largely wiped out. Patrick Mayhew, the Northern Ireland Secretary, is to represent Britain at the official commemoration in France. He reminds critics who say someone more elevated should go, a Royal perhaps, that he has a right to represent them. His father was in a Northern Irish regiment. The Battle of the Somme is one of the things that makes Loyalists want to stay British.

Sometimes politics is too near the surface. In the lobby after breakfast I picked up a free paper called the *News Letter*. It's a Protestant rag. There's a piece on a 100-year-old man who was in the 36th and lives down the road in Newtonards. There's another on the IRA admitting attacking an army base in Germany (I didn't see that in the other papers) and a feature on 'Ulster's strong links with twelve US Presidents'. But the lead item is this: 'Suicide on the Farms, by Gary Kelly. Ulster Farmers and their families are coping with the emotional stress of Mad Cow disease better than their counterparts in the rest of the UK, Ulster Farming Union chiefs have claimed'. The ultimate macho, I suppose, religion *and* politics!

Then, going out for a walk and seeing it was raining, three or four people at the desk say wait, we'll find you an umbrella. And they do. I take one that's emerald green and smooth as silk. 'Good colour', I say. 'Not as good as this' says the young man, holding up the other one, which I see now is orange. I'd been thinking 'Ireland', and spoke as a tourist. He was thinking 'Northern Ireland', and was talking politics.

TODAY IS THE EMOTIONAL OR CEREMONIAL CENTRE of the visit. (I tell myself if it doesn't work out that way it doesn't matter, I have a paper to write for next week's conference in Dublin.) We drive to The Loup, a small town, just a cross-roads really, near Magherafelt and Moneymore. Plaques have been made commemorating a sister and brother who died there as infants when I was four and five and were never buried in consecrated ground. (I have written about this in *Letter*.) Today we will see them. The Saltersland Presbyterian Church is named after a family called Salter who is commemorated again as the supplier of eighteenth century cannons now displayed on the walls of Derry. The church

has stood here at the Loup for over a hundred years in the shadow of a Catholic church the size of a small cathedral and today it's surrounded by tricolours and Derry football colours hanging from television aerials and telegraph posts ('But never a gun around', people tell us, 'there's never a gun been seen around here'.) We could not get to the dedication the week before but we see over the church and take pictures of the plaques and later we can listen to a tape of the service.

'Were you well-pleasanted by the boards?' This was Mrs McKinley's son, an engineer with Ulster Bus. Did I like the plaques? Mrs McKinley was my first teacher (my sister Maime and I helped save the school from closing in 1945 by making up the numbers when the inspector came) and lives in the school house where we lived fifty years ago. It turns out she was nineteen when she taught me, just about the Daughter's age, now. 'Didn't I do well!', she laughs, as if I had won a medal. She has made us cakes and tea and tells us about her sister who 'caught a flu that if it'd gone over her brain she'd have been a vegetable but it went over her heart so she died'. Then about her niece who's training to be a nurse but has to repeat a course 'by just three marks, would you believe it? Had an *awl bat* teaching her. Anyway she puts yes when she should have put no in her exam, and the *awl bat* won't change it or give her another go'. The Teacher asked what was the question they asked? Mrs McKinley said 'The question was can men be as good nurses as women? and the niece put yes and that's why she has to repeat her subject. The answer they wanted was no.' Turning to the Daughter she asks 'Now would you agree with that? What answer would they want you to put to that in the University in Melbourne?'

In Britain these days, after Thatcher, the slogan might as well be 'It's the community, stupid!' It sounds right. Here in Northern Ireland, I'm not so sure. 'Och, you're just like family', Mrs McKinley tells us, 'And me afraid I'd not be knowing what to say to you.' But—and it may just be me, and my emigrant father in me—aren't we going a bit too fast? I get the feeling of doors closing behind me. I'm not sure that I want to be 'family', here, now, even if I was once.

We drink our tea and eat cakes with hard icing, looking into the garden. Out of the tail of my eye I watch the son prepare roast potatoes for the dinner after the morning service. They do better on a low setting in her slow-combustion stove (it looks like the Aga my mother used to recall wistfully, though I'm not sure she actually owned one) while the roast is cooking at the daughter-in-law's down the road. They're peeled, cut in half and laid out in a flat pan, rashers of bacon are laid on them and then, pouring slowly and evenly, he finishes the job with half a jug of pure bacon fat.



I'm very taken by Mrs McKinley. At 72 she's pretty and flirtatious, and she tells us how we were in the house because she, as the teacher, wasn't allowed to move in till she had a husband. 'The minister told me 'And if you do, I'll scandalise you around the district'. Of course we hardly know her, and we can hardly guess about the life she's lived in this same house all these years with her children (bar one, I think) never far from her. It's been what people call a 'community-based life', that's for sure; but maybe not a life without reason to complain. Indeed, in the car afterwards, we admitted we'd found the talk wearing—a lot of it how this one over here gets away with no work at all, unless the Inspector's due; how that one over there gets on by courting favour; how her son there has been denied the promotion that's long overdue. We feel the pressure to agree, of course, to see the injustice of it all the way she does; aren't we almost family? When we leave, Mrs McKinley smiles at me and says 'Next time you're here we'll expect you'll not have so much weight on you'.

In Dublin a few days later I read a newspaper column on how in Brussels the Irish are using their charm to steal business from the British. Apparently Irish friendliness is worth millions in new investments. The columnist is an American who once lived in Dublin but moved on to London, a double-expatriate, fleeing what he calls Ireland's control-by-intimacy. A day or two later a man told me good morning. I smiled and nodded but it wasn't enough. The man stopped and looked hard at me and repeated his good morning, and of course I cleared my throat and said it back to him loud, as I should have done the first time and he went on, satisfied.

The Loup is in the south of Co Londonderry (or Derry), not far from the farm where Seamus Heaney grew up. We drove north-west to visit a friend living near Derry city. Dr Joanne Wright is a Political Scientist, another peace-and-conflict expert, studying how multi-national organisations like the UN and Nato might do better in future wars. On the way, the Daughter, looking at the fields and the mountains from the back seat of the car, said 'How can it all be so beautiful!'

Joanne points out the more infamous atrocity sites, most of them pubs. 'But the peace has gone too far', she says, 'there'll be isolated troubles but there'll be no going back'. She showed us Lough Foyle and the view of the Donegal hills.

DERRY ITSELF SHOCKED US. It's laid out like a battlefield, the Catholic housing estate up on a bare hill behind the Bogside, the Protestant one on an equally bare hill opposite it near the river. They are like two ancient armies drawn up for a hundred-year war. The Bogside itself looks so vulnerable under the wall the Protestant Apprentice Boys march over in August. Far up on the hill, where the Catholic church is, we saw a great crowd gathering. It was for the Blessing of the Graves, a Catholic remembrance of the Somme, I think. (Battles everywhere in this country!) We could see an outdoor altar and the people streaming across from the church. The hymns floated down to us as we walked the city wall, reading the tourist information. They were the same hymns that Protestants sing.

The other thing about Derry is the steepness. There's nowhere that isn't either up or down, and the getting between the one and the other is terribly hard. There's nowhere just to stroll about or have a leisurely ride on a bicycle. Imagine dragging kids up those hills to do the shopping. Imagine always having to climb up to go to school or the pictures or to get married, and half-running and tripping on the way down again.

We drove back to Bangor over the Glenshane Pass in rain and fog. The road is wide and easy. (Northern Ireland extracted an extensive motorway system from the British years ago, now the Irish Republic is doing the same from Europe.) In Ireland the clouds are always at eyebrow-level and all you have to do is stand on tiptoe—or it comes down to you—and you're in a world of misty lights and bluish-green and brown and plaid-patterned fields. We open the window to smell the peat. Irish rain comes in as many forms, driving, drenching and so soft you think it's a nice day and you don't notice it's raining till you're already sopping wet. Whoever invented the intermittent windscreen wiper had Ireland in mind. ■



Graham Little is a Melbourne academic and writer. His autobiographical *Letter to my daughter* was published by Text in 1995. *The North* will continue in the next edition of *Eureka Street*.

Radio waves

A View from the Bridge, Pierre Ryckmans, [1996 Boyer Lectures] Sydney, ABC Books, 1996. ISBN 0-7333-0553-9 RRP \$14.95
A Truly Civil Society, Eva Cox, [1995 Boyer Lectures] Sydney, ABC Books, 1995. ISBN 0-7333-0502-4 RRP \$14.95

EACH YEAR A 'prominent Australian' is invited by the ABC to deliver the Boyer Lectures or, as the ABC's description puts it, 'to present ... work on major scientific, social and cultural issues' to a wider general audience. The series is a radio flagship: it is widely advertised, and widely noticed, and the lectures are subsequently published on the Net and in book form. Modelled on the BBC's Reith lectures, the Boyers have been running since 1959. Pierre Ryckmans, the 1996 lecturer, is the latest in a long line of distinguished invitees. I read *A View from the Bridge*, the published version of his lectures, alongside the recent



reprint of Eva Cox's from the year before, *A Truly Civil Society*. In different ways, these two books demonstrate just how hard it is to address the nation convincingly from such a lofty eminence.

Eva Cox is frequently heard on the ABC. She is an engaging broadcaster, especially in conversation, relaxed, confident, decisive in her opinions and resolutely humane. Unpopularity does not deter her: listeners might have heard her, in recent months, arguing the case for a more substantial tax base. Eva Cox's lectures are what politicians expect the ABC to favour. They're the work of an 'activist', a reformer, veteran of many committees and author of many reports and pamphlets, who has developed a broad feminist critique of social institutions, argued for sensible measures like proper child care, and now, based on all this nitty-gritty, takes the Boyer opportunity to present an overall case about the kind of society she wants to live in. So far, so lullingly appropriate.

Cox is a very good broadcaster, but the printed form of the lectures show up flaws masked (so to speak) by her on-air persona. What gets her into trouble is the English language. For example, one central idea in her lectures is the concept of 'social capital'

... the processes between people which establish networks, norms and social trust and facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit. These processes are also known as social fabric or glue, but I am deliberately using the term 'capital' because it invests the concept with reflected status from other forms of capital. Social

capital is also appropriate because it can be measured and quantified so we can distribute its benefits and avoid its losses.

In a rough and ready way I understand what this is all about, just as I do when people use comparable phrases like 'the public sphere' or even 'the common good', generalised basket-concepts, useful ways to get things started. But in Cox's prose, as in so many writers influenced by certain kinds of sociology, the terms, once set in play, escape further inspection and start running wild. *Capital* here is a metaphor, as she acknowledges, (and so is 'glue' and so is 'fabric'). *Capital* in (one) literal sense can certainly be quantified, and indeed, alas for my bank balance, counted. But what Cox is saying is that we

can quantify, for example, 'trust'. And she thinks this a quite straightforward matter:

Demand a social capital impact statement before selling any public assets or converting them into business enterprises and then *calculate* whether the financial gains exceed the social capital losses. [my stress]

If only it were that simple.

Behind the linguistic muddle is the old 19th century positivist dream of a wholly transparent, itemisable 'society' in which all values could be translated into an ethical Esperanto. Cox, although she at one point claims to be a gradualist, is really a big, brightly-lit-picture person, who thoroughly dislikes shadows and ambiguities and would find it demeaning to cultivate a sense of limits.

