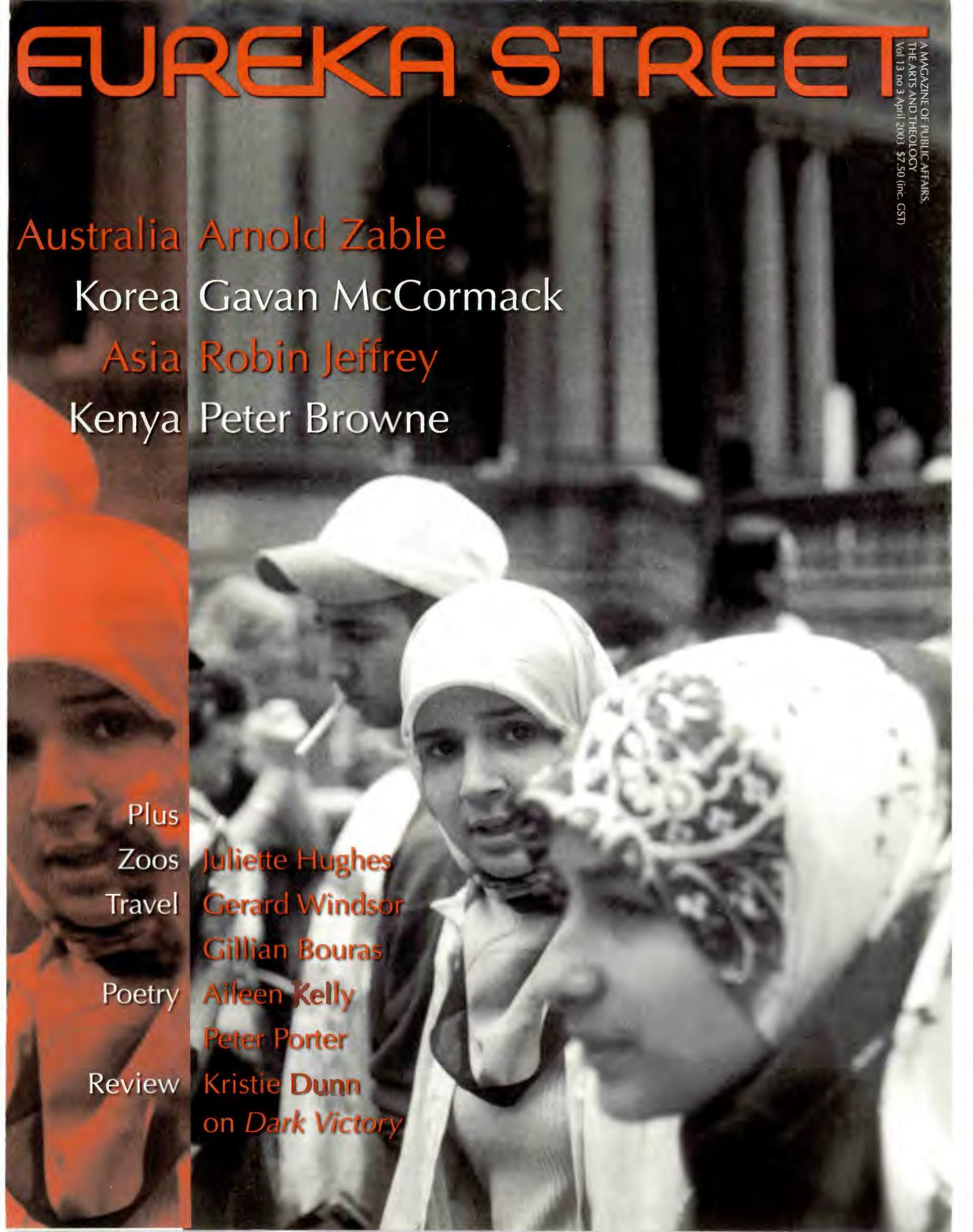


# EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS,  
THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY  
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Korea Gavan McCormack  
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# EUREKA STREET

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## COMMENT

- 4 *Morag Fraser* Unfinished business
- 5 *Andrew Hamilton* Changeover time

## SNAPSHOT

- 6 Roman surprises, home truths, and Malcolm Williamson remembered

## THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC

- 8 *Michael McKernan* Peace drums
- 8 *Frank O'Shea* Irish visitor
- 10 *Mark Deasey* Travellers' tales
- 10 *Morag Fraser* Epiphanies
- 13 *John Carmody* Deep structure
- 13 *Brigid Hains* Counter-terrorism kits
- 15 *Pip Robertson* Circling the square

## COLUMNS

- 7 Capital Letter  
*Jack Waterford* Grim reaping
- 9 Summa Theologiae  
*Andrew Hamilton* Lenten signs
- 15 Archimedes  
*Tim Thwaites* Fluid interpretations
- 28 By the Way  
*Brian Matthews* Dire diary
- 62 Watching Brief  
*Juliette Hughes* Old days, lost ways

## FEATURES

- 17 Hammered at the heath  
*Peter Pierce* goes to the races.
- 18 Need to know basis  
*Robin Jeffrey* makes the case for more Asia knowledge.
- 22 Howletts  
*Juliette Hughes* talks with the animals.
- 26 Watchdogs put down  
*Moirá Rayner* on the muzzling of anti-corruption bodies.
- 35 Surviving Africa  
*Peter Browne* visits a refugee camp in Kenya.
- 39 Seoul-centring Korea  
*Gavan McCormack* on the rapprochement between Seoul and Pyongyang.
- 45 The purest of pleasures  
Or is it? *Gillian Bouras* gardens in Greece.
- 47 Occasional harmonies  
*Gerard Windsor* in Sicily.



## COVER STORY

- 29 Perilous journeys  
Refugee stories told by *Arnold Zable*.

## POETRY

- 53 *Peter Porter*  
The Fundamentals of Music
- 54 *Aileen Kelly*  
Specifics

## BOOKS

- 50 The short list  
Reviews of *Justice, Jesus, and the Jews*; *The Land is a Map: Placenames of Indigenous Origin in Australia*; *Don't Tell the Prime Minister*; *Unfinished Business: America and Cuba after the Cold War 1989-2001*, and *The Double Helix*.
- 51 The Viennese moment  
*Michael McGirr* looks into Peter Singer's *Pushing Time Away*.
- 52 Tall tales, but true  
*Kristie Dunn* reviews *Dark Victory* by David Marr and Marian Wilkinson.
- 56 The only hope  
*Robert Phiddian* reviews Ghassan Hage's *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for hope in a shrinking society*.
- 57 Agreeing on something  
*Andrew Hamilton* surveys four books on power and the Catholic Church.

## FLASH IN THE PAN

- 60 Reviews of the films *Talk to Her*; *The Pianist*; *Ned Kelly*; *Sur Mes Lèvres*; and *The Hours*.

## SPECIFIC LEVITY

- 63 *Joan Nowotny* Cryptic crossword



# Unfinished business

**I**T'S A CLICHÉ, and that in itself should make you suspicious. In George Orwell's centenary year, doubly so. 'Unfinished business' is so often the language of squalid vendetta. Reflex language. When used, as it has been, in the context of the war against Iraq, it wears an air of necessity, as though settling scores were an essential part of noble destiny.

The Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, used the phrase to mean finishing off a 12-year-old war, one prompted by Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, and prosecuted by the father of the current US president. Much *was* left unresolved after that war, but it was work to be done in peace, with ingenuity, resourcefulness and diplomatic finesse, not bombs.

The Saddam Bridge (left), shot by documentary photographer Mathias Heng, was built after an older bridge was destroyed in 1991. Saddam Hussein, with the hubris reminiscent of another dictator, and the architectural bombast of Hitler's favourite builder, Albert Speer, replaced it with the angled vanity of the 'Saddam Bridge'.

But no-one has replaced the shattered wind-screen of the Baghdad taxi through which Mathias Heng photographed the Saddam Bridge. The taxi driver, Abdulilah Abbas (see page 32) is a veteran of the Iran-Iraq war. He has had to rebuild his life since that conflict, no simple task in a country ruled ruthlessly. He has been helped by the great technocratic skills of the Iraqi people, who have managed, through the oil-for-food program, to keep themselves nourished in an organised fashion throughout 12 years of sanctions and arbitrary rule. But it has not been easy. Neither will the consolidation of an Iraqi state, controlled and administered by Iraqi people—with its considerable oil wealth in Iraqi hands—be easy to achieve. But if the world is serious about combating terrorism, and committed to the reality, not just the rhetoric, of freedom, that consolidation is business that must be done.

Even less easy, but absolutely necessary for any decent world order, will be the settlement of the current conflict between Israel and Palestine. Without a Palestinian state, and a corresponding sense of security for Israel, there will be no peace in the Middle East and little guarantee of peace in the rest of the world.

Oil has been a focus of this current US-Iraq conflict—not the only focus certainly, but an important

factor in the strategic calculations. More precious even than oil is water. If we are not careful, and farsighted in our dealings, the wars of the near future will be fought over water.

The water tanks (left, photographed by *Eureka Street* institution, Bill Thomas) are every bit as ingenious as the Saddam Bridge, but in their combination of utility and beauty there is no bombast. In Australia water tanks are part of our physical and psychic landscape. But we need now to bring them, and all they represent, to the front of our minds. No imperial power, not even one that can build the 21st-century equivalent of aqueducts, will be able to quench the thirst of a world that has squandered its life source.

No imperial power can afford, either, to squander its young people, or stymie the joyful energies that prompt them to jump like the Australian child (again, photographed by Bill Thomas) testing himself in the benign dunes of our island's long coastline.

\*\*\*

This is my last *Eureka Street* as editor. In May, Marcelle Mogg takes over. Please welcome her and

give her the generous support that I have enjoyed these past 12 years.

The Australian Jesuits have been the inspiration and backbone of this venture into independent publishing. They will understand the depth of my gratitude—personal and professional. So many people—writers, photographers, artists, cartoonists, contributing editors, subscribers, our Board, patrons, donors and supporters—have made *Eureka Street*. I thank them all.

And in the engine room, where it all happens: to my assistant editors and graphic designer, who have borne much; to my editorial, production and marketing assistants; to the hardy, generous staff at Jesuit Publications; to our printer and his people at Doran, and to the editor-in-chief at the *Canberra Times*, thank you. Not a single issue could have appeared without you all.

And to all of you who are now reading this—thank you, and please, keep backing independent publications. They're the sinew of democracy.

—Morag Fraser

COMMENT:2

ANDREW HAMILTON

## Changeover time

**T**HE FIRST EDITION of *Eureka Street* appeared in 1991. The magazine promised informed reflection on public issues, which took account of the human reality so commonly ignored in public discussion. The leading articles in the first issues discussed the war against Iraq and the plight of Afghan refugees.

This edition is overshadowed by the same questions, and the need for informed and argued reflection on cultural and political life is even more marked than it was 12 years ago. If *Eureka Street* has helped discharge its promise in small ways to address this need, we owe it to the energy, intellectual passion and generosity of Morag Fraser. She has been the editor of the magazine almost from the beginning, and has become the public face of *Eureka Street*.

After 12 years, Morag has decided to leave the magazine in other hands. As reader, friend, writer and Jesuit publisher I have progressively come to know Morag. I speak for everyone in those capacities in thanking Morag for giving herself so generously to shaping *Eureka Street*, and for building such a significant cultural institution. We wish her well in her continuing involvement in Australian public life.

We also welcome the new editor, Marcelle Mogg. Having edited *Australian Catholics* for 2 years, Marcelle is well placed to continue and develop the tradition of addressing Australian questions in a

public voice. The need and the challenge remain as great as they were in 1991. Indeed, in public comment on refugees and on the war against Iraq, the level of brutality, unargued assertion and occasional dishonesty seems higher than it was in 1991.

In the last decade, many periodicals providing independent and critical commentary, such as *Modern Times/Australian Society*, *The Independent Monthly*, *The Republican* and *The Australian's Review of Books*, have ceased publication. Few have taken their place. It is no comfort, then, to hear from our readers that *Eureka Street* is irreplaceable. For it is natural for little magazines to come and go, as the energy and financial sacrifice needed for their survival become too great.

*Eureka Street* has flourished partly because of the generosity and gifts of Morag Fraser. It has also survived because the Jesuits have believed strongly enough in the need to address public issues in a public language from a catholic moral perspective that they have underwritten it financially.

Ultimately, however, *Eureka Street* will survive only if the need for it is recognised by increasing numbers of subscribers and donors. So, in thanking Morag Fraser and welcoming Marcelle Mogg, we also recognise that it is you who will determine our future.

—Andrew Hamilton SJ



## Realignments

Dissident theologian Hans Küng, so long at odds with Vatican authority, announced in late February that he was completely at one with Pope John Paul II in his stance over war with Iraq. 'It is clear that on this question, the Pope is recognised by everyone as a very high moral authority', Küng said in the Italian daily, *Il Messaggero*. He was, he declared, '100 per cent with' the Pope in opposition to military action against Iraq.

Clearly not in diplomatic mood, Hans Küng also had this to say about US President George W. Bush: '... if a politician is in love with power, arrogant, pursuing imperial ambitions as the head of a world power, and presents himself as someone chosen by God, that is a grave abuse of religion.'

The Vatican's chief foreign policy official, Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, was less brusque, but nonetheless direct: Saddam Hussein should disarm, he told an audience of some 100 ambassadors, including those from the US and Iraq, but pre-emptive or preventative war against Iraq was, he said, not justifiable. His summing up: war is justifiable only when it is undertaken to restore true peace.

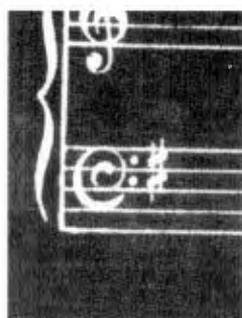
The Catholic Commission for Justice Development and Peace (Melbourne) called the decision to commit to war morally unjust and illegal. Just for the record.



## Sign of the times

On the front of a neat Federation house in a Melbourne suburb: a neatly painted placard that reads: REGIME CHANGE BEGINS AT HOME.

The Scandinavian occupants (and sign-painters) greeted our photographer warmly, told her to 'spread the word', then rode off smartly on very shiny bicycles.



## Malcolm Williamson 1931–2003

Malcolm Williamson, the first Australian Master of the Queen's Music, died in Cambridge on 2 March, aged 71, after a long illness. He was a myth maker in music and in life.

Malcolm's highly intuitive gifts derived more from the pre-Aristotelian world of polyvalent myth than from the mundane realm of binary logic. Contradictions excited and vivified him. For example, he was at once a proud member of the Royal household from 1975 and an antipodean iconoclast who took the mickey out of the pompous with relish.

He was always the proud father of three children in whose Jewishness he exulted. From the end of 1975, Malcolm was the partner of his publisher, former Jesuit scholastic Simon Campion, a secular saint—esteemed by those close to the couple in much the way that Manoly Lascaris, Patrick White's partner, is revered.

Dame Leonie Kramer, a conservative intellectual, was as dear to Malcolm as was the memory of Marshal Tito, who fused what seemed like a nation from incompatible Slavs. Malcolm, a son of the manse, and a Catholic convert as a young adult, was joyously enriched by the apparently contradictory Yahwist and Elohist accounts in Genesis, just as he was by Euripides' seemingly incompatible accounts of the fate of Iphigenia after her father sacrificed her for a fair wind to Troy.

In opera, Malcolm taught himself Swedish so that he could set Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, creating a modernist tour de force, *The Growing Castle*. He also wrote a children's opera that is in romantic terms as beautiful as Menotti's *Amahl*

and the *Night Visitors*. It is *The Happy Prince*, for female voices, after Oscar Wilde. Opera Australia must be pressed to mount *The Violins of Saint Jacques*, which ABC television produced triumphantly when it still had funds.

Written in homage to Messiaen, Malcolm's *Peace Pieces* for organ solo were among his favourite works. His *Mass of Christ the King* is perhaps his masterpiece in large form, as his Concerto for Harp and Strings, *At the Tomb of the Unknown Jewish Martyr*, is special among more intimate orchestral works.

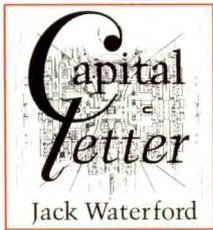
Coming to maturity amid post-serialist modernism, Malcolm was clever and fecund enough to write in a wide variety of forms in that idiom. But his melodic gift was Schubertian. It was displayed in *The Happy Prince*; in his big opera, *Our Man in Havana*; and in the 'cassations'—a series of do-it-yourself operas for untrained groups. He discovered while at the Australian National University in Canberra that they were a potent therapy for intellectually disabled children.

Like his near contemporaries Peter Porter, Barry Humphries, Germaine Greer and Clive James, Malcolm arrived young in the UK from a culturally deadening Australia, and remained an expatriate. His best work was achieved in spite of episodic insobriety. It is possible that some of his headline-making indiscretions at the expense of the fashionable would have remained private if he'd been a lifelong teetotaler.

Malcolm's Australian spiritual director and friend for 20 years, from the early 1970s, was the Melbourne Franciscan Augustine Watson—a psychotherapist, musician and, with the paradox that Malcolm valued, a contemplative sophisticate. His private name for Malcolm was MQM (Master of the Queen's Music), a Genesis-inspired naming.

Augustine, had he not died first, would have pronounced at Malcolm's Cambridge funeral, on 18 March, his own wickedly witty variation on the appropriate formula: May perpetual limelight shine upon him; may he rest in peace! Vale, Malcolm Williamson.

**Ken Healey** is Literary Manager at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) in Sydney, and a freelance writer and broadcaster on the performing arts. He was for 13 years a Franciscan friar.



## Grim reaping

**T**HE UNITED STATES will probably complete its war against Iraq with its military clout enhanced, its diplomatic clout reduced, and its place in the world less secure. Australia will share the last two outcomes, but will not have even the comfort of the first. Nor, probably, will it have the satisfaction of knowing that, in standing by its ally when all but Britain had fled, it will win any particular brownie points in a post-Iraq America.

The US could hardly have handled its diplomatic battles more carelessly, or more arrogantly. Its accession even to the idea that the United Nations had any role to play in disarming Iraq was slow and reluctant. The military build-up proceeded apace not because the US believed that weapons inspections would not work, but because they thought the inspections process a sham in any event. The message was that the US wanted war at any cost, and that any slowdown for diplomacy or concessions involved being conned by Saddam Hussein. Australia and Britain loyally tried to anticipate every American argument, and get on the record with them first. Tony Blair at least focused initially on the moral case—one that came to John Howard only late in the piece—and, with Australia, helped persuade the US that it should at least attempt to get a UN Security Council blessing.

That was a blessing that might have been obtained a year ago. But America's arrogant carelessness has sapped not just the goodwill of most of the non-English speaking world and actively alienated public opinion in all parts of the world that count, but has actually created a new form of international anti-Americanism—one not so much hostile to its culture as believing that international American power needs checks and balances. The apostles of some counterweight, France and Germany, represent much more than an old Europe used to creating balances of power against the strong: they have the support of public opinion in most of the non-English speaking world, and substantial support even in Britain and Australia.

Increasingly, moreover, such nations will seem able to put the US in the moral wrong. The way in which the US has squandered any moral advantage it had after the events of September 11 is staggering—a result primarily of the 'ourselves alone' play on its domestic opinion, and its 'with us or against us' rhetoric in international forums. But the process of alienating other countries had begun much earlier—with US rejection of international agreements such as Kyoto, and the creation of the International Criminal Court and some deliberate dismantling of diplomacy initiated by Bush's predecessor, Bill Clinton, not least over North Korea.

Yet if America has been more conscious of its military and economic primacy, and more determined to defend and assert it, it has also never been more in need of diplomacy, and

of multilateral bodies such as the UN, to help it do so. An Iraq, or an Afghanistan, can be coerced. A Pakistan, or perhaps a Turkey, can be bribed or bullied. But practical trade and general peace and good order require co-operation and agreed rules. Moreover, there has been much goodwill towards America, not least among the old Soviet satellites and Europe, even if mild anti-Americanism has been fashionable among the intelligentsia. The feat of George W. Bush and his coterie of advisers has been to convert that advantage to antipathy, even among the more conservative classes.

The problem with Australia's and Britain's close identification with the American cause comes in part from their inability to define what specific British or Australian interests they are defending. Even the general case—that Saddam is an evil man who persecutes and murders his own citizens and is a threat to his neighbours, and that there is a serious risk that he will use weapons of mass destruction or, worse, make them available to terror groups such as al Qaeda—did not, of itself, mandate war. Neither Britain nor Australia, as pigs in the minefield, nor the US, ever convincingly demonstrated a connection between the secular apostate, Saddam, and al Qaeda. But, even were that taken as read, it has never been clear how war would make al Qaeda's acquisition or use of such weapons less likely. Indeed, America itself has accepted that war with Iraq would produce an enormous counter-reaction in Muslim circles, and make terror incidents more, not less, likely, particularly in the short term.

**A**ND NOT ONLY in countries such as Iran, or Syria, or even Saudi Arabia, which are presumably further down the American list for some cultural cleansing. The risk is as great, in some respects even greater, in Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh or Pakistan or, on the other side of the Middle East, in Nigeria, Morocco or Tunisia. And those who want to use terror primarily for demonstration purposes, as all the best terrorists do, have now had it spelled out to them that the English-speaking union—sans, perhaps, Canada and New Zealand, if anyone could be bothered to distinguish—provides the best targets.

But just as significantly, the impact of American arrogance on public opinion as much as on the politicians in such countries, and the fact that one can take a swipe at Australia, or Britain, rather more easily and more safely than at America, accentuates the diplomatic risk Australia has adopted. The cost of this will not be felt in military expenditure, but in trade and humiliation, and declining influence. Just the sort of thing America could not shelter us against, even if it wanted to. ■

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



# THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC

## Peace drums

IN EUROPE

**I**T WAS IMPOSSIBLE to walk back far enough to see the building in perspective because it stood in its own tiny, almost private, square. Yet this Romanesque church that the guidebook had ignored demanded attention in its bulk and its beauty. A note on the church door scolded parents for allowing their children free rein within the church and regretted that, as a result, the church could only be opened for a few hours each day.

My companion had every right to be a bit sick of churches and abbeys but I quickly calculated that, doing all the other things that the day promised, we could still return this way during opening hours. We were rewarded. Impressive as it had been from the outside, within, this church soared. I do not have the words to describe the sense of nobility of the interior. All stone, and the colour—so light and golden—gave a feeling of spaciousness and grace, as if this building, so heavy outside, could simply float away. The place was stunning. One of those unexpected treasures that justify travel.

Even better, this church was in use. Churches work for me when they are used as their builders thought they would be used. There is a sense of time and effort fulfilled; they justify themselves and their makers.

When we entered the building, we found three rows of women at prayer. Sandwiched together when they might have spread out—six to a pew—for the warmth, I supposed. They were praying for peace, these women, in the middle of February, with the news from Washington resolutely bad. In a tiny French village, in a 12th-century church, in the face of a 21st-century war. If the church took my breath away, these women's prayers forced me to sit down to think.

I had taught a unit on women and war all those years ago at university. Women and war had been a theme in two books I

had written on the impact of war on the Australian people. I had worked on exhibitions around this idea at the Australian War Memorial and I had spoken about it on the radio often enough. For me it was a concept, another way of doing history. Here it was real.

When my brother had been conscripted for national service there were women from



the Save Our Sons movement outside the Swan Street depot when he reported there to begin life as an Army barman. A paperback reprint of my book on Australians in the First World War featured a remarkable photograph of three women, one quite old, the other two very young, awaiting anxiously but lovingly the tortuous passage down from the troopship of their soldier, made blind in France.

When on battlefield tours, I take my travellers to the Peronne war memorial in northern France. Our troops fought in Peronne and at nearby Mont St Quentin, and we have our own memorials there. This one is from the local people. It shows a woman lying, but raising herself, above the slain body of her son. Fist clenched, arm raised in the direction of the viewer in anger—or perhaps revenge. A shocking image—not the sad digger we are used to, with arms reversed—but a woman enraged. This memorial shocks Australians in its savagery.

To understand it, we need to remember the cost of war to France in the 20th century. Millions of men killed, more driven insane or so badly injured physically as to

render them useless for any normal life. This the outcome of that first war. Then war came again, as they knew it would, bringing defeat, invasion, occupation, humiliation. And you do not have to travel far around France to find a plaque remembering one who fought in the Resistance—deported, possibly, or executed there on the spot.

The women in the church at St Martin-de-Londres may have been thinking of these things as they said their prayers. They may have been thinking of the women of other nations for whom war would cause the anguish we can see at Peronne. They may merely have wanted to do something together lest they give way to despair.

A few days later we would see images of people from around the globe—from Canberra and London, Berlin and New York—all marching for peace, all trying to show that they can make a difference. Perhaps the women did not march at St Martin-de-Londres; perhaps they joined the march in Montpellier instead. But they had shown the need to be doing something and the purpose of a place so beautiful and so ancient.

—Michael McKernan

## Irish visitor

MARY McALEESE

**I**N HER TWENTIES, Mary McAleese spent three years as a current affairs reporter and presenter with RTE, the Irish radio and television service. In a book to be published shortly, she describes her time at the station as 'the worst part of my life'. She claims that there were four reasons why it was hard for her: she was northern, nationalist, Catholic and a woman.

When she ran for President of Ireland in 1997 to succeed the popular and successful Mary Robinson, these four aspects of her CV surfaced again. Being female was no drawback (all the other candidates were also women, except for a token man) while her quiet and committed Catholicism made her a safer choice than the bouncily

charismatic Dana Rosemary Scanlon who was her main opponent. But being northern and nationalist were serious problems.

People in the south of Ireland regard northerners with a mixture of suspicion and glazed bafflement. Suspicion, because how could you tell which side they were on in the troubles up there, and what they might have done in support of their cause? Bafflement, because they are hardworking and thrifty and lack the devil-may-care, to-hell-with-tomorrow attitude of southerners. All of which is not helped by the famous northern reticence: 'Smoke-signals are loud-mouthed compared with us,' as Seamus Heaney put it.

I remember driving 350 km to a football game between Kerry and Down many years ago, and being amused to see groups of northern supporters sitting beside expensive cars near Croke Park drinking flask tea and eating sandwiches. My group was certainly not well off, but a few drinks and a proper sit-down meal in a two-star hotel were as much a part of the day as what happened on the field. (To add to our confusion, the northerners won the game!)

To come back to Mary McAleese. The only time she lost ground during the presidential election campaign was when newspapers suggested that she was soft on Sinn Féin and was friendly with Gerry Adams. Eamonn McCann, a left-wing journalist from Derry, put that in context when he wrote that her interest was not in Sinn Féin (We ourselves) but rather in mé féin (Me myself). In his acerbic way, he may have intended it to indicate self-centredness, but there is nothing in her record before or since to support such a charge. That it meant she was her own woman, capable of making her own decisions, is a much more credible meaning and in keeping with what we know about McAleese.

It was easy to assume that she would be sympathetic to Sinn Féin. She was born in the Ardoyne area of Belfast, a noted nationalist enclave surrounded by Protestant housing estates. Although hers was not the grinding poverty depicted by Louis MacNeice in his home town of Carrickfergus:

The Scotch Quarter was a line of  
residential houses  
But the Irish Quarter was a slum for the  
blind and halt,

there was much in official government policy that wished such fate on second-class citizens like the McAleese family.



## Lenten signs

**R**ITUALS ARE LIKE spinning tops—they keep changing direction around a still centre. Lent is a good example. At its centre is attention to the kind of death that leads to life, the life that overcomes death. But in Europe, its edge is imagery of green growth that follows a bleak winter. In Australia, its resonance is in the return of foliage to burned trees and burnt land.

The celebration of Lent has also spun around the compass. Its stable centre is its association with Easter, the memory of the death and rising of Jesus Christ. People remembered that death through a fast that led to feast.

Easter was also the natural time for baptising adults who wished to follow the way of Jesus Christ. The long journey to faith, that took converts away from a path associated with death to discover God's life among the disciples of Jesus, was associated with the dramatic story of Jesus' way to life through death. The journey gathered pace at Lent, as the community came together in solidarity with those who were to be baptised. Those already part of the Christian community could share the journey of those waiting through fasting and praying. At Easter came baptism and celebration of what plenty was to be had.

Later, as the baptism of adults became a rarity, the journey to Easter was associated with the human experience of moral lapse and conversion. This focus on sin, however, had its costs. Because sin and virtue seem to be opposites, the emphasis on sin obscured the paradox of Easter—the discovery that life comes through death and not despite it. Concentration on sin, too, can be isolating in its emphasis on individual failure. Despite the sense of community engendered by receiving ashes together on Ash Wednesday, solidarity with others in the journey towards Easter became incidental. We could give up cigarettes for Lent without considering the burdens this might put on our family.

In common with other church seasons, Lent now grasps the imagination less intensely. In the Roman Catholic Church, its rituals emphasise solidarity—a common commitment to those in need through Project Compassion, and a common engagement in conversion through communal celebrations of reconciliation. But compared to the early church, there seems to be less imaginative connection between what we do in Lent and what Jesus Christ did in his journey from death to life. Our solidarity with our fellows in weakness does not bear clear signposts marked with life and death, betrayal and forgiveness, violence and peacemaking.

This Lent, however, promises to be different. At the beginning of Lent we pause at a crossroads. At Lent's end, we shall have taken a path that will shape what we and our children throughout the world can expect for our lifetimes. Because the journey of Lent will be a public journey, the rituals by which we walk with one another and follow the steps of Jesus from death to life will also be public. On view will be the fears, the instinct for violence, calculation that finds the blood that falls on children to be an acceptable price and the lies and betrayals that had Jesus Christ taken to his death. They will be there to see in the way in which we and our leaders conduct ourselves. So will be the compassion that raised Jesus from death to life. It may be that for this Lent the most apposite liturgies will be peace marches, the best forms of prayer will be emails to consulates and politicians. ■

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

She was a teenager when the burnings and riots broke out in the late '60s and knew the intimidation and fear of her besieged neighbours. The oldest of nine children, she was a surrogate mother to many of them, including her profoundly deaf brother who was badly beaten by a loyalist gang.

Home duties did not leave much time for schoolwork, but she excelled at her Catholic all-girls school on the Falls Road and won a scholarship to Queen's University. A first class honours degree, a call to the Bar in Dublin as well as Belfast, Reid Professor of Law at Trinity College Dublin—a post previously held by Mary Robinson—journalist in RTE, Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, member of the Institute of Linguists in London, and finally selection ahead of David Trimble as pro-vice-chancellor of her old university in Belfast all brought her a long way from the dead end which was the fate of many of her contemporaries. Add marriage in 1975, daughter Emma and twins Sara Mai and Justin and you have a picture of someone who could balance home and career without compromising either.

Whatever her background, if there is one thing that has characterised Mary McAleese's six years as president it is her commitment to reconciliation and harmony. At her inauguration she quoted one of her predecessors, Cearbhaill O Dalaigh: 'Presidents under the Irish Constitution don't have policies. But a President can have a theme.' As her theme, she chose 'Building Bridges'. As good as her word, one of her first public acts was to attend a Church of Ireland service and take communion. Catholic authorities were outraged, but not enough to take on either the public's approval of her action or her formidable knowledge of canon law.

Although she has supported the ordination of women and the full inclusion of homosexuals in the life of the church, McAleese is not the stirrer that her predecessor Mary Robinson was. She is deeply religious, believes in the power of prayer and meditation and has written an inspiring book on the subject, *Love in Chaos: Spiritual Growth and the Search for Peace in Northern Ireland*.

She is more at ease with people than the patrician Robinson; more unaffected and outgoing. While Robinson was someone to be admired for her courage and respected for her intellect, McAleese is loved for her

naturalness and warmth—precisely the qualities that Ulster needs to show the rest of Ireland and that Ireland still represents to a fretful world. —Frank O'Shea

## Travellers' tales

MOVING ON IN IRELAND

COUNTY WICKLOW, immediately south of Dublin, is promoted as the 'Garden of Ireland', and when you follow the lanes that meander through the chain of towns spreading south along the coast from Bray, it's easy to understand why. For a long time the preserve of Anglo-Irish gentry (and not a few wealthy Catholics), it abounds in lush estates with high walls and magnificent, centuries-old trees. One branch of the Guinness family has a whole mountain valley to itself, complete with lake; the Delgany golf club now occupies the estate of the Huguenot banker who founded Deloitte Touche.

It's a natural roosting place for much of the new wealth of Ireland. From Dun Laoghaire south, BMWs and Volvos jostle each other in the narrow shopping streets, and the slopes from Bray to Wicklow town are increasingly carpeted with plush new housing estates. Prices for identikit three-bedroom brick homes would make much of harbourside Sydney seem affordable. High streets boast good restaurants and shops well stocked with luxury comestibles (including no small quantity of high-end Australian wines).

