EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS,
THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY
Vol 14 no 1 January–February 2004 $7.50 (inc. GST)

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Patrons *Eureka Street* gratefully acknowledges the support of C. and A. Carter; the trustees of the estate of Miss M. Condon; W.P. & M.W. Gurry

Eureka Street magazine, ISSN 1036–1758, Australia Post Print Post approved pp349181/00314, is published ten times a year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd, 300 Victoria Street, Richmond VIC 3121
PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121
Tel: 03 9427 7311 Fax: 03 9428 4450
email: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au
http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/
Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by Andrew Hamilton SJ, 300 Victoria Street, Richmond
Printed by Doran Printing
46 Industrial Drive, Braeside VIC 3195.

This month
Cover photograph Bill Thomas
Cover design Janneke Storteboom
All illustrations by Janneke Storteboom unless otherwise indicated.
Cartoons p13, p36 by Dean Moore, p34 by Darby Hudson
Photographs pp28-29 by John Fish
Omission Photographs in December 2003 issue on p20 by Sarah Nichols

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VOLUME 14 NUMBER 1 JANUARY–FEBRUARY 2004

letters

Beyond the Act

Paul Martin's 'Caught in the Act' (*Eureka Street*, November 2003) is a misleading article, mainly because of what it doesn't say. His approach to water reforms, by examining selective parts of the Victorian Water Act only, is extremely limiting.

There is no acknowledgment of the tremendous changes of attitude in the water industry that have occurred in the last ten years and especially in the last couple, driven in part by the drought. No mention of bulk entitlements, caps on water extraction, *Living Murray* or the current green paper from the Victorian government. There is no mention of the Catchment Management Authorities, established over the past decade to oversee river health. There is but scant mention of other pieces of legislation and of agreements, such as the Murray Darling Basin Agreement (which governs water distribution between four states), that are equally important.

Some of the points Paul Martin makes are contentious. He states that a person has a right to take water, free of charge, for domestic and stock use, with the implication that farmers are over-using the system. What he fails to say, however, is that landowners in irrigation districts have a set entitlement and have to pay for such use. Under the Act, the relevant water authority has the power to charge, a fact Martin overlooks. In addition, anyone with a bore must have it licensed and a fee is payable. Frontages to waterways or lakes are leased and a fee is payable—even if no water is available.

The irrigation system is and has to be self-funding. Irrigators pay for their entitlement and for the delivery of the water. That is, they pay both for water as a product and for the infrastructure that delivers it. Paul Martin quotes delivery charges of $122,647 as being beyond the environment's capital resources and a reason why environmental allocations are not used but sold off. These charges apply only when the irrigation system is running at full capacity. Government has refused to fund delivery charges and expects some of the water to be sold, especially in a drought. However, I agree that provision needs to be made for society, via the government or a community levy, to pay for these delivery costs.

It is interesting to note Paul's concern with the Kerang Lake environmental allocation. Most of these lakes are kept full as part of the irrigation system. There is a requirement that this continue under the Ramsar Convention*. The considerable evaporation from the surface of these lakes is debited against irrigators as bulk water charges. So farmers, through their payments, are financially supporting environmental flows in this respect.

Paul Martin touches briefly on the need for structural changes in agriculture. Economic forces are already altering the balance between agricultural enterprises. However, change is not as simple as it would appear. In creating new farm products 'more reflective of economic and environmental realities', much is needed: physical changes to farms, technical knowledge, finance, plus major structural adjustment to the irrigation systems and most importantly to rural society. Care must be taken to achieve the best outcome. Agriculture is often seen as the enemy of the environment. The reality is it has to be compatible. Good farmers see agriculture as part of the environment. One day the public might, too.

Geoffrey Laity
Kerang, VIC

*The Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971), better known as the Ramsar Convention, is an international treaty that focuses on the conservation of internationally important wetlands.

Congratulations!

Winners November *Eureka Street* Book Offer:

C. Aldridge, North Melbourne, VIC; C. Daniel, Fishing Point, NSW; P. Lightfoot, North Melbourne, VIC; J. McCubbery, Mandurang, VIC; A. & B. McCurdy, Lane Cove, VIC; Sr I. Ormesher, RSCJ, Esk, NSW; J. O'Callaghan, QLD; J. Schull, Park Ridge South, QLD; E. Wood-Ellem, Alphington, VIC; C. Alback, Aspley, QLD.

Word Watchers

We certainly touched a nerve in our October 2003 issue when we invited readers to submit the five words they never wished to see or hear again. Many struggled to limit their list to five and most had phrases included as well. Often it was not the words themselves that offended, but the manner in which they have been used. The most common offences included the words: awesome, going forward, absolutely, partner, closure, benchmark, reform, utilise, constructivist, wrap-around service, positivist, prioritise, throughput, sexed up, cohort, mantra, paradigm, incentivised, customisation, pre-emptive, deliverables, key, stomp, ground zero, black armband and knee-jerk.

Thanks to all who entered and the CD prizes are on their way to: S. McGushin, Queenstown, TAS; L. Davidson, Weston, ACT; E. Marsh, Pacific Paradise, QLD; R. Fairbairn, Elwood, VIC.

Andrew Hamilton

Washed clean

In Cambodia, included in the celebration of the new year is a washing ceremony. You dip your hands into scented water in order to wash off the old year and to wash in the freshness of the new.

The image is appropriate for Australian public life at the beginning of 2004. Much that is squalid and stale cries out for washing and renewing. We can think of particular policies and the harsh execution of them, like the continued detention of children, welching on our responsibilities to the Turkish Kurds who sought asylum, sending asylum seekers back to likely death, going to war on Iraq on fraudulent grounds and refusing to contribute to reconstruction. And you can find other instances in the policies that will engage *Eureka Street*'s attention during the year.

But the grottiness in Australian public life today goes beyond particular policies and events. It lies in a pervasive calculation in the exercise of power. That calculation is shown in economy with truth, in the understanding that ministers should not hear from the public service truths that might implicate them in immoral actions, in the expedient nonsense devised to avoid the obligation to respect human dignity or to honour international commitments.

Calculation also rules in public discussion, when sour abuse of opponents becomes the preferred form of argument, when mistakes are never acknowledged, and when power is preferred to truth. Humanity and reason are expendable.

A cynic might ask why we would expect governments or newspaper columnists to do anything other than lie. And this cynicism appears to be shared by most Australians. But the consequences of devaluing truth and virtue are large, as becomes evident when we reflect on older political philosophies of kingship.

The rule of the king was instinctively seen to image the rule of God. When the nation was governed well, the wisdom, reason, love of humanity and lack of envy recognised in God's ordering of the world were mirrored in the king's government. He was expected to rule reasonably, to pursue the universal good, and to act without vindictiveness or partiality. The king was a public figure who bore himself in a way that inspired respect for the divine order and commended the common good to his subjects.

Implicit in this view of rule is the conviction that good government is not merely executive but exemplary. Governments must commend the virtues that are necessary within society. These include a level of trust, a commitment to a national good that goes beyond individual interests, an impartiality based on a respect for all persons, an honesty that respects agreements, and a commitment to act reasonably. By embodying these qualities, a government and public bodies will commend them to the citizens. Neglect of them will lead to alienation.

No-one now would advocate a return to kingship. In modern democracies, the heavy reliance on the king's virtue has been replaced by structures of accountability and review designed to exclude arbitrariness and conflict of interest. But the exemplary function of government remains enshrined in the assumption that the government should be a model litigant, one inspired by benevolence and reason, and not by the simple desire to win or by vindictiveness.

In any political system, truth and virtue matter and need to be commended by public example. The miasma that hangs over Australian public life today comes from the corruption of reason and moral seriousness. A government that prefers calculation to reason does not only cause personal suffering. It also weakens confidence in the foundations of society and of government itself. To wash away these things, the waters of the new year will need to be singularly powerful. ■

—Andrew Hamilton SJ

the month's traffic

MedicarePlus

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT has been trying to edge us closer to private health care for many years. It continues to subsidise private health in the form of the Private Health Insurance Rebate. Kay Patterson's health package 'A Fairer Medicare' planned to allow people to take out insurance to cover the gap between doctors' fees and the Medicare rebate. Private health care costs governments substantially less than public health care. It looks better on the bottom line. So why is 'cuddly Abbott' (as Labor Health spokesperson, Julia Guillard, called him) now spending $2.4 billion on public health?

One answer is that it's election countdown time. Australians expect free or highly subsidised health care. When Howard said in 1987 that Medicare was 'one of the great disasters of the Hawke government' he could not have known how much the concept of free and universal health care would become part of the Australian psyche. How it would be one of the biggest obstacles the bulldozer of Liberal Party economic reform would have to face. So much so that in 2004, Howard would need to be seen to embrace Medicare. Announcing 'MedicarePlus' he vowed to protect 'one of the best health systems in the world'.

But the Medicare that Howard claims to protect is a system in decline. In 1987 the amount a doctor received for bulk billing was adequate as full payment. Now with a payment of $25.70, bulk billing is almost untenable.

'MedicarePlus' offers a complex series of reforms including a $5 incentive to bulk bill children, pensioners and concession card holders; a safety net to protect people from rising costs and money to recruit more doctors and nurses. At a cost of $2.4 billion it is certainly more generous than Kay Patterson's $900 million 'A Fairer Medicare'.

No doubt the additional expenditure helps. More patients will benefit. Out-of-pocket expenses will be reduced. Doctors will be better off and will be able, for a while, to continue to bulk bill targeted patients. But 'MedicarePlus' is still a two-tier system. The rich will be able to afford to go to doctors who charge more; the poor will not. And Medicare will exist as a safety net rather than a universal system of health care. Those who must rely on the safety net will be the least empowered in our society. What will happen when the value of subsidies like the extra $5 for bulk billing decreases? Will the government be willing to pledge more money without an election looming?

'Medicare Plus' is designed by Howard and Abbott to avoid accusations of dismantling Medicare. Howard says they have 'listened to the Australian people', but he is throwing money at a failing system. 'MedicarePlus' is an attempt to prop it up for a while. When it comes crashing down, after the next election, private health insurance funds will be waiting quietly in the wings.

—Kathryn O'Connor

Global village

LIFE IN MADRID

IF IT WASN'T FOR the minor fact of having six million other people as neighbours, life in Madrid could sometimes be mistaken for life in a Spanish village.

At the end of our street, on any afternoon after the siesta hour, old men in berets sit with old women on wooden benches to discuss the day's events, pass on the gossip of the *barrio* or simply watch the world go by with the enigmatic gaze of the ancients. Every week, I hear the mournful whistle of the old knife sharpener who passes along our street, fighting to be heard above the car horns and amid the general Spanish disregard for noise. His whistle summons the cooks of Madrid from their apartments to the street, where he refashions their blades on a pedal-powered sharpener. If it wasn't for the clamour all around him, to which he invariably seems oblivious, this man (also in a beret) could have been strolling through the quiet streets of San Martin del Castañar or any other *pueblo* across rural Spain.

Madrid is also the sort of place where you get to know the local personalities. There's Rosa, the *portera* (loosely translated as caretaker) of our building, who has a heart of gold, makes it her business to know everybody else's business and accosts all unauthorised visitors to the building in her role as the maternal guardian of those of us who are fortunate enough to live here. Or there is Luis, the watchman at the underground car park across the road who, every Monday morning, announces for the benefit of the whole street the weekend's football scores.

On the numerous occasions when world events invade the city, the response, too, is sometimes that of the village. When I was in Australia in February, I watched television coverage of the mass anti-war protests across the world. As soon as the coverage shifted from serious-faced protesters in Sydney and Berlin to a happy crowd of demonstrators singing and dancing, I recognised the energy of the Spanish village fiesta and knew that it had to be Madrid. Back in Madrid a month later, on a cold night in March and at the height of Spanish public opposition to the war in Iraq, I was washing the dishes when our street erupted in a cacophony of noise. I have to confess that at first I didn't notice. When it continued, we went out onto the balcony to be greeted by the sight of all the other balconies filled with Madrileños banging their pots and pans in protest against the war. Across the city, the scene was played out simultaneously in perhaps the most creative (and noisiest) protest among many.

Ride in the lift of any office building across the city and you'll be greeted by every person who gets in, and then wished well by everyone who departs. On the streets, pedestrians, particularly the elderly, routinely step out onto the road and seem genuinely surprised (and even irritated) to find a vehicle bearing down upon them.

Yet for every vestige of village-Madrid, this is also a city which does things on the grand-

est possible scale, making it one of Europe's liveliest and most extravagant cities.

This is the city of Real Madrid, a team of outrageous football (soccer) talent containing an unparalleled gathering of Zinedine Zidane, Luis Figo, Ronaldo, Raul and Roberto Carlos. This is football royalty with all of the attendant expectations. At one game last year, the team was roundly booed when they could only win 3–1. When their only trophy at the end of the season was the Spanish *Primera Liga*, the coach and club captain were unceremoniously sacked, even as 300,000 Madrileños crowded together to celebrate in the Plaza de Cibeles.

With the arrival last summer of David Beckham and his celebrity wife, Victoria, it appeared as if *Los Galacticos* were set to become the most perfect team in history. Football quickly took backstage, however, as it became apparent that David Beckham and the city of Madrid were made for each other. In the Spanish capital, a passionate love of celebrity runs deep. It was in Spain that *Hola* magazine (which later grew into the worldwide juggernaut *Hello*) was born. Every night, Spanish television is awash with talk shows passing judgment on The Next Big Thing (the wife of a bullfighter, the chances that the Beckham marriage will survive), all at the tops of their voices.

But even Beckham was upstaged at the beginning of last November when it was announced that the very eligible bachelor, Prince Felipe (the king-in-waiting), was to marry a glamorous TV presenter. The city went into a frenzy, above even its usual buzz of rumour and celebration, as every aspect of the betrothal was dissected. At the end of it all, every analyst confirmed that this was truly a marriage made in heaven.

For those of us lesser mortals who live in Madrid, it is this strange harmony of village values with a city of significance that is so compelling. For an Australian, Madrid feels like the clamorous centre of the world, calling everyone from beggars to Beckham. And yet as I walk down the street I can still be certain that people will know my name.

—Anthony Ham

This month's contributors: **Kathryn O'Connor** is an emergency doctor and a freelance writer; **Anthony Ham** is *Eureka Street*'s roving correspondent.

Fine lines

It is a truism that most people today are intensely interested in spirituality, less interested in religion, and little interested in churches. People who offer independent answers to the deeper questions of life receive a good hearing, but Christian answers to the same questions are generally seen as boring.

The tension between spiritual hunger and distaste for traditional Christian food can be seen in the programs offered in Christian spirituality centres. Apart from explicitly Christian retreats and prayer days, they may also make room for yoga, aromatherapy and reiki. They may also encourage retreatants to participate in retreats on their own terms, without asking of them an explicit religious faith or practice.

These customs blur the boundary between Christian spirituality and other spiritualities, as well as the boundary between Christian and other participants. They sometimes provoke a reaction from those who wish to return to a more narrowly focused program in which Christian faith and practices are reinforced.

The same debate about boundaries is also found in discussion of attitudes to other religions and to our contemporary culture. If you insist that Christian faith and practices are uniquely privileged, you will most likely hear the objection, 'But we all worship the same God, don't we?' To which you might object in turn that neither ancient Judaism nor the early Christian churches were heavily into crossing boundaries. They saw other Gods as rivals. They also insisted on the crucial importance of distinctive practices like baptism or dietary laws. And so the argument will continue.

In Christian debates about spirituality and religion, both sides will appeal to the belief that God came into our world in Jesus Christ—the doctrine of the Incarnation. Those who believe that boundaries should be porous will see in the Incarnation God's strong affirmation of the world, of culture, and of the aspirations expressed in other faiths. In becoming human, God wanted us to recognise the value of our world, including the aspects of it that a narrow view would discount.

Those who insist on the privileged character of Christian faith and on the importance of a distinctive Christian faith and Christian religious practices also appeal to the Incarnation. They argue that in coming into the world in Jesus Christ, God named this one life as a unique meeting place. So, the Incarnation is an exercise in boundary marking.

In any decent Christian theology these two aspects of the Incarnation will be held in tension. But the image of God identifying with our solid world suggests a further tension in spirituality. The Incarnation underlines the value of every human being, and affirms the invitation that God makes to each human heart. God is involved in each person's personal journey.

But the earthiness of the Incarnation also suggests that journeys do not end in the heart. We travel fortified by rituals, practices, public commitments and beliefs. These, however, are related to the inner journey in complex patterns that cannot be manhandled to fit an established template. So although spirituality cannot be identified with the inner journey that remains when religion and its institutions are siphoned off, neither can it be identified with a one-size-fits-all set of religious practices. ■

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snapshot

Stakes ...

Good to see Mark Latham restore the simple metaphor to political life, even if a humble ladder seems a bit out of place in our monumental Parliament House. Of course, you can't put too much weight on metaphorical ladders. They always speak of dreams of the unlikely. Unlike the real thing, you can't fall off metaphorical ladders, feel faint when you are three steps up them, break the rungs as you climb, or find them swaying backwards as you reach the top. But ladders do have a long history that politicians might usefully draw on.

Mark Latham's ladder is a typically modern model. It is a one-way ladder, made for going up. You can't come down it, at least not while preserving your self-respect. This brand has a long history of use in moral exhortation. A Greek spiritual writer was even called John the Ladder. St Augustine used the ladder as a model for spiritual progress, admonishing his hearers to make a ladder by trampling down their vices. When the executive chair replaced heaven at the top of the ladder, the vices became other people who were to be trampled on as you made progress towards realising your aspirations.

and ladders

These one-way ladders are pretty frightening affairs. They create shame when you descend the rungs. And they also make you isolated on the way up, and fearful that the music might stop before you reach the top. And if it does, then with Yeats we are back to the world of Augustine:

Now that my ladder's gone
I must lie down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

Given the disadvantages of the one-way ladder, perhaps Mark Latham might ponder the virtues of the older model: the two-way ladder of Jacob's dream. Jacob saw a vision of angels ascending and descending the ladder that joined earth and heaven, a vision of connection. Ladders of connection that bring together people at the top and at the bottom of society for their mutual enrichment have advantages. Certainly, they are better than the ladders of aspiration that you need to kick others off if you are to climb.

New views

The National Gallery of Victoria is a favourite landmark of Victorians. Many have childhood memories of running fingers across the iconic water curtain, seeing a masterpiece up close for the first time or being struck by the energy and life emanating from canvas. The St Kilda Road gallery reopened in early December, as the NGV International, after a four-year closure and a $168 million makeover.

Italian architect Mario Bellini has cleverly reworked the 1968 building, originally designed by Sir Roy Grounds. Its exhibition areas have been expanded, new light, open public spaces have been created, and a sculpture garden at the rear of the building has become home to many of the sculptures previously scattered around the city. The Australian Art collection has moved to the Ian Potter Centre in Federation Square, allowing the St Kilda Road gallery to display a greater number of works from the international collection. The space for contemporary art is now bright, white and stark.

To the relief of many locals, the most admired elements of the original building have been preserved. The much-loved water curtain (*don't* call it a waterwall) still acts as a luminous filter between the noise of St Kilda Road and the contemplative spaces of the gallery. However, new technology has now enabled the architect to move the wall forward, separating it from its concrete pillars. The Leonard French stained glass ceiling remains, restored for future generations to lie on the floor of the Great Hall and gaze up at the net of colour.

Taking over the asylum

Many of us were nurtured on the story of Maximilian Kolbe, the Franciscan who, as a prisoner in a concentration camp, gave his life so that a married man might live. He is a worthy example for the bishops of Australia. In November, 14 Turkish asylum seekers were repulsed from Australian shores. They were not exactly repulsed. The shores were redefined to avoid the need for anything so crude. The Governor-General was summoned from the Melbourne Cup for the purpose.

But 14 is not such a large number, even of Turks. It would be a fine thing if, instead of speaking up yet again, 14 Australian bishops offered to take their place. This would say more than words in the current climate. Some of our Christian leaders should hand their passports over to those in greater need and forfeit their citizenship to asylum seekers. This is not to disparage the episcopacy, although most people do recognise that it's harder to replace a decent parish organist than it is to replace your typical bishop. Indeed, the bishops could flourish in Turkey. If you take Gallipoli and the cities of St Paul, there is more Australian spirituality in Turkey than there is in Australia. On the other hand, there is more Turkish food here than in Turkey. Indeed, if the example of the bishops were to take on, an entire country swap makes excellent sense. It would save a lot of travel on Anzac Day and mean that the Prime Minister would never need to go far when he needed to mouth a few clichés. In time, Suvla Bay could become the new Bondi. And if anybody dared to step uninvited on our beach, we'd be waiting for them in the hills.

capital letter

Gloves on

Of all the comments made after Mark Latham's surprise ascension to the Labor leadership, Paul Keating's remark—that it represented a defeat for the bankrupt ALP factional system and its operatives—was the most sound. All but two of the factional chieftains (John Faulkner, from the left in NSW, and Kim il Carr, from the left in Victoria) had voted to put Kim Beazley into the leadership. The ALP machine in every state bar Victoria and Tasmania is under the strong control of men who desperately wanted Beazley in the job. Nor had they taken his victory for granted, even if they had assumed he would win. Every politician whose preselection was capable of being upset by a block of Transport Workers Union or Australian Workers Union votes was threatened, and by people who mean even now to deliver on their promises.

Some of the old hacks put more effort into getting Kim Beazley up than they had in trying to install their own children, or spouses, in safe seats in parliament. The hardened factional chiefs in parliament who had decided that the Simon Crean show was terminal, their union overlords who control the big branches, the relentless party apparatchiks in state branch secretaryships who had been leaking damaging poll results to undermine Crean, and the reflexive plotters, schemers and finaglers, such as Stephen Smith, Wayne Swan and Stephen Conroy, were all on the wrong side when the votes were counted. Even Carmen Lawrence voted for the man whose moral compromises in 2001 had rendered the party, in the minds of many who voted for her as party president, unfit for government.

Mark Latham has been in a forgiving mood, pretending to welcome Stephen Smith back to the front bench. In January, however, he faces a national party conference which will be controlled by the forces he has just defeated—indeed, the same forces that Carmen Lawrence had just defeated, had anyone wanted any evidence that the party machines are on the nose, even with paid-up Labor members.

But the controlling factions are not of a mood to surrender their power lightly, least of all on the economic issues where Latham must make an impact with the electorate. The chieftains enjoy most of their power from patronage and corruption at state government level, and there Labor is comfortably entrenched.

Of course not all of those who campaigned against him did so because they were in thrall to the old factional system. Some don't like Latham or don't trust his personal or political instincts or his self-discipline. While he has some capacities as a salesman, a fighter and a thinker, he is impatient with party process, with talking and negotiating, and, particularly, with listening. A man who could easily trip over a foot put there by the government or by enemies inside his own party.

The conclusion that the risks with Latham outweighed the benefits was not difficult to reach. For many, however, the idea that the best alternative on offer was Beazley was too much to stomach, particularly since Beazley has not been associated with a new idea in years.

Mark Latham has not had a personality transplant, but was not only surprisingly impressive in his first outings but showed some signs that he is not going to allow his enemies to work off his weaknesses.

He immediately pleased two important constituencies to whom impressions and a general sense of direction are more important than detail. His first pitch, at the aspirational voter, was not in the language of the whinge or a coalition of the dispossessed but of class advancement. 'I stand for the things I've been doing all my life—working hard, trying to climb that ladder of opportunity, working hard, studying hard,' he said. 'I believe in an upwardly mobile society where people can climb the ladder of opportunity to a better life for themselves and their family. I believe in hard work.'

And his second was at a wider constituency within the party itself. Latham has no particular reputation for empathy with the underclasses, for fashionable left-wing causes, for Aborigines or refugees. Within his first week, however, he had said more effective words identifying with all of these struggles, and locating them under the Labor umbrella, than his two predecessors have in eight years.

His efforts have produced a mood swing in Labor circles, and made everyone realise that victory in 2004, if unlikely, is far from impossible. Latham may actually benefit more from a damaging stoush than by maintaining a veneer of unity with those who had practically destroyed the party as any sort of movement, or academy of ideas, or ideals, or anything, in fact, other than a place to exercise power.