But it is not her paraphrasable ideas so much her muddles that concern me, her failure to respect the medium. This is not an 'aesthetic' objection, nor is it 'elitist'. Language is never wholly under our control, precisely because it is a public medium, but everyone who contributes to the common capital of public discourse must try to use it as precisely as possible, to guard against its devaluation. As Orwell argued fifty years ago, the health of a language is a political matter.

Boyer lecturers should not write, or talk, like this:

Creative outputs are more than their resale value.

We must validate the social . . .
These crises are double-edged.
. . . our daily reproductive processes are now publically-supported.
We need to think very carefully about the way we establish the
parameters of good and evil, right and wrong.
A shift from the concept of solving differences by physical means
will allow us to incorporate dissent as productive rather than
destructive.

One admission in these lectures reveals the habit of mind that
can produce such writing. Cox tells us that in relation to child care
policy,

I carry some responsibility for changing the terms of debate because
I taught others Econospeak. We learned that translating what we did
into bean counting terms meant that we could talk to the animals
and make some progress. We translated child care into an economic
problem . . .

Passing over 'animals' ('Respect includes respect for others'
views even if you do not agree with them', p. 66) this sentence takes
us close to the central wrongness. I am not convinced, reading these
lectures, that Eva Cox commands a language of value which is not
undermined by the quantitative barbarities of Econospeak. Perhaps
she does—and it's just that she chooses not to use it. Or perhaps she
thinks that the terms in which a social issue is posed and debated
are in some way separable from, irrelevant to, the substantive
issues themselves. They are not. The much-discussed ethical crisis
of our time involves the decay and disappearance of ethical con-
cepts, and this is reflected in the loss of vocabulary. Anyone seen
'disinterestedness' lately?

As the literature of hypocrisy teaches us, all masks are dangerous,
including the mask of language. A more extended case about her
lectures might even show that Cox's Utopia, which she believes
would be open, free, and invigorated by constant dissent would turn
out to be closed, rigid and stiflingly monolithic. Such a case would
begin from one phrase: '. . . we need to *build in* modes of dissent and
criticism.' As Harold Ross used to note in the margin of *New Yorker*
copy, Who we? What this? This kindly-intentioned set of lectures
is an example of what happens when language carries
us along. In the grip of the undertow, we think we're
surfing.

PIERRE RYCKMANS IS ACKNOWLEDGED by fellow sinologists as a
formidable scholar of Chinese painting. He has just produced an
important new translation of the *Analecets* of Confucius. To a wider
audience he is better-known, under the pen-name of 'Simon Leys',
as the author of polemics against the Maoist regime such as
Chinese Shadows and *The Chairman's New Clothes*. Written at a
time when the Little Red Book was in many a Western hip-pocket,
these were iconoclastic, savage, detailed, and, to the non-expert
still very persuasive accounts of the Great Lurch Backwards.
(Experts—as experts will—question some of the evidence on which
they are based.)

Ryckmans is also a creative writer. His novella, *The Death of
Napoleon*, won the Christina Stead Prize for Fiction in 1992. It's an
as-iffery, diverting and rich in implication, in which Napoleon
escapes from St Helena and returns to France, dreaming of renewed
conquests, only to become a fruiterer and die in obscurity. The
novella is full of silky narrative charm and also of those shadows
and ambiguities which mark the true fictive imagination.

Ryckmans, then, is a genuinely impressive and interesting

writer; his Boyer lectures, however, are splenetic, illogical and ill-
informed.

His topic is culture, which he defines as 'the true and unique
signature of man'. What he means by culture is approximately what
Matthew Arnold and his successors meant. Works of art figure
largely in this tradition, but so do styles of thinking, manners and
faith. It is not enough to know things: the things you know must
change you for the better. Ryckmans' own conception seems to
have been formed by the Chinese art and civilisation he has so
exhaustively studied. As he revealed in *The Burning Forest* the
stakes are very high.

It is by cultivating the arts that a gentleman can actually realise the
universal harmony that Chinese wisdom ascribes as his vocation:
the supreme mission of a civilised man is to grasp the unifying
principle of things, to set the world in order, to put himself in step
with the dynamic rhythm of Creation.

The Boyer lectures begin with an attack on contemporary
scholarship in the humanities. Ryckmans recalls a seminar at
which a distinguished scholar of traditional Chinese painting was
volubly and lengthily abused by a young Maoist and his friends for
his class-based blindness, his omission of the art of 'the broad
working masses' and so on. 'You may find it small and trivial', says
Ryckmans, (here as elsewhere inclined to treat his audience as
blocks and stones) but what struck him then, and galls him in
retrospect, was the absence of protest, the ineffectuality of the
chair, his own silence.

It became suddenly evident to me that most of us were dead, and had
been dead for many years already, and the stench made you gasp for air.

This is the single most striking sentence in the 1996 Boyer
Lectures, the germ, I suspect, from which the rest grew. To Ryckmans
the incident revealed that Australian higher education was deserting
'objective values'. Yet (his argument continues) such values are 'the
prerequisite of any inquiry into art, letters and the humanities'.

After disposing of the humanities today, he moves quickly on to
the still more ambitious claim that 'truth' itself is not the end-
product but the starting-point of any enquiry. To buttress this
point, he comments on a parable by the Chinese philosopher,
Zhuang Zi, in which Zhuang 'breaks free from the fetters of empty
intellectual games and enters the realm of reality, which in the end,
alone matters.'

This may be so, and there are perhaps matters of which we
should not speak, or to which our speaking is plain irrelevant, but
one cannot have it both ways. Having elected to play the speaking
game, and having denounced the world around him for its neglect
of proper argument, its incivility, and its shams, the onus is upon
Ryckmans to uphold the standard. If the Humanities today are a
sink of iniquity the matter is surely worth half an hour of argument,
but it doesn't get it here. Ryckmans argues only intermittently; his
radio mode is the apodictic. His persuasive weapons are in general
rather blunt—calling the young radicals 'baboons' for example—
and bludgeoning us with Authorities—Hannah Arendt, C.S Lewis,
Samuel Johnson, Zhuang Zi.

The informing animus is towards those 'revolutionaries' who
attacked the distinguished scholar, those who redefine 'truth' as
that which conveniently advances their interests—which in turn
they pretend (or if they are dupes, believe) are identical with the
interests of the toiling masses. I remember, about the same time (20
years ago?) being told, by a dinner guest, to get the *Trout Quintet*
off the turntable, because a recent edict had exposed Schubert as an

enemy of the people. Many of us have memories of that wave of academic fashion—we may even know some beached survivors. And I can see how a scholar of traditional Chinese painting, an editor of Confucius, who has closely studied and observed the Mao years, who has devoted so much effort to exposing the nightmare that overtook China, would be infuriated by Western fellow-travellers.

Ryckmans' mistake however, is to suppose that all the activities practised in literature departments today are simple extensions of hard leftism. It is true that sundry more recent enlightenments are also critical of 'objectivity' and an informed liberal-conservative case about critical theory—though oddly specialised for the Boyers—would have been interesting. The trouble is that Ryckmans is too far off his patch: on the evidence of these lectures, he simply doesn't know enough about what he calls 'critical theory' to mount an attack worth considering. He does not distinguish, for example, between the anti-objectivity of the the *lumpen*-learned Maoists and the postmodern critique of objectivity. Postmodernists criticise 'objective' values, precisely because they have so often led to massively cruel political systems, so often refused the right of individuals to heed 'the evidence of their own eyes and ears'.

THE SECOND DISCUSSION, 'Reading', begins by describing the high esteem in which books and writing have been held in traditional China, then turns to the subject of bookburning, as the ultimate sin against the spirit. Reading, for Ryckmans is a spiritual experience of the utmost intensity; one reads only what one loves, and the highest tribute one can pay to a book is a deeply comprehending silence.

This account of reading corresponds, as one would expect, to an account of writing as something conveyed through certain chosen vessels by inspiration. It follows that reading cannot be taught; there is this persistent minority of people who just know how, and for the rest, who cares? Let the non-readers read the non-books provided for them in such abundance by the publishing industry. Between the true lover of literature and the (mere?) scholar there is a perpetual dissonance.

Listening to this brought back for me the heady days of a warped colonial Leavisism, when students who asked what they were supposed to do were answered with T.S. Eliot's dictum, 'the only method is to be very intelligent'.

Why should a man who has written so well elsewhere turn in a performance as unconvincing as these Boyer lectures? Readers of *A View from the Bridge* can compare the lectures themselves with the two appendices, which are articles written earlier on related topics. The articles are much more precise, balanced and generous than the lectures. It is certainly, then, something to do with his conception of the medium, and I will return to that. But there is also something more basic, a failure to understand that what served him so well in his analysis of the Chinese situation cannot simply be applied to contemporary Australia.

His work on Mao led Ryckmans to believe that the abandonment of objectivity led straight to totalitarianism: 'totalitarianism is the apotheosis of subjectivism', he writes, in a 1978 essay.

Objectivism—the belief that there is an objective truth whose existence is independent of arbitrary dogma and ideology—is thus the cornerstone of intellectual freedom and human dignity ...

Otherwise, his discussion suggests, we are like prisoners in concentration camps who are allowed to know only what the authorities want them to know; or like Orwell's Winston Smith, in

1984, who realises at the end that he loves Big Brother and always has.

In one of his earlier books, *The Chairman's New Clothes*, Ryckmans muses over great authoritarian rulers whose politics can be seen as displaced aesthetics. They are men 'whose political designs were the reverse side of a kind of ill-expressed or stifled artistic creativity—or a substitute for it; unable to master the language of literature or the plastic arts, these men have used peoples and empires as their material, as an outward expression of their inward vision'. He quotes a terrifying passage in which Mao speaks of writing on the 'blank page' of China, which at the time contained six hundred million Chinese. *Terra nullius* writ very, very large. This human possibility haunts Ryckmans across 25 years. It reappears in *The Death of Napoleon*.

An ironic reversal indeed: Ryckmans' aesthetics are the site of a displaced politics. Here is a man who has written most persuasively about the evils of dictatorship but who confines art to the exclusive possession of an initiate, and lays down aesthetic laws quite as unilaterally as any dictator.

There is a parallel here with his hero Confucius, whom the advertisement for the new edition describes as

... a man of great passion and many enthusiasms, a man of bold action whose true vocation was politics. But in his lifetime [he] saw his world sinking into violence and barbarity. Unable to secure the political role he sought, he engaged his crumbling culture in ethical debate, exercising his moral duty to reform society and restore its former glories.

I wanted from these lectures more engagement, and more debate, not the psychomachia of Ryckmans' Chinese studies—Confucius vs Mao—imposed upon the Australian scene. Our present conflicts cannot be articulated in that way.

LEAVING ASIDE THE LIFETIME OF DISTINGUISHED LABOUR that qualifies you to do it, it can't be easy to write a Boyer lecture, especially these days. In the more earnest past, the distinguished lecturer just held forth and the listener was expected to hold on. Nowadays, when so much radio consists of chat and blather, there is an increasing danger that the plague of infotainment will reach the few places left—most of them on Radio National—where serious issues can be seriously addressed. Cox and Ryckmans are both serious people, and they are also conscious of the need to produce 'good radio'. Neither however seems to me to have solved the cardinal problem, which is how to address the audience.

Eva Cox's talks are marred, not only by local tar-patches of the kind I picked out earlier, but by woolliness and repetitiousness. She errs on the side of chat.