The droppings of the Celtic tiger have also littered the landscape: Wicklow has achieved a certain notoriety for illegal rubbish dumps, as Dublin has grown faster than its service infrastructure and dangerous hospital waste has ended up in open tips. Farmers have been paid to turn a blind eye. The hospitals in question don't ask where disposal contractors take the waste the hospitals give them.

The worst abuses have gradually been curbed, not without some very high-profile scandals. But at a lower level, the system still struggles in its efforts to deal with the by-products of the new affluence, and here the Travelling people—probably the most vulnerable section of the whole population—have often been caught in the middle.

The Travellers' claim to pre-date the  
*continued on page 12*



## Epiphanies

THERE ARE submarines in the New South Wales country town of Holbrook. They lie snugly berthed in the grass of the classic Australian park that runs alongside the main street.

Holbrook worked hard to acquire its submarines. Why? What would an inland country town want with submarines, even authentic ones with their detailed specifications and war histories listed on billboards all over the park?

I was reminded of Holbrook and its wonderful weird fleet when I opened a new book of documentary photographs by *Eureka Street* regular, Andrew Stark. That's his work above and right. Don't ask me why the man is calling on his mobile while behind him the inflated Titanic angles towards perdition. But you can only be glad that someone caught and fixed the moment.

The bill posters at right—with Sydney City Mission rising just above the Soul of America—make absolutely no impression on the man wandering past. The gent in the photograph below: is he measuring the spring in the woman's thigh muscle the way one would size up a thoroughbred? Or is he just nicking matches from her pocket? What does the child on the donkey expect?

Since 1991, *Eureka Street* has been blessed with its photographers. Their work has been too eloquent to be used as mere illustration to text. It has spoken for itself, as here—obliquely, wittily, profoundly. —Morag Fraser

*Andrew Stark's Snaps from Sydney, from which these three photographs are taken, is available from 53 Willandra Parade, Heathcote, 2233. Tel: (02) 9520 1582.*



from page 10

Celts in Ireland seems well founded: the 30 thousand-strong community has a distinctive gene pool, and their speech is studded with words of Pictish origin, which can (at times conveniently) make it impenetrable to outsiders. Many of the economic niches in which they previously survived—seasonal agricultural work, repairing pots and pans—have disappeared. Travellers have always been convenient scapegoats, the contrast between their nomadic—and to outside eyes, disordered—way of life and the increasing affluence of many of the settled people making them even more likely to be targets of condemnation.

I went with a community worker friend on her rounds of some of the halting sites which are supposed to provide basic amenities for Travellers' caravans as they follow their circuits, which don't conveniently tie in with county boundaries. There are concrete toilet and shower blocks, power points and partition walls to designate individual families' sites.

This one was surrounded with a metre-high ring of rubbish: garden waste, old fridges, building debris. Jagged bits of asbestos sheeting lay in the open near where children were playing. A glimpse was enough to confirm to passers-by the received wisdom—that Travellers are dirty and shiftless. But when I talked to a group of women from the site, a rather different story emerged. A small amount of rubbish was originally left there by men linked to the community, but not living on this site (one of the few things Travellers can make a living from these days is the disposal of hard waste). But the pile soon grew into a mountain, as local people saw a convenient place to dump their rubbish, with every likelihood of its being traced back to the Travellers rather than to 'respectable' householders. The women were distressed about the danger to their children, worried they might injure themselves on the mounds of sharp and rusty waste, be bitten by rats, or catch diseases from the rotting kitchen scraps.

We were invited into several caravans on this and other sites—each one spotlessly clean, and intimidatingly neat. 'It's like a tinker's caravan in here' is the term Irish mothers will most often use to express disgust at the state of their children's bedrooms. From all I saw that day, and from what friends who've worked with the community over time reported, the old

saying bears little relation to the way the Travellers actually live. They're also often tritely condemned as parasitic. In fact, the picture that emerges is more often one of family solidarity, and heroic efforts made to care for sick and disabled relatives with no call on outside assistance.

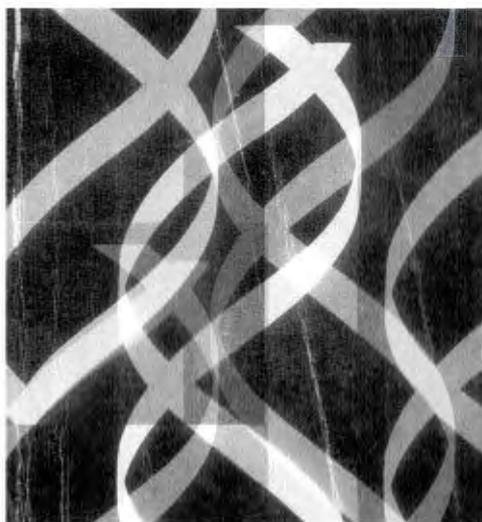
At the end of the day's circuit, we came back over the hills to Delgany. In really clear weather, you can see Wales from the top of this green rampart. This was hazy spring, a riot of fuchsia and daisies and bluebells among the emerald, but we could still see far out into the Irish Sea. By the time we reached the bottom of the slope, there was evidence of nothing but tranquil affluence. The uncomfortable truths that Travellers, asylum seekers, and the new proletariat of eastern European contract workers might tell about this society could be safely ignored.

—Mark Deasey

## Deep structure

ALL THE WAY WITH DNA

LITERARY CRITICS ARE apt to hyperbolise about the enduring resonance, down the decades, of the door that Nora Helmer slammed at the end of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Fifty years ago, another door was opened and the sound that it created has not stopped swelling since. That metaphorical door was a surprisingly



brief paper in *Nature*, on 25 April 1953, in which the Englishman, Francis Crick, and his younger American colleague, James Watson, announced their discovery of the structure of DNA—an achievement for

which they won the Nobel Prize in 1962.

Their paper was, in some respects, as disingenuous as it was short. The history of scientific interest in DNA is long, however, and many people had been striving to prise open that door, especially in the previous 20 years. While Watson and Crick emerged as the victors, some of their actions were decidedly ignoble. In his solipsistic and famous (even notorious) account of the story, *The Double Helix*, Watson said of his colleague (clearly, the more intelligent of the pair), 'I have never seen Francis Crick in a modest mood'. Nor Watson himself, one might riposte. This shared characteristic blurred their ethical vision: they had no scruples about appropriating other scientists' work.

For example, through reading the letters of the renowned American chemist Linus Pauling to his son Peter (a PhD student in their Cambridge laboratory), they knew far more of his work—its successes and its errors—than they had any right to. They also discovered the crucial, precise details of the outstanding experiments of Dr Rosalind Franklin at Kings College, London. Franklin employed the powerful technique of X-ray crystallography, which involved beaming the rays into DNA crystals and looking at the shadow pattern which emerged—akin to discerning the regular arrangement of trees in an orchard by looking at their shadows cast by floodlight or sun. These patterns prove to be specific molecular fingerprints and can as precisely identify a molecular structure as an aroma, or the pattern of walking or the sound of a voice can identify a person. They acquired Franklin's data when their ingenuous colleague (and fellow Nobel Laureate) Dr Max Perutz, a member of an external team to review research at Kings, unthinkingly divulged it to them. Without it they simply could not have built their model, but at least they were astute enough to recognise its worth instantly.

So in the end it was not the case that Watson and Crick do not deserve their fame; rather it was that, in bitter circumstances (especially because Rosalind Franklin died of cancer only a few years later), a brilliant female scientist has been denied her legitimate share of that renown. Sooner rather than later (and this was an aspect of Watson's anxiety), *someone* would have lighted upon the solution: all of the pieces of this scientific jigsaw puzzle were to hand.



The revelation of that molecular structure has allowed an enormous number of scientific questions to be asked (and, in many cases, answered), many of them simply not previously conceivable.

One of these is the basic question of inheritance. We now know that DNA is a double helix (like an elaborate corkscrew) with four vital and variable compounds (purine and pyrimidine bases) attached to two sugar-phosphate backbones. The mosaic of those bases forms the code that determines the detail of all of the proteins in our body. Four may seem a tiny number to explain all of this diversity but we should consider how rich a code Morse is, with only two elements (a dot and a dash), or the binary system upon which computers operate. In fact, the code works in triplets of these bases, each specifying a specific amino acid constituent of proteins, so 64 combinations are possible. As there are only 20 relevant amino acids—with structure and function determined by the number of amino acids and their sequence in the protein polymers—it is clear that the possibilities of DNA coding are almost limitless (as with a vocabulary built from combinations of 26 letters). A single error, though—however it is initiated—will change the protein, perhaps with serious functional consequences (as in cystic fibrosis).

We now know that the double helical structure is replicated for cell division. The chemical bonds between the two twirls are broken (like sawing through the treads of a spiral staircase) and then each strand acts as a template to allow the production of a complementary copy. Sectors of DNA can be read off and decoded to allow the development of the daughter cells.

Everyone knows of the remarkable use being made of DNA 'fingerprints' in forensic investigation and, if vaguely, of the often exaggerated promises made by entrepreneurial scientists and clinicians for cures to a variety of serious diseases. Between the promise and the reality there falls a considerable shadow. What is less known is the contribution that this modern biochemistry has made to our understanding of evolution. Some proteins—and thus the DNA from which they are coded—have been incredibly constant in their structure. For example, there is a group of proteins called histones, which are tightly bound to DNA in the cell nucleus and which probably exert an influence on the degree to which the DNA can be read off ('transcribed' as biochemists term it) and replicated. In one of these histones, only two amino acids out of 102 differ between cells of peas and the thymus gland of calves (a much studied tissue). As the great biochemist Lubert

Stryer commented, this suggests 'a critical role that was established early in the evolution of nucleated cells and has remained nearly invariant since then'.

There are many other important proteins whose structure and operations have also varied little over the evolutionary aeons: proteins which act as channels for the flow of electric current in and out of cells are more than 75 per cent the same between jellyfish and human beings. In yet other cases, changes in proteins have allowed us to map evolution and to refine our taxonomy of plants and animals. Haemoglobin, the red pigment which allows our blood to carry oxygen, has been the subject of a dizzying number of point mutations (changes of individual amino acids) which radically alter its capacity to bind oxygen—hence the plethora of 'haemoglobinopathies'. Studies of the changes in its multi-strand protein structure (and hence which sectors of our DNA are expressed or repressed) during the course of our foetal development have shed light on our evolutionary history.

It is now clear that some parts of our DNA inheritance are 'expressed' and others are not—some are 'intruder' sequences while others are relics of apparently redundant genes. As Stryer puts it, 'We see in our genomes both the mighty and the fallen'. So if DNA was, as many have said, *the* molecule of the 20th century, there is every prospect that its tantalising code and immense potential will make it the molecule of the 21st century as well. This is simply because, however philosophers may fret about it, the meaning of life is surely to guarantee the triumphant march of DNA down the generations.

—John Carmody

## Counter-terrorism kits

NEW ALERTNESS AND OLD FLARS

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S 'counter-terrorism kit' is an odd mix of practical advice, self-congratulation, and alarming pictures of people being hosed down in the event of a chemical or biological attack. It provokes reflection on the way Australians feel about this post-Bali-bombing world. It is easy to see Bali as a defining moment: a 'loss of national innocence'. Yet it seems

to me, as an historian, that our current fears reach deep into our national history. Events like Bali reinforce some very old anxieties indeed.

I am sometimes bemused by the ready comparisons made between John Howard's time in government and the heyday of Menzies in the 1950s and early 1960s. To be sure, there are parallels: Howard's opponents on the left denigrate him for small-minded conservatism, for his patent lack of ease with Asia, his stiff and unconvincing salutes to multiculturalism. Howard himself, on the other hand, is proud of the comparison. He looks back to a time of prosperity and confidence. Where Menzies congratulated himself on representing the 'forgotten people', Howard sees himself as standing for 'ordinary Australians'.

But the 1950s and early 1960s were very different times from our own. There was a powerful rural lobby, confident that the country vote was central to national life. New houses, new neighbours, new jobs and new babies were central to the lives of many 'ordinary Australians'. Despite the narrowness of cultural and political life in Australia, the postwar period was also a time of national expansion and an influx

of European migrants. The foundations of a modern, secular and diverse nation were being laid, in spite of the insularity of a conservative, Anglophile establishment.

It is true that Menzies' artful use of Cold War fears for domestic political purposes, and his cultivation of the United States as a 'great and powerful friend', are reminiscent of our own time. But the Howard years are an echo of a much older Australia again: the newly federated and insecure nation of the early 20th century.

The parallels are many. After the florid boom of the 1880s, and the terrible bust of the 1890s, Australians were a chastened lot. There was plenty of verve and excitement about Federation of course, but the undercurrents of fear and anxiety were never far away. The nation seemed caught in a pincer grip: a small population, an arid continent, and 'teeming' neighbours to the north. A spate of popular novels between 1890 and the First World War played on this sense of an 'unguarded North'. They elaborated scenarios in which secret settlements of Japanese or Malay invaders might be set up in the Northern Territory as an advance party for a total invasion.

In the rhetoric of the Empty North, racial fears were brought to life in vivid metaphors of corruption, infiltration, even impregnation of the nation by alien seed. We are no longer comfortable with the language of racial purity, so now such fears are phrased in terms of 'way of life', 'values' and 'Australian-ness'. As Peter Mares has written (in *Borderline*, UNSW Press, pp27–28), illegal immigrants are now described either as a 'flood' that will 'swamp' Australia, or as a contagious menace that will 'infect' the nation, either with fanatical ideas, or literally with the dirt and disease of the outside world. The 'terrorist cell' is the new cancer in the body politic.

In his cover letter to the counter-terrorism kit, Howard claims that 'as a people we have always engaged the world optimistically ... our open friendly nature makes us welcome guests and warm hosts'. He is quite wrong. We have often excluded, not engaged the world; we have frequently done this anxiously, not optimistically. We may have been welcome guests, but we have certainly been most ungracious hosts at various times in our history, not least the present.

Granted, our insecurities about national borders are not unfounded: we have an enormous coastline, a very small population, and highly volatile, overpopulated

islands to our north. Hardly surprising that we look now, as we did a century ago, to three remedies: the patrolling of national boundaries, the cultivation of powerful friends, and the encouragement of a larger, but still 'truly Australian', population.

These salves to our national insecurities were all first mooted in the early 20th century. When America's magnificent naval fleet visited in 1908, the United States was courted by Alfred Deakin as an ally, to Britain's evident displeasure. Deakin foresaw that the United States would be Australia's great Pacific ally, just as Howard has stated these past weeks that the alliance with the United States is more important to Australia than our loyalty to the United Nations.

It was in 1901 that the *Immigration Restriction Act* was passed, intended to prevent the infiltration of the population by alien races and cultures. Migration was strictly limited to those who would blend imperceptibly into 'Australian-ness'. The early decades of the 20th century saw the gulf between city and country give rise to mutual bewilderment and political difference—acute enough in the 1920s to provoke the creation of underground rural militias. The rhetoric of rural politics of the 1920s is eerily reminiscent of the xenophobic, anti-Aboriginal, nationalistic views of Hansonite politics today.

In 1901–1902, population anxieties reached such a pitch that the New South Wales government set up a Royal Commission into the declining birth rate. The Commission blamed middle-class women, with their small families, for the decline. In 1999, when Jeff Kennett remarked to an assembly at a girls' selective high school—perhaps facetiously—that they had a duty to bear children, he was roundly criticised as a regressive sexist, but his views have since been echoed by people like Malcolm Turnbull, and the many others who are anxious about our low population growth and our ageing population.

I find it hard to listen to such rhetoric when a conservative federal government (with bipartisan support) devotes hundreds of millions of dollars each year to excluding and imprisoning illegal immigrants and asylum seekers. We stumble, as we have done for over a hundred years, along a fine line between holding fast to our 'Australian-ness' (once exclusively white, now defined by 'lifestyle' and 'values') and our need to open the door—at least to prop it



## Hope and Fear

July 10 - 13, 2003

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ajar—to the world in order to populate the continent and maintain a vigorous national culture.

Like John Howard, I enjoy being Australian. This seems to me a very fine place in which to practise a life of enquiry and personal freedom. There are powerful drives towards tolerance, open-mindedness, optimism, and vitality in our history, alongside the anxieties and fears. However, I am wary when politicians start treating national security and individual freedom as symbiotic partners, as this government does in the new counter-terrorism kit. The need to control and police a population, and the desire to safeguard individual liberty, are indeed related, but they also strike me as natural enemies, to be carefully weighed against one another.

The fortress mentality of early 20th-century Australia was no protection against the bitterness of the First World War and the Great Depression. Our openness to postwar migration has immeasurably enriched our society. Is it possible that we can draw on our history of tolerance and generosity in facing this 'new and more dangerous' world, rather than reverting to the well-trodden path of national bluster and insecurity?  
—**Brigid Hains**

## Circling the square

FEDERATION SQUARE

**W**HEN I ARRIVED in Melbourne in late 2000, it seemed every cultural institution was closed for renovation or under construction. Of these projects-in-progress, none grabbed the headlines as did Federation Square.

'Fed Square' (as it has been popularly truncated) was designed by Lab architect studio of London and Bates Smart of Melbourne, beating 177 other entries in an international competition. Its position—adjacent to buildings of such cultural and architectural significance as Flinders Street Station and St Paul's Cathedral—meant this could never be a low-key addition to the city. It seemed a week couldn't go by without some aspect being publicly debated—especially the revised completion dates and wildly escalating budgets (quadrupled to \$450 million at last count). The fractured, triangular shapes behind the



## Fluid interpretations

**A**RCHIMEDES WAS HEARTENED by one aspect of the whole sad Warne anti-doping affair—that people knew enough about the issues to filter out the bull-dust.

They could pick up a dictionary and determine that the great spin doctor's term 'fluid tablet' was but a subtle variation on the word 'diuretic' which means 'tending to increase the flow of urine from the body'. Most people with whom Archimedes was in contact suspected it would take more than a single 'fluid tablet' to disappear a double chin. Even without those long and boring anti-doping classes—to which Warne said he did not pay attention—they were suspicious that a tablet labelled ModURETIC might be worth checking up on as a DiURETIC.

Would that the community became as knowledgeable about other science-based issues that are potentially important to their daily lives—such as the vilification of eminent stem cell researcher, Alan Trounson, in the Senate last year.

Trounson showed the senators a video, in which a mouse was shown to recover movement in its formerly paralysed hind legs after treatment, supposedly with embryonic stem cells. But 'embryonic stem cells' was a simplification. Stem cells in embryos are capable of forming all the tissues in the body. As organisms grow older, most stem cells lose flexibility (don't we all!), and the range of tissues they can regenerate becomes more restricted.

The cells used to treat the mouse were not strictly embryonic, but somewhat older. 'Ha!' screamed anti-stem-cell senators. 'You misled us! You tricked us!' But those cells were less likely to have the desired effect—and they still worked. Why weren't people wise to that?

It's a strange sort of trick to make life harder for yourself, as Trounson did. And a strange sort of politician who insists on setting standards of truth for others that far exceed those of the everyday exchanges in parliament. In this case the consequences were potentially dire—the withdrawal of federal government support for a world-class research institute, in a field where Australia is a leader and could alleviate the suffering of millions (and turn a nice profit).

The irony is that one of the aims of the new National Stem Cell Centre, of which Trounson is the director, is to determine just what makes embryonic stem cells so flexible—in an effort to reduce their use. If we could turn other cells into embryonic stem cells, or treat some conditions as effectively with older, even adult, stem cells, we could possibly reduce or eliminate the need for embryonic tissue.

We live in stressful and warlike times. It's almost a cliché that the first casualty is truth—and the word of the President of the United States, let alone the President of Iraq, is no longer taken at face value.

The only protection we have against this blizzard of distortion is education—in which Warne professes not to be interested. Now more than ever, that has to include science, engineering and medicine, as well as economics, law and the humanities. ■

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

hoardings were described with everything from hostility to suspicion to optimism but never, it seemed, with outright, unabashed enthusiasm.

In mid-2002, I left Melbourne.

When I returned last month, opinions on Fed Square had not exactly shifted, but they'd altered in volume. There are still criticisms, but muttered rather than proclaimed. People whose views had been reserved have become more vocal and positive since the square's opening in December. Some of the commercial tenants have not moved in, a few areas are still fenced off, scaffolding is still in place on some exteriors and pay disputes with subcontractors threaten to put back completion dates. Nonetheless, much of the square is functioning and I was curious finally to walk around what I had known only as an unruly, contentious construction site.

The buildings, with their fractured exteriors, form a ramshackle collection—cohesive but far from uniform. Large sections (most notably the huge atrium that forms the Flinders Street entrance to the square) are made up entirely of a geometric web of steel, filled in with glass. Other buildings are resolutely solid. This diversity is fitting for a site that commemorates the coming together of a nation of so many different peoples.

Colour extends the diversity: grey and pink concrete, reflective steel, green glass and the dappled red, orange and purple sandstone paving of the square itself. These form a pleasant contrast to the ochre of Flinders Street Station opposite, a coherence with St Paul's (which, in an apparent gesture of solidarity, is currently also clad in scaffolding) and chromatic relationship with the Moorish oddity of the Forum Theatre. These other buildings are also incorporated into Fed Square by nooks and crannies that create peepholes and frames through which you can view other details of the city. The effect is surprisingly harmonious.

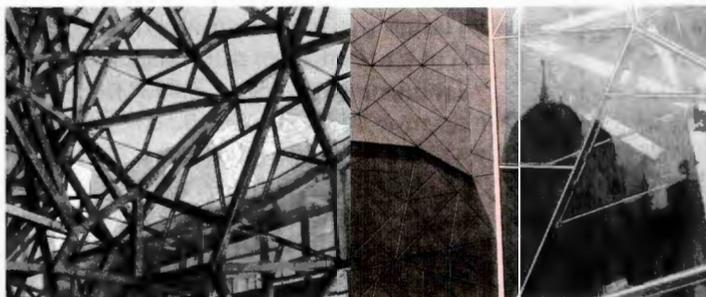
It has been heralded as the structure that will bring the city to the river. Some of the riverside areas are still fenced off but even so, there is a sense that, in keeping its eye on these other buildings, Fed Square has rather turned its back on the river. The Edge, a concert hall, seems the exception. Like the atrium, it is encased only in steel and glass and so has both an indoor and

outdoor quality, with views of trees, the Yarra, and the rowing club opposite.

There are two other main non-commercial cultural institutions within the square. One is the Australian Centre for Moving Image (ACMI), with a cinema and a gallery dedicated to film, video and other moving media—apparently a world first. Each offers an excellent program. The other—and most anticipated—is the Ian Potter Centre: the National Gallery of Victoria, Australia, now fully operational.

After seeing the works in the Potter (some for the first time), I'd challenge anyone to dispute that this excellent collection of Australian art deserves both its new home and constant display.

For the most part, the exhibition spaces are light and spacious and uncluttered. Subtle detailing in the wooden floors and predominantly white walls allow the work to take priority. Several features from the external structures are repeated in the interior: angularity, the use of steel and concrete,



the windows which frame views of the city. These are not entirely successful.

The public entry point of a gallery can be used in two main ways. It can showcase significant artworks or it can highlight the building itself. The ground level view of the sweeping spiral form of New York's Guggenheim in New York does the latter. The first interior view of the Ian Potter is a large space of polished concrete and jutting angles without anything very art-specific in it. More than anything, it resembles the foyer of a smart minimalist hotel.

Viewing artworks can be a physically and mentally tiring process, something many galleries acknowledge by providing places to sit and rest. The Ian Potter has such spaces between main galleries. Some offer windows or sculptural works to view. However, with a lack of natural light and an excess of concrete, they are more like forbidding waiting rooms than comfortable resting places. In this they are reminiscent of the work of the architectural theorist

Daniel Libeskind, whose design was recently selected for the World Trade Centre site memorial in New York City. Libeskind is associated with the architects of Fed Square and was on the judging panel that selected their design. The acclaimed Jewish Museum in Berlin, designed by Libeskind in 1998, uses the concepts of absence, emptiness, and the invisible to create 'voids': enclosed concrete spaces. In the context of that museum the effect is contemplative and emotional. In the Ian Potter it seems needlessly sombre. Again, with the river and trees so close, it seems curious that the view was not better exploited.

Without many external landmarks visible, the interior spaces in the Potter, and indeed throughout the square, can be disorienting. This is not an absolute criticism, however. In a time when much contemporary architecture is derided for banality there is something refreshing in this. What can at times seem confusing or disorganised also gives a sense of exploration and discovery that a more conventional design could never do.

It's been a long time coming and was not cheap when it finally arrived, but Fed Square succeeds far more often than it falters. It is not easy; it is a series of buildings and interiors that presents a decided challenge to visitors—but a stimulating and diverting one. It is already established as a

'people place'—in one week hosting a dawn screening of a soccer match and the largest protest the city has ever seen. Even when there is no event taking place, the cafés, galleries and open spaces are full of people. If there can be an objective sign of success, then that, surely, is it.

—Pip Robertson

*This month's contributors:* **Michael McKernan** is a broadcaster and author, most recently of *This War Never Ends: The Pain of Separation and Return* (University of Queensland Press, 2001); **Frank O'Shea** teaches at Marist College Canberra; **Mark Deasey** is regional manager/Asia for Oxfam Community Aid Abroad; **John Carmody** is in the School of Medical Science, University of NSW; **Brigid Hains** is an historian and author of *The Ice and the Inland: Mawson, Flynn and the Myth of the Frontier* (Melbourne University Press, 2002); **Pip Robertson** is an artist, writer and teacher originally from New Zealand.

# Hammered at the heath



## Pierce does Caulfield

I HADN'T BEEN TO Caulfield since Redoubt's Choice came again to beat Testa Rossa in the Guineas. On this Orr Stakes day in February the course had never looked better, but it was now under the control of the Melbourne Racing Club, the new (or recycled) name for the Victoria Amateur Turf Club. Whatever the name, the club was blessed with a couple of standout events. Even so, only 8300 punters turned up.

My friend Graeme and I walked into Caulfield to encounter Bart Cummings even before we saw a horse. The trainer had only one runner for the day, Frightening. It's not home yet. That week racegoers in Melbourne were overwhelmed with choice. There were meetings at each of the four metropolitan tracks in the space of five days. Wednesday was the Lakeside track at Sandown. There is also a Hillside track. Punters are working on the difference. Thursday was a night meeting at Moonee Valley, delayed because someone forgot to order the ambulances. That was no joke with the spate of jockey deaths and serious injuries in the last months.

At the weekend there were Group One races at Caulfield on Saturday (the Orr) and at Flemington on Sunday (the Lightning Stakes). But the first horse we wanted to see at the Heath (Caulfield) was the ill-named and unfashionably bred Murphy's Blu Boy, seven-lengths winner at his last start and long odds-on today for the colts' Blue Diamond Prelude. At one stage the betting on the race was 20/1 bar one.

The colt was down from the Queensland border town of Goondiwindi. Owned by battlers, it was bidding fair to be a 'people's horse' and to follow in the hoofprints of the champion Gunsynd, from the same town (hence The Goondiwindi Grey). I'd seen Gunsynd win the Futurity Stakes in 1972 while I was on the way to a wedding. Essentially a miler, he ran third in the 1972 Melbourne Cup at 3200 metres, giving the winner, the Tasmanian Piping Lane, 12.5kg in weight. Today Murphy's Blu Boy had to run 1100 metres.

He did, but weakened into second. Think of the new part-owners, who had paid \$700,000 for 49 per cent of him during the week. One wag calculated that this race cost them \$10,000 a second as Murphy's Blu

Boy led till near the post, but was run down by the flashing Hammerbeam, which had been two lengths off the second last horse before the turn. Darren Gauci, Hammerbeam's jockey, had spoiled the party and caused an indecent form reversal. At its previous start, his horse had been 12 lengths adrift of Murphy's Blu Boy.

The Prelude for fillies had gone to a good one, the oddly-spelled Halibery (school or Oscar winner?). She ran nearly half a second faster than Hammerbeam would. Then it was time for the Orr Stakes at 1400 metres. Despite the distance, three Melbourne Cup winners won the race in the 1990s: Let's Elope, Jeune and Saintly. On this day there was Australia's champion racehorse, Northerly, resuming, together with Fields of Omagh, the gelding that he had narrowly beaten in the last Caulfield Cup. Fancied too were the three-year-olds—the brilliant filly Innovation Girl and the John Hawkes-trained gelding Yell, which the stable thought might not be up to Group One class.

YELL HADN'T HEARD. He and Innovation Girl cleared out from the rest, with Yell camped on her outside. He took over near the post, where he veered out into the path of the hurtling Fields of Omagh. The race was almost over, the margin decisive, but the jockey of the second horse nevertheless lodged a churlish protest that was quickly dismissed. The air-raid siren sounded and the announcement was made that Yell had kept the race. Gauci was in the saddle this time as well.

Hammerbeam will be one to watch in the Guineas in the spring. Yell goes on to the Futurity, a shin-sore Murphy's Blu Boy to the paddock. On the Sunday, Choisir tracked alone down the flatside rail and easily won the Lightning. Dextrous (Gauci again) took the Vanity cleverly. At Caulfield, the Melbourne Racing Club would have been happy with its day of racing, if not the crowds. For racegoers in Melbourne only flock in the springtime, to the soulless vastness of Flemington. At Caulfield, if they choose, they can come to the best course in the country. ■

Peter Pierce is *Eureka Street's* turf correspondent.

# Need to know basis

It is crucial that Australia increases its knowledge of Asia, argues **Robin Jeffrey**

**'Y**OU'VE GOT TERMITES in the basement,' said my friend the journalist after I poured out my story about the faltering capacity of Australian universities to teach and research about Asia. 'Termites aren't a story. It'll be a story when the house falls down.'

'But a large chunk of the house fell down on September 11,' I said. 'Another bit broke off when the club in Bali blew up.'

'I don't think newspaper editors see the connection,' he said sympathetically, as one who suffers from editors.

As globalisation drags us into daily dealings with folk far away, you'd think that study preferences, educational policies and all those Thai, Chinese and Indian restaurants would lead to a steady diffusion of knowledge about Australia's geographical and economic place in the world—that is, south-east of India and south of China, with more than half our trade flowing in those directions.

But you'd be wrong. In most universities, the vigorous but tiny base of research and teaching about Asia, built since the 1950s, is imperilled by funding cuts and restructurings.

*Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge*, a report of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, illustrates the on-again, off-again quality of Australia's attempts to understand its Asian surroundings. In 1988, when a push for 'Asia literacy' began, fewer than three per cent of Australian university students did any serious study of Asia. *Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge* estimates that the proportion in 2001 stood at less than five per cent.

In areas like Chinese and Japanese

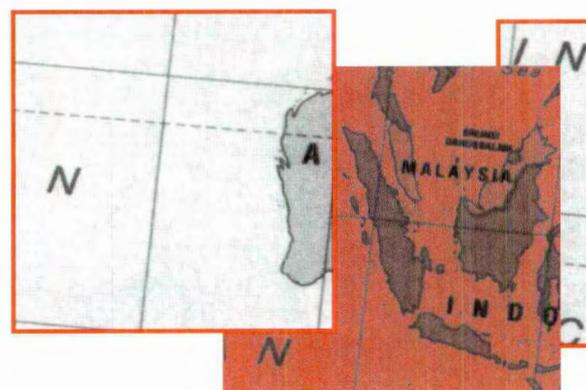
language study, there have been increases—but from tiny bases—so that in 2001, no more than 9000 university students were studying Japanese and no more than 5000 Chinese. Students of Indonesian narrowly exceeded 2000. That means 16,000 in a student population of 830,000 individuals who represent Australia's elite—the proportion of the population able to study at university. And a significant component were overseas students who would return to their own countries.

Study of regions like west Asia (the 'Middle East') and south Asia (India and its neighbours) have shrunk. In 1988, 15 universities taught about India; in 2001, only five. Five universities taught Arabic to a total of about 400 individuals. Hindi/Urdu, the second largest spoken language in the world, had a secure base only at the Australian National University (ANU).

Australia's problem lies in creating an imagination that fits with its place on the globe. At one level, Australians have it too easy, sensing themselves part of an English-speaking, white-skinned set of kings-of-the-hill and cocks-of-the-walk. There are perils in such complacency, especially for a country of 19 million people, located far from the cocks-with-whom-they-would-like-to-walk. For long-term survival, Australia needs the ability to look with much more discernment across the back fence into neighbours' yards, not to gaze wistfully across the ocean to Global City Hall in Washington, DC.

People and cultures can change. Kerala—the corner of south-west India that I have explored longest—was in the 1920s the most caste-ridden part of the country, where low-caste people were 'unseeable' and had

to flee the roads when high-caste people approached. In 1957, Kerala returned the world's first elected communist government and became known for having India's stroppiest, most assertive people. It also became the corner of India with by far the highest rates of literacy, lowest infant mortality



and longest life expectancy.

