

# EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS,  
THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY  
Vol 14 no 6 JULY-AUGUST 2004 \$7.50 (inc. GST)

*Moral equivalence*

*Free trade agreement*

*Dorothy Horsfield*

*Kate Llewellyn*

*Indonesian elections*

*Solomon Islands*

*East Timor*

*Saudi Arabia*



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# EUREKA STREET

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# Moral equivalence

**I**N POLITICAL DEBATE, you always need a conversation stopper or two. A good way to close discussion of Iraq, Palestine or refugees is to accuse your opponents of holding the doctrine of moral equivalence. While they are working out what it means and why it is so terrible, you can open up another front.

In 1985, Jeane Kirkpatrick, the then US representative to the UN, brought the doctrine of moral equivalence into political use in a speech given in London. She discussed its use in the Cold War. In her view, the Soviet bloc tried to project the image of two morally and politically symmetrical powers. Their program was to compare Western ideals with their practices, so showing systematic failure. The Soviet leaders also commended a falsely rosy view of their own practices, and claimed that they were inspired by values dear to the West. By redefining political discourse and making

inappropriate comparisons, they encouraged the conclusion that there was no moral difference between the two power blocs. Moral equivalence, then, was the doctrine that there is no moral difference between the moral status and conduct of the United States and its adversary. It was used to subvert public support for the Western alliance.

After the end of the Cold War, critics of Israel's policy toward Palestine and the United States war against Iraq have also been accused of subscribing to the doctrine of moral equivalence. The accusation implies that the critics are not only wrong in their criticism, but also subvert the principles of moral judgment and are nihilistic and confused.

After 20 years it is hard not to read Kirkpatrick's argument as self-serving and ideological. But moral equivalence, the denial of moral difference, is alive

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and well on all sides of political debate. In the tabloid version, outrage at the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison is countered by the argument that the regime of Saddam Hussein was far worse. Implicit in this argument is the claim that where two groups do terrible things to one another, the sins of the more obnoxious group disqualify criticism of the other. Critics should focus on the relative goodness and evil of the regimes, and not on the morality of the actions of the better party.

The broadsheet use of the principle of moral equivalence is more sophisticated. If you compare what was once done at Abu Ghraib under Saddam Hussein with what is now done under United States rule, I will criticise your doctrine of moral equivalence. I imply that you dismiss the moral difference between the two regimes, and undermine commitment to a just and necessary cause.

Three things need to be said about reference to the principle of moral equivalence. First, in itself, the charge of comparing one regime with another proves nothing. Comparisons do not prove moral judgments. Nor do they falsify them. At best they illuminate them, and at worst they obscure them.

Second, conversation about morality becomes useful when we speak about actions. Discussion about whether people are good or evil belongs in the primary school yard. On inspection, evil doers always turn out to be diminished human beings, and to compare their moral culpability with that of others assumes a God's eye view. It also obscures the fact that good people can do terrible things.

**W**E MAY, HOWEVER, COMPARE the moral quality of actions done in the name of different governments. We can also compare the policies from which these actions flow. We may say, for example, that a nation which cares for the human dignity of its citizens by guaranteeing them shelter, food, education, personal security and the opportunity to shape society, is a better society than one where people are routinely starved, exploited, tortured or killed. Kirkpatrick is right to deny that abuses in a generally humane society make it morally indistinguishable from a brutal society. To justify such a judgment, we would need to compare in detail the abuses of human dignity in each society, and examine their context.

But the relative justice of a society does not entitle it to act as it wills towards a less just society. Nor is it entitled to endorsement of its unjust actions. If the United States has acted badly in going to war and in conducting it, it is important to protest at the incompatibility between its ideals and what it does.

Third, comparisons made between nations on the basis of what they do are not necessarily illegitimate. To compare the torture practiced by

United States interrogators in Abu Ghraib with Saddam's treatment of prisoners, for example, would be illegitimate if it simply insinuated that both parties were as bad as each other. It would invoke moral equivalence improperly. But it would be legitimate to make this comparison in order to underline the evil of torture by forces with which we are allied. It would also be proper to use the comparison in order to show that the roots of all torture lie in giving people power to use and abuse other human beings with impunity. To identify this kind of argument with an improper use of the doctrine of moral equivalence would be to reduce morality to politics.

**F**INALLY, THE DOCTRINE of moral equivalence is tricky to use, because it rests on a paradox. At one level, morality is built on moral equivalence. It assumes that the lives of all human beings matter equally, no matter who and where they are. Because the life of the Iraqi prisoner in an American jail matters as much as the life of the American prisoner in an Iraqi jail it is wrong to torture either. On the basis of this moral equivalence, we are committed to criticise the evil policies and practices of our own society as much as those of other nations. Apologists for evils like detention and wars lightly undertaken do not accept this moral equivalence. They ask us to measure what we do to others by different standards than what is done to us.

At a deeper level, the moral equivalence that values each human being equally, is based on a deeper lack of moral equivalence. The ground of morality is the conviction that each human being is uniquely precious. Because each human being is unique and so ultimately incomparable with others, we may not treat human beings simply as members of a group, but we must respect the dignity of each. That means not treating anybody as a means to an end, whether by detaining children in order to send signals, bombing people to implant democracy, or torturing some people to save the lives of others.

Ultimately, the coins of morality are stamped with individual human faces, each of which is precious. The principle of moral equivalence is benign when it defends each of those different faces. The real perversion of the principle can be seen in the hooded faces and naked bodies at Abu Ghraib. ■

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

*On inspection, evil doers always turn out to be diminished human beings, and to compare their moral culpability with that of others assumes a God's eye view.*



## letters

### Unfit to govern

When questioned about the findings of the HREOC report, that indefinite mandatory detention of children amounted to 'cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment,' John Howard replied, 'We don't like detaining children, we really don't, but the problem is that if you reverse the policy of mandatory detention you will be sending a beckoning, a signal to people smugglers ...'. His comments supported those made earlier by Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone.

The Australian people are using the indefinite mandatory detention of children as a border protection tool. We are expending the liberty of these kids in order to purchase the security of our borders and the deterrence of people smugglers.

Next time you hear a tourist tell you



"When I was a child I was taught about Jesus, and I asked where He lived. 'Above the clouds,' was the reply. 'Well, I wish He'd stick His hand through and wave to me sometimes,' I said. You see, I was asking questions even then!"

*Singer and children's entertainer  
Franciscus Henri*

"As the only Anglican bishop to have publicly endorsed the Australian Government's case for war, I now concede that Iraq did not possess weapons of mass destruction (WMD)."

*Bp to the Defence Forces, Dr Tom Frame*

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'how great Aussies are,' or feel a lump in the back of your throat when you hear the national anthem, think of the kid we locked up for five years, five months and 20 days so we didn't send the wrong message to people smugglers. This child and his mother were released from Port Hedland detention centre on 12 May 2000, after eventually being assessed as refugees.

The statements and actions of the Howard Government are those that damn a generation.

As a nation we must make a decision that the freedom of children is simply too high a price to pay. No amount of border protection is worth one night of a child's freedom, and no amount of deterrence is worth one second of stolen innocence.

If this government cannot come up with strategy for protecting our borders and deterring people smugglers that does not involve breaching the human rights of children, then they simply no longer have the policies, the imagination, the humanity, and the dignity that is required to govern this country.

**Lachlan Harris**  
Canberra, ACT

### Suffer the children

First we heard of the International Committee of the Red Cross report of prisoner abuse in Iraq, not a published report, but leaked information. This rightly caused outrage around the world and ongoing front page stories. Then we heard of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's report of 'cruel, inhumane and degrading' treatment of children in Australia's detention centres over a period of years. Our government did not deny knowledge of this report, it was simply dismissed.

The abuse of prisoners in Iraq has rightly caused dismay and horror. Harm caused to children is surely at least of equal concern. All Australians, and especially those of us who work for the welfare of children, continue to be con-

fronted with the reality of suffering from earlier child welfare practices, and with the trauma of the 'stolen generations.' There are lessons to be learned from these experiences. Any failure in care of children diminishes us all. We know that now. Nevertheless, between 1999 and 2003, 2,184 children were held in detention. It was eventually established that 92 per cent of these were genuine refugees entitled to seek asylum. They and their parents were no threat to Australia. It would seem that we have not learned.

There are still more than 160 children in detention. In the mainstream media, comment on their plight has dwindled, while comment on the treatment of the prisoners in Iraq is undiminished. Where is the moral indignation and shame over the revelations in the HREOC report? Documented violations are not even denied. Is it because there are no photographs to focus our attention? Is it because we cannot bear to imagine a shameful system operating in our country? Surely it is not true that the majority of Australians would be willing to pay for 'the integrity of our borders' by inflicting suffering on children?

The HREOC report set June 10 as the date by which viable solutions should be found for those children still in detention. There are well documented alternatives which respect the dignity of families and their children. June 10 has come and gone. Protests have attracted little attention.

Many courageous and compassionate Australians have worked doggedly over these past years for asylum seekers to be treated with dignity. The HREOC report vindicates their selfless work. We urge the government to act with similar integrity, and to put an end, once and for all, to a practice which offends fair-minded Australians.

**Sr Joan Healy RSJ**  
Sisters of St Joseph  
Congregational Leadership Team  
North Sydney, NSW

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# Strike up the band

**I**N THEORY, THE STAGE IS SET. An election could be as early as August, more likely October. Strictly it could be as late as March next year, but there is little chance of it following the US presidential election in early November. John Howard is rolling out cheques to two million households; the budget will deliver tax cuts for the administrative and professional classes. Medicare, he hopes, is neutralised as an issue, if not turned into a positive, and further taxpayer millions are spent promoting it in a partisan way. The Treasury is looted for sectional programs designed to square off sugar farmers, the roads infrastructure lobby and any environmental swinging vote capable of being garnered. A bit of symbolism is put up—on access to the Medicare records of adolescents for parents, the banning of homosexual marriages, and denying prisoners a vote at the election—not seriously, but so as to remind everyone that the Liberal and National Parties are the parties of god and conservative values.

Mark Latham seems to be travelling fairly well. Polling evidence suggests that the budget give-aways did not do much for the coalition. Labor is still the party of choice on domestic government entitlement issues, particularly health, education and community services. No-one has a clue what Labor will do in such areas: it simply has not spelt out its approach, even if it has tried to make it clear that it is aware of the financial bottom-line.

Labor is deliberately silent on an array of core emotional issues—immigration numbers, refugees, Aborigines, and justice and human rights—because it believes that voters instinctively know that Labor is on the decent side of such debates. Raising the profile creates the risk of the coalition using such matters as a wedge through appeals to Hansonism, or creating the false impression (already used by Howard to some effect) that core Labor is nothing more than a collection of busybodies with special, un-Australian interests, privileging access to lesbians, wogs, Abos, tree-huggers, dole-bludgers, union heavies and human rights lawyers, who divide the cake while ordinary decent working men and women miss out. Since Mark Latham has no record of pandering to such groups it's the Government which runs the risk of the grenade blowing up in its face. At least Latham's strategists believe and hope so.

This leaves two pots boiling on the stove. One is Peter Garrett whose significance may lie more in a reputation for ideals and speaking his mind than for his reputation as an environmentalist and pop singer. His natural constituency is the Greens; the party which has successfully assaulted the intellectual and emotional base of Labor and now seems set to do the same to the Democrats. Garrett's primary pitch is anti-political.

But a gig with Labor must have enormous attractions. A person like Garrett could make a difference, the more so because in him there is a compromising and pragmatic element, which would prefer achievement to the personal reward of being pure. Even if he must compromise, Garrett can be a beacon of moral integrity to those natural constituents of Labor who are profoundly disillusioned by its moral failures of the past few years. Indeed, simply by being there, Garrett can help rebuild idealism, ideas and membership. No wonder some of the tired and corrupt old factional chiefs are horrified. Garrett may be able to reassure Labor voters that the party still has a moral compass.

**I**T IS HARD, HOWEVER, to imagine Peter Garrett drawing a single vote away from the coalition. He may pull Green votes back to Labor, whether directly or by ensuring that the second preference goes to Labor. But this almost invariably occurs, independent of Green leaders. Threats by Bob Brown to withhold preferences from Labor, or to direct them to the coalition, are hollow and unconvincing. But Brown represents a threat in other ways. He has himself stolen Labor votes particularly in safe Labor seats. Indeed, his biggest single constituency of late has been the natural Labor voter disgusted by Labor's shameful record on core issues. His next biggest constituency is environmental and this is unlikely to shift to Garrett. The next, oddly, consists of religious fundamentalists, perhaps attracted by the millenarianism or the absolutism of the Greens. These too, are unlikely to rush to Latham.

The second issue is Iraq and the US. John Howard has pulled out every stop and called in every debt, in lining up Americans to assert that Mark Latham is imperilling the alliance. Whether it has worked is moot. Even if John Kerry has been prevailed upon to express concern, the fact is that the Democrat contender is campaigning on Iraq as Bush's disastrous war, not as America's disastrous war. The likelihood is that Iraq will get worse, not better, as the US election nears. If Latham holds his nerve, he will benefit by holding an opinion contrary to Howard's, so neutralising Howard's capacity to use national security as a wedge.

What Howard desperately needs is for an issue to blow up in his favour. A piece of luck like *Tampa*. A piece of unbelievable political luck—dare one say it—like September 11. Howard has always had his share, but he has made his share of luck too. As things stand, however, he badly needs it, and quick. ■

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

# snap



## Medallists

Congratulations to Morag Fraser, the former editor of *Eureka Street*, who was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in the Queen's Birthday Honours. The many community groups whom Morag has encouraged and supported will feel honoured by the award. *Eureka Street* basks in the reflected sunlight both of Morag's medal, and of the AM awarded to Fr Kevin Mogg, the uncle of the present editor, for his contribution over many decades to social welfare and prison chaplaincy.



## Splitting hairs

Casuistry is the art of applying firm laws to slippery situations. Jesuits were once famed (notorious) for their skill at it. It often produces a more flexible practice than we might expect. (Did eating at 12.15am, for example, break the fast from midnight once required for communion? Yes, said the letter of the law. No, said the casuists, not at least if you lived at Ceduna, where real midnight came later than the official clocks proclaimed.)

The great exponents of casuistry, however, are the Orthodox Jewish Rabbis. Their law prohibits married women from displaying their hair. This, being culturally awkward in Western societies, led the casuists to approve wearing wigs. Now the best (and most expensive) wigs

are made of human hair, and come from India. This origin, however, has raised questions for the Rabbis: Indian women have their hair cut in Hindu temples. This fact has led the most authoritative Rabbis to ban Indian wigs on the grounds they are so intimately associated with idolatry. The casuists, undefeated, now reflect on whether the hairdressers had religious or secular things in mind as they sat in the temple cutting hair.



## Darwin and the dinosaurs

Christians also struggle with culture. In Florida, many Christians were disappointed with the dinosaur exhibition at Disneyland, because it portrayed the reign of dinosaurs as predating human beings. So they opened their own Creationist Adventure Land, in which dinosaurs are shown to have been created on the sixth day of creation. Souvenirs include fishy T-shirts, depicting Darwin at the moment of being engorged by Truth. The struggle between God and the forces of mammon goes on in the Park office as well as in the grounds. The taxation people came calling to seize documents. They claimed that the Park had paid no taxes. The park owners retorted that churches owed no taxes.



## Pretty pollies

Election fever and the polls threaten. Polls come from an old English word, referring to the human head. Governments have always liked heads. They counted heads

for taxation purposes, and more recently have supplied talking versions for television. As one of the major functions of governments has been to decide who should lose their heads, polling appropriately embraces such apparently unrelated activities as cutting off the tops of trees and removing horns from cattle.

Polling is now done by pollsters, whose particular skill is to ask inane questions at considerable length with the goal of turning people into headless chooks. As is well known, parrots are also commonly named polly. This has been said to refer to the more primitive practice of politicians speaking repeatedly about what they have been told, rather than, as in contemporary practice, ensuring that they were not told at all. This derivation, however, is false. Polly is derived from Moll, a diminutive form of Mary. (See Gangster's Moll, Bloody Mary, etc.)



## Latino fiesta

Here's your chance to support the people of Guatemala at the Third Annual Latino Charity Fiesta and get your dancin' shoes on. Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez will make a special guest appearance to support Mission Quetzal in Guatemala. Much needed funds will go towards scholarships for students at the Quiché Technological Institute. The institute caters for the indigenous Mayan population by providing technological and civic education.

Saturday, 28 August 2004

Viva Cabaret

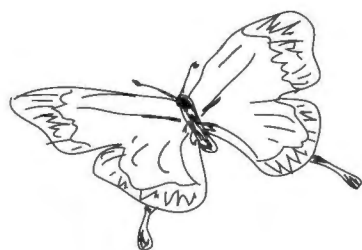
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## the month's traffic



## Dunk Island

E.J. BANFIELD

WHEN 'BEACHCOMBER' first rolled into the language it meant a wave. Later it would conjure up images of those folk who walked beaches without haste to see what the waves had brought in from the sea. Beachcombers were not those wrecks of men who desolately find themselves 'on the beach' in stories by Conrad, Stevenson and Becke. They are contented souls, able languidly to relish 'drowsy noons and evenings steeped in honeyed indolence' (in Keats' words, if sadly, not of them).

The most famous Australian beachcomber, spiritual descendant of Thoreau, recluse on a tropical island inside the Barrier Reef for nearly 30 years, was Edmund James Banfield. A journalist like his father, Banfield came to Australia in 1854, when he was two. After working on the *Ararat Advertiser* (which stayed in the family until the 1960s), he moved to North Queensland. There he was a reporter and sub-editor on the *Townsville Bulletin* and became an advocate for North Queensland separation. The newspaper work led to a nervous collapse. Banfield leased (and later selected) a portion of land on Dunk Island, where he had once camped, and his creative life began after he moved there in 1897.

He knew the Aboriginal name for the island, Coonanglebah, but preferred Dunk, for the names that Cook bestowed 'judicious and expressive—are among the most precious historic possessions of Australia'. Sighting this 'tolerable high island' in 1770, Cook named it for George Dunk,

First Lord of the Admiralty, Earl of Sandwich and inventor of the snack that enabled him to linger at the gaming tables.

On Dunk, Banfield's health quickly improved. For long a keen naturalist, he observed the life on and around the island, on land, in the air and the sea. He discovered a new species of rat that was named after him. Although he and his wife would weather cyclones, and unwelcome visitors, they rejoiced in 'this isle of dreams, of quietude and happiness, this fretless scene; this plot of the Garden of Eden'. His first book *The Confessions of a Beachcomber* (1908) was followed by three more, each as alluringly titled as the first: *My Tropic Isle* (1911), *Tropic Days* (1918) and, posthumously, *Last Leaves of Dunk Island* (1925).

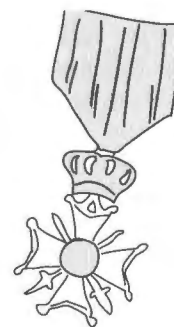
When Banfield died of peritonitis in 1923, it was three days before his wife was able to attract a passing steamer. Now Banfield and his wife lie under a cairn of stones in a clearing behind the Dunk Island resort, in the rain forest, near the swinging bridge over Goo-Tchur creek. The grave is well-tended. The site is quiet, save for bird song and the rummaging of crimson-headed bush turkeys. Banfield's obdurate solitariness was the bedrock of his literary achievement. A gentler version of it informs the reveries of every beachcomber. His epitaph announces that 'If a man does not keep pace with his companions/Perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer/Let him step to the music which he hears'.

Besides the resort, and a farm, most of Dunk Island is National Park. But not all: in 1967 Eric McIlree, Chairman of the island's then owner Avis Rent-a-Car, ceded land surrounding Banfield's grave to the Crown which then vested it in the University College of Townsville, now James Cook University. That this occurred was the result of another of the visionary exertions of Professor Colin Roderick, on behalf of the Foundation for Australian Literary Studies. McIlree died soon afterwards when his motor boat exploded on Sydney Harbour. Banfield's large collection of Aboriginal and New Guinea artefacts was tracked to his niece's house in Ararat, then transferred to Townsville. The collection was destroyed when Cyclone Althea struck the city on Christmas Eve 1971.

It was not until 2003 that the university's small claim on Dunk was remem-

bered. Banfield's life is overdue for fresh remembrance. On Dunk he would no longer find 'the pleasure of the absolute freedom of isles uninhabited, shores untrodden'. Indeed he never had, for the Djiru people had fished here for thousands of years before Banfield withdrew from the world to establish an idyllic, but strenuous, life on the island. This was his sea-change, when he found how 'Nature, not under the microscope, behaved', from his refuge within the Barrier Reef's 'shield of shimmering silver'.

—Peter Pierce



## American dream

THE RISE AND FALL OF COLIN POWELL

ON 12 APRIL 2003, US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld hosted a cocktail party in Washington to celebrate the US 'victory' over Iraqi forces. Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz and representatives of the coalition revelled in the knowledge that they had proven the world wrong. Conspicuously absent was Colin Powell. Queried on the matter a State Department official replied: 'No, people here didn't know about that party.' And so began Powell's fall from grace.

It has been said that it is better to be respected than feared. Before the Iraq war Powell had no shortage of respect in Washington. Touted as a potential president, Powell's career is a true rags to riches story. Speaking in 1995 on the release of his autobiography, *My American Journey*, Powell told audiences that 'this is a story of a black kid of no early promise from an immigrant family of limited means who was raised in the South Bronx and somehow rose to become National Security Advisor and then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff'. And subsequently, Secretary of State. Like

Clinton, he embodies the American dream. Powell's career continued on its upward trajectory until the Iraq war.

In a cabinet largely dominated by neo-conservatives, Powell was an unusual choice. His selection was reflective of the high esteem Powell is held in by many in Washington. His name gave Bush's cabinet an air of credibility and prestige. Unlike others in the Bush administration Powell served in Vietnam—and won a Bronze Star and Purple Heart for his service. Powell has opposed most American military adventures. This is not because he is a peacenik but he argued that in most conflicts there were 'unclear purposes' with no clear 'exit strategy'. These are the lessons he learnt from Vietnam. Not that American power is inherently evil—a conclusion that many deduced from Vietnam—but rather that American power should be used in a scrupulously calculating way. It is somewhat surprising then that he became a public face for the war by going to the UN.

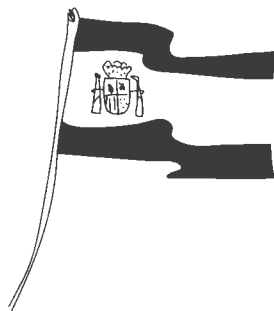
Some have questioned why Powell went to the UN. In light of his 35-year career in the army—where there is no higher good than loyalty—it is more than understandable. Powell showed a soldiers' loyalty to his superior. Apparently, Bush never asked Powell explicitly what he thought of going to war. As a loyal deputy Powell never volunteered an opinion. Privately, he was more questioning. 'You break it, you own it,' he told Bush and Cheney with regard to Iraq. A statement that is only beginning to resonate in foreign policy circles at the White House.

Since the cocktail party in April 2003 Powell has been brought in from the cold. However, his reputation has been tarnished. Powell's visit to the UN to present what always appeared questionable evidence was done at great political risk to his career. Before this time, Powell was widely respected in Washington and around the world. Powell's original stance cautioning enthusiasts has been validated by recent events. The Defense Department are becoming increasingly aware of their limitations. While it may be able to win wars it is unable to win peace—something Secretary Powell's department is much better equipped for. If Vietnam taught the US one thing it is the limitations of military force.

Whether Powell will be re-appointed or retire—resigning would damage the Bush administration—is yet to be seen. Regardless of this, Powell is unlikely ever

to enjoy again the high esteem in which he was held before the Iraq war. Perhaps against his better judgment, Powell hung his career on a politically risky war. For this he has paid dearly.

—Aaron Martin



## Wedding belle

NEWS PHOTO BY JEFFREY C.

**B**ARELY A WEEK after our Mary became the future Queen of Denmark, Spain celebrated its own royal wedding amid much pomp and ceremony. Like Denmark's king-in-waiting, the next Spanish monarch, Felipe, married a commoner. In a further departure from royal tradition, the new princess had been married before. The marriage of the prince to Letizia Ortiz, formerly a reporter in Iraq and co-presenter of TV Espana's nightly news program, caught the nation by surprise after a secret courtship.

As if that weren't sufficient intrigue, Felipe had once before been denied permission to marry the woman of his choice. Back in 1989, Felipe began to date Isabel Satorius, a woman of aristocratic blood whose mother had been twice-divorced. Traditionalists pointed to the Spanish royal family's historical requirement (more a convention than a written rule, originating in the 18th century) that any future monarch must renounce his right to the throne should he choose to marry a commoner. More importantly at the time, reports circulated that Felipe's parents, King Juan Carlos I and Queen Sofia, disapproved of the union although their reasons were never made public nor was their opposition officially confirmed. The most informed speculation suggested that Isabel's divorced mother was the stumbling

block. Whatever the reasons, the relationship floundered on the impossibility of its continuation in 1993.

