

EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS,
THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY
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Time and place

AMID THE TRAGEDIES of September, we focus on books. In the last month we have seen too many and too great barbarities. The line of dead bodies has lengthened—through the long-planned siege at Beslan, the bombs outside the Australian Embassy in Djakarta and outside countless police stations and homes in Iraq, and through the famine and flight from Darfur.

Then there are the lesser barbarities—the rough trading of election campaigns in Australia and the United States, and the anxious reading of entrails by people who expect us to believe that wisdom or illumination is to be found there.

In the midst of all of this, it might seem an indulgence to review books. Yet books provide a bridge between our personal lives and the public world. They also, better than almost anything else, stress the importance of the person in the public world.

But even the most serious of books dedicated to the most public of issues evoke the small and intimate delights of being human. The weight of a book in your hand, the texture of the pages, the design

on the cover, or the feel of the cloth binding of an old book all hint at the promise of what is to come. Words and ideas find their proper place in the broader human context.

So even light-hearted and ephemeral books matter because they affirm the obvious: the essential place of light-heartedness and forgetfulness in human life. To be forever serious and focused only on the eternal may be an appropriate attitude in the streets of Iraq, threatened as you are by exploding cars and helicopter missiles. But it is an attitude from whose necessity you would wish your children to be delivered. Playfulness is a gift.

We make no apology for reviewing a full range of books—earnest, frivolous, curious, and bright. We hope you enjoy the reviews and the books. We are glad that we can all take for granted the space in which to write and to read, even as our hearts find space for those to whom these things are luxuries. ■

—Marcelle Mogg



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Let them stay

IF THE PLIGHT OF REFUGEES in our country will affect your vote in the upcoming election, don't be fooled. While Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) holders are now eligible to apply for non-humanitarian visas, the Federal Government is introducing yet another hoop in this humiliating process.

The regulations, as recently reported, will allow those TPV holders who have 'made important contributions to their community during their time in Australia' in country areas to apply for permanent residency.

For residents on TPVs in Greater Dandenong, the regulations don't seem to mean all that much, except that many of them may now have to move to the country having spent many years establishing supportive communities in this region.

We will be sorry to see them go. There is no doubt that the City of Greater Dandenong would be a lesser place had we never had any refugees settle here. Those living in our area on TPVs make substantial positive contributions, they have built a vibrant community, and they belong.

But I'm not going to argue that point, because I'd be buying into the basic premise of the Howard Government's argument: that proving you are a refugee and in danger of persecution in your country of origin is not enough. You must also prove that you have special characteristics that make you 'deserve' assistance. Not only do you need to be a refugee, you need to be the right kind.

THE HOWARD GOVERNMENT is trying to differentiate the people on whose plight they so heartlessly capitalised in the 2001 election (the 'illegals' and 'queue jumpers') from those who are now 'making a contribution'. The main point of division seems to be whether they settled in the country or in the city.

This is a most amoral distinction to draw. People who settle in rural or regional Australia are not more deserving of our protection than those who reside in our cities. This is a shameless attempt to build public policy around a balancing act of appeasing rural communities while maintaining the demonisation of those refugees who, in the government's view, don't share the same level of strategic political support.

Of course, any policy shift in the area of TPVs represents a victory. This is time for guarded congratulations to groups like Rural Australians for Refugees and Spare Rooms for Refugees.

The government has all the appearance of compassion, but none of the policy that might support the rhetoric. This is not acceptable. We must remember too, that there is a pretty simple answer to this problem. One that doesn't involve twisted rhetoric, fanciful categorisations and perverse moral judgments. People who are on TPVs in our country have proven, by Australia's legal definition, that they are in danger of persecution in their homeland. For me, and I think for most other Australians, that is enough to invoke our compassion. Let them stay. ■

Clare O'Neil is the Mayor of the City of Greater Dandenong. Greater Dandenong settles more refugees than any other municipality in Victoria.

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Buddha and the Society of Jesus

Anuradha, who entertained
the notion that his name
had led him willy-nilly to his lot,
endlessly pounded the concrete paths
of modern Anuradhapura
to enlighten however he could
tourists, pilgrims who walked to the great god Buddh'.

Nobody there was poorer
except perhaps the beggars resting in shade
to whom my daughter gave whatever she had
(she carried fruit; I gave her my small change
and a note or two perhaps of Monopoly money)
or the cattle moving the meadows in broad swathes.

I walked and chatted to the old man
(younger than me, as it turned out)
about this and that: archeology, changing times,
the ways of the world: who bows to whom,
how wives (and daughters) shop and talk –

it was a long, long walk
which finally left him drained.

Mostly we talked about what, alas,
scholars would call 'comparative religion'.
Schooling in Lanka is still run
mainly by the Society of Jesus
and my learned, weary, learned Buddhist man
who wants to give his knowledge free
(his notes are being made into a book:
he promised one to me)
at last conceded that my friends could pay



whatever it was worth
for further copies: 'Lanka needs the money'
(it has no lack of life).

I had foremost in mind my Jesuit master,
contemplative to a fault,
busy beyond belief:
their forces are no longer legion,
they try to cover the same territory:
there's this and that disaster –

but other mini-polymaths are eager too.

Bad news: a letter from my Buddhist pastor:
kidney trouble: hospital fees: the book's delayed
(the hospital fees are, say, three hundred Aussie bucks):
'thanks for the lovely gift'
of 'two modern poetry books'.
He has nothing left.

Now a new monster gives birth,
give what you can to Lanka:
they have them all, the deaf, the blind, the halt,
submissive, gentle, given to fate:

belief in God and gods covers a wide range.

Maybe Ganesh will thank you.

Evan Jones

Shades of grey

Most of the election so far has proven to be a referendum on whether we could endure having John Howard back. Not a referendum, as such, on his achievements, such as they are, because we take them mostly for granted. Nor on his malfeasances. Aside from some general innuendo about his being a liar, no-one seems to care much, least of all about refugees or going to war in Iraq. Labor doesn't care, in any event, lest it draw attention to its own inglorious record in the same area.

It's not that anyone much, even most Liberals, could summon great enthusiasm for Howard. He has again allowed himself, reluctantly, to be painted into a corner, promising to stay forever, knowing that Peter Costello seems hardly capable of attracting a single vote. Or that many believe that Labor equals fiscal instability and higher interest rates, or risky and reckless hands guiding SS Australia in an uncertain ocean. But John Howard, however boring and sometimes pedestrian, is known and predictable. While never inspiring, Howard seems safe enough to many punters.

Howard could hardly be accused of campaigning on his principles, or on his convictions. He has both, but not much of an agenda with either. Everything he is campaigning with is focused at holding the line. Spend whatever seems necessary to neutralise Medicare as an issue. Do whatever seems necessary to prop up pesky sectional interests. Risk even the fundamental reputation for fiscal rectitude if it is only money standing in the way of shoring up support, or winning it back. And nagging, ever nagging, with whatever wedge comes from within the most cleverly worked focus groups Australia has ever seen.

That's not to say that Howard will win. Despite what the bookmakers seem to think, the odds still favour Labor, if only because the Howard Government seems to have run its course. Mark Latham has, in technical terms, performed fairly well, maintaining discipline and focus, and dealing reasonably professionally with most of the inevitable misadventures. Latham has been outperforming Howard on the hustings. But he has seemed dreadfully dull. There has been little in the way of inspiration, only a little more in the way of aspiration, and nothing which appeals to the heart or the gut that reflects conviction, passion, a willingness to make a stand or even (gasp) stand for anything. John Howard's jibe that he does not know what Latham stands for was cleverly researched. It is by now apparent that Latham has sufficient substance to be rated a reasonable contender for the Lodge. The cheers which will follow his cart there, however, seem more likely to be those of sheer relief at the demise of Howard, rather than any belief in a shining new dawn.

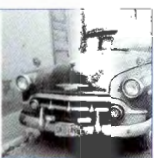
Some of this is deliberate, of course. Whatever Latham promised about being himself, on being elected leader of the Opposition, he has been persuaded that he cannot appear to be the lightning rod or the withering tongue. He is perpetually closeted with advisers and people helping him prepare lines: the same people who worked with Kim Beazley, to such ill effect. And Latham is following the same essential strategy; present a small target, reduce the incoming government's baggage by keeping promises to a minimum, limit those promises which might excite misrepresentation or counter-interest groups, and avoid addressing any fundamental issues likely to make people anxious about a new government taking them in worrying new directions. Mark Latham is, perhaps, choosing his own battlegrounds with rather more effect than Kim Beazley, but they are safe and predictable ones, calculated not to take people outside their comfort zone. There's no real turning back the clock, indeed no fundamental new post-Howard direction, on industrial relations reform, on the public sector role in the economy, on our broader foreign policy, even on our relationships with Asia. The differences between Labor and the Liberals on hospitals and Medicare, higher education, defence and environmental protection are of reasonably narrow compass.

IF THERE ARE MAJOR DIFFERENCES with the Coalition over what were once core Labor values—looking after the disadvantaged, the poor, the helpless, and the people who are never given a chance—no-one would know it from anything that Mark Latham says. We hear next to nothing about from Labor about Aborigines, migrants, refugees, the disabled and the feckless underclass. This reflects the view that there are no votes in them, and the risk, if one speaks up for them, that such action will alienate Latham's aspiration classes, who believe, as he continually reminds us, in decency, and hard work and not bludging. Presumably the bleeding heart vote will come to Labor via the Greens—the modern home for sentimentalists, Christian socialists, Labor traditionalists and utopians, or so the professional Labor ascendancy thinks.

The stripped-down third-way Labor 'movement' may lack some working parts. To many (Mark Latham in particular), it sounds awfully priggish and selfish. This stance enables Labor to compete only for the accolade of being better technical managers of the economy. Or of having somewhat better insights into what will promote growth. But no heart. No moral reason to govern. No faith. No hope. And damn-all charity. ■

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

the month's
traffic



Australian election

THE VIEW FROM SPAIN

ASK ANY SPANIARD for his or her opinion on the forthcoming election in Australia, and the response is invariably two-fold. The first is an earnest disavowal of any desire to meddle in, or even offer an opinion on the preferred outcome of any election held overseas. Far from the apathy characterising so many democracies across the world, Spaniards consider democracy as something akin to a sacred duty, having only again become a democracy in 1975 after decades of dictatorship.

In Spain there are no tabloid newspapers, no *Herald Sun*, no *Daily Mail* and no *New York Post* to sensationalise the issues. Instead, the future direction of the nation is taken very seriously. Although voting in Spanish elections is a voluntary process, voter turn-out is high—76 per cent at the most recent national election in March. Having had no control over the political destiny of their country for almost 40 years, Spaniards exercise their democratic rights with a sense of responsibility. At the same time, they hold fast to the principle that the only people who have the right to determine political outcomes are the inhabitants of the country in question.

It was thus with considerable dismay that Spaniards emerged from the grief of the terrorist bombings on 11 March to learn that they had been charged with the crime of appeasement for voting out a government barely three days after 191 people were killed. When Alexander Downer blundered into the fray during July with his attack on Spain and other countries for withdrawing their troops from Iraq, his comments simply reinforced the idea among Spaniards that their votes had been cast wisely. Indeed the ruling Socialist

Party has, since being elected, grown ever more popular, something not possible if the election result had been solely a knee-jerk reaction to profoundly unsettling, but temporary events.

The second Spanish response to news that Australia is having an election is a genuine concern that the Spanish election result—coming so soon as it did after the bombings—does not encourage terrorists to seek a similar outcome elsewhere. Far from being blissfully unaware of the implications of Spain's vote for change, many Spaniards freely acknowledge that terrorists could take confidence from their apparent 'success' in Madrid. However, they resolutely refuse to accept that the election result constituted an act of appeasement, pointing out that the terrorist cause has been aided far more by the invasion of Iraq than by a democratically expressed desire to disengage from a war which 90 per cent of the Spanish population opposed.

That the Spanish government remains wholly unrepentant about its withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq was confirmed on 9 September when Prime Minister Zapatero called for other countries to do likewise, stating: 'Nothing justifies terrorism, but there are responses to terrorism that reduce violence and other responses that multiply it'.

Among the people, Alejandro, a film producer in Madrid, summed up the prevailing mood in the following terms: 'Of course we worry that terrorists will, during an election somewhere else, try and do what they did in Spain. We know what it's like to suffer from terrorism and would not wish that on anyone. But

I'm still convinced that we did the right thing. It was necessary'.

ON ANOTHER LEVEL, there are many similarities between the issues of concern to Spaniards and those which will play a role in the Australian election, indeed many parallels between Australian and Spanish society. There is a deep concern here about the independence of public broadcasters, an uneasiness about terrorism and the most effective way to fight it and a preoccupation with issues such as health and education that impact more immediately upon people's lives. Spain, like Australia, rarely elects one-term governments, preferring each party, of whichever shade, to be given at least two periods in office to prove its worth. Indeed, since 1978, Spain has,

like Australia, had just three governments, each serving at least eight years. One of the many pan-European jokes which regularly does the rounds claims that Italians elect governments to reflect the feeling of the moment, the French demand change and then vote out any government which tries to effect it, while the Spaniards elect a government and then require damned good reasons to kick them out.

Spaniards, also like Australians, view patriotism with suspicion other than in a sporting context. Apart from adorning government buildings and sighted at football matches, Spanish flags are rarely displayed and most people associate more with their local barrio than they do with any jingoistic sense of national identity. Perversely this sentiment was tested by none other than Australia, when the wrong Spanish national anthem was played—a 1930s-era anthem that had survived just a handful of years—at the 2003 Davis Cup Final in Melbourne. At first, I considered the uproar in Spain over the error to be quaint and chided my Spanish friends for their preciousness. That was until they pointed out that it was the equivalent of playing 'God Save the Queen' to honour Australia.

And so Spaniards will watch the Australian election with interest and a sense of common feeling, even from afar. Events such as the bombing of the Australian embassy in Jakarta are met with great sadness but no Spaniard will accept for a moment that he or she is somehow responsible. Beyond that, most will consider the election to be none of their business, something which, it seems, we have yet to learn.

—Anthony Ham

African dreams

YOUTH OF THE FUTURE

IF THE YOUTH ARE THE FUTURE, their dreams are the blueprint for it.

These dreams, the great, and the not-so-great, are reflections of societal ambition.

In the last five years, I have variously studied at university and worked in Australia, China, and Japan. Currently, I am an aid worker in Kenya.

With little effort on my part, a suburban quarter-acre block complete with a Hills-hoist drying the nappies of 2.3 kids seems

a likely future prospect. With this and the almost stereotypical university travels under my belt, I feel like I am living the modern Australian student dream. This has led me to investigate the dreams of my peers throughout our global village.

Everyone knows the Great American Dream. The dirty-poor-to-stinking-rich story is still the mould of many American personalities. In politics there is the ultimate dreamer Martin Luther King or, more recently the Democratic vice-presidential nominee John Edwards. For entertainers there is J.Lo. For business icons, look no further than Bill Gates. In all fields, the list is long.

The Japanese Dream is just as formulaic but otherwise unlike the American Dream. As a student of a Japanese high school, I heard my peers talk of their desire for a stable job and a nuclear family. My host sister studied abroad only briefly to improve her English before returning to Nara to begin what she hopes will be a lifelong career in economics. This dream is reflective of a fiercely modern society that continues to pride itself on sustaining traditional values.

But what of Africa and its people? The lack of consideration of this dream seems to indicate, yet again, that the continent is condemned not to dream but to suffer.

Either way, there are perhaps two dreams for young Africans—what one might call the Great African Dream and the Not-so-great African Dream.

I SHOULD NOTE that the following comments break a self-imposed rule not to discuss Africa as if it is one country. Of course, it is not. It is, for the moment, 55 countries. But for present purposes, my travels across six African nations indicate that there is a consistency in the hopes of its people that justifies use of the generic title.

The Not-so-great African Dream is to escape the African nightmare. It is, therefore a stepping stone to other dreams: the Australian Dream, the American Dream and many others. By way of illustration, in 2003, one-third of Kenyans paid a substantial fee to add their name to the lottery for a visa to gain entry to the United States. The Not-so-great African Dream is the dream of the refugees who form the human tide washing across the continent. Given that ten per cent of

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The pharisees

IN THE SCRIPTURES the Pharisees get a bad press. They are accused of being legalist, obsessive about detail, hypocritical and self-serving. The Scriptures, of course, reflect the sharp conflict between the followers of Jesus and the Pharisees. So many scholars ask if we should not give a more positive account of the Pharisees, separating their attitude to law from the hypocrisy, self-interest and obsessiveness with which the Gospels associate it.

Looked at with a little empathy, the Pharisaic way of life is easily seen as noble and generous. In this world God's love for us and our love of God are woven intricately into the tapestry of daily life. In living by the Law we find God's favour and will joined to the rhythms of daily life. Times and places, work and play, meals and hygiene, are all turned into ritual. The Pharisee walks with respect and reverence in God's garden by treading in God's intricate footsteps.

God takes delight in an ordered world where people live out the Law. Meals properly conducted, with their distinctions between the just and the unjust, between the washed and the unwashed, between clean and impure foods, are the image of the transformed world that we hope God will bring about.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE a Pharisee to admire this way of life. It is faithful and can be lived lightly. So it should seem surprising that in the Gospels, Jesus constantly criticises it, and Paul struggles with its incursion into the Christian community. They do so, not because the way of the Pharisees is bad, but because it is good.

Paul, raised a Pharisee, appreciated their virtues. But the Jesus whom he discovered led him to a God whose way of working was quite other than he had expected. At the centre of God's world was not the ordered garden, but the wasteland of Golgotha and a man the Law called cursed. The Gospels add that at meals he had associated with sinners and treated the Law cavalierly. The God whom Paul found in Jesus was not rapt with pleasure when looking on people observing the Law, as the Pharisees would have expected. For Paul, the God of Jesus was slightly distracted, concerned for the people who did not count.

Because the vision of the Pharisees is so admirable, it is found within all religions, including Christian churches. It seeks God's will in rubrical attention to the demands of daily life. But to be made Christian it needs the mind of Christ whose concern for humanity goes beyond law.

We can see the tension in the recent Catholic regulations on communion breads. These exclude coeliacs from full symbolic participation in the Eucharist. The decision belongs to an admirable tradition of attention to foods and ritual prescriptions as the field of faithfulness to God's will. But is it Christian? ■

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



Higher learning

NO FEWER THAN EIGHT Fellows of the Royal Society of London—an organisation which has boasted Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin and Albert Einstein among its members—were taught and inspired at secondary school by one science teacher, Len Bassar of Sydney Boys High School. This fact emerged from the 2004 Prime Minister's Prizes for Science.

Bassar's former students include a Nobel Prize winner, Sir John Cornforth, the current president of the Royal Society, Robert May (Lord May of Oxford) and this year's winner of the \$300,000 Prime Minister's Prize for Science, Professor Graeme Clark, the man who developed the bionic ear. There cannot be many others who have had such an effect on science as Len Bassar.

It brought home to Archimedes and those gathered at the awards ceremony in Parliament House just how important science teachers are. And the PM's awards recognise this. Of the five prizes awarded, there is a \$50,000 Prime Minister's Prize for Excellence in Science Teaching in Primary Schools, this year won by Mr Alwyn Powell, who teaches year one at Darling Heights State School in Toowoomba; and another \$50,000 prize for Excellence in Science Teaching in Secondary Schools, which went to Dr Mark Butler, head science teacher at Gosford High School.

The delight and dedication of both winners was a highlight, and made an indelible impression on the audience. Also Professor Ben Eggleton, the winner of the Malcolm McIntosh Prize for Physical Scientist of the Year, realised at the ceremony that one of his students had been taught by Mark Butler.

Despite this, how often do we think of the teachers who underpin our society? Australia will need about 85,000 more scientists by the end of the decade, according to Queensland's chief scientist, Professor Peter Andrews. His estimate is based on the projected expansion of science-based industries such as biotechnology, and the consequent need for qualified people.

We can import some of these scientists—although it will be expensive, as we will be competing with the rest of the world to do so—but the best solution is to grow our own. However, the number of school leavers qualified to take up science is dropping. For instance, Andrews says, the number of secondary students studying physics and chemistry has halved since 1980. His solution is to improve the pay and conditions for science teachers, so they can provide inspiring teaching to get students interested.

To be fair, Federal and State governments recognise the problem and are slowly trying to encourage more young people into becoming science and mathematics teachers. But it really needs more than that. In the past, teaching was an honourable profession. Nowadays, how many young people aspire to become teachers, and how many parents encourage them?

