

EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS,
THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY
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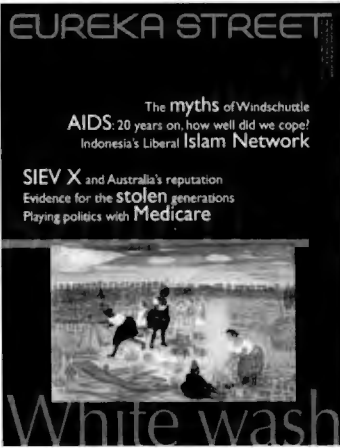
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EUREKA STREET

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Let's be clear

Recently many progressive activists have drawn an analogy between the former Indonesian occupation of East Timor and the current Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

This is also an analogy I have personally drawn in the past, both in order to confirm the merits of a clear-cut two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and also to carefully delineate the precise limits of such a solution. That is to clarify that 'Israel out of the West Bank and Gaza' means precisely the same as 'Indonesia out of East Timor'. It does not and cannot mean the abolition of the state of Israel any more than East Timorese independence required the destruction of Indonesia.

However, there are three fundamental differences between the two situations which need to be considered in any balanced assessment.

Firstly, the East Timorese never made any demands on Indonesian territory beyond their own state. In contrast, the Palestinians continue to demand a Right of Return of 1948 refugees to Israel proper, and the major Islamic factions unequivocally demand all of Israel.

Secondly, to the best of my knowledge, the East Timorese never attacked Indonesian civilians anywhere outside East Timor. In contrast, most of the recent Palestinian suicide/homicide bombings have taken place against Israeli civilians in Green Line Israel, rather than in the Palestinian Territories.

Thirdly, the countries neighbouring Indonesia never provided military or political support to the East Timorese, and certainly never funded extremist factions within East Timor. In contrast, Israel's neighbours still support the Palestinian intifada to a greater or lesser degree, and some of them specifically fund Hamas and other extremist groups which are opposed to any two-state solution.

Philip Mendes
Kew, VIC

Call to arms

Recently the Vatican issued what has been aptly termed 'a call to arms' to all Catholics. Clearly the Vatican believes that homosexual activity is not only wrong but also deserving of a public, Catholic condemnation.

This belief is at odds with its attitude to paedophile activity. Until the secular press forced it to change its mind, the Vatican believed that some paedophile activity deserved not public condemnation, but silence and a cover-up.

This inconsistency does not trouble the Vatican, but it troubles many Catholics who, apparently, are expected by the Vatican to rally to the call and add our condemnation to its own.

The Vatican, of course, would not have noticed it, but many Catholics are still trying, day by day, to live down the shame of belonging to a Church whose spiritual directors covered up for paedophiles and, when eventually caught, tried to represent their part in that worldwide disaster as no more than 'an error of judgment'.

So we are not in the mood for condemning homosexual activity or partnerships. We have no desire to flourish the Vatican's condemnation in public debate, for that would only add to our shame since it would leave us open and without an answer to the charge of hypocrisy.

John Haughey
Carlton, VIC

Drawing the line

From time to time we hear mention of the term 'territorial integrity'. The need to respect territorial integrity was recently invoked by Alexander Downer, as a constraint against intervening in the Indonesian Government's suppression of Aceh nationalism. No-one seemed to ask, 'What is territorial integrity?' or 'Why do we need to respect it?' Territorial integrity seems to be one of those sacred cows, like economic growth and mandates, which those in power would have us believe are beyond argument.

In the case of Indonesia, territorial integrity means that the territory which

formed the Dutch East Indies in the colonial days, before independence, is to remain forever a political unit. Why? Because that's the territory the European colonialists ruled. It doesn't matter if any of the many racial or religious or other groups that inhabit parts of the area never wanted to be ruled by the Javanese, who happen to be the most populous group. Their country was part of the Dutch East Indies, so they are ruled by whoever is strong enough to dominate the whole area. It doesn't matter either that the state that they agreed to be part of originally—those who did agree—was not the unitary Republic of Indonesia but the United States of Indonesia, without the centralised rule that was later imposed.

The same, or similar, applies to many other countries, especially in Africa. Examples are Sudan—the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, as it once was—and Nigeria. These are countries that seem destined by design to be bitterly divided. It applies too to situations resulting from the interference of Western powers. Turkey's boundaries reflect the desire of the Great Powers to deny the Kurds their own country, and deliberately split them up only to become oppressed and despised minorities in other countries. Using territorial integrity as a reason for refraining from opposing the oppression of the Kurds by Turkey is tantamount to sacrificing the Kurds to the perpetuation of the results of Western manipulation.

Is it too much to suggest that pleading respect for territorial integrity as a reason for not intervening on behalf of an oppressed group could be called racism?

Gavan Breen
Alice Springs, NT

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Pastoral politics

ALEXANDER DOWNER recently put his boot into the churches for not sticking to their pastoral last. The subsequent exchanges of opinion echoed past debates about the right and duty of the church to buy into matters of state. About this little new was said. The question was addressed in the 19th century when the separation of church and state was in train. People living in the 19th century, or a bit earlier, would find helpful many of the contributions to this latest debate.

The more interesting question concerns the relationship between the evolving 21st-century state and the human beings whom it serves. What kinds of public conversation do we need to encourage to ensure that the policies and administration of government encourage humane values?

When the question is put in that way, it seems almost self-evident that the contribution of any group that works out of a vision of human flourishing and has a moral perspective should be sought and welcomed. It also seems axiomatic that such groups will normally be critical of what is being done. For any vision of a humane society can only be imperfectly realised.

Why do governments fail to welcome such moral comment? A true but superficial answer is that we all react badly to criticism. But at a deeper level, it may be that the modern state is under pressure to assume the functions of a church. This development would make criticism from independent moral agencies unwelcome but also make it the more necessary.

To describe government as church is playful—we

can amuse ourselves with easy political parallels to cardinals, acolytes, doctrine, sermons, curia, collections and cant. I have in mind something more nebulous than this: the way in which Western societies see the business of government as being to protect the free choice of individuals and their material prosperity. Policy and its execution are seen as controlled only by the will of government.

The difficulty with this view is that the belief that we are more than isolated individuals, that our well-being is measured by more than financial criteria, and that government policies must be guided by humane values, is still extant. Furthermore, societies become difficult to govern when these beliefs are seen as illusory. So it is important for governments to convince people that even such of its choices as the incarceration of children are morally justifiable and humane.

Thus governments are compelled to construct and proclaim the simulacrum of a humane moral universe in which they do not believe. They can find support from media companies whose financial interest lies in maintaining the myth of economic individualism, and in which cost-cutting privileges opinion over enquiry.

The bad faith inherent in this construction of government inevitably makes governments suspect and resent those who appeal to a long tradition of humane and communitarian values. It also makes the contribution of such groups the more important if people are to be subjects and not merely the objects of policy. ■

—Andrew Hamilton SJ



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Taking responsibility

THE STAGED WALKOUT by the state and territory leaders at the recent heads of government meeting was calculated to keep unrest simmering in the health services until the next federal poll. Dissatisfaction with health care changes votes. Blaming a seemingly 'mean-spirited' Commonwealth shifts the political risk and provides cover to reduce health budgets, while directing community ire towards Canberra.

Labor leaders like to champion their commitment to health care. More often than not the voters seem to agree. The Prime Minister knows this and has raised the stakes for Labor. By forcing the states to carry more of the funding for hospital services John Howard is challenging Labor to match their political rhetoric with money. Little wonder the Labor leaders are attempting to turn the tactic on its head. For them this is a massive Commonwealth cut to public hospitals and reveals a hidden Coalition agenda to erode the benefits of Medicare. It started with the Commonwealth's push to raise fees for drugs and medications, followed quickly by a GP package where more patient charges are envisaged. It is now compounded with a deliberate attempt by the Commonwealth to 'turn the tap off' in paying for a free public hospital system. Access to essential care is increasingly determined by ability to pay rather than need.

Political ideologies aside, the funding dispute reveals a deeper divide. The shared government responsibilities for health are not evenly matched. Although the states are correct to cite the almost \$1 billion reduction from the Commonwealth, their protest is somewhat limp. They have gained nearly \$7 billion from stamp duties last year alone. Their capacity to make up the health shortfall seems obvious. Yet they insist that their economies cannot keep pace with the demand for services, the costs of medical technology and the ageing of the population.

The risk management of the health system is increasingly out of balance. The Commonwealth has responsibility for the viability of Medicare. This includes subsidies for medical services and listed pharmaceuticals. The states and territories are responsible for delivering the part of the insurance benefit that gives free access to public hospitals. Although the promise of insurance exists for all, the capacity of the public hospital system to meet demand and evenly distribute benefits is stretched.

Last year up to 60 per cent of people with a diagnosed mental disorder did not receive an appropriate service. Nearly 2000 public hospital patients should have been admitted to a nursing home. Up to 6000 disabled patients were waiting for appropriate accommodation in the community.

Emergency departments remained clogged and ambulances were forced to bypass inner city for outer metropolitan hospitals. People were discharged earlier than ever before, with less home support, while Indigenous people suffered the worst health conditions of all Australians.

In a nation increasingly shaped by commercial mind-sets, these are not impressive performance indicators. Governments at all levels balk at setting realistic targets to reduce the rates of heart disease, cancer, mental illness, arthritis, diabetes and other chronic conditions. They readily instigate onerous tests for the unemployed and disabled but shrink from any tangible assessment of their own performances.

To reduce the debate to blame and cost-shifting is to belittle the importance of health. An effective Medicare system requires sustainable investment from public and private sources, and a wholehearted commitment to universal access. Political parties must appreciate that Australians regard health care as too fragile to be toyed with for electoral gain.

OTHER COUNTRIES have taken the leap to modernise their universal health insurance systems to improve access to hospital and primary medical care services. Both Canada and the United Kingdom have recommitted to the goals we hold dear in our Medicare system. The Canadians have even claimed that health care is a moral enterprise.

Australia should follow the lead and reclaim health as a social good. This means ensuring that all Australians receive the same level of access to essential care is firstly a community responsibility. This sense of solidarity reflects our regard for each other.

If the Commonwealth, states and territories need to better rationalise sharing the cost burden of health care then so be it. There is nothing wrong with seeking greater efficiency from government spending. But these steps must not be used as a smokescreen for governments to withdraw from their responsibilities. It is counter-productive to shrink the involvement of government when at the same time an ageing population requires innovation and investment to keep pace with the burden of disease too many Australians face on their own.

It is time for government leaders to stage a 'walk in' and recommit the country's resources for the health of everyone. ■

Francis Sullivan is the Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Health Australia.



Well-laid plans

WHEN PEOPLE CALCULATE the likelihood of things going pear-shaped for John Howard, the usual assumption is of economic downturn, a bust in the housing bubble, sluggish world trade and increasing voter dissatisfaction over issues such as university education and Medicare. On international matters, the Prime Minister is thought to have both the initiative and the advantage. But most of the uncertainties of the year ahead are international, particularly in our region. John Howard will be lucky if things work out as he hopes. Indeed, they could throw all the disadvantages of his strategy into broad relief.

Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia will have elections over the next year. It is hard to predict outcomes, even harder to see how the results could work to Australia's advantage. Indonesia will host the first popular election for the presidency: previously the president has been chosen by the parliament. It is doubtful that Megawati Sukarnoputri can win. While it is not clear who her opponent will be, at least one candidate should be a stalking horse for the TNI, the Indonesian armed forces, and his chances—it will certainly be a he—would have to rate highly. Not a few of the candidates will campaign from Muslim platforms, even among those who are secularist. They are unlikely to think that saying friendly things about the United States or its local deputy will be attractive to voters. The Bali bombings shocked Indonesians and do not assist extremist politicians; but Iraq and the anti-Islamic aspects of the crusade against terror, as well as lingering resentments about Timor, keep the West unpopular. Australia's tentative renewal of relations—particularly involving police co-operation—may be difficult to sustain under a new regime.

Malaysia sees the exit of Dr Mahathir Mohamad, a long-time critic of Australia, but also one who has successfully suppressed Muslim tensions and maintained a broadly pro-Western outlook. His successors are likely to hold similar views, but may find it difficult to match his capacity for juggling balls in the air—not least as Malaysia aspires to champion the rights of developing countries in securing access to the agricultural markets of Europe, the US, Japan and Korea.

In the Philippines, it's by no means clear whether Gloria Arroyo will stand for the presidency again. Co-operation from her government in countering domestic Muslim separatists and international connections is patchy at best and unlikely to improve under her successor.

The outlook in the Pacific is hardly rosy. Renewed Australian determination to get value for money from its extensive aid to Papua New Guinea is already exciting deep anger at what is alleged to be Australian neo-colonialism. The day has long passed, if ever it existed, when Papua New Guinea had choices about whom it begged from, but that nation is too big and complicated to be liquidated and restructured like the Solomons.

The situation in North Korea seems hardly likely to improve, so too the prospects in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Iraq is a nightmare—to the Americans and the British, if not for us—and it's unlikely that anything in the next 12 months will repair the much sabotaged roadmap to peace between Israel and Palestine.

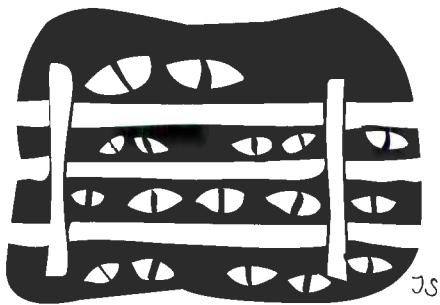
Dangerous and unstable times, which make voters look for steady, reliable and calm hands on the tiller, right? Perhaps, if not for the role John Howard has himself played in creating some of these hostilities, or in making them worse, while assuring voters that the worst would not happen, or that it did not matter if it did. Who seemed insensitive to how some of his smug statements, spoken for domestic consumption, sounded in the regional capitals? Who has helped undermine the United Nations and the role of international law and, now that America has rediscovered this body, is scrambling for a new position? Who has seemed impatient and ill at ease with Asian leaders, while unable to get Australia any political dividends from appearing as the pig in the minefield for American pre-emptive and unilateralist foreign policy, not least over the volatile stand-off with North Korea? John Howard is no more the man for nimbleness in a quickly changing and more hostile regional environment than his foreign minister, Alexander Downer, seems the one to advise him.

PERHAPS SIMON CREAN seems as ill-equipped. His floundering in search of an umbrella position in the crusade against terror suggest so. But the times could suit him if he, or spokesmen such as Kevin Rudd, were developing the right positions now, anticipating Australia's situation in nine months' time, rather than the present moment. In the way in which, for example, Laurie Brereton was able, rather against Kim Beazley's will, to reposition Labor on East Timor. A smart Labor Party, even with a strong pro-American wing, might recognise and respond more quickly than John Howard to the fact that, in Washington, the neo-conservatives are losing sway and that George W. Bush, swinging into election mode, becomes rather more conventional in his foreign policy. In areas such as this, Howard's old clevernesses may do him in. To an old reputation of being mean and tricky, he has now added a reputation for looseness with the truth and a refusal to accept personal responsibility for poor outcomes. The electorate, on the evidence of the polls, sees this but, so far, does not much care. But it works its poison, even within the Government. Few of Howard's colleagues trust him these days; fewer trust his instincts.

Unpopular as Simon Crean is, Labor is not that far behind in the polls. Importantly, once an election is on, the nature of campaigning means that Crean will get equal time and attention—if he has anything to offer. It can only be his fault if he has not. ■

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

snap



Cheshire grin

England has experienced that rare thing, a long, hot summer, and the heat and extended hours of sunshine seem to have turned the dial on the behaviour of the locals from quaint and eccentric to strange and disturbing. It's official: the green and pleasant land is now brown and feral.

A case in point is that of Steve Gough who decided that it would be a tremendous achievement if he could walk the length of Britain from Land's End to John O'Groats clad only in a pair of boots and a floppy hat. Reports of 'the naked rambler' filled the papers for days in August, with witnesses describing him in the fraught language usually reserved for Yeti sightings, until Gough identified himself. His progress has been interrupted by repeated arrests by bemused constabulary.

Continuing with the 'there's something out there' theme, Kent is supposedly being terrorised by wild cats led by the 'beast of blue hell', attacking livestock and scaring the bejesus out of the locals. Crop circles were definitely out this year as a result, probably because the spotters—a race unto themselves born, it is rumoured, already clad in a mac with binoculars hanging from their neck—weren't game enough to get out into the wheat fields for fear of a mauling.

But the weirdness is not only in the countryside. Illusionist David Blaine, who pretends to slice off his ear in public and wanders around with an eye tattooed on the palm of his hand mumbling nonsense in a monotone someone must have told him gave him a sense of mystery but just makes him unintelligible, decided to spend 44 days in a glass case suspended from a crane next to the Thames. He only had water to drink and a lot of nappies. No-one has been able to answer the question: why?

The poms will say they aren't

responsible for Blaine as he's an American but he was an accountant in Baltimore before he got to the UK.

I think it's mad cats and Englishman, Mr Coward.



Nirvana on the run

Meanwhile, back in Australia, bike paths early on Sunday morning are usually bereft of naked runners or feral cats. Last Sunday, however, the local path was divided by witches' hats and decorated by runners lured by the antipodean cuckoo call that harbingers spring: the oxymoronic fun-run. On the runners' T-shirts was a coloured rectangle, and on this patch a name and a number; Self-Transcendence 9, Self-Transcendence 125, etc. Along the path, the birds were singing, the bees were beginning their working day harvesting from wattle, and the sun was breaking through the light spring mist. But the runners were self-preoccupied. At the finishing line, there was a large digital clock measuring out the seconds, by the saving of which, it seems, is self-transcendence measured.



Holy (steam) roller

Self-transcendence is usually the currency of evangelists, because it involves a quantum leap which your ordinary self cannot produce or even imagine. The colloquial version of Quantum Leaps is Jump Up, a Koori coining which means rising suddenly beyond your capability. The phrase occurs in the title of Germaine Greer's recent *Quarterly Essay* in which she shows herself to be a powerful evangelist. The jump up

she pleads for is that white Australians should renounce their colonial attitudes and history and embrace Aboriginality. This is a leap of faith and of imagination: you can stand up and be converted, but you are not quite sure what you are being converted to or how it will save you.

Germaine Greer displays all the evangelist's skills in evoking the totally corrupted world of white Australian society, and in offering a subtle reading of classical Australian texts in order to bring out the sad reality which we habitually ignore. And her readers are likely to treat her like most evangelists—when they return from the pulpit to the fireside, they will wonder whether things are really as bad as all that, and whether the conversion she calls for is either necessary or enough.



Watch your mouth

Swimming each day through a sea of language, *Eureka Street* has developed a list of words we never wish to see again. As is often the case, it is not so much the words we despise, but the service in which they are employed.

Historically, key offenders have included lifestyle and nuance. More recent chart-toppers are synergy, actualise, sexing, positivity, discourse and enhance. Adverbs are best used like garlic, sparingly, and anyone caught thinking outside the envelope, square or circle shall be shot.

We are sure that readers have their own list of 'love to hate' favourites. To soothe the jangled nerves of serious word watchers, we have three CDs to give away courtesy of ABC Classics: Malcolm Williamson's *Complete Works for Piano*, Marcus Stenz's *Mahler Symphony No. 5* and Macquarie Trio Australia's *Libertango: The Music of Astor Piazzolla*. Please send your top five words to Word Watchers, *Eureka Street*, PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121, by 31 October 2003.



Death of the king

IDI AMIN DADA

RARELY HAVE SO FEW mourned the death of a man.

On 16 August Idi Amin Dada, one of the most notorious and brutal dictators in modern history, passed away quietly, in peaceful and luxurious exile far from his native Uganda.

Idi Amin seized power from Milton Obote in a 1971 coup. He arrived on the world scene with the blessing of the British Government, the former colonial power in Uganda. He had served his time in the British army, playing rugby with British officers, before going on to become one of the first Ugandans to receive the prestigious Queen's commission. Upon his ascension to the presidency, a British intelligence report described him as 'benevolent but tough' and 'well-disposed to Britain'.

A year later, Amin expelled 40,000 Ugandan Asians. Mostly Indians and Pakistanis, their families had been resident in Uganda for generations since their grandfathers had been put to work on British government construction projects. Those exiled were the backbone of the Ugandan economy and most sought refuge in Britain. The British government of Harold Wilson began to hatch secret (but never implemented) plans to assassinate Amin.

Abandoned by his father as a child and now by Britain, Amin unleashed the reign of terror for which he will be most remembered. Under Amin's rule, from 1971 until his overthrow in 1979, more than 300,000 people were killed in this country of 12 million. His years in power were marked by widespread torture, 'disappearances' and extrajudicial killing. But what brought him to the attention of an international media hungry for macabre figures of African barbarism were the unconfirmed reports of cannibalism, his practice of keeping the heads of his victims in a refrigerator, dropping opponents from planes high over Lake Victoria and singling out entire tribes for ritual humiliation and slaughter. Through it all, Amin forced white residents of

Uganda to carry him around on a throne.

Amin will also be remembered for the high farce which accompanied the brutality. Amin once described President Nyerere of neighbouring Tanzania as a coward, an old woman and a prostitute. Soon after he told the world's press that he 'would have married [Nyerere] if he had been a woman'. On the 25th anniversary of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth, Amin let it be known that he expected the British monarch to send him 'her 25-year-old knickers' as part of the festivities. He even declared himself the King of Scotland and offered to lead the Scottish people in their struggle for self-determination.

Perhaps it is because of these twin personas—Idi Amin as the face of evil and the tragi-comic buffoon—that the world dismissed him as a madman. Amin was, however, a complex personality. A compelling speaker with a commanding, charismatic presence, he spoke to the newly independent citizens of Africa in the language of African nationalism and won plaudits for his brazen willingness to confront the former colonial power. Denis Hills, a Briton sentenced to death in Uganda for criticising Amin and rescued only after a frantic visit to Kampala by the British Foreign Secretary James Callaghan, refused to accept the stereotype of Amin as a madman. Instead, he acknowledged that Amin 'personified aggressive black national leadership' and had:

the successful tribal chief's compensatory qualities for his lack of formal education: cunning, a talent for survival, personal strength and courage, an ability to measure his opponents' weaknesses and his subjects' wishes. It is not enough to dismiss Amin as a buffoon or murderer ... He has realised an African dream: the creation of a truly black state.

