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A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS,  
THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY  
Vol. 14 no. 10 December 2004 \$7.50 (inc. GST)



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A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY  
VOLUME 14 NUMBER 10 DECEMBER 2004



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

*Eureka Street* magazine, iss. 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 st, 300 Victoria Street, Richmond  
**Printed by** Doran Printing 46 Industrial Drive, Braeside VIC 3195.  
© **Jesuit Publications 2004**

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned. Please do not send original photographs or art work unless requested. Requests for permission to reprint material from the magazine should be addressed in writing to the editor.

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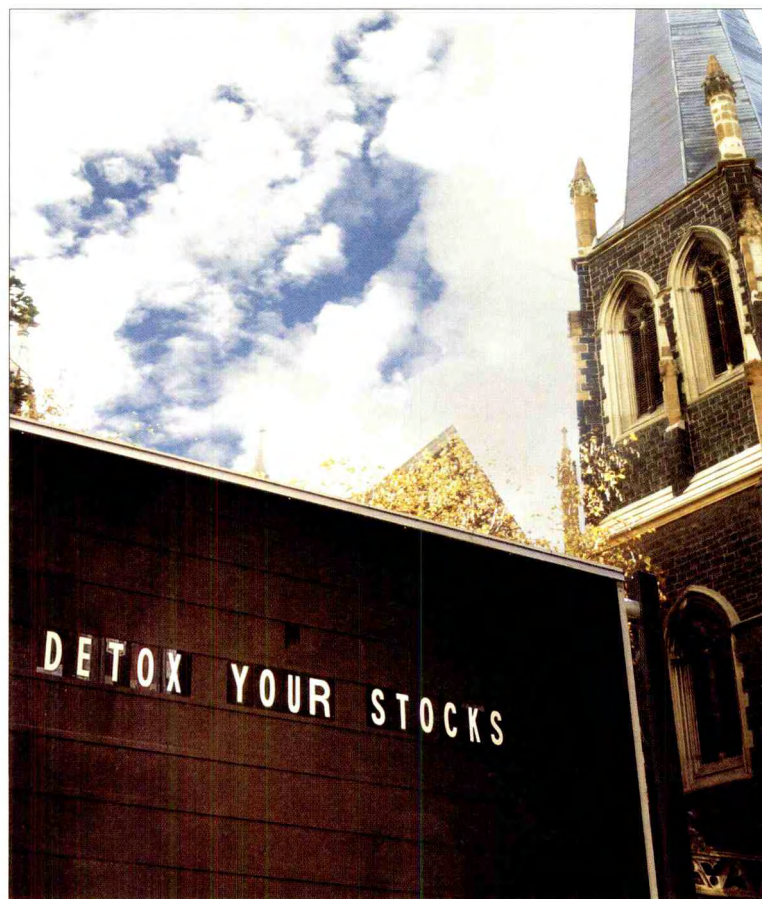
# Tough times ahead

**I**T COULDN'T MAKE IT AS AN ISSUE in the federal election campaign, but the Howard Government is now embarked on radical change in Aboriginal affairs. Though some of the early proposals, or their source, might seem calculated to raise suspicion, some of the germs of what is on offer could make more difference than 30 years of failing welfarism. The aim is to cease merely sustaining Aboriginal communities in what, for too many of them, is a slide towards oblivion and to begin rewarding policies that work, programs that actually make a difference and, particularly, to require individuals, families and communities to be more active in the matters which affect their fate.

The current proposals involve coercion and some differential, and, perhaps, discriminatory treatment of Aboriginal Australians. They involve less active Aboriginal participation in the planning, organisation and delivery of services than ever before. But for anyone in despair at what is happening in Aboriginal affairs, it may well do more for the alarming disadvantage that others—particularly children—suffer, and

do more to make governments, as well as Aboriginal people themselves, responsible for making a difference. There's a good argument that some of the hand-wringing about paternalism, discrimination and social engineering it involves has at its root a complete unwillingness to accept that Aborigines themselves are the primary actors in their own liberation—from poverty as much as anything else. One of the major reasons why things are going backward is that Aborigines have been too passive, not only about their own fates, but those of their children.

A decade or so ago, I wrote in these columns that the stolen generations we should focus on were the current crop of children. As things were, their fate looked far worse, in material, spiritual and psychic disadvantage, than most of the children snatched by the welfare authorities until a generation or so ago. A decade on, it is impossible to say that their prospects have improved. Indeed, we may be moving to a stage where, in many areas, there will be or already is intervention in Aboriginal families, primarily to protect children, at a greater rate than ever before. What will



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change is that it will be at the instance of the welfare state rather than the old native affairs bureaucracy.

This will not happen because the kids are black but because the children are neglected, and subject to physical and sexual abuse at rates unimaginable elsewhere. The parents of many children are so trapped in their own apathy, depression, victimhood, or drug addiction that they are virtually oblivious to the fact they are harming their children. This is not some subjective middle-class standard, ignorant of different cultural ways of looking after children. Nor is it from an assimilationist perspective.

The most obvious, if milder, neglect is that, in many remote communities, attending school seems to have become voluntary, with average daily attendances usually at less than 50 per cent of catchments, and, in some cases, as low as ten per cent. Occasional fitful campaigns shame communities into making more children attend school—the favourite carrot and stick approach being rules such as ‘no-school, no pool’. A high proportion of those who attend only casually are, of course, learning nothing, despite the best efforts of teachers. In some areas, such as in the Centre, the most alienated and neglected children are not merely wagging school, but destroying their senses by petrol sniffing. That is the obvious self-abuse. There are country towns in NSW and Queensland where the rate of use of heroin and amphetamine drugs is far higher than anywhere one might find in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne (where the highest abuse rates are among Aboriginal communities) and causing more problems and family breakdown than alcohol.

It may be argued that it is unsurprising that children do not attend schools when the schools are so culturally alien and irrelevant to these children’s lives. Perhaps, though this ignores the efforts and the investments in adapting curriculums to needs. It might be said that many Aboriginal children are sick—particularly those made deaf by chronic ear disease—that they cannot give attention to lessons, and that such objective illness is particularly marked among truants. Yes, we should do something about it, but what have their parents been doing about it?

One might say that poor educational outcomes reflect the low investment the wider community has made in education, and the criminal lack of facilities in many remote communities. So far as this is true—and it must be said that the Northern Territory Government ought to be prosecuted for fraud for the differences between what it says it is doing and what actually occurs—it can hardly excuse the fact that, inadequate or not, what is available is all too often not consumed. The primary reason is that the parents and responsible others in these children’s lives, make little effort to encourage or force their children to attend. The parents, themselves hobbled by educational disadvantage, place too little value upon education. Some will assume a level of autonomy among ten year-olds, or seven year-olds that assumes that school attendance is a matter of personal choice. By whatever standard, we are perpetuating new generations of kids who, as young adults, will have no choices and opportunities available to them, even in their own communities. And whose frustration, will further compound the difficulties of such communities.

It’s a form of inverted racism to imagine that Aborigines are merely the passive victims of every one else’s incompetence, malevolence or neglect in these matters, or to imagine, as some sympathisers with Aboriginal aspirations do, that life in

traditional communities involves ideal relationships, sharing, caring and strong families. Too many communities are seriously dysfunctional, on a downward spiral and failing to address the consequences as well as the causes. Of course, there are many people in such communities trying very hard to look after their families and who are willing partners in programs to make things better. Too often these people are themselves victims of a culture of apathy, passivity or active hostility to change. It is time they enjoyed more support.

**A**T THE LEVEL AT WHICH IT WILL APPEAL to the Hansonite constituencies—ever an active part of John Howard’s imagination—new measures will involve tying social security payments to performance in looking after children and dependents, not least in making sure that they are attending school and receiving proper food and health care. The rationale will be blunt and uncompromising: we give out social security assistance, such as single mothers’ benefits, so that people can care for their families. You cannot say that you are doing so if your children do not attend school, or fail to receive needed medical attention. So you will be cut off. Other ways will be found, not least community-based reward and punishment schemes to pick up on your obligations, but as for you there’s no more ‘sit down’ money. Those who think this approach discriminatory may well find that government is increasingly willing to extend this attitude to the more obvious forms of welfare abuse in other parts of the Australian community. Don’t worry; it will be popular.

The planning is what the ideologists might call results-based programs. At Commonwealth, state and local government level, and in grants projects of the sort once funded by the now defunct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the accountability focus will move away from ‘prove you spent the money as you said you would’ to ‘prove you made a difference’. It’s going to be an unpleasant experience for many people—even those involved in well-established programs, such as legal aid—as many admit that they are achieving very little. Why should the new stolen generation have to suffer so that we can sustain useless schemes whose only effect is to add a little more money (perhaps 20 per cent of the grant) to that circulating in the community?

The crisis has been present for years, if overshadowed by the politics of symbolism, apologies, reconciliation or the shenanigans of some senior ATSIC personnel. It simply cannot go on. Not because the political will to help Aboriginal Australians will evaporate. Though that may happen. Not because the government lacks a desire to improve Aboriginal conditions and prospects; as I have remarked before, there are many more Liberals with genuine knowledge of, interest in and commitment to Aboriginal interests than can be found in the parliamentary Labor Party. After 30 years, the expenditure in real terms of approximately \$70 billion on programs to redress Aboriginal disadvantage, and many more billions in welfare payments, there is still no plan to make things better. No plan. No belief that more programs, or more time, will effect any improvement. Indeed there exists a growing conviction that many Aboriginal Australians have been further trapped in the mire, further impoverished, and, perversely, made seem the most cash-rich, most materially disadvantaged people on earth. ■

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

## Calendar guy

The manager of a troubled and sharply criticised business recently claimed, much aggrieved, that he was the victim of the tall poppy syndrome. Trouble was, he said, he wasn't even a tall poppy. He certainly wanted to be a tall poppy, but people kept cutting him down before he could get there. The sad story reveals the urgent need for a Patron Saint of Failed Tall Poppies. A suitably height-challenged candidate could be Dionsyius Exiguus—Tiny Denis—who was good at working out dates. He fixed the date of Mary's conception of Jesus, and worked to get agreement on computing the day of Easter. But, as later happened with the Standard Gauge in Australia, things then fell apart. The calendars remained separate, and Denis remained unsainted.

## Roman idol

Elections always end with the triumph of the victor, maintaining a tradition that traces back to Imperial Rome.

## Vale Marie

With the sudden death of Marie Tehan, we at *Eureka Street* have lost a dear friend and patron. Marie, who had just accepted the invitation to chair the Board of Jesuit Publications, was passionate about the causes which *Eureka Street* represents: the claims of decency in public life and the place of reasoned argument in public discussion.

During Marie's time in Victorian Parliament, when she served successively as Minister for Health and Minister for Conservation, she appreciated the place of *Eureka Street* in public life, even though she might have disapproved of its criticism of the policies of the government to which she belonged. Marie, who had actively sponsored refugees to Australia after the end of the Indochinese wars, shared our concern for asylum seekers and refugees.

Only Generals who had won particularly significant battles enjoyed triumphs. They were solemn affairs. The General would lead his troops into the city wearing his Nike toga, gold crown, and armour of burnished bronze.

In the procession, he displayed his booty—consumer goods and hand-dog slaves. The latter had then to listen to the imperial orators tell them what miserable people they must be to fight against the might and morality of Rome.

In the meantime, the soldiers doubtless meditated nostalgically upon the origin of *triumph*: the Greek procession in honour of Bacchus, the God of wine and anarchic behaviour.

To pay suitably reverential homage to the victors of recent electoral triumphs, though, you can't go beyond Thomas Babington Macaulay, one of whose English Civil War poems was mined for the Battle Hymn of the Republic:

O wherefore come ye forth in triumph  
from the north,  
With your hands, and your feet, and your  
raiment all red?

After she resigned from parliament, she was free to engage again with this issue. I came to know her well at this time, when she joined the Management Committee of the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre. The invitation was made after some hesitation: many refugee activists had little sympathy with the Kennett Government, and Marie's portfolios of Health and the Environment had always been at the centre of fierce public debate. And to invite such a competent public figure on to the board of a small NGO always awakens latent doubts about one's own professionalism.

On the agenda of her first meeting were delicate items that needed to be handled wisely. Marie listened carefully, and then spoke a few warm words of appreciation of the care and compassion with which the

## At Christmas time

Christmas is the imagination season. Amid the frenzy of end of year school concerts, shopping marathons and preparations for the day, we make room at the inn for the imagination. The events that Christmas celebrates sound like the plot for a Dan Brown blockbuster, or the pitch for the next Mel Brooks musical; political intrigue, the intervention of the divine, a monarch obsessed with absolute rule, a miracle birth, an angelic chorus, several sheep, assorted farm animals, and a bit with a donkey.

Yet the Christmas season also marks a time of reflection when we recall the events of the year—both personal and public—and perhaps, imagine a different reality. The Christmas story reminds us of the need to take a long view both of our own lives and the events of our world. Christmas teaches us that some events are aberrations, while others are part of a larger, unfolding story.

As you reflect over the events of 2004 we hope that the times of joy take precedence over darker moments and that in our world and our lives 2005 is a time of renewed peace.

matters had been handled. The committee members relaxed, and grew in energy and self-confidence from her contribution. She had a purity of purpose that built resolve and resolution about what the organisation was and what it was doing.

We were to recognise this style in her contribution to the Board of Jesuit Publications. She read submissions carefully, listened attentively and appreciatively, asked incisive questions, and offered wise advice. But above all she shared our enthusiasms and passions, and encouraged us to do more effectively what we believed in. We grieve with her husband Jim and their family in their loss, and for ourselves and so many community groups for the friend and adviser we have lost.

—Andrew Hamilton 51



## letters

### Setting an example

It seems that it is not enough for our sportspeople to be setting the standard for athletes around the world. Nor is it enough that Australian actors and musicians have become a force to be reckoned with on the world stage. After spending a few weeks in the UK, where I will be studying for a year, I've discovered another great Aussie export which has been filling the Home Office in Britain with glee for some time now: our refugee and asylum seeker regime.

Imagine the pride I felt upon discovering that the 'Pacific Solution' was the inspiration for a similar idea—the less exotically labelled 'New Vision'—which proposes to automatically send asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants arriving in the UK to 'regional protection zones' where they will be detained in 'transit processing centres' located at the external borders of the EU in order to submit their claims. The masterstroke of the British proposal is the range of nations at its disposal. The suggested 'host' countries currently include Albania, Croatia, Iran, Morocco, Northern Somalia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine. All have serious records of violating the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. As this method finds no support in international law, Australia and Britain can now join forces as pioneering nations of the gulags of the 21st century.

Patriotic sentiments have also been stirred by the extent to which the system of detention has been catching on here. Around 1,800 asylum seekers are locked up without trial and without a time limit. Furthermore, in addition to around a dozen centres already in operation here, construction is underway for new detention centres with target capacities of 4,000. And, unlike Aussies who detain asylum seekers in 'Reception and Processing Centres', over here a spade is a spade, and asylum seekers

coming across the English Channel are kept in the Dover 'Removals' Centre.

When it comes to record-holding however, Australia is clearly in front. The Brits are still able to express shock over the fact that some asylum seekers have been detained for up to two years. The case of two Turkish girls held in detention for 13 months recently provoked an outcry. Have no fear Australia, the record is safe with us for a while yet.

But Australians must not get too complacent, as Britain has plenty of ideas to offer our corridors of power. Just the other day, for example, the Shadow Home Secretary David Davis pledged to 'substantially cut' immigration because, in his words, it endangered 'the values that we in Britain rightly treasure'. He later claimed that uncontrolled immigration would 'fill six new cities the size of Birmingham over the next three decades'. Substitute Birmingham for Geelong and Senator Vanstone could have her next policy platform.

**Christine Bacon**  
Oxford, UK

### Nanny nonsense

Anne Summer's claim that the taxpayer should fund nannies (*Eureka Street*, September 2004) shows how unreal the world has become. There is no justification whatsoever for the taxpayer to subsidise the incomes of middle and upper-class families who do not want to look after their own children.

It is now unexceptional for both parents to work, but that decision should be made with both the costs and the benefits falling on the family which makes it. The taxpayer ought to keep children out of poverty and ought therefore to fund generous child allowances for all families. The family can choose then whether one parent stays at home to look after the children or goes out to work and outsources the care of the children.

Labor's acceptance of the ideas of a transferable tax-free threshold and a higher threshold for the phasing out of family benefits is a fantastic step for all families, especially low paid ones. But it should go further. The best arrangement would be to lift both the individual and

the transferable tax-free threshold to 50 per cent of the minimum wage and index it to the minimum wage. The 30 per cent tax rate should apply to all income over the threshold(s). Family benefits should also be increased and indexed to the minimum wage. The phase-out threshold should also be increased and indexed if it cannot be abolished. Together, these steps would reduce the cost of people moving from welfare to work and ensure that national wage increases were paid in full and not discounted by a loss of benefits.

If the job you want doesn't pay enough to allow you to afford a nanny, then economic sense says either don't take the job or do without the nanny.

**Chris Curtis**  
Langwarrin, VIC

*Eureka Street* welcomes letters from its readers. Short letters are more likely to be published, and all letters may be edited. Letters must be signed, and should include a contact phone number and the writer's name and address.

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## the month's traffic



## Passing go

**G**ONE ARE THE DAYS when Australian immigration officers would conduct spot-checks of the bedrooms and bathrooms of applicants for a spouse visa. These house searches—disinterested inquiries in the name of the law—reflected a presumption within the Department of Immigration that those seeking to migrate to Australia on the grounds of marriage were guilty of deception unless proven otherwise.

Two toothbrushes by the basin. His and her underpants in sufficiently proximate drawers. Letters addressed to both parties as a couple. Such were the critical pieces of evidence which guarded our borders.

The form may be different, but the spirit of spot-checks remains alive and well. When Marina, my wife, wished to apply for permanent residence in Australia, the tranche of evidence required by the Australian Government seemed like the paper equivalent of bathroom inspections.

Although planning to live in Spain, we had decided to apply for Marina's residence to avoid reliving past experiences at Tullamarine airport. On Marina's first journey to Australia prior to our marriage, she was made to feel like an intruder at the gate by an earnest, humourless immigration official who was innately sceptical that anyone on a tourist visa could possibly want to return home after seeing what Australia had to offer.

In addition to the residence application, we needed statutory declarations by friends and family detailing our history as a couple, our own statements detailing where and when we met, our periods of cohabitation, our commitment to each other and even our plans for a family. Documentary evidence of joint economic responsibility, financial solvency, medical perfection, photos of us together and all letters between us during periods of separation soon swelled our dossier to a weighty 2kg pile.

For this abrogation of the right to privacy, we were charged €10 (around A\$17) for the explanatory booklets and

application forms, plus €780 (A\$1,335) as the application fee.

The application form itself was a minefield. Wedged in between 'Have you, or any other person included in this application, ever committed, or been involved in the commission of war crimes or crimes against humanity or human rights?' and 'Do you and your partner intend to maintain a lasting relationship?' (would we really pay \$1,335 if we didn't?) was the ultimate lie detector test: 'Did you enter this relationship with your partner solely to gain permanent residence in Australia?'

