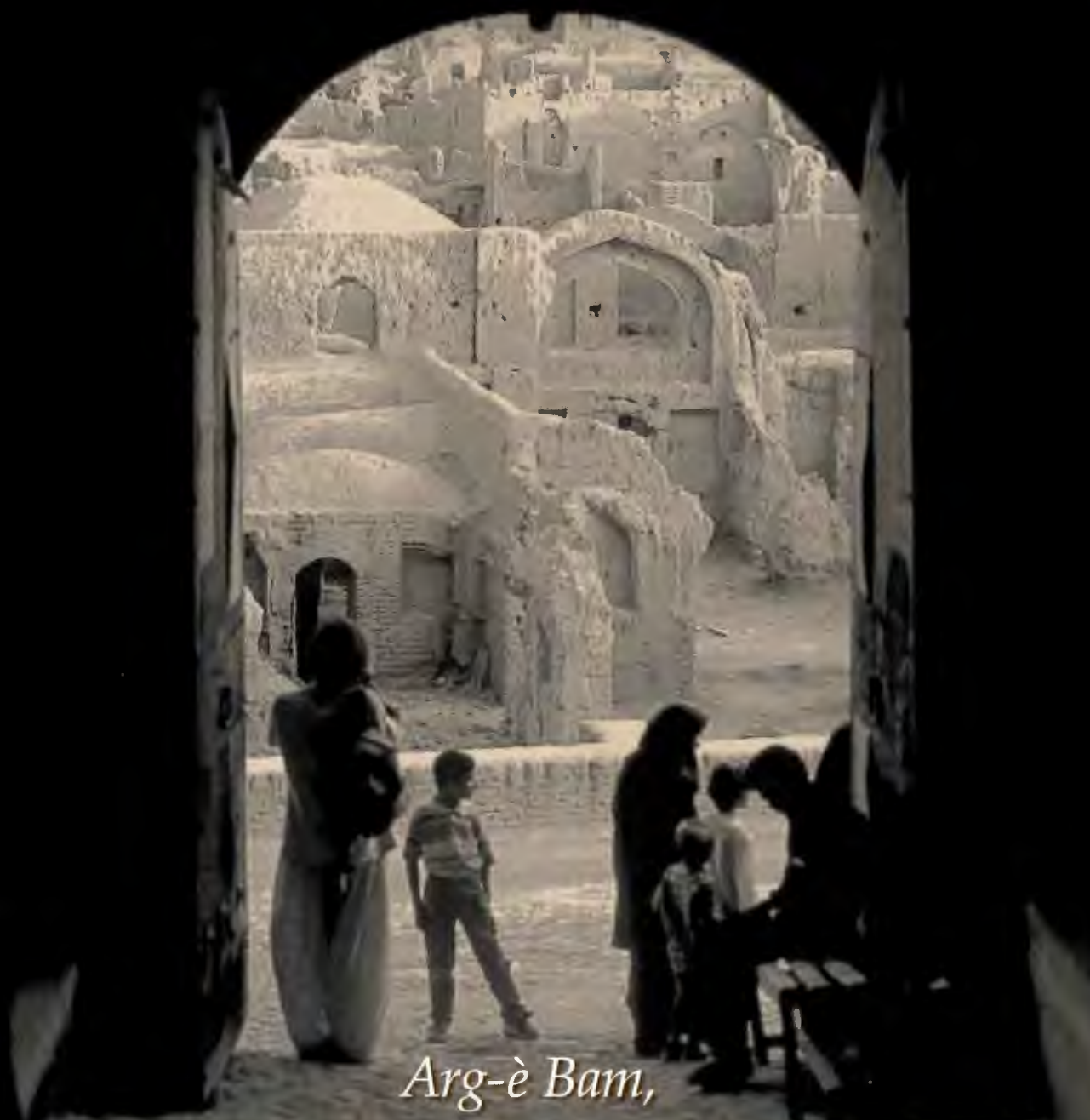


EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS,
THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY
Vol 14 no 3 April 2004 \$7.50 (inc. GST)



*Arg-è Bam,
a city built of mud and
surrounded by a forbidding wall
with watchtowers overlooking the
abundant date palms of the oasis.*

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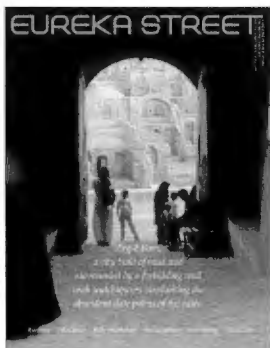
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This month

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The final word

THIS LENT THE *Passion of the Christ* has been the biggest Christian show in town. Among the many faults theological critics have found in it, they have accused Mel Gibson of being false to the Gospel by wallowing in the gore and sweat of the Passion at the expense of the Resurrection.

That criticism surely misses the target. In the Gospels, Christ rises only after fully testing the devastating power of death. Although Mark's account of the Passion is understated in its detail, he enumerates all the things that might make us believe, or even hope, that death has the final word in human life. He tells of power cynically used, of betrayal, injustice, torture, terror and of humiliation. In the lead-up to Easter, we are invited into the bear cage in the company of a death whose claws are unsheathed. It is there that we recognise that death's embrace is not fatal, not final. If we were to use Easter as a reason for avoiding or softening the brutality of death, we would show that we feared its power.

We commonly learn from experience that our personal way to life runs through death, or at least that it goes through no other place. But public life tells another story. Politics defines human well-being as the prosperity, security and reassurance of the majority, offering a passing assurance that even in sickness and misfortune you will be looked after. The art of politics is to persuade people that you have the technical skill to devise strategies and policies that will give them what they want. To introduce into this conversation moral considerations that speak of human purposes, dignity, destiny, despair and mortality is to drag a dead bird into the political drawing room. Politics is built on the denial of death.

The denial is useful. It allows you to happily think in abstractions and neglect the human effects

of your policies when putting them in place. You are free sunnily to involve yourself in bombing Iraq or in imprisoning children without seeing the faces of those whom you have maimed physically or spiritually. You need not contemplate your own death or the death of those whom you afflict. Where policy is radically dissociated from the reality of death, the paradoxical result is a society dominated by the logic of death. It is caught in the cinematic image of the future city where human government, having devised a policy that will guarantee security through the bombardment of enemies, has subsequently been wiped out. But computers continue to organise and deliver the daily bombardments of an abandoned city. The transition from a human government based on the denial of death to the dominance of a pure technology of death is seamless.

IN AUSTRALIA OVER the last few years, we have endured the myth of public life as technology and the denigration of those who criticise policy on moral grounds. More recently, in the discussion of the ways we should educate our children, and support the elderly, there have been seeds of hope that our public conversation can encompass death. But we are still hearing advice that we should move on from Iraq, move on from Tampa. The counsel indicates that the denial of death is alive and well. To the extent that we heed it, we shall render cosmetic the transformation of Easter. Easter will have touched our public life when we are able to enter respectfully the Passion to which we condemn our fellow human beings. Then we may discover that death does not have the last word. ■

Andrew Hamilton SJ is *Eureka Street's* publisher.

Just the ticket

SO MR LATHAM thinks he has a problem. If elected Prime Minister this year, he is worried that he will have two houses, one in Sydney and the other in Canberra. He made the point that it is only possible to sleep in one bed at a time. A man with small children should know better. Most children have no trouble sleeping in three beds in the same night: their own, their parents and the spare bed to which the parents have fled in desperation.

Mr Latham seems to have forgotten one extra bed made available to the PM at taxpayers expense. This is the bed in the flatette located in the PM's office in Parliament House itself, a curious facility given that the Lodge is so handy. Perhaps the architects of the house considered it a risk to stable government to allow a sleepy Prime Minister to walk in on his wife in the middle of the afternoon. Or maybe they thought that the resting place of power would be a tourist attraction when, in due course, the new house becomes too small and has to be superseded by one still further up the hill with more room for security staff. Presumably, Mr Latham intends to make the flatette available to the homeless of Canberra for emergency accommodation.

The real issue for Mr Latham is what to do with Kirribilli House. Unlike Mr Howard, who never wanted to live anywhere else, Mr Latham does not appear to want to reside there. It is rare for Mr Latham to be so out of touch with his constituency. He has done well so far on a list of populist ideas. He should realise that, if he doesn't want to live in a harbourside mansion, then he is one of the few aspirational voters in Australia who doesn't.

Yet Kirribilli House holds the key to Mr Latham's success. The only policy Mr Latham needs to take to the next election is a clear plan for Kirribilli House.

He should raffle it.

The policy goes like this. Labor promises, if elected, to give every citizen a free ticket in the raffle. There is one prize: Kirribilli House. Winner takes all. Elements within the Labor Party will protest that this is a regressive system, that the rich will have as much chance of winning as the poor. Fair point. Let's give those on the top marginal tax rate one ticket. Those in the next bracket two tickets. Those with health care cards might get six tickets.

The raffle could be tailored to provide incentive as well. Those paying their HECS fees up-front

might get an extra ticket, for example. The same policy can be used to create desirable social outcomes. Those on maternity leave might get extra tickets and families could be offered a ticket for each child. The policy can be further developed to make sure it pushes all the right emotional buttons. Surviving diggers from World War II can have twenty tickets. Foreigners arriving on leaky boats with tickets purchased illegally overseas will have them publicly confiscated and put in another raffle with no date set for the draw. Parliamentarians get no tickets. This would avoid embarrassment if, by another stroke of the bizarre fortune on which he has built his career, Mr Howard were to win the raffle.

THE POLICY WILL BRING Mr Latham into government in a landslide. First of all, people will trust him. They will support a man who tries to bribe them openly and shamelessly more than if he tries to do it by subtle means. Second, the policy is cheap. It is a while since I bought a harbourside mansion in Sydney, but I believe they are still going for under \$50 million. Believe me, this is not a lot of money. You can pay more for a decent haircut in Hollywood. Paid maternity leave has been costed at \$200 million, and that is an annual expense. Fixing Medicare will cost even more. A one-off raffle for Kirribilli House is the cheapest way Mr Latham can get into power.

Mr Latham will become a folk hero overnight. In a single stroke of genius, he will have given the people of Australia the two things most of them really want. One is the chance to own a house with great views of all major firework displays. The other is another lottery. We have become accustomed to government services being paid for with gambling revenue. In fact, we seem to like it. It makes abundant sense that not just government services but the government itself should be provided in this way. Of course, Mr Latham may find that there are still voters who care about more than over-priced little pieces of real estate, but they can be told not to spoil the party.

As for winning a second term, Mr Latham might consider raffling Telstra. It wouldn't be a backflip. He only said he wouldn't sell it. ■

Michael McGirr's biography of the Hume Highway, *Bypass*, will be published this year by Picador.



A refugee problem

Two years ago I attended a forum with Peter Mares (journalist) and Jeremy Moore (activist lawyer) as keynote speakers and bought Peter's book *Borderline*. I sat and read that book twice through and have read it a dozen times since.

Throughout the past two years I have come to work with some of the most decent people in this country as they have worked pro bono to release those incarcerated in places like Woomera.

I have read and written millions of words about refugees, asylum seekers, SIEV X, the children overboard affair, Woomera and children in detention and I have a refugee problem.

My first family members came on boats in the 1850s as refugees from the Prussian army, the next wave came in the 1890s as migrants from poverty in England, Wales and Cornwall with the last arriving on a boat from England in 1920. Given that all but the Indigenous owners of this land have similar tales, this is my problem.

What gives us the right to write laws which make it impossible for people with real problems to reach our shores and claim asylum?

There is a reluctance on the part of the nations who wrote the refugee convention to live up to their obligations.

I don't have a problem with anyone but fellow Australians who use refugees for political gain; who imprison innocents and call it border protection; with those who fail to understand that in the absence of travel documents refugees must have 'illegal' transport; and the stupidity of criminalising asylum.

Peter Mares says in *Borderline* that 'the more we seek to deter asylum seekers and refugees through harsh treatment, the more Australia comes to resemble the repressive nations from which they flee.'

Marilyn Shepherd
Kensington, SA

Misguided intelligence

Important findings of the parliamentary inquiry into intelligence on Iraq include

the following:

Mr Howard cited UK and US documents from which 'the uncertainties had been removed' and which relied heavily on 'new and largely untested intelligence'.

'Government presentations were in some areas incomplete', notably in relation to some significant UN information. Not mentioned were judgements that Iraq 'was only likely to use its WMD if the regime's survival was at stake' and that 'war would increase the risk of terrorism.'

The government argued, 'Iraq possessed WMD in large quantities and posed a grave and unacceptable threat.' Yet this is 'not the picture that emerges from an examination of all the [intelligence] assessments provided to the Committee'.

'Assessments by Australian agencies about possible degradation of agents and restricted delivery capability cast doubt on the [government's] suggestion that the Iraqi "arsenal" represented a "grave and immediate" and a "real and unacceptable, threat".'

The inquiry's report reinforces early criticisms of the government. It exposes the selective use (and hence misuse) of intelligence and information, and the portrayal of Iraq as a greater and more immediate threat than logic and the balance of intelligence and information justified.

Brent Howard
Rydalmere, NSW

Eureka Street welcomes letters from our 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.

Send to: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au or
PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121

Post script

As *Eureka Street* goes to press, the people of Madrid are marching in protest at the recent terrorist actions and families gather to bury their dead.

The import of the event was brought home to us at *Eureka Street* as our much loved roving correspondent Anthony Ham and his wife Marina live and work in Madrid. We spent a nervous 24 hours waiting to hear news.

'Es una barbaridad ... We're all fine. It was something of a frantic morning, as we couldn't get through to my wife's family as the mobile system was overloaded. Marina's dad had just passed through Atocha not long before [the explosions] and her sister lives 100m from one of the other stations affected. A couple of anxious hours later, we'd finally tracked down all family and friends, all of whom are fine. As one of them said, there's a 'special silence' right now in Madrid.

'Needless to say, we're all devastated and plan on joining millions on the streets of Madrid tonight. It's a very special place for me, as are its people, so I confess to feeling a bit lost today. As I send this email, all work and everything is stopping around Spain for 15 minutes. And every one of us has an uncontrollable desire to weep.'

Anthony Ham
Madrid, Spain

Congratulations!

Winners December Eureka Street Book Offer:

J. Artup, Hawthorn, VIC; E. Burke, Cremorne Point, NSW; V. Ferris, Sydney, NSW; G. Mahon, Canterbury, VIC; B. McDermott, East St Kilda, VIC; R.D. Moore, Surrey Hills, VIC; M. O'Connor, Edgecliff, NSW; B. Roberts, Sydney, NSW; P. & B. Snell, Glen Waverley, VIC; J.W.Vodarovich, Claremont, WA.

Congratulations!

Winners January/February Eureka Street Book Offer:

D. Brooker, Aberfoyle Park, SA; A. Dooley, Clifton Hill, VIC; J. Dudley, East Fremantle, WA; J. Gomeze, Brighton, VIC; Fr D. McKee, Adelaide, SA; E. Melville, Cherrybrook, NSW; K. Norris, East Launceston, TAS; F.B. Robinson, Penshurst, NSW; F. & A. Thompson, Highton, VIC; C. Williams, Heathmont, VIC.



Credit overdrawn

MARK LATHAM IS DOING far better than anyone expected. No one had particular faith in him, though there was a bare majority in his caucus, if not in his party's machinery, who had the sense to recognise that a great gamble with an outside chance was more sensible than a low-risk, low-dividend Kim Beazley. But the signs, so far, are good. It's probably six months out from an election, but the polls put Labor well in front, and show Latham, personally, gaining in stature with the electorate. The doubters worried about his self-discipline; he has kept it. The doubters thought that a history of flirting with often contradictory ideas would make him vulnerable to parliamentary attack. The attacks have been made, but they have not seemed to work. John Howard does not seem able to get a fix on him, and often responds to Latham rather than making Latham go after him. This has weakened the Government's self confidence and faith in Howard as leader, although there is no evidence that Peter Costello is a surer bet. Indeed even Costello's supporters suspect that his unwillingness to wield the knife against Howard is a proof of incapacity, not only to use it more successfully on Latham, but to govern generally.

John Howard has been in this fix before. Six months before the 2001 election he was in much the same position at the polls. Howard fights well with his back against the wall. At that time he dumped unpopular policies and not a little of his reputation for fiscal rectitude. He looted the Treasury to buy off key groups who were critical. He kept hammering away at a complacent Kim Beazley, who had imagined that government would fall into his lap, if only because the Howard Government had plainly run out of steam and ideas. And Howard was pulling back the margin well before two extraordinary bits of political luck came his way; the Tampa, and the events of September 11. Even in his exploitation of that luck, he left nothing to chance, quite happy to mislead the electorate, to misuse defence forces for crude politics, and to throw \$1 billion away to save face over his Pacific solution. That Labor panicked and, seeking to neutralise Howard's issues, abandoned any moral right to govern was mere bonus. Howard does not panic, and, this time, does not even have any core agenda or principles to defend. He will do whatever is necessary to win, and is still better at calculating the chances than any of his rivals.

Howard's problem as he sets his budget, is not how much money there is in the bank but how much credit he has, or more accurately, credibility. He's used a lot of it in areas where he has been regarded as stronger; national security, and

management of the economy. It's not just children overboard or gilding the lily about weapons of mass destruction, though these are the areas where he has lost trust, not only among his enemies, who never believed him anyway, but in core constituencies. He's been spending his credibility with farmers, home buyers, school parents and hospital patients. The evidence is that an increasingly cynical electorate simply doesn't believe him any more. Even when Howard delivers, or gets some grudging credit, there is widespread suspicion of his motives. Mark Latham, moreover, seems to have some knack at wrong-footing Howard over symbolic politics right in the middle of the legend he is trying to sell, whether about values, or the Australian dream, or self-reliance. Perhaps Latham is being cunning too, playing the same policies game that Howard did, so successfully, in 1995. The bland assurances about not upsetting the apple cart, keeping the focus on government and broad management credentials, together with some sharply focused policies on issues such as Medicare, superannuation and tax, while (unlike Beazley) uttering vague but sincere-sounding slogans directed at long-term Labor constituencies to keep them quiet.

WILL THAT BE ENOUGH? Enough, perhaps, for Labor to win back power, though Howard will be trying to shut down issues where he cannot win and polarise on issues where he may, all the time seeking to probe and expose Labor's weaknesses. But ought it be enough for constituencies looking for something to believe in, some moral crusade they can get behind, even some amends, perhaps, for those who have been let down, whether by the Government or by Labor, or both? Does Labor really have a refugee policy anyone who has cared about the issue can support? Does anyone know what Labor plans for Indigenous Australians? Does anyone know who Labor's shadow minister on the subject is? Has Labor offered an education policy beyond slogans? Or should those who worry about such issues shut up and hope for the best, assuming that, however awful, it must be better than Howard? Is Labor properly positioned to take on the Greens in any contest over the environment or over moral righteousness? Or does it just hope or expect that the votes will drift back via preferences? One's answer to such questions may vary according to faith, hope or taste. But some who yearn to see the end of Howard, because they think he deserves to go, have yet to persuade themselves that Labor deserves to win. ■

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

the month's traffic



A sporting chance

EAST TIMORESE IN AUSTRALIA

A STAGGERING NUMBER of religious and human rights groups as well as local government people joined forces several years ago to try and convince the Federal Government to grant permanent residency to Australia's 1650 East Timorese asylum seekers. Most of those seeking a change in status fled to Australia after the Dili Massacre in 1991. Their state of 'limbo', which has been a roller coaster of emotions, came to a head in 2002 when they discovered the Government's reluctance to grant them a permanent visa. They have been drip-fed information over the years telling them that their category was unusual and it would be considered down the track. But as deportation notices began arriving, agitation and fear in the East Timorese community grew and led to a massive public campaign.

By the end of 2003 the Federal Government had granted permanent residency to about 800 of the 1650 East Timorese people, living in Melbourne, Sydney and Darwin. The new Immigration Minister, Senator Amanda Vanstone, has used her ministerial discretion to grant more people permanent residency. No such certainty as yet for several hundred others.

Most of the activists who have been agitating, writing letters and pleading with the former Immigration Minister Mr Ruddock for almost a decade, believe the December decision is due largely to the intensity of the community campaign, known as *Common Sense For East Timorese—Let Them Stay*. The campaign, which had been running informally for several years, was drawn together by Melbourne's City of Yarra in 2002 because of the threat of deportation facing so many of its community members.

Several 'agitators' flew to New York recently to receive the United Nations'

2003 Golden World Award in recognition of the success of the campaign. The gala dinner was attended by several people (at their own expense) from the Yarra City Council, which took up the baton for the East Timorese people and has not stopped arguing for the rights of the several hundred still awaiting determination. Also at the award dinner in New York was the 'front man' for the East Timorese community and the *Let Them Stay* advocacy campaign, Fivo Freitas. Fivo, 29, came to Australia in 1999 and was one of the 800 people granted permanent residency in December. He has become a strong voice for his community over the years, speaking to anyone who will listen.

The campaign was one of six worldwide to be short-listed for the 2003 Golden World Award representing a specific program area of interest to the United Nations. Fivo participated in many of the events organised as part of the campaign, including a highly-publicised 10th birthday party for many of the children from the East Timorese families who came to Australia after the Dili Massacre. The party illustrated how embedded in Australian life and culture most of the families have become. Many of their children were born in Australian hospitals, have only ever been educated in this country and play cricket and football for suburban Melbourne teams.

Fivo also accompanied a cricket tour, called *It's Just Not Cricket—Let The East Timorese Stay*, to Canberra last year to play against a Federal Politicians XI on the grounds of Parliament House. The junior team of young cricketers known as the Croca Roos (crocodiles and kangaroos) was made up of East Timorese children from the City of Yarra and many of their supporters. The young sportsmen wanted to show politicians, particularly the cricket-loving Prime Minister Mr John Howard, that the team members were all young Australians who love the game. Many of the children in the team were born in Australia after their parents fled Dili.

Ironically, one of the junior cricket tour's organisers and Executive Officer of the Melbourne-based Good Shepherd Social Justice Network, Christine Carolan, won a Centenary Medal last year for 'voluntary service as an advocate for East Timorese Asylum Seekers in Melbourne'. It seems that *Common Sense For East Timorese—Let Them Stay* campaign

participants are being applauded on national and world stages, but the East Timorese people at the centre of the campaign are still waiting, desperate to find out what their future holds.

—Rosie Hoban

Seven last words

AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

IT WAS LATE MARCH, with Easter promising and a new seasonal crispness in the air. Perfect timing for the Australian Chamber Orchestra (ACO) to program the newly commissioned *Seven Last Words*, with music by Georges Lentz and words by a royal flush of Australian writers—David Williamson, Thomas Keneally, David Malouf, Peter Goldsworthy, Dorothy Porter and Michael Leunig. The reader—his bass voice throwing to the gods of the Melbourne Concert Hall with the ease of Ivan Rebroff—was Jack Thompson.

The seven last words—Jesus' from the cross—have been a staple for composers for centuries. Perosi, Schütz, Haydn—all have interpreted the words in their times, translating them, as music can, with a transcendence equivalent to the source.

It's characteristic of the ACO, and its galvanic artistic director, Richard Tognetti—who seems to play his Guadagnini violin mostly on his toes—that the orchestra (16 members for this occasion) should try a new, 21st century rendering of the words, or variations on them, for this concert. Characteristic, too, that the ACO should choose Australian writers. The result, for the audience, was an immediacy—these writers speak in tones we recognise, precisely—and a realisation, again, of the dynamic potential of words with music—how exciting their intersection can be.

Lentz's *Seven Last Words* are orchestral (mostly string) meditations, or reflections. And the 'words', for this concert, were personal poetic takes on the scriptural fragments, 'Father forgive them; they know not what they do'; 'Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise'; 'Woman, behold thy son! Behold thy mother!'; 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'; 'I thirst'; 'It is finished' and 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.'

Lentz did not readily accept the

commission. Born in Luxembourg, and raised in 'a predominantly Roman Catholic environment', he was intimate with the tradition. Christ's Passion, he writes 'is still for me the most powerful narrative about the human condition.' But he was also hesitant, inhibited by doubt, and anxieties both religious and musical. It took a poem by the great German, Friedrich Hölderlin, to spur—or release—him into composition. Among Hölderlin's own 'last words', and written at a time when the old poet was thought mad, the poem translates, says Lentz, something like this: 'What is God? Unknown, yet full of his being is the face of the heavens ... The more a thing is invisible, the more it wraps itself in strangeness.' Lentz found a recording of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger reading the poem 'in a brittle old voice in the 1960s'. 'So many meanings of last words,' remarks Lentz.

So that is the complex provenance of the music, and the beginning of an explanation of its form. But only a beginning. The music itself—sheets, or curtains of sound that peel into silence, stutterings, breathings on strings, percussive beats, skittering notes, cosmic shudders (Lentz refers to a love of astronomy, of Aboriginal dot paintings)—is layered and mysterious, evocative without ever being programmatic.

The words, poems and prose poems, are variations, excursions. Read between each musical movement, they provided both springboard and platform for the music. And the writers themselves seem to have been more liberated than bound by their commission. They range, and sound so like themselves.

David Williamson: 'Sorry Jesus, but I think they knew exactly what they were doing ... /... "Do unto others as you would have them do to you", was without any doubt, the most threatening moral maxim the powerful, the messianic, the corrupt and the indifferent had ever been confronted with.'