Maybe familiarity has bred a certain amount of contempt. Perhaps it's time to see them for what they really are: skilled professionals who help shape the future of our society. From that perspective, in addition to a goodly share of the taxpayer's purse, they deserve our respect. There are few more sound investments. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

Continued from page 9

Burundians are refugees, for example, this dream is a significant consideration. For these people, the dream is simply to escape the continent's ugliest corners.

My dear friends in the 8,000-strong Sudanese refugee community in Australia are living this dream. In my experience, they soon see that the Not-so-great African Dream is, in fact, not so great even when it is fulfilled. Who could come to Australia, after all, and not aspire to leave housing-commission units, dependence and a lack of means to upward mobility?

THEN THERE IS the Great African Dream. According to my peers, the Great African Dream, like the ideal quarter-acre block, is surmised in three words: education, education, education. This, they tell me, is the key to their freedom and the hope of their nations. But there is a catch.

'My hope for my four-year-old daughter is that she will study hard and then go and find work overseas', explained Brown, a resident of one of the townships outside of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

'Do you want her to come back to work in Tanzania?' I asked.

'Only when she has had a good career overseas, then she can come back.'

Like my peers in Japan, my friends in China view an international education as a means to bring the world back to China. By contrast, Brown's comments and those of any of my younger work colleagues in Kenya, indicate that an international education is a route of escape, a means of survival not only for the escapee but for the onlookers and dependants who remain in Africa.

If these dreams are the crystal ball into the future, the trends are clear. China will rise. Australia will be stable. African countries, varied as they are, will continue to suffer on the periphery of world affairs while their citizens take their virtues to live out other greater dreams.

But we youth are flippant. We change our minds, our plans and our dreams regularly. For this great continent, we can only hope this will happen soon.

—**Matthew Albert**

This month's contributors: Anthony Ham is a freelance writer living in Madrid; Matthew Albert is an aid worker in Kenya.



Bush tales

DAVID IS MAKING mud bricks. A small, young wallaby watches him from less than five metres away.

'Me little mate', David explains. 'Comes here to graze that patch of green next to the shed every time I'm making bricks. He looks up now and then to check on me, make sure I'm not bludgin', I suppose.'

David is lean and weather-beaten. He looks like Clint Eastwood. Beneath a sinister black Akubra, his high cheekbones shadowing a slight concavity on either side of the face combine with narrowed eyes and a stubbly jaw to give him that brooding, dramatic air that allows Clint to get away with so little dialogue. David likewise is a man of few words but when he uses them, they count. He smiles often, however, and has a sharp, saturnine wit. When David graduated as an industrial chemist, he took to coal mining in direct defiance of his father's wishes, but years later he decided to live by his wits. A talented builder, furniture maker and a bushman with vast natural know how, he was soon in demand round the district. Three days a week he works here, for Bob and Sally at Long Gully—a paradisaal slash of beautiful bush meandering gently uphill between two craggy escarpments, the Elephant and the Lion. 'Best office there is', David's phrase, as he 'takes a look around' deep in the forest.

And then there's Mike, a near neighbour. Conservationist, gardener, horticulturist, timber expert, builder—especially of circular mud-brick structures, in one of which he lives with his wife—Mike wears shorts, usually bright and noticeable, a singlet often red, and socks of many colours. Freezing or wet weather has no effect on this choice of ensemble. Nor, by and large, does formality. Mike turns up to dinner parties and other gatherings in his shorts and, while he might start off with a shirt or sweater covering the singlet, it usually comes off after an hour or so of talk and bonhomie. Sally assures us that he has a special black singlet—for weddings. He always wears sturdy boots over each of which is a sort of gaiter, elasticised at the top, to prevent sand and other bits and pieces invading his feet. Very understandable out in the bush, less so at indoor gatherings, but he wears them then anyway.

Mike is a true environmentalist, which means that while nature benefits from his care and consideration, human beings, delinquent or shallow in their relationship with the cosmos provoke in him a venom surprising in such an essentially amiable and easy-going bloke. When someone over morning tea one day referred to the late Jim Bacon with sadness and affection, Mike snorted, 'Tree killer'. The ensuing awkward silence bounced right off Mike who, gazing around and

running a hand through his Harpo Marx coiffure, said, 'Wattles're late this year'.

Bill drops in now and then for a yarn or a meal or to do a job. When Bob and Sally were planning their house warming party, Bill made them a bush fridge—a 44-gallon-drum with the top cut off and alternate layers of bottles and ice all the way down. When Bob was cleaning up the next day, the surviving bottles on the bottom were half frozen. Bill lives on a property the other side of Elephant Mountain. He says it's 'a two stubby trip' to get to Bob and Sally's mud-brick, gracious Australian bush house, built by Mike, David and Bob, at the top of Long Gully, and he usually arrives clutching an empty and pocketing his stubby holder as if returning a gun to its holster.

THE GULLY USED TO BE PART of Bill's family's land and years ago Bill's mother decided to burn off an infestation of blackberries. Creating a whooshing firestorm along the hillside she scorch-earthed blackberries practically through to the next county, but in the process also took out the family ute, whose tyres exploded into flame followed by the crackle of the bullets Bill had left in their packet on the front seat. When Bob bought the land, he wanted to clear off the blackened wreck but Bill and Mike persuaded him it was a monument from Long Gully's past and so it sits there still, threaded and looped with blackberries.

Not that the blackberries have won in Long Gully. 'Blackberry Dave' sees to that. 'Blackberry Dave' first encountered me on my early morning run along the track to the gate.

'G'day', Dave said, through the open ute window. Then, with a long, eloquent look at my baggy red running shorts which are actually swimming togs, blue socks and improvised, flapping black top (well, I hadn't actually expected to go running), he said, 'That explains it. I was wonderin' what had scared all the roos and wallabies. Runnin' mad everywhere this morning they are. See you, mate'.

These are just some of the people who come and go on Bob and Sally's Long Gully. This is Lawson country in the 21st century. Like Lawson's imaginative world, it has memorable characters, it is tough on human aspirations, it is beautiful, yet faceless if you get lost in it. But it is more loved and so more smiling somehow, better understood and valued than that hard-bitten, pocked and gloomy terrain on which Lawson's characters played out their lives of quiet desperation, always on the edge. ■

Brian Matthews is a distinguished Visiting Professor at Victoria University.

The Spanish factor

The Hispanic population may play a critical role in the forthcoming US elections

I AM IN NEW YORK, along the east-west grid from the site of the Twin Towers, towards the tenements and the fledgling gentrification of the Lower East Side. It is a warm day and I have walked here past people laying out on pavement trestles, bits and pieces that only scavengers could covet. Every door stoop is a patio and it seems every building has a room to rent. The church is flush to the street corner in that uncompromisingly New York urban way, and hanging off its rear is a high narrow terrace. In the house, the basement is alive with Spanish: women cooking in one room, toddlers playing in another, an old lady telling the cat to get out of the way of her broom. Sitting over from me is a girl whose future has just turned lucky and she shines with the news. She is 16 and she has come from an interview at the prestigious Mother Cabrini High School in Upper Manhattan, which has offered her a scholarship. Before the new school year begins she must read, she says, *Pride and Prejudice* and *A Man For All Seasons*.

This girl represents the Hispanic factor in American politics and in the US Presidential election. Two years ago she came to New York from Ecuador, with her two siblings and her mother, to join her father who was already working in the city. The children had agreed, it was better for the family to be together. In New York, their mother cleans, their father works in construction, they live five together in one room, and if anything untoward happened to any one of them it would be a tragedy. They are undocumented immigrants, working illegally, who have no insurance, for whom access to higher education is out of the question, who pay taxes but whose healthcare depends on charity, who are the life-blood of the city but for whom security of residence does not exist. Of course they cannot vote. And they are by no means unusual.

A considerable proportion of the 39 million Hispanics (or Latinos) living in the US will not be taking part in November's ballot:

in California, for instance, only 13 per cent of its huge Hispanic population are eligible to cast a vote, and then, only 30 per cent of the electorate overall even make it to the polling booth. Put those figures together and you understand how little the Hispanic population of the US might enact citizenship. Under current law, up to 40 per cent will never vote, and probably only half of those who are now of voting age are eligible to vote in next month's election. Nevertheless, the Hispanic or Latino population matters to this presidential campaign in multiple and complex ways.

To begin with, Latinos as a group stand vividly before the American electorate. As a group they embody a range of important issues—border security, the economic anxieties of low-wage earners, the obligations of

and already in 23 states they form the largest minority. Since 1990, this population has grown by at least one million each year and that growth rate shows no sign of diminishing. In part now, it is growth native to the US: there are ten million US native-born Latinos under the age of 18. But in great part it is growth due to immigration, legal and illegal. Last year, 210 people died trying to make it across the border, through the desert—there is no repressing that kind of desire.

Blood, sweat and tears is what Latinos say it takes to begin the journey towards the polling booth. You can become a citizen in the States five years after you achieve legal permanent resident status but to become legal you need either the sponsorship of a close citizen relative, a petition from a prospective employer, or



patriotism in a time of war, and the weight that might be given to moral or ethical issues as opposed to economic issues. Hispanics now outnumber the African-American community. They are double the size of the Asian-American and Jewish electorates

acceptance as an asylum seeker—blood, sweat or tears. Neither blood, sweat nor tears can be drawn from many of the Latino immigrants, at least not yet.

Alongside the scholarship winner is a young couple from Guatemala. They

were in New York legally, as visitors, when their young son was born an American citizen. Shortly after his birth, they returned home. Two years later immigration authorities would grant them only a one month visitor's visa: their citizen son represented a risk that they would stay. That one month has long passed and both parents are working. Fifteen or twenty years down the track their son will be their avenue to documentation and then his vote will tell. Now, their situation is an issue for activists and for the enfranchised amongst Latinos.

THE ACTIVISTS INCLUDE the Cabrini Sisters who run this Centre for Immigrants and who belong to a New York-wide network of like-minded groups linked into a nationally organised lobby for the rights of immigrants. The city runs on the backs of these people, Sister Pietrina says, and the sisters have no qualms about lobbying.

'If we vote them into office we have a right to tell them what we think. We go to

to the Hispanic vote. About two-thirds of the Hispanic electorate is made up of people of Mexican descent and their political allegiances tend to mirror the political divisions in their states of residence: in Texas, Mexicans tend to be Republican, in California they tend to be Democratic. However, both Republicans and Democrats must mobilise the Hispanic electorate. It was not the Hispanic vote that put Arnold Schwarzenegger into the Governorship; rather, it was the failure of Mexicans to turn out to vote as loyally Democratic as the African-Americans did in California.

In the state of Florida, for example, two major groups of Hispanics and some smaller groups could all influence the election outcome. Miami Cubans who maintain an exile mentality are critical of the Bush administration for making Iraq a priority when there was opportunity for war much closer to home, and the administration has been obliged to make some gestures of good faith towards this community. On the other hand, the children of

generations, where most Latino voters belong. The shift is towards Pentecostal or evangelical Protestantism, by as much as 12 per cent in the third generation. In other words, Latinos are taking on in subsequent generations something of the dominant religious character of the host country. There are now more Latino Protestants in the US than there are either Jews or Muslims.

There are more Latino Protestants than even the broad mass of Episcopalians and Presbyterians combined. However, this shift towards a conservative religiosity does not mean that Latino evangelicals respond to the same prompts that mobilise white evangelicals. Whether Protestant (mainline or evangelical) or Catholic, Latinos are in the majority Democrat voters. There was little difference between the Catholic and evangelical Latino vote during the last presidential election—the Latino evangelical vote for President Bush (35 per cent) was reflected in the national Latino vote. It will be interesting this time to observe whether there has been a shift in the relative weight

A few hundred votes decided the election in Florida, last time around, so there is serious attention being paid to the Latino voter in Florida.

Washington, we go to Albany, we go to the City Council. We try our best to get bills passed that will enable our clients to get some kind of legalisation.'

At least locally, candidates have to explain to activists, including all the major church organisations, how they propose to make naturalisation and legalisation fairly available, and how they will afford to immigrants some basic protections and access to basic public benefits. They must also explain their policies to the Hispanics who are enfranchised, even though these voters' interests and view of the world may be significantly different from that of Hispanics overall.

Hispanics have been described as occupying an in-between space in American public life. They tend to be socially conservative and economically liberal while their own socio-economic status and their common educational, social and political concerns encourage them to be politically progressive. Mexicans in particular are eager to rally around the flag in time of war. The result of these competing factors is that both Republicans and Democrats can lay claim

the exiles are less interested in anti-Castro politics and they now form a substantial group that may not vote with their parents' interests in mind. In the north-central part of Florida, young and affluent Puerto Ricans—many of them re-located from New York City—are seen as voters who must be retained by the Democrats or wrested from them. A few hundred votes decided the election in Florida, last time around, so there is serious attention being paid to the Latino voter in Florida.

Importantly for the campaign managers, religion plays an influential role in the lives of Hispanics. The Republican Party is busily courting the Catholic mainstream vote, banking on Catholic social mobility and social conservatism. Think tanks are devising electorally strategic rapprochement between Catholics and evangelicals around issues such as abortion and gay marriage. On the face of it, this is a strategy designed to win the Hispanic voter but, interestingly, Latinos resist this simple categorisation.

While 70 per cent of Latinos in the US are Catholic, the percentage of Catholics decreases in the second and third

given by the Hispanic population to moral issues versus economic and immigration issues. There is good reason to imagine the shift may be slight.

In this election, Hispanic voters will go to the polling booths identified as an explicit challenge to the US. The man who fingered the *Clash of Civilisations*, Harvard professor Samuel P. Huntington, has added *The Hispanic Challenge* to the adventures facing America. Latinos do not assimilate, Huntington says, in the way prior immigrants did and their overwhelming numbers are seriously undermining the cultural foundations of the American idea. If Latin immigration is not stemmed, the US could become a nation of two competing cultures, creeds and languages.

A volatile, independent, and issue-driven Latino vote is likely to identify ideology where it sees it and vote accordingly. ■

Margaret Coffey was in the US recently to collect program material for *Encounter* on ABC Radio National. *An Encounter on The Hispanic Factor* will be broadcast on Sunday 31 October.

Waiting for Arthur

Peter Hamilton prepares to cast his first vote in a US election

LAST YEAR I STOOD in a packed Brooklyn courtroom, held up my right hand, and with the fingers of my left hand crossed firmly behind my back, I solemnly swore that 'I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign potentate'.

I became a new US citizen, but a mildly depressed one. I felt gutless—as if I had chickened out in the face of September 11 paranoia. As I prepared for the ceremony, I asked myself: What rational US resident would want to test their worst nightmare of landing at JFK airport with a foreign passport while his wife and two children carried American passports?

I could imagine the tap on the shoulder at JFK: 'Mr Hamilton, please say goodbye to your family, kindly take a seat in this small, fluorescent-lit room. And please ignore that orange jump suit on the hook behind the door.'

'Now, Mr Hamilton, the records show that in 2003 you made two donations of \$100 to Churches for Middle East Peace and another of \$100 to Foundation for Middle East Peace, which are organisations that espouse and fund pro-Arab causes ...'

Aside from the paranoia, I've lived for more than 20 years in Brooklyn, and the only 'foreign potentate' that came to mind was my mother. I couldn't escape the vague feeling of shame that the whole point of the citizenship ceremony was to renounce her. I felt that I was betraying my allegiance to a distant way of life that she represented, one that is preserved in my decent memories of silver birch trees on a front lawn, side tables crammed with puddings, and the latest news from the Jesuit Mothers' Club.

There was one important consolation to my betrayal. I had gained the vote. And in November 2004, my son will

cast his first vote, too. I look forward to helping drive the disastrous George W. Bush from office.

I had voted for the first time in 1966. It was a Federal election. I vaguely remember walking from the university to a polling booth inside a red-brick school near Rathdowne Street, Carlton.

As we left the hall, a black Commonwealth car pulled up to the kerb, and out stepped the rumpled Arthur Calwell, the Honourable Member for Melbourne Ports. His large face was famously jowly. It was dominated by a crooked, bulbous nose and a big natural smile. This was to be his final term.

Calwell was the bright eldest son of a working-class family. He left St Joseph's Christian Brothers' School in North Melbourne when he was only 15 to help put food on the family table. Educated in what he proudly termed 'the school of hard knocks', Calwell rose through the Labor ranks to become leader of the Federal Opposition. A handful of Communist preferences denied him the prime ministership in 1961.

Calwell's nemesis was Robert Menzies, the son of a Wimmera shopkeeper who grew up to acquire raging royalist preferences. The University of Melbourne-educated Menzies skilfully nurtured the idea that regular Australians would be embarrassed at Buckingham Palace if we were represented by the dishevelled Calwell with his working-class accent. One thing you knew about Menzies: He wouldn't dunk his biscuits or drink from the royal saucer at tea time. You just couldn't be sure about Arthur Calwell.

In 1965, Menzies had sent Australian conscripts to fight alongside the Americans in Vietnam. The move lit a flame under Labor's anti-conscription legacy. The Catholic population was split, and the hard men of the Catholic Right filled

the air with charges of 'treason' and 'capitulation to the godless communists'.

Unfortunately for students of my age, this was more than a debating exercise. We could soon be conscripted to fight in Vietnam. Many of us knew draft resisters who were being jailed. Our fate was to be decided by the Army's birthday lottery. As we waited in our student hang-outs for the ballot to be announced, we were naturally drawn to argue about the rights and wrongs of the conflict. The official line was that the public debate was over. There were only two approved courses of action for the doubters: Shut up! And meekly report for your medical if your birthday is called.

Bitter arguments raged around many Catholic dinner tables, and they left wounds that took years to heal, if they healed at all. After all, it's hard for a 20-year-old to feel comfortable with a middle-aged man who feels so strongly about a war that he is determined for the youth to do his fighting for him.

IHAD COME TO ADMIRE Calwell for taking a very tough and unpopular stand. I walked up to him on the footpath, introduced myself, and we shook hands:

'Mr Calwell, I want you to know that this is my first election, and I'm really pleased that I cast my first vote for you.'

'Ah, Peter,' he replied. 'It's a funny thing. I first voted in 1917. And what was the bitter issue that divided us? It was whether Australian boys should be conscripted to die on distant battlefields in a colonial war.'

'And now, it's your first vote. And what's the issue? Should Australian boys be conscripted to die on distant battlefields in a colonial war! It seems that nothing's changed!'

So here I am, a newly-minted US citizen, and I'm only weeks away from

my first American presidential election. I wish that I could tell my son that Arthur Calwell called this one right from the grave—that this election is being fought over whether Americans should continue to fight and die in a distant colonial war.

That's the way I see it, but unfortunately, it's not the reality of John Kerry's election challenge. The indigestible fact is that John Kerry and George W. Bush are on the same page with respect to Iraq. Senator John Kerry voted to authorise the war, and he has not repudiated his support. Both candidates believe that Iraq is too important to lose. Kerry's wing of the Democratic Party wants to clean up Bush's mess by fighting the Iraq occupation more intelligently. Kerry wants the occupation to be run by smart planners instead of ideologues. He seems to believe that a diplomatic charm offensive will lure reluctant allies into a murderous battleground.

Iraq is part of a wider struggle for control of the Middle East, so it is even more disappointing that John Kerry and George Bush both align the United States with the Israeli Right in its relentless crusade to dominate all of historic Palestine, including Jerusalem.

For example, soon after the Democratic Convention, Israel's Prime Minister Sharon dispatched the heavy Caterpillars to raze land in the E1 block of the occupied West Bank to build condos for Jewish settlers. E1 is located due east of Jerusalem, and all parties to the conflict had determined that its seizure would end the viability of a future Palestinian state by dividing the West Bank into two non-contiguous cantons. It would also isolate East Jerusalem's large Palestinian population deep inside a ring of walled Israeli settlements, thereby removing East Jerusalem as a potential Palestinian capital.

It was a momentous decision that upended decades of diplomacy. The two US presidential candidates responded similarly: Ignore it! This is an internal Israeli matter! Both candidates accept that American and Israeli policies in the Middle East have become strategically enmeshed, and they recognise that a strong Iraq is against Israel's interests because it would be an oil-rich, anti-Israeli, Arab state.

