

EUREKA STREET

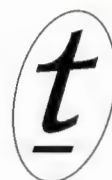
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When you're holed up in the bunker at three minutes after midnight, with a guttering candle, a dozen tins of baked beans, a 20-litre container of No Frills spring water, and fighting over the last sheet of toilet paper, console yourself with the thought that life could be worse—there's always the Eureka Street Quiz. See page 14 and weep.

Front and back cover: two views of the staircase in the new Melbourne Commonwealth Law Courts. **Photographs by Bill Thomas.** **Design by Siobhan Jackson.** Graphics pp10, 18, 30–33 by Siobhan Jackson. Cartoon p12 by Peter Fraser. Photographs p16 by Mark Deasey.

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EUREKA STREET

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

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January–February 2000

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EUREKA STREET

*A magazine of public affairs, the arts
and theology*

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COMMENT: 1

PAUL DURCAN

New Year's Eve, 1999

Thank Ophelia that's all over—
Eileen Dubh, Greta Garbo—
One thousand years of teens!
But will our twenties
Be any wonderfuller?
Up the cul-de-sac behind every disco,
Creeps & fiends?

*O tomorrow let's be Warm
Who today are Cool.*

It's 3001 I pine for:
The treeline of fiction;
Children of the New Forest;
Our Lady of the Fertile Rock;
You and I—
A pilot and a doctor
Of the fertile ice.

*O tomorrow let's be Warm
Who today are Cool.*

What a cheesy scene
Adolescence has been!
The Black Plague when I was thirteen,
Wars of Religion at sixteen,
Famine at eighteen,
AIDS when I was nineteen,
Cromwell, Hitler in-between.

*O tomorrow let's be Warm
Who today are Cool.*

Count down to 11.27,
Nuzzle noses at 11.38,
Fire off our retro-rockets at 11.49,
Up into our goosepimples at 11.53,
Zapping in the Eye of Midnight
A space shuttle docking—spraying soft slow sticky
stuff o'er all the beanbags and the screens!
Another small-screen step for kinderkind!

*O tomorrow let's be Warm
Who today are Cool.*

Paul Durcan

Angling in the new century

THE IRISH POET, Paul Durcan, opens the New Year for us with the refrain 'O tomorrow let's be Warm/Who today are Cool.'

You might add a nod to irony when reading what Durcan—or any poet—writes. But irony's not a bad caution at the start of a new venture—an acknowledgement that complexity goes arm-in-arm with hope.

We begin the year 2000, *Eureka Street's* tenth year of publication, by taking a fresh look at the necessary baggage we carry with us as we move into new territory, new time. This month—and indeed throughout 2000—it will be Australian institutions that occupy us. Pity about the Latinate lumpiness of the word 'institution'. It is such a dry term for the common law, or for any part of the body politic, or for the passions and structures that bind us together as a people or a family or a state or a religion. We will blow the dust off the term this year as we peer inside the engines of our social and political lives.

If you look at this month's cover, with its great pale coil of public staircase leading directly from the sunlit people's entrance to the number one court in the new Commonwealth Law complex in Melbourne, you get some sense of the way in which traditions can be turned around to fit a shift in historical mood and professional conception. The law moves slowly, but when it does move, its gait is fascinating. And surprising—a bit like a tortoise heading, with some grace, for refreshing waters.

The photographic essay on page 26—a day inside and outside of one representative set of Australian courts—was prompted by a hint from lawyer and media commentator, Paul Chadwick, whose journalist's eye was struck one day by an unusual vista: for a brief period in Melbourne you are able to see all of the law courts laid out before your eyes. The view will close up once the new Children's and County Courts rise to fill the space that was once occupied by the old rabbit-warren ABC building. But for the moment the law is on full display. It was not an opportunity to be missed.

On another institutional front, Brian Howe and Anthony O'Donnell take the spanners to the rusty word 'welfare', in 'All work and no play?' (page 22). We have lost the meaning of the term, they argue. In a country that once pieced together the Harvester



Judgment, we have forgotten what makes for a healthy society, and the questions being posed by government are the wrong ones.

Because it is summer and because summer allows a corner of leisure, there is poetry to read—in unusual quantity. Poetry doesn't bow low before institutions, but it

does pay them the courtesy of scrutiny. The essay and books in our summer reading sections are variously diverting (on food and climbing trees), informative (on Catholic education) and provocative (on prime ministers). And when you have finished with them you can retreat into the riddling maze of the Y2K quiz, and learn patience when you can't crib the answers from the internet because the whole system has gone down. We also have the first of our new columnists for 2000, Denis Minns, writing from Blackfriars in Oxford with a pen sharp enough to puncture blimps.

SOME OF THE SHAPE of *Eureka Street's* publishing for 2000 was conceived as I wandered, bemused and gratified, through the newly hung Australian and international sections of the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra. It is impossible to maintain a static, or calcified sense of this place we live in when you see how it has been represented in art over many centuries, by settler and by Aboriginal Australians. Or by artists who have visited and been marked by the place.

We no longer curate in impermeable categories. In one room a work by Rover Thomas, a Kukatja/Wangkajunga man, hangs beside a work by the American Mark Rothko. The language of art is exploratory and connective. Apparently when Thomas first saw Rothko's paintings he wanted to know who was 'this bugger' who had ideas so very much like his own. The rigidities of our political institutions, our inadequate generosity and our pinched attempts at reconciliation fall away in the face of such knowledge, such links.

Rover Thomas' intuition of connection is a more positive portent for 2000 than the Seattle demonstrations against the World Trade Organisation. But both suggest that we need new ways to carry us through to the anniversary of Federation and beyond. ■

—Morag Fraser

Painting above: 'A New South Wales native Stricking fish while his wife is employed fishing with hooks & lines in her Canoe', 1788, by the Port Jackson Painter. Watercolour. From the Watling Collection, Natural History Museum, London, and used to effect in Tim Flannery's *The Birth of Sydney*, Text Publishing, 1999.

Haven havoc

IN NOVEMBER, Parliament passed legislation affecting asylum seekers. During the debate in the House of Representatives, notes passed across the benches recording the progress in a test match; finally, the Prime Minister announced that Australia had defeated Pakistan.

The same day, I was talking with two asylum seekers who were related to one another. They seemed uninterested in the cricket. One had been granted protection, and hoped soon to be reunited with his wife and family. The other had arrived a few days later; the dateline of the legislation meant that even if she won asylum, she would not see her husband and children for at least five years. She feared for their safety and the effects of long separation.

The Minister for Immigration had secured bipartisan support for the legislation by an energetic campaign in which he spoke constantly of the boatloads of asylum seekers who had arrived recently, and warned of a flood of people waiting to embark. The media picked up the images they were fed: images of the invasion of Australian shores, of criminality, of wealthy Indonesian middlemen operating with impunity and of an alien horde, variously described as Iraqi, Afghan and Middle Eastern, plotting brazenly to break our laws and jump our queues.

The media also carried reflective articles refuting this simplistic rhetoric, pointing out that Australia received comparatively few asylum seekers by world standards, that people came to Australia as a last resort after being forced out of other countries, that most Afghan and Iraqi asylum seekers were granted asylum because of the fearful persecution which they had encountered in their own countries, and that the majority of those living and working unlawfully in Australia were British or American visitors who had stayed beyond the expiration of their visas. This message, however, was not heard. It was the Government that was heard, and its reception expressed itself in xenophobia. On talkback radio, callers were alarmed at the risk of contamination, and suggested that boats be sunk while still at sea.

In such a climate it is not surprising that brutal legislation should be summarily passed with the agreement of both major parties. Its most publicised provision was to restrict asylum seekers to temporary residence for three years, after which they would have to apply for protection again. They would not be able to bring out spouses or children for at least five years.

The Border Protection Legislation Amendment Bill had other dramatic features: notably the licence to board boats and arrest aeroplanes. But the technical changes which restrict the categories of people who can claim asylum are of much greater concern. The Bill excludes people who could have tried to enter another country which may have offered them protection. It also excludes those who have spent more than seven days in a country that could offer them protection, and those who have nationality in a country other than that from which they have

fled. These people are excluded from applying for asylum, and are to be deported as soon as practicable.

The Bill justifies these changes on the grounds that they will prevent forum shopping—the attempt to choose the country in which to apply for asylum. Why it should be illegitimate to attempt to choose is not explained. Its practical effect may be to allow immigration officers to make their own judgments about whether people can find protection elsewhere, and to remove them without any possibility of appeal. The provisions of the Bill form a seedbed for administrative severity.

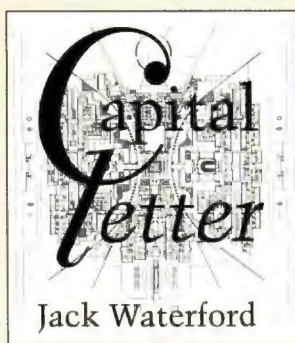
Meanwhile, in the harsh climate for refugees, the Minister for Immigration did not apologise for the new detention centre at Woomera. He proclaimed that it was not a holiday camp, that it would not have air conditioning. Its isolation would prevent escape, and potential escapees were warned that they might die in the desert. Any pretence that detention of asylum seekers is anything other than punitive incarceration has now been dropped. Australia has resurrected an old practice—the transportation of undesirables. This new regime of transportation, however, is different: it is internal, and transportation is not preceded by a trial to establish that only the guilty are punished. In November, too, the refugees who had been received from East Timor were put under pressure to return to East Timor in time for the monsoon season. They were to be given rice and blue plastic to prepare them for their return. Many were

hesitant, for the NGOs had yet to provide shelter from the monsoon rains. Blue plastic offers little protection.

WHAT TO MAKE OF ALL THIS? If you feel a little ashamed, you're in good international company. For what is being done in Australia echoes the harsher attitudes to refugees prevailing in other developed countries. There are no grounds for believing that compassion will return soon to refugee policy. But in the longer term this shameful treatment of refugees points to a contradiction that will need one day to be resolved. On the one hand, the governments of Australia and Europe endorse populist policies that exclude the entry of aliens. On the other hand, demographers and business leaders recognise that immigrants are needed to sustain an ageing and infertile population. Finally, self-interest will dictate a more intelligent policy. When humane sense returns to the politics of immigration, it may well recognise that refugees are the most resilient and resourceful of immigrants.

But if that offers hope, it is a hope for the future. In the meantime, asylum seekers in Australia are matched in tests against an opponent who changes the laws to ensure that foreign bowlers will be called for chucking, and that foreign batsmen will be forced to play tippetty run. Once we might have said that this was not cricket. ■

Andrew Hamilton SJ teaches at the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne.



On a smooth wicket

YOU CAN TELL when a government, particularly one which started with

reformist zeal, is settled in power. It's when it seems relaxed and comfortable with the institutions it is dealing with and the machinery it is using. When it regards the levers as its own, and feels that generally it can manage merely by pulling them rather than by remaking the engine. And when it feels that it is setting the agenda and that the others are responding to it.

The Howard Government is now at the point where it can be expected to operate in office much as Menzies or Fraser did (or even Bob Hawke)—presiding over affairs, influencing them with a nudge there or a pull there, no longer acting with any real sense of urgency or belief that the system needs fundamental change. This shift also means that the Government is spending again, and treating the assets of government as a re-election fund.

This does not mean that John Howard has achieved all of his objectives, or that he has abandoned those objectives—complete industrial relations reform, for example—that he has been unable to achieve. Howard has enormous flexibility about how he gets to the finish line, but hardly ever changes destinations. Rather, he seems to see it now more as a stately progress than as a bumping grind against all odds. And getting there now involves much more compromise, and a sharp political eye for what keeps the others offside.

IT IS HARD TO DENY that Howard had a blinder of a year in 1999. He hung on to his ministers—even clear liabilities like John Moore—and muddled past the point where their poor performances were causing him damage. He got his Goods and Services Tax through without great compromise. The economy was strong—and he skilfully exploited the fact that most taxpayers are better off because of low interest rates, even though many government decisions have imposed costs. The Timor crisis concluded. He outplayed his rivals on the republic, and had never been more calm or more confident, or more in control.

As he fashions his 2000 agenda, there's a lot of work to be done yet, but it is hardly against a background of political crisis. The polls are poor for the Coalition, and it would not take many switched votes for the electorate to tip the Government out, but there is still plenty of time.

Howard is back in the social policy market, and with money to spend. The driving force is continuing National Party consternation about the state of rural and regional centres, but the policy consequences are new spending plans in education, public health, community services, job creation and public infrastructure. There may be new rules, more contracted-out services, new phrases such as 'reciprocity' and an old Howard phrase, 'social coalition', that he is now much given to repeating. But we are hearing less about tightening belts, about government getting off people's backs, and about reducing the size of the public sector. Several ministers, indeed, have been giving speeches about what a great thing the public sector is.

But not everything can be neatly managed. Most of the states are now hostile to the Federal Government, and the politics of the public hospital system keep federal health policy in a perpetual

state of crisis. Though state mismanagement of hospitals has as much to do with the poor state of affairs as federal meanness, the Commonwealth's position is hardly helped by the complete failure of its tax incentives designed to increase private health insurance.

Media policy is still a minefield, though events may give Howard some new flexibility. As ever, he is under pressure on questions of cross-media and foreign ownership rules. The new element in the debate is digital television and whether broadcasting should be preserved as a monopoly for existing television players, or opened up to allow other media owners to use the airwaves to transmit specialised services, including news, sport and finance services. Even at the broadcasters' end, there are questions about whether digital television's greater capacity should be used for one channel of high-definition television or for several standard-definition channels (say sport on one channel, with second or third angles of the same scene on different corners of the screen).

The Government, however, is proving inept as always in attempting to control technological change. Inevitably, it will be forced to permit multiple channels, even at some cost to a quality which will in any event be many times better than today's television transmission. And it will be hard to keep non-broadcast players out of it. However vicious the lobbying, most of the moguls have fallback positions. The Packer empire, for example, still has its eye on Fairfax, and its attitude to husbanding the medium for existing television broadcasters would change if it had access to the data Fairfax could sell. News Ltd, presently out of television, is campaigning very strongly for entry into the datacasting market, but, if cross-media ownership rules change, could be expected to bid for the Seven Network, at which point its focus will not only be on finding more avenues for selling its information, but about keeping out competitors.

FOR LABOR, the work is still before it. It has staked an enormous amount on massive public discontent about the implementation of the GST, and is presently benefiting from that. It sees itself surfing to power on that discontent, along with a few sharply focused policies, particularly in education.

But Labor is taking risks too. First, many of the teething problems of the GST should have disappeared by the time Howard faces the electorate. So far as the grumblings of small business are concerned, the clincher, for Howard, will probably be the capital gains tax changes he put through only a few months ago, with complete Labor acquiescence. Labor has been far from clear on what it, in power, would do to reverse a GST and, if there is one thing Liberal campaigners have done with success in the past, it has been to generate nervousness about Labor's tax agenda.

Labor's strategy of narrowing the issues may be sound, even as it progressively alienates more and more of its old constituencies. But with events rather more in Howard's control than Beazley's, Labor's party-conferencing needs more than choreographed speeches full of meaningless sentiments, and a minimum of serious debate. It too has to show that it is in charge of, and on top of, affairs. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

Ethics up in smoke

From Geeta Singh

On its website, BT Financial Group states that it is a proud sponsor of The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS), a leading independent think-tank. Well, that may be so, but this alliance has produced the idea of 'sponsored independence'! This oxymoron should both amuse and disappoint those who believe in the protection of intellectual freedom.

Corporate sector-funded think-tanks are a growth industry; however, CIS's simultaneous claim to both independence and corporate support is almost bizarre. Take another cosy sponsorship arrangement: in 1998 it was widely reported by the media that Phillip Morris had sponsored the Liberal Party's national conference in Brisbane. It must be applauded that at least there was one member of the party who decided to boycott this event. In the US, the tobacco industry has long been associated with buying political favours via donations, sponsorships and community largesse

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designed to thwart anti-tobacco legislation. In fact, it has been shown to be the leading donor to US political campaigns. Are we following suit? What are the implications of these arrangements?

In the first case, we might assume that, as long as the sponsorship deal stands, the BT Financial Group is unlikely to get a negative comment in any study that may be conducted by the CIS. In the second case, perhaps one thing could be guaranteed—in that particular conference at least, the Liberals would not have taken any stance against the tobacco industry. Furthermore, it raises a serious question: is the tobacco industry's sponsorship affecting our current Federal Government's tobacco control policy-making?

These are not isolated cases. There are many instances which suggest that the 'cash-for-comment' (or 'cash-for-no-comment') syndrome may be eroding areas of public policy research and determining the real 'degree of independence' of independent studies.

However, it is heartening to occasionally see a stand taken against such practices. In 'Sponsors Warn Academic to Keep Quiet' (*Campus Review*, 10–16 February 1999), the Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Australia decided to uphold the notion of academic freedom at the risk of losing research funding and promotional support. But, in our universities' new battle of bottom-line

and academic freedom, will the latter always be the winner? We can only hope so.

Geeta Singh
Bundoora, VIC

True humility

From John F. Haughey

There are things that I can imagine and there are things that I cannot imagine.

I can imagine Jesus washing the feet of the Sisters of Charity, and I can imagine the Sisters humbly protesting as He did it.

I cannot imagine the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith washing the feet of the Sisters; but I can imagine the result if it did. The Sisters would be in intensive care, suffering from shock; but Church reform would have begun.

John Haughey
Toorak, VIC

Make an omega point

From G.R. Fallon

Thirty-plus years have passed since I began discovering the *Cosmic Christology and Christic Cosmology*

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of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. So I was pleased to note your recent reference to that Jesuit priest and palaeontologist who has influenced my life so much (*Eureka Street*, November 1999, p4).

While I have not yet had a chance to access her new book, *Dragon Bones*, other writers suggest that Teilhard's involvement in the discovery of Peking Man was more significant than Penny van Oosterzee apparently indicates. Also, considering how deeply Teilhard mourned the untimely death in 1934 of Davidson Black—loved 'more than a brother'—they seem to have been more than 'occasional companions' (*Teilhard de Chardin: A Biography*, Robert Speaight, p195; *Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Teilhard de Chardin*, Ursula King, p158).

Indeed, Teilhard's mourning for Davidson Black has been likened to that of Tennyson for Arthur Hallam's death in 1833, immortalised in his

great elegy *In Memoriam* (1850). Described by T.S. Eliot as a poem of 'poor' faith, it needed to be reconsidered in cosmic context or in the light of Teilhard's work which, as Arnold Toynbee said, 'gives our generation the comprehensive view it sorely needs' (*The Continuous Flame: Teilhard in the Great Traditions*, H.J. Cargas).

In fact, on the verge of the third millennium of the Christian era, we would surely do well to consider to what extent Teilhard made it possible for Pope John II to restore Christ to his ancient 'status' as the Pantocrator—Lord of the Cosmos, Lord of Time, Lord of History (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*).

Indeed, in the first words of his encyclical (*Redemptor Hominis*) in 1979, the Holy Father proclaimed that the Redeemer of mankind, Jesus Christ, is also the centre of the universe and of history, which extends from the beginning (15 billion years ago?) to the end of time.

Never lost in Eastern Christianity, 'this enlarged perspective is at last beginning to gain currency in Western consciousness as well, especially as a result of the work of Teilhard de Chardin' (*Introduction to Christianity*, J. Ratzinger, p152).

G.R. Fallon
Woody Point, QLD

Unhealthy situation

From Ken O'Hara

How tragic that our Ministers of Health seem unable to advance anything better than miserable Federal/State wrangling on the hospital crisis, now hurtling from bad to worse.

Blind Freddie can see that the only solution is more money across the board, and, in the final analysis, this can only come from the public.

Now we all fork out to buy our cars, houses and furniture, computers, TVs and music systems, etc. etc. ad infinitum, so why should we expect our basic hospital care to be available almost 'free', with the existing Medicare levy only providing eight per cent?

Isn't this what our governments should be solving, to ensure the highest possible hospital care to everyone needing it, everywhere?

Ken O'Hara
Gerrington, NSW

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The Month's Traffic



Small lives

RICARDO WAS 22 WEEKS when he was still-born. His father spent two hours alone with him in the hospital room. Then his body was wrapped in serviette-size white cloths and he was taken to the morgue.

Tom rang me to ask if I could do a funeral. He didn't want to involve funeral directors. He wanted to pick up the body himself, take it to St Canice's and have some prayers said with his wife, Alicia, and some family and friends. Then we would take the coffin in his car to the crematorium.

I told him that I was sure he could do this, little knowing how difficult it would be. Tom later told me that he had to make many telephone calls and ended up talking with the Minister of Health. The hospital, the Health Department, the Crematorium, local councils—they all had regulations and procedures for the burial or cremation of 22-week-old babies that they were reluctant to waive. Tom, however, is a merchant banker and he can work a phone. He was sure about what he wanted and managed to get the necessary permissions.

He arrived to pick me up at St Canice's with Alicia in the back seat. The shoebox-sized white coffin was on the front seat, a miniature in every way right down to the small cross on the lid. Alicia appeared utterly disconsolate. She waited with two friends at the church while Tom and I drove to the Women's Hospital in Randwick, the coffin now on my lap. When we got out of the underground car park, Tom put the coffin under his arm and we walked to the lifts. Others joined us in the lift and I wondered if they knew what Tom was carrying.