Or Tom Keneally, with the rhetorical tang of Herman Melville's preacher in *Moby Dick*: 'My thirst hangs, a thunderhead of absence, above deserts, above the least village, the dark streets of the assassins; and the lit rooms where narrow men consign the humble lives to furnaces.'

Or David Malouf, seriously playful in his 'Seven Last Words of the Emperor Hadrian': 'Soul, small wandering one, / My lifelong companion, / Where will you go /



The thick and thin of inter-religious dialogue

DIALOGUE IS NO LUXURY; peace depends on it. The question most simply put is: How shall we live our lives together?

Years ago Pierre Teilhard de Chardin re-told a story from Genesis. According to him, *homo sapiens* originated somewhere in East Africa and swarmed from there all over the world, rather like the 70 or 72 grandsons of Noah when he asked them to move out of his homestead. Without realising that they were walking on a globe, they walked further and further away from each other, passed the equator and started to meet again. It is that meeting we call in our day and age 'globalisation'.

Biblically, it is seen as a kind of family get-together. Each community—Christian and Muslim, Jewish and Hindu, and all the others—has its own history, its own unique religion, and its own interpretation of the shape and future of the world. Yet, while living in these different worlds, they all have been living in the same world with a future still to be determined.

These separate histories find their full meaning only if seen in the perspective of God's 'whole-ing' or healing the whole of God's people. This being so, dialogue is essential to discern the focus and shape of God's work and mission in our world. A dialogue based on this insight participates in God's work and mission. It will respect how the Spirit is at work 'from within' the other, just as the Spirit is at work 'from within' myself.

This dialogue is not a discussion or debate. There will be no winners and losers, though there might be changes and conversions. There will be a mutual enrichment, and an approach to God as not experienced before. To alienate one's self from this community, in a kind of monologue, would mean to cut one's self off from humanity.

The dialogue asked for is not only a question of listening. There is also the aspect of 'speaking', of witnessing. Christians would not be fair either to themselves or to the other, if they failed to mention Jesus' role in their past and present. Christians have to be clear to themselves and to others, that what they do is because they discovered, in Jesus, the reason for a dialogical approach.

Witness is not so much a technique to convince, as an opportunity to open ourselves to the other on the reality of God in our lives. It is not so much a question of 'conversion' but one of convergence, progressing together toward a full understanding of what it means to be the one family of God.

Inter-religious dialogue should be much more than about bringing members of religious communities into discussion with each other. It is what some would call the thin, or spiritual, of inter-religious dialogue. The Federation of Asian Bishops Conference constantly stresses that a serious inter-religious dialogue can only be done through solidarity and sharing with the poor. That is the thick, or corporal, aspect of inter-religious dialogue with its implications for the political, social and economic organization and life of humankind. Its goal is total human development. ■

J.G. Donders M. AFR. is an Emeritus Professor of Mission and Cross-Cultural Studies at Washington Theological Union, USA.



Green science

IT HAS BEEN ONE OF those Australian summers where nature has been dominant. The heat, the drought, the dust and the ever-present, terrifying spectacle of the bushfires, sweeping away all in their path. Sadly, but not surprisingly, wherever the fires have touched they have inflamed environmental politics dividing those who believe nature should serve humanity, versus those who want to live in harmony with the environment.

On one hand, the forestry industry and others who make their living in the bush are calling for an increase in burning off, greater logging, and clearing the forest of fuel; yet conservation authorities and environmentalists argue that bushfires are inevitable and that we must develop ways of living with them. Most of us are caught somewhere between. And just as God was traditionally invoked against the infidels by both sides in the Crusades, so the standard of science is now flown into battle by both sides of the debate. Keeping science apolitical, like keeping politics out of sport, is never an option.

This sort of argument is not confined to the forest. According to a report released last December by the UN-sponsored Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, the bulk of the Great Barrier Reef is in comparatively good condition. Many prominent reef scientists and conservationists, however, argue that the reef is in trouble, increasingly affected by rising sea temperatures which cause bleaching, under attack from recurrent plagues of crown-of-thorns starfish, polluted by sediment and chemicals from nearby agricultural land, and exploited by fishermen and tourists.

The truth seems to be that the proportion of the 2000-kilometre long reef impacted by any of these factors tends to be small. The question is when to sound the alarm: when you first become aware of a potential threat, or only if the impact is obvious by which time it may be too late to redress the damage?

Even President George W. Bush is finding the environment a hot political topic. His administration has refused to ratify the Kyoto agreement as it views the regulation of greenhouse gas emissions as bad for the US economy. Yet across America, states and municipalities and even the Senate are contemplating and passing laws which undermine the Bush position.

California, a state built around the motor car, is cracking down on vehicle emissions. New York is boosting the use of renewable energy, and the six New England states have instituted a program of cuts to greenhouse gas emissions which ultimately go further than Kyoto. These states argue that their measures will contribute to a better environment, and improve their economies. None of these problems has an easy answer, and there are many more waiting in the wings; fish stocks, resources of fresh water and genetically modified foods. Each issue has proponents of all persuasions waving scientific data to support their point of view. Does this make science the whore of the environment, bending before the will of all? No, it reflects the complexity of environmental problems, where people find it easier to generate half-truths. We have to educate ourselves and establish centres of knowledge which can provide balanced views. It was good to see, for instance, that the Australian government funded a Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre last October.

Without the aid of knowledge generated using the scientific method, we have no chance of sorting out the complexity which surrounds us. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

—numb, pale, undefended— / now the jest we shared is ended?'

Or Dorothy Porter, personal, intense: 'I am here, / ninth hour, / I am here / stripped and shivering.' Or Peter Goldsworthy, with his analytical mystical mix: 'At first I thought this world a dream, / whether Yours or mine I couldn't tell. / My mind could find no footholds / in its firmaments ...'

And, finally, Michael Leunig: 'It is finished. / So let us share ...'

The drama of the concert was subtle but powerful. Jack Thompson sat, monumental, as the music shed around him, but then he would stand, as though on steel springs, and speak.

The ACO's performance was lithe and exact—perfectly cued to the words, their meaning and the meaning of the music. What more can one ask, or say? Except that before *Seven Last Words* they gave us apposite Brahms, Beethoven and Bach, glorious, and gloriously played.

—Morag Fraser

Dutch (er, Russian) courage

WINSTON CHURCHILL ONCE described Russia as 'a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma'. Like the quote itself, the former USSR is a region that rarely makes sense to the outside observer. Despite the initial culture shock, there is no doubt the 9289 kilometres from St Petersburg to Vladivostock are filled with enough chaos and mystic tranquillity to satiate the thirst of any adventure-craving backpacker.

Western stereotypes paint Russia as a land of cloak-and-dagger politics run by a network of spies—the freezing cold Siberian steppe as the backdrop for what is perceived as continued Cold War sentiment. However, while there's no fooling anybody about the cold, there is no doubt that Russia is looking to a brighter future.

Travelling on the descending escalator into the former nuclear bunkers that now make up the St Petersburg and Moscow metro systems is an excellent time to 'people watch'. The traditional hard, stoic faces dominate, but upon closer inspection, sparks of colour, life and culture exist. This

Continued on page 12.



Butchering words

A FRIEND OF MINE, fond of fashioning his own brand of aphorism, announced one day, after what he claimed had been a long period of research, 'butchers are much given to bullshit.'

It was actually said with some affection and, unlike most of his other putatively pungent reflections on the cosmos, this one struck me as having some truth.

Butchers tend to be rather jolly blokes (they are almost invariably blokes) with a ready line of patter, chitchat, jokes, small talk, wisdom, footy gossip and observations.

This is because, unlike their retail brethren, butchers need to fill silences which might otherwise be punctuated by the slash of the cleaver, the crunch of bone, the whine of saw, the splat of soft tissue and pulpy organs, the secretive but noticeable oozing of blood. Butchers' endless verbalising—their 'bullshit'—distracts us from all this and turns what might have been a gory, vegetarian-inducing experience into a kind of theatre.

This is why, when I first entered the village's sole *boucherie*, I did so with certain anticipation. What would be the Gallic butcher's manifestation of his trade's verbal embroidery?

At first, I was disappointed. My opening gambit—an enquiry about chicken *filets*—elicited an unequivocal *Non* and silence. Taken aback, and being taken aback often happens in a foreign language, I asked for some *pâte de campagne* and left it at that. But my second visit was much more successful.

Monsieur Leclos, the butcher, is a big man, perhaps in his mid thirties. His white apron covers a vast area of chest and stomach. His face is large, its features pronounced and definite. Heavy black eyebrows make him look as if he's ill-tempered and scowling, but bronze tips through his thick mop of black hair suggest a more playful nature. Still, it's heavy going again until he refers to me as *Anglais* and I correct him: *Je suis Australien*, I say.

Had I seen *La Coupe du Monde de Rugby*? *Absolument*, I lie. (Well, I saw the semis and the final on telly.) He has a heavy local accent: he corrects my pronunciation of *Australien* to *Australienne* which makes me female; he calls *les Français*, his team, *les Franci*; when we get round to talking about wine, as we inevitably do, *vin* becomes *ving*. But it is *le Rugby* that is his great interest and passion. With blade poised above the three large chicken legs that he is to cut each in half for the *pot au feu*, he anatomises *les Franci* and their faults.

They are not strong enough, he says, too easily brushed aside. I tell him that many Australians had hoped for an Australia–France final in the interests of attractive rugby.

Brilliant, yes, concedes M. Leclos, wonderful to watch. But, his face contorts as he searches for an image, *comme les oiseaux*. Like flitting birds. Whack. The cleaver halves the first of the birds' legs on his block. He moves aside the two pieces, positions the next one and, with weapon again airborne, says the Australians, the New Zealanders, even recently the English, train hard. The Australians, he says, what do they do as soon as a *Coupe du Monde de Rugby* has ended, win or lose? He waves an interrogative cleaver at my chin. '*Je ne sais pas*,' I answer dutifully, but I can guess.

They start training again for the next one, says M. Leclos and his savage emphasis dismembers another chicken leg.

'*Et les Franci? Ils vont en vacance*,' he says with derision, making it sound as if the vacation lasts three and a half years. This hardly sounds fair to me, and I try to tell him how well regarded the French had been for their attitude to the game, and how disappointing was the philosophy of the conquering *Anglais*.

But he is scarcely listening. He has wrapped the meat and is contemplating the till, the drawer of which has sprung open and is nudging his generous midriff. He looks at me, glances out the window to the narrow street, and takes a deep breath. When *les Franci* lost the semi final—his voice is full of import, like the first rustle of the mistral—I was sick, he says. '*J'avais mal à l'estomac*.'

I embark on a sympathetic anecdote to show that a sick feeling in the stomach is a condition associated almost continuously with following my team, which plays *les règles Australiens*, a game, I add proudly, that we Australians invented.

'*Ca ne m'intéresse pas*.' He is very dismissive about anything to do with football, which to him means soccer. What is the secret of the Australians, he asks and then tells me. '*Les Australiens sont Cool*' he says, handing me my parcel with a triumphant flourish. '*Vous comprenez Cool?*'

But now he must retire to the back of the shop to watch a Rugby match between Toulouse and Edinburgh. Each side has five internationals playing. He is expecting a memorable Toulouse victory over *les Écossais*. I wish him *bon jeu* and leave.

In *Le Figaro* the following morning, I see that Toulouse won 33–nil. I can't wait to discuss it with him. In the manner of butchers everywhere, he will speculate, reflect, pronounce, report, conclude. It will take a roast of *porc*, some *veau à morilles*, half a dozen *saucissons* and a *tranche* of *pâte* to analyse the game. ■

Brian Matthews is a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Victoria University, presently living and working in France.

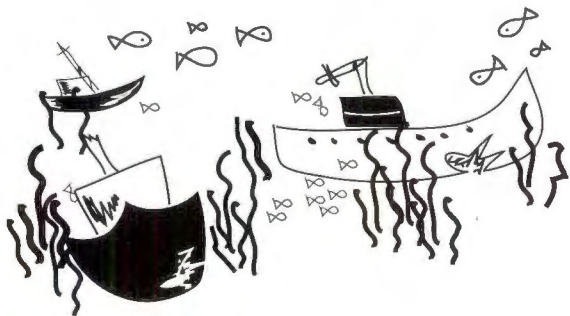


To be or not to be: What are the odds?

A risk assessor has recently calculated the odds on the existence of God as exactly 67 per cent. According to *The Guardian* report, Dr. Stephen Unwin set his book after considering the things that persuaded for the existence of God, including miracles and natural goodness, versus the evils that counted against it. Dr. Unwin sees his project as an attempt to reconcile science and faith—two worlds that collide but rarely concur.

William Hill, the big UK bookies, however, are not impressed, and are refusing to accept bets. Their refusal, it must be said, does not reflect an anti-religious bias, but rather a prudent problem of finding unbiased judges. They will happily take bets on the Second Coming on the grounds that the Archbishop of Canterbury would universally be accepted as a reliable arbiter of whether it had taken place or not.

But asked to declare correct weight on the existence of God, even the Pope would have to disqualify himself as having a conflict of interest. We do not know, however, whether William Hill would accept a double on the Second Coming and the Existence of God.



Slick question

When naming threats to our way of life in our Pacific region, some might place battleships among the first fifty. But it is unlikely they would be thinking of sunken battleships. Yet in the Pacific region, there are almost 4000 ships sunk in battle, all carrying oil, and some in huge amounts.

Just 200 kilometres off the Great Barrier Reef, an oil tanker lies carrying 19 million litres of oil. Sixty years after World War II, the ships are gradually disintegrating, threatening marine parks and the livelihood of many Pacific islanders.

We know who sailed the ships and who sunk them. The more pressing question today, however, is who, if anyone, will pay to clean them up.

Following the success of Australia's creative immigration policy, it has been suggested that the wrecks be excised from Australia's environmental zone. But some have doubted whether that would be a real 'pacific solution.'

Continued from page 10.

is, after all, the country that boasts the Bolshoi Theatre, Hermitage Museum and imposing Soviet monuments.

In people as well as place, Russia is a land of extremes. The streets of Moscow are full of the sounds of thumping night-clubs, bustling shopping centres and majestic churches.

Out in the Siberian Far East, the middle-aged owner of a Soviet-style coffee shop laboriously hand winds his antique gramophone for his customers listening pleasure. He then looks at them quizzically, eagerly gauging their responses to his treasured music.

Burger-munching, money-grabbing corporate giants are yet to spoil the sparsely populated villages of Siberia and it remains a place where small town feeling exists. The intimate hospitality shown by Russians in these locales is a far cry from the heavy military presence and fast-paced life on the streets of St Petersburg and Moscow.

It is sometimes easy to forget that the epic train route covers almost one-third of the globe—making it the longest train route on earth. One of the primary pleasures of the experience is simply sitting back and watching the world pass by the frosty-edged window.

However, the truly unforgettable moments come from interaction with other Russian passengers. Breaking out a pack of cards can start conversations that make for hours of cultural exchange. After just a few hours on the train, the commotion of Moscow is a memory. Endless steppes sweep past the window, sprinkled with tiny wooden huts and minute industrial towns. Train stations are few and far between. Despite the monotony one might expect on a week-long journey, sights take on a fairytale quality thanks to the blanket of pristine snow.

The trains are run by a legion of carriage conductors, commonly known as *provodniks*, (or if female, *provodnitsas*). These are more than just ticket inspectors. A handy friend to have in a foreign country, these people are the experts on the where and why of Russia. Charmingly, they also don't shy away from inviting you into their premier carriage for an intimate dinner. Just beware of the vodka bottle that is placed on the table next to the bread loaf, suggesting the two may be consumed at equal rates.

To the delight and devastation of many Russians, the legend about 'vodka terrorism' is completely true. Many travellers fall victim to the infamous gesture of a flick of the finger to the neck, symbolising the next round of drinks. For fear of appearing rude by refusing a glass, this young traveller bypassed the social dilemma by pouring excess alcohol down the side of her trousers when her overly zealous host turned a blind eye!

Travelling in this part of the world is an extreme challenge. Just when you think you have it all figured out, something is bound to surprise you. But that's the nature of extremities—there's always one extra mile to go. ■

—Kate Stowell

This month's contributors: **Rosie Hoban** is a freelance journalist; **Morag Fraser** is an Adjunct Professor in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at La Trobe University and **Kate Stowell** is a second-year journalism student at RMIT.

Remembering Herbert

ON 10 NOVEMBER 1984 one of this country's most paradoxical, complex and truly great individuals breathed his last. Xavier Herbert, without peer as a chronicler of white Australia's injustice to its Indigenous peoples, died aged 83. Twenty years later, Herbert has been consigned to the hazy recesses of memory; a deep wrong given his role in shaping our awareness of white Australia's morally dubious history.

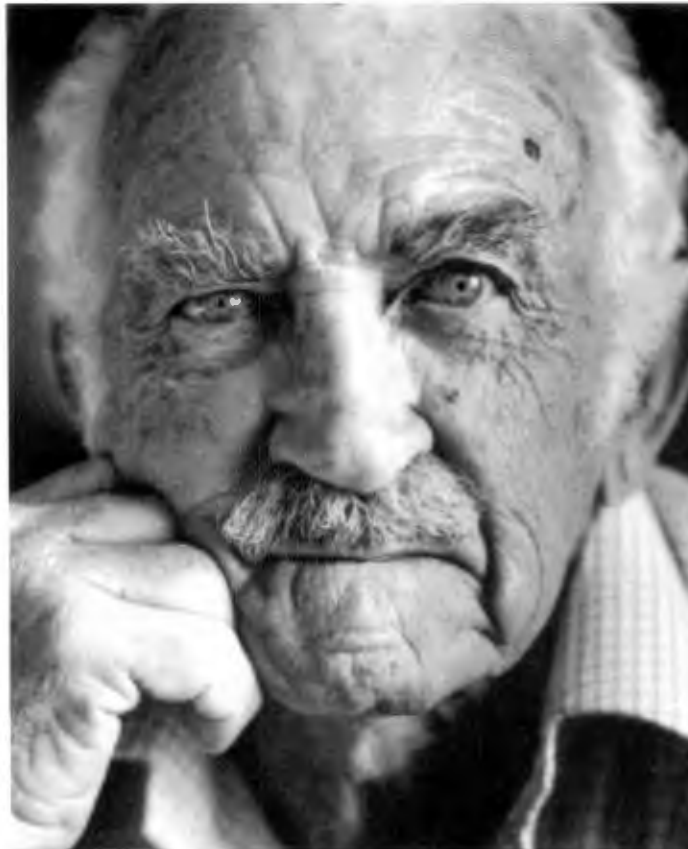
Unlike the rather sanitised authors of today who have fallen into the clutches of publishers' marketing departments and say little of consequence, Herbert had definite views and campaigned relentlessly to bring them to reality.

He was, as his biographer Frances de Groen rightly says, a man who 'found himself endlessly fascinating and expected others to do so too.' But, as de Groen notes, Herbert was indeed fascinating, thanks to his 'incident filled, wandering existence.'

Born in Geraldton, Western Australia in 1901, Herbert's mother was an interesting woman to say the least. By the time Xavier was born, she had two other children to different fathers, and there is conjecture about the identity of Xavier's father.

Herbert grew up in Fremantle and the Swan Valley town of Midland Junction, and it was in those years that he first witnessed Aboriginal dispossession. He studied pharmacy and in his early twenties left the West to travel to Queensland, the Northern Territory, Sydney, Melbourne, and the Solomon Islands. Eventually he settled with his Anglo-Jewish wife Sadie in the Cairns suburb of Redlynch.

Herbert graphically describes the



Xavier Herbert by Jaqueline Mitelman

tragedy of Australia's Indigenous and white divide in *Capricornia* (first published in 1938), an epic novel that spans the first 50 years of white settlement in the Northern Territory.

Unlike many in the writing game, Herbert was not only a storyteller but an activist, who 'rolled up his sleeves' for the Indigenous cause. Writing to a friend in 1936 he plaintively observed, 'You know how I have slaved and suffered and impoverished myself for the cause of aborigines.'

In his two sojourns in the Northern Territory, in the late 1920s and mid 1930s, Herbert made himself unpopular with the local administrators, or 'tin-pot rajahs' as he called them. Nevertheless,

in October 1935 he was appointed Superintendent of the Kahlin Aboriginal Compound in Darwin. His record there was not unblemished—far from it. He was accused of taking a stock-whip to an Aboriginal 'half-caste' girl and confessed to assaulting an Indigenous man. But Herbert's achievements on behalf of those Indigenous people 'imprisoned' in the compound were tangible and definitely set him apart from the Territory's racist administrators of his era.

De Groen (no shrinking violet when it comes to criticism of Herbert's ego and capacity for exaggeration and excess) notes that Herbert built a windmill and a school for 'half-caste' children in the compound, erected toilets and repaired the corrugated iron huts. De Groen writes that, 'Aborigines who knew Herbert at this time, appreciated his efforts on their behalf, particularly his attempts to encourage pride in their cultural heritage. In befriending many of his charges and treating them as fellow human beings, Herbert represented a threat to Darwin's prevailing white supremacism.'

HERBERT IDENTIFIED WITH those born of Indigenous and white parentage. He claimed that only if he 'infused' his blood with that of Indigenous Australians would he be able to 'claim the right to live in this land'. White Australians were simply invaders according to Herbert. He founded, in 1936, a 'Euroaustralian League' for people of white and Indigenous ancestry. 'Fantastic, is it not, to teach people to feel proud of Aboriginal blood?' he wrote to Dibley. This was a wacky but perhaps understandable inversion of the 'racial purity' theories circulat-

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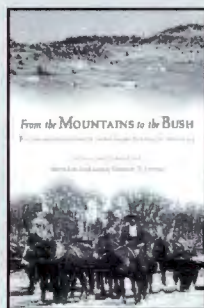
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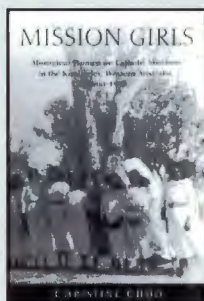
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ing in Europe and the British Empire at the time. Confusingly, at times Herbert also indulged in anti-Asian rhetoric, but in a period when the 'inferiority' of Indigenous Australia was taken as immutable fact (*Capricornia* portrays Territory station owners according more status to their horses than to Aborigines), he otherwise challenged the prevailing orthodoxy.

AS HERBERT'S CHARACTER Peter Differ pointedly observes in *Capricornia*, the governmental system of 'protection' of Indigenous Australians was designed to ensure 'humility'.

And while white Australia in the 1930s applauded the efforts of Christian missionaries to make 'good God fearing' people out of Indigenous peoples, Herbert mercilessly and accurately ridiculed that effort in *Capricornia*. He noted in a letter to his friend Arthur Dibley, on 17 October 1936, 'the missions have failed to do more than upset tribal discipline'.

Capricornia lifted the scab off the Indigenous-white conflict. The novel's hero is Norman, the son of a white man and a black woman. At the time, as de Groen notes, white Australia perceived 'half-castes' as a threat to its conquest of the land. This group of people might 'revitalise' what was alleged to be a dying Aboriginal civilisation.

Herbert's memorably bleak description of the food at the compound was widely quoted in the 1997 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's report on the Stolen Generation: 'The porridge, cooked the day before, already was sour and roped from the mould in it, and when doused with the thin milk, gave up the corpses of weevils by the score. The bread was even worse, stringy grey wrapped about congealed glue, the whole cased in charcoal.'

Yet Herbert's legacy remains obscured by current literary fashions. One of the most frequent writers on

the Northern Territory and the top end of Australia generally these days is *The Australian's* Nicolas Rothwell, who rarely if ever cites Herbert as an inspiration. Rothwell's writing misses a beat or two as a consequence of this omission.

Herbert's novel *Capricornia*, (and *Poor Fellow, My Country*, for that matter), should be compulsory reading for any writer in that part of the world.

Almost 50 years after Herbert's travails in the Northern Territory he returned to give evidence in a major land rights case—the Finnis River Land Claim. As de Groen describes it, Herbert's evidence to the court in Darwin on 25 August 1980, 'was helpful in establishing the presence of the

Warai and Kungarakan peoples on parts of the land ... and in illustrating the way officialdom had inhibited Aborigines from maintaining their traditional cultural links with "country" by breaking up families and forcibly removing them into government institutions.'

Xavier Herbert's burning desire for justice for Aboriginal people was often clouded by his own ambition, scheming, grandiose visions and his anti-Asian rhetoric. But the genuineness of that commitment, and the ever-present acknowledgement that

white Australians will always be the invaders of this ancient land, never wavered. In an age when both the Liberal and Labor Party, encouraged by elements of the media, refuse to deal with the threshold question of a formal apology for the horrific wrongs described in Indigenous people's testimony, its timely to remember that once upon a time one Australian placed it before us and pricked our collective conscience. Xavier Herbert's cultural and political legacy deserves constant recognition. ■

Greg Barns is a Hobart based writer and lawyer. He is a former senior adviser to the Howard government and is now a member of the Australian Democrats. Greg's book *What's Wrong with the Liberal Party?* was published in 2003.



Old Man's Last Pilgrimage

On this my last pilgrimage
I travel by what light and signs
the sky affords. I do no penance,
seek no remission of sins.
Majestic highways and safe roads
took me to famous places of worship
in the far country of youth,
where I prayed and saw my dreams
come true.

Yet archmagician time
turned all those gifts to tracts
of waste and thirst, where
I wielded number and calculation
to reckon the worth of friend and foe.
This I regret, though my riches grew
and glowed, yielding a measure
of satisfaction.