Australians need to make similar leaps. Not into stroppieness—Australians are pretty good at that already—but into changed attitudes about the possibilities and dangers of their own locality. Australians need to acquire some of the attributes of the Dutch, Scandinavians or Swiss, particularly in relation to language learning and interaction with the world. The targets set in 1989—ten per cent of undergraduates studying an Asian language, 20 per cent doing some study of history or culture of an Asian country—are desirable and achievable.

**R**ELATIONS WITH ASIA have been part of the national story since European settlement in Australia began. But it was the war with Japan from 1941 that led to policies

aimed at enabling some Australians to put themselves in the shoes, sandals and bare feet of people who lived around them.

The perils of not doing so were cruelly apparent in 1942. Accounts of briefings given to Australian soldiers in Malaya are worth repeating:

[The Japanese were] fanatical and tough but not very bright. They were armed with small calibre rifles, were not good shots because of defective eye-sight, and rarely hit their targets. If by any chance you were shot, the bullet only made a small hole which healed quickly ... (Ron Magarry, *The Battalion Story: 2/26th Battalion, 8th Australian Division—AIF*. Brisbane, 1995, p56. Quoted in *A Bitter Fate*. Canberra, Dept of Veterans' Affairs, 2002, pp55–6)

After the war, Australian governments set up and generously funded the Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University (now the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies)

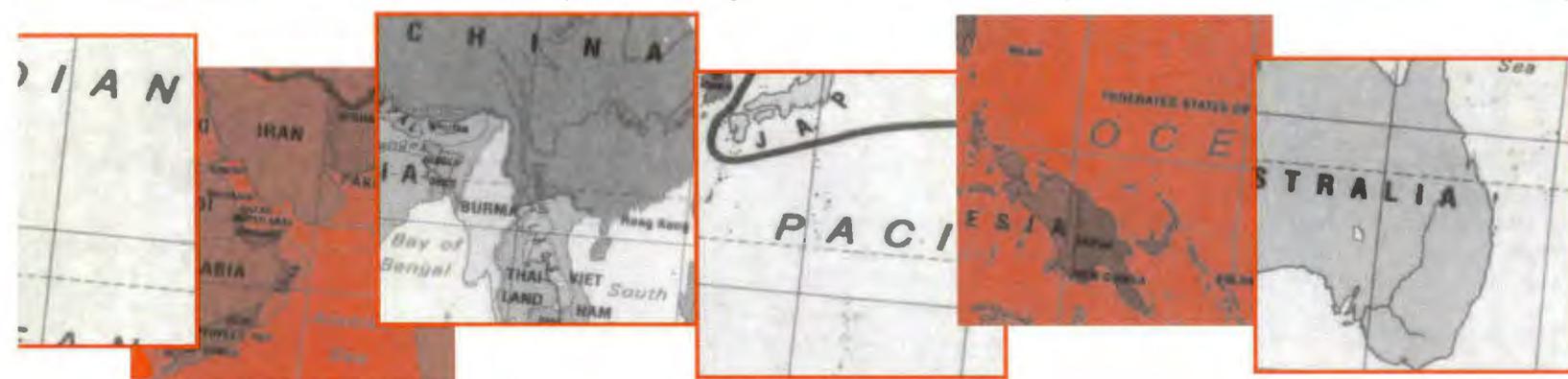
the opportunities and became outstanding scholars of places in Asia.

However, when Australia got involved in the Vietnam war in the mid-1960s, knowledge of Southeast Asia was not widespread in the community as a whole. 'I didn't even know bloody Vietnam existed,' a soldier said. 'I'd never even heard of the country ... I didn't know where Laos or Cambodia ... were ... I didn't know the French had been in Vietnam.' (Stuart Rintoul, *Ashes of Vietnam*. Sydney, Heinemann for the ABC, 1988, p5)

**I**F THE MALAYA experience of 1942 helped provoke a focus on Asia in higher education, Vietnam led to the realisation that the wider community needed to know where Laos, Cambodia and a lot of other places were. As Education Minister, Malcolm Fraser established the Auchmuty Committee in 1969, which identified vast gaps in Australian education when it came to the countries and languages of the neighbourhood. (*The Teaching of*

At one level, restructuring of tertiary education, and contraction of funds, have made lower-enrolment subjects vulnerable. As ageing academics retire, cash-strapped universities replace only those who teach subjects of highest student demand—business, computers, etc. Few universities can afford the luxury of, say, two teachers of Chinese history or someone 'expensive'—like a professor of Indonesian.

And success has had its own consequences. Between 1997 and 2001, at least a dozen professorial level scholars of Asia were headhunted for strategic jobs elsewhere. The National University of Singapore, intent on becoming a 'Harvard of the East', is a special beneficiary, with Anthony Reid (ex-ANU) heading its Asia research centre, Peter Reeves (Curtin) its South Asian studies program and languages area, and Rey Iletto (ANU) in Southeast Asian studies. The University of Sheffield attracted two top China scholars from Western Australia—Beverly



to improve knowledge of Australia's region. A number of universities encouraged modest programs in the history and politics of Asian countries.

People like the late Herb Feith, killed in a railway-crossing accident in November 2001, blossomed from such engagement. After being at the University of Melbourne, Feith went to Indonesia in 1951 as a volunteer. He became a friend of that country and a legend in the scholarship about it. Similarly, Peter Reeves, who now heads the South Asian studies program at the National University in Singapore, went to India for the first time in 1958 while doing an MA at the University of Tasmania. There are a number of other examples—20 or 30 at most—of university-educated Australians who drank the spirit of that time, grasped

*Asian Languages and Cultures: Report of the Commonwealth Advisory Committee*, 1971) Other reports—and action—followed: in 1980, *Asia in Australian Education* (the FitzGerald Report) and in 1989, *Asia in Australian Higher Education* (the Ingleson Report).

*Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge* is the fourth such document in 32 years. But where the earlier inquiries found relatively receptive audiences, *Maximizing* has had a muted response. Earlier, a push for Asia knowledge grew out of the common-sense recognition that the histories, cultures and politics of the countries of Asia were almost unknown to most Australians, yet they would increasingly affect Australia's economy, security and internal harmony. So why has the push faltered?

Hooper and Tim Wright—to support its specially funded China programs. Andrew Watson (Adelaide) runs the Ford Foundation in Beijing. And there are half a dozen other top Australian scholars of Asia in senior posts in Asia and Europe.

Why do such people leave? Simple: the money is better; salaries in Singapore can be nearly double those of equivalent levels in Australia, and tax rates are lower. And among those who have left, some also cite 'the crazy amount of administrative work I was required to do', shrinking pools of research funds and class sizes that rose by 60 per cent in five or six years.

Few of these people are replaced in their Australian universities. And when a cadre of specialists numbers no more than a few hundred, to lose a dozen movers and shakers sucks vitality from the system.

Policy-makers and citizens cherish widely held but mistaken beliefs that:

- globalisation means Australians need to know less, not more—English is now the all-conquering global language;
- the market will take care of demand—if people want to know a language, they'll sign up for it and pay to learn it;
- autonomous universities must make decisions about what to teach as they see fit—they can teach about Asia if they really want to;
- language teaching in Australia is too hard—there are too many 'community' and Asian languages—a small population can't manage to offer eight or nine languages in a coherent, sustained way;
- and, anyway, Australia is doing pretty well as it is—what would be gained by doing anything differently?

Each belief is misguided, in the following ways:

- global capitalism reaps increasing profit from business in the great languages of Asia. The growth of Hindi-language newspapers in India, driven by advertisers seeking to sell products, represents the most vigorous newspaper growth in the world. And why does the Murdoch media empire so cherish its reach into China?
- left to themselves, few Australians will learn languages unless convinced of the advantages. Governments and universities need to proclaim the needs and benefits;
- coherent and sustained availability of language teaching is possible, but it needs *national* initiative—something that will happen only through the creation of a national body. Individual universities, or

even state education systems, cannot supply it alone;

- and how much better might Australia do—in securing its prosperity and security—if a far higher proportion of the population knew the languages, and something about the history, politics and cultures, of the neighbours?

**I**NDIA PROVIDES A thundering example of the potential profit to be gleaned from paying better attention than we do now. India today, for example, has the fastest growing newspaper industry in the world—in 12 major languages. It is driven by an advertising boom that in the 1990s stunned even old-time Indian marketing people. India has an estimated 82 million television households—400 million people sleep each night in a place where there's a TV. Indian cable operators offer 40 or 50 channels, always with five or six language choices.

There are plenty of anecdotes illustrating the old saw that knowledge is power—or at least, that it works better than ignorance. In East Timor, Indonesian-speaking members of the Australian Defence Force have been widely praised for their work in making contacts, explaining intentions and heading off conflict. At least one fluent Mandarin-speaking official was a key figure in the prolonged negotiation of the Woodside gas contract with China.

The webpages of two university Asia centres—Griffith University in Brisbane and Murdoch University in Perth—highlight possibilities. There's the Murdoch graduate in Chinese who became 'executive floor

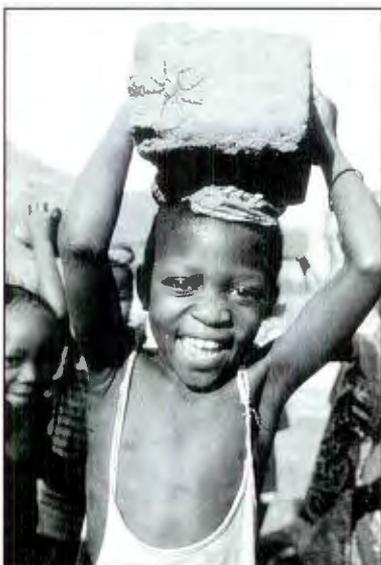
manager' of the Marriott Hotel in Chongqing. Or the Griffith graduate who became a translation specialist for the Tokyo Metro Government. But there's also a depressing side: the Perth high school where the hotel manager started learning Chinese has stopped teaching the language. And both young women were working for foreign, not Australian, entities.

Ignorance is costly and can be cruel. Consider:

- the days after September 11 when angry Americans attacked and even killed Sikhs simply because Sikhs wear turbans and most Americans had no idea about religious differences;
- how much more effectively the 'processing' of refugee claims might proceed if a sizeable proportion of immigration officers knew a language of South or West Asia;
- and how much more comfortable Australian business people might feel—and how much less gauche they might appear—if more of them absorbed from their youth an understanding of the histories of the neighbours.

As an American in Jakarta told the *New York Times* in February, 'Other Americans here who do not speak the language ... are more concerned' about their safety. He lives in an apartment block where he is the only foreigner. 'Because of his close ties to the people and his familiarity with the culture ... he remains essentially at ease'. (NYT, 24 February 2003)

Both symbols and substance are necessary to improve Australia's capacity to acquire the power of knowledge. The symbols can come only from signals sent



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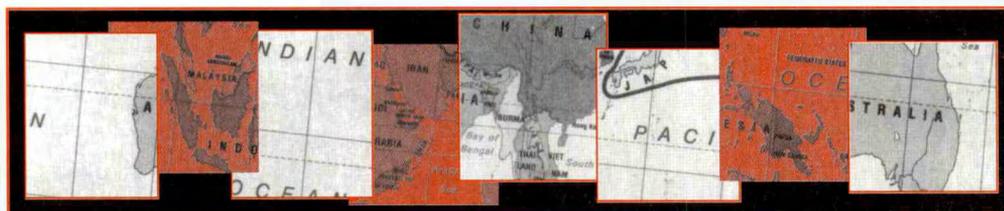
by the national government. Principals, parents, business leaders, vice-chancellors—and neighbouring countries—need to see that Australian governments rank widespread understanding of our neighbours as a high priority. When the Commonwealth ended the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools scheme a year ago, the symbolic setback was as great as the financial one.

The federal Minister for Education in a recent defence (*Symposium*, Newsletter of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, January 2003, p7,) of language policy points out that a survey of Year 5 and Year 8 students across the country showed more than 40 per cent 'in the top category' of

five years. Close to half of those chairs are going to social sciences and humanities. Canada's Asia-oriented universities thereby have a chance to renew and extend their pools of talent.

**T**HERE ARE THREE reasons why Australia needs to work harder at learning about the near neighbours.

First, for security. The advantages of being able to recognise one's friends—and enemies—are obvious. How many of the dozens of federal police who have worked in Indonesia have fluency in an Indonesian language or much understanding of the politics and culture of the place? Australia needs a far higher proportion of its citizens



understanding of Asia. This, of course, is partly the result of the leadership—and practical programs—of the Asia Education Foundation (AEF), founded in 1993 to promote study of Asia from Kindergarten to Year 10 in schools across Australia. About 20 per cent of Australian schools are now part of the AEF-led Access Asia network.

Similar effort is necessary to preserve the shrinking Asia expertise in the universities and to extend it throughout university curriculums and into Years 11 and 12 of secondary school. *Maximizing Australia's Asian Knowledge* recommends the creation of a 'Council for Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge and Skills' to highlight such an Australian commitment and co-ordinate, over a period of four or five years, a series of measures to provide substance.

Australia has been slow to preserve and take advantage of the Asia knowledge it has. In the US, the Luce Foundation committed \$US12 million in 1999 to the creation of 40 new positions for Asia specialists in liberal-arts universities and colleges. In Britain in 1999, the government set up a five-year program, at a cost of 1 million pounds a year, to extend the study of China in British universities. In 2000, as part of a general exercise in scholarly renewal, the Canadians began creating 2000 research chairs at a cost of \$Can900 million over

with these sorts of skills. That's what was advocated and widely accepted after the Ingleson Report of 1989.

Second, for commerce and economics. It is possible to work through interpreters and other countries' citizens, but would you buy your family home through an interpreter? There is no substitute for wide, accurate, Australian capacity to communicate with possible business partners. Such communication works not merely at the level of sealing deals, but in imbuing Australians with the cultural skills to be happy and welcome in other people's countries while deals are done and projects delivered. It is possible, for example, for an American to live in an

Indonesian apartment block in Jakarta in 2003 but language and cultural understanding are the keys to his comfort.

Third, for Australia domestically. The capacity of large proportions of citizens to put themselves in the shoes of others—others who have not come from Christian-influenced, English-speaking backgrounds—increases harmony and cohesion. And the more people of 'old' Australian background move comfortably with the million or so Australian residents who were born in Asia, the more 'Asia skills' and 'Asia comfort' rub off. The process increases the pool of Australians who can work with the neighbours with ease, grace and understanding.

Modest national initiatives can make this happen widely and effectively. Investment of \$15 million over five years, according to *Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge*, would have far-reaching effects in repositioning and renewing knowledge of Asia in the universities and the wider community. That's the cost some estimates put on the 'alert Australia' public relations campaign.

These are small sums in national budgetary terms. Nor should they necessarily all come from the Department of Education, Science and Technology. The United States launched its great 'area studies' initiative through a 'National Defense Education Act', after the orbiting of Sputnik in 1957. In Australia in 2003, the Departments of Defence, Foreign Affairs and Trade and Industry and Tourism all have an interest in—and might bear part of the cost of—seeing that Asia knowledge spreads and deepens.

Australians can't avoid our rendezvous with Asia. The question is: do we arrive ill-equipped, awkward and unknowing or skilled, sensitive and discriminating? But you don't pick up skill, sensitivity and discrimination from a management manual in an airport bookshop. They have to be learned. ■

**Robin Jeffrey** is Professor of Politics at La Trobe University, and was one of the writers of *Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge*.

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# Howletts

You should do your zoo with a difference: **Juliette Hughes** reports from Howletts and Port Lympne, two of the most innovative wild animal parks in the world

**W**HEN YOU MEET a gorilla, you should look down modestly and rumble a low, friendly growl deep in your chest. It is only polite, and gorillas know the importance of manners. Our two guides had been chatting with us as we entered the gorillas' living space. Suddenly the two men began growling to left and right. We were startled (they had been so charming up to that), and then laughed excitedly: nothing was going to be predictable today. The next few hours were about to overturn all our former assumptions about zoos. This was the moment of contact: we were in the presence of gorillas.

It was a freezing January day in the south of England and the gorillas were mostly inside in their private living quarters where it was cosy. The place smelt of warm bodies, soft stable smells—nothing rank, just a healthy, homely waft of someone there. There were many presences in the big space. Smaller monkeys flittered and chattered in the high reaches of the sturdy gridded walls and ceilings, diving along the ropes and streaking across the beams, or sitting nibbling a piece of fruit.

There were several gorilla youngsters romping about and pestering the adults, who either played with or ignored them as they went about their business. They were so busy; atypical of the usual gloomy, bored zoo gorilla. This was Kijo's group. Kijo is a 22-year-old silverback, a dominant male

gorilla with five females. There are five of his offspring as well: three female, two male, ranging from five years to six months old. His is one of eight groups, totalling 71 gorillas at Howletts & Port Lympne Wild Animal Parks, the largest number of captive breeding gorillas in the world.

'We put the monkeys there because we thought they'd get on with each other and it would be enriching for them,' said Robert Boutwood, Administrative Director. Peter Litchfield, the Zoological Director, told us what kind of monkey they were—something to do with making it all more like home for them with a mix of species—but just at that moment it went over our heads. We were looking at gorillas, several gorillas, as they mooched about doing gorilla stuff: nibbling raw vegies, relaxing in the warmth of the deep straw litter that forms the floor for all the gorilla quarters throughout the two zoos. The space was divided into several different interconnecting 'rooms' where each gorilla could make a nest from straw and have a sleep.

These cage-like grilles are important to the gorillas' physical and mental health, Peter Litchfield told us. Along with stout



naval ropes and other climbing opportunities, they act as 'forest' to the animals, allowing them to climb as they would in their natural habitat, and in ways that are not possible in 'rainforest' enclosures in some zoos. Such enclosures sometimes have to protect their vegetation from the inmates with electric fences, so they can neither climb nor eat from the trees, leaving one with the impression that the 'rainforest' is there mainly for the human onlookers to imagine that they are viewing the gorillas in their natural habitat. Howletts & Port Lympne give the substance, not the shadow, of rainforest environment to the gorillas. The keepers put their food on the roof of the vast enclosures as well as on the ground. The climbing means that these

gorillas have much better pectoral muscles than the usual zoo gorilla. The deep straw litter cushions any falls and is much more like a forest floor than a tiled or earthen one.

In the Howletts indoor living area, one of the females was eating a leek in her own niche. She leaned close to the bars and looked calmly at us. 'This one is Mushie,' said Litchfield and growled softly again, talking gently to her. She passed the time of day with him but clearly was interested in us. This time I tried to imitate the greeting sound. It was, of course, impossible to go behind the bars into their space, as their keepers do, but Mushie was as close to me as someone sitting next to you on a bus. Then she pushed her leek through the bars to me. I made some sort of pretence of biting it and handed it back, but she was having none of it. Motioning to her mouth she insisted that I taste it. So I took a bite. Again, she gestured. Take another bite. I did, and in a roseate daze of joy handed it back to her. Mushie delicately peeled the outer layers of the leek down to the tender yellow-green middle, took a ladylike nibble and handed it to me once more. Again I tasted, but at this point there was a sudden commotion further up in another part of the quarters. Kijo was displaying: rushing up and down, banging the bars (they needed to be sturdy) and doing a bit of chest-thumping. He didn't like being ignored. We took reluctant leave of Mushie and went over to

where Kijo now sat with his back to us, ignoring us magnificently.

**T**HERE IS NOTHING to prepare you for the impact of the massiveness of a silverback. Female gorillas are more on the human scale at about 165cm and they weigh up to around 78 kilos. Males can be over six foot, but can weigh over 200 kilos. They are easily ten times stronger than a human of similar height: no steroids could make a man accumulate such muscle mass on shoulders, back and haunches. Yet the comparisons still bear weight: gorillas share 98 per cent of our DNA, have similar blood groups and can catch all the human diseases. (Chimpanzees are related even more closely with 98.4 per cent; orang-utans are a little further away with 97.6 per cent.) Gorillas com-

municate, devise and use tools, and have ordered social structures. They prey on no other creature, being mostly vegetarian, and at Howletts they have been known to enjoy a beer. 'We can't give them cans any more since aluminium cans came in,' said Litchfield. 'Steel ones were OK, but they'd tear up the aluminium ones and could cut themselves.'

Giving an occasional beer to a gorilla is a clue to why there is such a difference between Howletts/Port Lympne and other zoos. The difference was in the founder, John Aspinall, who died in 2001, aged 74.

As the millionaire proprietor of a gambling club in London, he understood calculated risk. In the 1950s he bought a tiger cub from Harrods and kept her in his Belgravia home, along with a Capuchin

## Tiger etiquette

If you happen to meet a tiger, and cannot instantly jump into a car or retreat through a door that you can then shut securely, you have only one chance of survival. (Climbing trees or diving into water will avail you nothing with a tiger.) Here's what you do: blow air through your nose and mouth, making an airy, whispery FNEHF, FNEHF, FNEHF sort of sound, letting your lips flutter a little. It's the big-cat equivalent of the gorilla rumble, meaning 'G'day, nice tiger, I'm friendly and unchallenging!' If the tiger is hungry or in a bad mood, it won't work, but at least you'll have done all you possibly can. Good luck with it.

monkey and two Himalayan bears. As they grew, he realised they needed more space, and also that they were dangerous: his tiger cub, with one blow of her paw, killed a large dog that challenged her when Aspinall was walking her along the street late one night. Legend has it that a big win on the races then enabled him to buy a mansion and acreage in Kent: Howletts. There his collection of animals grew and his methods of keeping them became safer, though never conventional. He asserted controversially that animals should have regular physical contact with their keepers. It made sense in many ways: for one thing, they rarely needed tranquillising (always a risk to the animal) for relocation or veterinary treatment. In the mid-'80s he bought a much larger patch of land with a mansion some

miles from Howletts at Port Lympne (pronounced 'Lim').

There has always been risk involved in keeping of wild animals, in all zoos: since 1980, five keepers have died at their jobs in Aspinall's wild animal parks. Keepers had been killed in other zoos all over the world as well, but Aspinall's high profile and different views ensured that there would be more media interest. Three were killed by tigers, two by elephants. In 1980, Zeya, a Siberian tigress, killed two keepers. (After the second killing Aspinall shot her himself.) The third death, in 1994, was more worrying. Robert Boutwood is honest about the distress caused by the third man's death: Trevor Smith, like the other two, was a highly competent keeper, but perplexingly, unlike Zeya, the killer was a 'bonded' animal. That is, the tiger had been in close contact with Smith all its life; had been socialised and nurtured by him. It seemed to challenge all their theories.

**C**ANTERBURY COUNCIL then attempted to ban Howletts from allowing keepers to have further contact with animals. There was a public outcry: after a petition of over 250,000 signatures, the council gave up. Nick Marx, the current head keeper of big cats, was interviewed on video about the tragedy, which he witnessed along with horrified visitors. Marx had a theory that the tiger made a mistake, that it momentarily treated Smith as prey and was unable to resist its instinct to deliver the killing bite to his neck. Marx was philosophical about whether he would meet the same fate. 'I'm doing what I want to do; if it happens, it happens,' he says. His obvious love for his charges matches that of his boss. But Boutwood told us that they have now instituted more stringent health and safety procedures, and with great regret, have decided to stop keeper contact with tigers older than 16 months. We stopped by the large tiger enclosure at Port Lympne when Boutwood noted a Siberian tiger that was ambling around the bushes and greeted it with a strange snuffling sound (see breakout box). It approached and snuffled back. We were highly impressed.

Aspinall's legacy has been to make us see that there is a possibility of a human

relationship with wild animals that is beneficial to them and not just feeding our curiosity about them. Too often a zoo will have functioned as a museum where we can take a last look at the creatures whose future we have destroyed. Zoos can be desperately sad places, not just because the animals are miserable and bored and imprisoned, but because in them we can feel that efforts to preserve individual animals, no matter how kindly meant, are doomed if their habitat is destroyed. And our priorities are so often harmful to animals, even indirectly. When Aspinall was asked to take over the running of London Zoo, he replied that they should sell the entire site for its enormous real estate value and house the animals in state-of-the-art parks elsewhere with the proceeds. It was impossible, he was told. London Zoo's vintage cages had heritage status and must be preserved, even if no animals could be kept in them.

**A**T HOWLETT'S THERE is a feeling of freshness and energy in the place. It feels more like a creche, or even a farm—but without the sense that animals are a commodity—more like a co-operative endeavour with the animals. This could be because they are so keen on bonding with the animals, treating these refugees with companionship and respect. Aspinall's gift was to see this possibility: it showed in his determination to feed them gourmet tropical fruits and the occasional beer or chocolate. 'Why feed a gorilla rambutans?' someone asked him. 'Why not?' he replied.

His son Damian Aspinall, inheritor of the responsibility, along with Aspinall's half-brother, James Osborne, said on the video *John Aspinall: A Tribute* that the animals honoured his father because he honoured them. Like him, the keepers and other people we met at Howletts and Port Lympne seem permanently affected by the animals they serve.

When asked if his association with the animals during his long career at Howletts had influenced him in regard to human relationships and interactions, Robert Boutwood said playfully, 'Oh yes, they're much more sensible than we are.' More seriously, Boutwood reminded us of how easy it is for humans to forget their huge evolutionary advantages when comparing themselves with animals. He said that gorillas are not as adaptable as we, that



they are much more fragile emotionally, and can die easily of illnesses if things go wrong for them. And things are going very wrong for so many gorillas and other great apes around the world. Places like Howletts are becoming like Noah's ark. Creatures such as Przewalski horses and Barbary lions are now extinct in the wild: Howletts is breeding them successfully, and has a long-term policy of returning animals to their native habitat whenever possible. They have been trying to return gorillas to a sanctuary in Africa.

But it is terribly hard to do: too often that habitat is gone, or compromised by war, political corruption and disease and even if the animals were returned, they can be hunted ruthlessly again. Sometimes sanctuaries, by confining the animals to a relatively smaller area, can save poachers the trouble of looking for their prey.

Boutwood said that animals were honest and that their groups and social systems make you realise how supremely important your own close relationships are. The survival of an individual depends on the bonding with other individuals in the primary group. It begins with the mother who is of paramount importance: no infant can survive without maternal devotion. When zookeepers replace maternal care they often 'save' an individual animal only to set up a vicious circle—generations of animals who are in turn unable to rear young, who could never pass on their genes in the wild again.

**A**SPINALL'S ZOOS HAVE often had to hand-rear animals but he claimed that his policy of open contact between keepers and their charges can limit the problem of inability to rear. Animals are not stupid, says Boutwood. They know when they are in human territory; they know they are captive. This tension can be fatal to animals, and certainly interferes with their ability to breed. But if, as in Howletts & Port Lympne, they know their captors as friends, then they relax. A relaxed, happy animal will breed naturally. Aspinall's unmatched breeding record reads like a list of triumphs: no-one else in the world has got honey badgers to breed in captivity. (Remember the stubborn little animal that clung to the baddie's boot in *The Gods Must Be Crazy?* That was a honey badger.) There are around 68 different

endangered animal species at his parks. More breeding gorillas than anywhere else outside Africa. Twenty-three black rhinos at Port Lympne—the largest group outside Africa. They seem to like it there: the video shows Aspinall shoving family-sized blocks of chocolate between slices of bread and feeding them to an eager rhino. The rhinos we saw that freezing day did not seem at all affected by the cold: they, like the gorillas, had warm indoor quarters and could go there if they wanted. But a huge cow ran up and greeted Boutwood, nosing over the fence as if expecting a treat. Her calf bleated eagerly. Her head seemed as big as a dinosaur's to me—a metre long and furnished with huge horns, the formidable weapon that ironically dooms them to be poachers' prey. 'They thought a few years ago that if they cut off the horns then the poachers would leave them alone,' said Boutwood, 'but they killed them anyway so that they wouldn't have the trouble of stalking them again for nothing.'

Aspinall never studied academic zoology and was characteristically proud of the fact. He claimed to work entirely from his observations of the animals in their natural state. There is, of course, something here of the tradition of the British amateur bordering on eccentricity. If feeding chocolate sandwiches to black rhinos is eccentric, then he certainly was eccentric. But then so was the disconcertingly friendly rhino, which thrived on it. And animals and people thrived on his largesse: he pumped over 100 million pounds into the local economy of Kent during his life at Howletts.

Howletts has never received any financial support from government: Aspinall left money to help the place cover the gaps for the next few years, but every year the place costs twice as much to run as it takes in from the gate. This is partly because it is run, as Boutwood and Litchfield said, first for the animals, second for the keepers and third for the public. They are trying to start up a scheme encouraging people to make small regular direct debits, but it will take time to build up.

**W**HEN PAUL THEROUX wrote disdainfully in *Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Cape Town* (Penguin, 2002), of tourists intruding on gorillas' 'shrinking habitat so that they could boast of paddling

paws and fingers with a silverback gorilla and his mates in the dripping seclusion of the bewildered apes' bower', he missed two important points. Almost the only hope for the endangered animals is for tourism to fill economic gaps caused by eliminating poaching. And the way to encourage that is to get people either to reconnect with animals living naturally, or to learn about them in places where they are happy and well cared for. Mushie could tell him a thing or two. ■

**Juliette Hughes** is a freelance writer. She had her head licked by a giraffe when she was nine. Some people think that explains a lot.

Drawings of Mushie and Kijo by graphic artist **Lucille Hughes**.

## Websites to visit

[www.howletts.net](http://www.howletts.net)

The website has webcams and information on how you can assist them to continue.

[www.bushmeat.org/](http://www.bushmeat.org/)

About the hunting crisis affecting all wildlife, especially the apes, in Africa.

[news.nationalgeographic.com/](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/)  
Massively informative, with news of the ebola epidemic.

*Great Apes Survival Project*

[www.unep.org/grasp/](http://www.unep.org/grasp/)

A UN initiative on saving the world's great apes.

*The Jane Goodall Institute*

[www.janegoodall.org/](http://www.janegoodall.org/)

The chimpanzee specialist is campaigning over the bushmeat crisis.

*GLOBIO: Mapping Human Impacts on the Biosphere (Great Apes Study).*

[www.globio.info/region/africa](http://www.globio.info/region/africa)

Stunning satellite imagery with much food for thought.

# Watchdogs put down

**Moira Rayner** traces the sorry history of Australia's anti-corruption bodies

**K**EEPING GOVERNMENT accountable is the problem of our time. The people do not trust politicians or parliament; police have too often been caught out lying and stealing; judges have lost their mystique. If the institutions of a modern representative democracy can't be trusted, what then? We create statutory watchdogs.

But in February, two of them were taken to the pound.

The NSW Police Integrity Commission (PIC) failed, after its three-year, \$8 million 'Operation Malta' inquiry, to find any bottoms to boot or recommendations to make. This, despite 51 witnesses giving evidence about certain officers who were opposed to the reform of the state's police force. The Police Minister announced a 'review' while denying this would see the PIC put down.

In Western Australia the Police Minister, Attorney-General and Premier jointly released the interim recommendation of the Royal Commission into Police Corruption and announced the abolition of WA's Anti-Corruption Commission. Their announcement followed remarkably frank revelations from a 'rollover' detective, known as 'L5', who named some 40 corrupt officers at the Commission. The Commission was the West's third official inquiry into police-related misconduct since the 1970s. None of them found anything. The government will set up a new Corruption and Crime Commission, virtually a standing royal commission, by the end of August, when the Royal Commission ends.

The WA Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) was doomed from its birth in 1996. It never had the powers it needed—and repeatedly asked for—to be effective. It couldn't hold public hearings, grant

indemnities to witnesses, make findings or initiate prosecutions—it could only 'refer' to other authorities. It couldn't even bark. Its stringent 'confidentiality' provisions were thought by its chairman, Terry O'Connor QC, to prevent the ACC from making any public comment on its work, despite a 'public education' duty in its governing Act. So when the ACC was hounded not only by WA's powerful Police Union (which accuses ACC investigators of zealotry, bias and incompetence), but also by local media—especially the monopoly daily tabloid, the *West Australian*, and a local commercial radio station whose morning talkback host is a former editor of the *West Australian*—it couldn't fight back. As well, most MPs, ministers, shadow ministers and members of the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee (the 'watchdog on the watchdog') thought the ACC was not only unaccountable but arrogant and ineffective. Little wonder: the ACC never had the operational information it needed because of 'confidentiality'.

Yet virtually all of the Royal Commission's witnesses made their admissions first to the ACC, then to the Commission. The ACC conducted all the Royal Commission's telephone surveillance and joint investigations. It simply could not say so. When I was appointed a part-time member of the ACC on 11 December 2002, this muzzled guardian of the public interest had no website, no searchable database of allegations and no researched overview of the nature and extent of corruption in the public sector of the West.

The criticisms levelled at the ACC have been made against every anti-corruption body in Australia: that they are unaccountable, over-opinionated, over-zealous and inefficient.