The idea that a Labor conference ought to be a choreographed public display, with policies already agreed behind closed doors, is actually new. Perhaps it is a development on the old, tiny, closed conferences of the early 1960s. But between then, and the packaged pap of the '80s and '90s, were out-in-the-open brawls of conferences in the late 1960s and early '70s. Sure, they showed division, open animosities and public bloodletting. But the debates sharpened policy and created discipline and cohesion once consensus was reached. Latham is a disciple of Whitlam, who thrived in such confrontations and benefited in the public eye by being seen to down those opposed to him.

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

archimedes

Being water wise

SUMMERTIME, AND THE livin's less easy—at least in southern Australia. Recent summers have been hot and dry, with serious bushfires, water restrictions, and the threat of blackouts as air conditioning puts an increasing load on power systems during heatwaves. It seems that global warming is upon us. No snow resorts in Australia by 2070, says a report to the United Nations Environment Program. No new dams and 20 per cent of Melbourne's water to be recycled by 2010, recommends a Victorian government green paper.

Global warming is going to put significant strain on our basic infrastructure—health services, water, agriculture, and particularly energy. In the developed world, authorities are looking at sustainable solutions and clever use of resources. Green building, for instance. Melbourne architect Ann Keddie says, 'It is becoming mainstream. The leading edge of architecture now incorporates green design as a matter of course.'

Under the auspices of the Victorian Building Commission, together with architectural colleagues, engineers, quantity surveyors, developers and planners, Keddie recently travelled overseas investigating energy conservation in buildings as part of an Australian Green Building Mission.

Somewhat to its surprise, the mission found that, despite a lack of large, well-publicised demonstration projects, Australia is well placed in the design and construction of energy-efficient buildings. Australian expertise in green building is as good as anywhere, and we lead the world in storm water and grey water conservation, Keddie says.

In North America at present, says Keddie, there is much talk about IEQ—indoor environmental quality. 'The debate is mainly driven by the public sector unions. They argue that improved IEQ leads to increased productivity—if people feel better, they work harder, and absenteeism is lower. But the quantitative research has not been done to show that this is true.'

Nor does green technology always come at a premium. Some conservation measures can cut building costs. Ventilation that comes up from the floor demands less energy and can reduce the size of ducting—so much so that builders can fit a greater number of floors into the same height of construction.

Highlights of the trip included the double skin of the Deutsche Post Tower in Bonn, which allows office workers to open windows to control air quality around their desks, and the light wells and sky gardens of the Swiss Re Tower in London.

In general, Keddie says, what the mission saw in Europe was more sophisticated than in the US. But nowhere did the group encounter water conservation measures like those becoming common in Australia, such as capturing storm water or recycling 'grey' water.

As the mission points out, while water conservation may not be of much concern to Europe and the US at present, it is highly relevant to places like China and India. We could export our expertise. A recent federal government report, 'Mapping Australia's Science and Innovation', argues that Australia is becoming more entrepreneurial. In our approach to energy conservation, perhaps we will find out.

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

A sea of opportunity

A WEEK IN WHICH Mark Latham becomes the Leader of the Opposition and begins talking about 'rungs of opportunity' to which the Prime Minister, riposting with, among other things, his Medicare reforms, announces that 'a safety net can be a rung' is a week of rare circumstance.

And sure enough, as if to put—in the argot of award-winning sportspeople—the icing on the cake, what should come sloshing into Melbourne's Station Pier but the *Star Princess*. This is a cruise vessel that had all the pundits whipping through the *Oxford Dictionary of Outrageous Hyperbole* to embroider their already breathlessly overawed descriptions. The *Star Princess*, we were told, is twice as long as the MCG. No-one bothered to point out that the *Star Princess* could not possibly substitute for the MCG. For all its multi-decked extravaganza of astonishments, the vessel would be useless as a venue for football, cricket or athletics, whereas, as all those know who have spent hours and days of their life there, the MCG could quite easily be navigated up the bay and through the Rip, with 100,000 people on board (five times the number on the *Star Princess*), if this happened to become necessary. It's just that the need has never arisen. Or am I missing something?

What is more, we were assured, if you stood the *Star Princess* on its stern, it would be some extraordinarily significant amount higher than the Rialto building. No-one mentioned that everything, including the water in the several pools, would crash down the vertical decks gathering up everything along the way and accumulate in a great heterogeneous lump at the blunt end. All of which is only to say that, take it for all in all, the *Star Princess* is a ship and is at its best on water, horizontal and far away from the playing fields of Melbourne, let alone Eton. Its essential distinctiveness will in the end belong not to its dimensions and accoutrements but to the way its cruising incumbents behave. And that's another story.

Cruise ships, whether incomparably equipped or not, all have an uncanny capacity to transform their passengers. Straggling grimly through an early morning Melbourne fog to board the SS *Black Orpington* or the MV *Falling Star* or the RSVP *M. Aroyd*—or, indeed, the *Star Princess*—passengers will be conservatively dressed, apprehensive in manner and generally resigned, as if in an eerie and reverse re-enactment of the convicts of yesteryear. Yet within a few days, once they have turned slightly green at the very thought of the Rip and sniffed a warmer air and glimpsed a bluer sea in the offing, the passengers all go mad. Dancing, boozing, groping, singing (in most cases against all sensible advice to the contrary), necking on the decks, bonking in the boats, yo ho ho and a bottle of Bollinger, your bunk or mine, a bit of how's your father, you put yours there and I'll put mine here, isn't it lovely, only live once, wouldn't be dead for quids ... in a veritable crescendo of hedonism. Until, sheepish, hungover, they pick their way at cruise's end back down the gangway to the grey wharf, carefully not catching the eye of people who, once again mere fellow passengers, were even as recently as after the farewell party, last night, shoving a pillow in their mouth to keep the noise down for the old couple in the next cabin. Or so I'm told.

MY THEORY, FOR what it's worth, is that it's not the classiness of their maritime surrounds but the sheer ubiquity of water that sends everyone half mad. Subconsciously, it's like going back to the womb, or that's how I see it. Surrounded afresh by atavistic amniotic memories of a fluid environment, people feel suddenly liberated, because everything is possible again, everything is potential, just like when they were waiting to be born. So they buy crazy drinks that they wouldn't ordinarily contemplate, let alone pay for; and they behave in ways that they spend ensuing and respectable years trying to forget. (Luxury hotels, incidentally, work on the same water theory and send people comparably mad during their stay. Foyers are approximately eleven acres across and running with water. Fountains spurt upwards like columns, plummet down as waterfalls, leap sideways in sudden gobs, emerge from this or that cunningly concealed pipe as globes, spirals, corrugations. Water splashes, shooshes, gurgles, galumphs, whispers, tinkles: El Nino is not even a rumour here.)

In short, the continuous and in most cases entirely uncharacteristic trans-oceanic orgasm of the cruise ship is induced by—water!

It takes a very cold eye of a kind not available on the hot decks and in the rampant cabins of luxury cruisers to see through the kaleidoscopic phantasms that make up daily and nightly cruising life, the kind of eye Thomas Hardy, in his wonderful poem, 'The Convergence of the Twain', gave to fish gliding curiously around the *Titanic* where it lay at the bottom of the ocean: 'What does this vaingloriousness down here?' they ask scornfully.

But, in the absence of a mordant latter-day Hardy, the cruise ship, and especially the *Star Princess* it would appear, provides just the environment in which anything can happen, in which a safety net can credibly and effortlessly become a rung. Johnny Howard would love it. ■

Brian Matthews is a Melbourne-born writer who lives in the Clare Valley in South Australia.

Rod Wilson

MedicarePlus or minus

Reforming Medicare is a favoured New Year's resolution

THE FUTURE OF primary health care is at the forefront of community debate in the lead-up to the next federal election. This issue has only become of real concern to politicians over the last 7–8 months.

During this time we have seen the release of the federal government's Fairer Medicare Package, the Labor Party's own Medicare Package, the revised Fairer Medicare package called MedicarePlus and now a community debate about the future of Medicare and primary health care services throughout Australia.

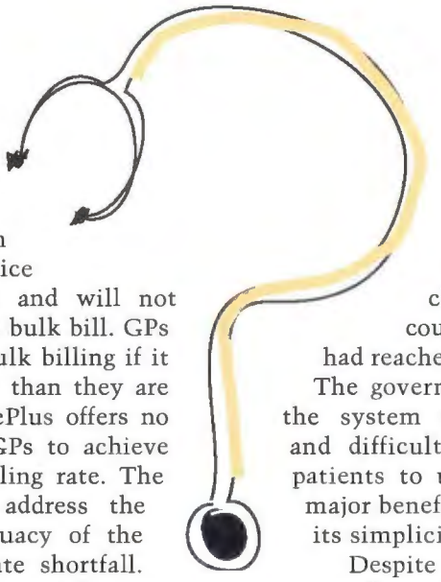
MedicarePlus is based on an assumption that most Australians should not only pay for the health care services through their taxes, but also at the point of delivery, in the form of an upfront fee to their general practitioner (GP).

It is acknowledged by politicians of all parties, the broader community and health economists that implementation of MedicarePlus will see decreased bulk billing rates.

The Australian Medical Association acknowledges that the extra $5 rebate to doctors for seeing patients with a health care card or those under 16 years is not enough to meet the practice costs of most GPs and will not encourage doctors to bulk bill. GPs will not return to bulk billing if it means charging less than they are at present. MedicarePlus offers no encouragement to GPs to achieve an optimal bulk billing rate. The package does not address the fundamental inadequacy of the amount of the rebate shortfall. This can only result in a decline in bulk billing and an increase in upfront fees.

The Minister for Health, Tony Abbott, has indicated that the Commonwealth government does not believe in universal access to bulk billing. MedicarePlus provides significant disincentives for people to use primary health care services. Establishing safety nets once people have reached either $500 or $1000 annually will still mean that those on low incomes will have to think twice before seeing a GP. Given that those who have the lowest incomes also have the worst health, it makes little sense to impose any obstacle to securing basic health care services.

The average out-of-pocket expense for attending a GP across Australia is over $13 per visit. In order to get to the $500 safety net or the $1000 safety net a person would have to visit the GP on about 40 occasions. It would also require the person to keep very clear records so that they could determine when they had reached the safety net.



The government's proposals make the system extremely complicated and difficult for both doctors and patients to understand. One of the major benefits of Medicare has been its simplicity.

Despite recent increases in the overall number of GPs, MedicarePlus fails to address the need for a more equitable distribution of GPs. Present incentives designed to encourage GPs to move to country or outer urban areas are failing.

The MedicarePlus package does not address the need for better after-hours access to health care. Emergency departments throughout Australia are now flooded with patients who should have been seen in GP practices.

MEDICAREPLUS ALSO fails to address practice inefficiency. Recent studies have shown that most medical practices spend over 50 per cent of their revenue on operating costs. This is clearly an inefficient use of money. We need to consolidate GP practices into more economically viable operations.

It is my view that the package will cost more than the projected $2.4 billion over four years, as the resulting decline in access to health services will inflate overall costs to the system. As we enter

a market-based, 'user pays' era of health care, we will see significant increases in the prices that GPs charge. Already consultations cost $50 in some areas and it will not take long for the charge to reach $55, $60 and even $70.

This will see a much higher level of Australia's gross domestic product spent on health care than the current 9.3 per cent.

The Victorian Medicare Action Group, in consultation with over 300 members, has recently developed a draft *Consumer Medicare Charter.* This has allowed us to be proactive and positive in determining what we want from our health care services.

THE CHARTER CALLS FOR the development of a National Health Reform Council capable of determining state-Commonwealth demarcation issues over funding, and the development of consumer-based Primary Care Trusts, which will hold funds from the Commonwealth and state governments.

There is a need for significant incentives for GPs to lift bulk billing rates. Further, GPs ought be licensed to practice in nominated areas to prevent over- and under-supply of services. The charter also outlines the need for more university places for training GPs, nurses and allied health workers.

Primary health care teams ought to be integrated and the community would profit from a stronger emphasis on health promotion. In this way the effectiveness of the health care system might be measured by health outcomes rather than how many patients are seen.

The Public Dental Service requires a further $500 million commitment from the Commonwealth government in order to provide adequate care. Scrapping the $2.5 billion health insurance rebate, which is clearly ineffective, may go some way to addressing funding shortfalls in other areas.

The charter is intended to act as a catalyst for discussion among community groups and people seeking to develop a positive and feasible blueprint for the delivery of health care services in the community.

It is worth noting that surveys conducted following the last round of federal tax cuts indicated that consumers would far prefer better access to basic health care services than further tax cuts.

The principle of access to health services based on need rather than ability to pay should be at the core of our health service. Historically, Medicare has been able to provide this for the vast majority of Australians. It has become less effective as GPs have moved away from bulk billing. We now have an opportunity as a community to voice what it is that we want from our health care services in the lead-up to the next election. ■

Rod Wilson is the Convenor of the Victorian Medicare Action Group.

Frank Brennan

Poor fellow my country

The following is an edited text of an address given by Fr Frank Brennan SJ AO, at the launch of his most recent book, *Tampering with Asylum*.

THREE PARTICULAR reasons heighten my delight at being in the Brisbane City Hall for the launch of *Tampering with Asylum*. First, Brisbane is the place of my birth, childhood and initial education. Launching a book on refugees, it is good to return to a place that will always be home. Second, the Queensland Government and the Brisbane City Council have done much to make up the shortfall in our welcome to those who have been proved to be refugees fleeing two of the most dreadful regimes in modern history. Third, this is the home of the Tiger XI soccer team, a group of young Hazara men from Afghanistan who fled the Taliban and who now face the review process for their temporary protection visas (TPVs). These young men put a human face on the desperate journeys these people have made to every corner of the earth—journeys that cannot reasonably be classified as queue-jumping searches for migration outcomes or as secondary movement entailing the voluntary surrender of effective protection.

I have five pleas. Could our government stop tampering with the truth? Could our government offer us a coherent rationale for the detention of children? Could our government take a sensible, decent humanitarian approach to the return of those whose TPVs have expired and to the permanent resettlement of those refugees still deserving our protection after three years living in our community? Could our government stop invoking the Christian scriptures in support of such an un-Christian policy? And could we all go and do something about it? It is up to us to stop our government tampering with asylum.

TRUTH AND CONSISTENCY of policy are elusive with our developing policy of tampering with asylum. When the *Minasa Bone* was being towed out onto the high seas in November 2003, lawyers sought the intervention of the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory to ensure that the 14 Turkish Kurds could obtain assistance and pursue their asylum claims if they had any, which of course was highly likely.

The Commonwealth saw fit to inform the court by affidavit: 'On 6 November 2003 the AFP/DIMIA (Australian Federal Police and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs) team boarded the vessel and conducted interviews with the crew and passengers to elicit intelligence information regarding possible people smuggling.' Why did the Commonwealth not see fit to inform the court of the interviews conducted or about the information received about asylum claims? The government now admits that asylum claims were made across the Turkish-English language barrier without translation services being made available.

During the hearing of the case on 7 November 2003, the judge asked the Commonwealth's key witness, Mr John Charles Eyers, Assistant Secretary, Legal Services and Litigation Branch, DIMIA: 'Do you know whether or not any of the persons who arrived on the vessel asked for assistance?' He answered, 'Not to my knowledge, Your Honour.' He clarified this answer saying, 'I don't know whether they did or not.' When the judge delivered his written reasons two weeks later, he said:

> Mr Eyers (was not) able to advise whether or not any interpreters in either Turkish or Indonesian had been employed at any time either by the Navy or by the Australian Federal Police/DIMIA team. Mr Eyers was asked specifically why Ms Cox's [Director of the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission] request to seek access to those on board the vessel was not acceded to. He replied that it was normal procedure that unless a person requested legal assistance it is not provided. He said that he did not know whether any of the persons concerned had asked for legal assistance or not and did not know whether any of them had asked for asylum. Even allowing for the urgency under which this affidavit was sworn I found it incredible that the (Commonwealth's) principal witness could not answer these questions.

Next day, Mr Stewart Foster, the Director of DIMIA's Public Affairs section in Canberra, issued a statement

saying that 'a number of comments made by Justice Mildren in his judgment on the *Minasa Bone* case need to be clarified'. Mr Foster wanted the public to understand, as Justice Mildren had not, that one reason for the government pronouncement of a 'temporary air exclusion zone' around the boat was 'to protect the privacy of those on board the *Minasa Bone*'. Justice Mildren had the temerity to observe, 'Behaviour of this kind usually implies there is something to hide.'

According to Mr Foster, 'The government's key witness was never asked if those on board the *Minasa Bone* had made a claim for asylum.' But hang on. The key witness had told the court that interviews were conducted 'to elicit intelligence information regarding possible people smuggling' and he did not know whether anyone on the boat had asked for assistance of any sort. What is DIMIA suggesting? If Mr Eyers had been asked directly about any request for assistance with asylum, would he not have answered, consistent with his more general answers, 'I do not know'. Or is DIMIA now intimating that if asked directly, Mr Eyers would have told the court that he did know? That he did know what? Would he have asserted that no claim of asylum was made? Remember that two days after Mr Eyers gave his evidence, Ministers Downer and Vanstone told us formally in a joint press release, 'The passengers of the *Minasa Bone* did not claim asylum in Australia'. We now know that was false. At the time Downer and Vanstone made this statement, there were public servants who knew this to be false. Is DIMIA now intimating that, if asked, Mr Eyers would have told us correctly that asylum claims had been made? Either he knew or he didn't. The judge thought it incredible that he did not know. If that requires clarification, then presumably Mr Eyers did know or else there must be some credible reason for the most senior public servant responsible for immigration litigation not knowing. If he did know, did he know the truth or did he know only the lie being peddled around Canberra at the time by his fellow public servants: that there had been no asylum claims made?

Isn't it time for DIMIA to wear the rap? Whether it be deceit, reckless incompetence or wilful institutional miscommunication born of the 'Children Overboard' mindset in Canberra, public servants have caused senior ministers to misstate the facts and have withheld from a court relevant information in a way the judge finds 'incredible'. Having heard from the government's key witness that he did not know whether any of those on board had asked for assistance of any sort, the judge was justified in finding it 'incredible' that the key witness did not know whether any person on the boat had asked for asylum. It is even more incredible that public servants use the taxpayer-funded website to further obfuscate the truth, implying that the judge hasn't quite got it right. Unlike Downer and Vanstone, Justice Mildren was not led into error by the public servants. But neither was he assisted by them. Sadly, in this high policy area the Commonwealth is no longer a model litigant.

It is time to put a stop to the government's word games.

WHY DO WE CONTINUE to detain unauthorised arrivals, including children, once we know they are not a health or security risk and once we know they are no more likely to abscond than other asylum seekers living in the community?

On 14 November 2003, Prime Minister Howard told ABC Radio: 'The point of our policy is to deter people from arriving here illegally. That's the starting point. That's what people have got to understand. Our policy is to say to the world "We will take 12,000 humanitarian refugees a year", we'll have that policy, we'll run a non-discriminatory immigration policy, but we will not have people arriving here illegally and we will act to deter that occurring.'

Has the Prime Minister now given us the true explanation? We have a panoply of measures in place, including the long-term detention of children, hoping to deter others from coming here to seek asylum. Mr Ruddock knew there was only one problem with this simple prime ministerial explanation. The High Court has said detention for such a purpose is unconstitutional unless authorised and supervised by a court.

Mr Ruddock always said it was a matter of regret that we had no option but to detain children during the processing of their refugee claims. His argument ran thus. Usually it is best that children remain with their parents. If we release parents with their children from detention, we will set up a magnet effect, providing an incentive for boat people to bring their children with them. So we must keep them all in detention.

Once identity, health and security issues have been addressed, is there any reason to keep everyone in detention? Or should we only detain those who are a risk to the community? Mr Ruddock offered two reasons for ongoing detention: ease of processing and availability for removal.

Those in detention are six times more likely to succeed in an appeal to the Refugee Review Tribunal. So it is hard to argue that detention helps with processing. Ninety per cent of the last wave of boat people were proved to be refugees and therefore not in need of removal. Though we remove more than 10,000 people from Australia every year, on average only 222 of them are boat people. The

search for a coherent rationale for universal mandatory detention of unauthorised arrivals including children is ongoing. So is the traumatic effect on the detainees. Such detention may be popular with the electorate. That does not make it right. That just proves that fear of the 'other' is so deep in Australia that we are prepared to lock up kids for no good reason.

If there is no practical reason for the ongoing detention of children related to their processing or removal, then we have to admit that we are using these children and the deprivation of their liberty as a means to an end. We detain them to deter others. There are not only legal and constitutional problems with this approach. It is morally flawed. Government should not use children as a means to an end. Government should not abuse the liberty of children to send a message to others. Using their detention as a deterrent signal might be incidentally defensible if there were some other compelling reason for the detention. It is time to distinguish detention

at the initial screening phase and at the final removal phase. There is a coherent rationale for detention at those times. There is no coherent rationale for universal, mandatory, judicially unreviewable detention during the processing phase. Asylum seekers who come without a visa are entitled to the same freedom during the processing of their claims as are other asylum seekers once they are proved not to be a health or security risk.

The detention of children without a coherent rationale is institutional child abuse.

I HAVE SOME SYMPATHY for a government policy of granting temporary protection to people who flee situations of persecution or civil war. If governments were always required to grant permanent residence, they would be less likely to permit people to stay in the first place. And there are some humanitarian disasters in the world that can be put right in a few years, making it safe for people to return home. But there must be limits to the extent that we ask people to put their lives on hold and to the extent that we demand that people return to humanitarian disaster situations once we satisfy ourselves that they face no greater risk of persecution than anyone else in the situation of humanitarian disaster.

The Afghan TPV holders are a case in point. Yes, the Taliban has been removed as the government of Afghanistan. Those who fled fearing systematic persecution by the Taliban are now not likely to be in any worse position than others who fled Afghanistan at the time. The Australian public is now regularly told that the Australian government 'sees no reason why people no longer in need of Australia's protection should not return to Afghanistan'. After all, 2.3 million refugees have returned home since March 2002, most returning from camps in Pakistan and Iran.

Afghan TPV holders are presently receiving the first letters of rejection now that their three years' protection is over. Even if someone is found no longer to suffer a special threat of persecution from the Taliban, we are still asking them to return to an untenable situation. So why the need for indecent haste? If we are committed to a TPV regime, why can't we permit the TPV holder to remain in Australia with work rights but without the right of family reunion until it is safe for the person to return to their home country?

Our decision makers now admit that some applicants would face acute risks if they return to their home villages outside Kabul. They overcome this glitch by pressing the word processor entry that says, 'On the information available I am satisfied that the applicant would not be at risk of Convention-based harm if he elected to relocate to Kabul'. Pray tell, how many people are we expecting to relocate to Kabul so that we can simply clear our books? There is little consolation in the decision maker's cute observation, 'While I accept that the applicant has no family or community links in Kabul, the resourcefulness and survival skills that he has demonstrated in establishing himself in Australia, lead me to conclude that the applicant could relocate to Kabul and "could reasonably be expected to do so".'

Why do we insist on going through the bureaucratic hoops for refugee reassessment including the payment of a $1400 fee for an appeal to the Refugee Review Tribunal when it is inevitable that forcible return at this time would be a humanitarian obscenity? Why not simply put the processing on hold until it is safe for these people to return? If on reassessment they are found still to engage our protection obligations, they should be permitted permanent residence in Australia. I imagine that most of those who are rejected at this time will have the decision makers adding this sort of conclusion to their finding:

> While the applicant's claims do not bring him within the Convention definition, I recognise that his reluctance to return to Afghanistan stems in part from concerns over the general security situation in the country, and particularly in his home province, where the security situation remains highly unstable and volatile.
>
> Regular and constant reports of random violence, banditry, looting, property disputes, and other civil unrest involving warlords attempting to assert their control in particular areas have been well documented. Furthermore UNHCR reports of Afghan returnees have noted difficulties in resettlement due to lack of available housing, job

opportunities and the widespread poverty in the country. That these difficulties represent major obstacles to the successful and sustainable reintegration of returnees is undeniable. Hence the main concerns being expressed now by UNHCR and international welfare agencies focus on the provision of adequate infrastructure to support returning Afghans.

In light of the current country information it appears that there may be humanitarian considerations which need to be considered in relation to the return of this applicant.