Now new lands
born of the lifting mists
beckon to the nomadic soul,
uncharted streams and mountain paths
lead it to shrines long strayed
from memory,
mentioned in parchments long decayed

where
I now hear musics not heard before,
smell scents from alabaster jars
and phials buried in vaulted tombs
to make sweet the sleep of queens,
visit old crimes that strange faith
has turned to things of veneration.

On this my last pilgrimage
I seek no evidence of fact
but firmer certainties, not hope
but truth of nobler substance
where, in secret folds, the mind
still dreams of wings.

—Dimitris Tsaloumas



poem without dice

there are only two types of movies worth watching
movies taken of a road & movies taken from a road
this assertions of course open to criticism & possibly outright
attack just think how political discourse is altered when you
exchange all the vs for ws or js for ks for that matter
the poem taxis & avoids the spot on the lesion of ac
or aesthetic correctness preferring a kind of continental
sprawl the long line favoured by for example frank ohara
suitable for the beach or sydney's or melbourne's streets
its no surprise to be a little heavier around the waist
& if you can get home without donating too much loose change
& other sentimental objects to the world hey thats
doing well besides my bloods internationally worthless
anyone can carry on in this way to the readers anxiety
inside time & expectations of nourishment if not
from the page then a passing waiter is your bladder
in order an ultimately meaningless question designed
by waiters to annoy & discourage diners from requesting
too many glasses of water meaninglessness accrues
like anything & any sense of the reader becomes faint
imagine stevie smith on her death bed playing an atheist
bishop she calls for her cat & draws him a door there
rudolph like many cats named after reindeer theres where im
going through the monsignor door like so many santas to follow

—Michael Farrell



Anthony Ham recalls the people and place of Arg-è Bam

THERE ARE PLACES in the memory which no longer exist. In late 2000, I visited the Indian Gujarati town of Bhuj and stood atop its clock tower to survey the decaying splendour of a remote, beautiful old city near India's troubled border with Pakistan.

Three months later, the tower remained, but nothing else within the old city walls had survived an earthquake which killed more than 30,000 people. The photographs I took were so overexposed they made any identification of Bhuj impossible. I still have them, for they are a symbol of what can never be seen again.

In July of the same year, I spent almost a week in the ancient city of Bam, in the corner of south-western Iran, close to the borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan. Now Bam, too, has fallen, also destroyed by a devastating earthquake which took the lives of almost 50,000 people on 26 December 2003.

When I arrived in Bam, I had only been in Iran for a few days. The city instantly became for me a symbol of those early days of discovery. There I was, in Persia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, a collision point for the charms and contradictions of the Islamic world. Bam was at the crossroads of ancient civilisations, and lay on a branch

of the old Silk Road. I remember being overwhelmed by the hospitality of the inhabitants, who greeted me with gentleness that contradicted the harsh austerity of the mullahs who had ruled Iran since 1979. Elsewhere along its streets, women cloaked all in black hurried by in the shadows, eager to avoid the impropriety of an encounter with a man.

My interpreter for much of my time in Bam was Akbar, an eloquent English teacher who had lived in London but who had chosen to live in Bam because it was his home and the only place where he felt he belonged. 'I am happy, here with my family and my date palms', he told me one

Views towards citadel, Bam, Iran.



afternoon after the heat had forced us into the shade. We drank from the springs of clear water which rose up from the earth and ran through channels along the streets. He was the perfect guide to Iran, at once making a mockery of Iranian hostility to the West and fiercely proud of his homeland. His guesthouse became a haven for travellers from across the world, a place to relax without worrying about dress restrictions or running foul of the police.

For two weeks after the earthquake, I received no news of Akbar. Then I heard that his guesthouse had been reduced to rubble. That Akbar had died was incomprehensible to me, and I felt a grief, as much for the world's loss as for my own, that I had rarely felt before.

Three days later, news reached me that Akbar and his family had survived! Two travellers had died in the rubble of Akbar's guesthouse but eight more were pulled out alive by rescue workers. Amid the deaths of so many others, Akbar's miraculous survival (very few families were left untouched by the tragedy) prompted a profound sense of relief.

At the same time as hearing that Akbar was alive, I learned that Mohammed Ali, a young resident of Bam and another guide, had also escaped relatively unscathed. Mohammed was an instantly likeable young man who claimed that he had no greater love than his town. An eligible bachelor, he had the looks of a movie star,

yet seemed remarkably unassuming and joked that he would always be married to his city first.

Indeed, Mohammed's true love was the Arg-è Bam, a city built of mud and surrounded by a forbidding wall with 36 watchtowers overlooking the abundant date palms of the oasis. Of uncertain origins, the Arg-è Bam possibly dates back 2000 years. At the height of its power under the Safavid dynasty (1502–1722), the city was home to some 11,000 people—Zoroastrians and Jews amid the Muslim majority—and contained within its walls some 400 houses, mosques, a synagogue and a fairy-tale citadel rising high above the town.

Over time, the ravages of invading armies saw the Arg-è Bam fall into disrepair. By July 2000 it was in ruins and uninhabited, but still relatively well preserved and one of the most enchanting old cities in the world. The walls of the city, particularly those of the citadel, had in ancient times been reinforced with palm trunks to provide flexibility during earthquakes.

On 26 December, the earthquake that destroyed the city, and so many lives with it, drastically hastened the process of the Arg-è Bam's return to the earth. Parts of the old city remain intact, but large sections collapsed, taking with them a heritage which had survived for centuries. I cannot



Baluchian musician, Bam, Iran.

Main gatehouse, Bam, Iran.



reach him, but I wonder whether Mohammed Ali's heart has been broken, and whether he will stay.

On my last day in Bam I took one last walk through the deserted byways, silently promising I would one day return. As sunset neared, I sat in a café above the citadel gate, and there I came across a description of the old city by local writer Abdolreza Salar-Behzadi. Since 26 December his words have never ceased to haunt me: 'Watch and pass very gently by these ruins, because every spot that you put your foot on, there may lie a king, a swordsman, an old sage, a lover, a mother.'

Anthony Ham is *Eureka Street's* roving correspondent

Photography by Anthony Ham.

The durability of poverty

FROM COLLINGWOOD TO Kew, and from Redfern to Baulkham Hills, there are larger divides than a road or a river. Communities in New South Wales and Victoria are often defined by their position on the socio-economic ladder.

Disadvantage is strongly correlated with location according to the *Community Adversity and Resilience* research report recently released by the Ignatius Centre, the policy and research arm of Jesuit Social Services.

The report, authored by Emeritus Professor Tony Vinson, indicates that the negative effects of social adversity in Australia are heavily concentrated in particular areas, defining these people's opportunities throughout their lives. The report aims to provide data to policy makers about the location of social disadvantage in Australian society and to contribute to research into the influence of place on poverty and social disadvantage.

Community Adversity and Resilience builds on earlier research by Jesuit Social Services in 1999, *Unequal in Life*. The findings of the new report echoed those of *Unequal in Life*, concluding that a small number of communities in Victoria and NSW were over-represented in the figures for early school leaving, unemployment, crime, low income, low labour market skills and child maltreatment. Unlike its predecessor, the new report examines the mediating role of social cohesion in assisting communities to overcome disadvantage and its attendant consequences.

The report explores the concept of community resilience—a sense of mutual responsibility and commitment that encourages communities to work together to overcome the problems that stem from social disadvantage. The report identifies those communities that function better, those that have a sense of control over their destiny and strong community leadership.

'Now that we have the benchmarks from 1999, it's very clear that disadvantage is remarkably durable. It hasn't changed to any large extent at all since 1999 and the situation is as it was even 25 years ago. So

it's not going to go away without special effort', says Vinson.

'In areas where there is a measurable degree of social cohesion then there is the possibility of the harmful consequences of conditions like unemployment, incomplete education, low work skills, and low income being held in check by communities working together.'

Jesuit Social Services' Policy Director Fr Peter Norden, says that politically, parties are keen to match each other regarding important social issues as we move towards a Federal election later this year. As one party makes promises, the other is ready to pounce. 'A bipartisan approach

is needed to address these critical issues', he says.

TONY VINSON BELIEVES that serious social problems could be addressed more easily if governments were to heed the findings of the report.

'I think that politically, the most important thing is that governments are aware that there's quite a concentration of serious social disadvantage in a small number of places.'

'We know that the criminal justice system is involved in ever more intensive

mining of these very same locations, the same suburbs, but building more prisons is not the answer.'

Vinson's understanding of the criminal justice system reflects years of experience. At 22 he was the youngest parole officer in Australia, working at Longbay Jail, Australia's largest prison. He's worked as a psychologist, in social work, education and has studied justice systems in Australia and internationally. During his studies at The Hague, Tony had the opportunity to analyse the Swedish and Dutch judicial systems and this gave him an understanding of how things could be better handled in Australia.

'I've had the chance to see what really progressive systems are like. Australia would do well to aspire to the civilised way prison systems are run in those countries. They don't just rely upon the prison system as the first way of dealing with social problems. There, prisons are used as a measure of last resort and their prisons preserve a degree of normalcy.'

Prior to the release of the report, both Tony Vinson and Peter Norden have had the opportunity to meet with Federal Ministers and the leaders of the Labor Opposition, and senior Public Servants in



Prof Tony Vinson and Fr Peter Norden sj. Photo by Pru Taylor.

both Sydney and Melbourne to discuss the research findings.

Vinson says that the report places the onus on policy makers to focus on specific regions. In some locations for example, young people do not have the protection of, or exposure to, positive adult influences.

DURING MEDIA COVERAGE of the recent Redfern riot, Opposition Leader Mark Latham questioned where the parents of those young people involved were. The answer, according to Senator Aden Ridgeway, was that many parents were in jail, or fighting mental illness, and that many young Indigenous people are being raised by extended family.

In discussing the report, Vinson explains that instead of simply listing the most disadvantaged areas, as in the 1999 *Unequal In Life* report, *Community Adversity and Resilience* features a classification system to avoid furthering the stigma often associated with particular regions.

The information underpinning the research was gathered from state govern-

ment departments in Victoria and New South Wales, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Vinson is well aware that the report has the potential to be inflammatory, and that the stigma attached to being listed in 'the bottom five' communities could incite further problems. He well knows how some government policies seem to preserve a bad situation rather than preventing them. Vinson describes such policies as 'criminogenic' as a culture of social problems is perpetuated by the punitive measures used to respond to them. The current methods of incarceration and punishment are one such example as the justice system is not intercepting criminals, but creating them.

In order for disadvantaged communities to benefit in the future, Vinson believes that developing health and education services is the best starting point.

'If you apply the scales of disadvantage to particular portfolios, one question you might ask, for example, is "Is bulk billing available for these most disadvantaged areas?"'

Similarly, providing better educational

options for young people and encouraging them to complete secondary school would mean that they are less likely to enter the poverty cycle.

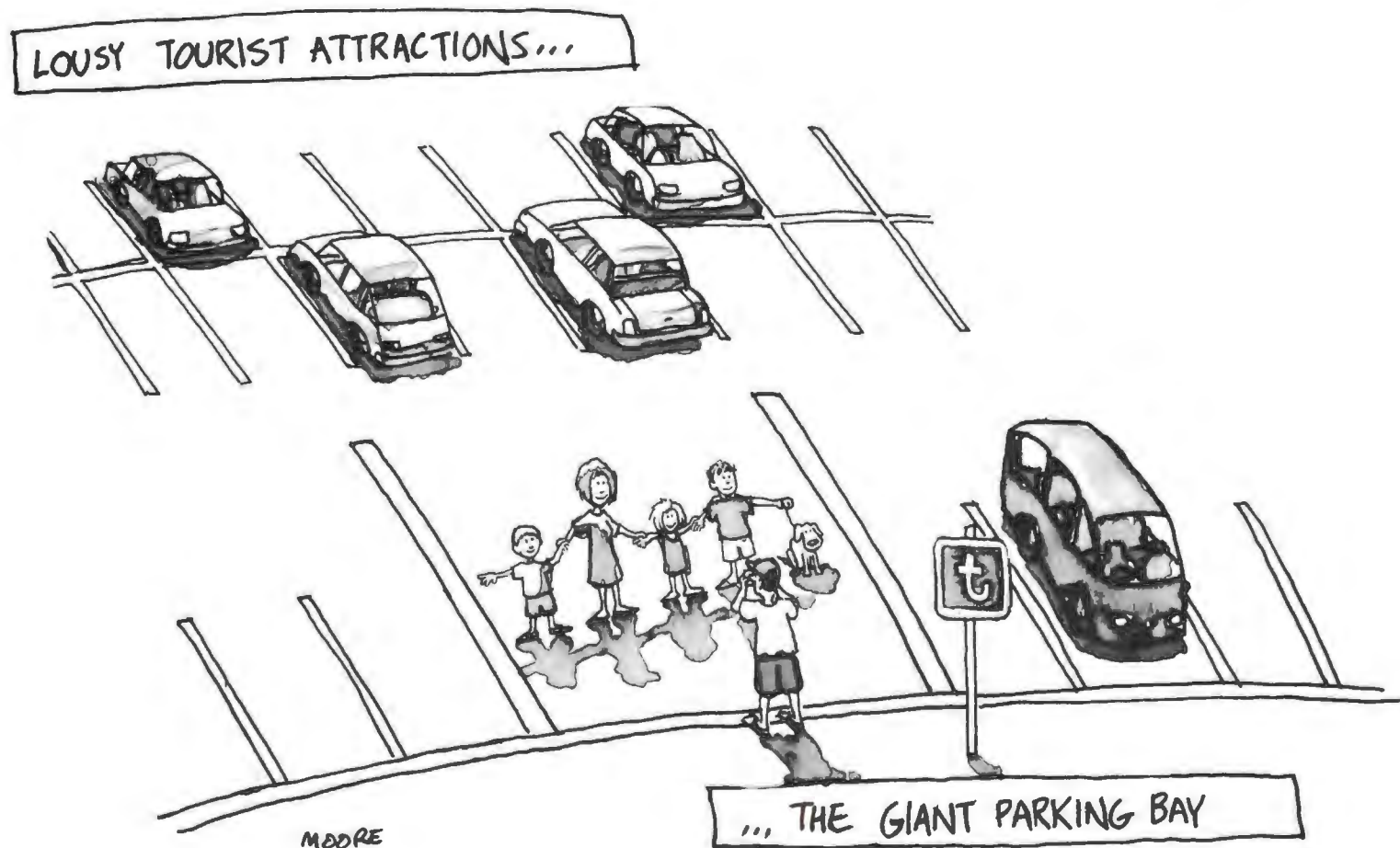
'Nothing better predicts what's going to happen to you than the number of years you stay in school.'

The *Community Adversity and Resilience* report is available to policy makers and is likely to be valuable to a broader inquiry into poverty which could well follow the forthcoming Federal election.

The report supports the suggestion that Australia is, in general, more prosperous than it was even ten years ago, but that not all people share the benefits, and some will not benefit at all unless specific localised responses are made.

Peter Norden, concludes: 'If for the first time in Australia's history, one's destiny might be shaped by one's location, or even one's postcode, it might be time to rethink some of the rules of the game'. ■

Beth Doherty is the assistant editor of *Eureka Street*.



Lost in the battle

John Wren: A life reconsidered, James Griffin. Scribe, 2004. ISBN 1 92076 911 0, RRP \$60

THERE IS ALMOST as much heat generated about John Wren as there is about Ned Kelly. James Griffin's book will certainly raise the temperature. His thesis could be construed as 'glory without power'. By examining every account of Wren, incident after incident, commentator after commentator, Griffin argues that Wren did not rig sporting events but did use his wealth to influence pre-selection ballots—he was a productive investor and a genuine philanthropist. Why then did he receive such damning press? This extraordinary biography leaves many puzzles and does not produce a clearer picture of the 'real' John Wren.

Griffin relied heavily on journalist and Wren confidant, Hugh Buggy. His retrospective and laudatory accounts in *The Real John Wren* were published to refute characterisations in Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory, A Novel*. Griffin sets about dispelling the myths—well some of them. He argues Wren was not a Tammany Hall figure (as asserted by Frank Hardy and Manning Clark); he ran his totes with 'fair dealing and orderliness'; and Buggy's title of a 'human benevolent institution' fitted. In so doing he provides some subtle variations.

Whereas historian Niall Brennan in *John Wren: Gambler, His Life and Times* has Wren born in a slum of slum parents, Griffin's Wren, a resident of Collingwood, was the product of illiterate parents who had initiative. He describes the Wren family as 'upper working class' asserting that the Irish who came to Australia were not as destitute as their American counterparts—they could afford the higher passage or presented well enough for state assistance. He delineates the litany of Wren's family disasters with siblings, children and grandchildren. Unfortunately he fails to explore either cause or effect.

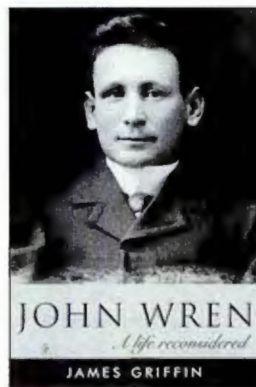
To understand Wren, writers have focused on his physical appearance. Brennan describes him as 'short, bandy-legged, rather rodent-faced and almost instinctively furtive of manner', while Griffin's portrayal is 'short but not inordinately so'. Ironically Griffin later refers to Wren's nemesis, Judkins, as

'short wiry, with sharp features and the wags said that he and Wren could have been mistaken for each other'. Griffin also dismisses Frank Hardy's description of West/Wren as 'Looney Tunes'—not a serious literary work.

Griffin, all too often, does to others what he so vehemently objects to in studies of Wren. He perpetuates the furrphies. William Lawrence Baillieu, of Collins House fame, is pilloried for his 'secret compositions' during the Depression, but no mention is made of his later work in war munitions or industrial welfare schemes. From my own investigations, Wren, the teetotaler, was not instrumental in the transfer of the liquor licence of the Tivoli (German) Club to Collingwood Football Club in 1941. The idea and the execution belongs to architect Robert Henry McIntyre, whose practice was largely in hotel renovations. Griffin's real ire is directed towards journalist Monty Grover, describing him as 'patently a hostile commentator relying on hearsay and seemingly disturbed by the existence of knockabout Collingwood blokes, though not by the raffish chaps around *The Bulletin*'.

GRIFFIN DESCRIBES Grover's 1907 article in the *Lone Hand* as diatribe. Yet the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* refers to Grover as being renowned for his honesty and hatred of opportunism. Why were Grover's perceptions widely accepted? Perhaps there was an element of truth, or perhaps Buggy's statement, 'malicious gossip about Wren's motives for this or that action ran off him like water off a duck's back' is closer to the mark.

Griffin's exposé is not for the faint hearted. In 419 pages almost every event, association and activity in Wren's life is explored in microscopic detail. Yet mystery surrounds his schooling. What kind of rudimentary education (state or Catholic) did Wren receive? Only in about 25 instances (the notes are frustratingly unclear in their



attribution) does Griffin quote Wren. The quotes are from speeches, newspapers, Royal Commissions, and a smattering of letters in the Barry and Wren papers. The most outspoken of these are the two letters to *The Herald* in 1906 following the bombing of Detective-Sergeant O'Donnell's house. Yet even Griffin wonders if Wren was the author.

Aspects of Wren's stance on the Irish question and the Catholic Church are still unresolved. Griffin's book is riddled with suppositions ranging from 'it is not fanciful to imagine the Wren family were stirred by Ned's self-justifying Jerilderie letter, like those who protested against his execution, and were riled by the manifest bias at his trial by the Anglo-Irish hanging judge, Sir Redmond Barry', to assumptions such as 'Wren would have been more at ease with the affable, ursine Queenslander than with his own awesome, gaunt archbishop, who liked to put people down where Dubig preferred to placate his opponents'. Does he agree with Brennan that 'even historians should be allowed some imagination'?

If you can ignore the frequent swipes at Manning Clark's 'yarrasiders', (the gentility on the other side of the river); not choke on Sacré Coeur and the Titian-haired Mary Wren being described as 'posh'; and accept that the intent of Evatt's cryptic letters to Wren are about his preferment (wanting to become a Privy Councilor), then this account opens new vistas. It is a detailed account of an intriguing man who, reputedly at his death, had two books by his bedside, the Bible and a history of the Collingwood Football Club. Unfortunately the book is almost indigestible in its detail. Perhaps a better title would be, *John Wren: A life rehabilitated*. ■

Jane Mayo Carolan is a Melbourne historian and author of a history of Trinity Grammar, Kew, *For the Green, the Gold and the Mitre*.

Of passion and belief

EDDIE TAMIR HAS TO finish the interview by six because it's Friday. At sunset he will need to be home from work for the Sabbath. He is a prize-winning filmmaker: one of his films, *Lilliput Café* won a Protestant film award in the Oberhausen Short Film Festival, and this year his latest, *Father*, will be shown at the St Kilda Film Festival. He is also the owner of two small suburban cinemas. One is the Classic, in Elsternwick, the other the Cameo in Belgrave which he bought recently, and refurbished. He picked out the most controversial film of the year for the Cameo's gala opening. The film was Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*.

It has been doing, he says, 'back-to-back box office'. I ask what that means and he tells me that it's when someone goes to see a film, comes out when it's over, goes straight back to the box office to buy another ticket and goes back in to see it all over again. That is one extreme of the range of views that Gibson's film has engendered. The other reaction is of antipathy, ranging from aesthetic judgements ('really bad film-making, tedious and boring') or moral/theological ones (it is inaccurate, dangerous and even anti-Semitic).

Before seeing the movie, I tell him, I wondered how on earth anyone could blame Jewish people for the death of Jesus: it's like blaming Danes for the death of Hamlet. Then when I saw it, I realised that the depiction of Jews might, despite Gibson's small attempts at balance, still be offensive and dangerous.

Why show it then? 'The Jewish response has a whole other level. I think,' Tamir says, 'that the question of the piece of art versus the actual artist—a lot of Jewish commentary has enmeshed that.' We talk for a while about the fact of Gibson's father being a Holocaust denier; I worry because it seems to me that Gibson has, in interviews, publicly affirmed his rejection of that position, but doesn't want to go to the extent of saying that his aged father is either deluded or intentionally in grave error.

But it goes deeper: Tamir has seen and heard comments after the movie that concern him. 'Someone said, "the Jews didn't actually kill him but they made it happen"'. He fears that some people believe, as Gibson's father is said to, the evil and ludicrous conspiracy theory of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

Even if ordinary people around the world don't know of the theory, says Tamir, the stereotype is perpetuated in the film, of elite Jewish figures cynically manipulating a nation's titular powers—'that Jews are this all-powerful, dark force behind the scenes.' He laughs and says, 'Anyone who really knew Jews would

know that we can't agree on what to eat for lunch!'

I reflect on the film's stark array of Jewish high priests near the beginning, plotting, all decked out in costumes that recall some of the ceremonial clothing of rabbis today; it must be very distasteful for Jewish people to watch that.

'And Pontius Pilate, he is painted as a complex character: he was a brute, so brutal that five years later even Rome got rid of him!' Tamir feels that the depiction of Caiaphas and Pilate skews the moral balance as outrageously as though a story of the Holocaust were to downplay the role of Hitler, while raising Pope Pius XII's role to that of the main evil-doer.

Mel Gibson's assertion that anti-Semitism is a sin is nice, Tamir says but it still concerns him, because he thinks that it is reductive of Judaism, and sees it as simply part of the Christian world view.

WHAT DOES HE THINK of the film as film? 'It's opera rather than drama', he says. 'I don't think it's a great film and I don't think it will stand the test of time; but time will tell.' It does, disturbingly, remind him of the medieval Passion plays that were used to manipulate Europeans into hideous crimes against Jews. I agree that the flavour is of very traditional older Catholic beliefs, similar to the meditations on the Stations of the Cross that I was brought up with. I feel impelled to tell him where I come from, that my childhood was full of the knowledge of the war that had finished not long before I was born, of the horror that everyone I knew felt at the fate of the Jews who were murdered by the Nazis. But I'm probably not the kind of person that would worry him, I hope. I say that perhaps the depiction of the suffering of Jesus in the film is meant to make a whole lot of people empathise with anyone who is being abused. I agree that it's clumsy, that it's Gibson's well-meant attempt to portray deeply felt belief. He isn't convinced and I don't blame him. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.



The future of families

How society chooses: Policy and values, past and future

SOCIAL POLICIES, and social policy outcomes, are different in different countries because they have been shaped over many decades by a diversity of values concerning the purposes of social policy—a diversity, which is continually affirmed, but occasionally, modified through political choice. What the welfare state does and is expected to do is, in other words, a reflection of a country's ideas about social justice and how that end may be achieved. Such ideas differ. Generally, the character of a country's social policy profile changes only slowly. For the most part, social policy systems are like 'elephants on the move', going forward ponderously one step at a time. Very occasionally, they move at a canter and change direction radically.

Over recent decades, Australia has been elephantine in certain respects and radical in others. We have been extremely slow in modifying our family policies to cope with the new realities of family life, but have moved much faster to remove key elements of the system of social protection that once made Australia unique. I would also suggest that our choices do really matter: that the way we structure our systems of welfare provision can have major consequences for the quality of the society in which we will live in the future. It follows that, if we care about families, we should choose carefully.

In examining the facts of social expenditure and family policy development across the OECD area, I have compared total social expenditure as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 21 advanced Western nations from 1960–1998.