Queensland's three-year-old Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) is under review by a parliamentary committee and accused of tardiness in investigating complaints, including one against Queensland's Chief Magistrate. It has less capacity to carry out its own investigations than its predecessor, the Criminal Justice Commission. Seven years ago, Queensland's then Minister for Police ticked off the CMC's predecessor for criticising inadequate safeguards over new police powers of arrest, saying that a non-elected body had no right to demand its views be implemented. It has not taken long for NSW's Police Integrity Commission, the establishment of which was recommended by the NSW Woods Royal Commission into police corruption, to come a cropper either.

**T**HE FACT IS that watchdogs, no matter how well-intentioned, clever or righteous, fail to protect the public interest very well for very long. New South Wales had plenty of watchdogs: a Professional Integrity Branch of the Police, an Inspector-General accountable to an independent Police Board (a position abolished in 1993 as 'unnecessary'), an Ombudsman, a DPP, a Crime Commission, and even a relatively youthful Independent Commission Against Corruption that had more powers than Commissioner Woods, but failed to use them. It took an outsider—Woods—with curiosity, a limited focus, ample resources and tenacity to track corruption down.

Standing bodies do not typically have curiosity, limited focus, tenacity or ample resources.

Governments tend to set up watchdogs when they need to be seen to be doing

something. Living with them is another matter. Western Australia's Royal Commission looks like it will get the proof of what many WA defence lawyers already believe: that there are at least pockets of so-called 'noble cause' corruption, which morph swiftly from verbals and bullying to perjury, extortion, torture and crime.

Oppositions usually like anti-corruption watchdogs because they embarrass governments. In Western Australia, the ACC's demise should embarrass the Opposition as well: when in government they too failed to provide the powers necessary for the ACC to function.

Watchdogs such as Victoria's Auditor-General Ches Bharagwanath (almost deified by Jeffrey Kennett while he was in Opposition and the Cain/Kirner government was under attack) are far less acceptable when Opposition becomes government. Typically, they are subjected to inquiries whose outcomes are known, and their 'message' about the proprieties of government conduct is trivialised or denied.

Governments that create these bodies anew usually hamper their capacity to deliver the goods. Sometimes this is achieved by deliberately limiting their functions. WA's first Official Corruption Commissioner was retired Justice Wickham who, in 1988, was expected to receive and refer allegations of corruption without the benefit of any staff. He became, in effect, a privileged letter box, forwarding to others for investigation credible citizen-initiated claims of corruption.

Sometimes the hampering is done by starving the bodies of resources. New South Wales ICAC Commissioner Irene Moss referred in a 2001 speech to the '80 per cent rule': typically, anti-corruption bodies get about 80 per cent of what they need and so are forced to refer most corruption allegations back to the agencies in question for them to investigate internally. Western Australia's new anti-corruption body will have a huge new mandate, including the investigation of organised crime and local government inquiries. It will also have powers, including the ability to hold public hearings, and responsibilities such as providing witness protection. Its proposed budget, however, of less than \$20 million (not even twice the ACC's present budget) will not enable

it to carry out all those functions.

The new WA Corruption and Crime Commission will vest all of its powers and discretions in a single commissioner. The Royal Commission recommends that the new commissioner should be a judge, which raises concerns about a potential breach of the separation of powers—the appointment is to be made by the Executive. (The ACC members, uniquely in Australia, are appointed by an independent committee comprised of the Chief



Justice, the Chief Judge of the District Court and the Solicitor-General.)

A standing royal commission is a contradiction in terms. A royal commission is an executive inquiry with vast, focused, temporary powers. A standing body, a permanent watchdog, quickly develops its own cultural norms and powers. The new body is to be accountable to a 'Parliamentary Inspector'—but how can that work, in the closed circle of WA politics?

The elimination of corruption, as distinct from the elimination of organised crime, is not achieved in a culture of fear but rather in one of legitimate expectation. When the ethical principles underpinning

the law are understood, approved and willingly implemented, then corruption can be expunged. But it won't happen when good people can't bear to work in their watchdog offices because they feel compromised, or when honest cops make cautious decisions and take defensive positions because they (unreasonably) fear other, probably equally honest, officers.

Creating an ethical culture is a long-term project. Anti-corruption watchdogs don't live long enough to become wise or remain enthusiastic, original and effective—and fair. The idea of a 'standing royal commission' is a contradiction in terms, giving enormous executive power to one person in a particularly closed legal culture—remember, WA's closest capital city is Jakarta.

Perhaps we might consider a different 'integrity' model that does not institutionalise power at all. Perhaps every few years, those who control the state's coercive powers and financial institutions should be scrutinised by an outsider, an independent auditor or investigator. The true value of a Costigan, a Fitzgerald, a Woods and WA's almost silent Justice Kennedy is their lonely integrity.

Only an outsider would notice that to which others have become unresponsive or over-familiar. She or he could observe, receive confidences, force public disclosures, make recommendations and then move on, leaving integrity and management strategies

that would probably work—at least for a while.

The major obstacle to this modest proposal is the limited number of 'commissioners' who would be willing to live with the personal odium that follows their work, and the swift resurgence of the old ways. As Byron wrote, 'Tis sweet to hear the watchdog's honest bark.' But not all night. ■

**Moirá Rayner**, author of *Rooting Democracy—Growing the Society We Want*, was appointed a part-time Commissioner of the Western Australian Anti-Corruption Commission on 11 December 2002, for one year.



## Dire diary

**B**Y AND LARGE I disapprove of diaries or, to be more precise, I disapprove of the effort required to keep diaries. I have tried on a number of signal occasions during my life to record the great (or mostly ephemeral) flux of events as they washed over me day by day, and I have failed. On the third or perhaps the eighth or, best ever, on the 29th day, I have given up. The encrypting pen has fallen from my nerveless fingers, stupefied by the banal run of recorded events that scarcely merited being allowed to *happen* let alone being written down.

For extremely busy and prominent people, like, say, John Howard or Alexander Downer, the diary might be a luxury they cannot afford the time for. But addicted diarists, of whom, for all I know, Howard and Downer may be two, will always write *something* down, which is another one of the many things wrong with this form of self-expression. Imagine the swiftly scrawled entries in John Howard's diary over the latter days of February and in early March—swiftly scrawled but still influenced by the inveterate diarist's need to give the impression of development and evolution, and to deny, correspondingly, that one day may—and usually does—turn out to be depressingly like those before it.

24th Feb: 'Saddam Hussein is running out of time.'  
25th Feb: 'For Saddam Hussein, time is running out.'  
26th Feb: 'Time is what is running out for Saddam Hussein.'  
27th Feb: 'Running out for Saddam Hussein is—TIME!'  
28th Feb: 'Check with George to see if time still running out for SH.'  
1st March: 'Pinch and a punch first day of the month and no returns.'

Or Alexander Downer's equivalent quotidian notes.  
24th Feb: 'War starts in five days.'  
25th Feb: 'War starts in four days.'  
26th Feb: 'War starts in two days.'  
27th Feb: 'Pinch and a punch first day of the month and no returns.'  
28th Feb: 'Shit!'

I think one of the reasons I so deeply loathe those newspaper feature pieces that purport to be a typical week in the life of some luminary, celebrity or other significant nubile or virile, is that such effusions are actually disguised diaries. But diaries of the worst kind—diaries in which life is just so packed, exciting, lovely, promising and fulfilling that it is almost impossible to contemplate it without inducing dangerous rapture.

'Monday: Excellent jog round the Tan. Later, met Fifi for coffee at La Gabetta before signing the Falconi deal. Coalition of the willing invaded Iraq. Or was that yesterday?'

I know I hate this stuff because I found among my archives (that is, piles of papers randomly abandoned in the cupboards, the corners and under the table of the room I call my 'study'), the following aperçu—an anti-diary from my distant past, a

tortured tirade against the deceptions of the world of 'Dear Diary' and 'That was My Week'.

'Is there anybody left out there who still finds mouse dirt in the pantry? Who has mice that are too intellectual to be deceived by a trap and seem to thrive on virulent poisons? Who forgets to put out the rubbish two weeks running? Whose team loses after being 63 points in front at half-time? Who has noticed a slight variation in bowel routine that must surely denote cancer? Who has failed for two and a half years to organise an optometrist appointment and has as a result the largest collection of abandoned magnifiers in the Pacific basin? Who remembers to put out the rubbish in the third week only to have it disdained by the garbos because the local foraging cats have spread it a mile down the road during the night?

'Surely there are just a few others who submit their 'best' kitchen knives to a sharpening steel, stropping in the approved and wristy manner, and succeed in producing edges so dull that if applied to the roast lamb they leave a broad, blunt furrow.

**'D**OESN'T ANYBODY ELSE have a pop-up toaster with five sensitive settings, each of which burns even the coarsest bread to a black twist? That sometimes "pops up" with such anti-Newtonian fervour that it flings the incinerated wafer high in the air and drops it into the washing-up water, but at other unpredictable moments imprisons a piece of bread, regardless of its configuration, as if in a vise so that it is only ever retrievable by fishing for it with a knife—a process which blacks out the entire house if the dryer is also running?

'Is there really nowhere else in this best of all possible worlds where Marcus Aurelius is daily invoked: "This too shall pass"? Where each pair of socks consigned to the wash metamorphoses into one sock, while the other one is transmuted through the ether by means unknown to science, and re-emerges in another room transformed into a wire coat-hanger? Is there no other household that counterposes 683 wire coathangers with five and a half dozen odd socks?'

Dear bloody diary: *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Whom the Gods wish to destroy, they first make mad. This too shall pass. And so on ... Add your own favourites. Time is running out.* ■

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



# Perilous journeys

*Tale 1: Maybe I will see you in paradise*

**O**N 19 OCTOBER 2001, a woman gave birth on a sinking boat en route from Indonesia to Christmas Island. She was one of 421 people, including 146 children, 142 women and 65 men, who had boarded the boat the previous day in the Sumatran port of Lampung with hopes of being reunited with loved ones who had preceded them, and of beginning life anew in Australia. She was last seen, by survivors, drifting past with her baby attached by the umbilical cord.

Amal Hassan Basry, a survivor of the tragedy who now lives in Melbourne, says that at least three women gave birth as the boat sank. One of the mothers was just six months pregnant. The tragedy induced the births prematurely. Amal recalls the events of that day with great clarity. She knows the exact moment the boat capsized: ten past three in the afternoon. Many watches stopped at that time.

'Because I was waiting for my death, I saw everything. I was like a camera,' she tells me. 'I can still hear the shouting, the screaming. I see the people going under, my son swimming towards me. Everything.'

More than one year later, the memory of the tragedy remains a raw wound. But before she recounts the story, Amal insists on telling me why she was so desperate to make the journey. 'I want people to know why I stayed on the boat even when I saw it was very dangerous', she says. 'I want people to know who I am. Why I escaped from Iraq. Why I risked my life. Why I wanted to come to Australia. Maybe then they will understand.'

We meet in the living room of the Thornbury Asylum Seeker Resource Centre. It is a house of welcome, a place where we can talk in peace. I see the strain on Amal's face and the lingering anguish in her eyes. As if sensing my thoughts, Amal says, 'I'm a strong woman, believe me.'

Amal's troubles began in 1980, when her husband, an engineer, was conscripted to fight in Saddam Hussein's war against Iran. She left her job in the Bank of Iraq, in Baghdad, to look after their three young children in his absence. The eight-year war claimed an estimated one million lives.

In 1990, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, and in 1991, at the height of the Gulf War, Amal's 20-year-old brother, a civilian worker, was killed by an American bomb in the southern city of Basra. 'Collateral damage' is the term US officials use to describe

such 'incidents'. Months later, in the wake of Iraq's defeat, a second brother, 29 years old, was executed because he had refused to take part in the fighting. 'He said he did not want to kill people, that Kuwaitis are my brothers and sisters', says Amal. 'So he got six bullets in his chest.'

In the same year, a brother-in-law was killed in Southern Iraq for taking part in a Shiite revolt against Saddam's regime. Amal's entire family was now under surveillance. Her husband, and two of his brothers, were jailed and tortured in 1995. In 1997, the police came for them again. The family was threatened and harassed. One brother-in-law was arrested and has not been heard of since.

It was time to escape. Amal and her family found sanctuary in northern Iraq, in the Kurdish zone, with Iraqi Kurds who had been persecuted by Saddam Hussein. They lived there for 18 months, in an area that was under threat of attack. In 1999, with the help of the Kurds, the family fled to Iran.

At this time, word had it that Australia was a potential haven. They would be welcomed, Amal's family was told. Her husband flew to Malaysia. He arrived by boat on Australia's north-west coast in January 2000. After eight months in Woomera Detention Centre, he was granted a temporary protection visa (TPV) and settled in Melbourne.

Amal was determined to join her husband as soon as possible. He phoned her in Iran and warned her the journey was too dangerous. But Amal could not wait. Under the conditions of his temporary protection visa, her husband could not leave Australia to visit her. The family faced years of separation. Life in Iran, where refugees numbered in the hundreds of thousands, had become very difficult. Deportation was a constant threat.

**I**N JULY 2001, Amal left her 19-year-old son in Iran, and together with her younger son, then aged 17, she flew to Malaysia. At each stage of the journey there were moments of great danger and payments to be made to people smugglers whose promises could turn out to be lies or half-truths.

From Malaysia Amal journeyed by boat to Sumatra. She finally arrived in Jakarta where she met people smuggler Abu Quassey. 'He told us that he had a boat that would take us to Australia. He said it was a big boat, with a lot of space, radar, satellite, plenty of food, toilets. We had to pay 500 dollars American. We went by ferry back to Sumatra, and by bus to the port of Lampung, in the middle of the night.'

The women and children were the first to be taken from the beach to the boat, by launch, in the pre-dawn darkness, on 18 October. As they boarded the boat, now known as SIEV X (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel X), Amal and her companions realised that the smugglers had lied. The vessel was just 19 metres long, and four metres wide. A fishing boat of this length could barely carry 150 people, let alone the

421 asylum seekers who were being ferried to the ill-equipped vessel. 'We couldn't believe it', says Amal. 'We were crowded together. It was raining. There was little food. We were fed only bread and water. The sea was angry. We quickly became sick.'

Amal's teenage son sat on the roof of the cabin while she remained on the deck. Others crammed into the hold. Those on board came mainly from Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran. Later that morning 24 asylum seekers, Mandaean Christians from Iraq, disembarked near a group of islands, south of the Sunda Strait.

At dawn on 19 October, says Amal, one of the Indonesian crew informed the passengers they had moved into international waters. They were well on the way to Christmas Island. A group of children saw dolphins swimming by. For a while the refugees' spirits lifted and their fantasies were revived. 'What do you think Australia looks like?' the children asked. 'Like paradise', was a common reply. Others thought of the husbands and fathers they would soon be reunited with. 'Everyone had their special dream about Australia,' says Amal. At one in the afternoon, the engine broke down. The backup motor proved useless. The sea was becoming rougher. 'We were very afraid. We were crying. The children were crying. We prayed to God. Everybody was praying.'

At two o'clock the boat began taking water. Passengers were instructed to throw luggage overboard. Some joined the crew in bailing water with improvised scoops. As the boat listed heavily, panic began to take hold. Soon after, the top-heavy vessel capsized. Many women and children were trapped in the hold. Amal closed her eyes, lost consciousness, and came to underwater. Somehow she managed to propel herself to the surface.

When she opened her eyes, the boat had resurfaced and was beginning to break up. Amal saw people drinking water. Shouting. Drowning. 'The doors to hell opened to us. One man was screaming—all my family are gone. My wife die. My daughter die. Then I thought about my two sons, my husband, my daughter and her children in Jordan. I had to live for them. I had to find a way.'

Amal speaks with a sense of urgency, as if driven by a need to record each detail: 'I saw a dead woman in a life jacket, floating. I cannot swim, so I held onto her. I remembered that when I was a child I read a story about a body that could float. That memory saved me. Then I saw my son. He was holding onto a piece of wood. He said, mother I want to give you one last kiss. He took the life jacket off the dead woman and helped me put it on. Then he said goodbye mother. Maybe I will see you in Paradise.'

Amal clung to the woman's body. As night fell she was floating alone. She disappeared into the dark. It was cold and still raining. Says Amal: 'I spoke to the dead woman. I said, forgive me, but you save me. I was drinking in water. I was waiting for the time of my death.'

Photograph previous page,  
taken by *Mathias Heng*  
in Baghdad, of the Omran  
family, four generations of  
women who live together in  
this Baghdad house  
Their men are at work  
outside the home.

Amal saw a shark circling. She believes that it did not attack her because her clothes were saturated with fuel. She saw a whale spouting water. That night she saw lights. She could hear other survivors calling for help. She came upon friends clinging to debris, planks of wood. They moved together towards the lights. For two hours they fought the waves as they tried to reach the mystery boats. 'When we came closer, I saw three boats, two bigger and one smaller boat. I heard their horns. We cried for help, but they did not save us.'

At dawn Amal saw no-one as she drifted on. Later that morning, she saw an Indonesian fishing boat. A crew member jumped in to take her on board. Only when he touched her did Amal finally let go of the woman's body. She had clung to the corpse for about 20 hours.

On the boat there were about 40 asylum seekers the fishermen had rescued. Amal was frantic in her concern for her missing boy: 'I cried: My son! My son! Some people told me they saw him half an hour ago. I wanted to jump in, to go after him. I asked the captain, please turn back, and he did it. One hour later we found him. He was holding onto a piece of wood. He kissed me. He held onto me. He was sitting next to me like a baby.'

One of the rescued was a twelve-year-old girl, Zeinab, who had lost her entire family—her mother, father, two brothers and two sisters. Says Amal: 'She was crying. She was saying, I'm all alone now. I told her I will take you. You can be my daughter. We were in the fishing boat for three nights. I dreamed of sharks. I woke up and saw it was not a shark, but my son.'

After a seven-and-half-month wait in Jakarta, Amal was granted a five-year temporary protection visa and was reunited, on 7 June, with her husband in Melbourne. But after all she had endured, her future remained uncertain. She envied those survivors who had been taken in by Scandinavian countries where, Amal claims, they have been treated far more sympathetically, and given permanent residency. At one point, in Jakarta, she had implored UN officials to allow her to go to Norway. She felt it was better to bring her husband over there where she could get on with her life with greater certainty. Australia had become the most feared destination for survivors. 'We thought Australians do not like us.'

Amal credits the softening of her feelings to 'some good people'. She speaks glowingly of the volunteers who work at the Thornbury Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, and of her teachers at Broadmeadows TAFE. 'They are beautiful. They give me new hope. I know good Australian people who stand by me, and help me. I want to learn computer. I want to work. I want to help my son who is in Iran. He is still in danger.'

The memory of the tragedy pursues her. On the 19th day of every month, Amal relives the sinking.

Every day she glances at her watch, at about 3.10pm, and is seized by the memory of the boat capsizing. The watch was a farewell present from Zeinab, her 'adopted' daughter, who was reunited with relatives in Sydney. 'Think of me when you look at the watch', she had asked Amal, before they parted in Jakarta.

Almost every night Amal dreams she is sleeping on the ocean: 'I can't breathe. I am alone. Then I see people who are shouting: Turn back! Turn back! You're going to drown. I put out my hand to stop, and I wake up with my hand still held out. My husband hears me call out and he turns on the light.'

Amal has another recurring dream. She is walking. It is dark. She sees a door. She opens it and can see paradise. Inside, she sees all those who had perished in the disaster. 'In the dream they are happy,' she says. 'But I do not want to go in. I close the door, and return to life. My true dream is to live with my family, in peace.'

### *Tale 2: Living in limbo*

**A**FRAYED VISA DOCUMENT, a learner's driving licence and an interim Medicare card are all that remains of Zainalabaden Aluomer's former presence in Australia. The visa, printed on cardboard, was his longed for passport to a new life. Instead, it proved to be one of the factors that contributed to his death.

Aluomer's nightmare began when his father was executed by Saddam Hussein in 1982. Aluomer escaped to Iran in 1991 and languished for eight years in refugee camps both in Iran and Saudi Arabia. In 1999, as the situation for Iraqi refugees in Iran continued to deteriorate, he left behind his wife and mother with the promise of reuniting with them in a country where they could feel safe.

Aluomer arrived in Australia by boat from Indonesia in September 1999, and was transferred to the Curtin Detention Centre in Western Australia. When he was finally released in September 2000, he was granted a three-year temporary protection visa and bussed to Melbourne, where he was left to fend for himself.

With help from caseworkers at the Ecumenical Migration Centre, and the Darebin City Council, Aluomer was able to find transitional accommodation in a flat in West Heidelberg. Early in 2001, Aluomer learnt that his wife and mother had arrived in Jakarta and were looking for a boat that would enable them to make the final run to Australia. He pleaded with them, by phone, not to risk the voyage.

To understand what happened next, we need to look at the provisions of Aluomer's visa. Between 1994 and 1999 asylum seekers, including those arriving by boat, who were found to be genuine refugees, were granted permanent protection visas, subject to health and character checks. This visa entitled them eventually to sponsor family members they had left behind.

In October 1999, the Howard Government introduced a new visa regime. Asylum seekers arriving

by boat, and judged to be genuine refugees, were to receive three-year temporary protection visas. They were required to wait 30 months before being eligible to apply for permanent protection. Until then they could not be reunited with their families. If they left the country merely to visit their loved ones they could not return. In effect, this meant they could not hope to see their wives and children for years. They could also be required to return to their countries of origin at the end of this three-year period, if it was deemed safe to do so.

Aluomer's wife and mother could not wait any longer. They decided it was preferable to risk their lives in flimsy fishing boats than to remain separated from him indefinitely. Aluomer consulted with Haider Al Juboory who was then a caseworker for the City of Darebin and the Ecumenical Migration Centre. He was contemplating the possibility of joining his wife and mother even though it meant losing his visa. He was advised against leaving Australia, but he could not bear the thought of his loved ones taking the boat journey unprotected and alone. He flew to Indonesia on 13 July 2001.

On Friday, 19 October 2001, Aluomer, along with his wife and mother, boarded a leaking fishing boat in Sumatra. They were among the 353 asylum seekers who drowned when the boat sank later that day, en route to Christmas Island.

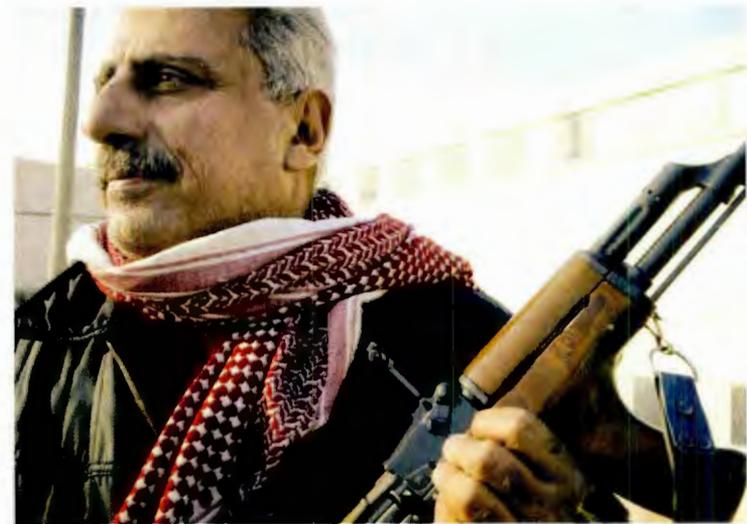
Aluomer's tale was publicly recounted on Friday, 2 November 2001, at a memorial service for the victims of the SIEV X tragedy, held at the Migrant Resource Centre in High Street, Preston. Among those present were asylum seekers who had lost family on the boat. I have rarely seen a group of more devastated people. Their distress had been compounded because, as holders of temporary protection visas, they could not even visit survivors of the tragedy.

SOME OF THOSE present at the memorial service had an additional reason for feeling bereft. Just weeks earlier, on 27 September 2001, the Howard Government's revised visa regime had become effective. According to the new provisions, asylum seekers who, en route to Australia, have spent a continuous period of seven days or more in a country in which they could have sought and obtained protection, can now never gain permanent residency. Instead they must apply, every three years, for a renewal of their temporary visas. In effect this means they can remain in Australia, but cannot be reunited with their families either in this country, or anywhere else, indefinitely—unless they are prepared to forfeit their right to protection.

The predicament of TPV holders was highlighted by the plight of Sydney-based refugee, Ahmed Alzalimi, who lost three daughters in the boat tragedy—Eman, aged eight, Zahra, six, and Fatimah, five. Ahmed had arrived in Australia before his wife, and spent eight months in Curtin Detention Centre, before being granted a three-year temporary protection visa. The

government refused his plea to visit his grieving wife, Sondos Ismael, in Indonesia, unless he was prepared to forfeit his right to return to Australia. For the next five months, 27-year-old Sondos Ismael grieved alone as Australian immigration officials investigated the details of her visa application. She was finally reunited with her husband in Sydney on 21 March 2002.

Hazam Al Rowaimi, a 29-year-old Iraqi asylum seeker, was fruit picking in Mildura when he heard the news of his tragic loss. Al Rowaimi, who fled Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 1999, lost his wife, Akhlas, his mother, Hamda, and four children: Noor, aged eleven, Fatama, eight, Nargis, five, and Mohamed, three. Al Rowaimi had warned his family, by phone, not to embark upon the dangerous journey from Jakarta. But almost three years of separation was too much to endure. Again, the travel restriction on his temporary protection visa was one of the major reasons his loved ones chose to risk the journey on an unseaworthy boat.



Ten days after the memorial service I met a group of eight asylum seekers, now released from detention, who are caught in the noose of the new temporary protection visa regime. Their countries of origin include Syria, Iran, Iraq and Yemen. All have wives, children, or other family members who remain in the country they fled, or within refugee camps in third countries. They live in Melbourne's northern suburbs where several hundred TPV holders are now concentrated.

All eight had been found to be genuine refugees. Some had been tortured or threatened with death in their countries of origin. They had all lived, for varying periods, in third countries en route, and had arrived in Australia by boat. Several had lived in a series of refugee camps for up to a decade.

The men I spoke to did not wish to reveal their names. They fear they could be put in jeopardy by speaking out. There is an irony in this. As one of the men put it: 'We chose Australia because it was a democratic country. It was our dream to

Photograph above right by Mathias Heng. The man pictured is Abdulilah Abbas, Baghdad taxi driver and veteran of the Iran-Iraq war. The Kalashnikov he's carrying—standard, if rather ancient, issue for civilians—is normally kept in the boot of his taxi..

live in freedom. This is why we risked our lives.'

The pain of their situation was evident in the tears that came to their eyes as they spoke. Some have nightmares in which they have seen their families beyond reach, beyond touch. Others wake up screaming their children's names. Those who are able to speak to their children by phone sometimes break down during their conversations. One regularly walks the streets all night, rather than return to his terrifying dreams. He has come to fear the night.

The men all spoke of their sense of vulnerability and anguish: 'September 27 was a black day. Since then we have not felt safe or protected. We feel that the government has set a trap. They want to break us. We are knocking on closed doors. We do not know when this will end. We feel like animals caught in a steel trap.'

Several of the men I spoke to said the most difficult aspect of their ordeal was being unable to practice their hard-won skills and qualifications. The group included a journalist, a metallurgical engineer,

their country of origin. The men I spoke to feel like outcasts. They believe many Australians are against them. They know the Howard Government cares naught for their plight.

The new legislation is also retrospective in impact. It not only applies to people who have arrived since 27 September 2001, but also to anyone who had been previously granted a TPV, but had failed to lodge their application for permanent protection by that date. There was no warning or amnesty period offered by the government.

There is an additional catch. Asylum seekers who decide they have had enough of this agony are, in some cases, not even able to return to their families because they do not have the papers that would enable them to do so. Others cannot return because it could mean further persecution or even death.

ON 11 JANUARY 2001, *The Age* published a story I wrote about a TPV holder, Mohammed Arif Fayazi. Mohammed is an Afghan refugee, and a member of the much-persecuted Hazara minority—he had fled because his life was in immediate danger. He now lives in a high-rise flat in Fitzroy. He left behind a wife, teenage daughter and baby twins. Several days after the article was published, I received an irate message on my answering machine. 'That Mohammed character is having you on. How could anyone leave behind his wife and children?' the anonymous caller complained.

He was ignorant of the history of migration. In all countries from which there has been significant migration, for reasons that range from political persecution to extreme poverty, it has been a common pattern for fathers to leave first to pave the way for their families. Often the family has pooled together their resources to allow one person to make the journey. This has been the case for emigrants of all backgrounds.

There is a sad sequel to the story of Mohammed Arif Fayazi. In mid 2001, he received news that his wife had escaped to Pakistan. But he had lost two of his children. His older daughter, and one of the twins, had died as a result of disease brought on by famine and lack of appropriate medicines.

The news was a devastating blow. In the ensuing days he spent many hours in his Fitzroy flat curled up like a shadow. He had often dreamt of the moment when he would be reunited with his family. His deep depression has been intensified because, under the conditions of his temporary protection visa, he will not be allowed to see his wife and remaining child for at least two years. And possibly much longer.

In January 2003, Mohammed Arif Fayazi received the dreaded letter. His TPV was coming to an end. He has been offered a sum of money in exchange for his voluntary return to Afghanistan. Mohammed's Hazara friends, fellow TPV holders, who are still in touch with relatives, report that the situation in post-Taliban Afghanistan is deteriorating. Outside Kabul the

an artist, a surgical technician and an economist. They say they have so much they wish to offer their new country. But when potential employers discover they are on temporary visas, they are overlooked for the job. Instead they work at whatever comes along. Many travel to country areas in the fruit-picking season. Others work in the abattoirs, or in other menial jobs.

Said one: 'I am floating between sky and earth. We are in Australia, but we are not a part of Australia. I want to show Australians what I can do. But in this situation I cannot focus. I feel shattered. My mind goes blank when I think about my family. Australia is a beautiful place, but we cannot enjoy it. This legislation is a rope around my neck.'

According to caseworkers I have spoken to, TPV holders exhibit both physical and psychological symptoms of trauma. Some are suicidal, others severely depressed. All suffer from a sense of guilt for not being able to help their families, especially those who have relatives still being persecuted in

Photograph above left by Mathias Heng. Lateefa Flaih, houseproud and well provisioned (her store contains six months of food rations) lives in Saddam City, one of the poorest areas of Baghdad.

country is returning to the control of rival warlords. 'Now we are dealing with many Talibans', Mohammed tells me. 'Even in Kabul there is little security. For ordinary people the situation is getting worse. They live both in fear of their lives, and in extreme poverty.'

Mohammed says that Hazara TPV holders are now extremely depressed: 'A lot of the young Hazaras are now like old men. They feel that their life is worth nothing. They do not smile or laugh. They have no energy to laugh.'

The Howard Government's visa regime has very little to do with 'protection', or with upholding the rights of refugees as defined by UN conventions. The regime is punitive. It was designed to break the spirit of asylum seekers in order to deter others from making the journey.

In most spiritual traditions it is said that the cruellest fate that can befall a human being is to live in limbo. It is described as a predicament worse than death. Many of our refugees now belong to a new underclass, and are condemned to live in an eternal twilight zone in which they cannot even begin to rebuild their lives, or even hope to be reunited with their families. As one of the asylum seekers I talked to put it: 'We feel there is no end in sight to our agony.'

**T**HERE ARE MANY questions that remain unanswered about the sinking of SIEV X. Former Australian diplomat, Tony Kevin, who has pursued the case with great tenacity, summed up the issues in a damning speech delivered at the Perth Writers' Festival on 8 February this year.

Kevin asks two principle questions. First, what happened in Indonesia 'for this boat to embark in so obviously unseaworthy and overloaded condition'? And second, what 'happened at sea, for the highly resourced Australian border protection military exercise [Operation Relax] not to detect this boat in danger, and to take emergency action to try to save lives'?

Kevin asserts that it is now established that the vessel sank in international waters, at least 50 nautical miles south of Java, and not in Indonesian waters as the Howard Government maintained in the days following the sinking. There is evidence in the form of a Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade cable, recently declassified, that Howard and his senior advisers knew the details of the sinking within four days of the tragedy.

The cable, issued on 23 October 2001, is remarkable for its detailed account of the SIEV X journey, the route taken, and the position of the boat when it sank. It traces the fatal voyage from the time the asylum seekers departed at 1.30am on 18 October, to the arrival of the rescued survivors in Jakarta on Monday evening, 22 October. These details have been confirmed by survivor testimonies.

The sinking of SIEV X warrants, at least, an independent judicial enquiry. On 10 December 2002, the Senate passed a motion—with the support of the ALP, Democrats, Greens and Independents—calling for such an enquiry.