This time around, palace sources suggested that Felipe issued his parents with an ultimatum: let him marry Letizia or he would renounce the throne of Spain.

Even now with the union granted royal blessing and having passed without notable dissent, the couple retain the power to capture the public's attention. This is partly because after its surprise election in March, the government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero announced a major departure from traditional royal practice: the first-born child of Felipe and Letizia will be considered the heir to the throne, irrespective of gender.

Aside from such arcane arguments of succession and the right of a future king to choose his partner, there is a serious side to the issue of the monarchy in Spain. Polls consistently show that up to 80 per cent of the Spanish population consider the monarchy to be an anachronism. And yet, among the many Spaniards who consider themselves nominally republican, most don't pursue anything beyond vague expressions of opinion. An often heard refrain describing the royal family is that 'they don't bother anyone'. That's a lot easier to say in Spain than it is in England, where the royal family represents twice the cost to the public purse than their Spanish counterparts; there is no royal court in Spain beyond the king's immediate family. Spain also has no tabloid newspapers and other media widely observe the taboo not to intrude into the private lives of the royals, thereby avoiding the scandals which have dogged the Windsors and so tarnished their reputation.

Further, there is a strong sense that the Spanish royal family has proved its worth. The current king's father was banished from the throne by General Franco and lived out his life in exile. Six years before Franco's death in 1975, Spain's dictator anointed Juan Carlos as his successor. In the hands of the young prince, Franco could, it seems, rest assured that his legacy would be protected. Juan Carlos had been groomed from an early age by Franco who chose the prince's education and acted as his mentor in affairs of state.

When Franco died, Juan Carlos found himself in an invidious position. Presiding over the nation's transition to democracy, he was deeply mistrusted because of

*continued on page 12*





# Inferno bound

**T**HE TIMELESSNESS OF GREAT ART is not just a matter of it still being around every time you happen to look. It's also that the work, whatever it is, and no matter how venerable, strikes you suddenly with a pointed and surprising contemporary import.

Take Dante, for instance: 'Midway along the journey of our life/I woke to find myself in a dark wood/for I had wandered off from the straight path'. Rich with metaphoric reverberations certainly, but in its third line this famous opening of Canto I of *The Inferno* uncannily prefigures the modern Italian motorist. He drives as if he has just woken up, he spears towards any daylight between cars as if he's emerging gratefully from a dark wood, and exhibits an exultant penchant for wandering from the straight path. But wait, I am ahead of myself ...

It is a shining May morning in the small southern Italian fishing village of Santa Maria di Castellabate—a region more or less despised by sophisticated Bolognese, Milanese and Venetians, and probably unimaginable to the exiled Florentine, Dante. Such northern loftiness, however, neither impresses nor concerns me. From where I am sitting, which is in the sun outside a bar by the beach, life in Santa Maria looks hard to beat, rough hewn though it may be here and there.

I've been in the village long enough to know the bar staff, Maria, Teresa and Costabile; and Angelina at the Paneteria, who advises me on the day's bread; the swarthy, unshaven blokes who, from the back of their trucks, sell their sturdy vegetables, dug that morning, the earth still clinging to the roots; Guido at the Pesceria who likes to talk about Australian fish; and Massimo, sitting in the sun on the steps of his Salone, where I have my hair cut—*una spuntatina, non troppo corto*—an instruction which never ceases to amuse him: 'Just a treem,' he tries in English, 'non too shorta.'

This morning every one is out talking and bustling and calling across the narrow, pedestrians-only street, because spring—*la primavera*—has settled in.

Springtime—which in Australian lore 'brings on the shearing', and in England was once the 'only pretty ring time' and induced outbreaks of 'hey nonny no' and other medieval ejaculations—still loosens inhibitions and changes stodgy routines. People don't go on pilgrimages any more, but the gusts of new perfumes, the sudden warmth of the air, the seductive budding and leafing, the wanton and suggestive profusions induce Londoners, for example, to take their pints and stand in groups on the footpaths outside the pubs. In Paris, these vernal vibrations bring beautiful young couples on to the streets like colourful teams bursting on to green ovals. And in Italy, drivers wind down the windows of their cars and hang the left arm out

to feel the rushing air.

Trailing along behind and already insecure about being on the wrong side, the cautious foreign tourist takes this quixotic salute to mean that a left turn may be imminent, but not inevitable. Well, the driver *may* be going to turn. Or he may be rejoicing in the warm air. Or he may be about to add a cigarette butt to the dance of spring. But let's not complicate things.

**D**EPENDING ON YOUR MOOD, general state of health and temperamental equilibrium, driving in Italy is a grand adventure no matter what the season, a nerve-wracking test of courage, wits and imagination. Which brings me back to Dante.

Italian drivers do not 'wander from the straight path' because they are suicidal, although it can sometimes look that way. On the contrary, they are often joyous, full of life. A zest, a sense of enormous possibility seems to engulf the Italian male when he settles behind the wheel. Even the mundane and often infuriating business of parking is carried out with an inventiveness and élan worthier of higher tasks, which is why so many cars appear to have been abandoned not parked, not angled into a gap, but flung there.

Observing at the head of a crocodiling convoy of cars three semi-trailers, two international tour buses and a swaying truck-load of hay, your red-blooded Italian does not sigh, swear or resign himself in the Anglo-Saxon manner. He sees a challenge and begins a long series of experimental swoops over to the opposite side of the road looking for a break, tucking himself back into line if a head-on collision looms. Much of this will be done one-handed (the left arm is cleaving the breeze, remember) and in the midst of animated conversation intermittently requiring gestures with the *other* hand. As Dante puts it in the last stanza of Canto VI, lines 112-113, 'We circled round that curving road while talking/of more than I shall mention at this time ...'

And so, when spring came to Santa Maria di Castellabate, and the fishing boats threaded their wakes into the blue waters and the nets were run out and the Saturday market started up again and the young men took to their cars and Vespas on the narrow sun-drenched roads, 'a demon taking possession of the body/controlling its manoeuvres' (Canto XXXIII, lines 130-131), I left my car in its garage, lay on the beach and read Dante, enjoying, even that far south of his beloved Florence, 'the lovely things the heavens hold' (Canto XXXIV, line 138). ■

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



## Congo compounds

**A**N INTEGRAL PART OF SCIENCE is detecting hitherto unforeseen connections. The path of research is not straightforward. There are often twists, forks and junctions along the way. While working on a couple of stories at La Trobe University, Archimedes was struck by the connections which can lead to significant outcomes in research. Then the stories merged ...

The first story begins when Lorenz Gran, a Norwegian doctor working with the Red Cross in the Congo in the 1960s, observed a tendency for the contractions of women in labour to accelerate after being visited by relatives. He soon tracked down the cause—a traditional medicinal tea brewed from a local weedy plant smuggled into the women. On his return to Norway, Gran extracted the active ingredient. It was a small protein, but he was unable to unscramble its structure. Twenty years later, Prof David Craik, now at the Institute for Molecular Bioscience at the University of Queensland, used nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) to solve the problem.

Craik found a complete ring of about 30 amino acids, tied into a pretzel-shaped knot by cross linkages between sulphur atoms. He named the compounds cyclotides. Not only is their structure tiny for a protein, it is also exceptionally stable and resists boiling. So, Craik reasoned, they could pass through the digestive system without being broken down. Yet they were so small, they should be easily absorbed. In short they could form a useful platform for oral drug delivery.

Concurrently, cyclotide compounds were found to be widespread in plants though their natural function was a mystery. 'We thought anything produced in such abundance in leaves—where you get 20 to 30 different types produced by one plant—probably had something to do with plant defence', said Dr Marilyn Anderson of the La Trobe Department of Biochemistry. She was right. When Anderson and her research team fed a diet containing the compounds to an important pest of cotton and corn, the insects did not grow, and nearly half died within a fortnight of hatching, leading to the possibility of a new class of insecticides.

But there's another strange link—multiple sclerosis. MS is a degenerative disease of the nerves of the spinal cord and brain that, since the eradication of polio, is the most common cause of paralysis in Western countries. La Trobe has a research group working in the area, headed by Prof Claude Bernard.

Until recently, MS was thought to be associated solely with inflammation of the fatty (myelin) sheath surrounding the spinal nerves. Following recent work in the US and at La Trobe, many neuroscientists now believe the condition actually involves damage to the nerves themselves.

Now, the La Trobe group has published evidence in British journal *Nature Neuroscience* establishing a link in mice between an MS-like condition and nerve damage, providing possibilities for treating MS by applying new techniques for repairing spinal cord injury.

The connection to the cyclotides? Professors Craik and Bernard are now exploring the potential of the protein from the plant in central Africa to treat MS.

These stories provide support for open access to scientific knowledge. How else can researchers become aware of obscure medicinal plants in the Congo? Today, commercial and security interests restrict the flow of scientific information. The end result could be to choke the life blood out of science. ■

**Tim Thwaites** is a freelance science writer

his ties to the former regime. It transpired that the king had been secretly cultivating contacts with the clandestine democratic opposition even before Franco died. A successful transition to democratic rule elevated the king's reputation but it was not until 1981 that the king won over most of his detractors.

On 23 February of that year, disaffected soldiers seized the fledgling national parliament during a debate which was being broadcast live on national radio. Spaniards listened with horror as gunshots rang out and the broadcast was cut. Tanks rolled onto the streets of Valencia where an army division announced its support for the coup. Spaniards still talk of their dark fears on that day, certain that the dictatorship would soon be returning.

And yet it was also the day when Spaniards would learn the resilience of their young democracy. While the nation fretted and children were kept home from school, King Juan Carlos appeared on national television to deny that the coup leaders had his support and to call for a return to barracks. By his side was the young Felipe.

The king's orders were obeyed and, since that time, the Spanish monarchy has been viewed by many as the institution which safeguarded democracy in Spain. Although some analysts claim that Juan Carlos did not, in reality, act as decisively or as quickly as he would like to suggest, there is little if any active opposition to the monarchy.

There is, of course, a sense in which the monarchy has also served a hugely symbolic role in recent days. In the aftermath of the 11 March bombings in Madrid, the royals were at the hospitals comforting the sick and grieving, while at the memorial service to honour the dead, the family broke with protocol to greet each of the mourners in person.

The terrible events of March, some analysts have suggested, caused the wedding celebrations to be more muted than normal. But perhaps only a royal wedding could have prompted the headline in the left-leaning *El País* newspaper on the day of the wedding: 'Madrid smiles again.'

—**Anthony Ham**

*This month's contributors:* **Peter Pierce** is Professor of Australian Literature at James Cook University, Cairns; **Aaron Martin** is completing his honours in international relations at Melbourne University; **Anthony Ham** is a freelance writer living in Madrid.



## POETRY PRIZE

The **Broadway Poetry Prize** is one of Australia's most prestigious competitions for poetry.

Sponsored by the Broadway Shopping Centre, this year the prize for the winning poem has been increased to \$6000.

The winning poem will be announced at the **Australian Poetry Festival**, Sydney, on 5 September 2004. The judges are Jenifer Compton and Peter Bishop.

The winning poem will be published in the Poets Union journal *Five Bells*. The winning poem and shortlisted poems will be published by Picaro Press and made available through the Poets Union.

Entries should be sent to:  
The Broadway Poetry Prize  
Poets Union  
PO Box 91  
Balmain NSW 2041

The deadline for submissions is 26 July 2004.

Further details and entry forms are available from the Poets Union, telephone 02 9818 5366, email [info@poetsunion.com](mailto:info@poetsunion.com) or on line at [www.poetsunion.com](http://www.poetsunion.com).

The Poets Union is supported by The Broadway Shopping Centre, Australia Council for the Arts, Leichhardt Council, NSW Ministry for the Arts, Picaro Press and Gleebooks.



## Today's religion

**W**HAT SHAPE IS MODERN WESTERN CULTURE in today? The 20th century confronts us with both the grandeur and the misery of modernity—in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and Auschwitz to name just two events. But how are we to account for modernity as a whole? This is an important question for theology, since faithfully proclaiming the Gospel presumes an insightful understanding of the culture it addresses. Many interpreters of Western culture fall into what Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor calls the booster/knocker polarity. The 'knockers' of modern culture argue that with the Enlightenment people have lost their faith and as a result Western culture is in decline. 'Boosters' argue that through the Enlightenment, the rise of science and reason has enabled moderns to free themselves from their illusions about a god in order to become who they truly are: a free, self-determining people.

Although both boosters and knockers provide some pieces of the puzzle, neither view adequately accounts for modern Western culture. This is not simply a matter of balance—of taking neither an overly optimistic nor an excessively pessimistic stance—but rather a question of what constitutes an adequate understanding of cultural change. Both boosters and knockers offer acultural understandings of modernity; neither accounts for the massive cultural shift of the last few centuries, which has often been powered by Christian understandings and practices.

Earlier this year, in *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Duke University Press), Taylor published his account of how we have arrived where we are. He argues that 'central to Western modernity is a new conception of the moral order of society', which originated in the minds of thinkers like Grotius and Locke, and grew to influence whole stratas of society until it has become the background understanding of modernity.

Taylor describes this modern moral order as 'the society of mutual benefit'. The idea is that you and I go about our lives as bakers, bankers or priests, and fulfilling our own sense of self redounds to the good of all, with plentiful bread, money or spiritual blessings. His argument is that this understanding undergirds the institutions and practices of our culture. The key institutions discussed are: the rise of the modern economy, the public sphere and popular sovereignty. In this accessible and thought-provoking book, Taylor analyses the formation of these institutions.

Taylor's account of modernity is both incisive and deeply sympathetic. There is no hyperbole here, which is a significant gain since some theological readings of modernity reveal more about the theological method adopted than the culture in which we live. His reading enables Christians to avoid the untenable position of accepting some of modernity's gains—for example, human rights—and recognising their significance, while condemning the whole movement of thought and practice that brought them about. At the same time, Taylor sees a strong place for God in modern secular culture: 'God's will can still be very present to us in the design of things, in cosmos, state, and personal life. ■

**James McEvoy** teaches at Catholic Theological College, Adelaide.



# The threat to empire

An ageing population may be the downfall of the Western empire

**I**N 1917, BRITISH FORCES hoisted the Union Jack over Baghdad. In the words of one chronicler, hoisting that flag was an act that marked 'the thirtieth seizure in history of this Caliph's capital with minarets in the skies and feet in the mud'. Today, the difficulties of Iraq dominate current affairs. Talk of 'the American Empire' is commonplace enough; talk of the Iraq affair signalling its impending failure is starting to appear more often. For some, Iraq is the touchstone for general American decline.

Whether it is or isn't, the suggestion poses bigger questions still: is America really an empire? If it is, is it in decline? And if Iraq won't, what would bring down such an empire?

Amidst the theories, historians often posit the rise of competing powers, or the over-stretching of imperial aspirations as triggers for decline. But today, one true seed of decay exists and it is taking firmer root by the year. It is a new threat to a new type of empire. It is nothing less than the ageing of the developed world.

Beyond the threat of a terrorist holocaust, the less visceral but more likely prospect seems to be the slow decline occasioned by an ageing population that can no longer fuel its own future productivity or pre-eminence. Over time we may find that, with the application of sufficient vigilance and resources, terrorism might be managed within 'tolerable' levels—a new cold war that can be waged beneath the daily consciousness of the majority. But the many implications of an ever-ageing population are especially troubling, because no simple answers are apparent and the effects

are felt everywhere. The citadel's old and neglected walls may crumble under their own weight, rather than being smashed spectacularly from without. But the result remains the same—the citadel falls.

The whole of the developed world lives in an empire of sorts. It is not one of occupation or colonisation in the traditional sense, but, measured by any historical standard, given the relative health, wealth, comfort and ease within which so many of us live, it may as well be. This empire is a

societal grouping, amalgamated by the elevated positions of many in the developed world on the ladder of global prosperity; by their participation in familiar markets of trade and by their allegiance to similar socio-political systems. For the most part, the citizens of this empire are afforded unprecedented freedoms, opportunities and conditions of life. Yet—seemingly as a consequence—they aren't breeding.

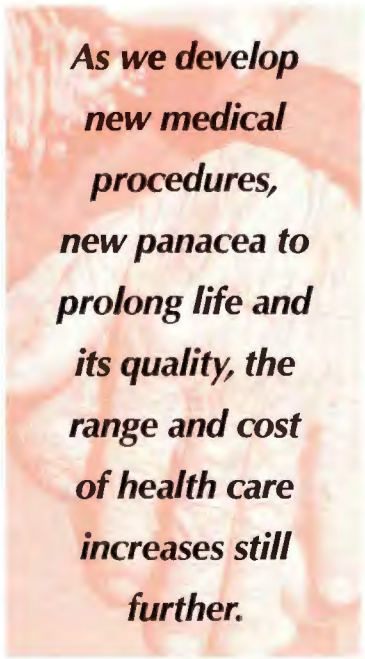
In its simplest terms, assuming that migration levels do not fluctuate much to shift the equilibrium, a simple ratio of

two children born per woman keeps the age profile of any population relatively constant. In Australia today, the total fertility rate lies at around 1.7. In 1955—the age of the 'baby boom'—the equivalent Australian mark was 3.4. It would appear that the current rate will either rise or sink only marginally over the coming 50 years. In any case, it is unlikely to rebound violently to levels well above two. In other parts of the developed world, the situation is even more desper-

ate. Rates in the United Kingdom are around 1.6; in Portugal 1.5; in Japan 1.3. In fact, of the OECD countries, only Mexico (around 2.5), the United States (around 2.1) and Turkey (around 2.4) have maintained fertility rates above the basic replacement level over the past five years.

**T**HE UNITED STATES is certainly buoyed in this respect by the influx of Mexican labour. As a result, the gap between the rich and the poor in the US is perhaps more pronounced than in many other developed countries. But this is not a question of quality of life alone. Other developed countries may have more generous welfare systems than the US. But those other countries face a decline through ageing. In the long term, which is worse: a country where the gap between rich and poor may approach medieval proportions, or one in which the gap is narrower, but wherein a decrepit society ceases to function? Who pays for social welfare benevolence when most of the population has retired? It is a compelling question.

And just what is an 'ideal' fertility rate? Somalia and Niger now both 'enjoy' a fertility rate approaching seven. Tragically, such rates, at the other end of the scale from those of our developed empire, say much about the position of these countries on the lowest rung of society: life for the great majority in this world is a hand-to-mouth existence at best; its people are stalked by diseases long banished from the developed world. Only around 17 per cent of Niger's population can read and write. In Australia the figure is closer to 100 per cent. The average life expectancy of a Somali male is 46 years. In Australia it is around 76. Fertility rates matter; they say much about the standard of life that can be expected in that society.



*As we develop  
new medical  
procedures,  
new panacea to  
prolong life and  
its quality, the  
range and cost  
of health care  
increases still  
further.*







Increasing migration can act as a partial inhibitor for the ageing trend, but perhaps even this remedy is a mirage. Modern economies continue to move away from the low-level manufacturing and agricultural work that can be done at less cost in developing nations. Service industries and high technology are ever-more significant drivers of developed economies. And in these latter fields, low-skilled labour may not find a ready home. Equally, skilled migration, which is seemingly a poultice, is chimerical: in comparison to refugees and other low-skilled migrant numbers, skilled migrants—those with professional, technical or managerial expertise—represent quite a small proportion of total migration levels. Competition to attract such labour is intense. Besides, the majority of skilled labour is generated from within the ageing empire itself. At a national level, attracting more young talent is a worthy endeav-

our, but at a global level, skilled migrants are like migratory birds: their concentrations might shift, but their overall numbers do not change. And they will age with the rest.

**A**N AGEING POPULATION is the offspring of the high standard of living and the frenetic pace of life that we have created for ourselves. Of necessity, dual income families are much more prevalent than 30 years ago. As the cost of living increases, people work longer hours and sacrifice more to maintain their quality of life—their house, their car, their holidays, their access to acceptable standards of health and education, their choice of leisure activities. As fertility drops, the age profile increases. As more people retire, the tax burden shifts to a pool of younger workers that, in relative terms, is shrinking. As numbers of retirees increase, the health system groans under the strain. As we develop new medical procedures, new panacea to prolong life and its quality, the range and cost of health care increases still further. National health industry costs are today growing at annual rates that far outstrip the general growth in community prices and wages. The bill is settled by a dwindling base of 'working age' people. Caught in such a trend, living a life that matches the pace and the cost of change becomes a gamble on martingale terms—the stakes are doubled after every loss. Not managing one's wealth and career (such as they may be) in one's younger years could be ruinous—the greater the degree of wealth and comfort, the further and harder the fall to relative poverty for those who slip up.

Across this empire, the response of many is hardly surprising: children become a luxury, as people just try to stay in the game. Children certainly are an expensive choice. In a recent UK report that surely matches the best that Huxley or Zamyatin could produce, it was suggested that the cost of raising a child to the age of 21 approaches \$360,000. Were you to ignore any other evidence of the difficulty of bringing new life into the world, here is the

clinch—the actuaries are costing it for you.

This is the fabric of the empire that today's youth inherits. But outside the borders of internet cafes, other struggles take place. Those on the bottom rungs of this world enact a brief cycle of birth, growth and decay, as disease, war, corruption and famine take their toll: in Nigeria today, around 270,000 children live with HIV/AIDS. In Rwanda, you have a better than even chance of dying before you are 40. In such countries, the escape velocity required to ascend to a better life is as incalculable as it appears impossible.

Still other countries lie wedged between this 'drowning' world and the empire we live in; they form the 'developing' world. This world is working hard to take its place at what it perceives to be the table of relative affluence and ease—to become citizens of empire. In time, such countries may also find their populations ageing, as they too discover that the price of imperial citizenship prohibits breeding. Viewed from some celestial vantage point, the world must then appear a strange farce: the poorest and weakest nations stuck in their slough, the

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# On Common Ground

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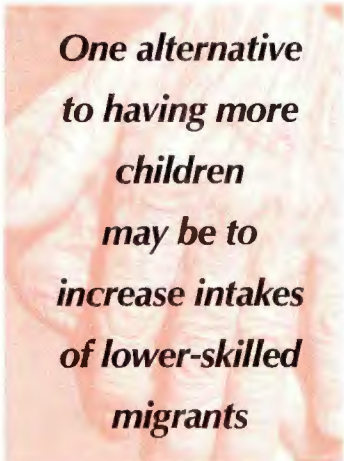
**6<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> August 2004**

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developing countries emerging from it to higher ground; the occupants of the highest ground busily building elaborate ladders.

Governments across this empire are beginning to recognise the ageing problem. The tectonic shift in wealth and tax burden—from youth to old age for the former, the reverse for the latter, is starting to be addressed. Future governments will no doubt do more still. But will it be enough?

At some point, a question almost antithetical to all of the developed world's wealth creation principles may have to be considered: should we knowingly curtail our standard of living to preserve the future of this empire? One (the only?) alternative



**One alternative  
to having more  
children  
may be to  
increase intakes  
of lower-skilled  
migrants**

to having more children may be to increase intakes of lower-skilled migrants—a mixture of those from the two worlds outside the empire: the 'drowning' and the 'developing'. In the short to medium term, such people may not add much at all to the bottom line of a highly-skilled economy. Indeed, their presence may drag it down, for a time, away from the relative wealth and health levels to which we understandably aspire. Yet in the longer term, the children these new citizens give birth to may arrest the

ageing process. They may themselves prosper, adding to a bottom line, two or three generations hence. A broader, healthier link between these other worlds and the developed empire might well mean the empire's salvation. Yet it would seem to involve slowing down our progress and relative prosperity, for a time, to place ourselves in better shape for renewed efforts later on.

**W**OULD GOVERNMENTS, business or even individuals in any great number choose consciously to slow down our progress in this way, in the name of the hazy concept of 'longer-term prosperity'? Self-interest is easily recognised in the short-term. Is it so easy to discern over the countless years of the future? The question is not a new one. We might be best to leave one of greater eloquence to muse upon it:

A being of the nature of man, endowed with the same faculties, but with a longer measure of existence, would cast down a smile of pity and contempt on the crimes and follies of human ambition, so eager, in a narrow span, to grasp at a precarious and short-lived enjoyment. It is thus that the experience of history exalts and enlarges the horizon of our intellectual view. In a composition of some days, in a perusal of some hours, six hundred years have rolled away, and the duration of a life or reign is contracted to a fleeting moment: The grave is ever beside the throne; the success of a criminal is almost instantly followed by the loss of his prize; and our immortal reason survives and disdains the sixty phantoms of kings who have passed before our eyes, and faintly dwell in our remembrance.

—Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. ■

**Luke Fraser** is a director in the federal public service. He lives and works in Canberra.

## The Boat

All day I row a dinghy  
and at night rest the oars  
within their rollocks  
yet I move increasingly asleep  
or wide awake towards the vast horizon  
lit by stars.

New Zealand looms  
and islands pass while I plout  
the paddocks of the sea.  
This wooden boat cannot last  
none ever do—  
packed with house and garden  
dolls and pens and clothes and books.