A first point to notice is that, contrary to the warnings of the globalisation literature, there has been no 'race to the bottom' in social spending, with OECD average expenditure rising by four percentage points of GDP over the past two decades. Contrary to the views of many domestic critics, Australia has been amongst the countries in which expenditure growth has been greatest in that period, increasing from 11.3 per cent of GDP in 1980 to 17.8 per cent in 1998.

A second point to note, however, demonstrating the range of social policy choice open to us, is that differences between countries are huge. At one end of the distribution, we find countries like Sweden, Denmark and Switzerland, spending



at and around 30 per cent of national income on the welfare purposes, and, at the other countries like the United States (14.6 per cent) and Japan (14.7 per cent), spending less than half that figure. Despite recent expenditure growth, Australia remains, as it has always been, close to the bottom of the social expenditure league table, with only Japan and the US spending less.

IN THE ARENA OF family policy, the story is very much the same. The Scandinavian countries score highest on all aspects of family-friendly provision. Once again, the United States is at the other end of the distribution on most counts, but here the US at least outscores Australia in one respect. We share with the United States the dubious distinction of having no public maternity leave schemes and almost no public provision of childcare places for the under threes, but the US does, at least, have ample access to private childcare for this age group. Australia does not.

There are clear distinctions in social policy responses among OECD nations. Social policy choices have been made on the basis of quite different conceptions of social justice.

What Gøsta Esping-Andersen calls

'liberal' welfare states (and I call the English-speaking family of nations) spend less, have weak maternity leave schemes (in general), and spend little on publicly funded childcare. The values expressed are a preference for market solutions, and for intervention only in demonstrated cases of need and incapacity. This is generally described as a 'residual' approach to welfare. In line with the preference for market solutions, several countries, but not Australia, have large private childcare sectors.

At the opposite extreme from the 'liberal' welfare states in most respects are the 'social democratic' or Scandinavian welfare states, spending more on average than any other groupings, with excellent maternity leave schemes (and parental benefits, as well) and large public (but not private) childcare access. The choice here is to use the social policy and taxation systems to promote egalitarian values. High levels of public childcare express a strong emphasis on free provision of services as an instrument of egalitarian redistribution and of gender equality in the labour market.

In between, are the 'conservative' welfare states of continental western Europe and southern Europe. These countries were the pioneers of high social spending, remain generally large spenders, with generous maternity leave schemes, but offering little in the way of childcare provision to the under threes—neither private nor public. Esping-Andersen sees these countries as 'conservative' because their social security systems focus on replicating in the social policy arena, distinctions drawn from the world of work. The vast majority of benefits are earnings-related and contributory, while egalitarian service provision is no more prominent than in the 'liberal' countries.

Given these distinctions, can we simply classify Australia as a 'liberal' nation, preferring market outcomes and, in its means-testing of benefits, employing a characteristically 'residual' approach to social provision? I would argue that, for much of the post-war era (say from 1945

through to the early 1980s), this would have been an unfair characterisation of Australian social policy, given the existence of a wider system of social protection, which by controlling wages, border protection and migrant inflows succeeded in producing a high wage economy of a remarkably egalitarian kind. In my book *The Working Class and Welfare* (1985), I called this uniquely Australasian policy configuration 'the wage earner's welfare state'. Its key features were high minimum wages, extremely low unemployment, easy access to owner-occupied housing and a selective system of welfare state benefits that was almost wholly non-discretionary in character. As Ronald Henderson, the author of Australia's most famous poverty study noted, these were characteristics that led to low levels of poverty by international standards and poverty largely confined to welfare beneficiaries. Those in work were not poor because arbitrated wages were (at least, in principle) sufficient to support a working husband, a wife who stayed at home and at least two children. This was the other important feature of the 'wage earner's welfare state'. The presumption was that wage-earners were males and the prevailing pattern was an extreme version of what has come to be called the 'male breadwinner state'.



The fact that Australia could, for a long time, be described as a 'wage-earner's welfare state' meant that economic outcomes were more egalitarian than might be assumed on the basis of Australia's low levels of social spending. This is now much less the case than it was in the past. Unemployment is now higher, home ownership less affordable and, above all, governments of both political complexions have moved to strip away the protections once afforded by tariff protection and arbitrated wage awards. In its heyday, the awards system protected the wage levels of around 80 per cent of Australian workers, that figure is now well below 50 per cent. Recent changes to the benefits system—in particular, those described by the phase 'mutual obligation'—have made entitlements far more discretionary than

in the past.

These changes may not have been easily avoidable, they may have been forced on us by international developments in any case, but they have been deliberately embraced by politicians across the board as part of their agenda of 'economic rationalism'. This is the radical change and the clear choice that Australia has made in recent decades. To the degree that the former wage earner's strategy was a successful one—and it might well not have been successful under modern circumstances of global competition—the change has involved a reduction in the scope of social protection, with a much greater reliance on the mechanisms of a 'liberal' welfare state to guard against poverty and the extremes of inequality.

The increased emphasis on discretion is an instance of this.

WHILE AUSTRALIA HAS recently moved with daring speed to deregulate the economy, the same has not been the case in the arena of family-friendly public policy. It is easy enough to see how, in these respects, the legacy of a wage-earner's welfare state might make us lag even behind other 'liberal' welfare states in this area. Who needs maternity leave and childcare when the basic assumption of the social policy set-up is that married women do not work? But that is a reality of a long-gone era. Our Prime Minister may believe in women being 'home-makers', and may choose to modify aspects of the child benefits system to make that alternative more enticing, but today's economic bottom line is that most women, including most women with children, need to work to help provide their families with a decent standard of life. Just as importantly, very large numbers of women want to work: to have careers no less fulfilling than those of men.

The big changes in the structure of the family and in women's aspirations are only marginally reflected in policy change. Despite major pressures from women's organisations, Australia still has no publicly funded maternity leave. Public subsidies for childcare are so low that many women find that they are virtually

working 'for the joy of it'. Women are self-financing the preservation of their human capital, once the costs of the private provision of childcare are taken into account. Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that there is so much complaint about the difficulty of combining work and family and that Australian fertility rates are well below replacement rate and continuing to fall. In *The End of Equality*, Anne Summers notes that today traditionalists on family policy issues are increasingly using a fear of declining fertility to reinforce their call for women to forgo career aspirations and return to the home.

Finally, there is strong evidence that the choices countries make and the values imbuing their welfare systems really do matter and that, in particular, they matter for the future of Australian families. The level of a country's spending in areas of social policy makes a huge difference to child poverty. Essentially, the higher is social spending, minus spending on the aged, the lower is the level of child poverty. Once the Australian wage earner's welfare state might have protected children living in families in which there was a male head in employment. Today, in an era of greater wage 'flexibility', that is far less likely to be the case. If we want to do something about child poverty, we should be spending more on social programs.

Similarly there is a strong positive correlation between access to formal (private and public) childcare for the under threes and both female employment and fertility. The world, as the traditionalists see it, has been turned almost completely upside down. The best way of boosting fertility, of guaranteeing that there are families in the future, is not to encourage women to desert the labour force for the home, but rather to underwrite a widespread access to childcare, making it possible for women to do what so many appear to want: to combine satisfying long-term careers with family life. ■

Frank Castles is Professor of Social and Public Policy at the University of Edinburgh and presented a version of this paper at the recent Families Australia conference, *Globalisation, Families and Work* in Brisbane. Frank is the author of *The Future of the Welfare State: Crisis, Myths and Realities*, to be published by OUP in July.

Photos by Bill Thomas.

Rwandan mist

Ten years after the genocide Rwanda still mourns its dead

ON A LATE FEBRUARY morning a mist blanketing the hills and valleys of Rwandan capital Kigali, refuses to lift.

Below the mist is one of the smallest, poorest and most densely populated countries in Africa. It is also a country still coming to terms with its past—the 1994 genocide of Tutsis and the massacre of moderate Hutus in which an estimated 800,000 to one million people were killed.

Images of the exodus of millions of refugees across the Rwandan border and hundreds of thousands in makeshift camps captured the international media's attention. What was often overlooked at the time, however, was the failure of the international community—including the UN who had a small mission deployed in the country—to intervene and stop the genocide.

In Rwanda these days there are many reminders of the past—mass graves, a high number of widows, child heads of households and orphans. According to Ministry of Justice sources, something like 600,000 accused of crimes during the genocide, still await trial. Furthermore, tens of thousands of Rwandans remain in exile.

The Kigali Genocide Memorial in Gisozi, a short drive from the capital, serves as one further reminder and the government intends this one to be permanent.

Partly modelled on a holocaust museum, it will serve as a memorial—the surrounding gardens are the burial place of 250,000 victims—and an education centre.

Although construction began in 2000, in February 2004 it still looked like a construction site. Hundreds are working to complete it by 7 April—the date earmarked as the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide.

In the week leading up to this anniversary, survivors will gather from all over Kigali to remember and plant roses in the bare garden beds. Other commemorations will take place throughout the country.

It's hard to get your head around genocide. Even Rwandan government ministers and officials echo this sentiment.

Yet Busingye Johnston, Secretary

General of the Rwandan Ministry of Justice, is certain of this, '... across Rwanda there is a determination never to return to the killing, to get out of the past.

'If we lost one million people in 100 days, then a lot of people are implicated as killers, looters, rapists, planners and financiers.' He adds, 'Genocide is not just about criminal killers, nor is it just about criminal justice issues ... The seeds of this genocide come from decades of irresponsible governance.'

That irresponsible governance resulted in ethnic discrimination, a culture of impunity, and the failure of the judicial system, the rule of law and the police to protect the civil population. Added to this was a civil war, and the overriding poverty of the majority of the population, in a country with one of the highest population densities in Africa.

Coming to terms with the past and rebuilding a unified Rwanda takes enormous political resolve and reform. Yet if last year's overwhelming election of the Government of National Unity (GNU)—its main political party the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF)—is any indication, Rwandans believe they are the best option for moving forward.

From 1990–94 Paul Kagame led the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA) which stopped the 1994 genocide. He then became Vice-President and Minister for Defence in the new government, before being elected president in 2000.

When the GNU came to power, it inherited a decimated country. Social and economic infrastructure had collapsed, there was a high level of insecurity and law enforcement agencies no longer functioned. Nor did basic services like hospitals and schools, since many of their staff had been targeted in the killings. The civil service

was also non-existent and even the Central Bank had been looted.

The GNU's reconstruction strategy was not only to get the country functioning and to transform post-genocide Rwanda—in spite of the loss of so many professionals and civil servants and the destruction of infrastructure—but also to begin a program of unity and reconciliation.

The 'top-down' nation-wide education program on unity was as extensive as it was necessary.

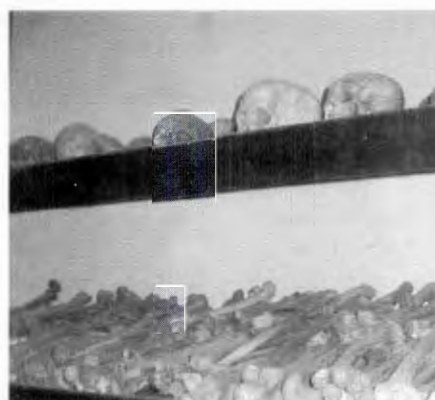
Back in the exhibition space at the Kigali Genocide Memorial, there are glass cabinets full of human remains. On top are human skulls, many cracked or smashed, evidence of the blows to the head. The middle

shelves are stacked with arms and leg bones and the bottom rung exhibits pieces of victim's clothing.

IN ANOTHER GLASS display, weapons—many of them wooden instruments used to bludgeon victims to death—bring home the shocking aspect of this genocide. The number of Rwandans not shot at a distance with semi-automatic gun-fire, but hacked, beaten and macheted to death where the perpetrators were militias, villagers, neighbours, friends, and in some cases the victim's own family members is abhorrent.

With almost every village in the country affected by the genocide, the government searched for a way forward to establish the truth about 1994 and bring to trial those implicated in the genocide, while fostering restorative justice and forgiveness.

'We needed to look at our history and our future as a community,' explains Busingye Johnston. Rather than follow truth and reconciliation commissions used in other countries, such as South Africa, Rwanda embarked upon a



Remains of victims on display, Kigali Genocide Memorial.

traditional model of village justice—Gacaca.

Gacaca does not replace the criminal justice system, but rather allows for the collection of evidence at the local level. Where the crimes are considered appropriate to be dealt with by a panel of local judges—those against property, as distinct from murder, rape or planning the killings—the judges have capacity to do so.



Exhibition and Education Centre, Kigali Genocide Memorial

Like so much of the reconstruction of Rwanda, the establishment of the Gacaca system, including the education of the judges and reviews of the process, has taken time. Although it is too early to speak of its success, many believe it is worth the investment.

Mary Gasengaire, 35, a widow with three school-aged children, and a worker at the Seeds of Peace tourist resort—a reconstruction project at the village of Gahini in the eastern part of the country, supported by Anglicord—has been elected by her village to be a Gacaca judge.

She recalls that during her grandparents' lifetime, Gacaca was the system of participatory justice used in the villages.

One day a week she is released from her work at the resort to attend Gacaca proceedings. She received one month's training to be a judge and like the other judges, she is not paid any additional salary for her services. 'Rwanda is a poor country and we all have to do something to make it a good place to live', she says.

Judges come from a variety of backgrounds. Some of the ones Mary serves



Gardens at Kigali Genocide Memorial, where garden beds await planting and cement tombs cover mass graves where 250,000 people are buried.

with are teachers, cultivators and local business people. They were all elected by the village members to preside over the local Gacaca court.

In the community where Mary lives, she, along with a panel of between 10 and 19 judges must deal with crimes of the past: listen to the evidence, establish the truth, and refer the accused where appropriate to the criminal justice system. (The accused and the victim often live in that same community, or nearby.) 'One judge cannot preside over a Gacaca case,' says Mary, explaining that having the accused face friends, neighbours and respected community leaders is an integral part of the process.

THE RWANDAN PRISONS were so filled with people awaiting trial, that tens of thousands have been released because, after eight years in prison, their crimes would carry a lesser or equal sentence to the term they had already served. Mary explains that many people come to Gacaca to confess and to seek forgiveness. In this way, Gacaca is as concerned with reconciliation at a community level, as it is with justice.

When I ask how people can forgive, she stops in her tracks, looks me in the eye and says, 'We must forgive. If we do not, then God will not forgive us'.

'But not everyone is religious, or shares this view, surely?' I ask.

'No, but we must teach everyone to forgive, otherwise how can we live together?'

But everyone must pay for their crime, in some way. According to the local Gacaca judge, there are no exceptions to this, although some form of community service, compensation for destroyed property or a

prison term already served, may be deemed adequate.

This is Mary's second year as a Gacaca judge. Of the evidence she has heard, eight accused who were in prison have been freed, and ten others have been sent to prison.

There is a sense that the Gacaca process is going to take a long time. 'It may,' agrees Mary, 'but the results will be good.'

'After 1994 people just wanted to be alone. They were afraid to look at each other. But now it's different. That's a big change.'

And even the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), established by the UN Security Council in 1994, has had its difficulties. Although high-level genocide organisers have been convicted, the process has been slow, expensive, and dogged with administrative and procedural difficulties. This includes reports of genocide suspects working at the tribunal.

As Rwanda faces the tenth anniversary of the genocide, democratic institutions, including a new constitution have been implemented, basic social services restored, strategies for economic development implemented, and there is no longer talk of Hutu and Tutsi, but rather of 'the Rwandan people'. Much effort has been invested in unifying the country, in establishing truth, justice and reconciliation.

Looking out over the gardens from the Kigali Genocide Memorial, one can't help wondering when the burdens of the past, not unlike the mist in the valley, will finally lift. ■

Michele M. Gierck is a freelance writer.

Photos by Michele M. Gierck

A fair go in an age of terror

The following is an edited text of an address given by Frank Brennan SJ as part of the Jesuit Lenten Seminar Series 2004

AS WE MOVE INTO AN election year in Australia and in the United States where the incumbents John Howard and George W. Bush have led the initiatives for countering the emerging terrorist threat unveiled since September 11, 2001, there is the risk that any critique of these initiatives can be seen to be party political or partisan. That is not my purpose. I am quite agnostic as to whether Mark Latham, John Howard or any other conceivable inhabitant of the Lodge, would be any more solicitous of human rights and protective of Australian identity in response to such a crisis. Though it is important to examine the conduct of political leaders, my purpose is to see how robust our democratic processes are in finding the right balance. To examine how informed and committed we are in insisting that our politicians do not diminish fundamental human rights in the name of national security.

At times of national insecurity, there is an increased need for citizens to trust their political leaders and those leaders are likely to feel acutely any criticism of their discharge of that trust. There are lessons for us, without our canonising or demonising, any particular political actors.

The United States now claims the prerogative for unilateral action, not only in making pre-emptive strikes against imminent threats, but also in taking preventive action to destroy a prospective enemy's capacity to become a threat. Bush claims a mandate for 'deal(ing) with those threats before they become imminent'. The bottom line for Bush with Saddam Hussein was: 'the fact that he had the ability to make a weapon. That wasn't right.'

The invasion of Iraq was consistent with the previously published neo-conservative agenda of Mr Bush's key advisers. Regime change in Iraq was a centre-piece of their agenda. Our own Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO)

told our parliamentary inquiry into the intelligence operations preceding the recent war: 'We made a judgement here in Australia that the United States was committed to military action against Iraq. We had the view that was, in a sense, independent of the intelligence assessment.'

When tabling the unanimous, all-party report, the government member David Jull told Parliament of the Committee's conclusion 'that there was unlikely to be large stocks of weapons of mass destruction, certainly none readily deployable.' We did not go to war because there was an imminent threat to our security. We went to war because the Americans asked us to. The reasons why have become a movable feast. Before the war, Prime Minister Howard insisted the goal was disarmament. 'I couldn't justify on its own a military invasion of Iraq to change the regime. I've never advocated that.' The problem was that George Bush's advisers did, and their request was met. Howard told parliament that Iraq's 'possession of chemical and biological weapons and its pursuit of a nuclear capability poses a real and unacceptable threat to the stability and security of our world'. Walter Lewincamp, the head of DIO, said this 'was not a judgement that DIO would have made.' It's a pity they were not asked!

EVEN IF THE United Nations Security Council be not considered formally to be the relevant authority for deciding just cause for war, it remains a suitable sieve for processing the conflicting claims in determining whether there is 'a real and unacceptable threat to the stability and security of our world', and whether or not war is the only realistic resort. The French and Germans had various motives for their stand, just as the English and the Americans did. Given the mix of motives, the elusiveness of truth, and the

now admitted unreliability of the intelligence, it would be better in future to have decisions made by a community of disparate nations united only by a common concern for international security against terrorism, rather than a coalition of allies who either share, or are neutral about, the strategic objectives of the US administration.

Our politicians have a difficult decision to make when assessing intelligence about the likelihood of weapons of mass destruction being developed and handed on to terrorist organisations. In times of crisis, we need to trust our leaders. It becomes more difficult to grant that trust when the rationale for war is changed after the event. The belated emphasis on the humanitarian concern for the Iraqi people was rank hypocrisy on the part of the United States which first gave Saddam Hussein his WMD capacity for countering Iran. Hypocrisy too, from an Australian government which punished Iraqi asylum seekers who had the temerity to seek asylum within our borders. Trust in government would be better maintained if Mr Howard simply admitted that his public rationale for war was the honouring of the US alliance irrespective of the wisdom of seeking regime change in Iraq without UN endorsement, and the concern about readily deployable WMDs regardless of shortcomings in the intelligence.

Prior to the Madrid bombings last month, many Australians thought our participation in the war was justified because the world was now a safer place. We had won without any Australian loss of life, and the murderous Saddam Hussein had lost power. Post-Madrid, we have to question whether the world is indeed safer and whether Australia is at no greater risk of being a special target for terrorist groups.

In the lead up to the Iraqi war, the church leadership in the US, UK and

Australia was remarkably united in its criticism of the public rationale for war. However, there was a variety of views about the margin for error to be afforded to government. When asked about the clear opposition from church leaders such as the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Howard told the National Press Club: 'There is a variety of views being



expressed. I think in sheer number of published views, there would have been more critical than supportive. I thought the articles that came from Archbishop Pell and Archbishop Jensen were both very thoughtful and balanced. I also read a very thoughtful piece from Bishop Tom Frame, who is the Anglican Bishop of the Australian Defence Forces. The greater volume of published views would have been critical, but I think there have been some very thoughtful other views and the ones I have mentioned, I certainly include in them.'

ONCE THE WAR commenced, Archbishop Jensen said, 'For my own part I remain unpersuaded that we ought to have committed our military forces, but I recognise the limitations of my judgement and the sincerity of those who differ.' After the war, Bishop Frame said: 'If it is established that the weapons did not exist and the Coalition did or should have known this, the war will not have been

justified and must be deemed immoral. A case for war against Iraq based solely on "regime change" would have been inadequate and I would have been obliged to share this conclusion with those for whom I have a pastoral responsibility.'

Despite the Prime Minister's fudging of the issue, Cardinal Pell has never given any public indication that the war was justified. Pell did not make any clarifying statement once the war commenced. He let stand his earlier caveat, 'The public evidence is as yet insufficient to justify going to war, especially without the backing of the UN Security Council.' The Prime Minister's statements and the Cardinal's later silence left many Catholics confused. Presumably the Prime Minister drew solace from the Cardinal's pre-war observation, 'Decisions about war belong to Caesar, not the church.' Though Caesar makes the decision, the church must discern and comment on the morality of that decision. Church leaders must publicly help their people make the moral assessment. It is not good enough

to suspend the moral faculty and simply trust the government of the day. If we do that with war, then what of other moral issues? When it comes to war, Cardinal Pell allows more scope for an unformed or uninformed conscience than most other church leaders, including the Pope.

Church leaders like the Anglican Primate, Peter Carnley, have received rough handling from government when they have publicly questioned the morality and prudence of our strong alliance with the United States in an 'age of terror'. Two days after the Bali bombings in October 2002, Archbishop Carnley promptly published a letter pledging prayers and support for the victims and their families. A few days later he then addressed the annual synod in Perth, observing, 'The targeting of a nightclub, which is known to have been popular with young Australians on holiday, suggests that this terrorist attack was aimed both at Australia, as one of the allies of the United States of America and, at the same

time, at what is seen by militant Muslims to be the decadence of western culture.'

Does anyone now seriously doubt what Carnley was saying? Australians were being targeted both because we are identified with the decadent West by militant Muslims and also because of our close relationship to the United States. There may also have been other factors, including our intervention in East Timor. Carnley's remarks greatly upset Anglicans John Howard and Alexander Downer. In the 2003 Playford Oration, Downer singled out Carnley's behaviour post-Bali as an instance of 'the tendency of some church leaders to ignore their primary pastoral obligations in favour of hogging the limelight on complex political issues.' Ignoring Carnley's earlier pastoral letter of support for the victims and their families, Downer falsely stated, 'There was no concentration on comforting the victims and their families, no binding up of the broken-hearted while a shocked nation mourned.' Two months before Downer's Playford Oration, the government was arguing for an expansion of ASIO's powers in the Senate. Government Senator Santoro told the Senate: 'We know from horrific experience that not only do Australians face the same level of threat as any other people but also, as was the case in Bali in October last year, they are very specific targets.'

WHAT SANTORO SAID is quite consistent with Carnley's position. So what's the problem? Are we not permitted to speculate on why Australians are very specific targets? Or is that no role for reflective church leaders? Our political leaders have readily conceded that we are a target with terrorists because we are Western. They have also conceded that we are a target because of the fine things we have done such as assisting with the restoration of peace and order in East Timor. But they get very testy when there is any suggestion that our closeness to the Americans, or our commitment to coalitions of the willing, could heighten the risk to our security. There must be room for informed and divergent debate without vehement government attacks on people such as Archbishop Carnley. Trust and respect ought be mutual even in times of crisis.

In the wake of the Madrid bombings,

Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty answered the question, 'Could this happen here?' in words reminiscent of Archbishop Carnley: 'If this turns out to be Islamic extremists responsible for this bombing in Spain, it's more likely to be linked to the position that Spain and other allies took on issues such as Iraq. And I don't think anyone's been hiding the fact that we do believe that ultimately one day, whether it be in one month's time, one year's time, or ten years' time, something will happen.'

Though there was spirited debate and cabinet resignations in the UK because of Mr Blair's ready membership of the Coalition of the Willing, Canberra compliance with prime ministerial directives was complete. It was troubling to hear differing messages at that time from Prime Minister Howard and Tony Abbott about the increased risks of terrorism to Australian citizens. Abbott, the Leader of the Government in the House, told Parliament, 'There is the increased risk of terrorist attack here in Australia'. Next day, the Prime Minister told us, 'We haven't received any intelligence in recent times suggesting that there should be an increase in the level of security or threat alert.' Regardless of who was right, their contradictory statements provided incontrovertible evidence that there was insufficient debate, discussion and discernment within the Cabinet and political party processes, prior to making a commitment to war in such novel political circumstances. The thinking was done in Washington. We signed on, presuming that our national interest and the international common good would be served by Alliance compliance. In these circumstances, there is a place for unelected citizens, including church leaders, to speak out. If they are misunderstood and then correct the public record, as Archbishop Carnley did, that should be acknowledged by our very sensitive political leaders.