We had trouble finding the morgue and arrived drenched with rain. Inside was cold and shiny steel. The assistant drew open the chamber. I was reluctant to unwrap the little bundle, not knowing what to expect. Tom knew his son and with great care and love unwrapped the cloths and there was

Ricardo. I could only see the seepage and the redness of the tiny body, but Tom saw Ricardo. I said the vigil prayers for the deceased and Tom carefully wrapped the body in the cloths and placed it in the coffin together with some momentos. Then he screwed the lid on and we walked through the rain to the lift. Tom walked so purposefully through the crowded hospital, the coffin under his arm. I felt proud to be walking beside him. We laid the coffin on the altar in the church, lit the Easter candle and gathered as friends in prayer. At the crematorium Alicia, Tom and I released his body into the furnace.

Later in the week I went over to see Tom and Alicia in their home. Alicia was still drained. Their one consolation was Sarah, their first-born, who was playing on the floor. Tom knows that not every parent would have been able to negotiate the hurdles placed in front of him simply because he wanted to do his son's funeral himself. He wants to help change the bureaucracy so that the choice is available for all parents to be able to do what he did.

Last week Caitlin came to see me. Ten months ago she became pregnant and then had the baby aborted. The baby would have been due about the time she came to see me. Her body still knew that the time had come and she was grieving the baby that would not be born. She had agreed with her boyfriend that they could not manage with a child. They had just arrived in Australia from New Zealand and had no work and no place to stay. She wasn't regretting their decision. She is now married to her boyfriend and has a good job. Her body has its own history, however, and its own time.

I was moved by her. She was listening to and honouring her body and at the same time accepted her choice. I lit a candle, put on a stole, laid my hands on her head and anointed her forehead and the palms of her hands.

This morning I visited Molly whose mind is wandering and who is very old. She is in a nursing home. I knew she had one son and asked her how many other children she had. 'Two,' she said. 'One was difficult and died at birth.' I looked at this old woman

with her sagging shoulders and wrinkled skin and wondered at this sacred knowledge that she still held. She had entrusted this knowledge of her child to me and now I was a custodian of that knowledge, just as I am a custodian of the knowledge of tiny Ricardo and of Caitlin's unborn child.

—Steve Sinn

Safe as houses

INJECTING DRUG USE has always involved the threat of death. A decade ago, it was widely believed that HIV infection was the most significant health consequence associated with drug addiction since the invention of the hypodermic syringe in the 19th century. Drastic measures, such as the introduction of needle and syringe exchanges, were implemented to prevent the transmission of HIV, and its low prevalence among Australian injecting drug users is often attributed to the public policy responses which have been articulated in successive national HIV/AIDS strategies.

Despite the prevention of HIV transmission, injecting drug users are dying in unprecedented numbers in Australia, with the number of deaths from drug overdoses in Victoria now approaching the state's road toll. Once again it is contended that remedying a desperate situation will require drastic measures, with proposals for the development of safe injecting houses being supported by the state governments in both Victoria and New South Wales.

Interestingly, some of the criticisms of safe injecting houses are similar to those which emerged a decade ago over needle and syringe exchanges and which evidence now suggests were unfounded fears. For example, the common objection that needle and syringe exchange programs act as a disincentive to treatment is not supported by the evidence, which suggests that some contact with exchange programs may actually facilitate the movement of injecting drug users into treatment. Nor is there any evidence to support claims that making needles and syringes available encouraged the uptake of injecting behaviour in the first place.

Opponents of safe injecting houses have often advocated drug treatment as the only



Cogito

way to prevent deaths associated with substance use, despite a plethora of evidence which suggests this approach has only limited effect. However, many injecting drug users do not see their substance use as an issue that requires treatment, and hence the challenge for the health system is to reduce the dangers associated with drug use. Furthermore, even for individuals who seek drug treatment, the process of becoming drug free is often a long and arduous one with periods of abstinence intermingled with relapses to drug use.

As in the rest of the health system, the challenge for both policy-makers and treatment providers is to remember that the priority is to keep the injecting drug user population alive and well. No country has yet been able to eradicate the practice of injecting drug use once it has been introduced, but some have been much better at not losing track of this priority. Safe injecting houses are not the whole solution to this very complex problem, but in combination with a range of other strategies may well be what is required if we are serious in reducing the incidence and effects of drug overdoses. —Beth R. Crisp

Episcopal recall

DISGRACED ANGLICAN Bishop George Browning withdrew his resignation on 7 December 1999 following an overwhelming vote from his diocese for him to stay on.

A special synod of the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn met on 4 December 1999 to deal with the crisis precipitated when the bishop resigned in September after he had confessed to adultery within a pastoral relationship (see *Eureka Street*, December 1999). In a secret ballot of clergy and lay representatives, 83 per cent voted that the bishop should withdraw his resignation.

At a media conference in Canberra Bishop Browning said he had received more than a thousand letters of support. But the pain he and his family had suffered had not inclined him to accept the possibility of returning to his duties. However, it was now impossible to be deaf to this call. 'We understand that such a vote could only be possible if the voice of God and the voice of the people have been as one,' he said.

Dispute over a church tribunal's public rebuke of the bishop had intensified with the publication in the national Anglican newspaper *Market-Place* of a prose-poem

DO MOTTOES CAST A LIGHT on those who choose them? I have sometimes wondered if the differences between Sydney and Melbourne might be illustrated by the different mottoes chosen for public institutions by their founding fathers. 'We may be on the other side of the world', sniffed the University of Sydney, 'but our minds are as good as theirs' (*sidere mens eadem mutato*). It is not just Sydney but the whole of New South Wales that similarly congratulates itself with 'Newly arisen, how brightly you shine' (*orta recens quam pura nites*).

Melbourne's University, on the other hand, preferred Horace in elegiac mood: 'Win acclaim I shall, eventually' (*postera crescam laude*), while its city fathers opted for Virgil, but hoped still to strike the forward-looking note: 'She grows strong as she goes'—*vires acquirit eundo*. Jeff shortened this to just *eundo* (*On the Move*), perhaps in prophecy of his own meteoric *transitus*, and applied it to the State of Victoria. But even so, it bothers me. When I first encountered these words in *The Aeneid*, I was sure I had seen them somewhere else, and it was only a moment before I remembered where—on the ornate cast-iron lampposts adorning a bridge on the Yarra. The trouble was, though, that the context in Virgil was hardly propitious for the young city. For what Virgil described in this way was evil rumour—all watching eyes, all clicking tongues and pricked-up ears, speeding from place to place, sapping morale, inspiring fear, and *growing stronger as it went*. Not Melbourne, surely? I find it consoling, all these years later, to recall this characteristic of rumour when gossip reaches me here about the Catholic Church in Australia. Can it really be in such a welter of denunciation as is made out? One almost hesitates to greet a compatriot in the street for fear of hearing that yet another highly starched exemplar of Australian ecclesiastical rectitude has been delated to Rome.

I do not recall that, when I was a boy, the special obloquy reserved for 'dobbing' (chiefly an Australian expression, my dictionary tells me) was any less marked in Catholic than in other schools. My own schoolmasters, although always eager for information leading to a conviction, seemed to believe that the testimony of schoolboys, like that of slaves in ancient Rome, should be admitted only after torture. But, *autres pays, autres mœurs*. Ears flapping for news of naughtiness in foreign parts are no new thing in Christian Rome. An early victim was the saintly and learned Denis, bishop of Alexandria about the middle of the third century. Not that one should feel too sorry for him on account of his saintliness and learning—Denis himself had vigorous views about how properly to deal with purveyors of unsound doctrine, and lent such support as old age permitted to the episcopal posse which would eventually bring down the hapless Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch. In his own prime, however, Denis had found himself delated to the bishop of Rome—another Denis, as it happened—and one can still sense his shock and outrage at the impertinence. It almost knocked the wind out of his sails, but not quite, and after some deft tacking, he was able to put about and return fire.

In the course of his exchange with his Roman namesake, the Alexandrian Denis allows us a fleeting glimpse of the protocol governing these encounters. He describes his accusers (evidently anonymous) as *sycophants*. The primary meaning of this word is given in the lexicon as 'common informer, voluntary denouncer' and, no doubt, Denis was choosing his words carefully. It had been a lack of accuracy in the choice of words, he ruefully observed, that landed him in this bother in the first place.

Perhaps a similar precision should be adopted in the Australian Church. If it is to have the ancient reality should it not also have the ancient name? Avoidance of sycophancy, it is true, was one of the things urged by John the Baptist on the soldiers who asked him what they should do, but it was the practice, I imagine, that he meant to interdict, not the use of the word. ■

Denis Minns op is *Eureka Street's* United Kingdom correspondent.

from the woman at the centre of the controversy. The woman, whose identity remains a closely guarded secret, wrote that her action in bringing charges to the tribunal was not about vengeance or destroying the bishop, but '[t]o open the door for others to walk through'.

Newcastle Bishop Roger Herft (in whose diocese the woman resides) also entered the fray in defence of victims of abuse who find courage to come forward. 'Time ceases to be relevant as the pain and loss of trust betrayed takes its toll,' Bishop Herft wrote. 'For Church commentators and theologians to demand mercy and forgiveness without considering the brokenness that has been caused to the exploited human person is to make forgiveness trite and cheap.'

Bishop Browning was hopeful that the misgivings of 21 clergy and 27 lay representatives of synod who voted against his return would be overcome. He was confident that diocesan unity could triumph over fears that his leadership had been morally compromised for some groups.

But questions remain over whether church structures can or should accommodate this model of forgiveness and reconciliation. Can Bishop Browning's episcopal leadership remain a focus of unity following the controversy, and how will it affect pastoral situations he finds himself in with both clergy and laity in the future?

Meanwhile, church revisionists are busy pondering the problems of the institution's capacity to respond to relational procedures of restitution and forgiveness. The dispute takes place in the shadow of February's election for a new Primate following Dr Keith Rayner's retirement in November 1999. No single candidate has clearly emerged from the ranks of diocesan bishops eligible for the position of Anglican Primate, but both Bishop Browning and Bishop Herft had been mooted as strong contenders with the NSW/ACT church metropolitan area next in line for the primacy.

Bishop Browning has taken up some episcopal duties and expects to be back at work full-time by February.

—Maggie Helass

Regions at the margin

THE PARTICIPANTS at the Federal Government's Regional Australia Summit left the three-day conference punching the air and chanting positive mantras. Behind them were some confusing messages and headlines... 'Can Do Communities', 'Rural lag out of our hands says Deputy PM', 'Globalisation good for the bush says business leader'. Senator Brownhill's newsletter stated that 'there is simply not enough money in Government coffers to provide financial support at a level that alleviates the pressures on many regional towns and cities.' Summit observers were confused about the mix of hope and despair—has the Federal Government given up on the regions or does it simply not care?

The Summit was a direct result of One Nation's decimation of the Federal National Party, and general rural disenchantment. Deputy Prime Minister and self-proclaimed 'Minister for the Bush', John Anderson, announced the summit mid year. In October, a selected audience of 200 people met in Canberra to address 12 areas of concern in the general categories of public

infrastructure, community well-being, commercial opportunities and sustainable resource management.

Potentially, it was a good opportunity, but the result was predictable. Session leaders had been preappointed, debate was stifled and dissent non-existent. Critics of the summit communique believed it to be ideologically based and supportive of the party line—that is, that '... the regions are to blame because of their lack of get up and go ... and if only they can develop a positive attitude, all will be well.'

Typical of those wanting a seat at the summit to submit their ideas on regional rejuvenation is a loose-knit group known as CENTROC (Central West Regional Organisation of Councils), 14 local government authorities in Central West of NSW. Its submission detailed the European Union's approach to its regions: government intervention, infrastructure funding, keeping people on their farms by rewarding them financially for environmental and heritage work and moving into new products. The key to Europe's positive message in caring for its regions is based on a spiritual and moral commitment to improving the lot of economically depressed areas. Supportive policies and actions have followed with a de-politicisation of

the regional development mechanisms and an elimination of pork-barrelling. A strong regulatory environment requires companies to work to a triple bottom line: good for profits, good for the community and good for the environment. The EU's pronouncements are strongly based on notions of the common good and we could learn much from their statement that 'growing economic disparity between city and region does not bode well for Europe as a whole'.

A feature of the summit was the announcement of the philanthropic trust. However, the solitary donation of \$1 million by the Sidney Myer Foundation coupled with the Federal Government's cajoling, has not yet been able to encourage further private enterprise contributions. The greater disappointment derives from the perception that





government now sees no worth in expending public money in the regions and so the responsibility has been passed on to a 'charity'.

So where to from here? The Federal Government has formed a committee headed by Professor John Chudleigh, Head of Orange Agricultural College, University of Sydney. Chudleigh is an academic well-versed in practical regional economic development issues. His committee's big challenge will be to convince the Federal Government of the difference between the warm and fuzzies of the Summit and the practicalities of grass roots issues in rural Australia. It will not be an easy task. The Federal Government has an obvious distaste for direct intervention in the market forces which have pushed regional areas into their current situation.

The Federal Government has formidable problems: real and identifiable inequity in the regions (as demonstrated by the detailed research of Professor Tony Vinson in his report *Unequal in Life*—see *Eureka Street*, November 1999) and strong political disenchantment. John Ralston Saul, Canadian commentator on globalism and democracy, hits the nail on the head when he argues that governments, instead of taking a statesman-like approach, simply become administrators of what they see as the inevitable outcomes of globalism. When government despairs at ever being able to effect change there is little chance for substantive intervention being initiated.

There is, however, another view which is even more disturbing. Australia exhibits burgeoning growth, so perhaps regional economic serfdom serves the nation well. But the European Union experience suggests something different. Within the complexities of a century of warfare, economic and social poverty casts a long shadow over Europe and one does not have to read too far between the lines of their policy documents to recognise this reality. The respect for regional citizens in the EU is obvious, and markedly different from that shown by government in Australia.

—Graham Apthorpe

This month's contributors: Steve Sinn SJ is parish priest at Kings Cross/Elizabeth Bay, NSW; Beth R. Crisp is from the Australian Institute for Primary Care, La Trobe University; Maggie Helass is a journalist who has worked on assignments for the Anglican Church; Graham Apthorpe is Economic Development Manager for Cowra Shire Council.

A At last: the boffin lobby

AS GOVERNMENT FUNDING BECOMES TIGHTER and private money is drying up, scientists are beginning to use their brains. While the day of the boffin—the chemist in the lab coat, the mathematician in the sandals and long socks—is not quite behind us, the day of the science lobbyist fronting his local member of parliament has definitely arrived.

A few weeks ago, more than 160 scientists converged on Canberra for the first Science meets Parliament (SmP) Day. The neophyte lobbyists were even provided with a training session at the National Press Club the day before they went into action. The whole exercise turned out to be one of the most successful publicity efforts that the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies, the nation's major science lobby group, has ever mounted. More than 70 per cent of scientists were granted audience of at least an hour with their local member or senator. In the afternoon, Shadow Science Minister, Michael Lee, used the occasion to launch a Matter of Public Importance in the House of Representatives on Australia's future as a 'knowledge nation'. Many of his fellow members weighed into the debate, armed with what they had learned in school that morning. The action of the scientists even moved *The Australian* to write an editorial declaring that the state of science funding in Australia was 'a national disgrace'.

Yet the Howard Government has taken science a lot more seriously than many of its predecessors—a point that was underscored two days after SmP Day when the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council spent an hour considering how to increase national science awareness.

Archimedes suspects that this newfound political concern with science and technology stems not so much from a love of intellectual pursuit and knowledge, as from the fact that research and development indirectly provide viable sources of future jobs for Australians. And medical research in particular can help to rein in the nation's healthcare costs by developing more effective drugs and therapy, thereby reducing dependence on imports while raising the potential for exports.

Certainly, such pragmatic arguments have helped medical researchers attract the attention of Australian governments. Biotechnology, the industrial arm of medical research, has become flavour of the month. Not only is the budget of the National Health and Medical Research Council to be doubled over the next five years, but money has been spent on setting up a federal agency, Biotechnology Australia, to co-ordinate a national biotechnology strategy. Also, the Ralph Report has specifically targeted investment in biotechnological R&D as an important target for tax relief. In addition, the governments of at least four states—Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia—are involved in cut-throat competition to attract biotechnology-based industry and development to their states. It's a heady scene for researchers used to working in a vacuum created by government ignorance and general lack of interest.

But it is still a little ironic that November was the 50th anniversary of the first tests of the world's fifth electronic stored program computer, CSIRAC (the CSIR Automatic Computer), designed and built entirely in Australia. CSIRAC ensured that Australia, along with the US and Europe, was in on the ground floor of modern computing.

But those were the days when it was thought that only about six such computers—each with all the power of a modern electronic organiser—would service all the world's computing needs. And Australia, still strongly in the grip of cultural cringe, eventually pulled out of computer research. The funding was diverted to more 'practical' areas, like agriculture.

It's no use crying over the billions of dollars of exports lost and imports gained from that short-sighted decision. But by now we should be smart enough to support the development and marketing of the expertise we have gained in those areas where we *have* invested—mine engineering, remote sensing, dryland farming, landcare, pest management, communications, for example. Mining industry know-how, to take just one area, is now a billion-dollar export industry, according to the director of national awareness for the CSIRO, Julian Cribb. And Australia has the raw material to develop plenty of other such knowledge-based industries, given some nous and planning. ■

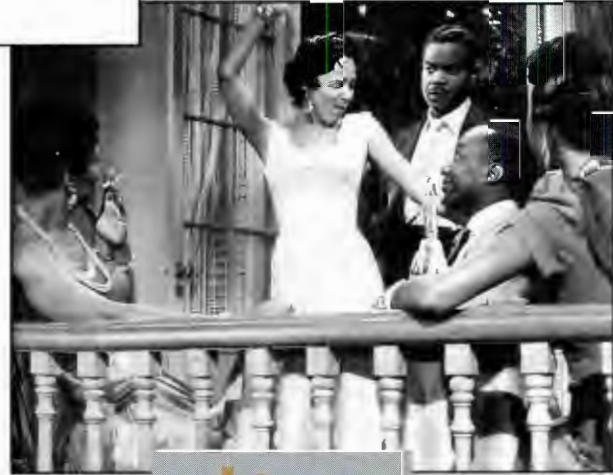
Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

Clear some room between the stockpiled tins and water bottles,

The when all else fails, crashes

suspense

1. What, at two million copies sold, was the largest-selling jazz album of all time?
2. What is an mbira?
3. Who, in what work, by whom, asserted:
*'Thy doom is nigh, pink cheek, bright eye!
Thy knell is rung, rose lip, smooth tongue!'*?
4. Name all four members of ABBA.
5. Which famous composer, at the beginning of his career, wrote under the names of G.W. Marks and Karl Würth?
6. Which Australian politician had the middle names 'Meernaa Caedwalla'?
7. What happened to the city of Oslo in 1624 and in 1925?
8. What is the highest peacetime honour one can receive in: a) Spain; b) China; c) France; d) Australia?
9. To which country was which poet referring when he said:
*'... sad relic of departed worth!
Immortal, though no more; though fallen,
great!'*?
10. What does 'Territory rig' mean?
11. It was spared by Cyclone Tracy in 1974, but fell to the developers' bulldozers in 1999. What was it?



dire



12. What is the Dean of a diplomatic corps?
13. What is the loudest living creature?
14. In which of his novels did Evelyn Waugh offer an 'Alternative Ending'?
15. What were James Joyce's middle names?
16. What figure of speech are we using when we say 'the Crown', meaning the monarchy, or 'the pen' for writing?
17. In which Chinese province did The Long March begin, and in which province did it end?
18. What name did the Turkish revolutionary leader, Mustapha Kemal, choose for himself?
19. Who was the real singing/speaking voice behind a) Deborah Kerr in *The King and I*; b) Dorothy Dandridge in *Carmen Jones*?; c) Darth Vader in *Star Wars*?
20. In which sport do you find a) the death spiral; b) the zadnik?
21. Who 'yammered metaphysics with Abramowitz'?
22. Identify the six novels and one autobiography whose first lines are given here (NB: first lines of prologues are *not* counted as the true first line):
a) "The Bottoms" succeeded to "Hell Row."
b) 'It really begins with the wedding—the Boxing Day Chris got married—because that was the day I decided to *do* something about Ingrid Rothwell besides gawp at her like a lovesick cow or something whenever she came in sight.'

precipice

apocalyp

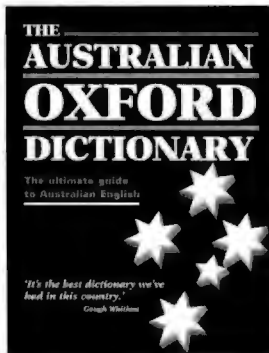
gather your surviving friends, light a candle and tackle and blacks out Summer Quiz

angst

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Please include your
name, address and
telephone number.
Winner and
answers in our
March 2000 issue.