Ryckmans is all Continental charm and courtesy (and rather lengthy quotations from his touchstones). It's not that he underestimates his audience, more that he doesn't engage with what their interests are likely to be, and thus set up, as the best speakers do, an implicit dialogue with the listener. Someone who offers to discuss 'culture' in the Australia of 1996 must surely be aware of multiculturalism, of the post-colonial critique of cultural hegemonies, of the debates about gender, even (to lower the tone) of the ways in which 'culture' has been taken up lately by governments intent on boosting exports. I don't expect or want Ryckmans to agree with any of this crowd, or to accept its terms of discussion, but in ignoring it altogether there is a certain presumption of inequality, a touch of the old *de haut en bas*.

In discussing the Peter Weir film *Dead Poet's Society* he tells us

that the scene in which students tear the introductory pages out of books of poetry is one which cannot fail to inspire horror in a European or a Chinese. (It might well have pleased Brecht, or Artaud, or Luc-Godard but these must be the wrong Europeans.) 'Could it be' he asks 'because Peter Weir, being an Australian working in America, belongs in fact to two young cultures equally blessed with the same innocence?' 'In no context could it ever conceivably be turned into a metaphor for liberation' says the lecturer. Well, are we here, or aren't we? I do not wish to trivialise the experience of suffering under a totalitarian regime. But could it be, I ask, that I am hearing yet again that metaphor in which some Old Country or other figures as the mature goal to which we must aspire?

By way of conclusion, let me wax dictatorial to the ABC. A Boyer lecturer should be assigned an editor who can actually edit and who can look the famous unflinchingly in the eye and demand

their best of them. Such a one would have taken the slack out of *A Truly Civil Society* (Eva Cox's recent book, *Leading Women*, is a much better text, and no less approachable). Secondly, Boyer lecturers should be invited to talk about the work that has brought them to prominence, and not be given a licence to roam the universe. Pierre Ryckmans could and should have been invited to talk about China, about Confucius—even about Napoleon. Lastly, the ABC needs to trust its listeners more. 'Did you hear that wonderful quote from C.S. Lewis?' Phillip Adams asked at the end of Ryckmans' third lecture, and went on to repeat the five lines we'd just that moment heard. Quite a lot of Australians can stay awake for thirty minutes at a time, and none of them needs to be told what to think. Leave off the protective coating, Auntie. ■

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ART & ARCHITECTURE

TIM BONYHADY

The Paris Harbour Bridge

FEW EXHIBITIONS BEGIN WITH such panache. As you enter *Paris in the Late Nineteenth Century*, the Eiffel Tower rises before you in almost all conceivable media. There it is in photography and lithography, there in moulded glass, there embroidered on silk, there as a cardboard sweetbox. All that is missing is the Tower in paint.

The rest of the exhibition is little more than a pot pourri of the Musée d'Orsay's lesser holdings. But *Paris in the Late Nineteenth Century* is worth visiting for the Eiffel Tower alone. What makes this entrée to the exhibition is that it is diverse yet coherent. While the Tower provides their common subject, the photographs, prints and decorative arts all have something different to say. Even works within the one medium convey different facets of the Tower.

Take the photographs. In Louis-Emile Durandelle's views you can see the Tower rise platform by platform, seemingly without human aid, until the Palais de Trocadero is just a footnote to its bottom section. But in the photographs of Henry Rivière you see workers in space. The ground is invisible. You never know quite what they are building or where they are. For all their jauntiness, you know their work is perilous.

The silks and the glass candlesticks, bottles and dishes have a different function. They show how rapidly engineering became emblem. Soon you could



eat from the Tower while wearing it. This reproduction of the tower was neither an accident nor crass commercialization. Rather it was the very reason the French government commissioned Eiffel to build the Tower for the Paris Universelle Exposition of 1889. The Tower was designed to market France by manifesting its technological prowess.

Yet the Tower was always more than just a landmark or symbol of the greatness of French engineering. It also radically altered the scale of the urban environment and fundamentally changed the relationship between nature and culture. Until the Exposition, it was a matter of debate whether the world's tallest trees eclipsed the world's tallest buildings. For example, after Victoria's mountain ash were reported to reach 150 metres, it became a cliché that they eclipsed the world's tallest cathedral in Strassburg and the great pyramid of Cheops. At 300 metres, the Tower put this issue beyond doubt.

The proliferation of memorabilia of the Tower was a direct result of its popularity. While painters, sculptors, writers and architects protested that this 'useless' monstrosity would desecrate Paris by 'humbling all our monuments' and 'belittling all our architecture', the public flocked to it. The attraction was not just the novel perspective which the Tower offered of the city but that it was so much higher than any other building



The Eiffel Tower: Three workers on the scaffolding of a curving girder of the 'Campanile'
 Photograph: Henri Rivière

in the world. In the six months of the Exposition, almost 2 million people visited it.

Looking at all these exhibits of the Tower, it is hard not to think of the Sydney Harbour Bridge which opened in 1932. Like the Tower, the Bridge broke records for its giganticism. It remains the heaviest and widest single-arch bridge in the world and would also be the longest had not Americans gone out of their way to make the Bayonne railway bridge between New York and New Jersey 60 centimetres longer. Like the Tower, the Harbour Bridge also immediately became iconic, inspiring more art than any other Australian building.

The parallels between the art of the Tower and that of the Bridge are striking. Henri Mallard's photographs of the workers on the Bridge match those of Henri Rivière. Harold Cazneaux's less humanised views can be set aside those of Durandelle. Jessie Traill's series of etchings are a counterpart to Rivière's book of lithographs. The ashtrays and paperweights in the form of the Bridge sit naturally alongside the cigarette cases and brooches of the Tower.

The key difference between the Tower and the Bridge is in painting. For almost 20 years, French artists continued painting Paris as if the Tower did not exist. While it was being built, the Tower seems to have attracted only George Seurat who made it the subject of just one minor sketch.

Once it was completed, only that oddity of French art, Henri Rousseau, painted it—and then as just part of the backdrop to a self-portrait. It was not until 1910 that Robert Delaunay celebrated the Tower in a major series of canvases.

Australian painters reacted very differently to the Bridge. While it was still under construction, Sydney's modernists greeted it with major oil paintings. Grace Cossington Smith painted it twice, Dorrit Black and Ronald Wakelin each once. Once it was finished, a long line of Sydney painters led by Blamire Young and John D. Moore soon followed.

The failure of Parisian artists to paint the Tower was a mark not just of their dislike of it but the Tower's wider reputation as a fairground folly. By way of contrast, 'Our Bridge', as Sydneysiders warmly referred to it, met a long felt need which had excited deputations and competitions, royal commissions and inquiries for fifty years and been discussed for much longer. Lachlan Macquarie's architect, Francis Greenway, had proposed a bridge from Dawes Point to the North Shore already in 1815!

The design of the Bridge was also much more conservative and less controversial than that of the Tower. While its construction was manifestly exciting and inspired all the best paintings of the Bridge, the finished structure was a much tamer affair. The completed arch was not as interesting as the part arches reaching out across the harbour. Even worse, the sandstone pylons erected purely as decorations—they serve no structural purpose—obstructed that great sweep which inspired Grace Cossington Smith's *Bridge in Curve* in the National Gallery of Victoria. To Margaret Preston the finished Bridge was mere 'meccano'. She dismissed it as a poor imitation of European models when Australia should have been inventing its own distinctive forms.

The neglect of the Tower and the popularity of the Bridge were, however, principally a function of timing. The Tower was too early for French painters. When it was new and hence most exciting, French painters were more interested in escaping to Giverny, Pont Aven or Tahiti or retreating into symbolism than responding to technological change. Even when they turned to cubism, they were more concerned with deconstructing a bottle or guitar than engaging with the urban environment around them.

The Bridge was safely late. By 1930 futurism and vorticism had long made the dynamism of the modern city their subject. Sydney, with its height restriction of 150 feet for all buildings, had offered little stimulus for art of this type. The Bridge, for all its limitations, provided local painters with an unprecedented opportunity to play catch up or even surpass their European counterparts. ■

Tim Bonyhady is a member of the ANU's Urban Research Program. His books include *Images in Opposition: Australian Landscape Painting 1801-1890*.

High flying

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE and basis of professional codes of ethics?

The cynical view is that they are intended to elevate those groups of people, whose status is uncertain, into respected members of professions with publicly recognised skills, knowledge and expertise, and to give further protection, sometimes from their own dissident members, to other groups whose social standing and expertise are already acknowledged by the community.

The authors of this timely collection of essays, while aware of this cynical view, do not endorse it, but instead explore in interesting detail the rationale of such codes and the difficulties of establishing and enforcing them. Their particular focus is on the professions of psychiatry, nursing, and journalism, and accounts are given by some of those who were actively involved in the formulation of such codes.

The cynical view, though obviously an exaggeration, nonetheless embodies elements of truth which any discussion of ethics and the profession should take into account. The recent publicity about police corruption and the difficulties of conducting proper investigations into it testify to the strength of the public perception that professionals are often more concerned to protect their colleagues and the reputation of their profession than to get at the truth of serious allegations of professional misconduct.

Apart from the motivations which lead some to clamour for professional codes of ethics, and the way in which some of these codes are put into practice, there is also the issue of what the functions of such codes might be in a world in which there is some possibility of improvement to current practices and attitudes. This is discussed in different ways by several contributors, but especially by Judith Lichtenberg, Margaret Coady, and Robert Fullinder.

A professional code will

Codes of Ethics and the Professions,
Margaret Coady and Sidney Bloch (eds),
Melbourne University Press, 1996.
ISBN 0 522 84701 3 RRP \$29.95

include some general principles, such as those protecting client confidentiality, and more specific rules regulating conduct in particular situations. It will very likely embody both requirements, imposing duties to which all member are expected to conform, as well as statements of ideals toward which members aspire.

The code will reduce self-deceptive practices by redescribing situations confronting professionals, and providing them with new perspectives for viewing their conduct. It will co-ordinate activities in such a manner as to ensure that those who abstain from certain activities—such as advertising their services—will not be unduly disadvantaged. It will promote moral deliberation and understanding by encouraging reflection on the principles and moral purpose of the profession. It will also express the profession's commitment to certain moral standards.

These purposes can be served even without sanctions for non-compliance, but sanctions are of course useful, particularly for those cases in which greed, temptation, and naked self-interest lead people to exploit the vulnerabilities of their clients. On the other hand, sanctions are not even relevant

for the complex situations where what ought to be done is not transparent and cannot be encoded in precise rules. If the code succeeds in promoting moral deliberation and understanding about what is morally appropriate in various circumstances, then we can expect that the majority of professionals, who are well-motivated and who are imbued with the values inherent in the best traditions of public service manifested in their professional practices, will participate in formulating and interpreting these values so that they can be more sensitively applied to new and difficult cases.

Codes of ethics cannot be formulated once and for all, but have to be adapted to changing circumstances brought about by technological advances and novel combinations of social circumstances. Even the more general and fundamental principles of the code have to be constantly reinterpreted, and sensitivity and judgment are required in applying them to new cases. Codes of ethics are the products of this reinterpretation, while at the same time contributing toward the cultivation of the sensitivity and judgement needed for their own continuing revisions and effective application.