CONFRONTED WITH THREATS of terrorism, government has a responsibility to arm police, defence and intelligence personnel with the powers to protect us while respecting the civil liberties of all persons. We Australians lack a Bill of Rights to guide our judges or restrict our governments. The Senate and the parlia-

mentary committee system worked well when the government tried to bluff the Parliament into passing amendments to the ASIO legislation that would have entrenched draconian measures on our statute books in 2002. Originally the government proposed that ASIO would be able to detain any person incommunicado, including a child. ASIO would have been able to detain indefinitely any person without charge or even suspicion. While detained, any person could have been strip-searched, questioned for unlimited periods and prevented from contacting family members, their employer, or even a lawyer. They would not have been able to inform loved ones of their detention and could have been denied legal advice.

SENATOR JOHN FAULKNER said that 'the original ASIO bill was perhaps the worst drafted bill ever introduced into the Australian parliament.' Thanks to the Senate, the legislation is now more protective of human rights, while responsive to the present terrorist threat. There was a lengthy stand-off between the government and the Senate over this legislation. Before Christmas 2002 when the legislation was deadlocked John Howard warned, 'If this bill does not go through and we are not able to clothe our intelligence agencies with this additional authority over the summer months it will be on the head of the Australian Labor Party and on nobody else's head.' The government then further delayed the legislation so it could be added to the mix of a double dissolution election, if need be. Having been introduced in March 2002, the legislation was passed in highly amended form in June 2003. The legislation now contains a three-year sunset clause so it has to be reviewed by our parliamentarians after the next election. Sir Harry Gibbs provided an assessment of the final product in his Australia Day address to the Samuel Griffith Society. He notes that the powers given to ASIO are 'drastic' and 'only experience will show whether (the) safeguards are sufficient'. Gibbs says the law goes too far in prohibiting lawyers and others publishing information about the questioning of any person. This could 'prevent publication of the fact that an abuse of power or a serious error of judgement had occurred.' The

government likes to portray the Senate as obstructionist, but the Senate has modified national security legislation to better protect civil liberties.

When we experience a low ebb in the political cycle with government encountering little opposition in the House of Representatives, or on John Laws and Alan Jones' radio programs, it is difficult to conduct robust public dialogue about policies related to minorities and national security. Fear and flabbiness take over. There is an ongoing deficit in public honesty and rigorous inquiry when it comes to debate about the morality of our engagement in war, about the limits of ASIO's powers, about our treatment of asylum seekers and the identification of their deprivations with national security and border protection. There is an important democratic role for unelected citizens, including church leaders, to question government's public rationale and private purpose, to correct the misperceptions, and to espouse rational and coherent policies that do less harm to vulnerable people and to our peace and security. We would all profit from more respectful and rigorous dialogue between elected politicians and unelected community leaders, including that between church and state.

CHURCH LEADERS LIKE Archbishop Carnley, the courts, the Senate, an independent media, and a robust civil society are entitled to express a view contrary to the executive government of the day, even if the majority are satisfied that the government will do what is best for 'us' (as against 'them') in tough times. The morality of our engagement in the Iraq war cannot be left contingent only on self-interested outcomes; one, whether our special relationship with the US bears fruit, and two, whether we are more immune from onshore terrorist attack. And even if it were so contingent, the jury is still out on both counts. A more coherent morality of war may yet be even in our own short-term national interest in an 'age of terror'. ■

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

Frontier romance

The Ice and the Inland: Mawson, Flynn, and the Myth of the Frontier, Brigid Hains.
Melbourne University Press, 2003. ISBN 0 5228 036 7, RRP \$49.95

EVERY ONCE IN a while a book comes along that defies the Dewey decimal classification system. Would you call it history? Or a biography? Although it was short-listed for the 2003 NSW Premier's History Awards, I am tempted to categorise Brigid Hains' *The Ice and the Inland* as a sociological thriller.

Hains uses the stories of two Australian folk heroes, Douglas Mawson, who explored Antarctica, and John Flynn, whose efforts centred around the outback, as the launching pads for studying the frontier myth and the effects on the psyche of the individual and the imagination of a people.

The Ice and the Inland provides a novel window through which one can glimpse how a young nation might be influenced en masse, and how national opinions or even identities can be forged by significant events, or by the actions and writings of a couple of individuals.

'The frontier mythology of the early 20th century is epitomised in the stories of these two extraordinary—and very different—men', says one reviewer. However, *The Ice and the Inland* is not a biographical account of the lives of Mawson and Flynn. There is not even a descriptive account of the successes of the two men—Mawson's heroic lone struggle for survival or the crowning glory of the achievements of Flynn, the flying doctor service. Instead, Hains examines a huge amount of primary evidence, the writings, letters and journals of these men and their contemporaries, and comes to a series of conclusions that explain the shaping of the frontier myth in the Australian imagination.

What drove Mawson and his men to the inhospitable landscape of Antarctica? One of the great rationales for confronting

harsh environments was that the wilderness brought out the best in men and weeded out the weak and the unfit, the 'spawn of [the] gutters'. Such adventures were for men who wanted to get away from the domestication imposed by city environments and family life. It was a chance to pit his ingenuity and wits, not to mention physical strength, against the forces of nature.

The landscape which allowed man a transcendental experience could also sink him into the depths of depravity as the veneer of civilisation wore off. Herein lay the paradox of wilderness landscapes—attractive because of their wildness, but this very wildness a threat that needed to be tamed,

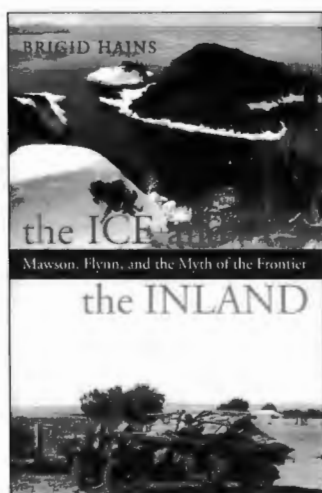
mapped and bounded. It was sublime because it was far from the trappings of 'progress', yet it became liveable only when the products of progress—communication and medical facilities—were made available.

THE FIRST PART OF the book deals with the effects of environments on individuals. Many subtle aspects are exquisitely probed: the role of language and metaphor in comprehending so alien a landscape; the tendency to describe the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar; the loss of perspective in the endless freezing expanses and the epistemological uncertainty imposed by the need to re-examine all that was taken for granted, when faced with 'wind like a solid thing', or a 'river like a gigantic torrent of air'. Excerpts from the diaries of members of the expedition team, as well as other poets and writers, make this portion of the book almost lyrical.

While Hains used the interlude to draw parallels between this first part

of the book and the second—in which she talks about Flynn—this connection seems a bit tenuous. As she points out, Mawson and Flynn were contemporaries, and Antarctica and the outback were both frontiers being explored at around the same time. Mawson's Antarctic expedition was a time bound trip, Flynn was trying to achieve a lasting victory over the outback environment. Mawson and his team tell the story of man against the elements, whereas Flynn's narrative is more of a political crusade, first to get people to settle the 'red heart' of Australia, which was unsuccessful, then to make outback communities more viable by providing medical and communication facilities to remote settlements.

Flynn wanted to settle the interior



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with 'smiling homesteads' coast to coast, not only for Australia's economic health but to ensure that there was no invasion from the north. Just as importantly, people who moved to the outback and stuck it out in the difficult terrain were the very people who would enrich Australia's gene pool. They were the salt of the earth—the brave, the persevering and indefatigable. Unfortunately, white women were hard to come by in the outback. Worse still, the outback wilderness, like its Antarctic counterpart, could have exactly the opposite effect to the sublimating one to which both Mawson and Flynn alluded. The solution? Provide facilities in the outback so that more people, including women, would move there and create communities in which individuals would support each other. Here we come across yet another paradox—individuality is what the wilderness is all about. But without a community for support, the individual was in danger of overstepping the boundaries of the acceptable and indeed his very survival was threatened.

The unrelenting nature of the desert made settled life difficult—people were forced to be nomadic. But nomads have a short-term outlook and no commitment. They are likely to exploit the land rather than to tend and nurture it. Setting up nursing homes and camps, sending nurses to remote areas and providing wireless communication that could summon medical services, all served to make it easier for settlers to stay in the outback.

While Hains does touch upon the question of Flynn's racist attitudes, she does not dwell on this. Rather, she focuses on the role of the outback in the economics and politics of the time.

THE POWER OF TECHNOLOGY to make unfamiliar landscapes more comprehensible is also examined. Print media and photography served to bring the Antarctic and outback landscapes into the imagination of the urban Australian. The wireless brought a virtual community to the outback. To the Antarctic expedition team, the wireless served as a way of staying in touch with the outside world. Modern transportation and communication technologies that brought these remote regions within the grasp of people either physically or in spirit, were all

precursors to the way the internet is serving to transcend distances today.

Mawson and Flynn saw the frontier as having the power to renew civilisation and affect moral character. They extolled the transcendental qualities of sublime landscapes—immovable, eternal and powerful as opposed to man who is transient and insignificant. The vast and harsh Antarctic and outback landscapes, to this day, stand utterly indifferent to man and his feeble struggles, to his successes and his failures. 'The symbolic power of the frontier,' says Hains, 'was refigured in the lifetimes of Mawson and Flynn.' This power became embedded in the Australian imagination as 'the potent

blend of romanticism, individualistic rebellion against conformity and social nostalgia', and formed the basis for present attitudes towards the frontier, nature and conservation.

Hains' theories are convincing and novel, though the book suffers somewhat from a repetition of ideas. While her style is unobtrusive, she speaks with clarity and accuracy, a virtue that is, alas, quite rare. Quotes from a number of sources enhance and enrich the book immensely, and allow the reader to play a part in creating images and forming impressions as an equal partner with the author. This is an original and commendable piece of work. ■

Radhika Gorur is a Melbourne writer.

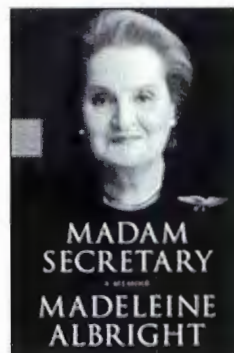
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Aaron Martin

Flintlike

Madam Secretary: A Memoir, Madeleine Albright.
Miramax, 2003. ISBN 1 4050 3369 x, RRP \$59.95

FEW PEOPLE, AND even fewer women, have been as close to the machinations of power as Madeleine Albright. Indeed, it is difficult to think of a memoir written by such a senior woman—only Hillary Clinton and Katharine Graham come immediately to mind—and it is this feature that sets her story apart. Albright writes with a degree of candour rarely evident in the memoirs of her male counterparts. She writes with honesty about her husband leaving her for a younger woman and the discovery of her Jewish ancestry. One would hardly expect such frank admissions from the likes of Henry Kissinger or Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Madam Secretary is both a personal history and a chronicle of Clinton's



foreign policy. Albright is a fierce patriot and proud of the administration's achievements. But she is willing to concede failure. Interestingly, she regrets that the Clinton administration did not do more to push for liberalisation in the Middle East. On Rwanda: 'we did too little'. She gives a deeply detailed account of her time under Clinton that may be a

little too forensic for the general reader. Nonetheless, Albright argues cogently that the international community, far from being 'illusory'—as Rice termed it—is a confronting reality of modern politics. America ignores this reality at its own peril.

This is a book for our troubled times. ■

Aaron Martin is a Melbourne writer.

The state of education

WHEN I RETURNED to Australia from England last year, two things struck me immediately about education. The first was the gulf between the public primary school our children had left behind in London and their new one in Sydney. The commitment of the staff was the same. Everything else—buildings, open spaces, resources, staff levels, curriculum, parental involvement, access to sport, music and drama—was so much better in Australia that it was almost painful to make the comparison.

Paradoxically, it became apparent that middle-class Sydney parents were suffering a crisis of confidence about the state system. Defections to private schools have already begun among our children's peers, even at kindergarten level. A neighbouring primary school which offers an 'opportunity class' (OC) for high-achieving students in years 5 and 6 is packed to the rafters. But it was the flight from the comprehensive

five schools: a public school specialising in the arts; a single-sex public school several suburbs away; a quirky private school; a Catholic school; and even a hugely expensive top-notch establishment.

I wondered why they had not considered the standard public school almost literally across the road. Was it the academic standards, or the social mix? Perhaps the principal had not impressed them, or the facilities were inferior? I was amazed to discover that the thought of checking out the school had not even crossed the parents' minds. It wasn't simply that it had a poor reputation—it did not even intrude on the view of their peer group who swapped anxieties about secondary schools.

In fact, I have found almost no parents who have even considered the local state secondary. We live in one of the safest Labor seats in the state. Attendance at the demonstrations against the Iraq war was virtually compulsory. Yet belief in the concept of the local, truly comprehensive public school, is dying a death among the liberal middle class here.

The evidence is not just anecdotal, of course. In the past 30 years, the proportion of NSW children attending private schools has increased from 22 to 32 per cent, figures mirrored in other states. But that is only half the story. For an increasing

number of public school children now attend an institution which selects students in one or more ways: by academic ability, by proficiency in an extra-curricular activity such as music; or by gender. In NSW, only half of all secondary students now attend a non-selective public school.

The trend is rapidly extending to primary schools. NSW public primaries have lost more than 6,000 students in the past two years, mostly to the small new schools ambiguously labelled as 'Christian' (in fact

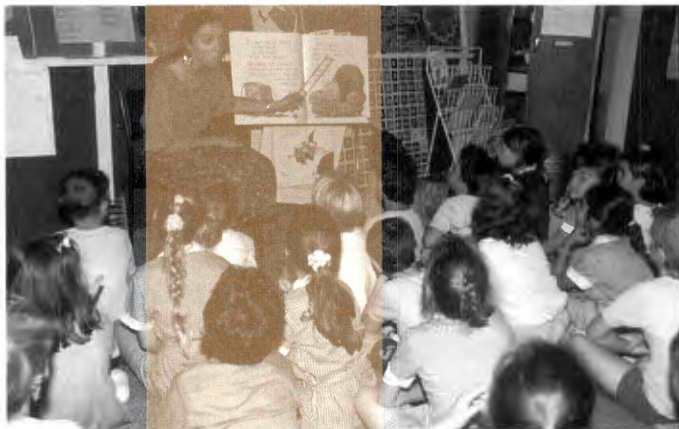
Protestant evangelical of various stripes) and to high fee-paying private schools who are recruiting earlier and earlier.

I am sure my views on education differ from those of many *Eureka Street* readers. However, you don't have to send your children to a public school to be concerned about the crisis that appears to be threatening them. It is obvious (and confirmed by studies worldwide) that public education can fall into a downward spiral of low achievement and demoralisation if it becomes a system of last resort, catering only for those who do not have the resources to escape it.

Australia has certainly not yet reached that stage.

BUT WHILE OUR overall standards compare well with the rest of the world, Australia scores worst in comparative research (such as the Programme for International Student Assessment studies of the OECD) on equitable outcomes—those at the bottom are getting left behind. This clearly has consequences for society as a whole. *Sydney Morning Herald* commentator Paul Sheehan has aptly called schools 'the hammer and anvil of culture'. It is in no one's interests for what is still the largest single sector of the school system to become a workshop where debased metals are turned into cheapjack tools for building a divided nation. To become more like England, for example.

Why have so many parents (not exclusively middle-class, but predominantly) lost their nerve when it comes to public schools? We know that John Howard thinks it is because the schools are 'too politically correct and too values-neutral'. Mark Latham, in his 2001 book *What Did You Learn Today?* put it down to their 'homogeneity and inflexibility'. Others point to the perceived academic success of the non-government sector. However, a study in 2000 for the Centre for Independent Studies found that the major consideration for prospective private parents was 'not differences in academic standards and curriculum, but issues of discipline and order'.



secondary system that was most striking. The word comprehensive may have English connotations, but it is necessary to use it because the kind of schools increasingly being sought by worried middle-class Australians cannot be defined simply as 'non-government'.

A couple of years ago, friends told me of the secondary school options for their daughter. 'All we want,' they said, 'is a normal school for a normal kid'. When the time came, however, they considered

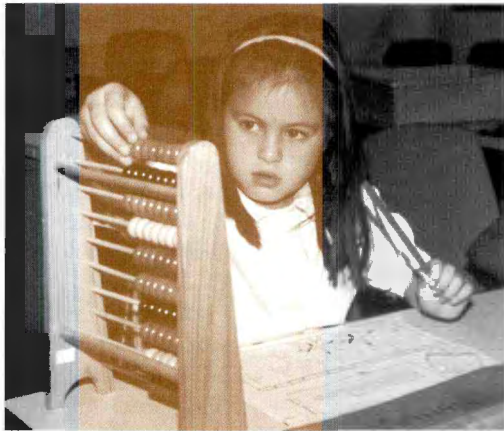
Leaving aside religious conviction, I believe the most useful way of thinking about such choices is in terms of advantage. The rhetoric is about 'choice' and 'diversity' of schools, but increasing choice for the better-off inevitably restricts it for everyone else (a point rigorously dissected in Adam Swift's recent British study, *How Not to be a Hypocrite: School Choice for the Morally Perplexed*). In fact, whether consciously or subconsciously, the motivation of many parents is to give their children a hand up the ladder, as Latham himself might put it.

I would go further and argue that it is not always an actual advantage that parents are seeking, but a perceived advantage. In some circles a failure to avoid the local public school is regarded as a poor reflection on the parents—they have not exerted all their energy and resources to 'do the best for their children'. That would help to explain why the parents I know would not even visit the local public school to see for themselves, and why the clamour to escape the local comprehensive appears to have no particular target. Private, religious, selective, single-sex, specialist—as long as the parents can point to any aspect of their chosen school that marks it off from the lowest common denominator, then they have done their job. They feel the need to be doing something—almost anything—that demonstrates an intent to gain advantage. Exactly what that advantage is, or even whether it actually accrues, is not the main point.

I have listened with mounting incredulity to stories of the desperate measures taken by parents to get their children into the desired schools: the child who never showed up at birthday parties because his weekends were taken up with coaching classes; the eight-year-old who told my son that 'the most important thing about school is getting into an OC'; the portfolios of 11-year-olds' work painstakingly compiled for applications to single-sex schools; the parents willing to move house for a year into the 'right' catchment area. It seems to me this kind of

behaviour has its own dynamic, quite separate from the actual condition of public or private schools, which remains to be adequately analysed. It cannot be described as 'doing the best for your children'—it is more like an extreme neurosis.

Two of the many possible reasons for this state of mind are worth highlighting. As family size decreases, parents have more resources to put into each child, and that may be a factor in promoting an over-protective and altogether too precious attitude. A study by the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria



found that many who chose private schools 'thought their child was not only unique but vulnerable and in need of special care: they were shy or quiet or fragile or sensitive, and in a large and vulgar school would be damaged or lost to sight'.

A SECOND IS THE emergence of 'parenting' as a skill that can be learned, an idea which has grown along with the increasing role played by fathers in child-rearing (mothering, of course, was always 'instinctive') and which is fostered by the bookshops' groaning shelves of manuals and the 'Good Parent Guides' of the broadsheets. The main outcome of this trend is anxiety, and the desire to enlist whatever help is available to achieve the status of 'good parents'. In response to John Howard's statement on values, Hugh Mackay suggested that one reason parents chose private schools was that they 'want the school to do the values job they can't or won't do themselves'.

Unfortunately for those people who might want to halt or slow the flight from public education, neither of those reasons suggests an obvious policy direction. The broad consensus is that 'doing the best for your children', whether through paying fees, moving house or almost any other means of getting them into a 'better' school, is justified. Any suggestion that it is not would be political suicide.

With the prime minister spruiking for the private sector, and favouring it with lavish Federal funds, Labor is trying hard not to

fall into the trap of appearing 'anti-choice' or of identifying itself with the perceived shortcomings of state schools. So its support for them, in NSW at least, has taken the form of mimicking their non-government counterparts. As well as promoting selective public schools, Bob Carr promised last year an extension of the 'gifted and talented' program to every state high school, in an explicit bid to keep wavering parents in the system. This followed the report into public education by Tony Vinson, whose most important recommendation (according to Vinson himself) was to 'provide advanced educational opportunities for talented students in all public schools'.

It is easy to see why the ALP might favour this approach. Just as Mark Latham has stressed 'opportunity' and 'aspiration', it must enlist voters who instinctively reject the language of egalitarianism and anything that smacks of welfare.

On the other hand, you have to wonder whether pandering to the preciousness or the ambition of the middle-classes is the best way to sustain the core virtues of a public education system. Bob Carr, in promoting the 'gifted and talented' program, cited his own experience at Matrville High, where he was forced to do woodwork and technical drawing, rather than being allowed to pursue his obvious gifts for languages and history.

From a policy point of view, however, he is the perfect example of the redundancy of spending money on such programs. Those it is aimed at are precisely those who need it least, as his own career amply demonstrates.

By contrast, money spent to improve standards of literacy among disadvantaged children at an early age has demonstrable social benefits in producing economically productive, law-abiding and engaged adult citizens. So it has been good to see Mark Latham reading to young children in the early days of his leadership. It would be even better if he could find ways to honestly promote the egalitarian and social benefits of comprehensive public schools, rather than sacrificing them to the often neurotic desires of the middle classes. ■

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Photography by Bill Thomas

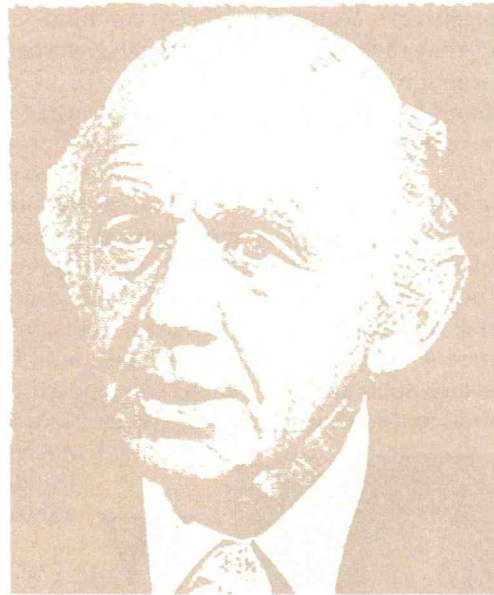
Wherefore art thou Billy?

Revisiting the government of Billy McMahon

WILLIAM MCMAHON is often regarded as the worst prime minister of the past half century. When Paul Keating was looking for an epithet to use against the then hapless Liberal leader Alexander Downer in 1994, he described him as 'the most foolish political leader of this country since Billy McMahon'. To rub it in, he later apologised to the McMahon family. Deputy Prime Minister Doug Anthony claimed that McMahon was 'just not big enough for the job'. Donald Horne argues McMahon was 'perhaps the silliest prime minister we ever had'. However, my research into the cabinet papers of the time show McMahon in a different light. McMahon understood the challenge posed by a resurgent Labor Party under Gough Whitlam and he worked tirelessly behind the scenes to regain the political initiative. McMahon harassed his departments for suggestions, relying heavily on their policy and political advice. But he was caught between a government wanting to maintain its conservative traditions, whilst also acknowledging the need for social change. In the end, of course, he failed. But the path to his eventual failure shows a prime minister with a steely determination to hold on to government.

McMahon was the fifth Coalition prime minister in just over five years, succeeding John Gorton in March 1971. Since the disappearance of Harold Holt, the government had been fraught with disunity. McMahon lacked Whitlam's media and parliamentary skills. A figure of ridicule, he was not popular and lacked respect among his colleagues. McMahon ended 1971 with an approval rating of just 36.4 per cent, yet it was slightly higher than Whitlam's personal approval rating at 35.6 per cent. What follows is an examination of several policy areas through the prism of the cabinet papers; space prohibits a more detailed study.

In politics, disunity is death. The disunity and cabinet leaks which had plagued Gorton soon caused McMahon the same anxiety. In 1971, McMahon took it upon himself, at the very first meeting of his cabinet, to make sure that his ministers were 'familiar with, and to observe, the practices and procedures instituted for the effective operation of the cabinet system'. He emphasised the central role played by cabinet in government: it 'determines policy and it ensures coordination. It brings together as necessary the political and administrative elements in the decision-making process'. The statement explicitly noted that background briefing of journalists 'should not be to distort or criticise a government decision or, in this or other ways, to advance



the personal point of view of the minister giving the background'.

The problem of cabinet leaks continued, and in January 1972, McMahon 'drew attention again to reports of cabinet discussions reaching the press in unauthorised fashion'. As a result, cabinet agreed that the prime minister should first speak with the media regarding decisions, followed by more detailed statements by ministers. Also, that the business lists of cabinet would no longer carry titles of submissions, only numbers. In September 1972, McMahon again asked ministers to avoid 'expressing views on matters which are within the portfolio responsibility of other ministers'. Clearly, McMahon was unable to command respect as prime minister. He could not inspire unity in the government. His pronouncements rang

hollow, especially given McMahon himself was widely known among journalists and his colleagues as 'Billy the Leak'.

Having generally relaxed censorship regulations, McMahon wanted to make government more open and accountable. Whitlam adviser Jim Spigelman had achieved quite some media coverage with the publication of his book *Secrecy: Political Censorship in Australia*. Spigelman, who is now the NSW Chief Justice, argued that McMahon presided over a secretive, closed government, where the decision-making processes were not transparent. Shadow Minister Clyde Cameron had outlined Labor's plans to open up government and to make it more accountable.