27. What is the difference between a cardinal number and an ordinal number?
28. What did Wynkyn de Worde and Johannes Gutenberg have in common?
29. What do Lorenzo de' Medici, Niccolò Machiavelli, Fra Filippo Lippi and Vasco da Gama have in common?
30. Name the four *varna* or broad classes of Indian society.
31. Which ancient country lay between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates?
32. Who is the patron saint of all Europe?
33. Who were the two founders of Method Acting?
34. Why did Joseph Asscher need all his courage and skill on February 10, 1908?
35. Who was the first person to break the sound barrier and when was it achieved?
36. In October 1999, a baby was declared the six billionth human inhabitant. When was the five billionth baby born?
37. Michael Milken and Ivan Boesky were famous (or infamous) for what?
38. What were Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker notable for?
39. What did Laurence Olivier, Samuel Beckett, Daphne du Maurier, Georges Simenon and Beatrice Lillie do in 1989?
40. What is the world's busiest airport?

c) 'It all began in 1949, on the kind of spring day that reminds you of winter.'

d) 'It was love at first sight.'

e) 'Now, what I want is, Facts.'

f) 'Standing before the kitchen sink and regarding the bright brass faucets that gleamed so far away, each with a bead of water at its nose, slowly swelling, falling, David again became aware that this world had been created without thought of him.'

g) 'It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, mid October, with the sun not shining and a look of hard wet rain in the clearness of the foothills.'

23. What, in humans, is a) the epidermis; and b) the epididymis?
24. Forgetting Toyota entirely, define a) a corolla; b) a corona.
25. Which two US physicists discovered cosmic background radiation in 1965?
26. If the number of chromosomes in an organism determined how clever it was, how would humans rate in regard to a) a pea; b) a potato; c) a crayfish?

breakdown



oblivion

se

Language is only the first hurdle when you're trying to understand a culture, as Mark Deasey discovered, in Laos.



W Lao learning curve

WHEN I WAS PRESENTED to my Lao language teacher, the abbot at the pagoda down the road from the office, an appropriate gift was required, so my colleagues filled a small rattan basket with bags of coffee and sugar, tins of condensed milk, and a jar of Ovaltine, the whole trimmed with pink ribbon, and we made our way to his room in the barracks-like dormitory building. Proper reverence was made, and he then looked up from the *Pasason* (The People) newspaper and heard our request.

Lessons took place in the *sim*, the central building of the compound. A large wooden structure on stilts and open to the air on three sides, it served as sanctuary, schoolroom, meeting hall, refectory and sometimes dormitory. Sleeping mats were spread out on either side of the platform holding the Buddha images, and above them were shelves of schoolbooks. Spare robes hung over the railings, and chests, baskets and cooking paraphernalia stood in the corners.

In Laos as in other Buddhist countries in South East Asia, the pagoda and the monkhood offer boys from poorer families and remote villages their best or only chance of an education, and most of the monks in this pagoda were boys from eight to their late teens. My first lessons especially aroused considerable interest, and if I glanced away from the whiteboard or the textbook, it would be to see that a semicircle of orange-robed figures had silently formed behind me. At any mistake I made, brown fingers would shoot forward to point at my copy book, with soft exclamations of 'bo teuk!'—that's not right.

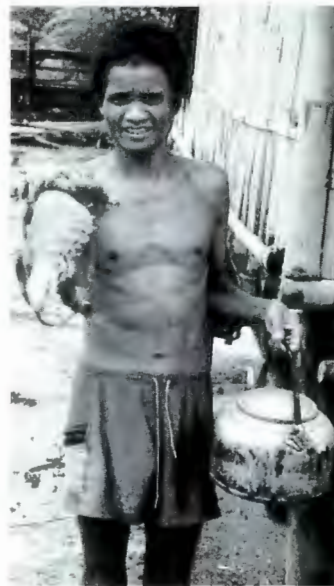
My first lesson of the day was mid-morning, a lull for many following

pre-dawn prayers and meditation, the begging rounds and breakfast. A lot of the boys would sit or sprawl on mats conning lessons; others would be about preparing the second and final meal of the day, taken around 11. The cooking fires were between the stilts of the building, and occasionally smoke would drift up between the floorboards at our feet. At times my teacher would pause to call one of the boys to chase out the chickens that had strayed into the *sim*. The day was often punctuated with loud detonations from the surrounding hills, as the UXO team (Unexploded Ordinance) tackled some of the legacy of US bombing; more bombs were dropped on Laos than on all of Japan in World War II, and at the present rate, it is estimated it will take more than a century to clear them. A rocket lies half-buried in the grounds of our own office here, under a protective cover of thorn bushes, and explosions have recently become so commonplace in Saravan that not even the turkeys and pigs wandering in the yard around the *sim* are startled by them.

Learning and teaching Lao as a foreign language presents problems all its own. It's the official language of one country of four-and-a-half million people, and the first language of little more than half of them. (Though in fact it is also the spoken language of much of

north-east Thailand). There's not really a definitive Lao-English dictionary, and successive governments have changed a lot of official and technical vocabulary. Not a huge amount is printed in Lao, and Laotians approaching technical or other texts in English or French or other languages of extensive publication often have recourse to Thai bilingual dictionaries; or—in the case of those trained in the Soviet bloc in the '70s and '80s—Russian or German or Bulgarian resources. In the villages, a colleague who studied agronomy in Leipzig interprets for me from Lao to German.

FOR LESSONS, my main text was the second-grade reader. It's in fact a very well-structured book, teaching a lot about health and sanitation as well as vocabulary and syntax. On the day half the dignitaries of the town were arriving for a major meeting, I was stumbling my way aloud through the story of 'The Little Fish Who Didn't Listen to His Mother' (he got caught and cooked). It was the end of the wet season and beginning of the harvest, a time of many festivals and ceremonies, and there were occasional pauses in lessons as individuals and committees came to discuss details and preparations with the abbot. All would make reverence, and crouch or sit to speak to him; women would keep



Goanna for dinner? Patu village, Ta Oy district, Saravan, Laos.
Top: Abandoned tank, Don Sar Village, on the edge of the Bolovens Plateau, southern Laos.

clear physical distance; but the ensuing discussion invariably seemed genial and informal on both sides.

Buddhism has penetrated only patchily into the higher hills and forests, inhabited by the minorities who mostly pre-date the arrival of the lowland Lao. In Padu village, among the Ta Oy people, the gathering place for meeting and ritual is a clearing in the primeval forest in which the five constituent hamlets are scattered. In the headman's house, where we were entertained, vessels hung in each corner to host the spirits protecting the house and family, and carved posts between the houses marked the spots where buffalo are tethered for ritual slaughter at New Year.

Communities like this are easily characterised as 'primitive' or, only slightly better, 'hill tribes', but the Ta Oy people seem to have a far wider knowledge of the world outside than many of those closer to both the tarmac and information highways. This is the heart of the Ho Chi Minh Trail country, and many of the older men had both military and general education in Vietnamese cities.

Since the war, the dearth of arable land here has forced many families to go in search of seasonal work in the coffee plantations of the Bolovens Plateau, or on the Mekong plain and, unusually for the minority areas, both women and men speak Lao fluently. Hospitality is very readily offered, but in the case of food, is best declined, as most families live most of the year on the edge of hunger. In the end, though, our hosts insisted on supplementing the food we had brought ourselves with a vast bowl of bamboo shoots, freshly cut in the forest.

The forest yields much else besides; as we walked up to the newly cleared rice fields, the first project we'd supported in this area, we passed one inhabitant holding something like a small goanna, which would make its way to the pot by nightfall. A little further on stood a father holding a small child in a sling; around the two-year-old's ankle was a string of silver coins, which on closer inspection, showed the legend '*Indochine Française, 1938*'. ■

Mark Deasey is a Community Aid Abroad Program Co-ordinator.

After Twenty Years

It's hard work, maintaining a rainbow.

Flies, for instance, who would have costed-in those little irritating familiars?
Though everyone knows (after the event) that they invade anything
and a rainbow isn't exempt—
it's a free slide.

Then there is the business of reflections.
The double-rainbow glimpsed then and now
and remembered back from the best positions—
on Mount Agung, or that time down the canyon
of 42nd Street with the air so suddenly clean
and rinsed as if we were not only forgiven
but blessed.
Reflections, though, have poison tips
to their arrows.

The domestic rainbow is wonderful enough
perhaps even for the twentieth time
but comes that moment when the knives tear in
screaming 'Rainbow! Rainbow outside!'
and you don't shrug
but you don't move either.
That very evening snails consume your lettuce
and your favourite CD goes silent,
the wonderful Bogart video skitters out of control
and it is your own hair clogging the downpipe.

Rainbows outlive you, and that's a problem,
for all their suddenness and their unfamiliarity.
It is true, certain waterfalls project rainbows
like a light switch, but nobody yet
has patented the supermarket model
or even the boutique variety.
Like marriage, rainbows prepare for a long haul
and many silences. Like silence
they remind you of hard work. And perhaps
you do go outside, after all, brushing away flies.

Thomas Shapcott

Unevensong

I was inside, listening to the grass
being mowed. The terrier was
attaching itself to the velvet pouffe.
Someone dropped by. The clock chimed
quarterly. Other things happened.
Toast & radio mainly, I think

though

who can be sure in times such as these?
Then the mail arrived. A postcard from
the university, reading 'am having fun.
You wouldn't understand'

& it was then that it all came back to me.
This morning [at least, I think today]
brushing my teeth I felt a rattle. Then
quite a twinge. Another tooth gone?
Something in my mouth. Loose. It came
out. It was in a twin-set, it had luggage &

it was my brain

saying [after I'd yelled 'hey! I need you'
just like a bad script] 'yeah well, talk is
cheap baby. I'm outta here!' It left me then
& now, well here I am. Sorry. I do this

—where did you say you were from again?

Dan Disney



Gravity Moment

Looks like I've fallen down a hole
straight through the middle of the earth.
There are impossibilities everywhere. Like

what's the longest piece of rope?
where's the nearest McDonald's? what speed
do feet catch fire? It's terrifying, I tell you.

Which way's out, & who forgot the exit signs?
I got time for the deep questions. Why'd
I wag so much Physics? where's north

from the guts of the earth? did the dog & the roses
& my aunt get fed? what idiot thought
to put a hole here in the first place? did they

find gold or hell? maybe a god? maybe not.
Anyway. Up & down. It's one & the same really
when you can move towards the light like this.

Dan Disney

Iran: divided revolution



*There are
no easy
questions,
no easy
answers in
today's Iran.
Anthony Ham
reports.*

IN MID 1997, I attended a refugee determination interview alongside Ali, an Iranian asylum seeker. The interview was proceeding well. Ali's candid answers to difficult questions had helped him over the bar of suspicion which, increasingly, all asylum seekers were being asked to clear.

With that hurdle of credibility successfully passed, the interviewer turned her attention to Ali's fears of future persecution upon return to Iran: were they well-founded? On the evidence, there was little reason to doubt their veracity. Ali belonged to a family of reformers known to the Iranian Government. He had deserted his government post after suspicion fell upon him for 'un-Islamic' comments in the workplace. And he had secret, albeit indirect, connections to the Mujahedin

based in Iraq. Ali had a strong case for international protection.

The interviewer seemed to be satisfied, except for one nagging factor—the landslide election in Iran a few weeks before of President Mohammad Khatami. Didn't Khatami's election prove that democracy existed in Iran, that the people were free to exercise their political voice without fear of recrimination? Didn't President Khatami's rise demonstrate that things were now different in Iran, that the era of repression was effectively over? Didn't it all mean that it would now be safe for Ali to return to Iran?

Ali's replies were immediate and simple.

'We are all pleased that President Khatami has been elected. We hope for the future. But if you think that this changes everything and that the road

ahead is easy ... to say such things shows that you know nothing about Iran.'

More than two years later, Ali's words have proven prescient on both fronts: the signs of hope are many; the road ahead remains difficult.

With international attention focused overwhelmingly on the Israel–Palestine axis, events in Iran—which re-enact in microcosm the struggle for the future of the Middle East—are largely ignored, just as they were in the late 1970s.

When the students of the Islamic Revolution thrust Iran into the international spotlight in 1978, Iran became a byword for fanaticism, for religious fundamentalism and for the shadowy threats which the mullahs posed to the West. The taking of hostages at the American embassy, the sponsorship of international terrorism, the Iran–Iraq

war, and the involvement of the Iranian Government in the kidnapping of Westerners in Beirut all seemed to confirm this reputation.

As the West finally came to see beyond the paralysing parameters of its own angst, beyond the sense of its betrayal by a former ally, the Western media began to document the imposition of strict moral, social and political codes upon Iranians themselves, particularly Iranian women. The belated discovery that the Iranians had been the ones who had borne the brunt of the persecution, long after the last Western hostages had gone home, did little to explain the complex historical causes of the revolutionary phenomenon.

The problem was not that these stories were reported. Instead, the problem was that these were the *only* stories that were reported. The subtlety of the struggle within Iranian society, between the secular-nationalist forces and the clergy, was missed entirely.

This struggle lies at the centre of Iranian history. In the same way that the Islamic Revolution caught many analysts by surprise, failure to trace the lineage of this struggle for power continues to blind many to the reasons why the reform movement in Iran will ultimately succeed or fail.

IN THE 1970s, it came as a major surprise to many in the West that anyone would want to overthrow the Shah. Remembering his program of modernisation, the Americans in particular imagined that because *they* loved his government, so too must the Iranian people.

Determined to transform Iran from what he considered was an old-fashioned and peasant society into a modern Western-style state, the Shah launched an ambitious program known as the White Revolution. Increasing oil revenues were

directed towards ending feudalism, modernising the country's industries, and implementing widespread literacy programs.

These were noble aims.

But what was achieved came at the expense of social cohesion, and the consequence was that the country became increasingly polarised. The Shah ruled his subjects repressively. In particular, the power of the Shi'a clergy was severely circumscribed. Because

Iran was a key Western ally, the excesses of the brutal secret police, the SAVAK, were rarely reported, even as Shi'a clerics and political opponents alike were being persecuted. Further, although land reform was championed as a policy benefiting the poor, it resulted in the richest families controlling most of Iranian property.

Repression acted as a substitute for consultation, and bred considerable resentment among Iran's powerful Shi'a religious establishment. As a result of his vocal opposition to reforms over the property rights of the clergy and the emancipation of women, the Ayatollah Khomeini was exiled to Turkey and then Iraq in the 1960s. Unrest among students who felt that the Shah's reforms had not gone far enough, simmered alongside the frustrations of Shi'a clerics seeking an Islamic Government. The Shah's agents responded to both with renewed repression.

And thus was the cycle of alienation enacted. Two key historical power bases

of Iranian society—the students, and the Shi'a clergy—had been disenfranchised from a government which had come to speak only for its own narrow interests.

It should therefore have been no surprise at all when the students and the

clergy united in a marriage of convenience to overthrow the Shah. Equally, the venom with which the revolution was launched was not some primal Islamic scream, but an outpouring of resentment for decades of repression.

Traced to its primary historical causes, the Islamic Revolution made perfect political sense. Just as political and religious oppression in Israel, Syria and Egypt have all fostered resentful subjects, many of whom have turned to Islam in search of a political voice, so too in Iran was the Revolution a direct consequence of persecutory policies over the preceding decades.

While the West was concentrating all its attention on the threat posed to its own interests, arguably far more frightened were other dictatorships in the region who saw in Tehran the portents of their own demise. Indeed, a major cause of the Iran-Iraq War was Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's fear that his own majority Shi'a population would seek to emulate the revolutionary tendencies of their co-religionists across the border.

With the end of the Iran-Iraq War in August 1988, and the death of the Ayatollah Khomeini in June 1989, Iran largely disappeared from Western view. News stories and strategic priorities shifted elsewhere. In the meantime, the images of revolutionary Iran remained—women veiled in the thick, black *chador*, frenzied crowds chanting '*Marg Bar Anrika*' (Death to America). These images fed the popular perception that Iran is a country rooted in a fundamentalist and archaic past, hostile to the outside world.

The reality is rather different.

The second decade of the Revolution in Iran has not been characterised by a preservation of the status quo. Rather, the political culture of Iran is one of the most dynamic in all the Middle East.

When students at Tehran University began to protest in July 1999 over the closure of *Salam*, a pro-Khatami newspaper, their actions were the culmination of ten years of struggle. It had been a long journey from the incremental changes, instituted by the cautious President Hashemi Rafsanjani in the early 1990s, to the more far-reaching transformation envisaged by President Khatami, under whom the rate of change has accelerated dramatically.

Across the Middle East, governments and opposition movements are watching Iran with interest, carefully monitoring who triumphs in the battle between secular and Islamic forces, between civil and clerical society, and between a burgeoning young population and an old guard whose conflicts belong to yesterday.



Newspapers began to proliferate (one recent count identified 26 national papers), championing all sides of a newly unleashed political debate. Iran's reform-minded current government has begun to repair its relationships with the West, pushing a more moderate Foreign Policy line, making overtures to the USA, and effectively nullifying the bounty placed on the head of Salman Rushdie. Khatami himself was a symbol of the hesitant liberalisation which had already taken place. That the students protested at all would have been inconceivable a decade before.

PITLED AGAINST these agents of reform are the conservative clergy. They have sought, wherever possible, to keep a tight rein on the revolution's progress, promoting themselves as the rightful guardians and interpreters of Islamic orthodoxy, as the keepers of the revolutionary heritage. Their continued control over all levels of the judiciary, military and intelligence apparatus has resulted in more than a thousand students being imprisoned. Some have been sentenced to death in a calculated backlash against the reformers.

An added cause of Iran's currently fluid state is that the lines of control are no longer quite so demarcated. The students—in many ways the icons of the revolution—have proven themselves respectful of the revolution, yet also restless for change.

Many of the heroes of the revolution have also begun to call for reform. Ibrahim Asgharzadeh—a primary instigator and spokesman of the 'Students Following the Imam's Line' (the group responsible for storming the American Embassy in Tehran)—recently addressed a student rally with these words:

Our dealings with the hostages were not directed against the American people, and not even against the hostages themselves. Today we invite all the hostages to return to Iran, as our guests. We have a new language for the new world. We defend human rights. And we'll try to make Islam such that it won't contradict democracy.

Similarly, Iran's most prominent dissident cleric is Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who has been

under house arrest since 1997 for challenging the country's supreme leader and calling for reform. Montazeri—who, like Asgharzadeh, has impeccable revolutionary credentials—was once viewed as the likely successor to Khomeini.

Once stalwarts of the Revolution, these men are now the touchstones of the struggles within Iran, between civil and religious society, between hardline conservative revolutionaries and the next generation of reformers. Their fate represents nothing less than the struggle for the soul of the country, a struggle which has taken place on battlegrounds which are as old as Iran itself—students restless for change, the clergy jealously guarding its control over key institutions of power, moderates seeking tentatively to span the divide.

Added into this mix is the sophisticated middle class who came to ascendancy under the Shah. Never friends of a revolution which destroyed their influence, and hit particularly hard by draconian dress codes and social restrictions, these elites joined the Baha'is, Christians and perceived political opponents in a mass emigration from the country. In the spirit of the new freedom, many are now returning, impatient for change.

This is the complex context within which future developments within Iran must be viewed. Cycles of liberalisation and conservative backlash presently co-exist in a climate of mutual suspicion, as three key sectors of Iranian society jostle for the right to determine Iran's future direction. The parliamentary elections in February are likely to be the next catalyst for conflict.

Events in Iran also have significant implications for trends further afield in the Middle East. While Western commentators were describing the first Islamic Revolution as a regression to the past, Arab and Iranian commentators

were identifying the conflict as the battleground of the future of the Middle East. Little has changed. Across the Middle

East, governments and opposition movements are watching Iran with interest, carefully monitoring who triumphs in the battle between secular and Islamic forces, between civil and clerical society, and between a burgeoning young population and an old guard whose conflicts belong to yesterday. These are the issues with which all states in the Middle East are struggling, and typically it is in Iran that the debate is most robust.

The best indicator of how these tensions will be resolved perhaps lies in the unarguable facts of Iran's demographic revolution—65 per cent of the population is under 25, and within 10 years, a majority of Iran's voters will be under 30. These age-groups are the primary support bases of President Mohammad Khatami and his band of reformers. Increasingly unburdened by the need to claim a revolutionary heritage, or remain

true to the principles of their parents' era, Iranian youth may be the ones to deliver the next revolution, which, like the one before it, will have been a long time in the making.

In the meantime, Ali prefers to stay safe in Australia, just in case. ■

Anthony Ham is a Melbourne-based writer specialising in the culture and politics of the Middle East.

Photograph of Iranian woman and Ayatollah Khomeini is from Fielding's The World's Most Dangerous Places by Robert Young Pelton with Coskun Aral and Wink Dulles, published by Fielding Worldwide Inc., California, 1998. Dangerous Places has some quite useful information. For example, what kind of vaccinations are required before travelling; what not to take (drugs) and what to expect in the way of departure tax.



With international attention focused overwhelmingly on the Israel–Palestine axis, events in Iran—which re-enact in microcosm the struggle for the future of the Middle East—are largely ignored, just as they were in the late 1970s.

At the beginning of the century, Australia developed the idea of the basic wage. At the end of the century, we're back where we started, struggling with definitions of work, welfare and equity. **Brian Howe** and **Anthony O'Donnell** argue that the Government has not come to grips with new social realities.

All work and no play?

AFTER SEVERAL FALSE STARTS, the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Jocelyn Newman, has initiated what she describes as a major review of the welfare system.

Addressing the National Press Club at the end of September 1999, the Minister announced the establishment of a high-level reference group which is expected to produce a Discussion Paper early this year which will inform a government White Paper in June.

Yet the review seems more like yesterday's agenda than a blueprint for the future, more about making social security increasingly conditional than about winning public support for a fresh approach to the problems of unemployment and underemployment. These are problems that require a whole-of-government approach, not another limited examination of welfare dependency.