But whose interests are served by professional codes of ethics? The cynical view is that professionals use them in a self-serving manner. Professionals themselves

tend to see the primary beneficiaries of the codes as their clients. But there are other constituencies which may have claims to be taken into account. The most obvious case is the general public, or specific individuals who are not clients but whose interests are affected by professional practices. In these days when many professionals are employed by large organisations, both public and private, the claims of such employers may affect the loyalties and attitudes of professionals. A code of ethics would help to remind professionals of their duty to uphold certain stand-



ards which are not ultimately dictated by the interests of these powerful employers, and which might indeed sometimes come into conflict with those interests. Margaret Coady quotes from the Physicians' Oath of the Soviet Union, 'I will in all my actions be guided by the principles of communist morality, ever to bear in mind the high calling of the Soviet physician, and my responsibility to the people and the Soviet State'. This is an example of professionals allowing their conduct to be subservient to the interests of the State, and there is a similar danger of professionals failing to maintain standards independent of the interests of the organisations for which they work. For example, some engineers working for large corporations allow safety standards to be relaxed in order that their employers may reap larger profits.

There are other kinds of cases in which some professionals resolve conflicts of interests in ways which must surely call for further moral reflection. For example, a few years ago a physician stated on television, with respect to a hypothetical case centering on patient confidentiality, that if he were told by a patient that the patient was HIV-positive, he would not let the patient's wife know about it, but he would inform the surgeon who was to operate on the patient. Although the risk to the surgeon was much lower than that to the wife, the surgeon was a colleague in the same profession. This testifies to a kind of solidarity among professionals that outsiders will find it hard to understand, let alone justify.

The phenomenon here is the familiar one that when a group of people participate in worthwhile activities, insulated from the views and reactions of others, they tend to develop attitudes and standards which seem perfectly natural to them, but which are strange, and even repugnant, to outsiders. Surely the lesson to be learnt from this is that there is a need for the participation of outsiders in the regulation of some professional activities, including the formulation of codes of ethics.

IT IS GENERALLY ACKNOWLEDGED that professionals are allowed to perform acts in the course of their work which would be unacceptable in non-professional contexts. Lawyers, for example, in the interests of their clients, subject honest witnesses to hostile and aggressive cross-examination. What is true of conduct may also be extended to the cultivation of certain dispositions. There are familiar reasons for generating a certain distance between professional ethics

and the more general ethical standards applicable elsewhere in social life. For one thing the direct pursuit of certain desirable social goals will be self-defeating, and for that reason we may not want every professional act or disposition to be justified directly by the general ethical standards. Justice may sometimes be better served by letting lawyers pursue the interest of their clients in a manner which, in other contexts, would be regarded as morally unacceptable. But, as Margaret Coady points out, the professions are often criticised for conduct which is seen as benefiting themselves and their wealthy clients at the expense of the community. The complete separation of professional ethics from general ethical norms will only lead to the strengthening of activities and dispositions which undermine, and will be seen as undermining, standards of fairness and decent behaviour.

But the protection of the interests of the community is not the only problem. Tony Coady addresses the issue of the ethical regulation of professional activities, focusing on the role of research ethics committees. He persuasively defends such ethics committees against charges that they tend

to be obstructionist and inhibit valuable research. He points to evidence indicating that the opposite tendencies are often generated: lay members of ethics committees are intimidated by the expertise of the professionals, while the experts are subjected to peer pressures for conformity and show a reluctance to check the work of colleagues. Coady makes the important point that ethical codes are not intended simply to block practices and experiments that are intended to produce bad outcomes or that will fail to achieve their intended outcomes; in addition they must stop certain ways of realising good outcomes.

If the formulation of ethical codes for the professions helps to generate wider and more profound discussion of these kinds of issues among both professionals and sympathetic outsiders or critics, then this is all for the good. It is the considerable merit of this book, with its accounts of the theoretical and practical problems of constructing professional codes, that it will encourage such discussion. ■

C.L.Ten is Professor of Philosophy at Monash University.

BOOKS: 2

JOHN S. LEVI

Faithfully catalogued

The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion, General Editor Jonathan Z. Smith; Associate Editor, William Scott Green, with The American Academy of Religion, Harper San Francisco, 1995. ISBN 006 067515 2 RRP \$69.95

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED to read and comment upon a dictionary? In my case the task was made easier because the *Dictionary of Religion* is really an encyclopaedia in disguise and I confess that I have been an encyclopaedia freak from my earliest television-free years. *Children's Encyclopaedias* were inclined to turn up at the end of my bed, birthday after birthday. Arthur Mee kept all of us busy. My 1890 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is literally falling to pieces (I am not really that old.) The famous 1901 *Jewish Encyclopaedia* edited by Joseph Jacobs and published in Chicago is one of my cherished possessions.

Spirituality is 'in' throughout North America. The editors of this Dictionary, acknowledging the 'current unprecedented popular movement toward religious and spiritual awakening', have bravely assembled 327 'leading experts' to contribute 3,200 entries which fill 1154 pages of text, charts and photographs. The result is not just 'good in parts'. It is excellent in parts. [And yes, the word 'curate' is in the Dictionary, telling us that 'in the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches, [it is] a title for either the pastor or assistant pastor of a parish church'.]

Naturally, I began my survey of the

Dictionary by exploring the entries that had some relationship to my own faith and tradition. I had high expectations because the Associate Editor is William Scott Green, the distinguished Professor of Judaic Studies at the University of Rochester and was the editor of the *Journal of American Academy of Religion* for then years. He chose the illustrious Professor Jacob Neusner to be Judaism's 'Area Editor'.

Neusner is a stringent and prolific expert on rabbinical literature. He pulls no punches and is a ruthless critic of sloppy scholarship. Neusner chose twenty-four colleagues to write the entries on Judaism and his team is most impressive. They are all leading North American Jewish scholars and (Glory be to God!) there is not a fundamentalist among them.

All the entries are well written and there is a remarkable unity of style. They are succinct. It is a pity to find they are also anonymous and that there are no listed references to enable the reader to continue on investigation of a particular subject. The guide to the pronunciation of a technical or foreign word often (and not always) spells it out in clear phonetics for American English speakers but does not tell you how the word is pronounced in its original language.

Inevitably, in the course of eleven hundred double columns of text, some entries are disappointing. 'Casuistry' is listed quite properly although the topic is discussed only in relation to Jews and Christians. Are we the only world faiths that consider a particular case and then move to a general rule? Surely not. 'Academies' apparently only occur in Korea. The famous rabbinic academies of Sura and Pumbeditha where the Babylon Talmud was fashioned are only to be found, by implication, in the major, excellent article on 'Judaism'.

Strangely 'compassion' is only identified with Buddhism where it is defined as 'the earnest wish to relieve the suffering all human beings'. No one could quarrel with such a fine definition but surely compassion is an ethical imperative shared by many faith communities.

'Higher Biblical Criticism' is confined to Christianity! Only Christians and traditional Chinese appear to have distinctive religious calendars until you discover that Judaism's and Hinduism's sacred times are probably dealt with by the heading 'festal cycle'.

'Conversion' is confined to Judaism. Only Christianity and Islam share the definition of the word 'miracle'. 'Hell' gets

short shrift and 'demons' seem to be the prerogative of Hindus and Japanese.

The G-word's entry is a pithy 'god, common term for a male deity'. It is true that my prayer book and Bible call God by the masculine pronoun but I try to avoid giving god sexual characteristics. In Hebrew all words are either male or female and neutral objects are not granted a gender by the grammatical structure of the language. 'Goddess' gets columns of space. Is this an example of political correctness? I looked up 'deity' and found two terse sentences. 'Theism' was no help. 'Theodicy' and 'theology' were briefly discussed but I found the entry of 'Theory—an explanatory account of some puzzling and intriguing phenomenon' to be impressive, thought-provoking and unexpectedly inspiring.

Eventually I discovered the Dictionary's general discussion about God began under the letter 'R' because its key sentence commenced 'The study of religion.' The article that followed is a superb summary of the phenomenology of religion which was, in turn, followed by an important, thoughtful essay about religious experience.

Mindful of the sponsors of *Eureka Street* I searched for an entry about the Society of Jesus. I am sure the Jesuits are somewhere within the Dictionary of Religion but I failed to find them. As befits their cultic status there were entries for 'Jews for Jesus' and 'the Jesus people' and, although 'the lotus posture' made it, Ignatius Loyola did not. My search illustrates a problem caused by the fact that the subject matter is interconnected and it must have been very difficult to avoid repetition. Nevertheless, this weighty volume would have benefited from an index.

I would not like to belittle this book. It represents a high standard of scholarship and it reads well. *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* belongs in every library. ■

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T Opening the lyric vein

THE FLOOD OF MUSICALS on the Australian stage is showing no sign of abating. Despite a lean year last year, Melbourne is presently awash with artists hoofing, emoting, swash-buckling and belting out high Cs as if there were no tomorrow.

Sunset Boulevard is still running in the renovated old Regent Theatre, Simon Gallaher's *HMS Pinafore* is finishing up in Melbourne's State Theatre, the State Theatre Company of South Australia's revival of *The Venetian Twins* has ended a short run in the Playhouse, where it was followed by the Melbourne Theatre Company's production of Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*, and a revival of *Sweet Charity* has opened at Her Majesty's. And then *Chess*, the Andersson-Rice-Ulvaeus musical, moved into the Princess in mid-February.

In Brisbane, *Phantom of the Opera* is doing switchboard-jamming business, while the Gershwin tribute show *Crazy for You* is wowing them in Sydney and *Beauty and the Beast* is also a stayer. There's talk of revivals of *Showboat*, plus a musical about Peter Allen, and still more!

Are we now doing musicals for the sake of doing musicals? There have been dark murmurings in foyers lately that we must soon reach exhaustion point—of audience as well as available talent. I doubt it, although a shortage of suitable theatres (they're all occupied by long-running shows) has caused some projects to be shelved.

Of the present batch, *Sunset Boulevard* is easily the biggest, most expensive and most publicised. Before it opened, Debra Byrne's fall, the cancellation of previews, the lack of understudies ready to take over, director Trevor Nunn's return to London before opening night and the tragic death of musical director Brian Stacey all contributed to the (not always kind) pre-publicity.

Added grist to the fourth estate's mill were state Premier Jeff Kennett's pleading with Lloyd Webber's Really Useful Group to open the show in Melbourne—more importantly, in David and Elaine Marriner's Regent Theatre, whose massive refurbishment after 26 'dark' years has been another of the Premier's pet projects.

For all that, it's not a bad show. I am not

a fan of Lloyd Webber's one-dimensional music, but he excels himself here. Songs like 'We gave the world new ways to dream' and 'The perfect year'—and even the title song—have melodies worth reprising, and Don Black's and Christopher Hampton's lyrics have an uncommon subtlety and depth. Likewise, their book—admittedly largely given to them by the Billy Wilder film—is strong, and all their main characters are convincingly drawn and have somewhere to go.

I thought Debra Byrne probably a shade too young as Norma Desmond, but she does the job persuasively, and Hugh Jackman gets to the heart of the young writer, Joe Gillis. Faced with what is tantamount to incarceration in Desmond's hideous gothic mansion, his combination of relish and deep apprehension is convincing. They are well supported by the imports from foreign productions. Equally impressive are the sets: not so much for their design (an indentikit version of their overseas counterparts) as for the amazing Australian technology that enables the huge mansion to fly to within

two metres of the stage floor and whole movic lots to move around the stage untouched by human hand. This is one of those glitzy shows where you come out singing the lyrics *and* the sets.

