

# EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS,  
THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY  
Vol 12 no 1 January-February 2002 \$7.50 (inc. GST)



something old something new something borrowed  
**East Timor in transition**  
where are we now? Robert Manne

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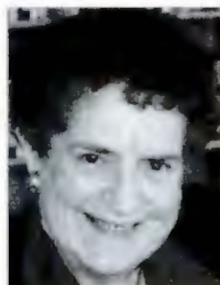
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# EUREKA STREET

## happenings



### Cryptic century

In this month's *Eureka Street*, fans of the intricate mind of Sr Joan Nowotny IBVM (at left) will observe a remarkable achievement. In its traditional spot on the inside back cover, the cryptic crossword is 100 not out. Since April 1992, Joan has devised at least ten crosswords a year, for the enjoyment and to the bemusement of our readers.

From time to time, the crossword turns up at the *Eureka Street* office with a word or two missing from the solution.

Joan (a philosopher and academic in her other life) will respond to a phoned enquiry, 'Oh yes, unload the fish to make the pudding!' Curiously, this repetition of the clue doesn't always assist, but she'll eventually respond to bemused editors. 'Well, "dumpling". You see ...' The explanation that follows is always generous, though there remains a sneaking suspicion that she's enjoying herself a bit more than she would have had the solution been left out *entirely* by accident.

### Opening innings

Brian Matthews once owned a Gray Nicholls bat autographed by Neil Harvey, and on a scrap of vacant land near a beachside canal, he wielded it for Australia. In fact, when his mate Tod lost the toss, Brian *was* Australia—the complete team in himself.

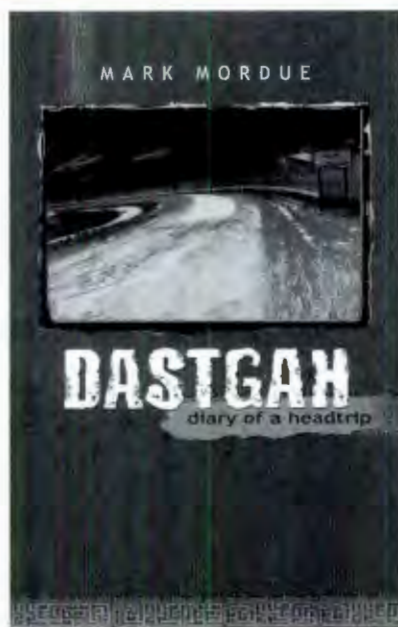
*Eureka Street* welcomes the whole-of-Australia player to our ranks as the new 'By the Way' columnist (see page 20).

Brian, who in his non-sporting professional life is a prolific writer, Lawson scholar, raconteur and critic, will appear every month—musing on whichever quirk, foible or miracle catches his mind's eye.



# EUREKA STREET

## book offer



## Dastgah

Diary of a Headtrip

By Mark Mordue

From a lightning storm in Calcutta to heroin addicts in Tehran, from a dead boy by a roadside in the Nepalese Himalaya to New York disappearing in a mist, *Dastgah* maps a one-year journey across the planet.

Private reflections, comic anecdotes, poetry, dreams and the radical spirit of new journalism are all called upon as award-winning writer Mark Mordue weaves through questions of identity and love on the road, building a refined diary that walks the line between reporting on the world and getting lost in it.

Thanks to Allen & Unwin, *Eureka Street* has 15 copies of *Dastgah* to give away. Just put your name and address on the back of an envelope and send it to:  
Eureka Street January–February 2002  
Book Offer, PO Box 553, Richmond,  
VIC, 3121. (See page 8 for winners  
of the November 2001 book offer.)

  
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# EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY  
VOLUME 12 NUMBER 1 JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2002



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Cartoon p13 by Dean Moore.  
Photograph p21 by Peter Browne.



## Letter to a tank commander

**I** REMEMBER OUR first meeting. We were preparing presentations for international aid workers. Your topic was 'civil/military co-operation'. Mine was 'working with refugees'. Although you were casually dressed, your whole being exuded a military air: the physique, short-cropped hair, the tan, the demeanour.

I wondered as we began that week-long course, how a peace activist like myself who had denounced so many military atrocities, could end up working with a tank commander.

Our first conversation was challenging. I explained that, had we met ten years ago, I would not have been able to speak to you. I was then so angry at the military for what they had done in Latin America, and for all the US funding and weaponry that was used against the people and communities I had worked with in El Salvador. You replied instantly: if I chose to be angry with the military, so be it, but in order that I and other Australians had the

democratic right of choice, you were prepared to die.

Later, you appeared in military uniform. 'Dressed to kill,' I remarked, but then caught my breath—that green camouflage garb triggered memories of military madness. You listened, suggested we go somewhere for a chat. Never once did you seek to disengage.

You told me about your work: looking after those in your command and following orders. And if the enemy falls? That's the fault or weakness of their commander. And you added, or at least this is what I thought I heard you say, 'And I have to live with that.'

How *do* you live with that? How does anyone? I realised that down to your last drop of blood, you would look after those men and women under your command—an admirable quality.

I had learned a lot about the military during the civil war in El Salvador. The safety and security of my friends and colleagues in that country depended on my not engaging with the military, so I learnt how

Australian soldier on the beach, Dili, 2001. Photographed by Michael Coyne while he was on location in East Timor doing photographic background work for the play *Tour of Duty*. The play, by Graham Pitts, concerns a WWII soldier who returns to East Timor to recover the *lulic* (spirit) of the place and to find the East Timorese *criado* (guide) who once saved his life.

to avoid them, how to cast my eyes down when an encounter was unavoidable, how to keep quiet, and, when the lives of the people I loved were under direct military threat, how to pick the moment to speak up. (Was I now expected to capitulate?)

Unlike you, I was not trained for war. I didn't know the first thing about grenades, bombs or bullets when I first landed in El Salvador. There are, however, some things that don't take long to learn.

At DM4, the infamous Salvadoran military base located at the foot of the mountains, a camouflage wall is painted with huge black letters, in Spanish: 'No Mission Impossible'. Even then, I knew the haunting truth of that message. In 1996, 15 years after the El Mozote massacre, the *New York Times* reported that as many as 1000 unarmed peasants had been killed. That mission was unleashed from DM4. I worked with the one female survivor—Rufina Amaya.

Until the day I stepped into that military headquarters at DM4, I had supposed that evil existed but I had never actually felt it. At that moment, in that place, I knew, right down in my bones, that evil was precisely what I was experiencing.

Life for me since then has never been the same. Perhaps, as a tank commander, there were times, decisive moments, which changed you forever too.

One of our finer moments of engagement occurred on the dance floor. Who would ever imagine that an Australian tank commander could dance salsa as well as any respectable Latin American? Somewhere between the twirling, the Latin American rhythms and the perspiration, we were just two people enjoying the music and dancing.

Later you talked to me of good military and bad military. Australians in your schema were naturally good. You spoke of their peace-keeping roles. But weren't we the ones who trained the Indonesian Special Forces before the systematic devastation of East Timor? And what about the US military, training elite Latin American forces including perpetrators of the El Mozote civilian massacre? Who is responsible?

As the days passed, I began to glimpse the man behind the uniform. Yet, a voice kept reminding me, 'he's military'. I began to disengage. From your perspective, my disengagement resulted from my lack of having any clear objectives. But I could not bring myself to debate tactics.

I hadn't slept all week. My past was keeping me company, surrounding me.

The last day of the course was a relief. I knew I needed to touch home base. In the final hours, during a scheduled feedback session, you and I sat down and faced each other. The tank commander and the peace activist finally get down to tin tacks. There is a lot they admire in each other.

I was impressed by your strategic abilities and communication skills. You, as I recall, noted my zest for life and sense of humanity. Then came the tricky

part. You knew I did not have a clue who you really were; that in six days I had not managed to get beyond the military surface. What's more, you had been subjected to so much of my past as I relived it that week and I found your strategic approach devastating. I was left to ponder if the only reason we engaged at all was so that you could meet your military objectives—what is referred to as 'commander's intent'.

But still we listened to each other intently. Something seemed to shift. The real dialogue of two human beings who live in different worlds could now begin.

Later that afternoon, you took me to visit a military base in Brisbane. You wanted me to see that not all military bases were like DM4 in El Salvador. Walking around were regular Australians who could be neighbours or family. The next day, as we said our farewells, you reminded me that I now had a friend in the military.

**W**HEN I RETURNED HOME, I emailed colleagues from El Salvador. One, Ana, was a young girl when the Salvadoran military rolled tanks into the parish of San Antonio Abad in the capital of San Salvador, splattering everything in their wake: the fence, the garden, and the priest, Father Octavio Ortiz—Ana's brother. That was before the war officially began. During the war Ana's four other brothers were killed and the mountains where she was born were bombed—extensively and persistently.

After my encounter with you, it was Ana's counsel I sought. (Perhaps I wrote out of guilt, having fraternised with the enemy.) Ana could just imagine me twirling the night away. In fact, she couldn't help but laugh—Michele being spun around by the military. She added, if that's what it takes to fix my injured back, then why stop?

But somewhere in that message, Ana was encouraging me to leave the past behind. Not to forget, but to move on. Had I been caught in the past while my Salvadoran friends and colleagues embraced reconciliation?

I will continue to believe that alternative solutions to war are possible. As you said, that is my right. After all the refugee camps, the bombed communities, and the devastated people I have seen trying to rebuild their shattered lives years after the war finishes, I consider it my responsibility.

Thirteen years ago, issues of war and peace seemed so black and white. But it's not that simple, is it? There are so many areas of grey. That's where I stand now, up to my neck in grey as I search for a degree of humanity in social responses, and in each human being I encounter. I just never expected to find that humanness behind the uniform of a man who commands military manoeuvres from inside an army tank. ■

**Michele M. Gierck** is a freelance writer.





## Adelaide Festival trials

The tribulations of this year's Adelaide Festival have made depressing reading. Losing Artistic Director Peter Sellars only three months before opening night (was he pushed or did he jump?) is certainly regrettable and one doesn't envy new director Sue Natrass' task of trying to tidy up what is obviously a pretty sorry mess. But several points must be made about this saga. Whatever the shortcomings of Sellars' eventual program, and despite the failure of vision that saw the partial unravelling of his nine-person associate director structure, any seasoned observer—let alone the Festival Board—should have seen it coming. What Sellars delivered was surely pretty much what he promised two years ago.

And this is not the first opportunity lost for the Adelaide Festival. Indeed, its earliest days are best remembered for what it didn't do rather than for what it did. Was it not the very first Festival of 1960 that turned down Alan Seymour's *The One Day of the Year*, because it might offend the RSL? And didn't it follow suit in its second (1962) by not doing Patrick White's too-depressing *The Ham Funeral*? Given that both plays have since taken honoured places in the Australian dramatic canon, could the Adelaide Festival again be left wondering what might have been?

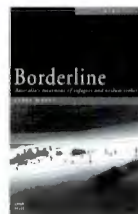


## Burnt offerings

Are prayers answered? Sometimes, as the Bible says, in mysterious ways. Margaret Walsh's recent, capacious *The Good Sams* tells a story of how the novitiate building of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, in Sydney, was run down, the hot-water system and the plumbing

clapped out and the rooms overcrowded. So the novices held a novena of Masses, that the leadership would take notice of their distressed building. Exactly one month later, the building burnt down.

## Scooping the pool



December 2001 was a busy month for Peter Mares, *Eureka Street* regular and ABC broadcaster. In recognition of his recent book about Australia's refugees, *Borderline*, Mares received both the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Human Rights Award 2001 in the category 'Arts Non-Fiction', and the Centre for Australian Cultural Studies Award 2001 for an outstanding contribution to Australian cultural life. *Eureka Street* readers will recall Mares' two recent articles, in July/August 2000 and November 2001, on Woomera and on the events surrounding the *Tampa*.



## Raising the rights flag

Many church leaders have recently taken up the cause of asylum seekers and refugees. Most, understandably, speak of the claim that asylum seekers make on our hospitality and kindness. But Adelaide's new Catholic Archbishop, Philip Wilson, in a notable recent statement, insisted that our support was also a matter of justice. As human beings and as societies, we owe protection to the unprotected.

In Melbourne, the mood was related. Exactly one month after the recent federal election, former Human Rights commissioner Chris Sidoti and former Liberal Minister for Immigration Ian McPhee made forthright statements. Speaking at the launch of the 2001 Human Rights Register (compiled by the Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and

Peace) they called for a concerted grassroots campaign to change perceptions and, ultimately, policy, on the detention and treatment of asylum seekers. Both questioned the government's position on family reunion. Chris Sidoti noted, with disgust, the occasional practice of holding family members in different detention camps, a situation made even more distressing when Department officials make no effort to notify relations about the welfare of those dearest to them.

Details of the Human Rights Register are available on the Commission's website: [www.melb.catholic.aust.com/agency/justice.html](http://www.melb.catholic.aust.com/agency/justice.html)



## Aspinall's election

Brisbane's next Anglican archbishop was elected in November 2001.

At 41, Bishop Phillip Aspinall is the youngest archbishop ever chosen in Australia (beating Primate Dr Peter Carnley by a year). In a church desperate for renewal, his youth flags a generational change and new ways of leadership.

Diocesan clergy fears—that the prolonged selection process would come up with a manager rather than a pastor—were fanned when a media release listed Dr Aspinall's Master in Business Administration. But at his first media conference on 16 November, the archbishop elect confounded expectations by making an eloquent pastoral response to the events of September 11. He reminded journalists that passengers on doomed aeroplanes headed for the World Trade Center and the Pentagon telephoned loved ones.

'At the deep core of human life,' he said, 'what ultimately matters are things like love and compassion and relationships, and finding the courage to be truly oneself ... That's when people discover what it really means to be fully human and to be fully alive.'

Dr Aspinall has been assistant-bishop in the Diocese of Adelaide since 1998 and chairs Anglicare Australia. He will be installed in St John's Cathedral on 2 February.



# Dividing the spoils

**J**OHN HOWARD IS STILL savouring the moment. He will probably keep doing so all the way to February, when he will have to address a Budget by then looking about \$3 billion in deficit. It's not that the political antennae are not out checking what his political opponents—particularly in his own party—are doing, but the Prime Minister is looking very relaxed and comfortable after his toughest year yet in politics. He has very little in his in-tray, and not a little good-humoured mischief on his mind.

Retiring? I'd be very surprised indeed if he faced the next election, but he has no idea of doing Peter Costello any favours and will go at a time entirely of his own choosing. Until he does, he will run government his way, as if to set up yet another victory by himself. John Howard got where he did by being himself and now, in his sweetest moment, he is not going to change, even if, as ever, he remains flexible on issues that are not central for him. But forget the idea that he may do a U-turn on his refugee policy, or on Aboriginal affairs. If his successors, whoever they are, want to change course, that will be a matter for them, but he is not going to make their task easier.

It would not be strictly correct to say that he is actively sabotaging Peter Costello as the natural, ultimate successor, but Howard has done all that he can to keep a few rivals in the ring. Tony Abbott has been effectively promoted, and so has Brendan Nelson and some other ambitious politicians from NSW and elsewhere. None have significant personal support bases—they will depend on Howard's goodwill for any success that they enjoy—but all have platforms from which they can show off what talents they have. And some have opportunities to look good at a time when Costello may be looking mean, tricky and difficult to communicate with (in part because he will be dealing with the Howard-Costello black hole).

Brendan Nelson has been given education and, clearly, the task of repairing the relationship with the universities. Moreover he has been given a departmental secretary, Peter Shergold, with some capacity for making ministers look good. Nelson may be a moderate of the type Howard—ever the factional warrior—despises, but he is not being set up in the way that most of the senior moderates, such as Amanda Vanstone and Michael Wooldridge, were set up in 1996. The moderates then were given the big-spending departments, and the biggest agenda for cuts; most had to severely mortgage their own reputations to survive. Nelson, by contrast, may not be there to preside over a major expansion, but he will not be the minister for bad news.

No doubt Kay Patterson, the new Minister for Health, does not want to be the minister for bad news either, but she may

not have so easy a task before her. Howard has no great intention of helping the states out of the problems of hospital funding. The new secretary of Health will be Jane Halton—very able, but highly aggressive. Even her champion, Max Moore-Wilton, jokes that he has been trying to teach her to go for the knees rather than the throat. Halton is Canberra's first second-generation secretary—her father was also a secretary. From her deputy secretary's position in the Prime Minister's Department, she was the one who co-ordinated the Howard government's response to the *Tampa* affair and also the deployment of troops in Afghanistan. Tony Abbott, in industrial relations, will have Canberra's most ideological and political secretary, Peter Boxall, doing his barking for him, and will as well be Howard's primary strategist in parliament—hardly a sign that Howard intends to lower the temperature on chamber acrimony.

The hopefuls who have fixed their fortunes on Costello—such as Bruce Baird—failed to get promotion in the reshuffle, and the only complete dud to get marching orders was Bronwyn Bishop, who can do Howard little harm if only because she commands so little support. On the other hand, Howard was not only willing to retain, but actually promoted into cabinet, the hapless Ian Macfarlane, the minister in so much trouble over

GST shenanigans until he was saved by the *Tampa* affair in early September.

**I**T MAY WELL BE THAT THE most comfortable prospect facing Howard, however, is the knowledge that yet again he has Labor over a strategic barrel. Presumably, this time around, Labor will be doing rather more to develop policies so that they are seen 'to stand for something'. But whom are they campaigning against? Suppose that Howard does go. Suppose too that Peter Costello wins the leadership. One can assume that Costello will fairly abruptly change a few symbolic policies, if only to demonstrate that a new, forward-thinking man is now in charge. If Labor has, in effect, pitched itself against Howard, it might not be difficult for Costello to sneak by on Labor's left. Yet if Labor recognises Costello as the likely enemy and keeps its focus on him, its parliamentary performance against Howard is likely to be weak—a fact which Howard will exploit. It could almost incite him to do some sort of Hawke in imagining that he, and he alone, could bring back the Liberals a fourth time. Somehow, however, I doubt it. Howard didn't get where he did in politics, or survive so long, by self-delusion; Bob Hawke did, at least while others were willing to stroke him. ■

**Jack Waterford** is editor-in-chief of the *Canberra Times*.



## In two minds

Recent events in the Middle East present a tragic and sobering reality for those of us committed to a peaceful solution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. More than ever, the region seems dominated by ideas and actions of extremism and violence, rather than those of moderation and reconciliation.

Until the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada, I believed that a clear-cut two-state solution was not only the most practical, but also the most likely, if not inevitable, outcome of the peace process. However, with hindsight, it now appears that the Oslo Accord was based on the inherently fatal defect of assuming that pragmatic conflict resolution could overcome the emotive and irrational aspects of the conflict.

In short, the Oslo Accord did not require either the Israelis or the Palestinians to participate in a process of honest self-examination leading to a deconstruction of their core narratives regarding the history and the causes of the conflict. Consequently, neither side was willing to come to terms with the practical reality of dividing a land into two separate states, or move towards identifying the core limits of their proposed final state or territory.

In particular, the Israelis failed to examine how the continued presence of militant Jewish settlements in sovereign Palestinian territory could possibly be compatible with a two-state solution. And similarly the Palestinians failed to conceptualise how the proposed return of hostile Palestinian refugees to Green Line Israel could possibly be acceptable to a sovereign Jewish state.

The problem of the Jewish settlements needs to be addressed first for the simple reason that their presence has long acted as a foreclosure on the peace process. In addition, the current centre-right Israeli government is firmly opposed not only to their dismantling, but even to a cessation of existing plans for expansion.

Contrary to popular perception, the settlements were not solely the creation of right-wing governments committed to the concept of a Greater Israel. To be sure, the Begin and Shamir Likud governments were primarily responsible for their massive resourcing and growth. However, there was a broader national consensus in favour of



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Jewish settlement in the biblical areas called Judea and Samaria. Labor governments both prior to 1977 and following the Oslo Accord of 1993 also actively initiated and expanded settlements.

The most recent Peace Now *Settlement Watch* report estimates that 146 Israeli settlements with a total population of around 203,000 settlers exist in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These settlements sit alongside a total Palestinian population of approximately three million people. Most significantly, there has been a 52 per cent growth in housing in settlements, and an approximately 72 per cent growth in the settler population, since the signing of the Oslo Accord in September 1993. This building has also been accompanied by the paving of over a hundred Israeli bypass roads designed to strengthen ties between the settlements and Green Line Israel.

Many of these settlements exist in or near densely populated Palestinian areas. For a number of reasons, the presence of the settlers inflames Palestinian opinion. First, the confiscation of Palestinian land for Jewish settlements involves a second dispossession for Palestinians, many of whom lost their original homes in 1948.

Second, the settlers regard themselves as the true owners of the territories, and make no attempt to recognise Palestinian national or political rights. On the contrary, many settlers engage in verbal and physical abuse of the Palestinian population, including violent assault and murder. Third, the presence of the settlers provokes constant

conflict and violence between Palestinians and the Israeli army.

There seems to be a consensus inside Israel that the debate over the settlements was lost in the 1970s, and that they will never be dismantled. However, the one continuing certainty in the Middle East is that all Palestinians will continue to regard the settlements as illegal, immoral, and an unacceptable foreign intrusion into their territory. They will almost certainly continue to target the settlers with indiscriminate and often brutal violence in an attempt to force them to leave.

There is therefore an urgent need for an internal Israeli debate around the future of the settlements, and their implications for the peace process. This debate would need to recognise the political errors of the Israeli core narrative of the last 34 years, and particularly the fatal mistake of aligning military and security concerns in the territories with political objectives. It will also require an explicit amendment to the Israeli Law of Return designating that it does not apply to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This is not likely to be a debate with a simple or speedy resolution.

The Palestinian claim to a right of return inside Israel similarly acts as a core barrier to a two-state solution.

The concept of a right of return was based on the UN General Assembly resolution 194 of December 1948, which gave Palestinian refugees the option of return or compensation. However, by the early 1950s, it was obvious that the Israelis would not permit the bulk of the refugees to return, and that equally the neighbouring Arab states would refuse to permit any organised resettlement.

Prior to the 1967 Six Day War, Palestinian right of return rhetoric was used to deny the legitimacy of the State of Israel, and so provide a rationale for the Arab refusal to recognise the State of Israel. However, following the 1967 war, the international debate shifted from questions about the legitimacy of Israel within the Green Line borders to questions about the legitimacy of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The subsequent political contest for or against a two-state solution explicitly assumed that any resolution of the Palestinian refugee tragedy would be addressed within the territories occupied by Israel in 1967.

### November 2001 Book Offer Winners

R. Borrell, Port Fairy, VIC; D. Carroll, Garran, ACT; W. Du Vé, Deepdene, VIC; M. Fitzgerald, Wellington Point, QLD; N. Gardner, Thirroul, NSW; S. Houghton, Westbury, TAS; N. Lanskey, Edmonton, QLD; S.J. Fletcher, Box Hill South, VIC; E. Meadows, Parkville, VIC; A.R. Molomby, Essendon, VIC; E. Robinson, Seacliff Park, SA; A. Stevenson, Mawson, ACT; J. Sutherland, Mosman, NSW; R. Walsh, Newdegate, WA; J. Wilson, Toowoomba, QLD.



The current Palestinian position, however, is that a right of return must also apply to Green Line Israel. This position is backed by suicide bombings inside Israel which suggest an opposition to Israel per se, rather than an opposition to the Israeli occupation of the territories.

To be sure, the proposed right of return is currently theoretical rather than real. However, as with the actual presence of coerced Jewish settlements inside Palestinian territories, a plan for a coerced Palestinian presence inside Israel constitutes an unacceptable foreign intrusion into a sovereign state.

For the Palestinians, the right of return is a core narrative which clashes head-on with two forms of reality. First, no representative segment of the Israeli population from Left to Right will accept the return of 1948 refugees to Israel. Second, the Palestinian narrative of 1948 has to confront the absolutely dichotomous Israeli narrative of 1948. For the Israelis, the core story of 1948 is not the dispossession of the Palestinians, but rather the unprovoked attack on the fledgling Jewish state by neighbouring Arab countries.

While a number of Israeli revisionist historians, including most prominently Benny Morris, have debunked the mythical Israeli version of 1948, few Palestinians have been willing to deconstruct the Palestinian version. One scholar, Professor Rashid Khalidi from Chicago University has, however, at least been willing to ask the hard questions.