The novelist Giles Foden captured the multifaceted Amin in *The Last King of Scotland*, portraying a magnetic, larger-than-life figure from whom his personal doctor, a Scot, could not tear himself away, as fascinated as he was repulsed. The world's attitude towards Amin's rule was similar: we were unable to look and we were unable to look away.

From his expulsion until his death, Amin lived a life of comfortable exile in Jeddah as a guest of the Saudi Arabian Government. He was sometimes seen shopping in the supermarkets of Jeddah,

and even tried to set himself up as a taxi-driver. Throughout, according to confidantes, he never ceased to dream of a return to Uganda where he would be welcomed as a hero by the Ugandan people.

In an uncharacteristic gesture, members of the African press overcame their usual reluctance to criticise political leaders, at news of Amin's death. Kenya's *Sunday Nation* newspaper declared that 'one would not be faulted for shouting "good riddance" from the rooftops', calling Amin 'one of the worst accidents of leadership on our continent'.

The depth of the enduring pain caused by Amin was captured by Uganda's *Sunday Vision* newspaper. On the day after Amin's death, the paper turned to an epic and bloody Old Testament vision, as if nothing else could capture the moment. Quoting Isaiah, they wrote:

You used to be honoured with the music of harps, but now you are in the world of the dead. You lie on a bed of maggots and are covered with a blanket of worms.

In life, Idi Amin was never made to pay for his crimes. Ugandans hope that he will do so in death.

—Anthony Ham

Little argument

ACTU CONFERENCE

THE GAP BETWEEN the pragmatism of the ACTU leadership and the instincts of many of the 900 delegates at its congress in Melbourne was revealed in the response to three speakers.

Under the watchful gaze of ACTU secretary Greg Combet, there was a restrained reception for Qantas chair Margaret Jackson, who spoke on 'the future of work'. As she did so, members of the Transport Workers Union were striking at Melbourne Airport over the airline's introduction of labour-hire baggage handlers.

But Kevin Quill, a member of the plumbers' and electricians' CEPU, received a standing ovation from most of the hall for his account of the attempt to rebuild unionism at a former movement stronghold, Rio Tinto's Hamersley Iron operations in Paraburdoo, Western Australia.

Similarly, there was a warm reception for Henry Li, a member of the

miscellaneous workers' LHMU union, who spoke about a campaign by Australian and US unions to force Westfield boss Frank Lowy to increase pay for shopping centre cleaners, who earn \$12.80 an hour. 'We know the union is the only way we have power in our job,' said Li. 'We will not be an invisible workforce.'

The tension between 'realism' and resistance surfaced in different ways. On the opening day, the police band played in uniform on the stage, while on the final day virtually the entire Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) contingent abandoned congress to get back to the real business of unionism at a delegates meeting.

Delegates sat patiently through video presentations and academic panel discussions, and then joined rallies outside by the CFMEU and the National Tertiary Education Union. With so little genuine contest on the conference floor, and so much of the event given over to the placing of stories at key points in the media cycle, this was one of the few ways that activists could show where their sympathies lay.

There was one exception to the rule, with a sharp argument surfacing over attitudes to reform of anti-union laws. Initially, this led to two days of heated debate within the left caucus. The majority of left delegates argued for a total rejection of non-union collective agreements. Others, spearheaded by Australian Manufacturing Workers Union national secretary Doug Cameron, argued for the ALP's 'realism'—that unions had to live with such agreements.

The matter finally spilled on to the conference floor, providing a rare contested debate. The left's amendment went down with a respectable minority in support.

The issue was part of a broader tension within congress—how the union movement strikes a balance between backing its own positions while supporting Labor. So there were speeches from the platform

from Simon Crean and his deputy leader, Jenny Macklin, and video presentations by Gough Whitlam, Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. Combet urged delegates to get behind Labor's election campaign.

But the union leadership cannot simply ignore widespread workers' dissatisfaction with what is seen as Labor's weak, pro-market agenda.

Although the ACTU leadership of Combet and Sharan Burrow still formally defends the years of the ALP-ACTU Accord—1982 to the mid-1990s—as a plus for the union movement, many union officials and most activists now recognise that period as a disaster which laid the basis for a sharp decline in union membership.

That mood was reflected in the ACTU adopting policy on questions like tax, tariffs, free trade agreements and public-private partnerships which put it at odds with ALP positions.

The real test for rebuilding unionism, however, is whether union members at companies such as Qantas can win their fight for safe jobs and decent wages.

—David Glanz

Words to end winter

THE MELBOURNE WRITERS' FESTIVAL

ON THE FIRST Saturday morning the photographers had a field day. There was the Rt Hon Malcolm Fraser deep in conversation with Tariq Ali, out on the gritty sand that links the Melbourne Writers' Festival Malthouse home to the rusted façade of the Contemporary Art Museum. And if the ironies and odd bedfellows of 21st-century politics didn't grip the journalists, they could roll the cameras across the bonnets of the four vintage FJ Holdens parked there as visual complement to Don Loffler's passion for Australia's iconic auto.

At lunchtime Pat Dodson turned up, the famous hat set firmly over the famous bearded face. A photojournalist with an eye to history could have got the lot.

Two nights before, at the Town Hall, festival patron, the Hon John Button, kept Tariq Ali entertained and interrogated backstage while the Age Book of the Year winners were announced. 'Very interesting man', remarked Ali as he

walked on to deliver an hour-plus history of the international situation pre- and post-Iraq. Not a note, and not a moment's hesitation. If the 1000-plus crowd had come to hear the Marxist rant predicted by some columnists, they would have been disappointed. Tariq Ali crafted his address for a sceptical Australian audience, and was as careful to include an American perspective ('I go there very often these days') as he was to provide a cause-and-effect history of Middle East politics from the beginning of the 20th century.

By Saturday, word of mouth had ensured that Tariq Ali's conversation with David Marr was booked out. Marr played the journalist-devil's advocate, asking questions that might have been devised by the Prime Minister's staff—how could one possibly regret the overthrow of Saddam's appalling regime, etc. Ali's answers, if predictable, were hard to contest. Whatever the audience came away thinking about the politics, they'd heard more informed history than is customary in Australia's managed politics. The pity was that Tariq Ali was not debating with Australia's current power brokers.

Peter Carey, by contrast, did not want to be confined or confirmed by history. Yes, he used the Ern Malley hoax as a springboard for his new novel, *My Life as a Fake*, but he was more interested in the anarchic life of creatures that the imagination contrives than in any fictional replication of the lives of Max Harris, James McAuley or Harold Stewart. Carey read, unusually but informatively, from an earlier, rejected draft of his new novel. It was a shrewd and entertaining way of deflecting the more prosaic questions that the new novel has prompted because it lit up the more mysterious corners of the plot. And if I tell you any more I'll be giving away secrets. Read the novel.

Keith Windschuttle and Robert Manne did seem confined by history. Their debate over Aboriginal deaths in Tasmania, scrupulously and civilly chaired by La Trobe historian John Hirst, was a frustrating and impacted affair—as much for the participants as their listeners. The two men seemed unable to find—or grant—enough common ground, either about historical methodology or about rules of engagement, to yield much to an audience keen to learn what

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happened in Tasmania, and what is happening in history generally.

More satisfying, because less fraught, were some of the many other sessions that could loosely be labelled 'history' or 'political'. Iain McCalman, Rebe Taylor and Stuart Macintyre, chaired by Marilyn Lake, made abundant sense of the question 'Can we change the past?' Rebe Taylor's personal experience of black/white family interrelations on Kangaroo Island showed how difficult it can be to find out 'exactly what happened', but also demonstrated how much can be learned by careful sifting and even more careful interviewing of the people involved. She provided a useful counterfoil to Windschuttle's insistence on 'dispassionate' history. Michael Pusey, Judith Brett and Mark Peel looked at the state of the nation through the prism of their recent research into the Australian middle class, the Liberal Party, and the poor in Australia. They didn't always agree but the audience came away smiling and arguing volubly as they made their way downstairs to buy the books.

At the Celtic Club, class storytellers Gerard Windsor, Anthony O'Neill and Andrew O'Hagan were genially corralled by Michael McKernan. All three novelists read, wonderfully, though 'read' isn't quite adequate for O'Hagan's performance. In rapid Glaswegian, he did New Year's Eve in a Scottish nursing home. Heartbreaking, black and utterly hilarious.

There were more than 200 writers at the festival and 34,000 people came, so I can give only a sliver of what went on over 11 days. The festival was intensely political, 'and that's wonderful,' remarked the decidedly unpolitical Annie Proulx. 'It's wonderful that people should come together to talk rationally about such things.'

And from Annie Proulx came the quote of the festival. How one might react to repeated rejection by publishers? 'Write better', said the woman who works her words as hard as anyone writing today.

—Morag Fraser

This month's contributors: **Anthony Ham** is *Eureka Street's* roving correspondent; **David Glanz** is a Melbourne-based writer; **Morag Fraser** is an adjunct professor at La Trobe University, and former editor of *Eureka Street*.

archimedes



Unsexy science

SEVERAL YEARS AGO Archimedes travelled to China to write about an Australian pilot program which introduced the idea of peer education about AIDS to Chinese university students.

It was remarkable that such a program was given the go-ahead. Knowledge in China traditionally flows from elders and betters, not peers. The program was imported from a Western country. And the Chinese Government is sensitive about sex education. Despite all this, to the Chinese academics working in the program, one of its most significant aspects was the insight into the Western way of doing science—specifically, how such programs were assessed.

The most mundane, unglamorous aspects of science can often be the most useful. All our safety and efficiency testing, programs for improving our industrial processes, and the reliability and durability of our products rely on behind-the-scenes science that is almost never reported.

Recently Archimedes wrote an article about mining automation. The CSIRO and other research organisations are developing technologies to take people away from the dangerous work at the ore face. The research at CSIRO Mining and Exploration in Brisbane is a fascinating mix of robotics, communications, mechanical engineering, electronics and navigation, but it lacks the media appeal of a cure for breast cancer or the extinction of a rainforest butterfly.

Australia supplies software to more than 60 per cent of mining operations worldwide. The export of mining services and expertise puts more than \$3 billion a year into the Australian economy, a figure that is growing by about 13 per cent annually. Hands up those who know anything much about Australian mining research?

In another example, the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Clean Power from Lignite, based in Melbourne and Adelaide, is charged with finding out how to burn our brown coal more efficiently while emitting less pollutants. Not glamorous stuff, and positively frowned upon by the greener segments of society. But the CRC has come up with processes that have the potential for reducing greenhouse emissions from brown coal by more than 30 per cent. At the same time, they will increase the efficiency of energy output of brown coal from about 29 per cent to about 44 per cent.

Substantial deposits of such low-rank coal exist in many of the most populous countries of the developing world such as China, India, Indonesia, Thailand and Turkey (as well as in the United States and Germany). For developing nations, these coal reserves represent a way of powering their expanding economies and raising living standards. The work of the CRC may end up doing more for the environment than more environmentally acceptable studies.

Archimedes would argue that such science forms the backbone of our society, in the way that adequate sewerage, clean water and good dietary information do more for human health than heart transplants and Viagra. Yet it's not the kind of work that catches the eye, that people remember in their wills, or that newspapers tend to report. Like electricity transmission lines, unglamorous science tends to go unnoticed until it's not there. Maybe that's why the Chinese were so interested in what went on behind the scenes. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.



Care to remember?

MANY COMMENTATORS HAVE described the current Australian condition as one of apathy. They refer to the puzzling coexistence of two phenomena: well-publicised government actions that are morally repugnant, like the detention of children, and the commonly shared belief that governments lie about such things. We would normally expect outrage at this combination of evil doing and mendacity. Instead we find indifference.

The Judaeo-Christian tradition makes much of apathy and its remedies. In contrast to the practical and cynical advice to move on, the Psalms respond passionately. For them the heart of the problem lies in the evidence that the wicked triumph, grow rich and esteemed, and become invincible. This attacks our instinctive belief that God should and will reward virtue. The Psalms deal with the temptation to give up on God and justice by urging inwardness and the longer view. In God's time, goodness will win.

This assurance is hard to believe, not least because in God's time we are all dead. In order to encourage faith, the Scriptures characteristically appeal to memory. In the Older Testament, people are constantly urged to remember the way God liberated the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt and so made them a nation. As long as they keep this memory alive, their commitment to a just future will remain firm and their moral compass for judging their own world will not waver. Memory is the answer to apathy.

Memory is equally central in the Christian tradition. When you think of the church, your first image may be of people gathering to celebrate the Eucharist. At the centre of the Eucharist is the memory of Jesus Christ's death. On the face of it, this was a story of the victory of injustice, of expediency, of overwhelming power, of the death of hope that there could be something more. The appropriate response was that of the two disciples who sadly left town. But in remembering Jesus' death, Christians remember his rising from death as victory. This grounds the hope in a just God and a just world that can overcome apathy.

The Christian arsenal also stores another kind of memory that is equally subversive. It is expressed in the Ash Wednesday admonition: 'Remember man that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return.' This memory of transience is liberating because it insists that empires, dynasties and conventional wisdoms last a short time, and that even policies written in stone will pass. We should always be underwhelmed by celebrations of power and solidity.

The memory of transience cuts all ways. In bookshops, prices fall for the just and the unjust alike. The works of Stalin and Lenin can be bought for a song. So can the works of Pius XII and John XXIII. Nor will their worlds return. In due course, too, Saddam Hussein, George W. Bush and John Paul II will be remembered for what they have made of God's world, but their collected speeches will also be curiosities.

The Christian antidote to apathy is the memory that seeds of hope will eventually crack the most solid concrete, and that in Christ spring triumphs over winter. Even in bookshops, remainders are reminders. ■

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

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Anarchy rules

JUST SAY YOU WERE ON *Who Wants to be a Millionaire!* and, coming up to the \$500,000 question, Eddie asks you, as he would be highly likely to do at that moment, 'What do the following have in common? King Humbert I of Italy, President William McKinley of the United States, King George I of Greece and Marie François Sadi Carnot, President of France? (a) John Howard denies knowledge of any of them and says we should move on; (b) Wilson Tuckey will not confirm that he has written to them; (c) Tony Abbott denies having funded them; (d) they were all assassinated by anarchists.' Lock in (d) Eddie and let's head for the million.

Not many contestants would get that right, but Joe Toscano, the subject of a brief, slightly awestruck report in a recent issue of *The Australian*, probably would. Who is Joe Toscano? I hear you cry. Well, he's *Dr* Joe Toscano, GP, for a start and while that may not especially distinguish him from the medical ruck, the fact that he bulk bills does lend him a fading and arcane particularity. When you add that Joe is a radical anarchist and a sometime S-11 protester he bursts from the ranks of the grey and anonymous as surely as if he's paraded down Pitt Street in peak hour wearing a jockstrap and playing the bagpipes.

Anarchism, as distinct from anarchy, has fallen on hard times since its heady days in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The founding father of anarchism, Pierre Joseph Proudhon, and his so-called Philosophical Anarchists, sought to remove the idea of authority from society, and replace it with extreme individualism, but they expected anarchic organisation of society to evolve without violent stimulus. Proudhon would have been appalled by the modern equation of anarchism with random terror. Though it was definitely anarchists who finished off Humbert, McKinley, George and Marie François, (and who, unlike some latter-day ideologues of the left, right and centre, proudly owned up to their handiwork), the movement was blamed for many deaths of which it was innocent.

Joe Toscano is in the apparently contradictory position of being an anarchist—that is, someone who is opposed to all forms of government—and at the same time a vigorous campaigner for Medicare. I'll leave Joe to sort that one out for himself while applauding the fact that a true anarchist has emerged at this time of anxiety and stress: such a manifestation allows us to identify the closet anarchists among us, one of whom pre-eminently is Wilson Tuckey.

He would be appalled at such an idea, but consider the evidence. In a flurry of activity a few weeks ago, he attempted to influence the role of a government official, accused an entire state of being soft on drugs, suggested that the whole Labor

Party hated children and then, having done all this on Parliamentary notepaper or trumpeted it in the House, stood up in that same Parliament and, after vigorously justifying all his actions, about-turned and apologised for them abjectly in his own brand of tortuous, logic-chopping malapropisms. In comparison to Tuckey, Phil 'Let me say this in relation to that' Ruddock is a veritable fount of rhetorical limpidity.

If that's not anarchy of a sort—even if only intellectual anarchy, a species with which Mr Tuckey has always shown himself to be peculiarly afflicted—then I'll dust off my bagpipes, dig out the stiff and starchy jockstrap from under the old, still mud-encrusted footy boots and join Joe Toscano in Pitt Street.

BUT THE GREAT ANARCH, as Alexander Pope would have said, is Tuckey's boss, John Howard. Returning from important talks on war, rumours of war and plans for war, Mr Howard found himself engulfed by a distracting confusion at the centre of which stood the hapless Tuckey. With drum rolls from the Westminster System booming in his ears and an image of his own Parliamentary Code of Conduct hovering above his head like the Holy Ghost, Howard rebuked Tuckey and let it go at that.

Just over 130 years ago, Mikhail Bakunin and his barrackers were expelled from the First International. The expulsion occurred partly because Bakunin and team were outvoted by the socialists and partly because they were regarded as too violent. The interesting thing is that, when told to go on a matter of principle, they went; though admittedly they probably didn't want to stay. A kind of Westminster System among anarchists and socialists, forsooth. This is not the kind of behaviour for which Bakunin, Kropotkin, Emma Goldman and others of like beliefs were normally known. It *is* what we expect of our own leaders and representatives, but probably even Bakunin, as a spectacularly transgressing member of the Liberal-National Party Coalition, would have had no more than an irritable nod from Mr Howard and stern advice to 'move on'.

Of course, it is distorting anarchism as a political doctrine to apply it to these and similar demeaning, shameful and embarrassing events and behaviour among our highest elected leaders. 'Shambles' would be nearer the mark. Or—if we want to stick to an 'A' word to describe the Prime Minister's brazen disregard for the Westminster System and the erstwhile impressive but now tattered and comic Code of Conduct—what about 'arrogance'?

As for Tuckey: lock him out, Eddie. ■

Brian Matthews is a writer and academic.

The art of spirituality

Religion and art renew their relationship

FRIEDHELM MENNEKES is a Jesuit priest and the parish priest of St Peter's, one of the oldest churches in Cologne. Peter Paul Rubens was baptised there and in gratitude painted for the church his famous *Crucifixion of St Peter*. Artists as diverse as Francis Bacon, Anish Kapoor, Rosemarie Trockel, Arnulf Reiner, and Cindy Sherman have all created or exhibited triptychs for display behind the altar.

As an art historian Mennekes holds honorary professorships internationally and at the Australian Catholic University. Speaking engagements and professorship duties have brought him again to Australia and *Eureka Street* was fortunate enough to sit down with him and hear his thoughts on the place of spirituality in contemporary art.

ES: What is your definition of spirituality in the context of contemporary art?

FM: I would say spirituality, in the most inner sense, is to question. To think or reflect conscience, knowledge, feelings and questions.

Which particular artists do you think can make the viewer question in this way?

I've been working significantly for 25 years now with the arts. I received a particular education by the artists—my

biggest teacher was the sculptor James Lees Byars. His work is about questions and he really deeply, deeply let me know that art doesn't have to be understanding parallel to religion, but the other way around—religion has to be understanding parallel to art. To him, all work he is doing, or what an artist is doing, is to put up the questions, not give the answers. The one who really educated me and brought me to art was Joseph Beuys. Another is Francis Bacon, or even the very consequential female American artist Barbara Kruger. Also Rosemarie Trockel, Cindy Sherman and Jenny Holzer have really spoken to me. I've had the opportunity to meet all of these artists. I have done many exhibitions with all of these artists, and many others. When I was a learner, wide-eyed and hungry for art, I was always doing exhibitions, sometimes ten a year. I had an exhibition on every corner.

Can a work of art that is not overtly religious, or that doesn't even have a

religious theme, still offer the viewer a sense of religion or faith?

I think religious people have to get trained in seeing new things with their inner eye. They have to learn how creativity can transfer into religion. This is what is really so important.

The times for Christian subjects are over. The time of Christian iconography is over. After 25 years [in the arts] I would say that as a Catholic I have become more of a Calvinist. First, I would say art is not needed in a church, we don't need any art. But



'Study for Self-Portrait', 1976, by Francis Bacon (1909–1992), Art Gallery of NSW. Copyright Francis Bacon, 1976/DACS. Licensed by VISCOPY Australia, 2003. Photograph by Jenni Carter for AGNSW.

second, as a Jesuit I would say we need all art. So then art is needed, but not Christian subjects in art.

So you feel it's unnecessary for a contemporary artist to take up, for example, the theme of the crucifixion in their work?

Absolutely not necessary. Some [art-works of religious theme] work, however, but this is not the reason. For example, Barbara Kruger took a photo of four elderly women protesting at the start of the Iraq war. She took this photograph and enlarged it greatly (4 x 8 metres) so they look like they could be praying hands, and placed it right in the middle of the church floor. So you have to go to it, you can't avoid it, you have to put your feet on it. Then, to disturb the image she put with it these four questions: Who salutes the longest? Who prays the loudest? Who dies first? Who laughs last? This, in the first instance, has nothing to do with the church, it's just one of Barbara Kruger's critical statements. But by having this within the church it really touches you, it pushes you. In one way, if you are celebrating a wedding it means that the wedding group is sitting on praying hands, which is very beautiful. But then if you look at the questions, it's disturbing.

This is what artists do, they disturb the way to understand a sacred space. They disturb everything by questioning and this is so important.

The artists that you've worked with, do they share your philosophies on spirituality and art?