The humanitarian answer is as plain as the nose on your face. So why does the government department whose officers know all this as much as we do continue to post on their website political cant such as 'The Government sees no reason why people no longer in need of Australia's protection should not return to Afghanistan'.

We are back to the struggle for truth and justice in the face of politics and populism.

When speaking to church audiences over the last couple of years I have been fond of giving a modern Australian variant on the story of Dives and Lazarus and on the parable of the Good Samaritan.

If seeking to implement a Christian response to refugees and asylum seekers on our doorstep, we might contemplate the present Australian version of the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-26 with a contemporary Australian gloss):

> There was once a rich man, who dressed in purple and the finest linen, and feasted in great magnificence every day. At his gate, covered with sores, lay a poor man named Lazarus, who would have been glad to satisfy his hunger with the scraps from the rich man's table. Even the dogs used to come and lick his sores. One day the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up; and there, far away was Abraham with Lazarus beside him. 'Abraham, my father,' he called out, 'take pity on me! Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue, for I am in agony in this fire. And remember that I overlooked Lazarus at my door only because there were many other people on the other side of the world who were in even greater need. I wanted to dispense charity and justice in an orderly way, not rewarding queue jumpers like Lazarus who is now with you.' But Abraham said, 'Remember, my child, that all the good things fell to you while you were alive, and all the bad to Lazarus; now he has his consolation here and it is you who are in agony. But that is not all: there is a great chasm fixed between us; no-one from our side who wants to reach you can cross it, and none may pass from your side to us.'

My adaptation of the parable of the Good Samaritan has run along these lines: unlike the priest and the Levite, the Good Samaritan takes pity on the man by the roadside but then says to himself, 'There are many other people on the other side of the world who are in greater need than this man. If I help him, I will only attract others to come here and I will not have the resources to help those on the other side of the world. It is best that I do nothing.'

In a November edition of the *Good Weekend* magazine, Mr Ruddock offered his interpretation of the parable of The Good Samaritan. Mr Ruddock distinguishes Christ's situation from ours. Christ was describing what one should do if one stumbles across a single person in need of our help. 'What Christ wasn't describing was how you deal with a situation if 200 people lay down beside the highway, all claiming they need assistance, one genuinely in need of assistance and others saying wouldn't it be nice to get it.' But let us not forget that 90 per cent of the last wave of boat people to Australia were proved to be refugees deserving our protection. Maybe it would be a different situation if it were one in 200, rather than 180 in 200 who made a legitimate claim on our care and protection.

Not unreasonably Mr Ruddock suggested that Jesus might have set up a triage system for dealing with those most in need. Invoking another gospel story, he asked, 'Would He, as He did with the money changers in the temple, have said to those who were fabricating their claims that they didn't deserve his attention?' But what would he have said to those fleeing the Taliban and Saddam Hussein and who were not fabricating their claims? Even if we cannot collectively emulate the Good Samaritan, could we not at least emulate the United States in this one regard: admitting a generous quota of offshore refugees each year and granting asylum to onshore asylum seekers without pretending that each successful onshore applicant takes the place of a more needy offshore refugee? The last thing the Good Samaritan would have done was to abuse the needy person in his street in the name of helping the more needy elsewhere, then do nothing further to help those elsewhere. We take only 4000 offshore refugees a year which is less than the annual average since the end of World War II. Our foreign aid budget is only 0.24 per cent of our gross domestic product while the UN's recommended level is 0.7 per cent. Let's not invoke the gospel as an excuse for doing less at home when we might in the future merely consider doing more abroad.

As Australians we need to find our way back to the truth, to a way of treating children decently, to treating in a humanitarian way those whose visas have expired but whose countries are still disaster zones, and to a way of applying the great Christian parables of care for the other to the complexities of our present situation. Let's maintain hope that decency and democracy are not antithetical to each other even in an age of terror and uncertainty. ■

Frank Brennan SJ AO is the Associate Director of Uniya, the Jesuit Social Justice Centre. His most recent book, *Tampering with Asylum*, is published by University of Queensland Press, 2003.

verse

Funeral of Queen Mary

Morning and turbulent dreams
in the chapel lies a dead child knight
I am holding his small marble hands
he tells me hush, hush.
I open my eyes to stillness.

Out there its Elizabethan
white frost on the silver roof
crows, bare branches
wood and wings—one sleek drama
glistening. Winter. Tallis scholars sing
from the clock radio
thou knowest lord the secrets of our hearts
for the funeral of Queen Mary.

Processional.
Black trains trail, sweep brush
through the bright snow.
Let the ice tears be shed.

And here has happened a rare
and secret thing
a december mystery
a late arrival in this room last night
doors were unlocked
and some sweet tenderness ushered in.
Your face wakes quietly
a new reign has come today.

—Kirsty Sangster

Surviving

A patchwork of tin: rust red
peeling away from silver,
faded light green, and greys
of several ages—cut
to fit the irregular space
above a carport door—

it's classic Australiana.
You could move my neighbour's shed
to the National Gallery. Found
materials, and the skill
of cutting precisely to size,
and all the right tools, and a life
when nothing went to waste.

To sit and look for an hour
at these rusting panels, half
obscured by the waving branches
of the apricot tree—to sit
with the telephone silenced, and gusts
of wind and rain on the windows
and not write, not find words
for everything that's happened:

without this emptiness,
this quiet watching, how
can the words re-form themselves
around the unspeakable? Look
how the shed sits square in the chaos
of billowing green leaves,
unmoved by the passing drama
of horizontal rain

or without fuss absorbs
the afternoon sun—the tin
too hot for a human hand—

—Caroline Williamson

Troy Bramston

Opening Whitlam's cabinet

The annual release of the once secret cabinet papers on New Year's Day is now a political ritual. After 30 years, the public is able to look at cabinet's deliberations on weighty matters, which have been kept under lock and key for a generation.

The recent release of the Whitlam government's cabinet papers from 1972 and 1973 have revealed much new information about one of Australia's most reformist governments. Readers can examine the inner workings of the government as if sitting at the cabinet table with the major players of the day. These papers are important because cabinet is at the centre of executive government, comprising the most senior members of the ministry. The cabinet papers include submissions to cabinet, decisions and departmental files kept by bureaucrats. They expose the inner workings of the cabinet process and illuminate executive political power in action.

The newest papers, from 1973, have revealed a government keen to implement its mandate, dealing with a wide range of issues such as foreign policy, defence, the economy, health, Aboriginal affairs, education and social services. Speaking at the embargoed media briefing in December 2003, Whitlam argued that these papers would serve to demolish the many myths about the Whitlam years. Namely, that they did too much too soon, had little regard for the economic consequences, paid little attention to the proper practices of government, that they ignored public service advice, and that they were driven by centralism. Perhaps.

But what these papers do show is a strong-willed prime minister firmly in command of his government. The 1973 papers illustrate the work of a cabinet driven by a grand Whitlam-Labor vision to achieve social reform, confident and prepared for the task. The depth and breadth of the work is apparent. That year was the government's high point. But more importantly, it is the government's earliest days, documented in the 1972 cabinet papers, that reveal much about the tragic fate of that first Labor government in 23 years.

As the 1972 election approached, the contrast between Prime Minister William McMahon and Opposition Leader Gough Whitlam could not have been more apparent. McMahon was the fifth prime minister in five years, being elevated to office at the fag end of the Liberal's long reign. Since the disappearance of Harold Holt the government had been fraught with disunity. By November 1972, McMahon's approval had fallen to 33 per cent, while Whitlam's had risen to 46 per cent.

The 1973 papers illustrate the work of a cabinet driven by a grand Whitlam-Labor vision to achieve social reform ...

The government was clearly rattled by a resurgent Labor Party with Whitlam as leader, confident after its strong showing at the 1969 election when it won 18 seats. In contrast to Whitlam, McMahon lacked a commanding political performance in the parliament and in the media. Whitlam won the December 1972 election. Yet what was remarkable was not that Labor won, but rather that Labor almost lost. Labor attracted an overall 2.5 per cent swing and won eight additional seats. Labor lost seats in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. However, many argue it was an election that McMahon never looked like winning.

On Tuesday 5 December 1972, following Whitlam's election victory on 2 December, the first Whitlam ministry was sworn in. It comprised Whitlam and his deputy, Lance Barnard. Between them, they held all the portfolios of the national government. 'Whitlam came in like a lion,' wrote Bolton. 'The two-man ministry,' he argued '... suited Whitlam's proconsular style as well as his penchant for unorthodox constitutional devices.' The first Whitlam government lasted until 19 December, when the Labor caucus elected a full ministry and cabinet. In 14 days, the Whitlam-Barnard duumvirate made around 40 decisions through media releases and the Federal Executive Council. The speed and haste with which these decisions were made caused grave concern and consternation within the senior levels of the bureaucracy.

The decisions made, and others foreshadowed, included: the complete withdrawal of forces from Vietnam, the release of draft resisters, the removal of excise tax on wine, a ban on racially selected sporting teams, independence for Papua New Guinea, major grants for the arts and Aboriginal people, grants for Western Australia, Tasmania and South Australia, rice aid to Indonesia, the purchase of new F-111 planes, the appointment of Elizabeth Evatt to the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, a judicial inquiry into Aboriginal land rights, the appointment of John Armstrong as High Commissioner to London, the opening of unpublished government reports, special assistance for Aboriginal education, new nursing home benefits, a reference to Australian suppliers in government purchasing, a commitment to the decentralisation of university locations and more Commonwealth funding of universities, a grant to clean up the Tamar River,

new government representation at the International Labour Organisation (ILO), removal of the ban on the advertising of contraceptives, removal of sales tax on the contraceptive pill, new membership of the Commonwealth Grants Commission, the convening of an interim committee of the Australian Schools Commission, a new airline curfew for Sydney airport, new benefits for permanent members of the armed forces, the appointment of 'Nugget' Coombs as an adviser to government, the commencement of talks on diplomatic recognition of China, reopening of the equal pay case, restoration of Wilfred Burchett's passport, instruction to TAA to lower fares, announced scrapping of the honours list, the closure of the Rhodesian Information Centre in Sydney, and the recalling of Australia's ambassadors to the United Nations, Washington and Taiwan.

Courtesy of *The Canberra Times*, Labor's 'big four' at the caucus meeting, 18 December 1972. From left: Lance Barnard, Gough Whitlam, Lionel Murphy and Don Willesee. Photo: Bluey Thomson.

Whitlam and Barnard also met with Governor-General Paul Hasluck as part of the Federal Executive Council and approved 18 recommendations at meetings between 5 and 19 December 1972. These included: amendments to various government regulations, the making of ordinances, making various government appointments including permanent heads of departments, the signing of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the abolition, merger and establishment of government departments. One journalist termed it 'rapid-decision government'.

The concern within the bureaucracy over Whitlam's style of government was such that a 'confidential' note in the department's files from secretary John Bunting to his assistant secretary was distinctly uneasy. Moreover, so disturbed was Bunting at the speed and method of the decisions being taken, he decided to mark it of relevance to 'future historians'. Bunting wrote:

> For record purposes, including for future historians, I would like you to have it properly recorded in our running papers that the McMahon Government went to election on 2 December; that the first Whitlam Ministry was formed on 5 December; that it consisted of two Ministers only—saying their names and portfolios; that it was designed to be an interim Ministry; that it held no Cabinet meetings but that it nevertheless made and promulgated certain decisions.'

Casting doubt over the methods of decision-making and the pace with which such decisions were being made, Bunting suggested to his deputy, 'It would be useful to get from the press or the prime minister's office the daily statement of decisions or actions.' As a senior public servant who had worked with prime ministers since Robert Menzies, and who was well schooled in the proper methods of public administration, the the first Whitlam ministry appeared deeply unorthodox to Bunting. It indeed appears as if the public service, and in particular the Cabinet Secretariat, which had hitherto been responsible for administering the cabinet, keeping proper records of its discussions and implementing its decisions, had suddenly found itself on the outer. The public service was being kept in the dark by its new master. Moreover, the decisions that Whitlam made in those first 14 days were far from insignificant—rather these were among the more groundbreaking decisions of any government since Federation. It is concerning that no cabinet meetings were held to make such decisions, nor was there any proper record kept of such decisions or the processes surrounding them. Indeed, the cabinet papers include what Bunting had asked his deputy for—merely a list of media releases issued by Whitlam and Barnard. Yet Whitlam saw no grounds for concern, at the time arguing in a televised 'Report to the Nation' that every decision was in response to 'our unmistakable mandate'.

While 'rapid-decision government' was the method adopted by the first Whitlam ministry, the second was comparatively considered. The first meeting of the full cabinet on 20 December made just five decisions: it adopted standard procedures and practices for cabinet, noted the 'requirements and conventions' of public duty and private interest of ministers in government decision making, appointed several permanent heads, and established a procedure for award variations in government employment.

The first full cabinet meeting also decided to support the claim by public servants before the Public Service Arbitrator for an extra week's annual leave. This was the first and only decision by the Whitlam government in 1972 that was based on a submission, and where the public service was comprehensively consulted. Newspaper reports at the time noted that the Public Service Board had

previously opposed the application for extra leave. Despite these objections, on 18 December, Whitlam indicated to the Chair of the Public Service Board, through his adviser Peter Wilenski, that he wanted a 'comprehensive analysis' prepared on the proposal in the form of a submission, which could go to cabinet the next day. Noting time constraints, Cooley indicated that they would do their best, and a submission was prepared. The Cabinet Secretariat indicates in a 'Note for File' that if a submission could not be prepared by the following day, and be ready for cabinet, Whitlam had resolved to 'make his own decision ...'. The departmental file makes it clear that although the public service carried out the wishes of government, the demands and style of administration were not what they were used to.

WHITLAM SOON TURNED his attention to the structure of the bureaucracy, causing further disquiet among senior mandarins. Brian Johns, writing at the time, labelled the changes as '... the most drastic remodelling of the public service in the post-war years ...' New departments were created and several were abolished but, according to Johns, senior public servants baulked at several of Whitlam's changes. The Department of External Territories was to be merged into the Department of Foreign Affairs, but it remained in place after bureaucratic resistance. Similarly, the government had planned to split the Trade and Industry Department, with Foreign Affairs assuming responsibility for trade matters. Johns wrote that '... while the top public servants are malleable on policy, they are determined defenders of their institutional homelands. Departments can be renamed, even regrouped, but our mandarins, predictably, resist to the end the abolition of their power bases.'

In its first 14 days, the Whitlam government clearly and unequivocally moved decisively on many of the issues that the McMahon cabinet had found difficulty with. In subsequent years, Whitlam and his ministers would make additional far-reaching decisions in many areas. Whitlam offered a visionary agenda, which dramatically altered Australian political life. However, within six months the Australian people had begun to grow weary of the radical reform agenda and the frenzied style of government. Before the constitutional deadlock began, the public's support for the government had declined rapidly. By July 1973, Labor was trailing the Coalition in the Morgan Gallup Poll. Despite winning a second term in 1974, with a small swing against the government, Labor was largely behind in the polls for much of the period. In almost every poll from July 1973 until November 1975, Labor was behind the Liberal-Country Party opposition under Billy Snedden and later Malcolm Fraser.

Apart from policy, in many ways the Whitlam government's later problems stemmed from the administrative practices it adopted in those first 14 days. Whitlam was suspicious of the public service after 23 years of conservative government. Further, he believed that there was a lack of interest in, and expertise for, some newer areas of policy he championed. Whitlam appeared unwilling to listen to advice or to include the public service in the processes and decisions of his government. Whitlam suffered from a failure to consult, to debate, to listen and an absolute belief that he was right. While the records show that McMahon suffered from a lack of decisiveness in cabinet, Whitlam's decisions suffered because he was too decisive and disinclined to debate.

The incredible number of decisions made by the first Whitlam ministry took place without any cabinet discussion or debate, nor any input from the public service. Nevertheless, political historians Lloyd and Reid (*Out of the Wilderness: The return of Labor*, Casell, 1974) argue that '... it would not have been possible to symbolise the regeneration of an infirm political party in a more impressive way.' Indeed most of the major policy directions of the whole Whitlam period were foreshadowed in those first two weeks. However, equally important is the 'style and character' of the government. Lloyd and Reid write:

> If many of the virtues of the second Whitlam government were present in the first ministry, so also do many of its flaws show up in the prototype. Most importantly, a pattern of decision-making appropriate to two men in a hurry and with little time for rational assessment was carried over into the working of the full ministry. Preoccupation with the number of decisions, piling one on the other without proper attention to coordination or coherent strategy, was one of the major flaws of the two Whitlam governments.

While the records show that McMahon suffered from a lack of decisiveness in cabinet, Whitlam's decisions suffered because he was too decisive and disinclined to debate.

Whitlam's key adviser, Peter Wilenski, acknowledged that the '... inherent problems in Labor's programs were compounded by their mode of implementation.' Despite making several spending commitments in its first few days, there is no evidence in the papers that any advice was sought on the state of the economy or the impact on the government's budgetary position.

While the method of government throughout 1973 was more conventional, the speed of government remained the same. The papers show a bureaucracy under incredible pressure and a ministry seemingly burdened with more paperwork than ever before. In 1973, the cabinet considered 823 formal submissions, made 692 decisions not based on submissions and passed 221 acts of legislation—more than any government ever before. The initiatives were often so ambitious that there were disagreements over their implementation and concern in the public service over how they would be funded. Yet Whitlam sailed through. While noting the large amount of business, he maintained his reforming zeal, all under the authority of fulfilling the 'mandate'.

The implementation of his 'mandate' was central to the government's fortunes. Whitlam's speech-writer Graham Freudenberg argues that this was '... fundamental to any understanding of what the Labor government did, why it behaved in the way it did, why it succeeded, why it failed and, ultimately, why it fell.' Indeed, the beginnings of the Whitlam government's eventual destruction were evident in those first 14 days. ■

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Held captive

Irish Political Prisoners, 1848–1922, Theatres of War, Sean McConville.
Routledge, 2003. ISBN 0 415219 91 4, RRP $200

In the context of current debate about how to secure Australia against terrorist threat, it is interesting to reflect that Australia has been integrated in the history of modern terrorism for a very long time. Way back in April 1876, six Fenian prisoners, all of whom were serving life sentences, escaped from the colony of Western Australia on board the barque *Catalpa*. Their escape was the fruit of 'secrecy, careful planning and financial control' and its achievement a persuasive argument in the minds of a particular segment of Irish nationalist militants for the application of the same organisational principles to the dynamiting of British cities. 'Scientific warfare' is what they called it, back then, out of confidence in the capacity of a well-placed stick to eliminate legislators instead of 'innocent soldiers'. Ironically, the planning, fundraising, recruitment and training for the 1880s Dynamitards campaign to destroy the centres and symbols of power in Britain all took place on United States soil.

Who now knows about the climate of fear in England, the emergency Bill to control the possession and use of explosives, and the attacks on train stations, the Home Office, Foreign Office, Colonial Office, the Local Government Board, military barracks, Scotland Yard, London Bridge and *The Times*. The name of the Bin Laden-like figure, O'Donovan Rossa, and the organisation he directed has disappeared from public memory; in British cities, the 'deep and profound disgust with Ireland and her people', which in the 1880s displaced a growing sympathy for Ireland, has in turn given way to a mood that accommodates Irish theme pubs and Irish rock stars, even when it tires of events in Belfast.

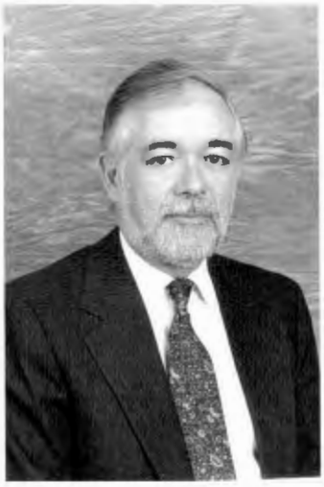
Whatever about repeating itself, history certainly echoes, and you can hear those resonances in a recently published account of Irish political prisoners in British jails during the three quarters of a century leading up to the declaration of the Irish Free State in 1922. Sean McConville's *Irish Political Prisoners, 1848–1922: Theatres of War* surveys the crimes, the prison experiences and the penal ideas that governed the treatment of these prisoners. The book arrives, at least implicit at a recommendation to democratic governments: locking up (and/or executing) your political opponents is not inevitably a good idea, because that way you grant them political longevity and even, possibly, political triumph. As a rule of thumb it seems to hold, when you consider not just the Irish Free State and Eamon de Valera but also Nelson Mandela and Xanana Gusmao, along with Aung San Suu Kyi in her domestic prison and Yasser Arafat confined by checkpoints and security fences. The prisoners at Guantanamo Bay have yet to prove it but the United States Government might well attend to the observations Sean McConville makes of the Irish Free State's attempts to punish generations of Irish rebels—and the State's obliviousness to the lessons taught by its own historical experience.

Irish Political Prisoners begins with another Australian connection, in the sentencing to transportation to Van Dieman's Land of the 1848 Young Irelander leadership, who had imagined that their self-sacrifice would awaken demoralised people to political ambition. Of course they failed spectacularly but in their story, McConville says, he found a nascent theory: that 'the closer one gets to a proper democratic state, proper popular representation and so on, the more intolerant the state will become. The stronger the mandate of the state, as validated through the ballot box, the less room it has to compromise and the less reason it has to compromise'. In the case of the Young Irelanders, the government was astute enough to avoid creating martyrs, commuting the traditional death sentence for treason (hanging, beheading, and quartering), to transportation for life. All were gentlemen of one degree or another, and having spared them from the gallows it behoved the government to treat them as such. 'I suppose removing somebody from their everyday life, especially if they have an interest in politics, to a remote corner of the earth, was a punishment, but in terms of material punishment, they weren't really punished. They sailed out to Van Dieman's Land in better conditions almost than anybody apart from a colonial governor. They had their own cabins: do you know what it would have been like to have your own cabin on one of those little sailing ships?' McConville makes much of the comparative privilege the Young Irelanders enjoyed, and of the 'ingratitude' of some of them. He points out for example that John Mitchel's partial fettering as he boarded the convict ship became the myth of 'Mitchel, bound in chains'. A footnote records that this 'myth' was given life in the first instance by Gavan Duffy immediately after Mitchel's transportation, and regenerated by Mitchel himself five years later, when he hit the speech circuit in America as a liberated man. Even if the British authorities were not prepared to treat the Young Irelanders as ordinary convicts, it was rhetorically useful to invoke the image of such degradation.

This is a big book, 820 pages, with copious footnotes, and for a good part of it McConville's theory seems to stand up. 'As we advance through the story, he says, because of changing political circumstances, because of the changing class nature of the people who came, the types of punishment also changed. It is fair to say that by the time the late Fenians are imprisoned, they were imprisoned under extremely arduous conditions.' Those conditions were the terms of ordinary imprisonment of criminals during the 1860s and one of the Fenians was Michael Davitt, who later testified before the Kimberley Commission to the grotesqueries of the British penal regime, designed as it was to crush the spirit. McConville's recounting of Davitt's experience (and of the Fenians' generally) makes for unpleasant reading, in the descriptions of terrible deprivation and cruelty and in its tale of the recruitment even of medical personnel to the administration's implacable logic of suspicion. (Prisoners in Irish jails were allocated much smaller bread allowances, just in case Famine victims

sought prison as a solution to their hunger.) The prison doctor at Mountjoy in Dublin was an exception: in a suppressed report he insisted on the connection between insanity, prolonged confinement and severe discipline, and when his report made its way into the public domain, forcing some improvements in the prison regime faced by the Fenians, he was removed from his post on a pretext.