Writing in the 1999 text *The Palestinian Exodus* (edited by Ghada Karmi and Eugene Cotran), Khalidi acknowledges the immense gap between Israeli and Palestinian narratives of 1948, and the practical barriers to any return of refugees to Israel. Nevertheless, Khalidi recommends that Israel formally recognise its primary responsibility for the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem, and accept at the very least a responsibility to compensate the refugees for loss of property.

He suggests that this recognition occur within the context of a truth and reconciliation commission similar to that currently existing in South Africa. What Khalidi doesn't do, however, is extend this prescription of repentance to the Arab states which were equally involved in the 1948 war.

Perhaps this is in part because the five Arab states involved are still unwilling to open their archives on the 1948 war to historians, let alone publicly expose their actions to international analysis and criticism. Yet as Edward Said noted recently in *The War for Palestine* (Cambridge, 2001), their decision (with the partial exception of Jordan) to confine and isolate the Palestinian refugees, rather than welcome and sustain them, was and remains scandalously inhumane. Moreover, it is unlikely that the Israelis will enter into any serious atonement for their actions in 1948 unless discussion also extends to the broader context of the associated military conflict with the Arab states.

For the Palestinians, coming to terms with the practical limits of their core

narrative may be harder than for the Israelis given that the former still lack an established nation state. This is particularly the case given that there are now Palestinian right of return coalitions all over the world campaigning for what they describe as an inalienable right. Nevertheless, it is an internal debate that the Palestinians have to have if there is to be any hope of movement towards a genuine two-state solution.

Philip Mendes  
Kew, VIC

## Second impressions

Robin Gerster concedes that 'Perhaps it is just too soon to write about what happened on September 11' ('Recurring Images', *Eureka Street*, November 2001) but that has in no way deterred him from giving us another 2000 words on the subject. His article is rich in meteorological detail, but poor in serious analysis. Yet he contemptuously dismisses writers who have attempted to find the real significance behind the CNN images: Edward Said is an 'old critical warhorse', Susan Sontag is accused of 'colossal fatuousness' and 'polemical chutzpah', John Pilger is 'the great gadfly'. Gerster is surely correct in saying that 'the events have yet to be properly digested'. Unfortunately his article only contributes to our dyspepsia.

John East  
Greenslopes, Qld



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# THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC

## In memoriam

HERB FEITH, 1930–2001

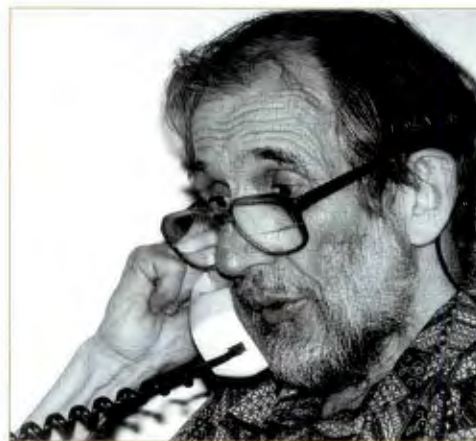
**H**ERB FEITH, who died in Melbourne in November at the age of 71, was a remarkable and delightful person. When he was alive people knew that he was special, and it has been in mourning him that so many have discovered just how large and various is their company.

Emeritus Professor Jamie Mackie of the ANU has described Herb as one of the foremost scholars working on Indonesia throughout the past half century, and as universally acknowledged to be the best and wisest of Australian scholars of Indonesia. That's saying something. There are many eminent Indonesia scholars in Australia (for whom we are grateful, because they maintain inquiring, friendly and knowledgeable contact with Indonesian people and communities all the while our government mood is in flux). Herb Feith was their precursor.

Herb Feith went to Indonesia first in 1951 as a new University of Melbourne graduate to work with the Indonesian civil service. In this way not only did he begin a life-long involvement with Indonesia, but also he pioneered the Volunteer Graduate Scheme, which has since evolved into the Australian Volunteers International organisation and which also partly prompted the setting up of the American Peace Corps. Many of those active in the Scheme's beginnings were members of the Student Christian Movement (SCM), which Herb had joined when he was 16. They shared an international vision and a passion for social justice, and I like to reflect that they had arrived at this kind of world view when they were teenagers at school, sustaining it, many of them, in action throughout their lives. Herb continued his connection with the SCM through its Indonesian branch.

When Herb set sail for Indonesia he was barely 21 and he had been in Australia only 12 years. He had spent his first years in Vienna; his parents were Austrian Jews who fled with their only child in 1930. Herb remembered Kristallnacht. In his background there were certainly observant Orthodox Jews, even a Chief Rabbi of Vienna. However, of his immediate family

his father was agnostic and his mother, secular in Vienna, joined the Liberal congregation in Melbourne. Herb's contact with the SCM and with his future wife, Betty Evans, drew him towards a life-long engagement with Christians. Even before he went to Indonesia that first time he was involved in the setting up of the annual appeal we call the Christmas Bowl. The



National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) sponsors it now, but it was initiated by a Methodist minister who worked to form the ecumenical International Relief and Rehabilitation Committee as a response to the needs of people affected by World War II. Betty Evans was herself a Methodist, later a member of the Uniting Church, and today she remains a committed Melbourne volunteer for the NCCA, where Herb too was a familiar figure.

Herb took up a senior lectureship at Monash University in 1961, shortly before the publication of his classic study of *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia*. He was co-founder there of the Monash Centre of Southeast Asian Studies and an exemplary teacher.

Nearly 30 years later, on his retirement from Monash, Herb returned to Indonesia, a volunteer again, to teach at the University of Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta. Betty went with him to teach English while Herb's courses were on Indonesian history, peace studies and conflict resolution. To Herb, peace studies and conflict resolution were never only academic issues: when he was a schoolboy this Jewish refugee had collected food and clothing for German prisoners of war. He knew of the bloodshed that marked the ousting of Sukarno in 1965–66 and

during 1967 when he was living again in Indonesia he joined Indonesian Council of Churches delegations to visit political prisoners. From the beginning he was critical of Indonesia's East Timor adventure and of the Suharto government's human rights record. (He was denied a visa for eight years as a result.)

In the early '80s, with Professor Joseph Camilleri and others, Herb set up the Victorian Association for Peace Studies. Over the years Pax Christi members came to know him well and so did the students and staff at the Centre for Security and Peace Studies at the University of Gadjah Mada who were, among other things, involved in bringing together Muslim and Christian community leaders in Maluku.

The night before he died Herb was planning with Jo Camilleri a conference in response to the military intervention in Afghanistan. The next morning he rang the ABC to say how much he had appreciated the *Encounter* program broadcast on Radio National that week: Florence Spurling's program included an interview with Professor Larry Rasmussen of Union Theological Seminary in New York, who has written about Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Herb Feith admired Bonhoeffer greatly, and he especially welcomed Rasmussen's invocation of Bonhoeffer in the aftermath of September 11: 'How do you resist evil in ways that don't perpetuate violence and retaliation and don't issue in contempt for the enemy and humanity in general?'

Everyone who speaks of Herb Feith mentions his ability to listen, to attend, to pay respect. Everyone speaks of his modesty, simplicity and generosity. With that attention and simplicity Herb widened the world for all those he met. Religion was part of that wide world, not in any denominational or sectarian sense: in fact, Herb seemed free of any kind of attachment other than to people and ideals. He was devoted to the idea of inter-religious dialogue and to recommending Islamic and Christian thinkers who pursue this idea. Hence, he was a friend of Mangunwijaya—'Romo Mangun'—the Javanese priest/architect/novelist and advocate for the poor who died three years ago. He was drawn to theology that affirms a place in God's eternal plan for various religious traditions—theological ideas he heard about from people like Father



Bono s; in Yogyakarta. Long before Islam became the province of pundits, he was pointing people in the direction of thinkers such as Mohammad Arkoun and Farid Esack, and to the Indonesian Muslim and Christian activists for social justice and democracy whom he so admired.

The memorial service for Herb in Yogyakarta was an expression of all these things: there were many students and teachers and activists; the FCJ sisters (some of them originally from Melbourne) were there, as were his village family who had remained his family all those years since he had lived with them in 1953; and the Australian Ambassador came from Jakarta. There were Muslim and Christian prayers and readings, and at one point a friend wheeled in Herb's bike, his helmet slung on the handlebar. One obituarist wrote that Herb Feith was almost a kind of secular saint. He qualifies simply as a saint.

—Margaret Coffey

## Tiger attack

PUTTING THE BITE  
INTO FLY-FISHING

**I**N MID-SPRING my mate Martyn suggested we fish the King River over the Melbourne Cup long weekend. Work commitments meant that I could only manage the Saturday and Sunday, so on the Friday night Martyn, his family, my 13-year-old son Sam and I joined the thousands heading for the mountains.

We arrived at Pinnacle Valley resort too late to wet a line on Friday evening, but anticipated success the following morning. At 10am we met John, our local guide, to discuss a plan of attack.

Good recent rains had the rivers running fast but still clear. John suggested the Delatite in the morning, lunch and the Howqua in the afternoon, staying on for evening rise.

The rains meant that road and stream-side grass was about waist-high. The question of snake sightings arose. John had seen a few on the roads in the area and cautioned us to keep our eyes peeled. He went one step further and offered to lead and act as spotter (standard good guiding practice?).

The fishing was mainly nymphing across and down. It yielded us two fish apiece by the end of the day—all in the 'alpine' category. I did, however, have a take on the Delatite that was much better than average,

and made a mental note to visit that pool the next morning.

Sunday morning, 9.30am beside the Delatite. Glorious day, warm and sunny. We got out of the car. As I was walking to the back to get my waders, I felt my right leg being poked at with what I thought was a bit of dry bracken. I jumped, and looked behind me, to see a large snake removing its head from my leg and whipping away at about warp factor 9—the same speed that I was moving in the opposite direction. I saw only about a metre-and-a-half of it at any one time, but it was thick and I suspected a Tiger snake.

The hardest immediate task was convincing Martyn that I really had been bitten. It was only when I ripped my compression bandage out of my fly-vest and started to apply it that he saw the blood and realised that I was not having him on. He took over and bandaged expertly over the bite and up my leg. We headed for Mansfield Hospital. Fortunately, we were within mobile range and I was able to phone ahead to let them know how long we would be and what my condition was.

Symptoms appeared: within 15 minutes I had a blinder of a headache and was in a lather of sweat. Tiger snake venom is both a pre- and post-synaptic neurotoxin and rapidly affects the muscles. Double vision and drooping eyelids are usually the first signs, the muscles in these areas being very delicate. Then can come more serious involvement of the cardiac and respiratory muscles, in which case victims usually

need to be treated on a respirator, sometimes for many weeks.

The medical emergency staff at Mansfield Hospital were ready for me. After a speedy, thorough examination I had an IV drip inserted in my arm and an altogether unpleasant catheter inserted to allow for continuous urine analysis. Then a shot of adrenaline, followed by 3000 units of Brown snake and 3000 units of Tiger snake antivenene via the IV drip.

The antivenene is manufactured from horse serum. Some people have a severe reaction to it that can result in anaphylactic shock and death. There are two schools of thought about the use or otherwise of adrenaline to reduce the chances of the reaction. Having a fully equipped emergency room eased my mind more than a little and, fortunately, I appeared to have no adverse reaction to the antivenene at that time.

I was almost certain that a Tiger snake was the cause of my problems. The venom of different snakes works in very different ways so it is safer to treat for the snakes common to a given area until a positive identification can be made. Confirmation comes from a swab test and takes about 20 minutes. For this reason it is important not to wash the bite site or remove any clothes that may have venom on them.

My test confirmed that I had indeed been bitten by a Tiger snake. The first lot of antivenene had reduced my symptoms but they were starting to return, so I received a further 3000 units of the Tiger snake antivenene.



An Extra Large Fat Bastard-size snake victim needs an Extra Large helicopter. Photo: Karen Saunders.



## Ordinary happiness

**N**OVEMBER WAS THE TIME FOR serious literary criticism. Harry Potter got banned for sorcery. A friend attacked *Eureka Street* for not loosening up and celebrating the ordinary Australian things like sunshine, beaches, the footy, holidays and the everyday goodness of ordinary Australians.

Now, I know it's not a satisfactory defence, but all Christian literature has had the same bad press. Partly because it's not easy for anyone to write about cheerful things. It is much easier to describe the party where they served porridge sandwiches than the one at which we had a great time. 'St Paul today tells us to be joyful, so you've got to be joyful,' says the preacher threateningly. And less than enablingly. Theologians have had particular difficulty with ordinary happiness. They do suffering and sin better because, like all systematic writers, they are a bit obsessive, the kind of people who are likely to take their work to the beach.

But a deeper cause for the difficulty Christian and reformist writers find in relaxation lies precisely in the vision of hope for a changed world that animates them. This hope makes it difficult to leave alone injustice and evil. Christ is born, but still Herod schemes. For us, the surf is up, but people are penned on Nauru rock. And when officials are at work devising further humiliations, it is hard to lounge on the beach, easy to live permanently with furrowed brow.

The early theologians had to find their balance between celebration and criticism in dealing with the great stories of the classical tradition. These were well told, engendered great art and drama, and shaped the relaxations of the day. But they were often obscene and violent and celebrated alien gods.

Confronted by this association of beauty, culture and relaxation with pagan myth and worship, most theologians attacked classical literature, art and circuses alike with a severity from which a contemporary Harry Potter would not have escaped. To welcome the new, one had to abjure the old.

So the theory ran. But in practice, the mixture between celebration and critique was much more complex. Because all education began with classical stories, Christian critics like Augustine were steeped in the beauty and style of the texts that they damned. Their imagination was captivated by the old, and their enchantment in fact was essential for them to make room for the new.

One of the loveliest novellas of the early church makes this point. Nonnus is in conference with other bishops, when a procession winds past the church. The beautiful Pelagia, courtesan and actress, dressed in pearls and little else, rides by with a retinue of stunning young men dressed in equal style. The other bishops cover their faces, but Nonnus looks on entranced. 'Did you not notice her beauty?' he reproachfully asks the other bishops. They are silent, but Nonnus' enchantment will be the path by which Pelagia's heart is drawn to God.

Neither beach, sunshine nor Harry Potter is opposed to the newness of Gospel or a just world. They feed the same imagination in which faith and the passion for justice breed. ■

**Andrew Hamilton** is *Eureka Street's* publisher and teaches at the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne.

I was told that although things were going well, I needed to be moved to a hospital with a laboratory attached to it—for more accurate blood and urine monitoring. My blood tests were showing clotting problems and the presence of certain enzymes in the blood indicated muscle breakdown. Urine analysis showed both blood and sugar: my kidneys were threatened.

Mansfield scrambled the police helicopter from Melbourne. I was collected from the heliport just outside Mansfield, flown to the Alfred Hospital, met by my partner Jenny and taken straight to the emergency room. There I was again examined, had some more fluids removed for testing and was prepared for having the bandages removed from my leg. When these came off I again became symptomatic and was given a final 3000-unit dose of the antivenene. I had obviously received a very large amount of venom from a very aggressive Tiger.

Some hours later I was transferred to the Intensive Care Unit at St Vincent's Hospital, and after a good night and improving blood and urine tests, I was discharged with a continuing course of drugs to minimise serum sickness. I had received 12,000 units of antivenene and some ten days later suffered a serum reaction that made me crook for a few weeks. I have, however, been told that I should suffer no long-term effects from my encounter.

It was a lucky outcome from what could have been my final flick of the fly. I put my survival down to a number of factors. I am a big bloke: my official size is Extra Large Fat Bastard. I was beside the car when I was bitten and did not have to move far. The fact that I saw the snake removed any doubt about having being bitten (the bite itself was not painful at all until much later that day). I had a compression bandage with me and both Martyn and I knew how to use it. I was within mobile phone range and only 20 minutes from a hospital that had antivenene (*not all do!*), and immediately came under the care of an experienced doctor who made fast and accurate decisions.

Are there any things that I will do differently in the future? Yes. I will carry more than one compression bandage—the additional ones I have already purchased are in the Extra Large Fat Bastard size. I will carry my EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon) on all trips, even day trips. I will carefully consider the potential hazards of wet wading. Finally, I will halve my chances of further snake attacks by always fishing with a friend.



Postscript: after seeing me off at the helicopter, Sam and Martyn took my car and returned to the spot I had intended to fish that morning. A phone call to intensive care from Sam that night informed me that he had bagged not one, but *two fish in my spot*—a one-and-a-half-pound brown and a one-pound rainbow! —Bill Thomas

## Batting average

WHEN CRICKET WAS CRICKET

**M**Y CREDENTIALS AS a cricket critic could be considered dubious. Having played at only modest levels, with no dashing centuries or big swags of wickets, I displayed a potential which never materialised. Nevertheless, my passion for cricket has been long-lived and studded with unforgettable moments and memories.

It began at a dried fruits block near the Murray. Sitting on a dirt road under a few scraggly trees, another small boy and I played out Test matches just after Bradman's breathtaking run spree in England.

Sun and sky dominated above the young vines, trellises and irrigation channels. We sat less than two metres apart, with empty oblong Log Cabin tobacco tins for wickets, a marble for a ball and a tiny, rudely fashioned piece of wood for a bat. Vehicles, horse-drawn or motorised, rarely if ever disturbed us. There, Larwood and Tate would bowl to Woodfull, Ponsford and Bradman; and Tim Wall, Clarric Grimmett and Patsy Hornibrook tackled Hobbs, Sutcliffe and Hammond. It was late 1930.

Three years later I watched two days of the Adelaide Test to see the bodyline series reach a frenzied peak. Though long, long ago some things remain vivid: the 8.30am arrival to secure seats for an 11am start; the draught horse hauling the mower round the oval; the crescendo of boos for Jardine; the deafening exuberance only minutes into the game when Tim Wall bowled the England captain neck and crop; the solidity of Maurice Leyland, Wyatt and Eddie Paynter; the awesome speed of

Larwood; Ponsford's gallant 85 during which he allowed himself to be hit on the body, repeatedly, by fierce rising balls.

Strangely, the famous incident of Woodfull being struck over the heart by Larwood did not survive in my memory.

Later again came the almost unbelievable: a few precious coaching sessions from Clarric Grimmett when for a season I was opening the batting and bowling for Norwood High. At 48 the diminutive Grimmett, a towering figure in world cricket, was still playing for South Australia in the Sheffield Shield team.

The general perception of Shane Warne as the greatest wrist spinner of all time is arguably incorrect when Grimmett's record is analysed. He played his first Test at age 33—older than Warne is now. His 216 Test wickets in 37 Tests at an average of 24.22 per wicket is superior to Warne's. His wickets, it should be noted, were taken mainly against a cricket-strong England with batsmen of the calibre of Hobbs, Sutcliffe, Hammond and Leyland. Anyway, it seems that Bradman rated Grimmett slightly ahead of Warne.

Grimmett's appeals were low-key and he expressed no raucous or foul-mouthed unseemliness when confounding his opponents or being punished by them.

Unaccountably, Grimmett taught us virtually nothing about bowling but

concentrated on batting advice (like many bowlers he fancied himself as a batsman and, indeed, was a useful tailender) and in hawling us out for misdemeanours like forgetting our sandshoes on practice afternoons, a lapse condemned with memorable vehemence and effectiveness.

After such intoxicating highlights my brilliant cricket career started to go bung, despite my playing on for years around the Adelaide hills and suburbs.

So, from the age of innocence to cricket's modern times. Big money, television, advertising, bottom lines and endless one-day series which blur into the meaningless and forgettable have encouraged gambling and crime. Suspicion and doubt mar a game once regarded as the epitome of fairness and sporting skill. Replays and big screens encourage viewer and player reaction and titillation.

On-field unsporting behaviours, foul abuse and consistent sledging, perfected in the Chappell era, has slowly but surely spread to all cricketing countries, and throughout all levels. Snarled obscenities, taunts and insults disparage ability, courage and careers. Great bowlers like Warne and McGrath resort to such abuse when batsmen hit them about or when their appeals are rejected. Hurlled returns from close range often nearly decapitate batsmen who have been given the benefit of the doubt by umpires.

Contrast Gary Sobers driving Benaud for four after four in the 1960 tied Test. The bowler amiably applauded the batsman's shots, acknowledging his prowess.

Some years back the struggling West Indian, Robert Samuels, was labelled a '— — loser' by sledging Australians. He told Michael Holding that battling against the Australians provided a complete sex education. 'That just about says it all,' commented Richie Benaud.

But such things have always happened in cricket, according to sledging supporters! This is not correct. During all my playing years never once was I abused or taunted nor did I ever hear anyone else verbally assaulted. Such conduct would have been regarded



as outrageous. Great bowlers of the past like O'Reilly and Grimmett, Tim Wall and Keith Miller, Wes Hall and Andy Roberts did not bait and abuse their opponents; they exhibited their aggression with the ball, not with invective.

On the last Indian tour of Australia the mild-mannered Srinath struck Ponting with a bouncer. When he enquired if Ponting was all right he received a mouthful of abuse.

Ian Chappell, on and off screen, still encourages warlike sport. For example, some years ago Andy Bichel hit a ball very hard into West Indian Jimmy Adams at short leg. Adams had to go off for treatment. From the stump microphone Bichel was heard to call, 'Bad luck, mate.' An amazed Chappell complained, 'Well, he's a polite young man.'

When Curtly Ambrose struck a batsman and went down the wicket to look at his condition, Chappell lectured that such was *not* the business of the bowler. Why not? Even the dreaded Larwood ran to batsmen whom he thought he might have injured.

Such conduct and attitudes, irrespective of country of origin, contribute nothing except ugliness to cricket. Australia has refined a concentrated form of intimidation and attack. We should be in the forefront of trying to abolish both.

Steve Waugh's Australians have been recognised, correctly, as the strongest team in the world. However, defeat in India, victory over England and a drawn series against a resurgent and unlucky New Zealand was hardly a triumphant 2001. The series against South Africa will be interesting. The International Cricket Council's call for tougher penalties for bad on-field behaviour is necessary and long overdue. It is unfortunate that it was first implemented against half the Indian team for offences which some commentators considered to be minor, thereby inflaming harboured perceptions of racial bias.

Furthermore, in these times of privatisation, the regular practice of the Packer men, Ian Chappell and Tony Greig, officiating at Test match tosses and after-match presentations leaves a certain taste in the mouth.

For me some memories never fade: the majesty of the Walter Hammond cover drive; Don Tallon keeping wickets to anyone, anywhere; the power and grace of Bill Brown using his feet against Grimmett; the hostility of Lindwall and Miller opening the bowling for Australia; Sobers explosively and repeatedly square-driving Lillee

to the MCG boundary in his incredible double century for the Rest of the World early in the 1970s; the thrill of a bare-headed Richie Richardson hooking sixes off his eyebrows; the classically devastating wicket-to-wicket spells of Richard Hadlee and the breathtaking stroke power of Adam Gilchrist. Such is the real stuff of cricket.

—John Sendy

## Thérèse's things

READING RELICS

**I**N JANUARY, relics of St Thérèse of Lisieux are touring Australia. When in Ireland, they attracted millions of people and left commentators perplexed. Some recognised in the event the vacuum left by the demise of popular devotions, while others saw the triumph of sentiment over substance.

Devotion to St Thérèse has always attracted followers and critics. Her older sisters in Carmel, who even during her lifetime regarded her as a saint, encouraged devotion to her. They edited her writings and touched up her image to fit the ripely emotional world of 19th-century piety. That Thérèse herself belonged to that world is evident in her painting of the dream of the Infant Jesus. She painted it at the age of 20, four years before her death. She copied a commonplace work, adding touches of her own. Her sister later amended it to make it even sweeter.

Photographs of Thérèse Martin, however, show a strong and composed young woman, and the unedited version of her writings and conversations are laconic and astringent. She died agonisingly of tuberculosis. During her illness she thought occasionally of suicide, and in her inner experience entered fully the world of unbelief. Her faith remained simple, but was without reassurance. It finds expression in spare words in counterpoint to the devotional rhetoric of her sisters. When, for example, her sister remarks how lovingly Thérèse is looking towards Heaven, she answers, 'Do you think I am thinking about the real Heaven? I am simply admiring the sky. The other is more and more closed to me.'