There are other unanswered questions. Who manned the mystery boats that apparently did not respond to the pleas of survivors? Was this the logical outcome of the precedent set by the refusal to allow the *Tampa* to land in Australia? And those of us who have come to know some of the seven survivors who live in Australia, and have witnessed their continued distress, want to know why they have not received permanent residency. Why do they continue to live in limbo, caught between a terrifying past and uncertain future?

It is a cruel irony that the Australian government, which supported the invasion of Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, and now supports an attack on Iraq, and rightfully described these regimes as despotic, continues to treat those who have had the courage to flee these countries as criminals and illegal migrants.

There is a recent sequel to the events surrounding SIEV X that gives cause for hope while highlighting the continued agony of TPV holders. In February this year Sondos Ismael, who lost three daughters in the tragedy, gave birth to a daughter in Sydney. Because she and her husband, Ahmed Alzalimi, remain on temporary visas, they cannot look forward to the future. Sondos Ismael has said that she would rather die than leave Australia because this is closest to where her daughters drowned. Alzalimi's visa expired weeks ago and he still has not heard from immigration authorities. Perhaps the Howard Government is awaiting the outcome of the prospective war in Iraq, in the hope that it will provide an opportunity to send Iraqi asylum seekers back home.

The Australian government should release into the community all asylum seekers who continue to languish in detention, and are not a security concern, and grant permanent residence to all refugees currently on temporary protection visas. According to figures released in January 2003 by the Department of Immigration, there are currently 8607 TPV holders in all. They have committed no crime. They came here as asylum seekers, as is their right according to UN conventions to which Australia is a signatory. They have suffered far more than enough. They are entitled to begin life anew after their perilous journeys towards freedom. ■

**Arnold Zable** is a Melbourne author. His most recent book, *The Fig Tree* (Text Publishing, 2002), is about the lives of immigrants and displaced peoples.

*An earlier version of Amal's tale appeared in The Age on 19 October 2002, and an earlier version of Aliumer's tale was published in The Age on 13 December 2001. Tony Kevin's February speech, as well as the recently declassified cable, can be accessed at [www.sievx.com](http://www.sievx.com).*



# Surviving Africa

A remarkably peaceful change of government in Kenya could significantly improve the lives of refugees in the country's remote camps. But Australia and other western countries must play a part, says **Peter Browne**

**A**PPROACHING the UNHCR refugee camp at Kakuma, in far north-western Kenya, is a bit like flying across the hottest, driest stretch of the northern Mallee in the fifth year of a drought. Over 83,000 refugees from countries including Sudan, Somalia, the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi live here, fed—inadequately, at the moment—by the World Food Program, and provided with housing, sanitation, schooling and counselling by eight non-government agencies, all overseen by a UNHCR staff of around 60 people.

On my second day at Kakuma I met Yolande Floride, a refugee from Burundi in central Africa, who works for one of the

non-government agencies in the camp. In a tiny brick office, she described to me her journey from Burundi to Kenya. As a Burundian, she is not typical of the refugees I spoke to at the camp, but her story echoes others I heard from refugees, many of whom have attempted, sometimes more than once, to return to their own countries before resigning themselves to camp life.

Yolande grew up in Ngozi province of Burundi, the daughter of a mixed Hutu-Tutsi marriage. In mid-1993 she finished high school and was expecting to go on to Bujumbura University, where her boyfriend was already studying. Burundi's first democratically elected president, Melchior

Ndadaye from the Hutu majority, had just taken office after nearly three decades of recurring conflict within the country. The fact that he was identified as a Hutu was significant, for the Tutsi minority had dominated politics and the military since independence.

But, as Yolande points out, we need to be careful of talking about Tutsis and Hutus as if they are two quite distinct and identifiable ethnic groups. The distinction between Hutus and Tutsis was sharpened and reinforced as part of a divide-and-conquer strategy by the Belgians, who ruled Burundi until independence in 1962. Sometimes, says Yolande, the differences

in appearance are so slight that thugs from either side identify you by the part of the country you come from. 'People are being victims of where they are living,' she says, 'and when your parents are mixed, you are rejected by both sides.'

In October 1993, before university began, Burundi's President Ndadaye was assassinated in an attempted military coup. Violence broke out across the country, with Tutsis living in Hutu areas especially vulnerable to reprisals. An estimated 50,000 people were killed.

Yolande decided it was safest to go to

With the unrest continuing and no sign of classes beginning, Yolande and her boyfriend thought it safest to leave the country. They escaped to the Congo by bus, staying for two months with a Burundian parliamentarian in a town called Uvira. 'But we saw it was difficult for him to look after us, so we thought it was safer to go to a refugee camp.'

The UNHCR had set up a camp at Luberizi, in the Congo, to house refugees from Rwanda—where the massacres had taken place in early 1994—and from Burundi. 'I was working in the hospital, in

camp.' They stayed in the camp for over two years.

In October 1996, though, the camp was attacked, probably by Rwandans attempting to wipe out any groups of potential rebels near their border. Effectively, this was the beginning of the war in the Congo (involving local rebels backed by several governments in the region) which is only now being settled by the new Congolese president.

The camp was destroyed, and staff and refugees fled. Yolande and her boyfriend made the 100-kilometre walk back to



the town where her boyfriend was studying. 'On the way I was met by a group of Hutus who were about to kill me, saying I was a Tutsi. I was rescued by my classmate, who tried to explain. Because he was easily identified as a Hutu, they believed him.' She arrived at the university and waited for the academic year to begin. 'I was hoping to do economics,' she says, laughing, 'but now I have no interest in economics!'

charge of the medical store,' says Yolande. 'I had to go to an interview, show my school documents.'

With money, life was easier for Yolande and her boyfriend. 'The environment was not like Kakuma, anyway. It rained! Movement was easier, and there was much more interaction with the citizens ... We could easily leave camp to go to town. We could work outside the

Uvira. But after only five days, Uvira was attacked and again everyone had to flee. 'Everybody was just running, because these people were destroying and occupying the country.'

'It's a very long story!' she says, laughing, as I turn another page in my notebook.

Assuming she was one of the rebels, a group of Congolese captured her and threatened to kill her at nightfall. They

stabbed her boyfriend in the back but he escaped and went for help. He found another Congolese leader, explained and gave him money, and Yolande was released. Under armed escort, the Rwandans and Burundians were sent back to their own countries.

After three months in a government-run camp in Burundi, where they realised they were still not safe, and another five months in Nairobi, Yolande and her boyfriend ended up at Kakuma. 'I didn't want to go to another refugee camp. That's why we stayed five months in Nairobi. But the police were arresting refugees. They arrested my boyfriend and held him for ninety days. So that's why we decided to go to the camp.' It was September 1997.

Life was difficult for the two of them at Kakuma. They lived within the small Burundian community, but there were threats from other refugees who believed they were Tutsis. 'Recently, they openly said we were sent by the government to finish them off. That was an allegation they took to the UNHCR. UNHCR tried to get a solution, but they couldn't.'

Since last October Yolande and her boyfriend, now her husband, have lived in a tent in an open area away from other refugees because there's no room in the camp's small protection area, set up to house refugees at risk. Yolande hasn't heard from other members of her family since 1994.

**K**AKUMA IS AROUND 1200 kilometres from Nairobi, near Kenya's border with Sudan. It is one of two large refugee camps set up under Kenya's encampment program, intended to keep refugees out of Nairobi and other cities and towns.

When the camp was set up in 1992, the Kakuma township had a population of fewer than 7000, all of them members of the region's Turkana group. The Turkana are still a mainly nomadic people, struggling to survive in this arid landscape where the daily maximum temperature is rarely below 36 and Ugandan and Sudanese cattle thieves attack from across the border. Not surprisingly, they were hostile towards the refugees to begin with (and some of that hostility remains) but their numbers in the town have increased to over 40,000 as a small, vigorous economy has grown up within and around the camp.

Of the camp's 83,000 refugees, nearly 70 per cent of them are from Sudan—

mainly from the south—with another 25 per cent from Somalia and smaller groups from countries including the Congo, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. Most of the refugees live entirely on rations provided by the World Food Program, but in 2002 these provided an average of only 75 per cent of the recommended daily calorie intake. Since mid-February, rations are again at 75 per cent of the daily requirement, and a recent study found that more than 8000 of the children at the camp are malnourished, with thousands more in danger. Around the camp many of the refugees seem listless and ill, although the level of activity in the camp—a woman baking bread to sell, a man looking after his chooks, people walking from one part of the camp to another—is also striking.

A fortunate minority of the refugees have a family member among the 4000 or so who have jobs with the eight non-government aid organisations working at Kakuma. These 'incentive workers',

The [refugee] numbers have settled down to between 220,000 and 250,000—a figure that dwarfs Australia's intake, especially when you remember that Kenya's population is only 50 per cent larger than Australia's and its economy is much smaller.

who can't be offered formal employment, are paid between 700 and 2000 Kenyan shillings a month (up to \$A45). They can use their income to buy meat or vegetables, and a surprisingly diverse range of other goods, from tiny mudbrick shops, bars and restaurants set up by members of the various communities in the camp.

I drove through the Ethiopian market with Jose Kaippananickal, who runs vocational training and employment programs at Kakuma for Don Bosco. (Don Bosco was the 19th-century founder of the Salesian congregation, which works primarily with young people.) We had driven from the well-established areas around the Don Bosco offices and workshops in the middle of Kakuma, to the much newer section of the camp to the north, where row after row of small, identical mudbrick dwellings sit on a featureless expanse

of baked earth. Here, because the building program has not kept pace with new arrivals, some families are living in plastic UNHCR tents, in unimaginable heat.

Br Jose, who grew up in the South Indian city of Kerala, joined the Salesians when he was 15, trained as an electrical engineer, then studied social work, and had an ambition to teach teenagers practical skills. Immaculately dressed in a bright red long-sleeved shirt and crisp black trousers, he showed me around the Don Bosco projects, starting in a large workshop where young men are taught carpentry, and five permanent employees and dozens of casuals make tables, beds and solar cookers for the camp. Young men and women are learning tailoring and dressmaking in one building; in another, a large group of boys, and two girls, are clustered around an old four-wheel drive which they have dismantled and are now reassembling. Scattered through the camp, over 370 small groups of refugees

have been given in-kind loans—bicycles, groceries, small pieces of equipment—by Don Bosco to start businesses. Most of the bikes we see, usually with a passenger perched on the back, are run as bicycle taxis by these groups.

The trainees seem committed and enthusiastic and the teachers energetic and skilled. Meanwhile, about 80 graduates of the masonry course work in the teams that have built many of the mudbrick houses in the camp. In fact, the Don Bosco program is so impressive that I begin looking for flaws, and—because the organisation has a religious as well as a humanitarian mission—there are aspects of the program that others might do differently. But these are differences over detail, and the work of the organisation provides hundreds of refugees with an occupation, a government-recognised qualification or, at worst,

some relief from the great burden of life in the camp. Most of Don Bosco's funding at Kakuma comes from the Australian refugee organisation, Austcare.

Don Bosco has operated at Kakuma since 1993, through a period in which UNHCR policy has been forced to adapt to enormous pressures from outside and within the camp. Competition with the Turkana over food and firewood led to violence against refugees, especially against women searching for wood outside the camp. To deal with violence against women and secure a reliable fuel supply, the UNHCR eventually contracted a local group to supply firewood to the camp. In recognition of the inequalities emerging between refugees and local residents—even the minimal rations in the camp seemed generous from outside the camp—the UNHCR has helped establish or fund health, education and income-generating projects for the Turkanas, who also benefited from a growing trade with organisations working in the camp, and from job opportunities.

Inside the camp, other pressures were contributing to violence. Rebel groups have used the camp for recruiting, sometimes using force against boys and young men. Women and girls face a separate set of problems, which the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is attempting to deal with by creating a network of special services.

Heading the JRS at Kakuma, and supervising a staff of 160 refugees and nine others, is Sr Christina McGlynn—'an Irish woman born in Scotland' who has spent 15 years in Australia and Papua New Guinea, she tells me—who, wherever I go in the camp, is known and admired for her energy and warmth. JRS provides counselling and natural therapies for women in the camp. It runs three day-care centres providing crafts, sports and educational programs for women with severe illnesses or suffering trauma, and programs for their children. It runs a support group for single mothers, who can face hostility within their own communities. And it seems clear that the UNHCR relies on the

service to help identify women and girls who need special protection.

The main reason Kakuma exists—and exists in remote and inhospitable country—is the encampment policy of the Kenyan government, initiated in response to a massive influx of refugees in 1991. The numbers have settled down to between 220,000 and 250,000—a figure that dwarfs Australia's intake, especially when you remember that Kenya's population is only 50 per cent larger than Australia's and its economy is much smaller.

After three decades of rule by the increasingly corrupt KANU party, Kenyans voted in a new government at the end of December. Although there was



At work, at school and at play: above and on pages 35 and 36, people currently living in Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp. Photographs courtesy the UNHCR.

election-related violence and some killings, it was the quietest election campaign in a decade, and power changed hands with remarkably little antagonism. With economic growth stagnant, and donor countries withholding funds, there was immense popular pressure for change. The new government has set about reforming the leading institutions and exposing corruption with considerable energy—although there are fears that the momentum will slow—and one area of reform is refugee policy.

In February, the Home Affairs Minister announced that the two camps, Kakuma and Dadaad, would be moved to less arid areas. When the economy improves, refugees will be allowed to seek employ-

ment outside their camp. A new Bill will guarantee refugees' basic rights.

The announcement was greeted enthusiastically at Kakuma, although there's also a feeling that political opposition and implementation challenges will slow change. And there are practical issues out in the field, too: the need to find locations, closer to Nairobi, where a new refugee camp won't create resentment among local people, many of whom are already living in very difficult circumstances.

**F**OR THE UNHCR, the new government policy brings the prospect of a third option for assisting refugees: integration into Kenyan society. For refugees who are in danger in Kenya and can't return home, there is already the option of resettlement in countries like the US, Canada and Australia, but places are severely limited, with only around 6000 on offer each year.

The third option, repatriation, is often the best alternative for many refugees. But in a region where, despite some on-and-off peace negotiations, conflicts continue, repatriation is frequently impossible. And where it is possible, I was surprised to learn that the UNHCR doesn't necessarily have the funds to transport and settle refugees who feel it's safe to return home.

Whether this is the fault of donor countries, many of which have reduced their contribution to the UNHCR, or of the UNHCR itself, it's a very depressing reflection of the priorities of the West. While I was at Kakuma the US government released the list of companies that had successfully tendered to build homes and other infrastructure for the people displaced or made homeless during the war in Iraq. According to BBC News, the American companies who won the work will share between them \$US900 million, not far short of the total annual budget of the UNHCR. ■

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# Seoul-centring Korea

Encouraging the North–South relationship offers the best hope for North Korea and the world

**T**HE IMPERIALISM AT the heart of the emerging global system is nicely expressed by Zbigniew Brzezinski's formula, which was evidently taken to heart by the Bush administration:

## Empire and Nuclear Prerogative

... the three grand imperatives of imperial geostrategy are to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together.<sup>1</sup>

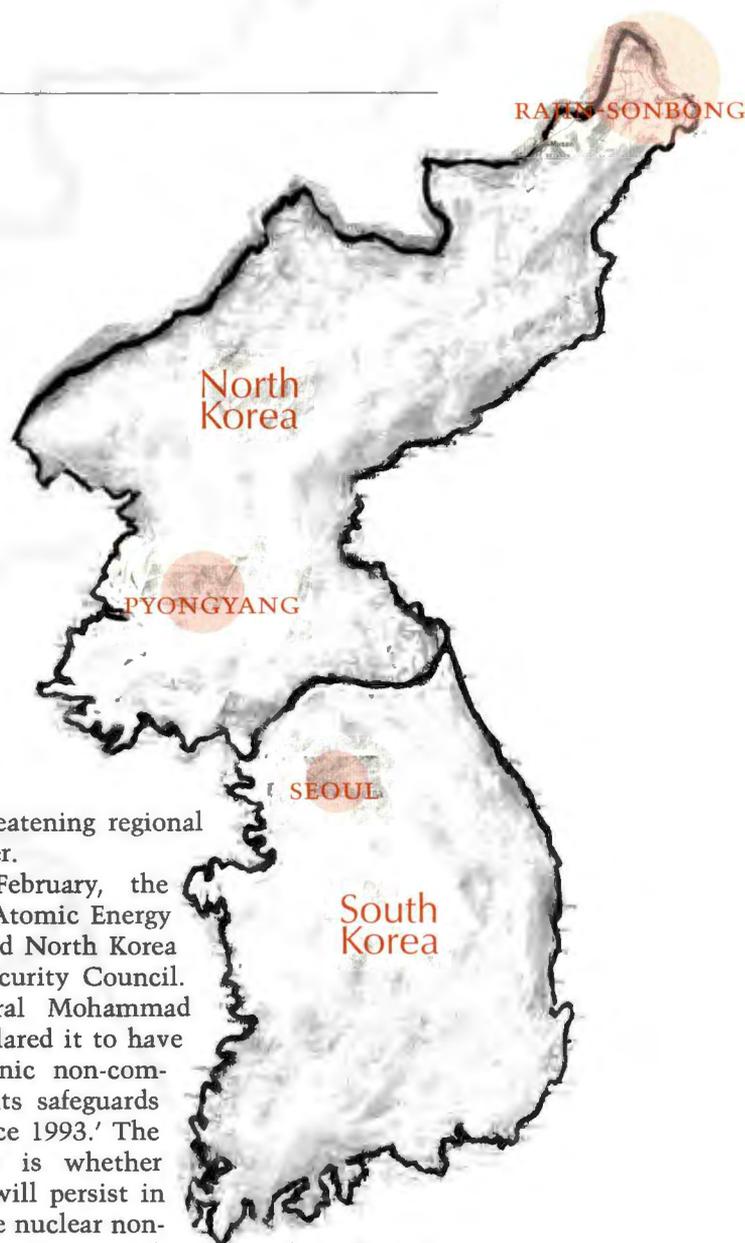
The presidential statement to Congress in September 2002 referred to only two 'rogue states', meaning 'barbarian' states that brutalise their own people, ignore international law, strive to acquire weapons of mass destruction, sponsor terrorism, 'reject basic human values and hate the United States and everything for which it stands'. They were Iraq and North Korea, and both constituted 'a looming threat to all nations'. As I write, war with the first is imminent; with the second, it seems to be approaching rapidly.

In October 2002, North Korea admitted to possession of uranium enrichment centrifuge technology, in December it disconnected the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) monitor cameras and then sent home the inspectors from its mothballed graphite nuclear plant, and in January it withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Although it insisted that 'at present' it was merely starting up again (for energy purposes) the reactors mothballed as part of the 1994 'Agreed Framework' deal with the US, neighbouring states were understandably nervous at the prospect of unregulated plutonium production, while the enrichment technology (of which it admitted possession but not use) has no known use other than for the production of Hiroshima-type weapons. Around the world, it was reported that an 'outlaw' regime was defying the

world and threatening regional and global order.

On 13 February, the International Atomic Energy Agency referred North Korea to the UN Security Council. Director-General Mohammad El Baradei declared it to have been 'in chronic non-compliance with its safeguards agreement since 1993.' The question now is whether North Korea will persist in rejection of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, with the Security Council moving gradually from appeal to pressure to sanctions, or whether a satisfactory formula can be found to permit of its return. Sanctions, according to Pyongyang, would be tantamount to 'a declaration of war'.

The demands, presented to Pyongyang by presidential envoy James Kelly in October 2002, were of the kind that only regime change could satisfy. After the Kelly mission, Washington continued to insist that North Korea back down unconditionally, but in January 2003 a bold 'new proposal' was unveiled. Provided Pyongyang abandoned all nuclear ambitions and accepted strict and intrusive inspections, it could be given assistance with thermal power generation and food, and a guarantee against US attack. However, the offer was predicated on a North Korean climb-down, made more unlikely by the hostile rhetoric that accompanied it. Donald Rumsfeld reiterated his statement of readiness to fight, and win, wars on two fronts, and North Korea was accused again of being a 'terrorist regime' with 'one or two nuclear weapons already in possession and sufficient material



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to construct six to eight more, and missile capacity to reach the continental United States'. In his State of the Union address for 2003, President Bush also made a point of declaring his loathing for Pyongyang as 'an oppressive regime [that] rules a people living in fear and starvation', and whose 'blackmail' would not be tolerated. Long-range bombers and an aircraft carrier were alerted for deployment to the peninsula. Pyongyang responded, not to the new proposal but to the threats, with its own threat of missile or weapons tests or even a pre-emptive counter-strike, involving 'unlimited use of means'.

The underlying thrust of US policy does not change. The core sentiment is one of fierce antipathy that goes back to the Korean War in the 1950s. The hatred for Kim Jong Il matches that for Saddam Hussein, and it seems that nothing short of regime change, in Pyongyang as in Baghdad, can assuage it. A participant in White House strategy meetings comments: 'Bush and Cheney want that guy's head on a platter. Don't be distracted by all this talk about negotiations. There will be negotiations, but they have a plan, and they are going to get this guy after Iraq. He's their version of Hitler.'<sup>2</sup> Nautilus Institute's Peter Hayes says: 'What they really mean is this: after we force Iraq to comply with its disarmament obligations, we'll focus fully on North Korea to burn another hole in the map.' Defense Secretary Rumsfeld is reported to be drawing up plans for a pre-emptive strike. The Japanese Defence Agency head, Shigeru Ishiba, declared that Japan, although committed

by its constitution to the non-use of force in the settlement of international disputes, would launch a pre-emptive attack on North Korea if it thought missiles were being readied for launch against it.

The global hegemon puts itself above the law, reserving to itself the right to employ violence, virtually without restriction, in pursuit of its global interests while labelling 'terroristic' those who oppose it. Even as Washington demands that North Korea (and other) countries meet various obligations, disavow any nuclear plans and substantially disarm their conventional forces, the US itself has for three decades ignored its own obligations under Article 6 of the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty to 'engage in good faith negotiations for nuclear disarmament' and is therefore itself in 'material breach' of the NPT treaty. The US has also withdrawn from the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Biological Weapons Convention, the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto Convention on Global Warming (*inter alia*). It signals its intent to

pursue nuclear hegemony including the domination of space; deploys as 'conventional weapons' newly developed weapons of terror and mass destruction, including cluster bombs, 'daisy cutters' and nuclear 'bunker busters'; holds its enemies indefinitely without legal warrant, representation or rights; proclaims its right to assassinate and to launch pre-emptive war against its enemies, and refuses to recognise the jurisdiction of any international court to try the actions of itself or its citizens. This is not 'roguish' or 'evil' because it is covered by imperial prerogative.

**F**ROM PYONGYANG'S POINT OF VIEW, the US was in breach of the 1994 Agreed Framework almost from its inception. Promised two light-water nuclear reactors (capacity: 2000 MW) by a target date of 2003, with half a million tons of heavy oil per year supplied in the interim for power generation and moves 'towards full normalization of political and economic relations' and a non-aggression pact, Pyongyang froze its nuclear development plans for a decade, hoping to hold the US to its word and to secure removal from the list of terror-supporting states. Pyongyang adhered scrupulously to the 'Framework', as Colin Powell recognised in February 2002.<sup>3</sup> It made every effort to associate itself with the mood of the international community after September 11 by promptly signing the outstanding international conventions on terrorism and declaring its opposition to terrorism in the UN General Assembly. In the end it got nothing. Washington under George W. Bush came to look on the Agreed Framework as a one-sided North Korean commitment to abandon its nuclear program. Even though until 2001 the Department of State could find no terror connection other than the continued refuge in Pyongyang of the ageing Japanese perpetrators of a 1970 hijacking, Bush nevertheless chose to describe North Korea as part of the 'axis of evil' and his government to name it, along with other non-nuclear countries, as a potential nuclear target. The '2003' pledge by the US was never taken seriously. Delays were chronic—construction on the site only began in 2002 when a few large holes were dug in the ground and some foundations laid. Meanwhile, North Korea's energy sector steadily deteriorated. In November 2002, the US stopped the scheduled oil supplies, and in January 2003 cancelled the entire deal, saying there would be no nuclear plant of any kind, ever.

As for the commitment to 'full normalization of political and economic relations', that was never taken seriously. The 'axis of evil' insult was plainly contrary to it and the nuclear threat was reiterated in 2002. The US actions taken after the Kelly visit merely confirmed the already existing situation: Bush's Washington was contemptuous of the Agreed Framework and glad of a pretext to be rid of it.

From the Korean War (1950–53) to today,

Pyongyang's nuclear program was always a response to perceived US nuclear threat. It took the view, not unreasonably, that the only defence that Washington respected was nuclear weapons. Even the IAEA's Mohammad El Baradei says that the US seems to teach the world that 'if you really want to defend yourself, develop nuclear weapons, because then you get negotiations, and not military action.'<sup>4</sup> While Washington wrung its hands over Pyongyang's outlaw behaviour, Congress was being pushed to authorise small nuclear warheads, known as 'Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator' weapons, or 'bunker busters', specially tailored to attack North Korea's bunkers and underground complexes. Yet it is not Washington but Pyongyang, the barbarian, that is accused of 'intimidation'.

The path Pyongyang seems to be taking has the potential to lead to nuclearising of the peninsula and the region, and is therefore disastrous, however understandable the motivation. It is said by Washington to be seeking to become a nuclear power, a 'rogue' regime pursuing incomprehensible policies that threaten innocent neighbours. Yet the alternative interpretation—that it seeks nothing so much as an end to the half-century of threatened nuclear annihilation—is at least as plausible. Pyongyang repeatedly says it would submit to an international inspections regime, provided that its security is guaranteed. The justice of its demand is, however, almost nowhere recognised. It is treated with something akin to derision by Washington, and by Washington's allies. It is not the 50 years of intimidation, but the call to end it, that is treated as roguish. Pyongyang is undoubtedly recalcitrant, but its recalcitrance is matched by Washington's arrogance, pre-emptive unilateralism, and refusal to be bound by international law, treaty, multinational institutions or global opinion.

In much of the debate over 'nuclear proliferation', the nuclear privilege of the acknowledged nuclear powers—US, Britain, France, Russia and China—passes without question. Yet it is increasingly clear that US attempts to combine nuclear privilege with deterrence and non-proliferation do not work. As Jonathan Schell says: 'Deterrence equals proliferation, for deterrence both causes proliferation and is the fruit of it.' The call for non-proliferation, or abstinence, falls on deaf ears when issued by those who cling to their own privilege.

#### The Tributary and the Barbarian

**S**OUTH KOREA, AFTER 55 years of tragic confrontation with its northern compatriots, has in the past decade staked its future on a 'Sunshine Policy'. It has good reason to try to understand the complex crisis Pyongyang faces and is motivated by a desire to take whatever steps might be necessary to avert its political and social collapse. South Korea's agenda is therefore fundamentally different from Washington's. It has little sense of threat from the North, and

instead sees the need to help North Korea deal with its economic, security and diplomatic problems, even by dint of providing a security 'guarantee', as incoming president Roh Moo-Hyun suggested during his campaign.

As a senior advisor to the South Korean president put it, the North Korea problem will only be resolved 'when the country suspected of building nuclear weapons [i.e. North Korea] doesn't feel any security threats and builds relationships of trust with other countries'. South Korea therefore aims to 'create an environment in which North Korea will feel secure, without nuclear weapons. After all, that is the quickest way to have it give up nuclear development'.

Following Kim Dae Jung's visit to Pyongyang in June 2000, South Korea engaged North Korea on a wide range of economic, cultural, sporting and transport fronts. The Seoul-Pyongyang railway line, cleared of mines, waits now only on the completion of a narrow 300-metre strip of track to link North and South (and thereby create a connection from South Korea, and Japan, to Russia, China and Europe). The service could be opened in months, and is blocked only by Washington's objections. The pipeline is full of joint South-North projects, including one to open Gaesong city, which is in North Korea but less than 100 kms from Seoul, as a special economic zone; that too is now frozen. Although Seoul has been slowly accomplishing something once thought impossible—the restoration of a measure of trust between north and south, one Korea and the other—its 'Sunshine' policy is dismissed in Washington as vain and worthless, or worse, dangerous appeasement. Delegations are entertained and contracts signed and implemented, mutual trust is engendered, fear diminishes and confidence grows, but from Washington's perspective Pyongyang is 'evil', and there can be no compromise with it.

The developing crisis not only pits Washington against Pyongyang but also potentially opens a rift between Washington and Seoul. The relationship with Seoul has been frosty since the advent of the Bush administration and its avowal of an explicitly imperial agenda. South Korea's Nobel Prize-winning former president, Kim Dae Jung, was insulted by Bush on the occasion of their first meeting (in Washington in March 2001), and was treated high-handedly for the remainder of his term in office. Seoul was sceptical of the Kelly mission to Pyongyang in October 2002, believing the

*Modern Korean nationalism, frustrated by foreign intervention for over 100 years, remains a powerful force, and beneath the state structures of North and South lies a shared Korean-ness. From the Korean standpoint—whether Pyongyang or Seoul's—the issue is one of sadae (reliance on the great, powerful friends and neighbours) versus juche (self-reliance).*

*If North Korea looks odd, its goose-stepping soldiers, mass game mobilisations and bizarre messages to the world being virtually incomprehensible, it should be understood that its real uniqueness in the nuclear age consists in its having lived under nuclear threat for longer than any other nation.*

Americans misread the signals—perhaps deliberately. In February 2003 the South Korean prime minister pointedly rejected the official US government position that North Korea was in possession of nuclear weapons. That prompted a riposte just a few days later from CIA Director George Tenet insisting on the US's 'very good judgment' that Pyongyang possessed one or two plutonium-based nuclear weapons, as well as long-range missiles to deliver them. On this crucial issue, the world chooses to believe the CIA, not the South Korean prime minister.

The contest between Washington and Seoul concerns not only intelligence—the assessment of what is going on in Pyongyang—but also strategy and tactics—how to respond to it. The gap widens between the thinking of the global imperium reliant on massive force projection capacity, on the one hand, and the small Asian country struggling still to achieve national unification, heal the wounds of civil war, and establish the modest goals of peace and development, on the other.

The new president, Roh Moo-Hyun, took over on 25 February. Like Kim Dae Jung, whom he succeeds, Roh is a pragmatist, expected to continue the line of his predecessor that: 'Love him or hate him, Kim Jong Il has been and will be in the foreseeable future the dictator with all the powers. You cannot exclude him or refuse dialogue with him.' While Washington urges Tokyo, Moscow, Beijing, even Canberra, to pressure Pyongyang, it is careful to avoid attributing any central role to Seoul; in fact the collective effort is designed to contain Seoul and to rein in its 'Sunshine' fantasies.

Not only do both old and new presidents in Seoul distance themselves from Washington's hard line, but anti-American demonstrations draw huge crowds and, in various recent opinion surveys, more than half of people in South Korea profess 'dislike' for the US. Between 60 and 70 per cent say they no longer see North Korea as a threat, favour normalisation with it, and oppose US attempts at 'containment'. Only 31 per cent support co-operation with the US. On 1 March 2003 Seoul hosted, for the first time, a joint, South–North ceremony to commemorate the 84th anniversary of the *Samil* movement, a peaceful uprising for national independence that was brutally crushed by Japan in 1919. The strengthening sense of shared past and common identity makes possible

the sharing of dreams for the future. To Washington, these are ominous trends.

**F**OR THE PRESENT, however, in South Korea the passions of war and Cold War are a thing of the past. While security is not neglected, both government and non-government thinktanks focus much of their effort on economic challenges. The state-funded Korea Development Institute (KDI) has a blueprint for generating a seven per cent annual growth rate in the North to bring per capita income to \$1000 by 2008, feed the population, and attract the foreign capital necessary to rebuild the economic infrastructure. Outside the circles of government, one of the key figures responsible for hauling South Korea out of abject poverty only four decades ago now offers to help Pyongyang do likewise. O Wonchol, right-hand man of Park Chung Hee in the 1960s and 1970s and one of the principal architects of South Korea's industrial transformation, is typical of those who, having lived through and played a core role in Cold War confrontation, seeks ways to help Pyongyang 'normalise' and develop. Pragmatism, a focus on economic and development problems, and a confidence that the North is not lunatic or beyond redemption, characterises such approaches. None of these qualities is evident in current official US thinking on North Korea.