Among Michael Davitt's achievements was his escape from the madness that in the end afflicted or threatened so many of his fellow nationalist prisoners, and McConville credits him with 'a touch of the Mandela's': 'Somebody who had gone through this great ordeal but with no bitterness, no exaggeration, no hysteria, no self-magnification, and quite apart from his influence on Irish nationalism, he had an influence on English penal measures to deal with ordinary criminals because he could speak humanely and decently, but not sentimentally, about criminals.' Irish nationalist prisoners invariably found their encounter with the general run of the English prison population distressing—it became an element of their 'martyrdom' and, as some British authorities recognised, 'led to a higher and even exaggerated sense of [their] position'. After the 1916 Rising, however, that encounter was minimal, as the state compromised in its treatment of nationalist prisoners while not admitting them to political prisoner status. (A War Office memo did describe them as 'prisoners of war'.) This is the point, McConville says, where his nascent theory came undone. 'The thesis that I started out with, that the closer we get to popular democracy the more repressive, is turned on its head. They [De Valera, Michael Collins, etc.] certainly weren't treated oppressively. Eamon de Valera in particular managed to turn the prison inside out.' McConville is unsure whether De Valera's inventive disruptiveness was 'out of a spirit of natural rebelliousness, or as part of a strategy to continue the struggle in prison' but he is certain about its disabling impact on the prison system. With De Valera 'inside', the prison commissioners found themselves negotiating with a prisoners' committee, an unprecedented event in English prison history. Nevertheless, only a few years later when the Anglo-Irish War had broken out, more than 2000 men were held in Irish internment camps and a spate of executions was under way. The closer we get to popular democracy, it may be, the more incoherent is government response and the more surely public sympathy is engaged. On 14th March 1921, a crowd of 20,000 people fell to its knees outside Mountjoy Prison as the bells tolled for each execution.



Three or four thousand documents, says McConville, provided the ground of his book. This assiduous poring over the archives enables him to pin his characters often to their flaws, but occasionally to their grandeur (as in the case of Michael Davitt), sometimes to their political nous (William Gladstone recognised that imprisonment alienated moderate opinion) and sometimes to the truly unexpected: recently released documents show that King George V intervened repeatedly in the case of the Lord Mayor of Cork, Terence MacSwiney, urging the government to exercise clemency. MacSwiney was on hunger strike in Brixton Prison (where he was visited by Archbishop Daniel Mannix) in protest at his 'illegal' arrest in Cork on 16 August 1920. While the government was determined not to give in, the King's concern was the 'increasing spirit of retaliation and revenge' that prevailed and the 'misery which at the present time casts a shadow over the daily life of the Irish people.' MacSwiney died on 25 October, after a hunger strike lasting 74 days. From his perspective, writes McConville, the contest had been one not of vengeance but of endurance. He quotes a speech by MacSwiney: 'it is not they who can inflict most but they who can suffer most can conquer. ...Those whose faith is strong will endure to the end and triumph.'

In the extraordinary accrual of reference and fact it is difficult to always discern continuing motifs. McConville leaves the task to the reader since his book comes abruptly to an end with the release of prisoners following the signing of the Treaty in December 1921. (A second volume is intended, dealing with post-independence Irish prisoners to 2000.) But there are some threads: through the 75 years from 1848, the authorities invariably found the Irish bothersome, and the limits were almost invariably—in the end—stretched. The Irish were always determined to distinguish themselves as political prisoners and the authorities to cast them as common criminals. Those detained were mostly younger men, middle class and at least reasonably educated. Many of them had committed acts of violence or had conspired to commit acts of violence. Often they distinguished themselves in prison by their discipline, character and bearing. Their sense of purpose validated suffering and self-sacrifice. In varying and increasingly focused ways they invoked a distinctive Irish identity. By De Valera's time, in the words of one British authority, 'they are bound together [in large numbers] by the common tie of their race and ideals, their cause, and their suffering, and they are permitted to study Gaelic which alone feeds their enthusiasm for their cause.'

The overriding continuing motif is the question of justice and the capacity of politics, as distinct from law, to deliver it. Sean McConville admires Gladstone's commitment to politics as a way of translating the ethical nature of the State into everyday life. He didn't vote for Tony Blair but, he says, 'I think of all the British Prime Ministers in the 20th century, he has taken the most Gladstonian approach to solving the Irish problem: I think politicians very often have to deal with a scale that doesn't balance and they have to be satisfied with that and the frustrations of that and Tony Blair has been prepared to take a view that the solution has been its own morality in a way. [It] somehow or other justifies all that could be portrayed as shoddy deals with violent and wicked people getting away with their deeds—there is a greater good coming at the end of it if I can write an end to this story.' It's hard not to admire that breadth of view. ■

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Thirty years of war

FEW OF US CAN say we've liberated a city. John Simpson did. Speaking as he entered Afghanistan's capital in November 2001, the BBC World Affairs Editor said that it was 'extraordinarily exhilarating to be liberating a city'. Interviewed next, the British Home Secretary David Blunkett said, 'I'm still reeling here from the news that the BBC and John Simpson have taken Kabul.' Fair call.

It was a remark about which Simpson later said he was 'very, very, very embarrassed', but he also took the opportunity to accuse those media outlets (not to mention military forces) who were 'hours and hours and hours behind us' of 'sour grapes'.

The episode gives a good measure of the man, a man with a Shakespearean sense of theatre and not a lot of tact.

A veteran of over 30 years and 30 wars, John Simpson was once threatened with liquidation—not corporate mind you, but corporal. By someone with both the malice and the means: Chaldean Christian and former Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, Tariq Aziz.

'I was probably a bit tactless in asking him questions. It was during the 1991 bombing ... We hadn't seen him for some days. I was determined to get some word out of him. So I just followed him down the corridor, asking him the same questions. He said at the end if I asked another question he'd have me liquidated. I just thought, well, he might do what he says. I went away.'

One rather gets the feeling that after a Palestinian gun to the head, being gassed in the Iran-Iraq war, shot at in Tiananmen Square, and taking 14 pieces of American shrapnel in a missile attack this year that killed his translator, it takes a fair bit to make John Simpson go away.

Aziz could have taken a tip from former British prime minister Harold Wilson who opted not to liquidate Simpson but rather just to punch him. The young Simpson had asked if Wilson were about to call an election.

Simpson's latest book *The Wars Against Saddam: The Hard Road to Baghdad* has just landed on the shelves of Australian bookstores. Those wanting to immerse themselves in the good cheer of platitudinous certainty this Christmastide should avoid it; those wanting to put both bleeding hearts and rednecks off their left-over plum pudding should stock up. Simpson will not permit a banal analysis along the lines of: 'ancient peace-loving culture—controlled by mad dictator—overthrown by Western forces [wholly liberators or wholly looters]—ancient peace-loving culture thrives again.' It is neither Hussein, nor Bush and Blair and Howard, who Simpson has in his sights; his target is simple-minded sloganeering.

For instance, Simpson is under no illusion about the Iraqi culture. Act One (the book unfolds in acts, not chapters) is called 'Iraq's bloodstained history'.

'It's a country with a very violent past', says Simpson. 'Lots of ferocious little city states fighting each other, turning into big empires, collapsing, new empires forming, violent gods, violent leaders. That is the history of Iraq—a history of violence, and of violent leaders.'

Simpson does nevertheless have much to say about Bush and Blair and their merry men.

'I'm sure Blair wouldn't have gone in for it if he didn't believe that they had the weapons. I don't think it was a cynical exercise on his part. I think Blair was a true believer.' Will Blair survive the fallout? 'I suspect that Blair will survive—he has survived reasonably well. I think he's going to be permanently damaged by it, winged by it. Everybody will always remember that this is what happened to him and why it happened.'

As for the Americans, Simpson is a little more critical. 'If it hadn't been for the United States on two completely different occasions, Saddam would have gone down. On two occasions they saved him, and so it's hard for them now to grumble about him, although they seem to manage.'

Hussein's first US rescue, according to Simpson, came in 1986 during the Iraq-Iran conflict. 'The Iranians invaded the Faw Peninsula, took it over—that was a stunning victory for them. Saddam was absolutely on the ropes and the British, the Americans, the French, the Germans, weighed in to help Saddam because they didn't like the idea that Iran was going to win. So they saved his bacon there.'

America's next omission Simpson seems to feel more bitterly: 'In 1991 after the Gulf War, when George Bush Senior said that Iraqis should rise up against Saddam, they did, and our friend Colin Powell was the one who persuaded George Bush not to give them any support. So those revolutions which would have undoubtedly succeeded, collapsed for lack of American support.'

THE IRAQIS HAVE not forgotten this, according to Simpson. Act Three is called 'The Uprisings and U.S. Betrayal'. Simpson, like many others including Bush, Blair and Howard, had been sure that the allies would be greeted as liberating heroes. But the betrayal of ten years earlier was still vividly in the Iraqi memory. 'I was certain that when the Americans invaded, they and the British and the Australians would be regarded as saviours and, well, it happened a bit but it didn't happen anything like I was certain it would.'

It was not just the 1991 betrayal that fed this ambivalence. The Iraq into which Bush's armies marched, or rather crawled, was also a country crippled by sanctions. Simpson is less than enthusiastic about this strategy. 'I've seen them in too many countries to like them', he says. 'Where they're successful they do awful damage to the weakest people in society, while the regime, whatever it might be, gets away with everything, and lives high on the hog. Secondly I just think it eats away at a country, even though actually for the most part sanctions don't work terribly well. Governments usually manage to get everything they need at a higher price, and again, the

price is paid by the poorest and weakest in society. It never has quite the effect that everybody promises at the start.'

Had there not been sanctions, would there have been weapons of mass destruction? Simpson's response was reluctant, almost grudging. 'That is a possibility, yes, that might well be. This is an historic kind of judgment, which is hard to be certain about. That is certainly possible, that is certainly why the sanctions were introduced.' He quickly adds, 'Whether, even given that, it was the right thing to impose them is another question, but yes, I think that is a possibility, certainly.'

Simpson is pessimistic about the prospects for the United Nations in the wake of the war. The Iraq episode 'leaves it really looking as though it does what the United States wants it to do; that is the biggest danger for the UN. This is not after all meant to be an institution which serves the interests of one particular country. Something has to be done about that, if the United Nations is to keep its self-respect and the respect of [member] countries. The Islamic countries feel that the UN doesn't operate in their favour at all.'

Simpson seems worried about America's commitment to reconstruction. 'I think the danger is that having found itself in this position, the Americans are going to get increasingly anxious about it, and politicians are going to come up who say the only answer is to get out, and then, as we saw in Vietnam, they could get out really, really quickly, without proper planning and organisation. Leaving a hastily got-together army from the UN or anybody else who'll send soldiers might be equally as dangerous.

'When the Americans get out of a place they get out of it so much that they scarcely leave a notice afterwards of what happened there.'

WHAT BEGAN AS a series of random acts of resistance in Iraq has turned into a 'planned, organised, fully operational war of resistance. As things stand, the Americans, the British, the Australians, the other UN outfits, do not have any serious intelligence about who's doing these bomb attacks, why, where or anything like that. That's a serious, serious disadvantage. You can't conduct an anti-terrorist war without intelligence.'

The same is true of the search for Saddam Hussein. According to Simpson, nobody really has any idea where he is. Simpson's best information is that he is with Bedouin tribes in the huge area to the west and north-west of Baghdad. Simpson has heard what he calls a 'very, very strong story' that there is an 'ultra secret bunker' which Hussein constructed. He is then said to have executed anyone who knew anything about it. 'I got that from one of his former prime ministers.'

'I'm certain that he thinks this is going to end up with him back in power again, even though I don't think that's very likely. I think that's what he's playing for.'

'He may well be protected and helped by the intelligence services of one or other of the neighbouring countries who just keep an eye on things for him.' Simpson reads a widespread ambivalence in the region. There are Middle Eastern leaders who are glad to see Hussein gone, but who nevertheless are worried that Iraq 'will fall into the American orbit'. He adds wryly, 'you can bet the Iranians are really stirring things up.'

Act Four is '11 September—the fallout'. Simpson referred to an extraordinary American opinion poll that claimed that 20 per cent of people thought that Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden were the same person. 'There never was any serious suggestion that Saddam Hussein, such an anti-religious character, could have had the remotest contact with Osama bin Laden. He's just the kind of person that Osama bin Laden wanted to overthrow. Yet, because we've managed to attach this "evil" notion so very clearly onto Saddam, that means "OK if he's evil, well he must have supported 11th September. That was evil, ergo he must be evil, and ergo there must be a connection". I do feel we've got to get away from that. I think there's an awful lot of projecting of our own failings and shortcomings and our own fears onto somebody else, onto Saddam in this case.'

And yet, Simpson is certainly no Hussein apologist. It was, he says, 'a horrible and fear-ridden regime. Sometimes when you read the anti-war people it's as though Saddam was a quiet little social democrat.' But he says that the book is 'an attempt to counter the idea that is so common [in Britain], and I think in Australia too, and certainly in the US, that Saddam is some kind of devil character. He's just a sort of mad dictator, that you don't need to take seriously. I've tried to present him as a real human being, not just a hate figure.'

'Everybody calls him by his first name as though they know him. And yet he's a very, very complex and interesting character and in some very restricted, limited way, is very impressive. I just don't think we should allow ourselves to lose sight of that simply because we don't like him.

'I just think it's important to see people as they are and not just do a lot of sloganeering about them.' ■

Joshua Puls is a lawyer and psychologist and is Chaplain of Newman College in the University of Melbourne.

John Simpson's latest book *The Wars Against Saddam: The Hard Road to Baghdad* is published by Pan Macmillan, 2003.

Minh Nguyen

US foreign policy:

Where to from here?

World order is in a state of flux not seen since the first half of last century. The way that the US executed regime change in Iraq is the realisation of a decade of change. Such actions pose a serious challenge to the multilateral system that has existed for nearly 60 years. The post-1945 system has been characterised by détente and containment, by multilateral institutions and by the compromise of power around the United Nations Charter. That system now risks being swept aside in a new era of unilateralism and ad hoc coalitions of the willing.

Proponents of unilateralism argue that the old order is no longer relevant, if it ever was, in guaranteeing peace and security in a hostile world. What the world needs now and into the future, so the argument goes, is a benign hegemony to maintain order and stability and to promote the universal values of freedom, democracy and free enterprise. This requires a leading nation with military supremacy, in this case the US, to defeat current and emerging enemies, unilaterally if necessary.

Some world leaders are troubled by this logic. The usually subtle Kofi Annan warned last September against what he called the 'lawless use of force'. 'We have come to a fork in the road', he said. 'Now we must decide whether it is possible to continue [with the present arrangements] or whether radical changes are needed.'

Annan left little doubt about the present disarray of world politics. But while we might be shocked by events of recent years, we should not be surprised. The world has been stewing, to adapt the old business analogy, like a frog in boiling water, oblivious to the changing temperature.

Over a decade ago the Cold War ended with the crumbling of the Soviet Bloc and its planned economies. This was a unique time in modern history, marked by turbulent change and a bankruptcy of political alternatives. With the monopolisation of world power, the Third World—which had benefited from playing off one superpower against the other—lost its bargaining leverage and became fractured and marginalised. Meanwhile, business interests became increasingly vocal and global in the absence of an ideological alternative. The triumph of the market hastened change and unleashed an unprecedented worldwide orgy of structural adjustment and deregulation.

The 1990s also saw the rise of groups resisting these trends. The Islamic terrorists are the most prominent, but there are others. Xenophobic and isolationist groups captured political discourse in many countries, including One Nation in Australia. They offered alternative views to the self-declared inevitability of cultural and economic integration. The same period produced the international protest movements against the excesses of global capitalism. These groups promoted globalisation of a different kind, one that prioritises human rights and sustainable development. By the late 1990s the world had become a battlefield of ideas.

It was in this context that two competing US foreign policy approaches developed. 'Pre-emptive unilateralism' is what we call the approach of the current US administration. Some Pentagon officials articulated this concept as early as 1992. This policy seeks to revamp the approach of the Clinton administration, which the former US ambassador to the UN, Madeline Albright, called 'assertive multilateralism'.

Assertive multilateralism works within the post-1945 international framework to exert US power while maximising consent and minimising risk. 'When the United States intervenes alone', Albright once said, 'we pay all of the costs and run all of the risks. When the UN acts, we pay one fourth of the costs and others provide the vast majority of troops.' Both views share a strong sense of America's mission to the world, but whereas assertive multilateralism represents the spread of American values in evolutionary terms, pre-emptive unilateralism understands it as a revolutionary activity.

The current revolutionaries in Washington do not entertain the notion that democracy and free enterprise is an automatic expression of economic facts or the inevitable product of history. 'Freedom is not determined by some dialectic of history,' says President Bush. 'Liberty, if not defended, can be lost.' While the unilateralist camp shares with the multilateralists foreign policy realism, the former is distinguished by its sense of moral purpose and historical urgency. Unilateralists see the absence of a rival superpower as an opportunity to transform the world radically and to create a capitalist version of 'permanent revolution'. President Bush calls his project a 'global democratic revolution'. The UN, a body that includes quite a few undemocratic characters, is a persistent source of frustration for the unilateralist agenda.

The importance of Iraq in this debate should not be overlooked. Iraq is not just another petrol station under new management, although it would be naive to dismiss the role of the global oil market in US calculations. Nor is the issue primarily about terrorism or weapons of mass destruction, reasons all but admitted to be 'bureaucratic' by the US Deputy Secretary of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz. It is both a moral necessity to clean up the Middle East and an opportunity to free the US from institutional restraints. Assertive multilateralism was undone in the same way it was introduced: by bombing Iraq.

History records the debate at the end of the first Gulf War about whether to carry the fight on to Baghdad or not, with serious implications for US strategy and world order. Bush Senior and National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft made the case clear. 'Going in and occupying Iraq, thus unilaterally exceeding the UN's mandate, would have destroyed the precedent of international response to aggression we hoped to establish.' The argument against invasion won in the end and set the terms of US engagement for years.

If world order is still in a state of uncertainty, Iraq is the testing ground. Foreign Islamic fighters pouring across the border understand the significance of Iraq. Loss of American life and the hindrance of nation-building in Iraq will be the biggest test for America's sense of purpose since Vietnam. But even as the situation deteriorates, the US is unlikely to abandon its hard-fought gains. The credibility of pre-emptive unilateralism is at stake. The US will wrestle the UN for the sake of it.

There are now signs, however, that the revolution is unravelling. The situation in the Middle East is deteriorating, as are any moral gains won via a quick victory over Iraq. No revolution can be sustained without short-term successes or popular domestic support. Social and political forces opposed to the new order are again on the move. The way the Muslim world reacts will affect how Americans see themselves. The way the UN and Europe, particularly the Franco-German alliance, reorientate themselves will affect US foreign policy options. Meanwhile, the people who mobilised the massive global peace protests last year are again meeting at the World Social Forum—in Mumbai, India, in January 2004—where they will work on alternatives to President Bush's vision. Over a year after the unveiling of the US's pre-emptive strategy, it is not just the UN that finds itself at the crossroads. All interested groups are reassessing their strategies. ■

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poetry

M. L. Escott

The Cubbyhouse

Overhead the loquat's
deep-veined leathery leaves
cast perennial shadows
across the perky gable.
Furry yellow fruit sheds to ground
squishy with decaying flesh
and slimy seeds.

Two children, mincing sideways
in their flimsy little sandals
the way mounted police dodge
protesters' marbles,
approach the picket fence
and miniature curtained windows.
Chameleon-like they enter,
fill the house with the rattle
of teacups and spoons,
and solemnly discuss housekeeping
interspersed with baby talk
as they feed their dolls
then tuck them up in cots
and read them stories.
One by one they tiptoe out
when their charges are asleep.

And over there a giant pumpkin
half-obscures the dark gaping
mouth of an air-raid shelter.
There'd been a war on and the men
divested of blue suits had thrown up
shovels of earth and sculpted the raw mound
now embraced by tendrils creeping
ever further on the quarter-acre block.

—M.L. Escott

photo essay
John Fish

South American journeys

1 The Iguazú Falls, Argentina
2 The church of San Francisco, Salta, Argentina
3 Sunset at Laguna Colorada, Salt Plains, Bolivia
4 The ring-tailed viscacha feeds for the camera, Salt Plains, Bolivia
5 Restoration workers on the Cathedral built between 1858–1878, Salta, Argentina

6 Alpacas by Laguna Hedionada, Salt Plains, Bolivia
7 Sunset at Laguna Colorada, Salt Plains, Bolivia
8 Village woman sifts and dries quinua grain, Salt Plains, Bolivia
9 Pink flamingoes on Laguna Cañapa, Salt Plains, Bolivia
10 Laguna Verde, Salt Plains, Bolivia

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Rufus Black

Community in an electronic age

Two SMS messages—one sad, the other joyful—captured for me the power and problems of communication in an electronic age. I received the first message a few years ago on a misty winter's morning on the shore of Lake Geneva. 'Gran has passed away peacefully. Lots of love, Mum and Dad.' The other was on my phone when I awoke in London in February this year. It was from my wife: 'I'm pregnant!'

I was very glad to receive both messages; it is not the sort of news you want to wait for. I was glad to receive the word, but it was only half or less of the communication; there was no-one to offer the comforting touch, and no belly to kiss. In some ways there is nothing new about this experience. Letters from the fronts of wars told an earlier generation of the passing of their sons. What is new is how much of our communication is done at a distance and how rapidly we have embraced it.

The shift to communicating electronically is not simply about increased frequency, it's about the mobility and variety of forms it can take—voice, fax, email, voicemail, SMS, mms and video. And the revolution is far from over. In its next phase, as voice recognition software improves, these different forms will merge. You can expect to have your email read out to you by your mobile phone and to record a message over the phone that will arrive as faxed text to a colleague.

Driving the communications revolution has been the plummeting cost of connecting. For example, a three-minute transatlantic call cost $US250 in 1930. By 1960 it had fallen to $50. Between 1970 and 1980 it went from the mid $40 range down to the $1 range and by the 1990s the cost could be expressed in cents.

There is no doubt that there has been enormous gain from this revolution. We are more connected that ever before. For Australians, cheap phone calls and flights have conquered the tyranny of distance.

In commercial terms the revolution is even more extraordinary. Cheaper, more sophisticated communications have changed the structure of organisations and markets by lowering the costs of co-ordinating commercial activity both nationally and internationally. Organisations have become more focused as cheaper communications have made outsourcing more economic, and more global, as cheaper communications, transport and information technology and falling tariffs have reduced the cost of distance.

Communications are changing the nature of organisations and markets, but what are they doing to the nature of communities and the ethical structure that secures them? We would do well to remember that the printing press was the precondition for the Reformation. Until people could possess their own version of the Bible in the vernacular it was impossible for religious authority to shift from the interpretation of the Church to the personal interpretation of the written word. When those shifts occurred, both the structure of society and nature of ethics changed irrevocably. Clearly the shifts created by electronic communication will be different to those of the Reformation, but perhaps no less important.

When people don't meet physically, there is an erosion of trust. The place where this is most obvious is the internet. Many people in the West already spend significant amounts of time in this world. What is distinctive about these relationships is that they are disembodied—people never need to meet physically. Or, more commonly, physical meeting becomes a less and less significant part of the relationship.

What are the limits of disembodied relationships? Advocates of the internet will argue that relationships in the 'online world' can be as rich as those in the 'offline world'. People certainly have significant relationships through the mediums of email and chat-rooms. Some of these conversations form, and many sustain, relationships in the 'offline' world. These possibilities for exchange will only grow as greater bandwidth enhances the quality of sight and sound.

However, what is missing when the body is absent is vulnerability. This is not to deny the psychological vulnerability that can be present in 'online' encounters. Nevertheless, in these encounters of the mind our physical self is never 'on the line'. Vulnerability and trust are inextricably linked, which means that a world with declining physical vulnerability is also one in which the landscape of trust is changing.

The same phenomenon, often in more subtle forms, is increasingly present in daily life. Notably, we use electronic communications to deliver the tough message. Partly that's because it's convenient. But we also find it easier to send an email with a message that we know will cause an upset rather than deal with someone face-to-face. Rarely do we see senior executives stand in front of a workforce they are about to retrench or restructure in wrenching ways and explain what they are doing.

As we become less accustomed to dealing with our vulnerability, our ability to trust is reduced and we start to withdraw from exposing ourselves to the physical presence of others. We become less comfortable dealing with conflict because conflict when we are physically present always has implicit within it a risk to our bodily selves. As we avoid conflict we become less able to deal with difference, dissent and plurality. We lose the levels of trust that enable us to speak openly and rely on others.

Speaking face-to-face not only grounds trust, it is also the basis of an ethics of empathy. An ethics of empathy is pivotal to sustaining community because it enables us to negotiate difference and conflict. It

begins with sympathy—when we recognise our common humanity in someone else. In that moment we recognise our ethical obligations towards them.

Empathy goes one step further. Empathy is not just understanding what it would be like to be ourselves in someone else's shoes, but also what it would be like to be them in their shoes.