The likely outcome of both the President's and Senator Kerry's policies is that Iraq will come to resemble the condition



of the Gaza Strip, though it will be a 'Gaza on steroids'. Iraq will continue to be fragmented and beset by violent internal conflicts. The Americans will hunker down inside huge and reasonably secure bases. Resistance to the occupiers and their local allies will be classified as terrorism and met with mass internments of young men, sieges, and Gaza-like bombardments of civilian populations. This situation will further inflame anti-Western resentment amongst Arabs, guaranteeing further attacks comparable to September 11, Bali and Madrid.

AT THE TIME OF WRITING, the election outcome is too close to call. Kerry comes across long-faced and wooden. He drones. Bush works on projecting himself as a likeable, somewhat goofy, but desirably single-minded leader. The final battle is likely to turn on voter turnout and its well-practised American twin, vote suppression.

America has proven that it has the capability to be a force for justice in the world. Sadly, the outcome of the election doesn't matter. There's no understanding

Leader of the Opposition, Arthur Calwell signs the mourning book at the Indian High Commission in Canberra for the late Shri Lar Bahadur Shastri, January 11, 1966 for the *Canberra Times*. Used with permission.

of history, no fearless analysis of the current situation, and no political will to implement policies that are not captive to the same lobbies that led the charge into Iraq.

Sometime in October the US mailman will deliver two pieces of mail that capture my citizenship moment. For me, a voter ID that offers a meaningless choice. For my son, a set of US draft registration papers that threaten a possible free, one-way trip to Tehran. ■

Peter Hamilton is a New York-based consultant. He has worked extensively on projects based in the Middle East. He can be reached on r2k@bellatlantic.net. Foundation for Middle East Peace and Churches for Middle East Peace are interdenominational organisations that are focused on just solutions in the Middle East. Contact them at www.cmep.org.

Survivor secrets

Dorothy Horsfield investigates an initiative to help the survivors of torture

FROM THE CELLS of Guantanamo Bay, to Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison, to the thousands of secret, brutal places in more than 80 countries across the world, the experience of torture is described by Berlin's Dr Christian Pross as a 'toxic agent'.

'This new season of cruelty', Pross says, 'infects not only the victim, but the family, friends, the torturer, the therapist, the wider community. It fundamentally disrupts human relations in a diabolical way'.

Pross is Founder-Director of the city's renowned Centre for the Treatment of Victims of Torture (BZFO) which he set up in 1992 to help those who had suffered at the hands of East Germany's secret

police, the Stasi. Particularly from the early 1960s, when the West German government began to pay the DDR to release dissidents from its jails. Berlin

has had an outspoken community of artists and others who were tortured. One of the sinister side effects of the publicity, as well as the international monitoring of torture by groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, was a change in the methods used.

'At first persecution in the DDR was mainly physical—beatings, bad hygiene, bad food. People often died from TB', Pross says. 'Later the Stasi became masters of sophisticated techniques of "zersetzung" (disruption) which can do deeper harm by making you doubt your own perceptions. Victims were told: "When you leave this place, no one will believe you".'

'And even if people never went to prison, their family and social networks were manipulated to create failures, so that step by step they lost career opportunities, status, job, income, family. Of course it was a world described exactly by Orwell or Kafka.'

The intention was 'to break a man's soul'. Pross describes the case of a poet in one of his therapy groups. He was a member of the small underground movement that met once a month to read poetry together. After he was twice arrested and released with the threat, 'we'll find a way to shut you up', he gave all his poems to his closest friend to look after. The third time he was arrested, the Stasi officer sat

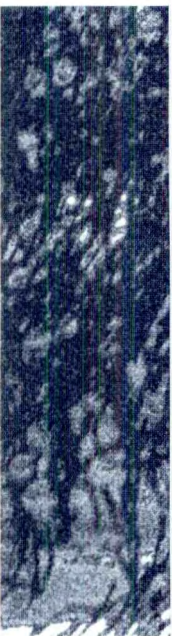
across the desk from him and read him the poems, leaving him utterly confused and paranoid. During that time he had all his back teeth removed because he was convinced that microphones had been implanted in them. After 1989 when he accessed his Stasi file, he said the moment when he understood his best friend had betrayed him was as if 'the world had broken down over him'.

Pross is also quick to point to the growing evidence that such highly effective psychological methods were also used by the torturers of Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib prison. A recent article in the *New Yorker* by veteran American journalist, Seymour Hersh—based largely on his conversations with disaffected members and ex-members of the US intelligence community—charts how official approval was given for the use of solitary confinement, sleep deprivation, endless interrogation and sexual degradation, as part of a covert policy of 'whatever it takes' in the war on terror. Investigations by the University of Minnesota's Professor Steven H. Miles, published in the August issue of the British medical journal *The Lancet*, draws similar conclusions, arguing much torture took place with the complicity of prison doctors.

Increasingly, Pross' centre treats refugees from Iraq, as well as from the former Yugoslavia, Turkey, Iran, Africa and Chechnya. Last year more than 200 of the 501 patients were women, 48 were children or teenagers. Moreover the centre has a long waiting list and a constantly growing demand on its services. The Copenhagen-based International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, to which BZFO is affiliated, estimates that for every person treated another ten are in need. Approximately 17 million people are of concern to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and UNHCR estimates that 30 per cent of these people have been tortured.

DELIBERATELY PLANNED as a multidisciplinary clinic, the centre uses a range of therapies from music and handicrafts, to dream analysis, stories,

'Our therapy is not a cure but it can slowly help people cope, to regain dignity and hope in life.'



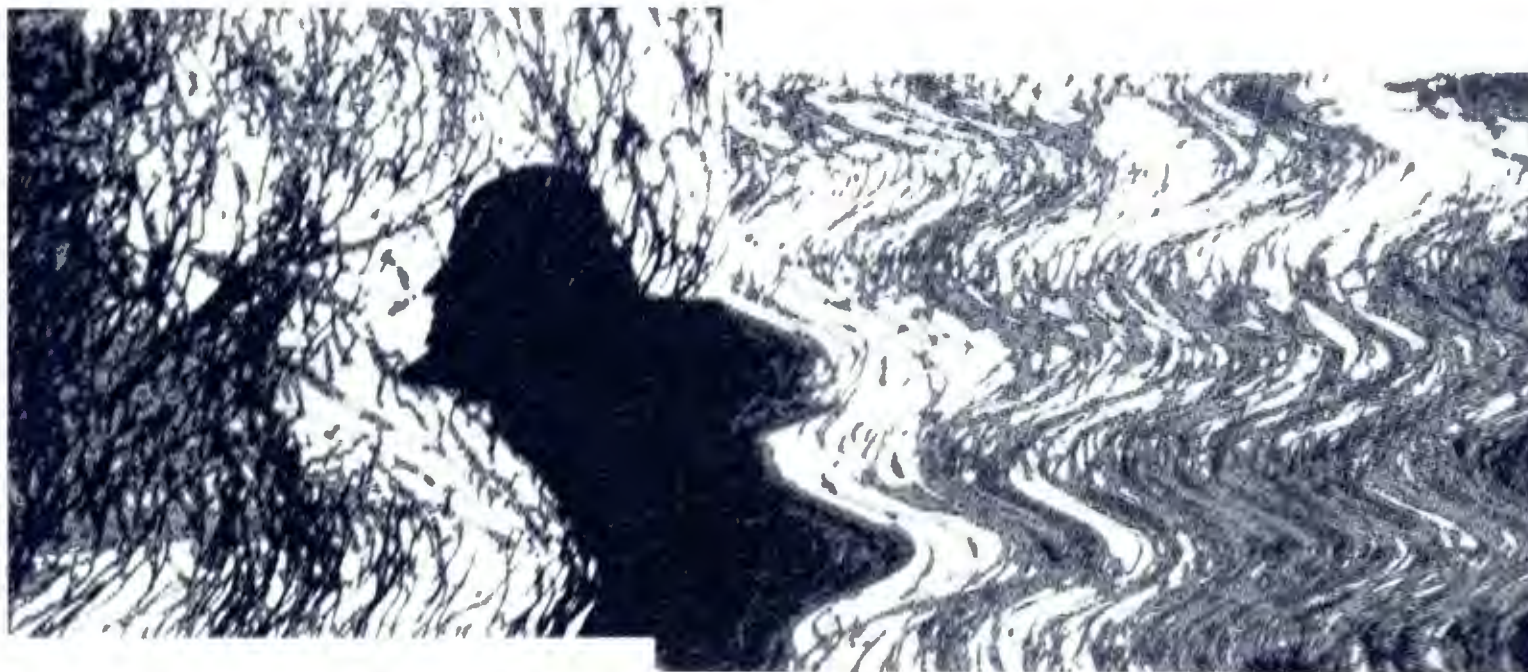
physiotherapy, group work and psychotherapy. Social workers help patients to find accommodation, jobs, to make visa applications or apply for welfare. Medical treatment is provided for the physically ill and injured. And last week the BZFO formed an official alliance with PLACET (Berlin's Plastic Surgery Centre for Terror Victims) whose special focus has been children from war-stricken countries such as Afghanistan. An 18-year-old girl from Chechnya whose face has been severely disfigured and partially blinded by scar tissue begins treatment next week under this scheme.

Both Pross' clinical experience and wider professional research leave him in no doubt that victims of torture often carry the scars for a lifetime. The effects are physical, psychological and social, including flashbacks, severe anxiety, insomnia, nightmares, depression, memory lapses and breakdown of relationships triggered by the humiliation they've endured or the guilt of having betrayed family and friends.

Germany and helped Pross establish the BZFO, tells stories from the Qur'an, or from myth and folklore, to open a dialogue with his patients that is the beginning of healing. Ahmad also believes that torture treatment centres can help heal whole communities like those in Iraq that have suffered long years of trauma culminating in the present continuing war. After five years of writing submissions to various governments and NGOs, Ahmad has finally received funding to set up a branch of BZFO in Kirkuk, northern Iraq which will open in 2005.

At the same time both Pross and Ahmad emphasise that without 'detoxification' through debriefing and mentoring by colleagues, simply treating torture victims can also 'do harm to your soul'. Two or three times every day a therapist is 'dipping into despair'. For Pross the challenge is to act with compassion, but not be drawn into the abyss.

At best such compassion may be no more than an imaginative act of kindness. One example is the situation of an Iraqi man who week after week



'At the BZFO we have become modest over the years', he says. 'Our therapy is not a cure but it can slowly help people cope, to regain dignity and hope in life. It can take years but the important thing is that the patient finds through a therapist there is still a human being on this earth they can tell their story to and they won't be betrayed.'

But in the clinical experience of the centre's Kurdish therapist, Salah Ahmad, sexual degradation and humiliation, as well as the potential stigma of seeming 'crazy', are areas of agony which make treatment of Muslims sometimes difficult. Rather than using traditional therapies, Ahmad, who trained in

described how he was besieged by a nightmare in which he was trapped up to his neck in a frozen lake. He could not save himself or call out for help. Finally his therapist took out a warm blanket and wrapped him in it. He looked at her in astonishment and then began to weep.

The therapist described his treatment from then on as a process of 'defrosting', with moments of 'refreezing'. ■

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

Time again to save the whales?

Anthony Ham investigates renewed efforts at the IWC to resume commercial whaling

'SAVE THE WHALES' was one of the signature phrases of my childhood, a mantra which entered the lexicon almost as completely as it infiltrated its way into the public consciousness. Growing up in the 1970s, I was in no doubt that saving the whales was an imperative so morally incontrovertible that its only dissonance was the disbelief that anybody could disagree with it.

Nearly three decades after the slogan first adorned bumper stickers, the phrase carries a nostalgia reminiscent of the idealism of the 1960s, the innocence of the socially progressive policies of the Whitlam government or with the anger of that same government's dismissal. Saving the whales—like the days before the internet dominated our lives or the time when the world was divided into Cold War spheres of influence—seems to belong to a distant, and altogether less complicated world.

A worldwide moratorium on the hunting of whales has been in place since 1986, largely in response to those same 'Save the whales' campaigns across the globe. The ban on whaling was the initiative of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), a body formed in 1946 to address the 1930 finding that 80 per cent of the world's great whale species were on the brink of extinction. It took 56 years to muster the requisite political will and to form the international alliances required to put in place a regime with binding worldwide effect.

It has taken just 22 years for the international consensus to begin to unravel. Facts as to the current status of whale populations can be difficult to come by, so highly charged is the debate. On 18 July this year, the International Environment Investigation Agency stated that the outlook for whales is 'increasingly bleak' because of ocean pollution. Other dangers faced by whales—climate change, noise pollution, strikes by ships—pale into insignificance, however, alongside what is known as bycatch (the entanglement of other sea creatures in fishing nets) which kills 300,000 whales, dolphins and porpoises every year.

Within this context of the ongoing perils faced by whale populations, there are two primary threats to the 1986 moratorium and hence to whale populations across the world: the use of loopholes by whaling nations to continue commercial whaling and a shift in the balance of power at the IWC.

According to Susan Lieberman, director of the World Wildlife Fund's Global Species program, loopholes in the 1946 International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling have permitted 25,000 whales to be killed since 1986. These loopholes allow limited whaling for scientific purposes and an unclear opt-out clause which allows nations to object to the moratorium.

The world's three major whaling nations—Norway, Iceland and Japan—are

members of the IWC and all have used the loopholes to resume commercial whaling.

After observing the moratorium for a few years, Norway announced in 1993 that stocks of minke whales had recovered sufficiently for limited whale harvesting to recommence. After an initial quota of 92 minke in 1993, the Norwegian figure rose to 753 in 1999 (Japan kills around 450 minke every year). The Norwegian position continues to garner some support in scientific circles. Indeed, a recent article in the *International Herald Tribune* asserted, seemingly with some foundation, that 'it is hard to find a whale biologist who, in terms of numbers alone, disagrees with the contention that some whale stocks are, in theory, harvestable now'. The article continued by claiming—prematurely according to many analysts—that the 'Save the whales' slogan 'no longer applies. They are back'.

TO BETTER UNDERSTAND the Norwegian position, it is important to remember that Norwegian whaling has a history dating back centuries. Where children elsewhere were reared on campaigns to protect the world's largest sea mammals, young Norwegians are taught to consider whale meat to be simply another form of food.

Deputy director general of the Norwegian fisheries industry Halvard Johansen argues that anti-whaling sentiments arise

simply from a detachment in modern societies from the animals we eat, with most people coming no closer to these animals than buying meat wrapped in plastic from supermarkets. Speaking to the *International Herald Tribune*, Johansen supported his claim in the following terms: 'I grew up on a small farm in the northern part of Norway. In the spring we were playing with the lambs, which by any definition are cute animals, but nobody did mind eating them in the fall. That was, and still is, part of life'.

Norway supports the continued protection of endangered whale species and claims no desire to return to industrial-scale whaling. Nonetheless they continue to argue with quiet determination in favour of a resumption of hunting minke whales which, they claim, can easily survive a limited cull.

NORWAY IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY to cease whaling any time soon. Potentially more dangerous to the survival of the species, however, are the efforts by pro-whaling nations, particularly Japan, to fundamentally alter voting patterns at the IWC.

All three of the major whaling nations have argued forcefully that the moratorium should be replaced by a sustainable management plan. Rather than relying only on the persuasion of existing members, Japan—whose government has described whaling as a 'noble tradition' and 'an issue of national pride'—has actively recruited traditionally non-whaling nations to the commission. The members of the IWC now include Mauritania, Ivory Coast, Benin, Surinam, Grenada, Tuvalu and—most bizarrely of all—landlocked Mongolia.

From just nine pro-whaling votes out of 55 in 2000, the annual meeting in 2003 saw 21 nations out of 57 cast votes in support of an end to the moratorium. Each of the nations who have suddenly developed an interest in resuming whaling is widely reported to have received substantial development aid from Japan. Adding to the problem is the fact that commission members such as Canada and Greece have allowed their membership to lapse and were not eligible to vote. Although 75 per cent of the commission's members must agree in order for the moratorium to be overturned, such are the rapid gains of the pro-whaling lobby that it is believed the moratorium could be under threat as early as 2005.

At the July 2004 IWC meeting in Sorrento, Italy, the only victory for anti-whaling nations was that Japan lost a vote for the final vote to be held in secret (29 votes to 24). Many anti-whaling countries feared that smaller nations who publicly oppose whaling would forge secret backroom deals with Japan to cast a pro-whaling vote. The only agreement to arise from the commission meeting was to return with a 'final' management plan, complete with costings, by the next meeting in 2005. Japan (who resumed 'scientific' whaling in 1987) and Iceland (who did likewise in 2003) have threatened to withdraw from the commission unless such a plan is enacted and the moratorium ended.

In the meantime, environmentalists fear that the ongoing commercial whaling activities of Norway, Iceland and Japan, and the latter's vote-buying campaign, are seriously eroding confidence in the commission. Such actions have also prevented the setting up of new whale sanctuaries in the South Atlantic and South Pacific. Conservationists highlight both a history of false reporting by whaling nations and a fundamental difference between supposedly safe quotas and enforceable limits which will work in practice. This is a particular concern when there is little concrete, scientific evidence to suggest that whale stocks have sufficiently recovered. In strictly economic terms, it seems not to matter in the debate that whales may be worth more alive than dead, given the massive growth in whale-watching tourism.

It is increasingly unlikely that the moratorium will be extended to become permanent. This grim conclusion rests on the near-certainty that if the moratorium is extended, pro-whaling nations would simply withdraw from the commission and return to the days of unregulated commercial whaling. Unlike more innocent days when conservation for its own sake was sufficient, the harsh, strategic necessities of whale politics ensure that some form of distasteful compromise appears inevitable.

And yet, for all of the talk of sustainable harvests and controlled culling, there is one remaining element which keeps alive the spirit of the soon-to-be naive days of

the moratorium: whales inspire awe and are special. They have come, perhaps more than any other creature on earth, to symbolise the epic and profound struggle of the natural world and its dogged survival in the face of human encroachment. In the words of Susan Lieberman, 'Few animals inspire such awe as whales ... yet relatively few other animals have suffered so severely at human hands'.

If there shall come a time when whales—described by one commentator

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as 'benevolent aliens'—do become extinct, their passing will perhaps be the most tragic of the many extinctions which we have inflicted upon the planet. Possessed of such size, grace and mystery, perhaps they alone can inspire the same awe-struck silence usually reserved for the vast oceans which they inhabit. Perhaps whales alone have a capacity to at once remind us of eternity and of all that we have lost. ■

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Realising a dream

Architect Peter Quinn is to bring to completion St Mary's Cathedral, Perth

IT'S NOT EVERY DAY an architect wins a competition to design a cathedral. And when it's one that's been unfinished for more than 70 years, with detailed liturgical and heritage considerations, it can be a mixed blessing.

A lot of people will be looking over the shoulder of Peter Quinn during the next couple of years: fellow architects, church-goers, heritage advocates, and a considerable part of Perth's population.

Quinn is the architect who won the competition to draw up concept plans to complete the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, commonly known as St Mary's Cathedral, in WA. The cathedral is a landmark heritage building that's still unfinished, even though it first opened in 1865.

It's not the first time Quinn has designed a church. He's been responsible for designing four suburban churches and a chapel in Western Australia. It's a specialised form of architecture, with special considerations.

'There's all the liturgical basics that you have to know but somehow you've got to imbue the place with the transcendent, that's the difficult bit,' explains Quinn. 'The cathedral is probably easier in some respects because of the extreme heights and the volumes that can go into it. The existing large volumes and heights already give you a sense of space and grandeur.'

'You've got to create that feeling somehow, that when you walk into it, you're in a special place. I don't think you can rely on liturgical furnishings and furniture to provide that. It's got to be more than that. It's about light, light and space and volume.'

And in this case, it's all about completing a job begun more than 70 years ago. Unlike an unwieldy house extension that's had bits cobbled on over the years, the cathedral has already been extended over the decades. As a result, it's a mish-mash of styles long unsuited to being the main house of worship in the Archdiocese.



The challenge now is to finish the cathedral, and open it up to make it function as a working church, while preserving as much as possible of the heritage elements of the building.

What is now the present cathedral began in 1865 as a modest Italian-style structure suited to the needs of churchgoers in Queen Victoria's era. Additions, including a porch and steeple for the bell tower, were made around 1909. And in the 1920s, the decision was made to completely replace it with a much larger, more imposing Gothic structure complete with flying buttresses.

But with the onset of the Great Depression, the money ran out and construction was halted mid-way. The result is two churches of completely differing styles, with one simply tacked onto the other.

'There was no real attempt to design or marry the two together,' says Quinn. 'At the moment, visually it is two churches rammed into each other, with different ridge heights, different roof heights and different materials.'