McMahon placed considerable pressure on his department to respond to these views. The departmental cabinet file on this matter is revealing. It includes correspondence from within the department and between the Commonwealth Public Service Board (particularly on the issue of the role of public servants), newspaper clippings about Spigelman's book, speeches and commentaries on Labor's proposals, draft answers to questions that

McMahon might face in parliament, and notes for file by departmental officials.

GEOFFREY YEEND sent a file note to Deputy Secretary Peter Bailey on 21 September 1972, noting that 'We are under some pressure to give the prime minister a statement he can make on secrecy'. Yeend noted that he was 'a little unsure about it' and asked for further work to be done by the department before the statement was sent to the prime minister. Yeend also noted that a summary of the ALP's policies was being prepared and

that McMahon's statement 'will be seen as a response to Mr Cameron's statement'. Two days later, a clearly irritated prime minister phoned the Secretary of the Department, John Bunting. At 9.20 pm, Bunting recorded in a confidential note, 'The prime minister rang'. Bunting noted, 'He said he was "listening to Spigelman"', presumably on the radio. McMahon reminded him that he had sent several questions to the department in the past few weeks 'about what Whitlam and Spigelman were saying', and, clearly agitated, asked again, 'Where were the answers? Can I get them hurried up?' Bunting noted that McMahon asked for 'something' to be prepared in response to Spigelman's accusations. He concluded, 'The prime minister said that the opposition will be making a good deal of this in the election campaign if the government is not alert.' Clearly McMahon was rattled by Whitlam (and Spigelman), but was looking for opportunities to respond to, and counter, their proposals.

Finally, after several drafts, McMahon presented cabinet with his own submission on the issue of secrecy in government. The date was 25 October 1972, just days before the election campaign. McMahon noted, 'I do see merit in our deciding that, when policy decisions or actions are announced, the considerations which have led us to the particular course should wherever practicable be made public'. He raised issues such as the role of public servants, the release of background material, and the introduction of green and white papers. The submission also included a detailed summary of Labor's policies in this area, proposals submitted by the public service, and papers on recent developments in the United Kingdom and the United States.



Former PM John Gorton and William McMahon, 31 May 1971.

The cabinet minutes recording the outcome of the meeting reveals a rebuff for McMahon. It reads, 'The cabinet deferred consideration of the submission'. Whilst the complex matters certainly warranted more detailed consideration, the evidence from behind the scenes outlining McMahon's strong desire to effect a change clearly signals that he wanted to move faster than his cabinet permitted.

In 1971, McMahon continued the Gorton government's more progressive stance on Aboriginal issues, which included increased funding for education, health, housing and community services. The Council for Aboriginal Affairs, headed by 'Nugget' Coombs, had helped persuade McMahon towards this position. However, the cabinet was uncomfortable about embracing land rights. There had been a ministerial and departmental focus examining land rights and its consistency with a

policy of assimilation. Unease in the Country Party and elements of the Liberal Party (not least Peter Howson) stalled the issue throughout 1971.

On Australia Day 1972, McMahon stated that the government understood 'the deep affinity between the Aboriginal people and the land with which traditionally they are associated,' and his desire that the cabinet's work should reflect this. McMahon announced that the government would make leases available for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory for 'economic and social use'. *The Sydney Morning Herald* concluded: 'it represents a quite important advance in federal government thinking', but 'it will fall far short of satisfying all, or even most, Australians'. Whilst McMahon understood and showed empathy with the position of Aboriginal people and the mood of the community generally, he failed to reflect this in the government's position.

The government did not embrace a land rights agenda, but instead initiated a system of leases for land as part of Aboriginal reserves. Whilst land could be used for specific activities, the government balked at surrendering native title rights to Aboriginal people. It did not want to establish any policy that could be construed as endorsing separate development, as opposed to the long established principle of assimilation. Whilst McMahon was probably disposed to a more radical approach in Aboriginal affairs, he moved cautiously, taking a middle course between his more progressive advisers and his conservative colleagues.

WHILST WHITLAM IS REMEMBERED for ending Australia's involvement in Vietnam, it was the McMahon cabinet that withdrew all Australian combat troops. In early 1968 the Gorton government announced that no new troops would serve abroad and a year later announced a planned withdrawal of troops. On 26 July 1971, the McMahon government 'decided that it should move immediately to withdraw, and to do so to an "accelerated" timetable.' Whilst not wanting



William McMahon and Treasurer William Snedden, 6 April 1971.

to trumpet such an announcement, the cabinet noted that there is 'no longer ... a combat role for Australian forces.'

Whilst the Gorton and McMahon governments had effectively ended Australia's involvement in the war, they could hardly make political mileage out of this, as it was their Liberal predecessors who had committed Australian troops to the war in the first place. In contrast, the Labor Party's earlier opposition helped it to gain credibility on this important issue. One of the first decisions of the Whitlam government, via press release no less, was to announce the withdrawal of the remaining 128 members of the Australian Army Assistance Group, which had provided training to South Vietnamese and Cambodian troops. There were no Australian combat troops left in Vietnam when the Whitlam government was elected.

One of the Whitlam opposition's major proposals was a new emphasis on urban and regional development. Whitlam's imaginative agenda for 'the cities' struck a chord in the electorate, as the urban sprawl of the post-war 1950s and 1960s demanded a renewed focus by government. It proved to be a decisive issue in Labor's 1972 election victory. The demand for such attention was not lost on the McMahon government.

In early 1972, the Minister for Housing, Kevin Cairns, made a submission to cabinet titled *The Role of the Commonwealth in Urban Affairs*. In that submission, Cairns acknowledged that 'there is a growing call for action now by suburbanites, motorists, commuters and social welfare workers to improve living conditions in our towns and cities by alleviating existing problems before they become worse, and to plan to avoid the creation of new problems.' Understanding the political need, Cairns sought more information and research on planning issues, and foreshadowed a coordinated approach with state and local government. The official records of the cabinet proceedings are limited, yet what is clear is that despite recognising a need for a new commonwealth approach on urban affairs, cabinet was divided on the best way to move forward.

There were a number of other submissions and decisions that followed the Cairns submission, which were all met with a lukewarm response from cabinet, and a cool response from the prime minister. In July, the Deputy Prime Minister Doug Anthony, who was also Minister for Trade and Industry, suggested in his own submission that, prior to a larger policy being implemented, the government 'participate in the development ... of several selected, decentralised growth centres'. He advocated a cautious approach.

IN AUGUST—FIVE MONTHS after Cairns' original submission—McMahon weighed in, with cabinet noting that he had asked John Overall to 'submit a report to him ... on the proposals relating to urban and regional development ... to assist the cabinet in its deliberations'. Next month, after interdepartmental consultation, cabinet decided that a 'National Urban and Regional Development Authority' would be established with Overall as head, contrary to the wishes of Doug Anthony. Whilst the government had recognised a problem, its slow policy response was symptomatic of its political woes. Lacking leadership and wracked by disunity, it was unable to retake the policy ground stolen by Whitlam.

Following a Senate motion by ALP Senator Lionel Murphy proposing an inquiry into poverty, the cabinet considered estab-

lishing its own inquiry on 16 May 1972. McMahon had written to the Minister for Social Security seeking his opinion. Whilst unsure exactly how to respond to the Murphy motion for a Senate inquiry, the cabinet discussed the subject again in May and then in July. The government decided against establishing its own inquiry, but was not opposed to a Senate inquiry, although they wanted the proposed terms of reference amended. Then, in August cabinet recognised that 'there had been a growing public concern about poverty' and therefore decided that 'the government should take the initiative in the matter' by instituting an inquiry into poverty. Two days later cabinet agreed to a terms of reference for the inquiry. Despite expressing doubts over Ronald Henderson's use of the term 'Henderson poverty line', cabinet agreed that Henderson be invited to conduct the inquiry.

WHAT THIS DEMONSTRATED was that, far from taking the 'initiative', the cabinet had identified an issue in response to the opposition's proposal, then delayed making a decision, made a decision declining to instigate an inquiry, then reversed that decision, and appointed a chair whilst expressing doubts about that chair's research methods. It is a further example of where the McMahon cabinet recognised a need but was slow to act, in this case due to poor leadership from the prime minister.

One of the key tasks of the McMahon government in 1972 was to produce a favourable budget in the lead up to the election. Throughout 1971 and 1972 the economy had deteriorated and McMahon and Treasurer Billy Snedden argued over economic strategy. McMahon was unable to secure widespread agreement and unity on the strategy needed for the economy and how it was to be executed. Frustrated by delays and departmental advice, McMahon went to great lengths to have his views recorded for history, noting where Treasury had made mistakes, rather than focusing on the present need to devise an economic policy which would reap a political dividend at the coming election.

The editorial of *The Australian*, 30 years after the cabinet papers were released, concluded 'the ship of state wallowed rudderless on the sea of politics with the prime minister incapable of plotting any course'. In reality, McMahon's cabinet was attempting to chart new policy courses, but the small moves instigated were more reactive than forward looking. The cabinet papers reveal a prime minister who clearly understood the challenge of the times and was fighting to get his ship back on course.

Indeed, Whitlam himself acknowledged that:

'It now tends to be forgotten that McMahon was an extraordinarily skilful, resourceful and tenacious politician. Had he been otherwise, the ALP victory in December 1972 would have been more convincing than it was.'

During the election 1972 campaign McMahon blamed cabinet disunity for his woes, believing that without it he might have been a more activist prime minister. In so doing, he identified his own failure. In the end, despite his efforts, he was unable to provide the leadership that his government required. ■

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Photographs are courtesy of *The Canberra Times*.

The legacy of Ern Malley

SIXTY YEARS ON, the Ern Malley affair has become more rather than less mysterious with age. In the past two years alone, the bizarre story of the poet fabricated by two other poets—whose work was subsequently drawn into, and all but consumed by, the vortex of their creation—has been the inspiration for a novel by Peter Carey *My Life As A Fake*, the latest of many plays *Black Swan of Trespass* and an opera. If it is in the nature of a myth to become more mysterious with the re-telling, then Ern Malley has acquired that status—the only post-1788 Australian story other than Ned Kelly so to do. Peering into its depths hoping it will tell us who we are and what it's all about, we only find more confusion, more possibilities. Ern Malley was not the only artistic hoax to occur in modernity, but the others are all but forgotten. Ern persisted because the Australian avant-garde was so small that a hyperkinetic 22-year-old could be the editor of one of the nation's leading modernist publications, and was so eager to find a great Australian poet, that he could talk in the same letter of both the possibility that the poems were a hoax and also of his certainty that they were works of genius. Malley's oeuvre, *The Darkening Ecliptic*, became cemented in the psyche because it moved so quickly from farce to black farce when a prosecution for obscenity was successfully launched.

Ern has established himself in global poetry culture more firmly than his creators could possibly have imagined—even allowing for their gradual and rueful acceptance that he had come to overshadow them. His position has benefited from the successive republication of the poems, their inclusion in Tranter and Mead's *The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry*, Sidney Nolan's statement that he never would have conceived of the Ned Kelly series without Malley's juxtaposition of European surrealist motifs with an Australian landscape, and a kind word

It is easy, almost irresistible to participate in the invention of Malley, the fleshing out of someone's imaginary creature.

Yet eventually one is drawn back to the mystery of his creators. And especially, in recent years, to a sense that the relationship between them was not symmetrical. More and more it becomes clear that the answer to the riddle of Ern Malley is not to be found in Harold Stewart but in James McAuley—in his frustrations, his fears, and the terrible splitting of his soul.

MALLEY WAS PRESENTED by McAuley and Stewart as a means to prove a point about modernist poetry. Yet it seems clear that Malley is borne not merely of a spirit of prank, but primarily of anger—not just at the alleged charlatanism of the 'apocalyptic' school of modern verse, but also in response to McAuley's frustration with the limits of his talents. Famously the first poem in the *Ecliptic*, 'Dürer: Innsbruck, 1945', is one that McAuley had written when he was attempting to become a modernist poet in the European manner. It expresses the greatest fear of any such acolyte—what Harold Bloom would come to call 'the anxiety of influence'—the fear that the style of earlier writers threatens to circumscribe one's own imagination.

I had read in books that art was not easy
But no one warned that the mind repeats
In its ignorance the vision of others. I am still
The black swan of trespass on alien waters

The Malley poems are an attempt to exorcise a fear of poetic failure. McAuley, a scholarship boy, an energetic, ambitious, thrusting alpha male, had been deemed most likely to succeed by the circle of professional bohemian failures he had hung around

I had read in books that art was not easy But no one warned that the mind repeats In

from John Ashbery—the leading exponent of postmodern discontinuous poetry in the English language today.

Like most great literature, the poems add resonance to the places they describe: the domed reading room of the State Library where Ern would go to read; and the quiet de Chiriquesque streets of South Melbourne, where his sister Ethel says he spent his final days in Melbourne. 'Princess you lived in Princess street, where the urchins pick their noses in the sun/with the left hand', he writes in 'Perspective Lovesong'. Malley roamed the night streets, bug-eyed and strung-out from the hyperthyroid condition alleged to be slowly killing him. At the same time Albert Tucker was wandering the same streets, churning with rage and fear, and visions of monstrous women. So too was US Army private Eddie Leonski, the 'brown-out strangler'—alcoholic, psychotic, he strangled three women because, he said, he was trying to steal 'their voice'.

with in pre-war Sydney. Stewart was reticent and humorous, a man who had conceded defeat early in life. In the crazy intelligence Directorate where the poems were conceived (and celebrated as an experiment in psychological warfare), McAuley was an officer and Stewart a librarian with the rank of corporal. Prior to enlistment McAuley had suffered reverses in his academic career, ending up as a private tutor, and his early brilliance was, by his own lights, fading badly. In this period the nightmares that had plagued him all his life became worse—he was sleepwalking, smashing windows and even jumping out of them. This abated somewhat during the Malley period, only to return with such force afterwards that his friends were convinced that suicide was only a matter of time. Creating another self—Malley—into which all the badness and chaos could be poured, particularly that of a poetic nature, took the pressure off. When Ern was exposed as a hoax and started to fade as a separate persona, the badness returned in full

force. What McAuley came to regard as a literal case of demonic possession was only assuaged when he entered the church.

One key to this is the (in part) striking poem 'Culture As Exhibit'. In part it is a found object, the first lines taken from a manual of malaria prevention that McAuley was reading

Swamps, marshes, borrow-pits and other
Arcas of stagnant water serve
As breeding grounds ...

The verse has always been taken as an example of how little McAuley and Stewart seemed to understand what they had done, for they always poured scorn on the idea that verse taken from such a source has any merit. Yet it's clear that not only does the passage have a rhythmic punch (magnified by McAuley's line division of it) but that the imagery of stagnancy and decay is immediately powerful. Malley warns:

now have I found you my Anopheles
(There is a meaning for the circumspect)

A clue to Max Harris that the whole thing is a hoax—he is being stung. But if Harris is being stung that makes McAuley the mosquito—even though he says he has found 'my anopheles'—his own mosquito. McAuley is the mosquito—the parasite, living off the blood of others—but he has also been stung by the mosquito, that is, by himself. He is living off himself, drawing away his own energy.

This is the key poem in explaining McAuley's own relationship to Malley, for 'Ern Malley' is not only echoed by the word 'malaria' (Mal-ey-ria), a disease carried by parasites from stagnant conditions, but is also *un mal air*, a 'bad tune' (McAuley, it should be remembered, had majored in French and German literature). Ern Malley—*un mal air*, or *une malle aire*—is also a bad odour, an ill wind or a bad feeling. It is bad poetry as disease (or dis-ease), and McAuley fears that he is the carrier of it—the anopheles. Stewart's contribution to this poem comes in here, with the line 'culture forsooth! Albert, get my gun'—a snippet from one of his letters. After this the poem loses its tension and becomes a silly, if fluent, riff.

McAuley's disease is that he cannot feel, that he is parasiti-

despised—the English all-rounder Herbert Read in particular, whom McAuley had hoped would be drawn into discrediting himself by supporting Malley's candidacy for genius.

Where did that anger come from? That sense of doom? In a secular form, McAuley's symptoms are not those of demonic possession, but of what has come to be known as borderline personality disorder—a loosening of the psyche that does not express itself in actual psychosis, but which leaves the sufferer with difficulty telling inside from outside of themselves—distinguishing emotional reactions from external phenomena. Manic depressive cycling, splitting of self, promiscuity, violent nightmares, and a certain dashing, cruel, wild energy are characteristic of the condition, and McAuley had all that, in spades.

The crucial point about borderline personality disorder is that it is overwhelmingly associated with one thing—childhood sexual abuse. And that might make us wonder about the origin of McAuley's recurring dream—that of a man in a stovepipe hat, casting his shadow on the wall. It is this figure that came to McAuley in nightmares, and had him up and smashing windows in his sleep—an attempt presumably to escape. Is it a child's view of a man in a hat frozen in the psyche? A trace of some experience that laid the ground for McAuley's torments? He himself thought that he was only saved from self-harm by a total and mystical conversion to Roman Catholicism in New Guinea (where he also contracted malaria).

CONSCIOUSLY OR OTHERWISE the move was a trade-off, for it ended McAuley as an interesting poet for some time. His next volume was one of pious religious devotion, and he then became bogged down in the composition of *Captain Quiros*, an extended theological exploration, whose only interest for most today lies in its rollicking, almost Errol Flynn-ish rendition of discovery and conquest. He had made a deal with God—he would give up the psychic freedom that allowed real modern poetry to be composed, in exchange for a guarantee of his life and sanity. It was only when—in his last decade—even this protection wore away and he was left face to face with a pure despair that he succeeded in writing a handful of poems that touch near greatness. Alcoholism, adultery and the paranoid political style of cold war-

its ignorance the vision of others. I am still The black swan of trespass on alien waters

cally living off the dreams of others. Much has been made of the idea of the 'black swan' as a symbol of antipodean alienness—but it could also be said that a black swan is a shadow of a white swan, that what is distinctively antipodean is not even embodied, but a mere effect. Malley it could be said is all these things—not only Mallarme (the master symbolist poet McAuley had tried to be) without the 'ame'—soul—but also McAuley with the 'call', the vocation, or even without the 'core'.

Is it worth deconstructing the name and these verses so deeply in pursuit of its authors? I think so, because the Malley poems were composed under conditions of great psychological pressure. McAuley and Stewart were both smart enough to know how far short they fell of great poetry, and were confronting a gradual fading of youthful promise. Harris, at the time, was not. His eager self-boosterism must have seemed like a local version of other boosters whose optimism and judgement McAuley

riordom seem to have been the mechanisms by which he maintained such psychological equilibrium as was possible.

Much of this was predicted by Stewart, who cautioned him against wading into the cesspit of worldly politics, and became wearied of his proselytising. The two drifted apart. While McAuley could function in the world of professional teaching and Cold War intrigue, Stewart's bohemian diffidence saw him fall for a long time until the synthesising doctrines of Rene Guenon's 'Traditionalist' movement—a basic commitment to eastern religion as the surviving example of the genuine religious impulse—and relocation in Japan gave him ground. Paradoxically, he became the more famous poet. His two collections of haiku translations sold tens of thousand of copies in the 1950s and 60s, principally in the US, and were a major factor in the form becoming popular in the West. Yet even this triumph underscores the tragically silly nature of Stewart's life—for the translations, done in heroic

couplets, look as kitsch as tiki art today.

Stewart was flippant about being a victim of the curse of Ern Malley, but it seems to have had a more fundamental effect than he admits. As confirmedly homosexual as McAuley was heterosexual (at least in McAuley's post-adolescence), Stewart was clearly in love with his collaborator. The Malley poems functioned as kind of rapid marriage and family life, and Stewart refers not once, but three times, to Ern as his and McAuley's 'baby'. Like a literary wife of the period Stewart had typed the manuscript, done the bulk of the work inventing and giving voice to Ethel, and providing, it seems, much of the lightness and humour within the Malley poems.

Indeed I suspect the intensity of their relationship can perhaps be found recorded elsewhere—in 'Because', a poem usually attributed to McAuley.

My father and mother never quarrelled
They were united in a kind of love
As daily as the *Sydney Morning Herald*
Rather than like the eagle or the dove
I never saw them casually touch ...

Can this record of a thwarted marriage—universally seen as

McAuley's finest work—be read not as a work of McAuley, but as the last known verse of Ern Malley himself? Is it his lament for his stillborn nature, as a product of a love that could not be consummated? The poem speaks of a father who has dammed up all his spontaneous loving feeling out of fear of where it might take him. Were these McAuley's feelings, and his awareness of Stewart's feelings—feelings he did not want to reciprocate in full. Was he conscious of Stewart's hurt and rejection? We will never know. The question itself is unanswerable, even impossible. There is only the mystery that deepens, and the awareness that these things, once started, start a rip in the fabric of life that rapidly goes beyond any possibility of control. Or, as the poet has said, in lines that I suspect many Malleyists have had float through their head at times of great trial

I have been bitter with you my brother,
Remembering that saying of Lenin when the shadow
Was already on his face "the emotions are not skilled workers".
—'Colloquy With John Keats'

Happy sixtieth, Ern. There will no doubt be many more. ■

Guy Rundle is co-editor of *Arena* magazine.



Modern Day Neanderthal by Katherine Brazenor.

Engaging the enemy

Social policy advocates equip themselves for the economic debate

EDITORS ROUTINELY HAND out assignments such as interviewing rebel leaders in Iraq, or hang-gliding over minefields in Cambodia, as if issuing an invitation to a barbecue. So I sensed danger when one editor began a briefing with an apology. Joining a US patrol in Baghdad, perhaps? No, worse. A four-day economics conference. It would take Hunter S. Thompson to make a story from this.

The Window On Economics conference was designed to give policy advocates and social service employees a better understanding of economics. The introductory material failed to mention that economists and policy advocates are not typically fond of each other. All the economists who spoke were male, while 32 of the 40 policy advocates were female. (Apparently social services are 'staffed by women but run by men', in part because women often lack the training in finance that boards of not-for-profit organisations now require.) I was about to witness a clash of cultures not seen since Nino Culotta arrived in Australia.

Participants indicated that they were attending the conference to learn the language of economics. There was an implicit assumption that economists speak a distinct language, presumably to exclude the outside world from their evil cult. From the outset the battle lines were drawn.

Conference convenor Tim Moore, from economic consultancy firm ACIL Tasman, began by defining economics as the allocation of scarce resources. Economic rationalism, he added, was a divisive term, best avoided, since this



rather slippery, non-technical phrase perpetuated the stereotype of economists as heartless conservatives. The phrase was little more than a term of abuse, and the participants needed to engage in real economic debate.

Sitting beside me at the introductory session was Bryan Lipmann, CEO of the residential aged care provider Wintringham. Bryan's facilities cater to the homeless aged, with the majority of residents in his care having less than \$1,000 in assets. He confided his view that many of the participants in the room who provided aged care should have their not-for-profit status revoked, with the resulting savings to be channeled into facilities like Wintringham.

THREE DAYS LATER, at the closing session of the conference, I questioned participants about Bryan's comments on aged care funding, particularly in the light of the Salvation Army's announcement, made that same day, that it was selling most of its residential aged care facilities. The response was radically different to what I imagine it

would have been prior to the conference. If the standard of care is guaranteed and 'the numbers make sense', then several policy advocates said it sounded sensible. If the private sector could be left to run most aged care facilities, then charities and the government could use their resources for those in greatest need.

Drawing on the lessons of the past week, other participants mounted a case for continued government subsidies. It was observed

that increased funding for aged care reduces the cost of acute medical care. It costs more to treat an elderly person who breaks a hip than to put them into residential care at an earlier stage to avoid such injuries. The policy advocates now seemed ready to critique the Federal Government's soon to be released *Review of Pricing Arrangements in Residential Aged Care*, prepared by Warren Hogan.

INTERESTINGLY, THE LOWER reliance on aged health care facilities due to informal care in ethnic communities, was cited as a positive economic benefit of multiculturalism. The greater cultural pressure to take care of elderly relatives in many ethnic communities was seen to result in a lower usage of aged care facilities. Although this benefit of multiculturalism has not been examined by any empirical studies in Australia, studies do confirm the positive economic impact of informal care.

Of great concern to some, it was revealed that economists must determine the price of a life, or perhaps the amount the government will spend to

prevent the loss of a life. The amount of funding allocated to such areas as health and road safety implicitly includes this calculation and is a decision that must be made.

The survival rate of the conference itself was high, about three quarters making it through to the final day, and some even chose to forego lunch to continue an economics lecture! A group that had initially gathered to understand the language of the enemy had discovered that economics is not only jargon but a valuable, though limited, tool. Used honestly, economics can provide a framework for productive debate. The participants were now better placed to battle cost-benefit analyses that fully costed social programs but neglected their wider benefits.

Participants also discovered that economists aren't necessarily the enemy. Most academic economists at the conference were more ideologically in line with the participants than with the boffins in Treasury. The presenters argued that economic analysis is often hijacked by politicians and over-simplified by journalists. A good analysis takes into account the wider impact of social policy, even if only in a monetary sense. Reducing unemployment, for example, indirectly saves costs in the provision of healthcare and law enforcement.

WHILE POLICY ADVOCATES must engage in economic debate, in so doing they risk conceding that economic arguments are pre-eminent, and that we must become a cost-effective society. Using economic cost-benefit analyses to secure funding may make it more likely that such analyses will become mandatory for all social programs. This might not always be appropriate. Given a limited budget for drug enforcement, it might be sensible to establish the most cost-effective way to spend it, however cost-benefit analysis also shows that the treatment of drug addicts is economically inefficient—more lives would be saved by foregoing all drug rehabilitation and redirecting these resources to other areas of healthcare. Most in our community would consider this unacceptable.