The tension between faith and the absence of God are caught in another poignant image: 'I am like a small child at

the railway station, waiting for its parents to place it on the train. But they do not come, and the train is leaving. Still there are other trains; I shall not miss them all.'

The difference between Thérèse's effusive painting and her spare words may provide the right lens for fixing the popular response to the visit of her relics. The distinction is one classically made between devotions and devotion.

The painting belongs to the world of devotions. Its interest lies in the contrast between the ecstatic expression of the child and the subject of his dreaming—the insignia of pain and death. The image brings together Christian faith and the hard things that most challenge it. But it does so tentatively and sentimentally, in a dream where suffering is not real. The painting explores whether such a dream,

such a dreamer, is possible.

Devotions allow people to test imaginatively hard realities against faith. Like soapsies, they help us explore from a safe place the reality of crisis and our response to it. Because they explore sentimentally, the art and rhetoric that they produce are often tacky.

The test of any faith, however, comes at midday when we face the full heat of pain and loneliness, without reassurance. Only devotion suffices, the unsentimental and stripped down love shown in Thérèse. Dream is replaced by reality.

The popular response to Thérèse's relics suggests the importance of the imagination within faith. A theology that speaks well about death and suffering does not substitute for an imaginative pondering of these things. But while images and devotions rehearse reality, devotion engages it.

—Andrew Hamilton



## In a word

RELICS  
OF THE CHILD

**‘W**HAT DOES Christmas mean to you?’ would have been an improbable question in the ancient world. More probable would be, ‘What does Epiphany mean to you?’ as it was Epiphany, not Christmas, when the early church commemorated Christ's entry into the world.





2002—The year of industrial relations? (Billboard, Abbotsford, Victoria)

'Epiphany' comes from the Greek for manifestation of a god, which is why the Orthodox to this day use the festival to celebrate Christ's baptism. The Western church emphasised the revelation of the Incarnation to the Gentiles, in the form of wise men. The Bible says nothing about the men being kings or only three in number. I find this preferable, as it opens up the possibility for any listener to be part of the story, bearing their gift. Anyone has the potential to become a wise person.

Because Epiphany grew to be synonymous with the wisdom story, it gathered to it other meanings. One was the recognition of an irrefutable truth. Another, the wondrous acceptance of the exceptional in the ordinary. Epiphany became an example of pilgrimage, the following of a star. Also, it was related in people's minds with giving, perhaps the real source of the Christmas practice.

We all have our own ideas about what the gifts mean. For me, the gold is not just some clumsy ingot but rather the brightness of the world itself, everything the sun shines on, all we've got. Frankincense has no other job than to burn itself up in an expression of glory. Myrrh, perfume for embalming the dead, is a prefiguring of Christ's death and our own. Essential to this reasoning is to read the story further, to

see that it is Christ, the receiver, who in turn teaches each one of us about our own gift. Open to awareness, we too learn about the preciousness of existence, the surprise of constant offering, the meaning of our own life and death—all these things being Epiphanies.

By 1648, when the poet Richard Crashaw writes to Queen Henrietta, 'May the great time in you still greater be, / While all the year is your Epiphany', the word is used to mean the gift itself. For Henrietta this meant the kingdoms that she ultimately lost anyway, but for us Crashaw's lines can be read as an expression of limitless possibility. Time is a hindrance and can be overcome. The world and our own existence are gifts that can be explained at any time and in any place, once we offer them in praise and thanksgiving. The created world is revealed to us in all its vulnerability and power.

In modern times Epiphany came to mean a kind of Twelfth Night of the Soul. James Joyce, in his proto-novel, *Stephen Hero*, defines Epiphany as 'a sudden spiritual manifestation' when the 'soul' or 'whatness' of an object 'leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance'. The language may be religious, but the intention is pure aesthetics. Joyce invents a literary device that can recreate in words the common facts of daily life. His works are crammed

with Epiphanies of worldly things ('the bar mirror gilded lettered where hock and claret glasses shimmered'), actions ('a plume of steam from the spout') and statements ('pennyweight of powder in a skull'), some metaphoric, some not, but all heightened with the nowness of existence. It is not too far-fetched to say that Joyce would have us see Epiphanies of the present world, a consciousness of the visible. He is one of the great artists of the senses, caught up in carnate experience.

Celebration of the senses, that very modern form of celebration, can be traced in part to Joyce, the sensual pioneer. And this concern is not too far from the meaning of the Magi's gifts as tokens of the created world we all enjoy. The task is to understand these gifts and use them wisely.

—Philip Harvey

*This month's contributors:* **Margaret Coffey** is a producer of *Encounter* on Radio National; **Bill Thomas** is a teacher and photographer. His work has featured regularly in *Eureka Street* since 1991. To ensure its continued appearance we are currently negotiating with all Tiger snakes; **Andrew Hamilton** is *Eureka Street's* publisher; **John Sendy** is a freelance writer; **Philip Harvey** is a poet and librarian at the Joint Theological Library, Melbourne.

# Where are we now?



At the second annual *Eureka Street* dinner on 30 November 2001, the guest speaker, **Robert Manne**, answered the question.

**I** DOUBT WHETHER THERE has been any election in Australia since 1975 more dismaying for the left-of-centre intelligentsia than the one we have recently been through. It is not merely, or even mainly, that the Coalition has been returned. Neither the election of 1996 nor that of 1998 was, for the group of people I have in mind, a particularly disheartening experience. What, then, was unusual about 2001?

It is clear that the election campaign was conducted under the shadow of the *Tampa* 'crisis' and the 'Pacific solution' far more than it was under the shadow of September 11 and our troop commitment to the war against al Qaeda in Afghanistan. It is also clear that the *Tampa* was more important than September 11 in the return of the Coalition government to power. Any account of the post-election mood of the left-of-centre intelligentsia must begin, although it must not end, with the role *Tampa* and its aftermath played in the shameful triumph achieved by the Howard government on 10 November.

*Tampa* signified the Australian decision to repel by military means all future asylum seekers who tried to get to Australia by boat. From now on the Navy would be used either to escort these boats back to Indonesia or arrange for the temporary incarceration of the refugees in processing/detention camps on whichever of the Pacific island states were open to Australian diplomatic or financial inducements—a system officially called the 'Pacific solution' but which I privately call the 'Ruddock Archipelago'.

Let me briefly recall the role *Tampa* and its aftermath played in John Howard's return to power.

After *Tampa*, but before September 11, for the first time since the 1998 election, the opinion polls began strongly to favour the Coalition. On 7 October, at the beginning of the formal campaign, Howard government ministers seized upon an incident where Iraqi asylum seekers were claimed to have thrown their children into the ocean, in order, so it was said, to blackmail Australia into accepting them. In his usual role as the nation's primary moral interpreter on matters concerning refugees, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock told us he had never witnessed a more callous act in his political life. The Prime Minister agreed. From the depth of his understanding of such matters, he told us that such behaviour was not the way of genuine refugees. The Western Australian Liberal Senator, Ross Lightfoot, described these Iraqi refugees as 'repulsive'. Throwing one's own children into the ocean might be acceptable in Muslim countries; it was not acceptable here.

It was already painfully clear, by the time of the election campaign, that Beazley Labor would support every word or action of the Coalition on the asylum seeker front, no matter how illiberal, no matter how damaging to the national interest, no matter how cruel.

A surprising amount of time was spent during the only election debate between John Howard and Kim Beazley on the issue of border control. The only significant difference to emerge was over whether asylum seekers were to be repelled by the deployment of the Navy or creation of a special-purpose Coast Guard. In order to prove his macho credentials over border control, Beazley reminded Australians that it



was Labor and not the Coalition which had instituted the system of universal and mandatory detention for asylum seekers.

The nature of the moral ignominy into which the bipartisan, tough-guy consensus had led was revealed not long after the Great Debate. During the campaign a boat with 400 or so asylum seekers on its way to Australia sank. Three hundred and fifty-three people drowned. There was on board an Iraqi woman, Sondos, with her three young daughters. Her husband, Ahmed, was in Australia. Although he had been accepted as a genuine refugee, under the barbarous system of temporary visas instituted by Philip Ruddock he was aware that he could never lawfully be reunited with his wife and daughters. Despite this, Ahmed had advised his wife, who had made her way to Indonesia, against coming to Australia. He thought the journey from Indonesia too dangerous. She disobeyed. Sondos was on the boat that sank. Miraculously she survived. Her three children drowned. I will never allow myself to forget what happened next. Sondos was not allowed to come to Australia. Ahmed was informed that if he visited his grieving wife in Indonesia he would not be permitted to return. Interviewed on this matter on successive nights on ABC TV, Mr Howard defended these actions and Mr Beazley concurred. I cannot recall a more abject incident in the life of Australian politics.

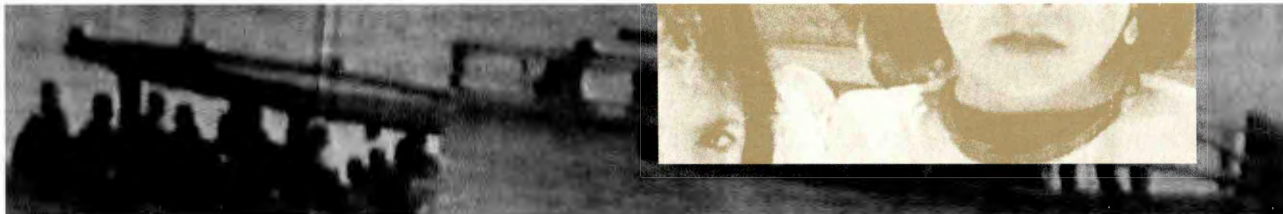
The Liberal Party, shortly after, held its launch. Among the ministers in attendance Ruddock received the most rapturous applause. With Howard's pledge that Australia would decide who would be allowed to enter this country and the circumstances under which they came, the audience erupted in delight. Liberal

asylum seekers ever again setting foot on Australian soil, or at least on that kind of soil which had not been excised from the Migration Act. Just in case all this was not enough, in the final week John Howard renewed the hint first dropped by Reith, namely that it was not impossible that operatives of the al Qaeda terror network might be on board the leaky vessels sailing from Indonesia to Australian detention camps.

It was, self-evidently, not indecent enough that the Coalition should have returned to power through a refugee repulsion re-election strategy. After the election, Lynton Crosby, the federal director of the Liberal Party, claimed that border control was not an important ingredient in the Coalition victory. According to him, an internal party poll revealed that only ten per cent of those who voted Liberal gave the asylum seeker issue as the primary reason for the way they cast their vote. *Only* ten per cent? Elections in Australia are invariably close. November 10 was no exception. Ten per cent of voters casting their vote for the Liberal Party primarily because of border control was proof not of the irrelevance of the Coalition's post-*Tampa* strategy but of its outstanding success.

**V**ERY MANY AUSTRALIANS now believe that a Coalition victory on the basis of the post-*Tampa* asylum seeker strategy and rhetoric has changed Australia. I want briefly to consider if this is true.

I have been arguing since the mid-1990s that the most important and troubling divide in contemporary Australia is the one that separates those who I have, not entirely happily, called the elites from those I have



Party headquarters took the hint. It was this sentence which dominated their advertising during the final week of the campaign.

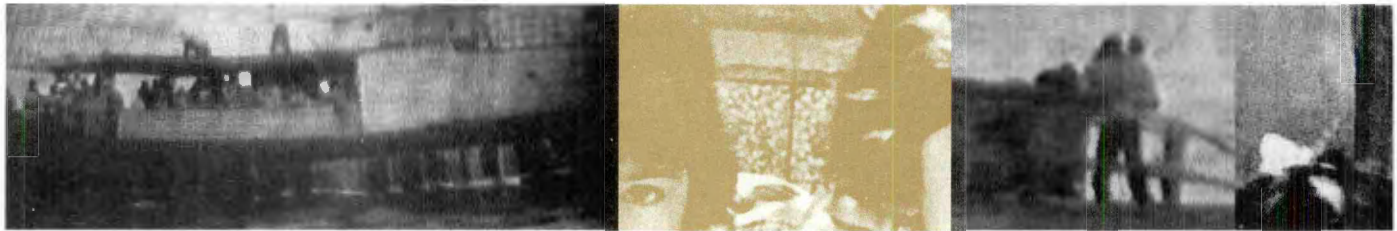
In the same week the 'children overboard' issue returned. It became clear now that the Minister for Defence, Peter Reith, had deceived the public about the existence of a Navy video showing children being thrown into the ocean by their parents. It also became clear that Reith had released photographs of children in life jackets in the sea, which had been presented as material evidence of children having been thrown into the ocean, but were in fact photographs of children in the water after their boat had sunk. Political insiders were of the opinion that even proof of ministerial mendacity would help, not harm the Coalition's election prospects, simply by reminding voters of Howard's mad dystopian scheme to prevent any

called, even less happily, the ordinary people. It has been my view that the elites and the ordinary people are separated from each other not only in power, wealth and status but also in world view.

In my argument, Australia, since the early 1970s, has experienced two great transformations, one located in the cultural, the other located in the economic sphere. From the 1970s Australia has been transformed culturally by the end of White Australia, the abandonment of the aspiration to assimilate migrants to the Anglo-Australian norm, by the opening of the country to Middle Eastern and Asian immigration, by the embrace of the idea of multiculturalism, by the attempt to deepen our bonds with the Asia-Pacific region, by the republican aspiration, and by the quest for reconciliation between the Indigenous dispossessed and the non-Indigenous

dispossessors. And from the 1980s Australia has also been transformed economically—by the dismantling of the old protectionist, interventionist and regulatory state, established after federation—in the name of a free-market reform process based on financial and labour-market deregulation, the idea of small government, a variety of national competition policies, the

Yet the meaning of the election of 2001 is more serious even than this. No-one who is not a knave or a fool can fail to see that the history of Australia is involved with troubling questions of race—the dispossession of the Aborigines and the radical exclusion of all non-Europeans from our shores on the basis of the White Australia policy. During the



removal of tariffs, the privatisation of publicly owned assets, and so on.

At the core of my interpretation of recent Australian politics is the following proposition: that while left-leaning elites have embraced the cosmopolitan cultural transformation with great enthusiasm, and the right-leaning elites have cheered on the economic rationalist transformation, the majority of the ordinary people have viewed both these transformations with puzzlement at best and hostility at worst. Hansonism is, in this interpretation, a populist howl of protest from globalisation's losers, against both cultural cosmopolitanism and economic rationalism. On occasions, political leaders who have embraced these transformative agendas too nakedly or enthusiastically—John Hewson in 1993 over economic rationalism, Paul Keating in 1996 over cultural cosmopolitanism—have been punished with humiliating electoral defeat.

It is my view that John Howard is the first Australian prime minister since the 'Australian settlement' began to be dismantled, who has broken with the kind of bipartisan consensus over the economic and cultural transformation of Australia. Howard is, of course, still an economic rationalist, albeit of a cautiously pragmatic kind. On the other hand, in his anti-republicanism, his hostility to the idea of multiculturalism, his indifference to the question of Australia's place in the Asia-Pacific region, his abandonment of the quest for reconciliation and, now, in his strident anti-asylum seeker policy, he has, in my view, reshaped Australian politics by mobilising the hostility of ordinary people against the cultural cosmopolitanism of the elites. This populist repudiation of an open, cultural cosmopolitan future for Australia is the reason I regard this post-1996 period in our history as the barren years. With Howard's re-election on 10 November, on this basis, a new era of populist conservatism has arrived. It is no accident that members of Australia's small right-wing intelligentsia have celebrated the re-election by poking their tongues at the elites.

Howard years, questions about Australian identity and race have begun, in one way or another, surprisingly and disturbingly, to return to haunt our discussions about ourselves.

**T**HE PROBLEM OF THE relationship between Australian racism and the asylum seeker issue is complex. Some parts of the relation, however, seem clear. As things stand, Australia will not, of course, revert either in its immigration or its refugee selection program to the racial exclusivism of the White Australia policy. For this reason, loose talk about a reversion to White Australia seems to me wrong. On the other hand it seems to me equally wrong to speak as if recent events and current Australian government policy, with regard to the treatment of asylum seekers, are unconnected to a new Australian policy of race. It is utterly inconceivable that if those of European ancestry—for example white Zimbabweans—were fleeing to Australia from persecution or tyranny, they would be treated in the way we routinely treat Iraqi or Afghan refugees. Is it conceivable that a white Zimbabwean who arrived in Australia would be defamed as a selfish, wealthy queue-jumper? Is it conceivable that a white Zimbabwean male found to be a bone fide refugee would be forbidden, forever, from reuniting with his wife and children? I think not.

Yet the connection between racism and the asylum seekers goes deeper still. In recent times three quite different events have raised questions in Australia about Arabs, Muslims, and those formerly living in the Middle East. The first concerned the vicious rape of young women in Sydney by Lebanese youths; the second the *Tampa* 'crisis'; the third the terrorist attack of September 11. As a result of the scrambling together in the public mind of these three totally unconnected issues, in contemporary Australia, in recent times, a powerful and disturbing anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, and anti-refugee wind has blown up.

John Howard would have to be an entire social innocent not to recognise that his decision, taken during the *Tampa* incident, to repel all future asylum



seekers was certain to excite the already existing hostilities to Muslims, Arabs and Middle Eastern refugees. He would also have had to be a total political innocent not to see that the way his government manufactured and managed the *Tampa* crisis and its aftermath would prove, by fanning these flames, to be of inestimable benefit to his re-election chances.



One day a scholar will, I hope, document the eruption of racist passion stimulated by the arrival, within a fortnight, of the *Tampa* crisis and September 11. If this study is made it will discover that the anti-Muslim and anti-Arab passions were found not only among ordinary people but, in addition, the kind of people who were at the heart of the anti-stolen generations campaign, the right-wing intelligentsia around *Quadrant* magazine.

The November *Quadrant* published an article by the emeritus professor of economics at the University of New South Wales, Wolfgang Kasper. It argued that, because they are a tribal people belonging to closed societies, without any respect for, or understanding of, democracy, free speech, the rule of law or—wait for it—‘tolerant openness towards others’, those coming from the entire Middle Eastern region (excluding for reasons unexplained, Lebanon), were unsuitable as migrants. For such people, violence, of the kind revealed in the Sydney rapes, and the supposed blackmail tactics, of the kind revealed by those picked up by the *Tampa*, were typical forms of behaviour. According to Kasper’s economic gobble-dygook, such people imposed upon us unacceptable ‘transaction costs’, which those elites who live in leafy suburbs are able to ignore but those who live in Cabramatta or Broadmeadows, in their daily lives, know only too well. The implication of the article was clear. With regard to potential Middle Eastern migrants, Australia should introduce a racially discriminatory policy. We should bar our door to Middle Eastern refugees.

Kasper’s article, which was cheered on by Alan Wood in *The Australian* and Miranda Devine in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, was accompanied by closely associated pieces from Christopher Pearson in *The Age* and John Stone in *The Australian*. According to their way of thinking, Australia should restrict Muslim or Arab immigrants because of their clear cultural incompatibility with Australian ‘Judeo-Christian’ civilisation and also, in the case of Stone, because of the clear inferiority of the Arabic or Muslim

civilisations in which such people have the misfortune to have been born.

In the course of making his case for a migration program, restricted to those ‘capable of assimilating into Australia’s basically Judeo-Christian culture’, John Stone asked us to ‘note that I have nowhere referred to race ... not race but culture is the issue’. In *The Age*, Christopher Pearson made an identical point. Because of their ignorance of European politics what neither Stone nor Pearson appears to realise is that the arguments they deploy are identical in their structure—culture, not blood or biology, as the basis for exclusion—to those offered by Jörg Haider in Austria and Jean-Marie Le Pen in France. In order, in addition, to prove that he is no racist, John Stone informed us that ‘calls for Australians to refrain from harassing our existing Muslim community are, of course, entirely proper’. While it is good to know that the former Secretary of the Treasury does not actually support anti-Muslim pogroms, it is genuinely alarming to see how quickly after 10 November the pro-Howard intelligentsia have begun to replicate the kind of arguments associated with the so-called ‘new racism’ of the European extreme right. ■

**Robert Manne** is Associate Professor of Politics at La Trobe University, Melbourne.

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## Dad's army

**I**T WAS CHRISTMAS MORNING OF ... many years ago. The small hours. I was awake, wound to a pitch of excitement that produced somewhere in my chest a sort of exquisite tension and made breathing difficult. I was about eight years old but, despite my advanced age, I remained a dogged believer in Father Christmas (as my family called him). This belief was maintained in the face of cynicism and derision from the youthful toughs I consorted with and despite my own unspoken qualms in moments of inconvenient rationality. Anyway, that Christmas morning, armed with my fragile faith, curled up in bed in the darkness of my room to which the skylight in the passage just outside the door lent a ghostly luminescence, *I sensed his immanence.*

Sensing Father Christmas' immanence in that room involved an even greater willing suspension of disbelief than you might think, because I shared it with my two uncles, Jim and Alex. Jim's snores rolled gently but insistently through the darkness like the distant gunfire from which he had so recently and with great relief escaped. Alex, an equally grateful survivor, daily expressed *his* relief in spectacular binges round his St Kilda watering holes, so that his snores, when at last sleep claimed him from other kinds of oblivion, were neither distant nor gentle. So, to imagine Father Christmas fairy-footing it across our worn bedroom lino amidst what sounded like the Normandy landing was a hard ask. I managed though, and, sure enough, he arrived—a dark shape carrying out indeterminate rustlings and tinkering in the gloom.

In deference to his visit, I squeezed my eyes shut, and when I opened them after what seemed only a few minutes, day had dawned. The snores crackled on, but early sun glowed in the skylight and silver dust motes swirled in its slanting beam which, inching across the floor like a searchlight, revealed a series of marvels. A camouflaged fortress with soldiers pointing rifles through the crenellations dominated a battlefield on which tanks, platoons of diggers, gurkhas, marines and other battle-clad armies that no doubt would have been very surprised to find themselves in the same operation, confronted each other or milled around with static resolution. Inside the closed doors of the fortress, gun carriers and jeeps waited their hour. Behind the fortress, emerging from under the dressing table, a column of trucks carrying machine-gunners at the ready and flanked by foot soldiers, wound towards the action. The soldiers' uniforms were meticulously painted, the trucks and guns and emplacements realistically camouflaged. Here and there, convincingly twisted metal showed where something had taken a hit in the last assault. It was a truly wondrous sight which left me almost tearful with amazement and pleasure.

Avuncular snores suddenly sounded right. This was battle and those nasal eruptions became the crump and staccato of shell and machine gun. The magical manifestation on the bedroom floor was both vindication of and a challenge to my carefully nursed belief in Father Christmas. On the one hand, who could argue? Here it all was, delivered in the depths of Christmas night, according to legend. On the other hand, as one of the more corrosive of the little pragmatists I associated with pointed out, 'If he did anything like that in every house, layin' everything out and all that, he'd never get through the street. So how does he get round *the whole world?*' How indeed.

Had my friends but known, they had an even stronger argument in certain information which was temporarily locked in my heart. 'Mucking around' at home one night months before Christmas, I had idly opened an unfamiliar cupboard to reveal folded towels, linen and ... a fortress: unpainted, unfinished, unmistakable. My father arrived—of course—as I was goggling. Slamming the cupboard door, he lifted me gently on my way with a slippered foot to the bum, immediately apologised and said he was 'doing a job for a mate'.

**M**Y FATHER HAD BOUGHT one each of an assortment of soldiers—all he could afford—made his own plaster of Paris moulds, melted down lead piping and poured figure after figure which, during late nights in October, November and December, he carefully painted according to books he borrowed on the regimental dress of various units. He was more interested in colourfulness than worried about anachronism—hence the staggering historical panoply of troops from many nations and times fighting shoulder to shoulder. These toys were made of lead. When you played with them, it was war games you played. As George Orwell remarked, telling a child to run away and play with his toy pacifists doesn't work somehow. Moreover, as my father moulded, sawed and painted at his tiny back verandah workbench each night, he would have been squinting through the smoke of his never absent cigarette. Whatever way you looked at it, from believing in Father Christmas through to lead and nicotine, it was all shockingly incorrect.