The Minister spruiked the Review with the claim that it would provide the 'basis for the most far-reaching and focused analysis of welfare dependency ever conducted in this century'. This seems an ambitious claim. It is difficult to see how a Discussion Paper delivered three months after its announcement could produce the depth and breadth of research of, say, the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty chaired by Professor Ronald Henderson in the 1970s, or Professor Bettina Cass' Social Security Review in the second half of the 1980s.

More to the point, the limited terms of reference announced for the Inquiry—focusing on 'dependency', incentives, 'mutual obligation' and financial sustainability—close off analysis of the deeper structural changes transforming Australian life. An understanding of these changes should inform any serious rethinking of our welfare state. The narrowness of the terms is likely to prove as

frustrating for the Minister's reference group as it is for those in the community who wish to build an intelligent welfare state to take us into the next century.

Given the fairly austere nature of Australia's social security safety net, being dependent on welfare—whether you are unemployed, disabled, or bringing up kids alone—often means doing it hard. Yet there is precious little in the government's discussion paper about hardship or poverty. Rather, reading through the Minister's speech, it is clear that 'dependency' doesn't just mean being poor. When the Minister talks about welfare dependency in the case of families, it is linked with domestic violence, drug use, poor relationship skills. When she talks about dependency among youth it signifies an attitude problem, a moral failure to cultivate a proper work ethic.

These are, at root, North American meanings, shorn of their more explicit racial inflection, and exported around the world by various writers and think-tanks. Such meanings resonate for a growing Australian cohort who see themselves as 'working poor' and who feel alienated from an income support system that has been increasingly aimed at the least well-off and those not in work. These meanings now seem to be driving current debate within the government, within sections of the Labor Party and among some Indigenous leaders. The result is that the welfare state is seen overwhelmingly as a corrupting influence—as Peter Saunders (of the UNSW Social Policy Research Centre) characterises this attitude, welfare becomes 'bad for those who receive it, bad for those who have to pay for it and bad for the economy overall'.

The principal problem any government needs to address is not the corrupting influence of the welfare

state but the realities of poverty, inequality, hardship and insecurity as Australian working life and family life undergo massive transformation. For nearly three decades after the Second World War the Australian welfare state operated in a specific economic and social environment. The established post-Federation structures of economic 'defence'—tariff protection and centralised wage fixing—were supplemented by a commitment to full employment. It was a model based on quite specific assumptions about working life and social relations, especially the desirability of

Recent studies show that only just over one third of the labour force now work standard hours, with another third working longer than standard hours, nearly a quarter working only part-time and around eight per cent not working at all. A fundamental shift in gender relations has also occurred. The shift is clearly seen in the increasing labour force participation of women, especially middle-class married women, a trend that has been consistent regardless of the underlying business cycle or changes in women's wage relativities.



uninterrupted full-time paid employment for men and married women's full-time unpaid work in the home.

What has changed in the past quarter of a century is not just the 'big picture' of macro-economic policy, but also the nature of daily life. Whereas the post-war social settlement sustained an increasing homogenisation of working life, we are now witnessing an increasing diversification of both working time and employment relationships. There has been a major growth in non-standard employment arrangements, in particular casual employment, fixed-term employment and contractor-based employment.

Taken together, the shifts in gender relations and employment arrangements have radically altered the typical relation between home and work and have made households' income trajectories increasingly diverse. Paid work at the household level has intensified among people of workforce age. That is, the average number of paid workers per family has increased and the average family is working longer hours to maintain its standard of living. Household needs during these working years have increased, as people make superannuation contributions, pay off HECS debts, meet childcare costs or support children

Unemployed?
At leisure?
Between jobs?
The old stereotypes
no longer fit the
picture.
Photograph by
Bill Thomas.

in higher education at home, and meet mortgage repayments in a time of declining housing affordability. But what we now understand by 'workforce age' has also changed as people stay in



The principal problem any government needs to address is not the corrupting influence of the welfare state but the realities of poverty, inequality, hardship and insecurity as Australian working life and family life undergo massive transformation.

education longer and retire earlier. The extent of full-time paid work over the life course has shrunk and full-time work for men—and hence high incomes—is now concentrated in a relatively short period between the ages 35 to 55.

UNDER THESE CONDITIONS of work intensification, less work-intensive families are increasingly marginalised. Australia appears to be faced with a growing gulf between 'employment rich' and 'employment poor' households, a gulf which now has regional and spatial aspects as well as social. Recent experience shows that jobs growth alone cannot address the marginalisation of large numbers of people of workforce age nor bring down welfare caseloads. The government's initial discussion paper quotes figures that show the proportion of people of workforce age in receipt of social security has grown and remained high, even while the numbers of officially unemployed have fallen by nearly three percentage points since the early 1990s. In other words, the problem appears to be not a lack of jobs but a lack of good, waged, full-time jobs that allow for economic self-sufficiency. A reduced unemployment rate may in fact mask the emergence of other forms of workforce divisions. Recently evaluating the outcomes of labour market deregulation in Australia, academics Iain Campbell and Peter Brosnan conclude that 'deprivation can no longer be seen as confined to the sphere of unemployment but, in fact, extends deep into the sphere of employment'.

We have already mentioned some of these forms of deprivation, in particular the growth in casual and part-time employment and work across unsocial or unpredictable hours. Net figures probably don't reveal the importance of these sorts of jobs in terms of the direction and nature of labour market flows. These jobs, Campbell and Brosnan point out, sweep up students and married women seeking additional household income, that is, those workers who make

up the flow between employment and 'not in the labour force' which complicates any reading of the monthly unemployment figures. Yet the new casual and part-time employment is also a destination for a disproportionate share of the unemployed and other welfare beneficiaries. And there is no guarantee that such jobs lead to better jobs, because earnings mobility at the bottom of the labour market appears fairly limited. A recent OECD study concluded that in the US labour market the predominant flow seems to be between no-pay and low-pay, and back again.

Campbell and Brosnan discern the consolidation of new patterns of intermittent employment as people move between periods of unemployment, short-term or low-paid employment, participation in government-sponsored schemes and periods of withdrawal from the labour force. For many, working life now consists of a variety of jobs and changing employment status throughout life, and the management of transitions between them. The old dichotomy that seems to inform Senator Newman's concerns—that of 'welfare' versus 'work'—is clearly no longer sustainable. Yet it is this dichotomy that still seems to drive the ongoing concern with the role that economic rewards and incentives play in people's willingness to leave benefits for paid work.

The post-war incentive structure that nearly always made paid work more attractive than social security benefits has unravelled, not because the welfare system has become incredibly generous or 'soft' but because the other side of the equation—work for wages—has fundamentally altered. Work is now more likely to be low-paid, part-time or insecure. At the same time, economic views of household 'incentives' tend to be unhelpful and one-dimensional. The cultural and psychological cachet that attaches to paid work means many people prefer work regardless of the 'marginal utility' of that work over welfare benefits. People's reference point for whether work 'pays' is not so much the competing level of welfare benefits but their estimation of household needs. Similarly, security of income for the low-income household can be as important as the level, so benefits can sometimes be a better option than work which pays marginally more but is precarious and temporary. Perhaps most important are people's obligations to those for whom they care. For half the population—women—the choice often presented is not between 'work' and welfare-funded 'leisure' but a three-way choice between paid work, unpaid work and leisure.

IT IS UNCLEAR how the government will resolve this dilemma, but in many families the tension between 'caring' work—looking after family—and paid work will always be acute. There has been some ambivalence over the past 15 years as to whether sole parents—predominantly women—should be workers or homemakers. This has generally been resolved by

setting a 'cut-off' age for the youngest child at which point the parent leaves Parenting Payment and enters the labour force. Currently that age is 16, but the government has flagged reducing it to 12 or 'work testing' sole parents of older children. Obviously it becomes increasingly difficult for a government to justify payments to sole parents who are looking after high school children when many married parents of older children feel they have no choice about going out to work and yet are offered no government support to be full-time homemakers. In fact, broadly similar proportions of women in both two-parent and one-parent families increase their paid work as their children get older. Yet many of these married women are accessing part-time, low-wage work, viable only because there is another wage in the household, and made easier because there is some sharing—or potential for sharing—of domestic duties with a partner. But it is another thing entirely to impose a work test on sole parents on the presumption that accessing such employment can by itself provide an escape route from poverty for someone bringing up children alone.

This again suggests that to frame the question as whether sole parents should be 'workers' or 'homemakers' misses the point. Many sole parents are already both, and their escape from poverty is predicated on both welfare *and* work, along with the provision of services such as childcare and training. Furthermore, receipt of Parenting Payment under these circumstances is usually a transitional episode. Few, if any, sole parents draw Parenting Payment for the full 16 years of their child's upbringing. The median duration of receipt for sole parents is around three years and the vast bulk of recipients are separated and divorced parents (*not* never-married mothers, let alone teenage mothers) who draw the payment for a short period before repartnering or entering full-time work.

SIMILARLY, the simplistic division that the government likes to make between 'active' and 'passive' welfare support misses this point. Department of Family and Community Services research shows that nearly 60 per cent of workforce-age social security recipients engage in some form of labour market activity, such as paid work, self-employment or job search. Around 60 per cent also engage in providing care for children or adults with a disability or unpaid community work. And one third engaged in both these spheres of economic and social activity.

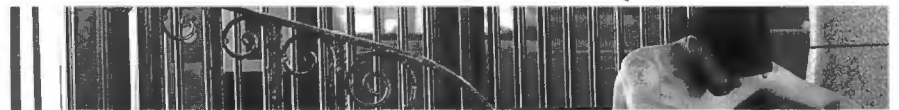
This really shouldn't surprise us. Many payments in the social security system have *always* been conditional on claimants undertaking some form of activity: job search, childcare, care for older adults. Under the Labor Government these obligations were supplemented with training programs for the long-term unemployed or packages for the disabled and sole parents, establishing important links between

income security and those other resources people need to seize opportunities in an increasingly discriminating labour market. Similarly, people don't automatically lose the desire to participate in economic and social life merely because they receive a government benefit. The issue is how the integration of these forms of activity and participation are recognised and validated by the government. The reality of social life in Australia is that over the course of life people will move among a variety of employment statuses and a variety of activities. A vital role for the welfare state is to help people manage these transitions rather than allow them to become occasions for poverty and diminished life chances.

Clearly the wrong question has been given to the government's reference group. Recently the theologian Hans Küng has argued that the issue of rights and responsibilities needs to be debated as part of a wider discussion on the meaning of citizenship, rather than used to impose a new moralism on the neediest members of our community. Then we could speak of the obligations of the very wealthy along with the rights of the poorest. In the meantime, if the

'Deprivation can no longer be seen as confined to the sphere of unemployment but, in fact, extends deep into the sphere of employment'

— Iain Campbell and Peter Brosnan



pressing issue is the very large number of Australians who are not working or are underemployed, then discussion should proceed on the basis of an inquiry no less far-reaching than the Henderson Commission of the early 1970s. If that were the case, the realities being faced by Australian households as they negotiate new patterns of working and family life would become central rather than being relegated to a side issue of increased welfare dependency. ■

Brian Howe and Anthony O'Donnell, Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne.

Brian Howe, with Associate Professor Linda Hancock, is undertaking a major research project, 'Towards a New Social Settlement'. The project aims to develop a framework for rethinking the future of the welfare state in Australia, with an emphasis on labour market and household change. The project is funded by the Australian Research Council, and involves research partnerships with the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Committee for the Economic Development of Australia.



Shedding new



THE PHOTOGRAPHS TELL ONE STORY: this is the formal architectural and institutional face of the law in one representative part of Australia, the Melbourne legal precinct. What we couldn't show were the people whom the law serves.

And for good reason. Cameras are as welcome as hand guns in the jostle of courts. Privacy matters, even when people's lives are being publicly paraded before the Bench. So in Melbourne's grand new Commonwealth Law Courts we were shepherded up and down and around by proud custodians who alternated their tour-guiding with advance security warnings murmured into lapel microphones.

But they were keen about the new way of housing the law. 'Light', they said, over and over. 'Light and access.' That is the literal and metaphorical key to the new Commonwealth building, with its 43 courtrooms and towering entrance dominated by the white periwinkle curve of the staircase that leads up to the number one courtroom.

Later, standing on the roof of the Magistrates' Court, in overarching sunlight, we watched a parking officer book our vehicle while we took in the legal panorama, from the domed and courtyarded Victorian Supreme Court, where Justice is seated but not blindfolded, across the building site that will one day be the Children's and County Courts, and all the way back to the Commonwealth Court complex, bounded by the lush Victorian expanse of the Flagstaff Gardens.

On the way back down in the lift from the roof of the Magistrates' Court we were joined by an amiable drunk who plucked at Bill's beard and asked him if he were Father Christmas. Then a young legal aid lawyer got in, carrying an armful of documents and more joy than she could contain, so she confided it to the lift at large: 'I can't sort out their personal lives, I can't fix their housing problems, I can't solve their drug problems, but I sure as hell can get them out of this legal hassle!' As we all bundled out into the foyer she was swallowed up by a whooping family who hugged her and whistled and cheered and spilled out together on to William Street.

It was more than enough consolation for the parking ticket. ■

Photographs by Bill Thomas. Text by Morag Fraser.

light on the law





6

PHOTO DETAILS, PAGES 26–29

1. The architectural structure of the law on open display in the sunlit atrium of the new Commonwealth Law Courts complex at 305 William Street, Melbourne. The building, designed by the architectural firm, Hassels, covers 35,000 square metres and contains 43 courtrooms: 25 Federal Court, 17 Family Court and one High Court. The soaring lines of the public entry space carry the eye upward and outwards, as does the massive spiral staircase (see this month's cover photograph) and the blue metal sculpture, by Robert Owen, that hatches its way up the multi-storey height of the building's interior wall. Beyond the glass is the green calm of the historic Flagstaff Gardens and, underneath the building, Flagstaff railway station.

2. The Victorian glow of the Victorian Supreme Court Library, all polished wood and calfskin volumes. Federal Court Chief Justice Michael Black AC has remarked of the 19th-century conception of the law precinct that it was a set of chambers from which the light and world were excluded. In the mahogany hush of this alcoved circular room you can understand the attraction of that chambered exclusion—for lawyers.

3. The room with a view: number one courtroom in the new Commonwealth Court complex at 305 William Street. The room is democratically flat, and the elevation of the Bench minimal. The green light flooding in from the Flagstaff Gardens is filtered through the Australian Constitution, sandblasted on the windows.

4. The witness box in one splendidly refurbished court in the Supreme Court building, set down a few levels from the Bench, and alongside the high-tech consoles and equipment which gives this Victorian courtroom a 20th-century tweak, all contained within the proper panelling.



7



5. One way of memorising the Constitution: through the window of the number one court at 305 William Street. You could, of course, be checking out the passers-by in the Flagstaff Gardens below, but who could prove it?

6 & 7. 'More light!' cried Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as he lay dying. He might have appreciated the efforts of some 20th-century architects who have combined with lawyers to bring about a change in the atmosphere of legal proceedings. Above, left, are the great lightwells of the new Commonwealth Law Courts, playing off the strong horizontals and verticals of the building. Below, left, are the illuminated angles of the staircase that dominates the entrance of the bustling Magistrates' Court on William Street, along from the new Commonwealth complex and just across from the old Supreme Court, with its classical and dignified dome.

8 & 9. For a brief period, any citizen interested in architecture or the law will be able to stand on one corner (at William and La Trobe Streets) of the Melbourne law precinct, and have an unimpeded view, from the new Commonwealth Law Courts across the empty lot that will become the Children's and County Courts, to the domed splendour of the Victorian Supreme Court.





MARK MORDUE



I KEEP THINKING about penknife marks in a tree. My initials, and those of my boyhood friends, up there in the thick grey sinews where the wind breathes and green leaves shiver.

I see those trees in my mind. At night when I'm in bed. Branches rustling out of the murk of my subconscious, shaking up the pond of sleep.

I see two trees in particular, the limbs low enough for us to climb with ease. And I keep thinking, I must go back there. Go back and see if my name is still in the branches, if the names of the others are still there too. But I never do. It's a case of one day I will, next time, I must remember, don't feel stupid about it, just do it ...



The weird thing is I drive by those trees every time I visit home (which isn't *nearly* as often as I should). Jammed as they are into a little park butted up against the side of a highway intersection. One of those motorway-excised playgrounds that gets bigger and bigger in the imagination all the while it shrinks into a cosmetic municipal reality.

It'd make quite a sight for passing motorists, a 39-year-old man monkeying around 'up there'. How would I explain it to concerned locals, the police, a psychiatric nurse sped to the scene? It'd be embarrassing, that's for sure.

Just the same way I'm embarrassed by the questions this tree-climbing urge raises in me now. Which is why I am tempted to edit such questions out of this story as immature or

undeveloped thoughts. Things to be hidden away.

But I do think, or *feel* these questions, half-formed as they might be. Like why do we stop climbing up trees to sit and talk for a while? At what point do we break such playful habits? How do we decide this is no longer a valid or useful or interesting way to behave? How does it become a part of growing up? Does a native closeness between us die when these 'habits' die? Something in us?

I guess there is a strange but compelling atavism at the heart of these thoughts. Even a respect.

Maybe that's why I empathised with Barry Lopez's essay 'Apologia', from his new book *About This Life* (Vintage/Random House). In it he describes stopping for roadkill, carrying various dead animals and birds off the road to lay beneath trees or rest in long grasses. 'I nod before I go, a ridiculous gesture, out of simple grief,' he writes. Then Lopez hops back into his car, trying to avoid the bemused gaze of other drivers on the road.

What Lopez touches on deals with our secret yearnings—and shame—in relation to nature. Our desire to respect life-forces, to commune with more transcendent possibilities in a casually desensitised world. And our clumsy, secular lack of ritual, the way we don't know how to react or listen to something instinctual within us when it calls. Lopez grieves for our broken partnership with the natural world and the spiritual ways it can feed us.

It's easy to be frightened of the sentimentality in these thoughts. And bury that sentimentality accordingly. Not to react at all. Quite often these instinctual responses are things we would do as children rather than adults.

With regard to my tree-climbing urges, I'm also aware of the nostalgia involved—the way nostalgia can act as a cancer that devalues and simplifies the past, commodifying it for easy rationalisations, sales-speak, anthems, TV shows. How memory becomes a retreat, not a guide.

But this childish trace in me is more than a nostalgic hook, a retreat. The image of trees shivering in the wind, the sense of watching where I once was as a boy, the detachment, feels colder than that.

The way an onlooker feels cold at an accident.
THIS DIVORCE, this coldness, is why these trees and penknife carvings have pulled me out of bed tonight. From sleep into writing. They've set me thinking again about the homesickness that somehow still plagues me even though I *have* arrived home after a year spent travelling the world.

Iran, India, Nepal and Turkey. Paris, London, Edinburgh and New York. It's been a huge 12 months. From coming upon a body of a boy at the foothills of the Annapurna Himalayas to underground bazaars in Iran and Calvin Klein's runway show in New York. After a year away, with so many extreme moments, the experiences begin to extinguish each other, and

you start to feel like the grotesque consumer of a life you are not really a part of any more.

At some point during such a long journey you are also likely to find that a restlessness has been cut into you. Most deeply at the journey's end.

There is of course a reaction to this. I have only been home a month to the day exactly, and already I want to set my roots down so totally and completely there is something violent about it.

It's an impatient desire. I don't want to go through any processes, least of all the grind of pulling possessions out of storage, the endless unpacking of cardboard boxes, the dust, the hayfever, the need to prune away all those things that I couldn't throw away before I left. I just want it to be done. To be over with.

The flipside of this is a desire to burn it all down.

Like that scene in *Betty Blue* where Beatrice Dalle starts throwing everything—*everything*—out of the house—'very Zen,' a deadpan neighbour observes—before the couple decides to be truly free and set fire to the place altogether. What a scene: home is burning, and the lovers are walking off happily down the highway into the night.

It's a romantic view. Fun to do for a while. But you do get tired. Desperately tired. Even Jack Kerouac had to observe within the hungry poetry of *On the Road* that 'I like too many things and get all confused and hung-up running from one falling star to another till I drop. This is the night, what it does to you. I had nothing to offer people but my own confusion.'

The great modern travel writer Bruce Chatwin suggests that we are somehow, intrinsically, nomadic at heart. That this is our primal calling. And we are always grappling with that. He almost turns this into a moral position—aesthetically, spiritually, genetically—throughout much of his writing. But we're cave dwellers too. People who love a good fire, warmth, a safe place from the endless night, the abyss of limitlessness. Even Chatwin admits there is a contradiction.

He implies that our journeys have lost the migratory structure and territorial meaning of our nomadic past. A sense of quest in travel or some reconciliation with the experiences might compensate for that. But these mission statements and reflections cannot entirely settle the contradiction. We need more than just movement, you see, we need an awareness of place.

This is the irony of 'the global village', where jet travel increasingly transforms our lifestyle and instant worldwide communication affects our headspace. We are careering through borders more than ever, faster than ever. It's no surprise people get a little lost, a touch disoriented. It's why we get so fascinated by indigenous people and their 'groundedness'.

In his book *The Songlines*, Chatwin looks at the spiritual beliefs of Aboriginal people, an intensely



complex task. His semi-fictional work involves a set of journeys through Central Australia, and is pivoted around a central section that collates scraps of wisdom and anecdotes from his travel diaries (all pushing his theory of nomadic essentialism). Mostly though it's a dialogue between the narrator and a character called Arkady:

It was during his time as a school-teacher that Arkady learned of a labyrinth of invisible pathways which meander all over Australia and are known to Europeans as 'Dreaming-tracks' or 'Songlines'; to the Aboriginals as the 'Footprints of the Ancestors' or the 'Way of the Law'...