Policy advocates must also be aware that economics is the traditional home ground of conservatives, who often have

the financial resources to produce costly reports that support their point of view. (Witness the \$7.2 million being spent on the Hogan report into aged care.)

Anyone serious about having an impact on the nation's policy debates cannot afford to put economics in the 'too hard' basket. Economics has ruled politics since well before the Howard government. As far back as the 18th century Edmund Burke lamented 'The age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists and calculators has succeeded and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever.'

POLICY ADVOCATES MUST learn the language and the concepts. A wealthy country such as Australia should be able to care for its aged, but economic analysis is required to determine exactly how much we can afford to spend. Governments must behave in an economically responsible fashion. Maintaining a healthy economy is the only way to create jobs and pay for education and healthcare, and it is an underrated achievement of the dismal science that we have learnt to prevent recessions becoming 1930s style depressions.

Economists often sound as though they have just walked off the set of an episode of *Yes, Minister*. I recall a wonderful episode in which the Minister is excited to find that spending a relatively small amount of money to reduce smoking would result in huge savings to the health system. Then, in magnificent bureaucratic mumbo-jumbo, he is persuaded not to do so because the government couldn't afford to pay the pension to all those people living for so much longer.

Economic terms are not just used to hide unpalatable decisions. They are used to deal with complex matters in the most convenient way, and to make definitions precise, even if precisely wrong. The accepted definition of unemployment, for example, is to have looked for work during the past week but to have worked for less than two

hours. Economists are quite aware this understates the true level of unemployment, and are equally concerned about under-employment, where people work in jobs that do not make use of their education. Yet economists must draw an arbitrary line in order to measure unemployment. All professional groups, from doctors to social services employees, have a language particular to their discipline.

As I departed the conference, confident that the social policy analysts were now better equipped to deal with economic issues, I discovered a parking fine lodged under my windscreen wiper. Don't parking officers realise the cost of enforcement results in a negative net impact to society? Or do the behavioural incentives and the increase in employment offset the costs of this highly regressive form of taxation? Where is an economically astute policy advocate when you need one? ■

Peter Hartnett is an investment banker with a social conscience.



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The ministry of women

REGARDLESS OF GENDER OR religion, ministry is as individual as fingerprints. The way women minister to congregants will always differ to how a man would do it, as ministry inevitably varies from person to person.

Women's ordination has made a mark in a number of faiths and the stories of women's experiences are telling. For some faiths, the ordination of women is relatively new. For others, it's the norm. Certainly the experience for women in this type of leadership can be difficult. However as some women attest, it can also be liberating.

The Uniting Church in Australia has ordained women since its formation in 1977. The Salvation Army has always had women in its ranks. When Anglican church law changed in 1992, women were ordained to the priesthood in dioceses that agreed with ordination, but it's likely to be some time before Australian Anglican law changes, enabling women to become bishops. The Jewish faith is also divided on the issue: Progressive Judaism allows female ordination while Orthodox Judaism strongly opposes the practice. The stories of women from these faiths are challenging, spirited and give a new dimension to ministry.

Rev Maree Armstrong

While studying to become an Anglican priest, Maree—a mother of three—found herself working through the basic issues. She attended a theological college that only had men's toilets.

'There was one other woman who studied with me, we used to take turns standing toilet guard', she says.

Or there were times when praying in church with the other male students was excruciating. 'They went on for so long sometimes I'd be thinking: "Come on, I've got washing to get off the line",' she says, laughing.

While funny, such situations only hint at the political issues women face in ministry. When Maree began in ministry, there was no female model to follow. She felt she had to work seven days a week, 24 hours a day, and still works up to 80 hours a week. 'The one time I took a day off because I'd been ill', she says, 'someone had the gall to ask: "Is it a bit much for you dear?" I was very hurt'.

Maree, now 50, was in the first group of Anglican women to be ordained to priesthood in NSW in 1992. Initially she tried to be demure and dressed conservatively, otherwise no one believed she was a priest. But one day she thought, 'blow, I'm just going to be who I am'.

Sometimes she dyes her hair purple for special occasions, but mostly it's vibrant red. These days she denotes her position by wearing collar crosses, but keeps a collar in her handbag for emergencies—a prop she regularly lends her grandson for dress-ups.

'I still wear my collar when I go into hospitals. Although most of them know me now, it can be difficult to get into intensive care without it ... a man would never have that problem.'

She says the residents of the nursing homes she visits have come to accept her, but will still ask for 'that nice young man', her assistant. And the parish priest who preceded her? He had people offering to do his washing and ironing for him; an offer Maree has never received.

I LAUGH IT OFF THESE days and have come to realise I minister completely differently to a man, not that it's better or worse, just different. I'm open with my congregation; I simply offer myself because when you're vulnerable, people become vulnerable with you. This has two sides to it, of course. You get to know people well, but it also means you can get hurt because your underbelly is showing. I think men tend to protect themselves from that.'

Maree's husband, Terry Armstrong, has always shared the household duties, and actively encouraged Maree. And despite their precarious financial position while Maree was still in training—Terry lost his fingers in a mining accident—Terry continued his support, as did their daughter and two sons who were children at the time.

Maree is currently the rector at Belmont North/Redhead parish in the Newcastle diocese. When she started there two years ago, the parish had a small community of regulars. Sundays are now a family affair attracting up to 50, with noisy children and squawking babies not seeming to faze anyone. The parishioners say they love their priest with the spiky red hair, funky glasses and acrylic nails, whose sermons are always personal and invariably funny.

'I think that even clergy who once opposed female ordination are finally coming around', says Maree. 'They've seen that it has not been the end of civilisation as we know it; we work hard and parishes are growing'.

'I feel saddened that people think [Archbishop] Peter Jensen's views are what Christianity is all about ... to be so black and white about things. I know I'm not a scholar like him but I just don't know a God like that.'

Rabbi Aviva Kipen

Rabbi Kipen once spoke at a public forum about Judaism during which the orthodox rabbi she admired as a youth spent his allocated time seeking to discredit Progressive Judaism—the stream that allowed her to become a rabbi. 'It was such a cheap shot and so disappointing', she says. 'The only way I could respond was to oblige him to take credit for the fact that, if I've not been sucked into anything foolish, it's because

my Judaism inspires me to behave properly, and I learned that from people like him.'

Aviva Kipen, 51, was the first Australian woman to receive rabbinic ordination in the Progressive (also known as Reform or Liberal) stream of Judaism in London in 1991, and is one of three female rabbis in Australia. She is an imposing woman who expresses herself with expansive arm gestures, has been known to blow kisses to members of her congregation during a service and, at her own admission, is an inveterate talker. 'The problem is to shut me up', she says. When Bentleigh Progressive Synagogue invited her to become their rabbi in 2001, she believes it was who she was, that was up for consideration, not her gender.

'I had a whole lot of life experiences that made me a much more approachable person than a stereotypically male, bearded rabbi fresh from rabbinical school. So, in fact, I did not find much resistance because of my gender.'

AS A TEENAGER, KIPEN did not do well at school, didn't matriculate and felt she was branded as being quite odd. 'There were rays of pleasure in my teenage years that had nothing to do with school,' she says. 'I loved singing and joined the choir at St Kilda Synagogue, partly also to perve at the good-looking boys. When everyone else went out for a fag during the sermon I would stay and listen to Rabbi Lubofski, an electrifying preacher, who nourished my love of Judaism and made it possible, even for the occasional girl, to get some serious scholarship and engage with Jewish issues.'

Had she been a man, Kipen says she would have attended rabbinical school by the time she was 25, but there simply weren't any women rabbis at that time. So instead, she became a primary school teacher, married—but is now divorced and single—had a daughter and moved overseas, much to the consternation of friends and relatives.

'I think everyone expected I would stay exactly as I was. Thankfully all that went out the door with my generation. I left teaching, trained as an adult trainer in industry, returned to teaching so I'd have enough time to do an Arts degree at night, went to rabbinical school and then returned to Australia 17 years later as a trained and experienced rabbi, ready to work in a completely new way, in a new identity, in a new moment of history where women were able to do that.'

Working at Bentleigh Progressive Synagogue takes up about one and a half days of Kipen's week, but her diary looks like a coloured maze with numerous commitments. She is a PhD candidate at Monash University, works at the Education Department credentialing teachers in religious instruction from non-Jewish and non-Christian religions, and received a Centenary Medal for her work with multi-cultural communities. Kipen has worked for the Department of Premier and Cabinet in Victoria helping design large, public religious events to mark the centenary of Federation and September 11, and has conducted 36 funerals this year—only two of which were for synagogue members.

'The work I do with other communities is also Jewish work. It may not appear in the vocabulary of someone from an orthodox position, but in my understanding of what it means

to be a "mensch" [an honourable person]—which is totally formulated on the basis of what I understand Judaism to be—I cannot be an Australian, I cannot be a woman, I cannot be a mother, I cannot be a teacher, I cannot find a way of separating those identities from my Judaism.'

Rev Sue Gormann

'I didn't have a religious upbringing and when I was 14 I thought the church was rubbish. At 16 or 17 I was even antagonistic.'

Not any more. In September 2003, Sue Gormann was inducted as Moderator of the Uniting Church, Victoria and Tasmania, as the church's spiritual head in both states, and at 43 is the youngest person in Australia to take on the appointment.

'The position comes with a lot of responsibility', she says. 'And it's really quite overwhelming because there aren't many positions where you are voted in by 500 people and have to get 66 per cent of the vote'.

Sue was previously the Chaplain at Methodist Ladies College in Melbourne and recently gave the sermon at an MLC ceremony in the Melbourne Town Hall. She began her sermon with

a story about new communication technologies—her excitement at receiving emails and text messages—which created an instant rapport with the young women in the audience. 'It's a knack she has', said a teacher. 'People are drawn to her'.

So, what brought about her dramatic shift in attitude to the church? It wasn't until her late teens, she says, after being introduced to the Uniting Church by friends and experiencing the effect of 'authentic relationships'.

'I listened to Gospel stories and heard how God was seen in the life of Jesus. Jesus became this radical life choice that cut across politics ... everything. It must

have been a powerful change in my thinking because all my family came with me after that. Three of us are now ministers.'

Even though the Uniting Church has ordained women since amalgamation in 1977, Sue feels that women still have a challenging time in traditionally male roles. She has to continually remind herself that only 35 years ago women didn't receive equal pay and had to resign from work when they had a baby.

Throughout her religious career, Sue has combined work with motherhood, but has also taken time out to devote herself to parenting her two children. Her advice to other women in ministry is to 'keep your hand in' when children are small, but not to be too hard on yourself either—enjoy the different stages of life.

'At this stage of my life I feel that anything is possible. But I might not have felt that way six years ago when my children were younger. I think women need to listen to those needs and give themselves a break.' ■

Annette Binger is a freelance writer, living in Melbourne and currently working on a novel for young adults.

Photo by Pru Taylor.



Rev Sue Gormann

Cultural collapse

The Twilight of American Culture, Morris Berman.
Norton, 2001. ISBN 0 393 04879 9, RRP \$26.95

THIS BOOK is prompted by a paradox. At a time when American culture has never been more pervasive and at a time when America itself has become the hyperactive hegemonic power, Morris Berman nonetheless argues that as a civilisation, and even as a state, it is showing signs of die-back. On the surface, all points to a kind of renewal but 'a superficial vitality', he writes, 'is hardly the same thing as a healthy culture. A false dawn is not a real one'.

There are four particular characteristics of contemporary America that feed Berman's pessimism. The first is the increasing social and economic inequality. We are becoming used to statistics like those which point to the fact that up till 1973, all levels of society benefited, more or less, from a rise in real wages; since 1973, it has only been the highest quintile. The bottom 40 per cent has actually experienced a decline in real income. And whereas in 1973 the typical CEO of a large company earned about 40 times that of a typical worker, today it would not be uncommon for that figure to be 400 times as much.

Less well known is that since 1979, some 43 million jobs have gone in America. The squeeze is on. Desperate for any work at all, the underclass glumly accept worsening conditions and wages knowing that Third World people may take their jobs, either by coming to America, or by staying at home, where the jobs are increasingly outsourced. Meanwhile America itself, with its increase in gated communities and visibly entrenched privilege, takes on more and more of a Third World aspect.

The second factor to be noted—and one that is now in evidence here—is the increasing incapacity of the state to handle support programs and manage growing socioeconomic problems. In America, predictions more alarming than Peter Costello's, warn that Social Security will become insolvent by 2004, with the

hospital insurance part of Medicare going bust by 2015. Partly this is due to the problem Costello identified here: life expectancy is rising, fertility rates are falling. This is not helped by an American national debt that continues to accelerate, or by an electorate which doesn't want taxes to increase—but isn't happy about lower benefits, either!

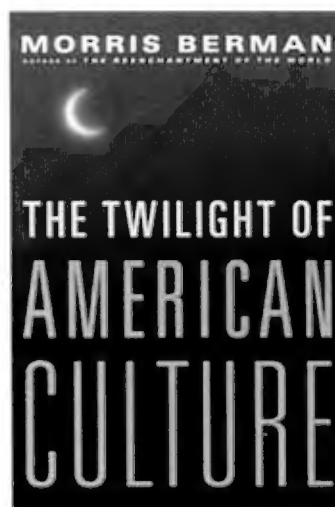
BERMAN'S NEXT FACTOR is perhaps the most devastating, 'the collapse of American intelligence'. There are many horror stories here, of a kind more or less familiar already. But the sheer weight of this culture-lite, a smothering in doona feathers, makes depressing reading. There are high school kids who can't name the three branches of government, but can readily come up with the names of the Three Stooges, and so on. Educational institutions in many respects have been hollowed out: students, at all levels, expect infotainment. Berman shows how colleges and universities in the United States have been happy to oblige, as knowledge has become commodified. Daringly he likens their position to that of the church in the late Middle Ages, selling indulgences (now diplomas or degrees) so that people can get into heaven (i.e. a well-paying job). The real problem is that faith in their own enterprise has been sapped, exacerbated by the effect of postmodernist dogma. Berman quotes a French philosopher: 'Once hat-ing culture becomes cultural in itself, the life of the mind loses all significance.'

The fourth and final factor to be noted is spiritual death. The rise of superstition and newer, shoddy forms of

Christianity is one aspect of it, another is New Age faddism (much more pronounced in America). Berman is perhaps least satisfactory here, lunging about as he only half-proves his case. Yes, a lot of common courtesy has been lost. Yes, there is a constant slugging of 'elites' (which doesn't mean, as it should, the people who actually run the country). And yes, as Paul Fussell writes, 'Nothing will thrive [in America] unless inflated by hyperbole and gilded with a fine coat of fraud'. So it is hard not to agree with Berman's proposition, but only later does he make it clear what he's driving at. 'Civilisation is impossible without a hierarchy of quality', he states, 'and as soon as that gets flattened into a mass phenomenon, its days are numbered'.

Not only civilisation will go, though, but also freedom. Berman's first epigraph is a quote from Jefferson: 'No people can be both ignorant and free.' Third World status for all is coming, he is certain, for 'democracy has traditionally depended on the existence of high literacy, a large middle class, and a flexible hierarchy'. These are all going under. The masses are becoming more indifferent, the elites less accountable—and more nepotistic. As in Rome, spectator sports provide ever greater mass diversion.

Berman engages in a comparison with the decline of Rome, and makes some useful points. The growing division between rich and poor was evident there, too, particularly when it came to the landowning class; and one of the reasons why the Eastern Roman Empire survived much longer, he claims, was that there a peasant proprietorship was much more entrenched. Turning to state incapacity



to meet financial commitments, he cites the immense growth in standing armies and the spectacular instances of currency debasement. Spiritual and intellectual debasement also occurred, with dumbing down evident in the decline of sophistication in surviving Latin texts.

The Twilight of American Culture is, then, a pessimistic book. Globalisation will surf along on the integration that has occurred between the expanding industrial, technological and new corporate culture. Already it can be said that of the world's 100 largest economies, 51 are those of corporations; the 500 largest account for 70 per cent of world trade. Berman can only see the situation getting worse. The present century will be a write-off: after the American twentieth century, the Americanised twenty-first. But the one after is likely to be different, given the nature of trends and counter-trends in history.

THE REAL QUESTION IS, how to survive the present—and how to ensure that many things of value in it are preserved in some way or other, so that when there is some sort of swing back to critical and humanist values, not all will have been lost. Rather like Don Watson advocating that each of us should take on managerial language when we can, so Berman speaks of NMIs—New Monastic Individuals, who, whether Michael Moore with his films, or a woman who organises chamber music concerts on a Manhattan barge, resist corporate values and the conglomerates. This sounds defeatist—a bit like the forest-dwellers in *Fahrenheit 451*, committing whole books to memory.

But there may be something in it, particularly given the acceleratingly consumerist bent of an increasingly corporatised publishing industry. Non-conforming ideas are going to find it harder to get an airing. One early indication of that is the surprising gratitude many American notables express on being questioned intelligently on Radio National—they have nothing like it at home. All the more reason why we should fight hard—as many country people will, amongst others—against any managerial talk of abolishing it. ■

Jim Davidson is Professor of History at Victoria University, Melbourne.

Reality versus illusion

TENNESSEE WILLIAM'S FIRST great success, *The Glass Menagerie* is the latest offering from the Melbourne Theatre Company's 2004 season. First published in 1945, it is a 'memory play', told through the eyes of Tom Wingfield (Ben Mendelsohn) as he remembers the events that led him to walk out of his home, leaving his mother Amanda (Gillian Jones) and sister Laura (Pia Miranda). Set in 1937 in St Louis, the play is in part autobiographical. Tennessee was christened Thomas, spent his teenage years in St Louis living with his mother and sister, both of whom were unstable and his father was absent much of the time. Indeed, in his production notes Williams himself states, 'Nostalgia ... is the first condition of the play'.

The Glass Menagerie presents the audience with a subtle yet powerful look at the way people can confuse, or indeed refuse to accept reality, choosing to live in a world of illusion. Although the Wingfield family are bound to each other by the weak relationships of their reality, they choose to escape into their own world of fantasy and illusion. Set against the backdrop of America during the Depression, the drama of the play is not so much in the action but in the way each of the characters elects to deal with the hardships in their lives.

Melbourne Theatre Company's director Kate Cherry and designer Dale Ferguson have been faithful to Williams' ideas and have presented a most intriguing and thoughtful version of this work. While the Wingfield apartment dominates the centre stage—light carefully focused on the table that holds Laura's collection of fragile glass animals, the photo of the father and husband who abandoned them constantly illuminated on the wall above—our attention is also drawn to the fire escape stairs outside the front door leading, it seems, to anywhere but here. It is the escape that Tom eventually takes.

Ben Mendelsohn handles the dual role of the older, narrator Tom and the

younger, angry and trapped Tom, competently and perceptively. As a young man, Tom withdraws from the reality of having to work at a factory to support his mother and sister, by turning to writing poetry, 'going to the movies' and drinking late into the night. The older Tom, is a playwright conveying, even justifying to himself more than anyone else, the reasons why he left.

Gillian Jones, as the faded southern belle Amanda, gives a performance that accentuates the plight of this abandoned woman. Amanda is the play's most extroverted character and Jones makes the most of the wonderful array of lines she is given, particularly when describing her days of being wooed by 'gentlemen callers'. The scenes between Amanda and Tom in particular, illumine the flaws in her character and highlight the tension that exists between her and her adult children—namely her inability to see and accept them for who they are rather, than what she expects them to be.

As the crippled and introverted Laura, Pia Miranda shows us the strength of character that her own family were blind to. We can mistakenly assume that she is just as fragile and transparent as the glass figures she spends so much time playing with. However, she doesn't crumble when the glass unicorn is dropped by her 'gentleman caller' Jim O'Connor (Tim Wright). The scene between Laura and Jim is undoubtedly one of the most captivating and riveting moments of the play. Wright's performance is both sensitive and strong, and while there is no fairytale ending for Laura, her encounter with Jim cannot be viewed as one person taking advantage of another.

There is much to take away from this excellent production of *The Glass Menagerie*, which is faithful to the play and its characters, and satisfactorily draws the best from its outstanding cast. ■

Anna Straford is a Melbourne secondary teacher and occasional writer.

Legal riddles

Litigation: Past and Present, Wilfrid Prest & Sharyn Roach Anleu. UNSW Press, 2003. ISBN 0 86840 550 7, RRP \$65.00

Adventures in Law and Justice: Exploring Big Legal Questions in Everyday Life, Bryan Horrigan. UNSW Press, 2003. ISBN 0 86840 572 8, RRP \$39.95

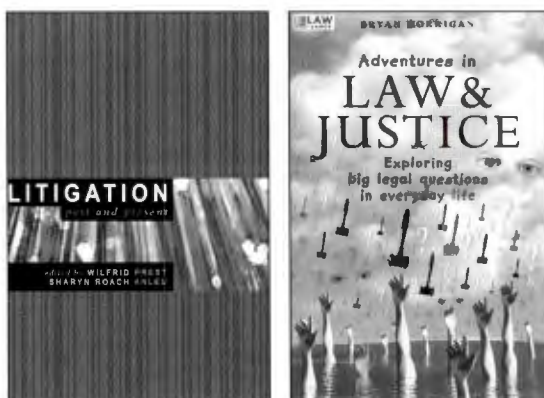
STEREOTYPES, GENERALISATIONS and assumptions are everywhere in our lives. I wonder how often we actually stop to think what exactly is the basis for most of our opinions? For instance, during most of history the majority of people thought that human flight was impossible.

A contemporary perception is lawyers are greedy ambulance chasers inciting people to litigate. This is one factor, amongst others, that erodes a sense of personal responsibility. When things go wrong, we look to blame others. The result is a litigation explosion which undermines community cohesion and trust. This may be true to a certain extent but is it the whole story?

Litigation: Past and Present and Professor Bryan Horrigan's *Adventures in Law and Justice* are two books that deal with common misconceptions about the law. Given that big legal questions arise from so many political and moral problems, the breadth of *Adventures in Law and Justice* is wide, making it an excellent introductory book to the major issues facing the Australian legal system. It is also worthwhile reading for those more experienced with the law.

Horrigan has a broadly postmodern approach and applies a coherent philosophical method to his topics. To dismiss *Adventures in Law and Justice* on ideological grounds would be to miss the point, which is to delve into the big legal questions.

Many conservative commentators write endlessly of the divide between 'elite' and 'common' opinion. While it would be foolish to deny the existence of this gulf, it would be too easy to label it as a sign of how irrelevant 'elite' thought is. Instead, what I think it signifies is a gap, in Horrigan's words 'a nationwide gulf in public understanding about law and government'. Horrigan eloquently argues for a more rigorous and philosophical approach to resolving the important questions at a time when public debate is



sensationalised and shallow.

Questions of native title and the treatment of asylum seekers continue to be, two of the most divisive issues in Australia. One of the things common to both is the use of a perceived divide in opinion between 'chardonnay socialists' and the 'battler'. This rhetorical device is used to manipulate existing prejudices and misconceptions for the benefit of powerful interests. *Adventures in Law and Justice* deftly deals with these and other major questions, such as the republic, a bill of rights, and the war against terror, sweeping away the sensational claims that tend to cloud the debate.

Adventures in Law and Justice also presents a challenge; to improve public legal knowledge. Horrigan says, '... community legal literacy remains largely unprioritised and relatively under funded in government plans'. In our democratic system public legal and political literacy is of supreme importance.

Adventures in Law and Justice makes a powerful case for legal and political reform and attitudinal change. As Maxine McKew writes in the foreword Horrigan is 'iconoclastic'.

MCKEW ALSO RECOGNISES that, 'we've never been more litigious'. Many would likely agree with her. Does the evidence support this claim? *Litigation: Past and Present* is a collection of essays edited by Wilfred

Prest and Sharyn Roach Anleu. It provides much needed quantitative and qualitative data on the subject of litigation. Prest and Anleu tackle issues such as case management, judges' workloads, approaches to indigenous activism in court and legal access, in a thorough manner.

Litigation also takes an historical view, examining litigation in a range of contexts from medieval England to contemporary Australia. I was amazed to find dramatic increases and falls in the volume of cases in early modern English society. Litigiousness, it seems, is not just a contemporary issue.

While some may find a book dedicated to the topic of litigation boring—and *Litigation: Past and Present* is more academic in style than *Adventures in Law and Justice*—it has important public policy ramifications. Especially in light of recent tort law reform.

TORT LAW, PARTICULARLY the tort of negligence, has often been blamed for the insurance industry crisis that has swept Australia, threatening access to medical care and the continuance of valuable community services. State parliaments responded by curbing some of the common law legal rights we possess, placing caps on compensation payouts. Yet Prest and Anleu point out other factors were also contributors, such as the HIH collapse.

According to Prest and Anleu, the media—with the assistance of certain interest groups—has helped to maintain the appearance of a 'litigation explosion'. The response by Australian governments has been to water down our legal rights, thereby exposing insurance companies to less risk. Prest and Anleu draw broad implications regarding power relations, particularly between our governments, media and well-funded interest groups, and law reform in democratic societies. ■

Godfrey Moase is a law student at the University of Melbourne.