I'm not interested in spirituality [when working with the artists], I'm interested only in true art. The deeper reason may be, or is, that art fills me up with spiritual insight, feelings; it transfers spirituality into my life.

Are you still questioning in your mind?

Yes. I really must say, in a way that is maybe a strange expression, being into art, opening your mind to art, is questioning, questioning as existentialism. But by going along with art this way I started to go along with religion this way. And I must say this is, in a way, very traditional because one always with religion has to distinguish between the content and the form, so the content is like the cradle and the form is desire; like questioning, like feelings, like taking up a higher level of something.

So by your definition a good artist can get that content across with form?

Yes. See, why is art spiritual? I would say art in itself is a practical form of questioning. What do I do today? How do I do it? The artist really has to question practically, to create. So in this way its form is structural, spiritual openness. I think a mystic person has to do the same. Sure, one knows many things by the credo, like an artist knows many things by art history, but to fill yourself with spirituality, to open your mind, it is not to say the credo is wrong but the credo is only one part and maybe this is the background of my questioning. But like art, religion is always orientated towards progression.

Is it a collaborative exercise when an artist displays their work in your church?

Yes, always. We are not doing exhibitions there, but we need artists. It's a group of us and we invite artists to do space-related interventions on the basis that it's art, so they have the space. We have an important Rubens. He was baptised there and his father was buried there. So in the nature of Rubens, you have to deal with the space. You have to do what he did, which means you have to be tough.

This space, the church, is very famous and many artists are attracted to it. They come and take, let's say, a kind of measurement of the space. It's a broken, late Gothic church, so it's very empty, very rare, radical, no chairs, nothing else, really rare. Because you know, this is a very interesting thing, art is more than theology; the experience is a deep connection between art and religion. Mostly Western art, but not only, came out of a sacred background. After the separation, artists said, 'we have to go on our own'. But now they're coming back to the history and they would like to reflect this, not only theoretically but also practically. Everyone is pleased to see that the work can open up new spiritual windows.

Can art and religion ever be separate?

They must and they cannot. That's a problem. Art must

become free of all this iconographic dictatorship. You know, normally churches say very strongly that they are not related to art, they are not interested in art. There are all these doubters, all these strange people [in art]. Christian art, liturgical art, is not art—it's kitschy stuff. It is restrictive. It wants to be symbolic and representing something, but art is not interested in that any more. So primarily, art has to be separated from religion because what these people think of as art is not art, and what they have in their mind is something totally different.

In your years of studying art, and putting on exhibitions, has there ever been a time when you felt you didn't need it in your life?

Never. If you touch art once, you never let go. This is my experience. I could never live without art or religion. I can't leave the one nor the other. I have to open up my faith to art and I have to open up art to religion. ■

Donna Noble is a Melbourne writer with an interest in theology and the arts.

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Denying the Grim Reaper

Australian responses to AIDS

WHEN THE FIRST case of AIDS was reported in Australia 20 years ago, health experts braced themselves for a morbidity rate to rival World War II. In 1987, the Grim Reaper advertisements announced that 50,000 Australians might already be infected and this figure would continue to rise. Due to Australia's pragmatic and innovative response, the rate of new HIV infections fell from approximately 2500 per year in the mid-1980s to less than 500 per year within a decade. Australia's response represents a success story, one frequently cited by the World Health Organisation as a model for other countries.

'Gays cause AIDS'

The first case of AIDS in Australia was diagnosed by Professor Ronald Penny, an immunologist at Sydney's St Vincent's Hospital, in November 1982. His patient was a 27-year-old New York City resident visiting Sydney. The case was reported six months later in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, by which time the first Australian had been diagnosed with AIDS. The early news reports of these cases were announced in a tone that bordered on hysteria. The public was left in no doubt about who was harbouring the fugitive, as media reports emphasised that all of the cases involved homosexual males and that this group in the US was in the middle of an epidemic.

Even doctors lent support to the opinion that gays were responsible for exposing Australians to a malicious new killer.

The public's anxiety about AIDS soon manifested in discrimination against homosexuals. A Sydney dentist banned

homosexual patients from his surgery, and numerous gay men were evicted from their homes or denied accommodation. Sydney Telecom engineers refused to carry out repairs at the Pitt Street mail exchange because, they claimed, it was staffed by a large number of homosexual telephone operators 'who probably had AIDS'. News that three Queensland babies had died from AIDS as a result of receiving HIV-contaminated blood donated by a homosexual prompted a gang of men to roam Sydney's gay strip looking for poofers to punish.

Such responses continued even after the viral origin of AIDS had been established. In November 1984, New South Wales police called for a halt on random breath testing, and then insisted on being issued with plastic gloves, because they believed that HIV could be transmitted via the saliva of motorists. (This caused one commentator to ponder which part of

Even doctors lent support to the opinion that gays were responsible for exposing Australians to a malicious new killer.

the policeman's apparatus the subject was required to blow.) Seven months later, Ansett and TAA airlines banned HIV-positive individuals from travelling on their planes as a means of protecting their staff. The Australian Flight Attendants' Association rejected the bans. A spokesman wryly noted that if anyone managed to have mid-flight sex with an HIV-positive passenger—one of the few ways of transmitting the virus—they should be given

'points for enterprise'. No-one was laughing, however, when three-year-old Eve van Grafhorst was prohibited from attending pre-school in July 1985 after parents, fearing contagion, threatened to withdraw their children from her class.

Given the hostility towards homosexuals, and the public's fear of those afflicted by HIV, it seemed likely that Australian governments would be persuaded to enact a range of coercive public health measures in an effort to contain the spread of AIDS. Opinion polls in 1986 and 1987 suggested that 25 per cent and 50 per cent of the population favoured the quarantine of infected individuals and universal screening of the entire population for HIV antibodies respectively. An even greater number supported mandatory testing of 'high risk' groups, such as gay men, injecting drug users and sex workers. Advocates of this 'traditional' approach to the control of infectious disease also called on the government to close gay bathhouses and other venues where disease might spread. In addition, they asked for funds to be channelled into research institutions and clinical facilities in the hope that a cure for AIDS might be found and widespread HIV antibody testing programs implemented.

GAY AIDS ORGANISATIONS, which emerged spontaneously within Australia's gay communities in order to educate their members about AIDS prevention and care for the sick, also asked for funding and to be a part of the policy-making process. This looked unlikely while medical experts dismissed their claims for legitimacy and homosexuals were still perceived to be the cause of the problem. Australian governments looking to the US for guidance would have noticed that most federal and state authorities in that country were refusing to fund gay community-based organisations, preferring to support programs devised by public health authorities. Facing the prospect of mandatory testing, the destruction of community institutions,

and the possible identification and isolation of HIV-positive individuals, gay men prepared themselves to fight again for the rights and public acceptance they had slowly gained over the previous 20 years. As the Victorian AIDS Action Committee's Adam Carr warned in December 1984:

The community's tolerance for our existence, and its respect for our rights, have always been fragile at best, and are now rapidly eroding ... Unscrupulous politicians, extreme right wing fringe groups, powerful religious bigots and a sensation-hungry media will combine to exploit public fear and channel ignorance into bigotry and the search for a scapegoat ... [T]here is no doubt that we will have a real fight on our hands to defend our rights, our freedoms and even our personal safety.

The expected backlash against the homosexual community did not eventuate. Australian state and federal governments—with the exception of Queensland and Tasmania—deviated from the US model and chose to incorporate representatives of the communities most affected by AIDS into a partnership with government and medical experts. This decision was made in order to gain their expertise in communicating with, and educating, people at risk. The result was an approach to AIDS prevention that stressed community participation and education rather than targeting infected individuals through testing and the curtailment of their activities through coercive laws. Instead of promoting abstinence and relying on prohibition, Australian public health authorities sought to inculcate an understanding that everybody was at risk from AIDS, but that this risk could be minimised by the adoption of safe sexual and drug use practices.

Thus by the end of 1987, the Commonwealth and state governments were funding targeted education campaigns that extolled the virtues of (safe) anal intercourse in glossy posters and pamphlets and supported the promotion of condom use on prime time television. Comprehensive sex and AIDS education courses were introduced in state (and most private) secondary schools, and nearly all of the Australian states established needle exchange programs. Sex worker organisations and

collectives of current and former drug users were also funded to provide education and outreach support.

These initiatives proved extremely successful in preventing the spread of HIV. After peaking at approximately 2500 in 1984, the number of new HIV infections fell to less than 500 per year within a decade, and has remained relatively stable ever since. Fortified by the partnership between doctors, the government, and 'a bunch of poofers, junkies and whores', as they are often pejoratively called, Australia effectively ducked the 'second wave' of

HIV infection that crashed on the shores of North America and Europe in the early 1980s, infecting drug users and their sexual partners, heterosexual men, women and their babies.

Learning to trust

Australia's approach to AIDS prevention became recognised as one of the most innovative and successful in the world. This was because politicians such as Neal Blewett, key doctors and the first National Advisory Committee on AIDS (NACAIDS), chaired by Ita Buttrose, trusted and empowered gay men, sex workers and injecting drug users to care for themselves and for others. They were persuaded to do so because these maligned social groups proved themselves to be responsible and committed to the fight against AIDS. They raised funds, devised educational materials, held forums and workshops and sought alliances with sympathetic medical professionals and politicians. They angrily refuted the notion that they were recklessly spreading disease and deliberately poisoning the blood supply, and proved themselves to be caring and committed lovers and friends. Their actions defied representations of them as hedonistic, selfish and irresponsible pleasure seekers.

As the epidemic in Australia effectively began 18 months after that in the US, gay men and sex worker organisations had time to understand what was required of them and to plan HIV-prevention

The expected backlash against the homosexual community did not eventuate.

strategies. Governments also benefited from this window of opportunity, through which they observed the mistakes made by civic leaders in the US. During a research trip to the United States in January 1985, Neal Blewett, the Commonwealth Minister for Health from 1983 to 1990, was able to witness the effect of the Reagan administration's reluctance to speak frankly about safe sex or finance AIDS prevention initiatives within the homosexual community. Touring an AIDS ward of a public hospital, and listening to frustrated doctors and AIDS workers, he glimpsed the consequences of HIV prevention policies constrained by moralism. Similarly, Australian AIDS advisory committees were able to read reports of HIV spreading rapidly through injecting drug-using populations in the US and Scotland before they had to deal with this reality in Australia. They became convinced that an innovative approach to HIV prevention, using the communication skills and energy of community-based organisations, was required to combat AIDS.



There was also an element of pragmatism. Politicians and public health authorities were eventually convinced that HIV posed an exceptional problem as it predominantly affected marginalised individuals and communities who had little faith in doctors and legislators, and who demonstrated a reluctance to alter their behaviour regardless of laws requiring them to do

so. As High Court Justice Michael Kirby stated, 'Law and the risk of punishment are usually the last things on the minds of people in the critical moment of pleasure'. Politicians and public health authorities also came to accept that there was little incentive for 'high risk' individuals to contact doctors, given that there was neither a cure for AIDS nor (until the late 1980s) drugs to delay the onset of the syndrome. Moreover, there was a significant disincentive to be identified as 'at risk' or 'infected' as it carried the possibility of discrimination and ostracism.

As Neal Blewett acknowledged, an approach to AIDS control that relied on testing was likely to drive individuals away from health services. Government had to build a partnership of trust between medical professionals and the communities most affected by AIDS, and empower gay men, drug user groups and sex worker organisations to become the vanguard in the fight against AIDS.

THE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS and safe sex messages devised by community-based organisations were effective because they employed a visual and textual language that was explicit, erotic and subculturally appropriate. In the hands of peer educators and the designers of colourful campaigns that depicted glistening latex-clad bodies in a selection of steamy sexual scenarios, condoms became the hottest sex toys of the 1980s, promising safe sexual pleasure. Large-scale surveys indicate that by the end of the 1980s, 85–90 per cent of gay men were using condoms or having non-penetrative sex with their casual partners—a substantial degree of behavioural change in a population that previously had little reason to use condoms.

AIDS Councils and drug user groups also faced the challenge of educating injecting drug users about using needles and syringes safely. When they pasted posters outlining such information on the doors of public toilets in an effort to reach this transient and nebulous population, they risked being accused of promoting drug use, just as the eroticisation of protected gay sex risked being construed as the promotion of homosexuality. While these risks inhibited many countries from supporting the work of community-based organisations, the Commonwealth and most state governments accepted that

gay sexual activity and drug use would continue regardless. They committed themselves to the principle of harm reduction, placing the lives of gay men and injecting drug users ahead of public sensibilities.

Two other examples serve to illustrate Australia's pragmatic approach to AIDS prevention. The first was the launch—relatively early in Australia's epidemic and before many heterosexuals had been infected—of a large-scale mass-media education campaign co-ordinated by NACAIDS. The 'Grim Reaper' campaign, as it became known, cost over \$3.6 million and aimed to inform Australians that HIV did not discriminate between age, sex or gender, and that, in the absence of a cure, prevention was the only method of combating the epidemic. It implored sexually active Australians to have sex with only one partner or, alternatively, to 'always use condoms'. The campaign was criticised for exaggerating the risk to 'ordinary' Australians and frightening children with its macabre images.

Prominent members of the National AIDS Task Force, including David Pennington and Ian Gust, suspected that its message of widespread risk was designed to remove the responsibility of AIDS prevention from gay men, thereby alleviating the compulsion for them to be tested for HIV. These criticisms overlooked the campaign's other aims which relied on members of the public personally identifying with the epidemic. For example, at a time when the government was curtailing public expenditure in response to economic recession, NACAIDS wanted to promote a sense of public urgency that would compel the Commonwealth and states to fund AIDS programs. It also sought to elicit public and political support for the introduction of comprehensive AIDS and sex education in secondary schools and the establishment of needle exchange programs. The realisation of these goals, and the failure of a second wave of HIV infection to swell within the heterosexual population, vindicated NACAIDS' decision to spend large sums of money scaring Australians and to speak frankly about safe sex on prime time television.

*The 'Grim
Reaper'
campaign
... aimed
to inform
Australians that
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between age,
sex or gender...*

The establishment of large-scale needle exchange programs in nearly all of the states by 1988 represents another example of Australia's commitment to harm reduction. Despite initial opposition, Australia's needle exchange program became the largest and most comprehensive in the world. Originally conducted by health professionals and pharmacists, community-based organisations were also funded to distribute sterile injecting equipment, puncture-proof disposable containers, condoms and safe sex information. Their success in preventing the widespread transmission of HIV among injecting drug users was demonstrated in studies that found a large discrepancy

between the rates of HIV infection in cities with, and without, needle exchange programs. Success was also reflected in the continued low level of HIV infection among injecting drug users in Australia in the 1990s—they now account for about four per cent of all HIV infections, as opposed to 50–60 per cent in other parts of the world. In real terms, lives have been saved. A recent evaluation estimated that Australia's needle and syringe program prevented approximately 25,000 HIV infections between 1988 and 2000.

The establishment of needle exchange outlets was, in part, born of the acceptance that education alone would not result in behavioural change among people who lacked the resources or power to act on the information. Drug addicts without access to sterile needles, or the means to purchase them, would continue to share equipment regardless of their understanding of the risks involved. AIDS prevention workers also recognised that prostitutes, although fully informed of the consequences of unsafe sex, would find it difficult to insist that clients wear condoms when forced to work, without peer support, at the mercy of their clients, on the streets and from the back seats of cars. Equally, there was little prospect of gay men taking pride in their health while they were humiliated or bashed at school, vilified in the community or rejected by their families. Economic, legal and

psychological factors conspired to make it more difficult for some to make healthy life choices.

Australia's success in preventing the spread of AIDS relied on countering these impediments. Governments funded AIDS Councils to offer workshops promoting self-esteem within the gay community. Comprehensive needle and syringe exchange schemes were established. And one state legalised prostitution in brothels as a means of providing a safe working environment where condom use could be enforced and prostitutes could be trained in safe sex techniques and negotiation.

THIS MODEL OF disease prevention, which recognised the need to educate and empower those most at risk, was very different from a traditional medical model that viewed disease prevention as a fight in which only doctors and medical researchers could engage. It challenged the validity of traditional measures of infectious disease control that focused on identifying and restraining infected individuals on the assumption that these people were autonomous agents capable of behaving 'rationally' once they were informed of their HIV-status or were faced with the prospect of imprisonment if they 'wilfully' endangered the lives of other people. It also contradicted the idea that some people with AIDS were deserving of their plight because they became infected through unsafe practices despite being aware of the risks.

Not all states and territories embraced the principles of explicit education, harm reduction and community empowerment, and none was willing to act upon all of the recommendations of the AIDS Councils and the Commonwealth's chief advisory committee. Queensland refused to distribute NACAIDS-approved educational materials or have contact with its AIDS Council until the end of 1987, forcing the Commonwealth to channel funds to this organisation through the Catholic Sisters of Mercy, whom Neal Blewett described as 'the most cheerful and altruistic of money launderers'.

Queensland also baulked at the establishment of a needle exchange scheme until 1990, and Tasmania resisted until 1993. All of the states enacted laws against the 'reckless' and 'knowing' transmission of HIV, and New South Wales displayed little hesitancy

in detaining a 'recalcitrant' HIV-positive prostitute in a hospital against her will. Brothels remained illegal in most states but escort agencies were tolerated, despite the fact that they do not provide a place for prostitutes to gather or receive training from sex worker organisations.

Similarly, laws were changed to allow for the possession and exchange of condoms and needles on the street—previously they had been used by police as evidence of sex work or drug use. Yet neither condoms nor sterile injection equipment was made available in prisons despite strong evidence that drug use and anal sex frequently occur between prisoners.

Finally, Tasmania refused to repeal laws that criminalised homosexual sexual activity, making it difficult for AIDS educators in that state to contact homosexuals (the laws were finally changed in 1997). Western Australia refused to lower the age of consent for homosexuals to match that of heterosexual adolescents. It was therefore difficult for AIDS organisations to target young gays in safe sex campaigns without appearing to condone unlawful sexual activity. Such restrictions contravened the principles of Australia's approach to AIDS prevention and remain challenges for AIDS prevention workers today.

While these are significant shortcomings, Australia's political response to AIDS was quick, innovative and humane, and defined by its trust in the communities most affected by AIDS to behave responsibly. Countries such as Russia and the Ukraine, without explicit safe sex education or needle exchange programs and now experiencing the fastest growth in new HIV infections in the world, have much to learn from Australia's pragmatic approach. Australia's success should also prove illuminating to those public policy-makers and community leaders who scorn 'harm reduction' approaches to social and health problems such as drug use, and who are still reluctant to trust and empower marginalised communities to care for themselves. ■

Paul Sendziuk is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of Historical Studies at Monash University. His book *Learning to Trust: Australian Responses to AIDS*, will be published by UNSW Press in November.

In real terms, lives have been saved.

HIV/AIDS HEP C.... TODAY'S PICTURE IN AUSTRALIA

- HIV danger alerts are needed in mainstream media
- HIV testing needs to be encouraged
- HIV overwhelmingly claims homosexual men....that doesn't mean heterosexuals and others are immune or have given up sex
- Those living with HIV need to have a really meaningful slice of the available funding.
- According to latest Annual Reports, the Victorian AIDS Council had an annual income of around \$3.5 million while ...
- ...an organisation representing positive people was given a grant of less than \$120,000. This can't go on. It's just not right.
- Many smaller agencies do so much that the VAC doesn't, yet they struggle to financially survive.
- HIV and Hepatitis C funding come under the one umbrella, even though the number of Hepatitis C infections is up to **30 times higher than HIV**. But political clout dictates only morsels for those with Hepatitis C.
- The VAC has dozens of employees, Victoria's Hepatitis C organisation a bare handful. This **MUST** change.

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HOW ABOUT A HELPING HAND?

Who cares about the facts?

More evidence emerges for the stolen generation

OFFICIALS DO NOT usually record facts of which they are ashamed. That is why competitors for the truth about colonial politics and Aboriginal history—Reynolds, Ryan, Windschuttle or Manne—have had to swim for the moral high ground through a swamp of unknowing. We will never know as a fact how many Tasmanian Aborigines were slaughtered by settlers or the secrets and whispering in the hearts of the dead.

Courts are not much good at finding and addressing old wrongs. Until the late 20th century the terra nullius principle rebutted the suggestion that Aborigines had been dispossessed. The High Court's blazing demolition of that principle in *Mabo* has since been smothered by a legislative blanket that has also dimmed the light of human rights and public respect for alternative dispute resolution and specialist tribunals. Aboriginal survivors of the 'stolen generations' have not been able to prove their right to damages in civil courts under 'white man's justice'. How can you prove an official policy, passing from one government to another, to remove Aboriginal children from their culture, when the witnesses are dead and the memories are 50 years old? And that the dusty, incomplete files show that custodians consented to the removal of particular children?

What if it could be proved that Aboriginal children were taken *illegally* under the laws of the time; detained by force and deception *without lawful authority*; and their parents and kin were *unlawfully* deprived of their children? What if there were credible evidence that this was knowingly done to countless children and their families, because it was thought that it was morally acceptable to break the law?

So long as there is argument about the facts, we can dither about the relative merits of a justice or welfare response to the misery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 'Practical reconciliation' assumes it is proper to address the needs rather than the rights of Indigenous children and their families. But if cultural dispossession, murder and the removal of those

children did happen, then striving only for better health, education, living and housing standards, while necessary, seems an ethically inadequate aim. A just Australia for the survivors and their children requires more than the response of Western Australia to the shattering 2002 report of the Gordon Inquiry into the abuse of Aboriginal children in their communities today: a cluster of 'multi-function' police stations in remote areas.

There isn't much of a market for Aboriginal people's memoirs, but I've just read an unpublished manuscript by Rene Powell and Bernadette Kennedy with an unusually thorough and thoughtful review of the law. The story is not uncommon: a life spoiled by the removal and institutionalisation of a four-year-old Aboriginal girl from Warburton Ranges in Western Australia. When she next met her mother, 17 years later, they shared no language. She wandered away. Decades later she started looking for her 'file' and a reason for her sadness, and recently she has gone back to her country.