I lived in steadfast denial for another year or so, but in the end, the fortress in the cupboard was Father Christmas' death-blow. No tragedy there, though, as the red uniformed fatty with a beard was replaced by a much more interesting figure: my extraordinarily talented father who, like my uncles, was exulting in his return to peacetime and wasn't even noticing that he was a quintessential battler. ■

**Brian Matthews** is a writer and academic.





# The new breed

**Peter Browne** meets a different kind of politician, the independent member for Calare, **Peter Andren**.

**I**T'S A WEDNESDAY morning in late November and I'm sitting in a classroom at St Joseph's Primary School, Molong, about an hour's drive north-west of Bathurst. Peter Andren, the independent federal member for Calare, is telling a room full of attentive grade four, five and six students about parliament, political parties and how he goes about representing the electorate. Returned to Canberra with an extraordinary 15 per cent swing three weeks earlier, he is emphasising the importance of independent MPs in the parliamentary process. But when the kids start asking questions it's not long before terrorism and asylum seekers come up.

'Do you think Australian troops should be sent to help find bin Laden?' asks one. It's not an easy question to answer concisely in front of 40 primary school kids, some of them only ten years old. But Andren isn't at all evasive, carefully explaining his fear that the US and its allies could get caught up in another protracted conflict like the war in Vietnam. 'Thankfully,' he says, 'it seems that

the objective will be achieved. But who will take the Taliban's place? There are a lot of doubts about the mob we've been helping.'

'You know the asylum seekers?' asks another grade-sixer. 'Why were they throwing children off the boat?'

Relieved that I don't have to answer this question either, I start loading film into my camera while Andren recounts the events surrounding that notorious allegation. But when he gets stuck on the most recent details he turns to me for extra information. Forty faces swing in my direction as I do my best to summarise the Navy's view of the original incident, which emerged a few days before the election.

Despite this minor gap in his knowledge, Andren's attitude towards the boat people is informed and sincerely held. Its strength became clear when the government's first 'border protection' bill was introduced on 29 August. With an hour's notice he spoke against the bill in parliament; according to Laurie Oakes in *The*

*Bulletin*, it was 'the gutsiest speech' on the day. 'We cannot claim the high moral ground in sending our troops against Saddam,' Andren told the House, 'we cannot condemn the Taliban extremists, if we aren't prepared to accept there are thousands of persecuted victims of those regimes who manage to escape. Why wouldn't they seek asylum in the most free nation on earth?'

As he told the students at St Joseph's, he believes that our first instinct should be to welcome people seeking asylum. Although it was a risky stand for a rural independent, it seems to have done no damage at all to his support in the electorate. Nor is it the first time Andren has spoken out on issues which, according to conventional wisdom, we wouldn't expect to win support in Calare. In April 2001, for example, he introduced a private member's bill aimed at abolishing mandatory sentencing in the Northern Territory.

But attempting a more detailed assessment of how voters in Calare reacted to



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Andren's attitude to the boat people—and whether his success offers lessons for the major parties—is not straightforward. Over the three elections that Andren has successfully contested, support for the two Coalition parties has fallen significantly in Calare, not just because of Andren's success but also because of the 11 per cent vote for One Nation in 1998. This year, perhaps as a consequence, the Liberals decided not to stand a candidate, leaving the field to the National Party. The Coalition vote fell by over two per cent, suggesting that part of Andren's increased support could have come from former Liberal voters, some of whom would undoubtedly have been alienated by the National Party's strident and simplistic anti-'boat people' campaign in Calare.

The dramatic fall in support for One Nation at this election would also have benefited Andren. He has been a vocal advocate for farming groups and local industry and a strong opponent of Telstra privatisation—all of which has some appeal for former One Nation voters—as well as taking up popular issues like the generosity of superannuation benefits for federal parliamentarians.

Underlying all this is Andren's seemingly unassailable standing in the community. I didn't encounter anyone in Bathurst who didn't admire his performance as local member, and people who have spoken face-to-face with him find that he's a good listener who communicates frankly but undogmatically. The worst criticism I heard is that he doesn't have a sense of humour (although I wouldn't describe him as humourless). His Labor opponent in the November election, Kath Knowles, obviously disagrees with various of Andren's policies—she mentioned his support for the government bill to exempt small businesses from the unfair dismissal rules—and argues that independents benefit from being under less pressure to release broad, coherent policies. But she readily concedes that Andren's energy and visibility have won him a high level of regard over the five-and-a-half years since he entered parliament.

At Bathurst's daily paper, the *Western Advocate*, journalist Tony Rhead says that Andren is 'astute and hard-working' as a local MP. 'I've yet to meet anyone who hasn't been happy with the outcome

when they've taken a problem to him.' In the electorate, he says, Andren is credited with successfully pursuing Telstra over rural services, and persuading the federal government to change Austudy rules that threatened to disadvantage the children of farming families. The *Advocate* editorialised against the government's asylum seeker policy and reported sympathetically on Andren's decision to oppose it.

When I talked to Labor's Kath Knowles over a cup of coffee back in Bathurst, she also drew a useful distinction between the political culture of an electorate like Calare and its urban counterparts. A local member who effectively represents the broad interests of the electorate, she says, can expect to retain a seat like Calare almost regardless of which party he or she belongs to. One great advantage many rural members have is their access to a comparatively large number of media outlets. Andren has a column in two daily papers, and is sought for comment by local and regional television, radio and weekly and tri-weekly papers. An urban MP, by contrast, will usually have only a handful of free weeklies published within his or her electorate.

In Andren's case, the range of media and his own background in television—nearly 20 years with Channel 8 (now Prime) and 2GZ in Orange—combine to reinforce his image of energy and commitment in Calare. The day we drove to Molong, Telstra announced job cutbacks in one of its divisions, with a potential impact within Calare. Prime Television's newsroom called Andren straight away (on the road between Orange and Molong) to find out what he knew about the cuts and to arrange to film an interview for the evening news. As if to underline the importance of Telstra in rural Australia, his mobile phone periodically cut out as we wound our way to Molong.

**I** FIRST MET Peter Andren in April last year, on the day he introduced his private member's bill on mandatory sentencing. Only one member of the government and five opposition MPs were present when he spoke in the House, and a small handful of journalists watched from the press gallery.

What the missing MPs and journalists didn't hear was a persuasive, well-researched speech delivered with passion



and conviction. As Andren spoke, a few ALP members trickled into the chamber, then in came a large Labor contingent to hear Kim Beazley introduce his own bill on mandatory sentencing. Beazley was luckier than Andren: by the end of his speech another two government MPs had wandered into the House.

Although it was prepared with none of the resources of the government or opposition, Andren's speech was an important contribution to the mandatory sentencing debate. Later, in the midst of his small, enthusiastic staff in Parliament House, he seemed unperturbed by the customary absence of government members during his speech, but a little surprised that members of the press gallery had complained he hadn't warned them that he'd be speaking.

Andren was elected as member for Calare, a regional New South Wales seat taking in Lithgow, Bathurst and Orange, in 1996. This was the federal election that propelled no fewer than five independents into the House of Representatives, all but one of them to be pitched out by their electorates two-and-a-half years later. Of the five, only Andren, who had been working at Prime Television, had not previously been a member of one of the major parties.

Andren decided to run in 1996 when the sitting Labor member announced his retirement. 'A lot of people were particularly unimpressed with the candidates coming forward for the 1996 election, and someone suggested that I run as an independent,' he told me at Parliament House. 'I thought long and hard about it and thought, why not? I'd been up there for 20 years or more and I felt that it was my patch of dirt as much as anyone else's, that I knew the issues. Like everyone else I was critical of the abandonment of the regions by successive governments. The National Party had become the little red caboose on the end of the Liberal train. So for all of those reasons I wondered how well regional and rural areas were being represented.'

Andren's win in 1996 was based on a simple electoral calculation. 'When I sat down with one of my sons and looked at the numbers from the 1993 election I could see that the Labor vote was never going to hold up,' says Andren. The Labor member, David Simmons, had built up a strong position which was unlikely to be

maintained after his retirement. 'I was confident that if I could come second, or better, on the primary vote then I'd pick up support from both ends of the spectrum.' That's exactly what happened. Andren received nearly 30 per cent of first preferences, picked up second preferences from Labor and the Nationals, and ended up with 63 per cent of the two-candidate preferred vote.

Other independents have managed to sneak over the line in three-cornered contests, but it's unusual for them to go on to win an increased share of the vote at



*Peter Andren had accumulated enough respect in the community and pushed enough local issues in parliament that his views on asylum seekers—whether voters agreed with them or not—did not pose an electoral problem.*

the next election, and to tie down one of the safest seats in Australia. Andren gained over 40 per cent of the primary vote in 1998—a swing of 11 per cent—and a remarkable 72 per cent of the two-candidate preferred vote.

Armed with that convincing majority, he set about representing his electorate on an enormous range of issues. Petrol pricing, coal mining, fuel grants, Telstra and superannuation are among those with particular resonance in Calare, but Andren has also spoken in parliament on the less predictable topics of drug policy, reconciliation, East Timor and mandatory sentencing. He argued persuasively against the government's intention to deny prisoners the right to vote, and he opposed the government's bill to censor internet content.

To keep up with this workload Andren has a staff of just four people. As a result of a deal between Brian Harradine and the former Labor government he is entitled to one more staff member than an ordinary backbencher in recognition of the fact that he has none of the resources of a parliamentary party.

During Andren's first term his job wasn't made any easier, he says, by the attitude of many members of the government. Like his counterparts in Victoria, who later had an opportunity to take revenge on the Kennett government, Andren says that 'apart from a couple of ministers' the Howard government treated him with 'a degree of contempt'.

Things changed in the second term. 'There was a lot more respect because I came in with the third safest seat in the place.'

**B**OTH KATH KNOWLES and another prominent local I talked to made a similar observation: that Peter Andren had accumulated enough respect in the community and pushed enough local issues in parliament that his views on asylum seekers—whether voters agreed with them or not—did not pose an electoral problem. Some may well have been

persuaded by Andren's newspaper columns on the topic and his advertisements on radio and TV, which responded to the National Party's scare campaign ('You might like Peter Andren ... but you won't like what he thinks about protecting Australia's borders.') with an argument for humane policy. Others, according to Tony Rhead at the *Western Advocate*, would have admired his courage in stating an unequivocal position on the issue.

It's impossible to draw any firm conclusions about the significance of Andren's achievement for other parties. Local electors knew that their vote for Andren would not contribute to the election of a government with a different attitude to 'border protection'. But it may be that Andren's decision to adopt a potentially unpopular stance helped to consolidate his reputation among segments of the community and so contributed to his dramatic rise in support.

On the way to Bathurst Airport I mentioned to the taxi driver that I'd spent the previous day with Peter Andren. 'Andren, eh?' he said. 'I always think that independents are a bit like granny's tooth—all alone and not much use.' He paused. 'But, gee, he seems to be stirring them up, doesn't he?' ■

**Peter Browne** is a research fellow at Swinburne University's Institute for Social Research and producer of *The National Interest* on ABC Radio National.

# Rights roughed

What happens to rights when the national interest becomes the main game?

**T**HE FIRST CASUALTY of war is said to be truth. In the war against terrorism, human rights are the second casualty.

After the Twin Towers' fall (surely, someone else has caught the Tolkien allusion?) the US president asked for and obtained Congress' support for an Anti-terrorism Act that fillets constitutional guarantees of habeas corpus, presumption of innocence and due process. It also allows non-citizens to be detained on suspicion or secret evidence, permits eavesdropping and placing people under surveillance without evidence of wrongdoing, flouts lawyer/client privilege and creates military tribunals in place of civilian courts.

In the UK, the Home Secretary decided that in presenting to parliament anti-terrorism legislation—which will authorise the indefinite detention of suspected terrorists without trial—he would not declare that it complied with the UK's international human rights obligations. It wouldn't. A year ago, the UK's Human Rights Act made such rights and that declaration a central tenet of the common law.

Detaining even unpleasant people without trial is wrong, objectionable and impractical. Nobody should be detained unless for a reason and through the disciplined proving of the case. Arbitrary detention is impractical because, on the evidence from World War II, it does not guarantee security and causes misery to the innocent. It is objectionable because international law does recognise states' entitlement to suspend internationally guaranteed human rights, but only to the extent necessary, in times of war or public emergencies that threaten a nation's existence: not these.

Australia has acted as though there were such a war since 1992, when Labor first introduced the mandatory detention of asylum seekers. A consortium of pro bono lawyers and civil libertarians

directly challenged their treatment just before September 11.

By the end of November the High Court had refused to allow Melbourne solicitor Eric Vadarlis leave to appeal against a Federal Court decision not to issue two of our most ancient prerogative writs for the benefit of 433 people, rescued from a sinking boat in the Indian Ocean by the Norwegian ship, *MV Tampa*, then prevented from landing on Christmas Island.

**I**N AUGUST, Vadarlis and the Victorian Council for Civil Liberties had asked for 'mandamus' to oblige the Commonwealth to bring the rescuees ashore, triggering an assessment of their refugee claims under the Migration Act. 'Habeas corpus', an ancient remedy for unlawful detention, was sought to procure their attendance before the court. It was on an application for habeas corpus by anti-slavery activists that a British Court ordered that Somerset, an American slave brought into Britain by his owner, must be freed because the common law did not recognise his servile status—ultimately killing off slavery.

A Federal Court judge, Justice North, had ordered the rescuees be brought to land and released. The Commonwealth appealed. Three judges arrived at different decisions on the same law on two issues: whether the government had the power to expel the rescuees from Australia and detain them for that purpose, and whether the *Tampa* passengers were detained.

Justice French decided that the Commonwealth had the sovereign power under the constitution to decide who might enter Australia, to prevent their entry and to make people leave. This had not been lost by the enactment of the 'comprehensive regime' of the *Migration Act 1958*. Australia's ratification of the

Refugee Convention did not fetter this power, other than procedurally. Anyway, he thought, the rescuees were not 'detained'. They had no right to enter Australia; the Commonwealth had the power to stop them, 'whatever might be thought about its policy or whether it was exercised wisely or well'; and their freedom was limited by the *Tampa* captain's refusal to leave Australian waters, not the Australian troops who were present on board for aid and security purposes.

Chief Justice Black came to the opposite conclusion. Though a nation state does have the sovereign power to protect its borders, it has no

executive authority other than by statute to detain anyone, citizen or no, in Australia. The power to prevent unlawful entry by non-citizens in peacetime does not lie in some unwritten common-law prerogative to expel or exclude non-citizens. That was last used in 1771, when the British Crown directed that Jews unable to pay 'the usual freight' should be excluded. It had never been used since and was defunct in 21st-century Australia. There was no room for a parallel, non-statutory regime once the exhaustive Migration Act regime was in place, and that regime could have applied to the rescuees had the government not, on its own admission, 'taken a view' that it did not wish it to apply. There was no statutory power to detain the rescuees on the ship. Australia's laws must now be interpreted in light of its treaty obligations, and our 'national interest' included Australia's protection obligations under the Refugee Convention. In considering whether they were 'detained', the court must look at the ultimate consequences for an individual's freedom of the series of acts by which detention was brought about. There was no point in arguing that





the rescues' situation was 'self-induced' or that the application might facilitate other rights claims under the Migration Act. Habeas corpus was a fundamental protection of a fundamental right.

Justice Beaumont agreed with French (which meant the Commonwealth won), arguing that: (a) Vadarlis had not pleaded that the rescues had a common-law right to enter Australia; (b) technically, the Court could not issue the writ, just relief 'in the nature of' habeas corpus (a fine distinction, which the Commonwealth had not argued); and (c) even if it could, the court should not, because it was a scheme to use the Migration Act regime. Besides, it was wrong for a person to rely on their own unlawful act (in practically compelling *MV Tampa* to divert from Indonesia to Christmas Island) to secure an advantage not available legally.

If the remedy of habeas corpus depended on the detained person having a common-law right to enter a country, then poor black slave Somersett would have languished in chains in an English port.

Justice French added a postscript:

The counsel and solicitors acting in the interests of the rescues in this case have evidently done so pro bono. They have acted according to the highest ideals of the law. They have sought to give voices to those who are perforce voiceless and, on their behalf, to hold the Executive accountable for the lawfulness of its actions. In so doing, even if ultimately unsuccessful in the litigation they have served the rule of law and so the whole community.

In abandoning human rights when the going gets tough, governments send a very clear message to people in their own country, and tyrants in others', that our stated values are mere political puffery.

But in instructing the Commonwealth to pursue the lawyers who tried to protect the rescues' rights for its enormous legal costs, federal Attorney-General Daryl Williams, who advocates pro bono representation by the legal profession, has gutted its willingness to take on public-interest litigation. Williams has said, coolly, that this litigation was not in the public interest. His behaviour reveals just how much it was.

The truth is out there. Drowning. ■

**Moira Rayner** is a barrister and freelance writer.



## The colt we may regret

**A**ROUND MELBOURNE CUP TIME, Australia's racing ministers decided unanimously to ban the cloning of animals involved in their industry.

Racing, like the stock market and other forms of wagering, is a very skittish animal, subject to all sorts of external physical and psychological pressures. So the simple certainty of the ruling may well be a good thing.

What was really interesting, however, was the debate surrounding the deliberations. At times it appeared to simplify the issues to an absurd degree. Many commentators seemed to assume that animals cloned from the same champion parent would be identical, and retain all the characteristics that made their forebear a winner. 'Imagine the difficulties of punting when confronted with a field of Sunlines or Northerlies,' one bookmaker said.

But an organism is much more than the sum of its genetics. To recognise the role that environment plays in shaping the final individual, we only have to reflect on the human clones we have met—more usually known as identical twins. Friends and family have no difficulty in telling them apart, and they often have very different characters, strengths and weaknesses—more than enough to sort them out on a racetrack.

Science fiction and the simplistic 'nature vs nurture' debates have taken their toll on the word 'clone'. In common parlance, it has now been reduced to describing some sort of photocopy. The reality is more complex. Hosts of factors are at play in any one action. Science generally copes with this complexity by studying the impact of one factor while holding all the others steady. This is reported in the scientific literature, but by the time it reaches most of us, the artificial context in which the results were obtained has been forgotten.

Recently, the media reported that a Massachusetts company had created the first human clones. In the ensuing clamour much of the context was lost. These cells were not grown as embryos, but as a step along the way to 'therapeutic cloning'. The distinction between producing full human beings via cloning, and creating embryonic tissue to replace degenerate adult tissue (therapeutic cloning) has never been clear in the public mind. The cells produced in therapeutic cloning never grow into a human embryo. (While this distinction does not amount to moral justification of the practice, it is important for informed discussion.)

The Massachusetts 'clones' had no arms or legs or heads. They amounted to three bundles of cells, the largest of which consisted of six cells. And it took 71 human eggs to create them. According to several leaders in stem cell research, this is the critical point—human eggs are difficult to harvest and limited in supply. They say the work may well be a last hurrah for therapeutic cloning, because it effectively demonstrated that it is likely to be too difficult and expensive to be practical. These researchers are now working on other approaches, many using cells from adults, which are more likely to be ethically acceptable. This is hardly the message that emerged, perhaps because it was not simple enough. ■

**Tim Thwaites** is a freelance science writer.

# T r a





In 2001, **Michael Coyne** travelled from Melbourne to East Timor to follow a story about a WWII Australian soldier who had been saved by an East Timor *criado* (guide). While there, Coyne met and photographed East Timorese citizens now able to get on with their own lives in their own land.



2001 was the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Refugee Convention. Australian lawyer **Martin Clutterbuck** recalls the people, from many countries, whose lives have crossed his own in the course of refugee work.

**A** YEAR AGO I WAS ACCOMPANYING six asylum seekers from Burma to an interview with the Department of Immigration. They were farmers from an ethnic minority high in the mountains of Burma and had arrived in Australia on visitor's visas. They had all been the victims of forced labour for the Burmese regime and they had no real experience of the modern world. When they approached the revolving doors in the Department of Immigration building they watched open-mouthed as people smoothly passed through. Then, after observing for a minute, they made a rush towards the doors—all six of them. There was much hilarity as they attempted to disentangle arms and legs. A bemused security official came to help them out.





Lawyers and other workers in this jurisdiction play a similar role when they assist asylum seekers with the complex refugee determination process on their arrival. Asylum seekers often come to a jarring halt when confronted with an unfamiliar world. They are propelled through the system to its often Kafkaesque conclusion. The cases of individual asylum seekers often illustrate the point.

Ali Hassan was an unsuccessful Somali asylum seeker who had sustained head injuries from a bomb explosion in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, during the civil war. His refugee application was refused not because he did not have a fear of persecution in Somalia, but because decision-makers claimed there was insufficient evidence to prove that Ali was in fact a Somali. He was now about to be deported from Australia, but to where? It was apparent to anyone who had anything to do with Ali that he was very much a Somali. As immigration officials scratched their heads they agreed that it would be appropriate to return Ali to Somalia. They then set about the task of obtaining a Somali travel document for Ali—the type of documentation that he had himself been unable to obtain to prove his case. Within hours of his deportation from Australia, the High Court intervened to prevent Ali's removal. He was allowed to reapply for refugee status and was found to be a refugee from Somalia second time around. Ali is an example of the type of refugee most in need of Australia's help despite having arrived in an 'unauthorised manner'. With a serious mental disability, Ali would have been among the most vulnerable in war-torn Somalia.

Before starting refugee work I had questioned whether asylum seekers really needed legal representation. Surely they could tell their stories directly to an immigration official through an interpreter without the need for external assistance? Working in detention centres soon disabused me of this notion. Being in a detention environment is a particularly disenfranchising and dehumanising experience. In July 2001 I was asked to assist an elderly Afghan asylum seeker in one of the remote detention centres. On seeing me, my client became overwhelmed with emotion. He pumped my hand vigorously and could barely stammer out his name. I looked at his identity card and saw a younger-looking man with brown hair. He smiled wanly and told me that he had been in detention for over five months without being able to see a lawyer, despite having made it clear that he wished to apply for refugee status. He said, apologetically, that he had become extremely distressed. His hair had turned completely white.

In many cases, the challenge is to try and free someone from the sticky bureaucratic web they have become enveloped in. Mr Ahmadi was a stateless refugee from Kuwait who had left behind a wife and six children as he tried to make a future for them. He arrived in Australia without authorisation and was detained.







Above: Santa Cruz cemetery, Dili, East Timor.

Opposite, page 28:

*Top to bottom:* Young chambermaids from a hotel in Dili (formerly occupied by the Indonesian military); Boy with pet chicken.

Page 26:

*Top to bottom:* East Timorese highlands—taking the pig to market; Villager, 15 minutes drive from Dili; Suai: after Mass.

Pages 26–27: Girl on the beach near Suai. The United Nations uses part of this beach for recreation.

Page 27: Traffic in Dili—back to normal.

Page 30: Karate street kid, Dili.

*For this visual essay, photographer Michael Coyne shot all the images with a plastic camera that has no focusing device and no exposure mechanism. The camera had to be reinforced with gaffer tape to keep the light out—not always completely. It also has a plastic lens that does not capture, as he puts it, ‘the full picture’. Judge for yourself.*

*Michael has sent copies of the photographs to all of his subjects.*

During the refugee application process, Mr Ahmadi's then advisers inexplicably contacted Kuwaiti authorities with his personal details. Kuwaiti authorities wrote back confirming that they had indeed deported Mr Ahmadi from Kuwait. They then made the wild assertion that Mr Ahmadi was an 'Iraqi spy'. Such behaviour might be expected from a persecutory regime, but one would not expect Australian authorities to accept such allegations at face value. Yet this is precisely what happened. Australian intelligence authorities refused Mr Ahmadi's application on the grounds that there were reasons to believe he was a national security risk.