And all of this before the interview.

As a former refugee lawyer, I was accustomed to hostile interrogations of my clients. After a Refugee Review Tribunal hearing, the Algerian brother of an applicant emerged sweating, with the words: 'I feel like I've just gone 15 rounds with Mike Tyson'. Four days after a particularly adversarial interview at the Department of Immigration, my 68-year-old Iraqi client died of a heart attack. When she learned of the applicant's death, the immigration officer said, 'I hope the interview didn't contribute to this. I was going to approve him and his wife anyway'.

On another occasion, I was present at a Department of Immigration liaison meeting. In the course of the meeting, I complained on behalf of one of our clients who had begun convulsing under interrogation, so aggressive was the questioning and so reminiscent was it of a prelude to torture she had experienced in her own country. The head of the department's Compliance Division—those responsible for border control, detention and the rounding-up of illegal immigrants—said simply: 'If I had an applicant who started convulsing in an interview, I'd know that I had them right where I wanted them'.

It was thus with some trepidation that we entered the interview. To his eternal credit, the embassy official who interviewed us at the Australian embassy in Madrid did so with impeccable politeness, not to mention an efficiency that put the two-year wait demanded of asylum seekers to shame. He did, however, admit that some Spanish applicants asked whether the application fee also included a return ticket to Australia.

My own experience of obtaining residence here in Spain was significantly different. In the first place, after falling illegal with the full knowledge (and lack of concern) of the Spanish police, these same policemen took me out to lunch and insisted on paying.

Then, after two years of uncertain legal status—during which time a German policeman at Frankfurt airport was the only official to ask how long I had been in the European Union—I made my formal application.

The only documents asked of me were my passport, Marina's identity card, our marriage certificate, a medical certificate and an Australian fingerprint check. There was no application fee and there were no intrusive questions.

Most of this took place under the reign of the Popular Party (PP) Government of Prime Minister José María Aznar who had nominated border control as a major priority. After the 14 March, 2004 election, the new Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) Government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero announced a new approach to illegal immigration. Under the plan, most illegal immigrants employed in Spain are eligible for residence. It is safe to expect that this will be granted regardless of what they have in their bathrooms.

—Anthony Ham

## Border bandits

**A** ROAD TRIP TO ATTEND a priestly ordination is not an occasion traditionally associated with sniffer-dogs pouncing on your luggage looking for drugs. Such was the case when I travelled with three other Jesuit scholastics, studying at El Salvador's University of Central America, on a recent journey to Honduras and Panama.

While several nations in the north of Central America are joining forces to create a free travel zone, the anomalies, red tape and corruption associated with border crossings in this region still exist. Borders bring out the good, the bad and the ugly in each of these countries where poverty confronts poverty and US dollars confront local currencies and red tape.

The border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica presents the most glaring contrasts. After paying to have our minibus fumigated for bugs, we joined a queue in the tropical heat and waited more than 90 minutes to have our documents processed. Relatively well off Costa Rica seems to be trying hard to temper the flow of poorer Nicaraguans looking for economic respite and jobs.

While waiting we were approached by 'guides' offering us the chance to skip the



queue and be delivered directly to a border official. My legally-minded Guatemalan brother questioned the man about the legality of his offer. He replied by asking us whether we had families to feed and informed us that he earned roughly US\$2 for the odd weary traveller he helps.

In the grey zones between countries some border officials seem to be a law unto themselves. Between Honduras and Nicaragua the immigration office closes for an hour over lunch. We arrived seven minutes before the hour, but the official held our passports behind the counter for a good while before asking whether we wanted to wait until after lunch or pay an inconvenience fee.

We arrived in the Nicaraguan capital of Managua on the day of the 25th anniversary of the Sandinista revolution and the fall of the Somoza dictatorship. Although in the middle of the wet season, residents ignored the humid and thunderous weather to dance and listen to music folklore and speeches harking back to the resistance movement heydays.

Between Costa Rica and Panama we got lost as we searched for the fumigation bay. We finally found an official and he seemed bemused by what looked to him like two gringos with a Guatemalan tour guide and a Panamanian driver.

'Anyone here speak Spanish?' he asked, peering curiously through the windows.

'Yes, we all do', we replied.

'And what's your mission?' he asked.

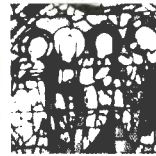
'We're missionaries', my Guatemalan brother replied.

In case you're wondering, we finally made it to the ordination in Panama and, on the way back, to the ordination in Honduras which required us to ditch the bus and board canoes to reach a Garifuna village on Honduras' Caribbean coast. The ordination was a spirited example of enculturation involving many customs of the Garifunas—descendants of deportees from the West Indies two centuries ago.

After all the festivities we sadly left behind the Caribbean shores of Honduras and headed back to El Salvador to start second semester and to reflect on the realities of doing theology and finding God in the third world.

—Kent Rosenthal

*This month's contributors:* **Anthony Ham** is *Eureka Street's* roving correspondent; **Kent Rosenthal** SJ is an Australian Jesuit studying in San Salvador.



## Wives' tales

**T**RADITIONAL CHRISTMAS CRIBS have shepherds, angels, kings and a variety of animals in the bit parts. Trendy cribs change the cast of extras to cowboys, media commentators, and a selection of kangaroos, wallabies and wombats. This Christmas, you could make a strong case for including doctors' wives.

Doctors' wives became notorious during the federal election campaign. It had become evident that many regular Coalition voters in safe Liberal seats intended to vote against it. They held Australia's treatment of asylum seekers and participation in the war on Iraq to be morally abhorrent. These people were then characterised as doctors' wives.

Once labelled, they were marginalised. Doctors' wives, it was implied, spent their idle hours driving hubby's Merce through leafy suburbs, sipping chardonnay, chattering incessantly about issues that only blokes could understand, contracting acute cardiac bleeding, betraying their class and embarrassing their neighbours. How else could you explain anyone failing to move on from *Tampa* and Iraq?

It is a disconcerting fact of life that people who take unpopular moral positions are marginalised. But after we recover from the disconcertment, the interesting question is what we make of being marginalised. Or, for religious people, what God makes of it.

That is where the bit players in the Christmas story, and particularly women—those perennial extras—are interesting. Matthew and Luke both include women. But whereas Luke puts Elizabeth and Anna prominently in the story as ideal versions of Jewish piety, Matthew includes four women, almost by stealth, in the genealogy of Jesus. Rahab, Bathsheba—referred to by Matthew only as Uriah's wife—Ruth and, of course, Mary are all dodgy by the standards of their society, all are marginal.

Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho who had read the polls. She could see that her side would lose, and so offered hospitality and a safe house to Israelite spies. After the town was razed, her life was spared and she lived, an outsider in Israel. Bathsheba, wife of David's general, Uriah, was raped and made pregnant by King David who, to cover his tracks, had Uriah killed. Ruth, another foreigner, went back to Judea with her impoverished Jewish mother. And we first meet Mary when Joseph has to deal with her pregnancy.

Biblical genealogies offer a map of God's way of working. Conventionally, the prominent features through which God's path runs are all male and respectable. That Matthew includes women on this path already says something surprising about God. That he includes only women who are dodgy because of their race or birth is shocking. At the centre of God's plan for humanity are strong women whom responsible men marginalise.

Later Christians softened this message. They saw female martyrs as central features on God's path. But they now described them as weak women who were given extraordinary grace by God. True enough, but the observers lost sight of the heart of the matter, that these were strong women humiliated by their society.

Cribs can be cosy, too. Shepherds neither drink nor swear, angels don't inspire terror, nor do the animals stink. So doctors' wives have a disruptive place there. They might remind us that God's way for Australia lies through their strength and humiliation, not their domestication. ■

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

archimedes



## Clever Kiwis

**O**VER THE PAST 20 YEARS, New Zealand has turned an annual NZ\$2 million fruit and vegetable export business into NZ\$2 billion. The dramatic growth in the NZ horticultural industry has been based on exports of kiwi fruit and wine. The Kiwis have managed to stamp their name all over a fruit that is not even native to their land.

But ask Dr Richard Newcomb from the HortResearch Institute in Auckland what the secret of success has been, and you may be surprised at his answer. 'R & D', he says flatly.

'From day one there was the expectation of building an export market', says Newcomb. With that international focus, the Kiwis developed a sustainable production system for fruit, and then determined how best to bring their fresh produce to international markets—when to pick them, and how to ripen, store, package and transport them. They invented special plastic films to keep them fresh, and tested varieties and tastes.

Newcomb is an expert in the genetics of taste and smell. He heads the Molecular Olfaction Group at HortResearch (the NZ equivalent of a co-operative research centre). His present research includes projects to intensify the taste of fruits and match them to Asian and European markets, as well as to control insect and mammal pests by disrupting their olfactory communication.

But the Kiwis are after even bigger bananas. In June, NZ signed a memorandum of understanding with all the Australian states and the ACT to form an Australia–NZ Biotech Alliance. The Kiwis have committed NZ\$12 million as a catalyst for trans-Tasman biotech business collaboration. 'Apart, we're bit players; together, we're the fifth largest biotechnology hub in the world', says NZ Trade Commissioner to Australia, Mark Ingram.

Projects undertaken range from tests for toxins in shellfish to development of better clover for cattle fodder. But the Kiwis are talking of joint research institutes and funding. Already NZ has invested A\$5 million in the Australian synchrotron, while the two countries have worked cooperatively to develop clinical trials for drugs and vaccines.

People like Dr Andrew Kelly, chief scientific officer of Life Science Ventures, an Auckland-based NZ\$100 million biotech venture capital fund, have a pretty good idea of where to start our joint assault—agricultural biotechnology. 'There's no point', he argues, 'in taking on the US and Europe in areas such as pharmaceuticals. Let's play to our strengths'.

Not only are we good at agriculture and agricultural research, but it is a large part of our respective economies. We have the networks to apply and sell whatever biotechnology we develop. We can even move into the medical field via agricultural biotechnology. An interesting model is provided by two sister companies in Dunedin on NZ's South Island—Ovita Ltd and Covita Ltd. Ovita focuses on developing biotechnology products based on the sheep genome, control of parasite infections, diagnostic tests, fertility control, and muscle growth and repair. Covita takes that research and develops it for off-farm application. In many cases, sheep can give us the clue as to how to deal with human problems, as sheep are already used as models for many human medical conditions.

Whatever other food they provide, those Kiwis are certainly providing food for thought. ■

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

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# Wandering wombats

**I** DON'T SUPPOSE YOU'VE HAD much opportunity lately to study the wombat. In general, this comically named and, one has to admit, somewhat comic looking herbivore is rarely seen on the svelte nature strips or along the bland, clinical streets or in the neat gardens of our capital cities' better suburbs. Or, for that matter, in those engaging backyards you see from trains, where abandoned fridges, eviscerated motorbikes, sloping-roofed chook houses, sagging blow-up swimming pools afloat with leaves, and random clumps of rhubarb all attest to a terrain inimical to the slow, philosophical wombat.

Where I am just now, however, on the verandah of a venerable, slightly staggering cottage looking out over the lush pastures of Bundanon that run down to the Shoalhaven River, the wombat does not exactly rule, but he and she maintain a substantial, unignorable presence. One of them lives under this shack and innumerable others are, at this mid-morning hour, snoozing in their very large burrows.

Your common wombat probably wouldn't appreciate being described as a 'lumbering marsupial' but truth will out. With a body like a beer barrel and a frankly bulbous bum, any pace above a rolling, honest-to-God lumber would have the stewards reaching for the swab.

When they got over their shock on first seeing a wombat, the early settlers called it a badger. But, according to the experts the wombat's nearest relative in the odd spectrum of Australian marsupials is the koala, another macropod, which means literally, big footed. Personally, however, I think the wombat has much in common with the frog.

When it comes to fashion and good looks, frogs, like wombats, start a long way behind, what with having comically bulging eyes, a broad, down-turned mouth that seems to signal defeat and disappointment, and a great spreading backside. As if that were not enough, frogs have swarthy, seemingly empustuled skin. Here beyond doubt is a creature which, if not quite the forgotten of God, is certainly languishing in the outer suburbs of the Divine awareness. All very well to protest that in their element frogs are magnificent, true. In mid-leap and at full stretch a frog is a slim gleam of plaited sinew. But imagine frogs pleading some case or other in court—gloomy, pop-eyed, swarthy, big-bummed and cold, like a delegation of malfunctioning thyroids.

Wombats, waiting patiently out in the foyer for their turn in front of the judge, would not look much better. On that rotund body, a large, well-eared head and a bland, big-eyed, snub-nosed face suggest a kind of dopiness that might engender patronising attitudes and even insults from the insensitive. Like the frog, but unlike his koala relatives, the wombat—when glimpsed motionless and apparently pondering his next move—

seems ill-favoured, not quite how he was meant to end up by his creator. 'Did he who made the koala make thee?' as the man more or less said.

But there is something terribly endearing and yet at the same time vulnerable about the wombat's unfathomable expression, which incidentally rarely changes. Teeth aren't bared, lips don't curl, eyes don't flash: whether racked by lust, tormented by thirst or transported by the sight of a new lush pasture, wombats maintain a Sphinx-like equanimity.

So they ought to, because behind the disguise of that glassy, seemingly brainless stare and that slow, clumsy gait, the wombat has the game sewn up. To begin with, the female wombat's pouch, wherein of course nestles the latest junior, is reversed so that when the wombat digs with its tough, muscled feet and claws designed for the purpose, it doesn't fill baby's bed with sand. Smart *and* thoughtful. Often with one offspring *in utero*, one in the pouch and a toddler in tow, the mother wombat produces a different milk for each teat, with different compositions of lipids, carbohydrates and proteins. This Mum is no mug.

**B**ECAUSE THEY ARE SO well equipped for the task, wombats make spacious burrows—as much as 30 metres long. I won't say I've actually seen a wombat manoeuvring a TV and a *chaise longue* into the burrow, but the way they recline in the warm spring sun at the entrance to their subterranean castles, before descending to sleep the rest of the day away, shows a highly developed capacity for sophisticated self-indulgence. As does their preference for living alone. Wombats welcome visitors—other wombats, that is—but basically are solitary dwellers, kicking offspring out at age two without a tremor of empty nest angst.

When 'my' wombat emerges from under the house each evening to graze the grassy slopes, he is setting out on a peripatetic feast that might take him three or four kilometres through the night and involve visits to several burrows, some his own, for a rest and a clean up. Should he break a tooth as he chomps along his nocturnal way, well, no worries. His teeth grow continuously and the broken one simply replaces itself. If wombats ruled, root canals, caps, crowns and bridges and similar barbarities would be things of the past: the entire dental economy would collapse, bringing not a flicker of interest to the wombat's impassive face.

Had Aesop been able to observe a wombat going about its nightly life, he would have amended his fable to read, 'Slow and apparently dopey wins the race'. So we take comfort. ■

**Brian Matthews** is a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Victoria University.

# The party's over

In light of the federal election, **Joe Camilleri** considers the questions that have yet to be asked

**S**INCE 9 OCTOBER we have had the usual stream of election post-mortems. Several weeks after the event, journalists, academics and pundits of various kinds are still trying to make sense of the unexpected scale of Labor's defeat, the implications of the Coalition's control of the Senate, and the inability of the Greens to stamp their authority as a new emerging force in Australian politics.

While there is much to explain, most of the analysis to date has focused on appearances and symptoms. Endless words have been written and spoken about the ailment which afflicts this or that leader, this or that party, or this or that election strategy. However, there has been remarkably little said about the ailment which may afflict the entire body politic.

Numerous explanations have been offered for the ALP's poor showing: Latham's youthfulness or 'inexperience', the ill-judged last minute release of new policies, especially on Tasmania's forests, the effectiveness of the government's advertising scare campaign, Labor's failure to return to its social roots, the reasonably good shape of the Australian economy.

No doubt all this sheds some light on the result, but little on the mood of the nation, and even less on the health of our political processes and institutions.

to shape the way we experience anxiety and the conscious and unconscious responses we bring to that experience. At first sight, deeply felt anxieties do not seem to impinge much on politics generally or on election campaigns in particular. Obscured though it may seem, the connection is nevertheless real.

The insecurities of the nation cannot but percolate through to issues of identity, multiculturalism, relations with the outside world, and most importantly to notions of the 'good life' that economy and politics are supposedly meant to deliver.

Australian insecurity is not a new phenomenon. Australians of European origin have long experienced in their relations with 'people-of-colour' a mixture of anxiety and discomfort. This experience continues to shape our relations with Aboriginal Australia as much as it does with Asia. We are still a long way from developing the knowledge, confidence and sensitivity needed to nurture relations based on reciprocal trust and sustained dialogue.

**M**ORE RECENTLY, economic insecurity seems to have grown, even in the midst of affluence. Australia's rapid integration into increasingly deregulated regional and global markets has produced both winners and losers. Hence, the sharp inequalities that separate the 20 per cent at the bottom of the wealth and income ladder (Howard's 'battlers') from the 20 per cent at the top. And for the remaining 60 per cent (where we find the so-called aspirational class), endless anxiety about how to move higher or at least how to avoid sinking lower. For many, employment does not mean job security, let alone job satisfaction. The ladder of aspiration often turns out to be more the treadmill of desperation.

For some, other questions are equally troubling: How will we cope with the continuing influx of Asian migrants (who take jobs and may weaken our 'Australianness'), with possible new waves of boat people (a reminder of the large pools of human misery within reach of our shores), and terrorists who can strike at any time, in any place (Bali may have left a deeper scar on the Australian psyche than is generally acknowledged)?

A deeper analysis would begin...with the electorate itself

## the mood of the nation

A deeper analysis would begin not with political parties, their leaders, strategies and tactics, but with the electorate itself.

One does not have to go far in today's Australia to observe a profound unease about the future. This is not to say that all Australians experience the same insecurities, or that they deal with them in exactly the same way. Age, income, social status, gender, and ethnic and religious background no doubt help

And difficult questions too for those with responsibilities for the raising of children: Can our schools deliver them pathways to comfort and security? And, what of the pitfalls of drug addiction, depression and other psychological disorders?

It is reasonable to argue that it has been Howard's great skill to read this psychological undercurrent and to harness it for political ends. Was it not he who—prior to his first election victory—promised to deliver a society where Australians could feel relaxed and comfortable? His message ever since has been essentially the same. The alliance with the United States, the treatment of asylum seekers, the children-overboard affair, the very notion of 'border protection', and the threat to take anti-terrorist pre-emptive action in the region are all meant to reassure, to convey the same promise of safety.

By identifying so closely with the great and powerful, Howard offers many Australians the comfort zone they so desperately seek. Dependence on and support for the United States—in Iraq, the 'war on terror', the UN, on issues of global warming, the free trade agreement, relations with south-east Asia and the Islamic world—are all presented as a sometimes costly, but indispensable, insurance policy.