The challenge for Kim Jong Il, writes O in the January 2003 issue of the monthly *Wolgan Chosun*, is to implement fundamental opening and reform and become a North Korean Deng Xiaoping. If Kim would learn from the experience of both South Korea and China, adopt an export-oriented national system (in place of the current 'Juche' policies of economic autarchy) and launch an all-out development drive, the prospects could be quite bright. O recommends that Kim take a leaf out of South Korea's book and do what Park Chung Hee did in the 1960s: empower the country's best technocratic brains to form a staff headquarters and lead an export revolution. The conditions for industrialisation in North Korea are favourable (all land is state-owned, labour is cheap and of high quality, minerals abound, educational levels are high). A million engineers and technicians should be sent abroad (many to South Korea, as part of the necessary division of labour and resources in a Korea-wide development formula) thus generating immediate revenues and reducing the surplus agrarian population. Most existing industrial plant, already obsolete, should simply be scrapped. The Rajin-Sonbong area (a remote site near North Korea's borders with both Russia and China, developed under UN auspices in the 1980s but so far unsuccessful in attracting investment), should shift its focus from light to heavy and chemical, export-oriented industry, with a deep-water port dredged to service it and industrial water drawn from the Tumen River. To

#### Thinking Non-Imperial Futures

nurture the agriculture and construction sectors, fertiliser and cement plants should be given priority (and the environmentally disastrous ammonium sulphate fertiliser replaced as a matter of urgency by complex, more environmentally gentle substances). Pork, chicken and cattle industries should be encouraged for export to South Korea and Japan, the proceeds going to the import of wheat and rice. Adopting a peninsula-wide approach, plant in some sectors could be moved from South to North, one immediate candidate being the South's currently surplus briquette plants, thereby solving the heating problem and arresting the chronic deforestation.

However, O recognises that the precondition for the success of all such policies must be the normalisation of relations with South Korea on the one hand and with the US and Japan on the other. This would open the path to low-interest international development funds from the Asia Development Bank and the World Bank. Whatever the viability of the specific proposals, the publication of such a paper in a leading Seoul journal, by one of those longest associated with building South Korea as a base of hostility to North Korea throughout the Cold War, attests to the emergence of a thoroughly post-Cold War national vision—one seriously at odds with the Washington agenda.

**I**F NORTH KOREA looks odd, its goose-stepping soldiers, mass game mobilisations and bizarre messages to the world being virtually incomprehensible, it should be understood that its real uniqueness in the nuclear age consists in its having lived under nuclear threat for longer than any other nation. If a kind of collective neurosis, even insanity, has overtaken it as a consequence, that is not altogether surprising. Facing complex crises and a kind of exhaustion from decades of mobilisation, war, mass campaigns, fear, tension and failure, it now gives strong indication of a desire for change, not only in the extraordinary apology offered to Japan and the admissions given to the US late in 2002 but in the sweeping economic reform policies adopted since 2001. Taken together, these may be seen as suggesting that the much-vaunted monolith is cracking, and that powerful elements in that state do indeed wish to set aside the guerilla model (secrecy, mobilisation, absolute loyalty to the commander, priority to the military), and pursue perestroika (for which the Korean word *kaegon* was coined in 2001). The September apology from Kim Jong Il, the attempted economic reforms, the moves to open road and rail links with South Korea (and to join the trans-continental system), and the growing web of economic co-operation with South Korea all point in the direction of Chinese-style market reforms and Russian-style perestroika.

Both the economic reforms and the diplomatic initiatives of 2001–02 seem, however, to have failed, and that failure has serious implications. Economic

reform is impossible under conditions of continuing confrontation and deprivation of access to global financial and other markets. According to Chinese sources close to Pyongyang, Kim Jong Il has determined that without security guarantees and access to international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF (to which the US holds keys), social chaos and economic collapse are possible. The nuclear issue therefore cloaks a desperate cry for normalisation, especially with the US and Japan.

Although the humiliating apologies and explanations to the US and Japan in 2002 bore only sour fruit, an even greater challenge faces Kim Jong Il now: can he can bring himself to make a comparable, even more important but more difficult, gesture to South Korea? Can he apologise, in terms however general, for the violent and tragic past, thank the South Korean government and people for having turned from containment to 'Sunshine', absolutely rule out any repeat of fratricidal violence and begin charting the only possible course for survival—*détente* leading towards reunification? The cold fact is that North Korea has no allies, few options, little time. Only South Korea today views it with any sign of understanding, even sympathy. Only South Korea, for that matter, does not seem to fear it.

The recent outpourings of analysis and comment on the Korean problem around the world are characterised by righteous indignation and denunciation. They tend to be shaped, consciously or unconsciously, by an imperial frame of reference, insisting that Pyongyang submit to the will of the international community when what is really meant is the will of Washington. To the extent that one adopts an alternative, Korean, frame, and a Seoul-centred approach, the problem begins to look different. Nobody understands North Korea better, or, in the present climate, is more positive and encouraging about dealing with it, and has more to lose from getting it wrong, than the government and people of South Korea.

Years of 'Sunshine' and multiple layers of contact and negotiation have begun to thaw and open tracks across the long-frozen demilitarised zone that divides North and South. The challenge for Seoul is to build a buffer of protection and a bridge of communication linking Pyongyang to the world, while guaranteeing that international obligations are met and ensuring that Pyongyang's legitimate security concerns are fulfilled—nothing less than internationalising 'Sunshine'. Building on the trust that slowly accumulated

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during the Kim Dae Jung years, a recent (Nautilus Institute) paper by Alexandre Mansourov suggests:

President-elect Roh Moo-Hyun should use the current nuclear crisis as a unique historical opportunity to fundamentally reshape the inter-Korean relations and radically redefine the missions of the ROK-U.S. military security alliance in the future. President Roh needs to develop path-breaking strategic vision, which will guide the entire Korean nation in the South and North on the path toward national unification.

Although Seoul has been slowly accomplishing something once thought impossible—the restoration of a measure of trust between north and south, one Korea and the other—its ‘Sunshine’ policy is dismissed in Washington as vain and worthless, or worse, dangerous appeasement.

In response, North Korea would ‘invite a goodwill expert delegation from the Republic of Korea (ROK) to tour the Yangbyun nuclear complex to see that all 8017 spent fuel rods are still kept in place at the storage site and that the reprocessing plant is still shut down’. Mansourov continues:

Only the South has to take the North Korean demands seriously and, in turn, can guarantee the North’s security and assist in economic development. The only sacrifice the North will have to make is to accept some practical limitations on its sovereignty, including in such strategic areas as WMD [weapons of mass destruction] development ... After all, if Korea is indeed one, as Koreans like to stress, it is all one nation, one family business.

He goes on to suggest a South Korean protectorate over the North in the realm of national security and foreign policy as the possible first step in a multi-stage process of peaceful transition to a unified Korean state. The idea of ‘protectorate’ has very negative and ill-omened historical associations in the Korean context, but the general thrust—the need to substitute a Seoul–Pyongyang frame for the Washington–Pyongyang frame of thinking about the Korea problem—makes good sense. Koreans themselves, North, South and overseas, will have to come up with an alternative to protectorate, some more historically sensitive formula that reflects legitimate concerns over face, history and correct relationships, so that through a deepening of North–South conversation and co-operation Korea can find a voice with which to address the world.

### Conclusion

THE PROBLEM TODAY resembles the problem of 100 years ago. Modern Korean nationalism, frustrated by foreign intervention for over 100 years, remains a powerful force, and beneath the state structures of North and South lies a shared Korean-ness. From the Korean standpoint—whether Pyongyang or Seoul’s—the issue is one of *sadae* (reliance on the great, powerful friends and neighbours) versus *juche* (self-reli-

ance). One hundred years ago, and at crucial times since then, many thought it wisest to look to great and powerful neighbours. That mind-set made possible a century of national division and catastrophic, internecine bloodshed. Facing unprecedented crisis now, South and North Korea have to find some way to trust each other more than they trust any great and powerful friends and neighbours. The stakes are even higher than they were a century ago, for this time the peninsula itself, and all its people, are at risk.

As the IAEA refers the issue to the UN Security Council, and as politicians, editorial writers and ‘experts’ crank up their denunciations of Kim Jong Il’s ‘evil empire’, we would do well to remember the lesson of history: a desperate, impoverished but proud people, backs to the wall, oil supplies cut off and sanctions threatened, is not likely to surrender. The best hope for a way out of the impasse is not likely to be pressure exerted through some combination of ‘5+2’ (the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Japan and South Korea) or ‘5+5’ (the Security Council Five plus South Korea, North Korea, Japan, Australia and the European Union), but rather a deepening of the accommodation between Pyongyang and Seoul, based on a simple formula of ‘1+1=1’. However mathematically unorthodox, such a formula has an essential truth that Koreans at least recognise. On such an axis, aversion to violence, fraternal trust, and the historical memory of the disastrous consequences caused by past reliance on the intervention of powerful outsiders may, together, point a way forward.

In February, Roh Moo-Hyun assumed the presidency in Seoul. The achievement of a non-violent solution to the growing crisis will depend on the kind of initiatives he takes, the kind of consensus he can forge with Kim Jong Il’s regime and the kind of leverage he can exercise on both Washington and Pyongyang. ■

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1. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American primacy and its geostrategic imperatives*, New York, Basic Books, 1997.
2. Seymour Hersh, ‘The Cold Test—What the administration knew about Pakistan and the North Korean nuclear program’, *The New Yorker*, 20 January 2003. ([http://www.newyorker.com/printable/?fact/030127fa\\_fact](http://www.newyorker.com/printable/?fact/030127fa_fact))
3. At a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on 5 February 2002, Powell confirmed that the administration believes that Pyongyang continues to ‘comply with the [missile flight-test] moratorium they placed upon themselves and stay within the KEDO agreement [the Agreed Framework].’ (<http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron.asp>)
4. Quoted in Jonathan Schell, ‘The case against the war’, *The Nation*, 3 March 2003.

# The purest of pleasures

'GOD ALMIGHTY first planted a garden,' wrote Francis Bacon, 'and indeed it is the purest of human pleasures.' Well, he should have known, but the general business of gardening is a pleasure I have come to late, even though I have the right hereditary input, being descended from farmers and passionate planters and turners of soil: perhaps this particular creative gene comes into its full strength late-ish in life. In any case, I was halfway through my allotted span of three score and ten when I migrated somewhat unexpectedly to Greece, and it was then that the dormant gardening gene staggered out of hibernation: in my neck of fertile olive groves in the south-west Peloponnese, it is usually a case of sticking plants in the ground and standing back. But in this part of Europe, scarcity of both soil and space also leads to a continuous tension between the desire for productivity and the desire for beauty, the desire for economy and the desire for ornament, so I was always in trouble with the old *yiayathes*, the old women who would prop themselves against the stone wall with the express purpose of telling me that I had no right to be wasting precious water on things as frivolous as flowers.

Summer   
Graeme from Norwich is on the phone.

'How's Greece?' he asks.

'Hot.'

'Anything else to report?'

'I've started a vegetable garden.' And already I'm asking myself why, but I don't tell Graeme this.

'Well, that's worth a chapter.'

But when I impart the same information to a Scot, she emits a hollow moan. 'Don't get like *them*,' she instructs, apparently fearful that I am in the grip of a threatening atavism and about to revert to some ancient and boring rustic pattern. Well, so what if I am? Many people round

about, especially the aforementioned old *yiayathes*, think I've had my fun. They're relieved that the foreign witch has seen sense and is doing something useful. At last.

Getting started on the vegie venture took some time. Because I'd been away for months, the whole garden took me what seemed like an eternity to clear up. I counted the jumbo-sized plastic bags as I worked. Each one holds 80 litres and I filled 35 of them with weeds and a motley collection of rubbish. I also had to dismantle a marathon-like tumulus of light wood—olive prunings mostly—mixed with weeds, rubbish and dirt, in the backyard. This alone took me days.

After that I had to assemble my poor collection of tools: the archaic spade with the equally archaic broken handle, the hoe with a head so temperamental that it regularly and heavily falls on my feet, and the rake, bought from the village shop last summer: the going price was about 50 cents a tine, with the handle extra. I decided I needed a watering can and trowel, and so had an entertaining interlude in the neighbouring town of Kalamata when I discovered, yet again, yawning gaps in my modern Greek vocabulary. The watering can was easy: it was sitting on the pavement outside the shop, but the trowel was another matter. I described what I wanted and the rather courtly shop-owner went straight to a stand and produced a set of two little forks and a trowel, annoyingly painted an earth-brown colour.

'What's the Greek word for this thing, anyway?' I asked.

'Blowed if I know,' came the reply, or in words to that effect. 'A little spade?'

I begin my horticultural endeavour in a condition of almost total ignorance, the lessons taught me by mother-in-law Aphrodite now largely forgotten; she was convinced I needed remedial teaching,

anyway. The only thing to do, I decide, is to learn from the environment and take a general approach of by-guess-and-by-God. I skulk around during siesta time—when the whole village dies a ritual and temporary death—in order to avoid interrogation, the inquisition, the catechism of rural life; I peep over walls and through fences in an effort to check on what is growing at the height of summer and how vegetable gardens are generally organised.

In the best gardens (and I decide there are two that would win any competition anywhere) loving care is obvious. No weed dares rear its ugly head; neat walkways allow for easy watering of the aubergines and courgettes surrounded by little canals, and of tomatoes tied to wigwam-like structures. Marigolds and basil, planted at judicious intervals, keep voracious bugs away from the infant vegies, while sunflowers, nodding from a great height, guard the whole. For the life of me I cannot see any peppers, but eventually decide to plant mine on mounds, where they eventually look like proud little flags fluttering in the light breeze of morning, and then drooping at the mast in the midday heat.

I bring back several bundles from the Kalamata market. Wet little wrappings of brown paper are secured by lengths of blue and orange twine cunningly arranged to unravel the moment the end is pulled. Pellets of sheep dung cling to the black soil. I plant my various purchases and protect them from the heat with newspaper, remembering mother-in-law Aphrodite painstakingly fashioning little Chinese hats out of the English newspapers I used to buy.

Surprisingly soon I have neat little rows of several vegetables, including *vleeta*.

Kyria Theoni gave me the *vleeta* as a kind of reward, handing over what look like a million tiny black seeds all wrapped

up in a scrap of tissue paper and secured with a rubber band.

She is very approving of my efforts. 'A *baktse*, Kyra Yeorgina! Bravo. A little vegetable garden *ne pernaei ee ora*.' And she flashes her gold fillings at me.

'Yes,' I reply, feeling buoyed by her kindness, but not deeming it worth the effort to explain for the hundredth time that I never have trouble whiling away the time: it leaps and bounds and gallops off into the distance at full speed. She gives me instructions about the *vleeta*, and I feel my heart sink.

'You're not going to growl at me and complain if nothing happens, are you?' I ask anxiously. 'I'm not very good at this sort of thing, you know.'

'*Sopa de!* Don't be so silly. It'll grow. Just you wait and see.'

And so it does. And then I start wondering what *vleeta* is exactly. To me it's just a tallish, leafy green that the Greeks boil to death and then eat with lemon juice and olive oil. Definitely an acquired taste, like silverbeet and spinach, only more so. Philhellene Beverley in Australia will know, I am sure. It turns out that she doesn't exactly, but she is interested to find out. It is called 'blite' in English, but dictionary definitions are vague. Blite can be a pot-herb, or amaranth or spinach, the authorities not being at all sure of their translations. Bev quotes from her man of the hour, Philemon Holland, Doctor of Physick, who translated Pliny in 1601. This is the translation used by Shakespeare, and Bev goes on to suggest that Pliny's comments could serve as a fine curse if the *vleeta* doesn't come up to scratch, because Pliny didn't care for it. 'Bleets seeme to be dull, vnsauorie and foolish Woorst, having no tast nor quicknesse at all.'

The blite/*bleet/vleeta* correspondence carries on for quite some days in cyberspace. Beverley suspects, but I'm not supposed to breathe a word, that Philemon 'lays it on a bit thick here and there,' so she meticulously and kindly checks the Loeb edition of Pliny. Prosaically named translator Jones offers the following version:

Blite seems to be an inactive plant, without flavour or any sharp quality, for which reason in Menander husbands use it as a term of abuse for their wives. It is injurious to the stomach. It so disturbs the bowels as to cause cholera in some persons. It is

said however to be good for scorpion stings when drunk in wine, for corns on the feet when applied in liniment, and also, with oil, for diseases of the spleen and for pain in the temples. Used as a food it is thought by Hippocrates to check menstruation.

I regard the blite/*vleeta* in a new and rather dubious light and can only hope that the other plants in my garden are not as freighted and fraught with as much meaning and potentiality. I also hope they have more taste.

Everything starts to grow like mad, and in no time at all I can see the pale mauve frill of aubergine flowers with their yellow centre, and the white bell of the pepper flowers. Quite suddenly an actual aubergine appears, small, glossily purple in colour and phallic in shape, emerging and growing, supported by its rim of furry green. Smooth little buds appear on the pepper plants. And later the papery yellow trumpets of courgettes open and close with the sun.

**T**HE GARDEN MAKES me notice again the little things and incidents I keep forgetting. I sit mesmerised for minutes while a single olive leaf spins and twirls at the end of a gleaming thread of cobweb. I observe a cicada hanging upside down, apparently glued to a twig. A tiny striped newt, barely three inches long, darts along the wall, a large ochre-coloured hornet clamped between its jaws. And then there are the geometric patterns on a butterfly: cream, yellow and blue marked with a black edge. The perfect creature skims and flutters, swoops and dives, alive for a day and making the most of every moment.

I can't believe that we're actually eating aubergines and peppers from the garden! And then there's the parsley, and I'm also keeping a careful watch on the mixed salad plants newly sprouted from seeds ordered online from England. Of these last the locals are deeply suspicious, so I fantasise about spreading rocket, frisée and largesse about the neighbourhood. But then the courgettes fail, and I feel a bit crestfallen, but Maria-from-next-door tells me how to use the flowers. Fry up some onion and garlic and then grate some tomato, add whatever else you like and the flowers at the last minute and *oriste!* There, you'll be surprised at how delicious it all is. She's right, and the whole concoction also

looks very pretty. But somehow I have the feeling that this gardening business is all going too well to last.

*Autumn* 

Sure enough, nemesis is at hand. In the guise of chooks. I always knew that poultry and I are natural enemies. I once had to guide my frightened children past nesting geese and protective ganders in Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens. Not a pleasant experience: I can still remember the violent hissing and the frantic beating of wings, and the creatures looked very large. Yiayia's favourite rooster, not so large but still large enough, would peck me viciously whenever I ventured into the fowl-yard in the course of my apprenticeship as a village woman. If ever a rooster did this to my paternal grandmother he would live to regret it, or rather, did not live very long at all. But she was, unlike me, basically very fond of chickens and actually hatched one out by putting the egg in a soup plate on the hob of her wood stove and poking at it carefully and at judiciously timed intervals with a darning needle. In due course the reluctant chick struggled out of the shell and was promptly christened Caesar. Never having seen his own mother, Caesar was convinced that my grandmother was a hen and followed her everywhere for quite some time. But I digress.

This afternoon I discover that the four feathered fiends belonging to one of the neighbours have wrought havoc in my garden. The whole back area underneath the grapevine has been assiduously dug up and mini-mountains of dirt deposited on the path, which is now invisible. But oh, my precious vegies! Ten broccoli plants have suffered death from a thousand pecks, the radishes have taken a severe beating, and half of the precious mixed salad plants have been scratched to extinction. I am, as my old Mum would have said, absolutely ropeable, have murder in my heart, and wish I had had a tomahawk in hand at the appropriate moment. Who would have thought that a mere four perambulating potential dust-ers could do such damage? I decide against the tomahawk: if I see the offenders in my garden again, the hose will be the weapon of choice. Wet hens.

Two days later they do it again, and my English mixed salad is no more. Two of the neighbours are irate on my behalf and inform me that the owner of the offending

birds is hiding inside her house. 'She always does that,' says Kyria Ariadne matter-of-factly. 'Those chickens have done for my pumpkins entirely,' announces Kyria Calliope, the cantankerous widow from next door. In the past this woman has made my life difficult: my children and my dog were trespassing on her land and she wouldn't stand for it; she watched my father build a barbecue and then announced it was illegal because it backed on to her six-inch-high wall. My side of this long wall was not

tidy enough for her liking; so it went on. For years. But now, when she sees me staggering back from the *agora* with a huge roll of chicken wire, she decides we are united in victimhood. The troubled past disappears in a flash and she commiserates, while having a vengeful verbal lash or two at the absent chicken-fancier.

Bleeding fingers are the result of my fence-making efforts. The wire barriers I manage to erect are desperately ugly, but so are the offending chooks. And then the

weather changes, and a gale-force wind blows for three days, after which what is left of the vegie garden is flattened anyway. The chooks do not venture out in this inclement weather: I have done my money. Oh well, at least now I have an inkling of how primary producers feel. And I can't think that any of us would necessarily agree with Francis Bacon. ■

**Gillian Bouras** is a freelance writer, whose books are published by Penguin Australia.

TRAVEL:2  
GERARD WINDSOR

## Occasional harmonies

**I**N THE NORTHERN quarter of old Palermo, Sicily's capital, similar businesses are found in clusters—bicycles, ironmongery, leatherwork. The Via dei Giudici is given over to babywear—clothes, prams, strollers. All these shops use the same signage—*Tutto per l'Infanzia*—Everything for Babyhood. Jammed between them is another business. It has large plate glass windows, behind which, well to the front of the shop, sit eight coffins.

You'd never see such a juxtaposition in Australia. I kept being confronted by left-field disjunctions, and unexpected unities. I went to the Palazzo della Posta one Saturday afternoon at 4pm to buy some stamps. Only two windows were in operation, but that was sensible because there was only one other customer and she was being served at the first window. So I went straight towards the second, rounded the barrier and came face to face with a child of about eight, sitting up behind the counter. She had her schoolwork spread out in front of her. She was very obliging and got down off the stool and went and called a woman who I presumed was her nonna, and who then sold me my stamps. I felt this was workplace practice at its most family-friendly, but it was not what I'd been used to in Australian public institutions.

The island is amusing, sometimes. At least as frequently it's depressing and infuriating. In other words the island is

full of voices, and it's not easy to respond. I'm an open-minded liberal traveller, I thought. I want to find a new note, a new expression added to my range. I want to feel lifted onto some new plane of vision. Sicily doesn't make that easy.

The post office scene was charming, but what if the sense of public responsibility is not just laid-back, but actually diminished, even corrupted? Even when

allowances are made for the annoying effects of tourists and people who refuse to try, or make a hash of, the language, public officials in Sicily seem abnormally brusque, rude, unhelpful and contemptuous. And outright dishonest. 'How much to the airport?' I ask, in my best Italian, the ticket clerk in the Palermo railway station. 'Seven seventy,' he tells me. I hand him a ten-euro note. He gives me the ticket and thirty cents change. I look at it. 'How much?' I repeat. 'Seven seventy,' he says. I stare at him. He waits, watching me. I don't move away. He plucks a two-euro coin from his rack and tosses it to me.

I seethe. I assure myself that no doubt he's ill-paid, and his people have been oppressed and kicked around for millennia by foreigners, but my outrage doesn't diminish. Later in the day I return to the station, and seek out an office designated Customer Services, and I try to explain, again in my best Italian, how one of the railway's employees has tried to rob me. The concentrating but puzzled official jots down figures on his pad and draws lines and does computations, and I can see that he believes I've presented him with a mathematical problem. So I assure him I haven't lost any money, and the exact figures are not important, but that this kind of barefaced larceny (but of course I don't know the Italian for that) is not good for Sicily. I can see that he understands me, and he rises from his chair and shakes



King William II offers the Virgin the archetype of Monreale.  
Mosaic from the nave of Monreale, Palermo.

my hand, and says, 'Scusi'. I am happy, even elated. I don't expect him to take any action (although I've very precisely identified the culprit), but all the pleasure of reparation comes from that admission and apology. Ah, the deep-souled satisfactions of justice.

I BEGAN TO SEE a pattern emerging in my dealings with Sicilian officials—shock/abrasion and then harmony (though not necessarily my harmony). For example I come through the portico of a gallery or museum or archaeological site with my poor language skills, and am immediately intimidated by the welter of officials crowding around the ticket booth or room. After a while I deduce that there must be a requirement that when all these places take on employees they do so primarily as an exercise in interpersonal relations. But not relations with the visiting public. For it's a totally predictable rule that the front office or the sunniest portico corner will at all times be crowded with the entire attendant and security staff. And yes, I feel, how could any employer with any heart condemn these obviously gregarious people to sit by themselves, mute, while the odd visitor wanders past the superfluity of potsherd. Weigh the security risk against the psychological health of the staff, and there's no argument. Yet I remain uneasy. A man with a small hammer could entirely destroy the cloister carvings at Monreale in five minutes, or 30 if he wanted that length of time—he'd certainly remain unseen and undisturbed.

I find the unembarrassed yen for company startling. To the Australian eye, overemployment is rife. Retail businesses in Sicily seem to be small. Yet a bookshop, say, where one person might enter every half hour, probably not to buy, is likely to have a staff of three. And the most common sight in Palermo is the proprietor, or a member of staff, standing just off the pavement at the front of the shop; he is being sociable or curious rather than touting for business. (How the businesses are surviving is another matter.) The fact is that Sicilians seem abnormally fond of company, yet paradoxically they are not noticeably considerate of others, not in the public sphere. On the roads they live by a code of such opportunistic aggressiveness that it is impossible to believe they are going to change their spots entirely the moment they dismount. No sermon

on the text 'Blessed are the meek' will be a goer in Sicily.

Largely due to the earthquake of 1693, the face of Christianity in Sicily is almost entirely baroque. It is a language of large gesture, proto-Romantic effusion, flowery ornateness, emotional shrillness, empyrean vacancies. The Italian language, regrettably, can easily attune itself to this hollow orotundity; Italian politicians, for example, are particularly good at airy nothings that at first blush have a philosophical profundity to them—but only because lots of abstract words are being used. (Australian pollies steer clear of such vocabulary; it would be wankery, and, in any case, alienating.) Gesture is easy, but I became doubtful how much was behind it. In the via Vetreria, a part of Palermo that's more or less as the Americans left it after their 1943 bombings, a new large marble slab on a house wall marks the birthplace of Paolo Borsellino, the prosecutor murdered by the Mafia in 1992. He is lauded in extravagant terms. But a couple of metres directly across from the building is a large vacant lot. It is given over entirely to rubbish, and is clearly an alternative to the municipal tip so copious is the scattering of often splitting white plastic bags. I hold my breath and hurry past and don't take too much notice of Paolo Borsellino.

GREEN PUBLIC SPACES are one of the things you don't see in Sicily. Others are golf courses, cinemas, indigenous trees, playing fields (except on television), grand country houses, police patrols—and animals dead by the roadside. The sort of public parks mentioned by the guidebooks to Sicily would rightly be sneezed at by the citizens of Bathurst or Ballarat. The impression is of a pinched, depressive (the incidence of smoking says as much) society—without many of the facilities taken for granted by Australians. And with a decrepit, disintegrating past no longer of much relevance. The churches, properly relieved of their better works of art, are abandoned, permanently closed, or sparsely patronised—largely by the elderly. In a few cases desperate attempts have been made to outdo the grossness of the past with new tawdriness. It's as though the baroque horrors have lost their punch. Instead, a platform that could be a giant musical box or perhaps miniature boxing ring, featuring technicolour pageantry,

has been pushed out into the nave, more directly into the sightlines of visitors. In San Domenico in Palermo the Virgin gives Dominic the Rosary, in San Stanislao Kostka she plucks from sand a mature naked youth with a bit of towelling across his loins. Other heads peer from the sand, waiting their turn. For all the macho culture of Sicily there is a very marked homoerotic presence in its art. Sicily's Renaissance pride and joy, Antonello da Messina, is the most overtly homosexual pre-20th century painter I've come across. His 'Portrait of a Man', the so-called Sicilian Mona Lisa, is not enigmatic at all; it's a cheerful gay come-hither look.

I know. No people would like to be pinned down in this way. In the last chapter of di Lampedusa's *The Leopard* there is an incident involving a painting. Concetta, the aged spinster, has it in her chapel; it shows a young woman holding up a piece of paper. Concetta says the subject is 'Our Lady of the Letter'—the Virgin presenting a petition to her son on behalf of mankind. The Cardinal Archbishop of Palermo, on a crusade to extirpate inauthenticity and superstition, says it's obviously a depiction of a desperate young girl with a love letter. Di Lampedusa's sympathies are equally divided.

I'd like to know the Cardinal's views on a monument installed in San Domenico, one of the churches of his archdiocese, in 1930. The sculptor Cosmo Soggiu did a piece in white marble to honour General Eugenio di Maria di Alleri-Medaglia D'Oro who had been killed in 1916. The work is pan-erotic. A naked figure, flat against a slab on a low relief of an outline of a cross. The pressure shown on the buttocks suggests a horizontal setting, but the figure is now raised to the vertical—and indeed the stomach is concave and the rib cage raised and distended in the classical crucifixion pose. The final result, however, is a woman's hourglass figure—rounded thighs and hips, nipped-in waist, swelling chest. Yet the elbows are tucked to the side and the forearms and hands are clasping the chest. What exactly is under them? The toes are pointed down at a 180-degree angle. There is a slight genital bulge (in spite of the nakedness) as though a film of very light cloth has been invisibly laid. The genitals are probably male, but only probably.

Strange unities. I'm more used to the kind of definite clarity I overheard from a group of elderly English tourists in

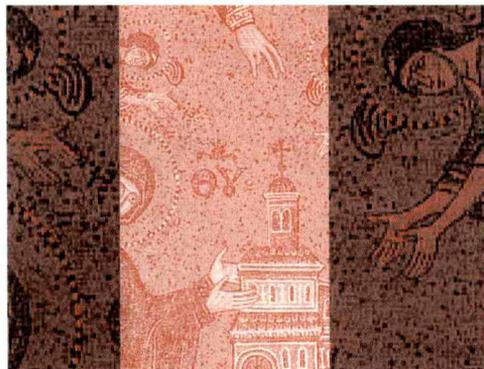
Siracusa. Their tour leader was blathering on, a bit inaccurately, about Proserpina, whom, she said, had a child. 'Who was the father?' asked a very old man, and answered himself, 'Pluto, I suppose.' A woman in the group remarked, 'Well, she didn't go down there to knit.'

**I**T'S MOMENTS OF unification that, at least for the tourist, redeem Sicily. The Duomo of Monreale on the hills outside Palermo is the most perfect church. The Normans with their structure, the Arabs with their designs and the Byzantines with their mosaics finished this together in 1182—as they had just finished Monreale's miniature counterpart, Palermo's Capella Palatina, 40 years earlier. The works represent one of those moments, such as the meeting of the Irish and English languages, when utterly different cultures fused and fired something new and magical. The rest of the vast acreage of Sicilian churches has little future; in less than a hundred years there will be a glut on the market of baroque polychrome marble side altars. Seventeenth and eighteenth-century Catholicism, gorged with the gold and silver of the New World, is now a sorry witness to Christ.

Monreale must have cost plenty, and competitiveness was there in spades, but the cathedral's clarity of Christian purpose, its biblical richness, its easy legibility, its lack of clutter, makes it so much closer to what we now regard as core, purified Christianity. It's the conversation that does it, and the conversation is in heaven. There is nothing to distract below the line of the capitals on the pillars, nothing except the non-figurative, simple rectangular, triangular, shafts of mosaic, deep green, red, white. They are so modest and subdued. Above, in the apse, Christ Pantocrator and his archangels, and, a little less than the angels, the saints, dozens of them. They are not in self-absorbed groups, none of them is in ecstasy (or is it agony?), all face the viewer directly, their expressions calm rather than impassive, nearly all in ecclesiastical vestments because that gives the variety and colour. In the nave, and high on the fortress walls surrounding it, a selection of clear dramatic scenes, all captioned, from Genesis, the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Apocrypha. Noah's nakedness is covered, Christ raises Lazarus, Paul is lowered in a basket from the walls of Damascus, Simon Magus plunges to

earth. The designer has had an eye for the dramatic scene rather than the moment of central theological significance; Noah's life is given in five scenes, but Christ's Passion and Crucifixion do not appear. Crosses are visible in the cathedral only as decorative items on the vestments of the great communion of saints. Christianity is a faith of personalities, of a great interlocking sequence of stories.

No Sicilian would want to be justified by the presence of an 800-year-old cathedral. Not even one emblazoned with colourful identities who love to be seen in public and in company. One midday when I was coming out from the cathedral in Monreale to sit for a while in the broader sunlight of the Piazza Guglielmo Secondo, a youth strode through the piazza wearing headphones and shouting angrily. He came to a moveable No Parking sign, and gave it a kick, and



then another kick till it toppled over. I had no idea whether he was deranged or high, but I kept my head down. He paced about, then returned to the fallen sign and leapt on it and jumped up and down with fierce cries. A few people came out of bars and tabaccherias and watched from a distance. Two young women in a nearby doorway giggled with only slight embarrassment. A young man came up to one of them and kissed her and ran his hand down her bottom and in under her thigh, turning as he did so, with perfect detachment, to watch the vandal in action.