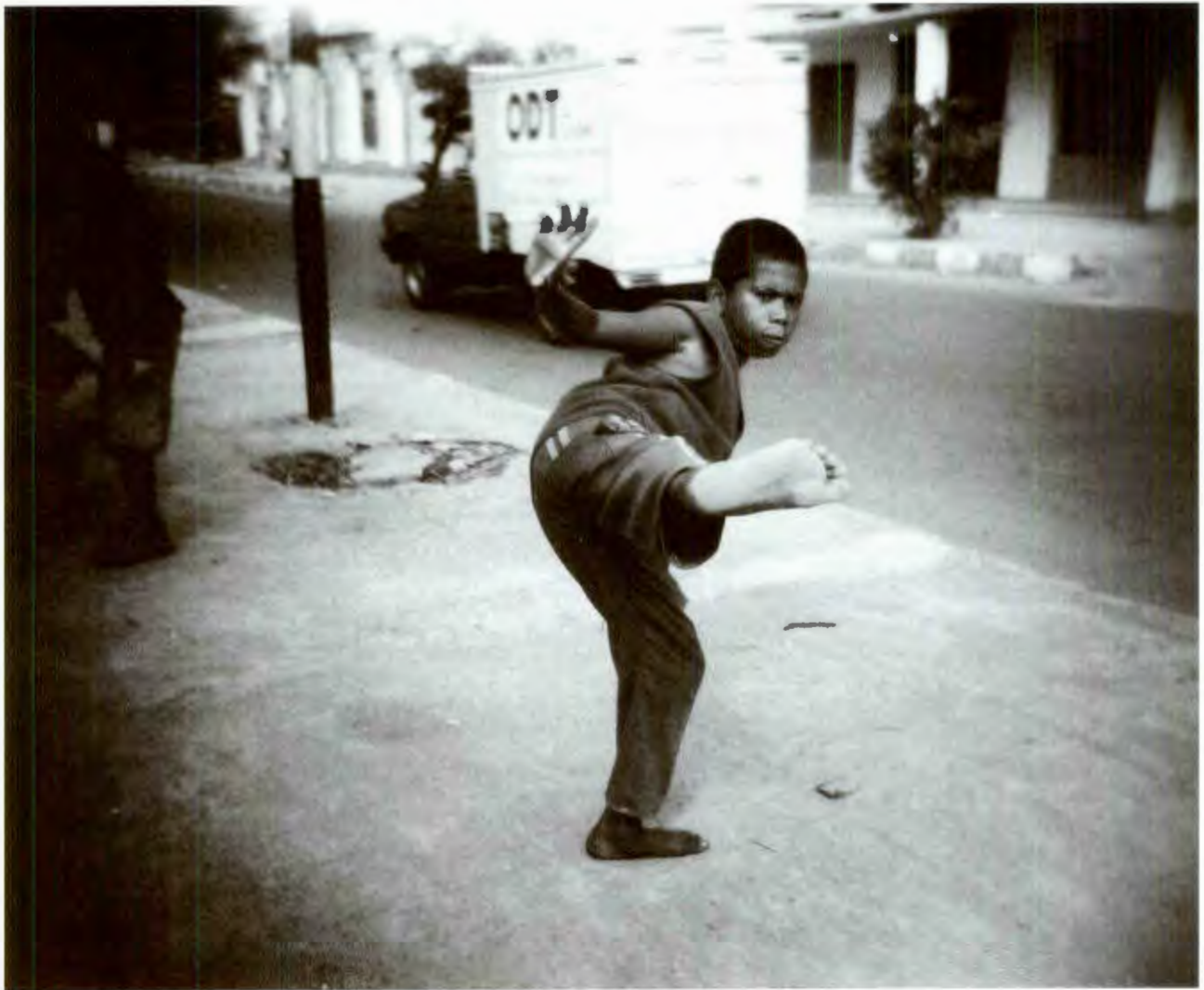
As we wound our way through the long and arduous process of refuting the allegations, Mr Ahmadi sighed with exasperation, 'If I were an Iraqi spy, why would Australian authorities leave me in detention where I have contact with all the Iraqi asylum seekers?' I shrugged my shoulders and tried to explain that regimes such as the one Mr Ahmadi had left behind do not have a monopoly on irrational behaviour. Finally, after Mr Ahmadi had been in detention for 18 months, intelligence authorities

admitted that they had made a mistake. He was offered a compensation payout and now lives in country Victoria with his wife and six children.

The act of detaining people has in itself become a growth industry under the present government. I recall speaking last year to some Afghan clients about conditions in detention. 'We have no complaints. We are fed, we are given blankets, we do not have to sleep on the floor and we are not beaten by the guards,' they said. They were comparing their detention experiences with their time in a Taliban jail in Kandahar in Afghanistan.

To my mind there is no question that our practice of immigration detention is a dark chapter that will become as unthinkable to future generations as the act of arbitrarily interring in Australia all persons of German or Japanese origin during World War II.

There have been many obstacles placed in the way of asylum seekers over the last five years. One of the most serious restrictions occurred early in the term of the Howard government when it moved to limit access to work rights and financial support. I currently act for an asylum seeker from Sierra Leone,





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Samuel, who has been in Australia for over three years without work rights or any form of financial assistance. Somehow, he has managed to survive, mainly on hand-outs. As I contemplate the compatibility of Australia's domestic law with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, my client states resolutely that he must not work in Australia because he comes from a country that has no law and he knows what can happen. Samuel was at home when his mother had her arm amputated by rebel soldiers in an act of pointless violence, so he speaks with some passion about the rule of law. Over the last three years, he has rebuilt his life. His nightmares have subsided and he has married in Australia. Despite this, his application to remain in Australia first as a refugee and then later on account of his marriage, has failed. As I explain the situation to Samuel and his wife Joanne, I can see Samuel staring back into the abyss.

'Pacific solutions' and 'border protection' legislation usher in a brave new world for refugees in Australia. Those who have beaten the clock can count themselves lucky. Yusuf Farah languished in the Maribyrnong Detention Centre for over 18 months before being accepted as a refugee. A Somali poet, Yusuf spent much of his time in detention writing articles critiquing the political situation in Somalia and the power-plays of Somali warlords. Over this

period he became the main feature-writer for the pre-eminent Somali newspaper in London, *Kasmo*. When interested readers asked how they could contact Yusuf to comment on his articles, the editor had to advise them that he was living in an immigration jail somewhere in Australia.

Yusuf was accepted as a refugee only after an important full Federal Court decision concerning his right to freedom of speech for his writings. As we chat over coffee in Fitzroy, Yusuf is aware of the irony that despite having been in detention for over 18 months, he is fortunate to have had his case decided prior to the new changes in law which would have torpedoed his claims. He knows he would otherwise be dodging bullets in Mogadishu. The eternal optimist, Yusuf beams from ear to ear, 'I feel just like a new child.'

For me, the last five years have been filled not with 'queue-jumpers' and 'illegals' but with a glimpse of the rich tapestry of the world. Kurdish journalists, Iraqi doctors, Burmese students, Somali poets and Afghan farmers. Stories of pathos, good humour in the face of adversity and people who are unstintingly grateful for the second chance Australia has given them. ■

**Martin Clutterbuck** was co-ordinator of the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre in Melbourne. He is currently in the East Timorese territory of Ocussi.

THE NATION:2

# The law of words

**Steven Columbus** examines the gulf between Australian government rhetoric and the realities of international refugee law.

**I**T MAY COME AS A surprise to some readers that government rhetoric on asylum seekers and refugees, while establishing a clear stance on those deserving of our protection, has no bearing on who ultimately receives such protection.

That latter task remains within the purview of international law, particularly the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees (hereafter 'the Convention'). The Convention operates at the administrative level of refugee determination, but also imposes obligations on signatories' treatment of asylum seekers/refugees across the board.

Both the Convention and the government recognise the need to assert an ambition to protect those 'most in need'. But they differ markedly in the criteria used to make this judgment about priorities, and consequently, in their respective conclusions. Why? Part of the answer lies in the fact that they reflect different imperatives. A product of enlightened self-interest, the Convention nevertheless represents a

rational, humanitarian response to the plight of those fleeing human rights violations. It is a moral document. The government also dons the mantle of morality in claiming to champion the rights of 'needy' refugees. But its high-minded assertions are compromised by parochialism and political expedience.

The government has been very successful in dictating the language, and hence the tone and content, of the debate. Dehumanising rhetoric has paved the way for callous, inhumane legislation. Australia purports to offer a haven to 'refugees in need', and a resolute barrier to opportunistic 'boat people'. What the Convention demonstrates so forcefully, however, is that 'boat people' and 'refugees in need' are in many cases one and the same thing.

The essential components of government rhetoric are contained in the following quotation by the Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock:

I am going to continue to press the argument that, if you have a moral view of these matters, you would

What the Convention demonstrates so forcefully is that 'boat people' and 'refugees in need' are in many cases one and the same thing.

be concerned about those people who are languishing in refugee camps with no prospect of going home: unsafe where they are, in need of an urgent resettlement outcome and in some of the most deplorable circumstances in the world. And I compare those circumstances with the circumstances of those who are able to travel freely and have the money to engage people-smugglers. I have to tell you that, if you are looking for refugees in need, I know where you will find them—and you do not find them coming to Australia unlawfully by boat.<sup>1</sup>

Not so much a definition as a value judgment, Mr Ruddock's 'moral' view is only ostensibly about refugees. A superficial reading presents two contrasting types: the 'refugee in need' and the 'abusive asylum seeker'. The subtext is immigration, and specifically border control.

Unpacking this passage further, 'those people who are languishing in refugee camps with no prospect of going home' refers quite clearly to those envisaged as eligible for Australia's off-shore refugee resettlement program. The comparison between these desperate individuals and those 'coming to Australia unlawfully by boat' could not be more disparaging.

Contrast this with the provisions of the Convention. According to Article 1A(2) of the Convention, a refugee is a person who:

... owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

Note what it emphasises: a well-founded fear of persecution. Note what it does not: money, means of entry and prior movements. Even a cursory reading should alert readers to the fact that both 'needy refugees' and 'abusive boat people' could hypothetically fall within the bounds of the Convention definition.

Refugee status determination is not a popularity contest; it does not pander to parochial conceptions of good character, or to religious, cultural or societal prejudices. It exists in isolation from the concerns of generic immigration policy. Considerations of skills, language, wealth and familial connection to Australia have no bearing on refugee status determination.

The current government penalises in word and deed refugees who enter Australia by unauthorised means. Such practices find no sanction in the Convention, which acknowledges irregular entry and in Article 31 explicitly prohibits the imposition of penalties on refugees on account of their illegal entry into the receiving nation. The drafters recognised that people fleeing persecution could face enormous obstacles in obtaining travel documents, not the least being bringing themselves to the attention of those they fear.

Australian government rhetoric includes terms like 'queue-jumper', and 'forum-shopper'. The Convention, however, makes no judgments about where an asylum seeker lodges a refugee application: rather, it places primary importance on protection as its *raison d'être*. One does not have to be poor (or uneducated, or downtrodden) to be a refugee. On the contrary, it is often the well-heeled and well-connected who are liable to face persecution. Lawyers, bureaucrats, intellectuals, journalists and politicians often possess both the means and motivation to confront injustice, and are frequently targeted by abusive regimes.

IT WOULD BE HEARTENING to conclude on a positive note, to emphasise that, in spite of the damage done by divisive rhetoric, it is the humanitarian dictates of the Convention that guide the process by which Australia actually determines refugee status. However, in the legislation pushed through parliament during the first two weeks of September were the *Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone) Act 2001* and the *Border Protection (Validation and Enforcement Powers) Act 2001*. Both are designed specifically to target 'abusive boat people'.

The former excises certain territories from Australia's migration zone, and therefore from the jurisdiction of the Migration Act. Asylum seekers landing on Ashmore Reef, Christmas Island or Cocos Island—territories which in the last two years have accounted for 100 per cent of asylum seekers landing by boat—are now denied access to the Convention-based determination process enshrined in the Migration Act. As for those intercepted at sea, the latter Act empowers Australian defence personnel to board the vessels, and detain and transfer asylum seekers to territories of the minister's choosing. Then, at the discretion of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, asylum seekers may be transferred outside the jurisdiction of domestic law and beyond the scrutiny of the Australian public.

So according to what procedures will the claims of these unfortunates be assessed? As yet, no-one knows. What we do know is that the Department's discretionary powers will be unfettered. The determination regime will have no legal basis; it will instead be a product of internal policy imperatives, subject to change without public consultation, and implemented without public accountability.

We in Australia have failed the test of our own civilisation. ■

**Steven Columbus** worked in the New Zealand Refugee Status Branch as the refugee determination officer. Currently he oversees publications for the Amnesty International (Victoria) Refugee Team.

<sup>1</sup> As quoted in 'Toxic rhetoric blurs sorry truth', Mike Steketee, [www.news.com.au](http://www.news.com.au), 25 September 2001.

A longer version of this article is available (email: [eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au](mailto:eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au)).



# Catholic identity and the abortion debate

A Brief, Liberal, Catholic Defense of Abortion, Daniel A. Dombrowski & Robert Deltete,  
University of Illinois Press, 2000. ISBN 0 25202 550 4

WHEN POPE JOHN XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council in 1962 he was seeking renewal of his ancient church, hoping that like the renovation of a historic building, the process would remove unnecessary accretions and disfiguring ornaments, returning the edifice to a condition of pristine beauty. But such expectations await the mercy or cruelty of circumstances and, from the vantage point of a new century, it is clear that the process of renewal has had surprising, confusing and often ambiguous consequences. The renovations have presented the outside world with a curious spectacle and left the inhabitants disoriented and unsure of their location.

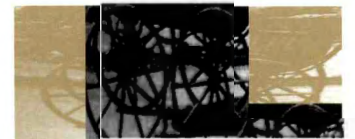
One of the most significant effects has been the erosion of a long-standing Catholic identity. There was a time, not so long ago really, when people were agreed upon the certainties that characterised the typical Catholic. Such typical Catholics confidently believed that their church was the one, true road to salvation, that the Pope was the fount of doctrine and discipline, that he was (in certain circumstances) infallible, that women could never be priests, that a married clergy was something only Protestants indulged, that contraceptive sex was mortally sinful, and that abortion was a dreadful wrong because the foetus, from the moment of conception, was an innocent human being. The list is not exhaustive: there were, for instance, matters of devotion, such as that to the Virgin Mary, that were characteristically (though not exclusively) Catholic, and there were various doctrines such as the Immaculate Conception associated with those matters.

Of course, there were many perfectly serious 'non-typical' Catholics who were unpersuaded of one or more of these certainties, just as there had been Catholics in every age who belonged to 'the loyal opposition' on such standard certainties as the legitimacy of torturing and executing heretics or the permissibility of slavery. There were also other certainties in the fairly recent past, such as the prohibition of vernacular Mass and the ban on eating meat on Fridays that were perhaps equally definitive

of identity at the time, but generally understood to be ephemeral because they were matters of church discipline which could and did change. The status of an unmarried clergy is surely in the same disciplinary boat, though church authority holds inflexibly to it with a determination that defies logic.

Such is the identity crisis generated by the events around Vatican II that virtually none of these certainties now have general acceptance. The proud boast that 'outside the church there is no salvation' is now an embarrassment, though this was a central and commonplace teaching for centuries. Moreover, few (beyond perhaps a small Vatican coterie) even harbour this thought secretly. The prohibition on contraception has not been formally abandoned, but it is no longer seriously taught or preached and it is hardly obeyed by any of the laity. Nor do the vast majority of the disobedient, or their pastors, see their behaviour as in any way sinful. Many still believe in papal authority and infallibility, but papal authority in most moral matters is effectively a dead letter with the laity, while infallibility is highly contentious as to meaning and truth. Marian devotion has dramatically declined in many parts of the Catholic world, and the impact of key Marian doctrines is mostly insignificant. But one item has remained rock solid—the rejection of abortion and the belief that the destruction of even the very early foetus is the killing of a human being (or, as some would more technically have it, a person).

Of course, this conviction is not restricted to Catholics. It has become a centrepiece of fundamentalist Protestant Christianity, especially in the United States, and there are even some non-believers who hold a similar position. Nonetheless, one gets the impression that Catholics who disagree markedly on all sorts of other religious and moral questions breathe a sigh of relief that they can at least agree on this.



*If we abandon or modify the current orthodoxy on abortion, what happens then to the sense of Catholic identity and solidarity that has been both supported and symbolised by it? There is no doubt that this identity will be further eroded, but is that such a bad thing?*



This collective sigh is surely emitted as a mark of common identity. The shared feeling is that here diversity can unite in the firm conviction that reason, faith, compassion and tradition speak together on this one certainty.

**Y**ET THERE ARE MANY curious aspects to this consensus. One is, of course, that Catholic women have proportionately as many abortions as any other group in their communities. Another is that the current Catholic orthodoxy on this issue is relatively new. A recent book by two American Catholic philosophers, Daniel A. Dombrowski and Robert Deltete, provides a timely reminder of this. In *A Brief, Liberal, Catholic Defense of Abortion*, the authors point out that not only were there striking differences among many of the Fathers, but the great theologians of the medieval and early medieval period, St Thomas Aquinas and St Augustine, did not propound the view that is now standard. They thought there was a marked difference between the early and late stages of foetal life, and the confidence of the contemporary view of the early foetus as 'a human person' would surely have struck them as unfounded. Augustine refers to the early foetus in vegetative terms and Aquinas held that 'ensoulment' could not occur in the early processes of gestation when a merely vegetative and then animal soul were involved. It required a later divine intervention to provide the developing living matter with a rational human soul. In fact, in an early work, his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Book of Sentences*,

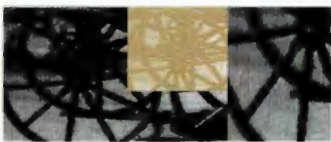
Aquinas places the crucial point at 40 days for a male and 90 days for a female. Making due allowance for equality of the sexes, this would plausibly indicate something like the end of the first trimester. Augustine displays less certainty about ensoulment, speculating at one point that it might occur at the 46th day and elsewhere expressing a degree of agnosticism. But his most considered judgment on the immorality of early abortion condemns it on the grounds of its connection with sexual licence. He does not call it murder but married adultery. Aquinas likewise considers early abortion in the context of sexual perversity. Their outlook was determinative of the church's standard teaching until the 17th century.

The usual response to this intellectual history by the church's moral majority (when they don't ignore it altogether) is to point out that Augustine and Thomas were operating with outdated science. Modern science places, or puts theologians in a position to place, 'ensoulment' at the beginning of foetal life and hence to treat early abortion as a form of murder. But there are many problems with this response, not the least of which is that most contemporary scientists in the relevant areas, such as embryology or genetics,

are distinctly unimpressed with this interpretation of their work. Of course, they may be wrong, but it is significant that the church's shift away from the Thomistic/Augustinian positions began with confusions generated by new scientific developments. As Dombrowski and Deltete point out, the invention of the microscope and some misobservations made with it led scientists in the 17th century to the profoundly mistaken theory of 'preformationism' whereby it was supposed that every organism starts off with all its parts already formed. The theories of procreation known as ovism and homunculism gave different spins to this outlook in projecting the idea that tiny humans were somehow wholly present in the female egg or in the male sperm.

These theories are now merely historical curiosities, though, at the time, they constituted advances in the understanding of generation. But as scientists moved on, theologians and religious apologists remained fixated in a preformationist mind-set. Dombrowski and Deltete give an interesting and persuasive sketch of the development of this fixation, and in doing so draw upon the work of such theologians as Messenger and de Dorlodot and, more recently, Shannon and Wolter. They chart the emergence of an ontological view of the immorality of early abortion (whereby the foetus is a human person from the 'moment of conception') and contrast it with the perversity view that dominated earlier thinking about the matter. The perversity view is the position (mentioned above) that early abortion exhibits the wrong attitude to sexual intercourse. It is connected with the idea, most explicit in Augustine, that procreative intent is the only thing that can justify sexual intercourse (and then only within the confines of marriage). More broadly, it is associated with the profound suspicion of sexual pleasure and sexual desire that has marked official Catholic Christianity from its earliest years. This was relaxed somewhat in the 20th century so that sex solely for mutual pleasure (between married couples) is now officially approved in certain circumstances—a view that would have struck Augustine as immoral. Indeed, the English Catholic philosopher, Peter Geach, a strong opponent of contraception, was speaking in authentic, if extravagant, Augustinian tones when he said, 'Apart from the good of marriage that redeems it, sex is poison.'<sup>1</sup>

**T**HE TANGLED HISTORICAL record does not prove that the present orthodoxy is wrong; but if it is wrong or dubious on other grounds, it helps explain how church authority got it wrong, and reduces the appeal of the argument from tradition. But is the present view wrong? Dombrowski and Deltete do not argue outright that it is wrong, only that it is sufficiently uncertain to allow that other views on abortion, more favourable to its moral legitimacy, should form part of a pluralistic outlook within the church. They are



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not the first Catholics to challenge the ruling consensus. On the local scene, Fr Norman Ford, the Director of the Caroline Chisholm Centre for Health Ethics in Melbourne, has argued in his book *When Did I Begin?* that the human person does not begin at conception, but roughly two weeks later at segmentation (or the 'primitive streak' stage) after which there is no longer any possibility of identical twinning.<sup>2</sup> Others have highlighted the same historical story that the American philosophers have told, and several other Catholic intellectuals—notably Daniel Maguire, Joseph Donceel SJ, Bernard Haring, and Garry Wills—have questioned the validity of the arguments by which the consensus is commonly supported.

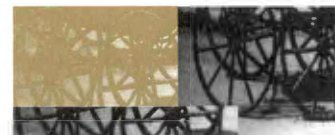
In an attempt to dispel the initial implausibility of the tiny person thesis, the anti-abortion case often deploys the idea of potentiality. The argument is that a certain point in embryonic or foetal development (preferably conception) marks the decisive presence of the potential for being a fully functioning human person. Destroying this potential is tantamount to killing that individual human being. But this manoeuvre has many problems. For one thing, it makes Norman Ford's argument difficult for the theological conservatives to handle. Ford is no radical on these matters, and opposes very early abortion on the grounds that it destroys potential human life, but he argues that the embryo is not an individual human being (or person) until the appearance of the primitive streak at roughly two weeks after fertilisation. Prior to this we cannot have an individual human being because too many things are indeterminate, including whether the entity will be one being or more—twinning can still occur. On this view, there would seem to be a dramatic difference in status after two weeks so that the morning-after pill could no longer be regarded as a person-destroyer, even if it destroyed something that had the potential to become a human individual.

But even after the primitive streak stage, the question of potentiality is very ambiguous. We must be wary of the traps that can beset the use of adjectives like 'potential'. 'Potential' does not function in the way many standard adjectives do. A happy dog is of course a dog, as a snappy tie is a tie, or a sad face a face. But just as a decoy duck is emphatically not a duck, and an imaginary win is not a victory at all, so a potential champion is not yet a champion of any sort. Hence the allegation that abortion kills a potential baby or potential person does not, even if true, amount to the charge of killing a baby or a person. Even if segmentation is an important step on the way to being a person, in that a more individual pathway for human development is in place, this does not license the conclusion that the implanted embryo is now a human being on a par with a newborn baby or late-term foetus. (I thank Arthur Kuflik for helpful discussion of this point.) None of this is to deny, of course, that the potentiality of an entity sometimes

provides a reason for according it value or respect.

Similar things can be said about the idea that the embryo and early foetus have already been 'programmed' for a distinctive human life. Popular genetics has much to answer for, most notably the quasi-magical notion that an individual's genes dominate their choices and destiny—'we are our genes!' Religious people are inclined to resist genetic determinism and various forms of genetic reductionism, and I am sure that they are right to do so. This makes it all the more surprising that they fasten on to fanciful elaborations of such ideas as 'genetic code' and 'genetic programming' for their own purposes. So they leap from the workaday significance of these concepts to dramatic conclusions about the presence of a small human being or person. This leap implies the equivalence of the soul or 'individual human substance' to the chemical make-up of remarkable but primitive cellular life.