Though they featured less prominently than in the 2001 election, these themes had been so clearly and forcefully articulated in the preceding months (and years) that the electorate was left in no doubt as to the Howard Government's cultural and psychological message. To this was added another potent symbol—the stability of interest rates. What was at issue here was not the government's technical capacity to prevent a future rise in interest rates, but the impression that it was sympathetically disposed to the fears of Australia's mortgage belt. The commitment to border protection (i.e. erecting a solid fence around the nation) was now complemented by the tantalising promise of another kind of protection (i.e. a safe financial fence around one's own home).

If one turns to the parties of change—the ALP, Greens and Democrats—the message was much less clear. Not much can be said about the Democrats as they were scarcely visible, not just in the election campaign but for the best part of three years. What can we say of Labor's response to Australia's profound insecurities? Medicare Gold, a slightly fairer system of funding for Australian schools, a promise to bring Australian troops back from Iraq, and a last minute pledge to do something about Tasmania's forests. What did all this add up to? Not a lot. How effective an antidote to the pervasive experience of anxiety? Not terribly.

As for the Greens, they signalled that when it came to issues of environment, peace and justice, they were generally on the side of the angels. But did they have alternative policies as distinct from an alternative wish list? More importantly, did they have a convincing story to tell about our future relations with the United States, Indonesia, or the Islamic world? And, what of future economic directions? Most importantly, what was the intended message for the 'anxious nation'? How were Australia's fears and insecurities to be handled?

To say all this is not to denigrate those who campaigned for the preservation of forests, an end to military involvement in Iraq or a more civilised approach to the stranger, be it the Asian immigrant or Middle Eastern asylum seeker. It remains to be asked, however, how well equipped the parties in ques-

tion are to address the underlying malaise that afflicts much of contemporary Australia.

To ask these questions is to invite several others. If serious soul-searching is called for, whose views and experiences should we take into account? In any case, the issue is not simply what happens inside Australia, but how Australia situates itself in the world. Whether we look at trade, investment, interest rates, oil prices, refugees, environment, global warming, terrorism, or security, we are dealing with regional and global trends. No serious diagnosis can afford to ignore these connections.

**F**OR POLITICAL PARTIES the problem is structural. Personalities aside, they lack the intellectual equipment and institutional infrastructure needed to diagnose, let alone to prescribe remedies. Not surprisingly, the content of what they have to communicate is at best flimsy. So is the medium of communication, especially during election campaigns, where the accent is on cosmetic presentation of leadership styles, tedious point-scoring, the 30-second media grab, and costly and mindless advertising.

It is arguable that many citizens, including a good number who voted for the Coalition parties, are disconcerted by the growing gap between repetitive, second-rate politics and the reality of their lives. Many might be more disposed to thinking about social and political options, if they were offered forums able to engage their concerns and fears about the future.

The key question can be simply put: can we envisage in the Australia of the next ten to 20 years a new kind of public discourse, and new ways of conversing? In such a conversation there would be few rewards for shortcuts and glib answers. The focus would be not just on policies, but on ways of thinking and doing things, on conventions and institutions. Our educational, media, legal and political institutions in particular would be subjected to thorough scrutiny. Political parties—even of the more progressive variety—in part because they have become professionally and ideologically attuned to the imperatives of media-packaged electioneering, seem ill-equipped for the task. What is in question is the party system itself. This is perhaps the

...can we envisage in the ... next ten to 20 years a  
**new kind of public discourse...?**

most important lesson of this year's federal election—a lesson which, we may be pleasantly surprised to find, many intuitively understand, even when they cannot articulate it or are at first psychologically discomfited by it. ■

**Joseph Camilleri** is Professor of International Relations at La Trobe University. He has written and lectured extensively on international relations, governance and globalisation, human rights, North-South relations, international organisations, the United Nations, and the Asia-Pacific region.

# Pomp and circumstance

Tim Martyn gets up close and personal on the campaign trail

**N**INE DAYS OUT from the federal election, Mark Latham emerged from another 30 minute stint of 'talk back' claptrap. 'Well that really set the news agenda for the day', despaired one *Sydney Morning*

the one individual best able to present their case and represent the nation's interests. Part of making this choice includes an opportunity to reflect upon the merits of each candidate before voicing a democratic preference;

for once these preferences have been tallied, the electorate is expected to remain largely silent while a new mandate is hastily implemented.

Election campaigns are intended to provide this opportunity for reflection. Now that another election has passed, it is important to ask just how much we learned about the policies on offer. Did the 'news' you read, saw or heard provide the analysis required for you to make an informed choice?

One trend that emerged from this election is that the Australian contest has become increasingly presidential. Through the mainstream media's narrow lens, Australia watched a slogan-filled slugfest between two big spending contenders. As each scripted barb was met by a choreographed riposte, journalists 'embedded' in the campaign eagerly redistributed the 'live action' recorded from the ringside. And while the cameras and digital recorders were trained on the prime ministerial stoush, those voices calling for attention on behalf of other national issues went unheard.

On the election trail, each 'embedded' journalist travels within a whirlwind of spin. From unknown destination to unknown destination, from photo opportunity to press conference, the media's brief was to spectate, not speculate; we watched what we were brought to watch. Thus, the Australian public became spectators too.

**A**S THE CAMPAIGN progressed, one day morphed into the next; even the media's questions appeared recycled. Faced with another policy announcement, the *Australian Financial Review* would ask Mark Latham whether it was fully-funded; Channel Nine

*Herald* journalist, snapping off her dictaphone in disgust. Labor's campaign launch was a mere day away, and the Australian voting public had just been treated to another hard-hitting interview: yes, Mark Latham had been present for the birth of his two children; no, he hadn't brought any massage oil.

Voting at election time is one of our few responsibilities as Australian citizens. However, making that vote an informed choice has become an increasingly difficult burden.

I've always been fascinated by the cut and thrust of election campaigning, and the making of an Australian prime minister. Subsequently, I volunteered to follow the Latham campaign as a youth 'Election Tracker', and write for an independent website, [www.electiontracker.net](http://www.electiontracker.net). My mission, along with three other young volunteers, was to provide an alternative analysis of the campaign than that presented by the rest of the travelling press gallery, while attempting to demystify the ultimate democratic event.

Once every three years, Australians are compelled to choose from a field of political candidates,



or Seven would ask for a response to the Coalition's response to an earlier announcement; and then one of the major dailies would follow up by asking whether this new spending commitment would negatively impact upon interest rates? By question seven or eight, someone might be so bold as to request additional information on the policy itself. Then question time would be over, leaving the journos an hour or two to peruse that morning's quotables, file their story, and then board the 'opportunity express' to the next marginal seat.

Thankfully, there was always plenty of time to drown one's sorrows on the campaign trail—one more of the trail's daily routines.

On the bus, I listened as seasoned journalists commented on how stale and stage-managed election campaigns have become; how politics has been turned into a public relations exercise orchestrated by professional PR firms. Now, the only message left to report is 'their' message. The need to feed 'news'—any news—back to headquarters up to three times a day has left the mainstream media vulnerable to this kind of message management. As the campaign spin doctors starve society of real information, the media quickly devours whatever scraps remain on offer.

**W**HILE AUSTRALIANS MAY be compelled to vote, they are not compelled to consume the 'information' dished out to them. Labor spent millions of dollars crafting the story of the 'Boy from Green Vale', yet Australia's swinging voters weren't listening. The federal election may have been one of the most policy-driven campaigns in recent history, yet Labor (through the media lens) failed to convey the merits of those policies to a sceptical electorate. Through a combination of spin and the media's need for simplicity, their policies were reduced to content-free slogans. In the end, Australia's swinging voters went with the devil they knew.

After eight years of conservative government in which numerous issues of national importance were raised—immigration detention, climate change, pre-emptive war, national security and our relationship with our region—this election was won on the back of four simple words: 'Keeping interest rates low'. No matter the forum, the fortunes of Australian families were incessantly portrayed as dependent upon low interest rates, yet where was the debate surrounding this assertion? While economists rallied against the notion that a future federal government, Labor or Liberal, would send interest rates sky-rocketing, the media continued to convey the Coalition's warning on interest rates to a cautious voting public. They continued to do so because it was all they were hearing on the campaign trail.

Which leads me to ask: just what sort of mandate did the Australian people really give the

Coalition for their fourth term? Did the Coalition receive an endorsement for their plans to privatise the rest of Telstra, or to remove unfair dismissal laws for small businesses and restrictions on cross-media ownership? Does a government elected to keep interest rates low hold a universal mandate to rule?

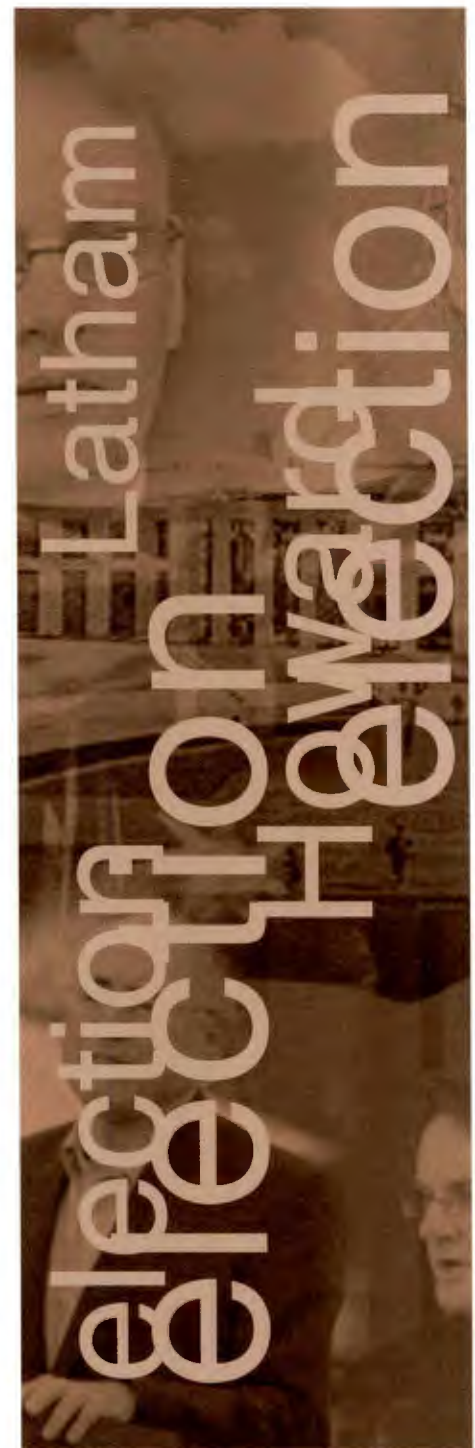
When election campaigns are reduced to a cacophony of competing soundbites, Australian democracy is poorly served. Unfortunately, the future outlook is similarly grim. Election coverage will increasingly be left to junior journalists, campaigns will be ever more tightly managed by public relations firms and the relaxing of cross-media ownership laws will see the range of issues covered contract even further.

The Australian voting public deserves better. Thankfully, the internet is one medium that supports in-depth independent investigation, and even provides an opportunity for debate among citizens. It is here that voters can become informed citizens by supplementing the information they receive from more mainstream mediums.

With fewer time and space constraints, the internet is only going to improve as a medium for political reporting and analysis. And as the internet becomes more mainstream, its capacity to inform voters will grow.

In the interests of democracy in Australia, it is my hope that rather than switching off at the next election, Australians turn on the computer instead. It is there that the Australian voting public will find answers to the questions that were never asked. ■

**Tim Martyn** joined Mark Latham on the federal election campaign trail for as a volunteer youth journalist. He is currently employed as Policy and Research Officer at Jesuit Social Services.



# The original Europeans

Anthony Ham discovers that Basque is not a region but a way of life

**S**OME YEARS AGO, deep in the Sahara Desert, I asked a traveller where he came from. He said Catalonia. I made some comment about Spain, whereupon he said, 'I don't think you heard me. I said that I am Catalan, from Barcelona. I am not Spanish.' And then he stormed off.

A few years later, I met Fernando in Madrid. When I asked him where he was from, he said, 'I was born in the Basque Country but I am not an ETA terrorist. I am Spanish and I am proud to be Spanish'.

More than any other country in Europe, Spain is a nation defined by regional sensibilities, by the battle for coexistence between a state and its constituent elements. This was most starkly illustrated in a 1997 survey by the Vizcaya Chamber of Commerce (Vizcaya is the region of the Spanish Basque Country surrounding Bilbao). Some 80 per cent of the native Basque children who were questioned stated that their primary identity was Basque. A further 12 per cent said that they felt European, while just eight per cent considered themselves Spanish. Among children whose parents had migrated to the Basque Country, 48 per cent said that they were Basque, 28 per cent saw themselves as European and 24 per cent said that they were Spanish.

Indeed, the Basque Country is the area of Spain where regional identity is strongest. It is also here that the survival, or otherwise, of Spain will be determined.

The Basques are quite possibly the oldest people in Europe. Their history has no legend of origins, no migration myth to explain how they came to live in the north of the Iberian Peninsula. The Basque language, Euskera—described by the 19th-century dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy as 'so confusing and obscure that it can hardly be understood'—pre-dates the Indo-European invasion of Europe in around 900 BC. It is an orphan language so distinct that no linguistic relative has been found.

It is for this reason that Basques consider themselves to be the original Europeans.

The Basques were here when the Romans occupied Iberia and the Roman province of Vasconia gave the Basques the name by which they are known.

The Basques, who have historically called themselves Euskaldun (speakers of Euskera) who inhabit Euskal Herria (the land of the Euskera-speakers), fought against the Vikings, against the Muslim armies which occupied Iberia for 800 years and against the Christian kingdoms which sought to integrate Basque territories into their realm.

This history of battling against national entities or larger empires has fed an enduring image of the Basques as a hostile, warrior race. In the 12th-century history, *Codex* by Aimeric de Picard, the author speaks of 'Basques and Navarrese, who practice such cruelties to Christians, laying waste like infidels, sparing neither elderly, orphans, widows or children'. In *Don Quijote*, it is a Basque or Vizcayan to whom Cervantes gives the words, 'Me kill you, or me no Vizcayan'.

At the same time, Basques, unlike other European peoples of history, have never harboured territorial ambitions beyond their own land. Their fight has always been for the right to live





in Basque territory as a distinct nation free from outside interference in their cultural traditions.

Basque territory is divided between Spain and France. Although there are three provinces in French Basque Country—Labourd (Lapurdi in Euskera), Basse-Navarre (Benafaroa) and Soule (Zuberoa)—French Basques account for just nine per cent of the overall Basque population. Some 75 per cent of Basques reside in three Spanish Basque provinces—Guipúzcoa (Gipuzkoa), Vizcaya (Bizkaia) and Alava (Araba). The final province, Navarra (Nafarroa), is a disputed territory, with the northern districts ethnically Basque and the southern districts inhabited predominantly by Spaniards. Although Navarra is considered by die-hard Basque nationalists to be an integral part of Basque territory, it does not fall within the Autonomous Community of Euskadi, the administrative entity of the Basque provinces in Spain.

**T**HE DIVERSITY OF THE BASQUE people across the provinces is reflected in its cities. San Sebastián in Guipúzcoa is elegant and sophisticated, at once the most European and most Basque of Basque cities, and historically the capital of militant Basque nationalism. Bilbao, transformed into a European centre of culture since the opening of the Guggenheim Museum in 1997, is the economic engine room of the Basque Country. It is also the home base of the traditionally moderate party of power,

the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV or Basque Nationalist Party). Vitoria, the official capital of Spanish Basque Country is provincial and strategically located as a buffer against the Spanish Castilian heartlands below the River Ebro. The walls of this brooding old town are adorned with pro-ETA graffiti.

Vitoria, Bilbao and San Sebastián may be the centres of modern power, but it is only in Guernica (Gernika), midway between Bilbao and San Sebastián in the province of Vizcaya, that Basque identity can be understood.

Guernica boasts a strange, hybrid architecture which itself tells a story. Subtle 19th-century arches support 1940s buildings laid out upon a medieval street plan. It was here, on Monday 26 April 1937, at 4:40pm, that German planes

dropped splinter and incendiary bombs upon a town filled with traders from the surrounding villages and with the refugees of Spain's Civil War. Urged on by Spain's future dictator, Francisco Franco, the German planes unleashed the first civilian massacre of the modern military age, killing 1,645 people in around three hours.

From his headquarters in Salamanca, Franco initially denied the involvement of his forces or their allies, claiming that poor weather had prevented their planes from flying. In support of his case that the Basques themselves had dynamited their own town, Franco released a flight log which later proved to be from the wrong day.

The journalist George Steer of the London *Times* was in Guernica at the time and his reports (carried also in the *New York Times*) horrified a world soon to become accustomed to the deaths of unarmed civilians. An outraged Pablo Picasso, who had been commissioned to paint a mural for the Spanish pavilion at the 1937 World Fair, produced a breathtaking and highly political masterpiece, capturing Guernica in all its deathly anguish.

Within three days, Franco's troops occupied Guernica. Mark Kurlansky, author of *The Basque History of the World*, reports an incident when one of Franco's troops became so exasperated by the questioning of journalists who were taken on a tour of Guernica that he snapped, 'Of course it was bombed. We bombed it, and bombed it, and bombed it, and, bueno, why not.'

And yet, somehow, despite the devastation, the Gernikako Arbola (Tree of Guernica), the most important symbol of the Basques, survived.

The Tree of Guernica still stands alongside the 19th-century Basque assembly, the Casa de Juntas. An oak tree has stood on this spot since the 14th-century. According to legend, the first oak survived for 450 years until its death in 1811. An offshoot, planted in 1742, replaced it and was the focal point of Basque independence until 1892. The third, missed by German bombers, survived



Clockwise from right: Plaza Foru, Gernika; San Sebastián and Bahía de la Concha; Bilbao and Museo Guggenheim; and Basque flag.



from 1858 until 2004, whereupon a new sapling was prepared to fill the void. Upon the death of the third Tree of Guernica, the president of the Basque assembly, Ana Madariaga, stated simply: 'It's finished its life cycle ... I want to believe in the idea of the eternal tree, we ended one cycle, we start another'.

The dried-up trunk of the original tree now stands in a small pavilion in the grounds of the assembly. It was under this tree that the Basque assembly, the Juntas Generales, met for centuries to legislate and rule on foral (Basque customary) law. Local village assemblies from across Vizcaya used to send representatives to meet under the Tree of Guernica. The King of Castile, who was nominally sovereign over the Basque Country, would come to the sessions under the oak tree to swear that the Spanish authorities would respect the authorities of the fueros.

The fueros themselves had first been codified in 1155 and were remarkably enlightened for medieval law, guaranteeing 'justice to the poor as to the rich'. These laws covered many aspects of criminal and commercial law, regulating everything from the requisite purity



of cider to laws of inheritance and the recognition of human rights.