The WA Aborigines Act 1905 originally defined a 'native' in terms of descent, physical characteristics and lifestyle. The Chief Protector (later the Commissioner)

was made guardian of any native child. The Minister could, by warrant, direct any native to be removed to, or between reserves, districts, institutions or hospitals 'and kept therein' without judicial or other review.

IN 1936 THE ACT was amended to define a 'native' in terms of 'caste', so clumsily that a quadroon, or 'quarter-caste', who was born before 31 December 1936 was not a 'native' *unless* they applied to be brought under the Act *and* the Minister consented. This resulted in an anomaly. Anyone of less than 'quarter-caste' was a 'native' and subject to the Commissioner's and Minister's powers, but a quarter-caste or quadroon was not.

Institutions where 'natives' could be kept were subject to gazette. One of those gazetted in 1937 was Sister Kate's Home (in Perth), where light-skinned children were taken to be educated and trained to 'pass for white' and be absorbed into the mainstream community.

On 26 April 1948 the Acting Commissioner for Native Affairs, Mr McBeath, asked the Crown for a legal opinion about his right in law to refuse to release 'light hued' but quarter-caste



Aboriginal children who had been transferred to Sister Kate's Home without their mothers' consent. He was aware that they were not 'native' children under the Act. The Crown Prosecutor advised that he had no right at all to detain children who were not 'natives in law' within the 1936 definition, even if their parents were. The definition of 'native' remained unchanged for ten more years despite significant other statutory amendments, eventuating in the Native Welfare Act of 1954.

Acting Commissioner McBeath felt he should have such a power and noted he intended to have the Act amended. He brought the anomaly to the attention of then Minister for Native Affairs, the Hon Ross McDonald QC, in a June 1948 memo in which he identified both Sister Kate's Home and the Convent and Holy Child Orphanage at Broome as places where such children were being unlawfully detained. He also acknowledged that he did not have the power to reclaim a child who was not a 'native' if a parent removed them. He did not say whether he had instructed the institutions either to release such children or inform parents of their entitlements.



Isabella Lynott, who was taken aged four from her Halls Creek home in 1907 to Beagle Bay Mission, WA. Her story, under the theme of *Separation*, is told in the exhibition *Eternity: Stories from the Emotional Heart of Australia*, at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra. Photo on loan from Pearl Hamaguchi. Used with permission

The Minister acknowledged and initialled the Commissioner's advice and asked for a copy for his own records.

Why then was nothing done? Minister McDonald was also a QC and Attorney-General. By November 1950 the Commissioner was writing to another Minister in an advice, set out below, which the Minister personally referred to his Premier. In this memo the Commissioner reveals the real policy underlying the application of the Native Administration Act provisions to the removal of Aboriginal children:

It is, in my opinion, questionable if the use of the Ministerial warrant is permissible in the case of children being removed to a Settlement or Mission in the interests solely of their physical and spiritual welfare, education and training. Fortunately it has never yet been challenged, *but native parents are rapidly becoming more enlightened on the matter of what may be their just and lawful rights within a white community and it would not surprise me if the Department was called upon soon to defend its action by the issue of a Writ of Habeas Corpus before a Court of Law. Such legal action would, I think, have quite a reasonable chance of success.* [Emphasis added] ... [T]he Department would be placed in an embarrassing position by the mere fact of its administrative act, however well-intentioned, being challenged by the very people whose welfare and protection represents its most important function.

In the same memorandum the Commissioner records that certain country Justices of the Peace had 'already quite illegally committed children and natives' directly to certain native institutions, and the need for ensuring that such illegally removed children be brought before a Children's Court. Perhaps he assumed that a Children's Court order could retrospectively validate unlawful removals and detention. It could not. The Commissioner proposed that the 'native institutions' be designated child welfare institutions too, to empower authorities to deal with the children (and their maintenance needs) under child welfare laws. There could

hardly be a clearer admission.

On 18 November 1954 Hansard records the Hon H.C. Strickland telling the WA Parliament that in about 1950 Minister McDonald had indicated that his statutory warrant should not be used because of its potential to authorise indeterminate civil detention. The Minister had also directed that 'native' children should be removed from their parents only through the Children's Court. The 'warrant' provision had been repealed in 1954. However Mr McDonald's instructions were apparently not effective. In a 1958 memorandum to the Commissioner about suggested amendments to the Child Welfare Act (i.e. eight years after the Minister had been told about the anomalous definition of 'native' and had directed no further arbitrary and unappealable apprehensions) he was advised that child protection proceedings had been and were still being 'initiated and carried through' by native welfare officers in the purported exercise of child protection powers that only child welfare officers possessed. If so, then these children, too, were unlawfully apprehended and detained.

The Commissioner referred that advice

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and its proposal, which he said he supported—that child welfare authorities ‘make available if possible any desired statutory authorities under the Child Welfare Act’ to his officers—to the head of that department. To cure such a litany of serious procedural defects one might expect authorities to have reviewed the apprehension, detention and circumstances of all Aboriginal children and to ensure that any anomaly be brought

Between 1 January 1937 until about 1960 government officers broke laws meant to protect Aboriginal people

to their parents’ attention. This did not occur. Commissioner Middleton directed his officers to ‘encourage’ parents to sign ‘voluntary agreements’ for the admission of their children to missions to be educated, which were later claimed to empower these institutions to refuse to return the children. In 1955 he had acknowledged that these ‘agreements’ were not enforceable and authorised ‘consent’ forms in their place. No ‘consent’ can deprive a parent of his or her natural guardianship rights and obligations, either, especially if they were coerced through threats of forcible removal.

IN 1958 THE ACTING Commissioner advised that when it came to the discharge of children from missions, ‘The laws should be used as a broad guide for procedure, but in our work the most important factor is what is in the best welfare interests of the native or natives concerned’.

The pattern is clear enough. From 1 January 1937 it would seem that a kind of benevolent inertia continued to drive a native welfare bulldozer over the civil and human rights of uncountable (because uncounted) Western Australian Aboriginal children and their parents. Their removal, transfer and detention without hearing or right of review was, to the knowledge of the Crown Law Department, the Commissioner for Native Affairs, the Minister for Native Affairs, the Attorney-General and the Premier, against the law. Parents of Aboriginal children were misled about their legal entitlements and remedies, if not always by actual misrepresentation then through official silence.

The final hypocrisy of inducing ‘agreements’ and ‘consents’ from parents with enforceable legal rights—but who had been accustomed to complete powerlessness—by government officers who were aware

that these accords were unenforceable, is overwhelming.

This is a small spotlight upon the fragility of the rule of law in our times. Between 1 January 1937 until about 1960 government officers broke laws meant to protect Aboriginal people, severed the bond between parents and children without a proper process and sometimes with neither right nor need to do so. In so doing, they flouted the absolute human right not to be subject to arbitrary arrest and detention, and failed to rectify grave wrongs when they became aware of them, persuaded that this was in the best interests of those for whom they were responsible.

What should be done? Perhaps a group of interested Aboriginal people should ask the Western Australian Supreme Court for a declaratory judgment. The Attorney-General should be asked to consent to the application being lodged so many years outside the limitation period, in the public interest. It must be in the public interest to know what else is to be found of the motivations and acts of ministers, cabinet and governor in council beyond what was found in overlooked ‘administration’ files. Was there a removal policy based on ‘race’? Were children removed and detained illegally? If so, did government authorities know? How far up did that knowledge go? Was any person under a duty to put it right? If so, what should they have done? What, if anything, did they do?

A clear finding by one state’s Supreme Court might soften our impatient political ethos. Sir Ronald Wilson, President of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission when it conducted the *Bringing Them Home* inquiry, and the subsequent report, have both been nastily dismissed as sentimental and foolish.

How harshly we judge those whose inadequate parenting, confidence and life skills are causally linked to what may at last be a provable fact: that successive Western Australian governments did have a removal policy; that the law was repeatedly and knowingly broken; that it was a ‘pragmatic’ but immensely discriminatory approach; and that the same forces are still denying it today. ■

Moira Rayner is a barrister and writer.



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Windschuttle's Whitewash

This is the full text of the speech prepared for the debate with Keith Windschuttle at the Melbourne Writers' Festival. It draws on some of the contributions found in Robert Manne's (ed), Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History (Black Inc, 2003).

THE FIRST BRITISH troops and settlers arrived on Van Diemen's Land almost exactly 200 years ago. At the time, it is thought by scholars, there were about 4000 to 5000 Indigenous people on the island. By the early 1830s the number of these people had been reduced to 200 or so. These survivors either surrendered or were captured and transported to Flinders Island. By the end of the 1870s not one of the 'full blood' Indigenous inhabitants, of a people who had lived on the island of Tasmania for perhaps 35,000 years, remained alive. Ever since the 1830s what had happened in Tasmania has been considered by civilised opinion as one of the most terrible tragedies in the history of British colonisation.

This is not Keith Windschuttle's view. According to the dust jacket of his book *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History, Volume One, Van Diemen's Land 1803-1847*, the British settlement of Australia was 'the least violent of all Europe's encounters with the New World', while according to its concluding chapter, Van Diemen's Land was 'probably the site where the least indigenous blood of all was deliberately shed'. Between 1803 and the removal of the Aborigines to Flinders Island, 30 years later, Windschuttle continues, 'the British were responsible for killing 118 of the original inhabitants—less than four deaths a year.' In a different section of his book he claims that it is 'clear' that 'the number of Aborigines killed by colonists was far fewer than the colonists who died at Aboriginal hands'. Windschuttle regards Aboriginal killings of the British as mere criminal acts: robbery and murder. He blames Aboriginal criminality, Aboriginal callousness towards their own women and the dysfunctionality of their society, as well as the introduction of European diseases, for the total collapse of Tasmanian Aboriginal society.

As is well known, Windschuttle's book has been hailed by conservatives with overwhelming enthusiasm. Geoffrey Blainey described it as 'one of the most important and devastating written on Australian history in recent decades'. Professor Claudio Veliz went further. He described *Fabrication* as 'one of the most important books of our time'. My view is different. I regard *Fabrication* as one of the most implausible, ignorant and pitiless books about Australian history written for many years. I will begin to demonstrate why I hold this view by an examination of Windschuttle's claim that in Van Diemen's Land 118 Aborigines were killed by British settlers.

The figure of 118 Aboriginal deaths was calculated by Windschuttle using the research of the man generally regarded as the pre-eminent empirical scholar in the area of the Tasmanian Aborigines, Brian Plomley. In 1966 Plomley published the extensive diaries of the man responsible for the surrender of the Tasmanians, George Augustus Robinson. In 1992 he published a monograph on the Aboriginal attacks on British settlers in Tasmania. By combining the figures of some of those Aboriginal deaths in the Robinson diaries which, for reasons best known to himself, Windschuttle regards as plausible, with those records of Aboriginal deaths found in Plomley's 1992 monograph, Windschuttle arrives at the figure of 118 deaths.

The first problem with this figure is that the scholar on whom Windschuttle relies, Plomley, made it clear in many of his writings that documentary records could be relied upon only with regard to British deaths at Aboriginal hands and that, because so many Aboriginal deaths were not

recorded, it was simply impossible to arrive at an even approximately accurate figure of British settler killings of Aborigines. Plomley's 1992 monograph is concerned exclusively with the record of Aboriginal attacks on British settlers and not with settler killings of Aborigines. In his charts he did not even include the evidence about British killings of Aborigines recorded in the Robinson diary he himself had spent many years editing. In *Fabrication* Windschuttle finds it 'puzzling' that Plomley himself never attempted to compile a list of Aborigines killed by the British. There simply is no puzzle here. Like virtually all other scholars, except Windschuttle, Plomley was aware, in general, that, as he put it in the introduction to his 1992 monograph, 'the written record suffers from one particular defect: it is only concerned with attacks by Aborigines on the settlers' and not with British settler attacks on Aborigines,



'Die letzten Tasmanier', 1886, by Ludwig Salvator, 1847-1915, Tasmaniana Library, State Library of Tasmania.

and that, in particular, an unknown and unknowable number of Aborigines had been killed by the so-called 'borderers'—the stockkeepers in remote regions, the sealers, the timber-cutters and the

escaped convicts, who had no reason to report their killings and good reason not to report them. Plomley knew that we would never know how many Aborigines were killed by the British.

There is a second reason why Windschuttle's pseudo-precise figure is absurd. Let us assume for the sake of argument that every time a settler killed an

Plomley knew that we would never know how many Aborigines were killed by the British.

Aborigine some documentary record came into existence and has been preserved. Even if this was the case no remotely accurate figure of Aboriginal deaths could be produced. As Henry Reynolds explains, the reason is straightforward. In violent encounters between the British and the Aborigines, while some Aborigines were killed on the spot, others were merely wounded. Henry Reynolds points out in his chapter in *Whitewash* that Robinson noticed 'not an aboriginal' on Flinders Island 'but what bears marks of violence perpetrated upon them by the depraved whites. Some have musket balls now lodged in them ... Some of the natives have slugs in their bodies ...'.

There is obviously no way now of knowing the ratio of wounded to killed, and it is, of course, quite certain that a proportion of those not killed but wounded subsequently died of their wounds.

This is the second reason why the figure of 118 is absurd.

A THIRD REASON IS this. If anyone imagines they are able to arrive at a plausible number of Tasmanian Aboriginal deaths it is obviously a requirement that they read whatever available published and unpublished sources exist. Windschuttle has not even remotely done this work. According to James Boyce, of the 30 books published on the subject of Van Diemen's Land, in the years between 1803 and 1834, Windschuttle is aware of at most five of these works and has 'directly cited' from only three. Moreover he has consulted almost none of the unpublished diaries or collections of letters, which are available to scholars. Given his claim to certitude, this is unacceptable at best, scandalous at worst. Let one example suffice. There is a published diary of a

woman who was in Van Diemen's Land in the early days, Rosalie Hare. Because he has failed to consult it he does not know of an incident reported in her diary relevant to the subsequent massacre at Cape Grim, which occupies an entire chapter of *Fabrication*. Here is the extract:

We have to lament that our own countrymen consider the massacre of people an honour. While we remained at Circular Head there were several accounts of considerable numbers of natives having been shot ... The master of the Company's Cutter, Fanny, assisted by four shepherds and his crew, surprised a party and killed 12.

There is a fourth reason to doubt Windschuttle's figure of 118 dead. Even when Windschuttle is aware of relevant sources he often misrepresents what they reveal. Again one example must suffice. Following a violent incident that took place in Van Diemen's Land in September 1829, John Batman wrote a report in which he told of having been informed by two Aborigines his party had captured that another ten were dead of their wounds or died shortly after. In his report Batman admitted to shooting his two prisoners. Windschuttle accepts this evidence. But in his text he dismisses the evidence of the ten wounded or dead. And in his Table where the 118 deaths are found, he even omits the two prisoners Batman admits to having shot.

Where there is a dispute about the number of deaths in a particular incident Windschuttle almost invariably accepts the lower figure. Concerning Risdon Cove, for example, Windschuttle accepts the evidence of two eyewitnesses, implicated in the killings, who claimed a very small death toll. He rejects the evidence of another eyewitness who, 27 years later, at the height of the Black War, when feeling against Aborigines was intense, told the Aborigines Committee that he had seen 'a great many Natives' being 'slaughtered and wounded'. There is no obvious reason why this witness should have lied. In his death toll table, for Risdon Cove, a mere three deaths are recorded. And these are only listed as 'plausible'. Why? As James Boyce points out,

no-one in the past 200 years had doubted that some killing at Risdon Cove took place. As he also notes, in Windschuttle's opinion there were only four killings of Aborigines in the history of Van Diemen's Land whose plausibility is rated as 'high'.

OR TAKE THE CASE of Cape Grim in the north-west. Robinson was told by one of those responsible for the main massacre, Chamberlain, that 30 Aborigines had been slaughtered. A second man who admitted responsibility, Gunshannon, was less forthcoming but did not dispute the figure of 30. On the other hand the Superintendent of the Van Diemen's Land Company, Edward Curr, reported to his directors in London, 'six dead ... and several seriously wounded.' Even though Curr's directors doubted his account; even though his subordinate later implicated Curr in several Aboriginal massacres; even though Curr spoke of the necessity of a policy of extirpation and issued instructions to employees to shoot Aborigines on sight; even though Curr was thoroughly



'Tasmanian aborigines at Oyster Cove Station', c.1900, attributed to Annie Benbow, 1841-1917, W.L. Crowther Library, State Library of Tasmania.

detested by his employees and by the Governors at Hobart, Windschuttle has no trouble in accepting his word. In his table six merely plausible killings at Cape Grim were recorded, with no mention of those even Curr had described as 'severely wounded'.

Even this does not exhaust the problems with Windschuttle's account of the Aboriginal death toll in Tasmania, which he claims was the lowest in the history of British colonisation. In *Whitewash*, Mark Finnane examines Windschuttle's own figures—118 violent deaths among a base



'Aborigines making & straightening spears', n.d., Benjamin Duterrau, 1767–1851, Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, State Library of Tasmania.

Indigenous population which, he claims, was 2000 in 1803. According to Windschuttle's own figures the violent death rate of Aborigines in Tasmania in the late 1820s was 360 times the murder rate in contemporary New York. According, moreover, to Windschuttle's own figures, if in the period between 1824 and 1831 as high a proportion of British settlers had died as Aborigines, there would have been 3200 deaths, not the 187 on record. If Aborigines had died at the same rate as the British settlers one would expect six deaths, not the 95 admitted by Windschuttle.

And not only that. Windschuttle entered this field of inquiry by pouring scorn on Henry Reynolds' figure of 20,000 Aborigines killed during the entire course of the British settlement of Australia. If Windschuttle's own figures for violent killings of Aborigines are extrapolated to Australia as a whole, and if it is assumed, as some scholars believe, that there were as many as 750,000 Aborigines alive at the time of European settlement, then the number of anticipated Aboriginal killings would be 44,000. The only way one could arrive at a figure as low as 20,000 violent deaths would be to assume an Indigenous population, at the moment of settlement, of 300,000 or less, a kind of figure most scholars abandoned 20 or 30 years ago.

One final point on death tolls. In recent days a conservative scholar, who is known for his scrupulousness, H.A. Willis, has published the result of his own survey of just those sources Windschuttle claims to have consulted in order to arrive at his list of 118 deaths. On the basis of these sources Willis arrives at a figure of 188 violent Aboriginal deaths between 1803 and 1834 and of another 145 deaths which were 'rumoured' or which he regards as 'doubtful'.

To summarise, thus far. Windschuttle's 118 deaths is reliant almost entirely on the scholarship of Brian Plomley, who believed it impossible to calculate the number of violent deaths. It is based on the assumption that no Aborigines died of their wounds. The figure is reached without the examination of many published or unpublished records. Where there is a discrepancy between witnesses Windschuttle accepts the lower estimate. Even if his own figures are accepted, they suggest a violent death toll 360 times greater than the current murder rate in New York—and an Australia-wide death toll higher than Henry Reynolds' estimate of 20,000. On the basis of Windschuttle's own sources, a careful, even pedantic scholar has discovered an additional 70 certain deaths and an additional 145 either rumoured or doubtful.

EVEN WINDSCHUTTLE cannot dispute that between 1803 and 1834 almost all Tasmanian Aborigines died. Why? According to Windschuttle the most important answer is introduced European disease, concerning which, he claims, evidence is clear. Regarding violent deaths Windschuttle demands evidence that might convince a court of law. Regarding the impact of introduced disease his evidentiary standards slip. As James Boyce points out, in *Fabrication* he produces only one piece of evidence for the impact of disease prior to 1829, a conversation recorded by James Bonwick.

The impact of imported disease *after* the transportation of the Aborigines to Flinders Island is not controversial. However the relative importance, before that time, of deaths through shooting, malnutrition through the loss of access to traditional hunting grounds, and lack of immunity to new diseases, is far

from obvious. Why the Aboriginal population of the north-west died out so rapidly, for example, where there were few free settlers, and where contact between employees of the Van Diemen's Land Company and the Aborigines was small and often lethal for reasons unconnected to catching a cold is, as Ian McFarlane makes clear in *Whitewash*, a genuine historical problem. Windschuttle argues that 'for some reason' the Aboriginal women who went with the sealers did not succumb to disease. 'For some reason' is not, to put it mildly, a satisfactory way of brushing away a problem that threatens Windschuttle's explanatory edifice.

If Windschuttle's claims about violent deaths are implausible, even more so are his speculations about the motives of those Aborigines involved in the violent conflicts of the 1820s. According to him Aborigines did not attack British settlers because they resented the loss of their land and hoped to drive the British away. Lacking both 'humanity' and 'compassion' they behaved as common criminals—murdering with pleasure, simply because they could; robbing because they coveted British consumer goods. The Tasmanian Aborigines not only lacked nobility. They even felt no patriotism. According to his account, having wandered aimlessly over the island of Tasmania for 35,000 years, they had formed no attachment to any particular piece of land. All this is nonsensical.

The most important evidence Windschuttle advances for this last proposition is the fact that 'None of the four vocabularies of Tasmanian Aboriginal language compiled in the nineteenth century, nor any of the lists of their phrases, sentences or songs, contained the word "land"'. Why the 19th century? As Henry Reynolds points out in *Whitewash*, although in his bibliography Windschuttle cites nine works by Brian Plomley, he does not cite by far the most important Tasmanian dictionary, Plomley's *A Word List of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Language* or any other dictionary of the 20th century. In Plomley's *Word List*, while there are no entries under 'land', there are no fewer than 23 entries under 'country', the word Aborigines normally use when speaking about their own or others' land. In Plomley's *Word List*, three entries refer to 'my country'; six have meanings connected to the question 'Where is your country?'

Reynolds also quotes the words of a translated Tasmanian Aboriginal song. 'When I returned to my country, I went hunting but did not catch any game.'