Now I see that all my life  
I've taken shortcuts—  
I garden with a knife—  
but the Pacific Ocean offers  
no quick way

My tangles of concern  
are nets not meant for me.  
What I must do is row  
and rest and marvel at the stars  
until I feel a bump  
then the boat becomes a coffin  
made of leaves

—Kate Llewellyn



## Ghazal

Its branches bloom with stars  
As the tree laces the sky ...  
The Milky Way watches the flowering of Mars  
As the tree laces the sky.

Night's gift, children at dusk  
Surrounded by waves look calmly upwards.  
In Russia, Taiwan and Uganda, it's free  
All may watch even soldiers or Czars  
As the tree laces the sky.

The moon, a ball stuck among branches.  
Marvel as prisoners through branches of bars  
As the tree laces the sky

Once, an owl swooped from this tree  
And made itself legend.  
Among the smoke from cooking tagines, the scent of apricots,  
Saffron and lamb even in bazaars  
The tree laces the sky.

Kate, beware of forgetting both work and heaven  
Hints remain while you sit drinking wine  
In a café called Escobars  
The tree laces the sky.

—Kate Llewellyn

## What I Have Lost

Great Grandfather's stamp collection  
A gold sovereign  
My mother's silver bracelet (in a sand dune)  
Friends  
Watches galore  
Some hearing  
Opportunities  
A brace of lovers  
Several stone  
Parents  
A dinner set (at Central Station)  
A husband  
Luggage  
Recipes  
My father's moth-eaten maroon woollen bathers  
Teeth  
Desire for revenge.

—Kate Llewellyn

# Women of Islam

Dorothy Horsfield speaks to some articulate and revolutionary Islamic women

**I**N CONVERSATION after the lunchtime press conference Dr Gabriela Guellil, from the German Foreign Ministry's Cultural Task Force seemed surprisingly straightforward. When it came to reaching across the widening gap between the Islamic world and the West, Dr Guellil said, the usual round of diplomatic rituals between elites and powerbrokers was not sufficient.

Since September 11 her task force has adopted a more pragmatic approach. Across the Middle East, North Africa and Asia, it targets the non-government sector, the intellectuals and professionals of the new middle classes who often open windows of opportunity for those around them. They are also often the voices of

hosted by Minister of State Kerstin Müller, as part of its 'European-Islamic Cultural Dialogue'. It gathered together in Berlin middle class Islamic women from almost 20 different Muslim countries and from Germany's large Turkish community. From morning until late into the evening, women teachers, social workers, journalists, scientists and academics passionately debated the rights of women, the wearing of head scarves and burkas, sharia law, the glass ceiling and, above all, the conflicting challenges of family and career.

They were a formidable gathering—articulate and confident, with an experience of life that had mostly demanded great courage. For example, Dr Sarah al-Fadil Mahmoud Abdel Karim from the Sudan trained as a sociologist in New York and now works for a non-government organisation (NGO) in her home country.

Bone-thin, elegant, strongly religious, she was imprisoned for six years and tortured by the Sudanese military, an experience which left her hospitalised with paralysis.

In a statement which resonated with the history of Christian churches, she told the gathering, 'Interpretations of the Qur'an by scholars made room for many developments including oppression.' Present conditions in the Sudan where millions have fled before a regime of murder, rape and plunder, 'stem from these developments.'

Such a view of the role of interpreters of Islam was repeatedly endorsed by other women in the room. As Khadija Ben Ganna, a

journalist with Al-Jazeera TV network who left Algeria after death threats and who recently began wearing a head covering in public, put it, 'Islam is more than a headscarf; nor does it forbid women to drive a car or meet men. What we are talking about is moral norms'.

Or from Dr Sayeda Saiyedain Hameed, a founding member of the Women's Initiative for Peace in South Asia, 'Recently in Kashmir, acid was thrown at girls who did not cover their faces. This is not Islam and we women have successfully campaigned against such behaviour'.

For Dr Hameed religious practice was a matter directly between her and her God, 'It is a fundamental

moderation spanning traditional strictures and modernisation.

'There is a sense', she said, 'in which all Muslim countries are Islamist because religion plays a fundamental role in every aspect of life. Of course this does not mean they embrace terrorism.'

'You have to understand al Qaeda are newcomers. Like Bin Laden they are wealthy but outside the old traditional networks that make up a kind of aristocracy. Because of this, they bear a sense of humiliation. They don't have the self-esteem of belonging to privileged groups. And the fact that al Qaeda is a franchise makes them dangerously flexible.'

This week the task force's latest initiative was





tenet of Islam,' she said, 'that God is closer to you than a jugular artery'.

Nevertheless for many in the room the success of her campaign is part of a wind of change across the region, from which they have benefited against the odds. And beyond the niceties of conference etiquette, there was also a firm acceptance of the importance of open discussion of brutality, prejudice and the 'dark dingy tunnel' that leads to equality for women.

**T**HOUGH SIMILARLY OUTSPOKEN, journalist Raeda Taha from the Palestinian territories had less reason for such hard won optimism. Like her Sudanese colleague, she is a graduate from an American university. From the age of 21 she worked for seven years in Tunis as Yasser Arafat's press secretary and now runs her own business in Ramallah. 'As a child I twice visited East Germany as a PLO guest and was shocked to see such a low wall', she said, 'the one the Israelis have just built is much higher. So is that a definition of development?'

Seated beside Raeda Taha at the large round conference table is Rana Ismail. She is a small pale woman in traditional dress. She is the headmistress of Lebanon's largest Islamic school and also an electrical engineer, in a country which she says will soon have more female than male engineers. At 14 she was already working for an NGO and witnessed the Israeli siege of Beirut. In 1982 while still a teenager she was in one of the first International Red Cross convoys to enter the Sabra and Shantala Palestinian refugee camps to bury the piles of corpses from the Israeli massacres.

Deeply religious and conservative, nevertheless, she too is a strong voice for women's rights and pointedly describes Lebanon as a tolerant multicultural society. The challenge of her life, she says, is how to use her gifts to benefit others. And this is not possible without love, above all from her husband.

This relationship is part of what has given her essential 'strength and support'.

**T**ALKING TO SUCH WOMEN, listening to their stories, their lives seemed interwoven with common threads of experience. Well-educated and professional, many paid tribute to their strong mothers who refused to accept that obstacles could not be overcome. Most came from egalitarian, liberal families in which girls

were encouraged as much as boys. Underlining their lives was the powerful belief that they were accountable before God.

And bringing these women together for a 'dialogue event' as the German Foreign Ministry's booklet describes it, what exactly will that achieve?

The task force's Dr Guellil twists in her chair, folds her arms. 'Maybe nothing', she says. 'But then there is mutual understanding, networking, friendships. These women are the role models for what comes next. And after this it is important that we try to support them when they go back into their communities.'


**Dorothy Horsfield** is a writer and journalist currently based in Berlin. Her most recent book is a memoir of her late husband, Paul Lyncham.



Photos courtesy of the German Foreign Ministry.







interview  
Christine Williams

# More powerful and more lofty passions

—Alexis de Tocqueville

Photo by Peter Solness/Australian Picture Library.

**I**T SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE that Peter Garrett has burst onto the party political scene amid controversy. It's not as if he's lived his adult public life as a wallflower. The French historian and politician Alexis de Tocqueville may well have understood the drive behind Peter Garrett.

Garrett is a highly credentialled candidate, despite the messy details over his irregular voting record. In addition to both academically-earned and honorary degrees, and the negotiating skills needed to head up the Australian Conservation Foundation, Garrett earlier showed the discipline necessary to direct a rock band that aimed for commercial success and a credible social message. As he says, he's 'ready to come into the mainstream'.

I met Peter Garrett a few years ago when he was the President of the Australian Conservation Foundation. We had come together to discuss his involvement

in environmental issues for a book I was researching. Over more than an hour his fixity of purpose never wavered.

For one raised as a carefree, suburban Sydney boy, Garrett is living an extraordinarily charged and committed life. He seems to radiate moral principle, yet you feel he's fighting for our values. It takes a certain bravery to match Garrett's forceful oratory.

Garrett grew up in West Pymble in the 1950s, his family living on a block of land abutting the Lane Cove National Park. He remembers playing around the river, building rafts and dams, climbing trees, and listening to the sounds of wildlife as he lay in bed at night.

'I became aware that nature has a kind of presence, an atmosphere. I have no fear or loathing of lying on the ground, of getting down among the insects, and I know the terrific freedom I was lucky enough

to experience as a kid growing up around the bush.'

Garrett's next lessons in respect for nature came from surfing and the excitement of interacting with what he describes as 'a primordial energy'.

For a radical, Garrett leads a stable personal life, most likely a result of his committed Christianity. He studied Arts Law at ANU in the early 1970s, completing the degree at UNSW, he married in 1985, and has three children. Garrett resists attempts to pry into his family life, drawing a clear line between the personal and the public. The public side of his life seems to have been fully integrated, with music and environmental protests dovetailing into campaigns such as those to save Jabiluka in the Kakadu National Park.

'My story is of a gradual, accidental, continual movement towards the place and the people in my life now. It was one



decision after another, that we weren't going to stand around any longer complaining about what we were doing to nature but, instead, try to do something about it.'

Midnight Oil started to do benefits for Greenpeace and other organisations on issues such as protection for the Antarctic and whales in the late 1970s and early 1980s. There was a link between the work the band was doing and its involvement in anti-nuclear campaigns and support for the Rainbow Warrior.

**G**ARRETT STOOD FOR the Senate as a Nuclear Disarmament Party candidate in 1984 and although he was not elected he says the backing of green activists meant it was a tremendously successful public campaign in terms of awareness-raising. He says he was happy to act as a public speaker on environmental issues in Tasmania until his 'use-by date' ran out.

'I thought it would be an occasional thing but I found myself getting drawn into the Lemnathyme campaign to the extent that eventually I accepted the invitation to become ACF President in 1989.'

He returned to the position for a second term because he believed Australia's environment had deteriorated rapidly in the five years since he'd left, particularly with the Howard Government's 'totally inadequate response to the worsening problems'.

'It's a question of whether you buy into the myth of continuing economic growth and a wonderful future made out of ever-increasing piles of concrete. We've never bought into it. That's not to say we're nihilists, but we think sustainability is a sensible word with a lot going for it and it certainly offers more potential for creative, meaningful human endeavour than unrestrained global growth.'

Garrett cites the campaign in 1989 to save Jervis Bay from becoming a major naval installation, as a model for environmentalists. The campaign involved local people, including Aboriginal groups, working and middle-class Sydneysiders with weekenders in the area, and national organisations.

'It was a multi-dimensional campaign. I didn't have any personal attachment to Jervis Bay but I'd been there, surfed along the coast, and I thought the idea of a whole Navy infrastructure, with bomb storage facilities and a six-lane highway fairly obscene, and that it should be countered

on the grounds of ecological, cultural and recreational value.

'Australia is a broadly middle-class country. One of its tragedies is that we haven't secured agreement from the political parties to meaningfully look after the natural ecosystems. We've achieved a very qualified pale green approach, a problem compounded by living in a poll-driven system within the context of a scientifically-unarguable decline in the environment, such as in the state of the rivers.

'Humans have always modified in some way their indigenous environment so to some extent the idea of a pure wilderness is a myth. Nevertheless the qualities inherent in nature—aesthetic, coherent and productive qualities—have been basic in forming human society and if we do away with that, we're effectively consigning ourselves to a nasty, brutish future.

'There are significant reasons why we need to care for the environment. Never mind how many satellites we have in space, earth is the only fertile planet we know of and its fertility is not in a fixed state and we're hacking off our own limbs when we hack into the earth. So it has a cosmological or spiritual component to it. People are happier and feel in control when they're inhabiting a natural environment: I don't mean living in caves; I mean streets with trees putting out some oxygen to feed the brain.'

But how do you get through to the numbers men who make things work?

'You get through by doing what you can within your own sphere of influence in your own environment in your way with your own skills ... And you don't give in. Individual citizens join up with other individual citizens and create movements and movements create change.

'We have to live in balance with the earth. We're torn between sensing this is true and the idea that the consumerist dream is going to make the nation great. It hasn't quite happened yet but society is changing.

'The signs of it are that there was no shortage of environmental dialogue over the first 50 years of Federation but there was little represented in the public domain. Now we've got environmental programs on radio and television, in private and public organisations, at local, state and federal levels of government.'

A pragmatist, Garrett brings esoteric theory down to earth.

'It's a mistake to think Australians are not a spiritual people, that their spirituality is not bound up with the land and the natural environment. People still rate national parks and a holiday in a beautiful, green, unspoilt place as highly valuable. It's difficult to make simple statements about the complex responses people who live in urban environments have because we're all faced with the way the world is and have to make the best of it. But all of us have the capacity to choose those things we value.'

Garrett sees an overland family trips during the summer holidays, as a big part of the Australian psyche.

'Where I part ways with some environmentalists is that I have never taken the view that humans are the blight of the earth ... we're giving the earth a beating, but we're also going to be the ones that fix it up.'

**I**HATE THE HYPOCRISY of governments paying lip service to the environment—in making promises and then not keeping them. The Natural Heritage Trust program that came about as result of the sale of Telstra was clearly a political way of buying off the green vote. The Howard Government had a great responsibility to ensure that those monies went towards real and significant environmental repair, and quite clearly that didn't happen.'

Garrett has a great admiration for the late Nugget Coombs for his service to Australians in economics and administration, particularly to 'the original Australians' in the latter part of his life.

In 1992 Garrett gave a lecture on Coombs' life, referring to his modesty, and the regard in which he was held by leaders on both sides of politics, from Menzies to Whitlam. He saw Coombs as a public servant and adviser who was prepared to speak his mind without fear or favour, citing his term as President of the ACF (1978–1980) as a period when it was unified and productive, and increased its 'commitment to Aboriginal land rights'.

Clearly, for Garrett environmental and social issues are bound together. And for light relief there's always some hard rock music in the background. ■

**Dr Christine Williams**, is a Sydney-based lecturer and writer. She is currently working on a book on environmentalists, [cwwilliams@ozemail.com.au](mailto:cwwilliams@ozemail.com.au).

# Operation in progress

Peter Davis examines progress on the road to peace in the Solomon Islands

**T**HE GUNS HAVE BEEN SILENCED. And most of the thugs and corrupt officials are behind bars awaiting trial. So where to from here for *Operation Helpen Fren* on the Solomon Islands?

'Before I used to be scared that the police would stop me, steal my car and leave me', said Linus, a taxi driver in Honiara. 'Now life is better. People are walking the streets and going to the market, but there is a long way to go. People need jobs so they can make money and use my taxi.'

As a barometer of the current situation, Linus is on the money. His claim that improvements are good but have a long way to go echoes like a mantra across the islands. As if on cue, Linus points out the Rove Prison, a new jail built as part of the Australian aid program. 'There are many policemen in that prison', he says, referring to inmates not guards. 'With them out of the way we can get on with our lives.'

Two of the 216 prisoners in Rove are former deputy police commissioners of the Solomon Islands. 'We treat them just the same as everybody else', says Gary Walsh, the Australian commander of Rove Prison. At lunchtime, low security prisoners prepare and cart the food to those behind the high security razor wire. From one corner of the jail come yells of abuse and protest. This is soon drowned out by some harmonious gospel singing from another corner. 'We encourage the singing', explains Walsh. 'Soon after they start, the whole prison settles down.'

Walsh is one of nearly 100 Australian civilians employed through AusAID, the Australian government aid agency. Mostly

they work alongside Solomon Islanders in all sectors of society including health, finance, justice, government, police, education, forestry and disaster management. 'We're in the nation building phase now', says Nick Warner, Special Coordinator of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). 'We've scaled back the role of the military and we're emphasising economic reform. This country needs investment if it is to have a future but to make that happen we need to strengthen capacity in all sectors'.

Complex laws governing land ownership are a significant obstacle to investment. Eighty per cent of the land is custom land, meaning it belongs to various tribal communities.

'Much of the ethnic tension began with land disputes. If you can't agree on who owns what land, the investors will stay away', says Steve Likaveka, acting Commissioner of Lands and a Seventh Day Adventist pastor. The AusAID funded Customary Land Awareness Program is an attempt to generate security of title among traditional owners. Through the program traditional land owners are encouraged to document the extent of their holdings and identify their boundaries.

'Stability comes once the boundaries are mapped and agreed upon', explains Rod Little, Australian Team Leader of the Lands Project. The project has put into place a system where potential investors and traditional owners must communicate through officials at the lands department rather than directly with one another. 'This may sound like we've created a new bureaucracy

but in fact it ensures the owners and investors reach agreement.'

To help traditional owners feel comfortable about walking into an office of bureaucrats, the area in front of the office in Honiara has been landscaped to resemble the meeting place in a traditional village. 'This may seem a small thing but it's significant as far as signalling the idea that the land project exists to help, not to hinder, the traditional owners', says Rod.

Land generates 80 per cent of export income for the Solomon Islands, through forestry. Most of the logging is done by overseas companies from Malaysia or Taiwan. During the conflict, logging companies enjoyed a free reign. Many operated illegally in collaboration with corrupt local officials and few paid taxes. 'With stability we can implement appropriate policies', says Dan Raymond, a forestry Project Advisor. 'The challenge is to introduce sustainable logging practices, acceptable safety standards and appropriate returns for the local land owners.'

One prominent logging company recently had its licence suspended because it failed to meet environmental standards. According to Dan Raymond, such actions were simply not possible during the troubles.

**I**T'S HARD TO OVERESTIMATE the value of the Solomon Island teak forests, not just to foreign companies but to local citizens as well. In the tropical island climate a teak seedling will be ready to harvest after just ten years. Dan Raymond cites the example of a widow who desperately





needed financial security so she could educate her children. 'She had the foresight to plant ten teak trees on her property. Those trees are her financial future. There are many people like her who, in a politically stable environment can live off what the land generates. If the forests can be properly managed and the companies made to comply with environmentally friendly legislation, so many more people will be able to benefit from these vast resources.' Timber worker Joseph Loku is happy to be back at work in the logging co-op. 'When the troubles became very bad the companies employed the criminals. For many months we had no work and no pay. It was very hard, but now I can feel the change. This is good.'

There are many parts of Honiara where change is evident. In particular there's the Magistrates Court, the Central Police Station, the Department of Finance, and the Lime Lounge—a coffee shop in the heart of the small capital.

Over at Number One Court, Principal Magistrate, Queensland lawyer, Jane White, hears cases and dispenses justice. Most convictions are for domestic violence, theft or corruption. By 9am the viewing areas and adjacent courtyards are packed. 'This is the only show in town', said Jane, one of the few people to refer to the 'troubled times' as civil war. 'During the civil war, law and order broke down. Many of the local magistrates simply ran away and buildings were destroyed. Now people want to watch the law being administered. It gives them a sense of security to know that order has returned.'

Nearby are the offices of the Public Prosecution as well as Legal Aid. It's here that Chris Ryan, a Crown Prosecutor in Victoria, works as Chief Prosecutor on an AusAID funded law and justice program. 'We have successfully charged many people with corruption, including at least a dozen police officers. We have a mountain of cases pending and we expect many more charges to be laid.' In the next building

Kirsty Ruddock provides legal assistance to one of nearly two hundred police officers seeking compensation for unfair dismissal. 'There's enough work here for an army of lawyers but there are only five of us', she said.

OVER AT THE CENTRAL POLICE Station, officers Mahlo Laha and Dave Campbell return from night patrol to file a report. 'It was a quiet night', reports Mahlo, 'one case of drunk and disorderly and one case of a stolen laptop computer'. By early morning the police station is buzzing with partnered teams divvying up the patrols. Solomon Islanders pair off with Tongans, Fijians, New Zealanders, Samoans or Australians. As well as this, there's the plain clothes internal investigation team whose job is to investigate corrupt officers and press charges. 'We wish we weren't so busy. We aim to do ourselves out of a job', said Leslie, one of the investigators. To the visitor, the police on duty represent the visible face of regional assistance. Not so visible is the labyrinthine task of the bureaucrats in the Department of Finance. 'This place looked like a bomb had hit it when we arrived', said Colin Johnson, leader of the Budget Stabilisation Team. 'Because this was the Ministry of Finance thugs would come here with guns and demand money. Most of the workers fled to their villages, and no money was flowing to the government.'

The task of Johnson and his team is to reverse that situation. 'The best thing we've achieved is being able to stop the bad guys from getting their hands on the money', says a plain talking Colin. 'The workers here feel safe now and the revenues are beginning to flow in the right direction.'

There's revenue and coffee flowing at the Lime Lounge. This is the popular hangout for the advisers, police officers, military personnel, aid workers and journalists. A partner in the Lime Lounge is Turkish born, Melburnian Derya Sato (a former Australian Volunteer and now

married to a Japanese born Solomon Islander). 'There's no way I would have opened a place like this if I didn't think the long term prospects were good', she said. 'I employ only local staff and I've trained them all. There was no coffee culture here before the Lime Lounge started.'

The Lime Lounge staff can look forward to some long term employment. The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands is set to continue until 2008 but quite probably for some years beyond that. No one is foolish enough to believe that independent sustainability is around the corner. In areas such as health and education massive resources are needed to eradicate preventable diseases and create even basic opportunities.

On the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal, I attended a reconciliation meeting organised by the National Peace Council. Approximately 200 people from surrounding villages sat in the shade of the trees in front of the rural health clinic. Most came to listen. Some came to talk. 'Meetings like this are important', explained John Lily, a pastor from Ngalido village. 'There are many changes happening in our country now and they are for the better. But these changes will be no good if the people don't talk about what has happened in the past. Many bad things have happened. Families have been fighting. People have been killed and children have suffered. We need to face this and agree on how to go forward. If we don't do that, we risk making more mistakes.'

For *Operation Helpen Fren* the way forward means minimising the influence of the *wontok* system in government and in the private sector. *Wontok* is a uniquely Melanesian system of expressing obligations and extending favours through kinships. Whilst this very system has helped communities survive during times of natural disaster such as cyclones, it can inhibit the economic prosperity that a free market is meant to bring. John Lily believes the two systems can co-exist. 'That is our future', he says. 'We must not lose our cultural identity and our customs. But we must embrace these changes so that everyone has a chance for prosperity.'

**Peter Davis** is a writer, photographer and a senior lecturer in the school of Communications and Creative Arts at Deakin University.



Photos by Peter Davis



# Good advice, falling on deaf ears?

**I**N THESE STRANGE HOWARD years where policy failures prevail, we have become used to the sidelining of wisdom and experience of people like Malcolm Fraser, Paul Keating, former Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) head Richard Wooleott, and former Chief of the General Staff Peter Gration.

A less well-known case is Professor Ross Garnaut, author of *The East Asian Ascendancy* and visionary architect of the 1980s–1990s Hawke–Keating strategy which locked Australia securely into the east Asian economic miracle.

Garnaut is still a person of high standing in Asia, especially in China, and an ANU economics professor with a string of directorships. But these days he spends more time than he should working on his farm near Canberra. So far as the present government and DFAT are concerned, he is pretty much old news.

Garnaut testified two months ago as a private citizen (also representing Bill Carmichael, former Chairman of the Industries Assistance Commission) before the Joint Parliamentary Standing Committee on Treaties under its Australia–United States Free Trade Agreement (FTA) reference. His testimony on 3 May and supporting written submissions yet presented, from an overall national interest viewpoint, against this proposed FTA.

The Committee completed 11 public hearings on 14 May and was due to report to Parliament by 23 June. It is not clear what impact Garnaut's testimony, under-reported in national media, may have.

Garnaut's testimony was important, discomfiting and sad. During the period of the Howard Government there has been such a loss of Australia's formerly formidable expertise in international trade negotiations, that Garnaut, a committed trade multilateralist, basically had to guide members of the committee through International Economics 101. He intro-

duced the written submission thus:

We [Garnaut and Carmichael] write as two Australians who have had substantial involvement in Australia's trade liberalisation and in international discussion of trade policy. An important lesson of our experience is that the domestic process through which trade liberalisation is discussed and trade policy decisions are taken is critical to progress in liberalising world trade. Disinterested analysis and wide dissemination of information about the costs of protection was a critical element in persuading Australians that reducing our barriers was in our own interest.

Four years ago, when the idea of an Australia–US FTA was first mooted, Garnaut (*Straw Polls, Paper Money* by David Love, Viking, 2001) warned quietly that it raised real questions about Australia's continued progress towards living in a productive relationship with its east Asian environment. He said that talk of a discriminatory FTA with the US was damaging. It could not be agreed to without significant concession, because the US was just not in a position to accept free trade in agriculture. But the fact that it was being discussed at all would negatively affect perceptions of Australia in Asia, at a time of the already damaging 'deputy sheriff' affair. Talk of discriminatory free trade with the US compounded emerging problems for Australia in east Asia, placing at risk important goodwill.

In his understated way, Garnaut suggested to Love that 'we had put a lot of effort into building something that was a bit different in Australia'. Deeper identification with America would change many of the things we liked about being Australian. At best, we would become second-rate Americans. Breakdown in relations with other Asian countries [in 2000, Australia's relations with Indonesia and Malaysia were glacial] would feed back into Australian fears, further driving an orientation towards the US. This

would reinforce adverse perceptions of Australia in Asia. Through such a circular process, Australian sovereignty would be diminished.