He went on to explain how each totemic ancestor, while travelling through the country, was thought to have scattered a trail of words and musical notes along the lines of his footprints, and how these Dreaming-tracks lay over the land as 'ways' of communication between the most far-flung tribes.

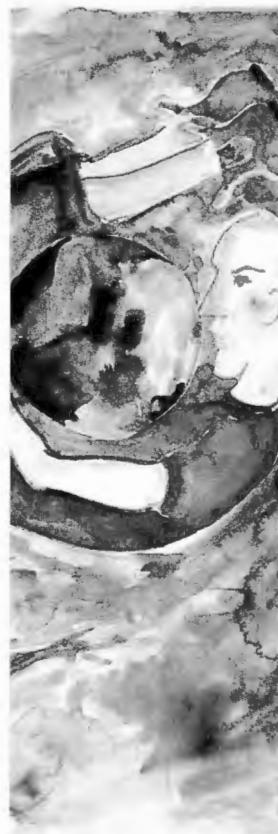
'A song', he said, 'was both a map and a direction-finder. Providing you knew the song, you could always find your way across the country.'

It was and remains the duty of Aboriginal people to keep singing these songs. In this way they 'care' for the land and keep it 'well'. Chatwin was naturally fascinated by this, as any writer and traveller would be. In a world of global movement and digital communications, this kind of belief and understanding virtually deifies the writer.

The Songlines was a masterful effort, but it did not win him friends in Central Australia's Alice Springs. Chatwin used many real people as characters, often cruelly or carelessly. He bent the truth. He suffered too from a tone of voice that suggested an Englishman who had breezed in to see things that all the locals who had been there for years couldn't. Go to Alice Springs and you'll find this book on everyone's shelf, where sooner or later people will tell you they don't like it very much. And yet it is the book that has done more than any other to introduce Australian Aboriginals and their beliefs to the world.

In his book, *Chatwin* (Harville Press/Jonathan Cape), biographer Nicholas Shakespeare quotes Nin Dutton, who travelled with Chatwin while he was researching *The Songlines*:

[Chatwin] knew the mystery was there and he didn't get it. In *The Songlines* he was desperately trying to



go to the centre. It was the most important thing for him and he realised halfway through he wasn't going to be able to do it. He was excluded. You have to *earn* mystery. It's only lovers who get there.

It was the central tragedy of his life.

IN AN ARTICLE CALLED 'A Literature of Place' for the Australian quarterly *HEAT* (#2), Barry Lopez tries to get at the root of a contemporary renaissance in what he calls 'nature writing' or 'landscape writing'.

Certainly something is happening out there in the publishing world that suggests a hunger for more than just the usual travel guides, adventure stories and journalistic analyses. People aren't just looking for maps and background detail and easy wit, they are wanting experiential guides to living, deep journeys.

Lopez draws a line from Melville's *Moby Dick* and Thoreau through to John Steinbeck and William Faulkner, to the more recent expressions of people like Gary Snyder, Peter Matthiessen and himself when discussing this 'landscape writing'.

One might well add works as varied as Cormac McCarthy's 'Border Trilogy' (*All The Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, *Cities of the Plain*) and Michael Ondaatje's *Running In The Family*—let alone the renewed interest that the *Chatwin* biography has inspired in that writer's work. You might even include musical figures like Tom Waits, with his textural fascination for farmhouse recordings and what he calls 'surrulism' (rural surrealism) in the lyrics to his new CD, *Mule Variations*, or the enduring iconic survival of a rustic rock 'n' roll figure like Neil Young. A director like *The Thin Red Line's* Terrence Malick similarly taps into a natural mysticism.

People are looking for some kind of ground.

In 'A Literature of Place', Lopez specifically notes three qualities that indigenous peoples have passed on to him in his travels as a writer:

Over time I have come to think of these three qualities—paying intimate attention [to a place]; a *storied* relation to a place rather than a solely sensory awareness of it; and living in some sort of ethical unity with a place ... as a fundamental human defense against loneliness. If you're intimate with a place, a place with whose history you're familiar, and you

establish an ethical conversation with it, the implication that follows is this: the place knows you're there. It feels you. You will not be forgotten, cut off, abandoned.

This is what travel should teach us, how to find home, how to respect it. All the while it can also displace you from it—sometimes forever. For a writer this tension is deepened by the need to explicate such perceptions and emotions.

You begin to question where your voice is coming from. In my year's journey I felt all the dilemmas of a Western mind sliding across the surface of other cultures and places, not quite penetrating them, yet somehow influenced: 'travel' as a way of getting lost in the world to rediscover oneself again.

I was aware of the colonial taint beneath this adventure. And strangely affected by the greater culture shock I experienced in the Western cities where things were familiar, yet subtly different from what I knew as an Australian. I was not English, I was not American. And yet a part of me was mediated and shaped by both these countries.

NOT TOO LONG BEFORE arriving home in Australia, I had a wild night out on the town in New York. A Chelsea Hotel kinda night.

I won't say how I managed it, but I ended up dancing around tables in one of the rooms with Abel Ferrara, the director of *Bad Lieutenant*, and Peta Wilson, the Australian star of TV's *La Femme Nikita*. Ferrara played very bad air guitar to Jimi Hendrix's *Voodoo Chile*, while Wilson and about a dozen other people went berserk. Gotta tell you, I was enjoying myself.

Later on, at dawn, I crawled up out of the downtown subway. I felt hungover, vulnerable, easily permeated, but I was lucky. I caught the faintest smell of wet stone warmed by the underground trainline. It made me think of summer in Australia, this rained-on pavement and the evaporating moisture, the gritty, sweet warmth of it in a light breeze in midwinter New York.

I realised then and there that I needed to go home for a while. The same way I later walked through Central Park and the smell of cut grass reminded me of being eight years old and mowing my grandmother's lawns. Time to go home, the cut grass and the wet pavement seemed to be telling me, time to go home.

So I leave New York for a while to try and reorient myself back in Australia. To experience where I've come from and resettle somehow *within* myself. That's the real issue: to settle within.

As human beings, we are made up of curious roots. Elemental things. A collection of qualities it is easy to overlook when one lives in a city as big as New York. Citizens of 'the Big Apple' might get it, though, from the smell of coffee or the sound of ice under their feet, the wet feeling of snow and how it tastes on their lips, a bad pizza on 8th Avenue, the warm air of a subway descent: New York, winter, home.

I can't really speak at that depth. New York is not my home. But now that I am away from it in Australia, winter New York has written itself into my skin, my sense of smell, my tongue. It makes me want to go back.

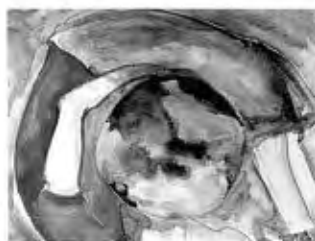
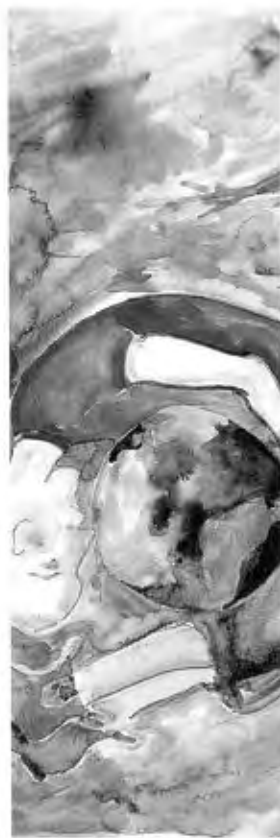
Travel has done this to me. Made me question what home is.

I want to get back to the penknife cuts in the tree. I want to go back to New York and taste snow as it falls. I want to accept who I am and find a place in the world, from an initial in wood to a footprint in ice and some words on a page. I'm homesick for who I am. Writing my way into the new me out of all the pieces I've become and all the places I've been.

So I think about those trees that shake my imagination from childhood. And something an old Aboriginal man once told me when we were up in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. He explained to me the way the limbs of the trees grew towards the sun, and how if you really looked at them, you could work out what direction to walk in, where you were headed if you ever got lost.

He then tested me, and I said every direction under the compass as he pointed at the limbs. I was hopelessly wrong each time, and he laughed and laughed. Remembering that incident now, I realise he was less concerned with my abilities at applied 'bush knowledge'. And more interested to give me a story which explained how all things grow into a pattern. ■

Mark Mordue is the author of *Dastgah: A Headtrip*, a book of stories based on his global journeying. It will be published by Allen & Unwin in October. *This essay was also published in Madison, a New York publication, in July/August 1999.*



In their prime

John Curtin: A Life, David Day, HarperCollins, Sydney 1999. ISBN 0 7322 6413 8, RRP \$45
Robert Menzies: A Life, Volume 2 1944-1978, Allan Martin, Melbourne University Press, 1999.
 ISBN 0 522 84864 8, RRP \$49.95

FEW INFORMED Australians would disagree with the notion that John Curtin and Robert Menzies are our two greatest prime ministers, even if they would disagree about the order.

It is therefore all the more curious that we should have had to wait so long for the definitive biographies of these two great Australians. The consolation is that each of these two studies has delved so extensively into the work of so many other Australian

his sources. Either book, if you followed the footnotes, would make a fine introduction to contemporary Australian historical scholarship.

Reading these books together impressed me with the connectedness of the lives of the two men and the divergences. The cast of characters overlaps, questions of family background intersect, and the events each character confronts are identical, though often seen from widely different perspec-

to 1955, would keep Curtin company in Canberra during the lonely weekends that a Western Australian backbencher had then to endure, talking over a cup of tea, or walking together to the cricket or football, depending on the season. In Martin's book, Green 'worshipped' Curtin but was 'bound to be critical' of Menzies.

Bert Evatt is a major intersecting character but both authors and surely both subjects agree on him, if they might have disagreed on Green. They see Evatt as unreliable, unstable, and menacing. Yet Martin's blow-by-blow description of how Menzies destroyed Evatt in parliament is almost too cruel to read. Curtin could never have treated another human being like that.

DAY AND MARTIN, delightfully, are narrative historians, Martin telling us that it is his ambition to find 'what actually happened'. Currently faddish explanatory devices like the devil, homophobia, or even a kind of 'speculative and theoretical' reasoning have no place in either book: 'beyond the range of my taste and expertise' (Martin); 'I was particularly anxious to examine Curtin's life on its own terms ... to portray Curtin "the whole man" rather than being another study of Curtin's prime ministership' (Day).

So David Day takes 415 pages of his 580 to ease Curtin into the prime ministership, devoting more space than many biographers would dare to the lives of his subject's parents, as distinct merely from the family line. Fate, such a powerful explanatory device in both books, intervenes and works for both writers. It is fate that sad misjudgment or mistake destroyed the young constable John Curtin's police career, sending him to Creswick, denying him promotion and ultimately destroying his health. His son, also John, would become trapped by his family's needs, taking his



An atypical moment of relaxation: Curtin, Frederick Shedden and Elsie Curtin during a train trip across the United States.

historians in such varied fields that the wait has allowed two biographies of real substance to emerge. Allan Martin is effusively generous in acknowledging his dependence on earlier work while David Day is more reserved, but no less catholic in the breadth of his reading and the range of

tives. It is just that Menzies lived so much longer and faced change, where Curtin faced challenge.

Curtin emerges as the more attractive character, though far more anguished, as others saw. Frank Green, for example, Clerk of the House of Representatives from 1937



father's role, before he had a chance to think for himself of education, career, ambition or faith. Robert Menzies, as we learned from Martin's first volume, owed everything in life to the education that he was able to win for himself.

The sadness that seems to have enveloped John Curtin's life, and which is certainly the major theme of Day's book, owes its existence to the sense that life had cheated young Jack before he even had a chance. An early romance, hitherto unknown to biographers, goes nowhere because of his beloved's tragic early death, but it could have gone nowhere in any case as Jack Curtin was shackled to his parents and family by the need to provide for them. And yet, for straightforward narrative, much of this early and vitally important section of the book is speculative. 'This biographer', David Day candidly and journalistically reveals, 'has found no reference by Curtin to those years in central Melbourne ... the effect on Curtin can only be speculated upon'.

For all that, David Day is confident that the poverty and the tension of Curtin's early years account for most of his subsequent life story. Never robust, with more than a touch of hypochondria, which he may have learned from his father, Curtin came to look at his life as a thing to be endured rather than enjoyed. A sense of failure followed him from job to job (almost all of them in the labour movement), in his role as a parent and as a husband. Day makes much of his alcoholism, which is well known, but shows how Curtin's drinking to incapacity lasted far longer into his mainstream political career than hitherto revealed. We learn, too, of his apparent affairs and his dependence on some close male friends who managed to keep him going through the roughest patches, if only just.

No Australian has ever shouldered heavier burdens of leadership in war and the strain at times of crisis was almost unendurable. Yet somehow this lonely, diffident, stricken man energised a nation and became a nation's friend and saviour.

Reading hundreds of files in the National Archives of Australia recently for a wartime project, I have been astonished at the intimacy of correspondence that Australians felt they could initiate with their wartime prime minister. Writing on an issue of crucial importance to themselves and their families, dozens of letters conclude with personal messages of support, affection and news. 'I know you are very busy and have a

great worrie', one correspondent wrote to her prime minister in November 1942, 'but Mr Curtin I have a great worrie too my son is missing in Malaya.' With some suggestions for Curtin, the writer concludes, 'may Our Lady of Good Council help you in a task that is very great.' Others passed on news, though undoubtedly the prime minister had never heard from them before. Others worried for his health or his stamina.



The succession: Curtin, in 1941, with his two predecessors as Prime Minister, 'Artie' Fadden and Robert Gordon Menzies.

Others just wanted to wish him well. All seemed to recognise that he was consuming himself for Australia's sake. Curtin died in office, as Geoffrey Serle has put it: 'a war casualty if ever there was one'.

I AM NOT SURE that too many Australians would have written to Menzies in the familiar terms they enjoyed with Curtin. 'Ah, poor Bob', Curtin had said, 'it's very sad; he would rather make a point than make a friend.' Allan Martin has structured his book around politics but tells us that although he is 'interested in a variety of matters incidental to politics' he would like his readers to 'sense and judge these for themselves'. So this is not an intimate portrait and we see none of the flaws in Menzies that Day finds in Curtin. And yet Menzies was a prodigious drinker, (his own jug of martini for lunch, so Beryl Beaurepaire observed when a guest at the Lodge) but perhaps Menzies was better inured to the effects of alcohol than Curtin. Martin wonders whether Menzies might have stayed on as long into the night at his

parliamentary office as he regularly did for lack of courage in the face of a waspish wife at the Lodge but there are no other suggestions of divergence from the paths of rectitude.

Fate, though, intrudes as largely into Menzies' story as it did into Curtin's. Menzies, despite his dominance of the party he created, is never really popular within it and even in times of substantial majorities

there was talk of looking for someone else. Indeed in 1947 Menzies might well have lost the Liberal Party leadership and have left political life altogether if Chifley had not introduced bank nationalisation to revitalise a dispirited and unhappy opposition. Chifley reignited Menzies' career just when he had him on the ropes.

Menzies seemed not to care too much for the interests or concerns of his own followers and he was a remote and isolated figure to them. Martin shows how easily and how deservedly he won the affection of those who worked most closely with him, his own staff, but a reserve prevented too many from seeing him at his relaxed best. Perhaps he did not enjoy Australia and its people as Curtin did. Menzies' first prime ministership collapsed as a result of a four-month absence abroad in 1941 and yet he travelled incessantly in his second term. Curtin might have served Australia better if he had made himself known personally to Roosevelt and Churchill in the first months of his term of office; no British prime minister or American president was ever

left wondering about Robert Menzies. Allan Martin does not add it all up for the readers but, increasingly astonished, I could not resist recourse to the calculator. In the years between 1950 and 1956, Menzies was abroad, in total, for 63 weeks, a generous sabbatical indeed. Of course there was cricket, but there was much work too and perhaps his high personal profile served Australia well.

But not at Suez. Long book though this is, the issues and controversies that Menzies' reign threw up can only be summarised by Martin. Indeed one of the strengths of the book is the ruthlessness of Martin's selection of material and his determination to stick to an accessible storyline. Menzies was deceived in his work on Suez by those British leaders whom he implicitly trusted and for whom he was working, just as he had been deceived by them in his decision to commit Australian troops to the shambles of the 'campaign' in Greece in 1941. Greece sank his first prime ministership and Suez might have scuttled his second. Menzies had every reason to be angry, and so, perhaps, does Martin on his behalf, but this is a compassionate book that allows no room for anger.

Finishing *Menzies: A Life* I thought I liked Menzies more and could see things his way on many points. But the lurking questions about this long prime ministership remain. Where was a vision for Australia in a period of rapid change; where was a strategy for moving Australia forward? Menzies benefited enormously from our own version of the Cold War and for most of the years this book covers, the communist can was always worth a resounding kick.

Yet there are so many paradoxes. Menzies swamped his parliamentary party in the immediate post-war years with ex-servicemen when Labor, which had won the war for Australia, might have expected to have been draped with the mantle of patriotism. And yet when I was writing the history of the Australian War Memorial, Dame Pattie Menzies declined to be interviewed about her husband's ideas for the place. He never liked the type of men he found there, she explained. I regret that Allan Martin does not believe that he can tease out such mysteries.

David Day augments the Curtin legend although he has suffused it with a sadness that Geoffrey Serle in his remarkable

Australian Dictionary of Biography portrait had not prepared us for. Readers will glimpse the nobility of Curtin but they will wonder at the anguish of his life. They may wonder, too, as I did, why the fates treated two such inspiring Australians so differently.

Footnote

Commenting on the recent pulping of the *Les Murray* biography, David Marr suggested that publishers would be wiser to employ editors than lawyers. It is a pity that Melbourne University Press has lost sight of the importance of an editor. Recent books, this one included, have too many errors which it would be churlish to list. But after a noble tribute to Athol Townley, one of Menzies' few genuine friends in politics, it is sad that the accompanying photograph is not of Townley but of Wilfred Kent Hughes, a man whom Menzies barely tolerated. ■

Michael McKernan's recent biography, *Beryl Beaurepaire*, was short-listed in the Centre for Australian Cultural Studies Awards for 1999. He is the inaugural Frederick Watson Fellow at the National Archives of Australia for 1999–2000.

BOOKS: 2

BRIGID ARTHUR

Alliances, holy and otherwise

Blazing a Trail: Catholic Education in Victoria, 1963-1980, Anne O'Brien,
David Lovell Publishing, 1999. ISBN 1 86355 074 7, RRP \$24.95

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH is in many ways like the rest of society—special interests abound and mavericks have a habit of just appearing. Among its members there are some individuals and groups whose ideology seems to them so compelling that no compromise is possible and any political manoeuvring is justified. But it also embraces individual people and groups who work selflessly for the common good, for whom ideology is not an end in itself, people who are willing to form partnerships and reach compromises where good outcomes seem possible. All of this is exemplified in *Blazing a Trail* by Anne O'Brien.

O'Brien is an insider and writes as one with an intimate knowledge of Melbourne Catholic education and particularly of the

early history of the Catholic Education Office of Victoria. She has interviewed most of the key players (Patrick Crudden—Director of the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne from 1969–70—is an interesting exception) and has access to all the relevant documentation, including the correspondence and notes of Fr Frank Martin, whose influence during his time as Director of Catholic education (1970–1980) was pervasive. *Blazing a Trail* is a valuable piece of history, written in a direct and uncomplicated style—although the wealth of information and detail makes it a somewhat dense read at times.

I was very involved with most aspects of Catholic Education during 1963–80, so reading the book was quite a nostalgic

experience for me. I kept remembering these and other stories associated with people and places. There are so many, some of which may one day be written. If they are, future writers could well go back to this book as a base document.

For those of us who were a part of the events, and suffered and rejoiced at every step of the way, *Blazing a Trail* provides a great opportunity to reminisce but also to find the hitherto unknown connections between some threads. For example, I always knew that the Australian Parents' Council was opposed to the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and the Catholic Education Office, but before reading O'Brien I did not know there was a connection between that body and



B.A. Santamaria and the National Civic Council.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin insisted that nothing is intelligible outside its history and in one way this book represents a chastening walk through a particularly interesting part of Catholic education history. This was a period where the shape of the future seemed a matter of choice and the choice depended on which values were to be held sacred: developing new partnerships and larger communities or ensuring a 'closed-shop' within known boundaries; working with others with a focus on the common good or an emphasis on sectional interests. The conflicting ideologies within the Church and the resulting cross-purposes that can exist in the name of religion are clearly evident in O'Brien's account. What may be more disturbing is that these same conflicting ideologies are even more evident now.

ON A POSITIVE NOTE, the resilience of those who kept working to get funding and resources, and the achievements of the leaders and schools within a relatively short period, are amazing. What occurred during this time was a total rethinking of Catholic education and the emergence of a system. The achievement was in no small part the work of Frank Martin, who persevered in spite of huge pressures—some external and others internal. Indeed, the focus of attention throughout the book is Frank Martin, and because this is a history of the establishment of structures and the obtaining of a measure of government funding the focus is entirely justified. Martin was perhaps the only leader who could have spear-headed the wide-ranging developments and seen them through after starting, as he did, pretty much with an empty slate.