Visitors to the cathedral still scratch their heads at the result. One end is a simple narrow structure with a cement render exterior, while the other is wide, ornate and built of limestone. And jutting iron bars and serrated stonework on the building's exterior show where the next section of the cathedral was due to join up.

'The present layout just doesn't meet the liturgical requirements of Vatican II', explains Quinn, 'the most important being the active participation of the assembly in the liturgy. It's too small. They couldn't get the numbers into the church, the sight lines are poor, the acoustics are poor, and the quality of natural light is poor'.

In Quinn's plan, the original nave would be removed and a new, much wider one inserted between the existing eastern and western ends of the cathedral. The roof would also be raised to match the 1930 extension. The altar will be placed in the centre of this much bigger space, and the pews arranged around it in semi-circular fashion. The result will mean a big increase in seating—from 800 to 1200 people—with the altar visible to all churchgoers, and more light and improved air circulation.

PETER QUINN'S DESIGN for the completion of St Mary's was one of four commissioned by the Archdiocese. As well as being unanimously selected by the Archdiocesan building committee, it was also voted the most popular by churchgoers from around WA.

In announcing the winning design, the Archdiocese said Quinn's plan completed the cathedral in an 'extraordinarily simple and beautiful way' by using a 21st-century building to link the two earlier eras.

But it's a job Quinn nearly refused.

'When I was asked to compete in the design competition, I was very reluctant because I'm a one-man band and I wondered whether I could handle it,' he says. 'And then I'd be competing against national architectural firms, and all the resources they could bring to the project. I thought I'd get blown out of the water.'

Educated at Xavier College and Melbourne University, Quinn settled in Western Australia some 30 years ago. Most of his work involves educational, religious and domestic buildings. He says his underlying

philosophy is to stay personally involved in projects so clients' needs are understood and faithfully translated into the completed project. His approach is cooperative, rather than dogmatic or egocentric.

Originally, Quinn thought he'd have to demolish the original 1865 structure to meet the brief: 'And my initial reaction—to achieve what they wanted to achieve—the Gothic end would stay and the rest would go. That was my starting point.'

But after an inordinate number of visits to the cathedral, a better alternative presented itself.

'The more and more I drove up there, the more I became convinced the western façade should stay, and I should try to make every effort to retain the bell tower and the front of the church,' he says. 'It's quite pleasant, I quite like it and you're not going to reproduce that sort of detailed architecture again. Having come

'The whole thing started to fall into place.'

Quinn says he never considered a design which simply continued and completed the 1930 Gothic design—an expensive option which had been costed at some \$50 million.

'I don't think any new work should be a copy of what's there,' says Quinn. 'And with my solution, the new work will be instantly recognised as new work. I hope the building will be seen as a whole. I think the three main eras will hang together as a whole building, almost as if it could have been designed that way from the beginning.'

Quinn was also keen to maintain the amenity of the site. The cathedral has a permanent entry on the State's Heritage Register, not just for the present building and its importance to the Catholic community, but also for its historic setting in a square which is part of the original colonial town plan.

Where the bodies are buried

THE HISTORY OF St Mary's Cathedral involves considerable behind-the-scenes drama. There were delays with the construction of the original 1865 cathedral because of a lack of money and skilled masons in the colony.

A further drama involves Bishop Serra, the then Administrator of the diocese, who was instrumental in getting land allocated for the cathedral. He even travelled to Italy to raise funds for its construction. Yet he never saw it built. While in Rome, he resigned and went back to his native Spain.

The priest who then administered construction of the cathedral, Fr Martin Griver, saw the project through and later became Bishop. Though most people don't realise it, he still has a connection with the cathedral—on his death, his remains were interred in a brick vault under the cathedral floor, near the sanctuary. Similarly, the remains of his successor, Bishop Gibney, were also interred in the vault.

During the 1920s, it was decided to build a totally new cathedral and construction of the Gothic building eventually began in 1926. But it was a case of history repeating itself. With the onset of the Great Depression, the money ran out. Work simply stopped, and the half-finished cathedral, the combination of the original and the Gothic structures, was officially opened in 1930. It might have been incomplete, but a huge crowd—estimated by police at some 20,000 people—arrived for the opening.

And it was left to future generations to finish the job. ■

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At left: A model of the cathedral showing Quinn's design with the new widened section and the original 1865 end of the cathedral at right. (Photo: Rob Frith)

At right: Big day out ... some 20,000 people cram the grounds of St Mary's Cathedral in Perth in 1930 for the opening of newly-built Gothic end. (Courtesy of the Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Perth)



to that conclusion, it then became a matter of making the church working liturgically and seeing what sort of envelope would result.'

After many weeks 'doodling and mucking around' the final plan emerged. The key was moving the sanctuary and the altar to the centre of the cathedral, and opening up the narrow end of the cathedral and raising the roof.

'Once you put the sanctuary where I put it in the middle of the transept, then the seating has to wrap around it,' he says.

'I wanted the majority of the square to remain as is, and the vistas from three streets maintained and the whole place recognisable as it is now,' he explains.

To retain the park setting, he's included underground parking for 100 cars, as well as rooms that can serve as a parish centre.

Quinn has been given the go ahead to draw up the final plans for St Mary's. With a total cost approximating \$15 million, construction is expected to begin next year, with the cathedral due to be completed sometime in 2007. ■

The last goodbye



SUMMERTIME, HEAT-RASH TIME. I itch and scratch, with the predictable result that large areas of my skin turn blotchily red. My surface is literally irritated, and I feel irritable at this betrayal. That most intimate friend and the one I usually take for granted, my body, has let me down, but of course it is useless to tell the rest of myself that my body cannot help it. And, when faced with physical discomfort and this high pitch of body awareness, my spirit is just not interested, it is off on summer holidays of its own. This time last year, though, I was made aware of both body and spirit in quite a different way.

We are our bodies, as I am learning all over again while scratching moodily, but attitudes to that fact and to bodies themselves are greatly subject to change. The Victorians, for example, tried to achieve the absence of the live body: think of the covering nature of their clothing, the men's beards and hats, the women's dresses and bonnets, and the way in which certain words (leg, ankle, breast) were not supposed to be mentioned in polite society. Concentration on heart, soul and spirit were the thing. Yet said live body was not to be denied, and families were usually large, while the dead body was very much a presence at often splendid and always ritualistic funerals. Perhaps it is no accident that the modern Olympic Games, replicating the ideal of the perfectly-tuned body conjoined with the spirit to drive it, started in the late dusk of the Victorian age.

Today sex has replaced religion as an interest and hobby. Western youth are obsessed with the notion of the body beautiful: gyms, relentless exercise, power walking, power eating, power everything, are all designed to produce the perfect package, presumably for purposes of sexual display and not much else. On a Sydney beach a few years ago, a crawling nine-month old baby latched on to the wrong breast, a mistake easily made, I imagine, in a large field of topless bathers. Much hilarity ensued, and the hapless young woman speedily learned what breasts are really for.

But few people want to know about an old body, let alone a dead one. I attended my first funeral when I was 19: my grandmother had died, the coffin was closed, and in the non-conformist Australia of the day, the graveside was considered 'no place for a woman'. Now I notice the increasing occurrence of memorial services in both Britain and Australia, occasions at which the inconvenient body is conspicuously absent, having been disposed of well beforehand and very privately. The memorial service, demanding an abrupt adjustment to absence, acknowledges the spirit, pays tribute to the life and work, but ignores, so to speak, the vehicle that made all things possible.

IN RURAL GREECE, where I have lived for the last 24 years, bodies are treated and viewed according to the generations. Youth is flaunting flesh as never before, but a widow following a traditional way of life will still wear deep black for the rest of her life, and will never appear in public without her headscarf. One often sees a wiggling, lycra-clad nymphet keeping very incongruous company with her soberly-dressed grandmother. My mother-in-law, the redoubtable and very traditional Aphrodite, it seems to me now, having concealed her body during decades of widowhood, then relinquished it quite deliberately. There came a day when she simply gave up walking, even though there was no physical reason for her to do so. The simple fact of the matter was that walking had always been associated with work, and she no longer wanted to think about either. I like to think that she wanted to concentrate on mind and spirit.

And so, over a long period, Aphrodite's life contracted, and her whole person simply faded away. In the week she lay dying, in June 1996, her room was always full. Her female friends lined the walls and chatted softly; every so often one would get up, totter to the bed and lift the sheet in order to check the condition of Aphrodite's hands and feet. 'Still warm',

would come the announcement, along with theories about her colour and the shape of her jaw, and then the waiting would continue.

The minute Aphrodite had drawn her last breath, action was the thing. Vaso, her eldest daughter, produced a strip of white linen and bound her mother's jaw. Wine was produced for the bathing of the body, and the neighbourhood women arrived and went about the business of the laying-out. Eventually Aphrodite was readied for her last journey, clad in the complete costume of dress, gloves, headscarf and shoes, and placed in a coffin ornately carved with the double-headed eagle of Byzantium. Her shroud was covered in red and white carnations, an icon placed on her breast, while candles burned at her head and feet. All night she lay in the sala, the best room, while people came and went and paid their respects: Vaso sat by her mother until dawn.

Practically the whole village accompanied the open coffin to the church. Three priests officiated, the voices of the choristers dipped and soared, and the impression of the message 'I am the Light of the World' took on reality as each person lit a candle and then snuffed it out at a certain point in the ceremony. At the last, the mourners trooped past, made the sign of the cross and kissed first the icon and then Aphrodite herself. It was then that I was reminded of a lesson I learned long ago: simple communities have always known what the therapists try to teach us, that we must say a genuine goodbye in order that we ourselves can continue to live.

Memorial services are held at the very least, on the third, ninth and 40th days after a death, after six months and on the first anniversary. Grief is replayed, and thus slowly diminishes in intensity, enabling an absence to be coped with. Final acceptance comes with the ritual of exhumation, at which point the stark fact of death is confronted as it has not been before. When the exhumation is over, the living are truly free to accept a new life based on an absence that has now been ritually assimilated.

My priest father-in-law, a man I never knew, was exhumed in the summer of 1980. Being very new to rural Greece then, I could not face such a foreign and frightening ordeal, and so cunningly volunteered to mind all the children in the family. By 2003, however, that generation of children had grown up, and escape avenues were cut off: I was going to have to attend Aphrodite's exhumation.

Exhumations are usually scheduled for the Saturday before Pentecost, the Orthodox All Souls' Day. Early in the morning, Aphrodite's two children, accompanied by their spouses, arrived at the graveyard, a place brooded over by mountains that seem, to me at least, to teach lasting lessons on the subject of human limitation. I was relieved to be spared a major part of the ordeal, the actual digging up of the body,

because the verger/cantor/gravedigger/general factotum met us with the words, 'Ola kala' (All is well). If there is any flesh adhering to the bones, it is evident that the devil has been at work and a reinterment must take place.

Like Vaso, I am the eldest child and the eldest daughter, but never have I been so thankful for my Australian birth as I was that day. Vaso lifted her head, set her jaw, and disappeared into the charnel house with her basket, which contained, among other things, a pair of rubber gloves. She had to wash her mother's bones. They were then placed in a big plastic trough-shaped container, boarded over and with an identifying photo on top, there to await the liturgy and the removal to the final resting place, a plain wooden box with Aphrodite's name printed on it.

We returned in the evening to find the graveyard startlingly en fête. Whole families were there: older people strolled up and down and shook the hands of those people whose relatives had been disinterred, even as the priest was reciting the service among the generalised buzz; the boards were removed from the plastic containers while wisps of incense floated ceiling-high. Children ran about noisily and played among the grave-stones; our own lot, older and more sophisticated than the ones of 1980 had been, skipped into the charnel house and lit candles that they then placed in among the bones of their great-grandmother Aphrodite.

I stood to one side, holding the bowl of kolivo, boiled and sugared wheat, which is ceremonially offered to all present. In a very ancient custom, those who eat of this believe that they have achieved reconciliation with the dead; any enmity that existed between the living and the deceased is also dead and gone. I do not like kolivo, but made sure that I ate a token amount, in honour of Aphrodite and of our edgy relationship. She had given me the culturally-prescribed hard time; not only was I a daughter-in-law, I was a foreigner. But with the passing of time we had mellowed towards each other, and so I stood, ate, and remembered.

Although I was 35 when I migrated to Greece, it was here that I grew up, being forced to test and use parts of myself that I had never used previously, for there is not even an attempt at disguising harsh reality in this land. The facts of life and death are as bare as the mountains and as the bones we all become. ■

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The memorial service, demanding an abrupt adjustment to absence, acknowledges the spirit, pays tribute to the life and work, but ignores, so to speak, the vehicle that made all things possible.

Captured on canvas

The artists of the Kimberley capture more than images

HER BROAD FACIAL FEATURES and lean frame make her easily distinguishable. And Peggy Patrick's voice, although gentle, commands attention. 'We want all people to be strong in their spirit and strong in their country.' Peggy is an elder and leader of the Warmun people, an advocate for reconciliation and instrumental in promoting the history and stories of her people.

A community of around 400 predominantly Aboriginal people, Warmun is one of the hottest places on earth, in the same league as the Sahara desert. It is also one of the most isolated. The next town is Halls Creek, 165km away. Food is at a premium here, an apple will set you back a little over a dollar. Petrol, at \$1.99 a litre,

was to become a post office in 1897 and later a telegraph station. During the early 1900s this post office served as an outlet for dispensing food rations to the needy. It became the art centre more than 80 years later, in 1998.

Now the artists sit in the shade under the building and paint in something like a meditative state. Each artist only paints their own country, the land in which they were born and raised, the land to which they belong. There is no such thing as a rough draft, each piece is permitted to take form during creation.

Many of the artists come from separate tribes and each paints the stories of their own people. Although most of the artists

unique and impossible to recreate. Each work comprises geometric figures; circles, half-circles, spirals and straight or curved lines. These shapes are often repeated and combined to create balanced patterns of great elaborateness. Never, however, have these patterns been regarded as pieces of abstract art by the Warmun artists. Rather they are used to share the stories particular to each tribe.

MANY OF THE ARTISTS are happy to share the story of their work with a curious onlooker and the question 'What are you painting?' is always met with the same answer, 'I paint my country'. Nora Nagarra, an artist from the Bungle Bungle region laughs when asked what she is painting, for the answer is clear. Her pieces almost always include the repetitive bald dome shapes of the Bungles, in dusty hues from pale pink to chocolate. She sits, cross-legged on the concrete, twig in hand, bent over her canvas in deliberation. Aside from the constant dot, dot, dot of her hand, she is motionless, absorbed in her work.

Hector Jandany is the oldest artist here. He is so old, not even he is able to pinpoint his exact age. He guesses he is around 90—36 years older than the current life expectancy of Aboriginal males. Hector paints rarely now, making his work all the more valuable. Recently, one of his earlier works was re-sold for \$300,000. Hector holds the brush gingerly in his long bony fingers, his leathery hands shaking and contorted with effort. Pausing regularly, Hector contemplates each mark. His beard is silver, streaked with dark gray and his eyes a rheumy yellow. His brush wavers from the pot to the canvas and back again. No dot is accidental, no line misplaced.

Like Peggy, Hector too is known among his people as a leader and chuckles about having met the prime minister.

In an arid and unforgiving climate, the small band of Warmun artists are able to provide their community with strength and hope and to ensure the survival of their culture and stories.

is also a little pricey. Both food and petrol are freighted up the west coast from Perth, along the Great Northern Highway, the lifeline of this community. Without it, the community's few businesses—the local shop, the road house and the art centre—would suffer.

While the shop and the roadhouse provide the essentials for passing tourists and the families that live here, the art centre is a business returning much more. Although produced in the most modest of circumstances, Warmun art is renowned worldwide. More importantly, the sale of the art produced here provides the community with a growing economic independence and stability. The art centre itself has a colourful past; it was the first building erected here in 1890, 800km south-west of Darwin and almost 900km east of Broome. Originally an inn and butcher shop, the building

use traditional symbols, it is described as contemporary Aboriginal art. Some artists even incorporate Western style figures and emblems into their work. Each painting is created using traditional ochre and natural pigments. The rock is crushed in stone bowls with the rounded end of a heavy steel rod and then sieved to remove any unwanted material. Crushing the rock is hard on the back and inevitably painful when fingers get in the way. Several blackened and bloodied fingernails and an hour later, a rock the size of a tennis ball is reduced to a fine powder.

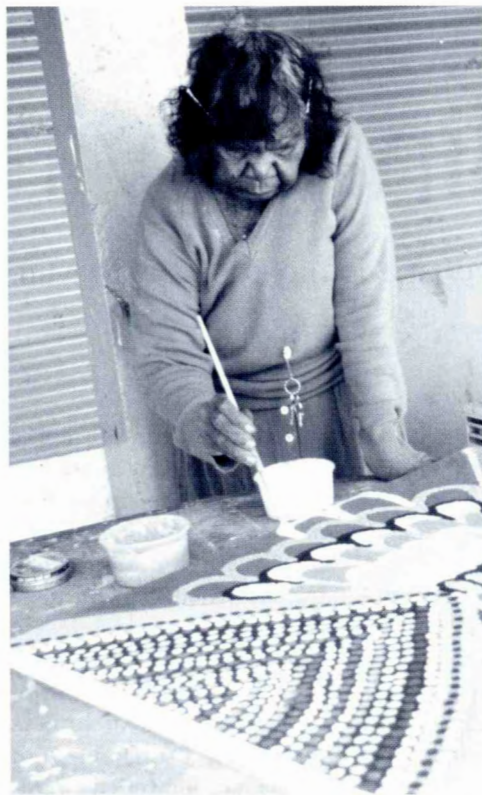
This powder is then mixed with a little water and PVA glue and applied to the canvas with whatever may be handy; a brush, a stick, or a gnarled finger. Charcoal is used in the same manner to achieve a midnight black. The result is breathtaking, a fusion of textures and colours, each

'Yea, I met John Howard', he says, 'and I just said to him "G'day"'. In all likelihood, Hector probably had far more say than just 'G'day'. He is an advocate for education of both children and adults and partly responsible for the opening of the primary school here in 1979. Of the many children that wander this community barefoot during the day he says, 'look at all these children here, they should be in school, they should be learning like you have'. He is, of course, referring to the Western education afforded the majority of Australian children.

The primary school is called Ngalangangpum, meaning mother and child and has around 140 children enrolled. The facilities are excellent, yet less than 40 children, usually the same ones, turn up each day. While many of the elders of the community are of the same opinion as Hector, enforcing education is an arduous task at the best of times.

In addition to writing, reading and arithmetic, the children are taught their native language and traditional stories with the help of Aboriginal Teaching Assistants. Their language is Kija and all of the elders and many of the children speak at least some Kija. One senses that the elders deliberately speak to the children in their own language to promote the learning of their culture. Kreol is also spoken here; it is a mix of Kija and English. Aboriginal English refers to the consistent adaptation of the English language and is distinctively different to Kreol or poorly spoken English. Although the children are encouraged to talk in English at school, they converse in Aboriginal English as this is often spoken in the home and in the wider community.

WATER IS PRECIOUS HERE. Even the smallest of children warn against wasting water. Those that use the drinking fountains carelessly in the playground are regarded with disdain. It's not hard to understand why. During the dry season, from April to October, the ground is cracked, hard and dry. The heat is unrelenting, with an average temperature in the mid 40s and the air hot and breathless. The last few months of the dry season are often referred to as the silly season, as the heat drives people mad. With the first rains comes a tangible sense of relief. It is during this more comfortable weather



Nora Nagarra at work. Copyright Warmun Art Centre, 2004.

that the elders like to return to 'their country', taking their children and grandchildren with them.

Cattle Creek is a favourite camping destination for Patrick Mung Mung and Betty Carrington, who are also artists at the centre. They care for around 12 of their own grandchildren in addition to many other children in the district. Patrick and Betty met at Texas Downs Station, near Cattle Creek, which is around 50km east of Warmun.

Texas Downs Station is now inhabited by snakes and bats, both of which the children delight in stirring up. This is daring, considering the lack of anti-venom kept on hand. It expires quickly and is simply too expensive to keep. The nearest hospital is at Halls Creek, nearly two hours' drive away. Those seriously injured are air-lifted by helicopter while others may be forced to endure a trip in the back of the four-wheel drive.