These were accurate predictions, well before the artificially confected Tampa border security crisis, the attacks of September 11 and Bali, and Australia's insertion into the US-led invasion of Iraq.

**G**ARNAUT STUCK STRICTLY to economics in his 3 May committee testimony. In summary, he debunked estimates claiming \$5.6 billion annual benefits to Australia after a ten year period. Fully \$4 billion of this was an estimated benefit from the FTA granting preferential higher exemption limits to US-sourced investments, under Australia's foreign investment review mechanism. If that were the nature of the main benefit, a much greater benefit—up to \$30 billion—would come from raising the exemption limit of the Foreign Investment Review Board for all investment-source countries, or simply abolishing the Board.

The remaining \$1 billion of claimed trade benefits was similarly specious. The report on which the government relied—hastily amended after the US finally ruled out Australia's anticipated trade creation gains from improved access to US sugar, beef and dairy markets—actually showed in its data tables that under the final FTA, trade diversion effects (bad) would exceed trade creation effects (good).

To explain, trade diversion is when Australia, under pressure of a preferential tariff, buys a higher-cost Toyota from the US instead of a lower-cost same-model Toyota from Asia. Trade creation is when a new US market is opened such as that for Australian sugar. If trade diversion outweighs trade creation, the long-term dynamic effect on Australia's economic welfare is also negative.

Garnaut concluded that, judged as a bilateral trade deal, the FTA had approxi-



mately zero net benefit to Australia. The economic modelling on which the government relied had failed to pass 'the laugh test'; an economic model that would not make an economist who knows the real world laugh.

His political economy analysis was even more arresting. In terms of the multilateral trade negotiating process, this FTA sent all the wrong signals to Asia. Having accepted US exclusion of Australian sugar and disappointing beef and dairy outcomes, Australia in future bilateral negotiations with large Asian countries has no argument against them excluding industries they may wish to protect. Australia had sacrificed an important negotiating position here.

This FTA also sent a strong signal to the world that the multilateral Doha Round approach to international trade liberalisation was losing ground to bilateral FTA approaches. This has already influenced the negotiating stance of other major players. Over the past four years, Japan and China have moved away from their previously preferred multilateral approach in favour of a regional bilateral approach. Australia has helped drive this.

This was the heart of Garnaut's argument. He pointed out that the east Asian trading region had already factored Australia's four-year push for a discriminatory FTA with the US into its own trade policy development settings. The development of an east Asian economic community that excluded Australia was already well underway. For example, tariff preferences now being given by east Asian countries to south east Asian palm oil, tropical fruit and vegetable producers are already disadvantaging Australia's competing export products including canola oil. If Australia is to preference Toyota cars made in the US over Toyota cars made in Asia, why should Asian countries not do the same to Australian exports?

Garnaut said that there is already a process of withdrawal into discriminatory regional trade blocs. Australia as a world trader will be the loser.

Garnaut suggested respectfully that ten or eleven days of parliamentary committee hearings could not replace a thorough professional examination in the Productivity Commission of the net benefits and costs to Australia of the proposed FTA. The data provided by DFAT

was inadequate. Insufficient credence had been given to the consumer interest and the general national economic interest. The process unduly weighted the voice of producers and exporters. (The Australian FTA negotiating team included the main producer and exporter groups, and the bulk of submissions and testimonies to the committee came from such groups.)

Garnaut argued that there was no need for Australia to rush its decision process before the Australian election, as the US legislature was unlikely to fast-track the FTA before the US presidential election in November. In this, Garnaut may be wrong. It looks now as if the Bush administration may try to rush the deal through the US Congress. This may be Bush's reward to Howard for Australia's participation in Iraq. It may help Howard's re-election chances if he can convince Australian electors that the FTA will benefit Australia, though this is still a big 'if'.

**G**ARNAUT MIGHT HAVE alluded in his testimony (but did not) to a well-sourced story by Christine Wallace, 'Bush rebuff stunned negotiators', (*The Australian*, 25 February 2004). Wallace reported that the Prime Minister (on broad political grounds) over-ruled the recommendation of Australia's professional trade negotiating team led by Trade Minister Mark Vaile, who wanted to walk away from the final deal offered by the US team. Wallace's story, which has not been officially denied, will be a reference point for future Australian historians.

Recently in Washington, US chief trade negotiator Robert Zoellick praised this deal in terms of its long-term export market-opening benefits to the US economy. This ought give Australian legislators pause.

Many Australian commentators opposed to this FTA have noted the inclusion of obligatory review and appeal procedures (which have hitherto been subject to Australian sovereign policy choice) like our pharmaceutical benefits scheme, quarantine matters, intellectual and cultural property, media ownership, even riparian water rights allocation. Everything that bears potentially on trade may be subject to review and appeal as part of the process obligations built into this FTA treaty; deep US corporate pockets may thereby

fund strong legal challenges to our social policies and our sovereignty. Also—and Garnaut alluded to this—if such issues become elevated to questions of alliance solidarity, will Australian governments have the strength to balance them? Such has been Canada's experience of its trade agreement with the US—of constant, wearing-down, US corporate pressure, backed by US governments.

Paul Kelly in *The Australian* has suggested that opposition to the FTA comes from both multilateral free-traders and from economic nationalists. His implication, if I understood it correctly, was that this opposition was thereby in some way weakened because it was self-contradictory. Actually, there is no contradiction between those positions. One may be an economic nationalist in terms of wanting to try to protect Australian ownership and social control over our limited national resources, and a multilateralist in seeing the best hope for doing so being through upholding equitable multilateral global or regional trade, investment and environmental protection regimes where small countries are not overwhelmed by large ones.

**L**ET ME GIVE GARNAUT the last word. When Love asked for the optimum scenario for Australia's international policy settings, Garnaut replied:

Well, the good scenario is the one we thought we were on. That is, maintaining a good relationship with the US, remaining in the US alliance, unlike New Zealand, but independent of the US; building a relationship of quality with nations in Asia—a relationship in which we are respected, in which we are a participant in regional affairs.

The question now is, can the Opposition parties which have the majority in the Senate find the common resolve to block the legislation necessary to implement this FTA, until such time as Australian voters elect a new government? It may be a close-run thing. Get ready for a lot of government spin. ■

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# Future nation

**This country: A reconciled republic?**, Mark McKenna. UNSW Press, 2004.

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**M**ARK HAS CHOSEN an auspicious time for the launch of his latest book *This Country: A reconciled republic?* The Canberra launch by Gatijl Djerrkura and this launch straddle 3 June. That date is significant for *This Country*. It was the date in 1769 which brought Captain Cook to the South Seas to observe the transit of Venus and go on to claim this country—or at least the eastern coast—for the Crown of Great Britain and Ireland. It is a date that has some significance for a republic, for it was on 3 June 1953 that, in this country, we received reports of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Queen Elizabeth and her heirs and successors ‘in the sovereignty of the United Kingdom’ are, by force of the Imperial *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act*, the monarchs of this country. And 3 June is significant for reconciliation, for it was on that date in 1992 that the judgment of the High Court in *Mabo v Queensland [No 2]* was published.

But the title of the book does more than draw attention to a date. It is an evocative title, challenging us to define our conceptions of the place where we are, the kind of people we aspire to be and the type of government we favour.

‘Country’ is a term which resonates with all Australians. It is, says Mark McKenna ‘a word that goes deeper than nation.’

Do we love this land? Do we care for its survival as the inland rivers dry, the old growth forests are clear felled and salt rises as the water table sinks? Is sustainability the key word in our plans for development of energy supply, transport, housing and urbanisation? Country is a term that evokes warm sentiments in all Australians, but it does not always translate into action. It is a term which evokes a deeper meaning in the minds and hearts of Aboriginal Australians. It is the term which our Indigenous citizens use to describe the land to which they belong—not land as an integer of commerce but land as a source of life. The significance of country to Aboriginal Australians was eloquently described by the late Professor Bill Stanner in his 1968 Boyer Lectures ‘After the Dreaming’:

When we took what we call ‘land’ we took what to them meant hearth, home, the source and locus of life, and everlastingness of spirit. At the same time it left each local band bereft of an essential constant that made their plan and code of living intelligible. Particular pieces of territory, each a homeland, formed part of a set of constants without which no affiliation of any person to any other person, no link in the whole network of relationships, no part of the complex structure of social groups any longer had all its co-ordinates. What I describe as ‘homelessness’, then, means that the Aborigines faced a kind of vertigo in living. They had no stable base of life; every personal affiliation was lamed; every group structure was put out of kilter; no social network had a point of fixture left.

This is the legacy of European settlement. There are now only remote areas in which Aboriginal Australians can perform the ceremonies and discharge the duties they owe to their country, and even in those areas the pervasive culture of the west has eroded the traditions and impaired the transmission of the sacred stories of the Dreaming. We cannot contemplate a future without reconciliation between Australians of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent and other Australians. As Sir William Deane observed: ‘Where there is no room for national pride or national shame about the past, there can be no national soul’.

At Federation and thereafter we boasted that we had a continent for a nation and a nation for a continent. We were unique. We shared no land boundaries; we had no divisions of the kind which marked Britain and Ireland. We achieved our national and constitutional identity and independence without rebellion or civil war. The people of the federating Colonies ‘humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God, agreed to unite in one indissoluble Federal Commonwealth under the Crown of Great Britain and Ireland’. We were the lucky country that enjoyed the blessing of Almighty God.

The rhetoric of the time saw Australians as a mono-cultural, mono-ethnic community, but the Aboriginal peoples of Australia were constitutionally ignored. We did not achieve our national and constitutional identity in unity with our Indigenous people. When we moved to a national Federation, sections 25, 51(xxvi) and 127 [‘In reckoning the numbers of the people ... aboriginal natives shall not be counted’] of the Constitution removed Aboriginal Australians from the Constitutional radar screen. And so it remained until 1967 when the enfranchised people of Australia voted to remove the reference to Aboriginal people in section 51(xxvi) and to delete section 127.

What explains this lengthy delay in recognition? Aboriginal society and culture were, and traditional Aboriginal society and culture are, so different from the society and the culture of the West that it is not surprising that it was not understood by European settlers and, indeed, is not well understood by most of us in the Western tradition today.

**I**T WAS NOT UNDERSTOOD that Aboriginal people could share their country but would never reduce it into exclusive private possession. In earlier times, if Aboriginal people tried to share country which had been granted to Europeans, the Europeans would treat the Aborigines as trespassers and the Aborigines would treat the Europeans as usurpers. Conflict was inevitable. Nor was it understood that Aborigines would allow others the right to forage over their country, so it is not surprising that they would forage for cattle or sheep that were regarded as the property of Europeans. Nomadic Aborigines were unlikely to understand the need for settlement of an agrarian society. Nor could an understanding of the social structure of the two societies be easily appreciated. A nomadic Aborigine had no concept of saving possessions; of necessity, each day was sufficient for itself and so the Aborigine appeared to be wasteful and incapable of joining our Western society in a successful industrial and post-indus-



trial age. Aboriginal people have never been restricted to a nuclear family; their obligation is to share what they have with members of a widely extended family. But Aboriginal society had the strength of a deep spirituality and it has largely retained that characteristic while Western society has drifted more into materialism and consumerism, forgetful of the spiritual and the transcendent. Western society could never understand the Aborigine who went walkabout to perform his spiritual duties and to join members of the extended family gathered for a ceremonial occasion.

Each culture had an intrinsic logic but the logic of each was the converse of the other. And so the policies of the Western society were formed, the laws enacted and the practices followed which were designed to bring about the mono-cultural community envisaged at Federation; policies to smooth the dying pillow of the expected-to-disappear Aboriginal race; policies to assimilate Indigenous Australians into the European way of living and thinking; and policies to take children from their families so that they acquired Western values. Policies which were tragic failures because they failed to acknowledge not only the culture of the Indigenous Australians but their very humanity.

In time the policy of compulsory abduction of children was abandoned and an appreciation of the intrinsic strength of the Aboriginal culture and tradition led to the realisation that Aboriginal Australians would never be forcibly assimilated into the Western culture or mainstream. Gradually, when Mr Whitlam poured the soil into the hands of Vincent Lingiari and Sir Edward Woodward's report was implemented by Mr Viner and Mr Fraser and the High Court delivered its judgments in *Mabo* and *Wik* we came to recognise that unoccupied Crown land was not Crown land but Aboriginal land—held by a fragile title, it is true, but nonetheless Aboriginal land. Then there was the massive outpouring of compassion when people marched in their thousands to say 'sorry'. We have seen some great steps taken towards reconciliation but a long distance is yet to be traversed.



Mark McKenna challenges us to take the journey as we move to a republican form of government. He shows how the movement towards reconciliation has been quieted—by political diversion, by 'the fear of cultural difference' and, he contends, by the timidity of a republican movement which treated reconciliation as a separate issue when it should have embraced constitutional recognition of Aboriginal people and their right to freedom from racial discrimination.

He proposes a new incentive and a new solution. Marry reconciliation with the republic, each movement giving vitality to the other. Let reconciliation be an objective of the new republic and let the republic be sought as a means of achieving reconciliation. This is a heady challenge and it deserves careful consideration. But I wonder about the wisdom of the marriage of these two movements in the context of constitutional amendment.

Two questions come to mind: one is practical, the other political.

**F**IRST, THE PRACTICAL QUESTION. How can constitutional amendment advance reconciliation? One section to which objection is rightly taken is section 25 ... if by the law of any State all persons of any race are disqualified from voting at elections for the more numerous House of the Parliament of the State, then, in reckoning the number of the people of the State or of the Commonwealth, persons of the race resident in that State shall not be counted]. It is offensive and obsolete. It should go but it changes nothing. Another provision is section 51(xxvi) which gives the Parliament power to make laws with respect to 'the people of any race for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws'. Should it be removed? The Constitution does not contain a Bill of Rights; for the most part, it simply distributes power between the Commonwealth and the States and among the Parliament, the Executive and the Judiciary. If the Constitution were to deny the power to make laws for the people of a race and were to forbid racial discrimination, a law could not be made to benefit only one race. A Constitution endures

indefinitely, so if we made an exception of beneficial laws for Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders, what would we do if, in the years to come, we need to make special provision for Pacific Islanders whose homes are inundated by rising seas?

Of course, reconciliation would be advanced by the protection of Indigenous rights but reference to the complexities of the statutes which currently protect Aboriginal land rights shows that, in a pluralist society, no individual right can be protected without qualification. Moreover, no broad statement of principle will suffice to achieve reconciliation. A variety of measures must be taken—some which prohibit conduct which is inimical to reconciliation, some which positively advance that objective. Take a current issue: what can be done to diminish the symptoms of despair—substance abuse and violence—that blight all our communities and especially some Aboriginal communities? However we answer this question, we may not adopt a policy that diminishes the power of government to assist those in despair.

But Mark McKenna does not seek to achieve reconciliation simply by substantive amendment of the Constitution. He would have Indigenous rights and Indigenous history recognised as an element in an eloquent preamble to a republican Constitution. He proposes a preamble which expresses three fundamental principles:

Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal people and freedom from racial discrimination; the values and principles of Australian democracy; and a commitment to care for the land and the Australian environment.

This is a feasible proposal. It would acknowledge our history and identity, our basic political values and our respect for this country. As for reconciliation, a careful wording of the first principle would permit governments to work for reconciliation by taking steps according to the needs of particular communities. The preamble could affirm a commitment to this country as the 'core of my heart'.

Is all this an empty symbolism? I think not. True symbols are the expression of our deepest values and the guideposts to our actions. For too long in this country have we been fearful of acknowledging the grandeur of our environment, the cultural richness of our population, the vitality of our next generation, the splendour of our

tradition of equality and tolerance. A new constitutional departure could celebrate all these characteristics and dismiss the narrow, fearful attitude that seems to rob us of our unity, our independence and our national pride. It could be a liberating stimulus to produce a free and confident nation. But the preamble would have to acknowledge not only the injustices of the past and our respect for Aboriginal tradition and culture; it would have to acknowledge our unity in the diversity of the many peoples who have enriched the Australia of today. The history and culture of modern Australia has roots not only in this country or in Great Britain and Ireland; it has roots in Europe and Asia and the islands of the Pacific. If we move to a republic, it must be a republic for all Australians, a republic that celebrates our unity in diversity and the mutual respect of all sections of our multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious community.

Now the second question: the politics. Many Australians have been made fearful of the future, troubled by change, cling-

ing to what they see as the certainties of the past. They may be in the minority on one issue or another, but if two or more issues are joined, the combined minorities may be marshalled to make a majority. We witnessed an alliance between monarchists and direct electionists in the most recent vote on the republic with a President elected by Parliament. So if we wish to see changes in our Constitution—both a preamble and a republic—let the issues be separated into separate pieces of legislation and permit each issue to be addressed by the electorate as it sees fit. That was the procedure favoured by the Constitutional Commission in 1988 when it drafted as many Bills as were needed to deal with the series of recommendations made for constitutional amendment. Else a coalition of the unwilling will defeat what would be a majority view on a discrete proposal.

For these reasons, I have reservations about Mark's thesis but not about his objective. A preamble which acknowledges the first peoples of our nation and

their unique and resilient culture and their occupation and custodianship of the land, which celebrates our unity in the diversity of all who make Australia home, which reaffirms our commitment to the rule of law and the system of representative and responsible government and which is expressed to further the protection of our homeland would be a powerful statement of the character of our people and society. To achieve reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and to adopt a Constitution for an Australian Republic would be to see our nation achieve its full maturity and dignity. For those of us in the autumn of our lives (or later), our hope is that our children and our children's children will see such an Australia—an Australia reconciled, a republican Australia, a free and a confident nation. ■

This is an edited text of **Sir Gerard Brennan's** address at the launch of *This Country* on 8 June 2004. Sir Gerard Brennan served on the High Court of Australia from 1981 to 1998.

encounter  
Morag Fraser

## Hands on

**I**MAGINE A GROUP OF Australian schoolgirls, clustered in the customs office of an international airport, their gear spilling all about them, playing solitaire and joking with the local security police.

It's not the way travel goes these days. More usually it's a business of anxious queues, searches, dogs sniffing, silent and armed inspectors. But there was nothing usual about this trip. And by the end, the girls were so inured to the unexpected that they took what came and made a feast of it. 'When we first arrived in Dili, we wouldn't have dared even speak to a policeman', one of them tells me. 'Too scared. We'd heard so much about troubles and violence. But by the end—well, it was just different.'

Very different. I'm listening to them, a few days after their return, gathered now in a formal, high-ceilinged room at school. It echoes a little as they all talk at once.

The principal, Helen Toohey CSB, is making tea, offering jellybeans, letting them unpack the experience.

Eight girls and three teachers from one Australian school took part in an experiment. Kilbreda College is a beachside Brigidine school and one-time convent in Mentone, Victoria, and this year it celebrates 100 years of educating young women. But these girls and their three teachers went away instead of staying home and congratulating themselves. They raised the money (degree of difficulty high), and went to East Timor, to the cities and out into the country. They visited schools, slept in dormitories, played basketball and volleyball with local kids, spoke English, taught some, tried to learn Tetum. They watched the reconciliation process in action. They met children, politicians, teachers, bus drivers, policemen, and the odd celebrity.

They tell me that they were astonished most by the affection and interest with which they were met. These are cool young women. And with Australian teenage coolness goes a certain inhibition of expectation. They don't expect other people to take them on, don't expect relationships to be built quickly. 'But the things they said, they actually meant', one of them tells me. 'They'd say, "I send my love to your family", and they'd actually mean it.'

**S**OMETIMES THE GIRLS' reception was formal and a little overwhelming. The hour-and-a-half ceremonial welcome in Ossu astonished them. 'We were treated like royalty.' They look astonished even now, as though they are only just beginning to understand the rituals of a culture that takes hospitality seriously, and wondering how much of it has rubbed off on them.



I met these young women before they left for East Timor, and I listened to their expectations, so it is intriguing to hear them now, less sure of themselves, though far more knowledgeable, than before. They seem surprised, shocked almost, to have been so liked, so accepted. They went with good intentions, but have come home more grateful than satisfied.

Sometimes the interest and the sudden intimacies generated out of concentrated experience had their comical side, and they loved it. 'How many children are you going to have?' they were asked, often. If the answer was the predictable Australian one—'Oh, one or two probably', they were told, 'No, have twenty.' Much hilarity and strenuous refusals. But then they saw many villages in which extended families, up to 18 or more, all slept in the one tiny house, the cooking done outside, and most of the living too. So the question—'how many children?'—acquired a context. They saw how the economics and support structures worked. They saw also the way village culture is being played out in the reconciliation process. They saw how East Timorese have to get together, how people who were the aggressors and people who were the victims must now sit together on the mat that has been the traditional place for sorting out differences.

They are also surprised, confused even, by the complexity of the sociopolitical culture. In Ossu, while they are being ceremonially welcomed, they hear East Timorese students acknowledge, indeed thank, Indonesian teachers for the part they played in their education. Then they have to sort that with the fact that, after Independence, only two

Indonesian teachers remained. They note, as only school students can, the specific differences between what these children take with them to school and what they are accustomed to lugging along. In East Timor the basic textbooks are there but there is 'none of our usual paraphernalia'. Necessities or luxuries? And they observe differences in attitude. 'You could really see these kids working hard.' The contrast with attitudes back home is unspoken, but implied. They don't look chastened but they do seem puzzled, as if poised for some shift in the way they understand and deal with their own lot.

They notice too, a culture that seems at home in its religion. Some of the most interesting people they meet are religious—the Bishop of Bacau for instance. Bishops don't much figure in their daily lives in Melbourne.

While in East Timor they swim and play and talk but they also visit some of the prisons and torture cells that speak of the recent past and the violence of Indonesia's occupation. 'The solitary confinement cells—they are really creepy.' They search for words. 'Exorcise', one



of them says. Another mentions Port Arthur. It's as though something has to be cleansed, and because they have been there, inside the places where brutal acts were committed, they feel the need to be cleansed too. East Timor exacts a price from them.

But it gives them boundless

and unexpected pleasures as well. Some of it is sublimely simple: swimming out to the coral reef at Bacau ('Almost too idyllic. I thought, "I can't believe I'm here".') Or playing with children. One day they run amok in the rice stacks with a bunch of young East Timorese. And become children themselves

again. They are amazed at 'how beautiful' East Timor is. Before they left they knew what they were going to do there. Something like good works—not a phrase they'd use. But none of them anticipated the degree to which the country would act on them, gratis.

**T**HEY PLAY BASKETBALL and volleyball. The trip was originally conceived in part as an exchange of sporting skills, and the girls come armed with gifts, including guitar strings, dress up dolls made at school, and sporting equipment. But do they dominate on the field? Well, 'In basketball we did fine', but volleyball—'a bit of a problem'. So much of a problem that by the end, their driver, Marcus, who speaks no English, can manage a fluent 'Volleyball, no good?' and barracks for the Australians, out of desperate solidarity.

While they are there, Australia and East Timor become embroiled in rancorous arguments over territorial rights to the rich energy reserves in the Timor Sea. Accusations of exploitation from the East Timorese government are countered by righteousness in Canberra. On the ground in Dili there are signs of a different kind. Leading up to Independence celebrations, the girls visit the Alola Foundation, set up by the Australian wife of Xanana Gusmão, Kirsty Sword. They see how it promotes women's health and craft. They come home wearing the Tais woven by the women, and they have their own experience of the kind of linkage between Australia and East Timor schools that the Alola Foundation promotes.

Finally, just before the Independence fireworks begin, they go to a concert and hear Paul Kelly sing. His support act is Peter Garrett. The Paul Kelly song the girls reprise to me in the echoing Kilbreda room is 'From little things big things grow.' They figure it was sung expressly for them. ■

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The eight girls were Camille Ravesi, Angie Stuart, Tracey-Anne Collins, Bridget O'Brien, Laura Bartholomeusz, Caitlin Wood, Amanda Sheppard and Jess Wilson. The teachers were Michelle Moore, Joanne King and Mary Stack.



Images of East Timor from the photos of the Kilbreda students.



# The sons of privilege

Anthony Ham travels the enigmatic and affluent Saudi Arabia



**I**N THE PLUSH PUBLIC SPACES of Dubai International Airport, wealthy Saudi men swagger through the concourses in pristine white robes, fingering their prayer beads absent-mindedly while veiled women trail behind in robes of black.

As night approaches, clusters of Pakistani men with henna-dyed beards stretch out on the carpet to sleep, blocking walkways. Harassed and be-suited airport officials with walkie-talkies, pass by at the head of two long, orderly lines of Asian women, like teachers escorting children on a school trip. Outside, where departure gates announce destinations including Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam, the women queue separately, divided from the men and from the people of wealthier nations.

Less than an hour later, high over the Rub al-Khali, the Empty Quarter, the bright lights of Dubai already seem a distant memory. Saudi Arabia is obscured by clouds. The cabin has fallen quiet.

The silence is broken by a cowed and whispering Bangladeshi man. He asks if I will fill out his Saudi arrivals card. He is illiterate and speaks neither English nor Arabic. He has been to Saudi Arabia before, many times. I help as best I can and he is grateful, perhaps more so for the fact that he is returning to a job offering wages which he could never earn in Bangladesh. He shuffles away, the anxiety of his alienation etched on his face and bowing, his demeanour mak-



ing him one of the most miserable and dejected figures I have ever encountered.