ONE OF THE CONTRIBUTORS to *Whitewash*, Ian McFarlane, has provided me with additional evidence concerning the Tasmanian Aboriginal attachment to their lands. George Augustus Robinson was questioned by the Executive Council on February 23 1831. He told the Council that the Aborigines were 'divided into various tribes under chiefs occupying various districts'. In Robinson's diary, *Weep in Silence*, which Windschuttle claims to have read carefully, Robinson was informed about the reason for a clash between two tribes. 'They [the Tarkiner] state that they and the Tommyginny have been at amity and at war alternately for a long period; that on this occasion the Tommyginny came to them on a visit and brought with them a quantity of red ochre which they refused, which was the ground of the quarrel ...'. In order to induce the Aborigines to go to Flinders Island Robinson guaranteed that 'as far as practicable they were ... to occasionally visit their native districts'. He also recorded the grief of one of the Aborigines he was transporting to Flinders Island: '... When we were off Swan Island Manalargenna the chief gave evident signs of strong emotion. Here opposite to this island was his country ...'. On the crucial question—of the lack of evidence concerning Aboriginal attachment to land—Windschuttle's argument collapses at this point.

It also collapses, I believe, on the question of whether, during the 1820s, Aborigines were in fact behaving like criminals or defending their traditional lands and hunting grounds. As Henry Reynolds points out, the British settlers with the closest connection to the Indigenous Tasmanians all commented explicitly on their patriotism. Here is Roderick O'Connor, the Commissioner of Lands: 'They were as tenacious of their hunting grounds as settlers of their farms.' Here is William Darling, superintendent of Aboriginal settlements for two and a half years: '[It] must be obvious to every candid

mind, that they are a brave and patriotic people', who had 'considered themselves as engaged in a justifiable war against the invaders of their country'. And here is George Augustus Robinson, who knew the Tasmanians better than any British settler: 'Patriotism is a distinguishing trait of the Aboriginal character.' Windschuttle provides no evidence from a contemporary who shared his strange view about the lack of Aboriginal connection to land. Recently in Launceston Windschuttle likened Aboriginal attacks on British settlers to 'modern-day junkies raiding service stations for money'. At the end of the fierce Black War of the 1820s, Governor Arthur spoke, rather, of this 'noble-minded race'. Who ought we to believe?

Windschuttle not only doubts Aboriginal attachment to land and Aboriginal patriotism, he even doubts the idea that they were involved in a war against the settlers. In order to maintain this he idiosyncratically restricts the concept of war to organised attacks on enemy troops. By his definition terrorist attacks on soft targets could not be regarded as war. He also ignores altogether the scores of occasions on which the British settlers and officials spoke of the 'war' in which they at least knew they were involved between 1824 and 1831. The Indigenous

separate Aboriginal attacks on British settlers occurred in the space of a fortnight in November 1827. What is this if not the evidence of a war? When Governor Arthur was given his commission, he was instructed 'to oppose force by force and to repel such aggressions in the same manner, as if they proceeded from subjects of an accredited state'. Windschuttle does not mention this instruction. Why?

The British Governor in Van Diemen's Land, then, received instructions, if necessary, to fight a war. The British settlers in the second half of the 1820s believed they were involved in a war, 'and that of the most atrocious kind', as one of them put it. The Aborigines, at this time, mounted scores of attacks against the British settlers. And yet because he wants to denigrate the Aborigines as criminals rather than as patriots, Windschuttle, almost alone among historians, believes that there was no Black War.

WINDSCHUTTLE THINKS that Henry Reynolds' characterisation of Aborigines, as involved in guerilla warfare, is nothing more than the Che Guevara romanticism of an erstwhile 1960s radical. Once more this is nonsensical. As Henry Reynolds shows, a key authority on the subject, Walter Laqueur, regards guerilla warfare as one of the most ancient forms of military encounter. And, as he also shows, on several occasions during the 1820s, both the Aboriginal bands and the British roving parties were referred to by contemporaries as guerilla armies. There is nothing anachronistic about the idea of guerilla warfare in Tasmania in the 1820s.

It is really because he has no grasp of early Tasmanian society that Windschuttle is unable to understand what caused the 1820s war. As James Boyce shows in *Whitewash*, because Windschuttle does not know something as elementary as the difference between land ownership and land occupation, he thinks that by 1823 only a little over three per cent of the Tasmanian land was occupied at the time the Black War began. It is true that in 1823 only three per cent or so of the land was owned. But by that time probably four or five times that amount of land was occupied, by those who held annual leases, so-called tickets of occupation, or who simply grazed their flocks



'G.A. Robinson with a group of Van Diemen's Land natives', 1835, by Benjamin Duterrau, 1767–1861, Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, State Library of Tasmania.

Tasmanians have left no accounts of how exactly they conceptualised what was taking place at this time. Yet, as Shayne Breen points out in *Whitewash*, in the north-central districts of Tasmania nine

on Crown lands. Extraordinarily enough, of both these forms of land occupation Windschuttle is altogether unaware. Much of Tasmania is mountainous or wilderness. By the time the war began a sizeable proportion of the valuable central plain of Tasmania was occupied by British settlers' grazing stock. These were also the most important traditional Aboriginal hunting grounds. As almost all historians before Windschuttle understood, this is the basic cause of the War, not a 'quasi-Marxist' explanation, as Windschuttle preposterously claims.

Again because he has no understanding of the reality of life in early Tasmania, Windschuttle believes that most British hunting activity ceased after 1811, when in fact, as James Boyce shows, for several decades the settlers went on a veritable hunting spree, allowing Van Diemen's Land to become a major exporter of kangaroo skins and other furs. As Boyce notes sardonically, if Windschuttle had read the early Van Diemen's Land newspapers, beyond the indexed references to Aborigines, he might have noticed that in December 1819 the *Hobart Town Gazette* editorialised against the practice of the grazers of animals who 'employ almost all their time in hunting, losing sight of their flocks for days together'.

And if, indeed, Windschuttle understood early Tasmanian society he would not, most egregiously of all, have assumed, as he does, that orders issued by the early Governors, in this case against the wanton killing of Aborigines, were almost automatically obeyed. On this question Windschuttle is caught in a hopeless contradiction. According to him in June 1813 not a single killing of an Aborigine had occurred in Van Diemen's Land for five years. Yet in that very month the Governor issued an order to the settlers warning them against taking Aboriginal life. What is the explanation for this apparent gubernatorial slander of the settlers?

The most distressing feature of Windschuttle's *Fabrication* is its vilification of the Tasmanian Aborigines. Some is almost comical—like his suggestion that the Aboriginal survival over 35,000 years or so was mainly a matter of good luck. Some is not amusing. Windschuttle accuses the Tasmanian Aboriginal men of treating their women brutally, by selling them into prostitution. The evidence about mistreatment of women comes

almost exclusively from the time when Aboriginal society had already almost altogether broken down. Windschuttle either has not read, or ignores, the evidence of the French explorers who give a very different view.

ACCORDING TO James Boyce, the least sympathetic of the early French visitors to Van Diemen's Land was Péron. Yet he wrote that the family life he had observed among the Indigenous people had touched him deeply. Moreover, as Péron makes clear, the efforts of the French to have sexual relations with the Aboriginal women were strongly rebuffed. In fact it seems almost certain that Windschuttle has not read Péron's account of the Baudin visit. For if he had, why does he confuse the dates of the publication of the volumes for the years when the expedition took place?

There is, however, a far more serious point here. In an account which is supposedly sympathetic to the plight of Aboriginal women, why does Windschuttle omit from his account of the reason for violent clashes the considerable evidence concerning British settler abduction of Aboriginal women, clearly one of the most important of the grievances of the Tasmanian Aborigines?

Because Windschuttle has not followed contemporary scholarly debate, he repeats Plomley's early view that Tasmanian Aborigines could not light fire, without realising that, on the basis of later argument and evidence, Plomley subsequently changed his mind. And because Windschuttle lacks understanding of the historical context, without the support of any evidence he claims that the Aborigines went 'naked' in winter even in the mountain regions, presumably because, as the most primitive people on earth, they had been unable to work out that animal furs might protect them from the cold. As James Boyce points out, in the 18th century 'naked' normally implied the lack of cover of the genitals. James Cook, for example, wrote of Van Diemen's Land that 'the females wore kangaroo skins tied over their shoulders and round their waist' which 'did not cover those parts which most nations conceal'. As Boyce rightly says, the idea of a people existing in such a climate for tens of thousands of years without working out that they might wear kangaroo skins is, to put the matter charitably, too ridiculous for words.

As Dirk Moses argues in the conclusion to *Whitewash*, the way Keith Windschuttle responds to criticism will reveal a great deal about whether *Fabrication* is merely a failed effort at historical revisionism or the first instalment of an authentic Australian historical denialism with regard to the dispossession of the Aborigines.

For my part I am not optimistic. In *Whitewash* Cathie Clement tells the story of how, on noticing an error Sir William Deane had made concerning a massacre of Aborigines at Mistake Creek (Sir William placed the incident in the 1930s; in fact it took place in 1915),

Yet in that very month the Governor issued an order to the settlers warning them against taking Aboriginal life.

Windschuttle went on the attack. One of the people who bore witness to the massacre was an Aboriginal woman, Peggy Patrick. As Peggy speaks not standard English but a local Kriol, when she was interviewed she spoke not of the loss of her grandmother and grandfather but of 'mum mother and father and two brother, two sister'. Windschuttle thought at first that Peggy Patrick was referring to the killing of her mother and father, not to her grandmother and grandfather. He mocked her mercilessly on that account. How could she argue her mother was alive in 1915, and so on? Windschuttle has been informed since then, on very many occasions, of his error. He has refused to apologise. He has even repeated his mistake.

In *Whitewash* a statement of Peggy Patrick's appears. She concludes by saying that in talking openly about what had happened to her family she had hoped that 'black and white can be friend when we look at true thing together'. After her recent experience, she says, 'Look like nothing change'. For my part I hope that this is not the case. Anyhow whether things have or have not changed—whether there will ever be a history which Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians might share—is what the debate between Keith Windschuttle and myself is finally about. ■

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In contrast to previous government apathy Indonesia's academics respond to a militant minority

I WAS BORN, RAISED and educated in Indonesia. I still live between Australia and Indonesia, so I often forget that what I can see in Indonesia's social and political landscape is not necessarily visible to most Australians.

When Australians think of Islam in

majority of Muslims, because it would have been regarded as targeting the weak. It would be too difficult to prove anything against members of the army, and even harder to get a conviction. It seems that behind the government's lack of action were inertia and denial.

in 2001, various Muslim thinkers and activists gathered together, this time at Teater Utan Kayu—a cultural centre founded by author, poet and senior journalist Goenawan Mohamad. The meeting was moderated by Goenawan, and a strategy for action was adopted.

Jaringan Islam Liberal, or Liberal Islam Network, was launched. A website was set up, moderated by Luthfi Assyaukanie, author and lecturer at Paramadina University. The website quickly expanded. Media syndication was established. Columns and articles discussing Islamic teachings began to appear outside Muslim-related publications. A wide-circulation newspaper group, Jawa Pos, which also has regional newspapers, now sets aside regular space for activists of the Network. Popular radio stations have set up chat shows, where day-to-day needs and problems of Muslims are discussed on air. Clerics with extensive understanding of Islam are invited as guest compères to answer questions from listeners, on topics ranging from inter-religious marriages to the correct attire for a particular event for Muslims. In answering questions about religious interpretation, the clerics often make distinctions between the universal Islamic teachings and the temporal and cultural aspects of Islam which have been open to interpretation for centuries. They remind people that the latter have been debated among clerics themselves, without them being less Islamic for doing so.

The Liberal Islam Network works across and transcends existing organisations. It challenges the literal and scriptural interpretations of Islam, and seeks to separate the temporal and cultural aspects from the universal truth of Islam.

In its activity not only does the Network find itself in confrontation with radical Islamic movements such as *Laskar Jihad* (Holy War Soldiers) and *Front Pembela Islam* (Defenders of Islam Front), it also incurs the wrath of conservative clerics from more established organisations, such as the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Indonesian Ulema Council).

Ulil Abshar Abdalla, chairman of Indonesia's Research and Development of

Reclaiming Islam

Indonesia, they now think of Amrozi, the Bali bomber who can't stop smiling; Abu Bakar Ba'ashir, who may or may not be the spiritual leader of Jemaah Islamiah; and terrorism. Who could blame them?

I can't blame Australians for being cynical, or at best confused, when told that the majority of Indonesia's Muslims are moderate and peace-loving. Moreover until the October bomb attack, the Indonesian government continued to maintain that there were no terrorists in Indonesia. Political analysts prior to the attacks were saying that the government was reluctant to take tough action against the hard-line Muslims for fear of a backlash from the wider Muslim community, whose support they could not afford to lose. There is some truth in all of the above.

Indonesia does have Amrozi, Abu Bakar Ba'ashir and Jemaah Islamiah. Violence has been employed as a political means by some militant Muslims. And the majority of Indonesia's Muslims are moderate and peace-loving.

There were reasons for the government's reluctance to act against militant Muslim groups suspected as being behind a number of violent incidents. The most important was that Indonesian society then believed that while many of the terrorist acts were committed by militant Muslims, they were also aided, even manipulated, by elements of the army for their own purposes. Seeing the government crack down on militant Muslims might well invoke the sympathy of the

It's not clear whether the resulting complacency contributed to the Bali bombing. The attack certainly jolted the Indonesian government out of its denial. They also have to face the fact that for many Australians, Amrozi has become the face of the Indonesian Muslim.

However, it would be wrong to assume that all moderate Muslims have been unaware of the presence of Islamic militants. For years Muslim intellectuals have been unhappy about the way the militants are using the name of Islam to perpetrate very un-Islamic acts. They have been writing columns in newspapers and speaking at conferences, emphasising that violent *jihad* and hatred are not a part of the real teachings of Islam.

THE SPEAKERS REPRESENT different Islamic organisations. Many are people with no clear political affiliations. This is an advantage as most Indonesians do not readily accept what politicians say at face value. Yet intellectual language has its own limitations. It does not reach the grassroots level, while political language, being 'sexier', is more easily understood.

In 1997, Nurcholish Madjid, a respected Muslim intellectual and scholar—founder of Paramadina Foundation, which also runs Paramadina University in Indonesia—raised the idea of a network of Muslim liberal thinkers. Several attempts were made to realise this ambition.

Following the Christmas Eve bombing of several churches in 2000, the need to create a network became urgent. Early

Human Resources Institute and one of the most prolific writers and active speakers of the Network, last year incurred a death fatwa from some clerics of the Indonesian Ulema Council. Ulil offended the ulemas with his trenchant and fearless criticism of the conservative practices in the country's Islamic communities, which Ulil believes blur the distinction between the universal teachings and the scriptural aspects of Islam.

The *fatwa* generated a great deal of controversy, while Ulil soldiered on, unrepentant.

'I'm lucky, in that I was brought up in an era where people were beginning to be critical of what they were taught, so now when I am supposedly condemned by these ulemas, I receive so much support from left, right and centre, even from some ulemas at the Indonesian Ulema Council itself. I know I have nothing to fear,' said Ulil when asked about the *fatwa*.

There is continuing opposition from conservative and radical groups, who accuse the Network of being funded by the West or worse still, by the United States (which is increasingly seen as opposed to Islam). They also say that the Network is too elitist to ever reach the general population.

The Network activists deny this. They are, they explain, Muslims who have been brought up in the local Islamic traditions and culture, who practice Islam and absorb Islamic values without having to transplant Arabic culture into their lives, unless, of course, they are of Arabic background. What they have integrated into their lives are the universal and absolute teachings of Islam, which can be implemented in any host culture. Indonesian people from different regions are generally proud of their own local mores, so the idea that they can be practicing Muslims while retaining their regional identities should offer reassurance.

The reach of the Network activists has also extended to rural and younger Muslims. They have been invited to *pesantrens* (Islamic boarding schools) for discussions with the clerics and students. And in these discussions, as in those with university students, the Network activists are at ease with the language of the Qur'an and well versed in its interpretations. There is not a language of slogans, which is important in promoting understanding rather than merely encouraging people to follow.

Disagreements arise as to what is meant by the temporal and cultural aspects of Islam,

but Luthfi Assyaukanie believes that this inquiring attitude is a healthy phenomenon.

People who support the Liberal Islam Network, endeavour to open the minds of Muslims who may otherwise be influenced by militant groups. It seems they may be winning as most Indonesians do not feel comfortable with anything extreme. The majority of Muslims in Indonesia do not want Islamic sharia instituted. They believe in Islamic values, but do not want to live under an Islamic state. In the 1999 election, the first democratic election in Indonesia since 1955, all the Muslim parties who supported Islamic sharia were defeated.

AMONG THE WIDER Muslim community there is an increasing tendency to reject the concept of the violent *jihad*. Those who practice it are generally regarded as irresponsible. However, this is not enough to prevent horrific events such as the Bali bombing from recurring, as the attack on the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta in August 2003 proves.

During an ABC *Foreign Correspondent* interview, the Head of the Team of Investigation into the Bali Bombing, (Police) General I Made Mangku Pastika, postulates that there are three layers of terrorists who were involved in the Bali bombing. There are the foot soldiers, who were made to believe that they were launched on a fast track to heaven. The middle-level operatives, such as Amrozi, Imam Samudra and Ali Gufron alias Mukhlas, who have a deep hatred toward the United States for what they believe are that country's massacres of Muslims around the world. Then there are those in the highest echelon, who have power in mind, who want to create a pan-Islamic state.

While this may sound like a thumbnail sketch of a complex situation, it offers a clear structure. It tells of the existence of radical Muslims who do not hesitate to use violence to fight for political gain, who also have enough persuasive power to recruit middle-level operatives and foot soldiers. Such people may be a minority, but they remain a dangerous and aggressive one.

What's more, such groups are mostly

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underground. To flush them out requires a carefully considered strategy.

The endeavours of people involved in the Liberal Islam Network, which is expanding internationally, deserve support. At present, the powerful nations are focused on eliminating problems by military might. This makes the tasks of liberal Muslims very difficult.

The militant groups base their recruiting technique on showing their candidates how the United States and its allies indiscriminately killed and tortured Muslims in Afghanistan and Iraq, and how Muslims living in Western countries are victimised just for being Muslim. If the West continues to fight terrorism by causing further killing, it will only serve to further the arguments of militant leaders.

There is no doubt that Indonesia's security and intelligence agencies need smartening up. But this should be accompanied by a serious study of the Indonesian social and political situation on the part of Western nations, particularly Australia. There needs to be a window to the world behind Amrozi's face. ■

Dewi Anggraeni's book, *Who Did This to Our Bali?* will be published later this year.

Sunken diplomacy

Former senior diplomat **Tony Kevin** examines the damage to Australian foreign policy

I RETIRED FROM my former profession, as an Australian diplomat and foreign policy analyst, in 1998 after 30 years' service. My final postings were as Ambassador to Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia (1991–94) and to Cambodia (1994–97).

In those years I was proud to represent Australia. Now I am a contrarian writer. The present government's international security settings are damaging both to Australia's security and to the personal security of ordinary Australians. They have undermined Australia's international reputation, and misled public understanding on these matters. The government's deliberate cruelty towards asylum seekers who arrive by boat—at the border protection stage, in detention, and finally in the limbo of Temporary Protection Visas—shames Australia's conscience.

Australia's national direction and tone have changed radically since 1996. The former bipartisan foreign policy consensus that suited Australian interests, subtly balancing Australia between the US alliance and the Asian region, no

kept a cordial but prudent distance from Bush's Washington.

The causes of the attack on the Twin Towers had nothing to do with Australia; they lay in decades of troubled American engagement with intractable Middle Eastern problems. The attack did not jeopardise Australian national security, or the personal security of individual Australians. John Howard achieved this himself, by plunging Australia voluntarily into a global security cauldron where we had no need to be. After our government's military partnership in the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, Australia is now tied firmly to George Bush's unilateral interventionism. Our security professionals now worry, alongside their American counterparts, about 'homeland security'. Six years ago this would have been inconceivable. Now it is real.

Contrast Australia's situation with Canada's or New Zealand's. Both maintain good international citizen credentials that Australia has lost. New Zealand, without sacrificing essential bilateral interests, keeps a safe distance from

For this government, Australia's safest course is to adhere firmly to American power—the big rich nation that is 'most like us'. So since 2001, Australia has moved steadily closer to the fearful, uncomprehending and casually cruel national security state that the United States has become. For both countries, it is a sad trend.

For most of my 30 years in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) I worked in areas where I did not feel confronted by moral choices. DFAT's working culture was always 'can-do', anti-intellectual, sardonic, uncomfortable with higher ideals.

The seemingly permanent Cold War meant there were always abuses and atrocities on both sides to be pragmatically balanced. Whatever we were doing wrong, it could plausibly be argued that the other side was probably doing something worse. Greene's *The Quiet American* had little impact on me when I first read it. I am far more impressed now by what it says about the gross imbalance of power in the world, and the frightening self-righteousness and moral blindness of American power.

I felt then that Australia was an autonomous global actor, that we had free choices, and that I was part of my country's professional resources to help make those choices better ones.

In Poland 1991–94, where taking visiting VIPs to Auschwitz was a regular duty, my Panglossian complacency was shaken as I watched the Milosevic regime's unchecked hideous cruelties towards Croats and Muslims. I was reminded by a Deputy Secretary—who has done well in his career since then—that 'these issues lie outside Australia's area of primary concern'. I did not think he was right, but I obediently set my conscience aside.

JULY 1997 was crunch time: the improbable co-prime minister regime in Cambodia set up by the UN peacemakers in 1993 finally fell apart. Civil war between royalists and post-communists

The Prime Minister, who sees himself as a realist, is driven by visceral fears.

longer exists. We have security and trade agendas, but we no longer have a real engagement agenda towards our region.

Since 2001, Australia has become umbilically attached to the present Washington administration. It is a sad accident that the Howard and Bush administrations coincide. With any other US president, Howard's unbalanced foreign policy tendencies would have been contained. With any other Australian prime minister, Australia would have

Washington. A perceived decency and modesty in New Zealand's international profile protects New Zealanders. Yes, some New Zealanders died with Australians in the 2002 Bali bombing. But the major targets there were Australians, the first collateral casualties of Howard's national security policies.