Both Patrick and Betty were born and raised on Texas Downs Station and as a result have an intricate knowledge of this land. Betty is able to identify the exact tree under which she was born and the shed in which she lived for her first 20 years. At the time of Betty's birth, there were too many female babies. Some of the

elder Aboriginal women decided it would be best to leave Betty on an ant nest to die, rather than bring her up. Betty was taken from her mother, who was in ill health after giving birth. After a day, Betty's grandmother, (who Betty speculates may have actually been a great aunt), went to check on Betty and discovered she was still alive. She decided that the baby girl was strong and that she would raise Betty herself. Despite living on the same station, Patrick and Betty don't think they met until Betty was around 20-years-old and were married 'bush way'. The tree under which they were married stands less than ten metres away from where Betty was born.

This is Patrick's and Betty's country. This is what they paint. Their work is then priced according to size, packaged and sold, often before the paint has dried. They receive 60 per cent of the sale—not profit—which is used to support their family. The remaining 40 per cent is used to fund outings to collect ochre, to pay for equipment and for other supplies such as canvas and brushes. A small percentage of this is returned directly to the community.

In an arid and unforgiving climate, the small band of Warmun artists are able to provide their community with strength and hope and to ensure the survival of their culture and stories. Patrick, Betty and their fellow artists demonstrate that technology is one of the least important ingredients of successful existence—that the things we have been clever enough to invent have been much less important to our survival than our capacity to live together in groups, to co-operate with one another. As Alan Thorne and Robert Raymond suggest (*Man on the Rim: The people of the Pacific*, Angus and Robertson, 1989), they are 'living proof that what is in our heads and our hearts is more important than what we carry in our hands'. ■

Gemma Gadd is completing her Masters in Journalism at Deakin University. For more information on the artists and art of Warmun Art Centre visit www.warmunart.com. Gemma would like to thank Peggy Patrick, Nora Nagarra, Hector Jandany, Patrick Mung Mung and Betty Carrington for sharing their methods and stories and for allowing her to partake in and witness the creation of their work.

Ordinary virtues

Don Gazzard visits the new academic centre at St Mary's and Newman Colleges

AN INTERESTING DILEMMA faced Newman College and St Mary's College when they received a substantial gift two years ago: should they build more accommodation, fund extra scholarships or put the money to other use? They decided to commission an Academic Centre—a library with associated rooms for seminars, IT and music practice. Father Peter L'Estrange SJ, the Rector of Newman and Sr Deirdre Rofe IBVM, then Principal of St Mary's, managed the project jointly. Unfortunately Sr Deirdre, whose portrait hangs in the foyer, did not live to see the completed building.

There were few options for the site of the building. There was so little suitable space available that it was necessary to build the new library suspended over an existing open car park that was equidistant between the two colleges. The budget of \$8 million was not high for such a complex building.

The selection process to find the best architect was exemplary, the only criticism one might level is that it was a totally Melbourne-centric choice. Half a dozen good architects were interviewed and re-interviewed until the Melbourne firm of Edmond & Corrigan was chosen; a brave choice in some minds considering their colourful and exuberant post-modern building at RMIT on Swanston Street. Quite apart from the reputation of the architects, the relationship of any new building to those by Walter Burley Griffin at Newman College—now on all the heritage lists—must have weighed heavily on the collective mind.

The later college buildings that were not designed by Griffin, such as the Chapel and the Donovan Wing, had all tried to more or less match the scale, and materials of the Griffin buildings.

The St Mary's buildings of the '60s are of the same height and scale, but are not so interesting in a design sense and clearly did not pose quite the same contextual problem as the Griffin buildings. The common Australian attitude to heritage is often a servile one of over-deference; in Italy it would be assumed that what was needed was the best modern building of our time. Most good architects would also insist on this position and in this case there was an enlightened client, minimising such concerns.

Edmond & Corrigan made their reputation with the Church of the Resurrection at Keysborough built in the last half of the 1970s, and the parish buildings and school that followed the church. These very low budget buildings were a celebration of the vernacular building style of ordinary suburbia, and the church has successfully weathered 30 years of change and adaptation as the parish has grown. The RMIT building was built in the 1980s and is reviled and loved in equal proportions; every city should have one! Peter Corrigan also has a reputation as a theatre designer and teacher, so expectations were no doubt high.

THE NEW BUILDING has to be considered in two intimately related ways: how well does the external appearance resolve the heritage context, and how well has the brief of accommodation been resolved internally? The latter is not just a question of accommodating all the rooms in the right relationships. Good architecture should open up new possibilities of delight for users of the building.

The new three-storey Academic Centre, approximately the same height as the Chapel, is on the western side of



the college (in line with the Donovan Wing) and more or less on the diagonal axis of the Newman quadrangle. This places it behind, but off the long axis of the Chapel, and it can therefore be seen from Swanston Street in the gap between the Chapel and St Mary's. It may have been serendipitous, but from one bay window there is a view in one direction back along the diagonal axis across the Newman quadrangle towards the dining room with its tower, and in the other direction towards St Mary's. The siting is subtle and the building fits in well with those that surround it.

The plan of the building is not at all regular, many of the peripheral rooms have been articulated (almost wilfully and not always successfully) in an attempt to give each room a special identity with irregular plan shapes, angled walls and bay windows. From the floor plan one might expect a very eccentric external appearance but this is not the case. Norman Day's review of the building in *The Age* was headlined 'Celebration of the Mundane' and while this may be journalistic phrase-making, the building certainly appears straight forward, even ordinary, from the main approach sides. Edmond & Corrigan appear to be

too knowing for this not to be intentional. Corbusier asserted that 'the plan and the section are the generators'. That is, the external appearance is a direct consequence of all the internal design decisions, and there is certainly a directness, a 'to hell with you' inevitability about the appearance of this building, in particular the way a fire stair is attached to the western side of the building.

Edmond & Corrigan are asking us to accept the philosophic position that the



appearance of the building has almost nothing to do with them. With that plan and that cross-section the building is just the way it wanted to be. This is an approach I have some sympathy with but the designer also has to be a bit canny; Corbusier would certainly never have just let it happen without some art.

I suspect that Edmond & Corrigan would agree with Robert Venturi's argument that 'mainstreet is almost alright'. The entrance with its red roof for example, which could well be that of a spec office building in the outer suburbs, is probably a deliberate gesture by the architects to demonstrate what architectural snobs the rest of us are and that we should learn to love it!

THE SOLID WALLS are concrete panels painted in a safe stone colour that more or less matches the Barabool sandstone of the Chapel and the Griffin buildings. Combined with the careful siting and height of the building, this no doubt helped ensure that Heritage Victoria, the City Council and the University were all satisfied about this heritage interloper.

The interior of the building however, is an interesting series of daylit spaces that made me wish I was a student again.

The library is on the entrance level with a central, elliptical atrium over the main reading area going up through the two smaller upper floors to a roof with skylights. Except for rooms for special Irish and Australian Collections, the upper floors are taken up with tutorial and seminar rooms, computer laboratories and music rehearsal rooms. The space over the bookshelf area of the library is two storeys high with more skylights.

The interiors have no-nonsense de-



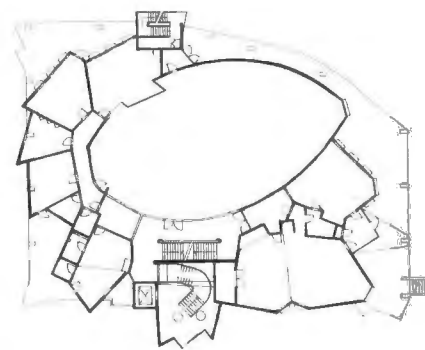
tails and pleasant, commercial finishes with blue-grey carpet, natural timber and painted walls in subdued colours. There are carefully designed windows that give good views over the campus, particularly a row of diamond-shaped small windows above the bookshelf area that are well placed for views from the upper floor. The bookshelves and desks in the library are arranged in a way that suits the irregular geometry of the plan and provides odd corners that help prevent the interior layout appearing over regimented.

With the floors connected by an open atrium there is a danger of acoustic disturbance caused by people coming and going to the upstairs seminar rooms. The architects have avoided the commercial look of flush, suspended acoustic tile ceilings to dampen sound by utilising plywood acoustic panels arranged in an irregular way on the ceiling. They are all interspersed with suspended light fittings, sprinklers and other necessary pipes and ducts. This arrangement is not entirely successful visually but has the virtue that it can be easily adapted if more acoustic absorption becomes necessary.

The building is not airconditioned but the lowest slab has in-floor heating

and fresh air is introduced at the lowest level mechanically, so that, allied with the stack effect created by the atrium, this should encourage natural cross ventilation through the building.

This approach may have been influenced by the budget but it also makes a lot of sense. Despite their common air of omniscience, architects are not all-wise, and buildings have to be run-in like new cars and adjusted in the light of experience in use. Like cars, they also need to



be maintained regularly, but this happens all too rarely.

The colleges are well aware that the surroundings of the new Academic Building are a bit forlorn after the construction, and indeed Griffin's original landscaping itself, which was always rather eclectic, is also in need of attention. Time has shown that the waterproofing of the 1915 Griffin buildings was inadequate and that they needed to be made leak-proof. Newman should demonstrate similar courage with the Griffin landscaping as they have with the buildings. Advice from the best landscape architects in town (they can do more than select the trees) could transform the College when funds permit.

It could sound like damning with faint praise to conclude that Edmond & Corrigan have designed a very workable building. But this is not the location or the budget for tour de force architecture. The new Academic Centre fits well within the Walter Burley Griffin context of Newman College and would be a delight to study in. What more can one ask? ■

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

Page turner

Printed books still possess the power to captivate, thrill and inspire.
Alison Aprhys confesses her addiction.

A LIFE-LONG LOVE AFFAIR is how many people describe their passion for books. If you have missed trains, trams, buses or ferries because you were captivated by a story; if visitors to your home say 'wow, you could open a bookshop'; or if you can easily recite passages (if not pages) verbatim from your favourite titles and can't remember a time when you didn't read, then welcome comrade, you're in my tribe.

In an age of computers, text messaging and digital TV, books still possess an incredible hold over many people. What is it about the old-fashioned printed word that compels us? What is it that lures people to leave more lucrative careers to work with their enduring passion? Is it the bindings or the content? The aroma of old paper and leather or is it the story inside? Again and again, booksellers state that it's not just their love of books but the people—colleagues, customers, authors and publishers—who make their choice a true vocation.

For second-hand bookshop proprietor Kreisha Balantyne-Dickes, it's easy to spot a book addict. 'You

can see it in their eyes', she laughs. 'I call it the "book look" and people either have it or they don't'. Kreisha and her husband Adam own Desire Books, a friendly and funky

treasure trove of '60s 'beat and rebel' and 20th-century literature near Manly Beach in Sydney.

'For a lot of people, books take them back to their childhood, to a very special place', says Kreisha. 'They recall how wonderful it was reading with their parents'. Adam nods in agreement. 'Every couple of hundred volumes you get that one beautiful book—inside and out—that makes it all worthwhile', he says. 'Over the last two years we have tended to attract the kind of person who simply can't walk past a bookshop', says Kreisha. Before opening their shop, these bibliophiles lived



Kreisha and Adam from Desire books

in the UK book mecca, Hay-On-Wye, and knew exactly the kinds of books they wanted to sell.

The common myth that booksellers get to loll around and read for a living, is firmly refuted by Tim Gott, the proprietor of Tasmania's Davenport Books.

'Never ever been able to do that', he says. 'Some days we are so rushed that reading the back cover before you shelve a new title is a bonus', he says with a laugh. While Tim may have been attracted to the profession by his love of books, he reckons it's the people that make bookselling so worthwhile. 'I really love the variety of people you come into contact with through my bookshop. Like books, we get all kinds of customers.' He feels that the combination of hundreds of thousands of new titles a year and the increasingly busy lives we lead, means that readers are relying on booksellers more than ever to assist them to choose a great title. Consequently, booksellers

'Every couple of hundred volumes you get that one beautiful book—inside and out—that makes it all worthwhile.'



Tim Gott from Tasmania's Davenport Books.

'Like many converts, booksellers are happiest when either reading a great book or telling someone else about its virtues.'

need to have excellent communication and people skills, not to mention a good memory.

However, there are others for whom books are non-essential. Reading is not only a non-essential aspect of life, it isn't even on their radar. Their reading is confined to the newspaper and perhaps a magazine aligned to their interest. Like two countries divided by an uncommon language, these people are an enigma and I have yet to enjoy a close friendship with a non-reader.

It seems ironic that despite over 100,000 new titles being published in English each year, so few seem to capture the ability to describe the absolute delight that reading brings. Fortunately, some eloquent writers proudly wear their hearts on their sleeves and invite us into their libraries, their lives and often their hearts. In Helene Hanff's classic love-letter to books and bookselling, *84 Charing Cross Road*, her passion is charmingly transparent and addictive. Hanff effortlessly and articulately captures the passion that so many of us have for books and her own books are deservedly read and loved. Anne Fadiman's erudite and excellent *Ex Libris: Confessions of a common reader* contains some wonderful essays on how books can shape our lives and how much richer we are for them.

'The books that have the power to excite us by stimulating our imagination rather than just entertain, they are the books that become a part of our lives', says Kathy Mossap, editor of *Good Reading*, an independent monthly magazine dedicated to reading, books and the people who love them.

Kathy feels that everyone's list of life changing books is different and it's interesting to hear of that impact a book can have on a person when it may invoke a very different response from you. 'Great books reach you in a very personal way', she says. 'They touch an emotion and can produce strong feelings.'

In 2001, research commissioned by the Australia Council on Australian reading habits, book buying and borrowing, 72 per cent of people surveyed had read a book for pleasure the week before their interview, 69 per cent have over 200 books in their homes.



Alison Aprhys in her usual haunt, Andy's Bookshop.

Another ABS survey stated that the average Australian reader reads for 70 minutes a day.

Like many converts, booksellers are happiest when either reading a great book or telling someone else about its virtues. Anthony Marshall, the proprietor of that Carlton institution Alice's Bookshop concludes in the introduction to his delightful volume, *Trafficking in Old Books*: 'My aim has not been to instruct but to entertain. And the people I wish to entertain are people like you, who have a passion for books and reading and who love to visit old bookshops and (possibly) old booksellers'.

As Hanff would say, 'Hurrah comrade!' ■

Alison Aprhys is a freelance writer and photojournalist who writes for magazines in Australia and the US.

in print



On atonement

Joe Cinque's Consolation, Helen Garner. Picador, 2004. ISBN 0 330 36497 9, RRP \$30

JOE CINQUE DIED on Sunday, 26 October 1997 after being administered a massive dose of Rohypnol and heroin by his girlfriend, Anu Singh, on Saturday. It took him all weekend to die. Others, including Singh's friend Madhavi Rao, who was also initially charged with murder, knew of a murder-suicide plan. They provided Singh with money, heroin, injecting lessons and dosage advice and, quite possibly, the nerve to proceed with at least the murder part of the plan. Only one person confronted Singh prior to Joe Cinque's death but was reassured that Singh no longer intended to harm him. In *Joe Cinque's Consolation*, Helen Garner guides us through a *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* set in a Canberra depicted as a nihilistic wasteland.

Garner confronts any similarities between this case and *The First Stone* head on. She has again written about a man and two female law students caught up in the legal process. Garner documents the beginning of her emotional involvement in the story and her developing commitment to writing about it. In a disturbing opening, Garner has again used a transcript presented as evidence to the court, this time of an emergency call made by Anu Singh on the day of Joe Cinque's death. Singh was eventually convicted of the lesser charge of manslaughter and Rao acquitted. The court had heard evidence from various psychiatric experts to the effect that Singh had been suffering from a major depressive illness or borderline personality disorder with narcissistic features. Eerily, Joe Cinque's voice was inadvertently recorded on an answering machine tape at about 10:30pm on the night before he died. The tape was tendered in evidence during proceedings. Only Joe Cinque's blurred and disembodied voice remained, like Narcissus's original Echo: '... Anu's worried for nothing!'

It appears Garner has anticipated a backlash comparable to that which followed publication of *The First Stone*. She has captured a groundswell of public feeling against lenient sentencing and the rights of victims and their families. This is uncomfortable territory for many of us, shared as it is by 'unseemly' public displays of grief and anger, together with reactionary elements. Reading *Joe Cinque's Consolation* itself is a discomfiting experience. The facts swirl elusively, derived from one aborted trial and two further trials, imperfect memory, witnesses keen to forget whatever role they played and others bludgeoned by the legal process.

Garner has further honed her technique since *The First Stone*. The characters and incidents described mediate the

story and permit different, sometimes astonishing, perspectives. Joe Cinque's mother dominates the book through sheer force of personality, her suffering and rage. Her moral authority is in no way lessened by her desire for greater retribution. Garner seems to shrink in Mrs Cinque's presence, on one occasion literally not knowing where to put herself.

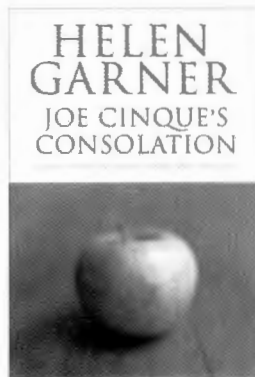
Her relationship with the Cinques manages to leaven the grim story, although their level of suffering clearly shocked her. It is a simple, devastating story for the Cinques: their son was killed. It is a hideously complex story for the Singhs and the rest of us: their daughter killed Joe Cinque.

The book has that mystery at its heart. Garner grapples with both the mystery and her own clearly identified prejudices. She is unable to explain why Joe Cinque was killed and why nothing was done to stop it. She can provide no response as to what the legal outcome should have been, particularly when confronted with the compassion of the trial judge, Justice Ken Crispin.

Garner has not simply raised issues of justice from the point of view of Joe Cinque's destroyed family. Neither is the book just about restoring his reputation, threatened at one stage during court proceedings. Garner is interested in the concept of atonement. How can a guilty person live with a crime for which they have not properly atoned? There may be a moral duty where there is no legal duty of care, and the legal concept of diminished responsibility may even permit the perpetrator to claim a share of victimhood.

MANY OF US WOULD STILL PREFER to live in a country with a judiciary capable of exercising compassion as opposed to elected judges expected to apply the death penalty or mandatory sentencing. There is room for judicial discretion in sentencing which should include empathy for the victims, as well as for the mostly unspecified need of the criminal for atonement. As Anu Singh launches her own career based on the circumstances of Joe Cinque's death, Mrs Cinque's question seems unanswerable: 'How am I supposed, Your Honour, to go on?' Garner was unable to provide Mrs Cinque with any direct consolation and is scathing at her own inadequacy in this respect. She has, however, provided us with a glimpse of Joe Cinque's face, given him substance and reaffirmed his human dignity. He is no longer a mere echo. ■

Paul Bourke is a lawyer.



New ideas

Imagining Australia: Ideas for our future, Macgregor Duncan, Andrew Leigh, David Madden and Peter Tynan.
Allen & Unwin, 2004. ISBN 1 741 14382 9, RRP \$24.95

THIS BOOK BEGINS with great expectations. On the cover, Paul Kelly says it is the 'voice and vision of a new generation'. On the back, Mark Latham welcomes it as 'an excellent starting point for a new debate about where our country is heading', and Gareth Evans praises the 'lively analysis and sparkling writing', lamenting that he hadn't written it himself.

As Australians go to the polls, here is a comprehensive policy blueprint, drawing together new and old ideas based on solid research and presented with passion and conviction.

With degrees from the world's best universities, and experience in business, both sides of politics, and the community sector, these four authors offer a smorgasbord of policy ideas on topics ranging from politics and civic engagement to social policy, economic policy, and international affairs.

This is certainly a book for policy wonks. However, it also warrants a wider audience. It may well be the most original, persuasive and intelligent policy offering during the election season, that is, if it can get a hearing above the bluff and bluster of the campaign.

Noting Australia's strong economic performance, sporting success, envious lifestyle and high international reputation, the authors argue that Australia could be doing better. Offering a social, economic and political critique of Australia, the authors set out, ambitiously, to offer solutions to seemingly intractable policy debates and arguments.

Arguing that Australians 'are looking for new ideas' to advance the nation, the authors want a 'country that conceives of its future in grander terms'. The book appeals to 'the greater good of society', to hope, and optimism, articulating a radical centrist political philosophy. Nobody would agree with everything in this book, but there is much grist for the policy mill.

Recognising the disillusionment with the political process and the need to increase citizen participation in public life, the authors argue for a republic, a bill of rights, regular constitutional conventions, an increased policy role for the Senate, the appointment of ministers from outside of Parliament, campaign finance reform, public-private sector job mobility, allowing the public to vote in party pre-selections, and an annual deliberation day to weigh up candidates and issues before elections.