Don't give the green light to the red light district

THE TASMANIAN GOVERNMENT has moved to legalise prostitution in the apple isle. The Tasmanian Government's lazy line that prostitution is a 'fact of life' which should be legalised, reveals a defeatist attitude to law reform. The Government's suggestion that legalising prostitution will minimise harm, protect health, and benefit society only appears progressive at a surface level. Deeper examination of the Government's proposal raises serious concerns about whether these promised benefits of legalisation will ever eventuate.

The reality, if Victoria's example of legalisation is anything to go by, is that legalising prostitution in Tasmania may increase social acceptance of an industry that is inherently harmful. Legalisation is a way to ignore and exacerbate the exploitation, violence and abuse suffered by sex workers. Legalisation suggests that we condone the infidelity of married brothel customers, and that we do not question men's entitlement to women's bodies, as long as they pay. Legalisation may also attract organised crime to Tasmania's sex industry.

Rather than taking an 'if we can't beat it we'll allow it' approach, some serious issues need consideration. First, high on the agenda for discussion should be whether legalising prostitution increases tolerance and acceptance of prostitution in society. Does the legalisation of prostitution endorse it as a valid, acceptable practice? Prostitution involves the commodification of (mainly) women's bodies and is often exploitative. If the Government legalises prostitution, it should also (at least) fund campaigns and implement policies to improve the status of women. The proposed reforms currently contain no challenge to the increasing male demand for exploitable female providers of sex and no measures designed to increase respect for women and women's bodies.

Second, prostitution represents an income opportunity of last resort in a society where a lack of alternative opportunities outside the sex industries, should be addressed as a root cause. At the very least, law reform that will allow prostitution to flourish should be accompanied by comprehensive exit programs for people in the sex industry. Such programs should include education, training, employment, housing and counselling services to enable people in the sex industry to access choices outside the industry. So far, the Government's proposal does not include this.

Third, legalisation may increase crime. To date (unlike Victoria), Tasmania has had few, if any, cases of sexual

slavery. Legalisation of prostitution may make Tasmania another magnet for people traffickers who exploit enslaved prostitutes behind the veneer of legally licensed brothels. The global trafficking of women and children for prostitution nets billions of dollars annually for organised crime networks. There is a risk that if prostitution laws are relaxed, the real winners of Tasmania's prostitution debate will be the people traffickers. Yet the Government's proposed legislation fails to include specific laws against sexual slavery and sexual servitude, which Tasmania may need if traffickers creep across from the mainland to Australia's newest legal sex industry.

FINALLY, IF THE GOVERNMENT does legalise prostitution, it should do so in a way that increases the safety and rights of prostitutes, rather than merely improving the convenience of brothel operators, pimps and customers. In Victoria, regulations require sex workers to have regular checks for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), but there is no such obligation on brothel customers. This is unfair when you consider that most brothel customers are men, most brothel workers are women and STDs are more easily passed from men to women.

Will Tasmania take a similarly one-sided approach, or will legalisation take account of prostitutes' health as well? The proposed legislation does include an offence for brothel customers to have sex without a condom. This is a step in the right direction. However, the legislation also requires brothels to keep a register of the names and addresses of prostitutes. There is no justification for such a register as long as customers are allowed to remain anonymous. Criminalising the purchase of sex but decriminalising the selling of sex is one approach that has been taken to prostitution in Sweden. While unlikely to be followed in Australia, the Swedish model illustrates that we can think about old problems in new ways.

Prostitution is not the oldest 'profession' in the world ... farming is. Even if prostitution has been around for a while, so has smoking and infanticide, and as a society, we do not encourage either of those. Tasmania's impending decision as to whether to give the green light to the red light district raises important questions. The Tasmanian Government's proposed laws have not yet answered them. ■

Georgina Costello is a barrister and human rights advocate.



The Murdoch Archipelago, Bruce Page. Simon & Schuster, 2003. ISBN 0 74323 936 9, RRP \$49.95
Chronicling the life of Rupert Murdoch and his empire was never going to be easy. Thus when Bruce Page begins the opening chapter recounting the history of *terra nullius*, the reader knows they are in for the long haul.

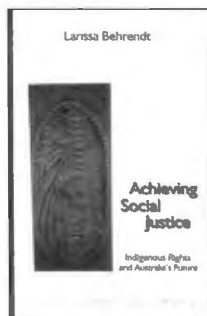
The Murdoch Archipelago's strength is that it strays from the typical biographical style. There is limited mention of wives and children and the story is not sentimentalised.

Instead, Page chooses to trace the complex business of the Murdoch media kingdom. Page argues that in this age of electronic multi-national media, entertainment has replaced information and commercial interests are paramount. However, to the media enthusiast—and one would have to be, to tackle a treatise of this length—this is nothing new.

The Murdoch Archipelago joins the dots between the countries linked by Murdoch enterprise: Australia, Britain and the United States. Page manages to make sense of Murdoch's 'tactical populism' that was once too gargantuan and cunning to fully appreciate. In addition, the historical quotations at the start of each chapter provide quaint food for thought and some political context.

Bruce Page demonstrates staggering attention to detail and tireless research. This can be both a curse and a blessing. While the book is full of relevant information for understanding the climate of today's media industry, the narrative is encumbered by too many facts. *The Murdoch Archipelago* is essential reading for the niche audience of media aficionados and professionals.

—Kate Stowell



Achieving Social Justice: Indigenous Rights and Australia's Future, Larissa Behrendt. The Federation Press, 2003. ISBN 1 86287 450 6, RRP \$29.95

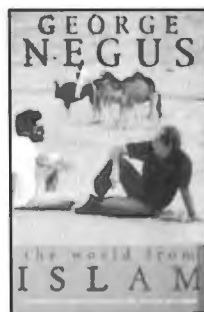
When the Law School at university set us a piece of assessment on Native Title, we wondered how useful it would be to know how to legally extinguish indigenous property rights. Larissa Behrendt's book provides an answer to the question. Behrendt draws indigenous issues into the wider discourse about Australia's moral future. The book counsels that we should stop

asking whether such knowledge is 'useful' and begin to look at the injustices in this country.

The book begins with a routine analysis of the rights that have been created post-Mabo. Behrendt then argues that the protection offered to Indigenous Australians by legal and political institutions is too fragile when one government can extend rights and protections, and another can swiftly relinquish them. Behrendt argues for a series of symbolic and substantive solutions based on rights and pressing needs like healthcare. The legal, political, economic and cultural institutions in this country need to be stirred into a different way of being, one that truly incorporates Indigenous peoples and their voices. Behrendt advocates recognition of Indigenous sovereignty as the first practical step in this process.

Achieving Social Justice is another important element of social justice discourse. What we need now are writers which take up its themes and deliver them to a wider audience.

—Emily Millane



The World from Islam, George Negus. Harper Collins, 2003. ISBN 0 7322 7623 3, RRP \$29.95

'Salam!' Was the message inscribed in the front cover of my copy of *The World From Islam* by author and journalist George Negus. The Arabic greeting means peace, a theme which dominates the book as Negus unravels the colourful tapestry of the Islamic faith.

Broadcaster Negus uses a technique where he focuses on the extremes of Islam to give voice to a moderate, peaceful religion. He

gathers his information from some of his travels—from Gaza to Dubai and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre—to the company of Suha Arafat, the Christian wife of the leader of the PLO.

Negus interviews those who are willing to speak to him, recording their explanations to help decipher their misunderstood religion.

Negus appeals to a very Australian audience, addressing each issue and attempting to give all sides a 'fair go.' He also writes on US foreign policy, and it's effect on Australia and on Islam. He writes in the style of a broadcaster—the words seeming to lift off the page in his broad Aussie accent.

'People like being Muslim, whether they pray five times a day, go to Hajj, wear a hijab, they like it. It's like being a Collingwood supporter,' he says, inciting the response from his interviewer at the Melbourne Writer's Festival, 'Though probably more honourable'.

The book depicts a distinctly Middle-Eastern Islam as opposed to a world view. It explains the pillars of Islam for a Western audience, deciphering the significance of the declaration of faith, Hajj, prayer, alms-giving and fasting for Muslims.

Negus does well in removing the stigma attached to Islam created by fundamentalism. His simplified study of the religion makes his book an important read for Australians and one of it's timely reminders is that terrorism is fundamentally un-Islamic.

—Beth Doherty



A Story Dreamt Long Ago, Phyllis McDuff. Bantam Australia, 2003. ISBN 1 86325 400 5, RRP \$29.95

Though innumerable accounts have been written of people's experiences during, and in the aftermath of, the Second World War, there are still individual stories that present a different perspective. *A Story Dreamt Long Ago* is one such account.

McDuff's background in storytelling is immediately evident as she recounts the history of her family, with the focus on her enigmatic mother. This memoir has the tone of being handed down by word of mouth. The writing is plain. The focus is the remarkable story itself and the clues McDuff gathers from her mother's family and friends. Indeed, the history reads like a mystery novel and includes travels through exotic locations, two Picasso drawings which are unable to be identified, and a large cast of characters all holding a piece of the puzzle.

Although the writing sometimes slips into sentimentality—particularly in one or two of the anecdotes about McDuff's father—the overall tale has the air of an authentic mystery and makes for an engaging read.

—Chloe Wilson



The view of a hawk

The Fog of War dir. Errol Morris, takes as its subject former US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, a man described as an IBM machine on legs, and a coldly rational hawk held responsible by many for pushing Lyndon Johnson into the Vietnam War. Errol Morris certainly offers a more complex perspective on the man. McNamara's reflections on the processes by which the US drew itself into a war he now clearly regards as a mistake, have a startlingly direct message for the current course of US foreign policy. At one point McNamara says apropos of Vietnam, 'If we can't persuade nations with comparable values of the merit of our cause, we'd better re-examine our reasoning'.

The more fundamental problem that both McNamara and the film confront is ultimately to do with how one can know the truth. What means do we have at our disposal to understand and interpret the world around us, and how can we know if they are adequate guides to action? This is a defining problem for all documentary film, expressed in the tension between the idea that the cinema can in some simple or direct sense 'document' reality or even the truth, and its status as film, that is, as an aesthetic and creative work of mediation. It is also a defining problem for McNamara. His speciality was the statistical analysis of data, the extraction of a clear numerical picture out of the messy blur of lived experience, representing the world through numbers. His analysis of the failure rates of bombing missions over Japan in the Second World War led to fire-bombing raids that killed over a million Japanese; an act he concedes would have been prosecuted as a war crime had the Allies lost the war. His obvious distress during this discussion invites the interpretation that he now feels that a statistical picture of reality is not an adequate basis for action (or as he puts it 'rationality alone won't save us').

What is remarkable about this film is the way that Morris is able to manifest

these tensions ('objective' documentation versus 'subjective' aestheticism, 'rational' statistical analysis versus human cost) in a single image: the view from a bomber as it flies over the burning ruins of Tokyo dropping not bombs, but numbers, statistics. This is not a 'documentary' image, but it captures what is essential about documentary: not reality, but rather how the choices we make about how we grasp and represent reality constitute questions not only of ethics, but also of power. More importantly, it also demands we ask ourselves if the picture of reality illustrated by our political leaders is an adequate basis for their actions on our behalf. WMD anyone?

—Allan James Thomas

Borrowed memories

The Passion of the Christ, dir. Mel Gibson. The phenomenon preceded the film. As my aunt and I walked into Adelaide's Norwood multiplex we were handed glossy brochures. Director's notes? No, a *Bible Society Making The Bible Heard* production, lavishly illustrated with stills from *The Passion*. A trio of demographically representative young enthusiasts precluded the screening with the declaration that this film—a 'true' story—would change our lives.

Mel Gibson's interpretation of the Passion is sincere—that much is clear from interviews. If it is not profound—and it certainly is not—then we have not been deceived by Gibson himself. The international publicity accorded the film—from favourable reviews in *The Tablet* to recommendations by prelates—has, however, blurred the boundaries between cinema art and religious conviction. Discussion, argument, controversy—all that's healthy. Endorsement is something else.

The film itself? It is simplistic, overwhelmingly violent, and a throwback to a Christian culture that projected evil in graphic human form—devils and wall-eyed, wizened infants. Gibson borrows the full range (including a shaven-eyebrowed Goth Satan), just as he takes his lighting from Caravaggio and his image of Christ in extremis from Matthias Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece. Gruesome, thorn-flecked, pocked and torn. But Grünewald painted out of his own Zeitgeist. Gibson

is anachronistic—as if his 21st-century cinematic—or spiritual—imagination were not equal to the task.

When the film is not mind-numbingly violent (the scourging seems as long as the chariot race in *Ben Hur*) it can be moving. The spoken and unspoken communication between mother and son (Maia Morgenstern as Mary, James Caviezel as Jesus) is potent.

Is the film anti-Semitic? Well, it portrays the Sanhedrin as unalloyed in their determination to destroy Jesus (why?—we don't learn), and while they inveigh against him, Satan (Rosalinda Celentano) glides between their ranks. You decide.

—Morag Fraser

Station master

The Station Agent, dir. Tom McCarthy. When in the second week of release a film earns double what it made in the first, cinemas know they have a 'sleeper' on their hands. *The Station Agent* is one such film.

This is a story about friendship which moves at a gentle pace but never loses



Peter Dinklage in Thomas McCarthy's *The Station Agent*.

your interest. Factually the plot is simple, yet the character interplay is complex and challenging.

Fin (Peter Dinklage, recently seen in *Elf*) is a train enthusiast who works in Hoboken, in the back room of a model railway shop. The owner dies and leaves Fin a rural property in New Jersey upon which there is an abandoned train depot, an old railway car and a section of railway track, all of which have stood idle for years.

Fin is a dwarf, tired of stares and tired of being pointed at. He is a man of extraordinary presence who has suffered for being different. The depot has no water or electricity, but it offers peace. It is an opportunity to be left alone.

a wealthy middle-aged artist who has taken refuge in a cocoon of grief after the death of her son. She first meets Fin when she nearly runs him over.

Three remarkable performances engulf the screen, and result in a wonderfully satisfying film.

This is a first film for writer and director Tom McCarthy, who has previously been a film and television actor.

Some of the best moments have no dialogue at all. In one scene the odd trio take a walk along a disused railway line. For Fin, the distance between sleepers is just about right. For Joe and Olivia, the sleepers are too close together. No, nothing else happens! Just three friends walking along a railway line, but it is an

at least not while we're watching!

At its end, what crises lie ahead are anyone's guess, but why fret when you've just been privileged to spend 90 minutes in the company of these characters?

Don't miss *The Station Agent*.

—Gordon Lewis

Unremitting

Irreversible, dir. Gaspar Noé. Form over function. Or should I say cinematic trickery over real cultural and emotional investigation. *Irreversible*, a film told backwards (opening with the end credits and weaving its way back from brutality to tranquility), traces the events of a young woman's brutal rape and her boyfriend's revenge.

Opening with swirling camera movements and an inscrutable conversation between two down and out men, this film takes you from the violent sexuality of a hard core gay night club to the light hearted sexual play of a young couple in love.

The impenetrable meanderings of the overly anxious camera operator felt contrived, the airy-fairy pop philosophy of the tag line (time destroys everything) was pretentious, the 'clever' structure was laboured and artful, and the violence exposed nothing except shock and horror.

Irreversible was such a sadly wasted exercise in brutality from a doubtlessly talented team—fine actors and talented craftspeople flirting precociously with a subject that warrants graver

cultural treatment.

I don't doubt the intentions of this project were noble, but its execution was devoid of real gravitas. Played in a more conventional narrative style this film would, I suspect, have gone relatively unnoticed. Although its shock value would have remained, its threadbare content might have been easier to pick.

—Siobhan Jackson



Peter Dinklage, Patricia Clarkson and Bobby Cannavale in Thomas McCarthy's *The Station Agent*.

That aloneness lasts for one night, then to his dismay Fin wakes up to find a hotdog and coffee van parked close by. The van is run by Joe (Bobby Cannavale), a human puppy who gambols around the reticent Fin. Fin doesn't know whether to pat him or tell him to sit. He is as loquacious as Fin is taciturn.

And then there is Olivia (played by that splendid actress, Patricia Clarkson),

enchanting scene.

There are several scenes which involve abrasive personal confrontation, which I felt were irrelevant, but presumably were introduced for fear of the film becoming cloying. McCarthy need not have worried, because this film is devoid of self-pity or false sentimentality. Indeed, contrary to Hollywood tradition, none of the relationships go quite where we anticipate,



Hot buttered bliss

FOR WHATEVER REASON, I never really got into *Friends*. It was the sort of thing you'd watch with the young ones, to keep up with new stuff, so that the old parent-kid relationship wasn't so gappy. (Of course there are those who disagree and say that Hughes never saw a piece of rubbish she didn't like, citing Carry On movies and *Inspector Rex* but they forget that I remember their little foibles too. What about that sister with the furtive addiction to *Neighbours*, hmm? Being in recovery is OK for her but some of us have long memories and a position to defend when necessary.)

However, I watched *Friends* recently and laughed, like *really* laughed: the HAHAAHA-snort-please-stop-cos-my-ribs-are-aching-type of laughter, which is rare and precious, even when you have a family who point out that no-one has seen your ribs for a long time and that they have become sceptical as to said ribs' existence. It is easy to become deflected at this point, sneering at his beer while he sneers at your *butties. Without beer and butties, what would our civilisation be, after all? (Thinner, at any rate.)

But I have segued (I prefer 'segued' to 'strayed'—so much more intentional-sounding) from the TV topic at hand. *Friends* made me guffaw because it indulged in some good old slapstick when eternal prat Ross decided to get a fake tan and had some exquisitely timed mishaps. It was rare, good and cautionary fun. When you get your fake tan, be very careful to ask the operator which way you should face, otherwise you will end up looking as if you have fallen in some taupe/orange ink that resembles no skin tone of the human species.

But some people seem to like the look of this, if last weekend's wedding was anything to go by. (Singing at such festivities enables the Hughes household to keep up the supply of beer and butties that keep one's ribs from showing too much.) The terracotta tans on the bridesmaids went strangely well with their dresses, which were roughly the colour of a Christmas beetle. In shantung, I think. All subtly different in style, although subtle is not really the word for anything to do with that wedding. You get the idea: one with a peplum, one with a bustier and the other one with a sort of tunic effect à la Dinnigan. They had obviously been reading European *Vogue* a bit before taking their ideas to the local bridery. Someone had looked at a few Issy Miyakes and a Gaultier or two and said, 'I get it: it's all about uneven

hemlines!' So the bride's extravagant sweetheart neckline juttied over a skirt for which the word frou-frou was an understatement. She rather looked as though she'd tripped over as the dressmaker was cutting the hemline, and had therefore made up for it by froofling up the skirt with some tulle *here* and frothling it out with a lettuce frill *there* and then sparfling the rest up, down, over and out till it looked like Ally McBeal's hair in the final series, the one where she looked as though her hairdresser had cut it with a Splayd. But I loved the boys: groom and groomsmen, all wearing their hired tuxes with great big pink Himalayan lilies in the buttonhole, like some weird fertility symbol. If I sound bitchy, it's because I've had to sing 'The Power of Love' *again*, when I swore I wouldn't, but they offered me money, dammit and there's the beer and butty factor to consider.

FRENCH AND SAUNDERS DID 'the wedding preparation sketch' brilliantly in the '90s and nothing has changed. The series, I forget which one it was, that had this wonderful sketch, is of course one that they never repeat. There have been F&S repeats, sparse but welcome, over the years, but never that one, the one where they read those awful wedding poems to each other, the ones that I routinely have to avert my eyes from on Wedding Saturdays. Their aim was true, because the stuff they were getting us to laugh at is never the full truth. All straight from the pens of greeting card hacks trying to coin new proverbs with all the skill and none of the sincerity of old Will McGonagall of blessed memory. You know the ones I mean: bombshells such as 'Today I marry my friend, the one I laugh with, cry with, yada yada yada'. Taste forbids my going further. And the bleeding Prophet with his 'sit on the same park bench but sip not from my Foster's or the sad cypress of life is not going to get laid' type of stuff.

Come back, Dawn & Jennifer (and Kath & Kim for that matter): life's not getting any funnier without you.

***butty**: a species of sandwich, but of nobler proportions, requiring thick white bread, lots of butter, and either good jam or really hot chips with salt and malt vinegar. (Northern English, working class, get over it.) ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

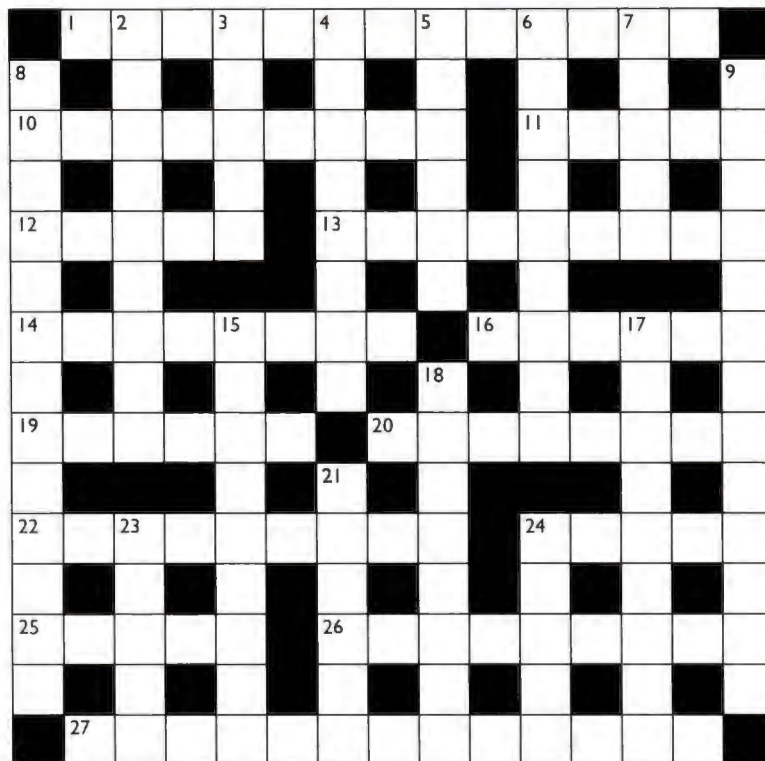


Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 122, April 2004

ACROSS

1. English flower festival with accompanying funny duet, say, in 7-down. (6,7)
10. Go other way, left perhaps, to find the blessed liquid! (4,5)
11. Direction taken in minor thesis. (5)
12. Keen to control wild anger with a change of direction. (5)
13. Does one hold it to steer the ship, or would he rather cultivate the soil? (3,6)
14. Formerly tense or taut, we hear, the muscle is used for stretching. (8)
16. What possible use are lines in a pattern to French astronomers? (6)
19. In speech, similar rantings characterise such a fool, for instance. (6)
20. Count down in order to the day Lent ends? (8)
22. Part after a grim breakdown? Long-winded nonsense! (9)
24. Papal office distinguished by triple symbol. (5)
25. When will he have the bottle? Could be never. (5)
26. Pet hate in Paris? (4,5)
27. Looking for a spiritual dimension, perhaps, through deep self-analysis. (4-9)



DOWN

2. 'See you later' one could say in rhyming slang to this reptilian beast. (9)
3. Transporter to the castle? (5)
4. Turning of the earth in sequence? (8)
5. Wind back? Sounds fanciful. (6)
6. Dispatched workers about information technology with some feeling. (9)
7. Many are tricked on its opening day. (5)
8. Change hose, putting them into pairs again, for sole service, maybe. (4,9)
9. Highways where Thomas briefly consumes coarse food. (13)
15. Plain Reno could be a city without equal. (9)
17. High spirits about Evelyn, in short, achieving such eminence. (9)
18. Look to past lore, perhaps, for one's guiding principle. (4,4)
21. Change the leader for twice Russian money. (6)
23. Does former reclusive film star collect the rubbish? (5)
24. Quarter way through 20-across would give you this place. (5)

Solution to Crossword no. 121, March 2004



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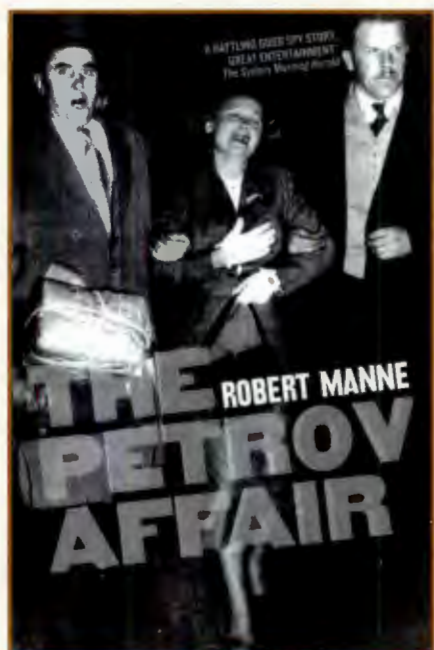
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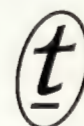
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The Petrov Affair

by Robert Manne



The defection of a Russian spy, the tearful rescue of his wife from a Russia-bound plane, an election won by a government previously well behind in the polls, a divided Opposition party and a Royal Commission, is a tale of the 1950s. But in Australia after Tampa and Iraq, the intricacies of the Petrov Affair bear rumination. Robert Manne's account, revised for the 50th anniversary of the case, is both a well-told story and an example of the detached and sceptical reflection we need in times of political passion, as well as in retrospect.

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