It was under the Tree of Guernica that the first regional Basque Government of José Antonio Aguirre stood, on 7 October 1936, to swear the oath of Basque office:

Humble before God  
 Standing on Basque soil  
 In remembrance of Basque ancestors  
 Under the Tree of Guernica  
 I swear faithfully to fulfil my commission

Less than seven months later, Guernica was in ruins and the entire Basque Country soon fell under the occupation of Franco's fascist government. Tens of thousands of Basques were rounded up into concentration camps and the Basque language of Euskera was banned, its speakers ordered to 'speak Christian'. All statutes of autonomy were abolished and the Spanish Basque Country, like the rest of Spain, would remain under fascist occupation until Franco's death in 1975.

**W**HEN SPAIN AND THE Spanish Basque Country emerged from dictatorship four decades later and took its first steps towards democracy, perhaps its most pressing issue was how to prevent the dismantling of Spain while satisfying regional demands for self-rule. The 1979 Statute of Guernica provided the Basque Country

with greater autonomy than any other region of Europe as matters of housing, agriculture, town planning, sport, tourism, health and social services all came within the powers of the Basque regional government. The statute was proclaimed under the oak Tree of Guernica.

Since that time, Spain has coexisted uneasily with its regions, most notably the Basque Country. Since 1968, more than 800 people have been killed by the Basque terrorist group ETA. During the same period, many Basques, led by the PNV with its motto 'God and the Old Laws', have strained under security crackdowns which have invariably targeted, and often killed Basques. The clamour for independence has never been greater.

In early October 2004, the arrest in south-western France of ETA's leadership signalled the latest, potentially fatal blow to the terrorist organisation. At the same time, the Basque regional Parliament was debating a motion by the leader of the Basque Government, Juan José Ibarretxe, which calls for the Spanish Basque Country to become a community 'freely associated' with Spain. Among the powers sought by this new entity is independent diplomatic representation abroad.

The motion is to be voted on before the end of 2004. At last count, the Basque Government remains two

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votes short of the necessary majority. Polls in the Basque Country suggest a region evenly divided between those wanting independence from Spain and those wishing to remain within the Spanish state. If successful, the Basque Government has promised a referendum on the proposal, regardless of the fact that regional governments have no legal power to call referenda under the Spanish constitution and despite the certainty that the plan will be rejected by the national Spanish parliament.

These are extraordinary times in Spain, potentially the endgame of a



Pasarela Zubi Zuri over Ría de Bilbao (left) and Bilbao's Museo Guggenheim (above).

centuries-long embrace of mutual misunderstanding. To Spaniards, at stake is the very idea of Spain, a country which prides itself on its diversity. To many Basques, the question is one of survival as a distinct people as expressed in their right to self-determination.

The Tree of Guernica has seen it all before. But this time could be different. In an era when Europe is centralising and moving closer together, it could be that one of its largest members is falling apart from within. ■

**Anthony Ham** is a freelance writer living in Madrid.



## Bali Cigarette

It was there. That crackle of fire between his fingers,  
Struck with the second last match, it ignited the attack—  
A thermal headspin ascending through twisting smoke,  
Vapours of clove rising like temples from terraced fields,  
To the warm neck of mountains. Some twenty years ago.

He knows this ambush but he is caught every time;  
Smells the numbing net of smoke. Hears the village  
Cocks crow. Sees the old men grin betel nuted teeth  
Oily red with resin. Tastes coconut and honey wax.  
Remembers how salt stiffened hair into ringlets.

Another tongue flames. Unhelmeted she rode pillion,  
Into the mouths of Kuta sunsets. Down shaded paths  
Of palm and two stroke. To be parked in photo albums—  
Ordered memories stored for safekeeping. Just like the  
Old surfboard now carried from one shed to the next.

**Tim Edwards**



# Spreading the word

Tony Malkovic investigates an Australian Christian broadcasting service into the Asia-Pacific

**M**IKE MOORE AND HIS WIFE CHERYL decided seven years ago to move to Kununurra, in the extreme north of Western Australia, not far from the Northern Territory.

For many people, the attraction of Kununurra is that it's the eastern gateway to the Kimberley, one of the most remote and breathtaking landscapes in the world: home of outback 4WD adventure, rugged terrain, an outback sea and giant barramundi.

But for Mike, the attraction was to lend support to an unusual radio project aimed at broadcasting Christian radio programs to some 60 per cent of the world's population.

'I guess I got involved because as a Christian our whole aim in life is to help people', says Mike, who used to run a mechanical repair and hire business and grew up in the West Kimberley town of Derby.

'And I could see that radio could help a lot of people in the Third World countries. We decided to chuck in the money side of things and come with HCJB where you don't actually get paid. You get supported by different churches and Christian people.'

Mike is the local manager for HCJB World Radio, a worldwide Christian broadcasting group based in the US. HCJB pioneered evangelical broadcasting in 1931, beaming short-wave programs from a converted sheep shed in Ecuador. These days, it broadcasts to more than 100 countries in 120 languages. And depending on the target audience, the group uses short-wave, AM and FM radio, satellite, TV and the internet to get its evangelical messages out.

HCJB is the radio call sign originally in Ecuador. From that, a motto has been created: 'The motto is "Heralding Christ Jesus Blessings" but that's not our name, our name is HCJB', says Mike.

In October, HCJB announced that it had finally cleared seven years of red tape and local opposition and had the go ahead from the Western Australian Government to lease Crown land to extend its broadcasting centre several kilometres outside Kununurra.

Although it already broadcasts radio programs in 11 languages to the Asia Pacific region from Kununurra, HCJB plans to expand its short-wave broadcasts by leasing the extra land and building another 31 radio towers some 90 metres high.

The Kununurra towers would take programs produced at HCJB's Melbourne studios and

broadcast them further into the Asia Pacific region. In all, the new towers would cost an estimated \$20 million. But for the past three years, emotions have run high over the proposal.

Long-time Kununurra resident Keith Wright is a vocal opponent who says there are still widespread concerns, especially given the rise in terrorism around the world in recent years.

'In Perth, you're about 1,800 kilometres away from your nearest Muslim country', says Keith, who is also a shire councillor. 'We're about 180 kilometres away from our nearest Muslim country. They're broadcasting Christian messages to 220 million people in Indonesia, and about 180 million of them are Muslim.'

'An awful lot of people have voiced the opinion, and I tend to be one of them, that it's probably not a wise choice to potentially make Kununurra, and Australia, the source of this religious indoctrination.'

He says another concern is that the towers would be a 'blot on the landscape' and a danger to planes flying scenic tours around the town. He acknowledges that people in other countries could exercise their choice and simply turn off the radio if they didn't like HCJB's programs.

'It's not the people's choices we're concerned about, it's the fact some of the radical groups or some of the governments in some of these areas might feel we're inflicting something on them that they choose that their people shouldn't be listening to', he says.

**B**UT MIKE MOORE SAYS the group's current three towers have been broadcasting Christian short-wave radio for more than 18 months, and there hasn't been any backlash.

'No, nothing at all. You must realise there are hundreds of Christian radio stations all around the world broadcasting into Muslim countries and there are hundreds of Muslim radio stations broadcasting into Australia. So it's a two-way thing. And I think people just accept that. There have been Christian radio stations around for the last 75 years, and there have never been any reprisals against the radio stations.'

He says the programs HCJB sends out don't need to be modified for Muslim countries.

'No we don't because we're non-political and non-critical. So we send out a positive family message and we send out the Christian message and we don't make any excuse for that', he explains.

So are Muslim countries likely to take issue with groups such as HCJB broadcasting Christian programs? President of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, Dr Ameer Ali, says on principle he doesn't have a problem with Christian groups broadcasting into other countries, saying Australia is a democratic country.

**'A**NYONE CAN BROADCAST any message they want as long as they do not hurt the feelings of another community or another group of people deliberately', says Dr Ali.

But he says it depends on what is broadcast. With hot spots of religious tension such as Ambon and Central Sulawesi in Indonesia, there could be concerns.

'If it deliberately broadcast into those regions with the idea of converting the Muslims to Christianity, that might be a problem', Dr Ali points out. 'A simple religious message promoting the ideas of Christianity, I don't think anybody can say anything against it. So that's harmless. It all depends on what is being broadcast. On principle, I don't see an objection.'

Anglican Bishop Brian Kyme is of a similar opinion, saying the issue is much the same as Muslim programs shown on community TV in Australia.

'They're very informative but if one is simply not interested they can turn off the program', he points out. 'I don't think there's really a problem with allowing that sort of broadcasting, I can't see that it's infringing anyone's rights', says Bishop Kyme, who's Chair of the Anglican Committee for Multicultural Ministry.

However, he sees a wider issue.

'I have heard some stories about some people who've claimed to have been converted through broadcasts', he says. 'But I think it would not be to any great extent. In my opinion, the vast sums of money to be spent on short-wave broadcasting to other countries could be spent more effectively.'

Mike Moore believes there's been a campaign of misinformation waged against the HCJB project over the years, which resulted in a petition with some 800 signatures. But despite that, he says when HCJB held an open day and tour of facilities for those opposed to the project, no one from the town bothered to show up.

'I think people are realising now that a lot of the nonsense against us was false', he says.

In October, HCJB announced on its website that it had finally got the green light from the Western Australian Government to expand onto adjacent land. The go ahead marks the end of a long road: HCJB had to get approval from some 19 government

departments, as well as native title clearances, and applications to Canberra for four international broadcasting licences. Mike Moore says the local shire has given planning approval in principle and construction on the 31 towers is likely to start in April/May after the wet season.

'I think one of the main things we have to realise in this whole exercise is that as Christians we believe that we're doing what God wants us to do and our confidence is in God', he says. 'So we're just a small cog in a big world, just operating under God.'



*'We're about  
180 kilometres away  
from our nearest  
Muslim country.  
They're broadcasting  
Christian messages to  
220 million people in  
Indonesia, and about  
180 million of them  
are Muslim.'  
—Keith Wright*

He said for the project to go ahead 'we need to be praying to God and relying on Him. It's not the people who are making it happen, it's God that's making it happen'.

**Tony Malkovic** is a freelance writer based in Perth. He is a former reporter and producer with ABC TV.

# Charting a course for the Philippines

Fatima Measham investigates the declining credibility of Filipino President Gloria Arroyo

**F**ILIPINO PRESIDENT GLORIA Macapagal Arroyo initiated a policy debate of a kind never seen before in Manila, when she announced the country's fiscal deficit had become its biggest problem.

The State of the Nation Address—an occasion generally dominated by pro-poor rhetoric and visions of national unity—raised more than a few eyebrows when President Arroyo presented a list of eight tax measures to address the looming fiscal crisis.

Whilst critics were quick to dismiss her legislative agenda, it was supported by a group of economics professors from the University of the Philippines, who warned of economic collapse in the next two to three years if certain strategies were not implemented.

Although the Philippines' budget has been running at deficit for several years, the prospects are indeed grim. The current fiscal deficit is over A\$7 billion. Public sector debt is at an astounding A\$130 billion and has been exacerbated by the devaluation of the peso (around half of the debt is in foreign currency). The government is currently trying to prevent a credit downgrade by foreign lenders, which would affect lending rates, debt serviceability, and availability of funds for development projects.

**A**T FIRST GLANCE, Arroyo seems to possess the necessary skills to navigate the economy through these turbulent times. She is, after all, an economist.

First catapulted to the presidency by a popular revolt against Joseph Estrada in 2001, her penchant for detail came as a relief to non-government organisations and advocacy groups who feel they can engage the new administration in policy reform.

However, a pattern of politically expedient decisions have undermined Arroyo's

credibility and belie her image as a strong president.

Her decision to lift the moratorium on the death penalty late last year, was widely perceived to be a reaction to increased pressure from the local Chinese community, whose members were being targeted for kidnapping (a capital offence in the Philippines). This decision contrasts with the withdrawal of Filipino humanitarian troops from Iraq, in order to save the life of abducted truck driver Angelo de la Cruz.

While the comparison may be weak, it is worth noting the underlying inconsistency between wanting to be seen as tough on local issues yet conceding to the demands of foreign terrorists. To understand these actions, one must consider the political value of populism. In both situations Arroyo revealed her vulnerability to pressure.

Inadequate government policy on population control further highlights the issue of Arroyo's credibility. The Philippines has a population of more than 84 million, with an annual population growth rate of 2.36 per cent. One might expect a person with an economics background to understand that high population levels and high public debt



President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo  
AAP/AFP Romeo Gacad

will lead to dire consequences. One clear illustration is to be found in education. At the start of the school year in 2003, there was a shortage of over 44,000 classrooms and 38,000 teachers.

Arroyo's government has not addressed the issue of population growth on a national scale. It is suggested that the absence of a clear policy is to avoid antagonising influential Catholic Church

leaders, who oppose artificial population control. In contrast, major business leaders are urging Arroyo to establish a national policy on population control, including the provision of artificial contraceptives to the poor. Described as a devout Catholic, Arroyo maintains a 'hands-off' approach, even as she sets a target of a 1.9 per cent population growth rate by the end of her term in 2010. How too might one reconcile her 'pro-life' stance on population control while permitting the resumption of executions for some capital offences?

The most infamous blow to her credibility, however, involves her decision to run for president at the May election. Arroyo had declared in 2002 that she would be able to govern better if she eschewed campaigning, and therefore would not stand for the presidency after her term.

**A**NALYSTS IN THE MEDIA remarked that her decision was a welcome change in a culture where positions of power are held until such time as they can be bequeathed to the next generation.

However, Arroyo reversed her decision a year later, saying that she would put aside her own wishes for peaceful retirement in order to offer herself as a leader with vision and experience.

Arroyo caused further disappointment when, after winning the election, she was believed to have coerced well respected cabinet member, Dinky Soliman, into resigning from the Department of Social Welfare and Development, in order to hand over the portfolio to Vice President Noli de Castro, a media personality credited with helping Arroyo win the election. De Castro has since declined the post, undoubtedly due to the backlash from civil society stalwarts. Indeed, serious discontent exists over Arroyo's leadership. To many Filipinos she comes from a long line of 'traditional politicians' who run for government in order to maintain the status quo from which they benefit. Lacking credibility, she has so far been unable to galvanise or inspire the people.

While Arroyo's coalition may hold 14 of 24 Senate seats and over 70 per cent of the House of Representative seats, the strength of her power base is deceptive. She was elected on a margin of 1.1 million votes—a small proportion of the 35 million votes available. Many legislators

are influenced by business or populist interests and may not fast-track the necessary fiscal measures Arroyo has proposed. The previous Congress passed only one of 13 bills that she had endorsed.

**T**AXATION IS NEVER A popular policy for government. Although some of Arroyo's proposals merely adjust certain excise taxes to current inflation levels, one can assume that people already struggling with poverty will be hardest hit by an increase in taxes or the creation of new ones.

An argument could instead be made for properly enforced tax collection. It is pervasive tax evasion, through illegal practices such as smuggling, which keeps revenue low.

In this respect, the challenge for Arroyo and her government is to initiate significant change in the ways in which government conducts and manages business, while balancing this against social asset reforms (with which she has identified herself) such as housing for the poor and agricultural land for tenant-farmers. Unfortunately, there is little evidence that people accept the changes needed to turn the economy around.

For example, a nationwide donation drive initiated by a prominent congressman to help close the deficit, may have attracted considerable contributions from corporate and church groups. However, it inadvertently raises the question of taxation. If people were indeed sincere in helping government raise revenue, paying prescribed taxes and eradicating corruption ought to be the solutions to which they subscribe.

There is also a case to be made regarding debt relief or at least debt renegotiation. Current legislation mandates 30 to 40 per cent of the annual budget be allocated to foreign debt servicing; a policy that has been upheld for the past 30 years and continues to keep one of the largest economies in south-east Asia from moving forward. (Some of these debts were incurred during the Marcos regime and are widely perceived to be under disadvantageous terms.)

Unfortunately, the Philippines does not qualify under the existing categories of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, launched in 1996 to secure debt relief for 42 of the world's

poorest nations. If it did and government advocated for its inclusion in the program, it would need to demonstrate adherence to International Monetary Fund criteria, including a proven track record in implementing a national poverty strategy.

To be fair, Arroyo is making progress in this area, albeit slowly, through programs on food security, micro-finance, housing, and agrarian reform. Much more needs to be done and a lot more guts is required to do it.

Many Filipinos feel that they need to rally behind her, despite their reservations about Arroyo's capacity to govern wisely, decisively and courageously. There is no solid alternative at present.

It could have been worse: presidential candidates at the recent election included an ageing actor with no educational or public service background, a former police chief believed to be the mastermind of certain summary killings, and a religious leader equipped only with good intentions.

With a history of voting for flashy public figures instead of policymakers, perhaps Filipinos should be given credit for electing a person with a proven work ethic and a commitment to good governance. Time will tell if they will be rewarded for their circumspection. ■

**Fatima Measham** is a Filipino writer residing in Melbourne.




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# Ash Street



**O**N ASH STREET the chestnut trees by the creek all let go at once and there is a steady rain of hard fruit the size of tennis balls. People move their cars. On windy days my children and I hear the nuts falling from our house and we amble down the street and watch from a safe distance as the heavy green nuts leap from the trees. We take home handfuls and rot off the fruit and burnish the lovely brown nuts and my young sons throw them at each other and at their sister until I insist on desist and put the boys to bed but not the sister who is a teenager and so never sleeps. I work the nuts through my fingers like fat oily coins and consider the parallels between chestnuts and children. Both are wrapped in soft pebbly skins. Both have stubborn centres. Both gleam when polished. Both are subject to being crushed by cars. Both are subject to rot. Crows are fascinated by both. I watch the gangs of crows flare and hammer and bicker and chortle among the shards in the street and then go kiss my sons and nod to my daughter, who deigns, for once, to nod back.

→→→→

Ash Street bisects a hill named for a man who was born in County Clare in Ireland. He took ship to America and landed in New York and walked to Nebraska where he joined that state's Second Cavalry Regiment and fought in the Civil War and then walked to Oregon, where he lived on our hill until the day he died. He was a stone mason. He died about noon, with a chisel in his hand.

→→→→

Holy place in my house on Ash Street: The infinitesimal indent made by ten years of left hands as woman and man and children lean against the wall while adjusting the thermostat with their right hands.

→→→→

Down Ash Street on our side lives the crazy lady, who occasionally walks through our back door and into our kitchen and stays for a long time, talking loudly. She tells the neighbours that her husband is travelling on business when actually he left ten years ago. Recently she leased her house to a young couple, telling them that she was moving to Egypt, but she has yet to leave, and is still living in the basement. They are puzzled and walk down the street to my house to talk about the crazy lady. They sit in the kitchen and talk softly.



Another young couple appears at our back door once a year or so to ask us to sign a petition to move their property line, which has an old right-of-way through it, as their yard was once near a road that led to the village smelter. The smelter and foundry and blast furnace where the first steel west of the Rockies was made are no more, but the legal means of approaching them with horse teams along Oswego Creek remains. I say to the young woman one year, but don't you like the fact that the ghosts of horses walk through your yard? and she says, uh, no.