They argue that central to their economic philosophy 'is a belief that open, flexible and well-functioning markets

are essential for strong growth'. They believe in trade liberalisation, enterprise bargaining and competitive markets. Although they are proponents of economic liberalism, they acknowledge these policies have increased inequality, damaged the natural environment and caused pockets of high and chronic unemployment.

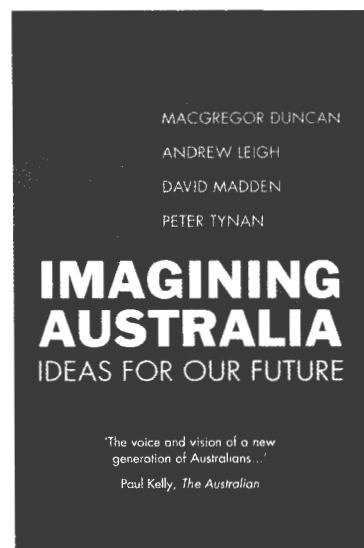
They propose to ameliorate the negative effects of economic growth through multi-lateral trade, increased foreign investment, adjustable taxation rates set by a group outside government to smooth out the economic cycle, changes to corporate bankruptcy laws to allow businesses time to readjust, more industry assistance and encouragement for our innovative entrepreneurs.

Offering a social policy vision based on 'equality, opportunity and community', the authors propose an earned income tax credit, a focus on inequality as well as poverty, several innovative indigenous policy proposals, more funding for education and greater teacher support, and efforts to encourage philanthropy.

A good argument is made for increasing social capital, which they define as 'the bonds of trust and reciprocity that bind communities together', proposing that local schools become 'a focal point for civic engagement'. Research shows that in areas where social capital is high, the economy is stronger, there is less crime, and better health, education and welfare.

ANOTHER PROPOSAL OF MERIT is an AustraliaCorps scheme where young people are invited to work in a disadvantaged community for a year, and by doing so receive a living allowance, and earn an education credit which can be used to pay for higher education or training. There are other worthy proposals to promote environmental sustainability, engage more closely with the region and the world, and encourage Indigenous entrepreneurship.

Nevertheless, there are some policy ideas which would find little public support and demand more rigorous advocacy than is presented here. A market-based HECS scheme, housing vouchers, an inheritance tax, the abolition of negative gearing, introducing competition to prisons, 'rolling forward' the GST, abolition of the First Home Owners' Grant and the Baby Bonus, are notable in this regard.



Whilst policy is the book's strength, the authors are less convincing when arguing about values and identity. Believing that Australia has no inspiring or unifying national 'story', they argue that the Eureka Stockade legend should become the centrepiece of a new Australian identity. Further, the Eureka flag should become the Australian flag, and the Eureka oath replace the citizenship oath. They also propose that Waltzing Matilda become the new national anthem. The case for such change is not persuasive.

THE AUTHORS SUGGEST that Australia Day, Anzac Day and the Federation anniversary, are not sufficiently unifying or inspiring national commemorations. However, on Australia Day in January, 800,000 people attended events in Sydney, and many more visited the beach, the bush and hosted backyard barbecues. More than 9,000 people became citizens. This year 200,000 people watched the Anzac Day march in Sydney, and a record 15,000 gathered at Gallipoli. In 2001, around 500,000 people lined the streets of Sydney for the Centenary of

Federation parade and millions more participated in national events that year. These events attract widespread media coverage and they inspire meaningful commemoration, something the Eureka Stockade has not yet achieved.

More emphasis could have been placed on the importance of political leadership, because leaders and leadership are a decisive factor in winning consent for bold reform.

The authors see Australia as 'a work in progress with great potential', but often 'content to rest on its laurels and luxuriate in its unfulfilled possibilities'. This book serves as a call to arms for politicians, policy makers and citizens to nudge the Australian story further. It is upbeat, forward-looking, and declaratory, like a Keating or Whitlam speech, with a dash of American optimism and hope, fuelled by the aspirations of the authors. ■

Troy Bramston is co-editor of *The Hawke Government: A Critical Retrospective* (Pluto Press, 2003), works for a Labor Senator and is completing a masters degree in politics at UNSW.



With true love showers

Ophelia's Fan: A story about dreams, Shakespeare and love, Christine Balint. Allen & Unwin, 2004.
ISBN 1 741 14444 2, RRP \$22.95 Allen & Unwin, 2004. ISBN 1 741 14382 9, RRP \$24.95

OPHELIA'S FAN is the second novel by the young, prize-winning Australian author Christine Balint. In it, she explores the life of Harriet Smithson, the Shakespearean actress and wife of the romantic composer Hector Berlioz. Berlioz was inspired to write his most famous symphony, the *Symphonic Fantastique* after seeing Smithson performing the roles of Ophelia and Juliet on stage at the Theatre Odeon in Paris.

Beautifully written, Balint's novel has captured well the life of the Irish actress Harriet Smithson and in particular gives the reader a vivid sense of what it must have been like to be a woman of the stage in 19th-century England and France. We see the whole precarious nature of the theatre, its fickleness and cruelty, and how rapidly the fortunes of the actors can rise and then fall. As working women, female actors were associated in the public mind as being almost dangerous and akin to prostitutes. Men often treated them as such, and Harriet Smithson had to fight hard to preserve her 'honour'. She must deal with a series of suitors, who want her not for a wife but as a mistress.

The choice of a non-linear narrative style, has allowed Balint to move seamlessly in and out of Harriet's life as a child and as an adult. We see her growing up in the green sodden landscape of County Clare and enter into her dream life as a solitary and creative child who was born already play-acting Shakespearean drama. We see her as a young woman who is forced to work in order to support her family and we follow her through the drudgery of line learning and performance—night after night after night. Her own life-story is interspersed with the stories of those women whose lives she performed: Ophelia, Juliet, Desdemona. Juliet comes to life when she speaks, 'When I look back upon this night I like to pause here, for this was the last hour of my contentment. My life was a straight line, the past still visible and the future an unwavering road into the distance, uncluttered, uncomplicated and whole ...'. The past and the present merge and what is dream, reality, fact or fiction in Harriet Smithson's difficult life becomes hard to discern.

Balint's lyrical and sensitive prose also awakens us to the near hysteria of the burgeoning Romantic movement in 19th-century Paris. As an artistic community, the Romantics were not known for their restraint. The French Romantics—Berlioz, Victor Hugo, the artist Delacroix—could certainly not be described as tame. In direct reaction to the cool-headedness

and clarity of the Enlightenment, these men went all out to live passionate lives that reflected their art. It was the time of the birth of Artist as Hero. It was almost a requirement for a 'real' artist to be seen falling in love, fighting duels, having affairs, climbing mountains and poisoning rival suitors. Without such experiences, it was believed that the creative spark could not really exist. The artistic dictum was: 'not Rule but direct Reaction to Feeling'.

As one of the leaders of the movement, Hector Berlioz appears to have embodied the whole Romantic sentiment.

Berlioz's life and his art merge into one vast obsession after seeing Harriet Smithson perform her Juliet and Ophelia. Balint describes well the way in which Berlioz mistakes Harriet Smithson for Ophelia. Ophelia, who trails in and out of scenes with straw through her dishevelled hair and whose voice can be heard faintly singing: 'larded with sweet flowers;/ Which beswept to the grave did go/With true-love showers'. Berlioz falls in love not with the woman but instead with the mad, frail and above all tragic figures that she portrays on stage.

The role of beautiful women as muse for the male artist is not a particularly appealing one. Berlioz wears down Harriet Smithson's lack of interest in him by sheer force of will and attentiveness. Yet he very quickly

loses interest in her once she has finally agreed to marry him. A muse must remain unattainable. Once attained she can be discarded like one of Ophelia's dead flowers.

Berlioz went on to marry several times over.

IN THIS NOVEL, Christine Balint has skilfully recreated the life and voice of Smithson, who was lauded as one of the most accomplished Shakespearean actresses of her time. With a high degree of historical accuracy, Balint has coloured in the background to Smithson's life and exposed the poverty and degradation that lay beneath the Romantic façade. Harriet Smithson may have been the muse who inspired Berlioz's most celebrated symphony but she herself dies in obscurity and misery. She goes the way of many women who have been courted and captured by artistic genius. ■

Kirsty Sangster is a poet. Her book *Midden Places* will be published this year by Black Pepper press.



Roving ambassador

Twelve Cities: A Memoir, Roy Jenkins. Pan Books, 2004. ISBN 0 330 49333 7, RRP \$25

ROY JENKINS is perhaps best known in Australia as the author of a much acclaimed biography of Winston Churchill. However, there's a lot more to him than that. Jenkins has a plump CV: 33 years in the House of Commons, Minister for eight years in the Labor governments of Harold Wilson, Chancellor of the Exchequer, President of the European Community, Leader of the British Social Democrats and (in political 'retirement') a Life Peer and Chancellor of Oxford University. This seems enough as a public life.

But Jenkins was also a prolific writer, the author of 21 books, including essays on politics and government, on politicians and men of power, eight biographies (several of them prize-winning) and an autobiography. *Twelve Cities* was his 21st book published in the last year of his life. He died in January 2003.

Why at the age of 82, Jenkins, a brilliant biographer and engaging writer about politics and people decided to write about 'places' is something of a mystery. He said that *Twelve Cities* is a 'form of reminiscent self indulgence' and 'intended partly as a relief' for readers 'who found *Churchill* heavy to hold and long to read'. This seems a serious miscalculation as self-indulgences often are.

Of the 12 cities chosen by Jenkins as the subjects of these essays three are British, two American, one Irish (Dublin) and six in continental Europe. It seems an appropriate distribution for a British public figure who became 'Mr Europe' and believed in Britain's special relationship with the United States. He visits safe places many times and this seems the extent of his ambition. There is no evidence of travel beyond the Caucasian circle.

Writing successfully about 'place' is a particular art form. Some of the crime fic-

tion writers, notably Raymond Chandler, have been good at it. Locally Shane Maloney and Peter Corris have done it well.

But the writing about 'places' which Jenkins attempts in *Twelve Cities* is more closely related to travel writing of the kind made popular by Bill Bryson (*Neither Here Nor There*) and Pico Iver (*Saturday Nights in Kathmandu*). Jan Morris, has for 40 years, been the most masterly exponent of this genre and Jenkins refers to her on several occasions.

In the introduction to her book *Locations*, Jan Morris talks about the intention of her writing as being to 'simply present an individual response to a place—a wanderer's response, offering no advice, expecting no emulations'. It suggests a degree of detached

observation, a writer with 'outsider' insights.

Roy Jenkins was unable to do this. From the time he left Oxford and entered the House of Commons (aged 28) he was never an outsider, nor in any real sense a wanderer. He enjoyed, as the title of his autobiography suggests, 'life at the centre'. He goes to places to meet other politicians, to attend conferences and high-powered meetings, and to give Ivy-League lectures and orations. In the essay on Paris he discusses at some length the relative merits of various high-class hotels, The Ritz, The Crillon, The Hotel Bristol and so on. The New York essay similarly describes various fine houses and hotels until he settles on most visits at the Knickerbocker Club, well placed for an early morning walk. Having experienced 60 years of 'French official life' he concludes that Frenchmen 'have got much better and the English much worse dressed'.

To check the veracity of his judgments, Jenkins has a number of 'experts'

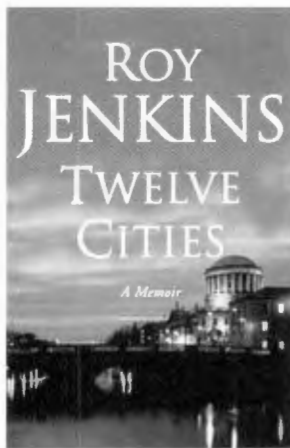
whom he acknowledges in the preface to his book. None of them would be missing from an international *Who's who!* They include Italian Foreign Minister Renato Ruggiero (Naples), twice Prime Minister of Ireland Dr Garret FitzGerald (Dublin), Lord Kilmarnock, author of *Guide to Catalonia* (Barcelona) and Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (Chicago).

Often Jenkins stayed at British Embassies. He is wary, however, lest his book becomes 'a sort of *Michelin Guide* to British Embassies'. It is not. But many of the essays are reminiscent of a *Michelin Guide's* descriptions of the built landscape and the brief and somewhat esoteric histories of particular cities. 'Chicago' is mainly about Chicago architecture and the development of the skyscraper. 'Barcelona' too is much about urban architecture, 'Brussels' about restaurants. But the average reader, unlikely to travel in the precise steps of Roy Jenkins, would be better off with a *Michelin* or indeed a *Lonely Planet*.

IT IS INTERESTING that Jenkins, so adept at capturing the light and shade of great men, is incapable of communicating the excitement and spirit of great cities. As might be expected, these essays are well written, but rarely compelling reading. Now and then there are some rich veins of gold which produce a chuckle: Margaret Thatcher in Dublin haranguing the leaders of Europe at a Heads of Government working dinner is a memorable example of Jenkin's wit and eye for portraiture.

Perhaps the problem was that Jenkins had left-over notebooks from his earlier writings—anecdotes and autobiographical material which he felt compelled to publish. These appear as fragments in otherwise unremarkable essays about cities. They should have been a coda to his memoirs, published as after-thoughts. ■

John Button was a minister and senator in the Hawke and Keating Governments.



Return of the native

I Saw Ramallah, Mourid Barghouti. Bloomsbury, 2004. ISBN 0 747 56927 4, RRP \$35

OVER THE LAST DECADE OR SO, we have seen moves to dismantle colonial legacies in places like South Africa and East Timor, Northern Ireland and Palestine. The success of attempts to redress personal and societal fractures in such places has been mixed, but there have been some significant homecomings. The Palestinian poet, Mourid Barghouti, has now published a powerful and moving chronicle of return in *I Saw Ramallah*. Prefaced by the late Edward Said and translated by the Egyptian novelist, Adhaf Soueif, *I Saw Ramallah* is the record of one man's journey back to Palestine.

Barghouti begins his account on the 'prohibited wooden planks' of the Allenby Bridge, which crosses the Jordan River to the West Bank. We learn that he last crossed this bridge 30 years ago, on his way back to Cairo University to take his final exams. Around this time, the 1967 six-day war broke out and he became part of the *naziheen*, 'the displaced ones', a stranger and outsider living in distant and fraught relationship to various places of exile. With the so-called 'peace process' making it possible for him to visit the occupied territories, Barghouti must now face the fraught and intense feelings that he has also come to feel towards Palestine.

Exile and displacement do not form a coherent and continuous narrative: we have instead 'scenes from an untidy life, a memory that bangs backward and forward like a shuttle'. As Barghouti crosses the border, memories and ghosts begin to crowd him: his dead brother, Manouf, who spent a day waiting on this bridge three years ago, but was eventually refused and turned back; the Palestinian novelist, Ghassan Kanafani, whose powerful voice was halted by a bomb; the still raw pain felt at the London grave of his friend, the political cartoonist Naji Al-Ali. Barghouti wants to recall those now absent and reconnect them as part of his return home. Clearly though, bereavement and mourning shadow the hopeful anticipation of his homecoming.

Edward Said argued for seeing Palestinian and Israeli histories and geographies as linked and intertwined. Barghouti wonders about the family of the Israeli soldier on the bridge: Did they come from Dachau? Were they from Brooklyn? Or were they dissident Russian émigrés? He contemplates these histories, but he contemplates also how their settlement and presence is based on the removal and denial of the Palestinians. He looks into the young soldier's face for some sign of recognition, but sees only boredom and vague discontent. The agreements have placed Palestinian officers on the bridge also, but there is no question as to who is currently in control. In any case, repelled by the indignities of imposed borders and limits, Barghouti asks whether Palestinian-controlled boundaries would be any better than Israeli ones?

A strong self-critical impulse running through this book resists any temptation towards the tribal. Barghouti realises

that it is insufficient to note only the fault of others, and asks himself whether 'attachment to the homeland can reach a sophistication that is reflected in my song for it'. While the defeated cannot really escape politics, he feels ambivalent about his place within the Palestinian movement and admits to not understanding the notion of 'unconditional support'. This is a text unapologetic at bringing the aesthetic measure of the poet rather than taking the supposedly factual approach of the politician. Its concern with emotions and states of being is intended to make us see the difference between 'facts' and a more encompassing conception of 'reality'.

AS HE TRAVELS from Ramallah to his home village of Deir Ghassanah, Barghouti is surprised at how much he had forgotten. He wonders: 'How did I sing for my homeland when I did not know it?' He refers to the ridiculous 'absentee love' held by those



who are displaced from a land that is essentially unknown, a land surrounded by walls and terror. He doesn't want to shed tears for the past; it is in the interest of the occupiers to turn memory into a 'bouquet of symbols'. Part of the work of Barghouti's book is to break down the walls and allow the 'truthfulness of the five senses' to disturb what he thought he knew. And what he discovers is a village under occupation, which failed to grow and develop.

Barghouti is familiar with the difficulties that return brings. He was permitted to return from Budapest to Cairo after his name was removed from the Egyptian Government's list of proscribed persons. After 17 years separated from his wife, Radwa Ashour, the Egyptian novelist and academic, and their son, Tanim, he came to understand that physical return sees merely the beginning of a much slower process of stitching past, present and future together. This patching continues now in Deir Ghassanah. He is to give a poetry reading in the village square, and is anxious about whether he

will be understood or whether he will understand those to whom he is reading. The stitching together of fragments from childhood and maturity, artist and people, exile and homeland, presence and absence, begins anxiously but hopefully.

Barghouti's careful objectivism sees him admit that he has 'become used to the passing and the temporary'. Perhaps he should have hated the hotels he often found himself in while abroad, but in truth he welcomed their freedom and transience. Writing, he observes later, is itself a form of displacement from the inherited and the merely given. He also recalls the less pleasant aspects of village life: his grandmother was threatened with expulsion from her home after she became widowed with two small children; his mother was denied an education because of her gender. Yet, it is this very refusal to overemphasise the negativity of exile or idealise the world he left behind that seems to add power to his assertion that: 'It is our life and their lives, with the good and the bad. We

have the right to live it and not defend it'.

There is no doubt that a pervasive sense of the temporary and of continual postponement has disfigured Palestinian life. Palestinian land and homes were saved by exiles registering their property in the name of relatives. However, some of these caretakers regarded the return of Palestinians as the 'miracle that would never happen', and came to assume ownership. Still now, questions of the rights of refugees and those made homeless over the longer history of the Israeli State remain unresolved. Barghouti finds hopeful examples of local endeavour in the projects and groups creating jobs and nurturing the talents of young people. Nevertheless, the damage of the occupation is evident in the way it arrests normal growth and deprives the

Palestinians of futures they would have created for themselves.

IT IS DIFFICULT to blame Barghouti for contemplating, at one point, the 'shadows of mockery and nihilism' that attend a long history of defeat. He is angry with the Palestinian authority representatives, whose personal power and aggrandisement sits strangely and pathetically with the lack of national power they managed to secure at Oslo. He despairs at the eloquence of Rabin and his representation of Israel as absolute victim: 'The Israelis occupy our homes as victims and present us to the world as killers'. The audience in the White House garden applauded Rabin's willingness to forgive the Palestinians. This prompts Barghouti to wonder whether it was the Palestinians who asked for their homes to be bulldozed, or for their bones to break, or for their bodies to lie in graves?

Yet, it is necessary, finally, to concur with Said when he notes in his preface that this book is remarkable for its lack of bitterness and recrimination. In its closing pages, Barghouti allows doubt to sit alongside anger. Lying awake in his bed, during his last night in Ramallah, he submits his story to the judgment of the pillow. Certainties become notions; fragments of a lifetime are unpicked and examined. While this book risks a heart laid bare, its unsentimental and dry-eyed perspective urges us to the edge of what may yet be possible. Rather than reach for easy rhetoric or blame, this is a work that adds to the collective resources of hope. ■

Dr Gary Pearce is a librarian at RMIT University.