That is not to devalue those many others who also contributed quite heroically. The Catholic religious congregations agreed to share the grants for secondary schools on a needs basis and established the Grants Allocation Committee to do this. Individuals such as Tom O'Donnell (Professor of Chemistry at the University of Melbourne 1979–88, a prominent Catholic layman and first chairperson of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria) continued to support the development of Catholic education in spite of numerous

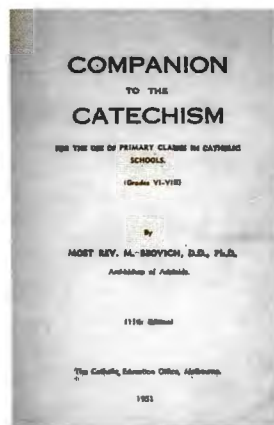
rebuffs. Early members of the Catholic Education Office, like Dan Sexton, Frank Rogan and Vin Faulkner, had to break new ground in every administrative area. Many teachers regularly came together after teaching all day in school to develop the catechetical materials in 'Let's Go Together' and 'Say Yes'.

In fact one whole section of the story lies with the teachers and leaders in the schools, facing huge classes, trying to be innovative in curriculum, coping with mammoth sociological change and still struggling financially, in spite of government grants (which, initially, were very small).

As well as being a chronicle of energy, persistence and dialogue, this is also

fascinating reading. The book reveals that, in the war against block funding and a 'needs-based' distribution of money, the alliance consisted of Santamaria, Margaret Slattery of the Australian Parents' Council, the independent schools and most of the bishops! The author says they formed an 'impenetrable web' which ensured that their activities maintained a degree of respectability. A web, with much of the same blinkered and unyielding force, threatens the Church today and this is the warning at the end of the book.

We are given a revealing insight into the extraordinary reach and power of B.A. Santamaria. Was this because he articulated the fears of many who then gravitated to his side? Because he (and they) believed he had the answer to everything?



Catholic education on display in 1946: St Joseph's Marist Brothers' College East Brunswick–North Fitzroy dressed for their school play at Cathedral Hall. The producer was Brother Matthias and the cast was all male. From *Going to St Joe's* by Val Noone, Spectrum Publications, 1999. Catechism also from *Going to St Joe's*.

a testimony to some 'unholy alliances' that in retrospect seem both fascinating and chilling.

In 1973, when B.A. Santamaria wrote the response to the Karmel Report for the Catholic bishops, they accepted the response and used it to reject the report vehemently and publicly, even though they had not read the document. Neither, as it turns out, had Santamaria. The intertwining story of the DLP, the suspicions of the Labor Party after the split, and tensions within the ranks of the bishops make

I remember he had immense power. As a child at school I was present when he spoke to an adult audience about the threat of communism. For years I believed that we were in imminent danger of being attacked and taken over. Many of my friends have told me that for years they voted as instructed by 'Alice in Wonderland' leaflets, devised by the National Civic Council, which gave instructions about how to vote in all state and federal elections.

Now, as then, a certain crusading zeal seems to bedevil the story of the

development of catechetical resources. Questions of orthodoxy seem to emerge as soon as anyone tries to devise any new or interesting approach. And with them come simplistic answers that present more problems than solutions.

'Come Alive' was the name of one such innovative approach, to a large extent the work of Maurice Duffy (a priest and charismatic figure in the Sandhurst diocese during the '50s and '60s). Just prior to the time of the publication of this series, I was principal of a small country school in the Sandhurst diocese. Bishop Stewart visited the place where I lived and insisted he knew dubious material was being used in our school. I argued with him that if we did not use any of the 30 or so resources he had banned, there would be nothing left. I was interested to read in *Blazing a Trail* that, a few years later, Stewart recommended a return to the Penny Catechism. I can only

say that as well as causing a lot of hurt and dismay, Bishop Stewart's various publications, including *The Catholic Religion: With Peter and Under Peter*, and *What's Wrong with Come Alive?* were also the cause of some hilarity among those of us who had to find some way of living with such extraordinary narrowness.

The way forward is never clear except by reference to the way behind. In her final chapter, O'Brien suggests a number of ways forward. Her conclusions lead me to reflect that government funding can only be expected for programs that are educationally defensible. As one of the challenges for the future, Catholic education has to continue to justify its demand for society's support through government funding. Indoctrination is not good education—no matter who does it. We need therefore to be able to demonstrate that what we do in the name of religious education is defensible as good

pedagogy and shows respect for the learner. In the light of this, the support of the official church for the Thomas More Centre (established by Santamaria as 'a home for several associations and publications') and any perceived or actual connections with the National Civic Council in present-day Catholic education will be seen as dangerous.

The author quotes from an address given in 1988 at La Trobe University by the now Archbishop of Melbourne, George Pell, who advocated that 'the doctrine of the primacy of conscience should be quietly ditched, at least in our schools'. It would appear from recent events in Melbourne that the various conflicting forces at work right through the period described in this book are alive and well. ■

Brigid Arthur is a Brigidine sister who has had a long-term involvement in education.

BOOKS: 3

CATRIONA JACKSON

Food, glorious food

The Oxford Companion to Food, Alan Davidson, Oxford University Press, 1999. ISBN 0 19 211579 0, RRP \$120

ALAN DAVIDSON prefers cheddar cheese to angel food cake, and you can tell by the way he writes about both.

'The light, pale, puffy American sponge ... is,' he says, seen by some 'as a good way of using up surplus egg whites'. He might have added that all but a very few Americans now make it from a packet. Cheddar on the other hand is best bought, he says, from small producers, and will be full-flavoured and nutty, with 'the firm but creamy texture and the pale glow that are the marks of real quality'. Two villages clubbed together to produce a 'monster' 1,125lb cheddar for Queen Victoria's wedding, he adds.

Opinionated, subjective, witty and highly informed is exactly how this first comprehensive and serious food encyclopedia is—and ought to be. I am rather a fan of the

snow-white confection, angel food cake, but Davidson is right: cheddar is simply more important.

The first thing that strikes you about *The Oxford Companion to Food* is the quality of the writing. Through nearly 900 pages, most of the entries have the smell and feel and taste of the foodstuff at issue, and a notion of where it comes from.

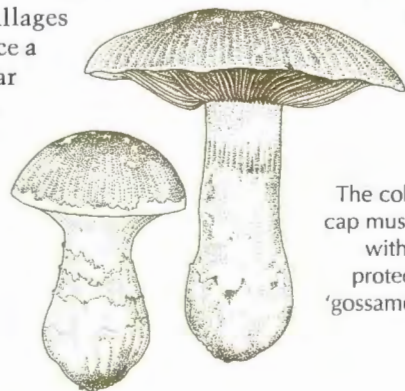
The vast majority of the food books that pour forth each year are as bland and relentless as individually wrapped cheeseslices. This book has a personality.

Davidson took 20 years to write and edit it, changing publishers along the way. But he used the time to advantage: the book satisfies a long-felt need.

Anyone who writes about food

and/or cooks a bit knows that there has been no good, global reference book on the subject. Until now there has been no single place to look for spellings, or rulings on whether a tomato is a fruit or a vegetable (he says a vegetable and I'd argue that he is right because tomatoes taste like vegetables), or how old Mrs Beeton was when she died [28]. Nowhere to seek a chat about the central role bread has played in the culture of Europe, the Near East and West Asia (the grains that grow in all three places contain gluten, which keeps bread together) or a discussion of foods suitable for a funeral. Of the latter Davidson says simply: 'Funeral food is a subject which does not appear to have had any books devoted to it so far ...'

While writing a book on South-East Asian seafood in the 1970s, he mentioned the problem of reliable universal references to his publisher, and the plan was hatched to fill the gap, with five years allowed for writing. A book as thorough as this could never have been produced in five years.



The cobweb-cap mushroom, with its protective 'gossamer veil'.



Taking the proper time over the work has allowed Davidson to write a majority of the entries himself, with carefully selected experts filling in the rest. But the author/editor's intelligence, enthusiasm and slight eccentricity bind the work, making it a great read as well as a comprehensive reference.

More a food anthropologist than cook-book writer, Davidson obviously loves eating, and understands its cultural significance. While a public servant, he spent some time in Laos in the 1970s, where he wrote several books about the food and culture of the region, one of which sorts out the linguistic confusion over the hundreds of different local seafood, with detailed drawings of each beast, and the names translated into seven languages. Later he did a similar job with his classic, *Mediterranean Seafood*. In 1979, he abandoned his public service career to form the food publishing company, Prospect Books, with Elizabeth David and others.

By writing, or in some cases correcting, history Davidson reminds us that mass production and uniformity and limitless 'consumer choice' are not universally good things if you care about how food tastes. The entry for chipolata almost made me cry. These lovely little sausages are meant to be made from rice, lean pork and pork fat pushed into a sheep's intestine, which is smaller than the standard pig's intestine. They should be a little mouthful as scrumptious to eat as the name is to say. But now 'chipolata' is used as a label for any nondescript little sausages, with no regard for quality or specificity. Some airlines have the temerity to use 'chipolata' to describe the nasty little sausage-meat grubs in flabby casings that they serve with their watery egg breakfasts.

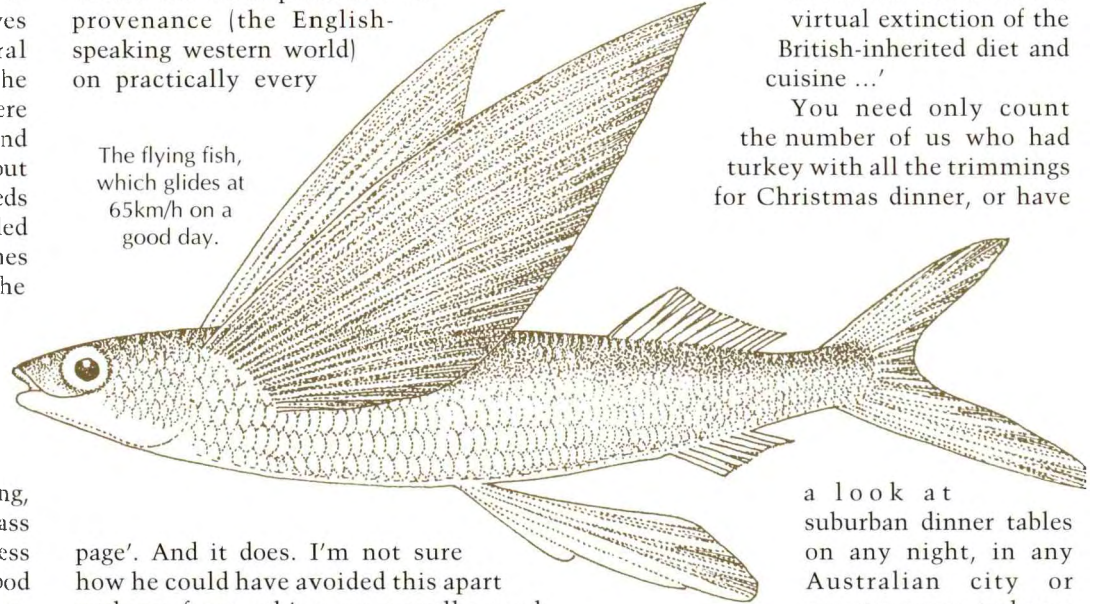
I have avoided the word 'definitive' in describing *The Companion* because it is not. One of the great things about an area so steeped in domestic culture and myth (and so ignored in formal historical circles) is that not all is certain. On almost every page Davidson engages us in debate, but even the well informed will find he often takes the upper hand through sheer weight of research.

I was extremely sceptical about his claim that Chili Con Carne originated in Texas, not Mexico. By the end of his entry I was almost convinced. He concedes that chili may have existed among the poor Mexicans of San Antonio in the Mexican Province of Texas as early as the 1820s, and that by the

1880s Mexican-American 'Chili Queens' served it from colourful carts in the same area. But it developed and became the Texan dish, with chili 'cook-offs' a statewide pastime.

Davidson admits that while he has struggled to shift the book's focus away from North America and Europe, he is 'aware the book proclaims its provenance (the English-speaking western world) on practically every

The flying fish, which glides at 65km/h on a good day.



page'. And it does. I'm not sure how he could have avoided this apart perhaps from taking on a really good contributing editor from India or China or Bangkok. Perhaps in the next edition. For now I will keep Charmaine Solomon's *Encyclopaedia of Asian Food* alongside Davidson's work.

NOW FOR THE GRIPES. With only so much space you can't include every food and cookery writer of note, but there are some glaring omissions. More than any other single person, Marcella Hazan has invited the rest of the world into Italy's great culinary tradition. Until she began publishing books, in the 1970s, Italian cooking was largely folklore—they didn't need to write it down because they could all do it. *The Companion* is not complete without her.

Individuals like Jennifer Paterson, Clarissa Dickson Wright and Rick Stein have headed a renaissance in English cooking, although their more recent rise to prominence perhaps excuses their exclusion. There are very good arguments for adding entries on Julia Child, Robert Carrier and Madhur Jaffrey.

The Australian entry is disappointingly fashion-bound and in some places simply incorrect. As you would expect from Adelaide food historian Barbara Santich, the history is good, but when she comes to

the present day, something goes wrong. She claims, for example, that: 'The once traditional Sunday family dinner of roast leg of lamb with mint sauce has been replaced by the casual barbecue where kangaroo sausages may cook alongside bratwurst or merguez, chicken satays next to oregano marinated lamb kebabs. The net effect has been the virtual extinction of the British-inherited diet and cuisine ...'

You need only count the number of us who had turkey with all the trimmings for Christmas dinner, or have

a look at suburban dinner tables on any night, in any Australian city or country town, to know what an overstatement

this is. The eating habits of Australians have become much broader in the past 50 years, and we have creatively adopted many Mediterranean and Asian dishes and techniques. However, the era of the overdone roast with three veg and plastic pud to follow is not yet behind us. Santich has been seduced by glossy-magazine hype, something the rest of this book has rightly avoided.

The Companion's delicate line graphics, by Soun Vannithone, with whom Davidson has had a long association, are beautiful, and help when words are not quite enough to explain the 'gossamer veil that protects the gills of a Cobweb-cap mushroom' or the wild look in the eyes of a flying fish.

In a publishing climate where most food books seem to be conceived (and perhaps written) over a few bottles of verdelho and a green papaya salad, it is a small miracle that a volume of this calibre has emerged. Oxford and Davidson have given food history the respectability it has long deserved. *The Companion to Food* is part of a remarkable story, one which we have only just begun to tell. ■

Catriona Jackson is the *Canberra Times'* restaurant reviewer and health reporter.

A series of shocks

Disgrace, J. M. Coetzee Secker and Warburg, 1999. ISBN 0 436 20489 4, RRP \$29.95

J. M. COETZEE HAS BEEN a distinct presence on the international literary scene for long enough now for his moody and detached narratives to have carved out something close to the highest kind of reputation. Despite his comparatively slender output, he probably has a better chance of winning a Nobel Prize than any fiction writer in Australia. And it's not hard to see the turbulent matter of South African history as having given him an artistic destiny which transfigures a talent that can look, at a five-page stretch, a little mannered and neat and hand-me-down. In any case, his new book, *Disgrace*, has won the Booker Prize (against a very strong contender in Colm Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship*) and is therefore, at least in theory, a novel worth wrestling with.

It is so in practice too. This is a brooding, 'black', masterly piece of dramatic economy that shows what a novelist can do when he has a structure which will release his story and afflict the reader like a series of shocks.

We begin at a university in Cape Town. The protagonist is a lecturer in English with a thing about the Romantics, who

teaches Wordsworth eloquently and is supposed to be writing a biography of Byron. Coetzee ensures that his classroom patter has a resemblance to what the real thing might be—though it's a bit 'good', and it is also notably (if incidentally) uninflected by any form of new philosophy or theory. So is our hero's behaviour. He is both widowed and divorced and takes into his bed one of his students, a good-looking, not especially bright young actress who neither asks for it nor knocks him back. At one stage she seeks him out in some moment of passion or need or insecurity. His own attitude—clinically surveyed and self-surveying—is neither admirable nor despicable. He is the kind of stoic or cynic who believes in the life of the senses in the absence of much else in the way of expectation in a dwindled if privileged middle-aged existence.

Pretty inevitably, he ends up on a sexual harassment charge and refuses to offer any plea other than a blanket admission of guilt. The consequence is that, instead of a leave of absence and a bout of *mea culpa*-ing (which is what the university authorities want), he is expelled from the university,

and Coetzee's novel—which has looked as though it might be a scathing, if riveting, novel of manners and critique of modish pieties and masculinist iniquities—turns into a very different kind of book.

He goes to the country to stay on the small farm of his daughter, whom he adores. She spends her days looking after stray animals in the company of a plain older woman. The daughter is a lesbian and maintains her farm with the assistance of a middle-aged black man, once their servant and now a neighbouring farmer.

The disgraced academic works out a bearable, if uncomprehending existence, in the vicinity of his daughter, who maintains a very different vision of the world from her father, one full of laconic convictions, independent and integral. The whole atmosphere of the novel is charged with a kind of bucolic questing quality as the hero comes to realise, bit by bit, that the deeply feminised and high-minded world of his daughter has a depth and a coherence which is in marked contrast with his own. At the same time he is revealed as a tougher and more self-doubting figure than his earlier incarnation as a professional worldling would have suggested.

AT THIS POINT the narrative takes another (and decisive) swerve into a strange unpredictability as it springs and coils and confounds every readerly expectation.

It would be wrong to summarise the entire action of a novel which gets so much of its reach and power from Coetzee's capacity to articulate a chain of events, with maximum charge and terseness, which maintain an unusual level of suspense without in any way dispensing with probability. *Disgrace* is a well-made novel with a kind of filmic structure and a dazzling use of transitions and dissolves which put it in a very different category from so many more or less worthy novels in which more or less complex and credible characters, in the vicinity of fine prose, meditate and frisk about in the ruins of anything like a satisfying structure.

Late Lines

Miscellanies as far afield as Tottel
Asserting death's the answer to life's quiz
And Philip Larkin with the second bottle
Pouring, saying, 'This is all there is'—

These are the texts to suit the temperament
Of a septuagenarian on holiday—
The sun and stinging-flies both heaven-sent,
The topless beauties spread around the bay—

The old man dreams of cigales in their tank,
Tries to embody their hot-water screams,
No Nobel Beckett, just a witty blank,
Dreaming he cries to wake: awake, he dreams.

Peter Porter



At the heart of the novel, somewhere in the depths of its darkness and sorrow and difficulty, is the idea of what it might mean for a liberal white woman to be violated by a black man. And there is a brilliance (even if there is at least a risk of factitiousness) in the way Coetzee sets up an implicit comparison and contrast with the paternal (patriarchal) womanising sleaze who burns with a sense of grievance and injustice when it comes to the child he loves so passionately and so chastely.

No novel like this, so rooted in realism and bristling with dramatic flair, could sustain the burden of allegory, but nonetheless Coetzee deliberately complicates the maze of moral and political dilemmas that this small representative action casts the reader adrift in. He also uses, at least initially, what is almost an alienation effect in order to withhold any automatic sympathy from the characters who suffer most terribly. The upshot is to normalise these figures by endowing them with a gradual and subtly evolved individuality. *Disgrace* is one of those books which confines itself to a strand of continuous and variegated action and exhibits character as a kind of subset of a moral drama that never ceases to be political. The construction is remarkable even if the vision is confounding.

This is the kind of nearly intellectualised realisation of the novel as drama which Camus learned from Dostoyevsky and which in Coetzee's case may have the same source.

It issues into a novel which can, by turns, be a bit speechifying and, conversely, a bit given to the iron clang of one-liners that summon up opposing worlds; at times too the prose can look enamelled in its neatness and in the echoic quality of its rhetorical tricks. But you can't complain when a set of strategies release themselves into a work of such energy, poignancy and pensive intellectual power as this one. By the standards of Dostoyevsky which it invokes, J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* is an adept novella which teases out some of the subtler and more heartbreaking paradoxes to be contained in a set of obvious ideas, potent though the throes of their enactment are. But that high and mighty yardstick does not stop it from being one of the most engaging, one of the most mordant and passionate books we have seen in quite a while. ■

Peter Craven is the editor of *Best Australian Essays 1999*.

Lightness

So full her life
of fanciful shapes
we found her asleep
with a flautist

their moth-light breathing

appearing
to rock the hammock
in behind the early-flowering
red japonica.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

The One That Got Away

I am the snail
that didn't take the bait
the dust
that missed the broom
the hair
the razor didn't cut
the place on the skin
the soapy water missed
the part of the table
the polish didn't reach
the girl you didn't marry
that high-style raver
the man you didn't meet
who does not exist
the poem
the critic didn't read
the letter
that went astray

yet life goes on
remorseless and beautiful
and the days swing into autumn
from which
once sniffed
nobody ever got away.

Kate Llewellyn

Mal Morgan, 1935–1999

IT'S A COLD NIGHT IN CARLTON but the mood inside La Mama is warm and convivial. The fire is crackling, wine and coffee have just been passed around, 40 or 50 souls are squeezed into chairs arrayed on platforms up two sides of the darkened pocket-handkerchief theatre, with additional seats shunted into place on the staircase side, near the entrance. Only the back wall, painted black for La Mama's latest dramatic offering, is empty of people. There is applause as a young woman finishes her reading and climbs back into the audience. A bearded, bespectacled man enters the arena. He is wearing a leather jacket, jeans and a leather cap. He thanks the poet, utters some words of praise. As if to illustrate a point, he reads a brief poem of his own. Then he pulls a harmonica from his pocket and plays. There is applause and a few cheers. Mal Morgan—for that is the MC's name—thanks the audience and introduces the next reader. It's a magical, timeless evening in here; outside, it's somewhere between 1985 and 1991 ...