→→→→

One house on Ash Street is a poker and drinking cabin for a group of men and their dogs. It's surrounded now, very nearly grown over, by vast blackberry and laurel thickets; the men park their pickup trucks on the street, in a dell carved out of the thickets for their trucks, and haul their beer and whiskey up the muddy steps into the cabin. At night you can hear the music and voices. Once a gunshot.

→→→→

Across the street is a very religious family with three small children; the oldest, age six, goes to a kindergarten where the children are punished for saying the word *cruel*.

→→→→

Animals seen on Ash Street: coyotes, deer, raccoons, hawks, herons, swifts, swallows, jays, flickers, once a policeman's horse, complete with leathery policeman.

→→→→

Before Ash Street was a street it was a path with no name, running cheerfully above a creek with a name. Before it was the path it was probably a trail, and before it was a trail maybe it was a tunnel forced by burly deer through fern and fir, and before it was a tunnel maybe it was a tiny path for tiny animals, and before that, before there was any green pulse in the world, maybe it was a stripe of stone; like it is now.

**Brian Doyle** (bdoyle@up.edu) is the editor of *Portland Magazine* at the University of Portland. He is the author of five collections of essays, most recently *Spirited Men*, about great male writers and musicians, among them the Adelaide genius Paul Kelly.

# Acting all raucous

Disability is sometimes a matter of perspective

CLEM BAADE is a striking young man. His shaved head reveals the curve of his skull and his mouth curls quizzically. His face communicates a strong sense of empathy with eyes that appear, at times, to verge on tears. It was perhaps this presence that prompted Kate Sulan, director of RAWCUS Theatre Company, to choose him for the video sequences flowing through the company's most recent work, *Sideshow*.

A collective of actors with and without disabilities, RAWCUS was established four years ago. Earlier this year, *Sideshow* received significant acclaim as part of the 2004 Next Wave Festival. A group-devised performance, *Sideshow* was inspired by Angela Carter's fairytale of the same name, based on the *Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Clem's character in *Sideshow* was projected on screens and sheets, and moved with delicate purpose across a darkened stage, creating an ominous sense of things about to go horribly wrong. Uncannily, these sequences mirrored Clem's personal journey over the last few years.

The eldest of four children, Clem Baade has intellectual and physical disabilities. Born in the early 1970s, doctors indicated that because of his disabilities, he would be best supported by specialist services rather than in his own home. 'Evidently, I felt like a puppet because I didn't have any use of my hands or legs for a while. So the doctor told mum to send me to a home and forget about me', he says, his eyes watering slightly.

As was the practice only 30 years ago, doctors did not foresee much potential in a baby born with a disability. Children like Clem, they thought, were best institutionalised and forgotten. Clem's parents, however, decided to challenge the professionals and contradict the advice of the time, giving him all the energy they could muster. Clem speaks with pride and a deep love of his family. In a world striving for perfection where many of us feel uncomfortable about our own inabilities, let alone others', he feels that family is often a haven for people with a disability.

The second last night of RAWCUS's season of *Sideshow*, Clem celebrated not just another successful performance, but the six-month anniversary of the kidney transplant operation he underwent in December. His commitment to RAWCUS meant that

rehearsals and performances for *Sideshow* were staggered around hospital visits where he received anti-rejection medication. Prior to his kidney transplant, most of his time with RAWCUS—the weekly rehearsals and numerous performances—was spent suffering from kidney failure. Only now can Clem see how sick he was. But humble and reserved, Clem refuses to believe his achievement of even making it to the stage is remarkable.

CLEM'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO GROUP WORK are often inspired by the poetry he writes. Because of his disability, his speech is significantly limited. And while he says he puts up with it, he can never completely accept people's inability to understand him. He repeats words over and over. And while some people kindly keep guessing, others are uncomfortable and unsure how to react. Sometimes Clem's frustration causes him to give up and fall mute: better to keep something to yourself than have your words fall into empty spaces, never to be really heard. But he refuses to live in a silent world.

'I did not speak until age ten', Clem says, 'and my voice was impaired'. A testament to Clem's persistence, he still has speech therapy sessions once a week, and has done so for over 15 years: 'I am proud that I speak well, walk and work well, and that I act well', he grins.

Language for Clem is often only a barrier because of others' inability to use some simple lateral thinking and understand basic signs. He supplements his speech using a range of sign language techniques, many of his own making. When I am unable to ascertain the name of his street as I drive him home, he asks me to think of Robin Hood. It cleverly leads me to Sherwood. His command of the written word demonstrates the ability to draw depth and sophistication through what may appear to be just simple sentences.

Clem's acting began in 1992 with Justus Theatre Company: a troupe of performers with disabilities, supported by St Martin's Youth Theatre, launching the 'best bit' of Clem's journey. Theatre became his focus for expression, friendships and direction. It was at Justus that Clem met director, Kate Sulan.



Clem made the move with Kate from Justus into a new project that spawned RAWCUS. 'Theatre is my life come true', he notes. Through Justus, Clem found a way to fit in, to fit in to a place with others, and into himself. His theatre work allowed him to explore how he occupied his own body, how it moved, how it could express what he wanted to

say and what it was limited to. Clem's hands help shape his words: 'I was in a bubble. Justus burst that bubble. (It) let me out'.

**F**ITTING INTO HIMSELF has helped Clem to force his way into a society that pursues physical perfection. 'As I have matured, I have been able to branch out into employment, acting and to study', Clem says. 'Everywhere, I have interacted with many, many people.' And, they, like Clem are the richer for it. As a founding member of RAWCUS, Clem is enthusiastic and passionate about their significant achievements.

RAWCUS began in 2000 by specifically creating a performance for the Australian Cerebral Palsy Association's National Conference. That performance, *Flight*, was then performed as part of celebrations for the International Day for People with a Disability in December 2000. RAWCUS places disability squarely on stage, as a celebration of ability and diversity, but they don't make the ride easy. Audiences are asked to consider issues from social isolation to genetic engineering. The actors are not afraid to shatter society's limitations on stage.

RAWCUS is a theatre company of people with a great range of abilities. Clem believes much can be achieved through the RAWCUS formula of workshop-devised performance. 'RAWCUS accommodates a range of all different people', he says. Clem sees

how quickly difference disappears in the face of people recognising their similarities on stage, as well as recognising their weaknesses and raw emotions.

RAWCUS's 2002 performance, *Designer Child*, was a challenging piece exploring issues of cloning and genetic engineering. Clem's view on these issues is more than strong: 'Cloning is wrong',

he says. The development of performance centred around these issues was powerful, asking its performers to reflect upon their very existence, and what that means in a world celebrating the complete physical transformation of people on reality TV. 'I just know how glad I am I was born', Clem says. 'I am so glad that I am me.'

It has been a hectic couple of years for Clem Baade. RAWCUS have now headed back into the rehearsal room to work with experienced dancers and actors to develop their next show to be performed at Theatreworks in December this year. Despite his personal triumphs, the success Clem feels most passionate about is RAWCUS. It is in the 'silence before the applause' that Clem knows people have been touched, that they have been moved to feel something. And while he can't know for sure what that feeling is, he knows that feeling things, anything, is good.

'RAWCUS is just something. It means for me the most loving, caring theatre company. And, it is not just a company. It is a huge family based in a theatre world.'

A world where a striking young man, full of ability, can really make an impact. ■

**Daniel Donahoo** is an OzProspect fellow. OzProspect is a non-partisan public policy think-tank. **Tania Andrusiak** is a freelance writer and editor.

# Phone a friend

Michele Gierck meets the people on the other end of the line

**P**AUL HARRISON HAS A SOOTHING VOICE and a zest for life that bubbles away in spite of being confronted each day at work with personal problems; those of children and young people.

He is a telephone counsellor with Kids Help Line; Australia's only free national telephone counselling service for those between the ages of five and 18.

With seven years experience under his belt, Paul is one of the 'long-termers', although he says that others have been there since the service began in 1991. Back then, it was a Queensland initiative but by 1993 it had expanded nationally.

A child or young person, anywhere in Australia,

while on other shifts, you might talk to 100 children and young people', says Paul.

Calls from those at the older end of the spectrum can take an hour or more, particularly if the situation has reached crisis point. If the caller is at risk of harm, the counsellor may put them in contact with other services.

Children as young as five often call too. 'They like to have a chat, tell you what their day was like and what they've been doing.' Like their attention span, their calls are usually short.

One central feature of Kids Help Line is the child-centred focus: working with children and young people on their level, and the sort of language that they bring to counselling.

Although Paul says that in some cases it may be best in the long term for a child or young person to see a counsellor face-to-face, Kids Help Line is always there.

'What we do well here at Kids Help Line is listen.' The statistics back this claim. On average, 20,000 kids ring the service each week. Many are repeat callers, and some have ongoing contact with one counsellor over years.

Paul adds that the most common comment made by callers is that they are ringing to talk because 'nobody listens'. The main reasons they ring, however, are problems with relationships—with family, peers, and to a lesser degree, with partners—and this accounts for 40 per cent of calls. It's the quality of their relationships that is a major concern to children and young callers. But relationships are not the only concerns.

The next major reason why children and young people call the service is bullying, which accounts for just over eight per cent of calls.

When it comes to bullying, what the figures do not indicate is whether there is an increase in the incidence of bullying, or that it is now reported more than it used to be.

Paul is of the view that there has been a change in social values, that it's no longer considered OK to bully at school. People are now prepared to take action and do something about it.

Emotional and behavioural management is the reason for almost five per cent of calls, child



can ring the service seven days a week, 24 hours a day, on their toll free number. Calls are not vetted, so the telephone counsellors must be able to cope with diversity as well as adversity.

Many of the 100 or so counsellors are psychologists and social workers, and all of them have undergone rigorous training and supervision tailored to meet the specific needs of Kids Help Line.

'Some shifts (usually six hours) might be quite heavy, and you might only talk to a handful of callers,

abuse 4.5 per cent, while drug and alcohol use, sexual activity, homelessness and mental health, each account for between three and four per cent of calls.

**O**N MEETING PAUL IT IS CLEAR that he loves talking to children and young people, helping them deal with the problems they face, and developing their own coping skills. In fact, he would like to see more enhancing life skills and interpersonal skills taught in schools.

'As a counsellor I believe in young people's resilience, and in supporting them. We need to hone their strengths, and bring them out.'

Paul also says that it's not unusual for young people to 'try you out' first, to see how a counsellor responds before they decide if they will open up.

Apart from being a counsellor, and at times working as a shift supervisor, helping counsellors with complex cases or listening to them when they need to debrief, Paul also visits schools, as a peer skills facilitator.

Having been bullied at primary and secondary school, he thought it would be good to help kids get through similar situations.

'I consider myself a fairly good role model. I can open the door for them, so they can express themselves.'

Although Kids Help Line is overwhelmingly used by females—comprising almost three-quarters

of callers—Paul is keen to encourage males to express themselves and not to wait until crisis point to ring the service or seek help.

Kids Help Line is currently embarking on a strategy targeting young males. While they represent less than 30 per cent of callers, they are over-represented when it comes to drug and alcohol use, violence and homelessness. What the research indicates, is that there is a culture among young males of not seeking help.

Some years ago, Kids Help Line undertook a survey focused on family life; the nature of affection and discipline in families, and how this impacts on young males. What became apparent was that boys who had good relationships with their parents were far more likely to seek help.

While it was hoped that the introduction of email and web counselling would increase the number of males using the services, this was not the case. These recent innovations, based on one-on-one counselling, introduced new children and young people to the service, but overall, did not lead to an increase in the proportion of males contacting the service.

Kids Help Line is well known in schools nationwide, and students of all ages are aware of it. The service also advocates on children's and young people's issues in each state. ■

**Michele Gierck** is a freelance writer.



# Urban identity

Bronwyn Fredericks argues for the identity of urban Indigenous Australians

**W**E AREN'T ALL in the 'bush', 'outback' or 'on communities'...

I don't leave my Aboriginality at the airport or in a locker at the bus station on the city fringes when I visit. It seems that some people assume that Aboriginal people don't belong in the city or big regional centres. Research undertaken in Brisbane suggests that some people think that Aboriginal people belong in the 'bush', 'outback', and 'on communities'. Others think that somehow our Aboriginality becomes irrelevant in the city or that we place our cultures to the side in order to 'succeed'. In spite of such comments, Aboriginal people are still asked to give a 'welcome' or an 'acknowledgment to Country' in cities and in other urban areas. We may be asked whether we know, or could we organise, a group to do traditional dancing or play the did-

geridoo, or whether we can get an artist to paint a mural or display some art? Our involvement is generally placed in the context of what is deemed 'traditional', 'authentic' or 'tribal'. That is, we are asked to be involved in ways that portray the artistic and material cultural images of the past. What if we don't depict the cultural and social stereotypes of what some people in society believe, perceive or expect of us? What if we aren't dark brown or black skinned?

I have experienced people trying to categorise me by my hair, skin or eye colour, in an attempt to organise me into a grouping that suits their framework of what they perceive to be an Aboriginal woman. I have been asked, 'What part is Aboriginal?' I know as an urban Aboriginal woman that if I don't fit the images that some people hold, I may be perceived as having no culture, as not being 'real', as 'unauthentic' or a 'fake'. Sadly, some Aboriginal people feel this about themselves and others. What



does the word 'authentic' even mean with regard to Aboriginal people in the historical context of urban Brisbane or in any other urban area?

Normally, the word 'authentic' is posed in a way that describes someone being more 'tribal' or 'traditional'. These terms can set Aboriginal people within a timeless and static setting where we are generally represented in the bush, on a hill, or in a remote community. These images trap us and don't represent the complex lives and situations in which we find ourselves as Aboriginal people. They also trap non-Indigenous people into a way of seeing us as Aboriginal people. In the trapping, the images and accompanying thoughts may keep us from honestly knowing each other.

There is no single urban Aboriginal experience or identity. The experiences

are as diverse as the population and include a diversity of experience, need, prospects shaped by gender, education, religion, age and level of human security. Culture cannot stay the same, it is dynamic and there are many cultural configurations. Aboriginal people live in the contemporary world and weave in and out of two, three and even more cultural domains. We are part of colonisation, just as it is part of us. Aboriginal culture has needed to adapt, adjust and modify itself in order to survive within the contemporary world. This does not mean that our cultures are not, and that we are not, Aboriginal. You might have to look and listen more closely, but culture is always there in some form, always was and always will be.

**A**BORIGINAL PEOPLE HAVE had to work hard to build and sustain positive Aboriginal identities due to the influence of the dominant culture on our lives. The contacts and interactions we have with institutions, agencies and services are grounded in the world view of the dominant culture.

The constant exchanges, interaction and dialogue with non-Indigenous urban society can present challenges to our identity. It can be a struggle to live a life within the dominant culture, while at the same time trying to honour and protect our own heritage, institutions and worldview. Sometimes it can be difficult for Aboriginal people living in the city, trying to deal with issues such as having a troubled, or no, connection to land due to historical processes or being removed as a child, or your parents or grandparents being removed. For those

that may not even know where they have come from, and where they belong, what then? It might be difficult for some people, for a range of reasons, to access ceremonies, language and Elders and they may therefore feel disjointed from what culture may mean. It is not easy for some Aboriginal people in the city. Life in big cities and other urban areas presents Indigenous people with many factors and interactions that create self-doubt, identity confusion and anguish—all of which can work to undermine one's sense of Aboriginality.

**D**ATA FROM THE AUSTRALIAN Bureau of Statistics shows that over 50 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people now live in urban areas including the big cities of Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. The statistics demonstrate that living in urban centres is as much a reality for Aboriginal people as living in a discrete Aboriginal rural, regional or isolated community. This reality includes using

a range of accommodation options, buying goods and services, finding a job, participating in sporting groups, clubs and organisations and sharing and interacting with people from a diverse range of backgrounds. It also includes trying to find or make space within the city for Aboriginal cultures, languages, individual and collective expression, establishment and maintenance of Aboriginal organisations, programs, services and other structures.

Just because we might work, go to school, TAFE or university, hang out, drink alcohol, smoke, play sport, be members of clubs and associations, shop for food and



buy services, drive cars, have problems and issues, or live in houses in urban streets or on the streets, does not mean we are no longer Aboriginal. Urban Aboriginal people are not 'hybrids' or alienated from the Aboriginal experience. Aboriginal culture is dynamic and new Aboriginal identities have developed in response to urban life. Urban identities will keep developing and adapting as they did in

the past and as they do in the present. This is about our survival. ■

**Bronwyn Fredericks** grew up in Brisbane and now lives in the Rockhampton region. Artwork by **Pamela Croft**.

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# The road not taken

a minimum meant 60,000 military dead and incalculable misery and sadness for those at home.

Princip's cause was for the reunification of Bosnia with the independent Serbia—not to start a world war. He was left behind by the waves and effectively had no further role in events. Under the benign (for the time) law of Austria-Hungary, a murderer under the age of 20 could not be executed. Princip was sentenced to the maximum 20 years in prison and died of tuberculosis—unrepentant—in April 1918.

The journey from Sarajevo to declarations of war by the various alliances took less than six weeks. The diplomatic and military steps involved along the road are too complex to recount in any useful way. But it is agreed by all the crucial point was the Austrian determination to punish the Serbs not only for their part in the assassination but also for other political reasons. The decision by Austria-Hungary not to show restraint dragged all the other countries into the conflict through the various alliances between the European powers.

**M**ANY WRITERS HAVE suggested that a war in Europe was inevitable—if not in 1914—with the ongoing political and military rivalries between the empires of Europe. Perhaps a more significant reason for the failure to prevent the war was the lack of a major European war in the previous 40 years as a model: no one appreciated the ability of modern economies and industry to transform both the technology and intensity of war. The working model for the generals was the brief, relatively bloodless, and decisive Franco-Prussian War, 45 years earlier.

The decision making processes of individuals are rarely based on a logical (or moral) assessment of the issues involved, large or small. For instance, the prospect of war can generate excitement

**O**N SUNDAY 28 JUNE 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, arrived with his wife in Sarajevo for an official visit. At the time, Sarajevo was in the imperial province of Bosnia-Herzegovina. As the royal party travelled in an open motor vehicle along the official route, it was fired upon by a 19-year-old student, Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian nationalist. Princip only managed to fire two shots before he was arrested, but these two shots managed to kill the Archduke and Archduchess. The assassination of Franz Ferdinand is generally taken as the starting point for the descent into what became known as the Great War or World War I.

At first, the assassination—no matter how shocking—was seen by the outside world as an event isolated from its deep concerns. The consequences of the assassination were expected to be contained within Eastern Europe. The response from King George V of Great Britain was perhaps typical: he wrote in his diary 'It will be a terrible shock to the Emperor and is most regrettable and sad. We dined alone. Marked my new stamp catalogue. Bed at 11.30'. But the planet by 1914 was a world of alliances between empires and nations and the networks of

colonies of European countries meant events in Europe had worldwide ramifications. Equally significant, the means existed not only to bind but amplify all these factors: such as the steamship for trade and travel and the ocean telegraph cables for immediate communication.