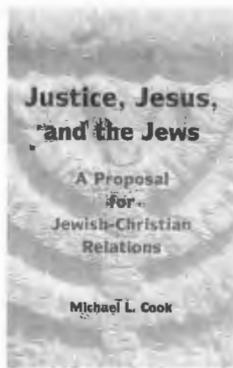
A policeman came round the corner, and the shouter yelled all the louder and yanked off the disc from the top of the No Parking pole and heaved it with a mighty discus swing far into the middle of the piazza. The policeman paused and spoke into his phone. The vandal yanked the pole itself away from its base and hurled both pieces out after the disc. Then he strode around again. The policeman

approached him, and he shouted and made complicated gestures with his fingers and his groin and the policeman backed off. A second policeman arrived and the two consulted and then withdrew and spoke into their phones again. The young man made no attempt to leave but walked with the same fierce purposefulness around the piazza. Then a jeep arrived and five policeman got out and all seven surrounded him and an officer spoke to him and he went without a word into the back of the jeep. Of all the spectators only I seem to have stayed till the denouement. Then, with the contemporary drama over, I went back into the cathedral.

**A**NOTHER LATE AFTERNOON, of rain, I was again going to Monreale, on the suburban bus, when two men got on. Both wore beanies, and saggy sports jackets and pants, and worn runners. One was in his seventies. He had thick white hair. The other was perhaps forty, but he could have been much younger for he had some five days growth of beard and it was totally black. It was hard to tell because he wore his beanie right on his eyebrows. This younger man was in some way disabled and limped very badly. The elder helped him into a seat next to the window and then wedged himself in against him. In time with every breath he took, the younger man let out a groan or a bellow that filled the bus. His chin and head would jerk up like an animal's. The face of the older man registered nothing and he seemed to make quiet remarks, pointing things out to his companion. It was possible to distinguish some embryonic control or variation in the cry the next time the younger man breathed. But when the sound, always painful, took on a particularly anguished, desperate note, the older man would readjust the other's beanie, pulling it higher on his forehead, then he would put a water bottle to his lips and tilt it. Most of it seemed to be swallowed and only a small amount trickled down the chin. Then the cries would be less anxious for perhaps another half a minute. Before we got to Monreale the two men got off, disappearing behind the misty windows, the older leading the younger by the hand. Things you don't see in Australia. ■

**Gerard Windsor's** most recent book is *The Mansions of Bedlam*.

# THE SHORTLIST



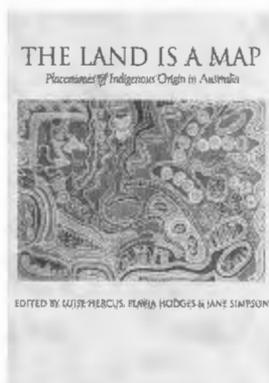
**Justice, Jesus, and the Jews: A Proposal for Jewish-Christian Relations**, Michael L. Cook sj. Michael Glazier Book published by The Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 2003. ISBN 0 8146 5148 8

The relations between Jews and Christians have been notoriously strained. *Justice, Jesus, and the Jews* is a well-documented attempt to find common ground for contemporary Judaism and Christianity in the Biblical tradition out of which they both came. Cook argues that when Jesus spoke of the

kingdom of God, he drew upon the central notion of justice that taught that God alone was king in Israel, that Israel was called to be a society in which there was neither poverty nor oppression, and that the reign of God had to take some social form. Jesus criticised the religious practices and institutions of his own day at the points where they neglected these principles.

To share common ground is not to agree. Both Judaism and Christianity have moved beyond the conditions of 1st-century Palestine, and beyond the emphases of Jesus in addressing that situation. Indeed, Cook's presentation of a Jesus who has a sharp interest in the shape that kingdoms take in this world will challenge many Christians. His understanding that God alone is king, that kingdoms are not to be trusted when they appeal to God, and that the test of any Christian politic is the priority it gives to overcoming poverty and oppression will challenge Jews and Christians alike, particularly these days.

—Andrew Hamilton sj



**The Land is a Map: Placenames of Indigenous Origin in Australia**, Luise Hercus, Flavia Hodges & Jane Simpson (eds). Pandanus Books in association with Pacific Linguistics, 2002. ISBN 1 74076 020 4, RRP \$38.50

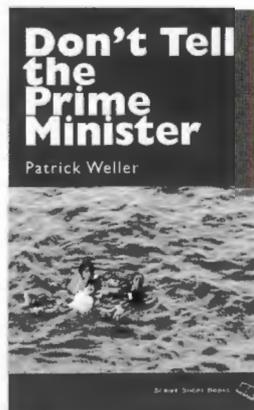
When Australian indigenous history hits the newspapers, the cause and focus of discussion are usually disedifying. It is a relief to turn to such a handsome and painstaking work as *The Land is a Map*. It provides detailed and astringent reading. It is also a humane work, for

it values the cultures which it studies for the sake of the people who formed these cultures, and not simply for their place in the commentator's view of the world.

The book contributes to the broader enterprise of recording Indigenous placenames in northern Australia. These names have often been superseded by the names given by settlers. Even amateur readers can recognise the book's contribution to mapping not simply the geography of the land, but also the geography of the spirit. As the connotations of language are re-created, the people and the land come alive.

As in any study of Indigenous people, there is a note of urgency and sadness. The editors note, '[A]ll Indigenous placename networks are under threat, and, when memories are fading, it is particularly urgent that the networks should be at least recorded.' This effort to record has much more to offer Australian self-understanding than has tendentious interpretation of history.

—A.H.



**Don't Tell the Prime Minister**, Patrick Weller. Scribe Short Books, 2002. ISBN 0 908011 76 8, RRP \$14.95

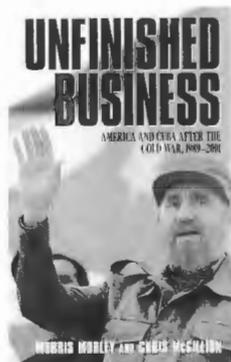
We're all familiar with the chaos theory at work: a butterfly flaps its wings in Brazil causing a tornado to occur in Texas. Well, in this instance a misunderstood phone conversation aboard the HMAS *Adelaide* results in the children-overboard affair of the 2001 election. However, Weller's concise account brings to light the disturbing truth that the affair could be played out as absolute fact to the Australian public, when members of

the public service knew otherwise.

Weller takes the reader out into the Timor Sea and through the halls of Canberra, reconstructing events with fast-paced vividness. But the heart of his investigation is an examination of accountability in modern Australian government. He tackles interesting issues such as the current legal status of ministerial advisers, the role of communication technology in constituting 'formal advice' and the changing nature of the public service.

*Don't Tell the Prime Minister* is short, not much over 100 pages. However, it is quite a dense read, weighty in its implications. Highly recommended for all concerned citizens.

—Godfrey Moase



**Unfinished Business: America and Cuba after the Cold War, 1989-2001**, Morris Morley and Chris McGillion. Cambridge University Press, 2002. ISBN 0 521 52040 1, RRP \$49.95

*Unfinished Business*, a model study of international relations, could well have been entitled *New Business*. Cuba has been the laboratory in which the war on Iraq and the wars that will follow have been designed. The chemistry of a new world order was established—in which the will and interests of the United States are determinant, and other nations are pressed to fall into line. In Cuba, Russia was forced to withdraw financial support; foreign companies doing business there were threatened with penalties by United States courts. Cuba itself could never restore normal relations. Whatever it did, new demands were made, and new reasons offered for sanctions.

And so in Iraq, the will for war remains, while new reasons for it replace discredited ones, and choirboy nations learn to sing new antiphons. But the international orchestra recognises barbarous music and refuses to play. Meanwhile, Castro performs each night despite all the attempts to shut him down.

—A.H.

something old something new something old something new

In 1953, Watson and Crick unravelled the structure of DNA, for which they and colleague Wilkins (but notably not Wilkins' brilliant assistant Rosalind Franklin) received the Nobel Prize. Fifty years on, and with the release of Brenda Maddox's *Rosalind Franklin: the dark lady of DNA*, Watson's own *The Double Helix* remains a compelling—if infuriating—account of Cambridge's competitive yet mannered academic culture, in which, Watson claims, 'the best home for a feminist was in another person's lab'.

—Kristie Dunn



**Pushing time away: My grandfather and the tragedy of Jewish Vienna, Peter Singer. Fourth Estate, 2003.**  
ISBN 0 7322 7743 4, RRP \$24.95 paperback, \$45 hardback

**P**ETER SINGER knew only one of his mother's parents. When his grandmother, Amalie, finally arrived in Australia in August 1946, he was six weeks old. The world in which she had been nurtured, educated and loved lay in ruins behind her. 'For the nine years that she was still to live, she gave us all the pent-up love that had been frustrated during so many years of sadness.' Amalie is one of millions who arrived in this country, and continue to arrive, with little in the way of material possessions but a wealth of experience, much of it painful. Her story resonates with many others; it is still unique.

*Pushing time away* is presented as principally the story of Amalie's husband, David Oppenheim. He was born in Vienna in 1881; Amalie was three years older than he. Oppenheim was richly cultured. In the years before World War I, Sigmund Freud was attracted to his grasp of myth, folklore, scripture and literature and welcomed him to collaborate on some of his work. Oppenheim became part of Freud's intimate group, which also included Alfred Adler.

Freud believed that the wellspring of human behaviour was to be found in unresolved issues of sexuality, especially those which seem to transgress social norms and kinship taboos. Adler proposed that a sense of inferiority is more formative of the human psyche. Depending on your point of view, he either invented or discovered what is commonly known as 'the inferiority complex'. I have only ever heard this term used in a superior tone of voice, which has always suggested to me that there was some substance in what Adler had to say. Freud was livid that somebody dared to develop alternatives to

his theories and had a nasty falling out with Adler. Ironically, Freud's behaviour towards his former associate, and subsequent rival, also indicates that Adler's insight had some foundation. Freud had a lot to say about love. He was a pretty good hater.

David Oppenheim decided to side with Adler. Among his reasons was the fact that 'I admired Freud but I loved Adler.' Perhaps the erotic subtext to this statement suggests that Freud was not entirely wrong either. Oppenheim's sexuality was a subtle affair. Both his sexual attractions and his candour about them would be more familiar at the turn of the 21st century than the 20th. When he and Amalie began writing to each other, they were both sexually attracted to members of their own sex. Indeed, it was their willingness to deal openly with such issues which began to bring them together. There is really no evidence, however, that Oppenheim's attraction to Adler was sexual.

Oppenheim was a highly principled man who, more than once, paid an exorbitant price for those principles. In this case, he lost the chance to exert an influence on the emergence of one of the century's guiding theories.

One of the themes that runs through this book is the fine line between human order and human chaos. In a way, this is what both Freud and Adler were trying to explain. But no simple theory accounts for the twin horrors which soon came to affect both David and Amalie: World War I and Hitler's Holocaust. Not long after he was part of Freud's salon, Oppenheim was fighting in the Balkans as an officer of the army of Austria-Hungary. His physical and mental health would be

permanently damaged by that pointless war. Nevertheless, even in the trenches, he continued to pursue his academic interests, especially in classical literature. There is in Oppenheim's character a stubborn refusal to give up on human nature. It is evidenced not just by a willingness to study under fire, but also by his reluctance to escape from Europe when he had a chance in 1938. He didn't want to go without his books. That reluctance reveals a belief that the hundreds of years of scholarship and culture to which he was an heir would endure longer than any tyranny or insanity. They could survive to speak more truthfully of the capacity of humans to create, painstakingly, something precious.

**A**S HE COMBS through their many letters and writings which have survived, it is obvious that Peter Singer is deeply affected by his grandparents. He retraces their steps and returns to Vienna, pondering the fact that his own marriage, to Renata, has endured for 30 years. He draws heart from the relationship of his grandparents. His simple and familiar insights into what makes a relationship last so long—that it has to be more than a physical magnetism—would hardly be out of place in a book of Catholic piety. Nor would his beliefs about the integrity required of a true teacher: that they need to embody what they say.

As I became more and more engrossed in this book, I warmed to the storyteller. Singer is often seen as the *bête noire* of Catholic morality, the philosopher who supports abortion and euthanasia while advocating 'animal liberation'. Singer has

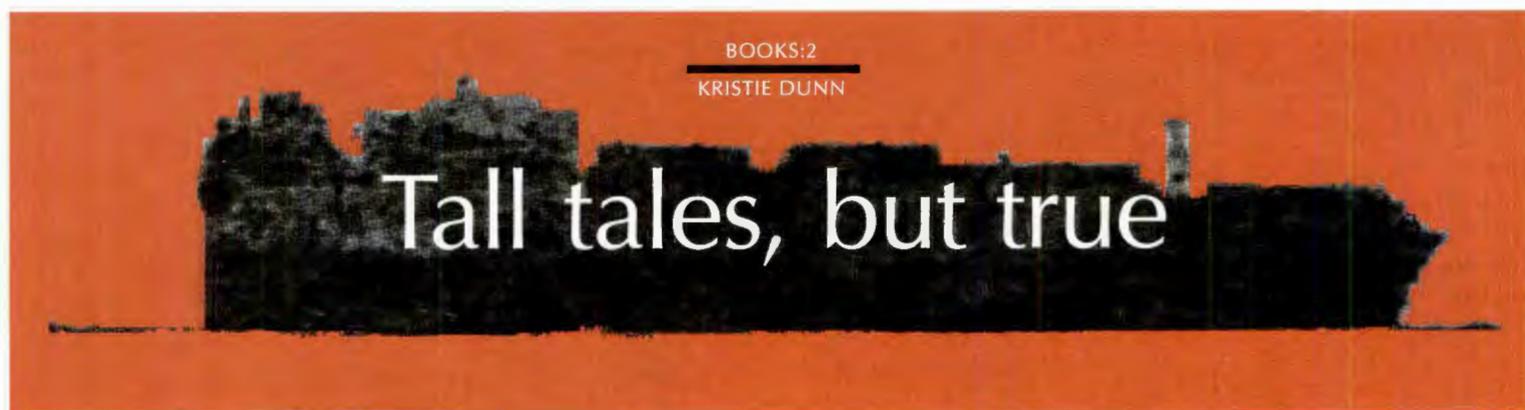
become one of the most visible proponents of an alternative system of ethics to that proposed by Christian orthodoxy. He has been called a few nasty names for that. This book suggested to me, time and again, how much common ground there is between those alternative ways of seeing the world. They rest on a profound willingness to trust the ability of human beings to do something good, however much evidence there is that they are at least as likely to do something blind and destructive. They differ in understanding what that

something good might be. But they share a kind of hopefulness.

Towards the end of this book, Singer asks himself why he has been writing it at all. Few writers, faced with such irresistible material, would move to that level of self-examination. Singer shares with David Oppenheim the fact that he is an atheist. He believes in no afterlife. So what difference will it make to David that his life is now being celebrated? Amalie was a believer. There are aspects of her life which I would like to have explored a little more, not least her faith. She was

with her husband as he died in a ghetto 60 years ago. She found her way to Australia. *Pushing time away* invites as many questions as it answers. Elsewhere, Singer has suggested that the two characteristics which define a moral being are the capacity to feel pain and the ability to develop complex relationships. The central characters in this book score highly against both those criteria. But I believe there is more to them as well. ■

**Michael McGirr** is the fiction editor of *Meanjin*.



*Dark Victory*, David Marr and Marian Wilkinson. Allen & Unwin, 2003. ISBN 1 86508 939 7, RRP \$29.95

**I**N THE AFTERMATH of the 2001 election, Wilh Wilhelmsen, proprietor of the Norwegian shipping line that owned the MV *Tampa*, wrote to John Howard. After congratulating him on his re-election, Wilhelmsen suggested that Howard owed him a case of fine Australian red for his role in Howard's dark victory. He received no wine, and no reply.

Wilh Wilhelmsen was not the only one to miss out. At the Liberal victory party on election night, there was an unexpected appearance by another key player—the Race Card. As the Race Card (aka one of the satirists from the ABC TV program the *Election Chaser*) was escorted out of the room to frosty silence, he yelled: 'I've been with him the whole campaign and now you're kicking me out. No respect. I tell you what, they just use you.'

A year later, Howard farewelled his Departmental Secretary, Max Moore-Wilton, who was retiring after six and a half years of service, and who had been

a conspicuous participant in Howard's celebrations at the Liberal victory party on election night. Howard praised Moore-Wilton for his years of loyal service, and his determination to make the public service 'responsive to the wishes and the goals of the elected government'. Moore-Wilton had led the purge of the public service in 1996. His approach to the Westminster tradition of an apolitical public service, able to offer 'frank and fearless' advice to government, was summed up in his comment: 'there are a number of people who have confused frank and fearless with just being a bloody nuisance.' He left Canberra to become executive chairman and CEO of the newly privatised Sydney Airport Corporation.

They say God is in the detail. So too is the truth about the *Tampa*. It has taken 18 months for journalists David Marr and Marian Wilkinson to piece together the tale of how a sinking fishing boat became the pawn in a campaign that converted a

likely loss of power into a conclusive election victory in a little under three months. Thorough research, careful composition and a deft use of light and shade turn what is an inherently fascinating story into a gripping, ripping yarn—alive with detail and rich in analysis. And the authors would be the first to recognise the irony: that the book's release is likely to be overshadowed by the War on Terror—the crucible that, in the course of those highly charged days and weeks, transformed fear first into anger and then into votes.

If this were a children's book, you'd be hard-pressed to get the kids to sleep. 'Just one more chapter,' they'd clamour. 'What happens next?' Others (notably Peter Mares in his revised *Borderline*, 2002) have written in depth about the various strands—*Tampa*, the 'Pacific solution', Operation Relex and the aptly termed 'raft' of legislation—that make up the Howard government's 'border protection' strategy. But not until *Dark Victory* have we had such a comprehensive

and compelling narrative about how those strands came together to lead the Coalition to victory in late 2001.

The story starts with the first sighting of the *Tampa* by the 438 people on board the stricken vessel *Palapa*, and ends at the Wentworth hotel in Sydney where, to thunderous applause, John Howard had already started to deny the role played by the *Tampa* in his re-election. 'Those who will seek to record wrongly that we only began to recover late in August', he said, 'forget the great turning point of the Aston by-election, and the way in which our party ... responded to the concerns of the Australian people in many areas'. As the authors of this book argue, however, no concern was as great as the fear of invasion by people on boats, and no response was more carefully and strategically planned.

As each chapter unfolds, the drama of those days is re-created in all its intensity. We experience again the tension and the stand-off between the government and the captain of the *Tampa*, Arne Rinnan, while 438 people lived, ate and slept between the containers on the open deck. We are confronted by the extent of the government's calculations to avoid the operation of the *Migration Act*, under which it was obliged to bring ashore the people on the *Tampa*, detain them and allow them to make applications for asylum. We are reminded of the long weekend and late nights in the Federal Court, when legal arguments were developed on the run, and of how Justice North's decision of September 11 that the government was unlawfully detaining the asylum seekers on the *Tampa* was overshadowed by the events that followed only hours later in New York and Washington. And we hear that fateful congruence invoked in the argument of the government's barrister, David Bennett QC, two days later: that in the wake of such terrorist activity, the long-standing distinction between the government's power to deter enemy aliens and its power with respect to friendly aliens was 'quaint and old-fashioned'. As Peter Reith said, more directly, on 3AK that same day: 'You've got to be able to manage people coming into your country ... otherwise it can be a pipeline for terrorists to come in and use your country as a staging post for terrorist activities.'

These early chapters confirm much of what was suspected but not known about the *Tampa* crisis. We find out the details of

## The Fundamentals Of Music

It's true, the world makes music everywhere—  
The shire sonatas gusting through the gums,  
The core continuo of a creaking stair,  
Recitatives of chained-up evening dogs.

The ferry-throb, wave-manacled groundbass,  
'Turbae', as the cyclone tops its bore,  
Dove da capos at roofs' interface,  
Block chorales of wakening cicadas.

Such backward-harking instances are theories  
Of sound by secondary metaphor—  
'Wie ein Naturlaut ...' The harmonic series  
Puns on the pliant ecstasy of numbers.

Peter Porter

the pressure exerted on the captain of the *Tampa*, Arne Rinnan, including threats of prosecution for people smuggling. We get confirmation of the policies of isolation of the *Tampa* in order to prevent the Australian public from empathising with the asylum seekers' plight. And most significantly, we learn how slow the government was to act on its intelligence information. It waited more than 24 hours from when the Coastwatch first spotted the *Palapa*, 'dead in the water', to issue the announcement that brought the *Tampa* to the rescue—a deliberate delay that would come to mark the government's approach to subsequent rescue operations.

**I**T IS THE little things that get you. Like the fact that many of those who braved the storms and the overcrowded ships had never seen a boat before, and could not swim. As one of the survivors said: 'I saw boats on the television or in the movies but in Afghanistan it's a landlocked country. It doesn't have boat or ship.' Like the description of the asylum seekers, who had just been transferred from the *Tampa* to the *Manoora*, standing on the deck with numbers around their necks before being shepherded below to the 'tank deck' that would become their makeshift home

for the next fortnight until they reached Nauru. And that many of those who were eventually allowed up to the open deck—and daylight—eight or ten days into the journey could not stand on the hot deck: it burnt their feet. All their belongings, including their shoes, had been left to sink with the *Palapa*.

These glimpses of human anguish form a counterpoint to the 'bigger' story, unfolding in briefings and memos and meetings in the landlocked capital on the other side of the country. The government's response to the *Tampa* 'crisis' was co-ordinated by the People Smuggling Taskforce, made up of senior bureaucrats from the key departments, and headed by Max Moore-Wilton's 'number two', Jane Halton. Moore-Wilton, the operation's mastermind, told Marr that he was receiving his orders from higher up still. This was the body charged with making sure that Howard fulfilled his promise: 'that boat will never land in our waters—never.' Still in operation six weeks later, after the *Tampa* had left Australian waters, the taskforce became the heart of the ensuing military operation—known as Operation Relax—to turn the boats back. And the navy was its front line.

The concept underpinning Operation Relax was displayed at polling stations

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## Specifics

*i.m. Denis Grundy*

For the hard bone hunkers    a cushion  
kindly on wooden pews    short sermons  
voices pitched perfect into the complex structures  
of roof and mozart

For the difficult breath  
pinched by exhausted traffic  
A mountain's homely fold    the raw sun gentled  
by courteous wattle

For the clenched stomach  
a savoury kitchen    marjoram and leek  
blended into butternut to slip  
over the tongue    a table's round  
of Delatite white in simple glass  
sharp humour    easy leaving

For the bitter muffled silence    the astringent  
stillness between these trees

### Aileen Kelly

all around the country on 11 November: 'We decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.' Empowered and protected by the new *Border Protection Act*, navy vessels were employed in the Indian ocean to intercept SIEVs (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessels) and tow them back to Indonesian waters.

As with all military campaigns, control of information was its key weapon, and truth its first casualty. The existence of the taskforce was barely known. In accordance with a code unprecedented in peacetime, all information about Operation Relex was controlled by Minister Reith's office. Neither those in command of the operation, nor those carrying it out, were allowed to speak to the media or to the public. Footage of interceptions was not to be released, and direct instructions were given by Reith's press secretary to the defence department that no 'personalising or humanising images' of the asylum seekers

were to be taken. Canberra was 'shut tight'. As Marr and Wilkinson observe, this information blackout came at some cost to the government. Footage of navy vessels intercepting fishing boats would have been a much more effective deterrent to potential asylum seekers than the Department of Immigration's infamous brochures warning of dangerous snakes. But it was not to the outside world that the government was trying to sell its 'tough on boat people' message. It was to the Australian electorate.

No-one—least of all the ALP—was surprised when John Howard called an election within weeks of his government's victory in the Federal Court and the events of September 11. International insecurity and the manufactured air of an invasion of boats was a vote-winning combination. In an environment in which Australia was mobilising its troops to go to war against Afghanistan, the deployment of those same troops in the war against

illegal immigration seemed appropriate, even necessary. The fact that the boats were filled with those fleeing the regime that the US and its allies were planning to invade did not seem to matter. As Marr and Wilkinson put it, Howard combined 'absolute opposites' into a 'single potent campaign'—'race wrapped in a flag'—with the help of such experts in wedge politics as the former Northern Territory CLP's Chief Minister Shane Stone and his pollster Mark Textor.

Throughout all this, Kim Beazley hovers in the background, a looming yet insubstantial figure. This is not his story, but it is, as Marr and Wilkinson point out, a story that relied on his co-operation. Without the ALP's support, the post-*Tampa* legislation, a set of bills that the government had previously but unsuccessfully introduced to parliament, would never have been passed. Among other things, the legislation authorised the use of force to turn back boats on the high seas, provided immunity from prosecution for the use of force in such situations, narrowed the definition of a refugee and the criteria for the issuing of a protection visa, excised certain parts of Australia (including Christmas Island and Ashmore reef) from the operation of the *Migration Act* and sought to restrict access to the courts, both for failed visa applicants and for those seeking to challenge the validity of the *Migration Act*. A separate bill was also designed to prevent Liberty Victoria and Eric Vadarlis from pursuing the *Tampa* litigation in the High Court.

Far from being a 'carping opposition', the ALP presented almost no challenge to the government's actions, save for its refusal to pass the original *Border Protection Bill* which it rightly recognised as an affront to democracy and the rule of law. No questions were asked in parliament about the welfare of those on board the *Tampa*, or about the detail of the arrangements made for their accommodation on the *Manoora* and subsequently on Nauru. Had such questions been asked, we would have known that the facilities described by Howard in parliament were not to be offered to the asylum seekers. Instead they were kept in the bottom of the ship on the 'tank deck' where the vehicles and tanks were normally kept. Similarly, the detail of the horse-trading that resulted in a tent city being constructed on Nauru, and the allegations of forced

removal of people from the *Manoora* to Nauru, were left to tenacious journalists to uncover. The Opposition just wanted everyone to stop talking about boats. As *Hansard* records, Senator Schacht summed up its position at the time: 'we are supporting [the legislation] ... to get it off the agenda and to concentrate on the issues on which we can win the election.'

**B**UT PEOPLE KEPT talking (not least because the government wouldn't let the issue die) and the boats kept coming—12 altogether. Some were repaired, towed back and left in Indonesian waters. Others, like SIEV X, sank, claiming 353 lives. The government's response was to distance itself from the tragedy, claiming repeatedly that the boat had sunk in Indonesian waters. After reviewing the evidence, Marr and Wilkinson conclude that 'it was impossible for SIEV X to have sunk in Indonesian waters'. Wherever it sank, it seems clear from Marr and Wilkinson's sources that, at the very least, Australia had reason to believe that the boat was on its way. When surveillance flights failed to find it, though, no-one was concerned. As the authors put it, the atmosphere of border protection and the context of a military campaign had blunted humanitarian concerns. 'The failure of a boat to arrive did not trigger an alarm that a human tragedy might be unfolding. It was just one less boat to worry about.'

The SIEV X case was not the only one in which humanitarian concerns were subsumed by the imperatives of border protection. Under the internationally recognised SOLAS (Safety of Life at Sea) principles, embodied in Australian legislation, the master of a ship must render assistance to any person who is in danger of drowning—even an enemy during war-time. But as Commander Banks of HMAS *Adelaide* was to discover, these well-established principles were frequently overlooked in the scramble to maintain the integrity of Australia's borders, leaving the navy crews to witness first-hand the human cost of the operation.

Members of the HMAS *Adelaide's* crew were regarded as heroes when they dived into the water to rescue children and adults when the *Olong*, also known as SIEV 4, sank. But they need never have resorted to such measures. Commander Banks had been shadowing the boat for

two and a half days. He had fired warning shots into the sea to deter it from entering Australian waters. When the engine failed—possibly due to sabotage by those on board the *Olong*—he was not permitted to evacuate any of the 200 passengers, despite the poor condition of the overcrowded boat. The order from the prime minister was to tow the *Olong* back to Indonesian waters. After a day and a night, the *Olong* literally fell apart, spilling all its passengers into the ocean. The photos and video of that rescue went on to be the centrepiece of the government's false claims at the height of the election campaign that children had been thrown overboard.

The outline of that shambolic episode has been pieced together in the coyly named *Report on a Certain Maritime Incident* by the Senate Select Committee Inquiry (2002). Those at the higher levels do not get off lightly in this tale of buck-passing, kowtowing and outright deceit, and in their recounting of the story, Marr and Wilkinson paint a picture of a public service—and, at times, a defence force—dutifully following Sir Humphrey's mantra. But their account also highlights the frustration and powerlessness of those such as Commander Banks, and Brigadier Bornholt from the defence force's public relations team, who did try to speak up. Their attempts to correct what was originally an innocent misunderstanding, caused predominantly by the abandonment of the usual protocols for communication between the defence forces and the bureaucracy by those in command of Operation Relex, were swept aside in the general frenzy of the election campaign and the force of the spin that was carrying Howard to his third election victory.

*Dark Victory* makes some serious allegations about the actions of various ministers. There is an account of a meeting in which Ruddock allegedly alluded to the possibility that Australia could play a part in the sabotage of boats leaving Indonesia. The inspector general of Intelligence and Security found that in addition to the extensive—and legal—surveillance of communications to and from the *Tampa*, the government used illegal phone taps to monitor the communications between the lawyer for the shipping line and his clients. And the role played by Reith and Howard in playing fast and loose with the truth about the children-overboard allegations during the election

campaign is, even after the lengthy Senate committee inquiry, still not finally resolved, given the government's refusal to allow ministers and their advisers to give evidence to the inquiry.

**T**HIS BOOK IS written with a steely precision. It is carefully sourced and footnoted, and the index is a joy, containing much valuable information as well as the bare facts. Take these extracts from the entry for Admiral Chris Barrie, for example: 'asked about military options by Howard'; 'begs Reith to give sailors a break'; 'considers whether he is a dill'; 'gagged over Operation Relex'; 'humiliated at press conference'; 'sceptical about feasibility of Operation Relex'; 'retires'. A major disappointment, though, is the cover. Dull and beige, it fails to do justice to the riches the book contains.

Marr and Wilkinson's analysis of the political strategising and manoeuvrings is comprehensive and persuasive. At the same time, one of the great strengths of this book is that they step back and allow the facts and the people to speak for themselves. There is Ruddock on why the government refused to let those on the *Tampa* land on Christmas Island: 'Once we had brought people ashore and they were in the migration zone ... [Australia's legal] obligations kick in and ... it was game, set, match.' (David Bennett QC could not have put it more clearly.) There is Christian Maltau, the first officer on board the *Tampa*: 'The fact that we never received any adequate supplies of medicines, food, blankets and other things that could have relieved the human suffering on board was perhaps what upset us most during the whole incident ... We were close enough to shore to see the buildings, even the hospital, but no help arrived.' And there is Rear Admiral Ritchie: 'We are talking about people coming to Australia illegally. It is not World War III.'

And, of course, there are the asylum seekers. Marr and Wilkinson have trawled through the transcripts of the various legal proceedings and the report of the *Inquiry into a Certain Maritime Incident* which, they acknowledge, uncovered many of the facts of this story. They have also sought out and interviewed a number of the survivors of SIEV X, and those rescued by the *Tampa*, many of whom are now permanent residents of New Zealand. The voices of those people resonate throughout

this book, asking questions that even the best-prepared minister would find difficult to answer. Like the following, from a survivor of SIEV X who, like the few other survivors, had spent a whole afternoon and night clinging to wreckage in the Indian ocean, thinking no-one would find him. After his rescue, he was interviewed by Australian and Indonesian representatives, who asked him to identify the boat that had sunk and claimed so many lives. 'You knew about our boat', he said, as they showed him a photo of the boat in the port prior to its departure. 'Why didn't you try to find us?' And the response of the Afghans on board SIEV 5 to being told that Australia would not accept illegal immigration: 'We are not illegal immigration. We are asylum seekers.'

As Neville Wran said after the sinking of SIEV X, 'We're not dealing with a problem here, we're dealing with people.' And while *Dark Victory* is a story about lies, threats and a political campaign built on fear, it is also a story about people, and about suffering. This is what you take away with you; this is what you cannot forget. Those 530 people still on Nauru and Manus Island, unable to be settled or returned, waiting for a new home. Those 353 people who drowned in the ocean, after boarding a boat that was so overburdened, so 'sad', as one of the survivors later described it, that it had trouble leaving its Indonesian port. And those 350 or so among us who, having suffered in one of the offshore detention centres as symbols of Australia's 'tough stance', have finally made it quietly to our shores. They are the victims of the new restrictive protection regime, unable now ever to become permanent members of our community. They are the true losers in Howard's dark victory. ■

**Kristie Dunn** is a freelance writer and lawyer. She worked as an associate to the Chief Justice of the Federal Court during the *Tampa* litigation.