Much as the personhood of the foetus from conception is proclaimed by the anti-abortionists, it is hard to believe that it is seriously held in their hearts. The test of genuine belief is surely the commitment to its obvious consequences. Yet there are many ways in which these consequences are ignored or avoided. If the early foetus is a person, then we would expect its death in miscarriage or abortion to elicit some concern for burial rites, but Catholic authorities have never required or urged anything of the sort. (Interestingly, Canon Law 871 states that 'aborted foetuses, if they are alive, are to be baptised, in so far as this is possible'. But pastoral practice is hardly in enthusiastic accord with this precept.) In fact, a very high percentage of normally fertilised human eggs are destroyed by natural processes, but no-one treats this as a natural disaster akin to an earthquake. Nor does anyone seriously suggest some sort of baptism for stored embryos, created by the new birth technologies, when they are about to perish or be destroyed (allowed to die). Similarly, most anti-abortionists make an exception to the ban on killing the early foetus in cases of grave danger to the mother's life, and some make an exception in cases of rape or incest. Yet if these foetuses are persons or human beings in any morally significant sense, they are clearly innocent of the crime or risk that allows their death. This is so whether we treat 'innocence' as meaning 'without moral fault' or give it the meaning common in 'just war' theory of 'not doing harm'. Some theologians adopt this second interpretation and allow the killing of a foetus whose presence is endangering the mother's life because it is (or is like) an 'unjust aggressor'. But the analogy with war is too remote:



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soldiers who try to kill you may be morally innocent (because they are ill-informed or coerced) but they are still trying to kill you and that is what licenses your lethal self-defence. The foetus has no such intent. (Contemporary philosophers would treat the life-endangering foetus in the category of 'innocent threat'

and many would hold it licit to kill an innocent threat to one's life. But it is doubtful that traditional Catholic moral theology can follow this path.) Consistency for the 'early foetus as person' view can be achieved by denying the permissibility of early abortion in such cases, but it is consistency achieved at the cost of compassion and common sense.

The implausibility of the ontological view suggests a deeper philosophical problem since the idea that the embryo or early foetus is already a human being with the same moral standing as other humans seems to fly in the face of the Thomistic tradition's unitary approach to the reality of human persons. Following Aristotle, Aquinas sees the human soul as the form of the human body. Dualistic theories that view the human soul or mind as a distinct complete substance from the body may be able to envisage a human soul connected to anything at all, a stone or a frog perhaps. But for Thomas there is surely something absurd about a rational soul animating a tiny speck that does not

have organs or sensation even though it has some prospect of eventually developing them.<sup>3</sup> It is surely more plausible to place the moral significance of the developing human organism at the stage where the physical structures underlying sensation and thought are at least seriously in place. Dombrowski and Deltete argue that this happens only towards the end of the second trimester. There is clearly room for debate about these matters but the standard Catholic view blocks this debate with its commitment to 'immediate hominisation' (as Donceel calls it).

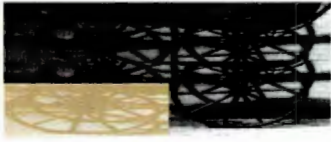
**D**OMBROWSKI AND DELTETE try to support their position by recourse to 'process metaphysics' and a philosophical critique of strict identity involving a theory of 'temporal asymmetry'. The average lay reader will find most of this merely mysterious and distracting, and I must say, as a professional philosopher, that a good deal of it struck me as philosophically unpersuasive and dubiously necessary for the case they want to make. The notion of identity at work in common uses of 'the same person' is not univocal; in one sense I am clearly the same person as the 12-year-old boy in the photograph preserved in my parents' photo album, but I can also say that, in a different sense, I am now another person altogether. But we do not need to unravel these issues to be clear that there is no sense in which any adult is the same

person as the fertilised egg that he or she grew out of.

Perhaps because the two authors themselves disagree on some fundamentals, there is a certain tension in their book between different reasons for respecting the life of the late-stage foetus. The official reason is that the late-stage foetus is conscious and capable of experiencing pain. This puts the case for respecting its 'right to life' on a par with respecting the right to life of various animals. Sometimes, however, they seem to place more weight on the combination of this actual sentience with the adequate development of the cerebral cortex to the point where it can be said that 'real capacity' (see page 72) for rational thought is now instantiated. In any event, however the authors should be interpreted, there is a real issue (or several real issues) here. If sentience is all that is at issue, there will be good reasons for not killing the late foetus but these will only be as strong as the reasons for not killing a dog. No doubt we should be more respectful of animal life, but even many dog-lovers might hesitate to accept this parity. This suggests that when development has reached the stage of 'real (though unexercised) capacity' for rationality there is room for an argument giving a stronger, though perhaps not absolute, right to life to the late foetus. Once we can think of the being in the womb not merely as an entity with a certain potential, but as an actual though immature member of the human community, then we should treat it as more significant (even) than the household pets. If this is 'speciesism', then so be it.<sup>4</sup>

Then there is the question of what respect, if any, is due to the foetus in the early stages of its progress to being a human person, an issue that receives insufficient attention in Dombrowski and Deltete's book. Even if we reject the minuscule person story, this may not mean that we can treat the destruction of the early embryo as a matter of moral indifference. The very early stages of pregnancy may deserve respect for reasons that do not commit us to anything like the metaphysics of 'immediate hominisation'. We can recognise that there is something remarkable in the processes of fertilisation and early foetal development (at least at and after the stage of segmentation), something to evoke attitudes of wonder and even a certain reverence, without falling into the trap of 'immediate hominisation'. Such attitudes might well deploy the notion of potentiality (without falling into the traps mentioned earlier) and might well lead to a certain recoiling from the idea that abortion is a perfectly neutral moral practice. They might also support a concern that abortion not become more widespread, and a sense of regret whenever it becomes necessary.

In allowing room for such attitudes, I do not mean to suggest that they are entirely unproblematic. In particular, there are two sorts of problem that they face. The first concerns the weight to be given to this respect. Some conservative moralists, including many Catholics, view it as overwhelming. Invoking talk of



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the 'gift' of life, they use this idea to rule out any research on the early embryo that is likely or certain to be destructive, including research that promises major medical breakthroughs such as the procuring of stem cells. I doubt that the respect in question can be made to do so much work. In particular, where infertility clinics have 'spare' embryos that are to be destroyed anyway, the serious prospect of curing disease or relieving great suffering by carefully supervised, though destructive, research seems to me clearly to outweigh the demands of respect.

The second problem concerns the question of whether such attitudes are distinctively religious, in some broad sense of the term, as Ronald Dworkin has argued, and whether, if so, they should form no part of law and public policy in pluralist democracies. These questions are related to the way we should understand political liberalism, and are too complex to discuss further here, although the issue is canvassed by Dombrowski and Deltete in their chapter on liberalism. This chapter is not particularly deep or novel philosophically, but it avoids many of the errors and misunderstandings about contemporary liberal thinking that are unfortunately far too common among Catholic and other Christian commentators. They also have an interesting chapter propounding a new Catholic approach to sexual ethics, but reasons of space also preclude a discussion of this here.

If we abandon or modify the current orthodoxy on abortion, what happens then to the sense of Catholic identity and solidarity that has been both supported and symbolised by it? There is no doubt that this identity will be further eroded, but is that such a bad thing? The sense of identity has an important psychological and moral role to play in human life, but its role is not always positive. There are good and bad identities and the fashion for preserving identities at all costs is one of the more ambiguous and sometimes dangerous fads of contemporary life. Nazi politicians and their supporters had a strong sense of identity but they would have been better off without it, and similar things can be said of many damaging, though less dreadful, identities. The Catholic identity referred to at the beginning of this article was both rigid and highly oppositional. It set Catholics proudly apart from other Christians and other religious people and signalled that their characteristic beliefs and practices were unchanging, indeed unchangeable. But this separation and inflexibility may be precisely what needs to be abandoned. Catholics should absorb the genuine insights, values and discoveries of other religious and secular traditions without viewing them as mere optional add-ons to the guaranteed 'deposit of faith'. They should be particularly wary of treating a mere attachment to social, moral and political conservatism as if it constituted attachment to the person and message of Christ. (The same goes of course for radicalism.) The record of church authority in recent centuries on

such crucial issues as slavery, separation of church and state, freedom of conscience, and the status of women illustrates the damaging effects of this ingrained resistance to change.

In the light of this resistance, the standard line on abortion has a significance beyond a concern for the status of the unborn. The standard line has led, for instance, to official Catholic opposition to in-vitro fertilisation and most other forms of artificial birth technology. It is an important element in the campaign against research using stem cells (which can only at present be got by destroying embryos), even though this holds out hope for the treatment of major diseases.<sup>5</sup> It is connected to the rejection of all forms of human cloning. Some of the issues in this area are legitimate causes for public concern and debate both with regard to their ethical and health aspects. The fact that a project is aimed at promoting human good does not immediately guarantee that it has no moral flaws. Nonetheless, a thread that runs through the church's comprehensive oppositional stance is a disturbing lack of compassion for human misery and suffering. One prominent church spokesman, rejecting recently the idea of genetic testing of embryos for tendencies to cancer used the 'what next?' device to suggest that scientists might next want to reject the implantation of embryos that had a tendency to asthma. The spokesman no doubt did not intend this as a gratuitous slight to those who suffer from this terrible disease, but this sort of insensitivity emerges all too readily in the polemical context of the abortion debate. A church known for compassion, humility and openness is more likely to achieve a deep and impressive identity than one marked by a passion for stringent metaphysical dogmatism in the face of complexity and suffering. ■

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1 Peter Geach, *The Virtues: The Stanton Lectures 1973–4*, Cambridge University Press, 1977, p147.

2 Norman M. Ford, *When Did I Begin? Conception of the Human Individual in History, Philosophy and Science*, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

3 When Thomas speaks of 'ensoulment' he does not—or should not—mean that an ethereal substance is injected by God into the foetus, but rather that a new stage in foetal development has emerged in which the organism now has rational capacities (if not abilities) and hence a new moral status. He also thinks this requires a special act of God, but this is another matter.

4 Lest this be thought too dismissive of an important line of moral critique, I would refer the reader to my more developed critique of Peter Singer's view on speciesism in 'Morality and Species', *Res Publica*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1999. Copies can be obtained from the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at the University of Melbourne (email: irena@unimelb.edu.au).

5 Recent scientific developments suggest that it may become feasible to get healthy stem cells from living adult humans without damaging the adults. Were this possible it would bypass the problem of embryo status.



# THE SHORTLIST



**In Fear of Security: Australia's Invasion Anxiety**, Anthony Burke, Pluto Press, 2001. ISBN 1 86403 125 5, RRP \$39.95

This book examines and criticises the idea that national security is an unquestionable good. A long time ago Augustine argued that wars are fought for the sake of peace, and that the quest for unconditional peace inevitably leads to war. This book explores the same paradox, analysing the process by which the idol of security leads us to identify groups whom we must fear, and to construct our own identity out of a shared struggle against them. Security, which is supposed to kill fear, in fact nurtures it. As the author was finishing his book, the *Tampa* sailed by. He quotes from a speech of Prime Minister Joseph Cook when he accepted naval vessels in 1913: 'This fleet will defend White Australia from less advanced but aggressive nations all around us with lower standards.' Today's prime minister speaks with the same timbre and sentiment.

—Andrew Hamilton sj

**September 11**, Noam Chomsky, Allen & Unwin, 2001. ISBN 1 86508 818 8, RRP \$17.95; **Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords**, Ahmed Rashid, Pan Books, 2001. ISBN 0 330 49221 7, RRP \$20

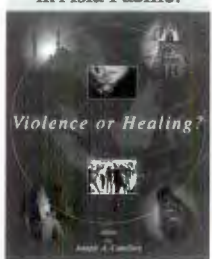
Two short books, both essential reading if you want background to the crisis in Afghanistan or some sense of the diversity of opinion in the United States.

Rashid's *Taliban* has a new, post-September 2001 preface. The rest of his meticulous and detailed journalist's account of the rise of the warlords is timely—and timeless—in its analysis of the power battles and the vested interests that lead nations and whole regions on a path of destruction. Rashid also gives a very useful account of the less-discussed agendas of the current 'war on terrorism' by detailing the complex of oil fields and transit routes that criss-cross Afghanistan.

Chomsky's *September 11* is a rather more opportunistic volume—a series of interviews given by the MIT professor of linguistics and long-time left activist to a variety of news services after the attacks on New York and Washington. There is, in consequence, some repetition, and some predictability in Chomsky's stance. But the book does make one think more than twice about what the 'war on terrorism' means and who, over the past two decades, have been the terrorists. His accounts of US activity in El Salvador should be familiar, but, given the short memory of international news media, probably isn't. Read *September 11* for that if

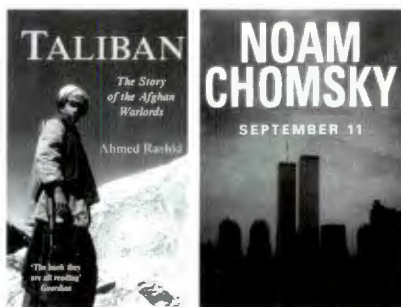
nothing else.

—Morag Fraser



**Religion and Culture in Asia Pacific: Violence or Healing?**, Joseph A. Camilleri (ed.), Pax Christi, 2001. ISBN 1 87637 002 5, RRP \$19.95

The title of this collection of papers from a Pax Christi Conference held in October 2000, reads poignantly after the events of September 2001. The threats of violence have flowered; the promises of healing have withered. But these measured analyses of the role of religion are



no less pertinent. Amin Saikal, in particular, outlines the impact on Islamic people around the world of United States policy—particularly its historical failure to address Palestinian grievance and its tacit encouragement of Taliban domination of Afghanistan. Chandra Muzaffar makes the most salient point about religious conflict in Asia. At issue is power and land, and religious differences are manipulated to further the agenda of the powerful. The prevailing religion is 'moneytheism'. If that bleak assessment is more generally true, we might expect that popularity of war against terrorism will enable governments to identify struggles for economic justice and cultural freedom with terrorism. Military power and economic exploitation can then grow unchallenged.

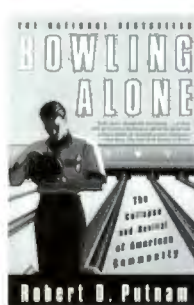
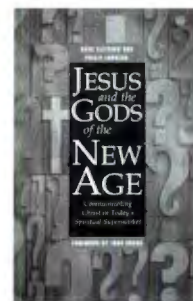
—A.H.

**Jesus and the Gods of the New Age: Communicating Christ in Today's Spiritual Supermarket**, Ross Clifford & Philip Johnson, Lion Publishing (Oxford), 2001. ISBN 0 74595 060 4, RRP \$22.95

These two Evangelical writers do not demonise New Age spirituality, but try to understand its attraction. In dialogue with their adherents, they describe various New Age beliefs and practices. At the close of each dialogue, they show how the speaker's desires and questions may be met in Biblical Christianity. Although, for my taste, they move too briskly from questions to Bible, they are spot on in identifying the questions that young adults ask: How can I be the best person I can possibly be?; How can I find my place in the world?; Who am I, and who might I become?; How do I find release from my brokenness, and cope with my illness?; Where do I find peace?; How can I reconnect with the divine source of all life?; What path should I choose, and what values should I embrace?; How is it that the world, which seems designed to be harmonious, is so stuffed up?

Anyone wishing to understand young adults could listen long to them addressing these questions.

—A.H.



**Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community**, Robert D. Putnam, Touchstone (Simon & Schuster), 2001. ISBN 0 74320 304 6, RRP \$34.95

Published well before September 11, this is a landmark study, written by a Harvard political scientist who has a common touch, a prophetic bent and all the analytical equipment needed to effect a sea change in American community life—if only people read and listen. It's a big book, but written with such lively understanding of the social dynamics of the United States that it could well fix the ills it documents.

Putnam's strength for a general reader is his vivid, concrete language—'bowling alone' is typical. How better to phrase a state of isolation? Or take another example: the Glenn Valley, Pennsylvania, Bridge Club, strong for 50 years, no longer has any members. Putnam tells why, explaining much about 'social capital' along the way. And better, he traces other times when America's social fabric was torn—and Americans repaired it themselves, with grassroots acumen. Community and individuality—Putnam understands and reconciles both strands of the American dream—with panache and infectious hope. Take it to the beach with you and then pass it on. Australia could benefit from it too.

—M.F.



# Party profiles

*Liberalism and the Australian Federation*, J.R. Nethercote (ed.), Federation Press, 2001. ISBN 1 86287 402 6, RRP \$45

*True Believers: The Story of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party*, John Faulkner & Stuart Macintyre (eds),

Allen & Unwin, 2001. ISBN 1 86508 527 8, RRP \$35

**N**OVEMBER 10, 2001. The first federal election of the new century. The Coalition is returned to government. The Prime Minister, John Howard, power walks towards more records in political longevity. The ALP records its lowest primary vote since 1931. The Greens receive their biggest vote and claim to be the party of 'thinking voters'.

It was an election in which neither of the major parties offered anything particularly new. At best each would patch up some holes in the social fabric. There was no spelling out of clear national goals or ambitions. The future was left uncertain; the past, by common agreement, imperfect. Neither side aroused much enthusiasm among voters. For many, parliament seemed as it did to Frank Anstey in 1934, 'the house of dead hopes, the habitation of dead souls'.

The Liberal Party and the ALP both chose the Centenary of Federation year to publish books about their past. *True Believers* is a history of the parliamentary Labor Party over the last 100 years. *Liberalism and the Australian Federation* is a panegyric to past successes: a rationalisation of how it all happened. Both rely heavily on contributions from academics, think-tank refugees and in the case of *True Believers*, political journalists.

The history of political institutions is best taken in small gulps, otherwise it can be indigestible. Contributed works like these happily lend themselves to reading a chapter at a time. This makes for easier reference later on; some bits are worth referring to, others not.

*Liberalism and the Australian Federation* suffers from overweening ambition. It attempts to mix a cocktail of philosophy, history and the murky water of Australian politics. The result must be unpalatable to anyone of civilised taste. The ingredients, taken separately, would have been much more attractive.

There is, for example, something rather pompous about attempting to appropriate the great Liberal tradition emanating from 19th-century Europe as the philosophical



Eyes front: wartime Prime Minister Robert Menzies reviews Australian troops in the Middle East with Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Blamey.

underpinning of the contemporary Liberal Party. This is a difficult task best done with mirrors. As Winsome Roberts points out in a chapter on 'Liberalism: The Nineteenth Century Legacy', the study of Liberalism is as 'elusive as it is alluring' and many of the connections that this book seeks to make are elusive indeed.

Even in the Australian context, to suggest that a thin gold thread runs between the Liberalism of Alfred Deakin, the achievements of Menzies and the manner in which the Coalition stooped to conquer in the election of 10 November, is to stretch that thread to breaking point.

Similarly, the characterisation of Liberalism as some nice user-friendly philosophy hovering between conservatism and

socialism is interesting. But what happens in a society like Australia, where, at least since the Chifley government of the late 1940s, there has been nothing battering at the ramparts of free-market capitalism that could seriously be described as socialism? Perhaps it goes further back than that. As early as 1917 Lenin characterised the Labor Party as 'altogether liberal and bourgeois', lacking in seriousness in challenging the status quo. And again, what happens in a society like Australia where conservatism as distinct from the Liberal Party has rarely existed? Here it is embraced within the Party. Liberalism as an ideal is, in this context, left floating in a pragmatic ether, influencing in turn all sides of the political debate.

As Kim Beazley wrote in the foreword to *True Believers*, the 'two party system has developed in Australia around a simple concept; Labor or anti-Labor'. If this is correct, *Liberalism and the Australian Federation* is merely a collage of the fantasies of the steering committee which put it together. If it had attempted less it might have achieved much more.

The truth is that the Liberal Party and its predecessors have been slaves to pragmatism, a word much used by Tony Staley and J.R. Nethercote in the first chapter. Liberalism, they assert, has been 'an example of values in action'. The actions have always been more apparent than the values. This book is designed to correct that deficiency.

Part of the pragmatism has been to capitalise on Labor's failings, a process in which they have been generously assisted by Labor Party splits, defections and ineptitude. Perhaps this should have been acknowledged.

The Liberals have always had a terrible hang-up about the attention lavished by historians, political commentators and biographers on the richer and more colourful story of the ALP. Labor has always been kinder to its leaders: more sentimental, if you like. There is a folklore about them,

which embraces even those with serious shortcomings. Revered leaders like Curtin, Chifley and—for vastly different reasons—Whitlam, are the most obvious examples of Labor icons in the 20th century. But others have their place in history too.

Menzies is the Liberal Party's only established icon. Deakin, who left the imprint of his mind on Australian politics for 80 years, could have been one but there has always been a strange ambivalence about Deakin. After all, he was, as Frank Moorhouse observed in his introduction to Walter Murdoch's biography, 'a thinker and a dreamer'. This is enough to make him a subject of some suspicion in Australian public life, particularly on the conservative side of politics. Hughes the populist and Lyons the pragmatist were both Labor renegades; not good material for iconography. And Gorton, the most attractive and interesting Liberal leader since Menzies, was undermined and stabbed in the back by his own party. And in turn, Malcolm Fraser is presented as presiding over a government of equivocation, although, as the author of the Fraser chapter observes, he was 'perhaps the most genuine heir of Menzies: a man of the right but inclined to be reasonable and not take things to extremes'. But nowadays he has become unfairly the subject, as Pat Weller put it, of 'a Liberal demonology'.

This leaves Menzies, a very skilful politician whose gravitas was underpinned by the fact that he was an erudite and cultivated man, which allowed him to embrace an ad hoc progressive Liberalism. He was 'inclined to be reasonable'.

The Liberal Party hang-up is encapsulated in this question: how come we, who occupied the Treasury benches for two-thirds of the 20th century, have so little written about us? It's a good question, to which there is often a range of unkind responses. Here, in the first chapter, written by Staley and Nethercote, the problem is expressed in this way: 'In very recent decades the literature about Liberalism and its various organisational manifestations has been growing, though it still has some distance to go before it rivals that of its major challenger.'

*Liberalism and the Australian Federation* carries a number of disclaimers in the preface. The views are those of the individual authors, not necessarily of the Liberal Party. Though 'a unique project in the life of

the Liberal Party' it does not 'cover the field'. There is, for example, no chapter on the party organisation, an important omission given that John Howard refers in the foreword to 'thousands of members throughout the country contributing their policy ideas'.

Though the book is conceptually flawed, it includes some fine essays. 'Australian Liberalism', a chapter by Gregory Melleuish, is nicely written, and 'Liberalism: The Nineteenth Century Legacy' by Winsome Roberts is an essay of quality, although it has little to do with the rest of the book. Clem Lloyd contributes an interesting and colourful historical chapter on 'The Rise and Fall of the United Australia Party' and Ian Hancock writes lucidly on Liberal governments from 1966 to 1972. There are several other good essays.

But the closer the contributions get to party politics the less objective and the more desperate they become. Michael Keenan, for example, is so incensed by Paul Keating's broad-brush criticisms of the Menzies legacy that he falls into the same polemical bear-pit himself. But when it comes to colourful arguments, Keating does it much better than Keenan. David Day (*Menzies and Churchill at War*) is accused of relying on 'circumstantial evidence'. Other historians, J.M. McCarthy and Roger

Bell, are motivated by 'ideology'. It is a belated attempt to remove any imperfections in the story of the only icon. Menzies would not have attempted it himself. He spent a lot of time trying to persuade Curtin to replace him as prime minister in a government of national unity.

The final chapter, 'In the National Interest: Liberal Foreign Relations from Deakin to Howard', by Professor Carl Bridge, is the most selective and subjective of all. It invites the reader to try to see through a keyhole with both eyes, and because of this comes nowhere near the quality of other essays in the book.

**T**RUE BELIEVERS, by contrast, makes concessions, accepting in the introduction the late Henry Mayer's view that the Labor Party has had no monopoly as the party of initiative. Even the introduction contains some nice ironies about the Labor Party's failings as well as its successes.

The book is edited by Labor's Senate Leader, John Faulkner, and historian Stuart Macintyre. As the subtitle says, it is 'the story of the federal parliamentary Labor Party' and because it is a history and tries to be nothing else, it's easy to follow the narrative. This is in spite of its many authors. It is a 'warts and all' history, with chapters on Labor splits, caucus critics, Labor 'rats' and Labor's shortcomings in its slow acceptance of a role for women. Break-out pages profile prominent identities like King O'Malley and reflect the views of various leaders on caucus procedures and functions. It all has a certain political earthiness.

The first Labor caucus met on 8 May 1901 in the basement of Parliament House, Melbourne. George Reid observed that already Labor was 'steering from the steerage'. Its members were predominantly British in outlook and background, with strong allegiances to the trade union movement and somewhat weaker allegiances to the British varieties of socialism. The platform was clear enough: one adult, one vote; exclusion of coloureds and 'undesirable' races; referenda as part of the democratic process and old-age pensions. Later a citizen army and compulsory arbitration were included. This caucus represented a fair cross-section of the broader Labor movement. It was, as Stuart Macintyre puts it, 'a white brotherhood that was exclusive in its



Prime Minister Paul Keating, the prestidigitator, in parliament.



composition and outlook and which nevertheless aspired to a more decent, democratic and equal Australia'.