Soon after my arrival in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, I travel north into the conservative Islamic heartland of the Najd. Here, local tribes consider themselves to possess the purest aristocratic Arab blood, and to be the most faithful custodians of Islam's legacy.

En route to Buraydah, Saudi Arabia's most conservative city where even Western women must be veiled and Saudi security forces are in a constant battle against al Qaeda militants, we pass the turn-off to the small oasis of Al-Uyaynah. It was here that, in 1703, Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab was born. His family origins were modest, his family pious but poor. With little means of subsistence in his village, al-Wahhab left to travel the region as a religious student, passing through Mecca, Medina, Basra and Hasa before returning to Al-Uyaynah to preach a puritanical message calling for the purification of Islam and a return to the religion's 7th-century roots.

The village sheikhs tolerated al-Wahhab for as long as it took for him to beat those who didn't participate in communal prayers and to lead the stoning of a woman accused of adultery. Al-Wahhab was expelled from the village, but his message found a ready audience in the surrounding communities.

Further north, I pass the night in another Najdi village. As I settle down for the night, reclining on cushions in a Bedouin tent, I am joined by some men from the village. Hamdi is gentle and hospitable, deferentially asking questions about the West and showing me photos of his time in London. He can no longer return because Saudi passports have become objects of suspicion. Another, Mohammed, is a genial man who wants me to know that he loves George W. Bush and what he is doing in Iraq.

**T**HE VILLAGE SHEIKH, a man of 80 who wears stunning robes of black with gold embroidery, learns that a Westerner is in town and invites me to a village feast. He speaks little but fills the room with his presence; a personal gravitas that inspires reverence among the villagers. His brother similarly presents himself with the nobility of royal blood, smiling easily and often, plying me with questions which



suggest a genuine curiosity for the world: What is Australia like? What are the main industries? Why have you come to Saudi Arabia? What is your opinion of my country? You are welcome, guest.

Before dinner, I am seated next to the sheikh who distributes gifts to the men of the village, who smile and talk and ensure that I am comfortable. Great columns of smoky incense fill the room and tea and coffee and dates are distributed. When we eat, the sheikh tears off the choicest cuts of lamb and hands them to me, imploring me to eat more. A flat screen

TV in the next room broadcasts Al-Jazeera's coverage from Iraq.

**A**FTER THE MEAL, a sheikh from a neighbouring village arrives, full of his own importance and with a bearing which little resembles the discretion and dignity of my host. The newcomer announces that all of his sons studied in America but he ordered them to return to Saudi Arabia lest they be corrupted by the ways of America. 'The Americans and their friends are criminals', he concludes with a look around the room to make sure he has been heard. Some of the young men nod, others look embarrassed. Unexpectedly, he shakes my hand warmly when he leaves, wishing me a pleasant stay in Saudi Arabia.

The following morning, I leave for Riyadh. As I depart the village, I realise that I have not seen a single woman for the entire 24 hours of my stay.

Back in the capital, I take a taxi driven by Azeem, a gentle, bearded Pakistani. As the chaos of fast-moving American Cadillacs and SUVs swirl perilously around us with frightening speed, Azeem exudes a calm, weary serenity. He takes me past a girls' school, outside of which young Saudi men cruise by in their shiny cars. In this land of strict segregation, they throw from their windows scraps of paper containing their mobile phone numbers in the hope of later receiving a call.

Azeem drives me to Dir'aiyah, just outside Riyadh. On the way, he speaks of his family. He has been in Saudi Arabia for 13 years, returning home to Islamabad for two weeks every two years. He has six children, born at two-year intervals and whom he scarcely

knows, but each day he works to secure their future. He would go home more often but his employers, who hold Azeem's passport while he is in Saudi Arabia, only allow him one week's annual holiday. His daily takings are around US\$55, but US\$15 goes to petrol and up to US\$35 must be given to his employer for the privilege of employing him. Still, he says, he could never earn that kind of money back home.

In the early 18th century, it was in Dir'aiyah, now a mud-brick ruin some 60km from Al-Uyaynah, that Mohammed ibn al-Wahhab sought refuge after being expelled from the village of his birth. Mohammed ibn al-Saud, the local sheikh who ruled just 100 houses, was at that time seeking to distinguish his rule from the countless other sheikhs of the Najd, seeking a status which only some form of doctrinal Islamic legitimacy could bestow. Similarly, Al-Wahhab had come to understand that the success of his reforms required the backing of a political authority capable of ensuring his protection.

Wahhabi Islam quickly became the ruling ideology in Dir'aiyah and, in 1744, Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Mohammed ibn al-Saud pledged an alliance. The agreement's grand aim was to extend Saudi-Wahhabi authority over the entire Arabian Peninsula. Under the terms of the agreement, which was founded on the twin pillars of piety and patronage, Al-Saud

assumed the position of imam, the political leader of the Muslim community to whom tribute must be paid. Al-Wahhab became the religious leader, authorised to rule on all matters of Islamic interpretation.

In Riyadh, the new capital of the Al-Sauds, Azeem takes me to the mud-brick Masmak Fortress, one of the few vestiges of Old Riyadh. In its door is lodged a spearhead from 15 January 1902, the day on which the Al-Sauds finally took control of Riyadh.

Not far away from the fortress stands the Great Mosque which overlooks the open area known by expats as 'Chop Chop Square'—it is here that public beheadings are still carried out. Also on the square is the headquarters of the





a Muslim nation from the same country as the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The most obvious expression of this was the anger of al Qaeda—Osama bin Laden is a Saudi by birth and 19 of the 23 hijackers on September 11 were Saudi citizens. Behind it all, Wahhabi Islam has become a byword for militant and deeply conservative Sunni Islam, an orthodoxy so powerful that, 14 centuries later, it still holds sway in the kingdom.

**T**HE TENSIONS WITHIN Saudi Arabia and increasing attacks on Western interests reflect the fact that the home of Islam is a deeply troubled land, a kingdom riven with contradictions.

This is a land governed by the precepts of 7th-century Islam,

ruled by a dynastic family whose power derives from the 18th century, and which together form a fabulously wealthy nation propelled into the 21st century by oil wealth and state-of-the-art technology. This is a kingdom which is home to some eight million expatriate workers and which annually welcomes millions of pilgrims, yet it remains largely closed and unknown to the outside world. Deeply traditional and historically insular to the point of paranoia when confronted by those who wished to enter Arabia, Saudi Arabia has been propelled into the future without shedding its past—a nation at odds with itself and the world.

Modern and moderate Saudis have long called for greater political freedom and pushing for greater recognition of the rights of women, arguing that their nation will only survive by building bridges to the West. Conservative Saudis wish to tear such bridges down, decrying them as offensive for a kingdom whose leader holds the title as 'Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques'.

The job of reconciling the many strands of Saudi society is hugely complex, one which the Saudi rulers seem no closer to resolving. Theirs is an unenviable task. Moves towards greater liberalisation continually founder on the fact that Islam not only casts an all-encompassing shadow over modern Saudi Arabia. It is indeed the country's reason for existence and the very reason that the Al-Sauds hold power.

On my last day in Riyadh I meet Mahesh, an Indian from Kerala who is counting the days until he can leave Saudi Arabia. He is here out of necessity, a symbol of the kingdom's perennially suspicious relationship with the outside world. I ask him what he thinks of the Saudis. He doesn't answer, other than with a smile that resembles a grimace. There is no doubt that the feeling is mutual. ■

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mu'tawwa (religious police) of the Committee for the Prevention of Vice and the Propagation of Virtue, the guardians of Islamic orthodoxy. It is their job to tear controversial subjects from international newspapers before they go on sale, to ensure that all businesses close during prayer time five times a day, that women are appropriately covered and that men and women do not mingle.

Since the 18th century in the Najd, and from its base in Riyadh since the early 20th century, the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance has always gained its greatest strength from confronting the threats posed to Islamic purity. More often than not, foreigners have been the target, uniting the faithful through their un-Islamic ways. Some 260 years after the fusion of Saudi political power and Wahhabi religious agreement was signed, it is this same suspicion of outsiders which fuels the forces that threaten to tear the kingdom apart.

When Saudi Arabia permitted the United States to launch its war on Iraq from Saudi territory in 1991, it was a fateful step. The decision to allow the presence of US and other foreign troops on the kingdom's soil brought to the fore the long simmering discontent throughout the Muslim world about non-Muslims operating so openly and aggressively against





# Rome and the bush

Bruce Duncan looks at the role of the church following the war in Iraq

**I**RAQ MAY TECHNICALLY have regained its sovereignty, but what sort of freedom or stability its people might enjoy remains to be seen. The United States, Britain and Australia waged a war to remove the tyrant, Saddam Hussein, but at great cost to their own standing in the international community, to the system of international law, the United Nations and the people of Iraq. Britain and the United States have since been desperately trying to retrieve the moral ground lost during the Iraq war.

At Mr Howard's meeting with him in Washington in early June, President Bush obligingly condemned Mark Latham's intention to withdraw Australian troops by Christmas, but elevated the question of the US alliance and the Iraqi entanglement higher on the electoral scoreboard.

Bush flew straight to Rome to meet Pope John Paul II who had strongly opposed the Iraq war on moral grounds and because of the 'grave unrest in the Middle East' likely to result. He told Bush: 'You are very familiar with the unequivocal position of the Holy See in this regard.' He pointedly reiterated that Iraq must quickly have its sovereignty restored, and the international community, particularly the UN, must be brought in to help return the country to normality. The Vatican was earlier dismayed at the new US unilateralism and its claim to a right of pre-emptive attack. Such actions undermine the system of international governance and the UN, which various popes have long supported as the best means to promote peace, the rule of international law and global economic security.

John Paul also noted that the 'deplorable abuses' of Iraqi prisoners 'have troubled the civic and religious conscience of all, and made more difficult a serene and resolute commitment to shared human values'. Implied in this last phrase is a criticism of the US claim to 'exceptionalism' and to a right to act against international norms of conduct if judged to be in its national interest. John Paul continued that without a commitment to 'shared

human values ... neither war nor terrorism will ever be overcome'.

The Pope highlighted one of the burning issues in the Middle East, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. The Vatican is deeply concerned about the hawkish support in the Bush administration for Israel's right-wing politicians. In carefully diplomatic language, the Pope called for 'new negotiations, dictated by a sincere commitment to dialogue.'

**M**ANY AUSTRALIAN CLERGY and laity have been disturbed that their religious leaders did not oppose the drift to war more vigorously, even though a number of bishops did speak early and clearly. In their defence, it must be acknowledged that other key bishops were preoccupied with sorting out the sexual abuse tragedy. In the light of that scandal, it was a difficult time for the churches to try to exercise public leadership. Yet the war was a moral issue of such magnitude that it demanded strong leadership.

The Iraq war has exposed the shallowness in Australia of church efforts to engage with these issues. The establishment of justice and peace commissions or organisations in various parts of the country has attempted to remedy some of these gaps, but despite some exceptional contributions, these agencies are relatively thin and poorly funded, even at the national level.

How can the churches generate networks of concern and forums that gather our many lay specialists to broaden the constituency of informed opinion and contribute more positively to the great debates about public policy?

The churches cannot do this by isolating themselves in narrow intellectual hot-houses, but must encourage lay thinkers and social activists to join the conversation about how to extend the rule of law, peace, human rights and prosperity. It means being present in the universities and media debates and keenly aware of the complexity of socio-economic issues, but also being

alert to the depth of resources available in the Catholic and wider Christian social traditions.

Little can happen along these lines without money. Catholics in particular contribute little financially to the development of their theological and tertiary institutes, as well as the justice and peace agencies. Why do we not have vigorous think-tanks inspired by Christian social activism and thought, and university chairs dedicated to the overarching moral issues of justice, development and the environment? Why have we been so slow in Australia to develop independent lay publications? Why do we not sponsor prizes and scholarships to advance expertise in these areas?

Catholic and Christian thought and activity in Australia is often timid, myopic and parochial, in contrast with the constant activity of the Vatican and other international church agencies wrestling with the burning issues of peace, development and international relations. The Australian churches have had little to say on the wider moral implications of US unilateralism, its expanded military spending, the neglect of the UN Millennium Goals, and the need for a political mobilisation to eradicate global hunger. Is the fact that the US is intending to establish military training facilities in Australia of no moral significance for the churches?

The sexual abuse scandals were a traumatic wake-up call to the churches about the handling of such issues. Australia's involvement in the Iraq war should be a further call that the churches need to lift their game to focus on pressing international moral issues, not least because the churches themselves form one of the most significant international networks in the Pacific and south-east Asia. ■

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# Gone surfin'

Alison Aprhys finds out why catching a wave is so catching



Peter de Monchaux at dawn.

**L**OOK OUT SON', called out an older surfer on a rainy winter's day at Bells Beach, as he took off on a wave we were both paddling to catch. Five years ago, clad in a thick men's XS wetsuit which flattened any curves, booties and with my hair newly cut short, I probably did resemble a teenage boy. But as he paddled back, I corrected him, saying 'Excuse me sir, I am a girl', which caused much hooting and laughter from the frozen surfers sitting around waiting for a wave, keeping their hands warm by clasping them under their rubberised armpits.

Chatting as we all bobbed up and down, they revealed an interesting cross-section: musicians and mothers, plumbers and lawyers, retirees, surf-shop workers and office managers. Some were newer to surfing than others, but all were sufficiently keen to have left their homes complete with fireplaces and footy on the TV to make the trek out to catch a few waves at an otherwise deserted beach on a glacial Sunday afternoon. Listening to their remarks about waves ridden and wipeouts taken, I was struck anew by how enthused they all were and I started wondering just what it is about surfing that grabs our hearts and souls? What is it

about surfing that keeps drawing us back?

It's 6am, somewhere on the Australian coast. While you're snugly asleep, I've pulled on a jumper and am sipping a much needed coffee, standing on a balcony, atop a sand dune or a beach front car park, silently waiting for first light. We're on dawn patrol and our mission is to get our daily wave fix.

As the stars fade and the dark slides into dawn, we spy the lines rolling in. As one, everyone sculls their coffee and sprints for their car. There's a mad scramble into wetsuits, boards are waxed and we pelt down the sand.

Surfing deftly cuts across any gaps in age, gender, political leaning or socio-demographic placement. Out there no-one cares about your bank balance, post code or waist size. Surfing is our solace, addiction and passion. That moment where you stop paddling, the instant you jump up and standing on your board, swoop down the glass-like face, across the unbroken wave ... nothing comes close. Not every surfer started as a grommet

and continued surfing all their life. Some have reclaimed their former love after years pursuing relationships, career, education, travel or a combination thereof. Others have recently discovered for themselves what surfing offers and how it lifts their spirits and heart to a new plane. Many found that after a youth of riding hard and fast on shortboards, that age and arthritis mean they now enjoy the fun and freedom that longboards offer.

**S**OMETIMES THE JOURNEY of surfing isn't so much measured in miles, but in years. Like a mermaid, Sybil Walsh drifts in the ocean, her long silver hair floating against a dark green sea. As soon as she feels the swell, Sybil is paddling hard to catch the wave and wham! Next moment she is in the power pocket of the curl and bodysurfing towards the beach. This extremely fit and energetic 60-something reclaimed her love of the ocean some nine years ago after a 30-year absence. 'I finally reached the stage in life where I was able to follow my love of the water', she says. Seemingly impervious to the cold, Sybil disdains the surfer's cold weather friend, proving that saltwater runs in her blood. A hardy soul, Sybil chooses to paddle, swim or bodysurf year round in just her swimmers.

'Wetsuits? I call them wimp suits', she laughs. 'I don't feel



the cold.' Last January, Sybil bought an old waveski and can be seen most dawns, lugging her board from her car roof-rack to the foreshore.

'The ocean is my addiction, I love swimming and seeing all the beautiful dolphins, fish, seaweed and feeling a part of this wonderful place', she says. Sybil recalls her love of deep-sea fishing off the cliffs north of Point Perpendicular at the entrance to Jervis Bay with her father, a search master with the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol. She agrees that the ocean has its own lure.

'It's just so inspiring out here, I'm just going to keep bodysurfing and paddling as long as I can', she says.

Somewhere on the northern beaches of Sydney, a freezing westerly slowly turns hands and feet to ice. Shivering, Peter de Monchaux runs into the water, giving a small sigh of relief.

'The water feels hot in comparison to the wind chill', he says, jumping onto a wave. 'People don't realise that it's so much warmer in the water than on the beach'. Like lots of 40-somethings, Peter loved surfing as a teenager and he's come back to it, as addicted as ever after an extended break spent developing his career as a music teacher and raising a young family. Unlike his contemporaries, he's not surfing a fibreglass glass longboard—in fact he's not surfing a fibreglass board at all. He's become captivated riding a 'five foot foamy'; the light-weight boards used by grommets and surf life saving clubs Australia-wide and he regularly surprises people with his skill.

'Getting a wave every day is essential to staying sane', says Peter.

**D**OWN THE BEACH, Ray Moran clearly remembers watching Midget Farelly and Phyllis O'Donnell win the world surfing championships in 1964. He recalls the heady days he spent surfing pristine South African waves with his mates in the late 1960s and early '70s.

'No wetsuits, lots of sharks and we lived on fruit and wheatgerm to save money', he says with a grin. 'It was tremendous fun'. A popular local identity around the Manly SLSC, Ray combines his role as board captain and managing their extensive archives between attending surfing festivals up and down the coast. A lifelong surfer who was one of the first to surf the northern NSW break of Angowrie, Ray gets out pretty much every day; a familiar sight in his yellow boardshorts, knee paddling his beloved longboards. Woe betide any grommet who mistakes his white hair and laughter lines as indicators he's past his best surfing days! He considers age a badge of honour and on the fickle beach breaks, Ray regularly shows the younger surfers what traditional stylish longboarding is all about. 'Couldn't live without it', says Ray smiling.

'There's nothing better than surfing',

agrees Robert 'Bobby' Furness. 'I've made some wonderful friends in the surf'. Bobby's life revolves around the waves; not only does he get wet as often as he can; he also runs the surf concession on the Channel island of Jersey, explaining that Jersey's predilection for a 40ft tidal range can limit surfing on smaller tides. 'I didn't take up surfing until the '70s when I moved to Jersey to teach PE and coach rugby', he says. A former rugby player for Wales and world champion triathlete, Bobby came to Sydney for the Rugby World Cup last year and ended up staying a few extra months to escape Jersey's chill and enjoy the Australian summer. A contemporary of Ray Moran, they finally met a couple of months ago, although each had met and surfed with mutual friends some 30 years earlier, when some of Ray's fellow Australian lifesavers made their annual winter pilgrimage to the UK during the short European summer. Like Ray, Bobby lives for the surf, no matter how cold. 'Surfing changed my life for the better', he says. 'I couldn't do without it now'.

Roaring Beach has definitely lived up to its name. Walking up the dunes after enjoying a cold morning's waves amidst the dolphins on the south-east of Tasmania, we listen to some surfers ahead. They are in raptures. 'Beautiful day', says one, craning his head for one last glimpse of the ocean. 'Yeah, some great waves', says his friend. They laugh and continue their conversation to the car park, where shivering tourists, scowling at the leaden skies and the freezing wind seem oblivious to the wild beauty the beach has to offer. As we pass by, their expressions clearly indicate they think we are mad.

Perhaps that's what sets surfers apart; surfing allows us to see more clearly not just ourselves, but also the beautiful world around us. It's not just the fun we have, but riding the waves ignites the saltwater in our veins. ■

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Sybil Walsh at Manly. Photos by **Alison Aprhys**.



# Volatile democracy

The forthcoming presidential elections in Indonesia are certain to surprise.

**I**N THE LAST YEAR OR SO, mention of Indonesia in Australia generally arouses images of hardline Muslims involved in regional terrorism. It may be interesting to take another look, especially as Indonesia is making further inroads toward democracy this year, with a parliamentary election and a presidential election.

Until 1999, elections in Indonesia had been a big yawn, because of their glaring predictability. After 32 years of Suharto's iron rule, Indonesia's first democratic election in 1999 was marked by euphoria, optimism and promise of massive reform.

Five years on, and much disappointment later, Indonesia faces an even tougher test. Not only were the results of the April parliamentary election full of surprises, the first direct presidential election to be conducted on 5 July, promises unprecedented suspense.

Many observers were caught by surprise with the results of the parliamentary election. While they had expected a reduction of support for incumbent president Megawati Sukarnoputri's party, PDIP, very few had predicted the extent to which people abandoned it. The votes the party received plummeted to 18.5 per cent, from 34 per cent in the 1999 election, the largest number of votes won by any individual party at that time.

Voters expressed their disappointment in the current government, who they believe failed to deliver promised reform, and had brought the country's economy into disarray.

It was expected that in spite of rowdy protests and demonstrations against the government, that voters would ultimately support it, the

rationale being the clichéd, 'better the devil you know'.

It is possible that the successive and easy victories of Suharto and his Golkar Party during 32 years, in retrospect, may not be entirely attributed to the government's bullying tactics. There must have been a degree of acquiescence, if not inertia, on the part of the majority of the people.

The chances for success for new parties therefore, are usually abysmal, unless they have ready-made support, such as Amien Rais' PAN in 1999, which drew much strength from Muhammadiyah, the second biggest Muslim organisation in the country.

For this reason the emergence in the April 2004 election of two new parties with little previous record and no apparent existing support base, is phenomenal.

The Democratic Party, co-founded by

Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, former Minister for Security and Defence, won 7.5 per cent, and the Prosperous Justice Party, a party evolved from a basically small fundamentalist Muslim party, Justice Party, 7.3 per cent.

**T**HE DEMOCRATIC PARTY was effectively founded in 2001 to serve as Yudhoyono's political stead, because Indonesia's electoral law specifies that only political parties can nominate presidential candidates. Even on the eve of the April election people were still speculating that the Democratic Party might not receive the minimum electoral support required by law, (three per cent), in order to nominate a presidential candidate. However Yudhoyono's supporters were not too worried, because they were sure that their candidate would be 'adopted' by one of the major parties, who would undoubtedly recognise what an asset he had become.

To their delight, the Democratic Party won 7.5 per cent of the vote and became one of the big seven which won 41 per cent of the vote in total. The remaining votes were distributed among 17 smaller parties, few of which won more than three per cent of the vote in their own right.

The surprise effected by the Prosperous Justice Party was not as strong as that of the Democratic Party. Those disillusioned by PAN, which started off as a party which embraced Muslim intellectuals and moderates, but evolved into a watered-down and vague political entity, found a natural home in the new Prosperous Justice Party.

Golkar attracted the highest proportion of votes at 21.6 per cent. This figure is only slightly lower than that of the 1999 election. Instead of losing support like PDIP, Golkar has consolidated its force.

Another major surprise for observ-

Children cheer in front of a poster of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, © AAP/AP/Irwin Ferdiansyah.





ers in Indonesia was the nomination of Wiranto by Golkar as its presidential candidate at their convention in late April. Most people had expected Akbar Tandjung, the party President and Speaker of the Lower House, to be nominated. Admittedly Tandjung's name was somewhat tainted when he was convicted of corruption last year, though the conviction was later overturned by the appeals court. On the other hand, Wiranto has been charged by a UN-backed tribunal in East Timor, with having ultimate responsibility for murder, deportation and persecution 'committed in the context of widespread and systematic attacks on the civilian population' during East Timor's transition to independence from Indonesia in 1999.

After its defeat in the 1999 election, where PDIP amassed nearly 34 per cent of the votes, Golkar has undoubtedly regrouped. In fact, Golkar does not appear to have really lost its support in the outer islands, especially in Sulawesi.

Against this background, the significant disillusionment against Megawati's government has worked in Golkar's favour. The only other government in the collective memory of the country's population is that of Golkar. And when people are uncertain where the next meal will come from or when it will come, greater political freedom is cold comfort. The memory of Golkar's regimented government suddenly looks a lot more attractive, especially when its excesses no longer loom large in its country's consciousness.

Golkar may have been draconian, corrupt and nepotistic, but people remember that at least they had regular meals, clothes to wear and somewhere to sleep.

A noted scholar and political observer once likened the country to a milking cow. During Suharto's rule, a small elite milked it and fed it. Under Megawati, the cow is milked by everybody and nobody bothers to feed it.

It is also worth noting that the present Golkar is different to that of Suharto. It is aware of a changed atmosphere, where there is a solid, albeit small,

body of social and media monitors who are not reluctant in exposing any wrongdoings or injustices committed by those in power.

It appears that Golkar is bothered more by the fact Akbar Tandjung had been convicted of corruption than by charges of human rights violations against Wiranto. The anti-corruption drive is one of the three major issues with which Indonesians are currently concerned, the others being improvements to education and reviving the economy. Even Wiranto's staunchest rival, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, declared clean governance his priority if elected.

**W**AVES OF PROTESTS against the 'return of militarism' in Indonesia rise and fall in big cities, especially in Java. Though both Wiranto and Yudhoyono are retired, the protests appear directed at Wiranto, as Yudhoyono is seen as a 'reformist' among the military.