The Prime Minister, who sees himself as a realist, is driven by visceral fears. Outside the English-speaking Western democracies, he sees a threatening world.

loomed again, and the West and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) were again preparing to choose the royalist side.

Australia had been quite complicit in a cynical Cold War endgame that inflicted a cruel 13-year insurgent war (1979–1991) on the Cambodian people. After Soviet-backed Vietnam liberated Cambodia from the monstrous Khmer Rouge regime in 1978, the West and its ally of convenience China isolated and tried to destroy the new Cambodian state, using a Khmer Rouge royalist insurgency as their main military vehicle. The 50 cent anti-personnel landmine was the Khmer Rouge's weapon of choice. Today, tens of thousands of amputees and bereaved families in Cambodia still pay, with their pain and grief and damaged lives, for this cynical realpolitik war.

It became supremely important to me after July 1997 to tell the world what I thought was the truth about Cambodia. At 54, I found courage to speak. In my last three months as ambassador, I used all my personal credibility to lobby vigorously for governments to negotiate with Hun Sen, as Cambodia's best chance for peace and stability. I succeeded, but at a personal cost.

OVER THE PAST five years I have written from an independent viewpoint on a succession of foreign-policy-related issues, such as Australian diplomacy in East Timor in 1999, 'border protection' and the suspicious sinking of SIEV X, and Australia's ill-judged participation in the invasion of Iraq.

I found that it is acceptable to express mildly contrarian views, but seriously to challenge conventional assumptions—to write too far outside the accepted frame—is confronting and disturbing to mainstream readers. Writing and academic opportunities, initially promising, tended to dry up as my policy critique sharpened.

I don't think I became especially radical. Rather I am trying to apply traditional Australian values of decency and fairness. It is the arrogance and thoughtless cruelty of present Australian national security policies that drove me to speak out.

It has been liberating, intellectually and philosophically, to shake off habitual DFAT constraints on my thinking and

expression, to try to apply the job skills of a former diplomat to contributing to informed debate about Australia's role in the world.

I have moved away from 'foreign policy realism'. A value-free and expediency-based foreign policy cannot be right. However complex the issue, Australia's starting point must be respect for all human life. Good ends cannot justify evil

However complex the issue, Australia's starting point must be respect for all human life.

means, and might does not make right.

Australians do not have a 'manifest destiny'. If we are not decent at home and abroad, we will not survive. We must help defend the rules-based international order based on the UN that we helped to create after World War II. To become an American vassal or mercenary, indifferent to the sufferings of others in this interdependent world, dishonours our nation's history and values and will not secure our children's future.

As a multicultural democracy, we must practice the values we proclaim—in our conduct abroad, and in how we treat people coming under our country's duty of care, including boat people. Here is the only link I see between refugee policy and the terrorism issue. Refugees are not terrorists—but how we treat refugees will affect how the world will treat us.

There is a vicious stupidity about the present policy mix that diminishes us all and makes us less safe. On terrorism, we lead with our chins—every time. It can only be a matter of time before we take serious casualties in Iraq where we still have 1000-odd Australian Defence Force people serving.

For most of my working life, I was more interested in 'policy' than 'administration'. Now I realise that government

is finally about ordinary people, and whether their lives are valued. Policies are only means: people, whatever their nationality, are the ends.

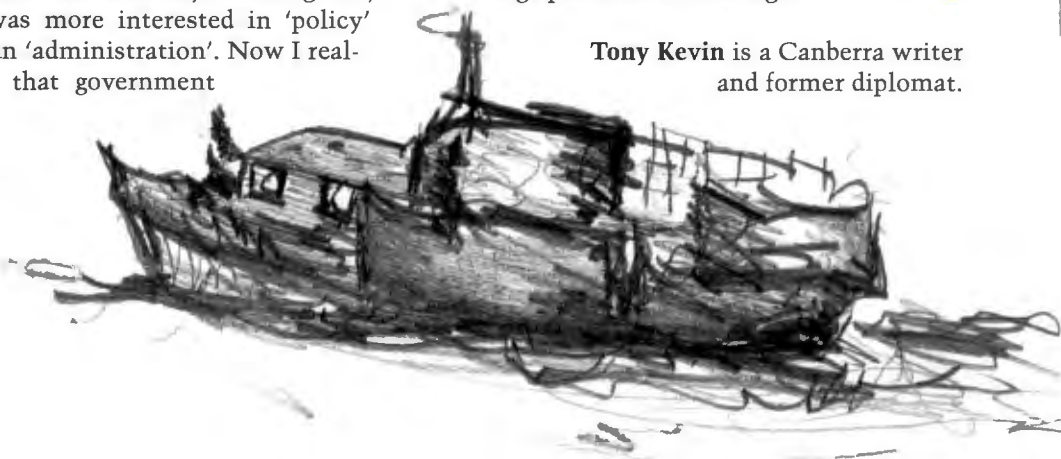
Things are improving. The harm that bad foreign policy can cause is now better understood. There is an informed and credible contrarian foreign policy voice. For example, former DFAT officers like Dick Woolcott, Richard Butler and

Bruce Haigh have become trenchant critics. Much of what I was struggling to convey about the morally bankrupt and reckless style of governance that now prevails in Australia is better appreciated after the exposure of the *Tampa* cruelties and the 'children overboard' photographs fraud.

Thoughtful commentators and former DFAT colleagues know, as I do, that there will be much foreign policy repair work after the present government. Australia will have to 're-balance', re-engaging with damaged or ignored relationships with the UN, with countries in our region, and with China, continental Europe, and Russia. We won't abandon the ANZUS treaty, but we will need to regain healthy distance between our country and the United States. Because Australia's world cannot only be about raw power: we must return to being part of an international order of nations.

We will rediscover Australians' genuine empathy with our neighbours. We will stop fearing them. And we will rebuild our country's tarnished moral credibility. Confronting painful truths about events such as the sinking of SIEV X will be a large part of that challenge. ■

Tony Kevin is a Canberra writer and former diplomat.



Language so lovely

After Shakespeare: An Anthology, John Gross (ed). Oxford University Press, 2002. ISBN 0 19 280 472 3, RRP \$39.95
The Oxford Book of Aphorisms, John Gross (ed). Oxford University Press, 1983, reissued 2003. ISBN 0 19 280 456 1, RRP \$39.95

JOHAN GROSS IS A MAN of learning, flair and energy. He did a remarkable job as editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* in the '70s, and is always worth our attention. Oxford University Press has recently presented or re-presented him in two of his hats: he pulls the strings behind two widely differing anthologies.

The more original and, surely, more arresting of these is his celebration or many-headed critique of Shakespeare: the Don Bradman of Western literature. All manner of writings are assembled here, woven together with Gross's own observations. These contents range from Borge's wonderful story in which God finishes up saying to the poet, 'like me, you are everything and nothing', to Cole Porter's 'Brush Up Your Shakespeare'; from Zbigniew Herbert's 'Elegy of Fortinbras' back to sturdy Ben Johnson.

As this will suggest, the book is a feast with a great many kinds of dish, with cooks of many schools. There are novelists, critics, poets, diarists, satirists and an 18th-century Swiss weaver, who

actually kept a Shakespeare journal. This gentleman was at least the sympathetic opposite of silly Frederick the Great, who complained that in German theatres 'you will find the abominable plays of Shakespeare being presented, and audiences in transports of joy listening to these ridiculous farces, which are worthy of the savages of Canada.'

Not all monarchs were such neo-classical barbarians: Catherine the Great, we are told, translated *The Merry Wives of Windsor* into Russian. And now, in an age when we desperately need Maynard Keynes to be reborn, it is nice to have his sound comment that 'We were just in a financial position to afford Shakespeare at the moment when he presented himself!'

Once, in Washington, making my way to the airport I listened to the African-American taxi-driver explaining why it has to be the case that Bacon wrote the Bard's plays; confusingly, he went on to point out how clear Bacon's style was, and how richly dense Shakespeare's. There are no Baconians here, nor yet the Marlovian thesis of Mike Rubbo, but there is a charming essay by Leslie Stephen demonstrating how W.S. wrote Bacon's works.

Again, some kinds of postmodern thinking have sought to dematerialise the man from Stratford, turning him into a series of textual traces and historical sites. This anthology does much to maintain his solidity, as does Brian Vickers' recent study of the writing processes, *Shakespeare, Co-Author*. If we are to be deconstructive, we might say that we have all eaten Shakespeare, turning him into our selves and even, miraculously, into our DNA.

Gross has devised many pigeonholes or categories in which to locate his riches. We pass through 'Worlds Elsewhere' and 'Echoes', 'Tales of' and 'Tales from'. Along the way we may delight in Emily Dickinson, Fielding, Sartre, crazed Ruskin and ever-gentle Max Beerbohm. We can think of omissions, no doubt, over and above all the critical classics which were deliberately excluded: I do like that moment when Tolstoy told Chekhov that his plays were 'even worse' than Shakespeare's. And yes, I miss the Falstaffian Harold Bloom, along with Thom Gunn's fierce poem, 'A Mirror for Poets'.

Of course, the business is all about language, and the richness of it. As Lawrence writes in one of his lively pieces of doggerel, 'How boring, how small Shakespeare's people are! / Yet the language so lovely! like the dyes from gas-tar.' Certainly there is nothing boring in *After Shakespeare*. You will be able to read it tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, at whatever pace you like.



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SAT Sabbatical

The *Aphorisms* are easier pickings, plainly, even if they were laborious fossicking for Gross himself. We ramble here among the usual suspects. There are plenty of jots or tittles delivered by those epigrammatical Frenchmen and Germans, from calmative Montaigne down to that Karl Kraus of whom it was written, 'When the age died by its own hand, he was that hand': he who must have loved La Rochefoucauld's 'We all have strength enough to endure the troubles of others.' Nothing here is more concise than clever Nietzsche's 'No victor believes in chance', nor anything more platitudinous than Conrad's 'In plucking the fruit of memory one runs the risk of spoiling its bloom.' But Conrad was always a plodding writer in English.

The Rochefoucauld reminds me, though the editor would not have known this, of Evan Jones's comico-plangent quatrain:

Life feels mainly too like stone,
two things feel like froth:
kindness when one's all alone
and good luck to you both.

Resignation is a leading actor in aphorisms, it goes almost without saying. There are just the quip and the dead.

Among the extroverts, Oscar Wilde is refulgently here, of course, along with Dr Johnson, much Hazlitt and the two Samuel Butlers. Beckett misses out entirely, as does Clive James; our contemporaries are scarce and could, no doubt, have been expensive: a reflection that lies like a dead weight on the heart of every anthologist.

Women are few—such is the tradition of wit—and Anita Loos entirely absent, but George Eliot does come up with the dwindled observation that 'A different taste in jokes is a great strain on the affections.' Blood oath it is! In truth, a great many of the aphorists sound as though they sweated too hard to come up with their punchlines. One relaxes pleasantly when that old crosspatch Dostoevsky offers us the notion that 'The formula "two and two makes five" is not without its attractions', when Stevie Smith notes that sin keeps us nasty, or when some obscure Japanese poet writes,

In a policeman's arms
The lost child points
Towards the sweet-shop.

Some of these examples are maxims, precepts, quips, proverbs and epigrams. The borders between such little provinces lie in dense bush, with the result that they are not easily determined. We readers are here to be improved, but always to be entertained.

As is right and proper, Thomas Hardy wins the gloom prize with 'The sudden disappointment of a hope leaves a scar which the ultimate fulfillment of that hope never entirely removes.' I have gone on brooding personally about Princess Bibesco's claim that endurance may be only a form of indecision, but have kept a careful distance from Kraus's explosive remark that 'Some women are not beautiful—they only look as though they are.'

Just possibly, this was the case with Cleopatra. ■

Chris Wallace-Crabbe is a poet, essayist and art critic. He is a Professor Emeritus in the Australian Centre, University of Melbourne.



Sleeping with the light on

It makes good sense to organise your sun.
You switch it on and wait to be a star.
Truth is content with such a sweet eclipse
Arrived at naturally. Light equips
Your birthright's quark, your memory's pulsar,
An inside moon would be a dreamer's pun.

And we are for the dark. The dark is for
The race re-run in Helios's car.
A light bulb's still on sentry duty, one
More squaddy of the all-enlisting sun.
The darkness fails to tell us who we are.
To map a lake you have to skim its shore.

The sun, the Aten of what is, may seem
The Devil's emissary. Monks awake
Are only drones, but dreams point every way.
Do oracles convince or just explain away?
Turn out the light for credulousness' sake
And leave it on that Lucifer may dream.

—Peter Porter



The art of letting go

WHEN I WAS a child in England we used to play a particular game in the winter. Without gloves we would crush snow and ice into our hands and lob it at a set target. When we became too numbed with cold to continue we rushed into the classroom, clutched the large hot radiator pipes and yelled 'Last one to let go is a coward'. We tried desperately to conceal our inability to maintain a lengthy grip. Eventually of course we did let go, just before the pain of looming blisters overrode the pleasure of tingling heat.

As we get older we learn that letting go is often desirable. And it is far from cowardly. In fact, letting go can demand vast resources of self-awareness and courage. Letting go is often about abdicating ownership. It is an affirmation that certain things contain their own life, independent of our desires and anxieties. We learn too that letting go means acknowledging and honouring the past in order that we can move on.

The Tibetan monks that I photographed in Melbourne in 1996 were engaged in a symbolic ritual that is all about letting go. They came from the Namgyal monastery in the north Indian town of Dharamsala where the Tibetans in exile have established a new homeland. It's the same monastery to which the Dalai Lama belongs. Their Melbourne stopover was part of a global tour to spread messages of peace and reconciliation. They do this by constructing a magnificent Kalchakra Mandala out of coloured sand. Over several weeks they

dedicate many hours each day to putting the sand into small fluted steel tubes. They tap those tubes with a metal rod to release the sand, grain by coloured grain, into the exact spot. The melodic tapping of metal on metal offers meditative accompaniment as the patterns form. It can take four monks six hours a day for 20 days to complete the pattern. When their construction is finished, they consecrate it and then, with great ceremony, scoop it up and toss it into the ocean.

'It's all about letting go and returning to the earth that which comes from the earth,' one monk told me. 'This is a celebration of impermanence. It's not a cause for regret but an invitation to live in the present, to embrace change and find security.'

These monks know about impermanence and security. I have been to Dharamsala where they live in exile. The Tibetans there are struggling to reclaim that which they have lost. So does this mean they are unable to let go? It's not as simple as that. Letting go for these monks does not mean

negating their traditions and beliefs. But it does mean letting go of the ego and the need for individual ownership.

There is a delicious contradiction in the fact that the monks asked me to take photographs of the mandala; their celebration of impermanence. The photograph is a fixed, permanent image of a moment. The monks readily agree that they enjoy having the photographic reminder of their work. They are, after all, human. I observed a powerful expression of this humanity at the ceremony after they tossed the sand into the ocean. It was an encounter between an Aboriginal artist from Western Australia and one of the monks. Her greeting was to touch the monk's chin gently. The monk clasped her hand and returned her look. In so doing he had let go of the tenet that monks must not touch women.

The exchanged gaze between these artists represents a moment that is a triumph of humanity. It was significant that this encounter happened at Port Melbourne Pier, a place of disembarkation for so many people forced by tyrannical regimes to let go of the place to which they once belonged and to embrace new worlds.

Belonging drives a lot of human activity. While the Tibetan monks see themselves as belonging to a monastery and to a strong cultural tradition, the essence of their belonging lies beyond a physical place and history. It lies within the very life force to which we all belong and is mirrored in their mandala.

We need these saffron-robed artists to remind us that letting go is far from cowardly. ■

Peter Davis is a Melbourne writer, photographer and a lecturer at Deakin University.



Heavy hand

Empire Lite: Nation-building in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Michael Ignatieff.
Vintage, 2003. ISBN 0099455439, RRP \$22.95

NATION-BUILDING is a fraught and messy business. Michael Ignatieff knows that well. As a journalist he has reported from war zones since 1993 and is the author of several books, *Blood and Belonging*, *The Warrior's Honor* and *Virtual War*, on the nature of ethnic conflict and intervention. Ignatieff's latest offering, *Empire Lite*, is a series of essays exploring the new global empire that is nation-building: the imposition of 'order' that follows humanitarian intervention in the 'failed' states of Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan. Ignatieff manages to avoid the didactic and self-righteous style that characterises journalistic writing on this topic—the tirade against land cruisers and expensive hotels. He is more interested in exploring the paradoxes and contradictions in nation-building than in outright condemnation.

Ignatieff does not shy away from naming things. The language of nation-building hides the reality of imperialism in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan. To describe nation-building as an exercise in 'humanitarian intervention' by the 'international community' is a fiction that obscures the fact that none of it would have happened without United States military power. Far from being motivated by humanitarianism, the nation-building exercises in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan are exercises in imperialism, interventions crafted to suit American objectives. They are imperial because their foremost purpose is to create order in border zones essential to the great powers. And while nominal power may return to the local capital, the real power remains in Washington, London and Paris. For Ignatieff the 'Empire Lite' is 'hegemony without colonies, a global sphere of influence without the burden of direct administration'. With its rhetoric of democracy and humanitarian need, nation-building is the kind of empire you get in the human rights era.

Ignatieff exposes the million-dollar enterprise that nation-building has become. Now the cure of choice for ethnic civil war and state failure, the nation-building 'caravan' has moved from Cambodia to Angola, to Sarajevo, to Pristina, to Dili, to East Timor and then on to Afghanistan. The caravan's most recent settling place, Iraq, is too recent to feature in Ignatieff's study. Wherever the caravan settles it creates an instant boom town, but this boom eventually goes bust.

The bridge across the river Neretva in the town of Mostar, in south-western Bosnia, has come to symbolise the tragic absurdity of the nation-building enterprise. The bridge was built in 1566 to link the mosques and markets from one side of the city to the other and was a structure of exceptional beauty, crafted from white stone. It became famous in Tito's Yugoslavia, bringing tour buses from all over southern Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1992–93 violence between Muslim and Croat militias destroyed the bridge: an artillery unit from the Croatian side of the city brought it down. Ten years later the reconstruction of this historic bridge has become a metaphor for reconciliation, for building a link from the past to the future, for assisting former enemies to reconcile. But it turns out that everybody (the Europeans, the Turks, the locals) is more interested in the bridge's symbolic value than in rebuilding it properly. The bridge must be rebuilt immediately, yet the engineer has not finished his studies.

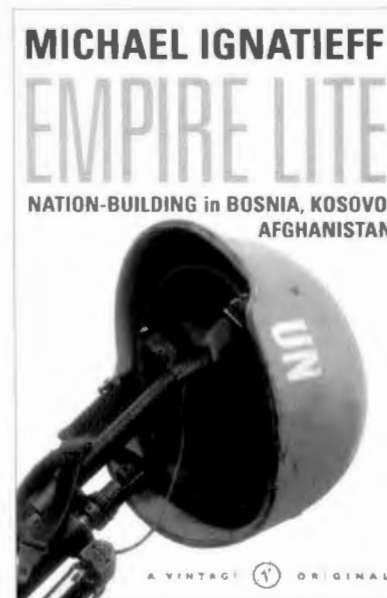
His craftsmen are not trained. There is a danger the bridge will turn out like the nearby Criva Cuprija, a little bridge over a tributary of the Neretva that has been restored to become a Disney-like version of what an old bridge should look like. Despite the physical link, reconciliation hasn't actually occurred.

People continue to live completely separate lives and the bridge will come to provide a 'substitute' for reconciliation.

Yet Ignatieff's view of nation-building is not a wholly cynical one. In bringing his attention back to the real nation-builders—the people of Afghanistan, Bosnia and Kosovo—he finds hope. The real nation-builders include the Afghani refugees returning to Kabul in their brightly coloured Pakistani trucks and the women teachers who secretly taught girls during the

Taliban years and have now established open-air schools for girls, most having their first-ever reading lesson. Ignatieff also finds he can believe in the Afghani brick-maker who has once again begun making bricks in downtown Kabul in the midst of desolate ruins. No-one bothered making bricks after the militia fighting in 1992. There was no point because the shelling might start again. When asked why he has started his business again, the brick-maker replies, 'We have a government now. People need houses.' The brick-maker does not embrace the Americans with open arms, but perhaps knows he needs them. It is an uneasy and pragmatic co-existence.

Ignatieff acknowledges that sometimes



states do fail and that there is a role for the international community to assist in reconstruction. But he sees how difficult it is to exercise a genuine act of solidarity in these circumstances. The principles of imperial power and self-determination are not easy to reconcile. The empire wants quick results, at the lowest possible cost. This means an early exit. Nation-building and reconciliation are long-term processes. Phrases such as 'capacity building' and 'empowerment of local communities' sit uneasily beside the fixation of nation-builders with political timetables. For Ignatieff the task of the nation-builder should be to keep an area free of external aggression and internal civil war, and to support local political authorities to take over political rule. The 'Empire Lite' fails on both counts. It neither provides a stable long-term security guarantee nor creates the conditions under which local leadership may take over.

I found many echoes of the UN's nation-building venture in East Timor in Ignatieff's descriptions. While not an exercise in American imperial objectives in the same way as these case studies, East Timor offered an unsurpassed opportunity for nation-building 'from scratch'. However, the impossibly short time frame imposed on the transition process was designed to suit the needs of the international community more than those of the East Timorese. Consultation and participation of the 'East Timorese people' in decision-making was often rushed and piecemeal, confined to the Dili-based leadership. While all attention was turned to political self-determination, the World Bank called the shots on economic policy, wielding enormous power in the determination of funding priorities and promotion of a market economy based around privatisation and a limited role for state regulation. Nation-building created a fine veneer of democracy and human rights which only too soon has begun to unravel. But the caravan has moved on.