Over the decades that followed, changes in the composition of the federal caucus, and sometimes its role, reflected fundamental changes in Australian society, particularly the weakening identity and decline of the traditional working class, the role of women, new technologies in the workplace, broader access to education, and the development of a more outward-looking and less parochial culture.

In 1935 John Curtin moved to give the party organisation more influence in the higher councils of the ALP. In the mid 1960s Gough Whitlam's interventions swung the balance back in favour of the parliamentary party. By the 1970s Whitlam had established a caucus which was more middle-class, better educated and more widely representative of the community in both its make-up and authority. The story of caucus is full of swings and roundabouts.

*True Believers* gives a lot of attention to the relationship between caucus and cabinet and not much to the relationship between caucus and the party organisation. Though understandable, this is a pity. It's a relationship which should lie at the heart of a democratic party. *True Believers* reflects great pride in the ALP's long history but there is a dangerous assumption that past longevity assures eternal political life. By implication, other parties come and go, change their names and spots, but Labor goes on forever. Other parties have to reinvent themselves but the Labor Party transcends all this. At the beginning of a new century it is in fact Labor which is in most desperate need of reinventing itself.

The philosophies and prejudices that have served both political parties well in the past will not necessarily serve them well in the future. After all, these books are both about the last century. This one will be even more demanding. ■

**John Button** was a senator and minister in the Hawke and Keating governments.

# Games we play

**The Best Ever Australian Sports Writing: A 200 Year Collection**, David Heaton (ed.), Black Inc, 2001. ISBN 1 86395 266 7, RRP \$49.95

**Local Rites: A Year in Grass Roots Football in Victoria and Beyond**, Paul Daffey, Black Duck Publications, 2001. ISBN 0 64641 248 5, RRP \$24.95

AUSTRALIANS SHARE AT least one thing with ancient cultures of which they are often suspicious. Like the Chinese, they read the paper from back to front. Browsing through David Heaton's mammoth collection, *The Best Ever Australian Sports Writing*, it is possible to see why. The Australian passion for sport, which is often carried to bizarre and tedious extremes, has engendered some passionate writing. A lot of it has qualities of insight, drama and comedy which makes it worth reading after the game, match or set it describes have long since passed into the graveyard of statistics.

Some of the best sports writing has a deep sense of moral grievance: the race that should have been won, the club that should have been saved, the umpire that should have been strung up. A lot of it is territorial. Victoria's Barry Dickins wastes no time in dismissing Rugby League as the province of drunks and big business. Hugh Lunn, a Queenslander, celebrates a Rugby League victory over NSW in 1980, reminding readers that the southern clubs made their money from poker machines long before Queensland descended to that level. In other words, the maroons deserved to defeat the 'cockroaches'.



Someone once said that the Australian coat of arms should have a chip on its shoulder. It is certainly true that the sports literature of defeat has a vital indignation that makes self-righteous accounts of victories dreary reading by comparison. The suggestions Kenneth Slessor made in *Smith's Weekly* in 1922 for improving the chances of an Australian Rugby League team against England are a case in point. He advocated the introduction of telescopic goal posts to frustrate opposition kickers. Another case is Roy Masters' portrait of Tom Raudonikis: 'At Wests we never made a grand final, reaching the preliminary final twice, and after both

games Tom was a spent, exhausted shell. It was the only time he was totally vulnerable because he had nothing left.'

One of the many treasures that Heaton has dug up is a piece written in 1862 by the firebrand Reverend, John Dunmore Lang, in which he rails against sport as a waste of moral energy:

One of the worst features in our colonial community is the wide-spread and growing taste for frivolity and dissipation in every form—cricketing, horse-racing, regattaing, &c., &c., &c., and I confess I almost despair of the social and political—not to speak of

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the moral and religious—advancement of a people who expend so much of their time and means in such pursuits and amusements.

The 700 pages that follow contradict Lang. They suggest that moral argument, the tribunal for the relationship between circumstances and character, is the stock-in-trade of a lot of sports writing. It is as at home in the back pages as it is foreign in the front. There is an entire seminar waiting for anyone game to explore this phenomenon. 'It's not a case of a novelist straining for meaning,' writes Tom Keneally. 'It's simply true. The great game is a fascinating moral phenomenon.' He could be thinking of any one of the numerous sports represented in this inexhaustible collection.

**P**AUL DAFFEY'S *Local Rites* has far fewer pages but, in some ways, is almost as vast. Daffey spent a year making contact with many of the small Australian Rules clubs in south-east Australia.

While some of Daffey's detailed descriptions of games might be of more interest to enthusiasts, the book is full of personality and local colour. He comes across a number of figures who've had starring roles in the AFL, the Broadway of the code, in out-of-the-way venues. He finds Bob Rose, the former Collingwood president, watching a game in the Mallee. Rose had played for Nyah West in 1945 before moving on to a bigger stage. At the age of 72, he is still connected to his roots. The same is true of the Danihers from Ungarie, 650km from Melbourne.

Daffey encounters Justin Charles on the sideline of a game in his initial year as coach of the North Footscray Red Devils. In 1997, when he was playing for Richmond, Charles became the first AFL player to be found guilty of the use of banned drugs. Daffey records the dramatic effect this had on his career, but also the importance of a local club in his psychological rehabilitation. He asks his players constantly, 'Who's responsible?' They respond, 'I am.' It is a lesson Charles seems to have learned and now wants to pass on. *Local Rites* also tells of characters whose return from different wars was eased by their connection to a club.

Nicky Winmar emerges as one of a range of complex, struggling personalities. Winmar appears in Headon's collection in a tribute by Stephanie Holt, one of the relatively small number of pieces by women in the collection. (Headon explains the reasons for this. It's not his fault that sporting culture has changed so slowly.) Holt is able to capture the fascination that such a mercurial player as Winmar held not just for St Kilda followers, nor even AFL followers, but for the Australian community. He was the player who lifted his jumper to indicate the colour of his skin to the crowd at Collingwood's Victoria Park, the home of the black and white. He is also another of the defeated.

In *Local Rites*, Winmar is playing out of town for the Warburton-Millgrove *Kookaburras*. His very presence at the club boosts the numbers at training. He creates a frisson of excitement. But his chaotic behaviour is not easy to accommodate. The club president lends him a car which rolls into the river when Winmar leaves the hand-

brake off. Winmar sends him a message: 'Hey, Cuz, you can have your car back.' Daffey indicates deeper problems in Winmar's life: 'In court, he was found guilty of assaulting his wife, now estranged, and fined \$3000. In the new year, he ended his days in Victoria and returned to Western Australia.'

Daffey is both entertaining and serious. He returns to where Australian Rules may well have begun, in a small town near the Grampians where, in the 1840s, Tom Wills noticed Aboriginal people playing a game of 'keepings off' called *marn grook*. He began to think of 'a game of our own'. That game now embraces all the complexity of the Australian community. Daffey encounters a club which has to replace a player because, being Islamic, he is required to accompany his sister to her sporting events. He also encounters a team from the Jewish community which has to negotiate for their grand final not to fall on holy days. He theorises that a Catholic background can stiffen the resolve of certain teams. He watches an Aboriginal team which is beginning to find its feet in Benalla. Meanwhile, on the other side of the tracks, Old Melburnians, the club connected to Melbourne Grammar, fights doggedly through the courts to defend its standing against an alleged breach of the amateur code. QCs are called to take up the fight. They do so willingly. They have a passion of their own. ■

**Michael McGirr** is the author of *Things You Get For Free*. His essay 'The Ultra-Slow Marathon', published originally in *Eureka Street*, appears in *The Best Ever Australian Sports Writing*.



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# Sound Winton

*Dirt Music*, Tim Winton, Picador, 2001, ISBN 0 330 36323 4, RRP \$43.95  
*Dirt Music: Music for a Novel by Tim Winton*, CD ABC 472 046-2, RRP \$30

*Anythin you could play on a verandah.  
You know, without electricity. Dirt  
music.*

*As in ... soil!*

*Yeah. Land. Home. Country.*

*You can't mean country and western!*

*Nah. Though we'd play Hank and  
Willie ... Plenty of bluegrass and some  
Irish stuff. Whatever felt right with a  
guitar, mandolin, fiddle. But  
mostly it was blues ...*

—Dirt Music

**B**OOKS ARE USUALLY silent things. Even when they are read aloud, any songs in them are only rarely sung. And when books are read alone, to oneself, songs that are quoted in the midst of narrative text remain somehow mute; you hurry over them to continue the story. Tim Winton doesn't bother to try to make his readers sing along in the novel *Dirt Music*. No futile reproduction of lyrics here: he forces you to take the music into full consideration by providing two CDs, produced by himself and Lucky Oceans, the presenter of ABC Radio National's daily music show, *The Planet*.

Films and cookery books are the usual providers of soundtracks—the latter generally about pasta and Pavarotti, aimed at a middle-brow aspirational market but really dependent on desperate Christmas gift buyers. Films are quite respectable here, providing employment for composers and orchestras and royalties for old rockers. But real book plus real music is a rare combination, one I have not encountered before. The film connection is there, real, and probably prophetic however, since *Dirt Music* is by far the most filmable of all Winton's novels.

It seems to begin conventionally, as simply as might a genre thriller or even a romance, introducing Georgie Jutland at her computer. For the first three pages the prose is uncharacteristically flat for a writer of Winton's lyricism. He risks a tone of



urbane, journalistic irony about the futility of being an aimless netsurfer as the narrative opens with clichés abounding: 'Logging on—what a laugh. They should have called it stepping off'; 'Still, you had to admit ...'; 'Besides, it kept her off the sauce'; '... padded across to ...'; 'poured herself a serious application of vodka'; '... but it gave a girl a start'. Yet in the midst of all this fierce, flat surety you get a sudden shot of vivid grottness: 'She swivelled in her seat, snatched up the mug and recoiled as her lips met the *cold sarcoma* [my emphasis] that had formed on the coffee's surface.' Again, it could be argued that this sort of overwritten phrasology appears in potboilers by such as Dean Koontz, Tom Clancy, Thomas Harrison. Something else, however, is unfolding: this is Georgie Jutland's mind-set. Cold sarcomas are something she knows about, having been a nurse. The breezy clichés are hers; we are walking through her mind as surely as Joyce walked through Molly Bloom's. And from time to

time Winton reassures the reader that he's always there: you haven't picked up a Danielle Steele by mistake. Straight after the cold sarcoma we get 'the moony sea seemed to shiver'. And soon after the worrying vodka there is a whole half-sentence: '... where the air was cool and thick with the smells of stewing seagrass, of brine and limey sand, of thawing bait and the savoury tang of saltbush.' And while 'savoury tang' is pure Georgie, the rest is Winton, and very pleased one is to see him showing himself. He can show alienation, human darkness, cruelty even, in all its aspects, not shirking horror or the abject (indeed Winton is brilliant at dealing with all manner of the abject), but ennobling the most painful and dirty of experiences with pity.

In *Dirt Music* Winton plays assuredly with tones, tenses and all the other notes in his range. All of Georgie's action is in the past tense, assured and yet set hard, incapable of healing. Luther Fox, the local poacher who becomes her lover, is all in the present, his text blindly striking through each moment, stumbling often. In the final chapter, though, past and present tenses come closer and closer, ducting until they coalesce and she comes into his present: 'She's real.' In previous chapters their encounters are mostly in past tense, seen mainly through the strength of Georgie's wilfulness, yet as the book continues, increasingly softened by Winton's continuous tracking of both their experiences. When they meet again at the end, his need for her is on every level. Importantly, her skill as a nurse saves not only him, but also herself: in ministering to him she claims her own life at last.

Before that happens, there are journeys to make. Behind Georgie and Fox there are the threatening presences of the townsfolk



of White Point, a fishing port, and White Point's leading citizen, Georgie's de facto, Jim Buckridge. When Georgie sees Fox's boat heading out to poach pretending to be a hobbyist or 'shamateur', she struggles for a moment with the problem of whether to dob him in, or just to let things lie. In doing the latter she is further weakening a loyalty that has become increasingly attenuated over the past few months. Her relationship with Buckridge has lasted three years, a record for her. As her past is revealed we see her as having been the rebel in a house of four privileged, privately educated sisters, daughters of a faithless man who belittled their mother, a man narcissistically flamboyant and detached as only a QC can be. His name, 'Jutland', opens an interesting line of speculation: it resonates with old pompousnesses in its evocation of the Battle of Jutland, and the sinking of *The Jutland* in World War I. Empire, British links, old money—Winton sometimes makes Dickensian magic with his names: think of Des Pustling in *Shallows*.

In Buckridge Georgie obviously sees someone close to her own background: he went to boarding school, his family have been powerful landowners and now he is a powerful fishing-businessman among a community that is fertile One Nation territory: under-educated bigots who have no allegiance to the poor from whom they have just sprung by sheer luck. The bragmansions that have erupted around White Point are contemptuously dismissed by Winton as more ugly than the hovels the new millionaires used to inhabit.

Buckridge is not an evil man: he stands, now at any rate, apart from their worst barbarities, but there is a darkness in him, and his past is full of bullying and heartlessness. A widower, he has more than grief to deal with. Yet his wife, dead of cancer in her 30s, is as sacrosanct as Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca. Georgie will not pry much: when Buckridge denies her entry to his past he creates the trajectory their relationship will follow. His small sons are as closed to her as he is. By contrast, Fox has few defences against her. Strangely, but not inexplicably for a Winton novel, Buckridge enables Georgie to track Fox down when he flees north. It doesn't make Buckridge into a hero; you sense that he wants to control the way Georgie leaves him, to make some sort of gesture that can make sense of things in his way.

Fox is a member of the kind of family we are used to in *Shallows* and *Cloudstreet*. Chaotic, joyful, tragic, jinxed and foolish,

the Foxes are the jonahs of White Point. In a superstitious fishing community their luck is too bad to risk employing them. His father an asbestos casualty from Wittenoom, his mother killed by a sheared-off tree branch in a sudden gust of wind, Luther Fox is left with music, his brother, his sister-in-law and their two children. They form a band that can fit safely into a small niche of acceptability gigging at White Point weddings and parties; given their luck, this cannot last, and when we meet Luther he is alone and freakishly bereft once more.

When things finally catch up with Fox in White Point, he takes off towards Broome and the Kimberley. The second CD is important here: it contains the classical music that is played by the elderly couple with whom Fox hitches a lift. It is a curious mix: Bach's 'Befiehl du deine Wege' (better known to most as the tune of 'O Sacred Head'); Peter Sculthorpe; Shostakovich; Vaughan Williams; Arvo Pärt. But in listening to the CD, the reading-journey through the endless spaces of the big west becomes

an odyssey of one's own. Some music is good travelling music, and Winton has chosen his pieces well.

There may be people who find the book more popular in feel than Winton's previous stuff. *Cloudstreet* fans may complain, but *Shallows* fans will rejoice at another working-through of grief, guilt and redemption. Like the music he selects for Luther to be expert in, *Dirt Music* is rich, not to be taken lightly, deceptively powerful, and simply strong.

In the end the thing that always springs at you is the compassion. Plunged into the boiling whitewater of experience in his books, you could be buffeted and drowning without the redemptive hand he reaches out. And the redemption is never facile, never a cop-out. *Dirt Music*, as with many a Winton novel, shows people stuck, struggling, yet alive with a kind of blind persistence in living that hardly qualifies as hope, yet functions very like it. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

SUMMER READING:4

JOHN SENDY

# The writing of wisdom

Henry Handel Richardson: *The Letters*, Volumes 1, 2 and 3, Clive Probyn and Bruce Steele (eds), The Miegunyah Press, 2000. ISBN 0 52284 797 8, RRP \$88 each

**W**HO DID SHE WRITE TO?' a friend asked dubiously when the three volumes of the letters of Henry Handel Richardson were published.

Indeed, many have believed HHR's long years in England, spanning the first half of the 20th century, were aloof and lonely, isolated from Australia and largely friendless here.

The letters indicate that such impressions are false. Large numbers are missing, deliberately destroyed or accidentally lost, but nearly a thousand remain.

They exhibit intelligence and learning, wit and humanity, inevitable splashes of conceit and prejudice and plenty of gossipy details. They provide illumination

and opinion about writing, translation, publishing, social issues and politics as well as a treasure-trove concerning the famous author, her family and her wide circle of correspondents.

In 1910, Paul Solanges, an elderly Frenchman living in Italy, wrote to HHR offering to translate *Maurice Guest* into French. She agreed and there developed a surprisingly suspenseful, riveting and wide-ranging correspondence which becomes the bulk of Volume 1.

HHR (née Ethel Florence Lindesay Richardson) tried to conceal her identity as a woman. However, a close reading reveals that Solanges tumbled to, and was greatly



amused by, her deception, lending their exchange a romantic or coquettish undertone.

For 35 years, from 1911, HHR corresponded with Mary Kernot, a Victorian, who as Mary Robertson was a school friend at Presbyterian Ladies College. The character Cupid in *The Getting of Wisdom* was based on her. Kernot loved books and nature. She could write and gave her friend plenty of Australian colour, lively gossip and valuable literary information and assistance. This exchange has great importance in Volumes 2 and 3.

Letters to and from Nettie and Vance Palmer, Miles Franklin, Brian Penton, Norman Lindsay, Katharine Susannah Prichard and sundry other writers, publishers, friends and acquaintances from many countries round out the volumes.

HHR's attitudes on many subjects are disclosed. These include her opposition to novelists trying 'to lead, direct and influence the social life of the day' and her belief that instead they should concentrate on 'the conduct of human beings in relation to other human beings'.

When Solanges criticised British suffragette actions as well as their charms, her feminism did not waver: 'Many of England's finest women are undergoing imprisonment today—and some of her most beautiful, too ... My own sister happens to be among them.'

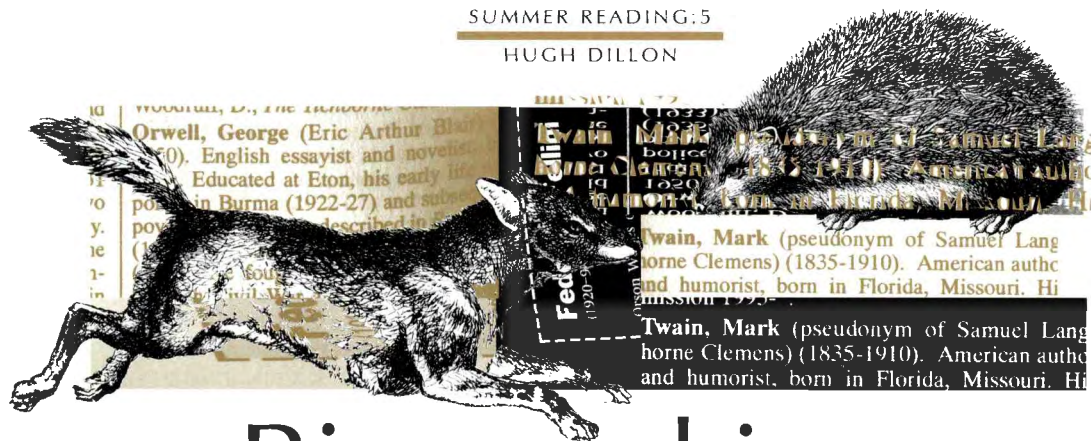
The reasons for her *nom de plume* become obvious in the letters: she had a mania for privacy and believed a male name as author of her first novel, *Maurice Guest*, would yield more interest and hope of success.

An added attraction is the two-way traffic: several hundred are letters written to HHR. Annotations at the bottom of each letter amplify and give simple and helpful information.

These three volumes, following the 1998 publication of *Maurice Guest* in its original and unabridged form, are a major cultural event for Australia and a triumph of scholarship for Clive Probyn and Bruce Steele and their team working on the HHR Project at Monash University. ■

John Senny is a freelance writer.

SUMMER READING: 5  
HUGH DILLON



## Ripe pickings

Even As We Speak: New Essays 1993–2001, Clive James, Picador, 2001.  
ISBN 0 330 48176 2, RRP \$26

CYRIL CONNOLLY once wrote, 'Literature is the art of writing something that will be read twice; journalism what will be grasped at once.' If that is so, Clive James has bridged the divide. In this volume are some of James' best essays, which will be read and reread for a long time.

While he claims that his belief in liberal democracy and his opposition to totalitarianism are the central themes of his thinking

and writing, the evidence of this collection and his oeuvre as a whole shows that he is not at heart a political thinker. Rather, to adopt the imagery of Isaiah Berlin, he is a fox rather than a hedgehog, a creature who knows many things rather than one big thing.

These intellectual tendencies may have resulted in James' never attaining the first rank as a writer of imaginative works,

despite his talent. But they have—in combination with his intelligence, gift for languages, humour, well-stocked mind, generosity, and volatile mixture of bravado and humility—produced one of the best essayists and critics (of an anti-post-modernist ilk) writing in English.

At his best James is utterly engaging, not only because of his verbal gymnastics—where words are concerned he is both gourmet and gourmand—but on account of the depth of his knowledge of a simply astonishing array of subjects. One of his greatest strengths as a critic is his capacity and desire to go where few major English-speaking critics will—for example, into eastern European and Australian literatures and pop culture. But he has also nervelessly taken on the far more taxing mission of saying something new or fresh about subjects—George Orwell, Hamlet and Mark Twain, for example—upon which the last word may be thought to have been spoken.

If James fails from time to time (I think this collection is a flawed one), no-one could ever accuse him of lacking the courage to stray beyond the boundaries of a speciality. The range of his learning and his enthusiasm for extending it has become so much a part of the landscape of bourgeois culture in the English-speaking world that we have almost taken it for granted. It is only when we attempt to measure it, by criticising the critic, that we fully realise his standing.

This new collection brings us 42 pieces. Many are brilliant, a few embarrassingly slight, a couple simply embarrassing. My first reaction was that his editors would have done him a big favour had they turfed his pieces on the Sydney Olympics and on Princess Diana. And yet ...

One of the characters in Kipling's *Just So Stories* is a young elephant full of 'satiableness'. This might be a description of Clive James. John Carey said of James in *Pure Pleasure* that he 'writes like a man who knows he may be torn to pieces if he lets boredom supervene for a microsecond'. James' remark, in his essay on Bill Bryson, that 'there is nothing like sophistication for cutting you off from experience' applies aptly to himself. He is a determined seeker after experience, sophisticated or otherwise. So my revised view is that the light, demotic pieces are essential to a full understanding of a man who, I suspect, thinks as he writes, 'When I grow up I want to be a ... [poet, novelist, photographer, film-maker, historian, philosopher or all of the above].' If seen that way, his less



admirable adventures, such as his ghastly television 'postcards', don't ultimately diminish him; rather, they show us more of his angles.

For my money, his essay on Orwell is not only one of his best but, in the vast corpus of Orwellian criticism, is one of the best-judged analyses of that 'wintry conscience of a generation'. Although it is by no means an original insight, James correctly recognises that Orwell's journalism was more important than the two novels for which he is most famous. Orwell's perennial gift to our culture was his recognition that language is political. As James observes, 'it wasn't just the amount of truth he told but the way he told it, in prose transmuted to poetry by the pressure of his dedication'.

James' trenchant critique of Daniel Goldhagen's controversial *Hitler's Willing Executioners* is one of the best non-specialist examinations in English of the flawed thesis that the entire German nation was simply waiting for an opportunity to exterminate Jews. Despite his scholarship, James seems to have missed Christopher Browning's important book on the same topic countering Goldhagen, but this does not detract from the force of his argument (and I am drastically simplifying here) that the Germans as a people were not uniquely evil as Goldhagen suggests, and that Hitler's rise was necessary for the Holocaust to be perpetrated. It is the best short piece on Goldhagen in English.

James writes, he says, for 'generalists repelled by an age of increasing specialisation, misfits caught between the active and contemplative life, hustlers too hard at work to examine at leisure the way the world is going yet incurably at thirst for the totality of knowledge—the true, the eternal students'. We see this as he explores the poetry of Les Murray, Kenneth Slessor and Philip Larkin, sheds light on Federico Fellini, reminds us of Mark Twain the journalist, defends the honour of expatriates, scrutinises photography, mourns Peter Cook, savages tabloid journalists and protests against the dumbing-down of television documentaries.