General Wiranto campaigning in Malang, East Java in June 2004, © AAP/AP/Trisnadi.

To most intellectuals and many in the political elite, Wiranto is a political embarrassment, because of his alleged actions in East Timor. However people are gradually resigning themselves to the fact that he may indeed win the presidential contest. The concern that this may alienate Indonesia from the West quickly faded when the US indicated that if Wiranto were elected they would work with him. If the pattern of the last eight years were to be used as a barometer, this suggests that Australia would not protest too much either. Then on 11 May, East Timor's Prosecutor General, Longuihos Monteiro, asked the UN-backed Judge

Phillip Rapoza to review an arrest warrant against Wiranto which Rapoza had issued on 10 May. Rapoza subsequently rejected the bid. It has become clear that even East Timor is thinking of softening its blows. All this has not been lost on observers in Indonesia.

Advocates of human rights in Indonesia have yet to 'naturalise' the concept. For those who live below the poverty line, bullied each day by local thugs while law enforcers turn a blind eye, the notion of human rights is unfortunately too abstract. Hearing that a former general, whose looks and public speeches do not invoke fear in them, is involved in human rights violations, only invokes disbelief. This is especially so when the alleged crimes were committed in a remote place, and as far as many people are concerned, if they do not see the act themselves or hear from someone close to them, it remains hearsay.

Even some of the more educated have problems with the issue. Their objection lies in the selectivity of the international concern. If the world is so concerned about human rights, how come they are only outraged about violations in East Timor and West Papua? What about what is happening within Indonesia? It is not hard to see how easy it is to insinuate that the West's preferential concern is influenced by the dominance of Christianity in East Timor and West Papua.

Five presidential candidates and their respective running mates are now registered for the July election. The strongest are Yudhoyono, Wiranto and the incumbent president Megawati. In the case of no clear majority, a second round of elections will be held on 20 September.

Direct presidential elections are entirely new in Indonesia, and it is no secret that it is causing a great deal of confusion on the part of the voting public. Much horse-trading has been evident among the political elite. However with international monitors present and the relentless media observation, it is less easy to sustain accusations of vote-rigging and electoral irregularities. At best, those who do not like the elected president can say that the voting public are yet to be properly educated. ■

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# A tale of two cities

**I**N THE SAME WAY that it helps to have read Pushkin and Gogol to understand the present day Russian Czar and his bureaucracy, the grand new public libraries opened in London and Paris at the end of the millennium say something about the differences in their cities, their histories and the societies that built them. Old habits and traditions die hard.



The British Library showing the piazza and Sir Eduardo Paolozzi's statue of Isaac Newton. © Irene Rhoden.

The TGB, la Très Grande Bibliothèque, or the Very Big Library to use its common name, (officially called the Bibliothèque Nationale de France), was the last of Francois Mitterand's *Grand Projets*, his most ambitious, civic, political and cultural gesture, clearly designed to bolster French prestige and the importance of Paris. The library is on the left bank of the Seine in a run down area of to the east of the Gare d'Austerlitz, and the project was consciously conceived as a stimulus to the urban renewal of the unfashionable 13<sup>e</sup> arrondissement. It remains to be seen if this library building does become a catalyst in this way or whether it will stand as a folly of political ambition.

Boldly Parisian in scale, the new library covers an area as big as the Place de la Concorde, a breathtakingly simple composition that is quite perverse in its organisation with the readers below ground and the books above. The architect Dominique Perrault has skilfully distilled

what must have been an enormous and complex brief of requirements into this deceptively simple arrangement

The site is dominated by four L-shaped 20-storey glass towers, one on each corner containing some offices but mostly the book stacks. When seen from a distance the towers are so far apart that, although obviously related in some way, it is hard

to grasp that they are all part of one building. They are often described as resembling open books (why do people always seek such simple symbolism?) and they sit on an enormous open plaza. This plaza is the roof of a six-storey building which covers the whole site and has a long narrow central courtyard patterned on the Palais Royale and containing mature trees. This rectangular podium is sunken into the ground however, so it is only a storey above the surrounding streets. No entrance is visible as you approach and there is no sense of the immense size of this buried

base. You enter by ascending a continuous flight of wooden stairs around the building up onto the vast elevated podium at tree top level.

Most commentators have described the appearance of the building as Orwellian, even pharaonic, because of its enormous empty heroic scale and I must admit the Ministry of Truth also came to mind. It has also been described as having grandeur and monumentality, and being at the same time forbidding and exciting. Another critic suggests that with cheap looking office towers the new library seems more like a business complex than a civic monument.

From the open plaza you descend via escalators at each end of the building into rich and interesting interiors. And all the reading rooms, special libraries and research rooms open off and look back into the enclosed landscaped courtyard, to which curiously there is no access. It was a dull autumn day when

I visited and the place had a monastic, cloistered feeling of being removed from the world, an oasis for quiet study.

The visual scale of the towers has been reduced by extra large sheets of special fire rated, laminated safety glass, and timber screens are used inside the glass to protect the books from the sun. But the arrangement certainly seems contrary and the building has not been without criticism locally, both for its moonscape appearance and the unprotected way one enters the building, up and over a windswept plaza. The practical working of the place, in particular the retrieval of books from the stacks has also attracted criticism.

The contrast between its austere grey exterior and the rich materials and colours of the minimalist interiors, and the



The British Library's entrance hall. © Irene Rhoden.



opposition of the busy city outside and the sunken cloister inside is impressive and intriguing. Baron Haussmann would have approved of both its size and ambition. It is all very Gallic, only the French would have the courage to make such a confident yet wayward gesture so in scale with the city of the Sun King.

**T**HE NEW BRITISH LIBRARY next to St Pancras Station in North London has replaced the circular reading room attached to the British Museum. Since 1753 the Museum library had housed one of the finest manuscript and book collections in the world until overcrowding forced parts of the collection to be housed elsewhere. Karl Marx wrote *Das Kapital* under its dome, and the reading room has been home to many famous writers. A new library was first proposed in the early '60s and was finally commissioned by Act of Parliament in 1972 but it then took almost 30 years before it was completed, a classic story of government bumbling, stop-start financing and Sir Humphrey-like machinations. This is a great contrast with the French situation; despite public criticism Perrault had unflinching political and financial support, and his building was completed in ten years.

The first design for a new British library was prepared in 1962 by Sir Leslie Martin and Colin St John Wilson on a site further down Great Russell Street from the Museum. It wove itself into the Bloomsbury context by incorporating St Georges Church and Georgian terraces into the overall scheme; all very English. Martin was a distinguished architect who had been head of the London County Council's Architects Branch in its post-war hey-day, an organisation that built some of the best schools and public housing in the world until it was abolished by Margaret Thatcher as a socialist abomination.

The scheme met strong opposition from conservation groups. By the early '70s Martin had retired so Wilson prepared a second smaller scheme in Bloomsbury which also met opposition. So the government acquired railway

land next to St Pancras Station in 1976 for a third scheme but construction didn't commence until 1982. In his book about the library Sandy Wilson complains that 'no other project in Britain since the building of St Paul's Cathedral (which also took 36 years to reach completion) is comparable in timescale or the magnitude of controversy surrounding it'.

Inevitably architectural design is compromised by such a lengthy process of stopping and starting, changing clients and constant amendment. It is a truism that great architecture not only needs a good architect, it also needs a good client; both are rare and the combination is even rarer. It is hard to appreciate the position of the architect and his 30-year travail, and the creative energy needed to keep enthusiasm and creativity alive over that length of time.

The British approach could not be more different than that of the French. Perrault hit on a big abstract concept (put the books in four 'open book' towers and sink the reading rooms into the ground) and then cram everything in to make it work functionally. Symbolic forms and ideas were imposed upon the situation.

Wilson claims to have a more organic approach, working outwards from the brief of requirements without any preconceived ideas and letting the building become 'what the building wants to be', to quote the poetic US architect Louis Kahn. Wilson, who is very historically aware, has been strongly influenced by what he calls the 'Other Tradition' of Modernism, architects like Aalto, Scharoun, Asplund, even Frank Lloyd Wright. He is worth quoting at length on his approach:

In designing the British Library building we have drawn widely upon this tradition not only in the adoption of organic forms that are responsive to growth and change but also in the repertoire of sensuous materials that are particularly responsive to human presence and touch—leather, wood and bronze. We touch, hear and smell a building as much as we see it and furthermore what we do see in terms of weight and texture, density or transparency transmits explicit resonances of a body language that is common to us all

but all too seldom consciously addressed. The organic form is innate; it shapes as it develops from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form. Such is the life, such is the form.

Unlike the hard-line modernist obsession with 'Progress' this tradition never sought to cut itself off from the past or deny itself allusion to precedent and always retained a blood relationship with painting, sculpture and hand-crafts in an age increasingly committed to mechanical reproduction.

This brave inside-out approach is more difficult to pull off than the big king hit approach of the TGB, although both of course depend on the skill of the architect. In the best hands the symbolic approach can look inevitable and right—one can't imagine it any



Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Photo: Alain Goustard. Architect: Dominique Perrault © ADAGP 2004.

different—but more often it produces buildings that simply seem wilful and arbitrary. The organic approach has produced masterpieces like Aalto's town hall complex at Saynatsalo, but in the wrong hands can simply look gauche and dyslexic.

**I**T IS INEVITABLE that buildings like these will need to expand and change during their use. Experience shows that it is usually difficult to alter and expand the former without destroying the concept but is less difficult with the more broken and complex forms of organic buildings. Financial constraints dictated that the library be built in stages (only Stage I has been completed) and Wilson sees the freedom to deal with future changes as a



virtue of his approach.

Wilson appreciates the modern dilemma about the symbolic role of a library clearly and embodied it in the incorporation of the Kings Library. It was a condition of the gift to the nation of the great book collection of George III that its beautiful leather and vellum bindings should be on show to the general public and not just scholars. The collection has therefore been housed in a central free-standing structure inside the building, an object in its own right, a six-storey high bronze and glass tower that can be seen from many parts of the interior.

**T**HE BRITISH LIBRARY is the kind of building where the inside and the outside must be understood together, externally it seems like a large building trying to look smaller. The main body of the library has been set back from its main road frontage 'in order to create an enclosed courtyard to mediate between the turmoil of the traffic and the entry into the building'.

The urban context was also important as the library's main neighbour is Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's 1867 St Pancras Hotel,

an over-the-top red brick Gothic Revival building, masterpiece to some and the butt of ridicule by Modernist orthodoxy. A similar red brick was chosen for the library both to work with its surroundings and because in Wilson's opinion brick is the one material that improves in appearance over time in London. The vertical arrangement of the library was largely conditioned by the importance Wilson attaches to incorporating natural light wherever possible, and as a consequence the reading rooms are located at the top of the building under a variety of Aalto-like roof forms to admit daylight. As a consequence the book stacks are in the basements where they have the most stable environmental conditions.

Reactions to this building vary widely. I appreciate the integrity of Wilson's approach after years of post-Modernism and fake facades attached to mean buildings. And I approve of its incorporation of natural light and its approach to the importance of natural materials that age gracefully. One UK critic concluded by saying that while some might have wished the British Library to be more modern and

more glassy, that it was 'a very British institution'.

Those words sum it up. Everything about it, the architectural approach (the abstract approach doesn't quite fit with British pragmatism does it?) the political suspicion of professionals, the concern about the urban context and the choice of materials is very British. The building suffers because all the basic design decisions were made 25 years ago and the uncertain political support and lack of consistent financial support have taken their toll. If it had been built then, it would by now be a well-loved, if eccentric, building. Although the interiors are impressive, it now it looks curiously out of time for a new building, a bit old fashioned, yet it sits in its fussy North London context with assurance.

How interesting to reflect on the differences in approach of these two buildings and how they reflect the political and intellectual cultures of the two countries. *Vive l'difference!* ■

**Don Gazzard** is an architect who works in both Sydney and Melbourne.

## THE AGE MELBOURNE Writers' FESTIVAL



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20-29 August, 2004

Australia's premier literary event – The Age Melbourne Writers' Festival will take place from August 20 to 29, 2004 at the CUB Malthouse, the Melbourne Town Hall and other venues around Melbourne.

Lynne Truss, the renowned author of *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*; celebrated Irish novelist, Colm Toibin; from Sweden, Henning Mankell; and world acclaimed crime writer, Michael Connelly, head a stellar list of writers who will be participating in The 2004 Age Melbourne Writers' Festival.



Lynne Truss

Also coming to Australia for the festival this year are award winning French novelist, Philippe Claudel; publishing sensation, Carlos Ruiz Zafon; David Denby from the US; Kenyan author Aidan Hartley; Chinese/US writer Xinran Xue and British publisher Toby Eady.

Among the Australian authors attending will be Peter Carnley, Helen Garner, Robert Dessaix, Edmund Campion, Peter Goldsworthy, Peter Singer, Frank Moorhouse, Frank Brennan, Matthew Reilly, Rodney Hall, Peter Hill, Amanda Lohrey and many more...



Michael Connelly



# Rhythm of life

*Percussion*, Jay Verney. University of Queensland Press, 2004. ISBN 0 702 23449 4, RRP \$22.95

**I**N 1994, JAY VERNEY released her first novel, *A Mortality Tale*, which told the story of how an encounter with death impacted on the life of an individual. It was short listed for both the Vogel and Miles Franklin awards. After ten years, her second novel, *Percussion*, has finally been published.

It has been worth the wait.

As in her first novel, Verney takes the theme of death as her starting point. This time she has broadened her scope, and instead of focusing on an individual, she tackles not just one, but two cultures.

Three generations of women travel to the US to attend a war veteran's reunion. Some of the grandmother's friends married American soldiers, stationed in Queensland during World War II.

This background to the novel provides an interesting context to the story. It was World War II when Australian and US relations effectively began. Since then it has been a gradual step closer toward America, as we separated from Britain. The main purpose of *Percussion* seems to be an examination of how well these two cultures cohabit, and an explanation for why they do not.

For Verney, the key to this is how differently each culture deals with death. She achieves this by creating a parallel between the granddaughter, mother and grandmother, travelling through the US, and the rest of their family dealing with their everyday lives in a fictional Australian coastal town, Pineapple Bay. This then comes together in telling how, on returning home, their period in the States has impacted on the whole

family. Here Verney contrasts the American denial of death with an Australian acceptance of it.

All the usual images of American culture as a wasteland are present, such as the superficiality of Las Vegas glitz juxtaposed with its surrounding desert. The central incident of the novel, an unexpected earthquake occurring along an hitherto undiscovered fault line, and the violent civil unrest which follows, could be taken by some as an analogy



of the Twin Towers disaster. In the hands of a lesser writer, such images could have fallen into cliché. But Verney crafts them into fine points of contrast, which sees, at the centre of *Percussion*, not an anti-American tirade, but a gentle nod to what it may mean for some to be Australian. ■

Matthew Lamb has a PhD in Literature, he lives and writes in Brisbane, and will soon commence a PhD in Philosophy.



# City terraces

**Carlton: A History** edited by Peter Yule. Melbourne University Press, 2004. ISBN 0 522 85061 8, RRP \$59.95

**L**IVING IN CARLTON in the late '70s meant teenage desires found climactic expression and bohemian tendencies went troppo. A rented terrace with seven residents, and a floating population of 70 times seven, was an unequalled domestic adventure. 'Floating' was in fact the word, with a daily intake of legal and illegal substances causing the population to see the great omphalos in the ceiling rose, or a Canning Street roundabout. Ganja plants lined the concrete backyard, or were cultivated by ultra-violet light under the staircase: the only things in the house given careful tending. Washing-up? What's that? We ran alternative shows on the nascent 3RRR. There was a high demand for sensory overload. Concrete poems built from Real Estate sections decorated the walls. Philip Hunter was imitating Tapies in one room, Paul Grabowsky copying Bud Powell in another. Weekends were one long jazz rehearsal. Parties were immovable feasts as guests took half an hour to find their way from front door to fridge. Culinary skills extended about as far as over-peppered spaghetti Bolognese.

We never thought we were making memories, but this book reminds us we were one small story in decades of change. As Arnold Zable says, 'from the outset Carlton has been on a roller-coaster ride of booms and busts.' This most lavish of local histories is full of surprises. Three closely-written pages explain how Carlton got its name. Nobody knows, the closest plausible reason amidst a labyrinth of guesses, being that the Carlton Gardens, established in 1852, lent the name to the surrounding bushland by simple mind association.

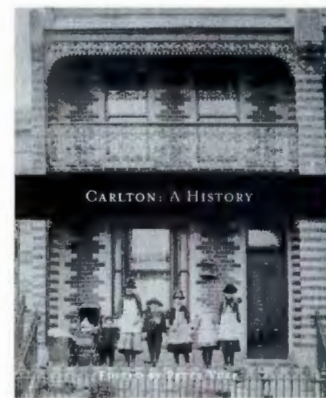
An attempt is made to piece together Koori history, though 'Carlton is not known to have had any particular significance to the Wurundjeri' and we mainly learn how the people were dispersed or assimilated. In fact one conclusion drawn by Don Chambers is that Carlton was 'probably associated with death and mourning' by the Indigenous inhabitants, as their people were buried in the new Melbourne General Cemetery, in the section 'Other Denominations'. The presence in the bush of the Collingwood Stockade on what is now Lee Street School, would not have been a friendly sight either.

The truth about Carlton is that it's unavoidable, geographically, culturally, collectively. It's often seen as an extension of the city of Melbourne. To get anywhere north of the Yarra, Carlton must enter consciousness. A range of topical chapters goes a good way in delineating how this happened. Carlton began late, really after the gold rush, which meant expansive use of space, whether for essential services like the brewery, or marvellous eminences such as the Exhibition Buildings. Classy housing and broad streets rose up beside factories and hospitals. Its symbiotic relationship with Melbourne University

later made it a second home for anyone who studied there. It was only the crash of the 1890s that changed this affluent progress.

Many of those who cohabited in cottages of glorious squalor in the 1970s became the ones who yuppified the place ten years later. Yet, that gentrification saved Carlton is a myth debunked here, as it becomes quickly apparent that the immigrant population after World War I, especially Italians and Jews, settled Carlton during an era when it was judged a slum by the rest of Melbourne. That, and the heroic actions of the Carlton Association in protecting large parts of the Victorian heritage from the predatory Housing Commission demolishers, are the main reasons for its preservation.

**S**OME OF THE MOST PERSONAL and effective work here covers the Jewish and Italian times, the period circa the Olympic Games being identified as when 'olives and pasta dura replaced pickles and rye bread in Carlton'. The tremendous social and cultural change brought to inner Melbourne, especially by the Italians, is everywhere apparent today. So much so that it seems to have eclipsed the work of that other group of boat people, who nowadays go by the exotic hybrid 'Anglo-Celt'—a term they themselves would have met with disdain, or worse. For it is the Anglo-Celts who, despite building and inhabiting Carlton for its entire existence, are shadows in their own history. We learn about churches, businesses, and the picturesque shorthand of local politics, but their absence grows greater as the text proceeds. The editor apologises for the omission, confessing more work has to be done, but gives no satisfactory explanation. Vincent Buckley's long poem 'Golden Builders' is a virtual reconstruction of Carlton as a place to which Melburnians are cloven and cleft. (It names so many Carlton streets that Michael Cathcart once called the poem the alternate Melways.) No such memory of long-term ancestral commitment can be found in these pages, or picked up quickly, even though it is easy to revel in the general scene. We spot the connections—Cardigan Street and the Charge of the Light Brigade—but not always the deeper meanings. Ray Lawler, who set his paragon play there, described it as 'a now scruffy but once fashionable





suburb'. The word 'fashionable' is used comfortably by many contributors to set the 19th century picture, yet the book itself provides few personal glimpses, giving impressions of some mythic otherworld, exact details of which are now lost. What we can see are the results: polychrome terraces, ferny wrought iron, and squares of tree colonnades. But was it all just business as usual, carried out by men with well-cut beards? This lack of a longer memory may indicate a failure of imagination. The scruffy second half of Carlton's life is in the foreground.

**T**HIS ALSO INDICATES another truth about Carlton: it is a place people left as better opportunity arose. The Skips went deeper into their verdant suburbs; the Jews crossed the river into Balaclava; the Italians sought something so simple as bigger gardens for their vegetables and grapes. Carlton's overall population steadily declined from 1945 to 1995, sign that for much of its history Carlton was a place to arrive at, then move on from. Even our own student micro-history of the late '70s bears this out. The owners suddenly wanted to sell the house. Romances turned into arguments. Personality intruded on personal relations. It got messy. By the time the household broke up it was time to get a job or return to study. We were kicked off the radio on the grounds the jazz show sounded like a party. It's true, it was a party; Carlton gave permission to party all night and we left without regrets.

For this reviewer, a Magpie barracker, the most irksome

chapter tables the triumphs of the suburb's football club, the Blues. Blues and melancholy are exact synonyms in the Collingwood lexicon, the 1970 Grand Final being fairly certainly the most brilliant comeback in the history of the game, a spectacular victory over the archrivals that has powerful undercurrents for both clubs to this day. Glory and catastrophe. Sport though is but one small aspect in a diverse, changeable history. Bill Garner's chapter on the theatre explosion, and its ultimate implosion, is heartfelt. The chapter on crime carefully charts shifting causes and effects. And the section on the built environment is simply drooly for anyone who has lived there for any time; bluestone lanes are forever part of the central nervous system.

The book is rich. It covers a lot of country in urbane and particular style. It need not be repeated. It's good value. That said, the book leaves certain avenues open, some already stated, and there is one especially. Tightly edited oral histories dot the text, but they dwindle. The time is ripe for a full-scale oral history of this and other inner Melbourne areas, especially with a new fierce phase in thoughtless re-development. 'In every nook and corner previously unoccupied, frail buildings are being run up ... in lanes and alleys, and on little patches heretofore used as yards and garden plots, miserable cribs are being erected for human occupation.' This is not a recent letter to *The Age* but a report in the *Melbourne Argus* of 1868. ■

Philip Harvey is Poetry Editor of *Eureka Street*.



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# Irish dignity

*Lady Gregory's Toothbrush*, Colm Tóibín. Picador, 2003. ISBN 0 330 41993 5, RRP \$22

**A**T THE TURN of the 20th century, Lady Augusta Gregory emerged as a key figure within the Irish Literary Revival. She was a major organiser of the theatre movement, a founder of the Abbey Theatre, and an important translator and dramatist in her own right. In *Lady Gregory's Toothbrush* Irish novelist Colm Tóibín provides us with an evocative sketch of this complex figure.

Gregory was born into the Anglo-Irish landlord class, rulers by inheritance who were under increasing pressure from an emergent Catholic middle class and an indigenous nationalist movement. Inherited rule is suggested by her marriage to Sir William Gregory, an Irish landowner, former British Cabinet minister and former Governor General of Ceylon. An interest in more illicit alignments is perhaps suggested by her early affair with the prominent anti-imperialist campaigner and poet, Wilfred Scawen Blunt.

In the decade following Sir William's death in 1892, Gregory edited his autobiography, which Tóibín regards as a key moment in her own emergence and self-invention. The Anglo-Irish image and ethos that she drew upon emphasised the traditionalist relation between landlord and tenant with its attendant duties and responsibilities. This tie between the Anglo-Irish and the native Irish was important in mediating the tension between her ruling inheritance and her increasing interest in Irish nationalism. It was an ideology that would also inform the political and poetic vision of W.B. Yeats.

Gregory would later take some satisfaction in recalling that there were no evictions from Sir William's estate at Coole during the famine. Tóibín notes the elision here: Sir William lent his name to the infamous 'Gregory clause,' an amendment to the Poor Law requiring the famine stricken to abandon even the most meagre land leases before receiving relief. Sir William's personal enlightenment and benevolence proved no guarantee against participating in government policy that caused great suffering and distress.

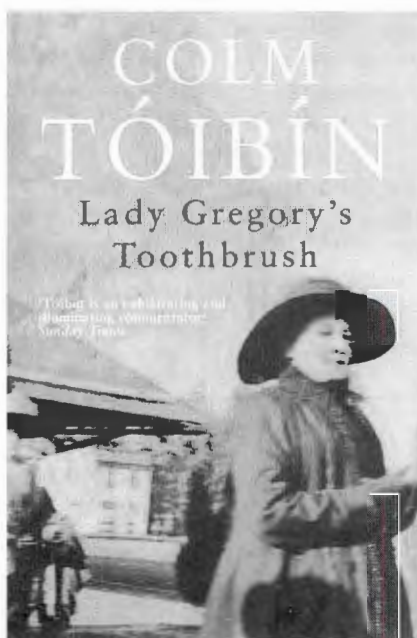
During the 1890s, Gregory learns the Irish language, studies Irish history and literature, visits the Aran Islands and collects Irish folklore. Under the radicalising influence of the Gaelic League, she undertakes a translation of the Cuchulainn myth, partly in answer to the Trinity University professors who argued that there was little of value in indigenous literature. As Tóibín also notes, the cultural nationalism underpinning all this ethnographic and literary activity did not prevent her from maintaining her position and estate at Coole, or being aghast at

radical nationalist incitements against the landlords.