In our transactional encounters through electronic media, both signs of our common humanity and of our diversity are obscured. When we deal remotely with people it is usually only their voice, the description of their circumstance and perhaps our memory of them that we encounter. At best video technology may give us an image.

What is missing are the numerous smaller clues, which we often don't even realise we notice—from seeing the key ring on the desk that shows they drive the same car to the twitch under the eyelid that betrays stress. It is these observations that create the moments of sympathy that enable me to recognise something of myself in someone else. Hidden also are the differences that enable me to enter their situation empathetically. It is the sympathetic and empathetic connections that even enemies make when they meet. That is why peace negotiations are conducted face-to-face and why the world is often surprised at the compromises each side will make. It is why when people aren't ready for peace they aren't ready to meet.

As greater use of electronic communication reduces our opportunity to discover our connections and limits our opportunities to practise observational skills that found an ethics of empathy, are we making ourselves a people who aren't ready for peace?

TRUST AND EMPATHY are not the only parts of the ethical structure of community put under strain in the electronic age. Because mobile communications allow last-moment changes to our plans, the fabric of commitment is also unravelling.

Consider the generation aged roughly 18–30. Hugh McKay calls this the Options Generation because an organising feature of their lives is that they seek to do whatever will keep their options open. They resist commitments—marriage, mortgages, careers or social engagements. Technology is clearly not the direct cause of this lack of commitment, however the mobile phone is its great enabler. It frees people to make last-minute decisions—not to attend if a better option appears.

It is not simply that we can get hold of people more easily. Reflect on when you are excusing yourself from a meeting or appointment. The best option is to have someone else do it for you. Failing that, we opt for voicemail, email or phone—anything that eases the awkwardness of saying face-to-face that we can't make it. I suspect the reason is that face-to-face makes it much harder to hide our real reasons for opting out.

The mobile phone also permits the Options Generation to create remarkably ephemeral social events, such as raves and protests. While there is appeal in the spontaneity and serendipity of these events, they do not amount to community. Their very spontaneity means that these groupings do not endure. To such groups we only give what we can get back in the moment. Where a group doesn't endure we won't provide others with time or resources, as we realise that we can expect nothing in return. We won't create what some call social capital—that reservoir of assistance that a community accumulates for the mutual benefit of its members.

Mobile phones also erode community in a more insidious way. With only a small percentage of mobile phone numbers listed in the white pages, the people who are accessible to us are increasingly only those we have chosen to exchange our mobile phone number with.

THE MOBILE PHONE also plays an important role in reducing the time for reflection. One of the many wise pieces of advice from my father was the idea of 'the bottom draw letter'—these are letters or notes written in anger, often in a healthy expression of frustration, which should never actually be sent. We need sustained moments to pause and reflect.

Our moments for reflection are rapidly disappearing. Partly because we are working longer and harder than ever before. Between 1964 and 1984 the percentage of the Australian workforce working more than 49 hours a week was constant at about 15 per cent. Since then it has been on an upward trajectory and now stands at over 20 per cent. Australian labour productivity grew at 13 per cent per year between 1980 and 1989. In the following ten years it grew at an average of 24 per cent a year.

One of the great enablers of this increased productivity has been communications technology, but it has come at a price. Emails and voicemails mean that there are always messages to be answered, and we feel an increasing compulsion to check and respond. Under this sort of pressure our very ability to pick up and respond to these messages anywhere and anytime means that we do. When I saw recently that British Airways is introducing

onboard in-seat email connections I despaired—one of the last sanctuaries from accessibility, where you genuinely get space to reflect and where I have some of my fresher thoughts, is about to be invaded.

This reduction of time to reflect is a problem for the ethical structure of community in a number of ways.

First, the immediacy of responses means we have no time for 'second thoughts'. These 'second thoughts' are critical because they are often about the wider effects of our decisions. When we suddenly set a demanding deadline for a piece of work, for example, do we reflect on how that will affect the commitments of people to their families?

Second, when we are constantly caught in what Harvard Professor Ron Heiftz calls the 'dance' and never have the opportunity to get on the dance hall 'balcony', we don't see the larger patterns. If you listen to stories of oil and mining companies caught out by human rights protesters you will find that many were so busy just running their business that they weren't seeing the patterns of social concern shifting.

Third, more and more of our communications are about co-ordinating activity rather than about letting someone else know who you really are. In the attics of the future I don't think we will find many bundles of emails tied with a ribbon because they are the treasured memories of a life. They don't carry the marks of the journey they have taken—no elephant stamp from India, no black postmark from a heavy-handed postmaster—and they don't provide a physical link to the person—no sense that this paper was once in one's lover's hands, no spidery writing that can only really be deciphered because you know the person well. Communication, rather than bringing us closer, making us more connected, will make us more distant.

If electronic communication risks eroding trust, empathy, commitment and reflection, how are we to respond? We can no more end email than we could have stopped the printing press.

Awareness of the risks is a good start because it allows us to make the thousand small choices that will help retain the balance. It allows us to recognise that it matters to turn up in the call centre or on the factory floor if we are a senior executive, to choose to deliver a difficult message in person, to carve out inviolable time in our diaries for reflection, to pause and find out how our colleagues are travelling.

We also need to re-ritualise the workplace. The passing of the tea trolley was one of many opportunities, now lost, to connect with workmates. To compensate, some workplaces now begin their day with a 'stand-up', in which everyone stands and says how they are in addition to what they are doing. If you have been at a stand-up and heard that a colleague has been awake half the night with a sick child, you can react with sympathy rather than fear their grumpiness later in the day. If this sounds like a time commitment that will be the straw that breaks the camel's back, then the camel's back has long since been broken.

It is not only in workplace rituals that we need to re-embody our communications, it is also in social and religious rituals. And perhaps the greatest and most important of those rituals in Western culture is the Mass. The very act of regularly turning up for the Mass creates community and social capital. More deeply, it is an invitation for us to be physically present to one another and to God. You simply cannot celebrate mass over the Internet. Every time we physically gather to receive the Eucharist we are once again being entrusted with the body of Christ. We are being entrusted with the bodily care of one another—to care for one another as vulnerable people.

The Mass is centrally about bodiliness, vulnerability and trust. This is startlingly clear if we reflect on the biblical passages that record its institution. Jesus took a loaf of bread and said: 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' We often tend to read this as though it's a one-sided transaction—Jesus is giving his body to us. But that giving is in fact a trusting—Jesus is entrusting his body to us. Jesus makes this disconcertingly apparent when he ends his words of instruction saying: 'But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table.' This is the type of trusting that is necessary for a truly intimate relationship—for a relationship that is not based on power, but on love.

Whatever else the Mass is, it is essentially ethical and political. It calls us to care for one another and all those we physically encounter as part of our daily lives. It is a reminder that true intimacy and trust with God and with one another is founded upon this type of trusting physical encounter. In the contemporary world this is profoundly counter-cultural and, in an age of electronic communication, profoundly important if we are to remain a connected community. ■

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Acknowledgements: I would like to acknowledge four current and former colleagues for conversations that gave birth to important thoughts in this paper: Cameron Hepburn, Scott Keller, David Dyer and Jules Flynn.

Juliette Hughes

Charting a future course

When she rises to talk, Dawn Cardona's deep voice rings effortlessly through the meeting room. As the new principal of Darwin's Nungalinya Theological College she is touring NSW, Adelaide and Melbourne to heighten awareness of its work. She mentions triumphantly that one of their students, Theodore Tipaloura, is to be made a deacon in early December at his home parish on Bathurst Island. Then there is a sardonic grin: she wonders if she'll need a new passport to go there, since the Howard government has just excised Bathurst Island from Australia in order to prevent some desperate Turks from claiming asylum. Cardona is unsurprised; she is no stranger to the vagaries of government.

At a young-looking 40, she is probably the youngest person in the meeting room at St John's Southgate on an unseasonably warm and muggy November morning. St John's is a Lutheran church, much sought after by musicians for its excellent acoustics, tucked into the new brutalist developments around Melbourne's southern and docklands area. Over the last 15 years, hotels, offices and shops have mushroomed, along with the casino and the kind of apartment blocks that are favoured by youngish lawyers and advertising folk with no pets or children. St John's is just as new, but its timber fittings inside and bits of garden outside make an oasis in the grey concrete tourist traps that surround it.

The space is late 20th century but the people who have come to see Cardona, are drawn firmly from the first half. Kind grey heads nod appreciatively as she talks; lined faces are bright and eager with goodwill. It is obvious that she is comfortable around the kind of enthusiasm that Catholics are often embarrassed about, and that Protestants can do very well.

Cardona looks as though she fits this postmodern space well. She represents many new things, many firsts: the first Catholic, the first woman principal of Nungalinya. She is one of nine children, a single mother, who likes self-help books, loves fishing and never forgets her Bible. 'I keep it close to my heart,' she says. 'My mum was a strict Catholic. I always try to live by what it says. I see myself as here to do the work of Jesus.'

She has entered into her job at a turbulent time for education in Australia, when higher education finds itself under the scrutiny of those whose first priority is not the education of the poor, the Indigenous or the unusual. At St John's that day, the whole Nungalinya endeavour looked to be under threat.

Cardona told us briefly about the Nungalinya story. The college was founded in 1973 by the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) and the Methodist Overseas Missions (later the Anglican and Uniting churches). The purpose was to train Indigenous people for leadership in their own communities. In 1994 the Catholic Church joined by invitation. Indigenous participation has always been a priority: by 1977 there was an Indigenous lecturer and now the principal is Indigenous. Since 1983, the majority of the Nungalinya Council members have been Indigenous.

The secret of Nungalinya's unique success is that it has built on Indigenous strengths. Its Textile Arts School has been an enormous success, along with its groundbreaking School of Family and Community Services, but these were the very areas threatened by severe funding cuts.

Nungalinya is dependent on Northern Territory government funding. The NT government receives the money to do this from the Commonwealth government GST allocations. But in November 2003, said Cardona, they were advised by government of a redirection of funding. This meant that the Recurrent Funding allocated to private registered Training Organisations was at risk. The threatened closure of two schools—Textile Arts and Family and Community Services—meant that Nungalinya students' commitment to a course of education would be interfered with. It is very difficult to get some box-ticking education bureaucrats to understand the needs of Indigenous students in higher education. Attendance criteria that are framed for urban Australians take no account of Indigenous cultural imperatives: for instance, if a death occurs, a whole family group must leave college for weeks to mourn the person properly. If the college were inflexible about such matters, then no Indigenous person could do a

higher ed course and still remain faithful to his or her culture. And it was the unique, Indigenous-rich curriculum that was under attack: at one point it was decreed that the textile course should be a duplicate of a Melbourne one.

However, Cardona has since shown her steel. After leaving the southern states she lobbied politicians carefully and persistently. On 2 December she met with NT government representatives. The news, surprisingly enough, was good: funding was made available for their courses via Competitive Response Funding, allocated on a yearly basis. They would have to fulfil actual contact hours of delivery but could negotiate if these were not met.

The news was welcome but that made the earlier rejection puzzling. 'The information we initially received indicated no funding at all', said Cardona. 'Was it a misinterpretation or uncommunicative information? For me, I understood and so did my two colleagues that there was to be no funding.'

The turnaround was complete, and they went to Theodore's diaconate with joy, and without needing new passports, and prayed for all the poor and desperate people caught in the snares of government. They were content to let their good fortune remain mysterious.

In the meantime Cardona can get back to the real job, that of running an ecumenical college that caters actively to Indigenous culture, without worrying that it will all fall to pieces, for this year at least.

SHE LIKENS WORKING in an ecumenical environment to making a cake. 'The answer is in the recipe stemming from the thoughts of Marie Vines,' she says. 'Think of it as making a cake. First let's put in some faith and hope—the Anglican, Uniting and Catholic Churches, a dash of culture—remote, rural, southern, Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people, a dollop of achievement—education, training, learning, and ministry. Now mix it all together so it's well blended, place in the sun and let it nurture with encouragement, commitment and dedication, then watch it rise to success.'

Nungalinya is still vulnerable. Like many wondrous things in this country that exist only because governments support it, it is subject to whims, fashions and vagaries among the box-tickers. It has been a success for Indigenous people because it respects their culture. People go there because they want to; old ghosts of past missionary coercion and wrongdoing have no place there except to be discussed freely. One of the participants at the St John's meeting mentioned that when she had worked in Papua New Guinea, it was the fundamentalist missions who created problems, 'threatening them if they did their traditional dances'. Nungalinya's unique gift is to convey Christianity with utter respect for Indigenous wisdom. Cardona says that each student works out the balance for himself or herself, that one culture impinges on another in completely individual ways.

She still marvels at the change of heart, and the hope for the future:

> On Tuesday when we met with the Government it was the day the tides were 0.0m—the day when Old Man Rock appears—a day of strength, solidarity and continuity. That's Nungalinya—solid rock standing on sacred ground. ■

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Anthony Ham

The new anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism is one of the most powerful words in the English language, a word resonant with the murder of more than six million Jews before and during World War II. In sheer numbers alone, the genocide practised upon the Jews of Europe is recorded history's most grievous crime against humanity. It all happened because of an anti-Semitism that fed off conspiracy theories and an abhorrent nexus between a person's race or religion and his or her right to live.

Fast forward nearly six decades and there are deep-seated fears that anti-Semitism may again be on the rise.

In early November 2003, a German MP and the commander of Germany's Special Forces were forced to resign after the former made comments linking Jews with atrocities committed during the days of the Soviet Union. The well-known Greek composer, Mikis Theodorakis, recently described Jews as the root of all evil. His comments came barely a month after the outgoing Malaysian prime minister Mahatir Mohammed stated at a conference of Muslim leaders that Jews are 'arrogant' and 'rule the world by proxy'. Little seems to have changed since deeply offensive conspiracy theories, that Jews had been somehow responsible for the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center on 11 September 2001, gained widespread currency in the Arab world.

As is often the case in a climate where racist comments are widely aired, attacks against Jewish targets are on the rise across Europe. This year alone, attacks against synagogues, Jewish cemeteries and other Jewish symbols have been reported in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Austria and Belgium. These attacks have ranged from defacing Jewish memorials with anti-Jewish propaganda and Nazi slogans to attempted suicide bombings.

Jewish communities elsewhere have been similarly targeted, to even more devastating effect. On 15 November, the bombing of a synagogue in Istanbul killed 20 people. In April 2002, a truck bomb exploded at the El-Ghriba synagogue on the island of Jerba in Tunisia. Nineteen people were killed.

That all of these attacks have been widely condemned does not temper the disquiet that the spectre of an old hatred may be re-emerging. As a people, no-one has suffered from racism as greatly as the Jews, and renewed fears of anti-Jewish violence are very real among the Jewish diaspora and in Israel itself.

There are, however, at least two important elements of the popular debate which must be considered alongside the recent outbreaks of anti-Semitism.

The first is the word itself. The literal meaning of anti-Semitism means racism directed towards the Semitic people or those who descend from Shem. Counted among the Semites are Arabs and Assyrians, as well as Jews. On one reading, the exclusion of Arabs and Assyrians from the world of Semites is a mere semantic distinction.

And yet, the fact that 'anti-Semitism' has come to exclusively refer to racism against Jews has the dangerous potential to separate racism into different, even unequal categories. The rising tide of 'Arabophobia' or 'Islamophobia', which gathered unprecedented pace after September 11, carries none of the power to shock that anti-Semitism, a term forever linked to the Holocaust, possesses.

While mainstream political leaders across Europe have publicly denounced the attacks against Jews, racism against Arabs and Muslims has become almost institutionalised in the West. In the aftermath of September 11, thousands of people with Arab-sounding names, and with origins that lie in Muslim countries, have been rounded up and detained incommunicado for indefinite periods and seemingly without legal rights. Although it no longer does so publicly, the current US administration has spoken of 'de-Arabising' the Middle East, while US Undersecretary of Defense, Douglas Feith, has talked of Israel's 'moral superiority' over its neighbours. And among those who daily police the Western occupation of Iraq is one Corporal Kevin Harnley who was quoted in the Western media as saying: 'Iraqis are the world's best dodgers and thieves—they are descended from a direct line of Ali Babas.'

If such words, such projects of cultural stereotyping, were to be directed against Jews, the outcry would, rightly, be widespread in its condemnation. But there have been few outcries in defence of Arabs and Muslims, no public denouncing of this form of anti-Semitism.

The point is not that the racism directed towards Arabs and Muslims is somehow worse than that which has been experienced by Jews. Nor does recognising the term is often misused in any way diminish the repugnant nature of anti-Semitic acts that *are* targeted at Jews. The point is, however, that both are equally repugnant. To enclose one within the definition of anti-Semitism, thereby evoking humankind's darkest days, while calling the other something else, is perhaps to suggest that some forms of racism are worse than others.

The second danger arising from the prevailing public use of the term 'anti-Semitism' is that it assumes that some people, by virtue of their race or religion, are somehow immune from criticism. It is a strange argument, one that seems to assert if your people have suffered from widespread racial violence or genocide, you cannot be criticised in perpetuity. Following this line of reasoning to its logical endpoint, the Tutsi-dominated government of Rwanda cannot be condemned for their role in fuelling the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, nor for their responsibility for large-scale human rights violations.

The Israeli government's dismissal of critics as anti-Semitic is an insidious means of stifling debate. Turning the spotlight around onto the accusers is an easy way to destroy credibility without having to address the issues in any substantive way. The equating of all opposition with an incitement to violence is, at its worst, an inverse form of racism, a

form of 'moral superiority'.

That such a belief should be sufficient to ward off criticism is a precedent as dangerous as anti-Semitism itself. Israeli government policy towards the Palestinian people includes extrajudicial killing, detention without trial, the destruction of houses and other collective punishments against the families of alleged suicide bombers, the strangling of the Palestinian economy, the construction of walls and settlements to separate Palestinians from their land in the name of security, and occupation of land which is not legally theirs.

WHEN PROTESTS AGAINST such actions are mounted by the international community, particularly by Europe, the response of the Israeli government is unanimous. When European foreign ministers recently issued a call for justice for the Palestinians, Natan Sharansky, a government minister who once spent years as a prisoner in Soviet labour camps, stated simply that 'Anti-Semitism has become politically correct in Europe'. Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon similarly did not address the substance of the allegations but instead said that 'What we are facing in Europe is an anti-Semitism that has always existed and it really is not a new phenomenon ... This anti-Semitism is fundamental, and today, in order to incite it and to undermine the Jews' right to self-defence, it is re-aroused.'

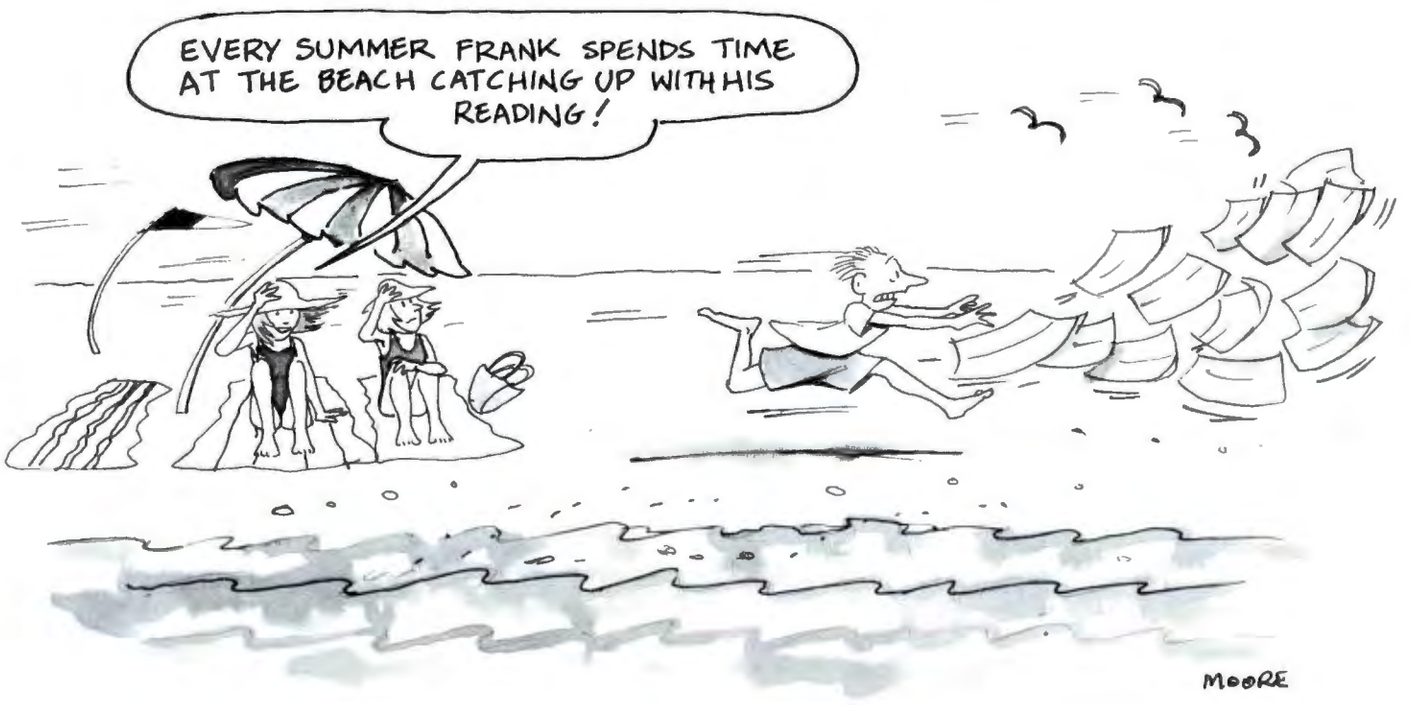
This is a prime minister who, barely a decade ago, claimed in an interview with *Time Magazine* that there was no such thing as the Palestinian people. And yet he decries as anti-Semitism (with justification) the hatred of those fundamentalists who seek the destruction of the state of Israel and deny Israel's right to exist. This is a prime minister whose own legal system condemned him as 'personally responsible' for the Sabra and Chatila massacres when he was Defence Minister during Israel's invasion of Lebanon in the early 1980s. Prime Minister Sharon evidently feels no hint of moral hypocrisy in describing suicide-bombers as anti-Semitic terrorists.

What is at issue here is not only whether those who seek the destruction of Israel by killing innocent Israeli people, or by attacking Jewish targets across the world, are guilty of anti-Semitic behaviour. There is little doubt that anti-Semitism is invariably behind such attacks. Such acts must be condemned in the strongest possible terms and the perpetrators brought to justice.

What is also at issue, however, is the casual manner in which some forms of racism are becoming acceptable. The misuse of the word 'anti-Semitism', the ease with which it can be invoked to deter criticism and the excision of Arabs from those who are the victims of such racism, resembles nothing so much as an intricate conspiracy theory levelled against an entire people. In their exclusivity and exclusion, such theories allow political opponents to be dismissed as evil rather than those who simply do not agree. This unwillingness to distinguish between those who seek change through violent means and those who seek reform through political debate also enables governments to sanctify some human rights violations as justifiable.

One of the tragic lessons of the Holocaust is that people of particular races and religions can be so degraded in the popular mind and by government policy that their very existence can be called into question. The Holocaust taught us that when racism becomes widely acceptable as a political tool, violence towards the victims of such racism can take hold and become seen as legitimate, even as a form of self-defence. But when people have said, as many have since World War II, that it must never be allowed to happen again, they were not just talking about the Jews. Whether we have learned that lesson remains to be seen. ■

Anthony Ham is *Eureka Street*'s roving correspondent.



Dewi Anggraeni

Asian relations

Australia's ambivalence towards Asia, J.V. D'Cruz and William Steele.
Monash University Press, 2003. ISBN 1 876 924 098, RRP $49.90

I NEVER THOUGHT I'D say this about a book: *Australia's ambivalence towards Asia* is not for the faint-hearted.

In the last few years, a number of books have been published looking into Australia's relationship with the other countries in the Asian region. It is fair to say the consensus is that Australia has problems fitting in.

Vin D'Cruz and William Steele's *Australia's ambivalence towards Asia* stands out, however. They consistently and relentlessly identify the reasons behind Australia's failure to be accepted as a neighbour by Asian countries. The subsequent report is disturbing, to say the least. Professor David Walker, from the school of Australian and International Studies at Deakin University, who provides the afterword, writes of *Australia's ambivalence* that:

> It disrupts many of the comfortable notions we may have formed about how best to interpret the relationship between Australia and Asia. I am right behind them in this enterprise.