Lying somewhere on the boundary of politics and moral philosophy, the strength of Ignatieff's writing lies in the moral questions raised rather than answers provided. Does the role of the West in nation-building tell us more about ourselves than about the places that we take up as causes? What is the role of outsiders in the healing and nation-building process? Ultimately, *Empire Lite* is itself a 'lite' read, a broad sketch rather than a rigorous study of nation-building in particular situations. There is much left untouched or merely alluded to, such as an exploration of the role of nations like the United States in contributing to unrest and state failure in those states now undergoing nation-building. After the most recent 'humanitarian intervention' in Iraq and as the caravan rolls in again, one can't help but feel Ignatieff lets the nation-builders off a little too easily. ■

Lia Kent was a human rights officer with the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor and is completing a Masters in International Law.

verse



With blinds pulled down

We're in six/eight and if this keeps on going
we'll soon be rocking in three-quarter time—
thank God the blinds are down ... we're slowing ...
relief! The postillion's horn is blowing,
the horses are straining for the climb.

My score is in my lap. A field of grain
would poison thought, a tree corrupt a metre—
if something's good, then serve it up again,
save paper, let the future take the strain—
manuscripts are neat, but minds are neater.

Music has bridges, proper network roads,
waterways which don't need locks and levels—
it bears its own anticipatory loads,
The Natural Order hands it down its codes—
saints appear—a bar beyond, they're devils.

God rested on the seventh day—why rest?
I'm like a fish inventing where it lives.
Life outside's a sort of palimpsest
of good and evil nurtured at the breast—
needy, you become the need that gives.

And so I keep the blinds drawn, lock away
the milk and honey of a proffered Canaan
to travel to the concertland of play,
and in the coach, by halflight, night or day,
create the only world I can be sane in.

—Peter Porter



interview:2
Juliette Hughes

Sex & death

GIL COURTEMANCHE WALKS past me a couple of times as I'm sitting in the lobby of the Windsor, but I don't recognise him—there is no author photo in the back of his multi-award-winning novel *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*. In the end he sees me chatting with a girl whose T-shirt logo proclaims her links to the Melbourne Writers' Festival and he approaches. His English is excellent, and with the kind of French-Canadian accent that sounds hip. Gauloises and cognac. This is his first novel but he has been a journalist for many years. We're both early, but he is flying out to Spain in two hours and needs to get things over with.

What is real and what is fiction in your novel? I ask. Clearly we don't need to do the ritual conversational dance of what does 'real' mean, yada yada. He smiles, a little tiredly. Everyone must ask him that, but each questioner needs an individual answer. He says it's a fair question and that the Rwandan political background, the sequence of public events, the facts about the killings and cruelties and the way they were carried out are all real. The moment a village or region was liberated from the grip of the *Interahamwe*, the murderous Hutu militias, the new government would interview the survivors while the memories were fresh.

There is no way to re-create genocide, but I wanted to work through the people I've known, trying to imagine how they lived and died, he said. I tell him that some of his details are terrible; I can't get them out of my mind. They really happened, he says. Those details are not the product of my imagination. What was it about the Belgians, I ask. He looks at me. I try to explain: the book has some instances of Belgians behaving very badly. And they

made particularly bad colonists, didn't they? They caused the enmity between the Hutus and the Tutsis by favouring the latter, didn't they?

The French were just as bad, he says. The French embassy was evacuated just before the massacres, and they left their Tutsi employees to the machetes of the *Interahamwe*. You have to understand, he says, that in this very small world, this *microcosme*, those who worked at that time in Rwanda—he shakes his head. They sent the worst, most inept diplomats there, their worst international 'experts' and accountants and supervisors, who would come for three weeks and live in the best hotel. A driver comes in the morning to take them to the air-conditioned office and brings them back in the afternoon. In this disorganised, derelict society, says Courtemanche, a little boss becomes a huge, crude boss, and is devoid of even the faintest perception that when the Rwandans address him as 'chef' they are laughing at him.

There is a small silence. The women, I say. The women in Africa are just meat. Why are they treated so horribly? Most African men don't want to talk about it, he said. Traditional matrimonial law in Rwanda dictates that if a husband dies the wife doesn't inherit if his family doesn't want her to. She is often obliged to marry his brother or uncle, and if she refuses, she and her kids are thrown out. So she'll go to Kigali, but if she finds work in a kitchen or a hotel, the pay is too low to support them, so the only way to survive is by occasional prostitution. It's one of the ways AIDS is spread, he says.

Courtemanche worked in Rwanda to educate about AIDS, which has spread with lethal efficiency down the 'AIDS

Highway' from Mombasa to Entebbe, using truckers for vectors as malaria uses mosquitoes. And thereby hangs an irony: many educated Africans believe that AIDS is spread through mosquitoes, and so they figure they may as well enjoy their sex unsafe.

You cannot understand Africa without understanding their attitude to sex; there is an enormous amount of screwing around, he says, adding that African culture separates sex and feelings. Everything is related to poverty, he says, and leans forward a little to say that if the Hutus had been rich and organised like the Germans they would have built gas chambers. And the daughter of poverty is deadly ignorance.

But there is too much ignorance in the rich countries too. Courtemanche's novel sees the link between sex and death that is so much more obvious in Rwanda. The Canadian journalist who accused him of writing a Mills and Boon for men and objected to his 'sexualising' of events has missed the elephant in the living room. His anger at the West's apathy in 1994 is palpable, and the resonances with the Nazi Holocaust are clear: those who defend the inaction of the UN's representative in Rwanda by saying that they were under orders not to act have forgotten the lessons of Nuremberg. He is fierce about Australia's treatment of refugees and Aborigines.

And as he leaves he signs my copy of the book with a gracious message. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali, by Gil Courtemanche, is published by Text Publishing, 2003. Photo: Darren James.

on stage



IN AUGUST, THE OPERA *Dead Man Walking* received its first international performance in Adelaide by the State Opera of South Australia. The opera, like the film of the same name, is based on Sr Helen Prejean's book about her experiences of accompanying those on death row at Angola State Penitentiary, Louisiana, USA.

Commissioned by San Francisco Opera, the opera—created by librettist Terence McNally and composer Jake Heggie—is accompanied by highly technical scenery and lighting which heighten the opera's impact.

Kirsti Harms, in preparing to play the

role of Sr Helen Prejean, visited murderers in an Adelaide jail. She met Helen and listened to her stories, spending many hours developing the character.

This kind of thorough preparation by the cast lent credibility to the characters. Among the most powerful performances were Kirsti Harms' portrayal of Sr Helen listening to de Rocher's confession and Douglas McNicol's role as Mr Hart, the aggrieved father of a murdered daughter.

The opera begins with the rape and murder of a young girl by Joe de Rocher and his brother. Sr Helen becomes a pen pal of the imprisoned de Rocher and is asked to visit him, much to the concern of Helen's friend Sr Rose (Rosalind Martin).

Helen receives a cold welcome from Angola State Penitentiary's chaplain,

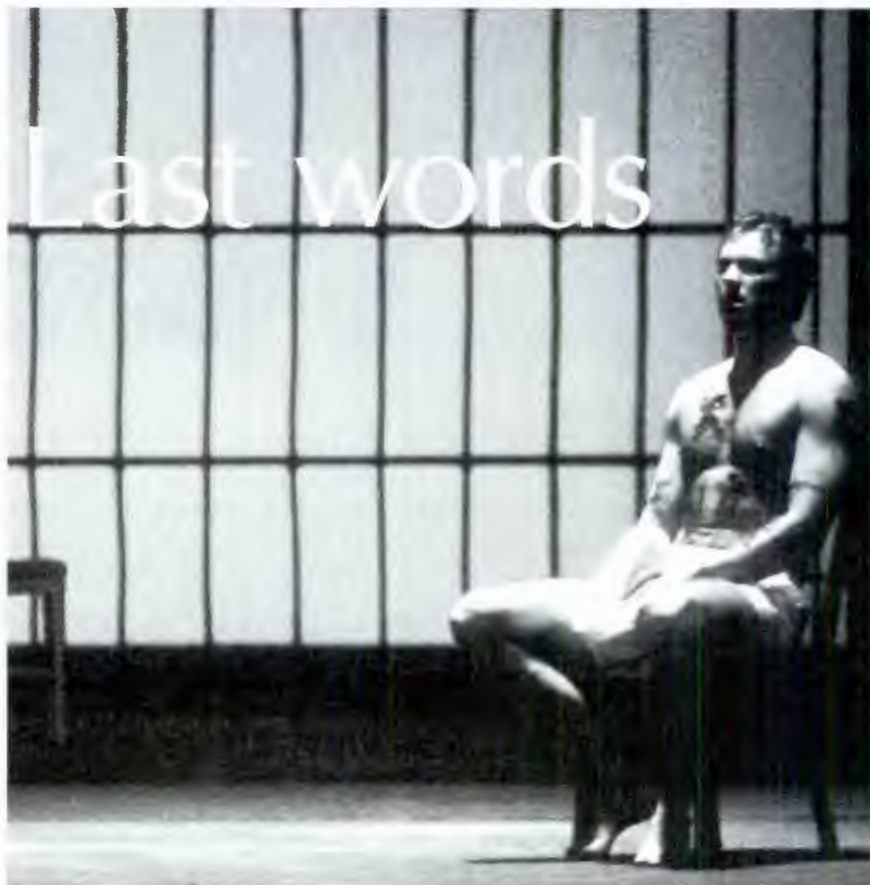
Fr Grenville. Andrew Brunsdon as prison chaplain knows that de Rocher can't be saved; in Grenville's eyes he's little more than a liar.

Kirsti Harms conveys Sr Helen's unerring determination and faith, continuing in spite of opposition. Occasionally Harms' vibrato clouded her diction, however in other situations its tasteful use enhances the drama of the music.

Teddy Tahu Rhodes captures the anger and confusion of Joe de Rocher. There is little to like in this character despite his beautiful body and a voice of sheer clarity and precision.

The execution scene was gripping. The families of the victim and perpetrator watch as de Rocher is strapped to the table. The slow movements of the figures and the silence of the scene are eerie. To meet the end of the performance with applause and an ovation seemed out of place, though both were well deserved.

Christopher Wainwright is an Adelaide-based freelance arts journalist, critic and music researcher.



Rich harvest

Growing Good Catholic Girls: Education and Convent Life in Australia, Christine Trimmingham Jack.
Melbourne University Press, 2003. ISBN 0 522 85055 3, RRP \$34.95

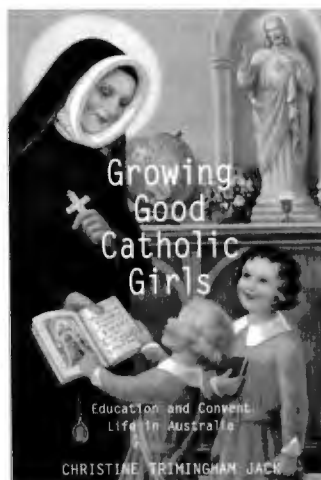
WHILE I WAS READING Christine Trimmingham Jack's fascinating personal account of the education young girls have within a Catholic boarding school run by the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I found a hymn refrain echoing throughout the text that I associate with my own, more recent education under this same religious order: 'bind, bind, closer—the old and the new ...'

The hymn celebrates the childhood of Saint Madeline Sophie Barat, the French founder of the order in 1779. It exhorts 'her children' in countries and centuries far removed from post-revolutionary France to acquire the 'stamp' of her blessed character. The Society's continuing and self-conscious aspirations to imprint on its students the characteristics of a 'Child of the Sacred Heart'—and more broadly the mark of a good Catholic 'lady'—provide the contours for Trimmingham Jack's history of Kerever Park, the boarding school she attended as a child in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales. The book explores the formative role of such a Catholic education in shaping the self-understanding of Catholic girls in the 1940s and 1950s. It examines the function of the school's physical setting, daily rituals, educational practices and religious symbols in producing 'Catholic wives and mothers in accordance with the middle-class model of the time'.

Trimingham Jack has interviewed 14 ex-students and religious sisters at the school. The results are interwoven in the book with her own reflections and some archival material. The book's strengths are the intriguing way these female voices have been placed in the foreground and the interplay between their past and present lives and ideas. These rich sources would have benefited from being placed in context within the women's broader life experiences and other formative influences. Trimmingham Jack carefully

investigates both internalisation and rejection of Catholicism's traditional constructions of femininity. There is an immediacy and potency in this dialogue between 'the old and the new' as the women recount their affirmation, interpretation or rejection of perspectives established during childhood. They do so as adults within a radically new social context and against the backdrop of the changes to Catholicism that followed the Second Vatican Council. Trimmingham Jack uses the interviews to explore the complex interactions between conformity and challenge to the school's social and spiritual order. Her history of Kerever Park resembles a number of recently published Australian Catholic memoirs in its movement between reminiscence and reappraisal, which is sure to resonate with readers from similar backgrounds.

As a commentary on education and convent life in Australia, *Growing Good Catholic Girls* provides a detailed and engaging history of one such school, some of its past pupils and teachers. Its discussion of the interactions between Catholicism and gender identity will contribute to the expanding academic exploration of this issue. However, it does not draw upon the growing historiography of Australian Catholicism now available, which would place the book within a larger context. Other important related issues are left relatively unexplored, such as class, nationality and race, feminist discussions surrounding the body, and recent explorations of religious spirituality all equally as constitutive of



Australian Catholic identities. This is despite the tantalising possibilities presented within the text.

These reservations aside, the affectionate yet sometimes ambivalent account of Kerever Park makes for an interesting study in the changes, continuities and multiple allegiances encountered in personal histories—and indeed within the history of modern Australian Catholicism.

In its exploration of the 'bind' between the past and the present, and the durability of these old school ties, Trimmingham Jack's book encourages the reader to summon up memories, and in my case melodies, from our own past school experiences. ■

Alana Harris is the recipient of the Newman College Archbishop Mannix Travelling Scholarship and the Rae and Edith Bennett Travelling Scholarship. She is presently undertaking a DPhil in Modern History at Wadham College, University of Oxford.

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Paul Tankard

High hopes

Hope: new philosophies for change, Mary Zournazi.
Pluto Press, 2002. ISBN 1864031409, RRP \$29.95

THIS COLLECTION of conversations, loosely organised around the subject of hope, is between Sydney-based freelance philosophy writer, Mary Zournazi, and other contemporary philosophical writers whom she admires. Most of these people are academics, based in Europe, the US and Australia. The best-known are probably psychoanalytic thinker Julia Kristeva and Gayatri Spivak, the translator of Derrida.

Zournazi is to be congratulated for having tracked down so many important professional critical thinkers (although all on the B-list rather than the A-list) and to have done so despite, as she asserts, being the daughter of migrants to Australia and not having 'lived out [her parents'] dream of success in the new country'. To have been able to spend three years travelling around the globe interviewing her favourite philosophers sounds pretty successful to me.

The interviews are not conventionally philosophical. Take sentences and part-sentences like 'What if hope was like another human "sense"—like some kind of anatomical part of us, *not* physically but allegorically? Hope as a sense that is visceral and ever-present, much like the kaleidoscopic experience of a fair'. These (in this case, Zournazi's) words, like a great deal of the book, need to be read with a certain lack of attention, otherwise you're stuck wondering what an allegorical part of your anatomy could be like, or how the 'experience of a fair' can be ever-present. There is certainly something meant here, but it's hard to discern what.

But if you can bring yourself to read that way, there are interesting and valuable things to be found. It is tempting to write them all out as aphorisms, and to then dispense with the book altogether. Take these aperçus

from Michael Taussig: 'Hope is against the evidence ... it comes out in spite of what went before' or 'Life is not a matter of one initiative after another.' Or Alphonso Lingis' observation that 'a lot of intellectual activity, at least in the 20th century Western cultural orbit, correlates lack of hope with being smart, or ... with profundity.' Or Ghassan Hage's rather un-P.C. thought that 'racism ... provides [migrants] with a good reason to hate people they already hate for a "bad" reason' or that 'There is a priestly element in the intellectual disposition'.

Indeed, the priestly status of these contemporary intellectuals is manifest in the book by liturgical reiteration of their various dogmas (the gift, the body, the other) or authorities (Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, Walter Benjamin), in the avoidance of systematic argument, and in Mary Zournazi's role as disciple and mediator. Also noticeable is the total failure to consider more traditional religion—still a potent influence and an important site of hope—in other than dismissive terms.

The trouble is (and I don't know if it is this style of book or this style of philosophy) that the speakers are only thinking intermittently. They talk their way towards some new or interesting or plausible idea, then drift off again. It's all rather vague, repetitive and hard to follow.

You sense Zournazi's interviewees trying to help her out. All of them make interesting and thoughtful points, but they seem to work as much against her questioning as with it. 'Is that what you're getting at?' she asks Taussig; 'I wasn't,' he replies, but he's happy to talk about it. A lot of the time, she and the interviewees don't seem to know exactly what each other means, but they are determined not to let that stop them from talking.

Many of the participants seem anxious that the discourses in which they professionally engage be able to address the sorts of topics that are usually the province of humanist discourse—more approachable but, according to the postmodern mind-set, discredited. For most people, postmodern thought seems to offer nothing more profound than a bottomless scepticism, out of which hope (much less faith or charity) seems unlikely to emerge. Hope, if it is to be real, must be usable and practical, and not simply 'fun and intellectually stimulating', as Taussig describes the subject.

The book needed tighter editing (and far better indexing); Zournazi should have used an editor to massage the transcripts into a more publishable form, and sought clarification from the interviewees. There's too much bumf.

It's not a heavy read, but it's too vague at



the micro-level and shapeless at the macro-level for the general reader. I suspect that *Hope's* main readership will be students of the various people interviewed.

In the first conversation, Alphonso Lingis quotes Nietzsche's remark, 'it is bad taste to formulate rational arguments in polite society', and then comments, 'most of what we say is nonsense.' I've never thought of a book of philosophy needing to be polite, and feel that readers of a book about hope are entitled to expect more.

Much of the conversational effort seems aimed at redefining hope. In the second-last interview, Brian Massumi concedes, 'rationally, there really isn't much room for hope', which may explain both why the interviewees emphasise that they want to discuss the present rather than the future, and why the conversations aren't particularly rational. Of course, one hopes *in* the present, but *for* the future.

The discussions frequently bring up the daily issues, the environment, multiculturalism, and the world situation after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. But useful insights come in isolated phrases, rather than in the whole. Unless you count the mere possibility of having a philosophical conversation as a positive thing, which of course it is. However, it requires postmodernists to be talking not only to each other.

I found *Hope* difficult to read, or at least to read with attention, and in the end, slightly depressing. Useful hope is not, I think, going to come from this direction. It's all very well for postmodernism to proclaim the failure of the Enlightenment, but the failure of postmodernists to conceive a future is one of the sure signs that unless things change, between them and the devotees of brute power who seem to be on the ascendant, there may not be one. ■

Paul Tankard is a Lecturer in English at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

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Love ought to show itself in deeds more than in words.

—St. Ignatius of Loyola

1988
Missionary for child workers and their families, Tacna, Peru.

1993
Youth Leadership Instructor: Voyageurs Outward Bound School, Ely Minnesota.

1994
Enrolled at Weston Jesuit School of Theology.

1998
Founding Member of the Weston Social Justice Forum.

May 1999
Completes thesis on directing the church's mission to abused children; Graduates with Master of Divinity from Weston Jesuit School of Theology.

July 1999
Director, Ignacio Volunteer Program, Boston College Campus Ministry Office.



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Emma Matthews (Lulu), Barry Mora (Schigolch) and Pär Lindskog (Alwa) in *Lulu*. Photo: Jeff Busby.

PROUD MEN and life-affirming women' are, to quote the prologue, the poles of Alban Berg's opera, *Lulu* and Frank Wedekind's two plays—*Earth Spirit* and *Pandora's Box*—which are its textual base. Berg saw a private Viennese performance of the just-published *Pandora's Box* in 1905, 23 years before he began work on the opera. Like the author before him, Berg was concerned to reflect the fundamental contradictions and absurdities of the human condition. Is this all nature or nurture? Is sex a creative or a destructive force?

Hence the male-female contrast with which play and opera confront us in the person of the Animal Trainer. He accuses us of being like animals brought up on a bland vegetable diet, our spirits sapped. *This* piece, he promises, will show us *real* wild animals; and he presents us with Lulu. That reveals the first stroke of genius in Simon Phillips's new production for Opera Australia, which opened in Melbourne in April and which Sydney will see in October. The Animal Trainer calls an assistant to bring on 'our snake' and out comes sleazy and wheezy Schigolch (a sort of Beckett-Patrick White shambles) pushing a supermarket trolley hung with old plastic bags. We never know, in the opera,

Through a glass, darkly

Opera Australia's *Lulu*

whether he's Lulu's father or an old pimp. He opens a big, soiled cardboard carton from which he draws a little girl, wearing the kind of saucy red dress in which we will soon see the 'adult' Lulu, knowingly twisting the strands of her blonde wig.

One could almost feel the chill of a shudder pass through the entire audience.

'The sweet innocent,' the Trainer says, 'My greatest treasure.' It is the complexity of this central character that has eluded many of the Australian critics who have written about this production. The question, surely, is—as the American scholar, Carl Richard Mueller wrote in the Introduction to his translation of the plays—'Who is Lulu? What is she? Lulu is all things and something different to every man. She is fact, she is myth; she is corporeal, she is idea; she is realist, she is ideal.' In telescoping the two plays, Berg sought to reflect the lifecycle of this polychrome character by a second part which is the mirror image of the first: the three husbands whom she kills, inadvertently or deliberately, all return as clients of Lulu the prostitute, in sordid decline after her previous luxurious ascendancy. The third of them, played by the singer who was Dr Schön, (ironically, as she said, the only man she ever loved), is Jack the Ripper and he murders her.

Berg brilliantly turns this plot back on itself with an orchestral interlude which is a musical palindrome (though it is not obvious without detailed study of the score). At this point the composer asked for a brief film, also palindromic, which unfolds and recapitulates Lulu's life. Several critics were upset that Phillips did not employ this device, yet all three European productions which I have seen also dispensed with it—with an imaginative production to complement Berg's music, it is unnecessary. Which part of her life, then, is 'real'—who is the real Lulu, who are the real associates, the real us?