Would that the same were true of *Sweet Charity*, which has been resurrected by a businessmen's group calling themselves Sweet Charity Productions. Mark Pennell has produced it, with direction from David Myles, designs by Krystof Kozlowski and others and choreography by Keith Hawley.

It's a variant on the well-worn prostitute-with-a-heart-of-gold-dudded-at-every-turn by men story. It, too, is based on a film (Federico Fellini's *Le Notti di Cabiria*) but it's pretty dated stuff now, after 30 years, and Neil Simon's book is a curiously stilted and episodic affair.

The directorial line wavers between modernisation (Charity's telegram to Oscar is now a mobile phone-call to an answerphone) and a museum theatre approach. It is hard for contemporary audiences to feel much for Charity: following her second ducking in a lake after being jilted, we want to give her a good shake and a couple of HECS-free units of Women's Studies!

Sweet Charity has three big numbers, but only one really captures the imagination in this underdone production. 'Hey, big spender' (sung with suitable boredom and irony by the parading Fandango girls, rather than as a solo belter) is adequate, but the religious cult-song 'The rhythm of life' is a shambles of technical incompetence. Charity's 'If my friends could see me now' is, with some of the dance numbers, the best thing in the show.

But alas, most of these are pallid reconstructions of Bob Fosse's originals: there's too much posturing and not enough of the genuine dancing this show needs. No amount of computer-graphic scenery projection, colour-scrolling 'Vari-lites' and moving-light technology can redeem what is really rather passé Fosse.

But a special word is due for Kelley Abbey's Charity: she gives an energetic, committed and skilful performance. Whenever she strutted her excellent stuff, the suits behind me whooped and shrieked like demented Red Indians, and fair enough, too. Time will tell whether the general public will do likewise.

The public acclaim factor is not in doubt with Essgee Entertainments' trilogy of operettas by Gilbert & Sullivan (and sundry other hands!) that began with a one-off but widely-toured *Pirates of Penzance* back in

the 1980s. This was revived in 1994 and was followed by *The Mikado* in 1995 and concludes with *HMS Pinafore* this year. These have been full of iconoclastic fun, songs from other G&S pieces (the present *Pinafore* includes songs from *Ruddigore*, *Princess Ida* and *Iolanthe*) plus musical quotations, additional dialogue and gags from almost anywhere.

TOPICAL REFERENCES CHANGE from day to day, and there are lots of cross-references to the earlier shows and a lot of frenetic energy and clever 'show-biz' ideas, such as using the all-girl pop-singing group, the Fabulous Singlettes, in such diverse roles as the 'Three little girls from school' in *The Mikado* and *as all* of Sir Joseph Porter's cousins and his sisters and his aunts in *Pinafore*.

As Peter Burch has observed (in *The Australian*), Essgee Productions has developed into an accomplished repertory ensemble of a kind we don't see much nowadays. Drew Forsythe is its star character actor, Simon Gallaher its regular 'juve lead', Jon English its indefatigable figure-head (hands up anyone who has seen a Dick Deadeye with such a central role as this one!?) and the clean-voiced and very clever Helen Donaldson its soubrette. Throw in the ever-developing bass, David Gould (here Captain Corcoran, following his impressive *Mikado* last time around), plus a number of regularly recurring chorus-members, and we have a very accomplished company for this kind of work.

Regular director/choreographer, Craig Schaefer, designer Graham Maclean (whose multiple revolving staircases have given no cause for actorly alarm or injury) and MD Kevin Hocking, are also key influences on the stylistic consistency of these productions.

They are not for G&S purists, but, having enjoyed this trilogy very much, I can't imagine anyone taking seriously the stilted museum-style orthodoxy of the D'Oyley Carte model nowadays anyway.

Seeing Drew Forsythe go around as 'the ruler of the Queen's navy' in *Pinafore* one night, I couldn't help noticing his absence from *The Venetian Twins* (the old Nimrod show by Nick Enright and Terence Clarke, with Forsythe as its original star) the next night, next door. Paul Blackwell certainly goes pretty well in the dual role of the twins Zanetto and Tonino (especially as the laconic country one) and so do Jenny Vuletic (as a towering Beatrice), Lucia Mastrantone (as a diminutive Rosina) and the rest of the State Theatre cast. I also particularly liked

Gina Zoia as Colombina and John Crouch as the much put-upon Arlecchino. But the overly grotesque costumes and a rather spare stage design which clearly didn't translate well from the intimate Playhouse in the Adelaide Festival Centre to its bigger namesake in the Victorian Arts Centre didn't help this revival to transcend memories of the quite recent previous revival in the same centre.

The MTC looks to have a rather more secure music-theatre hit on its hands, with *A Little Night Music* (music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, book by Hugh Wheeler). This is yet another musical based on a film (Ingmar Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer Night*) and it is the third in a highly welcome series of Sondheims from the company, all directed by Roger Hodgman. It is definitely funnier than either *Sweeney Todd* (1987) and *Assassins* (1995) and while less 'black' than those, it is brilliantly written, full of acerbic observations about the human condition, lovely ironic songs, and opportunities for a classy cast of actor/singers to shine in well-individuated character roles. It also gets pretty willing in the second act, when a group of appallingly mismatched couples go off for 'A weekend in the country' (in the height of the Swedish summer) where everything goes horribly wrong—and, in a sense, horribly right.

This production is beautiful to look at, Jean McQuarrie's musical direction is totally assured and a diverse cast a seamless ensemble. It unites opera singers such as Merlyn Quaife and Jeannie Marsh and music theatre specialists John O'May and Christen O'Leary with 'legit' stage actors like Helen Morse, Ruth Cracknell and Pamela Rabe.

Above all, it is great to hear songs like 'Send in the clowns' and 'Every day a little death' sung by fine actors (Morse and Rabe respectively) in the right context. Even the ubiquitous radio microphones here work to enhance the nuance and presence of the work, rather than destroying them as they usually do.

IF WE'RE TO HAVE A PLAGUE of foreign musicals, let them all have this degree of depth and wit in their books, scores and lyrics and let them all be performed with this degree of class, artistic and technical teamwork and simplicity of style! Give us more Sondheim, Mr Hodgman, thank you very much. ■

Geoffrey Milne is head of Theatre & Drama at La Trobe University.

Photo: Left to right: Vivien Hamilton, Helen Morse and Merlyn Quaife in *A Little Night Music*.

Baz on the bard

As acclaim swings towards socio-analysis and some critics fear that Baz Luhrmann's William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* may spark copy-cat suicides,

Peter Malone spoke to the man on the tightrope.

Peter Malone: How did you make *Romeo and Juliet*, especially with the backing of a major Hollywood studio, 20th Century Fox?

Baz Luhrmann: It was an incredibly difficult film to get made. After *Strictly Ballroom* we were offered all kinds of possibilities. We spent a long time not being involved in making a film. We went and did other things: operas, the 1993 Australian Labor Party election launch, a *Vogue* magazine layout and other things. Our philosophy has always been that we think up what we need in our life, choose something creative that will make that life fulfilling, and then follow that road. With *Romeo and Juliet* what I wanted to do was to look at the way in which Shakespeare might make a movie of one of his plays if he was a director. How would he make it?

We don't know a lot about Shakespeare, but we do know he would make a movie. He was a player, a relentless entertainer and a user of incredible devices and theatrical tricks.

That was what we wanted to do. We were interested in that experience. It wasn't that Fox rang up. There's this kind of story in America at the moment: 'How clever. What genius at the studio rang you up and said, "Do a funky MTV-style Shakespeare and wipe the floor with all the other pictures, go to number 1 and get the kids in"?' That was not the case.

Basically it was no, no, no, but because I had made a film about ballroom dancing and it grossed \$80 million, I was in a first-look deal, and I said, 'Look, don't say yes. Give me a few thousand dollars'.

I rang up Leonardo di Caprio, who I consider to be an incredibly important part of actually getting the film made, and he agreed to fly to Sydney himself, pay his own money. This is a kid who's been offered the incomes of small countries!

He gave up a picture with Richard Gere and came down to Australia. We did an initial workshop, did more script work. He flew down again and with local actors we created this workshop; and when they saw him (in the fight scene) get out of the car in a suit and come up and say:



Tybalt, the reason that I have to love thee
Doth much excuse the appertaining rage
To such a greeting. Villain am I none;
Therefore, farewell; I see thou knowest me
not,

they went, 'Oh, yeah, I get it. They're kind of like gangs. Yeah, that could work. Gangs, that's good, that's good'.

So then the executives said, 'All right, we'll give him enough money to get to production'. So it was sort of a war of attrition and, eventually, I got to a point where they said, 'Look, just give him a cheque' and, you know, 'See ya'!

Could you elaborate a bit more on the preparation you did in Sydney—how long it took, what you actually did and how that affected the final film?

I wanted to do *Shakespeare Makes a Film: Romeo and Juliet*. The first thing to identify was a way of conveying the notions of the piece and release the language. A device would be to set it in a particular world. You couldn't set it in the real world because it would then become then a social exploration of Miami or LA or Sydney, whatever. So we decided to create a world. That world was created from meticulous research of the Elizabethan world.

For example, a social reality for the Elizabethan world was that everyone carried a weapon. Then we found a way of interpreting that in the 20th century. There

were schools of swordfighting; they became schools of gunfighting. Only gentlemen would carry weapons, not the poor. Suddenly you had a place that looked a bit like South America, but it also looked like Miami. We picked the dominant culture. Whatever you say, the dominant culture in the western world is American, especially through the media.

So we created a world—it's American, Latin, it looks a bit like South America, it feels a bit like Mexico, it feels somewhat like Miami, but ultimately it's Verona Beach, which is ultimately a universal city. Now, that is not so out of keeping with what Shakespeare did. He never went to Verona. He created his mythical city. But really it was London dressed up as a hot version of London. So that was that part of the process.

Then we spent a lot of time researching the Elizabethan stage and then we put that into cinematic ideas. Then we went to Miami because we chose Miami as a really good place that identified or condensed American or contemporary western images. It is both culturally mixed and also a very violent city, almost an armed society.

Then out of that research we wrote the screenplay. We came back and did a series of workshops with actors in Sydney. Then I got Don McAlpine in who, for free, got a video camera. He's the highest-paid DP in the world and he came down and for a week we shot scenes with Leonardo, the fight scene, the death scene.

WE ARE NOTED FOR DOING a ludicrous amount of preparation. And we are noted for ridiculous kind of research, but this is what we like to do—the act of making must make your life rich. It's got to be interesting and fulfilling and educational and take you on a journey. They're the choices we make.

The only sacrifice you have to make is fiscally. To have been very, very wealthy would have been easy after *Strictly Ballroom*. I'm not poor, but the kind of wealth that I know others have is not ours because we choose to do the Bard in a funky manner. That's kind of more interesting

than doing *Jingle All The Way!* But, also, we're not for hire; we never have been. Freedom is worth something.