In another volume he remarks, apropos of Seamus Heaney, that the best way to guard against one's envy of another writer's gifts is to admit it. Most of us would confess envy of Clive James' riches as a writer, but it is washed away in the pure pleasure of reading him. ■

**Hugh Dillon** is a Sydney magistrate and writer.

# The dark gent

**Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from His Life**, Katherine Duncan-Jones, *The Arden Shakespeare* (Thomson Learning), 2001. ISBN 1 90343 626 5, RRP \$49.95

**T**HE COLOUR supplements of the weekend papers should be baying. William Shakespeare, pillar of Western civilisation, was a bisexual, misogynist, social-climbing miser who died of syphilis. Katherine Duncan-Jones' new biography of Shakespeare certainly runs the risk of being controversial. Her Shakespeare is an individualist on the make, hungry for material success, social

life can be; that is, factual in some of the details and no better than plausibly inventive in the psychology.

This is as it must be. The archive of known facts about Shakespeare's life has mounted over the centuries, but parish registers, political history, folk recollection, theatrical archaeology and legal documents can give us nothing that we would recog-



status and pleasure: the very image of the 1990s cultural entrepreneur, almost.

The world she imagines him in, though plausibly Elizabethan, has preoccupations very like our own:

I don't believe that any Elizabethans, even Shakespeare, were what might now be called 'nice'—liberal, unprejudiced, unselfish. For most men of talent and ambition in this period, even those who, unlike Shakespeare, enjoyed the privileges of high birth, some degree of ruthlessness was a necessary survival skill. It was also essential to be able to adapt effectively to continual change. I have tried to give some sense of the great part played in Shakespeare's life by sheer accident, such as unwanted pregnancy, sudden death, plague and fire. Three topics used to be traditionally taboo both in polite society and in Shakespearean biography: social class, sex and money. I have given a good deal of attention to all of them.

Duncan-Jones' Shakespeare is an operator. Her argument is as convincing as any argument about a Renaissance playwright's

nise these days as psychological depth. We have more direct access to Iago's or Cleopatra's personalities from one of their speeches than we do to Shakespeare's from all his works. Not only did he live before novels and Romanticism told us that we all have complicated emotional histories; he was also a playwright, an inventor of personalities. He wrote the traces of multiple identities, then gave them to actors to realise. What he was really like himself is just about irretrievable from the gallery of possibilities he imagined.

Duncan-Jones' Shakespeare is a professional writer and man of the theatre. Not the work of isolated genius, his plays are presented as coming into existence through collaboration with actors, audiences and other writers. An outbreak of the plague, shutting the London theatres, was a more immediate problem for him than any struggles with the muse. He worked every audience available: the Globe, the streets of country towns, the courts of monarchs and magnates, and the relatively intimate and select theatre at Blackfriars.



He was born in a part of the Midlands rich with literary men, married young, badly, and unhappily to Anne Hathaway, and sought his fortune in the metropolis. He made his real money through his share in the profits of the Lord Chamberlain's Men (in James I's time the King's Men) rather than directly from writing, and Duncan-Jones sees a steady search for respect (if not entirely for respectability) in his conduct. He sought gentleman status through the (somewhat dubious) purchase of a coat of arms, and was a peripheral player in court intrigues, particularly during the last decade of Elizabeth's reign.

Two things that Duncan-Jones insists upon to make her case for Shakespeare's ungentleness are his gouging attitude to money and his resistance to any form of female companionship. Unlike most prosperous citizens, he did no good works in his home town, but bought up some of the prime real estate in Stratford. Indeed, there

There is no evidence to contradict this possibility, but then neither is there anything more than a plausible hypothesis in its favour.

This Shakespeare lived in dangerous times, and Duncan-Jones is brilliant in bringing those times to life. Her writing also returns often and freshly to the poems and plays; this is not the dreary sort of literary biography where the literature gets lost under a pile of school records and laundry lists. *Ungentle Shakespeare* avoids bardolatry at every step, but never causes one to question the value and fascination of Shakespeare's works, either in their own time or in the light of our edgier preoccupations.

Duncan-Jones seems to have been influenced by her previous work as the Arden editor of *The Sonnets*. Her Shakespeare exists in a shadowy world of desire unevenly matched to attainment. She doesn't torture the (lack of) evidence to 'out' Shakespeare as a practising homosexual, and is too good a historian to pretend that our patterns of sexual identity map Renaissance experience at all accurately. However, she does place Shakespeare in a homoerotically charged, socially unequal world. All his deepest emotions, ambitions and friendships revolve around men of power.

This poet of the sonnets is conscious of his social inferiority, of his artistic superiority, and of the heaviness of his body. His body is vulnerable and prone to decay, yet it draws him into conflicting appetites, for both the beautiful young man and the dark lady. His mind is lonely, ambitious, and racked by self-doubt. Would the editor of one of the romantic comedies—*Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, or *As You Like It*, for example—have discovered a gentler Shakespeare, more inclined to celebrate intelligent young women and the values of community? Would the editor of *King Lear* have discovered an apocalyptic genius?

The central fact of Shakespeare's life remains the imaginative power of his works. Duncan-Jones insists on this, but she also shows it unwittingly. The poems she knows best warp the way she tells his life and, though this might detract from some abstract notion of balance, *Ungentle Shakespeare* is all the better for it. ■

**Robert Phiddian** is senior lecturer in English at Flinders University, South Australia.

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is evidence that he evaded civic responsibilities there and was listed during the famine of 1598 as hoarding grain to sell later at higher prices. His will is presented as a vengeful document, his money going mostly to those in important social places, with precious little to his unfavoured daughter or to the poor of Stratford.

And, of course, the will left only the second-best bed to Anne, his wife of 34 years. Duncan-Jones gives the impression that Shakespeare almost never cohabited with her, and suggests that he regretted the marriage to the older (and pregnant) woman almost from the moment it was contracted. His sex life with women is presented as predatory, unsatisfactory, and peripheral to the main, manly business of his professional life.

It's a provocative case, and one that sheds light on many of the darker places of the poems and plays. The misogynist rage of Othello, Lear, Leontes and others makes sense if the author had caught venereal disease from some obscure woman and was episodically dying of it over his last decade.



# FLASH IN THE PAN



## Leaden bowl

*The Golden Bowl*, dir. James Ivory. Here's Merchant/Ivory adapting Henry James again. This time it's *The Golden Bowl* and it's about a love quadrangle with three Americans and one Italian in Edwardian England (plus a dash of romantic Rome). Adam Verver (Nick Nolte) is a super-rich art collector. Adam's daughter, Maggie (Kate Beckinsale), is married to Amerigo, a dashing, penniless Italian prince who's got the hots for Maggie's impoverished best friend Charlotte, with whom he was entangled before the need for serious wealth struck home.

Steamy Charlotte (Uma Thurman, above, permanently on the boil) doesn't want to stop and fortunately contrives both close proximity and luxury by marrying widow Dad. For most of the film, Adam and Maggie seem oblivious to the screamingly obvious, largely because they have this deep father/daughter thing that Ziggy Freud would have been delighted to explore. Will the penny drop and what will happen to the serious bucks if it does? Should Amerigo really heed Adam's dark hints of violence against anyone harming Maggie? Does Amerigo really love Maggie as well as her fortune in spite of his lusty frolics with Charlotte? And will Adam forsake cultured Europe for the crudities of America, taking his treasures

and his sulky wife with him to exhibit (both) in a huge purpose-built art museum?

Who cares? Perhaps only the ghost of Henry James cuddling his psychological complexities in heaven and wondering why none of them made it into the plot. Several good actors waste their time on this decorative trifle and most give as good as they can, though the role of Amerigo is stereotyped beyond Jeremy Northam's powers of redemption.

There are the usual Merchant/Ivory servings of lush period buildings, interiors, paintings and scenery, and the usual fascination with the idle rich, but my overwhelming impression at the end was relief that the world so devotionally portrayed here has gone forever. —Tony Coady

## Well-spelled

*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, dir. Chris Columbus. It is quite possible that by the time this review is read there will be a fashion for Potter-fatigue. A week after the movie's release the Melbourne *Herald Sun* sported the question, 'Are we tired of Harry yet?' After profiting mightily, one imagines, from the sale of Potter albums and running endless hype-features on the film, the *Hun* gave notice that it will soon want to be on the side of the naysayers too. The essential unfairness of that should be

apparent to any of the children who still revel in the book and this film. The fact is, children love repetition of good things, from pat-a-cake games to stories and songs. What is tiring is the avalanche of peripherals that has accompanied the Potter hype. To be tired of Potter hype isn't the same as being tired of the books or the film, which will stand as children's classics beside Narnia, the Faraway Tree and hobbit-stuff, bearing repetition in the way only such classics can.

The film, perhaps the most faithful rendition of a novel since *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the most eagerly awaited since *Gone with the Wind*, has done all it should have done. Columbus has managed to convey the magic, the quiriness and the visual richness of the book in 150 minutes, which is pretty good going. In one interview he says that he and Joanne Rowling (the book's author) had agreed that it would have taken seven hours to put absolutely everything in. But the compromises are decent ones, and the non-compromises are a triumph.

The look is enchanting: soaring aerial shots, various castles and cathedrals making a perfect Hogwarts. The actors (Daniel Radcliffe as Harry, Rupert Grint as Ron Weasley) are all a reasonable Potter-fan could want. Emma Watson as Hermione is smaller and rather more pert than I imagined her, but delivers the lines with perfect understanding. Robbie Coltrane, the only possible Hagrid. Maggie Smith, the only possible Professor McGonagall. Alan Rickman, perhaps not nasty enough as Snape.

The film is really the first Potter book, done in faithful short scenes. Nothing is added: Harry, orphaned when his wizard-parents are murdered by the evil sorcerer Voldemort, is sent to live with the Dursleys, his pusillanimous aunt and uncle, loathers of anything to do with magic. So while their son Dudley is indulged to ruination, Harry is relegated to the cupboard below the stairs and half-starved. Columbus evokes the Dursleys' lower-middle-class narrowness with awful decor, and dresses them with a fearful respectable dullness: they could have stepped from an English *Women's Weekly* of the early '60s.

Harry, of course, is not forgotten by the wizarding world: in surviving the death-spell that killed his parents he has broken Voldemort's power. When the time comes for him to go to secondary school, Hogwarts, the wizards' boarding school, sends for him.

The film's designers evoke Hogwarts in fine style: Escher-like staircases, echoing



halls, mysterious passages, forbidden areas. John Cleese has a too-brief cameo as Nearly Headless Nick, a partially decapitated ghost. Julie Walters gets another short stint as the mother of the large and hopeful clan of Weasleys—not for the first time recalling Dickens: just as there is a David Copperfieldish, Oliver Twistish feel to Harry, the Weasleys are very Micawberish.

*Harry Potter* is a classic boarding-school story, with wizardry added. What sets the books apart from ordinary fantasy or school stories is the eccentricity, the solidity of the world conjured, and the small, rich ironies that underpin everything. The highlight of the film is the Quidditch game, where players zoom around on broomsticks to play a kind of fiendish aerial lacrosse.

If the joyful queues were anything to go by, expectations were high, and in the session I attended, not one child seemed bored, tired or anything but happily worn out at the end. All the red lollies and Coke in the theatre couldn't break their attention spans for this one. Roll on the sequels.

—Juliette Hughes

## On your bike

*Beijing Bicycle*, dir. Wang Xiaoshuai. You know the old adage that basically there's only a handful of stories at the root of all other stories—the coming-of-age tale, the adventurous-spirit-finds-a-path-home tale, the star-crossed-lovers tale, the country-mouse-visits-town-mouse tale, and ... well ... actually that's about it. How I wish it were not true. *Beijing Bicycle* certainly does little to shake the maxim. This is your classic town-mouse-country-mouse-coming-of-age story with just a few added spokes and derailleurs.

Guei (Cui Lin) moves to Beijing from the countryside and lands himself a job as a bicycle courier. He rushes packages all over Beijing on a silver mountain bike that he is slowly buying from the company out of his wage. The work is gruelling and the pay meagre, but Guei is content to be surviving in the big city. Just as he is about to pay off the bike, and so retain a larger cut of his earnings, it is stolen.

From here on the story skips between Guei's distress at losing his bike and the new owner's delight in being able to impress girls with his new toy. And while the contrast between necessity and vanity should have driven this movie along with some real emotional punch, instead it just free-wheeled for an hour or so before crashing.

Some well-staged bike chases through narrow Beijing alleyways and the odd handsome observation kept the film this side of boring but there was only a tyre width in it.

—Siobhan Jackson

## Golden wedding

*Monsoon Wedding*, dir. Mira Nair. The opening titles of *Monsoon Wedding* are in primary colours, the opening scene features a bridal arch of marigolds in vibrant yellow and what follows is a rich kaleidoscope of colour and sound. Director Mira Nair (*Salaam Bombay!*, *Mississippi Masala*) has achieved a joyous film, about an arranged Punjabi wedding between the children of two middle-class families in Delhi, in the quirky monsoon season.

The bride, Aditi (Vasundhara Das), has just ended a love affair with a raffish TV presenter and has agreed to an arranged marriage with an Indian engineer living in the USA. The problem is obvious: a modern young Indian woman in an arranged marriage with an expatriate Indian engineer, the relationship swathed in ceremonial custom and family expectation.

During the four days between the couple's ceremonial engagement and the celebration of the marriage, five stories are convincingly interwoven into the frantic wedding preparations, the family anxieties, the predictable tensions, and the clash between the old Punjabi culture and modern attitudes and technology.

Naseeruddin Shah gives a moving performance as Lalit Verma, the loving father of the bride, trying to cope not only with the demands of an arranged marriage, but also the pressure of social change. His confusion, his efforts to cope with events beyond his control and his bewilderment at past events that are more than his decency can absorb, are seen in juxtaposition with a montage of the old and new Delhi.

Winner of the Golden Lion at the 2001 Venice Film Festival, the film has an earthy realism. While the dialogue is a mixture of English and Hindi and while, as usual, subtitles distract, the problems and family crises are so familiar, so universal, that large stanzas of the film require no dialogue.

Surprisingly it is not the problems of the young couple that take centre stage. Rather it is the understated loving relationship between the father and mother of the bride that involved me most. After decades of traditional marriage, neither of them is equipped to cope with unforeseen changes

that surface as the families come together. They cope by relying on their love for each other.

Part of the vibrant action is a sometimes hysterically funny sideshow provided by the frenetic tent-and-catering contractor, P.K. Dubey (Vijay Raaz) and his love for Alice, the family maid.

This is a gorgeous film. Robust, fast-paced and earthy, it takes us for an exhilarating ride. The music is an important component of the ultimate satisfaction the film provides.

Visually and emotionally the film is a knockout.

—Gordon Lewis

## Three score gets 10

*The Score*, dir. Frank Oz. Three good reasons to go and see *The Score*: Marlon Brando, Robert De Niro and Edward Norton. Arguably the best male screen actors of their generations, the trio come together in a stylish and well-crafted thriller which is almost unbearably tense from start to finish.

The well-dressed world of traditional safe-breaker Nick (De Niro) and set-up man Max (Brando) is upset by aggressive young upstart Jack (Norton). Max's plans to smuggle a jewel-encrusted sceptre into Montreal (via a piano leg) are stalled when the instrument is impounded by customs. Jack is the man on the inside, and hungry for success in his first big job.

Counter to their best instincts, the careful veterans take Jack on; there is an impending sense of disaster. What elevates this familiar old-crim versus new-crim morality tale is its loving attention to detail, quality acting and character interactions, especially between Max and Nick. In one of the best scenes, the mountainous Max pleads with his long-time collaborator Nick, while sitting dissolute and resplendent on the edge of his half-built spa. The men share a quiet respect, almost love, for each other, something that the ruthless Jack completely fails to understand.

*The Score* is a radical change, of course, for director Oz, who made his name as part of the team behind the Muppets and later as the voice of Yoda. Brando was not impressed, and is said to have banished Oz from the set during his scenes, taking direction from De Niro instead.

The film ends with a great twist, and a smattering of cliché, leaving viewers with the warm feeling that in art and life, at least Hollywood life, the old buggers win some of the time.

—Catriona Jackson



**I**N THE WINTER OF 1987 we turned off the TV and read *The Lord of the Rings* aloud. We read it not only in the living room, but also in the car on a winter holiday to Wilson's Promontory. We read it together in the cabin in the evening and on wet afternoons. While we were in the story, the world was clearer, deeper—the sound of the sea, a walk under the full moon with strange wispy clouds scudding over the stars, the darkness behind the forest paths.

The kids were in primary school: the younger one in prep, the older in Year 6. Sixth grade is one of those halcyon childhood times. A time when it is possible to be childlike but wise with an open-hearted serenity that will soon be blown away by Cyclone Puberty. The older one sat, Zen-still, as the words made worlds in his mind. The young one listened kinetically: he swooshed quietly around the room with a cardboard sword, doing battle with orcs and Black Riders.

The Beatles, according to the 1997 documentary *Tolkien: An Awfully Big Adventure* (screened by SBS two nights before Christmas), wanted to play the characters, pretty much as my little one did. The six-year-old or the adolescent (however old) thinks that the story is all about himself: John was to be Gollum, Paul to be Frodo, Ringo would be Sam Gamgee and George, God rest his good soul, was to be Gandalf. He was probably all of 25 at the time. I suspect Marianne Faithfull might have ended up as Galadriel if the Beatles hadn't been pipped for the film rights even as they were pipped for the rights to the bulk of their own work. The first was a lucky escape for them and all of us; the second was an epic in its own right.

As I write this, I have not yet seen the *Lord of the Rings* film, which will arrive here on Boxing Day, that traditional time for Christmas pantomime. The youngsters are all hanging out for it, desperate to experience Middle Earth in a way that demands less effort than black words on white paper. I am apprehensive: this is somehow different from the *Harry Potter* film, which is pantomime of a high and satisfying order. But *The Lord of the Rings* is something else. I suspect that we'll be presented with something that resembles my heart's Middle Earth as much as *The Ten Commandments* resembled the Book of Exodus. Film's abbreviation of narrative creates problems: words can be carved in stone and yet be as live and slippery as water, but flickering images set ideas in concrete.

Words create a character, but the film ends all argument about his looks or the way he speaks. Ideas, put through the audio-visual mill, get minced, squeezed. 'It's a curse, having the epic temperament in an age devoted to snappy bits,' said Tolkien in the documentary. It showed him as very much the

## Rings and changes

old don, puzzled and embarrassed by anything hysterical. The idea of people taking the trouble to learn enough Elvish to converse in it made him impatient. You could see why: the documentary shows a scene where fans gather round his Catholic graveside to chant mournfully in Elvish, which in their earnest mouths sounds like Welsh-Swahili.

These funny folk may be the snake-dancing fundamentalists of the broad church of Tolkien aficionados, but they're not the only strange types. The stern spokespeople from the Tolkien Society were more your high magisterium variety: don't-getting-any-bright-ideas-because-it's-all-been-worked-out-by-us-and-Mr-Big. Lots of people had ideas about him, some quite interesting, as was the anthropologist who declared that Tolkien had set himself the task of creating British myth. Some were just annoying, such as Jenny Fabian, author of the earth-shaking book *Groupie*, saying that *The Lord of the Rings* was just like an acid trip, but with not enough sex.

**H**OWEVER, when Tolkien told us what *he* thought the book was about, I listened: 'When you really come down to any *large* story, which interests people, can hold their attention for a considerable time—the stories, the *human* stories are practically always about one thing: the inevitability of death. All men must die, and for every man his death is an accident, even if he knows it or consents to it—an unjustifiable violation. You may agree with the words or not, but *those* are the keyspring of *The Lord of the Rings*.'

George Harrison, who when young played with the idea of playing Gandalf, and who when a little older wrote *All Things Must Pass*, would have understood that. They're talking now, in some celestial anteroom where British Hare Krishnas can take a timeless moment before reincarnation or nirvana to chat with British Roman Catholics who love word and myth and epic.

Postscript: The ABC screened a footnote to a real and terrible epic in mid-December when it showed Jamie Oliver doing Christmas in New York. The 'MM' at the end credits was an underlining of the change that has come about the world since September. The Twin Towers were still there on the skyline. Frequent shots down narrow street canyons were an elegy to recent felicity, but also a chilling memory jog of the killing clouds that rolled along them like a volcano's pyroclastic flow that dreadful day. The food was forgettable: all I could think of was that the famous swinging, brash New York feeling evoked in the program had now become history, even myth. ■

**Juliette Hughes** is a freelance writer.





# Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 100, January–February 2002

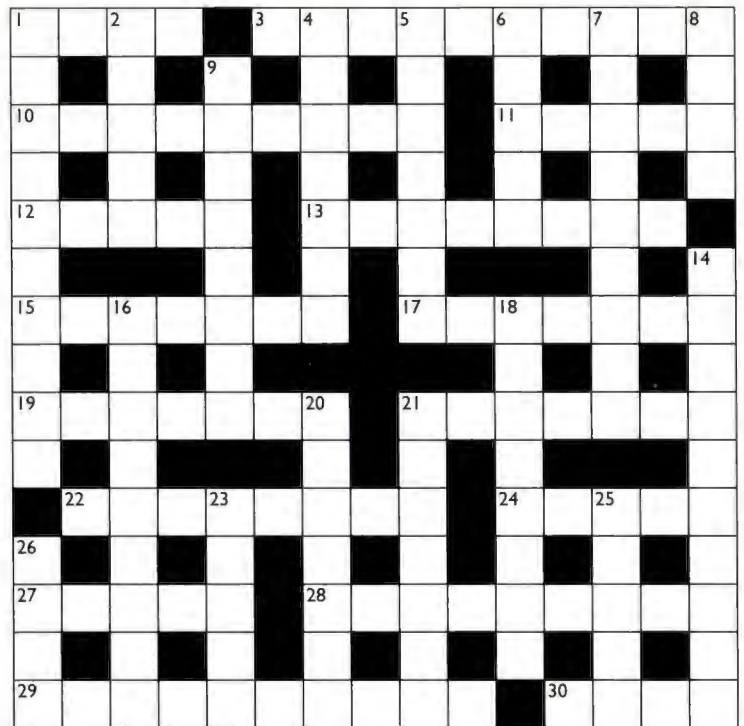
Devised by  
Joan Nowotny IBVM

## ACROSS

1. It's expensive, darling. (4)
3. Peculiar aroma around fish Dora, initially, tells the diplomat. (10)
10. Cryptic sort of writing, not for the tall worker? (9)
11. The newspaper, called Thunderer, had sales perhaps, multiplied. (5)
12. Old widow lost time looking for the keepsake. (5)
13. Small animal has place to sleep beside the river. (8)
15. Some rush in. I, erratic as always, show them something brighter. (7)
17. Happy 2002! (3,4)
19. In idyllic poem, English hint about the piece of wood. (7)
21. Poor Gran with keg produced something unsavoury—for the curate's breakfast? (4,3)
22. Somehow grip a pot when faced with Communist propaganda. (8)
24. Dad, to begin with, took 10 to the courtyard. (5)
27. Girl or boy names bird. (5)
28. Plate they used in the demonstration of this form of communication. (9)
- 30 & 29. Risqué displays viewed through tinted glasses. (4,10)

## DOWN

1. Very upset about the cutting of locks? (10)
2. Coral island everyone gets round to visiting, perhaps. (5)
4. In disguise, Dan and 'er and me—we just stroll along! (7)
5. Furniture for the hearth produces a din Ron dislikes. (7)
6. Dispute about games of tennis to follow. (3-2)
7. Ornamental metal etching by person from Syrian city. (9)
8. Wine with floral bouquet? (4)
9. Hose used by Santa for the children. (8)
14. Unusually dotty role George initially played—that eccentric hermit! (10)
16. Sick, for example, I half blench at the script that's hard to make out. (9)
18. Instrument of the orchestra or anatomical part? (8)
20. Make a mistake over a spasm that's abnormal. (7)
21. About the lentils—they're what I always reject. (7)
23. Whatever way you take it, such a belief holds firm. (5)
25. Arrant impudence, perhaps, of some tot altogether spoilt! (5)
26. Very French! (4)



## Solution to Crossword no. 99, December 2001



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