Tóibín recognises that 'inconsistencies are part of the history of Ireland in these years'. Gregory's combination of conservative and radical viewpoints was connected, in part, to the intense strains within Irish culture and society itself.

It is a bit odd, then, that Tóibín seems not to give broader pressures much determining force, veering instead towards the suggestion that Gregory behaved with some degree of personal bad faith. He would have it that Gregory was not prone to much self-reflection and that she displayed considerable skills in managing contradiction. Missing certainly is any sense of a personal, artistic or political struggle with her inherited position.

Tóibín observes that even as she joined the ranks of the rebels she seemed hardly to have moved much beyond the old friendships and associations. Indeed, she called upon such connections to lend support to the formation of the Abbey Theatre. Tóibín also argues that the reason she did



not press her claim to joint authorship of the play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* was because its call for nationalist insurrection threatened these older associations. Another sideways glance at other areas of her life at this time sees her threatening to seize the cattle of tenants for non-payment of rents.

Tóibín acknowledges Gregory's determination and passion. Her powers of organisation and direction were instrumental in establishing the Abbey. (He does observe a touch of the feudal in her dealings with supporters and actors.) Gregory also defended artistic freedom against the formidable line-up of the Catholic Church, the British administration, and other nationalists. She ensured some of the key works of 20th-century Irish theatre by Synge, Shaw and O'Casey first saw the light of the Dublin day.

**I**T IS ARGUABLY Gregory's and Yeats' defences of artistic freedom against narrower forms of Irish nationalism that provided their most important intervention in Irish cultural debate of the period. Tóibín notes the obvious key moment:



the riot against the Abbey performance of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. The play offended the pieties and idealisations of religious and nationalist forces, causing them to come together in unruly protest. Tóibín might have drawn attention here to extreme sensitivity of cultural questions within Irish society during these years. What he mostly identifies, however, was how readily Gregory and Yeats reverted to Anglo-Irish type: Gregory apparently characterised this as a conflict 'between those who use a toothbrush and those who don't'.

IT IS INTERESTING THAT Gregory helped the young James Joyce, despite 'his intermittent use of a toothbrush'. And yet, Gregory's basic lack of empathy for the Catholic middle-class world of Joyce's writing meant that their relationship would be cautious at best. Joyce, for his part, was not beyond 'biting the hand' and penned some rude comments about her in reviews and letters. Recent criticism has begun exploring Joyce's complex relationship with the Literary Revival, in which Yeats and Gregory played such a pivotal role. This is something Tóibín hints at but leaves undeveloped.

Not surprisingly, some of the tensions in Gregory's position come to the fore with the dramatic years of the 1916 Irish Uprising and World War I. After an initially negative reaction to the Rising she comes to perceive its symbolic importance and urges Yeats to do likewise. When he writes 'Easter 1916' Gregory has second thoughts and uses her considerable influence on him to delay its publication by some years. This influence is also evident in Yeats' remarkable sequence of poems to commemorate Gregory's son, Robert, killed while serving with the Royal Flying Corps. The titles of two of the best known of these reveal a tension between Robert's apparent English patriotism and his Irish origins: 'In Memory of Major Robert Gregory' and 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death'.

After the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922, Yeats and Gregory sought official status (and subsidy) for the Abbey. This brought new pressures, such as those ranged against the staging of Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* because of the offence it would cause to public opinion. To their credit, Yeats and Gregory defended the right to cause such offence and riots occurred once again at the performance of an Abbey play. Tóibín notes the imperiousness of Yeats' response, but also marks it as an important victory against what was to prove to be an extremely censorious Irish state.

The Abbey underwent a slow decline in the subsequent years and decades. Rejection of O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie*, because of its expressionist aspects, evidenced a failure to keep up with European developments in theatre: 'They had supervised one theatrical revolution; they were not ready to pay attention to another'. A new generation of playwrights, including those like Denis Johnston, would look to the newly founded Gate Theatre instead.

The least convincing moment in the book comes when Tóibín has Gregory meet Éamon de Valera, veteran of the 1916 Uprising, head of various Irish governments and subsequent President of Ireland. De Valera's politics were famously grounded in idealised images of a frugal and self-sufficient peasantry. Tóibín remarks: 'The ideology on which he based his politics was essentially hers, but without her liberalism and her belief in aristocracy, and, because it was politics, ready to accept failure.' These are large exceptions, but Tóibín does not allow this to deter him from suggesting a very strong continuity between Gregory and the ideology that informed Dev's blinkered theocratic state.

Tóibín's meditation on Gregory's life and work is frequently interesting and insightful, even if he sometimes displays a peculiar lack of sympathy for his subject. He skilfully weaves the key moments of her life into a cultural narrative of this important period. What is only occasionally evident, however, is the way Yeats' and Gregory's association with a basically residual world was complicated by a forward-looking cultural vision. Gregory will continue to interest us because she was part of a cultural formation that staged what some now identify as 'resistance theatre', and beyond that, signalled the arrival of the uniquely important Irish contribution to 20th-century modernism. ■

Dr Gary Pearce is a librarian at RMIT University.



# Not easy being green

*Memo for a Saner World*, Bob Brown. Penguin, 2004. ISBN 0 143 00034 9, RRP \$24.95

**I**T COULD BE ARGUED that most politicians enter public life with the best intentions. But such intentions are soon sacrificed to party expediency, narrow self-interest, and short term political goals. Here, the politician hopes the public won't notice they've given up working for the common good, that they act only to keep the public distracted by relying on a form of sleight-of-hand resulting from the separation of words from deeds.

It therefore says a lot about Australia's democracy, when a person like Bob Brown is seen as a political anomaly, rather than the norm. For over two decades Brown has been shaping his political mettle by bringing his words and actions into closer accord, trying to protect our long-term national and global interests, often at personal expense.

A cynic could argue that he can afford to behave the way he does because, not being in a major party, with all its pressures and responsibilities, he has the least to lose. But to argue this would be to miss the point, and that is that Bob Brown behaves the way he does out of necessity; solely because he—along with everybody else—actually has the most to lose.

It is this point that Brown is trying to convey in his latest book, *Memo for a Saner World*. 'It consists of stories from along the road I have taken', he says, in the introduction, 'as an environmental campaigner concerned for all humanity and as a Greens senator,

with discussion of some of the issues on the way'. These campaigns include the Franklin River blockade, the logging of both Farmhouse Creek and the Styx Valley, and more. As a senator for the Greens, he discusses the need for strong human rights and environmental protection laws, reflects on how the Greens behave in government, and exposes the violence directed against environmentalists in Australia and around the world.

**H**E EVEN INCLUDES an interesting essay regarding the consequences of his interjection of George W. Bush's parliamentary address in October 2003: this exercise in free speech came after Bush's earlier visit to Manila, where five opposition members walked out rather than be lectured by the President without the right to reply or question. Following Brown and Kerry Nettle's actions in Australia, Bush's planned address to the British parliament was abandoned, for fear that, emboldened by such displays of democracy, dissenting British MPs opposing the war in Iraq would protest.

What causes most concern about Bob Brown, however, is that some of the language he uses, both in these essays and elsewhere, may appear counterproductive. In the opening piece, 'Earth Spirit', he cites an Irish correspond-

ent and anti-environmentalist, who sees all greenies as 'chunky-sweatered folk who ramble at weekends, hug trees on

Wednesday and spend the rest of their time polluting every conversation with scare stories about holes in the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect'. In the same essay—where he argues, 'We are the universe thinking'—he risks playing into such stereotypes. And yes, he does also include an essay about global warming, holes in the ozone, and the greenhouse effect. Faced with this, it is possible to see how some would react by withdrawing into their fears and prejudices.

All interest groups—and the Greens are no exception—have their own expressions and their own language. This works well for groups who are not interested in communicating with anyone outside their own areas of interest, such as government and big business. But this does not work well for groups whose interests extend beyond itself and its own immediate members, such as those concerned with humanity and the environment. The challenge, if such groups wish to remain relevant, is to create a new language which can connect with these other, sometimes opposing, sometimes complementary, groups.

Bob Brown is most persuasive when he avoids using a 'green' rhetoric, which he occasionally slips into, especially when attacking market fundamentalism and excessive materialism. His best moments, and happily these comprise the bulk of his book, are when he effectively uses against them the language of those opposers, and demonstrates that a good economy is dependent on good ecology; that narrow self-interest is ultimately self-defeating, and that a broader conception of human interest, common to all, is not only possible, but necessary.

It is a pity that Bob Browns don't grow on trees. ■

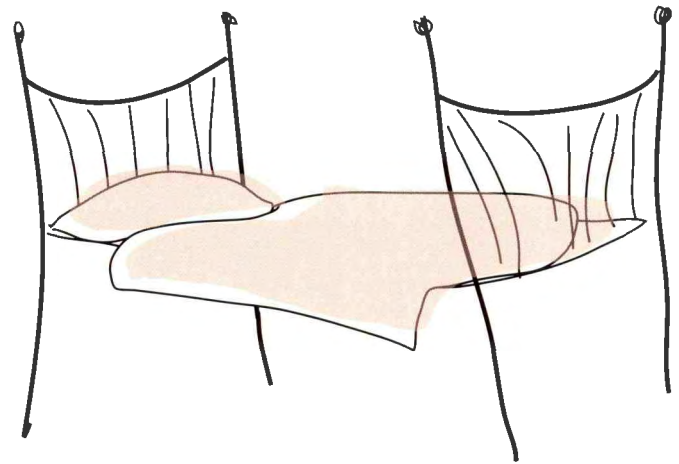
**Matthew Lamb** has a PhD in Literature. He lives and writes in Brisbane.





# On taking to the bed

Refuge, retreat and redemption



**F**RIENDS TELL ME TALES: of the woman in Mayo who took to the bed for three years, and the man in Donegal who took to the bed for a year, and the cousin of a friend who takes to the bed every winter when the rains begin. I am reminded of Darby Ruadh of Auginish, who took to his bed for a year for yearning love of a woman he saw in a river, and of Aoife of Connacht, who took to her bed for a year, emerging only to change her stepchildren into swans, for which she was punished by being changed into a gray vulture, doomed to live on the wing as long as time endured, which is to say that she could never take to her bed until the end of the world, which is a long time to be deprived of a particularly Irish form of refuge, retreat, restoration, surrender, defiance, passivity, prayer, and sadness.

In Irish culture, taking to the bed is not considered especially odd. People did and do it for understandable reasons—ill health, or the black dog, or, most horrifyingly, to die during An Gorta Mor, the great hunger, when whole families took to their beds to slowly starve. There are black days upon me every year when I cannot help but see those families in their skeletal beds, the wet wind snarling, the infant boy whimpering, the last moans of the mother, the father weeping silently, the daughter staggering up at the last to fold the arms of her family across their chests as bony as birds.

So many dead in the bed.

And in our time: I know a woman who took to her bed for a week after September 11, and people who have taken to their beds for days on end to recover from shattered love affairs, the death of a child, a physical injury that heals far faster than the psychic wound gaping under it. I've done it myself twice, once as a youth and once as a man, the first time in sheer

confusion and the second time to think through a tottering marriage. Something about the rectangularity of the bed, perhaps, or supinity, or silence, or timelessness; for when you are in bed but

not asleep there is no time, as lovers and insomniacs know.

**T**HE GREAT AMERICAN SONGWRITER Brian Wilson famously took to his bed for three years, as had his hard-fisted Irish father Murray. The writer Brendan Behan's grandmother took to her bed for three years, sending her son out to the pub every afternoon for a bucket of porter, and ruling her clan from the fortress of her four-poster, dressing every day for visitors, and finally rising from her bed without apology or explanation and resuming her former bipedality. A friend in Mayo tells me of his friend Annie Mary's mother, who took to her bed one day for no reason anyone could tell, no physical ailment or complaint did she state, no wound of the world apparent, and she stayed so long abed, years and years, that eventually she was called the *cran*, that is the tree, the rooted one. This was told to me by a man told it by his cousin who was raised under thatch four fields away from Annie Mary, so you may be sure it is true.

I know a man who once took not to the bed but to the top of a telephone booth, late in the afternoon, and there he stayed deep into the night, on the theory, as he said, that as long he was atop the booth none of his problems could get at him, no decisions or mistakes need he make. He had, as he said, placed himself in parentheses amid the sentence of life, and there he wished to stay for a time, considering the lilies of the field, how they grow, and the birds of the air, who did not sow nor did they reap; which he did, until a policeman came.

Before the law arrived I had been sent by women to the top of the booth, to remonstrate and persuade and dissuade, but after climbing up and listening to my friend explain himself I felt that he had a good point, so I clambered back down to the street. On my way down he leaned over the edge of the booth and said quietly: Which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to the span of his life?

A very good question.

Yet, anxious, we take to the bed, saddled by despair and dissonance and disease, riddled by muddledness and madness, rattled by malaise and misadventure, and in the ancient culture of my forebears this was not so unusual, it happened in every clan, a brother to the bed or a mother to the mattress for a day, a week, a month, a year, three years, the rest of her allotted days; and ultimately what is there to wonder at in this? For from the bed we came and to it we shall return, and our nightly voyages there are nutritious and restorative, and we have taken to our beds for a thousand other reasons, loved and argued and eaten and seethed there, and sang and sobbed and suckled, and burned with fevers and visions and lust, and huddled and curled and prayed. As children we all, every one of us, pretended the bed was a boat; so now, when we are so patently and persistently and daily at sea, why not seek a ship? ■

**Brian Doyle** is the editor of *Portland Magazine* at the University of Portland, in Oregon, and the author most recently of *Leaping*, a collection of essays. His work appears in the *Best American Essays* anthologies of 1998, 1999, and 2003. A collection of his essays about writers and musicians, *Spirited Men*, will be published in October by Cowley Publications of Boston.

# A century of giving

## The legacy of the Felton Bequest

MELBOURNE NOW HAS TWO major galleries—NGV Australia and NGV International, and it's hard not to smile when walking out of Flinders Street Station into a gigantic new arts precinct after doing without for so long. O brave new world, that has such buildings in it! As artist Robert Motherwell once said, people just naturally accept modern buildings. The Ian Potter Gallery in Federation Square opened its doors in 2002 and the public has been pouring in ever since. The refurbished NGV International in St Kilda Road finally reopened in December 2003 to accolades, and scores have been to the Caravaggio exhibition.

Gerard Vaughan, director and CEO of the National Gallery of Victoria, must be one of the busiest people in Australia. Any dream of a soul-baring interaction with Mr Vaughan was dashed by the circumstances of the interview. Yes, he could find a window for me—in the taxi on the way to Sydney Airport and then suggested I call again after he landed, in the taxi from Tullamarine to the carpark of the NGV. After serving as director of the British Museum Development Trust in London for five years, he replaced Timothy Potts as director of the NGV in 1999. He has shepherded the Federation Square and St Kilda Road buildings into being, both projects of mind-boggling complexity, which were started by former Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett.

I spend a lot of time on external relations with stakeholders, government relations, talking to the press and the members of the NGV. I'm lobbying for money a great deal of the time, that is very important of course, and support from the community. And I have to deal with a lot of straightforward administrative issues—not the day-to-day management, that's handled by the chief of finance and others. And of course I have excellent professional curatorial staff. Dealing with issues like conservation of works and retail operations. Acquisitions program—we have some very exciting works coming up. We are getting a sculpture

by Archipenko, among others.'

Fundraising is part of the duties of all gallery directors, but the rationing is what makes the difference. The NGV is often mentioned in the same breath as the name of Melbourne businessman Alfred Felton. It's now a hundred years since he died, leaving the then enormous sum of £191,500 to Victoria's National Gallery. Felton was a dedicated art collector but his taste was of its time, running mainly to middle-of-the-road landscapes. His was one of Melbourne's great 19th-century success stories. A watchmaker's assistant, he emigrated from East Anglia in the north-west of England during the Victorian gold-rush years and ended up at the head of a business empire. He believed in art as a force for good in society, and when he made his will he was farsighted enough not to place restrictive conditions on the use of his money. He did stipulate that the gallery was to keep its purchases, which has been lucky for the NGV. It now has holdings under the Felton Bequest worth around \$1 billion.

THE FELTON BEQUEST Trustees were always very conservative about investment. In the '60s the international art market rocketed while the Australian dollar dipped. By the mid '70s, it was seen that the Felton Bequest would be insufficient, and there was a period of financial doldrums. Premier Rupert Hamer was a very enlightened man ... (who was) ahead of his time. (He) arranged an annual departmental allocation from government funding in order to build up the Bequest. He had ideas like launching an endowment campaign. The aim was to put them back in the position they were in 30 years (previously), when they could have anything they wanted.'

'Anything they wanted' is an alluring phrase: Melbourne may well be the home of the luckiest gallery in the nation. Not all others have had such a cornucopia of money and good will.

'The NGV has one of the world's great art collections. We would only be a respect-

able provincial art gallery without it. We are what we are because of Alfred Felton's huge, amazing gift. And at that point the Victorian Government bowed out of collections. So much has been given to us from private benefactors, not taxpayers' money. As a young boy I was taken to the National Gallery and I was inspired by things like the wonderful Rembrandt drawings which the gallery was able to buy. The income from the Bequest in those days also meant that every year something exciting was being acquired.'

It's not so much the overall funding that a gallery receives, but other factors including the ratio and history of private and public funding. From the time of Felton onward there have been others who have strengthened the culture of arts endowment. The Myers, the Murdochs, the Baillieus—Melbourne's cultural history has an unbroken chain of the scions of establishment, deeply involved in the arts. Some galleries now institute flagship programs to educate business leaders in the benefits of 'qualitative rather than quantitative returns' to justify sponsorship of the arts to shareholders. In this climate, a gallery's director has to maintain complex relationships between the trustees, the funding bodies, public and private, the community the gallery serves and the exceedingly volatile fashions and markets in art.

Outgoing director of the National Gallery of Australia, Brian Kennedy, has likened public art galleries to secular cathedrals, and their CEOs to secular archbishops. His style differs from Gerard Vaughan's: it's more outspoken and speculative, he certainly appears to have attracted more than a director's usual share of strife. In February 2003, Kennedy's reported outburst at a Senate estimates hearing regarding faults in the air-conditioning system at the NGA hit the press, as did controversy about his acquisition of David Hockney's \$4.6 million *A Bigger Grand Canyon* and Lucian Freud's \$7.4 million *After Cezanne*—and all this amid rumours about low staff morale. In early June, only



a few days after this interview with Gerard Vaughan, *The Age* published an article by Lauren Martin that placed these issues in high relief, as it were. During the interview with Vaughan, I had wondered if the Felton Bequest and similar private funding meant that NGV had a more independent position from government than the NGA because of a different ratio of public to private funding. I asked Vaughan for his perspective.

'I can't possibly comment on that. I'm a public servant and the basic principle here is that I'm employed to do a job. While I'm obviously impacted by government, I've never felt restricted. I'm immensely grateful for the funding, but you have to remember that we're all competing with a huge number of lobbyists for funding from government. The funding is adequate—sometimes you get it, sometimes you don't.

'I can honestly say I've never had any pressure from government in five years. We had a recent incident that was politically controversial, the very confronting work at Federation Square (Gordon Hookey's *Sacred nation, scared nation, indoctrination*) by an Indigenous artist, which took a stand on the US and Australian involvement in the Iraq conflict. Both Andrew Bolt of the *Herald Sun* and the Opposition spokesman objected to it with Andrew Bolt demanding it be removed. Andrew Bolt challenged the Minister to instruct us to take it down. The Minister refused and assured me that the government would never involve itself in censorship.

'I've had some very interesting talks with government which have been very positive, collaborative. There's a consultative process which works very well. In fact there was a large collection of furniture, which we had acquired in the past, which we needed to dispose of, and although you would think selling off public assets would not be ALP policy, we were able to convince the Minister of the necessity for doing this.'

Another significant act of private benefaction to the NGV is Dr Joseph Brown's recent gift of his collection. He migrated to Australia from Poland in 1933 as a 15-year-old and eventually headed his own successful fashion business. His involvement in visual art, both as a painter himself and later as a gallery owner, led him to build his formidable Australian art collection. For 20 years Dr Brown, now 86, has been trying to find a permanent home for his 500 artworks, which have been



*Two old men disputing* by Rembrandt van Rijn, 1628. Collection of the NGV.

valued at \$30 million. They constitute a canon of Australian major works by artists such as Eugène von Guérard, Margaret Preston, Sidney Nolan, Brett Whiteley, Fred Williams, Peter Booth, and Frederick McCubbin. Their acquisition was a major coup for the NGV. Vaughan explained the initial obstacles to NGV's acceptance of the gift, and how they were eventually overcome.

**'D**R BROWN HAD INTENDED his entire collection to be on permanent display as an entity in perpetuity and we simply didn't have the space to house it under those conditions. But we were able to reach a compromise in due course. Dr Brown wanted it to be at the NGV Australia, knowing that more than a million people per annum pass through. We chose 100 works which best represented the collection. It was a wonderful and generous compromise for Joseph Brown to make. Of course it was the end of an odyssey, a saga, for him and he had wanted to donate it for 20 years.'

The current show '2004: Australian Culture Now', is an exhibition of 130 living Australian artists. I asked him if it represented a departure from the usual concentration on overseas acquisitions and the historical, collector's view of art.

'The gallery has always supported Australian contemporary art. There's a tradition of young practising artists being closely involved with us. Right up to ten to 15 years ago the National Gallery school was training young artists. They had young practising artists as part of the

infrastructure. In collaboration with the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, it's an opportunity for big, powerful issues in contemporary art to be seen. Many of the best new artists now are working with the screen and other new media instead of the traditional canvas—things like film, photography, design of video games, interactive computer-based works.

What have been some of the highlights of the last five years?

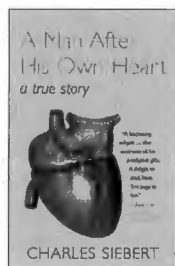
'There've been so many fantastic things. The biggest challenge has been getting those two wonderful buildings built, and the incredible detail of that, and the installing of the collections. Opening those buildings was fantastic. Another highlight was major new acquisitions. We've done our best, and in doing that, we've delivered what both the government and the people of Victoria want. We've given them the best buildings, the best staff, and the best collections in Australia.

'We didn't have a Biennale this time around—it might be a Triennial or a four-year initiative. We want to ride on the back of the Sydney Biennale and attract international visitors to both. We can't have them coming to Melbourne after Sydney to find nothing's happening here. We want them to know Melbourne's back in business.'

A way gallery directors put their stamp on their tenure is acquisition of significant artwork. Brian Kennedy's Hockney and Freud were momentous, controversial, echoing James Mollison's acquisition of Pollock's *Blue Poles* under the Whitlam Government, or indeed the NGV's own *Banquet of Cleopatra* by Tiepolo, acquired during the Depression. That and Mollison's vision have long since been vindicated. The NGV has the buildings for such things now, but will the money be enough for the really huge acquisitions? Gerard Vaughan hinted tantalisingly at a big purchase he is negotiating at the moment. When asked about his own tastes, Vaughan laughed. 'Everything,' he said. His taste, he said was so broad that it was hard to single things out, but he then spoke of two passions: the French Post-Impressionists, and the subject of his doctoral thesis, which was on the history of collections and how tastes form and change over generations.

Emerging from a honeymoon with press and public, the NGV is still basking. ■

**Juliette Hughes** is a freelance writer. **Lucille Hughes** is an artist. They are sisters.



**A man after his own heart: A true story**, Charles Siebert. Scribe, 2004. ISBN 1 920 76914 5, RRP \$30

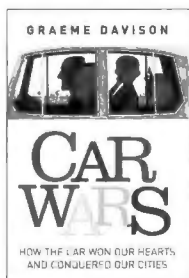
Nearing the end of this 'exploration of the heart', the author recounts an occasion on which he tried explaining the idea for this book to an ageing and unnamed academic. Responding to Siebert's comments, the gentleman seems uncertain of the author's intended work, which he dismissively summarises as 'some sort of book about the heart'.

This is a book about a man considering his father's death (of heart disease), becoming aware of his own mortality and the possibility of inheriting the same disease. It is also a study of the life of Siebert's father; an anonymous organ donor; harvester and recipient. Though impeccably researched and written with great sensitivity, there is something inexact about Siebert's narrative. This is common enough in biography, but in a book about the heart I suspect it is almost desirable. This is less a book about certainties than a history of questions.

There are rich engagements with some of the scientific and theological characterisations and caricatures of the heart through history. Siebert suggests that it is only in lived experience that the extremes of science and religion maintain a precarious but satisfying tension.

Charles Siebert's narrative is touching. His exploration of this symbol, archetype and pump is engaging at many levels. I heartily recommend it.