So it's not just a relocation of Romeo and Juliet to a different city and it's not even an updating, bringing it into the 20th century? I think what we are doing is William Shakespeare's play of *Romeo and Juliet* and interpreting it in 20th century images to release the language and to find a style for communicating it to a contemporary audience. Now, you might say, 'Well, that's a bit of a mouthful', and it is. I got a card from Kenny Branagh saying, 'Look, love the film and what a great thing for our Hamlet, because it's opening up an audience too'. I love the Laurence Olivier productions and I think Kenneth Branagh is fantastic. In fact, some critics have left the film and said, 'The accent is completely wrong. How dare you do it that way. It's embarrassing'. The truth of the matter is that Shakespeare wrote these plays for an American accent. Americans speak a version of Elizabethan sound. With a rolled R in there, you would basically have the Elizabethan stage sound. I worked with Sir Peter Hall on this. He does the accent. He came to Canada and did it for me. Now, it doesn't mean we should do all Shakespeare in the Elizabethan sound. But round-vowelled English pronunciation is a fashion. It was just the right way or the right fashion or the right device for a particular time to tell or reveal the play for that time.

TO HAVE LEONARDO DI CAPRIO asking, 'Is she a Capulet?' in a southern Californian accent is not too far from the Elizabethan stage sound; it is just another way of revealing the language. So it's not wrong. It's not the only way, but it's not wrong. I had a great triumph when two Californian academics, after a kind of 'Mr Ex-English teacher/I've become a local critic of the *Boulder Daily News*' declared the film was an outrage, stood up and said, 'Well, in fact, Mr Luhrman is correct about this'. A professor from the University of California said it's been in the *New York Times* in the critics' notes and an editorial—it makes for ticket sales really. And who cares?

I mean, the truth is this: the one thing we know is we don't know much about Shakespeare, but he was sure as hell focused on box office and he is not displeased that he's packing the houses. I know! William Shakespeare was an actor in a company that was competing with another. All they cared about was packing the house. Who is

worried that we put rock music in? Oh, here's the news—he put popular songs of the time in his shows because it was a good way of telling a story!

In terms of liberating the language, the cast had a strong sense of the rhythm, the poetry. Dustin Hoffman did Shylock in The Merchant of Venice on Broadway but he lacked a sense of the verse rhythms.

Do you know what I think that is? Dustin Hoffman is a fantastic actor, but what you get there is a brand of American actor that has this reverential attitude towards the English Shakespearian style, so you get a mid-Atlantic feel. Americans don't use their natural sound. They adjust their sound, and they try to take on a kind of subtle interpretation of what an English actor would do with the language. Leonardo and Claire, in their innocence, brought the language to themselves. Iambic pentameter is a natural rhythm for speaking and thoughts beat roughly in that iambic way. And they were able to find rhythm without it becoming a signpost.

It's not right, it's not wrong. It's wonderful to hear Laurence Olivier say, 'Now, is the winter of our discontent'. And it's fantastic to hear Kenny Branagh chomp it a bit more like Midlands sound. It's also great to hear Leonardo di Caprio in those soft Californian sounds say, 'Tybalt, the reason I have to love you'.

On the visuals, you have a great number of Catholic statues and images.

We shot in Mexico and Mexico is very, very, very Catholic with Catholic iconography everywhere. The giant statue in the middle of the city, that is Mexico City, with Jesus' statue put in the middle of the city. That's an electronic addition. All the iconography was about the fact of the plot point that when you marry, it is in the eyes of God and families can't pull the couple apart. So the slightly-on-the-edge priest says, 'but actually, if you do get married, the families can't do anything about it; so it's a way of forcing them to stop running around killing each other'. It's a key plot point in the play. It's very weak dramatically. So you have to have the audience believe that no-one questions religion, no-one questions the existence of God or the power of Jesus Christ. So when Juliet says, 'No, if thy love be honourable, thy purpose marriage',

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Romeo could not say, 'Look, you don't have to get married to have sex'. There's no argument about the fact that they existed in a religious context in terms of their thinking and beliefs. So it turned out like an Italian/Mexican/South American location. I mean, when you're in Mexico, religion is absolutely wrapped up with politics.

This Mediterranean, Hispanic piety is strong, as in the shrine in Juliet's room with so many statues of Mary, so many candles. Even the seedy apothecary has holy cards on his counter.

There's a lot there and they're on the weapons as well. Now, some can say that's sacrilegious. No-one has, actually—it's been a bit of a surprise—but the truth is that's an interpretation of religion in our societies. You can have an armed society like Bosnia, where everyone's running around claiming they uphold Christian notions, or Mexico where it's all very Catholic and yet you go into a restaurant and people are holding guns. In Elizabethan times a lot of that iconography was put upon weapons of war—and I always think that's a very disturbing notion. So it's not a judgment or an analysis of any kind of religion; it's about saying that everyone has to have a belief in a certain set of rules.

And the cross on Father Laurence's back? Well, Father Laurence is very important but, actually, in the play Laurence is a bit of an idiot. You remember that the Elizabethan world was slashing away at Catholicism. The good news is just because he's a priest he's not God, he's a human being. I think Father Laurence is a great character and a good person, but he's had sin himself to deal with. He's had a struggle with the human condition himself. He's not perfect.

Our scenario was that he went off to Vietnam and he was into drugs. He was tussling with his own personal dilemmas. Maybe he had a wife and a child or whatever but he went back to the church and really he is a good person.

HE REALLY WANTS GOOD to be done and really believes in the ideas of Christ and God. But he's not this guy in a white caftan who says, 'I have a wonderful idea. Let's marry and all will be hunky-dory'. So I was showing him to be a complex man—you know, he's a drinker. I quite like the idea—it's an old-fashioned idea that Spencer Tracy always played priests but secretly he was a drunk, which doesn't say he's bad. I think

priests that are flawed are at least more human. If you reveal it, you're therefore truthful. You're saying, 'I'm a human being. I'm not a deity'. I have a slight problem with the deity version of priesthood, as I'm sure certain churches do.

Your sets? Do you ever think, 'This is just too much? This is overwhelming?'

Do you mean too much in terms of its effectiveness in the storytelling or just incredibly decadent?

No, just in sheer extravagance.

Let me give you an extravagance. That pool: that entire outdoor pool is a set, interior built. It was made from concrete and it was filled with water. The day we walked off the set, in a frenzy to go up to Verona Beach, they had drained it the day before and now there were guys with jackhammers just tearing it to pieces. It was a million-dollar pool. It's a weird little world, film-making, and you do weird little things. One of the things I hate is waste, and I was not able to avoid the kind of waste I would like to avoid. Everything you see on that beach is built. There's not a palm tree or a telegraph pole on that beach that wasn't put there by us. It was a desert.

The illusion of film is fascinating and difficult but tricky. We were able to do things in Mexico that you can't do anywhere else in the world. We had this one chopper but it seems like a flotilla of choppers. We had one helicopter, which was that big white one. You can tell the electronic ones, we're not trying to hide that too much. The military guy in the chopper in silhouette early on, sitting, pointing with a gun—that's me. And Don McAlpine, we're just in a Bell chopper, the camera chopper, and he's there with the camera, hand-holding, and I'm just strapped in. And we've got the chopper with all these stunt guys dressed up and flying through Mexico City—I mean, in the middle of Mexico City and they were hanging out of the chopper. I'm just pointing out the kind of bizarreness in what needs to happen to get a scene is always extraordinary.

I'll give you an example of the surrealness of it: flying, looking for Mantua. We're flying over the desert. We're up in a chopper. We see tiny little sheds. So we fly down, we land, and the wind blows everything. The villagers live in cardboard boxes. Our Mexican interpreter says, 'Look, we want to make a film... and we're going to build some things here, but we'll leave everything for you and we're going to pay

you this money'. They're over the moon. So we came back. We built the entire Mantua, everything you see in Mantua, all those shacks, the cars, everything, like a town. And they bring all their cars and they're all employed and they're all, great. Then we shoot and we're always desperately behind. So all the trucks leave the next morning. We get the final shot. We leave and, as we're leaving, they're all waving. And there's a town left behind where their little shacks were, and it's their little town now. I mean, there is a surrealness about that.

Do they call it Baz Town now?

No, they call it Mantua. There's a big sign now that says Mantua.

People ask, 'Have they used the original script?'

Not only is it the text, but the Zeffirelli version, which everyone thinks is the Elizabethan show, actually has additional dialogue and does actually change the text. From, 'Do with their death bury their parents' strife', not, 'Doth with their death...'. I'm not criticising that, because I think it's a gorgeous production of 1968. But we are texturally more accurate. We have cut about a third, which is probably normal. Zeffirelli cut half the text.

ACTORS LOVE SHAKESPEARE because it's like giving them a sports car. They have a lot to say, and actors like to talk, God knows. It was a meticulous rehearsal process, but they dug it. There's no actor on that show that's not happy. Brian Dennehy had three lines. He's a terrific stage actor. I just asked him. I said, 'Look, I really need someone who could really believe he's Leonardo's father and someone with real credibility and who has good craft'.

You bring Shakespeare to the people. Was that a surprise that it's done so well and seems to have introduced many Americans, at least, to Shakespeare?

Being number 1 was a surprise to everyone. Being number 1 in America is like saying, 'I don't care what it is; I want it', to the industry. It killed *Sleepers*. That was a \$70,000,000 film with Robert de Niro, Brad Pitt and Dustin Hoffman. In a town where, 'What do you mean, Shakespeare's number 1? How come you didn't tell me about it?', it means a lot. But yes, I wanted to take it back to where it began, and that was for everybody. It was for everybody. ■

Peter Malone msc is a film critic and author.

Skin deep

The People vs Larry Flynt dir. Milos Forman (Hoyts, Greater Union, Village). Director Milos Forman (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*) has used an air-brush on Larry Flynt, the founder of the raunchy *Hustler* magazine. He is presented as an heroic figure devoted to the constitutional right of Americans to free speech, and for that matter, a free look.

Now if you swallow that, no doubt you will accept also that *Hustler* is really a glossy semi-scientific journal for apprentice (male) gynaecologists. Larry was in it for a buck and he realised that the average male didn't buy *Playboy* to read Hefner's pretentious philosophies or jazz record reviews. He took a punt on just how explicit nude photos could be and from then on it was war with the Moral Majority.

The result is a two-hour movie which always entertains. While Woody Harrelson as Flynt effectively plays Flynt with a mouth full of cotton wool in a wickedly funny performance, it is rock queen Courtney Love who dominates with a sensitive performance as Flynt's loyal wife Althea. Her failure to win an Oscar nomination hints at punishment for past misdemeanours.

EUREKA STREET FILM COMPETITION

Here's the *Carry On* crew carrying on a bit. This pic is taken from one of the many films in the series and if you can name this particular one (correctly spelt mind you—there's a clue) then you'll be off to the flicks with \$30 in your pocket to see the sequel of your choice.

The winner of the December competition was R. DeAngelis of Bedford Park, SA who correctly picked the origin of the shot with Kirk Douglas and Burt Lancaster as *Seven Days in May*.



The climax of the struggle between the self-described 'smut-dealer' and the Moral Majority led by Rev. Jerry Falwell came in 1984 when Falwell sued over a spoof Campari ad which asserted he had shown too much affection for his mother in an out-house. The court scene (truncated from a real six days) is very funny with Flynt's defence relying doggedly on the First Amendment.

The film sensibly sidesteps the horror of the shooting and resultant crippling of Flynt, to push on with its gutsy humour (Keep a look out for Flynt himself playing a Judge). And where does Courtney Love's career go from here? Perhaps as *Anne of Green Gables* in a remake? I'd like to see that!