As we know, the waves generated by the events at Sarajevo that Sunday did not just spread and dissipate within Eastern Europe. The waves from Sarajevo spread, were refracted by other events, and effectively dislodged or caused events which generated new waves. These new waves were far more damaging in their consequences for the world.

By the time the Great War was over, the waves had claimed around nine million military casualties and perhaps an equal number of civilian casualties through displacement, starvation and disease; the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman Empires were no more; and the Russian Empire was in the process of transforming into the Soviet Union. The refracted waves included the British Empire reaching its zenith in its geographic area; the German collapse creating the stage for the journey into World War II; and other events such as the first step in the creation of the State of Israel. For Australia, the war at



as much as dread, especially if there has not been one in recent memory. Many can have a vested interest in war: war to the military is the *raison d'être* and presents opportunities for new and quick promotions. This is to say nothing of the opportunities for business or of patriotism of the ordinary citizen.

More often than not, we work from the decision which best suits us back to the justification for the decision (if one is indeed required). And it can be said confidently that the decision that best suits us will more often be based on short-term gratification than long-term gains.

If our individual decision making processes are accepted as poor or short sighted, then where can we get objective guidance? Religion can provide guidance on moral or ethical issues in particular but cannot easily deal with complex temporal questions such as trade policy or the setting of educational standards. As an alternative, perhaps we could consider history? On the face of it, history is no good—at least as a teacher. Perhaps the reason for this failure is that we can't learn from history because it does not set out to teach us. History only provides examples (exemplars) of actions and consequences. We—individually and collectively—have to do the hard work of learning. However, history teaches half a lesson: deep inside us we do know that to do wrong to others means they will likely act in a similar fashion in return. But even with consideration, often we still go ahead and do wrong to others by direct means, by conveniently looking the other way at the right time, or through general indifference.

We also make decisions as individuals which collectively become larger decisions such as occurs with political elections. The result of a general election leads to a party being put into power and it then makes decisions. It generates waves and refractions by its decisions. Unfortunately, often we want to pass not only the duty of decision making to others but also every shred of responsibility for any outcomes. We try to build a barrier between us and responsibility: it was not my fault; don't blame me; they did it. In group terms, the responsibility for decisions in 1914 of emperors, generals, and diplomats can be argued as not being theirs personally: they were prisoners of the situation in which they

found themselves, or, they could not visualise the actual outcomes. Or that many decision-makers were only following orders (a precursor to the Nuremberg defence following the next World War).

As citizens in a democratic society, we still retain moral responsibility for decisions made even though we may abdicate the day-to-day decision making to the politicians. Good decision making in the collective sense is hard. It is difficult to cut through the bombardment of rhetoric, the opinions of the media, and the constant appeals to what can be seen as self-interest, patriotism, or whatever. But when we participate in a collective process such as an election we could at least reach a provisional decision as for whom to vote. Then ask ourselves of it: 'will this decision cause harm to others and how, and if so, why am I making it?' To love our neighbours as ourselves is an easy plea, but such a decision actively implemented is the hardest one of all, far greater than to ask someone to sacrifice their life as in war. As people, we favour the simple over the complex. All in all, we simplify the situations we face often to the point where any thinking of the possible consequences is brushed away in favour of the immediate.

Written histories too, simplify complex matters.

**T**he brief histories of the Great War will mention 'Sarajevo', 'Gavrilo Princip', and 'Archduke Franz Ferdinand'. Generally, the histories do not mention that there were six assassins in Sarajevo that Sunday—90 years ago this year—for we only remember 'the winner'. The assassins were spread along the route to be taken by the Royal party. Three of the six were chosen because they had tuberculosis—a disease at that time which was invariably fatal. Each person had a cyanide capsule to prevent capture and interrogation, a 'suicide squad' in modern terms.

The first assassin's courage failed him and he made no move. The second assassin threw a bomb which exploded, injuring members of the official party and others, but left the Archduke unscathed. The motorcade then left the scheduled route for security reasons and the Archduke went about his official duties for the visit. Later in the day, the Archduke on hearing there were casualties from the bomb attack in hospital, insisted on visiting them despite all protests to the contrary. Personal courage, common concern and what was termed *noblesse oblige* overcame any doubts that he may have had. The Archduchess insisted on accompanying the Archduke. Eventually, in a compromise decision, it was determined that a hospital visit would occur, but the motorcade would not go along the original route even though it led directly to the hospital.

As hours had passed since the assassination attempt, the assassins along the royal route gave up waiting, concluding that there had been a change of plans for the Archduke. Princip, when he came to the same conclusion, instead of departing for home like the rest, he reportedly went into a shop and bought a sandwich. Unfortunately, the official in charge forgot to tell the driver of the Archduke's vehicle of the new route. When the official realised they were going down the wrong road, he remembered and at last mentioned the decision to the driver. The driver stopped the car at that point and started reversing, so as to take the right road. It was at this point that Princip, who had now come out of the shop, saw what was happening. He decided to take advantage of this stroke of fortune. Princip produced his pistol, stepped forward, and fired the two shots. Two shots was all it took. And we live with the waves and refractions of Princip's decision, albeit attenuated, to this day. ■

**Stephen Yorke** lives and works in Melbourne.



in print



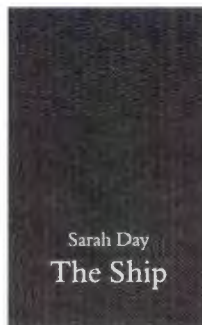
# Crossing the boundaries

*The Ship*, Sarah Day. Brandl & Schlessinger, 2004. ISBN 1 876 04059 9, RRP \$22.95

**T**HIS IS A BOOK OF EDGES, of peripheries, wrestling with gravity, unseen (underground) menace, poisonings and movements across time and place. There's a coherence in it, a dialogue between poems on things as diverse as the auguring yearly presence of the cold or flu in the house ('quiet clearing of the throat/from a child's room, close to midnight'), a Ferris wheel, a blowhole, and the elegiac rumination over the death of a neighbour. That coherence comes out of the desire to assert a positive view of a world so tainted by avoidable tragedies. There are always options to the poison. The book's vision is not Luddite—ships and planes can be cherished and ironised simultaneously. The white of Antarctica both beckons and symbolises an unattainable absolute.

I might hesitate to call this book darkly spiritual, but I would certainly call it spiritual. There's a caring in it—a sophisticated deployment of language anchored in the 'real', the actual, that drives the narrative of this tightly honed, compact book. Many poems have been written about visiting Antarctica, or imagining visiting Antarctica, but Day's is of a darker hue: 'A tawdry brass band extracts too much emotional mileage', as 'Antarctic Ships' begins. She gives us the tension between what the mind perceives and the emotions experience, the desire to be present and absent, and the fetishisation of the seemingly exotic, the ship as something akin to that of Poe's novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*; a perverse ferryman of the Southern seas:

The tilted vision has some allure—the thirty-degree list,  
the bloodstopping notion of deep green fathoms  
above which these tubs valiantly ferry  
the little emblems of life itself.  
Who knows mortality like a sailor?  
There's sympathy, even admiration here, but a recognition of an  
ironic sublime.  
The lines are effortless and yet strangely cutting.



The outsider, the new arrival, comes via those temporary villages, towns, and cities, ships. Migration, transference, exploration, visitation, pleasure—the ship is a kind of conjurer's trick, a delusion of connectivity and community. Day's ship poems give movement and stasis in the one line: a sense of approaching something but still being part of, even caught in, what's left behind. In others, the personae of the poems see themselves as the ship touches yet another port on its way to the symbolic vastness and emptiness. These experiences are overwhelmingly full, and it's the intricacy, the myriad variations and disguises of nature and people that compel us through surreal landscapes where the imagined merges with 'fact', and language generates purpose in itself. The truth of the poison is countered by the necessity of telling, of witness.

**T**HERE IS MUCH CONFLAGRATION and inferno in these poems. Images of fire and water abound, as an elemental struggle takes place. On one level, it's of earth, wind, fire, and water; on another, it is the quintessential struggle between moral responsibility in observing and telling, and accepting what is. Going with the pleasure cruise. Irony is never far away, but it's not bitter. When we read of planes passing overhead, observed from an aficionado's point of view, as being like rosaries, there's a double thrust: a technical admiration countered by the technological usurping of spiritual values. Do prayers travel higher than a Boeing 747?

*The Ship* is a book about time and chaos (theory). The movement from one era to another symbolised by the slow progress of the symbolic ship—which is told only as the passing of a few lines—is juxtaposed with the rapidity of flight on the other hand, right down to hours and minutes ... One end of the world one moment, the other end the next. Movement binds the collapse, the chaos together. It's the glue. Culture becomes transposable, movement both transferring cultural knowledge and also depleting it. There's not judgment here, but a vicarious

observation and participation. Old connections are triggered by new experiences; memory is physical and walks with you down corrugated gravel roads.

In her examination and ethno-linguistic critique of representations and alterations to the natural, to the restructuring of nature through genetic modification and cloning, Day insists that 'living' is not simply a matter of having a similar or the same physical structure. The learned experience, the patterns and progress of inheritance, are disrupted. You can't teach the recreated to be what it naturally would have been. And the genetically altered Salmon with its Trojan gene will come unstuck from the inside out. What has been lost outweighs what has been artificially 'regained'. These are Miltonic issues of the Fall, with no Paradise available to regain. The satirical 'Inaugural Speech at the Announcement of the Successful Cloning of the Thylacinus Cynocephalus' posits:

Now, teach this individual shy reticence, teach it elusiveness in  
dry sclerophyll and casuarina, teach it native invisibility in the  
shadows of shearing sheds and out-houses. Teach it fear.

There is a commentary on occupation of land here. There is a commentary on the impossibility of playing the hand of God. The codes of existence itself are being tampered with and upset, and what we have is J.K. Huysmans' 1884 *À Rebours* where nature is constructed, where real nature is merely the inspiration and stimulus for an artificial world. Day is ruthless in her critique, but the deftness of her language, its verbal twists and turns, its metaphorical base, lead to questioning rather than mere accusation. Yet there is real anger, and a real questioning of what religious belief is in such contexts. In 'Oncomouse (R) DuPont', the fetishisation of the living, the capitalist profit at all costs in the world of science-religion oppositions, psycho-babble and validation through this, the ultimate indifference to what it means to live, even be 'created', are all 'dissected':

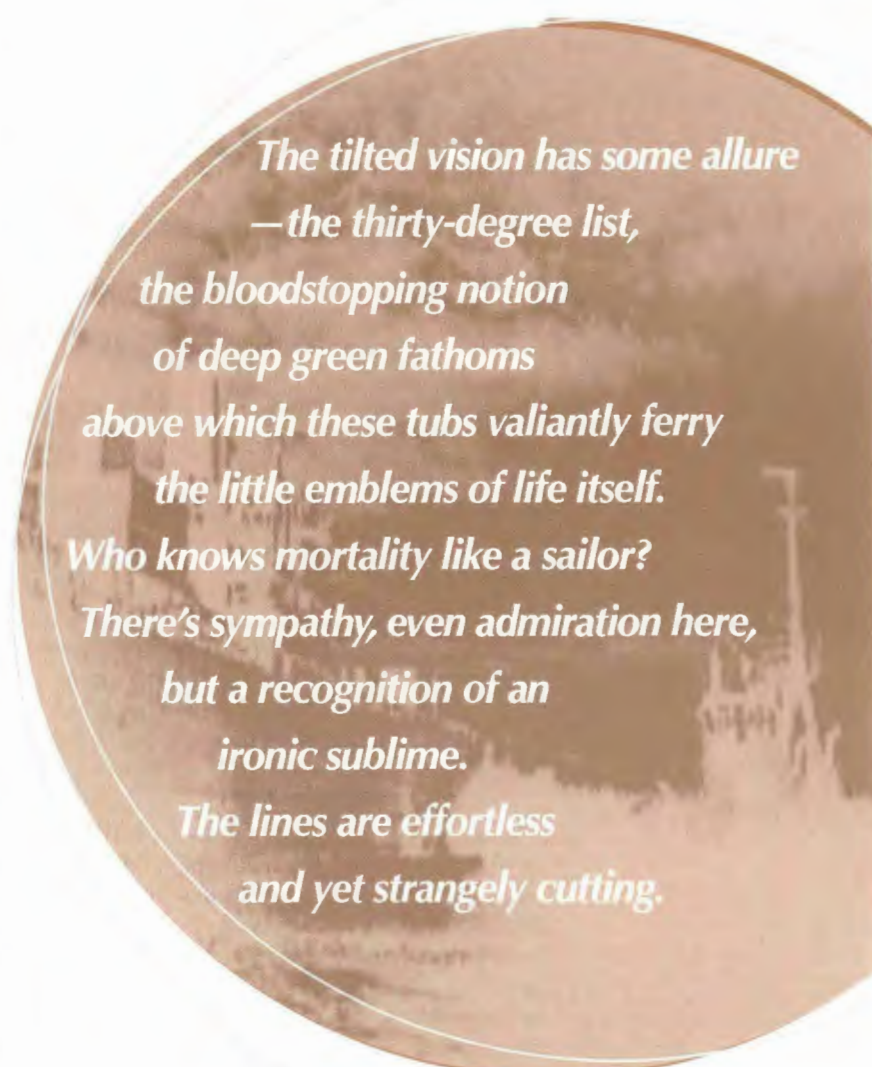
Try telling the oncomouse  
that a lab-bred predisposition to cancer  
is in some way akin  
to predestination.

And in the devastating poem 'Lex Talinas' the abuse and use of animals is templated against ideas of justice (natural) and law: 'Did they savour the sop/of the vocabulary of punishment?' and:

Better a wicked pig  
than an aimless God  
in a random universe.

There is a despairing humour, if that's the word, for this. Day makes full use of repetition and semi-refrain, and in the thylacine poem, the Biblical and Whitmanesque anaphoric repetitions parody sacredness. Tradition is tampered with, genetically modified. A love poem becomes a Dadaist inversion of the Aubade, and a 'romantic' image is grounded by empirical data.

This is a book of struggle. It has moments of immense beauty, with Day turned to natural phenomena, the 'human' moment. There's despair in the hubris of altering what is, with tampering with creation. But it's a scientific book as well—judgment doesn't fall blindly. The language of this tampering



*The tilted vision has some allure  
—the thirty-degree list,  
the bloodstopping notion  
of deep green fathoms  
above which these tubs valiantly ferry  
the little emblems of life itself.  
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The lines are effortless  
and yet strangely cutting.*

is entered and explored poetically. It creates its own directions. Sometimes possible readings might go against the purpose of the author, but Day creates digression through a sharp, intense linguistic register—she knows that words have so much internal pull, such energy, that as hard as she works to contain them, they will escape. This gives *The Ship* a life of its own.

This book of diverse poems is like the engine room of an ocean-going liner, the Rolls Royce engines of a jumbo, the Robert Stevenson M5 train belching smoke, and the most acutely realised moment in nature actualised. There's no simple answer. This book does not seek to answer, however, but to explore. Read it again and again, it's eerie to realise how many 'subterranean missives' there are. She reads the science, she knows the edges: she looks over them as we look with her. She asks the necessary questions. ■

John Kinsella's most recent volume of poetry is *Peripheral Light: New and Selected Poems*. He is a fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge University, and Professor of English at Kenyon College, Ohio.

# Towards a politics of hope

**Australian Son: Inside Mark Latham**, Craig McGregor.  
Pluto Press, 2004. ISBN 1 864 03288 X, RRP \$24.95

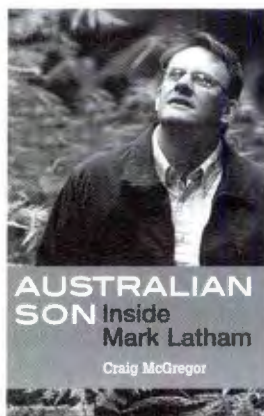
**Rebels with a Cause: Independents in Australian Politics**, Brian Costar and Jennifer Curtin.  
UNSW Press, 2004. ISBN 0 868 40695 3, RRP \$16.95

**I**N THE AFTERMATH of yet another federal Liberal party election victory, Craig McGregor's *Australian Son: Inside Mark Latham* and Brian Costar and Jennifer Curtin's *Rebels with a Cause: Independents in Australian Politics* offer two very different solutions to the problem vexing an increasingly disillusioned Australia; how to change the state (and status quo) of Australian federal politics.

The solution offered by Craig McGregor (with assistance from brother Adrian) is found in the man he has been researching for seven years since McGregor first recognised him as the future leader of the Labor party. Using material gleaned from interviews with Mark Latham, his friends and family members, as well as observations made while accompanying Latham on numerous campaigns, McGregor promises an 'inside' perspective of Australia's alternative prime minister. While the book provides short, sharp and often insightful observations of the 'man of dualities', at 197 pages, it is tempting to suggest that either there is not much 'inside' our future leader, or, as other Latham biographers have suggested, that the attempt to quarry Latham's 'inner world' is like extracting 'blood from a stone'.

McGregor begins his biography with a visit to Latham's suburban childhood. Through a series of semi-nostalgic, almost sepia toned, snapshots—which include Latham on the football field, Latham in the classroom and Latham doing his homework—we see an ambitious, bright, but rather lonely child who was exalted as the great hope of a family struggling against the odds. McGregor cites the death of Latham's father and the discovery of his father's secret first marriage and his drinking and gambling habits, as integral to both Latham's close relationship with Gough Whitlam and his interest in the so-called 'crisis in masculinity'.

As McGregor charts Latham's meteoric political ascent, we can track Latham's transformation from bright, right bovver boy to unifying party and family



man and see how this has also involved the negotiation of many contradictions. McGregor suggests these include Latham being economically right, but emotionally left, a bit of a bully boy, but also an intellectual, a bloke's bloke, with a soft underbelly. McGregor is at his weakest when he slips into adulatory appreciation of the man he has dubbed 'The Great Suburbanite', indulging in what Latham's first wife has described as Latham's 'Messiah complex'. At his best, however, McGregor offers some convincing insights into the shifting sands of Australian society as well as critical sensitivity to Latham's

thinking. Indeed, having reviewed Latham's writing McGregor argues that, as a politician, Latham's strength lies, not so much in his policies, but, in his ability to be responsive to new ideas.

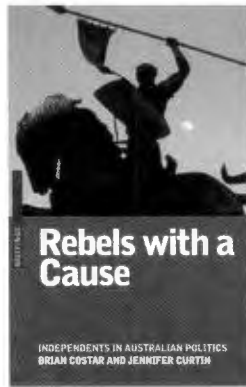
Ironically, Latham's intellectual strength may be the source of his 2004 election defeat. While Latham's perceived reluctance to reveal policy attracted criticism from the media and general public, when his policies did emerge they were criticised as being 'soft' or offering no solutions at all. Although McGregor's Latham possesses a persuasive command of rhetoric, 'election Latham' did not. In contrast to McGregor's Latham who describes Australia's need for a more clearly articulated 'politics of hope', Latham's 2004 election campaign offered little more than the reassurance that things would stay the same. In so doing, Latham not only failed 'to appeal to the future'; he also neglected to create a point of difference from 'The Program of Blandification' which has dominated federal politics during the Howard years.