Hence Phillips's second and pervasive coup: his use of a huge reflector, producing

distorting images, angulated above the action. We see everything twice, though *what* we actually see depends on where we're sitting; more than twice, really, because at scene changes this vast mirror is lowered and we then see the orchestra, the conductor (Simone Young, flaunting a sexy Lulu-like dress), even the prompter. It's all very Brechtian, a reflection of Wedekind's hostility to the social realists of his time.

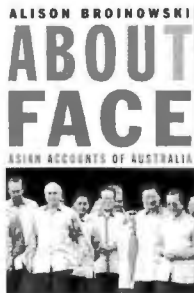
Phillips's third great success is the excellence he has achieved in his singers' acting. Whether these roles are small (John Bolton-Wood and Jamie Allen, in particular) or more important—notably Barry Mora (Schigolch), Conal Coad (the S&M Animal Trainer and the Athlete), Pär Lindskog (Alwa) and especially John Pringle as Schön/Jack, in the performance of his career—they are superbly played. Only Catherine Carby, as Geschwitz, the hapless lesbian aristocrat with her futile love for Lulu, is less convincingly focused.

And at the heart of it all, Emma Matthews as Lulu. She is not vocally ideal in Melbourne; her voice was not powerful enough to bestride the orchestra and was over-stretched in her top register. The smaller, more congenial Sydney Opera Theatre posed few such problems. As an actress she is brilliant: lithe, poised, sinuous in her unremitting eroticism and, eventually, touchingly desperate.

Presiding over the superb venture, the mirror of the composer's own genius, is Young herself. Her precisely assured conducting bringing both conviction and radiance to Berg's immensely complex musical thought and structures and sometimes achieving what sounds (especially from brass and lower strings) like resigned sighing. That wry but thoughtful emotion is, perhaps, how we should leave the theatre, pondering the overlap of life and art, the contradictions of Lulu and ourselves. ■

John Carmody is a Sydney medical scientist and opera and music critic.

the shortlist



About face: Asian Accounts of Australia, Alison Broinowski. Scribe Publications, 2003. ISBN 0908011962, RRP \$30.00

Diplomatic Deceits: Government, Media and East Timor, Rodney Tiffen. UNSW Press, 2001. ISBN 086840571X, RRP \$27.95

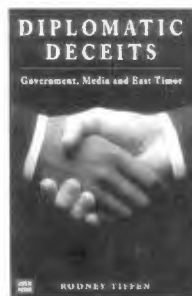
Asian-Australian relationships have always been a critical issue; they are either a source of promise or fear.

In *About Face*, Broinowski, a former Australian diplomat, has written a book that looks at these relationships from an Asian perspective. Broinowski charts the historical events that have impacted on Australian relations with Asia, from the gold rush troubles of the Victorian era to the Bali bombings. However, not only does Broinowski examine national agendas, she deals with the cultural results of East meeting West. This is an illuminating process in itself.

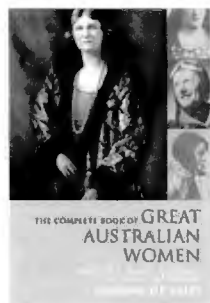
Broinowski argues two fascinating contentions. First, that Asian nations themselves are subject to the same racial virus that affects us in Australia and that this is a reaction to the 'white superiority' of the colonial period. Asian leaders use this fear of others to their own electoral advantage, much like John Howard. Second, that part of the cause of the Bali bombings was Indonesian resentment of foreign tourists on their soil. She claims that the offensiveness of Australian tourists to Muslim sensibilities, combined with the wider deterioration of Indonesian-Australian relations from the East Timor crisis, created a groundswell of ill will that made the Bali bombings possible.

Broinowski writes fascinatingly about contrasting Indonesian and Australian perceptions of the East Timor crisis. Rodney Tiffen's *Diplomatic Deceits* puts that crisis into a broader historical context, covering Australian political considerations in the period from the Indonesian annexation of the former Portuguese colony to East Timor's eventual independence.

Diplomatic Deceits, through no fault of Tiffen's, suffers from being written before the bombings in Bali. An analysis of this event would have added another dimension to the book, however Tiffen provides valuable insights into our government's acquiescence to the invasion and occupation of East Timor. *Diplomatic Deceits* highlights the constant tension between pragmatic and principled policy-making on East Timor. Tiffen argues that principle would have been the better option for maintaining Australian credibility. *Diplomatic Deceits* is a quick but valuable read.



—Godfrey Moase



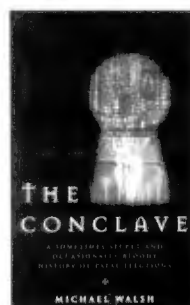
The Complete Book of Great Australian Women—Thirty-Six women who changed the course of Australia, Susanna de Vries. Harper Collins, 2003. ISBN 073227804X, RRP \$35.00

A senior female judge recently delivered a speech at Melbourne University called 'Women's Experiences in the Courtroom'. When asked what it takes to become a judge, she reflected that the women she knew on the bench possessed 'an element of the

extraordinary'. Reading Susanna de Vries' collection of stories about great Australian women, I understood what the judge meant. The women in de Vries' book are notable for their extraordinariness, and their courage. As for the visiting judge, she put her appointment down to an incredible amount of hard work.

The problem with stories that are intended to be inspiring is that they float somewhere far above the ordinariness that I can relate to. When de Vries describes the depression of Louisa Lawson, or the desperation of Miles Franklin as she suffers a heart attack alone in her Carlton house, it is without tangibility. The moments of greatness are so luminous that they obscure the depth of humanity that is shown through failure and despair, doubt and struggle. Through the glorification of success, these stories lose the capacity to move.

—Emily Millane



The Conclave: A sometimes secret and occasionally bloody history of papal elections, Michael Walsh. Canterbury Press, 2003. ISBN 1 85311 497 9, RRP \$33.95

One might be forgiven for thinking that a history of papal elections would be a rather weighty and densely written volume filled with meticulous detail, much of it frankly dull. Not so Michael Walsh's hugely entertaining survey, which ranges over nearly two thousand years in 180 pages. I like anecdotes in my history, and

there is no shortage of them here—and far from detracting from the subject matter they allow a brief glimpse into the way some figures from the past viewed the world. Some of the anecdotes record the downright bizarre, such as the extraordinary conduct of Pope Stephen VI (or VII, depending on how you count the Stephens) who arranged for the exhumation of the body of his recent and disliked predecessor Formosus. The body was dressed in papal robes, installed on a throne before an assembly of bishops and accused of various misdemeanours. Stephen got his comeuppance, however, being strangled while imprisoned in a monastery. History does not relate whether one of the monks was responsible for the deed.

Other anecdotes reveal a world both foreign and familiar. The punishment and shaming to which the antipopes were subjected seems crude and inhuman—Gregory VIII, created pope by Emperor Henry V in 1118 and then abandoned a few years later, was ceremonially paraded through the streets of Rome sitting backwards on a camel while antipope John XVI was obliged only to sit backwards on an ass, though he also endured mutilation for his troubles. But surely our own cultures have generated more subtle but equally devastating methods for the humiliation of those around us.

This is a history of papal elections—or, more accurately, of papal succession—so the material on policies and personalities is necessarily brief. Walsh includes enough to show the influence one pope's policies could play over the selection of a successor, particularly if those policies offended a secular ruler. But in a way, the very brevity of the book is its great strength, for Walsh manages to convey a palpable sense of the emergence of the present from the past, and a superb 'afterword' sets the stage, so to speak, for the conclave which will elect the next pope.

And no, the papacy of John Paul I was not the shortest on record.

—Tom Riemer sj

flash
flash in the pan



Amorality play

Buffalo Soldiers, dir. Gregor Jordan. Gregor Jordan's new film, *Buffalo Soldiers*, isn't actually that new at all. It was completed in 2001, in between making *Two Hands* and *Ned Kelly*, and sold to Miramax the day before the September 11 terrorist attacks. The reason we haven't seen it until now is that it was seen as being too critical of the American military for a post-September 11 world (read: America), out of sync with the 'spirit of the times'. Even now it's copping flak from some critics in the States for its supposed anti-Americanism. It's set on a US military base in West Germany in 1989, just as the Berlin Wall is about to fall. With no real enemy to fight, and no real purpose for being there but symbolism, the grunts fill their time stealing, fighting

each other and taking drugs.

Joaquin Phoenix plays supply clerk Ray Elwood, a petty crim forced into the army as an alternative to jail, who makes the most of his position to sell off army supplies to the black market. He drives a brand new BMW, and has a nice sideline cooking Turkish morphine into smack and selling it on to the MP who controls the base heroin trade. But when Elwood decides to date the daughter of the new base sergeant just to irritate him, in between trying to sell two truckloads of weapons to an illegal arms dealer and shagging his commanding officer's wife, his cosy life starts to unravel.

The film looks pretty, but there are narrative threads left hanging everywhere and the happy ending just seems arbitrary and gratuitous. In fact, the 'critique' the premise of the film implies is no more than skin deep. In reality it's just a standard Hollywood product: hero gets in deep water, but comes out on top and gets the girl, Anna Paquin in this case. The fact that Elwood is a drug-dealing, arms-selling thief who sees the death of his colleagues as little more than an opportunity to profit isn't supposed to get in the

way of us accepting his final triumph. Not that I want the film to become a morality play—but to pass off what is mainly a cynical exercise in formula film-making as some sort of political critique seems a little hypocritical.

—Allan James Thomas

Swell seas

Finding Nemo, dirs. Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich. Next to my computer is a glass of apple juice with a plastic fish sitting in the bottom of it. There is a straw sticking out of his tail. It's Nemo. My daughters chose cereal they don't like just to get the toy straw from the packet. The marketing madness that has accompanied this film is a little overwhelming but don't let it put you off. *Finding Nemo* is an absolute delight.

Marlin wants his family to have an unimpeded view of the open ocean—what proud clown-fish-father-to-be wouldn't? A dazzling vista of blue for his wife and umpteen soon-to-be-hatched little tackers to stretch their fins in. But like any property with dazzling views it costs—big time. Or should I say big teeth. Sadly for Marlin there are clearly hungry property developers at sea as on land and before you can say flake and minimum chips, Marlin is a single father of one.

Finding Nemo is about lots of 'real' stuff. Single parenthood, anxiety, love, fear, trust, growing up, loss, shark self-help groups and fish tank hygiene. The delightful combination of emotion, neurotic humour and whimsy allows both adults and children to giggle themselves into a medical condition.

The writers and animators at Pixar combine sentiment with wit and charm, and their voice actors (Albert Brooks, Ellen DeGeneres, Barry Humphries, Willem Dafoe and Geoffrey Rush to name but a few) understand the mix with hilarious clarity.

If you have children, take them; if you don't, take yourself.

—Siobhan Jackson



Chilled out

Morvern Callar, dir. Lynne Ramsey. Morvern Callar (Samantha Morton) lives in a near-empty flat somewhere in Scotland. The only two things that take up any space are her boyfriend's dead body and a computer that blinks occasional messages. Morvern works in a supermarket, wears a walkman and has baths with her best friend Lanna (Kathleen McDermott). Not much of any note happens in her life—her body just moves through space in time to the sounds from her walkman, unconnected and melancholic. Even stepping over the body of her boyfriend jammed awkwardly in the kitchen doorway forces only momentary change in her gait.

Morvern Callar takes you confidently to a place of devastating calm and its off-hand morbidity is surprisingly moving, but in the end my mind was searching for something more, something full of comment and commitment.

Influenced by Claire Denis' extraordinary film *Beau Travail*, Ramsey has not employed any snappy Hollywood storytelling rhythms to push this film along. Like *Travail*, *Callar* is slow and difficult—tempting you to stay tuned with the promise of something more than cheap thrills. *Travail* pays off with one of cinema's most breathtaking final moments that retrospectively informs your entire experience of the film—*Callar* never makes that leap, and as a result left me flat.

Ironically, one of the film's problems is Samantha Morton's glorious performance as Callar—it is better than the film can cope with. Morton fills every frame with a physicality that is at once uncomfortably visceral but retains stillness and pinpoint emotional accuracy.

There are some wonderful scenes in *Morvern Callar*, which make it more than worth the price of admission, not to mention a hypnotic soundtrack that will keep you firmly in your seats.

—Siobhan Jackson

Captains outrageous

Pirates of the Caribbean, dir. Gore Verbinski. It began with the phone call from the très chic London dwellers. 'We liked it. It was a good laugh,' said the cool temperate ones. That got me



wondering because those two hadn't seen anything less serious than *The Pianist* for years and I wondered whether *Pirates of the Caribbean* was going to turn out to be really about cool harsh stylish pirate-people who pirated because of the meaningless lightness of pirate stuff. But no, it hooted from the start—mostly but not completely because of Johnny Depp.

You don't usually get the divine Depp in Disney, but this is after all the studio's first M-rated film. There is a lot of fighting and a few stock corpses and skeletons. My sister leaned over at one stage and said, 'He's being Keith Richards!' And she was right: the next day he was on MTV admitting that he had used the Old Indestructible as his model for Captain (that should really be Cap'n) Jack Sparrow, the roving pirate marooned by mutineers. It's a great characterisation, hilarious and sexy—even when playing it gold-toothed and kohl-eyed-wasted, Depp is magnetic.

There is someone for all the family: Orlando Bloom for the young lasses who love Legolas in *The Lord of the Rings*; Keira Knightley, all pouts and attitude for the lads to perve on; Geoffrey Rush as the

vile mutineer Barbossa, and a whole crew of motleys dressed with some care for the look of 18th-century hygiene. Verbinski's dental prosthetists must have had a ball—all those brilliant Hollywood smiles to cover up with snaggle-green peggles. The make-up people excelled themselves with lots of dirty fingernails and a welter of warts, wens and wotten corpses.

There is a lot of ar mateyin' and avastin' and belayin' and parlayin'. Lots of leaping from bowsprits and climbing up the sides of ships with a knife in the teeth. Lots of pirate gold, and a pirate curse and did I mention a prattling parrot that poops on a redcoat? Go and laugh. And yes, they walk the plank.

—Juliette Hughes





A generation lost in space

THE MOBILE PHONE has given us, as if we weren't bulging with them already, a new kind of cheat: the phone-weasels who infest trivia nights. I was at one recently and the table who won made my gang very suspicious. We suspected that it was furtive texting that was giving such unfeasibly correct answers on Melbourne Cup history to a table of respectable-looking women and their teenagers. My table of eagle-eyed specialists came robbed-second. We were *good*: Rick the Renaissance man, Tom the sports fan, Terry the scientist, my sister the lit and music bible, and me the useless-info mistress and winner of the bubble-gum-blowing contest. Hah, those bimbos were left picking goo out of their bridge-work—they couldn't text their way out of that one.

Some of us use our TV-watching time profitably. There are those who knit in front of the telly, others who crochet or embroider, and yet others who construct Victorian paper-tassel-work mermaids in tasteful colours to go with that tole picture of the white geese on a blue background that they got from *Family Circle*. And some of us chew gum, never knowing when it might come in handy. I mean, you have to do something. The telly isn't the same any more since the end of *Buffy*. The new stuff doesn't grab me.

The post-*Buffy* vacuum has left me grumpy. I discovered this best and fairest emanation of America last year, in its sixth series, the one that purists deplore. Hooked, lined and sinkered on the least *Buffy* had to offer, I hired out the rest, the sheer gold, and watched them with all the fervour of the middle-aged who've discovered something new to think about. The nephew who'd goaded me into watching threw up his hands and rolled his eyes at his Aunt Frankenstein. 'Never try to get her interested in something because you just might succeed,' said my son. I think I've spoiled *Buffy* for him. He, being young and male, prefers the more Y-chromosomed approach of *Angel*, which to me is nice but mere Cadbury's compared to the pure Valrhona of the Buff.

He occasionally finds he likes something out of the usual 21-year-old male ken, like the reruns of *Keeping Up Appearances* on cable, though he would die rather than admit it. (He has developed the annoying habit of calling me 'Hyacinth' when particularly narked, but that puts me in quite exalted company: readers of *crikey.com* well know that our beloved first lady is sometimes referred to by that name. It seems we're not alone when we imagine her answering the phone

with 'The Howard residence, the lady of the land speaking!')

The trouble with new telly is that it is so predictable most of the time. *The Shield* looked quite interesting for a time, but *The Sopranos* it ain't. *Six Feet Under* can still make you watch if you're up at the midnight hour, but it is turning into an excellent soap opera, which is no shame, but, but, but ... Perhaps it's to do with being a decadent 21st-century person constantly looking for the shock of the new. And strangely, finding it in classic reruns.

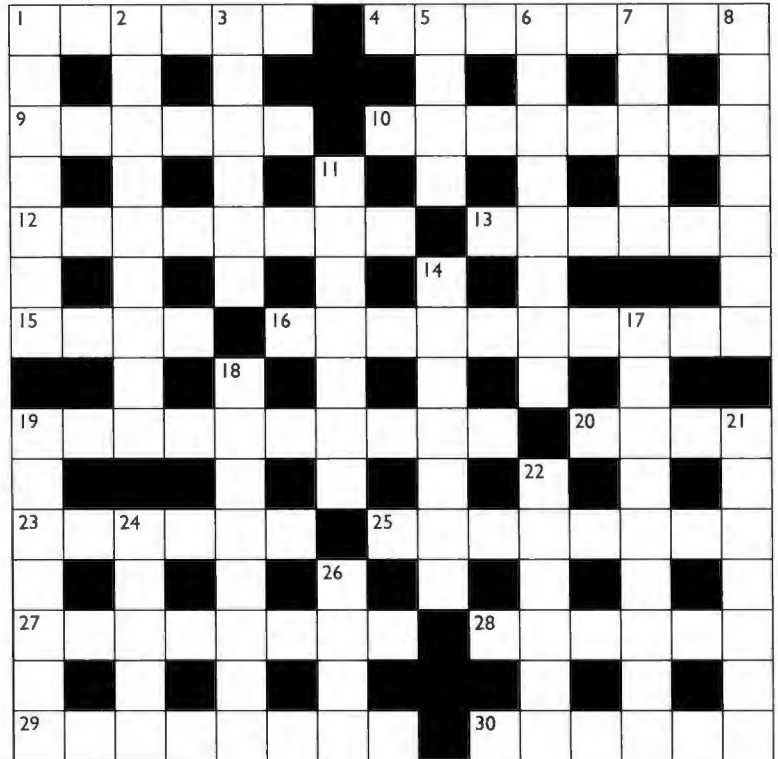
THE ABC HAS realised this and has acquired the original *Dr Who* series. It screens at 6pm from Monday to Thursday. You can get dinner ready (or chew gum) while listening to that fantastic WOEEEEYO OO music that was made at the BBC Radiophonic Workshop long before Fairlights or even Moogs. And wonder of wonders, Auntie has started at the first one, the one with the irascible and witty William Hartnell. (I have an affection for Patrick Troughton's Doctor, because that's where I began to take notice of the series. But Hartnell made *Dr Who* what it is.) Until this rerun, you could reliably tell a person's age by whatever Gallifreyan avatar they attached to: the layers of Whos are like the rings on a tree trunk. It would make a good, though knotty, question for trivia, too: how many Whos? (Do you count the movie one? *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* recently had a clever Kiwi chap who wisely took the half-mill because he couldn't decide how many Dalai Lamas there had been.) The ABC have also bought a revival of *Basil Brush*, though unlike the *Dr Who* series, not the original boom-boom. The new one is cute, though, and if it misses some of the élan of the old series, it's still miles better than the usual stuff aimed at young kids so you'll enjoy it too. This is presuming that you're still sensible enough to have only one TV so that you can have family conversation even if it's mainly comprised of mithering at the choices of whoever has the remote. Though there won't be any argument when you're watching *Iron Chef*, SBS' wild Japanese cook-off that is like nothing on earth except Japanese TV. It begins 11 October on Saturdays at 7.30pm. Do watch it: it's like a cross between *Takeshi's Castle* and *Jamie's Kitchen*. And the food is like, WOEEEEYO OO. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.



ACROSS

1. She could be a warrior on the river with a green parrot. (6)
4. Let someone know that the bill is bizarre. (8)
9. Firstly, Peter, in good time, arrives to stand guard over these gates? (6)
10. The place to be on a winter's day, but watch out for freckles, perhaps. (2,3,3)
12. Turning away a green mixed gin. (8)
13. Invent mascara, for instance. (4,2)
15. Tom and his double can beat it. (4)
16. Be sold cheaply in order to get money to attend concert featuring 19-across, maybe. (2,3,1,4)
19. Violetta has transformed a trait Val, a courtesan manifested! (2,8)
20. Actually unaffected! (4)
23. Donkey is one loved by St Francis in this place. (6)
25. A chief in charge? It's absolutely chaotic. (8)
27. Boy who cleans the chimney could win it at the races. (3,5)
28. Swaggers to game located between streets—going both ways. (6)
29. Pasty mixed with plum, mostly, is sometimes eaten by this monotreme. (8)
30. Entry given on admission. (6)



DOWN

1. A very quiet 'praise' speech caused everyone to clap. (7)
2. Therefore produced a last sure outcome. (2,1,6)
3. Monk made offering for old boy who died. (6)
5. Impossible to put up with such humbug! (4)
6. Molten rock thrown up round man in a sort of earthquake. (8)
7. Publication for children. (5)
8. Needed on camp site, it holds down the canvas, according to Margaret. (4,3)
11. Eulogies possibly come in a round of speeches. (7)
14. Satisfied with the matter dealt with in discussion, for example. (7)
17. Casually use phone on first offer of hospitality. (4,5)
18. Originate method of erecting high road. (8)
19. Sprang from seat to put up plea, perhaps. (5,2)
21. John ate them in the desert; it was the place for a saint to rise up. (7)
22. Aphrodisiac, possibly? It has core of desire. (6)
24. Portrait of St Catherine here, in tones of russet brown, reportedly. (5)
26. French boyfriend—he's handsome! (4)

Solution to Crossword no. 116, September 2003



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