Although the book focuses on Australia, it also projects Australia against the background of Western nations in general. Most of the discrepancies between professed ideology and practiced policy that abound in Australia can also be found in other nations that belong to the Western European intellectual and cultural tradition. However, some instances of glaring hypocrisy are idiosyncratically Australian.

The foreword by Ashis Nandy, a professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi, does not prepare the reader for the contents of the book itself, because while it is incisively critical of Australia's stance and attitudes towards Asia, the blows are somewhat broken by his delightful wit and humour.

> Australia may have been ambivalent towards Asia ..., but the Asians too have been ambivalent towards Australia for more than a century ... All through our childhood teens, we never got any inkling that Australia was or had been, like India, a colony. Unlike the Irish, the Australians hid that part of the story quite successfully from us. At least in India, Australia projected itself as an extension of Britain—a slightly declassé, provincial, off-colour Britain, but Britain nevertheless ...

In the pages following Nandy's foreword, all gloves are off.

Australia is uncomfortable positioning its psyche in Asia, according to D'Cruz and Steele, not only because Asians are people of colour and the majority of Australians are white, but also because Australia is obsessed with its desire to prove itself equal to Britain and other Western nations. While Britain and continental Europe believe they are superior, Australia feels it has to prove its worth.

One sure way of proving one's own superiority is, of course, to treat others as inferior. It is providential that in Australia's case, these 'others' are close by, in Asia and the Pacific, and in its own land. The feeling of superiority overshadows even Australia's intended good gestures towards its Asian neighbours and its own Indigenous people, and refuses to fade away though it is clear that it is causing considerable offence.

This patronising stance is extended to the former subjects of Asian countries who have migrated to Australia and become Australian citizens. For Australia, it seems, multiculturalism involves these new citizens accepting the existing cultural benchmarks that were initially set up by Anglo-Australians—namely, the current notions of what is good.

Prominent among the ideas about 'what is good' are democracy and liberalism.

D'Cruz and Steele demonstrate that Australian public figures are unable to see that the liberalism dominant in Australia's political life is flawed, because it allows for an insidious racism. They uncover and display evidence of this racism in almost all sectors of life, revealing an undercurrent of unconscious racism that affects not only the social interactions between white Australians and their Aboriginal and Asian-born fellow citizens, but also policy-making at the institutional level.

The authors use *Turtle Beach*, the award-winning novel by Blanche D'Alpuget, as a case study. It has a number of instances of this subliminal racism. As a writer of both fiction and non-fiction, I see another dimension to many of these examples. The fiction writer draws from his or her own psyche when writing a novel, so what is written reflects not only what the eyes see, but what the subconscious has absorbed. They are reflections of the writer's social conditioning. Whether the story is offensive or not depends very much on who sees the reflections.

Though I would be reluctant to call those instances racism, I would see them as proof that deep down Australians are yet to discard their sense of superiority and their tendency to be judgmental towards their Asian neighbours. *Australia's ambivalence* uncovers this attitude in many parts of *Turtle Beach*. Only when Australians begin to regard Asians as equal and accept Asian-Australian voices as part of Australia's orchestra of opinions will Australia be better accepted in the region, because only then will the discomfort and awkwardness ease all round. ■

Dewi Anggraeni's latest book, *Who did this to our Bali?*, Indra Press, will be released in February 2004.

David Glanz

Odds on

THE WAR WAS OVER and there were jobs for all. By September 1946, Prime Minister Ben Chifley could boast that, despite 10,000 servicemen being discharged from the forces every week, unemployment had remained below one half of one per cent. With rationing limiting consumer choices, that meant a lot of money burning holes in a lot of pockets. So where could a man dispose of a discretionary shilling or two? That summer, one place as good as any other was Foley's Lane in the northern Melbourne suburb of Coburg.

There, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, Cole Robertson, Jack Attwater and partners Phil Samson and Jim Elliott stood willing to offer fair odds on the nag of your choice—at the prices chalked on the boards they hung on the fence or at the starting price. Being an SP bookie was a lucrative business. There were four lanes working in Coburg alone, and dozens more across the city. At least one registered racecourse bookie gave up his licence to work in the lane. The SP men would hold five hundred pounds on a race day, at a time when three blocks of land a little further out of town, next to Fawkner cemetery, could be picked up for one hundred the lot and a nice little house in Rosebud was a snip at three thousand. So giving five pounds each race day to the 14-year-old boy who kept nit—looking out for the police—was a minor business expense.

To that boy, Arthur Bell, five pounds was a passport to freedom. 'My dad was getting that working at Millers Ropeworks.' Being one of the four nit-keepers in Foley's Lane twice a week, plus cannily playing the odds at two-up, brought his weekly income to a king's ransom of 15 pounds. 'I owned a horse and cart which mum and dad didn't know about. I used to play up a little bit! When I had to go to work at Gilmours Smallgoods as an apprentice I was getting just seven shillings and sixpence a week.'

Arthur didn't have far to go to 'work'. Foley's Lane, behind the Buffalo lodge and alongside a wood yard, has long since been covered up by the Coles supermarket carpark. Arthur's 1946 bedroom is now an aisle in the neighbouring Liquorland bottle shop. Keeping nit meant strolling around the corner into Victoria Street and keeping a sharp eye out for the cops—and for his own back. 'The cops used to haunt us. If we saw them coming, I'd head off through the pub or jump on a tram.' There were times when they had to scramble as the police came across the backyard fences. On another occasion, Arthur and his mates were walking down the lane, discussing how the Buffalo hall roof would be a good spot to keep nit when an incautious police officer looked out from over the parapet, blowing his cover. 'In 14 years I got caught once. This one time, I felt this big hand on my shoulder. It was a cop, and he warned me that if I yelled out I'd be nicked. But I didn't have to—just walking up the lane with him was enough to tip the blokes off.'

Circa 1946, Arthur Bell is the spiffy young man seated on the right. They're in a mate's backyard, just a few metres from Foley's Lane.

With such vast sums of cash sloshing through the bookies' hands each race day, was the lane a target for standover men? 'You never had any trouble at all,' says Arthur. Perhaps it's nostalgia, but the world seemed a different place then. 'I lived nearby and my lock never, ever had a key in it. I'd rather have those days back. My sister went up to the Trinity dance hall every Thursday and Mum and Dad never had a worry in the world. I used to keep bookies' money in the stove. Mum started it up one day without knowing. The money was all crinkled, but the Commonwealth bank still took it.' In the early days, even the police problem could be bought off with a judicious backhander or two, although not everyone played by the 'rules'. 'Bookies used to take bets in a paddock in Reservoir. One day the cops came driving past and jumped out to grab them. One bookie was very upset and told them, "it's not our turn—we paid last week".'

EVEN WHEN THE police did make an arrest, their victim would usually give a false name but a real address. That way, they could keep the police happy by paying the one hundred pound fine—then, as now, gambling was a revenue earner for the state government—without running the risk of getting three fines in their own name. Three fines meant jail time. From the age of 18, Arthur started writing bets. 'I had a bank book in a false name. If the cops got me I could produce it, as all they

wanted was to send out fines. The cops were getting them all the time from different lanes—wrong names, right address for the bluey (the fine notice). After the war everyone had a quid.'

The problem for the police was that most people didn't really consider SP bookies to be a danger to civilisation. They may have been illegal, they may have been linked to graft and corruption, but there was nowhere else to have a flutter away from the track. As Arthur explains: 'Senator McKenna's mother and father lived nearby. His father was the warders' boss at Pentridge. But they never complained. No-one around here accepted it as criminal. Everyone wanted to get a bet on. A mayor of Coburg used to bet with us. He had a catering and wedding business—and my brother didn't pay for his reception, given the amount I was owed. There was an off-duty cop—who I could name, but I won't—who used to come in and place his bets on the way to work.'

A combination of police crackdown and the establishment in Victoria of the country's first TAB brought the SP days to a close. 'All good things come to an end. Our lane was the last to finish.' Arthur, thanks to the false name in his bank book, could sit the examination for a bookmaker's licence with a clean record and a clear conscience. Today, he runs a pet shop in Victoria Street, a stone's throw from the lane where he worked in the SP business for a dozen years—even on his wedding day. But after work on race days, he still runs a book at the trots. Once he was one of 1300 or more bookies and would drive thousands of kilometres in a weekend, from Mildura to Gippsland. Now he reckons there are scarcely 160 and Arthur limits himself to Moonee Valley, Geelong, Yarra Glen and Ballarat.

Once a year, he heads down to St Francis' Church in central Melbourne, which holds a mass for the racing fraternity on the Sunday before the Melbourne Cup. He long ago got roped into doing his bit, taking round the collection plate. It's a long way from the days of keeping nit, but the punters' dreams remain the same. You could ask Arthur to lay odds on it. ■

David Glanz is a Melbourne writer who knows one end of a horse from the other—as long as it neighs.

Books

Kirsty Sangster

Delicate steps

Dancing with Strangers, Inga Clendinnen. Text Publishing, 2003. ISBN 1 877008 58 3, RRP $45

INGA CLENDINNEN HAS ONCE again written on a subject chained to brutality, anger and sometimes unspeakable suffering—as with her extraordinary book *Reading the Holocaust* (Text Publishing, 1998). The history of white 'invasion' or 'settlement' is also a highly politicised one: where both sides in the history war claim to know the truth.

Clendinnen describes what happened between black and white in the first few years after the arrival of the First Fleet. She does not claim the objective truth, but rather likens her subjective journey through the letters and journals of the First Fleeters to an underwater, an aquatic experience. Clendinnen takes as her academic mantra Milan Kundera's phrase 'Man proceeds in a fog'. Everything is strange here, in this misty and submerged place called the past. Yet through the patchwork process of research, Clendinnen lets us hear bits of conversation, distant voices and songs from Botany Bay.

Clendinnen gives us a wonderful picture of the chaos and misunderstandings of those years. The initial encounter between black and white is one that begins with dancing. As one Lieutenant William Bradley, second in command of HMS *Sirius*, recounts: 'these people mixed with ours and all hands danced together.' On the hot sands, the raggle-taggle mob that has just arrived from the seas meets up with the other mob that lives here. They begin to dance. Each partner in the dance is equally appalled by the other's weird smell. The white man is fetid, stinking of unwashed wool, sweat and grime. The black man is perfumed with fish oil that has been poured over his hair and all down his bare skin to ward off mosquitoes. Yet they dance and sing together.

This encounter marks the beginning of a fragile reciprocity between the newcomers and the Australians. On both sides, there is a mixture of puzzlement and contempt as they stare at the strange figures before them. There is the exchange of women, weapons and fish. They share also the violence of men. Two warrior cultures. One side is horrified at the hangings, the gibbets, the slash and burn of the cat-o'-nine-tails. The other side shocked at the domestic beatings, the blows across the head and the rape of women. To each party, the other's violence seemed aberrant and uncontrolled.

There is also, initially, a careful diplomacy and a degree of collective political bargaining. Clendinnen, in her description of the relationship between Captain Arthur Phillip and Baneelon (Bennelong), gives us a glimpse of two men who are genuine in their attempt to understand each other. There is tenderness in her portrait of Phillip. She writes of his humanity, his open-house policy for Baneelon's many relatives, his tempered generosity. Phillip builds a house on the Point for Baneelon and we see Baneelon's partner Barangaroo sitting naked with a 'slim bone in her nose' at the Governor's table, 'except once, when, fresh from a grand ceremonial occasion, she appeared in the glory of body paint'. Then comes the gradual degradation, the slow death of understanding. The 'springtime of trust' turns out to be fleeting and dissolves into violence.

Inga Clendinnen is a rare scholar. She dismisses academic jargon and writes clearly. She ventures into dark subjects that require honesty, empathy and moral courage. She refuses to be silenced by the mawkish ideologies that are rife in the current political climate. She seeks some common ground. *Dancing with Strangers* is a work of great beauty. ■

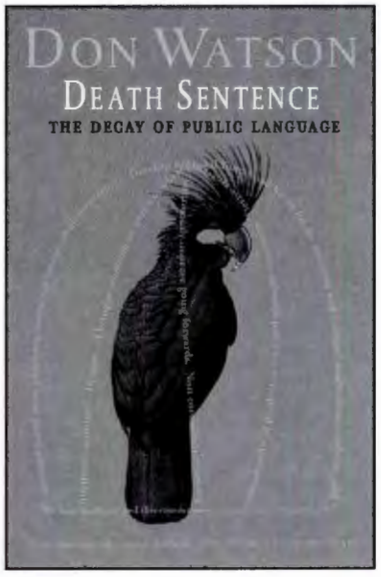
Kirsty Sangster is a poet. Her first collection, *Midden Places*, will be published by Black Pepper Press in 2004.

Jim Davidson

Not another word

Death Sentence: The Decay of Public Language, Don Watson. Knopf, 2003. ISBN 1 74051 206 5, RRP $29.95

Anybody who writes a book on language, and particularly its misuse, runs the risk of being dismissed as an old fart. But Don Watson writes so wittily about the problem he discerns, one which he sees as lying at the heart of contemporary life, that most people reading *Death Sentence* will be both instructed and amused. It ain't just grammar he's after, not even the errant apostrophe. As he says, in one amongst many aphorisms, 'To work on the grammar is like treating a man's dandruff when he has gangrene'. Or again, when he gets into his stride attacking verbless sludge: 'Split infinitives are not the problem with public language. In its modern form there are not enough infinitives to split.'



One of the book's epigraphs is drawn from Orwell's *1984*, where one character points out that Newspeak is designed to narrow the whole range of thought. We may have escaped—at last—the totalitarian spectre that novel raised, but other forms of control have been refined. The new management-speak, as Watson demonstrates, is now seeping into everything. It may be the language of the leaders rather than the led, and it may be true that people write in manereal-diseased prose because it is expected of them. But now one hears of 'accountable' football—from a footballer—or, 'They risk-taked all day'—from a coach. A brother might even say to his sister how a newborn child 'value-adds' to the relationship with his partner. The book provides many examples of the charmless prose we are all subjected to these days, prose which Watson variously describes as clag, gruel or porridge. Keynes, says Watson, would probably have been unable to develop his theories if they had been ventured in such verbiage. You can't joke in it, sing it, or exercise the imagination in it. Meanwhile it spreads like an oil slick. The language of everyday speech in turn has become 'less like a language and more like just what happens when you open your mouth'.

How have we got into this mess? The primacy of marketing has a great deal to do with it, as marketing has never been much concerned with truth. Rather, its imperative has been to turn needs into wants. (Or should that be to turn wants into needs? No matter, so long as it turns a dollar.) And marketing now goes everywhere the media goes, which today is just about everywhere. Meanwhile, since the '80s, the overlap between business and politics has seen a merger of political and economic language, a consequence of economics being seen as the main game. Business language itself has got worse, 'mauled by the new religions of technology and management'. So there is a paradox: at a time when the language is expanding as never before—20,000 new words are added each year—the capacities of everyday speech are actually declining.

This is at once evident in politics. Politicians not only fail to speak in arresting ways, but now lack even the words to do so. There has been no inspirational summation of September 11—though JFK would have found one. And that's quite apart from what Burke or Pitt or Lincoln, all discussed here, would have made of it. Instead of Pericles ... Little Johnny. The Prime Minister's letter about the terrorist threat is here subjected to a withering analysis, totally justified by the banality of its concepts and language. As Watson says, Howard makes everything sound the same. (The PM headbutts like a sheep, implementing a boredom strategy.) Watson also points out how these days our leaders worry less about what they say than the visual effect: Howard hugging survivors at Bali, Dubya landing on board an aircraft carrier dressed in full military attire. No wonder the Prime Minister's letter said so little about the Australian way of life that had to be preserved: the accompanying visuals said it all. We need to defend our sacred right to go to the beach.

Characteristic of this book is the broad perspective Don Watson brings to this subject. *Death sentence* may, he is well aware, already have been passed; resistance may be futile. 'Managerial language', he writes, 'may be to the information age what the assembly line was to the industrial'. Another comparison comes to mind: we had scarcely absorbed the impact of the

Industrial Revolution, then along came the technological one, effectively putting a brand new motor inside an old chassis. Clearly it is meant to run on hot air—if it doesn't shake to pieces. One of the most telling observations in the book is that many people are letting go of the language simply because it is ancient.

A section of the book focuses on the peculiarly Australian dimension of the problem. Since the nation was founded as a penitentiary, the most utilitarian of purposes and externally imposed, it comes as no surprise that not one of the first half dozen governors made a remark worth remembering. But the habit remained; as Watson shows, Australian statesmen (let alone politicians) have generally shied away from ideals and abstractions.

For a long time the space remained occupied by Empire-speak; it is no accident that Whitlam, who challenged much of that, is the greatest exception. Laconic, practical and inventive our language may be, but there's no real place in it for idealism or reflection. So manereal-diseased language seems to have marched further into public discourse here than anywhere else.

There are some aspects of the problem Watson doesn't address. The dramatic reduction in tenses, for one; most people operate now on a simple present, past, future. In reading, words tend to become ikons, recognised as a whole; rather than being misspelt by a letter or two, the wrong word is used—as in the injunction, not 'Seize the day' but 'Cease the day!' Then there is computer mangling, cutting off letters as if they were so many decimal points; the perfection of highly accessible printing, privileging presentation over content, also has much to answer for.

Watson is merciless about the overuse of certain cant words, such as commitment, enhancement and the like, but says little about 'product', a word now extended from the physically measurable to a wilderness of shysterism, or—my favourite—'exciting', the word which reduces us all to being a great big bunch of kiddies. Nevertheless, he does provide 'exercises' at the back of the book, and says we should all start somewhere. Journalists should challenge politicians more: 'At the end of *what* day?' Wherever we can, we should roll back the gunk.

This is a book of unusual significance, a meditation on our times as much as a work on language. Having been at various times historian, writer, satirist, country boy and speech-writer, Don Watson has drawn from an unusually wide conspectus to produce *Death Sentence*. It is as much a reflection on his experience as *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart*, and will still be read—and enjoyed—in 50 years' time.

Jim Davidson is a Professor of History at Victoria University of Technology.

Deborah Gare

Examining the remains

Black Kettle and Full Moon: Daily life in a vanished Australia, Geoffrey Blainey. Viking, 2003. ISBN 0670041327, RRP $45

Hallmarks of Geoffrey Blainey's career include his spectacularly good titles and his masterful command of prose. Devotees of Blainey have long admired both qualities in such books as *The Tyranny of Distance*, *A Land Half Won*, *The Rush that Never Ended* and *Triumph of the Nomads*. In his most recent book, *Black Kettle and Full Moon*, Blainey has triumphed again.

The immediate impression *Black Kettle and Full Moon* gives is of a weighty volume in which Viking has given more care to the text than to the illustrations. The font is generously sized and spaced, spread over a significant number of pages. But though it has been dressed with period images on the cover and on the inside, these seem to lack the punch and creativity that might have otherwise completed a terrific book.

The unusual and valuable thing about *Black Kettle and Full Moon* is that it covers a forgotten period of Australian history—the years between the 19th-century gold rushes and the cataclysmic days of the Great War. The historical consciousness of most Australians, if they have one, tends to jump from the Eureka Stockade of the 1850s, landing momentarily at federation, to Gallipoli and the birth of the Anzac legend. The period that Blainey recovers here is a forgotten one in our national memory, yet he considers it to be both 'crucial' and 'fascinating'.

This is mostly a social history of Australia, but it's not a rehash of the many others now in circulation. It pays close attention to the details of everyday life for earlier Australians. This is not a 'big picture' history. Rather, it looks at what people ate, drank and read; where and how they shopped; how they told the time, cast light into a darkened room and forecast the weather.

Black Kettle and Full Moon has two parts. The first resonates with Blainey's earlier books, in terms of technology and science. An interest in such things as climate, gas lighting, printing, shipping and cameras is quintessential Blainey. Indeed, in some ways this book is what his *Tyranny of Distance* set out to do 40 years ago: it praises the scientific advancements of Australians and captures the way that technology shaped their everyday lives. As he says, the story starts out with candles and billy tea, and concludes with ice cream and the telephone.

A combination of science and myth ruled many aspects of Australian life during this time: an often uncomfortable balance between what was proven to work in the antipodean climate and what was still protected by superstition from the old country. We are told that farmers killed livestock and planted crops based on the pattern of the moon; that households made their own candles by pouring fat into metal moulds; that the new steel pen aided the advancement of the letter as a conveyor of news.

These quaint tales of everyday customs had a surprisingly strong relationship with significant events. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Blainey's discussion of moonlight. For just as the society hostess relied on her almanac to plan an event around a predicted full moon, knowing that guests would have sufficient light to travel by, so too did Ned Kelly employ a full moon for some of his most daring robberies, ensuring sufficient moonlight to make a difficult getaway on horseback:

> A glance at old almanacs reveals that he made his two celebrated raids on banks—at the small town of Euroa in December 1878, and Jerilderie the following February—when the moon was full. The raids were carried out when the moon was in such a position as to be favourable to their enterprise.

It seems that the Eureka Stockade may have been planned around the advent of the full moon. A fact, argues Blainey, that was critical both in the strategy and in the defeat of the stockaders. Explorers such as Burke and Wills and, more successfully, John Forrest, made use of the moonlight as they advanced across unfamiliar desert terrain. It is partly for these reasons that this is an exciting book. In uncovering the aspects of 'everyday' life and custom that are now forgotten, Blainey has also added to our understanding of certain key events within Australian history.

In the second part of the book, Blainey describes the social and domestic aspects of Australian life. He writes of how Australians cooked, what they ate, what they smoked, and where they shopped. He describes the household economies that were made in times of financial hardship—the patched clothes that children wore, the way food was seen as the main target of constricting family budgets. In the 1890s, writes Blainey, the 'land of meat had temporarily become, for many, the land of dripping'. Pumpkin, potatoes and bread were the cheapest items in the 1890s kitchen pantry, though many looked to cut back on such expensive items as beef, pork, butter, cheese, bacon and eggs. Even coffee, tea, beer and tobacco were quickly rationed when necessary. And in times of adversity, social services were rarely available. Instead, these were the years in which friendly societies, trade unions and community co-operatives were the main source of social support.

But this was also the age of chocolate and sweet treats. In fact, writes Blainey, the appetite for cocoa and chocolate was indulged more often in Australia than in England, where people were generally less wealthy. And though the chocolate bar itself was probably not in common currency until nearer to the Great War, boiled lollies were cheap and had long been a favourite.

These kinds of small details have appeared regularly in all of

Blainey's work. But in *Black Kettle and Full Moon* he indulges in a rich collection of anecdotes, stories and factual accounts, showing how the combination of all these things added up to an Australian way of life. For example, on the Australian penchant for sweet things, Blainey writes that the word 'lolly' was probably in use from the 1850s. While luxurious chocolates were normally imported from Europe for the affluent, boiled sweets were as often made in family kitchens as they were in urban factories. Those who did buy their sweets from a store would find them displayed in tall glass jars on the shop counter:

> The shopkeeper thrust his hand inside the jar and clutched the lollies and then weighed them or counted them. The sticky sweets were wrapped in newspaper or greaseproof paper and then handed to the purchaser. Most lollies were touched by human fingers ... It was believed that glass jars protected lollies from germs and dust. The germs, however, entered the jar at their pleasure. The shopkeeper did not wear gloves and did not use metal tongs, and so the lollies were easily contaminated. But the feeling among medical men was that, if an infectious disease was traced to a shop, goods in jars were safe but goods in the open air were suspect.

Blainey has often tended to focus on the south-east corner of Australia, particularly Victoria. To me, the test of this book's strength was whether it embraced the peripheries of the nation as much as it did the people of Sydney and Melbourne. And it's not too bad. John Forrest appears on the same pages as Burke and Wills. The account of the complicated routine in Melbourne to broadcast the progress of the mail steamer from England is accompanied by the practices in Perth, Brisbane and Sydney. We find that Hobart had two mail deliveries a day while Sydney and Launceston had four. And though Blainey might have reverted in Part Two to a customary use of Victoria's post-gold rush decades as representative of all Australia, he appears to resist the temptation and continues to pay surprising attention to the rest of the nation—both urban and rural.