# The only hope

**Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for hope in a shrinking society,**  
Ghassan Hage. Pluto Press, 2003. ISBN 1 86403 196 4 RRP \$29.95

**P**ERHAPS IT IS St Paul's fault; many things seem to be. But in this case it is his superlative rhetorical power that has led readers astray, rather than the logic of his argument. The 'problem' lies in the great peroration on love and leaving childish ways, that ends with 'So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love' (1 Corinthians 13.13; RSV). Yes, love is the greatest, but the flow of the rhetoric encourages us to underestimate faith and hope, especially as we live in the shadow of the 1960s assertion that all you need is love. If recent history (national and global) is any guide, we need more love for our fellow humans, but to live well together, love is not all we need.

Faith doesn't receive much attention in Ghassan Hage's provocative new book, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*. What he has to say about hope is, however, fascinating, and is a powerful comment on the strange and distressing mental state we as a community are in. The starting point is crucial:

The most important thesis developed in this work is that societies are mechanisms for the distribution of hope, and that the kind of affective attachment (worrying or caring) that a society creates among its citizens is intimately connected to its capacity to distribute hope.

Society is not merely about the distribution of goods and services, 'equitably' or 'productively', depending on the brand of economics you subscribe to. It is about the circulation of hope, about individuals'

need to be able to place their lives in an optimistic or at least consoling narrative.

That is what is so bitter about living in the present compared to the postwar boom years. In material terms, nearly all Australians live better than they would have in the 1950s; we have even reached the historically bizarre point where obesity is a fairly reliable marker of poverty rather than wealth. Economic growth has delivered an unprecedented, if uneven, distribution of goods in Western countries, and yet we are ungratefully grumpy, to the bewilderment of economically liberal politicians and commentators. Hage suggests that, with the efficiencies, the productivity, the flexibility, and the global flows of capital, goods, and labour, have come anxiety and paranoia.

This makes a lot of sense to me. Most of the organisations I deal with, and especially the university where I work, are gloomy not because their members are, objectively, doing it particularly tough. It's just that we can see no plausible reason to hope for a better tomorrow. The looming threats of terror, ecological disaster, social meltdown, economic decay, falling standards in education, ageing populations, especially in churches—they congregate over the next hill, and the rumbling we hear when we pause for thought or worry comes from those threats, not from thunder.

Without social and institutional hope, we become paranoid about potential loss. Our own existence feels perilous, so we guard our borders, refuse to acknowledge Indigenous rights, and hoard our sympathy.

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Hage asks provokingly: 'What kind of people believe that a parent (even an animal parent, let alone a human from another culture) could actually throw their child overboard? Perhaps only those who are unconsciously worried about being thrown overboard themselves?'

Hage's angry and focused book traces the psychology of Australia's present paranoia about otherness and calls readers to account for their prejudices, particularly about race and class. He acknowledges that our condition is a symptom of wider global flows of paranoid anxiety set off by the warring fundamentalisms of religion and economics. However, it is particularly Australia's condition, and particularly the Howard government's role in enflaming it, that Hage calls to account. Nowhere have I read a better explanation of why John Howard's mean-spirited projection of Australian values renders me apoplectic. The punchline of the chapter on 'the rise of Australian fundamentalism' asserts satisfyingly that Howard's ideological ascendancy 'signals the rise of an unprecedented political narcissism: a numb and dumb sense of self-satisfaction with the

national self and a refusal to hear any voice other than one's own'.

So there! But don't rush to the bookshop expecting a neat affirmation of all your kind, liberal assumptions that the powerful are villains and the victims the salt of the earth. Hage is honest enough to make enemies on all sides. For example, he names Israel as a colonialist nation, and explores the condition of Palestinian suicide bombers as if they were human beings with intelligible motivations. His deepest formation is as a social scientist, always asking the question, 'What kind of social conditions must prevail and what kind of history must a people have internalised to make them lose [the] capacity of seeing the other in his or her humanness?' But he never mistakes explanation for justification. Consequently, he also rejects the despair and fundamentalist machismo of the bombers and the politicians who manipulate them. The main difference he sees is that the Israelis have more power on the ground to act effectively on their paranoid racist fantasies. Why, after all, should we expect Palestinians to be ennobled by their sufferings?

And why should Australians expect immigrants, Aboriginal people, asylum seekers, or any exploited group to be ennobled by, or patient in, suffering? Hage argues that what we call xenophobia is more often the fear that the 'others' are really just like us, and would want what we have were they given the opportunity. White Australia's history, in his account, goes back to the original deprivation of the Aboriginal people. Particularly 'since Mabo reawoke in us the memory of our original theft', we have been in a state of panic about others taking our land and 'our way of life' from us.

The paranoia is more a fear of sameness than of otherness, and it makes for hopeless politics in every sense of the word. Hage hopes that, by acknowledging these histories, we will be able to outgrow our paranoia, to deal generously and respectfully with others. I hope so too. ■

**Robert Phiddian** teaches English at Flinders University, and is on the advisory committee for the Adelaide Festival of Ideas, to be held in July on the themes of Hope and Fear.

BOOKS:4

ANDREW HAMILTON

## Agreeing on something

**A Long Way from Rome: Why the Australian Catholic Church is in Crisis**, Chris McGillion (ed). Allen & Unwin, 2003. ISBN 1 86508 917 6, RRP \$29.95

**Misguided Morality: Catholic Moral Teaching in the Contemporary Church**, Michael Winter. Ashgate Publishing, 2002. ISBN 0 7546 0742 9

**Breaking Faith: The Pope, the People and the Fate of Catholicism**, John Cornwell. Penguin, 2003. ISBN 0 14 100463 0, RRP \$23.95

**Authority in the Roman Catholic Church: Theory and Practice**, Bernard Hoose (ed). Ashgate Publishing, 2002. ISBN 0 7546 0531 0, RRP \$19.50

**T**HE LIVELY GROUP of essayists who write in the book edited by Chris McGillion is indeed a long way from Rome. The stimulus for the book was the meeting in Rome between Australian bishops attending a Synod and Roman church officials. The bishops were presented with the Statement of Conclusions, a document that presented a negative view of the Australian church. McGillion himself summarises the events well, and his contributors offer an alternative view of the Australian church to the one the bishops



heard. The book's enterprise is inevitably tinged with polemic, for the perspectives of the Roman Congregation and of the writers differ greatly. The Statement of Conclusions finds fault with the independence and lack of respect shown by Australian Catholics; the contributors

blame an excessively centralised and partisan Roman administration.

Two themes are developed in *A Long Way from Rome*. It describes the harmful consequences for the local church that flow from the centralisation of power in Rome. It also reflects on the specifically Australian context within which the local church lives. I found the discussion of this second theme the more interesting and significant. For even if the proposals made in this book for a less centralised church characterised by trusting relationships

were implemented, the challenges of living faithfully as a Christian church in Australia would remain. Indeed their intractability would come into clearer light. The contributors to this collection demonstrate this by agreeing in their account of the symptoms of decline, and by disagreeing about its causes and about what in detail a healthy church might look like.

**T**HE AUSTRALIAN DIAGNOSIS of the health of the church offered in Chris McGillion's book is consistent with that offered elsewhere. In the other books to which I refer, Winter, Cornwell and the writers in Hoose's collection also consistently speak of a crisis of authority and of inappropriate uses of power in the Catholic Church. They argue generally that the way in which authority is exercised is counter-productive, because it simultaneously distracts attention from the major challenges that the churches must confront in contemporary societies, and blocks attempts to meet those challenges reflectively.

The critics also converge in the evidence that they offer to show that the Catholic Church is dysfunctional. They argue that centralised organs of power limit the ability to adapt to local conditions, and furthermore disregard reflection by the local churches on their cultural environment. The more explicitly theological treatments of Winter and Hoose suggest that centralisation of power leads simultaneously to increasingly extensive claims for the authority of Roman views on details of faith and of sexual and medical issues, and to increasing local incredulity about the truth or wisdom of those views. Moreover, they agree that consultation by officers of the Roman congregations is limited, and their policies often reflect a partisan agenda. As a result, the life of many local churches is shaped by the desire to avoid any overt conflict between Roman policy and local experience. Conflict is concealed by creating a culture of silence. There is no place where controversial issues can be discussed freely, and in any case, the most significant issues, like the ordination of

women, are withdrawn from conversation. Furthermore, scandalous and unwise behaviour by church representatives is kept hidden out of a concern to maintain an appearance of rectitude.

All these books see an emblem of this church culture in the failure to deal decisively with child abuse, and in the preference given to maintaining the public reputation of the Church over concern for victims. They argue that, in dealing with child abuse, as also in the treatment of divergent thinkers, church procedures fall well short of the standards of justice presumed in modern democracies.

In marshalling the evidence for this indictment, Cornwell and McGillion, both journalists by trade, are most effective. Cornwell, particularly, writes with some passion, having rediscovered faith in his middle years, and having met with personal criticism for his book, *Hitler's Pope*. They instantiate the harrying of those who hold divergent opinions, the alliance between local minority groups and Roman officials, the widespread disaffection caused by the rhetoric of teaching

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about sexuality and about women, and the appointment of bishops to local churches where, in a free election, they could not have bought a vote.

I find persuasive the argument made by McGillion and the other writers, that the culture and operations of authority and power in the Catholic Church today obscure the Gospel and need to be reformed. Agreement with their judgment, however, commits the reader to face the deeper question raised by McGillion's book. Namely, how can even a reformed church embody and speak persuasively about the meaning of the Gospel within a culture whose public values and practices seem in many respects distant from it? If we are to avoid the polar responses of total contempt or total accommodation with culture, we need to approach this question with a sensitivity both to the Gospel and to the complexities of Australian culture. And we should not expect convergent answers on matters of important detail.

This is evident in the differences about liturgy. In *A Long Way from Rome*, for example, John Carmody argues well for a liturgy that responds to Australian spiritual depths. He dismisses as banal and derivative what is on offer in most Australian churches. In this critical judgment of church liturgy, he would find support from Cornwell, who was brought up on Gregorian chant well practised and performed. But in the essay previous to Carmody's, Morag Fraser introduces her discussion of women with a warm appreciation of local popular music used in a Brisbane liturgy. The difference between the two writers is partly a matter of taste. But underlying it are divergent understandings of the relationship between faith and culture. At this level lie difficult questions.

**I**N PASSING REMARKS about the Blake Prize for religious art, for example, Carmody refers to a tension that existed between those who wanted pious art and those who sought a spiritual artistic expression. He goes on to deplore the decline in standards of paintings submitted in recent years. He is correct to recall the debate among the patrons of the Blake Prize, but I believe that the conflict cut much more deeply than he suggests. It lay between those who wished to locate the prize within a religious tradition, and those who believed that in an increasingly

unchurched Australia, the prize must be open to those who wish to represent a more diffuse religious and spiritual sensibility. The broader definition of religious art won, as I believe it had to, but the decision did not guarantee that better art would be the result. A more inclusively conceived religious faith does not always liberate either art or people. This in microcosm is the dilemma with which engagement between faith and culture must deal. Its sharpness explains why a rhetoric of robust opposition to cultural trends is an attractive option for some Catholics.

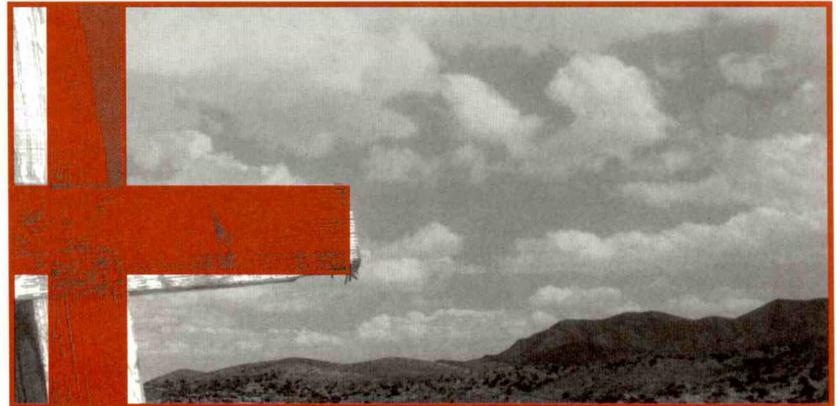
These accounts of the church, however, suggest that consistent opposition to culture is inappropriate for two reasons. In some areas, the attitudes embodied in contemporary culture and institutions are ethically superior to those embodied in the Catholic Church. Catholics are therefore morally bound to engage with the culture in order to learn goodness. To be radically opposed to culture, too, forgets that faith and culture are abstractions. In people they run together, and in practice contain good and bad elements. So, the only reasonable possible stance is of an open dialogue between two siamese twins.

If you are a siamese twin, the only way to go is to preserve your own identity and to find a language in which you can address respectfully issues which divide you from your twin. The conversation will touch all aspects of life. The chapter headings of Cornwell's book suggest the breadth of the conversation required in the Catholic Church. The way they are expressed indicates, too, that culture feels aggrieved by the failure of this conversation. He heads his chapters: 'The Great Adulteration' (of worship), 'Dilution of Belief', 'Catholic "Sexology"', 'Priests' (celibacy), 'A Disgruntled Laity', 'Women in the Church', 'The Science and Politics of Saints' and 'Hierarchy'.

To be fruitful, conversation demands an intimate understanding of culture. For that reason, I find most helpful contributions that attend to contemporary culture and reflect on the rules of engagement

with it. In *A Long Way from Rome*, Juliette Hughes offers a lively and sensitive account of cultural trends, particularly within the younger culture, while Paul Collins suggests the importance of the imagination within Catholic identity.

Collins' insistence on the imagination is suggestive, for it links the two themes of the book. It intimates why the pathologies of church matter, and it demonstrates how, in the conversation between faith and culture, both identity and openness can be preserved. In faith, the imagination is caught by a vision of life and of the world. The vision is fed by the symbols



of Christian faith. This faith expresses itself and is nourished by the community of those whose imagination is similarly caught. When authority and power are misused in the service of uniformity and control, the imagination is atrophied and not fed. It is nourished by open conversation.

In the dialogue with culture, however, Christian identity is not infinitely malleable. For the imaginative vision is distinctive. The uncompromising opposition of the churches to the war in Iraq, for example, is based in an imaginative vision of the ultimate value of each individual life from its beginnings to its end. In places the expressions of this vision are counter-cultural, as in resistance to abortion. In other places, as in opposition to the war against Iraq, it finds sympathy in popular culture, even if it is opposed by political culture and those who serve it.

Discerning what is integral to the Christian imagination requires energy and sensitivity. The issues raised in these four books are important because the ills they describe sap energy and sensitivity. ■

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# FLASH IN THE PAN



The risky sequence in *Talk To Her* is one that will thoroughly boggle Hollywood adaptation committees: how on earth will they present a gigantic vulva to their audiences without seeming to play in the porno sandpit? After all, they ripped off *Matador* to make the appalling and stupid *Basic Instinct*, which is an object lesson in how not to approach sex, death or anything at all. Almodóvar, as did Pasolini, defies the porn tag even when he quotes it because he has the Shakespearean compound fly-eye, seeing everything at once, processing seeing, thinking, feeling, hearing and especially remembering, humanely and richly and redemptively in a way that only the greatest playwrights and novelists can. —Juliette Hughes

## Beyond words

*The Pianist*, dir. Roman Polanski. Shortly after the Second World War, the German critic Theodore Adorno famously claimed that 'Writing a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric'. He said that to treat such an unimaginable horror as a 'subject' for art, to aestheticise it, is to distort it and to betray the truth of the injustice done to its victims. How, then, do I write about Roman Polanski's new film, *The Pianist*, which is winning prizes and being hailed as great Art wherever it goes?

It is based on the autobiography of Wladyslaw Szpilman, a classical pianist and survivor of the Nazi invasion of Poland, and of the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto. He was one of only 20 to survive the ghetto, out of half a million Jews forced there by the Germans upon seizing Warsaw. It also reflects Polanski's own childhood experiences of the bombing of the Warsaw and Krakow ghettos. Szpilman's entire family, and Polanski's mother, were among the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis in the concentration camps.

The film is unflinching in its portrayal of the brutality of life in the ghetto—of the systematic violence and humiliation meted out by the Nazis, but also by many of the Poles, and even by the Jewish police who collaborated with the Nazis in administering their program of incarceration, exploitation and murder.

Perhaps the most disturbing moment, however, in a distressing and disturbing

## Talk-fiesta

*Talk To Her*, dir. Pedro Almodóvar. Spain is a wondrous place, and it is the crucible of Almodóvar's imagination. Aspects of each are strong meat, and even with the mellowing of his vision, some people will find part of this story difficult to contemplate. But when Almodóvar shocks, he does it with a playfulness so far removed from the leaden melodramas we usually see that we forgive him. His films have become gentler, ever since the mellow surprise of *The Flower Of My Secret*, and we welcome it, but his beast is not tame. In the old days of his darkest comedies, sex and death were explicitly and very Spanishly enmeshed: *Matador's* bloodlust is a mad joy, not a dreary SM routine. It is also horrible, and with him we don't lose sight of that just as we don't in *Titus Andronicus*. But we see too that we are in danger of reverting to savagery if only for a minute, as in Hemingway's *Death In The Afternoon* when the corrida erupts in laughter at the catastrophic gutting of a picador's horse. Hemingway argued that this was not *schadenfreude* or sadism; it was more in the line of a prat-fall, a harsher slapstick. If you don't feel for the butt of the joke, it is funny and even

if you do feel for the victim, something in you walks as Hyde beside the Jekyll of your pity. In *Talk To Her*, Almodóvar revisits bullfighting with all the pageantry, superstition and brutality, yet his take on it has matured into something ineffably kinder and broader than in *Matador*.

The bullfighter in *Talk To Her* is a woman, Lydia (unforgettably acted by Rosario Flores, above left), and there is something of erotic surrender in the way she faces the bull, kneeling in her suit of lights with thighs spread like a limbo dancer. She is gored and ends up in a coma, tended by her latest lover, Marco (Darío Grandinetti, below left). We have seen Marco weeping at the very beginning of the film, coincidentally seated next to Benigno Martin (Javier Cámara) at a Pina Bausch performance. Benigno is a weirdo, a kind of innocent creep who is there for the woman he tends, a comatose ballet student (Leonor Watling, below right) he had been stalking for some time before the car accident that injured her brain. Echoes of *Psycho* and even *Boxing Helena* could be there, but Benigno is benign indeed: his creepiness brings life, not death. Almodóvar was drawing on actual events when he put this thread into the narrative, which includes genuine humour as well as fate and tragedy.

film, is when we first see Szpilman's father forced to comply with the Nazi edict that all Jews must wear the Star of David on their sleeve—to mark him as a thing apart from 'humanity', a subhuman, a monster; in short, a Jew. One cannot doubt the truth of the voices behind this film, or their right to be heard, or indeed the absolute need for such stories to be told.

For all the valuable and important and truthful aspects of the film, I must confess to being troubled watching it. Narrative cinema inevitably deals with individuals, characters—it cannot show us six million. Such knowledge as we have of the experience of the Holocaust comes largely through its survivors such as Szpilman. It is a marvellous and miraculous thing that he and others like him survived, and that we know their stories, but it's easy to forget that such stories *are* truly miraculous and anomalous, and that the 'truth' of the Holocaust is that almost no-one who entered its maw survived.

Szpilman's story (and indeed Polanski's) is real and true. But it seems too easy, in the uplifting final scene of the film when Szpilman performs once more to triumphant applause, to let slip the memory of all those others who left no autobiography, who made no film—murdered as he would have been but for luck. I do not know if this film is 'barbaric', as Adorno might have said had he seen it. Discussing it in terms of its Oscar chances certainly is.

—Allan James Thomas

## Full metal myth

*Ned Kelly*, dir. Gregor Jordan. If Ned Kelly hadn't lived it would have been necessary to invent him. He is the outlaw legend par excellence, our culture's pre-eminent survival myth, built on distortions, half-truths and widely agreed misperceptions—a tapestry of lies that spells truth. And now the myth has arrived at a multiplex cinema near you. The Kelly phenomenon continues its rise, absorbing all critiques, critics and admirers in iron-clad embrace, an industry in itself.

In this manifestation the myth starts with Ned (Heath Ledger) kissing a horse on its nose. Then he rides the horse through town with a pretty girl (Naomi Watts) at his back, gets shot at and pistol-whipped by the first of many evil-hearted

policemen and we're away (with an underlying sense of trepidation that it's going to be all downhill from here). Myth-making being myth-making, there is always going to be time for Ned to undress Julia, dance a jolly Irish jig in a bush pub, declare 'The land belongs to us' to rousing cheers from a town whose bank has just been robbed. But the tone has been unequivocally set: innocent boy with Irish brogue is harassed by evil men in uniform, eventually takes up arms to avenge his mother's unjust imprisonment and seek justice for all who suffer under a tyrant's yoke.

There's a breathtaking ruthlessness to the narrative, and in a way, that works. Nothing to complicate the moral clarity of Ned's vision.

Then Glenrowan. Cue men in armour, downpouring rain, gunfire, Ned making one heroic last stand (after another), orchestral accompaniment, more gunfire, innocent men, women, children, lions and monkeys shot by spineless city coppers. It works. It's hard not to feel the mythic things grabbing you by the throat. Ned rises at dawn. It's brave—like the landing at Gallipoli or a Collingwood Grand Final—and doomed.

It didn't actually happen that way. But that's not why we go to the movies.

—Alex McDermott

## Tuned in

*Sur Mes Lèvres* (Read My Lips), dir. Jacques Audiard. Carla (Emmanuelle Devos) emerges into focus: stooped, slurping water from her bathroom tap. The sounds, at first distant and muffled, crackle to life as she stands up and puts on her hearing aid. These first glimpses immerse us in Carla's world, a world isolated by deafness and undervalued by taunting co-workers.

When Carla's boss suggests she hire an assistant, Paul (Vincent Cassel) shows up. Just released on parole, after a stint in prison, he has to tread carefully or he will end up back inside. A mutual dependency forms between the two, beautifully played out, avoiding the clichés familiar to so many stories of unlikely pairings.

Carla and Paul—each instinctively defensive and selfish through bitter experience—desperately need one another. But the dependency is fraught and could destroy them both. Their chaotic journey

together runs hot and cold, but always has a compelling truth to it, making the film's ending all the more moving.

*Sur Mes Lèvres'* sound design is exceptional. Carla's selective use of her hearing aid is experienced directly by the audience as she tunes in and out of the world around her. In her most private moments Carla experiments in her bedroom, trying on Paul's clothes, struggling with their merging identities. Sounds are distant and we see her reflection in a dark mirror. Fragments of her body emerge through a mysterious blurred aperture, reducing the field of view to that of her own tunnel vision.

Vincent Cassel is back to his considerable best as the listless, seemingly impenetrable Paul. But it is Devos who commands most attention. Her portrayal of a woman beset by lonely awkwardness, and confusions about whether to go with her instincts or risk all, is extraordinary.

In the penultimate scene, Carla peers through binoculars at a distant window, reading Paul's lips. He cannot hear her, but through a veil of tears she whispers nevertheless: 'Oui ... Oui ...'

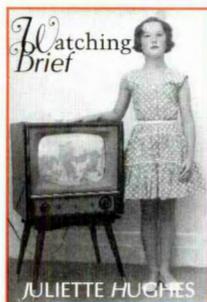
—Tim Metherall

## Longueur

*The Hours*, dir. Stephen Daldry. Bloomsbury, with its triumphs and parings, has turned a handsome profit over the years. Any film that pivots on one of its sacred texts (in this case Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*) is likely to start with its nose in front. Literally, in this case. Nicole Kidman has been lauded for her prosthetically aided portrayal (so brave) of Woolf in a highly wrought crisis. It's an actorly performance, and all credit to her. But picture a Virginia Woolf unable to twitch her aristocratic nose in disdain. I couldn't.

The film, based on Michael Cunningham's novel, with screenplay by David Hare, is lavishly credentialled. Its stars, Kidman, Julianne Moore and Meryl Streep—box office gold—give us three women, three intercut and interconnected lives riven with a sense of inconsequence. It's moving, artful, clever. But I'd have settled for so much less—and more. Just the superb Meryl Streep and no literary ballast. And none of Philip Glass' interminable score.

—Morag Fraser



## Old days, lost ways

**M**Y GRANDMOTHER LOST four children. Born in the 1870s, she lived the perilous life of a respectable married woman of the working classes in the early part of the 20th century. My mother, her seventh and last child, arrived as a welcome surprise in 1921.

Childbirth was the Janus face of love's consequences: joy or death lurked nine months after your short ecstasy. No wonder they took sex so seriously. If the beloved survived labour and delivery, the ordeal was often too much for the child. How did they, did she, cope? She talked very occasionally to me, with wet eyes, of little Annie, who died at five of a heart problem. But the babies—it was too hard to talk of them. I was a very little girl, and talk of babies was too close to talking of childbirth. She would not, in her reckoning, have wanted to spoil my innocence with such things. I remember her always as very dignified: tall and very old, white hair plaited and coiled into a neat bun.

Her house was small and very neat. Tasks were done to an unbreakable routine: Monday washing was one thing my Auntie Winnie rebelled against. The daughter-housekeeper for many years, she insisted on using the local laundrette as soon as it opened in the 1950s. But the polished brasses at the fireplace, the hearth-risen fruit bread at Easter, the Dickensian stout-and-brandy-laced Christmas pudding, were all still the way Grandma did things.

I was thinking of all this because of a very good program, *The Frontier House*, to be screened by the ABC over this month. In *The Frontier House*, reality TV treads some familiar territory, previously seen on *The Forties House* and *The Edwardian House*. These exercises in historical reconstruction are the acceptable face of the reality TV phenomenon. No bedroom/bathroom cams, no puerile competitive tasks, no audience voting. Just interesting reminders of our grandparents' struggles. Seemingly minor things making you think hard. How clean would we have been without running water, even cold running water? Without toilet paper?

Three families were selected from 5000 applicants to spend five months in Montana, from spring to late autumn, based on an 1880s US government scheme that granted lots of 160 acres of frontier land to people who could stay on them for five years. Many such 'homesteaders' abandoned their land—the three modern families were to be assessed at the end on how ready they would have been for the bitter six-month winter that was about to fall. There was a Californian millionaire with his wife, three children and 15-year-old niece. Then there was a church-going Tennessee nurse with her teacher husband and her son

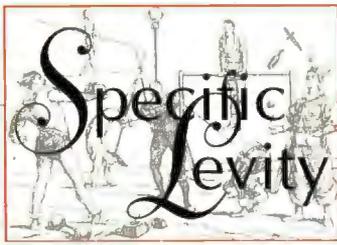
and daughter from a previous marriage. The third family was an African-American father and son who were going to prepare for the son's marriage to a white social worker halfway through the series. It got very interesting. The millionaire's wife, teenage daughter and niece got very upset at the historically authentic no-make-up rule. All the women were scandalised at the menstrual arrangements: no disposables—yuk!

I was settling in, comfortably despising the millionaire's family, when a few things happened to change my mind. I started to like them and to loathe the Tennessee woman, who would have been a perfect extra in *The Crucible*—bad-mouthing neighbours and generally behaving in the way you just wish that people wouldn't when they are so damn upfront about loving the Lord. The African-American family were great: hardworking and peaceable, they built courteous links that made up for the rancour between the millionaires and the Bible-bashers. Then a member of the Native American tribe who had owned the land, until it was stolen from them, was brought in to provide some game and to remind the participants of the civil treatment of the original owners. That, by the way, was the only game the participants ate: hunting was now forbidden under state laws in summer, deeply annoying the millionaire, who wanted to hunt to provide for the family. In the end he was placed second.

**O**F COURSE HE was robbed. The way that that family managed to bend the rules showed that they would have made shift with anything available, but the historian-assessors were rather inconsistent in what they considered important. The Bible-bashers were hopeless—their marriage in tatters, the woman's constant carping, jealousy and mean-spiritedness giving a useful window into why some Americans seem to find it hard to just get along with each other. The winners, the newly married couple, would likely have had all the problems of a frontier childbirth. The millionaire would have survived because, as David Attenborough points out in the marvellous series *The Life of Mammals* (Wednesdays at 8.30pm on ABC), adaptation to your surroundings and food source is the key to survival.

We hyper-adaptable apes have evolved to the point where we have art, poetry and Jerry Springer. We thrive on conflict, or perhaps when I say 'we' I mean whoever wins. At that point we start identifying with the winner, and that is the key to our success. And to the peril of our souls when we forget the losers. ■

**Juliette Hughes** is a freelance writer.



## Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 112, April 2003

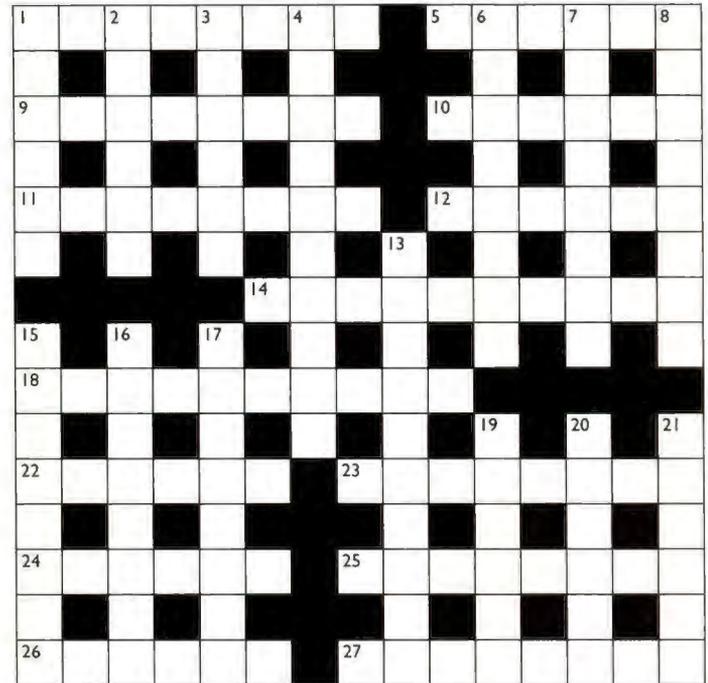
Devised by  
Joan Nowotny IBVM

### ACROSS

1. Ruptured beef-tins can have some advantages. (8)
5. There's always a way into this festal season. (6)
9. Charlady, for instance, uncharacteristically cites Dominic briefly. (8)
10. Appeared to notice the sea. (6)
11. Whale can be masticated without an extra word? (8)
12. Cart I'm awkwardly pushing to pass University entrance, in short! (6)
14. Shrill-sounding barn bird, seen in North America, mentioned in Shakespeare! (7,3)
18. Being in North America (U.S.) initially, having a meal was enough to make one sick. (10)
22. Sailor on the highway, or overseas? (6)
23. It may be possible to sail with tact, without moving. (8)
24. Judi was right about flood! (6)
25. Contemplate a friend about to produce an issue. (8)
26. Male sycophants after expression of agreement? (3,3)
27. Commendation for having finished making provision for water supply. (4,4)

### DOWN

1. I'd become quivery! Not me—in a tight-fitting top? (6)
2. Crowd are getting more paralysed from cold, perhaps. (6)
3. Cheery celebration of 5-across, after the French fast, possibly. (6)
4. On a journey, lie about cat; embellish the story again and again, and again! (10)
6. Be obedient, we hear teacher say, holding broken cane in waiting! (8)
7. For Macbeth, it creeps in a petty pace, but not today. (8)
8. Unfortunately, I die with curl out of place, subject to derision. (8)
13. The importance of presence—standing in the right place at the right time? (5,5)
15. Account with trans-Tasman bank an occasion to celebrate with patriotic pride. (5,3)
16. Portions the result of equal division into barracks, perhaps. (8)
17. Diplomatic manoeuvre to parade in the Scottish river. (8)
19. A fabric to be chosen as you please. (2,4)
20. In Oct., a voucher was produced for a book of this size. (6)
21. Woollen coat to take to the cleaners? (6)



### Solution to Crossword no. 111, March 2003



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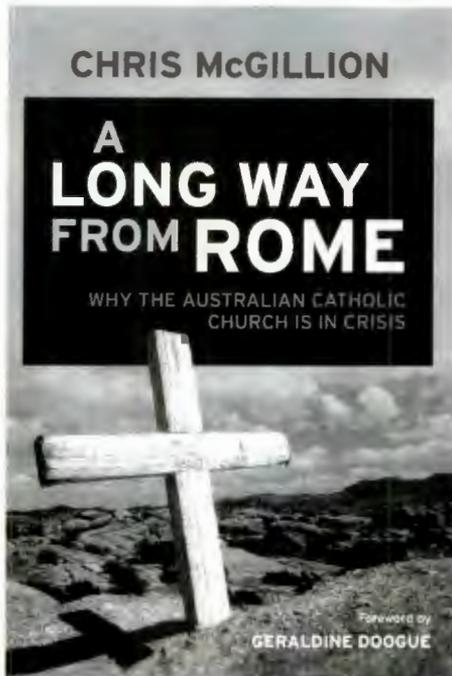
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