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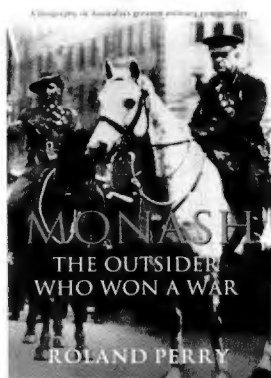
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Winning the war

Monash: The Outsider Who Won a War, by Roland Perry. Random House, 2004.
ISBN 1 740 51280 4, RRP \$49.95

IN THIS ROLLICKING BIOGRAPHY of General Sir John Monash, Roland Perry seeks to release his subject from the image of a dourly brilliant engineer and soldier. This, perhaps, has diminished Monash's status in the as yet unbuilt Australian pantheon. Due weight is paid to the earnestness with which Monash made the most of his scholarly chances at Scotch College in the 1870s, and to the distractions that led him to take so long to complete the degree in arts, law and engineering that eventually he secured from Melbourne University. Principally that was because Monash pursued several parallel careers to the academic. He was also dedicated to gaining experience and preferment in the militia, to socialising and to finding work as a junior engineer. His struggles as partner in his own firm during the 1890s Depression, where work took him deep into Gippsland and as far away as Western Australia, are vividly detailed. This is the story of redoubtable striving, not of some homiletic progress to riches.

Perry spends a lot of time with the sexually venturesome Monash, although little mention is made of his celebrated collection of erotica. Apparently women possessed of a 'superb figure' could prevail upon him. The first of these was Annie Gabriel, wife of Monash's clerk while he worked on the white elephant of the Outer Circle Railway in Melbourne. Though he was beaten up for her husband's pains, and contemplated elopement with Annie, Monash in the end demurred. Instead he took on an altogether tougher proposition in Victoria Moss, who became his wife and mother of Bertha, their only child. Vic left him after a few years and decamped to England. They reconciled, although Perry

is short on information as to how they accommodated the worst of what they suspected of each other. In the Great War, Monash was parted from his family for four years. When Vic was diagnosed with uterine cancer, in anguish he sought leave to return to Australia. This was refused. Before long Monash began an affair in London with Lizette Bentwitch, who would become his companion in Australia after the end of the war and Vic's death.

A racier Monash strides from Perry's biography than that of Geoffrey Serle. When his German-Jewish father was reduced to running a store in Jerilderie in the late 1870s, Monash may have met the Kelly gang, in town to sell a horse (a year before they robbed the place). What soldiers they would have made, Monash reflected—but in the 1920s—when Kelly stories enjoyed an easy currency. Serle was not convinced. More significant matters in Perry's interpretation of Monash need sharper attention. First is the subtitle to *Monash: The Outsider Who Won a War*. This 'outsider' was of German and Jewish extraction. He was a militia officer rather than regular army. In 1918, as an Australian who had eventually established his loyal credentials, impressed the King and General Haig, he commanded the largest corps in the war. Its exploits, more than any other, destroyed the German army that year, first checking its last great offensive and then driving it beyond the Maginot Line. That is not the same as seemingly single-handedly winning a war.

One of Perry's main themes concerns a protracted and malign interference with Monash's generalship. He contends that Monash's 'outsider' status encouraged the campaign against him by the journalists

Keith Murdoch (who had wanted to be Australia's official war correspondent) and Charles Bean (who was). They preferred Brudenell White for command and tried to influence the new Australian Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, accordingly. But Monash's British friends in high places and—most emphatically—the successes of Australian arms thwarted them. Perry regards Bean as anti-Semitic. Certainly Bean's account of Monash's role in the *Official History* is grudging in its praise.

PERRY'S BOOK CONCLUDES sweepingly, and misleadingly: 'John Monash was Australia's Napoleon, and much more'. He was nothing of the kind. Monash was neither a law-maker, nor did he have himself crowned as an emperor. Instead his post-war service was marked by distinguished if prosaic employment as manager of the Victorian State Electricity Commission. He chose not to enter politics, but was a fixture at Anzac Day, his presence cementing its importance. That this scholarly soldier and engineer was honoured posthumously by giving his name to a university seems right. Perry has written a popular account of Monash. The narrative drive and verve never flag, although the prose occasionally lapses towards slang or anachronistic joking (watch for alert but not alarmed). This is indeed, and successfully, the 'biography of Australia's greatest military commander' that its publishers proclaim it to be. Of the private man little is discerned, as Monash would perhaps have wished. ■

Peter Pierce is Professor of Literature at James Cook University, Cairns.

Hidden lives

Creating frames: Contemporary Indigenous theatre 1967–1990, Maryrose Casey.
University of Queensland Press, 2004. ISBN 0 7022 3432 x, RRP \$29.95

AUSTRALIAN THEATRE HISTORY is rife with misconceptions and myths. We have not taken our theatre seriously enough to record it accurately and because with some notable exceptions few of our critics of the '60s and '70s were visionary in their assessment of new Australian work.

Maryrose Casey is both a highly qualified theatre historian and an experienced theatre practitioner which makes her uniquely qualified to delve into Australian theatre history and to draw conclusions which challenge the current status quo. In *Creating frames* Casey has set out to record and honour the substantial and significant body of work that Indigenous theatre practitioners have contributed to the contemporary Australian repertoire and to illuminate the social, political and financial climate in which the work was created.

Casey's book is visionary in its analysis of the inadequate critical contextualisation of Indigenous work and practical in its articulation of the difficulties of creating theatre in an environment that is often unsympathetic and sometimes downright hostile. Casey's comprehensive book involves interviews with an exciting and wide-ranging collection of Indigenous artists including Wesley Enoch, Bob Maza, Justine Saunders and Ningali. It provides a desperately needed historical recording of the development of Indigenous theatre in the last 30 years and an insightful analysis of the reception of that work by Australian critics, mainstream Australian audiences, festival audiences and critics around the world.

Casey traces how the development of writers like Robert Merritt, Kevin Gilbert, Gerry Bostock and Jack Davis has had significant cultural impact by redefining how Indigenous Australians are represented on stage. In her insightful intro-

duction, Casey reveals that 'the book is a result of curiosity'. When she discovered that she could not find satisfactory historical recordings of Indigenous theatre work from the '60s through to the '90s, Casey set out to excavate and record historical events with clarity and objectivity, and to articulate the contexts within which those events were judged. As a consequence of her research, Casey was able to separate facts from perceptions and reveal certain historical 'truths' to be myths propagated by inaccurate judgments drawn from the perspective of the dominant culture.

It becomes disturbingly clear in the course of the book that the mainstream press in Australia, either because of cultural ignorance or prejudice, failed to recognise and record some of the most important developments in contemporary Australian theatre because they were initiated by Indigenous practitioners. As a result, many of the Indigenous artists mentioned in this book were never celebrated for the heroic and independent stances they took in launching various theatre groups. People like Brian Syron, Bob

Maza, Justine Saunders and many others too numerous to mention, deserved public acclaim for the enormous success some of their ventures achieved in the face of poor public funding. Yet such artists were often forced to live on the smell of an oily rag and their achievements went largely unnoted by the critics. Katherine Brisbane was one of the notable exceptions, and she was one of the few authoritative critical voices who recognised the importance of what she was witnessing.

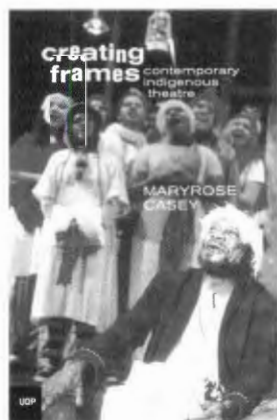
Creating frames challenges cultural myths by accurately recording historical data, clarifying cultural contexts and addressing some of the imbalances in the recording of our cultural history. In the

30-year period Casey writes about, Indigenous theatre practitioners have remained resourceful, imaginative and indomitable in the face of apartheid, assimilation, institutional racism and inadequate funding. The scarcity of funding, particularly during the period under investigation, meant that Indigenous theatre practitioners were never able to capitalise on national and international successes (both critical and at the box office) because they never received enough funding to develop adequate infrastructure. *Creating frames* ensures we will never forget the debt contemporary Australian theatre owes to those daring pioneers who continued to practise their art in the face of adversity.

CASEY'S WRITING is at its best when she allows her material to breathe and engages in the imagery of an experience. There is a wonderful passage about Bob Maza attending a theatre event in Canada that is rich in imagery and another in which she describes the tapping of the Black Theatre's telephone in Redfern. Casey has set out to be accurate and objective, so her writing sometimes feels dry and inaccessible. I was most engaged by the quotes from various interviews when the people being reported suddenly leapt off the page. My curiosity was piqued by the information Casey provided. However, I found myself longing for more imagery, a longer glossary, an in-depth analysis of group dynamics and relationships and perhaps even a little gossip. I was also surprised that, given their level of commitment to Indigenous theatre, David Gulpilil, Wesley Enoch, Neil Armfield and Aubrey Mellor received such cursory mentions.

These are minor quibbles. Casey has written an accurate and important book, which makes a significant contribution to Australian theatre history. ■

Kate Cherry is Associate Director at the Melbourne Theatre Company.



The problem with new money

After the New Economy, Doug Henwood. The New Press, 2003. ISBN 1 920 76918 8, RRP \$29.95

PUNDITS OF THE New Economy were unanimous: 'Exciting, vibrant and dynamic'. It promoted the free transfer of knowledge, the breakdown of traditional information powerbases and acknowledged information as the new capital. It was sold using utopian rhetoric: a society with more wealth and more time in which to spend it. Consequently, we invested. We really invested.

The numbers of people in the Western world who owned shares rose dramatically in the New Economy. In Australia, the Federal Government made the most of the New Economy vibe and sold off half of our national telecommunications company. After an initial flurry, Telstra has rarely risen beyond its initial offered price because the New Economy was exposed. Hits on a website are not customers because they don't pay; information is only valuable in a capitalist economy when it translates into a tangible cash transaction. The New Economy was fuelled by speculation. In many cases, well-spun company reports and creative accounting kept boards and shareholders in the dark. As Henwood suggests, when the company share price is climbing astronomically, shareholders are the last people to ask what is going wrong. In their eyes, everything is going splendidly.

Irreverent US economic journalist Doug Henwood was not impressed by the New Economy. Particularly, the fanaticism of its promoters, many that managed to profit nicely, despite its collapse. The ideas promoted by leading economists over the last decade are still around. *After the New Economy* is Henwood's attempt at 'kicking the thing while it's down, to make sure it won't get up again'.

Henwood traverses the novelty of a rapid expanding economy, through its



absurdities and failures to regard its impacts and implications. His tongue-in-cheek style and pursuit of the hypocrisy of key players and organisations puts him in the same realm as Naomi Klein, author of *No Logo*. And, though economics is not quite as appealing as culture jamming to young left wing activists, many would do well to read *After the New Economy* with the same fervour.

Henwood does not let those of us poorly versed in economics flounder in a sea of figures. He carefully explains how economists distort language and create concepts to serve their own narrow purposes. This book is as much about educating people in basic economic theory and practice, as it is denouncing the New Economy.

Though written for a United States audience, this book is relevant to all Western nations. It explores whether we've really experienced a technological revolution, compared to the dizzy heights of 100 or so years ago where the car, telephone and electric light arrived. It examines work, wealth distribution and the New Economy's impact on income and class division. Interestingly, Henwood is a defender of globalism, but spends too much time discussing the difference between globalism and internationalisation—especially as this topic is covered more effectively elsewhere. Still, it is a concern that obviously dominates his thinking, and informs the book.

THE MOST PROMISING aspect of *After the New Economy* is its driving philosophy. It is economics with equity and social well-being at its core. Henwood notes: 'It's one of the paradoxes of capitalism that the richer a person or society gets, the poorer they often feel.' He goes on to demonstrate that in many Western nations this is actu-

ally the case. We are comparatively poorer because wealth distribution is so askew.

Henwood is appealing for a realistic approach to the economy. He wants economists to create economic policy that serves everyone, not the GDP or market forces, but income, jobs and more ethical wealth distribution. Our world always has new economies; they cycle around regularly. Doug Henwood obviously hopes a few people will flick through the pages of his book and realise that they can control the economy's destiny in a more realistic way. ■

Daniel Donahoo is an Ozprospect fellow. Ozprospect is a non-partisan public policy think-tank.



"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
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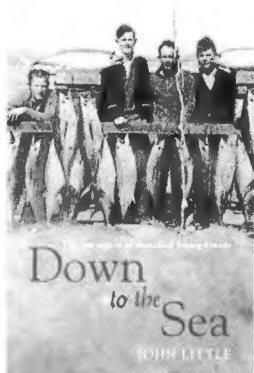
Fish tales

Down to the sea: The true saga of an Australian fishing dynasty, John Little.
Pan Macmillan, 2004. ISBN 1 405 03605 2, RRP \$30

BIOGRAPHERS DON'T, on the whole, invent their subjects' conversations, or freely paraphrase their subjects' writings without attribution; but journalists are allowed to take liberties and Little does with great effect. The story opens with a meeting between poet Henry Lawson and fisherman Ike Warren in 1910 in Malla-coota. 'The friends rowed on the freshwater lake, walked to Cape Howe to savour the smell of sea wrack, shipwreck and whale, moon at the ocean, delight at skirling seabirds, and shout poetry to the wind.' What follows is an engaging saga full of drama, stacked with tall tales and salty yarns—after all it is about fishing!

This is a biography of the exploits of five generations of the Warren family who earned a gruelling living fishing out of Eden on the south coast of New South Wales. Little took a tent to Eden and camped there for days chatting with current members and absorbing the flavour—and it shows. The founders, Ike and his brother Bob, earned a living by hand-line fishing, starting with a 28-foot open boat and venturing out in all weathers. They beach-hauled salmon. Catching fish was rarely a problem, selling them for a decent price was something else.

Career opportunities for working families in Eden were limited. The family fortunes depended entirely upon the fishing. When the catch was low the families survived on home-grown vegetables and oysters collected along the beaches. When the fish were running, the children skipped school to join in.



As the years progressed their sons and grandsons became fishermen, built and bought bigger boats and ventured further out crossing the Bass Strait and moving into Tasmania. New techniques were developed, spotting schools of fish from small planes, using purse seining nets and eventually huge boats using satellites and computers.

Along the way there were encounters with Japanese submarines, storms, shipwrecks, record catches, bitter disappointments, fights with other fishermen and finally increasing government regulation as the huge schools of southern blue fin were almost fished out. This is the Warrens' own story; they were tough and fought for their business every step of the way. This is not a forum for an environmental analysis of the impact of fishing or the politics of fishing. It is a story about survival.

AS THE WORK is based on memories of differing generations the narrative keeps sliding about. The inclusion of a family tree, some wonderful photographs and some bush-style poetry help to cement it together. All those with sea fever and all those who can recall reciting John Masefield's 'I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky, and all I ask is a tall ship, and a star to steer her by', will resonate with this account. ■

Jane Mayo Carolan is currently writing a biography of an Australian businessman, Sir Henry Beaufort Somerset.

THERE IS LITTLE SUBTLETY or refinement in the modern traditions of Afghan sport. Take the Afghan Olympic squad, a five-person team inclusive of a boxer, a wrestler and an exponent of judo. From a country moulded through the defence of the homeland and the absolute defeat of opponents, these Olympians come ably qualified in the skills of engagement, resistance and the blunt use of force.

A combination of brutish horsemanship and iron-clad nerves, buzkashi, a time-honoured Afghan sporting contest, is a chaotic test of life and limb, a pepped-up polo for the masses. The game, a staple fixture on the events calendar, pays homage to the marauding Mongol armies and their mastery of man over beast and is likely derived from the tradition of the hunt. Buzkashi, literally 'goat grabbing', is in essence, barely legitimised combat fought by only the most hardened and courageous riders.

Teams from Afghanistan's northern provinces are regarded as the country's finest, riders feted with the same passion usually reserved for fallen military and political leaders. Arriving in the stadium atop male stud horses, cloaked in heavy quilted coats, fox-fur hats, leather whip clenched tightly between their teeth, they appear impervious to fear or the notion of defeat.

While historically played on vast open plains with small cavalries for teams, matches are now frequently held in the provincial capitals, and are contested with at least a semblance of restraint and order. Two teams attempt to score points by carrying the 'boz'—the leaden weight of a dismembered goat or calf—the length of the field, looping a wooden marker then attempting to drop it in a chalk

Grandstand politics

A combination of brutish horsemanship and iron-clad nerves, buzkashi, a time-honoured Afghan sporting contest, is a chaotic test of life and limb, a pepped-up polo for the masses.

circle at the opposite end of the pitch. The primary impediment is of course the opposing team who have licence to stifle the run of the 'chapandaz' (master rider) by any and all means available. The game therefore pits the smaller, speedier horses against the massive frames of the larger breeds, with the riders skilfully pulling the reins.

AS THE GAME PROGRESSES, the rules become secondary to the grinding scrimmages and the dash of open play. Crowds are appreciative and knowledgeable; the intricacies of stirrup work, strenuous turns and blinding bursts of speed are not lost on even the youngest potential apprentice. The spectacle can continue for hours, though the game rarely deviates from a breakneck pace. At full gallop, riders two and three abreast will grapple side-saddle over the remains of the 'boz', till the immense strain or threat of fall rears them upright. Once clear and with the prize securely aboard, riders will rally an offensive posse and attempt to penetrate the goal circle. As horses become entangled in the throng, the 'boz' is often lost requiring a designated rider to reach among the clambering hooves to retrieve the booty. He then forces an escape with several stabbing blows of the horsewhip, muck like a gritty rover from the pack. As the horses are trained for years prior to competition and are specially conditioned in the lead-up months, they rarely buckle or feign an encounter. Most often the riders bear the scars of battle, though they will generally resist leaving the field even with the direst of injuries.

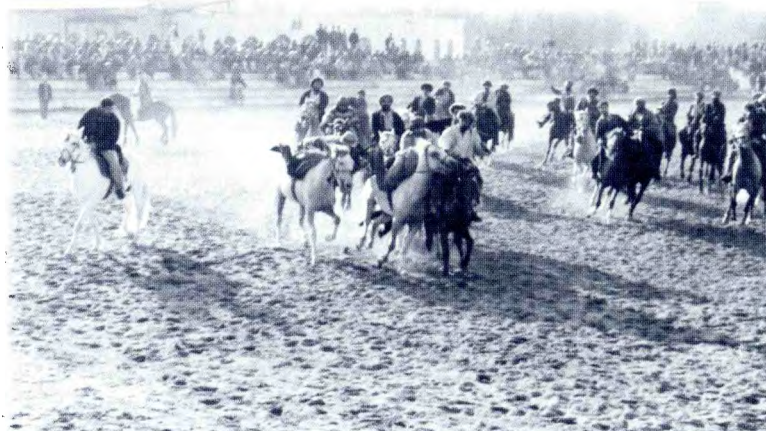
Other characters play bit parts in the spectacle; the hopeful umpire, the roving jester-like commentator, and the diminutive groundsman who reapplies the bound-

aries of the scoring circle with lime chalk as it is routinely trodden into the earth. Often the crowds become unwitting participants themselves as the action spills over into the unprotected stands with riders tearing at the bloodied carcass as if it were lined with gold.

Goals are greeted with furious applause, though the expectant crowds

Afghan Olympic Committee, the game still renews traditional rivalries and plays out power struggles like medieval theatre. Grudges are borne, deals are made and challenges laid down in the customary manner of Afghan politics.

Aspects of the Afghan struggle are punctuated through the heroic leadership of the chapandaz and the desire to



... the game still renews traditional rivalries and plays out power struggles like medieval theatre.

rarely gift the rider's acclaim. Competitors are rewarded handsomely for scoring and are heralded by supporters as they make self-congratulatory runs along the spectator stands. At more esteemed tournaments, successful riders are plied with gifts of cash, clothing and weaponry in lieu of a trophy or sober presentation. More precious however is the acclamation among one's peers, the value of the steed and the honour of the 'chapandaz'.

Though over recent decades, steps have been taken to standardise the rules of the game, principally by the fledgling

wrest control of the 'great game'. Across generations of Afghan families, tribes and communities, these realities remain both stark and poignant.

Though not likely to challenge the gentility of international equestrian events, buzkashi delivers more than a sporting contest should; winners, heroes, repercussions and the remnants of the 'boz' for the true fanatic. ■

Ben Fraser has worked in Afghanistan for several years as a project manager for national and international NGOs.

Home run

LET YOUR IMAGINATION LOOSE on baseball, and you will come up with images of chewing gum, men strutting about a field, stripey pyjamas, caps, attitude, hand signals, schmaltzy singalong tunes, fat spectators, spitting, cussin', mits, helmets and hot dogs. Translating something as wholly American as a play about baseball to an Australian stage is a brave move.

Richard Greenberg's *Take me out*, with its passion for baseball and what it might reveal about human relationships, stretches an Australian audience. But his play is funny, moving, challenging and ultimately sad.