The writing community was saddened recently by the death of Mal Morgan, who passed away on 16 November 1999 at the age of 64, after a battle with cancer. Mal was a popular, charismatic figure in Melbourne poetry—not only as a poet and performer, but as a generous friend, mentor and champion of the art. For years, La Mama Poetica and Mal Morgan were all but synonymous. He had a rare talent for bringing people together, and the programs he staged reflected his open-minded, eclectic approach. The Poetica readings, of which he was convenor (1985–91), were a perfect outlet for his talent and energy. He was an unflappable host, a skilled diplomat and an effective organiser—as attested also by the flair with which he conducted the Montsalvat poetry festivals (1991–93). He taught, assessed and reviewed poetry, and judged numerous Australian competitions and awards.

Malcolm Morgenstern was born on 3 September 1935, in London, and emigrated to Australia in 1948. He attended Melbourne High, and displayed an early talent for drawing and acting. But he went on to study pharmacy, and through the 1960s and '70s owned and managed a number of chemist shops; after 1979 he worked in the Royal Children's Hospital pharmacy. Meanwhile, in the early 1960s, Mal had begun to write poetry—later, he would say that he had found himself through poetry. Between 1976 and 1999, seven collections of his poems were published, and he edited the anthology *La Mama Poetica* (1989); his last book, *Beautiful Veins*, was launched at La Mama two months before his death.

During the months following his diagnosis and beyond, Mal would visit me at my home after chemotherapy at nearby Cabrini Hospital; we would sit and talk and drink a glass or two together. When he stopped driving I would come down to Scaford, where he lived. These were precious meetings and they strengthened our bond. We talked about anything and everything. Poetry, of course, and the literary scene; books and writers; political events; our families, our childhoods; and music. Sometimes our conversations would take a metaphysical turn.

One perspective we shared and occasionally discussed was the Jewish experience. Throughout his life, Mal maintained a strong sense of his Jewish identity. As a human being and as a Jew, he was distressed by the history of our century—and by our perennial refusal to heed its lessons. He understood the darkness and cruelty that could dwell within the human soul, alongside its noblest aspirations and achievements. His struggle with this paradox is a hallmark of his poetry.

Although there is joy and exuberance in Mal Morgan's writing, there is also a deep understanding of pain. His words have the capacity to move us. Mal's poems—many of them dedicated to his beloved wife Di, his children, friends and family members—speak to us honestly, directly, as if we're sitting together sharing a drink. His word-pictures are gifts, painted in the intense colours of experience. They fill the 'empty spaces' the poet periodically visits.

If I do not
fill my spaces they become abysmal
and so I fill them with things of this world
and with the nature of imagination
—with glass houses precariously perched
on the dome of the toppling hourglass,
with melodramas I invent which disappear
before reaching the corner of a startled thought ...

—'Empty Spaces'

HE NEVER LOSES HIS SENSE OF WONDER. In his poetry, the actual and the imagined, the real and the surreal, become a part of one another. His images intrigue us, sometimes dazzle us, and we sense that we have come closer for a moment to the *thusness* of things—to their essence. Mal sought the moment when art and life merge into each other's mystery, into the eternal mystery they share ...

A memorial gathering was held at Montsalvat, in Victoria, on 18 November 1999, attended by family, friends and many poets. Near the lectern stood a chair, with a stack of books placed on it, a leather jacket draped around it, and an old leather cap—at an angle just slightly rakish—spilling over the books like a surreal clock. Watching, still presiding, bringing people together to the last, Mal Morgan was with us. As he always will be.

I'll leave a poem or two some teeth for no-one's
mouth old books newspapers and cufflinks
a broken bust of Beethoven a silver wedding ring
fashioned into honesty-leaves. I was true.
I'll not leave a cellar full of vintage wines dusty
bottles lying on their sides stocks and shares
their golden dividends. I strove for something more.
Not to be shouted over rooftops not to be crammed
into letter-boxes. This poem made to be read
by five or six readers.

—'I'll Leave a Poem or Two' ■

Alex Skovron is a Melbourne poet.

Playing favourites

IT'S POSSIBLE ENOUGH in Melbourne to think that the place wears its faded glories with a difference even if you're part of the fadeout. During this year's Melbourne Festival, the only two things I succeeded in seeing were the one-woman shows of Leslie Caron, who played the title role in Vincente Minelli's Lerner and Loewe musical *Gigi*, which screened at the Metros here (remember Bourke and Collins and the Metro Malvern?) 40 years ago.

Gigi, from the Colette work of that name, was one of the late MGM musicals, though with its gorgeous Cecil Beaton costumes it aimed paradoxically to translate into cinematic terms the glamour of theatrical experience, and with its patter songs for Louis Jordan, its 'Edwardian' setting, and its character roles for old troupers like Maurice Chevalier and Hermione Gingold, it was some sort of attempt to Gallicise the stage success of *My Fair Lady*. It worked because of the great master of 'operatic' cinema, Vincente Minelli, who was a kind of thinking man's Baz Luhrmann.

In her two shows, one about Colette and one about George Sand and Chopin, Leslie Caron played across the keyboard of the Parisian in America (at least if one admits the America-of-the-mind we all inhabit). Caron's were splendidly adept performances, even if they played on the nostalgia that surrounds a half-century-old reputation the way a corsage can memorialise a life. The voice, with its French version of 'English' English (even though Broadway and Hollywood had made her), tinkled very beautifully, with a conscious charm that sometimes disguised art and sometimes displayed it. The effect was not incompatible with anguish in the Sand performance; in the Colette all the tone colours of a lifetime



Anthony Warlow as Papageno, in Opera Australia's *The Magic Flute*.

were on display, and the woman who as a girl had sung 'I don't understand the Parisians' gave a rather magnificent testimonial to the woman who (more than Proust or Cocteau) did most to form this departing century's image of things French.

AND SO TO THE OPERA PROPER, that most mausoleum-like of forms, which can nevertheless create the illusion that the dead can walk and the spheres make music.

I suppose if you wanted to understand the German imagination you would go to *The Magic Flute* before any other work, with the possible exception of Goethe's *Faust*. And even with the stakes raised that high, it's possible that *The Magic Flute* is the truer soulmap because its *singspiel* folkiness carries us into the profound deep as well as the headiness of the mountains of

magic. Northrop Frye said once that if you want something like the haunted and mystical magic of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, with all the riddling quietude that Ariel represents and all the godforsaken grandeur of Prospero's divinity, then you have to go to *The Magic Flute*. It teases us out of thought because its folkloric quality means that it is light and deep at the same time. This most-loved of Mozart's operas is partly like the world of Grimms' fairytales and partly like the parts of the Old Testament that bespeak a wisdom beyond dogma.

Everyone loves *The Magic Flute*, with its questing prince, Tamino, with Pamina caught between the despotic father Sarastro (who not only turns benign, but in his arias—'In diesen heil'gen Hallen' and 'O Isis und Osiris'—transfigures Enlightenment tolerance and Masonic high-mindedness into a religious vision through the majesty of Mozart's music). And then, at the opposite end of the scale, there is the birdcatcher, Papageno, a role for a baritone who can encompass both a lieder-like lightness and twist with Schikaneder's words (so pattering in Mozart's hands) and who is a clown at the same time, the two aspects one in this wonderfully refined sketch of comic buffoonery.

The Opera Australia production of *The Magic Flute* was fortunate to have Anthony Warlow as Papageno, even though the publicity milked the presence of the *Phantom* and *Les Mis* star somewhere on the far side of vulgarity. Still, Warlow is enough of an actor to have made a fair Higgins in the VSO's revival of *My Fair Lady* a few years ago and Papageno is well within his range—which is biggish for the repertoire of musicals but not for opera. I seem to recall that Warlow sang Masetto



Opera Australia's *Rinaldo*, with gilded, grand sets by Michael Scott-Mitchell.

to the Don of Håkan Hagegård, who was Ingmar Bergman's Papageno in that enchanting translation of Mozart's opera from stage to screen—as adept in its minimalist way as anything by Vincente Minelli.

Warlow's great advantage in the role of Papageno is that the voice is alive with dramatic possibility and its 'Broadway' moodiness in a production like this (sung for better or worse in English) is probably a fair enough equivalent to lieder technique.

Although this production is generically Swedish, Bergman it ain't. Goran Järvefelt's series of Mozart productions in 18th-century rig-out (with variable smatterings of wigs and cloaks) were one of the follies of Moffat Oxenbould, who rehearsed this production. At their worst they are dull in a periwigged and painted fashion that looks 'camp' even if it isn't, because the stifling good taste of the recreation sometimes has the air of a false antique. This doesn't happen in this production of *The Magic Flute*. It may not

be as imaginative as Gale Edwards' production of a few years back, but it moves, it swirls, I suppose it enchants. It is probably a bit unfortunate that Järvefelt's antiquarian imagination has so much of this most wild and proto-romantic of Mozart's operas taking place within the hallowed halls (or hallways) of Sarastro's demesne, but you can forgive a lot in a production which has such a marvellous collection of capering animals, including a magnificent 18th-century polar bear.

Dramatically this is a production which moves us as *The Magic Flute* must and almost inevitably does. Simon Kenway conducted the State Orchestra of Victoria very adeptly and the upshot seemed a good balance between proto-Beethovenian 'weight' and Mozartian tinkle. Of the principals Anthony Elek was a satisfying, not an outstanding, Tamino, Lisa Harper-Brown a fine Pamina and Jennifer McGregor an effective Queen of the Night who nonetheless had some difficulties with the tessitura. Donald Shanks as Sarastro retains more dignity

than most singers who would essay this role but he is a bit long in the tooth, a little wobbly on the note, even for this old wise man.

But this was an enjoyable *Flute* because it was an adequate one and an adequate *Magic Flute*, by virtue of Mozart's radiance, is always an enchanting one.

THE DARK ENCHANTMENTS and enchainments of Puccini's *Tosca* would be an improbable subject for opera if this *verismo* dramatisation of a Napoleonic war episode (rewritten as a potent legend of national liberation) had not become, in Puccini's hands, such a moodily precise instantiation of sexual tension and desolation.

Tosca became an instant classic for the very good reason that it is dramatically one of the greatest of all operas. The confrontation between Tosca, the most self-reflexive of prima donnas, and the mordant sadistic Scarpia, who offers her her lover's life in return for the satiation of his lust, is thrilling in its electricity even if you have seen it a hundred times. The

greatest of modern Toscas and Scarpias, Maria Callas and Tito Gobbi, are captured on disc in a famous version conducted by Victor De Sabata and recorded by the great Walter Legge, but this is an opera which has the pounce of a panther in any competent version.

John Copley's production for Opera Australia dates back to 1981, when the dominant style was still the kind of chocolate box tushery that had seemed appropriate during the heyday of the Sutherlands. In Louise Napier's restaging, the first scene in the church of Sant' Andrea della Valle is cluttered and fussy, if illusionistic and grand. In the second act, set in Scarpia's chambers (and the scene of his drawn-out cat-and-mouse game with Tosca) the large stage of the State Theatre is used to baleful and magnificent effect. And the third act, on the ramparts of the Castel Sant' Angelo, is potently scenic—easy to sniff at but dramatically effective in a way this opera needs.

It helps—immeasurably—that in this production the Scarpia is an actor-singer with the presence and snarl and style of John Wegner. His is a naturally Germanic voice, a voice that is indelibly associated with Wagner's Dutchman and Wotan (the gnarled and massive role which Wegner essayed for Jeffrey Tate's Adelaide *Ring* last year). He is superbly sepulchral at the outset, menacingly pensive in 'Va Tosca', and full of dramatic conviction, not just vocal assurance, during the tour de force seduction/duel with Tosca. This is one of those performances one goes to the opera house for—the true savage and scarlet. And it is gratifying that, in Wegner's case, the darkness is not just there in the tone, it is immanent in every gesture.

This sort of accomplishment is not there in the same way with Joan Carden, a veteran Tosca if ever there was one. She is still equal to the demands of 'Vissi d'arte' and the role is naturally suited to her voice, but in the first act she does have the air of an Indian summer recollection of Tosca. But in the second act—with its extraordinary theatrical art—something comes over Carden, or comes over us, and we accept that this older woman, her voice, like her face, not in the first bloom, is Tosca, or at least a natural and credible simulacrum. The climax—with its ghastly reversal—is tumultuous, heartbreaking, and Carden, old pro that she is, doesn't put a foot wrong.

Gregory Tomlinson as Cavaradossi is okay. His acting is natural within limits

even if the voice is a touch effortful at the top, so that 'E lucevan le stelle' doesn't have the gleam or the stab of silver that a more idiomatic and Italianate tenor might bring to it.

HANDEL'S *RINALDO* could not form a greater contrast because it represents, at a level of something like sublimity, opera at its most hieratic and adorned. Handel is, of course, a far 'greater' composer than Puccini, in the way that Alexander Pope was a far greater poet than Tennessee Williams, but he was perhaps as far from being his equal as a dramatist except in the qualified sense that works, if it works at all, by analogy. Handel's opera has its own intrinsic drama (which is and isn't the drama of its musicality), even if at any given moment it sounds like the orotund 'drama' of an oratorio.

Rinaldo is an opera about crusaders and Saracens and sorcery. It involves the capture of a beautiful maiden and the working-out of various spells by a particularly stormy and seductive witch. There is plenty of elegant 18th-century agonising but also a good deal of muscularity and colour in this music as battle is waged, victory signalled and the different phases of illumination or delusion are indicated. James Robinson's production of this moving tableau does Handel proud. It has both an energy and a stillness which are appropriate to a work which is both monumental and full of weird and wonderful developments.

The sets by Michael Scott-Mitchell are grand enough to prevent the set-piece quality of the arias and ensembles from becoming monotonous (there is one particularly nifty bit of dramatic inventiveness that seems to involve the redeployment of one of the gun boats from *Billy Budd*). Overall, the production finds a visual idiom that allows the music to do its work without driving the audience barmy (which is more than can be said for the chocolate-box approach to Handel). There's an enterprising use of light and depth and group movement. In the penultimate scene when the Crusaders lay siege to the Saracens, they mount the citadel on what looks like a steeply ascended, gold-plated, 3D chess-board. The effect, here and throughout, is to soothe the mind into the right kind of fancy.

It helps too, in an armour-plated war story saddled with the test to credulity (and modern taste) of no less than three counter-tenors, that the title role is sung by Graham Pushee with such instinctive style and a sense of warring masculinities and chivalric clamour. It is within its own terms a magnificent performance, full of variety and expressiveness.

Warring masculinities and warring femininities too. Ghillian Sullivan is superb as the witch Almira. She is magnificently secure vocally and manages to pluck a rich and credible characterisation as if from the sky. Emma Matthews is fine as the heroine Almirena, object of all the enchantment and imprisonment.

Richard Divall conducted with his characteristic passion and panache in the face of this sort of music. He is one of our most notable musical warhorses and one of our most versatile. With the collapse of the VSO a couple of years ago—a company which, whatever its extravagance, produced a couple of the greatest opera productions seen in this country in the last couple of decades—Divall is the kind of national treasure who should be on permanent display. ■

Peter Craven is the editor of *Best Australian Essays 1999*.

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Performing the Unnameable. An Anthology of Australian Performance Texts,
Richard James Allen and Karen Pearlman (eds), Currency Press & Real Time, 1999. ISBN 0 868 19 420 4, RRP \$35

AUSTRALIAN THEATRE has surely evolved since the 1970s, when the new wave of spoken-word drama began to dominate our stages. Evidence this most recent publication from Currency Press (a co-production with the bimonthly performance magazine *Real Time*) which represents the published face of that evolution in no uncertain terms.

Performing the Unnameable: An Anthology of Australian Performance Texts is what it says it is and more. In addition to a dozen examples of the allegedly 'unnameable' genre known since the early 1980s as contemporary performance—or simply 'performance', especially in Sydney—here are the surviving or reconstructed verbal 'texts' and fragments of performance pieces that might otherwise be named physical theatre or new circus, corporeal mime, mixed-media theatre or surrealist drama. This grouping of 17 pieces from as many individuals and companies is a thoroughly interesting—though, as the co-editors acknowledge, hardly a representative—sample of the directions in which our theatre has been travelling in recent decades.

The selection covers a timespan from 1981 (Richard Murphet's *Quick Death*, first performed at La Mama by Jean-Pierre Mignon's now-defunct Australian Nouveau Theatre) to 1997. Thirteen of the entries come from the 1990s, which is unsurprising even for the companies (like Sidetrack, Entr'Acte and Doppio Teatro) and individuals (such as Lyndal Jones and Jenny Kemp) who were

practising their crafts in the fields covered here long before the present decade. Non-naturalistic, non-verbal theatre in this country has advanced in leaps and bounds (literally and metaphorically) since the late 1980s.

It is arranged in no particular order (which won't surprise devotees of a form which persistently resists form and order). Nonetheless, by beginning with a 1992 piece by The Sydney Front—arguably the most influential of Sydney's performance groups—and ending with a 1982 one by Nicholas Tsoutas' anarchic All Out Ensemble, the co-editors impose some limited structure into what was always going to be a tricky book to assemble. All Out and The Sydney Front thus provide one set of broad stylistic and temporal parameters.

Editors Karen Pearlman and Richard James Allen make something of a meal of the 'unnameable' in their introduction. They say 'we hope to identify performance as a platform for new forms of writing ... [and] to make a set, but not a category, of works which might otherwise be defined in the negative as "not plays", "not librettos", "not scores", "not poems", "not anything you've seen before".' Still rather on the back foot, they later describe their collection as 'an anthology of texts from an unlimited form, one which deliberately defies limits, rules and definitions' and performance 'as a form ... irreducible to a single concept' (my emphases).

The task of identifying key characteristics of contemporary performance could

have been achieved more persuasively by accentuating what they *are* rather than what they are *not*. Performance writer Virginia Baxter, for example, defined 'performance' succinctly enough in her introduction to Playworks' 1994 edition of *Women Theatre Writers* as 'a vigorously developing and provocative form occupying a position between theatre and performance art'.

Performance works typically include combinations of art and craft forms—the visual arts (painting, sculpture, calligraphy, photography), fashion and other fabric-based crafts, screen arts (slides, film, video, computer graphics), dance (contemporary, classical, popular, ethnic), music (live and recorded, 'classical' and contemporary), poetry, documentary materials and spoken-word text. Many also include elements of display, burlesque, satire and orthodox acting. But the written or spoken text rarely predominates over the mix of other forms, even where a written play-text precedes the development of the performance.

SOME PERFORMANCES play to a static audience; many move the audience around in different spaces and the space itself can be as significant a 'player' in the performance as any other element. Simultaneity of elements is another frequent ploy; one watches what one can see, or what one *chooses* to see, among several images or actions on offer. Repetition of ideas, images and utterances is another frequently used strategy.

Finally, most pieces are company-devised or evolved through a creative development/rehearsal process, although writers are often engaged to assist in shaping a work, and directors are likewise employed to tie the whole thing together (or to keep the elements apart in an aesthetically determined way).

LIKE ORTHODOX DRAMA, and any of the other newer theatre forms represented in this volume, performance can be *about* anything. The pieces collected here deal, separately and sometimes together, with the family and domestic life, World War I, cultural and social heritage and Aboriginal reconciliation; sexuality, desire and violence (a recurrent motif—there are a lot of rapes and other forms of sexual violence here); scientific, philosophical and artistic theory; political corruption and deceit, and the impact of modern technology—as well as the relationships between performer and audience and between artforms themselves. Film noir, fairytales and other literary classics, performance poetry, surrealist painting—and the visual and plastic arts more generally—are among the forms frequently drawn upon (and often sent up) in these works.

If a somewhat defensive approach to naming the 'unnameable' is one of my disappointments with this collection, another is a lack of even a brief history of the genre (especially in Australia) and a brief summary of those groups and artists left out in an introduction which dwells perhaps too much on how the book came to be written. Contemporary performance may be a predominantly Sydney phenomenon, but there are and have been performance groups of various kinds all over Australia. Allen and Pearlman include works from companies or individuals in most of the capital cities, but Sydney and Melbourne still predominate as they do in most major works on Australian theatre of all kinds.

There is nothing from the rich tradition in Canberra, home at various times to the extraordinary visual company Splinters Theatre of Spectacle, the more orthodox performance groups Tango One 60 and The People Next Door and the more recent, dance-based, Paige Gordon Performance Group. Tasmania is represented only by a collaborative

commissioned piece by the co-editors' company, That was Fast, with TasDance: *Thursday's Fictions*, in 1995. This is a useful inclusion, in its blend of poetry-as-performance and contemporary dance, although the fragments reprinted here include no description of the dance work at all, which is rather odd. Adelaide is represented by Doppio Teatro's *Preludes to an Exile*, included rightly enough as a new direction for a company specialising before the mid-1990s in multicultural community theatre, but looking ready to burst out of its mould since the late 1980s. Even so, it might have been interesting to see one of Curtis Weiss' film-inspired productions for Mad Love (like *Alphaville*, Adelaide, 1989) juxtaposed against Richard Murphet's Raymond Chandler/Dashiell Hammett burlesque *Quick Death* (Melbourne 1981) for comparison.