But there are still some readers for whom alarm bells will rightly ring. *Black Kettle and Full Moon* claims to be a history of 'our forebears' which, by necessity, excludes the great numbers of people who descend from Australia's immigrants of the 20th century. It suggests that Blainey's Australia is still a British Australia, both then and possibly now. It implies what many already suppose, that he is uncomfortable with the period of Australia's history that has followed World War II. Little is said about rich and poor, convicts or Aborigines, churches, clothes and houses. But, then, Blainey doesn't claim to do so.

The innovation of this book, combined with all the hallmarks of Blainey's own trade, makes it a significant and highly readable contribution to the bookshelves of Australian history. It is unlikely to incite controversy among the profession. Rather, it will be valued and appreciated by those who normally enjoy his work, and questioned, even disliked by those who normally do not. *Black Kettle and Full Moon* is based on important new material. But it is not a new Blainey. ■

Dr Deborah Gare is a lecturer in the College of Arts and Letters at the University of Notre Dame (Australia).

Rebecca Marsh

Firebrand

No Logo, Naomi Klein. Flamingo, 2001. ISBN 0 00 653040 0, RRP $24.95

There's a pair of battered Converse sneakers under my bed, Body Shop moisturiser in the bathroom and Oakley sunglasses on the dressing table. They are part of a world of brands and siren calls, promising retro-alternative chic from shoes, sound ethical activism from toiletries and edgy urban cool from eye protection. They also speak the language of globalisation, the transnational marketing ideology that rose in the late 20th century. In *No Logo*, Naomi Klein sets out to chart the dominance of the branded transnational corporation in the global marketplace. She explores the loss of public space, free choice and civil liberties, the economic and social exploitation associated with branded transnationals and the growing dissatisfaction, resistance and activism directed towards these corporations.

No Logo is divided into four parts: 'No Space', 'No Choice', 'No Jobs' and 'No Logo'. In 'No Space', Klein looks at the triumph of the branded corporation and its symbolic representation, the logo. She follows the phenomenal success of branded corporations such as Nike, The Body Shop, Levi's, Reebok and Tommy Hilfiger during the 1990s—corporations that purport to sell not only products but images, ways of life, even political statements.

Particularly disturbing is the Faustian pact between the resource-starved US public school system and transnational corporations. This phenomenon has seen fast food franchises and movie merchandising in school cafeterias, corporate-sponsored educational TV featuring compulsory viewing quotas in return for audio visual equipment, sponsored curriculum featuring Disney movie characters and school web browsers recording the surfing patterns of students in order to tailor direct advertising to students.

In 'No Choice', Klein contrasts the underlying erosion of consumer choice with the apparent explosion of choice offered within a branded product line. She looks at the methods used by corporate franchises to nullify competition. These include massive price undercutting and the saturation of the market with branded product. Klein also examines the ideology behind the transnationals' censoring of which products are available and influence on what is actually produced. For example, Wal-Mart and Blockbuster remove magazines and films that do not promote the family values formulation implicit in their brand identities.

Klein explores this dark side of branded transnationals further in 'No Jobs'. Using oral testimony, case studies and an overwhelming array of statistical sources, she shows the standard labour practices of transnational corporations both in the West and in developing countries. Divesting brand from product manufacturing enables transnationals to shift continents and manufacturing contracts to chase the cheapest unit price. Klein looks inside the Export Processing Zones in Vietnam, China, Sri Lanka and Mexico where governments exchange cheap rent, tax concessions, minimum or no labour regulations and environmental and safety concessions for the promise of future prosperity. These zones feature less than subsistence wages, long hours and temporary jobs with few basic conditions.

Working culture has been transformed in rich Western countries by the transnationals' drive to reduce labour costs to the bare minimum. Klein examines the creation of a culture of temporary, low skilled, low paid work, where labour is often contracted through labour hire firms or reduced to casual short shifts. Wages are low, with minimal conditions and job security.

Finally, in 'No Logo', Klein looks at the various forms of community resistance to transnationals, branding and logos. Culture jamming, subvertising, hactivism and adbusting are all politicised attacks on advertising. She describes campaigns like Critical Mass and Reclaim the Streets. These protests are increasingly organised around resistance to world economic summits and Klein demonstrates the way the internet is used to link protests across the globe.

Klein also examines the highly organised anti-corporate campaigns, corporate watchdogs and human rights organisations that use the internet and mass media to make connections with worker support groups in Export Processing Zones and expose the labour practices of transnational corporations.

In the three years since *No Logo* was published, it has been translated into 25 languages. It was short-listed for The Guardian Newspaper Book Award in 2000, the Canadian National Business Book Award in 2001 and the French Prix Médiations, also in 2001. Klein is a journalist, and this is reflected in *No Logo*'s accessible and evidenced-based style. At times, the research, statistics, charts, case studies and examples become somewhat overwhelming for the reader. This was particularly evident in 'No Choice' and 'No Jobs', where the central arguments were sometimes difficult to maintain under the barrage of evidence and anecdote. Such evidence-based writing, though, is a boon to the activist reader, undoubtedly a core target group of the book.

No Logo sets consumer concern about corporate ethics and the dominance of branded products and advertising within the framework of globalisation. In this way, Klein translates free market ideology and global economics into a language that ordinary people can understand. This is arguably the key strength of *No Logo*. In revealing the exploitative, pervasive and highly influential apparatus beneath the imagined worlds promised by branded corporations, Klein enables the reader to make their own connections. The arrival of Borders directly opposite the independent Carlton bookstore Readings—a Melbourne institution set in a street of cafés, street culture and university bohemia—suddenly seems not just cheeky but part of a systematic corporate marketing strategy. In the context of increasing homogeneity and corporate dominance, my patronage choices are not just about cheaper books, but about what kind of world I want to live in.

Klein's hypothesis, stated in the introduction to *No Logo*,

is that 'as more people discover the brand-name secrets of the global logo web, their outrage will fuel the next big political movement, a vast wave of opposition squarely targeting transnational corporations'. While Klein documents a wide breadth of resistance to transnational corporations, her focus is largely on university-educated activists in the West and does not convincingly herald the growth of a large global movement. What *No Logo* does successfully document is the myriad of strategic and innovative resistances to multinational corporations. The mapping of patterns and strategies of resistance, criticism and change are very useful and provide strong models for subsequent activism. Klein's discussion of the limitations of consumer campaigns is particularly salutary.

KLEIN ALSO UNRAVELS some of the gender, class and ethnicity threads running through patterns of brand globalisation. She observes that in the US, it is the richer neighbourhoods that are able to maintain independent stores and unbranded public spaces. Poorer neighbourhoods are the targets of franchise saturation and invasive intrusions into public spaces, including aggressive billboarding and branding of public sporting facilities. She highlights the parallels between factory workers in developing countries and franchise workers in the West. Significantly, in a replication of class divisions on a global scale, it is in those non-Western countries that are poorest and least protect human rights—such as Burma, Nigeria, China, Indonesia and Sri Lanka—that transnational corporations proliferate, producing non-essential goods for comparatively wealthy Westerners.

Despite the excellent research and well-reasoned central arguments, Klein sometimes digresses onto historical tangents. These are often weak, unsupported and do little to aid her thesis. During her discussion of current worker discontent in the West, Klein says that 'the fear that the poor will storm the barricades is as old as the castle moat'. She supports this contention with a motley and disconnected assortment of evidence including an observation by Bertrand Russell on Victorian class fear, an account of her dying grandfather's mental confusion, an anecdote about fear of servants in the Punjab and the increase of gated communities in the US.

Similarly, Klein's claim that student activism around identity politics in the early 1990s was to blame for the incursion of transnationals into universities is both unsubstantiated and poorly argued. Klein provides little evidence to support her claim other than her own memories of university. She directs her critique solely at feminist activists 'fighting about women's studies and the latest backlash book while their campuses were being sold out from under their feet'. The reader may well ask where everybody else was. After making such a strong case for the sophistry of advertisers and the insidious undermining of public space and choice by branded corporations, this finger pointing seems a little simplistic and incongruous.

It is the gripping nature of Klein's writing, however, that makes *No Logo* so compelling and provoking. With her penetrating gaze, her savage and insightful analysis, Klein enables us to see that the transnational emperors are wearing no clothes. After reading *No Logo*, our choices, particularly our consumer choices, become politicised and powerful.

Rebecca Marsh is a Research Fellow at Deakin University School of Health Sciences.

Kate Llewellyn

Morning

The yellow chair and the red
sit at the pine table on the verandah
waiting for tea.

The voice of that crow
I can't kill
saws through the chairs' legs.

Green hills sit hands in laps
smoke coming from their nostrils.
Here come the guinea fowl
last to roost and first to rise —
a flock of nuns ringing their tiny bells.

An island floats in the dam
a burnt meringue in a green jelly.
One wild duck drags its silver victory flag
around and around the dam
while the blond boy sleeps on
in this old wooden house
sailing through the breathless morning.

—Kate Llewellyn

Close encounters

It took English playwright Noel Coward less than a week to write *Blithe Spirit*. It was penned in 1941, not long after the Blitz bombings of London. Many critics surmise that Coward sought relief from what was an increasingly mad world through his immersion in the bizarre world he creates. Coward himself suggested the same: 'I will be ever grateful to the almost psychic gift that enabled me to write *Blithe Spirit* in five days during one of the darkest years of the war.'

The irony is that Coward chooses to write a comedy about death. Murder mystery writer Charles Condomine and his wife, Ruth, invite the local psychic, Madame Arcati, to their home to perform a seance. Charles is writing a novel about a fraudulent homicidal psychic and wants to draw material from Madame's behaviour to flesh out his character.

The trouble occurs when Charles' first wife, Elvira, speaks to him during the seance. He is the only one present who can hear her voice. Elvira then appears to Charles—and Charles only—having apparently been summoned back to the world of the living. In spite of himself, Charles is lured into her 'reality' and manipulated into enjoying himself with Elvira at the expense of poor Ruth.

Blithe Spirit explores the relationship between husband and wife; it profits from the insatiable curiosities we have about our partners' previous loves, the jealousies and the misunderstandings. The interaction between Charles (William McInnes) and his wives—alive and dead—proves full of comic opportunity.

McInnes does well playing the henpecked husband, whose life has been run by women, starting with his mother and continuing with his two wives, even though he remains in denial. 'You won't even let me have my own hallucinations,' he cries to his second wife.

The banter between Charles and Ruth and Charles and Elvira is perhaps the most enjoyable part of the show. The contrast between the strait-laced, uptight Ruth, played by the very funny Roz Hammond, and the sexy, carefree Elvira, played by Pamela Rabe, turns the concepts of alive and dead on their heads. Rabe appears to be the most 'alive' of the play's characters, with the exception perhaps of Madame Arcati.

The scene in which Elvira makes the transition from a spirit to the ghost that Charles can see and interact with is excellent. The lighting on Rabe and her dress, and even her skin colour, seem somehow ethereal. She plays the mischievous, cheeky spirit very well, baiting Charles about the nervousness and bad humour of his second wife. He is initially defensive, but her barbs convince him to look at his second wife with new eyes.

Much comic material is drawn from the idea of returning from the dead—Rabe's character mentions having met Merlin, playing backgammon 'with a sweet old Oriental gentleman ... Ghengis Khan' and Joan of Arc ('she's quite fun!'). Coward plays with terminology and social euphemisms as well. At one stage, Charles refers to Elvira as dead, to which she replies 'Not dead Charles—"passed over". It's considered vulgar to say "dead" where I come from.'

Miriam Margolyes as Madame Arcati. Photo: Jeff Busby.

Madame Arcati, the town's psychic, is played by the inimitable Miriam Margolyes. She is completely over-excitable, yet presents as one of the few real characters, unaffected as she is by social expectation or convention, which contrasts nicely with the cloistered behaviour of Ruth and Charles. Well known for her appearances in *Black Adder*, *Romeo+Juliet*, and recent *Harry Potter* movies, Margolyes is a fabulous actor, and her presence on stage brings a palpable tension and excitement.

Coward mocks the English upper classes for their insular and snobbish attitudes. This is particularly apparent when they talk about 'the help' and how difficult it is to get the right staff. When the cook runs off after being completely spooked by the paranormal goings-on of the household, Ruth is consoled by her friend who reassures her: 'Servants are awful, aren't they? Not a shred of gratitude—at the sign of trouble they run out on you—like rats leaving a sinking ship.'

The language is gorgeously antiquated by today's standards, with terms like 'fiddlesticks', 'cowardy custard' and 'pompous ass'. Their quaintness does not diminish their power, as many of Coward's dry observations about life and the human condition remain true. His fast-paced, witty dialogues, especially between Charles and his wives, are rather like a tennis game with long, powerful rallies, heightening in intensity with each hit. It is a script full of Wilde-like observations, together with ordinary statements used to comic effect.

Directed by former MTC artistic director Roger Hodgman, *Blithe Spirit* is an enjoyable and well-executed production. It doesn't stretch one's mind and indeed was not intended to be anything more than an amusement. Coward himself called it 'An Improbable Farce in Three Acts'. In a time when it seems our world is going mad, in ways reminiscent of Coward's, the play provides welcome relief and carries you off to another world, albeit briefly.

Kerrie O'Brien is a freelance writer and editor.

Jo Dirks

The price of peace

Martin Doblmeier's recent film *Bonhoeffer* is a documentary on the life of anti-Nazi Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–45). It shows Bonhoeffer's transformation from pacifist to conspirator in a plot to kill Hitler. The US filmmaker, based in Washington, has mixed together archival footage, interviews with Bonhoeffer's relatives, contemporary theologians and churchmen, including Archbishop Tutu, and photos from the Bonhoeffer family archive.

The perennial issue of censorship comes up in the opening sequence of the film. Nazi thugs toss books onto a street bonfire. This is contrasted with the genteel and aristocratic atmosphere of an extended family gathering in the Bonhoeffer home. Bonhoeffer was born into a privileged class. His father was Professor of Psychology at Berlin University. This contrast between the family gatherings and Hitler's nighttime ranting, the rallies and torchlight marches sets the mood for the film.

'We should not harm anyone. But we will not allow anyone to harm us.' This strike-first policy belongs to Adolf Hitler. Sadly, similar words are heard in our own day to justify pre-emptive warfare. The conflict between good and evil is aptly summed up in the Edmund Burke phrase 'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing'.

Doblmeier shows how slow the churches, Protestant and Catholic, were to recognise Hitler for what he was. The most telling image is of Hitler greeting Abbot Schachleitmer and Reichbischof Mueller at a Nuremberg rally. The Catholic bishops were cunningly neutralised by Hitler's concordat with the Vatican. Bonhoeffer felt betrayed by his own Lutheran Church to such an extent that he became part of a group of dissenting clergy who formed the 'Confessing Church'. Doblmeier includes footage of Bonhoeffer in New York, where he studied under Richard Niebuhr, influential in the development of US social ethics. There are evocative images of Bonhoeffer at the black Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York (1930–31). There he found exuberant worship and spiritual songs, records of which he brought back to Germany and played for his own students. These experiences undoubtedly influenced him to take a strong stance against the treatment of the Jews in Germany.

Yet the film does not shy away from showing the human side of Bonhoeffer, his doubts and weaknesses, such as giving into fear and not preaching at the funeral of his sister's Jewish father-in-law, a decision that Bonhoeffer deeply regretted. On his second visit to America, just before the outbreak of war, Bonhoeffer admitted he had made a mistake in fleeing the coming disaster. Only those who stayed in Germany would earn the right to have a say in the reconstruction, he said. He sailed back to Germany from New York on the last ship before the war started.

Bonhoeffer's fiancée was Maria von Wedemeyer, whose grandfather provided the house where the illegal seminary of Finkenwalde was located. In interviews with Maria's sister, Alice von Bismarck, Doblmeier skilfully interweaves the intimate and the social. The regal and gracious Alice cries as she recounts the doomed couple's story and her sister's defiant and loving gesture in her last meeting with Bonhoeffer in prison.

Doblmeier has a few surprises for the viewer. In the mid-1930s, Bonhoeffer was about to go to India to study non-violence with Gandhi when the Finkenwalde project was offered him. The other surprise is Bonhoeffer's friendship with the Anglican bishop of Chichester, George Bell. This friendship proved vital when Bonhoeffer was invited by his brother-in-law, an officer in German Intelligence, to join a group plotting to overthrow Hitler. Bonhoeffer accepted and used his connections in international ecumenical circles to pass on messages. One of the most important messages from the group was to George Bell, who was also a member of the Westminster Parliament. Bell did speak in the British Parliament, but the plotters were told they were on their own. Ironically, Bonhoeffer is now captured in stone on the facade of Westminster Abbey. Doblmeier doesn't show this, but Bonhoeffer's is one of ten new statues unveiled by the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the presence of royalty, church leaders and representatives from many parts of the world, on 9 July 1998. Oscar Romero and Martin Luther King are two of the others honoured in stone.

Forbidden to write, Bonhoeffer nonetheless began his *Ethics*, published after his death, in which he rejects Luther's 'two kingdoms' doctrine where the political and secular realm have nothing to do with Christian ethics and obedience. This issue is still hotly debated. Does the church have a prophetic voice in the public arena? There are those who prefer the church to be silent.

Bonhoeffer failed to convince his church to stand by the Jews, failed to rouse the Allies on behalf of the German resistance and failed to topple Hitler. He died broken on the gallows, yet Doblmeier presents the execution as a Christ-like sacrifice. Bonhoeffer's life speaks of a costly, lived discipleship that makes him a compelling figure nearly 60 years after his death. ■

Jo Dirks SSS is the Australian Provincial of the Blessed Sacrament Congregation, a member of the Council of YTU in Melbourne and board member of the Christian Media Trust.

Bonhoeffer will be released nationally on DVD/VHS by Ronin Films on 1 February, (02) 6248 0851.

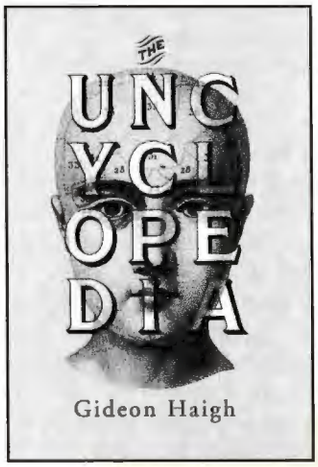
EUREKA STREET summer quiz

by Lucille Hughes

1. Who was Ambane-Lai? Name the literary work in which he appeared and its author.
2. Name the title and author of the book in which this is the first line:
   (i) My godmother lived in a handsome house in the clean and ancient town of Bretton.
   (ii) It was a warm day and they had behaved, as they had promised they could, so there must be ice-cream.
   (iii) I wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me; had they duly considered how much depended upon what they were then doing;—that not only the production of a rational Being was concerned in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind;—and for aught they knew to the contrary, even the fortunes of his whole house might take their turn from the humours and dispositions which were then uppermost: —Had they duly weighed and considered all this, and proceeded accordingly,—I am verily persuaded I should have made a quite different figure in the world, from that, in which the reader is likely to see me.
   (iv) I am in a car park in Leeds when I tell my husband I don't want to be married to him any more.
3. Who wrote the hymn 'How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds', and what were his other claims to fame?
4. If you counted all the stars in the Milky Way at the rate of one every second, how long would it take you to count them all?
5. Whose neglect by the Puteaux Cubists led to a new art movement?
6. What do Walter Pater and Ouida have in common?
7. What was the building demolished to make way for the Melbourne Trades Hall?

QUIZ

8. Who said:
   (i) 'It can take 100 years to build up a good brand and 30 days to knock it down.'
   (ii) 'I think I have to be there for the party to move forward.'
   (iii) 'Democracy passes into despotism.'
9. Which Australian male swimmer won two gold medals at the Mexico Olympics?
10. Between 1820 and 1920, how many immigrants entered the United States of America?
11. What is a benami transaction?
12. Define:
   (i) a Faraday cage;
   (ii) a Mandelbrod set;
   (iii) a bundle of Vicq d'Azur.
13. What is the winter diet of the Smoky Mouse (*Pseudomys fumeus*)?
14. Who was author David Brock's childhood political hero?
15. (i) Who won the 2003 Walkley Award for Television Current Affairs Reporting (less than 20 minutes)?
   (ii) What was the program that won it?
16. What caused Peter Costello to 'spit the dummy' on someone else's birthday?
17. Who has been called 'the great Narcissus of Australian politics' and by whom?
18. Why, unlike Britain, Canada and Australia, has the United States of America never developed its own version of Vegemite? Marks given for the most likely, and for the most creative answers.
19. Who was the first woman in Australia to:
   (i) graduate from a university?
   (ii) lead a political party?
   (iii) win the Archibald Prize?
20. What was demolished to make way for what next was demolished to make way for the Sydney Opera House? Seriously.
21. Why is it better to have round manhole covers than square ones?
22. Which mainland European dialect is considered by linguists to be closest to English?
23. Name the runners-up in the Australian, the UK and the US Idol contests.
24. Name the CEOs of (i) Billiton; (ii) Orica; (iii) WMC.
25. Where would you find an Oppidan during a half?
26. Define (i) eukaryote; (ii) prokaryote; (iii) karaoke. Bonus points for creativity here.
27. Define (i) creationism; (ii) creative accounting; (iii) creation myth. Bonus points for poetry, doggerel, limericks, aphorisms or inspired rants.
28. What are (i) the ILO; (ii) ELO?
29. What is the name of Ned Flanders' dead wife?
30. What did Will Danby, Hector Grant, Will Strong and J.P. McColl have in common?



Gideon Haigh

When you have done your best, post, fax or email your answers by 1 February 2004 to: *Eureka Street* Summer Quiz, PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121, fax: 03 9428 4450, or email: eureka@eureka.jespub.jesuit.org.au.

Please include your name, address and phone number. The winners will each receive a copy of Gideon Haigh's 'compendium of illuminating knowledge' *Uncyclopedia*, courtesy of Text Publishing.

Winners and answers in our March issue.

Matthew Klugman

The games couples play

A chess challenge for keen players

Chess is a revealing game. The great range of pieces creates a wealth of possibilities—it has been calculated that there are more possible chess games than atoms in the universe—and the styles of play we choose often reveal much of our mood and character. At times, some people can't seem to resist going on an all-out attack every time they play, striving through pressure and sacrifice to destroy their opponent as quickly as they can. Others enjoy slowly denying space and play to their opponent, strangling them to death. Some players tend to spend most of their time searching for beautiful moves and combinations, while others delight in a bleakly pragmatic approach. Some even enjoy frustrating the efforts of their opponents with stubborn defence, before gradually building a counter-attack.

Like those who analyse art and society, analysts of chess have come up with a myriad of theories. These range from the sublime to the brutal, such as the advice of Ruy Lopez, a 16th-century Spanish priest, who recommended placing the board in a manner that makes your opponent have to look into the sun. I like to think that the theories of chess echo the great epochs of Western thought. There was the renaissance of Lopez, who showed the importance of quick development; the enlightenment of Morphy who indicated the general rules for open games; the modernism of people like Tarrasch who codified the importance of controlling the centre; and the so called 'hyper-modern' movement of players like Nimzovich in the early 1900s, who undermined the rigid rules of the modernists. (In the late 1920s Nimzovich published perhaps the second-most famous book to have the title *My System*.)

The following game illustrates another revelation—the possibility of great change in a moment. My partner found it in an old book compiled from a BBC radio series on chess, *Chess Treasury of the Air*, and presented it to me with a wicked gleam in her eye. The game took place in a 1950s knockout tournament and features Mrs Rowena Bruce (the World Girls Champion in 1935 and eight times British Ladies Champion) playing her husband, Mr Ron Bruce. Many years before this game Mr Bruce had taught Mrs Bruce how to play chess, and so this game also shows how one day the student might take their revenge on the teacher (and so reveals a nightmare of mine).

Mrs Bruce sets herself for an attack on her husband's king, while he marshals his pieces around the centre. All seems to be going well for Mr Bruce as Mrs Bruce becomes increasingly desperate—until Mr Bruce becomes too greedy and is destroyed by a beautiful combination.

	White (Mrs Bruce)	Black (Mr Bruce)
1.	f4	Nf6
2.	e3	g6
3.	Nf3	Bg7
4.	d4	0-0
5.	Bd3	c5
6.	c3	b6
7.	0-0	Bb7
8.	Nbd2	d6
9.	h3	Nbd7
10.	Qe1	Qc7
11.	g4	e5
12.	fxe5	dxe5
13.	Qg3	Nd5
14.	Ne4	Rae8
15.	Bd2	Kh8?