—Luke O'Callaghan



**Car Wars: How the car won our hearts and conquered our cities**, Graeme Davison with Sheryl Yelland. Allen & Unwin, 2004. ISBN 1 741 14207 5, RRP \$29.95

'Cars are everywhere', Graeme Davison writes in this history of a city and its cars. 'They monopolise our streets and roadways and mould the landscape to their insistent demands.' Melbourne is a place Davison knows intimately, and about which he writes

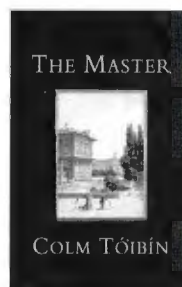
with insight. *Car Wars* analyses the effects of automobiles on cities—congestion, road trauma, suburban sprawl, motels, drive-in shopping centres, parking lots. It examines the aspirations of past governments—from the vast freeway networks of the 1960s, to the City Link schemes of the Kennett era.

Davison looks at protest movements against expansion along waterways and through Melbourne's historic inner suburbs. He examines arguments of earlier critics, such as Robin Boyd, an opponent of Australia's car-led transformation into 'Austerica'. He examines gender constructions and the effects cars had on the lives of young people.

*Car Wars* is written engagingly, supported by meticulous research that reveals unknown episodes in transport history. In 1948, Melbourne's Lord Mayor, a car dealer, decided to inspect traffic congestion in the CBD from the air. Unfortunately the rare sight of a helicopter brought Melburnians out into the streets and out of their cars, confounding the mayor's survey.

*Car Wars* is an excellent contribution to continuing development debates.

—John Molloy



**The Master**, Colm Tóibín. Picador, 2004. ISBN 0 743 25040 0, RRP \$25

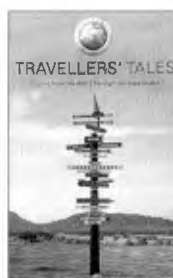
*The Master* follows the life of American author Henry James at the end of the 19th century. Though admired by many, James fails at true affection, needing freedom and distancing himself from anyone who threatens to weigh upon this liberty.

Though the text is not plot-driven, the beauty is in James' observations. We follow James through his life in Rome, Florence, Venice, Paris and finally settling in England. Tóibín's images represent a stunning literary postcard of the Europe that so appealed to the American bohemian set.

Tóibín paints his work with several raw scenes that show great insight into human nature. The deaths of close family members and friends produce some of the most moving passages in the novel due to the honesty with which Tóibín expresses James' reflections. Though the novel often reminisces on events in James' youth, Tóibín moves easily between past and present.

The images created in *The Master* linger in the memory. The description of the child James hiding in the family drawing room, listening to Dickens' *David Copperfield*—a novel not viewed as appropriate for one so young—who gives himself away by crying at David's mistreatment, is an image that remains because of its gentle humanity. I wasn't always captivated by the text, because the pace tends to move slowly and the constant introduction of new characters can be confusing. However it is Tóibín's narrative that makes *The Master* compelling, allowing us to see the honest self of Henry James.

—Rachel Hewitt



**Travellers' Tales**, compiled by Trevor Bormann. ABC Books, 2004. ISBN 0 733 31364 7, RRP \$24.95

'To be perfectly frank, journalists despise normality', Peter Lloyd confesses before describing the 'bloodbath' of the Bali bombings. Although it seems a catalogue of all that is wrong with this world, I couldn't help experiencing a sense of levity after finishing *Travellers' Tales*.

*Travellers' Tales* contains the anecdotes of a handful of the ABC's foreign correspondents.

As well as insights into the world's hotspots, it offers a glimpse into the motives of the roving reporter. When Michael Maher quotes Graham Greene's description of the journalist as the 'voyeur of violence', one wonders if perhaps this phrase is inaccurate. For instance, Mark Corcoran's engagement with mercenaries in Sierra Leone and Sally Sara's description of suburban Johannesburg inspire deep feeling.

The eye for the personal characterises the accounts, satisfying the need for information and providing a glimmer of constructive promise. Perhaps it is important to laugh at the woes of the world at times (Chris Clark manages to express the funny side of Chechnya), lest we be struck by the sad fact that according to Mark Simpkin, North Koreans are often reduced to eating bark and leaves while a 20 metre high statue of their 'dear leader' watches magnanimously over them.

—Nathan Kensey



# Fly fishing

**F**IRST PERFORMED WITHIN 20 YEARS of each other in the mid 19th century, *The Flying Dutchman* and *The Pearl Fishers* both feature capricious seas, broken vows and longing for deliverance through love or death. Yet in almost every other regard, they are opposites. Seeing them performed in tandem heightens the contrast between their distinct styles. Bizet's opera presents opera as entertainment, a vehicle for fantasy and erotic possibility. In Wagner's work, we see opera cast in a different role—the midwife of consciousness.

The elemental forces at work in *The Flying Dutchman* bring forth visions and emotions from a dream landscape which may be individual or collective. Both approaches stake their claims, just as both these productions vie for our favour. The production of *The Flying Dutchman* enjoys the advantage of a Wagnerian zeitgeist lending it added dignity. From the moment the impassive face of the Dutchman is plucked from darkness by a shard of white light, an atmosphere of foreboding and menace is established. The muted baying of unseen horns quickens the pulse. John Wegner hardly puts a foot wrong as the Dutchman. Even before he sings a note, his presence affects. He appears for the first time on the empty deck of his ship, cradled by its exposed ribs, brooding. Around him the storm may have subsided, but within his compact frame the howling winds have not abated. A bearded man in a heavy coat and peaked cap, he stands with a Napoleonic bearing. Commanding our attention, he is at once isolated, threatening, tormented.

Equally captivating is Senga's (Elizabeth Whitehouse) rendition of the Dutchman's ballad. Not content to spend interminable hours spinning thread, Senga strives to forge her own destiny. Her will to escape is as unyielding as iron, yet her summoning of the Dutchman remains sensuous, infused with delicate precision. The Dutchman's longing is generic—any woman may save him. Senga's is particular, and we share her triumph as their

destinies intersect with a glance. The entire ensemble pulls its weight. The sailors' chorus is suitably bouyant and the supporting characters played with unassuming gusto.

Thomas Studebaker's Erik deserves special mention—a complex creation combining a hunter's temperament and bulk with a patient tenderness evident in his interaction with Senga. Erik is an intriguing figure until the opera's dying moments, when a directorial decision has him nonchalantly snap Senga's neck. This is unfortunate, as it reduces Erik to a stock villain. However nothing should detract from the accomplishment of this committed cast.

Unlike the sombre opening of *The Flying Dutchman*, *The Pearl Fishers* begins with a wink and a nudge. The curtain rises to uncover ... an opera set upon which the set of another opera has been constructed. Receding proscenium arches in the manner of picture frames suggest the joke may continue towards a distant vanishing point—are there even more operas contained within this scene?

As the audience settles in, we observe Zurga settling in to watch a performance of

the Paris Opera. The opera-within-an-opera device is no mere ornament. By allowing the audience to witness Zurga falling under an opera's spell, it reminds us that we possess a similar opportunity. Indeed the production's success is contingent upon the audience accepting the invitation to indulge their imagination. Only by permitting our imagination to merge with the spectacle of the moment can we, like Zurga, be transported to a faraway world of colour and sensual promise. Without this permission we are left looking in at a 19th-century fantasy through weary contemporary eyes.

**T**HE EXTENDED SCENE between Zurga (Michael Lewis) and Leila (Miriam Gordon-Stewart) is spellbinding. Zurga's confession of his love for Nadir (David Hobson) appears to surprise even himself and his realisation that Leila saved his life years earlier has similar impact. Leila has earlier proven herself to be a woman of substance through her glistening aria in the cavernous temple, the duet with Zurga consolidates her grace and poise.

This production suffers from a tentative portrayal of Nadir, the third member of the menage-a-trois. The moment where Nadir and Leila's eyes meet in mutual recognition should glow. Instead Nadir is obscured in peripheral shadows. More tellingly, Nadir's discomfort throws into doubt the possibility of him harbouring affection for Zurga. Wagner's opera takes place in a state. We are not required to slip through the filters separating us from a defined time and place in the past. For this reason, quite apart from the production's evenness, access to *The Flying Dutchman* is immediate and engagement sustained. A strong autumn program, which, for the record, was completed by Bellini's *Norma*. ■

**Steve Gome** is a freelance writer and actor.



John Wegner (*The Dutchman*) and Elizabeth Whitehouse (*Senta*) in *The Flying Dutchman*. Photo **Jeff Busby**.



## Power of seduction

*Troy*, dir. Wolfgang Petersen. The British Museum is displaying the movie costumes—of Achilles, Helen, Agamemnon, Priam and Hector—in the great forecourt of the domed Reading Room. Children (and adults) stare, as if at the Elgin marbles. And in a nearby artefacts shop, in Great Russell Street, signs on some of the bronzes read, “It’s All Greek” supplied this item to Warner Brothers for the film *Troy*. The proprietress of ‘It’s All Greek’ is a classics scholar and so can’t get past what screenwriter David Benioff has done with Homer’s plot (You *can’t* kill Menelaus!), but she’s happy to sell the bronzes, and to praise Eric Bana’s performance as Hector. ‘Such Homeric presence, such dignity. And those eyes!’

I don’t buy a bronze (at £175) but we do conclude that we should go to the movie in questing spirit, to enjoy, to be intrigued, not armed with expectation or our Latimore translation.

price. His voice, though, is a flat disappointment, its lack of resonance showing up badly when he is matched against the likes of Peter O’Toole’s Priam in the scene where the old king comes to beg for his son Hector’s body. But the old stager’s craft is so honed as to lend stature to Pitt’s Achilles and the scene works. As does every scene with Sean Bean as the beguiling schemer, Odysseus. Is there any role this quicksilver actor can’t master?

Brian Cox (a Scot) is a sturdy machiavellian Agamemnon, and Brendan Gleeson (an Irishman) a Menelaus with gristle. Personally, I think Helen (played with marble dullness by Diane Kruger) made a mistake leaving him, and Orlando Bloom as the wife-stealing Paris did nothing to convince me otherwise.

Rose Byrne (the other Australian in the cast) as Briseis has spark and unfolding beauty enough to explain Achilles’ passion for her. Less explicable is Petersen’s complicity in the plot tweaking that sanitises Achilles’ other relationship with his sparring mate, Patroclus. Cousin, not lover. Hollywood market prudery rules and takes Achilles’ motive with it. In to battle to avenge a cousin? Hardly.

So it’s not Homer. But some boy or girl, gazing at ‘Achilles’ armour’ or Helen’s white pleats and crown of gilt in the bright light of the British Museum just might now go looking for him. Whoever he was.

—Morag Fraser

## Dark magic

*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, dir. Alfonso Cuarón. The cinema was packed, and not just with kids. At least half the audience were over 15, and indeed our own party of seven ranged from 16 to 55 with nearly every decade in between represented. I was hoping that Cuarón would be better than Christopher Columbus, because the two previous Potter films had been disappointing in retrospect, despite looking fantastic. On video afterwards, unable to blind us with big visual flourishes, they failed to live up to the humour and depth of the novels.

Now, with the third book, the demands on the film-maker are far more than getting the look right. The splendiferousness of Hogwarts, the special effects, the Quidditch matches, all these have been established in the previous movies; the challenge now

was to catch the more mature and complex tone and language of *Azkaban*. The young actors have grown; they really do look like the Year Nines that they are supposed to be, with the boys all lanky and broken-voiced, and Hermione having developed a figure that elicited approving comments from our 16-year-old.

The story is truncated in ways that might sometimes confuse someone unfamiliar with the books. But these are quibbles; Cuarón has created a moody, darker Hogwarts with more feeling and more tension. The story contains one of the most compelling ideas yet: the Wizards’ government bureaucracy uses cruel and immoral means to enforce order, particularly in its employment of creatures known as Dementors, who work by sucking away all happy memories from their victims. These are very well realised in the film, too well, I think, for the comfort of really little children, who might find those scenes troubling, despite the fact that the film classification board relented from its original decision to rate the movie M15. It is now PG with, I think, a real need for people to remember that that really does mean Parental Guidance and not simply ‘OK to send the prep class with the teacher’.

There are some new actors too: Michael Gambon has made an excellent Dumbledore in the vacancy created by the sad death of Richard Harris. He looks right, sounds a little different, is perhaps not quite as magisterial, but it will make no matter to the young fans. Emma Thompson as Sybill Trelawney, the loopy teacher of Divination, overacts a bit, but that is a relief after Columbus’ flattened, painted-by-numbers characters. Under Cuarón, the characters begin to breathe. (I wonder what Kenneth Branagh would have been able to do with the part of the mountebank Gilderoy Lockhart if Cuarón had directed the last one!) Dawn French as the Fat Lady is permitted some cheeky characterisation of her own that adds greatly to the fun. David Thewlis is perfect as the quietly tortured Remus Lupin, Professor of Defence against the Dark Arts. But the biggest gain has been in the acting range allowed to the young characters, particularly Daniel Radcliffe as Harry. Under Columbus he was barely allowed to do more than register expressions: scared, happy, puzzled, surprised and so forth. Now he is able to move us; after all, the major achievement of J.K. Rowling



Eric Bana in *Troy*

Petersen’s *Troy* is classy entertainment and sometimes more than that. His cast of Celtic and Antipodean warriors do Greek and Trojan with the best of them. The Trojan Horse is a triumph and Brad Pitt in motion is an Achilles to stir the blood and imagination even of a pacifist. His mid-air twists, deadly and balletic, make you understand the dread exhilaration of combat, and, as he drags Hector’s punctured body behind his victory chariot, it’s



is to explore grief and rage and wondrous complexity in deceptively simple and attractive prose. This film starts to let us into that part of her genius at last.

—Juliette Hughes

## Climatic tragedy

*The Day After Tomorrow*, dir. Roland Emmerich. If you've seen the trailer, or even just the poster for *The Day After Tomorrow* (and given the amount of advertising being done for this film, I'd be surprised if you haven't), then you've pretty much seen the best parts of the film already.

The premise of the film—that man-made global warming disrupts the ocean's currents and ironically leads to a new ice age—is pretty much another excuse for director Roland Emmerich to gleefully destroy famous US landmarks once again. In *Independence Day*, he gave us aliens blowing up the White House, in *Godzilla*, a giant lizard smashing New York to pieces. Here we get tornados smashing LA (and the HOLLYWOOD sign in particular) to smithereens, giant waves swamping Manhattan, and the Statue of Liberty snap-frozen by super-cooled air sucked down from the outer atmosphere by continent-sized storms. The surf breaking over the New York skyline is actually quite spectacular, and lots of fun to watch—but this is five minutes of a two-hour film.

The human interest plot (climate researcher Dennis Quaid trying to redeem his poor parenting skills by trudging through the snow and storms to New York, to keep his promise to pick up his son from the now snowed-in and frozen library) is just plain tedious, and the film-makers know it. They try to spice up the post-wave part of the film with escaped wolves and raging septicaemia, but frankly barking and blood poisoning tends to lose out in the cinematic spectacle stakes to skyscraper-sized surf. Jake Gyllenhaal (who plays Quaid's son) is charismatic, in a sleepy-eyed kind of way, but the rest of the actors may as well not be there for the impact they have. Let's face it—a story about a weather man trying to go to the library doesn't really rank up there with the great action movie plots of all time, does it?

There are some vaguely political digs in there somewhere—a nice little joke about hordes of US citizens trying to sneak

across the border into Mexico to escape the ice and snow, but being rejected as illegal immigrants (until the US promises to cancel all Latin American debt), and a weak President manipulated and dominated by his machiavellian Vice President, clearly based on Cheney and Bush. And of course, the film has generated more than a few minutes of press interest in things like the Kyoto protocol, and the refusal of the US (and Australia) to ratify it, which can't be a bad thing. This doesn't, however, excuse it for being a dull, loud, silly film that (as someone said of *Godzilla*) aims low, and misses.

—Allan James Thomas

## A cool gamble

*The Cooler*, dir. Wayne Kramer. Is bad luck contagious? Yes, no, maybe so? Whatever the answer William H. Macy has a contagion of sorts. As an actor he has become the embodiment of the luckless bastard. Each new role he tackles seems infected by the last sorry soul he played. Sacked, cheated, loveless and weary he wanders from film to film with barely a costume change. And *The Cooler* is no exception.

Bernie Lootz (William H. Macy) is so unlucky, Shelly (Alec Baldwin)—an old style casino boss—retains him to spread his bad vibe around the floor of the Shangri-La. And it works. The merest whiff of Bernie turns a winning streak pear shaped. But Bernie owes Shelly only one more week of service (he is paying off a gambling debt from years earlier—part of his payment was also accepting a broken knee). To Shelly, Bernie is the one sure bet left in a fragile and changing Las Vegas. His mobster world of knee capping and Rat Packed show rooms is being swamped by IMAX cinemas and arcades, so naturally Shelly will do almost anything to retain his luckiest loser.

*The Cooler* is a film about the conflict between old and new, the vanities of wealth, lady luck, love and loneliness. It is

also a film about dull coincidences, silly plot devices and flat performances. There were some refreshingly frank sex scenes and at times a giddy lightness to the films direction that gave its dialogue an unexpected truth. But none of this was enough for *The Cooler* to come up trumps.

Alec Baldwin and William H. Macy could sleep walk through their respective roles. Had Macy played the bullish thug and Baldwin the badly dressed loser *The Cooler* might have at least stepped with an ungainly (granted) but engaging gait. As it was this film was tired before the end of the first scene. Natalie Belisario (Bernie's love interest) was played with an admirable plainness by a very beautiful Maria Bello. I found her affection for Bernie a little hard to fathom but despite that, their scenes together marked some of more moving moments in the film.

I've heard it argued that Macy is the most over-rated actor in Hollywood. I'm tempted to agree but for his turn in the Coen brother's masterpiece *Fargo*. Now there's a performance that threatens to nip up and bite any Macy detractors sharp and hard on the backside. Clearly he can fight the good fight when the material is strong enough.

*The Cooler* is a small film that needed big, clear ideas to give it life. Notions of love and chaos, luck and moral imperatives were all dancing around, but Kramer failed to partner them with brave directorial or casting decisions. Better luck next time!

—Siobhan Jackson



Daniel Radcliffe (above) and Emma Watson (right) in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*







## Pushed and hushed

'Don't push yet.'  
'Get @#\$\$%ed!'  
'Now, now, Juliette, you know you need to pant like a dog at this point.'  
'You do it then, if it's so % ^ &ing easy.'  
'OK, now you can push.'  
'Don't want to any more.'  
'Come on love, have a go ...'  
'I HATE YOU! GO AWAY! WHERE ARE YOU GOING? COME BACK!'

**A**H, MEMORIES OF THE LABOUR WARD, or whatever they call it now. Probably now known as a best-practice-quality-assured-mutual-obligation extrusion facility complete with mission statement and vision commitment.

All you mums watching *Birth Rites* on SBS (8.30pm Thursday July 8) will remember, if you weren't mercifully doped out at the time, how damned irritating everyone around you can be when you are trying to get a quart out of a pint pot. The main thing to remember is how important it is not to give a labouring woman a gun.

Trying to get the process right for most women without causing death and injury in the tricky business of birth is a balancing act between the constant need for emotional support and the occasional need for machines that go ping. (Monty Python fans will remember that machine, and the breezy unconcern of the obstetrician—John Cleese, of course.) If it was daunting for an urban woman, imagine what it must be like for Indigenous women, often transported far from their families in centralised hospitals to give birth in ways that are cut off from their culture. *Birth Rites* examines how this causes terrible social and medical problems: women will often avoid the local clinics until it is too late in their pregnancies to send them away into isolation from their families.

That reminded me of a documentary I saw on the ABC years ago, about the discovery of the need for basic hygiene in obstetrics. In Vienna in the early 19th century, pregnant women would get their cab drivers to circle the hospital until they were almost on the point of delivery, because they knew that the longer they were in the place, the more likely they were to die of puerperal fever, at the filthy hands of ignorant doctors. The paradox is a cruel one: in Australia at the exact same time, in parts where Indigenous societies hadn't been reached by the white colonists, they were having babies cleanly and naturally, as they had done for countless thousands of years. The 21st century urban hospital system still threatens Indigenous existence, if not by infection, then by cutting women off from crucial support from their communities.

In Canada's northern region, Inuit women have experienced the same problems, but now have a local birth centre with Indigenous midwives. In this way they can have the benefits of Western medicine where it is needed, without being separated from their culture. The Inuit have had similar problems to Australian Aboriginal people, but have enjoyed a far more enlightened government approach in recent years; notably, they have a treaty and some measure of control in health matters for their communities. There are many valiant individuals trying to make a difference in Indigenous health here, but *Birth Rites* makes one realise that the real obstacle is government. If Canada can do it, why can't we?

Since August from the 13th onwards will be dominated by the Olympics, I can safely say that I will run from the room screaming whenever there is soccer, hockey, basketball, cycling or baseball. However, I will be watching avidly for the weightlifting, gymnastics, field athletics, boxing and some of the swimming. SBS will be picking up the stuff that Seven deems unpopular, and I think it will do well out of that, because people like me will switch on and watch the outré events that male sports fans tend to avoid. What we will agree on will be whatever incarnation the Roy and HG team come up with. I can never forget the way we all looked forward to *The Dream* in 2000. Who could forget such inspiration? Putting Barry White tracks with footage of the Graeco-Roman wrestling; the commentary that turned synchronised swimming and floor gymnastics from dagdom to cool joy. Here's hoping that Seven gives them lots of time this year.

**I**N THE MEANTIME, THIS DOUBLE issue will see the welcome demise of yet another *Big Brother*, which was notable among reality shows this year in that it actually contained something real. When Merlin Luck emerged from the house, self-gagged with tape and holding a sign saying 'Free th[e] Refugees' he subverted the whole ghastly totalitarian charade. He was not the docile manipulee that such artificially constructed shows depend on. Having smuggled in his small fabric sign (they are not permitted any writing implements), he followed through courageously and refused to spoil the gesture by taking off the gag to have a deep and meaningless chat with the increasingly enraged Gretel Killeen. He reminded us that there are other people in this country who are confined and under surveillance, but who haven't chosen to be treated like that. Is it too much to hope that this signifies the end of the whole damn dreary catchpenny faux-reality business? ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.



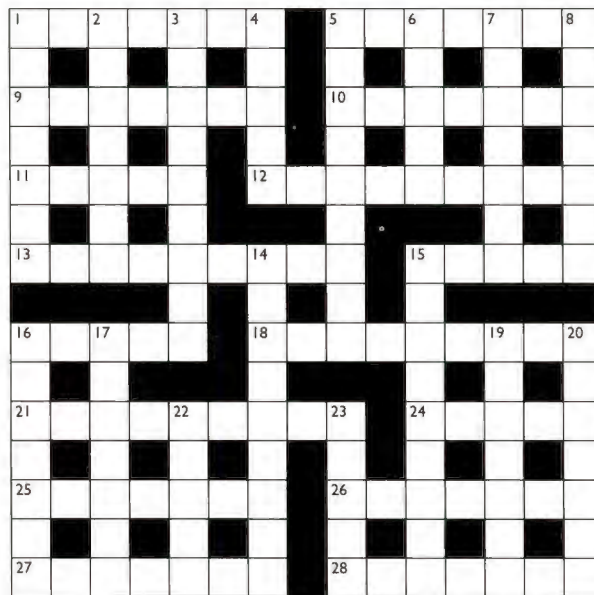


Devised by  
Joan Nowotny IBVM

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no.125, JULY–AUGUST 2004

ACROSS

1. Safeguarded against certain surrounding noise. (7)
5. Delivered one's party piece, perhaps. (7)
9. Parking for almost a quarter, strangely, on the patterned floor. (7)
10. Sitting on the fence, uninvolved. (7)
11. Which man in the field is on the offside boundary? Closer by a fraction. (5)
12. It looks like a rock on the seabed—a venomous creature. (9)
13. Orthographically possible to be bewitched? (9)
15. Wind about the east—for a stretch! (5)
16. Robustly energetic, if somewhat confused, without Robert. (5)
18. A poser on the counterpane in the small apartment. (9)
21. Does it tell us how to identify the Chablis, for instance? (4,5)
24. Time to tear oneself away from the current fashion. (5)
25. Perhaps Adam ran fast this month in Saudi Arabia, for instance. (7)
26. Inconsequential game? They're the sort of pursuits that rival it somehow. (7)
27. Left or right, footballers keep their politics off the field. (7)
28. Busy with fiancée. (7)



DOWN

1. Attributes letter exchange to a driving force. (7)
2. Car maintenance could be let? (7)
3. Run about circle, then slow up for song. (9)
4. Escorts often enjoy fruits. (5)
5. Hurry to glimpse one of the top players; he has become quite bedraggled. (3,2,4)
6. The producer will uphold the ideals of the group. (5)
7. Hung around for the rat-ride, perhaps, so obviously not in the rat-race. (7)
8. Hold pin arrangement to catch the cetacean. (7)
14. Will this election promise provide a dividend for the offspring? (4,5)
15. Doing this in the dark may keep up the spirits. (9)
16. Facial aspect that reveals plebeian tastes? (7)
17. Does he come from the beach when the children go to sleep? (7)
19. Abundant evidence of committee minginess can be found here. (7)
20. Annoyed about the Doctor's argument; it is shot through with holes. (7)
22. Boy the French used to serve the soup, perhaps. (5)
23. Some slat he shaped with a tool. (5)

Solution to Crossword no. 124, June 2004



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