So if Mark Latham is not the current solution to Australia's status quo, who or what is? In *Rebels with a Cause: Independents in Australian Politics*, Brian Costar and Jennifer Curtin suggest that the articulation of a politics of hope comes from the real 'outsiders' of Australia's political system: the independents. With over 55 elected since the 1980s, Australia now has more independent politicians than any comparable

Western democracy in the world. Of these, over 30 have represented rural and regional constituents, and, at the time of publishing in early 2004 there were still 25 independents in Australian politics. So, what do these statistics and the relatively recent phenomena of the independent say about Australia's political landscape? And how might this offer us a point of difference and even a voice of reason within a system, which some believe is now so top heavy with party politics and career politicians that it is in danger of grinding to a halt?

**F**OR COSTAR AND CURTIN, the rise of the independent can be traced to the fact that our main political parties are no longer meeting the needs of our regional and rural constituents. Add to this, the fact that Australia's major parties are experiencing a long-term decline in popularity, while inner party discipline is at an all time high, and we have a situation where the independent is often the only candidate able to articulate dissent and initiate debate. Compulsory voting has also worked in favour of the independent who is seen to offer the disenfranchised voter a local and immediate alternative to the remote power players of Canberra.

Using research gleaned from 85 nationwide qualitative interviews, *Rebels with a Cause* explores the history and future, power and position of the role of the independent in Australian politics. Through the use of current and historical case studies and an examination of the relationship



between the independents and the Senate, Costar and Curtin discuss the ways that independents have established Charters for Good Governance agreements, fought or failed to represent the needs of their constituencies, while simultaneously struggling to 'keep the bastards honest'.

To Costar and Curtin, the real heroes of Australian politics are independents like Peter Andren, the current Member for Calare, who maintains a stance against the government's treatment of asylum seekers which is unpopular with electorate; Doris Blackburn, who was elected as an independent in 1946 and was the

first, and to date, only independent female elected to Parliament, and Tom 'Tory' Aiken from Townsville, who kept his seat for 33 years, due to some highly amusing antics. These are people who bucked the system on their own terms and at their own cost with a zeal that was often visionary and radical.

Fast paced, well written and informative, *Rebels with a Cause* offers its own 'politics of hope' by reminding us that the Australian political landscape has always been punctuated with colourful and passionate, defiant and determined characters, who refuse to be bullied by the big guns of the party system. This book suggests, that while the current landscape is arid and barren, it may well be that from such deserts our next prophets come. ■

**Kiera Lindsey** is a project officer for the Development of Australian Studies in Indonesia at the University of Melbourne.



# Too little justice

**A fatal conjunction: Two laws two cultures**, Joan Kimm. Federation Press, 2004.

ISBN 1 862 87509 x, RRP \$29.95

I HAVE UNDERTAKEN THE REVIEW of this book by Joan Kimm with some hesitation. It is not that its content—the violence experienced by Indigenous women—is not important. Having lived in a number of Indigenous communities over many years, I have witnessed and heard enough to know something of this sad and distressing side of Australian life. The violence currently experienced within some communities is serious and needs urgent attention. Nor do I hesitate because I believe it is solely ‘Indigenous business’. We all have the right to live without violence.

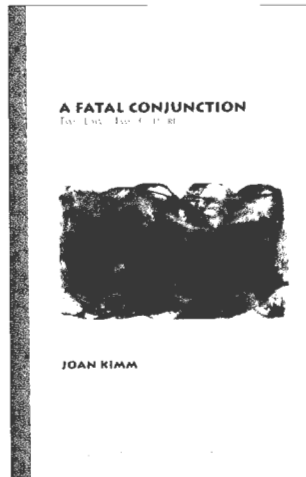
My hesitation arises from my own history and the perspectives I necessarily bring to this issue. I am not an Indigenous person nor am I a woman. There are aspects of Indigenous and gendered life that lie beyond my own experience, however much I have heard and seen. My response to this book is from a non-Indigenous male perspective. It is necessarily a response that is limited but accompanied by some self-criticism. When I observe violence against women, especially against Indigenous women, I am aware that too easily has their suffering been ignored, trivialised or even rationalised by men and much of Australian society. This book offers the possibility that serious issues around violence within Indigenous communities will be discussed and addressed. Unfortunately, it also runs the risk of upsetting and alienating some Indigenous men and women. They might not understand or interpret the violence currently being experienced in Indigenous communities in as straightforward a way as Kimm suggests. Indigenous researchers such as Judy Atkinson, Boni Robertson, Marcia Langton, Kyllie Cripps and Sue Gordon have argued that the sources of violence are multiple, complex and cumulative. There would seem to be no logic or reason to dissociate this present violence from the historical experiences of dislocations and dispossession, the decades of children being separated from their families and the immediate consequences of unemployment, welfare dependency and alcohol addiction.

Kimm’s book *A Fatal Conjunction*, appears to be based on the author’s thesis for a Master of Laws at Monash University in 1999 (although this background is not mentioned). In a relatively short and

easy to read book, she (a non-Indigenous woman) has opened a particular and public window on the violence that has been, and continues to be, experienced by Indigenous women. Evidently, she has come to her perspective of this violence from her legal background, the reading of case studies and some historical and anthropological research. It is not apparent that she has lived in Indigenous communities or collaborated with Indigenous women in the forming of her arguments. She firmly locates this violence within two key domains: a cultural domination of Indigenous men over Indigenous women, and a Western and patriarchal legal system that has perpetuated that domination.

MY OWN EXPERIENCE OF these two domains is that they cannot be as simply reduced as Kimm proposes. Indigenous women have cautioned me against assuming too readily that men dominate their lives and I have male Indigenous friends who openly acknowledge the relationship, spiritual and cosmic powers that women exercise over them. At the same time I have seen the results of male violence upon women (and other men) as I have also witnessed great sensitivity and gentleness in men. I have seen the blindness of the legal system in addressing Indigenous women and their rights. I have also seen it similarly and tragically deficient in responding to Indigenous men and youth.

What I found helpful (but also quite dispiriting) in this book is its litany of legal tragedy. Kimm moves across the decades of recent history and different state and territory boundaries to demonstrate a consistent, even systemic, pattern of legal ignorance, insensitivity and incompetence in relation to Indigenous women. When she quoted Justice Kriewaldt (Justice of the Northern Territory Supreme Court from 1952–1960) as saying, ‘the older I get the less I know’, she was more than repeating his comment about cases involving Indigenous defendants. Her book exposes, as it indicts, the Western legal system, especially as (largely) non-Indigenous men have administered it. It also discloses our inability, as non-Indigenous people, to seriously engage with, understand and respect the values that lie deeply within Indigenous society.



The dichotomy that Kimm proposes between 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' communities and her understanding of 'elders', 'promised marriages' and 'payback' tend to locate Indigenous people within fixed social (pre-colonial) spaces. These social spaces have, in fact, been fluid, changing and adapting as conditions, environments and social structures faced an often brutal frontier and the enforcement of government policies. Since first contact, Indigenous people have coped with a myriad of pressures due to colonisation and the demands of assimilation. Some are presently coping better than others. Some are trying desperately to hold onto values that connect their identity and social regeneration, and some are abusing themselves and their families. The violence that is currently being expressed—directed mostly inside rather than outside the Indigenous community—cannot easily be separated from the multi-faceted violence of colonial history.

**T**HERE EXIST TODAY many oral and written examples of the violence that Indigenous people have suffered. Take that of imprisonment. Unlike the army of North America that in the 19th century was used to control its native peoples, here in Australia police were used to settle and pacify the land. A long history of Indigenous imprisonment (with the use of chains) began where Indigenous men were regularly arrested for cattle and sheep killing. In recent decades the number of Indigenous people in prison has continued to rise to the extent that in 1998, 95 per cent of all Indigenous prisoners in Australia were male and 90 per cent of those who passed through the prison system in the Kimberley were Indigenous. At the same time there has been a steady increase in suicide amongst young Indigenous men in many communities. Clearly, especially through the use of alcohol, expressions of self-harm and violence have escalated within many Indigenous communities. For some men, old and young, violence towards themselves, or those closest to them, has become normalised behaviour.

The challenge to Indigenous communities is how this behaviour might change. How do pride,

self-esteem and self-respect become experienced and sustained by a group of men as it was in earlier generations? Do we, as Kimm proposes, continue to blame, accuse and abuse them? As the justice system so regularly and

efficiently performs, do we lock them away in another world separated from their culture, families and responsibilities? Do we believe that this conjunction of two laws and two cultures is, and can only be, fatal? Alternatively, we can support those initiatives and solutions that Indigenous men and women have been proposing and which promote their right to live without violence. We can form partnerships with Indigenous men that seek a more just and non-violent world for them and their families. I would argue that the latter approaches are critical if we want to create a safer world for Indigenous women and children but also a more dignified world for Indigenous men. It is also our only hope if we, as non-Indigenous men, wish to honestly deal with the legacies of our colonial history and the violence that has shaped us and those legacies.

The title of this book is powerfully suggestive. It points to the dire consequences that have resulted from the meeting of two laws and two cultures. However, by the end of the book we cannot more clearly identify the pathology of this violence than to conclude that its virulence comes from men; Indigenous and non-Indigenous. As a non-Indigenous male reader I found the book disquieting and limiting but also challenging. Part of me would like to think that there is less violence than Kimm suggests and I would like to hope that men have less responsibility for this violence than she argues. However, I am sure that for too long we non-Indigenous men have denied our part in the violence that has deeply shaped ourselves and our relationship with Indigenous people. I suspect that Indigenous men have denied their part in violence as well. If you decide to buy this book I recommend you check it out with Indigenous women. I found the experience informative and salutary. ■

**Brian McCoy** is a Jesuit who has recently submitted a Doctoral thesis at the University of Melbourne on Indigenous men's health.

## Lacedonian Living

the creek meanders through crops of maize  
into holding dams, dribbling into laundry troughs  
and duck ponds to emerge downstream

in this earth floor compound, hammocks are strung  
between poles wired for electricity  
men in white dresses tend the fields

there are only 800 left in this rainforest  
their daughters marry Parisian tourists,  
return home in coloured skirts and polyester tops

here is an anthropologist's dream  
framed and catalogued on a museum wall  
fading in the sunlight

we are driven for miles along a bumpy track  
to see the temple's vivid frescos, it is late  
all the stalls are closed

except for a hammock which divests itself  
of its occupant, he is an arrow seller, quiver and bows  
reading a cartoon magazine, night closes in

**Heather Matthew**

## Flores Festival

firecrackers break the night into stars  
it is 6am, no one is sleeping  
the men are drinking from paper cups  
dancing inside painted mannequins,  
wobbling crazily on a drunken axis  
another three day festival

laughter and music erupt from a shop doorway  
we need to leave but the streets are blocked  
the carnival is on parade, carrying the virgin on boards  
trailing flowers the length of this narrow bridge,  
we inch through the procession, against the flow of grandmas  
and children, turning sideways with our backpacks

our guide is hurrying on ahead, elbowing people  
who are walking orderly behind flags and banners  
women four abreast shouldering their holy burden in high heels  
each statue different in its own splendour  
they are singing as they walk along the streets to the cathedral  
we are rushing late for our plane

**Heather Matthew**





## Young Writers' Award

At *Eureka Street* we would like to extend our warmest congratulations to Annette Pereira and Angus Goswell who are the recipients of the *Friends of Eureka Street Young Writers' Award* for 2005.

Annette and Angus will receive awards of \$1,000 each and will write a number of pieces for *Eureka Street* in 2005.

The *Friends of Eureka Street Young Writers' Award* is designed to involve young writers more closely in the mission of the magazine.

The two recipients stood out among a field of applicants and some excellent writing. The final decision was made by Jack Waterford, editor-in-chief of the *Canberra Times* and member of the *Eureka Street* Editorial Board.

Annette Pereira is studying a Bachelor of Arts/Communications at the University of Technology, Sydney. Her major is writing and contemporary cultures. She is interested in the integration of faith and public life. Annette also volunteers for Fusion Australia, an ecumenical organisation which seeks to bring about a more just society.

Angus Goswell is completing a Bachelor of Arts in Media and Communications at the University of Melbourne. He has lived in Tamworth, Sydney and Amman, Jordan. Angus says he's pleased at the opportunity to take part in this program, as he recognises that it's hard for young people to break into the industry.

The *Young Writers' Award* would not be possible without the support of *Friends of Eureka Street* members. We look forward to bringing you the work of Annette and Angus during 2005.

on stage



**A**T THE 1986 ADELAIDE FESTIVAL, during a forum which followed the premiere of Richard Meale's opera, *Voss*, David Malouf (the librettist) was asked, 'Will it travel?' He gave a profound answer, not simply about that opera but for all art. 'You write for the tribe', he said. 'If others overhear and like what they've heard, that's great.' But the tribe is the real audience and that insight provoked my first and persistent question about John Haddock's new opera, *Madeline Lee*.

War and its political penumbra are common elements of opera. The suppression of memory and its consequences are, perhaps surprisingly, less common themes since we are all affected by traumatic memories, especially those involved in wartime horror, and there is no evading the truth that our fickleness in the face of serious challenge and how we subsequently account for it, are enduring aspects of the human story. So I have to be willing to concede that this new opera—despite the fact that it is almost overwhelmed by American cultural references—has something to say to Australia that is independent of our cultural symbiosis with the USA. Yet my scepticism persists: do the composer and his co-librettist (Michael Campbell, who also directed the recent premiere at the Sydney Opera House) have an eye just too obviously on an American market, to an extent that it compromises their work?

The setting is the Libyan Desert in 1962 where we strikingly see a portion of a crashed Flying Fortress, its vast starboard wing angling upward towards us. Four men are playing a dream-like game of baseball and we quickly recognise (rather faster, indeed, than the composer and librettist realise that we will) that they are the restless ghosts of that plane's crew—or almost all of them. Eventually (to be frank, about 30 minutes too late), the drama tightens with the arrival of a quartet of contemporary US military officers to examine this wreckage which, apparently, has just been discovered. All art tends to rely on coincidence, but here

plausibility is overstretched as we discover that the senior member of this group, the Major, was the captain of this very aircraft when it was shot down by German fighters in 1943. He had then instructed his crew to stay with the plane but had, himself, bailed out and ever since has been deluding himself that they also survived to return to serene, quotidian lives in suburban America.

The drama of the piece is, essentially, his coming to terms with his cowardice and duplicity. To the extent that we all do or avoid things which subsequently shame us—but eschew the uncomfortable and obligatory examination of conscience—this story does have a universality. The relevant question is: does this version survive as an opera? It certainly succeeds as theatre—eventually—largely through the intensity and conviction of Michael Lewis's performance as the investigating Major in what is, arguably, the performance of his career. He has done many really splendid things before but, surely, this achievement shows that it is the art of our own time which has the greatest capacity to speak to us and to draw the most potent responses from us as participants or audience. (Could not the same case have been made for what Marlon Brando did in *On the Waterfront*?)

## American arias



The score by John Haddock (who is a member of the music staff of Opera Australia, none of whose previous work has, to my knowledge, been heard in Sydney) is eclectic and merely ancillary, like a film soundtrack. Haddock, obviously, has a good memory rather than a strong imagination—there are more than echoes of Britten, Korngold and Puccini. It is hardly surprising, then, that the concluding Quartet for the dead airmen is altogether too

Panglossian and romantically pat. In the main, the music eschews serious conflict and desperately needs greater toughness—integrity, to be blunt. It leaves its emotional confrontation to be, almost entirely, the responsibility of the text, the striking design (Brian Thomson), the expressionist lighting (Stephen Wickham) and the highly committed acting of the eight ideally cast men. Nevertheless, it did make a significant impact on its audiences: that must be a commendable—and no small—achievement for any new opera. Plainly, it did say something to the tribe. ■

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

# the short list



**The Pyjama Girl Mystery**, Richard Evans. Scribe, 2004. ISBN 1 920 76936 6, RRP \$30

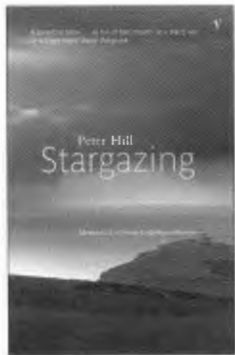
'Who was the Pyjama Girl? Who killed her? I don't know.'

Writers who eschew tidy resolutions are hard to come by. But crime writers who leave unanswered the classic 'whodunit' conundrum are almost unheard of. In the face of a complex case of murder, the conclusion of *The Pyjama Girl Mystery* is refreshingly non-committal. Author Richard

Evans traces a decade-long series of mistaken identifications, bizarre theories and official oversights following the 1934 discovery of an unidentified female body near Albury in New South Wales.

The picture he paints tells many stories: of a corrupt and incompetent police force; of a blind faith in forensic science despite its fallacies; of a pervasive social compulsion to sexualise and render responsible female victims of violence. The former journalism lecturer's real talent lies in his ability to unravel the web of myth and hyperbole spun by the Australian press. Accordingly, his own account of the case is determinedly matter-of-fact. The style is simple, economical, and self-consciously devoid of literary flamboyance. What remains is an unreserved indictment of those all too willing to dispense with evidence in their pursuit of a more seductive, more convenient version of the truth.

—Jess Low



**Stargazing: Memoirs of a young lighthouse keeper**, Peter Hill. Vintage, 2004. ISBN 1 740 51276 6, RRP \$22.95

'Open your curtains over the black starry night sky above Hampstead, or Boston, or Sydney ... and read a favourite poem. Then stare at the sky and contemplate the vastness of the universe. Gradually, you will turn into a lighthouse keeper.'

In 1973, art-school underachiever Peter Hill applies to the Dr Who-ishly named 'Commissioners of the Northern Lights' for holiday work doing a job that everyone

must have fantasised about at least once. Despite his waist-length hair and 19-year-old Aquarian idealism, he's accepted and spends six months as trainee keeper on various tiny islands off the Scottish coast.

Despite the realities of Watergate, Vietnam and the Yom Kippur War seeping in via TV and newspapers, Hill's world contracts to a cocoon of story telling, midnight watches and endless rounds of biscuits and cheese with tea.

In an age of 'Don't trust anyone over 30', he's thrust into close quarters with some colourful and often crusty older men who offer low key but lasting mentoring in life, love and gourmet cooking.

Though the gap between the events and their retelling occasionally shows as characters and places can blend into one another, *Stargazing* is a gentle, whimsical and elegiac story about vanished youth and an equally vanished profession. While Hill decides that lighthouse life isn't for him (today he's an artist and critic living in Australia), it's clear that the beauty, peace and sense of wonder of that time have never left him. Recommended.