—Gordon Lewis

Shacked up

The Apartment, dir. Gilles Mimouni (independent). Were you absolutely convinced Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan were right for each other in *Sleepless in Seattle*? Did you breathe a sigh of relief when he came back to get his kid's bag? Did everyone? *The Apartment*, a French film written and directed by Gilles Mimouni, covers much of the same ground regarding destiny and love but throws any audience expectations of resolution into complete chaos. The 'right' coupling of lovers changes throughout the film and culminates in the ultimate parody of star-crossed lovers.

To this end, Mimouni uses (and confuses) well known stories and motifs of love, but overturns any conventional outcomes. One brief example is an unforgettable manipulation of *Cinderella*. Mimouni uses perhaps one of the most widely recognised moments in love-lore when he has a woman trying on a pair of (magic) shoes for her lover. As they do not fit her, she appears to be exposed as the false object of her lover's desire. But this is turned on its ear in the film, marking the motif of falsity (the ill-fitting shoe) as the mechanism for finding true love. These master manipulations overlap and occasionally over-ride one another until you lose track of any expectations about destiny and desire, responding at last to the one unchanging aspect of the film, the unique integrity

FLASH IN THE PAN



of aching, unrequited love.

The film looks incredibly gorgeous; Paris is seductive, the lead actors are beautiful in the extreme and the apartments the characters wander in and out of are dream-pads extraordinaire. The film combines compelling visuals with emotional turmoil, which is irresistible. It is the same combination which makes up those most terrible and passionate love affairs that batter our hearts and psyches. With my heart and psyche quite battered, I was hopelessly hooked by *The Apartment*.

—Annelise Balsamo

The Miller's tale

The Crucible, dir. Nicholas Hytner (Hoyts). *The Crucible* first appeared as a stage play in January 1953 in what Arthur Miller, its author, has described recently as 'an America almost nobody I know seems to remember clearly.' They were years of cultural paranoia—typified by Senator McCarthy's investigation of so-called unamerican activities—and Miller has described the play as 'an act of desperation' which was written under a 'dead weight of fear'. He has observed that within twenty years of World War 2, students looked at footage of Hitler and smirked at his over acting. He wonders if the kind of mob hysteria depicted in *The Crucible* shares the same fate.

He needn't worry. Nicholas Hytner's only previous film, *The Madness of King George*, was a contemporary satire in period costume. His production of *The Crucible* has a similar hard edge. The story of the Salem witchhunts of the late seventeenth century have provided a metaphor to describe almost any situation in which a person or group, posing as a purist, is afraid of somebody's else's freedom. It also reveals

the inseparable strains that make up human motivation. John Proctor (Daniel Day Lewis) once had an affair with an employee called Abigail Williams (Winona Ryder). When

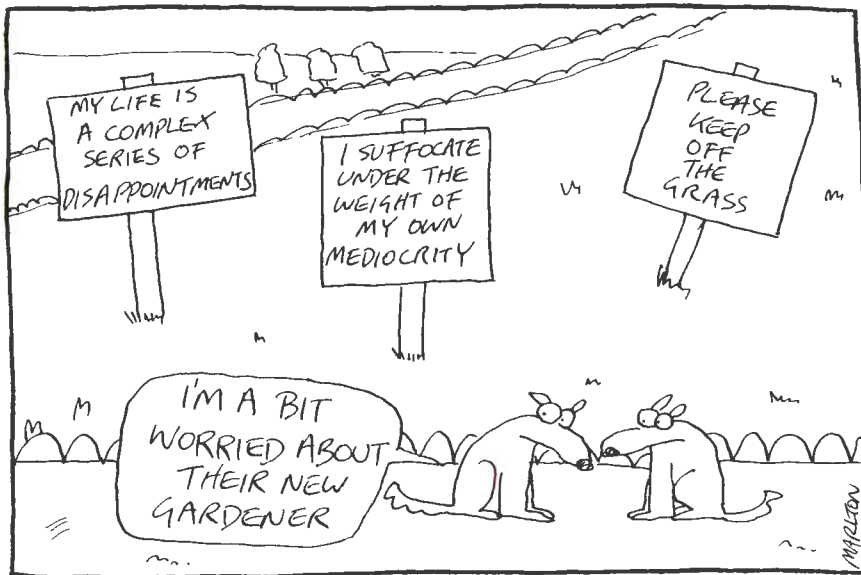
Kev (Ben Mendelsohn) on the other hand is pissed-off and constantly on the look out for something to be angry about. Sick and tired of always drinking VB long necks, unless they're 10 cents short of a beer, they decide to break out.

This is a funny, blokey film. It's not complicated, it's not social analysis, and Peter Greenaway it ain't. That said, it is, in parts, a revealing film. There is a good rapport between Jeremy Sims and Ben Mendelsohn, with Sims as a stand-out as the bloke who reckons that if you say

the heat of those stony cactus deserts, America somehow pure and gritty.

So *Lone Star* has a lot to live up to and all in all Sayles has done a pretty good job of keeping the audience interested for almost all of its 2 hours and 16 minutes.

The story is a good solid whodunnit set in a clash of three cultures in the small Tex-Mex border town of Frontera. The hero, WASP Sheriff Sam Deeds, is a SNAG caught in a very macho land, carrying a father-wound of some depth in an environment where fathers are of very questionable benefit. The older generation wants its sins hidden in stories that gloss over the corruption of the near past. Debates over correct versions of historical 'truth' rage in the high school staffroom and in the little cantina. The history teacher is Pilar (Elizabeth Peña), Sam's old flame from teenage years, of Mexican descent. The African-American story is somehow on the outer edge, highlighting the plight of the truth-seeker. Truth can hurt, we keep being told: there is a shocking moment when a very correct and



Williams becomes accused of meddling in witchcraft, she points the finger at Proctor's pregnant wife, Elizabeth (Joan Allen). Williams is the ringleader of a group of hysterics who force all kinds of fellow citizens to the gallows: often these deaths are mingled with the accusers' grab for land. In all this, the most disturbing character is Judge Danforth (Paul Scofield), the outsider who comes to sort out the mess. Scofield's calm balances Ryder's energy. Yet it is Scofield's performance which is the more haunting. He is a picture of evil working quietly from nine to five; it is more worrying than evil which breaks into sweats.

—Michael McGirr SJ

Watch this

Idiot Box, dir. David Caesar (Hoyts, Village, Greater Union) Two young white boys, called Mick and Kev, living out in western Sydney, are stuck in a rut somewhere between Rooty Hill and Mt Druitt. Mick (Jeremy Sims) has a touch of the dreamer. He likes to stand on overpasses and make up stories about the cars speeding on the freeway underneath, and deliver impromptu poetry.

something's a poem then it is [there's something post-modern about that, but I'm not sure what it is]. Graeme Blundell and Deborah Kennedy as the detectives are worth a look as well, particularly the latter doing a number on the hard-bitch cop routine.

David Caesar plays a rough story with a delicate hand, however he does complicate things at the end, without preparing the viewer. He introduces that theme—well-loved by Australian film-makers—the death of innocence (Local cinema looks ready to dispense with its security blankets but they're hard to toss). It's sort of like finishing off an ensemble of a tank-top and King Gees with a pair of moccasins. But it's tolerable if you have a taste for blackened Aussie humour.

—Jon Greenaway

Western fusion

Lone Star, dir. John Sayles; (independent). For me the pinnacle of the moody Latino Western is *One-Eyed Jacks*, with Brando doing what he did best, still looking like *The Wild One*, sultrily dangerous as Eastwood never could be, giving you

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uptight black army colonel suddenly realises his true status in the eyes of the army powers-that-be, the shadowy 'They' who call the shots. The evil embodied in systemic racism is adverted to continually, and is personified in the operatically villainous Sheriff Charlie Wade, wonderfully acted by Kris Kristofferson

There is a flattening of energies at times as Sayles goes into exhaustive detail for us, just so we don't miss a scintilla of the multi-cultural salsa of the Tex-Mex experience in the 90s, but the ending is a good one: no cop-outs, no sanctimony.

—Juliette Hughes

Lady Jane

The Portrait of a Lady, dir. Jane Campion (independent). So many directors are opportunistically adapting Great Books that you wonder whether Hollywood's scriptwriting school has been terminally discouraged by the Coen Brothers' *Barton Fink*. But Jane Campion's film of Henry James' masterpiece is no retreat and no adaptation. Campion is script smart and a pure filmmaker; the dark, enclosed world of evil, goodness and vulnerability she creates in *Portrait* is shaped by her powerful imagination and her ability to render visible the fluctuations of passion, affection and desire that make or break us. James is there all right, more as accomplice than mentor.

This is a jagged film—at the most literal level because Campion's camera is often angled, so that her 19th century world of English country houses and tenebrous Florentine interiors is seen obliquely. But Campion also has a knack of purposeful inclusiveness, so in every skillfully composed scene there is some mundane element to grate against perfection. This film is the antithesis of Merchant Ivoryness. You are never allowed the emotional time to bask and exclaim how beautiful.

One scene is typical. As Ralph Touchett and his father (seamlessly played by Martin Donovan and John Gielgud) confide and plot in the velvet luxury of the old gentleman's bedroom, you notice, almost subliminally, that the old man's foot is

slung in a stirrup. No interior decoration can take the shock of mortality out of an ageing, yellow toenail.

The film's casting is risky, but all of a piece with Campion's direction. Nicole Kidman has attracted criticism for her angular portrayal of Isabel Archer. True, she lacks range, but it is an intense and oddly moving performance nonetheless. The film's ensemble is so good that she is aided, not overshadowed, by Barbara Hershey's mercurial Madame Merle. Hershey is accomplished enough to make John Malkovich, as Gilbert Osmond, look almost programmatic. In her confrontations with Isabel/Kidman, some of Hershey's mobility and steel communicates to the younger player. With Malkovich, Kidman strikes fewer sparks. The minor players, like Shelley Winter as an irascible Mrs Touchett, are all splendid.

But it is Campion you think about when the film is over, Campion and the way she can turn insides out. Most directors gesture at emotion and intellect, but Campion—never. She gives face and life to human joy and human cruelty. This is a taxing, sombre, triumphant film.

—Morag Fraser

What price art?

Basquiat, dir. Julian Schnabel (independent cinemas). The early '80s saw art-buying and selling reach fever pitch—collectors were wall-papering lofts and mansions with the 'latest' and the 'greatest'. Jean Michel Basquiat was, for a short while, considered one of the greatest, but after only a few years at the top became one of the latest, dying of a heroin overdose at the age of 27.

Schnabel, also an art star of the '80s, has turned his hand to directing—with a good deal of success. For this first-time film he has managed to assemble a cast that would be the envy of any seasoned director—Dennis Hopper, David Bowie,

Christopher Walken, Gary Oldman, Willem Dafoe, Courtney Love, Tatum O'Neal, Michael Wincott and a dozen more whose faces you recognise. The film is handsomely crafted in itself, but the performances do lend this first feature stability and a fair dollop of class.

Tracing the fairy-tale rise of Jean Michel Basquiat (Jeffrey Wright) from young-black-graffiti-artist-sleeping-in-a-box to the art-star-courting-the-rich-and-stupid, Schnabel presents us with a profoundly bleak vision of the New York art scene. This tale is full of failed artists working as electricians (Willem Dafoe) for pretentious art dealers, or driving limos for wealthy buyers.