A waste of time. Black is better off playing in the centre, which his pieces are starting to control—a simple move like Re7 with Rfe8 to follow looks good.

16.	Qh4	N5f6
17.	Nfg5 threatening to win a piece on f6 as mate is threatened on h7 (e.g. Nxf6, Nxf6 followed by Rxf6 and if Black takes the rook then Qxh7 checkmate).	
	...	Bxe4
18.	Bxe4	exd4!

Black, following the adage that when all else is equal the attack in the middle should defeat the attack on the wing, is in a better position. White responds to her troubles by sacrificing two pawns for a speculative attack.

19.	Bd5	dxe3
20.	Rae1	exd2??

A greedy mistake—a counter-attacking move such as Re5 or even h6 would have held White's attack and given Black the edge, as White would have struggled to defend both her bishops.

21.	Rxe8	Rxe8

Suddenly White is able to unleash a beautiful combination that checkmates Black in five moves (that is, five moves by White and four counter moves by Black). Can you see it?

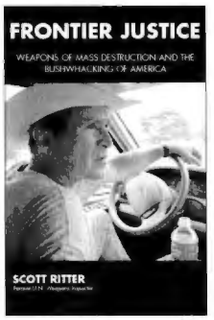
The first person to send in the correct combination* wins a copy of Cecil Purdy's *Guide to Good Chess*, which has generously been donated by Chess World www.chessworld.com.au Probably Australia's most famous chess player, Purdy was a World Correspondence Champion and four-time Australian Champion.

Solutions should be sent to: *Eureka Street* Chess Challenge, PO Box 553, Richmond, VIC, 3121.

*I will accept four-move combinations as one of the five is simply a last-gasp interposition by Black.

Matthew Klugman is a Melbourne writer.

the shortlist



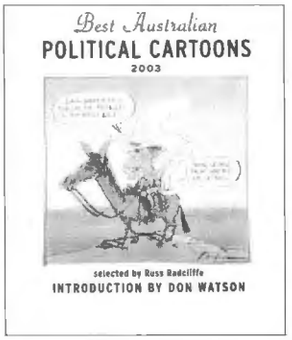
Frontier Justice: Weapons of mass destruction and the bushwacking of America, Scott Ritter. Scribe, 2003. ISBN 1 920769 04 8, RRP $25

George Orwell would have been proud of Scott Ritter's latest book, *Frontier Justice*. It continues the tradition of using clear and precise prose to cut through the spin, lies and hype that pollute our world. Ritter examines the foundations of the marketing of the war in Iraq, and exposes the half-truths and lies that led the American public into war, as well as those responsible.

The strength of *Frontier Justice* is that it goes beyond the single issue of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq to the deeper ideological struggle to define democracy, the rule of law and freedom. The parallels that Ritter draws between the political strategies of the Nazis and the Washington neo-conservatives or, as Ritter labels them, the 'PNAC posse' [Project for the New American Century] are both eerie and disturbingly plausible. Some may say that Ritter's analogy in *Frontier Justice* between Bush and Hitler is a tired leftist stereotype. However, the analogy is based on solid argument and highlights the gravity of the current American and global predicament.

Ritter recalls the words of Nazi minister, Hermann Goering at the Nuremberg trial: 'Why of course the people don't want war ... All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the peacemakers for a lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger.' The words are a powerful reminder that abuses of power continue, whether in government or the media. The exposure of such abuses in *Frontier Justice* makes it well worth reading.

—Godfrey Moase



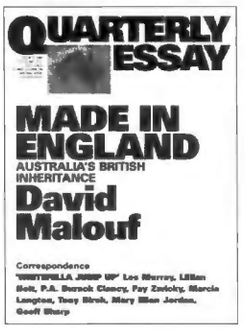
Best Australian political cartoons 2003, Russ Radcliffe (ed). Scribe, 2003. ISBN 1 920769 06 4, RRP $30

At last year's Melbourne Writers' Festival, cartoonist Peter Nicholson showed an early draft of his cartoon about Peter Hollingworth's handling of the sexual abuse issue. The archbishop marches proudly onward, eyes on the future, leading his sheep, while at the back of the pack, unseen by the archbishop, a ram rapes a small lamb. There was an audible gasp from the audience. The published cartoon depicts the same scene with a vital diffference. The ram is staring down at the lamb, intent on intimidating, but without the sexual element the image is much less confronting. (The first, unpublished cartoon, forms part of this collection.)

Russ Radcliffe's collection is a welcome assessment of the year past. Many of the cartoons depict the war in Iraq, and Australia-US relations in light of the justness or otherwise of that conflict. Remember too that 2003 gave us the 'history wars', the jailing of Pauline Hanson, the attempted dismantling of ATSIC, the ordination of an Anglican bishop who declared himself gay, accusations of ABC bias, the detention of children and Medicare overhauls. All have been rich fodder for Australia's excellent political cartoonists.

The Nicholson scenario underscores the power of political cartoonists, and in an age of polished spin and obfuscation, we have never been more in need of their sharp analysis. While we might recognise the name of a columnist and immediately read on, or turn the page, the cartoonist is much more likely to get his or her message across in one hit.

—Marcelle Mogg



***Quarterly Essay*, 'Made in England: Australia's British Inheritance'**, David Malouf. Black Inc, 2003. ISBN 1 86395 395 7, RRP $12.95

I have long suspected that David Malouf values what he perceives as his cool, rational English inheritance from his mother more than the warmer, Mediterranean infusion from his father. This essay—with his prose as detached and deliberate as ever—appears to confirm my hypothesis but he seems to have been enticed into byways which are as idiosyncratic as they are unconvincing.

I do not challenge his essential argument that language defines culture. Indeed, the force of history (as well as language) is extraordinarily enduring and Malouf presents well his belief that American society is, in its tissue and public rhetoric, the product of the Elizabethan England of the era of its foundation (can American solipsism be so readily accounted for?), whereas Australia is the post-Enlightenment child of Englishmen who had become phlegmatic of temperament and utterance—hence our understated character and cast of speech.

His view seems to be that the rest of us have pliably accepted this fine, if austere, patrimony. Accordingly he ignores the profound Irish counter-influence, going so far as to call Patrick O'Farrell as a witness to the genteel adaptation by the wild Hibernians when they entered a finer society.

This is odd in an essay that draws so extensively—and engagingly—on history but sometimes Malouf's conclusions are eccentric, even amblyopic. If it is a shock to read his opinion that Australian history has been 'unviolent' (how *could* anyone assert that nowadays?), then it is simply bizarre for him to argue that 1941 was the watershed after which we were all 'fully alive at last to our consciousness', deeply connected to the soil.

Few would concede that we have fully reached that state 60 years later but Malouf's assertion is of a piece with the pervasively panglossian tone of his perplexing essay.

—John Carmody

And further...

Essays read most sharply when you can instantly see who is the arguing partner. In this respect, the previous *Quarterly Essay* by Germaine Greer contrasts starkly with David Malouf's serene celebration of the patterns of relationships and institutions that come with an English foundation. Perhaps at the heart of Malouf's Australian story is a defence of the Enlightenment against its critics. For me, the essay did its job—it led me to take up again Manning Clark's more dramatic meditation on the spiritual and cultural conflicts involved in the distinctively Australian appropriation of the Enlightenment.

—Andrew Hamilton

flash in the pan

Crowe's nest

Master And Commander: The Far Side Of The World, dir. Peter Weir. The queues—and they're long—are about 70 per cent male. Interesting, because what they get for their money, apart from a couple of short, smoky sea battles and Russell Crowe's (right) commanding swagger as Captain Jack Aubrey, is a fair dose of life before the mast. It ain't all adventure: weevily food, hammocks that wreck your back and no workers' comp; weeks in the literal doldrums, a lot of shipboard domesticity at close quarters—sail sewing, deck swabbing, rope coiling. And discipline—this is the British navy, 1805, under threat from Napoleon, and with much of the crew press-ganged into service. A man is flogged for declining to salute an officer.

It's also a film about personal command—the charisma and integrity of leadership. (Maybe that accounts for its appeal at a time when leadership has become an event staged with a Thanksgiving turkey.) Aubrey has Admiralty orders to pursue a French frigate, the *Acheron*, a faster, better equipped vessel than Aubrey's HMS *Surprise*. But by his own admission, he exceeds his orders from Brazil on, so the quest becomes a personal obsession as well as a test of his ability to carry men with him. There is more than a touch of Prince Hal Aubrey—even a version of the 'Once more unto the breech' speech. 'This ship is England', declares Aubrey. And his rhetoric works.

Weir is interested, as he has been before (remember *Gallipoli*?), in the whys of power and how men wield it. In *Master And Commander* he uses the pairing of Aubrey and his friend, the Irish ship's doctor and naturalist, Maturin (Paul Bettany, exquisite in repaired spectacles), to examine the limits of power. As the pair improvise string duets together, so they question one another about war and personal ambition.

The questions linger, which is why this is an interesting film. They linger in the atmosphere that Weir conjures so skilfully—the sea, the French quarry in the mist. But, finally, adventure rules, and Russell Crowe's implacably glamorous

Captain Aubrey, sailing off to another daring encounter with the *Acheron*, embodies the film's strength, but also its confining weakness.

—Morag Fraser

Sharp edges

In The Cut, dir. Jane Campion. Campion sure can direct. Whether or not she can subvert a genre and control a sprawling slasher plot at the same time is still up for discussion.

In The Cut is many things—both good and bad, edgy and flat, tragic and silly, erotic and irritating. These contradictions are the film's downfall, but Campion's and her characters' casually uptight way of dealing with danger is genuinely subversive and lends the film more grace than gratuity.

Frannie (Meg Ryan) is an English teacher—sexually frustrated and lonely. She meets homicide detective James Malloy (Mark Ruffalo) when a piece of a woman's 'de-articulated' body ends up in the garden bed below her apartment window. The meeting is brief and frightening—charged with intelligence and crudity. And so begins the film's strange and unusual beat.

Encouraged by her half-sister Pauline (Jennifer Jason Leigh) to pursue Malloy, 'if only for the exercise', Frannie begins a dark slide into a relationship that is equal parts perfect and destructive.

The scenes between Pauline and Frannie are the highlights of *In The Cut*. Half-phrases and intimate understandings shared between two women who have spent a lifetime together. This is where Campion's direction really comes alive. Full of enquiring detail and texture, obliging you to forget plot and soak up character. Ironically this is both the film's downfall and its saving grace. The interior imaginings of the film's lead characters are drawn sharply but the plot is left floundering, almost to the point of silliness.

Frustrated by the mechanics of a thriller/slasher plot, *In the Cut* really doesn't work. But boy oh boy would I prefer to see Campion's failures than most directors' successes. She is an important director. She sees the edges of stories, the desires that loiter in shadow (not the standard hidden desires—shocking ones that expand understanding rather than confirming fear) and explores the form of cinema in complex risky ways.

—Siobhan Jackson

Down by the river

Mystic River, dir. Clint Eastwood. Dennis Lehane builds his tragic crime novel, *Mystic River*, out of an intimate and precise sense of what anchors people—to family, to the place where they grew up, to dignity, to a sense of themselves. So you understand, reading him, exactly what is lost when those anchors drift, or are cut loose.

Clint Eastwood has absorbed and translated Lehane's grasp of locale, of psychological context. He has also, in the quite

superb casting of *Mystic River*, matched the monumentality of Lehane's characters. This is, simply, a magnificent film.

Three men from the same Boston blue-collar district meet in adulthood. All are damaged, in linked ways. Jimmy's daughter has just been murdered. Sean, now a Boston cop, is investigating. Dave, abused as a boy in an incident that left his two companions unscathed, is implicated. All three men have wives, families and connections somewhere between psycho-criminal and just plain complicated. Could be *GoodFellas*—banal tribal evil, with banality being the point. But Lehane and Eastwood operate on a grander scale. These characters touch tragedy.

The performances are extraordinary. Tim Robbins as Dave, the man-boy robbed of his childhood and innocence, is lit, by Eastwood and his crew, to become a kind of grotesque, a mirror of his own internal terrors. Sean Penn's Jimmy, the reformed tough and bereft father, is mesmerising—one of the finest performances and most complex characters you'll see on screen. He has his own Lady Macbeth in Laurey Linney. Marcia Gay Harden, as Dave's accomplice-wife, Celeste, is Lady Macbeth haunted. Kevin Bacon, as the too-involved cop, has Laurence Fishburne as a sharp-tongued foil, and a reminder that this is crime genre—along with everything else.

Eastwood's direction is masterful. All his emphases, got by music, by quick changes of angle or perspective, by sudden burst into light, are Lehane (a good wordy novelist) in another mode, fully rendered. But it is Eastwood too—this is indelibly his work—in the dark sonority, the pace, the close focus on faces, and the faithful way he films the physical jostle of these people's lives, where wakes are held in crowded kitchens, and in the gravity of his way of giving form to the tumult in their hearts.

—Morag Fraser

Saint Nick

Nicholas Nickleby, dir. Douglas McGrath. Charles Dickens' galleries of well-loved grotesques always seem to tempt fine actors to out-ham each other, and in *Nicholas Nickleby* (right), which deals directly in dramatics and self-dramatisation, the dream of the self is played out both in the theatre and in life. Nicholas is a rash, ardent, slightly priggish, good-hearted romantic thrown into sudden poverty by his father's death. Along with his mother and sister, he then experiences the life of the poor in 19th-century English society. He earns the vindictive hatred of his wealthy uncle, Ralph Nickleby (Christopher Plummer), by said priggishness and good-heartedness. He suffers, becomes acquainted with cruelty and despair, and also unexpected kindness and love. It is easy to play it to the gallery, and why not? At feature-film length, if the main plotlines and characters of a Dickens novel come across successfully, you're doing all right.

Packed with Jim Broadbents and Christopher Plummers and Barry Humphrieses, Douglas McGrath's *Nicholas Nickleby* is occasionally real fun in the campy Christmas panto style (not that there's anything wrong with that) but is patchy and sometimes tiresome and raucous. Try as it does, the ensemble cannot get past the incomprehensible error of casting Charlie Hunnam (late of *Queer as Folk*) as Nicholas Nickleby. Charlie Hunnam is a gorgeous young hunk with tousled long, blond hair and truly magnificent abdominals, which he displays inexplicably in a scene at Dotheboys Hall. He says his lines as if he means well, but doesn't understand English properly—and blends into scenes of 1830s London only marginally better than Big Bird would. One after the other, some of the best character actors in movies today dash their performances to pieces against his irredeemably 21st-century handsome dopiness.

In spite of *Nicholas Nickleby*'s faults, it would be unfair not to mention Julia Stevenson's Mrs Squeers, which is impressive and far more terrifying than Jim Broadbent's Wackford Squeers. Heather Goldenhersh, as Fanny Squeers, is delightfully funny in her ill-fated pursuit of Nicholas. Romola Garai, as his sister Kate, conveys with delicacy the horrors of her lowered caste. McGrath did better with his version of *Emma* in 1996—perhaps Jane Austen's simple, elegant plots are harder to muss, even by blondes. **—Lucille Hughes**

watching brief

V. good

New Year's resolutions:

1. No more TV IQ tests that expose one's innumeracies and estimate one's intelligence at somewhere between a One Nation voter and a newt.
2. No more *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, *Wild On*, or suchlike fooleries, on doctor's orders.
3. Ration *Passions* to one viewing a month; won't miss anything of the plot at all, since it takes weeks for one day to elapse in their timewarp.
4. Take up another hobby using whatever fingers left from the leadlighting class.
5. Discontinue pottery because of family's cruel remarks and wimpish complaints about clay in the kitchen sink.
6. Take up smoking.

The last is possibly surprising for some readers, and I may or may not do this—but I am feeling quite sorry for smokers at the moment, pariahed and exiled, sneaking furtive drags in the roaring gales or stinging sun outside restaurants, workplaces and even pubs. There are hard, clever people around who'd like to make fags so expensive (even illegal) that they might become as attractive as all the other illegal drugs and form another useful income stream for criminals. In my teaching days, I always gravitated to the smokers' staffroom (in the days when they had such things) because they laughed more and swore more and tended to be members of the union. Non-smokers weren't always wowsers, and included wonderful, even ordinary folk, but one thing you could bet the hedge fund on was that whatever wowsers there were on staff wouldn't be found in the smokers' staffroom. Perhaps, since so many of my loved ones are nicotine slaves, I have finally become corrupted by the passive smoke: I love the smell of a cigar or pipe. Remember that immortal line from *Black Books*?

Huffy customer: Do you realise I'm breathing all your cigarette smoke?

Bernard: Don't worry about it: just buy me a drink some time.

Now there's a series that would bear repeating.

Anyway, if you're trying to give up something, try giving up the telly. The happiest winter of my entire life, as I think I have probably told you before, was when the boys were 12 and six respectively and we turned off the TV and read *The Lord of the Rings* aloud to each other. Some of their pals found out and would come round and listen too. Long car rides became sunny times of wonder, school holidays full of fierce paper sword fights and detailed map-making. The very memory of it has moved me to create the following lines of what my Grandma Hughes used to call 'doggery'.

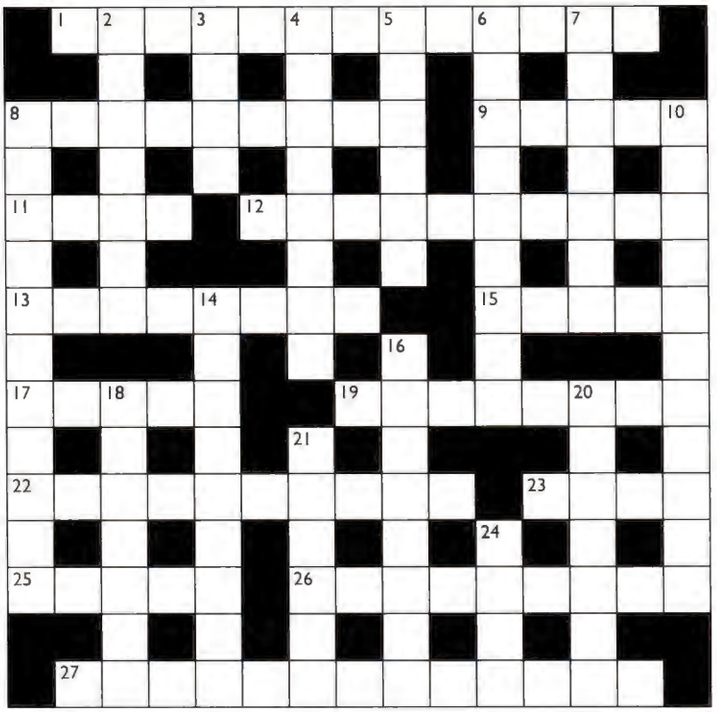
Oh the TV the TV is such a great thing
It makes us forget how to dance or to sing
We sit facing into the eye of its storm
Deluding ourselves that its glare keeps us warm
And when we attempt to escape that dead eye
We find we're addicted without knowing why
Oh turn the damn thing off and go out and play
Or start a petition or clean up the bay
Pester a pollie or write to the editors
Burgle a bad bank and pay off your creditors
Learn a new skill for the sheer love of doing
And tell bastard bosses you're thinking of suing
March in the streets and demand better rule
Bake scones and eat them while playing the fool
Run outside laughing and feed all the birds
Tell politicians you think they're all turds
Then start up a new movement, just for the brave
And face down your foes with an insolent wave
Don't be made-over by vanity's lackeys
Start a new shabby clothes label called Tackys
Applicable only to second-hand wares
That you gather with joy from garage sales and fairs
Invent a new love drug that makes people kind
And slip it in Howard & Ruddock's cold mind
Stand up for refugees kept in detention
Give the world's forests some precious attention
Look what you do when you turn off the teev
Read to the kiddies and learn how to weave
Starting late always feels better than never
Do all this just to feel ever so clever
Your dogs give the clue here resignedly waiting
For walkies while you sit here coagulating
And though this small song isn't all the solution
Make part of it your New Year's resolution

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

puzzled

Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 120, January–February 2004



ACROSS

1. Adder on vacation? This is the season for it! (6,7)
8. Gore, we hear, perhaps gone south where he threatens with clubs. (9)
9. Get to the bottom of it vertically? Sounds like a piece of fruit! (5)
11. That soup mixture is a work of art! (4)
12. Central direction to Syria or Jordan, for instance. (6,4)
13. Man from East Timor is assiduous. (8)
15. Grit one's teeth, for example, to be a man of such hardness! (5)
17. Gemstone found at an exit, perhaps. (5)
19. Being insecure, Ned grew slack. (8)
22. In Roman mixed farm, rear it on solid earth. (5,5)
23. Peas spilt in church recess. (4)
25. The ground could be arid, I think, where lines from the centre reach the boundary. (5)
26. Possibly sullen if I am thwarted! That renders the arrangement useless. (9)
27. Method of memory training? Or make superfluous utterance? (6,7)

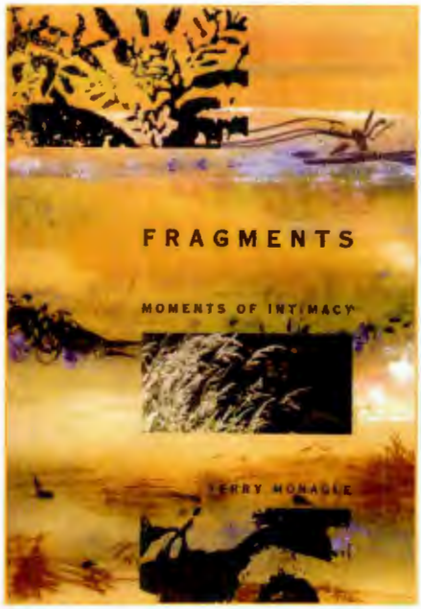
DOWN

2. Bazaar, by the sound of it, is out of the ordinary. (7)
3. Wise men brought some presents from a gift shop? (4)
4. 3-down had to find their direction again as they travelled east. (8)
5. Belonging to the team, having a favourable attitude. (2,4)
6. Makes a strong impact as one half returns around the cupboard. (9)
7. Flatter the person who wrote brief advertisement for a lute, perhaps. (7)
8. Farmer sowing grain, for instance, is heard on the radio. (11)
10. Ordinary uniform for soldiers somehow betters lad's appearance. (11)
14. Possibly I endanger silk fabric with pomegranate juice. (9)
16. Order nail from dispenser of disinfectant solution. (8)
18. Curtail a card game. (7)
20. Study up Latin for this type of conjugal ceremony. (7)
21. Bird found in poplin netting. (6)
24. 20-down relationship may be sealed with this osculatory act. (4)

Solution to Crossword no. 119, December 2003

S	T	R	A	I	T	S	■	S	I	G	N	S	O	N
W	■	E	■	N	■	U	■	P	■	E	■	E	■	O
A	L	L	E	G	E	D	■	O	N	T	A	R	I	O
L	■	I	■	E	■	O	■	T	■	O	■	I	■	D
L	E	A	R	N	■	R	O	C	K	N	R	O	L	L
O	■	N	■	E	■	■	■	H	■	■	■	U	■	E
W	A	T	E	R	G	A	T	E	■	T	E	S	T	S
■	■	■	■	A	■	T	■	C	■	O	■	■	■	■
T	C	E	L	L	■	T	A	K	E	A	S	I	D	E
I	■	N	■	■	■	H	■	■	■	D	■	N	■	A
M	A	T	C	H	L	E	S	S	■	E	L	V	E	R
P	■	R	■	I	■	F	■	E	■	G	■	O	■	N
A	Q	U	A	R	I	A	■	T	U	R	B	I	N	E
N	■	S	■	E	■	R	■	U	■	E	■	C	■	S
I	N	T	E	R	I	M	■	P	R	E	V	E	N	T

EUREKA STREET book offer



Fragments: Moments of intimacy

by Terry Monagle

Terry Monagle finds the rich life of the sacred in the ordinary events of each day: gardening, love, relationships, arguments and the people he encounters. *Fragments* is a collection of his writings, many of which have appeared in the *Age*. For those who doubt there is any such thing as an Australian spirituality, this book provides welcome evidence to the contrary.

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