—Sally Cloke



**The Sparrow Garden**, Peter Skrzynecki. University of Queensland Press, 2004. ISBN 0 702 23426 5, RRP \$22.95

Peter Skrzynecki's memoir *The Sparrow Garden* traces the journey of his family's immigration from the displaced persons camps of Germany to their new life in the late '40s.

We follow Peter as he explores personally haunting and memorable events, from his experiences as a child in the Parkes Migrant Camp, to the new family home in suburban Sydney,

and later parts of his adult life. The selected memories allow us insight into the struggles involved in the refugee experience and the nature of childhood, but perhaps most significantly, into the powerful connection between family, particularly parents and children.

The strength of *The Sparrow Garden* lies in its emotional honesty. From the Skrzyneckis' innate grief at the loss of their homeland to Peter's boyhood jealousies and frustrations; the emotions conveyed are real. It is Skrzynecki's raw presentations of humanity that make the text moving and cement many moments in the memory.

The beauty of *The Sparrow Garden* is found in the language and poetry used to encapsulate these emotions and experiences. The accompanying poems add to the text, and the author's ability to capture the essence of his experiences in a few verses is powerful. Skrzynecki's acute attention to detail in describing his surroundings, both past and present, is also strong, painting meticulous images (particularly of the treasured family garden after which the text is named) that linger in the mind of the reader.

—Rachel Hewitt



**Sacred Space, The prayer book 2005**, ed. Michelle Anderson. Michelle Anderson Publishing, 2004. ISBN 0 855 72348 3, RRP \$24.95

Juxtaposed with the momentum of the commercial Christmas rush is the timely release of *Sacred Space, The prayer book 2005*. This daily devotional follows the same format as the popular website by the same name. Alan McGuckian SJ and Peter Scally SJ of the Jesuit Communications Centre in Ireland created [www.sacredspace.ie](http://www.sacredspace.ie) in 1999 as a response to all those 'seeking a sense of spirituality'.

The richness of this structure is in its simplicity. At the start of each week there are six topics—The Presence Of God; Freedom; Consciousness; The Word; Conversation; and Conclusion—to contemplate, as well as a daily scripture reading and a series of statements and questions in response. The need for spiritual substance in our world is a quest not only for those already practicing their faith. *Sacred Space* knows no denominational limits and is as much an invitation to those estranged from church as it is for those with no faith background at all.

While over 11 million hits have been recorded at [www.sacredspace.ie](http://www.sacredspace.ie), there are still many who find solace away from technology. The commitment to seek daily comfort in the pages of this book would be the greatest gift or New Year's resolution the reader could give themselves. Holding tight to the spine of this prayer book may create a sacred space that becomes the backbone for their spirituality.

—Lee Beasley

flash in the pan



## Anime steam

*Steamboy*, dir. Katsuhiro Otomo. *Steamboy* is Otomo's first feature-length anime since the success of his 1988 sci-fi cult classic *Akira*. The global anime community has waited a long time for this successor, and now delivered, it has inspired bitter division and pulled limited critical and box-office success.

*Steamboy* is set in a visually magnificent Victorian England, where an alternate Industrial Revolution is taking place. Ray Steam, the young hero inventor, lives in working-class Manchester. Ray, who is also the son and grandson of famous steam engineers, receives a mysterious package from his grandfather: the 'steam ball'. In true anime tradition, it is an object of power—the catalyst by which the adventure begins and ends. Much of the film's meat is derived from the arcane speculative fiction genre, steampunk—think cyberpunk—but instead of neuro-interfaces and cybernetic implants, there are massive cast-iron steamships, elegant behemoths of trains, mind-bendingly intricate labyrinths of shiny brass cogs and gears, all fitted with elaborate pressure valves that scream 'She canna take nae more ... She's gonna blow Cap'n!' Otomo's very Japanese take on the subtleties of Victorian society is intriguing: we see old things through a new filter.

Otomo is obviously fascinated by vast landscapes of urban dystopia: he wrote the screenplay for the troubled 2002 anime of the late Osamu Tezuka's manga version of *Metropolis*. The very name *Steamboy* is a direct reference to *Astroboy*, the iconic television series created by Tezuka, widely regarded as the godfather of Japanese animation.

*Steamboy* feeds the eye a wealth of complex imagery in this retro-tech world. Otomo is a passionate artisan, who has devoted the last ten years to developing *Steamboy* without the use of the modern Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) technologies found in such films as *Toy Story* and Pixar's up coming blockbuster *The Incredibles*. The difference in texture is

extreme: each frame of *Steamboy* breathes style and craft.

Unfortunately the story doesn't match the visuals for brilliance. A ruthless corporation with its psychopathic henchmen battles the forces of Her Majesty (a stately Victoria) for control of the steam ball, an apparently endless energy source. The thematic focus of man versus machine plays out with a fair degree of complexity: the ideological struggle between the holistic and the mechanical. But what could have been poignant, will leave many cold.

If you can ignore the trite conversations and stilted interactions, *Steamboy* might get into gear for you. There's fun to be had, if you don't concentrate too hard. Compared with recent anime epics, such as Miyazake's enchanting *Spirited Away*, the characters are predictable, and the archetypes come thick and fast, with some minor exceptions.

Despite the story's flatness, the spectacle kept me in my seat. Scenes of Ray jetting over the mills and smokestacks of London, powered by the steam ball (more homage to Tezuka) culminate in a grandiose finale, which is perhaps a little over-packed with huge vapour trails and giant rivets.

A compelling yet flawed piece.

—Gil Maclean

## Small-town memories

*In My Father's Den*, dir. Brad McGann. Small-town New Zealand, domestic unease, teenage curiosity, adult distrust and global instability is the vital, if at times melodramatic, mix that strikes the light of *In My Father's Den*.

This is a 'demons lurking in the past' film told with pretty pictures. And while I wanted to believe the critical acclaim it has attracted, I found myself struggling.

Paul (Matthew Macfadyen), a celebrated, but troubled, war photographer, returns to the small New Zealand town of his childhood, for the funeral of his father. His unexpected return awakens the ghost of childhood past, present and, one suspects, future. In fact it's quite a séance. His born-again brother resents him, his sister-in-law looks like his mother, his ex-girlfriend has a daughter that has had as many birthdays as he has spent years away and his father had a secret den.

Paul, convinced to stay in town and teach at the local school, meets Celia (Emily



Barclay), the 16-year-old daughter of his ex-girlfriend. They form a strange friendship, filled with both suspicions, unexpected ease and spend a deal of time together in the father's den. They talk about books, life, dreams and disappointments, relying on each other for the emotional sustenance they fail to garner from the small-town world that surrounds them.

But lo and behold, Celia disappears. Last seen by Paul, clutching an atlas (yes, a gift from him and yes, a heavy-handed metaphor), insisting she is happy to walk home alone.

Naturally the town turns on Paul, and the whole ugly mess of his childhood sprawls out across the screen.

To be fair, *In My Father's Den* did have some exquisite moments, it was filled with performances that quite outstripped the film as a whole. Emily Barclay was perfect, full of adult promise while muted by teenage selfishness. Witnessing a mother's breakdown amongst the wintry bows of a disused orchard, was profoundly moving. But the film was hamstrung by the weight of its own complexity. It never quite carved out a place of its own, swinging erratically between aching family tragedy, rural metaphor and Inspector Morse.

—Siobhan Jackson

## Circle of life

*The Story of the Weeping Camel*, dir. Byambasuren Davaa and Luigi Falorni. In the Gobi Desert of southern Mongolia a family raises goats and camels. They also cook, play cards, sing songs, baby-sit and plait rope out of camel wool. In fact they do pretty much what we all do: mix life and love, play and work, laughter and silence. The only notable domestic difference is they don't watch TV. Yet!

*The Weeping Camel* is part documentary, part narrative fiction, and part fairy tale. The film opens with an old man sitting down to camera, telling an ancient tale of how the trusting camel lost his antlers to the goat. He describes the camel looking up to the sky, patiently waiting for his



forgetful, or perhaps plain thieving, friend to return his lent body part. But of course he never does.

Like Kipling's *Just So* stories, the tale plays beautifully with magic and reality, stimulating the 'strange wonder' bit in your head that cinema so rarely gives a work out.

It is calving time in the Gobi Desert and the camel herd is making noises that only camels can make. The first calf is born with ease. All sticky and sandy, it feeds without quarrel from its mother. Before long a whole posse of calves are drinking and milling about their mothers, but there is one expecting mother that is still expecting. Waiting. Finally the calf arrives after a long and difficult labour. It is a rare white calf, beautiful, but rejected by the exhausted and traumatised mother. With a calm determination the family tries to unite the two, but all their attempts fail. So the two young sons saddle up and head to a town, some distance away, to enlist

the help of a musician (not to mention buy batteries, watch TV, eat ice cream, and dream a little).

*The Weeping Camel* is a quiet story of domestic routine, working life, the determination of nature and the seemingly universal desire children have to watch cartoons. There is little artifice—no 'characters' created from acting methods—just people and their animals in front of cameras playing out a story, that is part real and part play.

But don't be lulled into a false sense of charm or sentiment. This film has a very sophisticated narrative and a determined pace that makes it far more culture than nature. A fact that is perfectly reflected in the family's eventual use of the highly cultured tradition of music to reunite a failure of nature.

Does the camel really weep? I suggest you go and find out!

—Siobhan Jackson

## Coloured sword strokes

*Hero*, dir. Zhang Yimou. Zhang Yimou's first foray into the wuxiz (swordplay) genre is a deceptively simple story. A man, known only as Nameless (Jet Li), is presented to the King of Qin (Chen Dao Ming), a real historical figure famous as a despot, tyrant, and unifier of the warring Chinese kingdoms. Nameless claims to have killed the three most wanted assassins in the land: Sky (Donnie Yen), Flying Snow (Maggie Cheung Man Yuk) and Broken Sword (Tony Leung). As he tells his tale and is questioned by the King, we find ourselves confronted by a layering of multiple versions of the same events, each incompatible with the last but nevertheless building on it, emotionally, aesthetically and narratively.

Each fragment retells the same events, but interprets the character's motives differently. Each fragment is also dominated by a different colour: black, red, yellow, blue, green and white (both Zhang Yimou and the film's Australian cinematographer Christopher Doyle are well known for their expressive use of colour). The effect is not one of repetition or incoherence, it is more as if time itself has been passed through Newton's prism and broken into divergent but implicated

possible pasts and futures. The richness of the characters, and our emotional involvement with them (and it is a film that moves some people to tears), comes from the recognition that *all* of the characteristics and motives attributed to them in each fragment—assassin/hero, noble/base, tyrant/unifier, lover/liar—truly belong to them at the same time, and in the same world.

As a martial arts film there are some truly breathtaking fight scenes, but the fighting is strangely secondary to the film's real concerns. Indeed for all its spectacular action the film is pervaded by a strange stillness. Zhang makes much of the formal and aesthetic links between martial and other arts, music and calligraphy explicitly, but also dance, theatre, painting, philosophy and even government. Even in the fight scenes themselves, the fall of rain on the cobblestones, or the colour and movement of the leaves in the wind seem more essential to the scene than the swordplay itself. It is an extraordinarily beautiful film to watch.

—Allan James Thomas





## State of the Universe address

**L**A LA LA. What a woonderfuul woorld...'

Oh, hello. Just pass the towel, would you? Well, don't you sing in the shower too? I mean, we've got so much to be thankful for, haven't we? Australia may be the lucky country, but thank heavens there's so much good work going on all round this wonderful, happy world. John Kerry is going to make such a fine President, and Simon Crean is showing all the doubters what quietly good statesmanship from a prime minister can do to make the nation mature and compassionate and visionary.

Yep, I feel glad to be part of it all. Since Joan Chittister became Pope ten years ago, there has been such a resurgence of faith that churches are packed with teenagers; and all those new small parishes are working so well with their clerical families. We all grieved when dear old John Paul I died, but he was such a wise, unifying force, that he left the church stronger, kinder and happier than he found it. There had been some fears from conservatives when he relaxed all those antiquated patriarchal marriage and reproductive laws, but strangely, throughout our culture, there seems to be more respect for the human body now that we know that harmless consensual joy is not sinful. And ordaining women and married people has saved the church from an unthinkable shortage of priests. JP1 was such a visionary that the church is affecting people's lives for the better all over the world. It's nice to know we're still relevant to today's world and respectful of different ways of thinking.

And it's such a relief to know that we've arrested the greenhouse effect. Thank God for the probity of the forestry companies: once it was pointed out that native forest logging was causing such problems, they all got together and began to work out truly sustainable ways of getting timber. 'We'd hate to think we were responsible for one of the greatest mistakes of the century', said the CEO of Nolongerrapacious Pty Ltd. He is now the main force behind an extraordinary resurgence in rural economies because now that employment and business aren't tied to a decreasing resource, they can really be creative.

Our Governor General, Lowitja O'Donoghue, said the other day that the 1988 treaty between Indigenous Australians and the rest of us—the January 26ers—had been a powerful force for good. She was launching a new book edited by a group of Indigenous Vice-Chancellors, entitled *Land, Learning and Opportunity*, the three things that have made all the difference for the first Australians.

And television is so good too: *The Map Makers* is a three-part series on the history and major developments in map making, screening from Saturday 4 December on SBS at 7:30pm.

Maps tell you more than the physical shape of a country: they show the political preoccupations in the names chosen for newly discovered places. There are some lovely little pieces of information: though Amerigo Vespucci's name was given to the enormous lands that had been rediscovered by Columbus, the map makers gave it a feminine ending 'AmeriCA', to be consistent with Asia and Africa. The later programs deal with the fascinating story of the Mercator projection and the maps of the D-Day landings.

And *The Elegant Universe*, a three-part series on SBS, Monday 29 November at 7:30pm, is a funny, interesting look at string theory. Though I am no mathematician, I think I understood most of it, and what I didn't quite get I still enjoyed. Brian Greene, theoretical physicist who also wrote, with Matthew Fox, *The Universe is a Green Dragon*, presents the big questions, ones that involve TOE—the Theory of Everything. He is very much at home amongst all the nifty computer animations and drinking blue orange juice at the Quantum Cafe. It seems that almost anything is possible if you calculate towards infinity: walking through walls, and juices of any colour, depending on what universe you inhabit. Because according to quantum theorists and the clever Mr Greene, there are countless parallel universes alongside this one. This is an idea much-visited by sci-fi authors: Terry Pratchett, that brilliant and funny writer (don't miss his latest, *Going Postal*: it's fantastic) often brings up this idea in his Discworld series, especially in *Lords and Ladies*. Funny, this idea of alternative universes. Wonder if it's all real.

**W**HAT? Hang on here, I have to try to take this in: What are you telling me? That only the bits about the telly are true? I don't believe it: people wouldn't be so evil—so damned STUPID. Don't tell me that Bush managed to disenfranchise a million Democrat voters with specious strategies designed to eliminate people of colour. Don't tell me the church has been bleeding internally from misogyny and fear for 25 years. Don't tell me the Indigenous people have not only got no treaty but have been weaselled out of their land rights. Don't tell me that we're putting children behind razor wire and sending our young folk to fight another land war in Asia. Don't tell me we're logging, fishing, mining, polluting and burning the arse out of the planet.

And when you tell me that the ABC have axed George Negus and Channel Nine have axed Don Burke, I just know we're in the wrong universe. How do I get off this one? It's stuffed. ■

**Juliette Hughes** is a freelance writer.

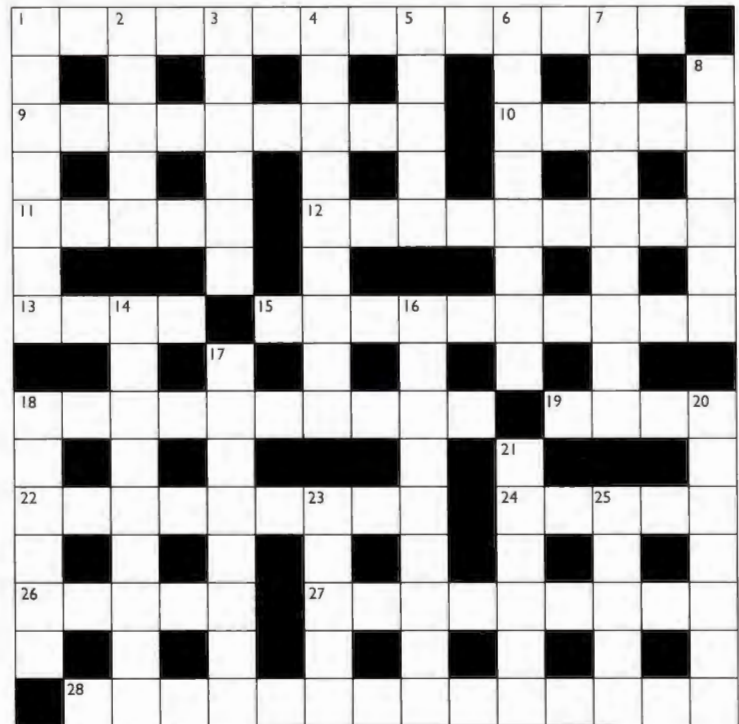


ACROSS

1. What a mess! Nolan saving cub—he needs a white wine! (9,5)
9. Go back to nip black French drink; it's a tasty drop! (5,4)
10. A child at one's ankles, perhaps. Ouch! (5)
11. In fright and dismay, leader gone! That's a mistake. (5)
12. Though mostly sane, I spent foolishly, not realising the unsuitability. (9)
13. Instrument helping one to return for a bath. (4)
15. Toast for the university lecturer saying 'nay' to a drink. (10)
18. Breadwinner, perhaps, who has the wherewithal to eat out? (4,6)
19. Possibly choose a place high up. (4)
22. Will inefficient trial ever result in recovery of property? (9)
24. Dante's hell has no ending, I conclude. (5)
26. Old card game in Rome where Brutus initially entered. (5)
27. English leader took refuge in rickety phone box, being afraid of passers-by. (9)
28. It can strike at the heart to express remorse. (4,4,6)

DOWN

1. How could anyone as inept possibly be regarded as wise? (7)
2. Unusual lunar perspective on a human bone. (5)
3. Doctor on the web without ET. (6)
4. Someone, perhaps, I clothe in attire of the Stone Age. (9)
5. Sort of standard a girl like her sets. (5)
6. Any of 1-across, 9-across, 15-across or 18-across could be used for such an offering to the gods. (8)
7. A spoilsport possibly would act like this. (3,2,2,2)
8. Somewhat bad-tempered about this sort of bread. (6)
14. How should one position oneself at the start of a meal? (2,2,5)
16. They are like 1-across and 15-across in some respects. But a single, Sir, would be adequate. (9)
17. Street torn about ID requirement—that's harsh! (8)
18. On the French sea, much pleasure can be gained from taking this. (6)
20. A phenomenon foreshadowing future trends, perhaps. (7)
21. Analysing primes could provoke a titter. (6)
23. Twisted vine holding ten bunches of grapes—watch for the little fox... (5)
25. ...which might also disturb the Roman flowers. (5)



Solution to Crossword no. 128, November, 2004



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