Ironically, while Schnabel the director sympathises with the hungry under-dog, Schnabel the painter was and remains one of the most conspicuously successful players of the art game in the '80s. It is a strange enough contradiction to make one wonder about the motivation for making this bio-pic—after all no one likes to be caught stealing chocolate from the rations box.

That said, this is a surprisingly good film, and not just because of its superb cast. Schnabel has gracefully



Courtney Love and Jeffrey Wright in a scene from *Basquiat*

told the story of a very troubled lonely young artist, to whom 'it didn't matter if you were killing yourself. He thought it was cool, romantic even. To him it was simple. Your life was the price you paid for your talent.'

—Siobhan Jackson



De Beauvoir's babies don't sing

Access All Areas, Paul Grabowsky's 15-part ABC series on music-making, is a lesson in creativity. The ABC's commentary claims that the series 'demystifies music' (God forbid).

But it doesn't (thank God). Watching art in formation becomes an art in itself under his direction. Composers' *modi operandi* are exposed but their spirit rightly defies capture; we are still allowed to wonder.

So much of the program's success has depended on Grabowsky's choices, and these have been like a wish list come true so far: Sting, Tiddas, Neil Finn, Archie Roach and Ruby Hunter, Paul Kelly, Tommy Emmanuel, among many. The fascination lies in watching the artists *do*. Grabowsky knows this. He is courteous and unfailingly interested, but challenging. He disarms his guests with simple-seeming questions along the lines of what makes them want to play, how they weave experiences into a musical form, would they like to create something, now, please?

It's a tall order, but they comply and we see music spawn in front of our eyes. In the first program he asks African singer Rémy Ongala to make up a song on the spot about Australia, and Ongala smiles, thinks for a few seconds and then chants 'Australia—holiday, holiday, holiday...' *a cappella*, in full morning huskiness without a trace of coyness or *gêne*. The tune is rudimentary, but the idea is a bolt from across the continents. I was digesting the idea of Howard's eco-rat Australia's being this exotic man's idea of a carefree, holiday camp when the program cut to the final version of the song in performance with accompaniment—assured, clear and ironic. But not ironic in the way *he* means it. I felt certain he saw us as naive, blessed; still some sort of lucky little country compared with the unimaginable complexities and sufferings of his Africa, the raddled mother-continent. He didn't mean it unkindly, I'm sure. Perhaps he hadn't heard Archie Roach's unbearable gentleness as he sang of being stolen as a baby, the music and words as unforced and perfect as the sea. Roach is a singer of rare clarity and power, his diction riding the tone with utter naturalness. Grabowsky knows when to talk and when to be quiet and let the guests have their head, and with some of the singer/songwriters in the first program, the result was memorable.

The guitarists are just as forthcoming: after all they have their beautiful instrument as a shield as well as a tool; singers are on their own. But singer-guitarists have it every way: to paraphrase Roy Castle, the late great vaudevillian, they've got their own accoomp'niment. Neil Finn talks earnestly about inspiration, plays and sings enchantingly for us, as does Paul Kelly. This is the land of The Jam, and these folk are fish in water. There are delights ahead for us in this series: the people are interesting people, all talking candidly about something they know well. The honesty of Grabowsky's approach could make us forget how hard it is to do a simple thing very well. We feel

we are taking part in something real: as familiar as breakfast and as surprising as a banquet. Themes he will cover in the series include Rhythm, Opera, Busking, Voice, Blues, Jazz, New Technologies, and Country, and we are promised Harry Connick Jnr, John Lee Hooker, Willie Nelson, Chris Isaacs, Lyle Lovett, Joe Cocker, k.d. Lang ... Sunday night is going to be all right for the next three months.

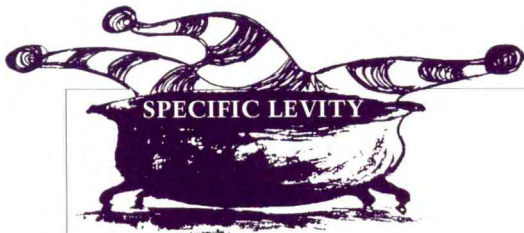
How annoying then, to look at another aspect of the ABC's creativity embodied in *Fallen Angels* and *Simone de Beauvoir's Babies* and find such a bothersome mix-up of self-consciousness, hype and good performers trying hard against silly scripting and leaden direction.

Garry McDonald is one of the greatest actors Australia has produced, and is effortlessly good in *Fallen Angels*, a flawed series about a community legal centre. But even he can't leaven the lump when the scriptwriters can't decide whether they're writing a black comedy or a melancholy soap. The tone is never secure: the themes involve suicide, betrayals, injustice—it would need better writers than these to get the balance right and make us laugh as *Cardiac Arrest* and *Fry and Laurie* do when they stare with us at the darkest recesses of Britain's heart and make us realise its darkness even as we laugh. The scene in *Fallen Angels'* first episode where a blind woman's guide dog was poisoned was obviously supposed to be farce, but was about as funny as a dead baby.

With *Simone de Beauvoir's Babies*, the problems are similar, but more acute. The cardboard characterisations pall from the first minutes: why do each of the four women have to *embody* something? The idea of a complex, many-sided character just doesn't seem to register with this series. One is a photographer, a Tortured Artist who freelances for advertising and insults clients for disagreeing with her. (Her submissions were kitschy David-Jones-window-stuff anyway). She scowls and snarls like something out of *The Exorcist*, and is meant to be her mum. She is supposed to be the Generation X version of artistic temperament, God help it. Then there are the ditsy-superstitious one, the workaholic-emotionally-constipated one and the warm-fuzzy-blonde one who comes up with the idea that what these lasses need on top of all their problems is to become single mothers.

What does come over is the outrageous sense of entitlement these characters have, but in a world where their sisters are still being mutilated and enslaved, there is no irony shone onto the privileges of their situation. And there are truly awful vignettes, like the chatty postwoman who tells one character that she's getting a postcard from 'Siam'. You might imagine that perhaps the last person in Australia to be ignorant of a country's name would be a postie. But in *Simone de Beauvoir's Babies*, what passes for imagination is a pudding of political correctitude and a lot of shallowness. Bring back *Brides of Christ*, I say. Huh? Oh. They just did. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer and reviewer.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 51, March 1997

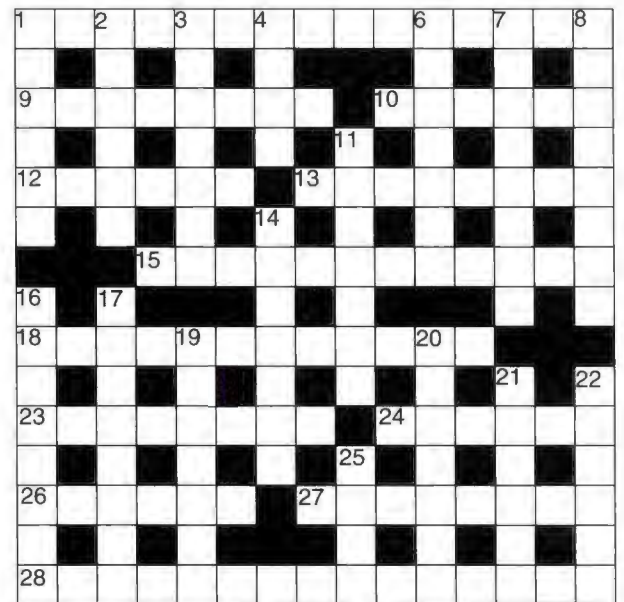
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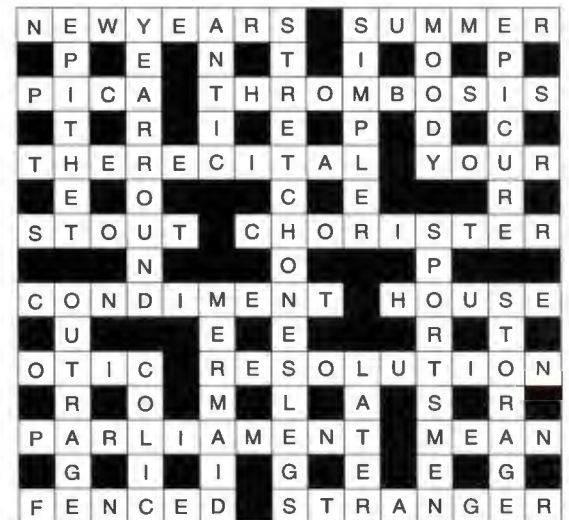
1. Lenten resolution, possibly, leaving all untouched. (5,10)
9. Would some of this break 1-across? Phone round lies to conceal it. (8)
10. 'Customs' exercises control about silver. (6)
12. Do we sin, combining to construct a little beetle? (6)
13. Go back to the land and repay the mortgage. (8)
15. Had awful guilt about rural a/c for land cultivation. (12)
18. It's surprisingly true! Sea, sandy beaches and rest await us on this holiday. (6,6)
23. Such efforts to interview Allan Border or leading trainer I've made! All failing! (8)
24. Author's name here, beside the verse, or below it? (2-4)
26. Pay attention to index every newspaper starts with. (6)
27. Stick around a politician showing up this unpopular method of impounding cars. (8)
28. One who still lives dream, perhaps, of being second. (6,9)

DOWN

1. Cast out of high office, we hear. (6)
2. Article almost best in Greek city. (6)
3. I'll go back into air bag for quiet soothing. (7)
4. Ossified, decapitated, black wood. (4)
6. Not applicable to aroma beginning to rise. (7)
7. Conservative politician, on raising firearm, thought it a trifling matter. (8)
8. Go early around unfinished step; your course will wind in a constant direction. (8)
11. Following quest north-east—clumsily! (7)
14. Young lady I have sent a letter to. (7)
16. Edward, returning, takes taxi back to Les and collapses. (8)
17. United States leaps at changing policy for adoption. (8)
19. Between my former partner and me, the beginning of true romance exists, but it could become excessive. (7)
20. Endless chasm Malcolm followed was immeasurably awful. (7)
21. I alternate with heads of Royal Merchant Navy in Italian port. (6)
22. Delay for audience produces gravity. (6)
25. 150 act up on blockhead! (4)



Solution to Crossword no. 50, January-February 1997



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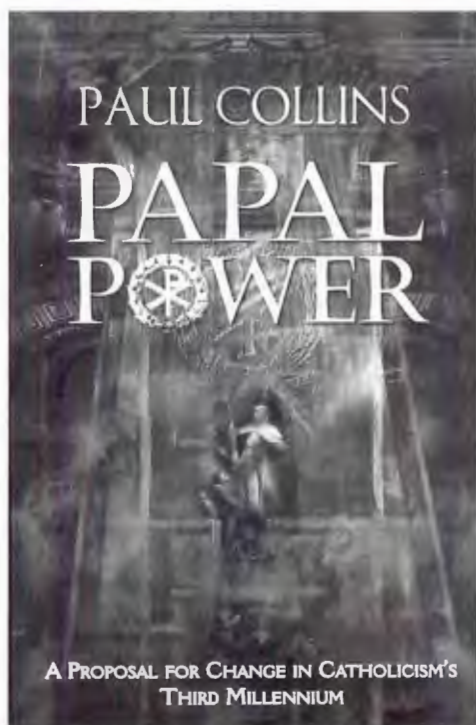
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