The Perth productions are David Williams' and Barry Laing's adaptation of Deborah Levy's *Beautiful Mutants* for the short-lived Ex-Stasis in 1993 and the thematically broader-based *Geography of Haunted Places*, by Josephine Wilson and Erin Hefferon. Physical theatre, new circus and performance work in Brisbane have enjoyed a particularly strong vogue during the 1990s, but what we get here is Kooemba Jdarra's monodrama *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, already published by Playlab Press (1996). I suppose the temptation to include scenes from this extraordinary piece must have been overwhelming—it was one of the most memorable pieces of Australian theatre of any kind seen this decade.

Melbourne is represented by the Richard Murphet piece mentioned above, the prolific Lyndal Jones, Jenny Kemp's *Call of the Wild* for the Church Theatre in 1989 and by Kemp's long-term associate Margaret Cameron's much-travelled and perhaps over-developed *Things Calypso Wanted to Say!*. Other Melbourne groups and individuals worthy of mention would have been de soxy theatre, Chapel of Change, the brilliant physical theatre/new circus group Club Swing, David Pledger's eclectic Not Yet It's Difficult Performance Group and Lloyd Jones, who has experimented in performance and performance art for over 20 years in and around La Mama.

Inclusion of the definitive *First and Last Warning* by the Sydney Front (see

photo, opposite page), together with works by their heirs and successors Sidetrack (*Nobody's Daughter*, 1997), Open City (*Sum of the Sudden*, 1993), and The Party Line (*Appearing in Pieces*, 1993), ensures a strong and varied Sydney presence in the book. The widely toured physical theatre piece *All of Me*, by Legs on the Wall, adds depth to the coverage, as do pieces from the physically based Kinetic Energy and Entr'Acte, now almost in the veteran category of Sydney performance groups. Many other Sydney artists are worthy of inclusion here, such as William Yang whose series of monologues with slides (*Sadness*, *The North*, etc.) are truly fascinating, visually based performance works but impossible to reproduce in print.

AND HERE LIES the principal difficulty in assembling—and assessing—a book like this; the words and the spoken text can only ever evoke a limited account of the actual performance text. For example, Jenny Kemp's spoken words, reproduced in *Call of the Wild*, look almost puerile on the page, but my memory of them in the theatre is enriched by a *mise-en-scène* embracing Paul Delvaux's visual imagery and extra-textual slide projections, movement, the vulnerability of the actors, and the music by Elizabeth Drake. Virtually none of this can be simulated in book form, even where the words are printed over production photographs, sometimes in such a way that neither the words nor the pictures are decipherable. You had to be there ...

But this is still an invaluable publication, both as a collection of some of the fragments of performance that have altered the course of Australian theatre history over the past 20 years and as an indication of the ways in which the act of writing is being put to the service of new theatre forms. What may be deduced from the fact that my review copy fell apart at the binding during my second reading, I am not so sure: the evanescence of this unnameable form, which will surely evolve further in the future? A curse from the bookbinders? ... or from the old Australian realist dramatists? ■

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

FLASH IN THE PAN



Havana heaven

Buena Vista Social Club, dir. Wim Wenders. Don't miss this film. Take your aunt, your brother, your granddaughter, your neighbours. Tempt them to dance with it. Book a ticket to Cuba on the strength of it. Or maybe just relish it for what it is: a ravishingly beautiful tribute to consummate musicianship and a certain tenacity of character. And don't be put off by the 'Best Documentary' awards the film has gathered recently. Great documentary salutes the texture and significance of the moment—and most of the moments we mark are full of dread or devastation. But this one is a feast of Orpheus.

Wim Wenders turns his formidable cinematic skill into a lyrical evocation of music-making in Cuba, a subject so rich in its human and musical virtuosity that he can dispense with the feyness that sometimes cloy his cinema.

The film is the fruit of a 20-year collaboration that Wenders has enjoyed with slide-guitarist Ry Cooder (who wrote the music for *Paris, Texas* and *The End of Violence*). But Cooder appears, fittingly, just as one of the musicians in the Buena Vista Social Club, playing alongside luminaries like pianist Rubén González (born 1919), singer Ibrahim Ferrer (born 1927, and not a quiver in his vocal line) and guitarist and tres player Compay Segundo (born 1907—and I wouldn't trust him with my daughter). The film follows their story—and that of the other Cuban musicians who

come back together through Cooder's initiative—with an improbable blend of tact, regard and lavish cinematography. Wenders can turn the duco of a Cuban convertible into a Monet. One long-tracking shot takes him up the stairs of a grand, tarnished Havana mansion into a kind of celestial ballroom and, finally, to an old upright where Rubén González is playing, his hands gnarled like polished mahogany. The excess works because the music, and the musicians—all of them, including Cooder, with their eyes on something beyond themselves—predominate, and give point and purpose to Wenders' own artistry.

The music of the Buena Vista Social Club has moved beyond cult status—it's now internationally famous and widely available on CD.

But the film adds a dimension—the infectious, concentrated joy on the face of born musicians at full stretch. There's nothing like it. —Morag Fraser

Upset the à la carte

The Dinner Game, dir. Francis Veber. Francis Veber is one of France's most popular directors, specialising in odd-couple comedies, constructing totally incompatible pairings and putting them under pressure to see what happens. He also seems to be Hollywood's favourite foreigner, given that they seem to have remade most of his films in English (*The Birdcage*, *Three Fugitives*, *Father's Day* are just some of the remakes).

In *The Dinner Game*, Pierre (Thierry Lhermitte) has no-one to blame but himself for his incompatible other. The game he and his smug yuppie friends play requires them each to bring a guest to dinner—the stupidest, dullest, most absurd guest wins. Pierre is sure he's on to a winner with his latest fool, an accountant named François (Jacques Villeret) who specialises in matchstick models of famous buildings. François knows his trade, right down to the number of matches in each model, and the tubes of glue used to hold them together, and he's very keen to display his expertise. At the last moment, however, Pierre puts his back out, and finds himself trapped helpless in his opulent flat with only his idiot for company.

The laughs come as François, with the best of intentions, destroys his new friend's carefully constructed life, alienating both

his wife and his mistress, setting the tax inspectors on to Pierre's undeclared art collection and generally causing chaos. Of course, this means that we're laughing at François with exactly the same smug condescension Pierre and his appalling cronies use to mock their dinner idiots. This is less thought-provoking than it might sound, however, since François redeems himself in the end, teaching Pierre that a good heart is more important than a good brain (which is exactly the kind of sentimentality that endears Veber's films to Hollywood producers, although they tend to spread it through their versions like mayonnaise, whereas Veber manages to be genuinely acerbic at least some of the time). There's no doubt there are some good laughs to be had in *The Dinner Game*, but if you find that subtitles strain your eyes, you may as well wait for the American remake (especially if you like mayonnaise).

—Allan James Thomas

Club socko

Fight Club, dir. David Fincher. On the face of it this is a witty, sharp sort of film with heaps of references to millennium zeitgeist stuff and how it's terrible to be a powerless worker/consumer in the soulless-gutless-capitalist-free-market-urban wasteland.

The first half-hour is great, with a ripper beginning that starts you off careening through the tortured synapses of a man who, it turns out as you emerge through a very open pore on his sweaty face, is in what the Famous Five used to call a very tricky situation.

Ed Norton is Jack, an office-worker who lives in a fussily minimalist condo, defined by his purchases and utterly unable to sleep. He begs a young doctor for help, and is told, in the self-righteous way that doctors affect when they can't really help, that if he wanted to see real pain he should just take himself along to the testicular cancer support group. He goes, finds he can weep and then is able to sleep. But the effect isn't permanent, so he begins an odyssey through the American self-help culture.

Self-help is such a resonant phrase when you realise that in the culture being described here, it's all the help you're likely to get. The groups are easy to lampoon because it's not yet politically incorrect to laugh at *emotional* cripples. But at this point the film is mostly keeping up with your own observations and making some pointed references to the anger and

emptiness of men who are fatherless and godless. Castration motifs abound.

Jack meets by chance, as it seems, a philosopher-outlaw, Tyler Durden, (Brad Pitt, very pumped and spiky) who tests him and starts to bring him out of himself. They fight in a very Iron-Johnish sort of way and so begin the Fight Club, a secret society of men whose way of connecting with their deep masculine souls is to bash the whatsits out of each other.

For me the plot began to loosen somewhat after this. Helena Bonham Carter plays an outré sort of girl who smokes angrily and has a very loud affair with Tyler, who smokes very stylishly, flinging dog-ends all over the place in a way I'm hoping the teenage lads who flock to this film won't emulate. It all finishes with a surprise ending, lots of colour and movement, because Hollywood has to tell you that anyone who believes that there's something wrong with the free-market wasteland just has to be a loopy Unabomber type. The males in my family *loved* it.

—Juliette Hughes

Criminal acts

Happy Texas, dir. Mark Illsley. *Happy Texas* is a pedestrian comedy. I was hoping it might be a comic sequel to Wim Wenders' *Paris, Texas* (now that would be something hilarious), but alas, nothing so brave and difficult. Instead it was a mildly amusing jaunt around small-town Texas in a dumpy mobile home with two decidedly heterosexual crims being mistaken for gay Pageant Masters. You can imagine the laughs to be derived from such a scenario—short, aggressive guy who can't express emotion is confronted by a church hall of ill-behaved princesses with corkscrew curls and umpteen metres of spangled lycra.

There seems to be a popular-culture obsession at present with straight guys finding themselves in situations where everyone thinks they are gay (*Seinfeld*, *Three to Tango*, etc). Perhaps it is the current equivalent of the early '90s near-death films (*Regarding Henry*, *The Doctor*) where blokes had to glimpse the 'other side' to be human enough to speak kindly to their wives. The lesson now seems to be 'touching spandex won't give you cancer and talking to girls like you care is not a bad idea'. Derrrrr.

William H. Macy's performance, as local Sheriff Chappy Dent, is a standout. Macy's tender and tentative explorations of his character's sexuality are both amusing and

intelligent. If the film could have sustained that tenor it would have been a comic and sensual treat. Steve Zahn's performance as Wayne Wayne Wayne Jnr, petty car thief and drongo, was also ripper, especially given the hair-do he had to work with. But generally the script and bounding performances of the rest of the cast were just too standard by half. Happy, it may be, but *Hilarious Texas* it is not.

—Siobhan Jackson

Into the woods

The Blair Witch Project, dir. Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez. This has now gone into movie legend as having provided the best outlay/return ratio ever. On a budget of \$50,000, two small-time directors managed to market their work on the internet and the rest is such history as Hollywood allows.

Briefly, the story is of three young people who enter the Maryland woods in search of evidence about a legend concerning a witch who was banished centuries before, only to re-emerge over the years in horrible stories of murder, mutilation and disappearance. The three never return, and the film is supposed to have been 'edited' from film stock that was found near where they vanished. The film is shot as fake documentary, but does it very effectively. The stock is video and 16mm, and the switching from one to the other provides some of the drama in the plot.

There is a problem, though not as serious a problem as some critics would have it. The marketing of the film pretends it to be 'true', pretty much as all that nonsense about *Picnic at Hanging Rock* has probably left some people thinking that 'it really happened'. The interesting thing is that if it were a true record of a disappearance, it would be terrifying, but it's neither true nor frightening, in the horror-fable sense. But it holds a kind of truth that *is* disturbing, something to do with young middle-class first-worlders having no spirituality beyond astrology, no history beyond TV reruns and no self-control. Searching for something old and numinous, they wake the kraken in all of us.

The whole thing can be seen as a microcosm of Western culture adrift, cut off from its roots, with its veneer of sexual equality undermined continually. The girl whose 'project' it is, starts out like a control-freak bossy-boots whom you want to kick or at least gag. But as the film goes on it

becomes plain that her control of the project is under continual attack from forces without and within. She has a map (to start with) and a compass, but both are useless without real knowledge and some divine help. At any rate, this film will now be a must for anyone interested in the horror genre.

—Juliette Hughes

Unbalanced

Cirque du Soleil—Journey of Man, dir. Ken Melton. I have surfed the net, played Nintendo, roller-bladed (if somewhat unsuccessfully), owned a Coca-Cola super yo-yo, and thrown a frisbee to a dog, but until last week I had never seen a 3D movie. I proudly, but daftly, stretched out my hand in front of me would disperse if I shoved my finger into it. Assuming my five-year-old would do the same, I whispered, while waving my hands around, 'It's like you can really touch it, eh, blossom?' She turned her goggled face towards mine, raised her shades and explained with the gentle lift of her eyebrow that she knew it was just an effect.



The story of *Journey of Man* was sentimental twaddle. The soppy voice-over about love and life and all things nice was an artistic disaster. *However*, the performers from *Cirque du Soleil* were wonderful. On a lily leaf in the middle of an Italianate pond stands a marble statue of two lovers. Slowly and beautifully it come to life. The couple move and balance and amaze. These people could balance an elephant on an earlobe and remain elegant. Cube Man in the Valley of Fire was more he-man than elegant, but hell, he was spinning a massive cube above his head on the edge of a cliff—you'd need a Solo after a performance like that. The 3D was a lot of fun, but its effect played a serious second fiddle to the circus performers themselves. Their balancing, bouncing, spinning and leaping was simply miraculous.

—Siobhan Jackson



Sounding brass

MUSIC IS THE damnedest. It marks you, you are identified irredeemably by your preferences. Show me your CDs and I will tell you what you are. If your CD stack is full of ABC

Swoon series and the Three Tenors you're a bit of a sweetie. We hide the sherry when you pop round because it makes you rave on about the craggy good looks of Richard Bonyng. If you affect nothing but Astor Piazzolla, Arvo Pärt and Gorecki you don't really *like* music per se. Kronos, Elvis Costello and mid-range Miles Davis: you frighten the kiddies in your neat black clothes, but you vote sensibly. Pinnock, Hogwood and Harnoncourt: you're a bore. Wu Tang, Korn, Limp Bizkit: you're my teenage son and you're driving me nuts because it sounds all the same to me. Mozart, Beatles, Bach, Wagner, Gershwin, The Who, Kathleen Ferrier, Led Zeppelin, Queen, Stevie Wonder, Björk and Sibelius: you're me and yes, I'm a worry to my friends—a bit eclectic like Mike Tyson is a bit violent, but that was the usual thing once.

My sisters and I grew up in England with *Housewives' Choice* and *Desert Island Discs* and in Australia went to a splendid Brigidine convent that had Mother Andrew to teach us music, and no domestic science wing. My parents, both singers, had had us all singing from the cradle. Their fare was opera, G&S, church choir and the popular songs of the era before their youth. We fell asleep to 'Ma Curly-Headed Babby', 'The Dream Man', and various music-hall bits and pieces about characters called Sweet Hortense or Alfonso Spagoni. We heard them and sang them back—it was what you did then.

Left outside a shop in a pram (still done in England), I'm told my two-year-old sister and I began singing a ditty that started:

The brokers are sitting on the backyard wall
Waiting for their two-pound-two ...

and finished with:

Mama's got the rolling-pin
Waiting for yer to come in
Faaather, faaather, do come 'ome!

My mother said, shame-faced, that when she came out of the shop the pram cover was full of pennies. She didn't give them back though; that would have been daft. Now people are embarrassed to sing; they measure skill and taste only by what they're willing to listen to, and the marketeers are happy with that—passivity makes good consumers.

The radio was full of lovely fruity music, from Chopin, Gershwin, Wagner to such friendly titbits as *The Rustle of Spring*, *The Dream of Olwen* and *The Cornish Rhapsody*. We'd gallop around the room to *The Ride of the Valkyries*. And the left-hand path was not neglected: *The Six-Five Special* was the BBC's version of *Countdown* in the '50s. And then one great day at my grandparents', the radio was tuned to the Light Programme, and I heard the King. The intro to 'Jailhouse Rock'

(DAH-DAH, dut dut) sizzled up my seven-year-old spine and enslaved me to rhythm forever. Now I heard and felt afresh the inner rhythms of the classical music I loved; rode the pitch curves of the wailing, the crooning, while joying in the bulls-eye A440 of the classical stuff.

In the '60s, here in Oz, my father used to wake us every morning with what was then 3AR. We would burrow under the covers, yowling for more sleep—but he was implacable, jolly, a hateful lark in a house of frowsty owls. At six a.m. in those days, the programmers weren't afraid to put on a bit of Wagner hullabaloo or a nice noisy Berlioz; people weren't being soothed, talked down to. You were being Woken Up, and soon found yourself conducting symphonies with your toast crust or, perilously, your cup of Lan-Choo. ABC-FM is only rarely now so lively—too much genteel Haydn and (my only musical pet hate) 19th-century polkas and minor Viennese waltzes.

Popular radio has ceded greatly to the music-video culture that distracts us from distraction with distraction. (T.S. was prophetic as well as diagnostic.) We take in images with the sound: all well and good—opera has done it for almost a millennium in the West. But the traps opera falls into (more and more these days) are there for the popular music performers too: fascinate the eye, and the ear is dulled. No-one goes to the ballet to be entranced primarily by the music performance—it has to be serviceably produced, that is all. When opera was taken over by the visual nazis it became more difficult for great singing to happen; young, pretty people look nice but their voices can buckle and dwindle from the strain: Puccini, Verdi et al. need vocal maturity. Close your eyes at your peril at many operas now. Similarly, the voices that are gravelled by the style demands and poor foldback of contemporary popular music are part of a culture that now sees artists with a shelf-life of an oyster naturel. Pretty young people, fodder for the devouring eye, vie for the attention of the print media that tie in with the recording companies.

THE MAGAZINES (*New Idea*, *Woman's Day*, *NW*), greedy for young flesh, seek new twists on the themes they're too corrupted, narrow and lazy to see beyond: royalty, pop stars, movie stars, TV stars—Britney Spears and Prince William with their images computer-faked together. The jailbait girl of the deathless 'Hit me baby, one more time' is dangled at us: the new royalty entwined with the old royalty.

Howard Goodall's *Big Bangs* (Goodall is the composer of that really lovely little theme song to *The Vicar of Dibley*) on the ABC in December was a great introduction to the history of music, but so few young people would watch it, so few be empowered by such perspectives, that they're left, listening/watching TLC and Backstreet Boys on MTV and *Rage* and reading the stories made up about them all. So what are we gunna do about it? ■

Juliette Hughes is a musical omnivore.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 80, January–February 2000

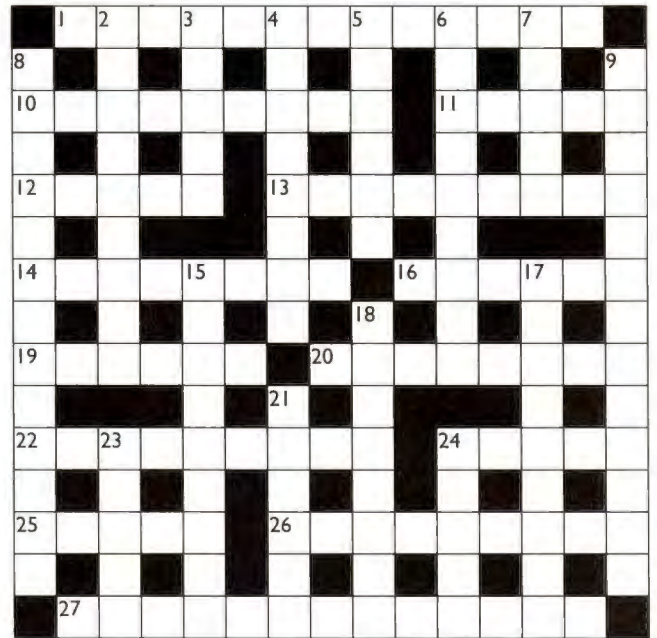
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

1. Run to earth and catch, perhaps, these events at 14-across. (5-3-5)
10. It's duplicitous to pretend to be in, as before. (9)
11. Spare parts to analyse. (5)
12. Heard short office in the church. (5)
13. What will you eat? Mashed peas and tripe, for a start. (9)
14. Unfortunately, open court leaders simply not good enough for these events. (8)
16. Exist without feeling? You astound me. (6)
19. Cambridge University theologian the French demonstrate affection for? (6)
20. That's a fine-looking peach! It's possibly only an imitation. (8)
22. Speaking of that almost full fellow—he's positively glowing! (9)
24. Chanticleer, perhaps, has left for his job as time-keeper. (5)
25. Return to start. Companies should apply for tickets to the Games committee. (5)
26. The Games committee is organising some participants to run this in the 14-across. (1, 8)
27. A country expression like 'bonzer bloke'. (13)

DOWN

2. Royal Engineering Service begged for no interference until the barracks had been freshly painted. (9)
3. Craft on the ocean wave! (5)
4. Because any rearrangement was useless, the decision was held in suspension. (8)
5. Otherwise, I'd peep at a place in France. (6)
6. I am in hospital, anyhow, and very irritable about it. (9)
7. Listen to the instruments—their sound is deceptive. (5)
8. What Noel celebrates at the beginning of the millennium. (5,2,6)
9. The Centre is in a process of disintegration. That's tragic! (13)
15. Some faint comprehension at the dawning of the day? (4,5)
17. Lays bare dress encompassed by sun—oddly. (9)
18. Former mutton producer I included in the preparation of the dish. (8)
21. Some strange lad accepts care of the African baboon. (6)
23. Angle, we hear, you developed in dress design using light scarf. (5)
24. String as long as a cricket pitch. (5)



Solution to Crossword no. 79, December 1999



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