Take me out is a strong ensemble piece in which each of the actors delivers a fine performance. They seem to have enjoyed the invitation to join an all-male cast, talk about sport and strut about the stage naked. The play moves easily between observations on the human condition and humour. The words speak for themselves and the actors have a sufficiently light touch.

Star baseball player Darren Lemming (Kenneth Ransom) is the iconic sports hero embodying the mixture of rare talent, self-belief, and narcissism required to succeed at an elite level. He is untouchable. Even when he publicly discloses that he is gay,

Lemming seems immune from public reaction. Not, however, from the reaction of his team-mates.

If Lemming is cast as the hero, then the deliciously named Shane Mungitt (Jeremy Lindsay Taylor) is the anti-hero. Mungitt's story is the mirror-image of Lemming's. Where Lemming has superstar cool and abundant talent, Mungitt ranges only from awkward to ugly. He embodies political incorrectness. Only the ability to pitch—which has brought him to the big league—saves him. But such talent in the hands of one so socially inept is certain to bring about disaster. Jeremy Lindsay Taylor's performance is a stand-out. Shane Mungitt revolts, amuses and always holds the audience.

Take me out explores notions of human identity. It contrasts the constructs we build of our selves and others with the truth of human identity, and shows how truth can disrupt even the closest relationships.

Greenberg, does not offer simple solutions. Although Lemming suffers the idiotic responses of his team-mates to his admission that he is gay, he is not simply a victim of prejudice. He is also capable of cruel and manipulative behaviour towards the vulnerable Mungitt.

The resolution of the play is found in the character of Mason Marzac (Simon Burke), charged with the task of selling some of Greenberg's tougher ideas (that baseball is better than democracy). He alone reconciles his inner and outer self. Marzac is only too aware of his shortcomings—they have long been his closest companions.

Greenberg's play recalls recent Australian sporting events, from the social disgraces (if not criminal actions) of footballers, to the ugly display by our women rowers at the Olympics. He reminds us that we often use sport to understand our social values and human relationships. We expect our politicians to fail, but when a sporting hero caught out we indulge in collective soul-searching. The hero's failings are those of the community.

Take me out deftly analyses relationships, race, sexuality, identity and our capacity to hold together the tension between belief and reality. Greenberg can be forgiven for occasionally over-reaching—he is at heart an enthusiast and an optimist. Surely there is room for both in our lives. ■

Marcelle Mogg is the editor of *Eureka Street*.



Musica sacra

Martin Ball attends the premiere performance of Christopher Willcock's *Miserere*

THE PENITENTIAL PEWS of St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, on a mid-winter's evening are the perfect venue for a concert titled *Miserere*, Latin for 'Have mercy'. A couple of hours sitting on cold, uncomfortable benches is enough for most people to plead for respite. And yet the rewards of this concert amply compensated for any discomfort, with some inspiring music enjoying the benefits of the cathedral's soaring acoustic.

The Melbourne Chorale's well-designed program comprised three a capella pieces, each titled *Miserere*. It included familiar works by Gregorio Allegri and Henryk Górecki, and the world premiere of a new piece by the Australian Jesuit composer Christopher Willcock. These three works all have a religious theme, though each evidences a different approach to asking God for mercy.

Allegri's *Miserere* is a setting of Psalm 50–51, the Latin text of which begins with the words 'Miserere mei'. It was composed in the early 17th century for use in the Sistine Chapel during matins on Wednesday and Friday of Holy Week. Allegri's setting has become one of the most famous works in the choral repertoire, firstly for its awe-inspiring music, but also for the story of how a young Mozart allegedly made a transcription of the secret score after a single hearing. The work's popularity was much increased by the 1963 recording by the Choir of King's College Cambridge, featuring the boy soprano Roy Goodman singing the angelic treble line with its ethereal high Cs.

Górecki's *Miserere* is a very different work, written in 1981 as a response to brutal suppression of a demonstration by the Polish Solidarity movement. Górecki's text consists of just five words: 'Domine, Deus noster, miserere nobis'. The work builds layer upon layer for more than 30 minutes repeating the simple acclamation 'O lord

our God', before releasing its tension in the humble supplication, 'Have mercy on us'.

Like the Allegri, Christopher Willcock's work is a setting of the psalm in Latin. It is a text this composer should know well, for when not composing Willcock teaches Liturgical studies at the United Faculty of Theology in Melbourne.

Given the intense feeling in this psalm it might have been expected to set the English translation of the text, with its beautiful and powerful phrases such as 'My sin stands ever before me,' and 'Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow'. But this work is a com-

Allegri's setting has become one of the most famous works in the choral repertoire, firstly for its awe-inspiring music, but also for the story of how a young Mozart allegedly made a transcription of the secret score after a single hearing.

mission that arose from Willcock's tenure as the Melbourne Chorale's Composer in Residence for 2004, and the choir's artistic director Jonathan Grieve-Smith wanted a work that would act as a companion to the often performed Allegri version. There are thus many deliberate parallels between the two settings, such as the use of Latin, and dividing the choir into three groups with structural interplay between the various parts.

WILLCOCK IS IN NO SENSE merely derivative, however. Perhaps the most important structural change is Willcock's use of repetition. Rather than proceeding through the text of the psalm in a purely linear fashion, key words are repeated throughout the work, beginning with the opening 'miserere'. Willcock repeats this word at the end of the text to reinforce the mood of supplication, which can otherwise get lost in the psalmist's (King

David) sometimes egotistical outpourings. Other phrases highlighted include 'Asperges me' and 'Libera me'.

This is something that possibly comes out of Willcock's pre-compositional process, as he explains: 'I write out the text many times, and the head grabs phrases as the hand writes them out.' Importantly too, Willcock tries to leave time between his initial preparation for a work and the ultimate composition: 'Images take hold between the thinking, and the writing.'

As well as the structural repetitions, Willcock makes several phrases into

dramatic acclamations, such as 'Ampius lava me' (Wash me thoroughly) and 'Averte [faciem]' (Turn your face away). Willcock's liturgical interests seem to be at work here, giving the psalm a role closer to something like the Kyrie.

The actual music has a contemporary feel, without being of any particular school. There are many close, dense harmonies within the three choir parts, with a focus on suspended seconds. As in the Allegri there is a final harmonic resolution, but only of sorts, as the sopranos centre on a single unison note.

The first performance of the work was a great success, with Grieve-Smith directing the choir in a focused and controllable performance. Perhaps Willcock's setting might become a regular feature of Holy Week services at St Pat's. Just a pity Mozart won't get to hear it. ■

Martin Ball is the Melbourne music critic for *The Australian*.

flash in the pan



Adopting Ali



Letters to Ali, dir. Clara Law. 'One day I picked up my DV camcorder and followed Trish and her family, travelling 6000km across Australia through a desert to a remote detention centre, to visit an Afghan boy with whom they had been exchanging letters for 18 months.' Clara Law (*Floating Life*, 1996, *The Goddess of 1967*, 2000) accompanies the Kerbi/Silberstein family on one of their extraordinary journeys to Port Hedland to see a boy called Ali, who came to Australia as an unaccompanied asylum seeker.

Letters to Ali continues Clara Law's preoccupation with identity and migration. Ali is a 15-year-old Afghan boy who is in mandatory detention at Port Hedland. Tarkovsky called making films sculpting in time: Clara Law is a species of director who carves away at her subject with a sort of relentless gentleness. The film starts with a series of personal statements in text followed by stunningly simple imagery. Law's amazement at having her own garden after growing up in Macau and Hong Kong reminds us of Australia's 'we've boundless plains to share'. This eventually resonates with why Trish Kerbi started to experience nausea whenever she heard *Advance Australia Fair*.

In the end this film is not just about its title subject, but about the Kerbi-Silberstein family and how Australia has become a country in which they no longer feel at home. Trish Kerbi was the instigator of the letters to a number in Port Hedland that turned out to be a 15-

year-old boy. She is a country GP, living in a sprawling, self-built house on a few acres with her husband and four kids, horses, ducks, dogs and cats. It is an image of rational paradise, of being surrounded by natural beauty, living the productive and rewarding life. Her kids are like Aussie spring lambs, frolicking in a life of security and unconditional love. They grow healthily for themselves and for others: they are able to extend their privilege to the egregiously deprived Ali. To Trish, her husband Rob Silberstein and their kids, extending their good fortune in life to someone so much less lucky, is a natural thing, a genuine commitment. In writing and receiving the letters they come to know him as a person and Trish soon becomes 'Mum' to Ali.

They try to adopt him as their son, to make him an official part of their family, and run into the predictable problems that are imposed by the kind of people who caused Ali's predicament in the first place. When they try to put adoption procedures in place they are mired in legal technicalities of such finessed complexity that it is hard to say exactly what they are. In doing this they come into contact with the Australia-wide network of pro bono lawyers who save us from complete shame as a nation by going in to bat for these victims of our racist fear.

Letters To Ali joins the growing chorus of compassion that comes from documentary makers from Mike Moore down: *Molly and Mobarak*, *Anthem*, and the countless smaller statements, rarely seen on big screen or commercial TV, all moved by the generosity that ultimately marks us as truly human rather than political robots. Go and see it.

—Juliette Hughes

Oh, the horror

The Village, dir. M. Night Shyamalan. I was very excited when I saw the trailer for *The Village*—not because I'm a Shyamalan fan, though *The Sixth Sense* was an enjoyable and effective thriller. What excited me was the way in which *The Village's* premise appeared to strip the genre down to its barest and most archaic elements—the uneasy tension between the seen and the unseen, the village and the forest, the light and the darkness (it's no accident that the film's heroine is blind).

The period and setting of the film are (deliberately) unclear, but appears to be a 19th-century Quaker-cum-Amish village, located in a picturesque valley surrounded by a dark and lowering forest. In this forest live 'those of whom we do not speak', beasts or monsters or men with whom the villagers have an uneasy truce of fear—the villagers don't go into their forest, and the unnamed ones don't go into the villagers' valley. As the story begins, this truce appears to be unravelling. Livestock are found skinned but uneaten in the fields, secrets and tensions in the village abound, signs and portents loom, and some of the villagers are drawn

by the lure of the corrupt and evil towns on the other side of the forest.

Shyamalan draws out the barrier between the villagers and their Other with an almost abstract simplicity. The forest leans against the valley like a wall, a border literally guarded by towers and watchers; to even take a single step into it is to hear the unnamed and unseen rustling and watching from the bushes. At weddings the forest is ritualistically hurled its share of the feast; red is 'the bad colour', which attracts the beasts, yellow the 'safe colour' which the villagers must wear as they approach the forest wall, and with which they paint the poles that mark out their border. One of most potent moments in the film occurs when two girls, sweeping a porch with balletic fervour, spy a red blossom peeping out of the ground, and rush to pluck and bury it.

One of the attractions of what I saw in the trailer was the possibility of a genuinely political fable—'terror' stripped back to its essentials, the unknown and unspeakable 'they' who threaten society, but also mould it into a cohesive and compliant mass to be led by men who preach fear as their one, true gospel.

But sadly, the fantasy film I created in my mind between seeing the trailer and seeing the film, was simply never there. Shyamalan's all too predictable final twist does indeed turn the film into a political fable, but one about isolationism, and the need to turn one's back to the corrupt and dangerous world outside. His mastery of the formal elements of the thriller is undeniable, but his whole is less than the sum of its parts.

—Allan James Thomas

Flat white



Coffee and Cigarettes, dir. Jim Jarmusch. No point hiding my obsession with the films of Jim Jarmusch under a bushel. Ever since seeing his second feature, *Down by Law*, (back in the mid-80s) I have awaited every one of his strange films with an uncommon level of excitement.

I have dragged an old water stained poster of *Down by Law* around with me for more than a decade. It is my version of the teenage band poster on the back of the bedroom door. *Down by Law* was like a pop song for me—it marked a moment. Anyway, you get the point.

Coffee and Cigarettes is a feature made up of 11 shorts. Each vignette shares the loose theme of drinking coffee (or tea in one case) and smoking. Jarmusch has employed this structure successfully before in films such as *Night on Earth* and more loosely in his first feature *Stranger than Paradise*. He clearly enjoys the lightness of the fleeting moment and the short film format allows him to explore exactly that—single, contained moments of nothing that open up a world of suggestion and mood rather than complicated plotting.

Jarmusch's films have been both pilloried and praised for this cool off-hand style, and there is no doubt *Coffee and Cigarettes* will divide the critics again. In fact it blows a great big raspberry at anyone searching for action or notable activity on screen. And despite my predisposition to like anything Jarmusch makes, this is the film's great downfall. In the past, Jarmusch has managed to squeeze a magical strangeness out of the tiniest situations, but not this time. He has a cast that would make any director weep, but gets



virtually nothing out of them—Tom Waits, Iggy Pop, Bill Murray, Steve Buscemi, Steven Wright, Roberto Benigni, Cate Blanchett and the list goes on.

There are no great moments in any of the films that make up *Coffee and Cigarettes*. There are only better moments than others. Alfred Molina and Steve Coogan are always a treat to watch on screen but here they are really making the best of an ordinary little story. It should have represented the worst of the vignettes, instead it was one of the best.

The only real highlight for me was the final film played out by William Rice and Taylor Mead; two old men on a coffee break. One floating on the outskirts of senility, the other planted darkly in reality. I was moved, genuinely. But the wait was too long, and remember, I'm a die hard fan.

—Siobhan Jackson



Ode to Oscar

OUR PAL OSCAR the marmalade cat died suddenly in August. At 13 he was not much of a telly watcher; the flickers in a fireplace were more to his taste.

When fire-gazing he wasn't one of your tightly curled-up cats—on the floor, he was more for extreme stretching out, legs and tail splayed in compass-defying directions, supple spine arched back in a caricature of trust. The dogs never bothered him because he was fearless—though they could challenge any cat-bravado, they had no answer for such deep nonchalance as his. He could be as alone as any normal cat, but when he wanted contact, he would bound onto your lap and breathe strong cat breath in your face as he touched noses with you in greeting. Then he would use me as a sofa, or comb my son's beard delicately with his claws.

I miss his heavy warmth on me as I recline to watch the flickering box that interested him so little. Sometimes when I was watching the news he was a real comfort, a reminder that in a world of lusts and hates that one could have simple hungers and comforts and do no harm to anybody.

He died just before John Safran's series started on SBS, *John Safran vs God* (Mondays, 8.30 pm). I think Oscar might have wondered at Safran's foolhardiness; such forays into the murkiness of human thought processes must surely have left the young man with some bad memories. Cats are far more sensible than humans: Oscar would have run miles away from the Haiti voodoo ceremony (he hated noise and crowds and pain). He would not have drunk peyote because nothing ever passed his lips unless he found it delicious, as we discovered when we used to try to shove worming tablets down his throat. Like Safran after the peyote, he was a champion regurgitator. And I could never imagine Oscar submitting himself to exorcism, especially American-fundamentalist style.

I found that whole episode quite horrible and disturbing, and could have done with Oscar sitting on my lap to reassure me about warmth and reality and snuggling and tenderness and otherness. The whole point of Safran's project was to make a brave search for the traces of God in other human minds and hearts, a laudable search that poked fun mercilessly at silliness and looked for mystery, for the numinous. The exorcist's position was basically one of undermining all search, all inquiry. According to this man, Safran's searches, however well-meant or brave, were all just invitations to demons to possess him. I hope Safran is all right now, because what was happening

during the exorcism ceremony seemed to be upsetting him dreadfully. If it was meant to be funny like the rest of the programs, it wasn't. I'm sure that the Holy Spirit is stronger than the exorcist makes out, and that God can be found in all sorts of strange places by different people in their different ways.

Oscar would have been amused by some of the other programs on SBS. *The Big O* documentary (1 Oct, 10pm) examines orgasm and the huge fuss and difficulties we lords of creation tend to make about it. Unlike cats, humans complicate pleasure. If he'd been a tom he would have fought and fornicated with the best and worst, but he was a great big kitten all his life, courtesy of the vet. As a neuter, he was blithely sensuous, a comfort-seeking missile, occasionally humped by our dog Pepe, (who is neutered too but is a Jack Russell, so I don't think it took).

Also on SBS, September's documentary about flashers reminded my sisters and me of a time when, as teenagers in Geelong, we were walking home from a Saturday dance in the St Mary's parish hall and got flashed at by a chap in a raincoat. There were three of us and one of him, and we were so innocent that we screamed and ran instead of saying clever, cutting things to deflate his pretensions.

The documentary underlined the fact that these heroes get their jollies from causing alarm in their audiences. Well, the Geelong wobbler probably had the night of his life, with all three of us screaming in our well-projected singers' voices and scooting off as though he had a deadly weapon instead of a pathetic problem. Chalk one up for the rogue penis: we lasses were not proud of our craven reaction once we got home and told the concerned parents and were plied with restorative cups of tea. Woe betide the next offender, we resolved. Much sarcasm, contemptuous lip-curling and unfavourable comparisons were just waiting for the next one.

One of my sisters got the opportunity, and used it. We heard about it and punched the air. We were even.

OH, OSCAR, OSCAR, our gelded lion, your 13 years were one long summer day of love and food. You were spared the maelstrom of lust and the fear of death that drives humans into madness and hate; you were a golden eunuch for the kingdom of heaven. You were struck down suddenly, suffered only a little and died in our arms. Say hi to my dad for me. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

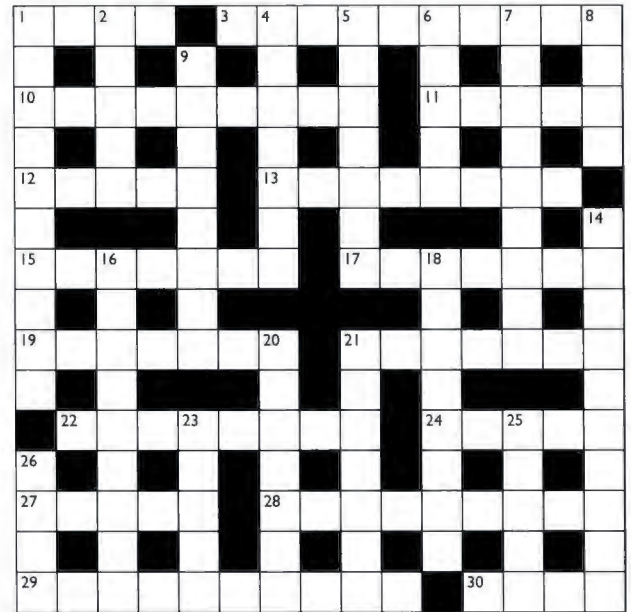


Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no.127, OCTOBER, 2004

ACROSS

1. Deeds in Canberra, perhaps, written about by 26-down. (4)
3. Poor man from Assisi is able to have him as a follower. (10)
10. They happen to mostly sick tinned components. (9)
11. Sort of column that has lost an electron, maybe. (5)
12. Caper, unfortunately, I can't stand. (5)
13. It is more meritorious to throw away wild anger. (8)
15. In the premier position, according to order. (7)
17. Extraordinarily, steam is a favourite subject of the painter. (7)
19. Split misshapen toes in smart comeback. (7)
21. Urged that the grapes be trodden on. (7)
22. Holy woman who is celebrated twice in October? (2,6)
24. One of 22-across from a country residence, we hear. (5)
27. Headless figure is the colour of ochre. (5)
28. Invalidation of commitment allowed for mental nun! (9)
29. Sherlock Holmes thus describes detective problem to Dr Watson.
Simple, isn't it? (10)
30. Note written by a listener, darling! (4)



DOWN

1. 3-across could possibly be interested in a book about this cattle ranch, for instance. (6,4)
2. It is understood that I'm involved in diplomacy. (5)
4. A fugitive out of control. (7)
5. Poor Ron must take his medicine. (7)
6. Sort of whisky favoured in Cork, for instance. (5)
7. Talks about opposite positions. (9)
8. Pleasant holiday spot for continental trippers. (4)
9. Cate's due, perhaps, but for the late trains? (8)
14. He manages the young when the dams are disturbed. (10)
16. Salesman puts you, reportedly on the list. Is he trustworthy? (9)
18. Wash up on the left in attempt to get fish. (8)
20. The final stage for worker is stylish! (7)
21. Queen on prairie seems less attractive. (7)
23. Some volunteer I employ is rather weird. (5)
25. She could be called a woman of peace; I met a Frenchman with her. (5)
26. Was he sort of warm when he wrote 1-across? (4)

Solution to Crossword no. 126, September, 2004



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